

Registration - Last chance for first impressions

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Registration is often the first real interaction that a user has with an organisation. Perhaps they've browsed a few pages, or they've seen advertisements, but now they're actually ready to come up and say 'hello' and introduce themselves.

In a human-to-human relationship, introductions are characterised by the exchange of relatively small amounts of information, and by the fact that the initial contacts are exploratory and governed by sets of social rules. In most contexts, we will exchange names (although in some cases – for example in a support group – it might be expected that even names would be fictitious). Except in extreme cases, provision of anything beyond name and affiliation (company name, for example) would rarely be mandatory. We would not insist on having someone's phone number and email address before talking to them.

Sometimes people find themselves in social situation where they are being imposed upon. Perhaps someone they don't yet know is asking for personal information, or asking them to commit to a course of action to which they are not committed. In these circumstances, people will stall, walk away or in some cases lie.

The same general conditions apply when registering online. People provide a small amount of information, but until there is a relationship characterised by **trust**, many will be wary of giving too much information, in case it's abused.

It's surprising at times that the simple introductory phase of the relationship is so frequently marred by a poor understanding – or lack of care – about the underlying relationship.

We often see registration processes that are designed to get the maximum amount of information. In a social setting, this is like being a person who is 'only interested in what they can get'. If marketing or sales requirements have prompted you to ask for more information than is actually needed to complete the registration process, then you are running the risk of being seen in this light.

The other major fault we see with registration is **poor error management**. This often goes hand-in-hand with excessive requirements (the more mandatory fields, the more opportunity for mistakes to be made). We often ask clients why they want users to enter their email address twice, for example. Sure, if the user gets it wrong, it may be a problem – but how many users get it wrong? Why don't we ask them to confirm their name in the same way? We also ask why users need to specify a user name, when an email address would be adequate for most non-sensitive situations.

Your registration page is your only chance to make a first impression – be polite and respect your users if you want to make a good impression.

For more on **Registration Best Practice** see Chapter 24 of "[The Usability Kit](#)" (Gaffney/Szuc) which covers:

- Establishing a Value Proposition
- Establishing Trust
- Asking Only for Appropriate Information
- Ensuring Security
- Avoiding Errors
- Providing Progress Indicators
- Providing Feedback
- Providing Ready Access to Registration
- Conducting a Usability Test.

See: <http://www.theusabilitykit.com>

References

1. Nielsen, Jakob (1999), "Trust or Bust: Communicating Trustworthiness in Web Design", <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/990307.html>
2. Schneiderman, Ben (2000), "Designing Trust into Online Experiences," Communications of the ACM.