

Why do Big Companies Keep on Getting it Wrong?

By: Daniel Szuc Posted: Jan 24, 2002

Many enterprises in Asia have web sites that provide poor customer experience and have low levels of usage. Information is often presented from a business perspective, without sufficient consideration of the customers' needs.

The following are some of the common usability issues we have identified:

- Sites represent an insider's view of the company, which is why it is often easier to find shareholder reports than basic information such as pricing, product details and customer support.
- Management chooses 'cool' sites because they are seen as impressive. However, overreliance on graphics may make the site slow, and may also make it difficult to find information.
- Web sites replicate Business Unit structures, even though these are probably meaningless to customers.
- Information is difficult to find.
- Too many layers are used, frustrating users as they attempt to navigate around the site.
- Lack of contact information makes it difficult for customers to get in touch with the company. As Gerry Gaffney (usability specialist - Information & Design) once told me - "At a minimum a web site should be as useful as a business card - allowing for easy access to phone, fax and other contact information."
- Jargon. Products and services are described using terms that customers may not know.
- Poor cross-referencing. The same information is repeated (often in different ways) instead of being centrally located and consistently referenced.
- Flash splash screens. Many HK sites use these for company introductions, lengthy music and graphic clips, demos or animated company logos. But how much real value do these offer to the customer? (See Feb 2002 article: "The death of the Flash splash screen")

The result is a customer experience that is confusing and difficult. How can this be addressed?

The first step is easy! Start thinking from the **customer point of view**, and question the design decisions.

For example, is there a real need to publish this information on the site at all? Does it really accommodate a customer need or want?

Think about how the site structure can be designed so that it reflects the customer's perspective.

Use customer-friendly language when describing products and services.

Flatten the information structure, and avoid publishing information that is not relevant to customers.

Use a style guide to encourage the business to produce content that is usable and consistent. Provide easy access to contact and support information. Make sure it is accessible throughout the site.

Consider providing a site map. However, site maps can also have problems (see [Site Map Usability](#))

Provide lists of frequently asked questions (FAQs). Make sure they are based on real and repeatable problems customers have in finding information on the web site.

Focus on **customers' tasks**. Companies that have done a good job of researching the tasks customers are trying to complete offer a better experience. Look at how these tasks are currently being completed rather than 'reinventing the wheel'.

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Thanks to Gerry Gaffney for review commentary