Actionable Ways to Boost User Website Engagement (Workshop)

By
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About me:

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- SEO professional since 1995, pioneering search-engine friendly website design.
- Website usability & UX professional since 2002.
- Information architect since 1990.
Workshop agenda:

- 4 Key Building Blocks
- Forms
- Visual Hierarchy
- User Engagement Dos & Don’ts
- Exercises
- Questions & Answers
If you check out some of the sample pages shown in this workshop, they might look different, or they may no longer exist.

The principles & guidelines that these examples illustrate are relevant long after they have changed.

This is a good idea, or this website implemented a user engagement best practice.

This is a bad idea; don’t do this; or this website did not implement an engagement best practice well.
Usability / UX tests that can help you monitor & increase the user engagement of your website.

Tools that can help you increase the user engagement of your website.

Actionable Ways to Boost User Engagement

4 BUILDING BLOCKS
4 key building blocks:

1. Aboutness (context)
2. Inceptor’s pyramid
3. Scent of information
4. Placemaking/orientation

1. Aboutness

“...basic assumption is that [people] are able to state what a document is 'about' by formulating an expression which 'summarizes' the content of the document.”

1. Aboutness (cont’d)

“The process is generally seen to involve the selection of 'key' words or phrases from the text, expressions which are 'significant' indicators of content and which together sum up the message of the document.”


Intentional aboutness describes the meaning of a document (such as a webpage, PDF, graphic image, or video), or what is inferred from the document.
Extensional aboutness is what is inherent in the document. It is meaning-based, fluctuating, & subject to interpretation.

...describe the conceptual analysis of a document from a two principal criteria – what does it mention and for whom is it intended?


Strike a balance between:

User Expectations

Business Goals
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #1: Headline ‘aboutness’ should be obvious out of context & within context. Users click on headings that have the highest probability of providing value.
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #2: Place most important info at the top of a page to establish (a) aboutness and (b) a sense of place.
Home page:

USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #3: Place navigation elements where users expect to see them.
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #4: Don’t waste screen real estate with unnecessary images or images that are too large. All images must serve a specific purpose.
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #5: Use the users’ language. Don’t put vague or confusing labels within navigation & main content.
Example:

USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #6: Minimize interference errors by including extra padding/spacing between touch targets.
Where are potential interference errors?

Google’s Mobile-Friendly Tool:

https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly
Preventing accidental touches:

**Spacing Between Tap Targets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Preferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 mm</td>
<td>30 pixels</td>
<td>38 pixels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Users should be able to scroll or navigate without accidentally engaging another link.
- Touch targets should be spaced at 8-10 mm / 30-38 pixels apart on center (i.e., measured from the center of each touch target).

USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #7: Make sure all touch targets are large enough for human fingers. Touch targets should be between 45-57 pixels.
**Touch targets:**

- An area on a screen that a user can touch to perform an action is a **touch (or tap) target.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Touch / Tap Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A minimum recommended touch target size is around 48 device independent pixels on a site with a properly set mobile viewport. For example, while an icon may only have a width and height of 21px, you can use additional padding to bring the tap target size up to 48px. The 48x48 pixel size corresponds to around 3mm, which is about the size of a person’s finger pad area.

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https://developers.google.com/web/fundamentals/accessibility/accessible-styles
2. Inceptor’s pyramid:

When people arrive on a website from a commercial web search engine, such as Google, or from a link on another website, they usually land on a page in the middle of the site, not the home page.
How do users find the children’s book section?

**COMMUNITY LANGUAGES**

**Hola. 你好. Привет.**

Sacramento is multilingual and so is our collection.

- Borrow books and audiobooks in a variety of languages
- Discover movies from all over the world in our International Films Collection.
- Recommend titles to help us grow our collection.

**Spanish Collection**

From classics to cookbooks to teleowords, our Spanish-language collection covers a wide range of topics and interests.

And on mobile?

**COMMUNITY LANGUAGES**

**Hola. 你好. Привет.**

Sacramento is multilingual and so is our collection.

- Borrow books and audiobooks in a variety of languages
- Discover movies from all over the world in our International Films Collection.
- Recommend titles to help us grow our collection.
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #8: Use the first-click & treejack usability tests to learn where users will locate / discover desired content.

