

Summary

The company in this case study is one of the leaders in its industry. The primary audience is the engineering community. The business falls within the industrial / technology B-2-B category, which from a marketing perspective typically means complex multi-touch lead generation and technical / long selling cycles.

Challenges

- The website had an average visitor satisfaction rating, but the company knew it could do better, and that the web site could be contributing more to the business through generating more marketing leads, quote requests, new names to the database and other web success events.
- Maintain the Voice of Customer in the redesign, instead of being driven by internal opinions.

Solution

- Through the web satisfaction surveys more than 300 completed questionnaires had been received each month, providing many suggestions for how to enhance the website.
- In addition, customer feedback was also collected through usability testing.

Planned Results

- To increase the overall average satisfaction by 5% within 3 months of launching the new site.
- Increase ability for visitors to find information by 10 %
- Increase the score for a positive search experience by 12%
- Decrease difficulty of browsing by 10%

Background

According to several B-2-B research sources focused on the habits of engineers, the web and, more specifically, a manufacturer's website is one of the single most important and trusted sources of information. Engineers visit web sites to become smarter – to learn about products, to find solutions to their needs or to look for support and usage information for instruments that they already own. They also need to be able to do this quickly, so that they can move on to the next phase of their work tasks. The current website had served the company well, and every year it contributed to the business by delivering sales leads, while at the same time being one of the preferred sources information, receiving an average visitor satisfaction rating based on industry benchmarking.

So why change?

The internet provides a flexible and cost-effective way of interacting with and serving customers, and there are always opportunities and a need to maximize the business contribution. In addition, customer preferences are always changing and based on visitor feedback, the company knew it could improve because being just "good" was not good enough in the current business environment.

Based on information gathered through web satisfaction surveys, in addition to discussions with business stakeholders, it was decided that the site needed a complete user experience redesign, to span all phases of the customer life cycle. Previously, the site has had incremental facelifts, but it was several years since a complete top-down architecture redesign had taken place. As a result the site had slowly become too inward focused, cluttered and inconsistent.

A different approach to a new site

Give customers what they want. One of the challenges with any redesign is managing inputs and personal preferences from various internal stakeholders, and although all suggestions should be welcomed with an open mind, it is important to stay focused. Through web site satisfaction surveys approximately 300 completed surveys had been received each month. Website users also provided many write-in suggestions for how to enhance the site, improve navigation, functionality, look & feel and content. In addition, the company also collected feedback through customer usability testing, in various phases on the project.

Recommended improvements to the site

A website is often very complex, serving many different types of users, each with a unique need, making it difficult to understand what the main improvement areas should be, but the combination of standard survey questions, specific custom questions, in addition to visitor write-in comments, usually provides segmentation data and valuable insight into what areas to focus on for a redesign project.

A pre-launch analysis revealed that the biggest pain points for website visitors were:

- Navigation (ease, number of steps, ability to find)
- Browsing (ability to browse, product search)
- Functionality (ability to accomplish the task)

In addition the following areas needed improvement:

- Product information (usefulness of pictures, thoroughness of product descriptions),
- Look & feel (ease of reading, clean layout, clarity of the site organization)
- Freshness of content

More specifically the data revealed that on-site Search, which was extensively used by the site visitors, continued to be a problem, due to visitors being unsuccessful in finding desired information, and with almost half experiencing some type of problem. Similar was true for browsing for which only about 70% reported to have no difficulty. Furthermore, the data pinpointed differences in the visitor experience based on what the customer was trying to achieve; learn, compare / consider or finding support for a product they already owned.

Redesign – under the hood

This redesign touched many aspects of the site, both customer facing, such as navigation, functionality, design (look & feel), branding, content presentation, messaging, search, localization and infrastructure related areas such as taxonomy, page optimization, coding, back-end content organization and forward looking governance.

Navigation / Browsing / Search

- The lowest scoring dimensions for navigation and browsing as measured were: Ease of navigation, numbers of steps, ability to find and product selection, ability to browse through products, product search capabilities.

It was also known through the custom questions that the primary reason for visiting the site was: To find product specifications / data sheets, to get product manuals, download software / firmware or to find pricing information.

Manuals together with the download of software / firmware were the strongest drivers of lower customer satisfaction, occasionally being up to 20% lower than the highest scoring elements and generally 5% lower than the average overall satisfaction. The write-in comments such as *"Name some links as they are called at other places on the website. e.g.: a) View Price Information, b) Checklist Price, Add a language button, where the user can select the language when viewing the site,"* provided more detailed insight into the problems experienced by the visitors.

