

COLUMNS

Increase conversion by removing friction in mobile user experience design

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Increasing conversion in mobile experiences takes more than competitive prices and great customer service. It also requires designs that remove friction for people using a site or application.

Friction is any part of the user experience copy, user interface, screen flow that causes people to stop their progression to ask, "What do I do next?" There are many causes of friction that can be eliminated or reduced by critically examining how people experience your mobile offering.

On same page

One cause of friction can be overly long forms for checkout or account creation. This may go back to the early days of ecommerce when designers and merchants focused on the number clicks to conversion as a key performance indicator (KPI).

While reducing the interaction cost of unneeded taps is an important goal in mobile design, it can come at the cost of user frustration if forms are perceived by consumers as too long or complex to be filled out on a small touch screen.

This problem could be solved by chunking related form fields on separate screens and reducing the amount of information people have process at any one time. This approach also can get them more invested in completing a task because they have invested some time in it.

A related form-design problem is not clearly indicting to people how many steps or screens are needed to complete a given transaction, be it account creation or checkout. This can be solved with page indicators or other design techniques that let people quickly understand how many screens they have to go through and where they are in that process.

Another all-too-common problem is asking for information that is not needed to complete a purchase or other task. This information is often desired by marketing or analytics teams to build a fuller understanding of customers for segmentation of promotions or data mining.

But to users this is just one more field that has to be completed on a small screen using imperfect input devices fingers while possibly in an already distracting environment such as a plane, an office or a noisy home.

A good approach is to analyze forms asking what is truly needed to compete a task and how other information is can be collected later.

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user accounts provide a good example of this approach because they can be created with just an email address and password.

Techniques such as LinkedIn's percent of profile completion can be used to get people to provide additional information after they have created an account or profile. And some information, such as ZIP code, can be gotten from the device itself and be presented as a smart default that a user can change if it is not accurate.

Weighing in

The weight of Web pages also should be examined, especially now that responsive design is more widely used to display device-appropriate versions of the same HTML page.

While there are many ways to reduce page load for people on mobile networks, such as taking a mobile-first approach to design and coding, many sites still send the same larger image files to all devices and rely on CSS and JavaScript to resize them to fit the smaller screen.

According to a recent analysis by SOASTA, a provider of cloud-based application testing services, the average page size in May was more than 2MB, and as is predicted to exceed 3MB by November 2017.

This slows down page-loading and rendering on slower 3G and 4G connections, and even some Wi-Fi networks if there are a lot of other people using the same connection a common occurrence in some work settings. And it adds to user frustration and unnecessarily consumes more of a person's data plan than needed.

Another source of friction is sites and apps that deviate too much from established platform user interface and interaction patterns for iOS, Android or Windows Phone.

People form their mental model of how mobile experiences work based on the many apps they use, and deviating from that can introduce confusion. That does not mean you should avoid novel, new interactions or interface widgets, but you should recognize when you are breaking from an established convention and conduct usability tests with consumers fitting your target audience.

WHILE THESE are a just a few examples of where you can find friction in your user experience design, they should get you started on thinking about your sites and apps with a new point of view.

Most sources of design friction can be eliminated or at least mitigated through more thoughtful design and development that actively looks for friction points and tries to remove them. Your conversion rate and customer satisfaction will benefit from this more-nuanced approach to design.

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