Research has shown that when users’ first click is down the right path, 87% eventually succeed.

When users’ first click is down an incorrect path, only 46% eventually succeed.
First-click usability test:

1. **First-click data**: Which tier-1 categories did users click first? First clicks are a good indicator of the strength of category labels.

2. **User confidence**: On a 5- or 7-point scale.

3. **Difficulty**: On a 5- or 7-point scale. If users rate anything less than a 3 or 5, respectively, ask users to elaborate on why they chose the rating. The open ended comments usually provide insight into mental models & ideas for improvements.

First-click usability test (cont’d):

4. **Navigation problems**: Long task times & high task variability (retracing, multiple places, site map, etc.) indicate navigation issues.

Present the task & scenario:

Task 1 of 6
You're going out for dinner in San Francisco and want to find out about some good nightlife spots for afterwards.

https://www.optimalworkshop.com/101/first-click-testing
https://www.optimalworkshop.com/chalkmark

Only upload section of page relevant to task:
Get specific results:

Treejack or tree test:

- A tree test does not display the user interface to test participants; they navigate the test using only link names.

- Menu labels & category names:
  - Identify overlapping, similar, & competing labels
  - Identify names that don’t adequately describe the content within them

- Helps to determine:
  - Strong or weak information scent
  - Unclear or misleading labels
Treejack or tree test (cont’d):

- **Metrics include:**
  - **Success rate:** Success & failure percentages for task completion.
  - **Directness:** Whether or not users struggled to get to the right answer.
  - **Time spent:** Issues exist if users retrace their steps & try multiple places before finding the right destination.
  - **First click:** If first clicks are distributed across multiple categories, you may have too many overlapping categories.
  - **Destination:** If first clicks are correct but success rates are low, data suggests that lower-level categories overlap too much. Make labels more distinct.
- Rename labels.
- Combine or move content.
- Identify shortcuts for advanced visitors.
- Implement cross referencing where necessary.
- Improve error prevention & handling.
3. Scent of information:

*Information scent* consists of textual and graphical cues that:

- Facilitate navigation (Where can I go? How can I get there?)
- Orientation/placemaking (Where am I?)
- Assessment of content value (Should I click on this link?)


**USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #9:** Review how other websites are linking to your website. Ask if the link text can be modified. For future link development, improve your site’s labeling system.

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**Majestic.com tool:**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Anchor Text</th>
<th>Referring Domain Total</th>
<th>External Backlinks</th>
<th>Internal Backlinks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>newKBD</td>
<td>36,240</td>
<td>30,374</td>
<td>5,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>link of engagers</td>
<td>31,219</td>
<td>5,259,137</td>
<td>9,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>library of engagers</td>
<td>2,095</td>
<td>99,924</td>
<td>9,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>links</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>16,185</td>
<td>2,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>attention harvesting</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>topics</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>67,127</td>
<td>4,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>search per</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>39,092</td>
<td>1,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pls.Reneo too per</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>14,445</td>
<td>1,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pls.Reneo too per</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>29,994</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pls.Rehino, purchase/df</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>19,025</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
4. Orientation

“On a website, orientation is a behavior whereby users determine their position in a website with reference to another point—establishing a sense of place.”


4. Orientation (cont’d)

“Give users well-marked roads and landmarks, then let them shift into four-wheel drive.”

Does this page provide clear location signals?

Mobile version – is this better?
Location signal test:

1. **Show pages.** Show users various pages at different levels of your website, one at a time, without navigating to them.

2. **Orientation.** Say: “Pretend you just arrived at this web page. Where are you on the website?”

3. **Indicators.** If they give an answer (right or wrong), ask: “How can you tell?”

4. **User expectations.** If they say they aren’t sure, ask: “What would you expect to see here to help you know where you are?”

Location signal test (cont’d):

5. **Information scent.** If they are still not sure where they are, ask: “What would you normally do in order to find out?”

