

# It's Not About You

*Design websites to meet your customers' needs*

**TO SAY I WAS A BIT COUNTER-CULTURE** when I was in my early adulthood would be an understatement. Very short hair dyed an unnatural color and a punk wardrobe with a hint of ashram were just the starting points. But I quickly realized that if I wanted to earn anything more than minimum wage at a vegan coffee bar, I needed to dress for the job I wanted, not the identity I embraced.

Throughout my business career, I have seen this scenario played out over and over again. One area in particular that suffers from the “dress for myself or for my audience” dilemma is graphic design, which includes websites.

## **YOUR WEBSITE MAY BE ABOUT YOU, BUT IT ISN'T FOR YOU**

Creating and managing a website is challenging. You have to decide the best way to use words, graphics, pages, and navigation to sell your products, promote your brand, and tell your story. This can all feel deeply personal, but the reality is, your website isn't for you. It's for your customers.

Your website's most important role is to deepen your relationship with customers, and that involves knowing what they like, want, and need.

Customers don't need you to entertain them with creative graphics. We live in a

world awash with creative graphics, and it's highly unlikely that any small business website design effort could wow a consumer considering the other options available to them. But what customers do need are solutions to their problems.

At its broadest definition, business exists to solve problems for consumers. Grocery stores solve the problem of what to eat, clothing stores solve the problem of what to wear. Your job is to figure out what needs you fill for your customers. Then, you must make those needs easy to fulfill using your website. The customer has a problem; you provide a solution—you're both happy.

So all website projects should focus intensively on the question “who is this website for?” Your answer must be more refined than simply “people who need jewelry tools” or “women who buy jewelry.” Your answer should include a character sketch describing the main customer.

- Is she 23 years old or 47?
- Is she from a specific geographical area?
- What kind of technology does she use? How does she use it?
- What does she do when she's not buying what you're selling?
- How much education does she have?
- What type of family situation does she have?
- Does she own her own business?



*While your website should be about you, it must be designed for your customers.*

Understanding who your customer is has tremendous impact on how your website should look and perform. Back in my music days, I worked with a group who had a wedding band. They could cover absolutely anything, and play it well. This group made more money than any other cover band I knew. How did they do it? They dressed and prepared sets for the audience for whom they were playing. If the venue was a sedate evening wedding for a mature couple, they weren't going to start playing Black Sabbath covers. They dressed differently for a rowdy frat party than they did for a bat mitzvah. In each case, the audience didn't care about the band's range of styles—they just cared that the band could play the songs they wanted to listen and dance to.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR YOUR CUSTOMER?

Once you know who your customer is, you need to figure out what problem you can solve for her. The more specific you can be, the better your site will perform. Broad problems, such as "my customer needs jewelry," will set you up for failure. Examples of more actionable problems are:

- My customer needs to reduce costs in her production shop.
- My customer needs to get control over business expense tracking.
- My customer needs to buy an engagement ring and wedding bands.
- My customer needs to buy gifts for his wives and daughters.
- My customer needs to mark important family milestones.
- My customer needs to buy environ-

mentally sustainable products.

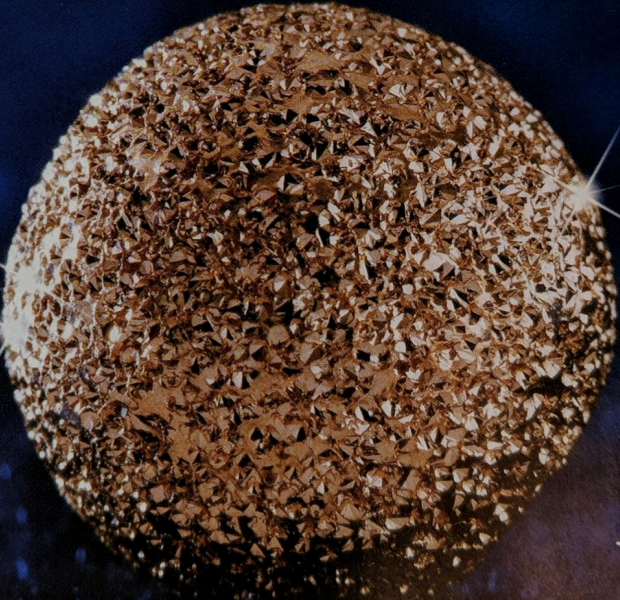
- My customer needs to buy products that don't involve child labor.
- My customer needs to buy jewelry that nobody else is wearing.

Once you know what you can do to help your customer solve a problem, you can use that knowledge to make sure your website menu titles, page headings, sidebars, and footer information provide answers to those problems. You can also select more meaningful search terms to ensure customers searching for solutions to their problems end up on your site and not on someone else's.

Finally, you can make sure that your

various articles, pages, and product descriptions further talk to your customer in a way that is meaningful to her. Less than 10 percent of purchasers buy something the first time they visit a website. Your job is to do the work of being so relevant, so appealing, so meaningful to your visitors that they remember you enough to come back a second time.

So here is your homework for this month. Do the work of identifying your customer and your customer's problem. Then completely review your website through your customer's eyes. Is the website enough about her? Or is it mostly about you? Get this right, and your bank balance will thank you. ♦



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