
CITIZEN GOALS ONLINE

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give to public institution Web designers a better understanding of the citizens' objectives when accessing a Web page. Understanding citizen online goals is critical because it gets to the heart of what the public institution website should or could "do."

Approach: *The challenge for e-marketers is that for most agencies/institutions, there are likely to be multiple goals that represent the "reason why" citizens could come to the website. For example, a national theatre website might be very effective for people who have already been there, they know effectively what place is the best, who are the actors, etc.*

Research limitations: *The nature of a public institution activity almost dictates the different types of goals that consumers have when visiting the site. It is clear that a citizen has a different goal when accessing a theatre Web page or when he's accessing a municipality Web page. This is the biggest impediment for drawing a good conceptual model for a public institution Web page.*

Practical implications: *there are likely to be many other goals that could lead people to visit the site, like receiving customer service or leaving a remark.*

Value: *Since citizen online goals represent the starting point for Web design efforts (for public institutions), this article has attempted to highlight the nature and types of goals that e-marketers might consider when planning what their website should do in order to create online citizen values.*

Findings: *The goal a site visitor has when arriving at a website tends to be very action oriented. If the visitor has never visited the site before, the goal may simply be to evaluate the website and figure out what the site is and if it will help him. On the other hand, if the visitor has reached the site as the result of a directed search or is a repeat visitor, the user goal is likely to be specific and functional. If important citizen goals are not supported by the website, the public institution is at risk of losing a significant amount time in dealing with citizens at its offices. As a result, and because the public institution feels that it should have an online presence, many websites are created to offer little more than online reproductions of its services.*

Keywords: *electronic, digital and cyber marketing*

Research type: *conceptual paper*

1. Introduction

Marketing managers charged with developing effective e-marketing strategies need to understand the implications of goal-directed behaviour online. Traditionally, the marketer's job has involved capturing the customer's attention and communicating a message about products or services. The customer (for the purpose of this paper I will put an equal sign between *the customer* and *the citizen* who want to interact with the Public Administration via Internet) is essentially a passive receiver of the marketer's message (the public institution) with little control over the marketing messages they are exposed to. Online the citizen arrives at the public institution website with a goal. The citizen has something that he or she wants to accomplish, whether it is to acquire information, to make a payment, or something similar. By understanding the citizen's purpose for visiting a website, the Web marketer is in a position to develop a website that provides significant value. Furthermore, failure to deliver a website that enables citizens to accomplish their goals is likely to result in dissatisfaction and by that he or she will not be interested in visiting again.

2. Theoretical background

A growing number of Web design professionals, committed to the principles of user-centred design, seem to truly understand how to create highly usable, customer/citizen-centred website. User-centred design (UCD) is an approach to designing computer interfaces that places the user of the system at the centre of the design effort (Karat & Karat, 2003). UCD practitioners strive to improve the usability of a system by focusing on the various tasks and activities users would like to perform when interacting with a website. Focusing on users is critical in design because systems appropriate for one user group may be completely inappropriate for another set of users. For example, a travel website created for frequent business travellers wanting a fast and easy way to schedule business trips would not be appropriate for a person planning a vacation and

wanting to learn about various vacation package options. By emphasizing users and their tasks, UCD aims to create systems that provide the appropriate functionality and are easier to use (Henneman, 1999).

Usability is the ultimate goal for Web designers who are practitioners of UCD. Creating a highly useable website means that the website matches what the site visitors need and want. Usability as defined by the ISO 9241 (ISO, 1997) standard is “the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use.” As can be seen from this definition, the concept of user goals is central to understanding usability.

Customer/citizen value (Levenburg, 2005; Adelaar, Bouwman, & Steinfield, 2004) is a concept from the marketing literature that is conceptually similar to usability when considered within a value-in-use perspective. The value in use perspective (Woodruff & Gardialm, 1996) emphasizes the instrumentality of products in achieving the customer’s goals. As a result, value in use involves an evaluation of the effectiveness of a product within a particular usage context. The work of Woodruff (1997) on value hierarchies is particularly relevant for understanding customer/citizen behaviour online. Websites are used by site visitors to accomplish their goals. Thus using a means-end approach to conceptualize online value provides a way to explain how online customers derive value from their usage experiences. Building on the work of Woodruff, Porter (2005) defined online value as:

...a customer’s¹ perceived preference for and evaluation of those website features and functions that facilitate (or block) the performance of the tasks that are instrumental in achieving the customer’s² goals and purposes associated with the website visit.

