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How to Build Trust Online

The world is in a crisis of trust. This impacts businesses at all levels, from the Fortune 500 company with a solid brand and a reputation that spans decades, to the young entrepreneur who's just beginning the task of turning a vision into a thriving enterprise—trust is relevant to all of us.

Most of us know that *trust is earned*. A holistic, user-centric approach to building online trust means that we bring this point to the foreground and keep it there. We must proactively build trust into each stage of the online development process.

Trust can be built into the online experience. A holistic approach to the interactive landscape, including Web sites, applications, mobile platforms and social media campaigns, integrates several key factors: a commitment to meeting the needs of each audience, a balance between the user's needs and the organization's needs, a powerful strategy for effective interactive communications and seamless consistency across all communication channels. A trustworthy brand reputation, visitor satisfaction, loyalty and the sharing of information are just some of the results.

Content

We all deal with the challenges of information overload. Stress symptoms of this common problem include confusion, uncertainty and distraction. This is the context in which we deliver messages to our online visitors.

Good content is clear, direct and distilled. It respects the visitor's time and gets to the heart of the message. Any confusion, inconsistency, fluff and filler that cloud the core message should be eliminated before it's delivered to the user. In a world of information, high-quality content will stand out, engage visitors and improve search engine optimization.

Information Architecture

Information architecture determines page layout, content organization, navigation paths, global elements and the interactive elements that will be used in a Web site, application or mobile solution. It also outlines the functionality. How does a business build a foundation for trust at this stage of development? By prioritizing information so that it's relevant and engaging. What content needs to stand out? What should a visitor see first? What are the key calls to action? Information needs to be organized with the visitor's needs in mind. Avoid infinite options; more is not necessarily better.

Interactivity

Businesses need to keep this question in mind: What am I inviting visitors to do?

Interactivity is about giving and receiving. It's about relationships. Whether visitors are looking for information, to buy and sell products and services, for opportunities to participate, to share information and experiences or for social interaction, clear communication channels are essential.

People want to be treated as individuals, not as data points. If the interactive elements are personal and relevant, visitors feel well-served and trust that a company genuinely cares about meeting their online needs. They'll be more open to engaging in an ongoing relationship.

Visual Design

Good information architecture sets the stage for a compelling visual design. The brand and message live in the design environment. Design brings the message to life and creates an emotional experience for the visitor.

Online visitors make emotional judgments of a site's visual appeal in just a fraction of a second. These initial impressions work to influence a visitor's judgments of the site's credibility. Creating a visual design that proactively addresses the importance of trust is critical to delivering consistently engaging visitor experiences.

Functionality

Every good online initiative starts with a vision and clearly defined strategic objec-

tives. Once the core message is clear, functionality needs to deliver it. Choices are then made from the wide array of Web technologies to serve and fulfill the vision. Great functionality supports the vision with a high degree of technical efficiency, quality and accuracy, all of which are essential elements for building trust.

The choices you make at this point are incredibly important to the user experience and your ability to build trust. Be sure to:

- Choose technologies that are *sustainable* and *scalable*—ones that can adapt to a company's growth and changing marketplace—and implement them with a high standard of quality.
- Choose technologies that are *relevant* to both the goals of the business and the needs of the audience.
- Remember that technology is meant to serve people, and not the other way around.

When trust is reflected at all of these creation points, an online presence comes to life. Visitors are offered an engaging experience—a seamless, artistic and innovative expression of a company's message—and the tools to succeed in satisfying their needs and delivering results. People turn to those they can trust in challenging times. There's never been a better time to inspire trust through an online presence than now. **m**

