Customer Care**words**
Top Task Management for Websites

Strategy & Online

How online is changing the game and the playing field for strategy development

Gerry McGovern
Customer Carewords
April 02, 2013

Table of Contents

You don't need an online strategy

We're all online. And we're spending more and more of our time there. Online is everywhere and is impacting practically everything we do; from how we interact with friends, to how we buy things, to how we deal with our health and taxes. Online is not something that can be neatly separated from the rest of the organization. It affects every aspect of the organization, from its employees to its customers. So, for that reason, you don't need an online strategy. You need a single organizational strategy that is heavily influenced by online.

"Online is about service."

Online is about service. For example, we go online to get service and support for something we own. We also buy products through a process of self-service, and increasingly we buy services online. (Microsoft Office, for example, used to be a product, now it is an online service.)

Products thrive on the complexity sell. Services offered in an information-overloaded world thrive on the simplicity sell. The route to simplicity is through rapid, continuous, incremental improvements. Get it out there as quickly as possible and then quickly improve it based on customer feedback.

To develop strategy you need to have an in-depth understanding of your strengths. You need to understand your competitors and industry. But you also need to understand your customers and the society within which you operate. Online is making customers and society bigger and more powerful players, so they now play a much more central role in strategy development.

Strategy is hard. "Most companies do not have a strategy," Freek Vermeulen, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the London Business School, states. He thinks most organizations cycle between drifting and reacting. "To be emphatically blunt," he states, "most companies and their top executives do not have a good rationale for doing the things they are doing and cannot explain coherently how their actions should lead to superior performance."

A. G. Lafley, former CEO of Procter & Gamble and Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management agree. Authors of a book on

strategy, Playing To Win, they believe a great many companies do not have a strategy and that managers often confuse strategy with having a vision or a plan.

How do you know an organization has no strategy when it comes to online? They talk about being for everyone. The website is full of content that is never updated and never removed. They want to be in all markets and deal with all audiences. They want to answer everyone's questions. They are unable to make choices, to prioritize. "The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do," Michael Porter, a pioneer in strategic thinking, has stated.

> "Strategy is choosing what not to do."
> Michael Porter

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on," Steve Jobs stated at the Apple Worldwide Developers' Conference in 1997. "But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things." And as Southern Company CEO Tom Fanning emphasizes, "Your greatest indicator of success is how many ideas you kill."

Organizations that have no strategy when it comes to online are in love with technology, tools and apps. They want a mobile app. They don't know why but everyone else has one so they must have one too. They want to buy a new content management system because they believe buying technology will inherently make things better. Every couple of years they go through a 'redesign' where they graphically change the first couple of levels of the website but leave the deeper levels alone. They focus on formats and channels and actions. They talk about how they need more video, more content, how they need to be on Twitter or Facebook.

Porter has talked about how strategy is often confused with a particular action. "My strategy is to outsource" is not a strategy according to Porter. The activity (outsourcing) is what results from a strategy. Creating more content is not a strategy. Why? What for?

Porter also states that we often confuse strategy with goals. It is not a strategy to be number one in your market. That is a goal. A strategy is about what you are going to do to become number one—and stay there.

Nor is strategy about having a vision; it's about implementing one. According to Porter, "the core idea of strategy is to provide an overarching view on how a particular company is going to succeed in the marketplace".

According to Roger Martin, strategy is really a "mindset" that views "business life as not entirely random; stochastic but not random. While it may be absolutely necessary to revisit and revise choices more often than convenient, the assumption holds that effortful, determined, revisable strategy is better than simply letting happen whatever will happen."

> "Strategy is about trying to take control and trying to win."

Strategy is about trying to take control and trying to win. Strategy is about trying to predict the future or at least enough of that future that will give you a competitive advantage. Strategy is about being specific. It is about helping you get from A to C by doing B. It's about putting your cards on the table, placing your bets.

More than choosing what to do, it is about choosing what NOT to do. Because today, more than ever, there are far more things that you could do—but shouldn't. These things distract and create complexity. They take away valuable time and resources from what really matters. Strategy is about understanding what really matters and acting on it.

According to Ken Favaro, a senior partner at Booz & Company, strategy is about answering the following questions:
1. What business or businesses should you be in?
2. How do you add value to your businesses?
3. Who are the target customers for your businesses?
4. What are your value propositions to those target customers?
5. What capabilities are essential to adding value to your businesses and differentiating their value propositions?