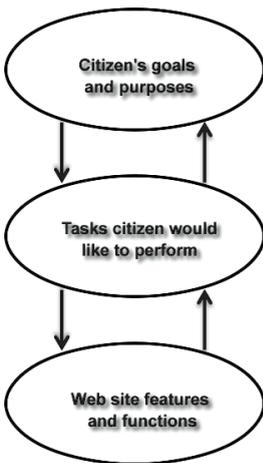


Figure 1. Perceived website value (adapt after Porter, 2005)

Porter’s model of perceived website value (see Figure 1) integrates concepts from user-centred design and marketing using means-end theory. The perceived value of a website is assessed based on the extent to which it allows the citizen to achieve his or her online goals. Likewise the perceptions of the effectiveness of goal accomplishment are influenced by the degree to which the website supports the necessary tasks or subtasks the citizen would like to perform in order to accomplish the goal. Finally, the effectiveness of task accomplishment is related to the features, functions, and characteristics of the website. An implication of the model

is that consumer perceptions of website value are related to the citizen expectations regarding what the website should do and what they would like to accomplish online.

1 For a proper quotation I will use *customer*, even if I am referring to *citizen*

2 Idem 1

The more knowledge the e-marketer has about the citizen goals, the better chance he or she has of creating a website that is truly valuable to him or her.

3. Research methodology

The key question is: what should be done in order to increase the citizen's interest in visiting public institutions Web pages? Obviously, as we shall see, owing to the many types of public institutions, it is very difficult to answer this question. The intention is not to create a single model but to show that the legislative requirements (because they are referring to all public institutions) do not satisfy enough all categories of citizens.

Since the beginning of this year I formed a focus group composed of 50 persons of different ages and activities (*Table 1*) and with whom I wanted to find out what are the objectives that citizens have when interacting with the website of a public institution (*Table 2*). Each of the participants were asked to answer a series of open questions and finally to conclude by presenting their goals when interacting with different real state institutions via the Internet.

Table 1. Participants list by category

Participants	Number
Students	20
Doctors	4
Teachers (high school and university)	12
Public employees	8
Private institutions employees	6

Table 2. List of analyzed institutions

Public institution	Type	Web address
The Bucharest National Theatre	Cul- ture	http://www.tnb.ro/
The National Opera House in Bucharest		http://www.operanb.ro/
Bucharest city hall	City hall	http://www.pmb.ro/
Constanta city hall		http://www.primaria-constanta.ro
Bucharest emergency hospital	Hos- pital	http://www.urgentaflorasca.ro/
Fundeni hospital		http://www.icfundeni.ro/
The Bucharest university	Public univer- sity	http://www.unibuc.ro/
The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies		http://www.ase.ro/
Romania tourism	Tou- rism	http://www.romaniatourism.com/
Bucharest guide		http://bucharest-guide.ro/

Elements that I've studied at each website are presented in the table below:

Table 3. Studied elements

Studied elements	The values that can be registered
Attractive design	Between 1 and 5
Easy browsing	Between 1 and 5
It presents information about on-line services provided	Between 1 and 5

Table 3. The scale, according to the table presented above, registered values starting with 1—very bad, to 5—very good:

Value	Description
1	the design of the website is very unprofessional, unattractive, probably realized inside/ <i>difficult browsing, the website is developed in .html and did not present dynamism, the maximum number of needed clicks to reach the last page in a branch is greater than 4/</i> doesn't present information of general interest for those who are visiting the institution (maps, etc.)
2	the design of the website is unattractive, probably realized inside / <i>difficult browsing, the website is developed in .html, did not present dynamism /</i> presents too little information of general interest for those who visit the institution;
3	design with a satisfactory aspect; the page is still too crowded/ <i>difficult browsing, overweight menus, hard to identify the place where certain info is located/</i> general information about the institution are displayed in the manner "let's put that here";
4	attractive contrasts, structured pages/ <i>easybrowsing, butwithoverweightmenuseveniftheseareprogrammedin advanced programming languages like ASP, PHP, etc. /</i> information about the institution is rich and easily accessed;
5	the Web site is designed in a professional manner, with structured pages/ <i>dynamic and intuitive navigation/</i> information about the institution is rich and easy to find/

I present in this paper the participant's views (and mine as well) of this new type of interaction between public institutions and citizens.

