



We Share Our Knowledge

Article no. 8

Enhancing the Use of Self-Service Websites

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January 2007

1. Background

Nowadays, more and more companies are acknowledging the importance of a Self-Service website. Assuming we have established one, generated traffic into it and learned all about our subscribers – what do we do next?

The next stage has to do with enhancing the customers' usage of the website in order to have them come back and use it over and over again. Consequently, we will be able to maximize website revenues and reduce the costs of website maintenance and operation and those of recruiting new customers, all the while improving customer satisfaction.

The objective of this article is to offer ways of enhancing customers' website usage.

2. Commercial Needs

One of the main objectives of establishing a Self-Service website is to attract customer traffic currently directed to call centers and (expensive) human service centers into the website whose service costs are much lower.

In order to reduce costs and increase profitability in the long term, one website visit per customer will simply not suffice. We need customers to visit the website again and again, and make use of all the options the website offers.

If, and only if we succeed in achieving this goal, will we be able to meet the ROI objectives outlined during the website planning stage.

3. How Do We Do That?

There are a few ground rules which, if correctly followed, will drastically improve the success rates of our efforts to convince customers to visit and to continue using the website.

3.1 Simplifying website registration

Currently - all Self-Service websites require the use of a username and a password. The problem is that companies make it quite complicated for the customer to get his initial password. While the most basic rule for internet activity is availability and immediacy, we force the customer to physically visit the service center closest to him in order to verify his details. Alternatively, we inform him that his initial password will be sent to him by post. The problem – losing potential customers in whom we have already invested time and efforts, urging them to visit the website.

The solution – simplifying the registration process, and offering self identification options (for a more secure registration, we can even combine several methods of identification, e.g., online identification combined with texting the customer a password to be used for the initial registration only).

3.2 Giving online access to all services normally rendered in service centers

Currently– most new users will be discouraged by a complex or a failed registration attempt, and leave the website. The remaining few, who stuck to their guns and managed to get the password, soon discover that the services they need are not available online, except for a few basic ones.

The problem – customer frustration and dismissing the website as a waste of time.

The solution – implementing most (or preferably all) services usually rendered in call/service centers, in the website, and allowing customers to truly self-serve themselves.

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3.3 Differentiating between human services and online services

Currently – despite high penetration rates of the internet in Israel, there are still some customers who refrain from using this technology, and prefer to rely on human services only.

The problem – the resources invested in the website are gone to waste, and we are not able to meet our ROI objectives.

The solution – the simplest solution is charging money for human services in call/service center, while offering the same service online for free.

An example of a service call: "Sir, a service call costs about 10 Shekels, but if you do this online, it's free".

3.4 Making the services more user-friendly

Currently – at this point, we have allowed our customers to enjoy all the services we have to offer, but we neglected to address one small issue – our customers were not trained in our service training centers, and are not familiar with our internal codes and terminology. In order to perform a simple action, they are sometime required to answer questions that are beyond their understanding, as include internal terms and terminology.

The problem – customer frustration and writing off the website as unfriendly and irritating.

The solution – after planning and designing the website and the online services, we should establish a User Interface (UI) lab, i.e., we should have a group of customers (who are *not* familiar with internal company processes) use the website and then implement their observations.

3.5 Giving incentives for recurring use

Currently – in some industries, the customer's emotional attachment to the product isn't very strong (e.g. the insurance industry), and the frequency of online service utilization is low.

The problem – is it quite possible that the next time the customer requires a service he will not refer to the website, but opt for human services instead.

The solution – introducing marketing incentives to motivate the customer to visit and use the website more frequently. For instance: sending emails urging the customer to visit the website, perform a certain action, and receive some sort of benefit in return. An example from the elementary insurance industry: recommend that the customer type in his car's monthly mileage, in return for a free carwash (sponsored by the carwash company, in return for marketing exposure to insurance customers). This way, the customer will visit and use the website at least once a month, and those visits can be used as opportunities by the company to suggest a variety of preplanned marketing and sales offers.

3.6 Creating continuity

Currently – our customer is prepared and focused. He logs in, performs the actions he needs, and logs out. He does not stop to browse other pages that we want him to visit.

The problem – missing potential up-sell and cross-sell opportunities with this customer.

The solution – planting triggers inside the website which, as a result of the user performing a certain action, will automatically prompt a new series of marketing/service offers, motivating him to visit other pages of the website.

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3.7 Adding values from other disciplines

Currently – after getting the customers to log in and even to use the Self-Service options, we still need to motivate them to perform other activities daily, weekly or even monthly. All in all, website traffic tends to continuously decline.

The problem – the resources invested in the website are gone to waste, and we are not able to meet our ROI goals.

The solution – adding applications borrowed from other disciplines relevant to the customer, which will motivate him to return to our website again and again.

For instance: adding a function of domestic cash-flow management in a bank's website. An application such as this will motivate the customer to log in weekly in order to record his expenses. Once he is logged in, we will activate all the marketing tactics preplanned for him.

3.8 Analyzing online activities

Currently – After generating website traffic and recruiting an impressive amount of returning customers, we still don't have any administrative insights as to what goes on in the website, apart from the number of pages viewed and the number of customers registered.

The problem – we miss valuable information and important insights about our customers. Those could have assisted us in better understanding the marketing aspects of customer service, and in compiling future offers better suited for our customers.

The solution – performing more perceptive analyses of our customers' usage patterns and browsing behaviors. Feeding this new information into our Data Warehouse, and cross-referencing it with all other recorded customer information, will enable us to improve our online as well as offline offers.

About Synergy

Synergy is an international consulting company, specializing in Analytical CRM solutions.

Synergy offers marketing oriented business ventures, formed by a team of leading local and international industry experts.

Synergy aims to provide its customers with the ability of acquiring commercial advantages by informative analysis of their customers' shopping data.

Synergy has vast experience in working with leading commercial organizations, both locally and internationally, and its clientele includes foremost industry leaders in the communications, financial and retail fields.

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