You don't need an online strategy. Online is too important for that. You need the online world (the Web, the Internet)—call it what you like—to seep into every aspect of your strategic thinking. Online changes the game. Online changes the playing field. Strategy needs to change because of online.

The elements of strategy

It's about winning

Winning is still at the heart of strategy, A. G. Lafley and Roger Martin state. According to them, a strategy is "a coordinated and integrated set of five choices: a winning aspiration, where to play, how to win, core capabilities, and management systems". It's about establishing a "difference that matters" as Cynthia Montgomery, Timken Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, writes in her book, The Strategist.

> "Strategy is about establishing a 'difference that matters'."
> Cynthia Montgomery

Strategy has its roots in military thinking and the art of war is the art of winning. While a desire to win is at the heart of clear strategies, you don't necessarily have to destroy the competition. Increasingly, there are win-win opportunities. "Strategy is about the game that we want to play and remember competition is not a zero-sum game," Dr. Amit Kapoor, chairman of the Indian Institute for Competitiveness, states.

Governments often struggle with the concept of winning as many government departments believe they don't have competition. This may be true in a narrow sense, but in today's interconnected world, countries compete with each other for resources and markets. Governments can win by being more efficient and less bureaucratic than their competitors (other governments).

It's about the future, not the past

"The only thing we know about the future is that it will be different," Peter Drucker once said when talking about strategy. He went on to say that, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." Strategy is about creating your own future. But according to Freek Vermeulen many organizations "write up their strategy in such a way that everything fits into what they were already doing anyway. This is much like generating a to-do list of activities you have already completed. Last year."

From an organizational standpoint the online revolution has happened very quickly and many senior managers are really struggling to understand it strategically. Some senior managers don't even consider online as being part of the strategic puzzle. They think it an 'IT issue' or something like that; something that can be delegated. Online has become much too important to delegate.

I've been working as a web professional since 1994 and one thing that has always surprised me is how little time senior management spends thinking about and engaging with online. In 2012, we surveyed over 1,000 web professionals and their number one challenge was not competitors but their own senior management's lack of engagement and understanding. That needs to change. There's such a huge opportunity out there in the online world if we bring our best and most experienced minds to bear.

> "If strategy is about the future, the future is online."

Unfortunately, when some senior managers do engage with online they bring old thinking, old strategies. The intranet is often owned by Communications and senior communications managers tend to see the intranet as merely a publication where they can tell employees how great things are. When the public website gets senior management treatment it often ends up with huge billboard graphics on the homepage; nice smiling faces and vague marketing statements that tell the customer how great things are. (One thing for sure: the empowered customer and employee do not want to hear platitudes.)

Online is a genuinely new game and playing field. We must bring new thinking if our strategies are going to succeed. If strategy is indeed about the future then it will increasingly be about online.

Strategy is coherent, unified and understood

Strategy needs to be coherent, with a strong central driving force. It's like a large river. Yes it can have tributaries but they must flow from the same core source. There is a lack of coherence and unity today when it comes to online. We've got IT strategy, UX strategy, content strategy, marketing strategy, customer experience strategy. Too many strategies equal no strategy.

Each discipline wants to drive strategy. That's classic organizational, silo-based thinking. Strategy today must shape itself around the customer. It must be outward-leaning and network-focused. If it focuses on organizational silos and professional disciplines it will fail.

> "Strategy must shape itself around the customer, not the organization."

Strategic thinking comes from military thinking. It's hard to win a battle if your ground troops, navy and air force are each trying to achieve different objectives.

"Most companies don't concentrate," Freek Vermeulen states. "They cannot resist the temptation of also doing other things that, on an individual basis, look attractive. As a consequence, they end up with a bunch of alternate (sometimes even opposing) strategic directions that appear equally attractive but strangely enough don't manage to turn into profitable propositions. Too many strategies lack focus." This is often a perfect description of the websites and intranets of large organizations. Lots of stuff being added without coherence. Essentially, these websites are strategy-free zones.

"A strategy only becomes a strategy if people in the organisation alter their behaviour as a result of it," Vermeulen states. A good strategy is holistic and joined up. It may be only a piece in a jigsaw but it is a piece that fits. It must be understood and acted-on throughout the organization. Otherwise, there is a real danger of the organization competing against itself.