Exercise:

Look at a content page of your website or a competitor’s website on a desktop/laptop computer & a smartphone. Does the page communicate:

- Aboutness
- Clear sense of place (does it have landmarks?)
- Clear, consistent information scent to other content
What you can do:

- **Aboutness.** Clearly indicate what information is available on the page (document) at the top of the screen.
  - H1-formatted heading
  - Location-based breadcrumb links
  - Subject tagline
  - On-page links
  - Readable, legible text
Page (subject) tagline:

- Conveys what each page is about & what visitors can get from it in a succinct manner.

Keywords, Aboutness, and SEO

How humans and technology (searchers and search engines) interpret the meaning of digital documents.

In This Article

- Why optimize metadata?
- 10 easy meta-tag optimization tips
- Some meta-tag myths & misconceptions
- Related articles

Why optimize metadata?

Meta-tag content should be optimized for multiple reasons:
What you can do:

• Sense of place (you-are-here cues). Clearly indicate where visitors are on every place in your website.
  – Brand / logo placement
  – Organization’s tagline (optional)
  – Highlighted navigation
  – Location-based breadcrumb links
  – Clear, consistent labels (from users’ point of view)

Does this page have clear you-are-here cues?
Does this page have clear you-are-here cues?

![Diagram of a library's website navigation with clear you-are-here cues]

**Actionable Ways to Boost User Engagement**

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Case Study: Medical Publisher Network

Despite Marketing Interactive’s inaction, they successfully improved the site’s traffic and visitor count.

Summary

A popular medical website with over 600,000 pages and 10 million unique visitors per month belonged to a network of six medical sites, each with unique content.

A previously failed search engine optimization (SEO) strategy created high spam rates for the main medical website.

Increased on-site popularity and search engine visibility. As a result, the site saw a significant increase in traffic and engagement.

About Us

Overview

- Case Studies
- Design Gallery
- Mentoring
If you choose to display location-based breadcrumb links on a mobile phone, make sure:

- Text is legible (not too small, good color contrast etc.)
- Visited / unvisited link status is shown
- Links are not too close together

USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #10: Make sure content is legible & readable from a users’ point of view. Poor legibility decreases user confidence.
Ac#onable Ways to Boost User Engagement

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Legibility tools:

- WebAIM Color Contrast Checker
  https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/

- WebAIM Link Contrast Checker
  https://webaim.org/resources/linkcontrastchecker/

- ColorCube Brand Palette Color Accessibility Checker
  https://oomphinc.github.io/colorcube/#results-content

- Acart Communications Contrast Checker
  https://contrastchecker.com

Grayscale tool:

http://www.uncld.com/
What you can do:

- Information scent.
  - Communicate that links are clickable / tappable.
  - Ensure link text resembles the landing-page heading.
  - Write clear navigation labels (from users’ POV).

Click / tap signifier test:

1. First paper prototype. Begin the test by giving test participants a paper prototype, graphic prototype, or screen shot of an actual web page.

2. Circle clickable/tappable elements. Ask users to circle everything on the page they believe is clickable.

3. Second paper prototype. Give test participants the same prototype or screen shot.

4. Circle unclickable/untappable elements. Ask users to circle everything on the page they do NOT believe is clickable/tappable.
Don’t forget the footer:

Actionable Ways to Boost User Engagement

FORMS
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #11: Do not use “placeholder” or “prompt” text inside of text-entry boxes.
Forms – prompt text (or placeholder text):

- **Password:**
  - Label
  - Must have at least 6 characters
  - Form field
  - Placeholder text

Image source: [https://www.nngroup.com/articles/form-design-placeholders/](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/form-design-placeholders/)
Issue – disappearing form labels:

Billing Information
Please enter your Billing Instructions here
Billing Contact
Phone Number *

Billing Address
Street Address Line 1 *
City *

Billing Address cleanup.png

Continue...
Here’s how an input field should look:

*Label (example):

Password:
Must have at least 6 characters:

Error message, if needed can go here.

Default appearance.
How effective is this form?

Library card application

[Form fields]

How effective is this form?

[Form fields]

Phone

[Form fields]
How effective is this form?

Library card application

1. Name
   (Organization or town or City)

2. Reason for getting a card is required.

3. Name

   First name is required. Last name is required.