Experience with search – Did you use search today? More than half of the visitors regularly used the search functionality. Satisfaction among visitors whose search results contained the requested information had a 10% higher satisfaction than the average satisfaction. Therefore, one of the objectives with the site redesign was to enable customers to more easily find relevant information through search. For those visitors who said the search results contained no results or too few/many the satisfaction score was only 10% lower than average, but for results not relevant satisfaction almost dropped

60%. The customer comment, *"Don't waste my time, the search tool didn't show the right results"*, explains this well.

The solution – quick and easy navigation. More prominent links to the most frequently visited pages / functions and the use of a customer-focused naming convention, making it easier to get the information in the least number of steps. Product information was placed in the center of the homepage, the top navigation bar and through search. A quick-find "application" was also developed to make it easier to locate the documentation such as manuals or product information.

The site also introduced an enhanced site-wide top navigation bar. Users could now easily navigate to product category and product hub pages from anywhere on the site and an Applications Slider helped finding information and configuration recommendations for specific design applications enabling visitors to easier browse by either application or product.

A Google powered search appliance was reconfigured to deliver more relevant results faster. It was also made easier for those visitors looking for Service and Support related topics, by providing quick links *"Add a direct link to repair or calibration from main page,"* on the homepage to the most popular Service and Support pages, now better serving all the phases of the product life cycle.

Functionality / Product Information:

Through the surveys, it was clear that the following areas / tasks needed to be improved: Help users accomplish their tasks, Clarity in the product descriptions, Usefulness of product images and Thoroughness of the product descriptions.

Supported by several visitor comments such as *" Better information about your equipment, Products specifications -especially accessories could be better, Take the user where he wants to go, not to advertising for products he already owns, Give more specific info on particular models not just model groups, Show list prices. This would be very helpful for budgeting and the ability to make recommendations."*

For the visitors to find their desired information was extremely important. The data revealed that if they were unsuccessful they would not stay on the site or contact the company, but instead "exit" and look else where online. The data also showed that while the site had been doing a reasonably good job for visitors who were in the learning and buying phases, the satisfaction for the use phase was almost 10% below average, and of all visitors in the use category only half of the users said they could find the information they were looking for. The conclusion of this was that the web site needed to be more in balance, not only promoting new products and technologies, but also better serving the needs of existing users, even though on many occasions the products weren't manufactured any longer. This would help strengthen the brand, build customer loyalty, greater satisfaction and future business opportunities.

The new site and all product category pages were redesigned to feature an interactive Product Selector to guide and help customers find the right product for their needs. Users would now be able to narrow the selection by filtering. For more information, they could select up to four products and compare their specs and features side by side. For even more information or if they already knew what they're looking for, they could simply go to the product hub pages.

A self-guided featured products area on the homepage would also allow users the opportunity to see current promotions in the context of the products they were interested in, by automatically rotating through six promotions, but the users can also control this

using the Quick Navigation bar. By leveraging product category tabs it makes content easier to find and read. Each tab has information about the product category, photos of the products and quick navigation to the most popular pages. At a glance, the visitors can also see the most recently introduced or most popular products within each category.

Talk To Us In-Page Feature – Visitors provided feedback that it was difficult to find contact information on the website. As a result an in-page feature called “*Talk To Us*” was added on all relevant pages. All product pages were also designed to include country specific contact information for the visitor’s convenience.

In addition, since site users are always on a mission to learn about new technologies, the site was designed to provide “*Learn Links*” with a direct line to educational and informative information.

Service and support pages were also split up into two different sections to ease the navigation, and in addition based on feedback such as “*Have better descriptions of the manuals that the links go to and eliminate manuals for models that I am not interested in*”, specific actions regarding manuals by improving manual descriptions and providing direct links to manuals on each product category page. Electronic versions (only an archived print version was previously available) of the most popular old product manuals to help fulfill feedback such as, “*Add support documentation and manuals for the older products.*”

Design / Look & feel:

In an attempt to improve ease of reading content on the site and clarity of the site organization, and in a response to visitor comments such as, “*More defined pictures of equipment, Add some pictures taken from other viewing angles i.e. rear view, a bit more color, It’s too bland, Site design and appearance may be better, It should have a higher resolution, at least 1024 x 768 pixels*”, the appearance of the site was also changed.