Most organizations and empires are weakened from within long before competitors do any damage. The drug of success is invincibility, and this often begins as the imagined invincibility of a particular product group, manager, division or discipline. Lots and lots of strategies that are only understood by their own narrow interest groups are a sure sign of organizational dysfunction.

Strategy improves organizational efficiency and productivity

The reason you have a strategy is to get better, to improve, to become more efficient and productive. "If we are not operationally effective, then strategy doesn't matter," Dr. Amit Kapoor states.

A strategy for an intranet should focus on productivity and efficiency but unfortunately rarely does. This is because most organizations do not value the time of information/knowledge workers. Another reason is that the senior managers who develop strategy do not use—or rarely use—the intranet. (They have secretaries and support staff.) Therefore, they have little conception of how unproductive and time-wasting most intranets are.

> "Strategies are about getting better at what we do."

Strategies must be about value creation. How do we make money? How do we save money? They must deliver competitive advantage. They must deliver increased efficiency. Strategies are about getting better at what we do. Great strategies are about clearly stating what we have to do to become the best at what we do. Strategy clearly shows how what you do matters.

How online impacts strategy

Online has changed the playing field. It's a new terrain, a new online world. So, what exactly has changed?

The empowered, social customer

Customers are more powerful. They are more social. They are more cynical and skeptical. They trust leaders less and their own peers more. They are more educated and do more research. They go online to complete a task.

Social media is about people talking to people, customers talking to customers. It is the world of the customer, where the organization is a guest. This is a radical change. Organizations are used to telling customers what to do, what to buy. Organizations are used to controlling the message. Traditional organizations are simply not used to customers talking back.

> "Organizations must develop much greater empathy for the customer today."

Today, organizations must develop much greater empathy for their customers. In many organizations, customer interactions are controlled by a tight group of people (often in sales and support). Large parts of the organization, including product developers, marketers, content publishers and online professionals, have surprisingly little interaction with or knowledge of the customer.

Without interaction it is very hard to develop empathy. In an online world where customers are increasingly dominant, more in control, more impatient and less loyal, this is a recipe for increasing dissatisfaction. Developing organization-wide empathy for the customer should be a key consideration for modern management. At the most basic level, that means employees observing customer behavior much more.

Strategy must now consider the empowered, social customer and citizen because more than anything else this is how the game and playing field has changed. Strategies that embrace openness and transparency are more likely to succeed today. Strategies that tap into the collective intelligence or wisdom of the crowds are also more likely to be successful.

Amazon and Google are perfect examples of organizations that have used social strategies to achieve success. One of the most valuable assets Amazon has is its customer ratings. Google built its success on linking. The more links a page had the higher that page ranked on the search results page. Links are the golden currency of the social network. People tend to link to things they like or think are important.

The customer is self-serving

One of the key changes that online drives is the movement away from products and towards services. Today, the product is in the Cloud or wherever. We don't care. We want the song not the CD. We want a place to store and easily access sales leads, not the Customer Relationship Management software. We care much less about the product and much more about the service the product delivers.

A service culture is different from a product culture. When customers buy products they are open to the complexity sell. That's because people are very bad at predicting their future needs. They don't need feature X and Y and Z but they might need them. So they buy them, just in case.

When customers buy services they are much more driven by immediate need. 'This is what I want to do now. Can you help me?' When customers are influenced by immediate need they tend to care more about speed, convenience and simplicity. We thus move from the complexity sell to the simplicity sell.

But most organizations think in products—things they produce—and I mean this in the broadest sense. The developers and programmers think in tools and applications. Customers think in booking flights and checking the weather. Content professionals think in documents and pages, but customers want to know what this rash on their child's arm could mean, or which of these models has the best fuel consumption? Nobody is looking for the installation manual because they like to read or want to 'engage' with your content. They want to install the product.

> "Online is in essence about self-service."

As members of organizations we inherently see ourselves as the creators of things (products), the doers and producers of things. It's all so Industrial Age, but it's a very deeply engrained mindset. Rarely

will you hear a programmer or writer say: 'I serve customers.' We don't like to serve, do we? 'Oh, service, that's that low level activity we have to provide to people who have bought our stuff, isn't it? Any chance we can outsource it?'