4. Position at organization

   Position at organization is required.

5. Organization information

   Organization name is required.

6. Street address

   Street address is required.

**USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #12:** Choose and communicate prioritized calls to action on each page...without overwhelming users.
Communicate prioritized calls to action (CTAs):

- What do you want users to do on your website?
  - Name 3 actions you want users to do on each page of your site
  - Put them in order of importance (1, 2, 3)
  - Create a calendar, if needed

- If you cannot instantaneously say what you want users to do on each page of the site? Then the CTAs are not obvious to users.
How about this mobile form?
Exercise – CTA worksheet:

• Please see the Excel spreadsheet named library-cta-worksheet.xlsx

• Pick a small section of your website & list the 3 most important CTAs per page type.

☐ __________________________________________

☐ __________________________________________

☐ __________________________________________
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #13: A call-to-action (CTA) button or link, that guides visitors to act, is more effective when the button text is ultra-clear.

Some CTA guidelines:

- Make them action-oriented (Search Catalog, Search FAQs, etc.)
- Use persuasive text (FREE tutoring services, etc.)
- Include strong visuals (color, contrast, shape, etc.)
- Create a sense of urgency (only 2 days left)
- Make them easy to find (placement & format)
How would you change this search form?
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #14: Create a clear visual hierarchy. According to Wikipedia, **visual hierarchy** refers to the arrangement or presentation of elements in a way that implies importance.

**Quiet**
- Dimmed text (de-saturated color)
- Italics
- Underlining
- Boldface
- Larger font
- White space margin (surrounding)
- Box or border
- Different color (high contrast)
- Graphic
- Sound
- Blinking
- Video

**Loud**
“People are **more likely to engage in a given behavior the less effort it requires**. As numerous studies have indicated, high perceived effort is a major impediment to behavior change.”


**USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #15:** Animation should be used wisely. Do NOT distract users from completing their desired tasks.
USER ENGAGEMENT TIP #16: Make page content easy to scan on multiple devices (desktop/laptop, tablets, smartphones).

Why should content be easy to scan and read?

- Web pages that are easy to read:
  - Have fewer user errors
  - Are easier to remember
  - Have higher user satisfaction

- Users spend more time trying to complete their desired tasks (Get Library Card, Subscribe to Newsletter, Sign up for Event, etc.)

- People usually do not link to or cite a web page that is difficult to scan.
To create scannable text-based documents:

- Shorter paragraphs
- Embedded or inline text links
- Subheadings
- Bulleted/numbered lists
- Blockquotes
- Pull-quotes
- Factual & persuasive intro text
- Photos and images with headings/captions
- Video with headings/captions
- Tables
- Bold and italics
- Numbers, capitalization, & special characters
- Short annotations

Shorter paragraphs:

- A **wall of text** is a major repellant that instantly makes users think twice about engaging with a web page.
- According to usability guru, Jakob Nielsen, concise text increased reading/scanning usability by 58%.
- Recommend one idea per paragraph.
- Users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the **first few words** in the paragraph – keywords are important.
- Vary paragraph lengths.
Lorum ipsum color sit amet


Lorum ipsum dolor sit amet, consecutuer adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.

Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum. Suspendisse posseure.

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.

Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eum quaerat voluptatem sequi nesciunt.

Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consecutuer, adipiscing elit, sed quia non namquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaderat voluptatem.

Lorum ipsum color sit amet, consecutuer adipiscing elit. Nam risus.
Embedded or inline text links:

• Very important for search engine visibility because embedded text links provide the greatest context:
  – In the hypertext link
  – Above
  – Below
  – Adjacent

• Are a natural call to action within content as long as the hypertext link looks clickable.

• Use common sense – shorter articles shouldn’t have many embedded text links; longer articles can have more.