A new sleek graphical design is now more appealing to users, but maintains some of the popular “old features”. Larger graphics and fonts are used for increased legibility. In addition the size / volume of promotional graphics were reduced for clutter-reduction, and width was increased to 1024x768 so visitors can see more at one time. “*Where are the USB plugs? What does the knob look like?*” Many times customers wanted to see the product up close to understand how it works, so a Product Photo Flip for all product families is now featured to see the shape, in a normal or enlarged format, of the product from different angles.

Content:

A large amount of effort was spent the content, after all the old saying “content is king” still holds true, and after all a web site can very much be thought of as a proxy for a company’s messaging hierarchy. Flashy features are nice, but if a technical audience won’t view it as credible or be able to find in-depth technical content, the site will fail. In addition, the job of a web site is being able to convey the product benefits to potential customers in an easy “scanning friendly” way, instead of talking only about specifications and features.

As a result, customers would now find it easier to understand the value and function of products through a completely re-written, web friendly and search optimized content on all product and application pages.

There are typically many product models within a series and a model-level specifications table now list out the critical specs (including starting price) for each model, and the new features and benefits tables also provide a list of the end customer benefits for each product along with the most important product features. To aid in customers’ decision

making process the new site also provides links to additional products, application and industry information including application notes, primers and other learning material.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know which ones of the products are right for testing a specific design, so wherever possible “Recommended Test Equipment” charts are also included and “Methods of Implementation” guidelines. Since products can be used for many different design applications with some better for certain applications than others, a customized “Related Applications” section is also featured. The terminology (what to call things) was also changed due to a notable preference by usability testers.

Benchmarking

As with any project, it's important to have metrics / benchmarks in place. For the site redesign, the target was set as the following within 3 months of the launch:

- Increase overall satisfaction by 5%
- Increase ability to find by 10%
- Increase the score for a positive search experience by 12%
- Decrease difficulty of browsing by 10%

In addition, specific targets for the technical health of the site were also monitored, related to the top 100 key word rank, page and link equity, tied to our search optimization efforts. Following the launch the scores were expected to decline the first two months but then recover and exceed the pre-launch scores.

Five months post-launch of the new web site

Due to various reasons the launch of the site had to be moved out a few weeks, but finally it was ready to launch and the anticipation was high, after all this was now the real thing beyond focus groups and lab environment. How was the site going to be received by our customers? What would the internal audience, the worst critics, say? It was also known that launching a new site, would almost always cause the satisfaction to drop, until the audience gets used to the new site, so the expectation had been set for a 3% point drop for the next two months and then to climb back up and level at 5% higher than the pre-launch satisfaction. At the same time, some of our custom questions on the web satisfaction survey were also tweaked to get more specific feedback about the new site. The days after the launch a flurry of emails and complaints were expected particularly from the internal audience, but it was stunningly quiet. Not a word, except some positive encouraging feedback. Some of the closest internal stakeholders were well informed about the Voice of the Customer approach, which is quite hard to argue with, but most employees, who are engineers themselves weren't aware about all the details. Was the site finally right? Close monitoring of survey feedback continued and although it seemed that there were fewer complaints, it would require a bit more time to know for sure. As expected the overall satisfaction dropped along with most of the other indicators. 3 months later the team frustration was high. Although satisfaction had climbed back up to pre-launch levels, which was good news, it was still below expectations, all the other indicators such as able to find, search experience was showing no signs of improving. In fact, some of these were worse than prior to the launch. What was the point of all the work if you can't move the needle? What would it take to improve? A team analyzed the customer data over and over, trying to gain some insights to why the site wasn't performing better. One of the areas identified was the visitor's on-site-search experience, and although this had been part of the site redesign it showed no signs of improvement. Due to this a full Search Usability Audit Review was performed to benchmarks the customer experience for a specific areas and to create a Usability Compliance Rating, comparing site usability performance against known usability indicators, and helping to identify the top 10 critical usability violations.

In the meantime, the overall satisfaction and most of the other indicators started to improve, and it was also clear that it wasn't a one month blip. Satisfaction improved for

each consecutive month and at the time of writing this article is now 10% above pre-launch, at an all time high.

What is next?

The site is now performing well. One of the indicators that haven't improved as well as expected is the visitor's on-site-search experience, which shows that the decision to do a Search Usability Audit was the right one. Other than search as always there are still many areas with room for improvement, so the usability optimization is an on-going effort.

About the web customer satisfaction survey

As part of the Voice of the Customer efforts the company has used various web satisfaction survey methodologies for the last 3 years, and received approximately 1000 survey completes each quarter.