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Make Your Website More Usable, Faster

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It has been almost two years since I asked which is faster, Home Depot or Lowe’s? No, I wasn’t talking about Tony Stewart (No. 20 — now Joey Logano), Jimmie Johnson (No. 48) and NASCAR. I am talking about using the home pages of these two companies to purchase a patio furniture set. One site is still faster.

One of my favorite statistics on the Internet is that 80 percent of the traffic flows through fewer than 10 percent of the pages. How can fewer than 10 percent of the pages garner more than 90 percent of the traffic? One would figure the great majority of the visitors would fall to this 10 percent as well.

My theory is usability. Quite simply, those few web pages are much easier to use and, therefore, keep customers coming back... quite a bit has changed in the two years since I first wrote about usability. We have a new president, collapsed housing and stock markets, a new health-care mandate and an ever-slowing economy.

What hasn’t changed are some of the basic principles of website usability. Is your website still slow? Now might be a good time to review it, update it and make it more usable.

One common usability mistake websites make is when they lose their focus. What is the purpose of your website? Too often I see websites that try to be all things to all people and end up being one of the 90 percent that are bypassed for usable sites.

If you are trying to connect with your customers or suppliers, you need more than a website. You need an extranet website. With an extranet website, you allow users to log in to gain access to information not available to the average public internet user.

If you are trying to connect with your customers or suppliers, you need more than a website. You need an extranet website. An extranet website includes a secure login to access one part of your website that has information available to the average public internet user.

Customer Relationship Management and Supply Chain Management websites allow the company to get a competitive advantage while freeing up the Internet site to be more usable for the public to interact with your company and become future customers and/or suppliers.

Another mistake is when some websites include information for their employees to access along with the public Internet users. This mistake will get both employees and potential customers lost on your unusable site.

What you need here is an intranet website. With an intranet website, much like an extranet, you allow the employee users to log in to gain access to information not available to the average public internet user.

Much like an extranet and Internet website, the intranet uses the same web interface to help facilitate the human resources function to make your company more efficient.

If have one website trying to be an Internet website, extranet website and intranet website all rolled into one, chances are it will become unusable for everyone. Split these websites into two or three sites, and you will speed up your website.

By creating extranets and intranets, your website can focus on one purpose, conveying information to the public so they can be converted into customers, suppliers and/or employees.

Don’t forget to use a pleasurably respectful tone while sharpening your website’s focus, and you will fix two of the 12 usability errors at once.

So who is faster, the No. 20 (Logano and Home Depot) or the No. 48 (Jimmie Johnson and Lowe’s)? How do Lowe’s and Home Depot do on a usability evaluation? I’ll let you try them out and judge for yourself.

I will tell you one is doing a better job than the other in its score for usability in the evaluation of the information systems students and majors here at Georgia Southern University.

Want to know your usability score? Contact me, and I’ll put a team of students on your website and see how fast you are.

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