Service and support is the new sales and marketing. It is the new branding. Service is the future.

Online represents a particular type of service—self-service. If you think face-to-face service management is hard, self-service is ten times harder. Online changes how we can deal with customers by letting customers deal with themselves. The empowered customer wants to do things for themselves quickly and easily. Self-service design is absolutely obsessed with speed, convenience and simplicity. Online, speed doesn't kill. Complexity kills.

> "Online, speed doesn't kill. Complexity kills."

Traditional organizations were often made up of intermediaries who channeled customer requests. Sales people talked to customers to understand them better. Administrators added customer details to internal systems. Rarely did the customer have to deal with the 'backend' systems. These complicated backend systems and their related 'backend' content have now become frontend.

Self-service design requires very particular skills. These begin with empathy. You need professionals who like to serve, who enjoy observing customer behavior, who don't make the fatal mistake of saying: 'Well, I love using Advanced Search…' (Critical rule: You are **NOT** your customer.)

Self-service management is driven by Big Data and small data analysis, by behavior observation techniques (usability, customer experience) and a facts-based, not opinion-based model of management. Thankfully, online is the perfect laboratory of human behavior. Those who become experts in working in this online lab will thrive in the future.

> "A fundamental rule of self-service design is: **Do as I do, not as I say**."

The worst possible way to design for self-service is to have five smart people in a room drinking lattes. The next worst way is to have 15 customers in a room. Customers are terrible at describing what they do in a self-service environment. We

have to observe what they actually do. So, a fundamental rule of self-service design is: **Do as I do, not as I say**.

Self-service design is about rapid, continuous improvement, not launch and leave. It is about small, incremental changes based on how successful the customer is in completing their task. And if the customer is not successful, then it is about adapting or ultimately taking away. "Wal-Mart isn't putting all of its digital eggs into one basket," All Things Digital wrote about the Wal-Mart strategy. "It's hedging strongly by trying out myriad programs simultaneously, expanding the ones that seem to have traction, and killing the ones that don't." Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, advises that you should "allow yourself room to experiment and don't try to make each individual release as polished as possible."

I have seen situations where changing just one word in a link has had a dramatic impact on customer task success rates. Most organizations are today not structured to deal with rapid, continuous improvement. They are built around projects, around inputs. Did the website launch? Did you add the content? Have you launched the campaign? The project-based management model will be difficult to dislodge but online demands a continuous improvement model that is driven by customer task success rates.

> "The online motto is: Test, learn and rapidly adapt."

Today, the world is too complex and things happen too quickly for any organization to design something perfect. We must get something that works for the top tasks up and running and then test, learn and adapt. Online is truly the world where the fittest survive. But as Darwin meant, fitness does not mean strength and muscle and brute force, but rather the ability to adapt. Particularly when change is at its most frenzied, fitness means rapid adaptability.

Search and strategy: the customer becomes the advertiser

There's an intersection in Manhattan that has five Starbucks; one on each corner and one just up from a corner. It's about speed and convenience, meeting rush hour demand. Top websites don't just want to be first when someone searches for their product. They want to be

the first five results, thereby squeezing their competitor out. In the online world it's still about location but that location is often on the search results page.

When it comes to online search it is the customer who is searching, not the organization. The customer is the advertiser. When they search they are placing an advertisement. So, the nature of the 'what' changes. In the offline world, the question was: What are we going to do to find customers? In the online world the question is: What are we going to do to get found by customers who are searching for our products and services?

> "The customer is now the advertiser."

Again, this is part of the dynamic of the empowered customer. They are not there to be led on the Web. They know what they want. When was the last time you went to Google and said: "I don't know what to search for. My doctor said to search once a day. That's it's good for me. Someone give me a word, please."

The future is about customers who more and more know what they want, and who increasingly view traditional advertising and marketing as an annoyance and irritation. Offline was about getting attention. Online is about giving attention. There's a huge difference between strategies for getting attention and strategies for giving it.

> "Offline was about getting attention. Online is about giving attention."

The attention deficit

People have basically the same amount of attention to give today as they had 50 years ago. It's just that there are vastly more things they can now give that attention to. So, the attention gets spread more and more thinly. And for most things out there, there is no attention left.