• Here are some examples....
Don’t overdo it:

Search Engine Optimization is an important part of any search engine marketing initiative. Some people believe that submitting the site to search engines alone is sufficient in getting top-10 rankings. This is not true. Search engine submission only announces your site’s existence to the search engines. To get a good search engine ranking, it is important that you carry out title tag optimization, meta tags optimization, and anchor text optimization of your website amongst other SEO techniques. You’ll need to optimize the visible text of your site through SEO copywriting after extensive keyword phrase search. It is also important to boost your Google PageRank in order to get a good website ranking. You can increase PageRank of your site by building your site’s link popularity through a link building campaign. A link exchange campaign with good industry relevant sites is the simplest way to get several incoming links to promotion. Remember, search engine positioning is a powerful media for your website promotion. While the above example seems like overkill, this is just to illustrate how you can accommodate your important keyword phrases by carefully rewording the text of your web pages. If you feel that the standard blue, underlined hyperlinks appear ugly on your website, then you can reformat its HTML markup code to change color of the text and get rid of the underline without losing the power of the anchor texts.
H1 heading:

- One of the most critical elements people look for during the appraisal phase is the main heading, if there is one.
- Users/searchers scan the primary heading first to determine the “aboutness” of a web page.
- People use the H1 heading to:
  - Get a sense of the page’s main topic (aboutness)
  - Validate information scent - are users on the page they expected to go to, given the link they clicked to get there
- People stop at the H1 heading because scanning reveals that it is not the wanted page/desirable content.
Subheadings:

• Users/searchers scan the primary heading first to determine the “aboutness” of a web page.

• If they can view them, they also scan subheadings. Subheadings tend to stand out because they look different (bold, color, more white space).

• Remember that Westerners tend to read from left to right. Users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in opening paragraphs and headlines.

• Add subheadings to long articles and web pages. Here are some examples....

Bulleted/numbered lists:

• Adding bulleted lists can increase reading/scanning usability by 47%.
  – Stand out (shape)
  – White space

• When combined with subheadings on a long page, bulleted lists provide more keyword focus and “aboutness” to both human users & technology.
Blockquotes:

- In XHTML, the **blockquote** is a block of text quoted from a person or another document or source. It may be just a few lines, or it may contain several paragraphs.

  "Great experience
  Thank you so much again! I’ve had a great experience with you. I’ll definitely be sharing your service with my network.
  
  Charlotte"
Pull-quotes:

• If a page doesn’t use a photo or a video, a pull-quote is a good way to focus attention on important text on a page.

• Pull-quotes provide an opportunity to repeat important keyword phrases in an article.

• Design guidelines:
  – The text inside the pull-quote itself should be left-aligned for easier reading.
  – The font/typeface can be different. For example, on a web page whose primary font/typeface is a sans-serif font such as Arial, a serif font/typeface (such as Georgia) will stand out.
  – Use color and borders to make the pull-quote stand out without being too ostentatious.
  – Pull-quotes should be able to appear on the left and the right side of a page.

Subject tagline:

• Sometimes, a headline (formatted as an h1) is engaging & compelling without any keywords.

• Solution: Add a subject tagline after headlines.
  – Text at the top of the page
  – Contains important keywords
  – Emphasizes important keywords
  – Is more INFORMATIVE than enticing
  – Summarize content

• Tip: Connect annotations with H1 and teaser text.
Images with headings and/or captions:

**Pollen**

Pollen from grasses, trees, and weeds can trigger hay fever or seasonal allergies. You might be sneezing and have a runny or stuffy nose and itchy, watery eyes. Treat these with over-the-counter products, prescription drugs, and allergy shots. To prevent symptoms, stay inside on windy days when pollen counts are high, close windows, and run the air conditioning.

Pictured is a magnified view of sunflower pollen.
Videos with headings and/or captions:

How to Lessen Allergy Symptoms

Pollen from grasses, trees, and weeds can trigger hay fever or seasonal allergies. You might be sneezing and have a runny or stuffy nose and itchy, watery eyes.

Here’s what you can do to manage your hay fever symptoms.

Play Video

Bold and italics:

• Used sparingly, this formatting can focus users’ attention on main points that you wish to emphasize.

• Remember, italics can be hard to read.
Annotations:

Perfect RV Vacation in California’s Napa Valley Wine Country

If you enjoy wine and the wine tasting experience, then Napa Valley should be a destination choice for your next RV vacation. From gorgeous vineyards and over 900+ stunning wineries, you can... Read more »

Questions?

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