

How Does Your Website Make Me Feel?

Note: This article can be customized with specific examples for your industry.

It's commonly understood that *"people buy emotionally, not intellectually."* Even when people think they're making a rational decision, powerful subconscious factors come into play. To sell effectively, we're told to anticipate our customers' needs, to demonstrate that we *"feel their pain"*, and to respond to clues in their body language and tone of voice.

In the "real world" we do this very well. And we know that if we can have a direct, in-person conversation, there's a good chance that we'll close the sale or keep a happy customer.

For the online visitor, your Web presence is the next best thing to that in-person conversation with you, your colleagues or employees. And since so many people are researching products and services online, it's critical that your Website has maximum impact in persuading them to take the next step with you.

How do you connect emotionally with your visitors? Do they feel listened to, understood and appreciated by your Website and your social media presence? Are you meeting their real needs? Do your existing customers feel supported and valued when interacting with you online?

The Critical Emotions for Web Success

I've been working with client Web strategies in a wide range of industries since 1995. Based on this experience, I've identified some key emotions that you need to evoke in your online visitors to create and sustain profitable relationships.

How well your Web presence does this can have a major effect on the visceral, instinctive reactions of your visitors, and their propensity to buy from or connect with you.

In total, I have twenty criteria for emotional connectedness that I recommend for any Website. That's too many to discuss in this article, but let's look at a few highlights:

1. Do I Feel Recognized?

When we first meet in a business setting, we're introduced, or we introduce ourselves with some statement about what we do, and why we should connect with each other.

The most important task for your home page is to accomplish this initial introduction. You've heard the "ten-second" rule about how long a visitor will stay on a site that doesn't engage them.

So, does your home page really tell me what you do? Does it speak to me in specific terms that make very clear what services you provide, and what type of customers or clients you work with? Does it use language that I'll understand even if I don't know the jargon of your industry or specialization?

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet there are astounding numbers of Websites that fail to provide basic information on the home page.

If your goal is to get the customer to visit your physical store, does your home page clearly show your location, and how to get there? Every time you force the visitor to make a decision, such as *"Do I click on the Contact Us page to find their address?"*, you open up the possibility that they'll make the wrong choice (from your viewpoint), or worse still, they'll just leave.

And is it clear to me whether you can, or would want to help me? Are you geared towards corporate bulk buyers, or small businesses, or both? Do you operate nationally or only in your immediate location? Will your visitors know what you mean by generic terms such as *"total business solutions"* or should you be more specific as to what you offer?

2. Do I Feel Engaged?

As we continue our "real-world" conversation, we start to find common points of interest, whether personal or professional. We begin to feel that we can relate with each other, and this helps to build our business relationship.

So you have to make the visitor feel drawn in - that they want to know more about your business, your products and your services - but again, from the viewpoint of their needs and interests. And you have to give the visitor a clear sense that you want to find those points of connection, and to learn more about them.

Does your site present a bewildering array of products, manufacturers or options without any guidance as to selecting from these? Think about the conversation that you'd have with a customer in your store. You'd find out what they were looking for, and then you'd ask questions to help them find the right solution for their needs.

So how can you mirror this process online? You could offer a "Help Me" page that guides visitors through some Frequently Asked Questions or other choices and provides links to recommended products based on their answers. You could incorporate an interactive chat facility with a customer service agent during office hours, or access to a searchable knowledge base.

3. Do I Feel Convinced?

If the visitor is seeing your business for the first time, they need to be comfortable that you are who you say you are, and that you can deliver what you promise.

One of the most important elements in establishing this part of the connection is to show the *"faces"* of your business. Have you noticed how many Websites don't name any of their owners, or the people that customers will interact with? It's much easier to have a conversation when I know who I'm talking to!

Customer testimonials and other third-party endorsements are critical elements in establishing trust - they say far more about you than your own marketing statements. How many sites have we all seen that trumpet *"nationally recognized"* or *"premier provider .."*? Prove it!

Include client quotes and success stories right across your site where they're front and center as visitors are engaged in your content. If you win an award, tell the visitor what that means for them in terms of how you were evaluated.

4. Do I Feel Motivated?

Towards the end of our "real-world" conversation, we'll hopefully close a sale, or we'll talk about some next steps, or we might say *"Let's stay in touch"*. To do that with our online visitor, we need to persuade them to buy something, or to tell us who they are, and give us permission to reconnect with them.

Too many Web pages give great information, but then tail off with no call to action or directions about where to go next. If you don't issue a clear invitation, you again leave it to the visitor to work out what to do - and you run a big risk of losing them.

So at every point on every page where the visitor might be thinking *"Tell me more"*, or *"How do I get this?"*, provide a clickable link to the next step, to your shopping cart, to your newsletter subscription page, or to whatever you want them to do. Don't wait until the end of the page - they may never get there! Look for the emotional *"tipping points"* on every page where they're ready to talk more with you and grab them in the moment!

Diluting the Connection

Of course, it's all too easy to undo all the good feeling that we create by frustrating or annoying the visitor, or simply by giving them a dead end.

One of my favorite bugbears is the site search engine that allows me to enter my query, and then tells me *"No results found. Please try again."*

How is that supposed to make me feel? What was wrong with my keywords or my parameters if the search page allowed me to select them? Am I being stupid? Or do you really not want to help me?

Your visitor is clearly looking for something, and has taken a step towards connecting with you. So how about a results page that lets them know that you can't immediately answer their question, but offers a link to your contact form so that they can send a question, or some tips or suggestions on how to find more information?

The ultimate customer service feature is an opportunity to interact with a live assistant - if your site offers this, the search results page is a perfect place to maximize its visibility.

So How Emotionally Connected is Your Website?

I hope that I've sparked your curiosity enough to take a fresh look at your Website.

Think about why different types of visitors are coming to your site, what might be on their minds, and review your copy and navigation accordingly. Think about new customers and existing ones, employees, media - anyone who might have a reason to visit. Are you doing everything that you can to create an *"emotionally connected"* experience for all of them?

The right mix will gain you significantly higher time spent on your site, more calls from pre-qualified leads, more signed contracts, happier repeat customers, attention from new markets, offers of strategic alliances and collaborations, and insights into creating successful new products and services.

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