The nature of all organizations is to behave like tribes, like empires. The customer is not part of the tribe. They are on the outside; the stranger. Empires and tribes tend to think that they are the center of the universe. What the organization does is valuable. The organization's time is precious. Not the customers' time. That sort of mentality must change in the online world.

Customers have very little time to give today and they are ruthless on the Web. They make decisions in seconds as they rapidly scan a page. That's why simplicity is so essential. Because if you're not simple, easy to use and fast then customers will just not use you.

Complexity never goes away. Rather, it's a question of who takes on the complexity. If you make it easier for the customer then you invariably create greater complexity for the organization. Greater complexity results in higher costs. To most organizations this simply doesn't make sense. They refuse to take on the extra complexity because they can't see why they should take on this extra cost and effort. That's because most organizations only measure inputs.

Online and value: measuring outcomes, not inputs

The nature of online allows you to measure outcomes in a way that was never really possible before. The Web is like a giant Petri dish of human behavior. On the Web customers leave a trail. We have the methods to observe what they are doing. Not what they say they are doing. Not what we think they are doing. What they are **actually** doing. People don't just consume content. They also create content. Their every movement is content. They leave a trail, a record.

Most organizations only measure half of what's important. The inputs. The purchase and installation of a content management system is an input. It's measured as part of a project. Once the project is completed that is marked as a success. But as I have often seen, such software can make websites worse, as it allows many more employees to publish poor quality content with much greater ease. Very few organizations measure whether the content the content management system publishes is actually useful or not. That's an outcome.

"We have a Cult of Volume when it comes to measuring."

Website redesigns often focus on inputs. Another project. Change the graphical design. Project launched. Project success. But is it a success? What is the real outcome? Is it easier for customers to do things now? Very few organizations measure that.

We have a Cult of Volume when it comes to metrics. We reward people who add stuff. We rarely reward people who take stuff away. And yet at Customer Carewords we have found on numerous occasions that

when you delete huge quantities of the content on a website, conversions go up and support requests go down. It's counterintuitive but it's true because the main message of the online world is that so much of what is out there is low quality and it just gets in the way of the good stuff. When people say they want simplicity what they mean is they want to quickly and easily get to the good stuff.

Top tasks management

Top tasks management is an outcome-based management model that is focused on the top tasks that are most important to the customer. It is about continuously improving these tasks based on evidence of what the customer is actually doing when they are trying to complete them.

It is based on the principle that in the online world customers know what they want to do and that they want to get it done as quickly and easily as possible. It measures the outcome. It measures whether the person has been able to complete the task. It measures how long it took them. It records a sample of these people and observes their behavior so as to identify what caused task failure, what wasted time.

> "When a tiny task goes to bed at night it dreams of being a top task."

For every one top task there are at least 10 tiny tasks. When a tiny task goes to bed at night it dreams of being a top task. Tiny tasks are often political and make a lot of effort to get on the website, on the homepage if possible.

Top Tasks Management involves the following steps:
1. Identify a masterlist of customer tasks. There are usually no more than 100 for any particular environment.
    a. Intranet tasks might include: find people; book meeting rooms; training; pay and leave; policies and procedures.
    b. Tasks for a health organization might include: check symptoms; basic facts about a condition; book an appointment; costs
    c. Tasks for a university might include: find a course; find professors and lecturers; costs; compare universities.
    d. Tasks for a technology company might include: download software; configuration; pricing; compare products; troubleshooting.
2. Once the task masterlist has been finalized give customers the list and ask them to vote for their top five tasks. At Customer Carewords we have carried out this process over 400 times and practically every time we see the same pattern:
    a. 5% of tasks will get about 25% of the vote (the top tasks)

     b. 50% of tasks will get about 25% of the vote (the tiny tasks)

     c. So, if there are 100 tasks in the vote, 5 will get as much of the vote as the bottom 50.

     d. This sort of voting gives you a task league table; from the most important to the least important. It allows you to focus on what matters (the top tasks) and defocus on what doesn't matter (the tiny tasks).

3. Test the top tasks by creating examples of these tasks and testing them with a representative sample of customers. Measure:

     a. The success rate: How many customers are successfully able to complete these tasks?

     b. The disaster rate: How many customers got an answer they thought was correct but was in fact wrong?

     c. Completion time: How long did it take customers to complete the tasks?

4. Use data from these tests to make changes so as to increase task completion, reduce disaster rate and reduce time-on-task. These become the new outcome-based metrics of success.

5. Continuously improve based on a process of making changes based on test results and then testing again to see if these changes have had the desired effects.

Top tasks management gives you the evidence to say no to the tiny tasks because the tiny tasks add complexity:

1. They make it harder to find quality results when searching. Each tiny task adds to the pages that need to be indexed. Because there are so many tiny tasks, the number of tiny task pages can explode making it harder and harder to find the top tasks pages.

2. They make it harder to navigate. Tiny tasks demand links and these links can confuse the customer, sending them off in the wrong direction.

3. They eat up your time: Many online teams are nibbled to death by tiny tasks. There are often so many requests for these tiny tasks that the very act of refusing them can take considerable time. This time could have been spent continuously improving the top tasks.

We need to make the hard choices. If we want to simplify we must focus on the top tasks. That means getting rid of—or at minimum demoting—the tiny tasks. We must focus on and continuously improve the customer's top tasks. Otherwise, we will never simplify and never

deliver what the empowered, demanding customer of today wants from us: speed, simplicity, convenience. Top Tasks Management gives us a model and approach to do that.

(To learn more about Top Tasks Management, read Gerry McGovern's book, The Stranger's Long Neck: http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/books/strangers-long-neck)

Strategy is hard: keep practicing

"I have never seen anybody become good at strategy without practice," Roger Martin states. "It may happen, but I have never seen it. I doubt that I will see it, because strategy is a discipline. Like any discipline, you have to believe in it and work at it to become skilled; both mindset and effort are required to make progress and become adept at the strategy."

"Does what you do matter?"

In her book, The Strategist, Cynthia Montgomery writes passionately about how strategy is an ongoing process that is intertwined with leadership. "There will always be countless contingencies, good and bad, that could not have been fully anticipated," she writes. "There will always be opportunities to capitalize on the learning a business has accumulated along the way. The strategist is the one who must shepherd this ongoing process, who must stand watch, identify and weigh, decide and move, time and time again. The strategist is the one who must decline certain opportunities and pursue others."

Particularly today in this age of frenzied change, strategy must be nimble. It must get constant feedback and adapt to that feedback where necessary. Do humans make the tools or does the tool make the human? The online world is remaking what it means to be human as much as we humans are making it. This is an age of great change and great opportunity, but also threat.

A key question that Cynthia Montgomery asks is: "Does your company matter?" To paraphrase this question: Does what you do matter? Does what you produce matter? Is there anything that you do online that actually matters to customers; that they would really miss if it were gone? Do the apps you launch matter? Does the content you produce matter? Even worse, might the customer be better off if your apps and content were deleted because the clutter has been reduced?

We need to start answering these questions because if we don't they will be answered for us. We can try and create our little bit of the future, as Peter Drucker suggested, or risk the danger of letting the future pass us by.

As part of getting good at strategy you must write it down. It is something you must be able to go back to so you can see if you achieved it or not. There follows some examples of strategy that is influenced by the new game and new playing field online creates.

Examples of strategy influenced by online

Strategies for intranets

- Reduce the length of time it takes for a sales rep to put a quote together for a customer by 50% by simplifying the online quotation tool.
- Reduce the number of HR phone support staff from 4 to 2 by simplifying the navigation and HR content, thereby allowing employees to answer their employment questions on their own.
- Increase patent idea applications by 25% by simplifying the online application tool.
- Cut 5 minutes off every meeting by reducing by 5 minutes the amount of time it takes to book a meeting online.
- Improve sharing of best practice sales presentations by rewarding both parties when a new sale is made due to a sales person using another sales person's presentation.
- Improve collaboration by mandating that any new product development must involve at least two distinct physically dispersed units of the organization. Facilitate this collaboration online.
- Improve policy compliance by integrating policy information directly at the point where the employee is about to complete the task online.

Strategies for commercial websites

- Reduce phone and face-to-face support costs by 15% by increasing customers' ability to complete their support tasks using online channels.
- Increase the conversion ratio from 30:1 to 28:1 by improving the ability of airline customers to see the costs of flights on days close to their preferred dates.
- Reduce repetitive, simple questions to doctors by 50% by allowing citizens to answer these questions themselves online.
- Increase the number of sales leads by 25% by asking the customer for as little personal information as possible when they seek to contact or otherwise engage with us.
- Make the purchasing process as convenient as possible for the customer by asking them for as little personal information as

possible and asking for that information at the last possible point in the purchase process.

- Improve customer satisfaction and loyalty 5% by being the most transparent organization in the industry by using online channels, particularly social media ones.
- Increase your customer base by 10% every year by being the simplest to use and most convenient online service.
- Reduce time to market by six months for new products by actively engaging customers in the product development process.
- Reduce checkout times by allowing customers to scan products with their mobile phones as they do their shopping.
- Allow customers to save more money by using their mobile phone to scan an item and find out if there are any special coupons or discounts available to them.
- Allow customers to use their mobile phones as a shopping list that checks off as they scan and then reminds them if they have forgotten something.
- Allow customers to use their mobile phones as a budget planner, informing them how much they have spent so far this month as they shop.
- Allow customers to use their mobile phone to plan a healthy diet by reminding them to purchase a range of health products.
- Combine offline stores with the online shop to allow for faster and more convenient delivery of purchases.

Government strategies

- Reduce the cost of paying motor tax by 25% by reducing the time it takes (both for the customer and department) to process motor tax by 35% by relentlessly focusing on removing all but the most essential steps in the process.
- Be the number one government in the world when it comes to saving citizens' and businesses' time by creating an online presence that is designed around customer and business needs, not government or political needs.
- Improve citizen trust in government by becoming the number one online source for citizens when they want to compare health care insurance options.
- Reduce your online 'time tax' on citizens by improving the success rates and time-to-completion of the single top task of every Department's website. Measure the positive economic benefits to the country's economy.

- Increase transparency by bringing together all the information the government holds on a particular citizen into a single easy-to-understand interface.
- Increase the uptake of online services by passing on some of the savings from doing it online to the citizen. In other words, make it cheaper for citizens to complete government-related tasks online.

Gerry McGovern

Gerry McGovern is founder and CEO of Customer Carewords, a company that helps large organizations implement a Top Tasks Management approach.
http://www.customercarewords.com/

Gerry's latest book is called The Stranger's Long Neck.
http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/books/strangers-long-neck

More reading

Playing to Win: How Strategy Really Works: A.G. Lafley with Roger Martin
http://hbr.org/books/playing-to-win

So, you think you have a strategy? Freek Vermeulen
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About Customer Carewords

Customer Carewords has been focused on the online customer experience since 1994. We help large organizations with complex websites. Our method is called Top Tasks Management.

Top Tasks Management helps you truly understand what the top tasks of your customers are when they come to your website and how well these tasks are performing. By continuously improving the performance of your customers' top tasks, you will maximize the performance of your website.

We have been developing customer centric strategies for websites since 1994, identifying the top tasks of thousands of customers and employees for organizations such as Microsoft, Cisco, Tetra Pak, US Internal Revenue Service, NHS Choices, Rolls-Royce, BBC, Innovation Norway, etc. We have partners in the UK, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Canada and United States.

The top tasks management approach is built around the following ideas:
- Customers come to your public website or intranet to complete tasks. (Staff are the intranet's customers.)
- Customers have a small set of top tasks (the Long Neck). These tasks are vital to the success of your website and you must seek to continuously improve your customers' ability to complete them quickly and easily.
- Customers use a small set of words to describe their top tasks (carewords).
- The words your customers use to describe their tasks are often very different from the words your organization uses.
- Organizational words (jargon, marketing waffle) are one of the key reasons for task failure on the Web.

Top tasks management is a set of research tools and techniques that help you identify on an ongoing basis:
- Your customers' top tasks (and their related words).
- How well your customers are able to complete their top tasks on your website (completion rates, completion times, disaster rates).
- What specific factors on your website are causing problems as your customers seek to complete their tasks (the navigation, the content, the search, etc.).

The company was founded by Gerry McGovern, who started his web career in 1994. He has published five books on creating customer centric websites. He has appeared on CNN, the BBC, MSNBC, and has spoken on the subject of customer centric web management in 35 countries.

www.customercarewords.com
info@customercarewords.com