4. Results and findings

A key challenge for Web marketers is to understand the citizen goals that motivate (or could motivate) visiting a website. Research on goals suggests that goals occur in

the form of a hierarchy with more abstract, higher-order goals closely related to an individual's personal values at the top and specific action-oriented sub goals at the bottom (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999), for example someone who wants to build a house. This high-order goal represents a "problem." So, for having that kind of information he or she must find first the right department from the public institution, who is responsible with giving the proper papers, and, just after, he must find the proper person who may help him in accomplish his goal. Thus a goal hierarchy serves as a way for a customer to break down a complex problem into a series of smaller, easier-to-manage problems (Pieters, Baumgartner, & Allen, 1995).

The goal a site visitor has when arriving at a website tends to be very action oriented. If the visitor has never visited the site before, the goal may simply be to evaluate the website and figure out what the site is and if it will help him. On the other hand, if the visitor has reached the site as the result of a directed search or is a repeat visitor, the user goal is likely to be specific and functional. For example a law firm specialized in consultancy—for those who need it in order to make the proper documentation for building a house.

The online goals that customers/citizens have when arriving at a website are clearly related to the concept of tasks in the UCD literature. Just as goals can be understood in the form of a hierarchy, tasks can also be represented hierarchically. The hierarchical levels associated with tasks can be seen in the design methodology of task analysis. By breaking down the various tasks a user would perform in pursuing a goal into finer grained subtasks, the system designer begins to understand how a user would like a website to perform. The process occurs iteratively, because subtasks can in turn be further decomposed until the website designer can capture all the different steps that the user would want to perform in accomplishing the task. By understanding the specific tasks and subtasks that would be performed, the system designer can identify the features and functions the website needs to support (for example a data base driven website).

5. Identifying Online Goals

The responsibility of the Web marketer is to understand the goals that could motivate a citizen to visit a public institution website. Sometimes this appears fairly straightforward because the nature of its activity almost dictates the different types of goals that consumers have when visiting the site. Thus the nature of the activity may largely dictate the critical goals that citizen have when arriving at the website. For example, a large percentage of the visitors to a national theatre website go there with the goal of finding and purchasing tickets to a particular event. Clearly the national theatre needs to make its site as suitable as possible for the accomplishment of this goal. However, finding and purchasing tickets is not the only goal that might bring customers to the site. A certain number of site visitors may be seeking to return tickets, track down missing tickets, or receive some other type of customer service. Some visitors may "use" the site in unanticipated ways, such as to find out who will be appearing at various events. Designing the website to make it useable for all the critical goals motivating a website visit is the key to developing a website that provides value to customers/citizens.

For other public institutions it can be difficult to identify a goal that would compel a significant number of customers to the website. Let’s take for example a national agency. Many of this kind of institutions did not address directly to the citizens but to other institution. These websites typically include information such as location, photographs or other elements required by law like organizational chart, etc. The problem is an inherent mismatch between the design of these sites and customer goals. The design of these sites would be appropriate *if* there were a group of customers looking to learn about the specific national agency online. This does not mean that national public agencies should not have websites, but rather that to provide value to citizens; it needs to consider the types of goals that would prompt visiting a website.

Another example of a public institution in which it can be difficult to think of a meaningful online citizen goal as a hospital (a public one). Yet many hospitals have websites. Often these sites receive little traffic because there are few obvious customer goals that prompt visits to these sites.

Citizens Goals across the Citizens Services Life Cycle

In order to avoid developing website that capture only a subset of the goals that citizens might have, researchers suggest it may be useful for the web designer to consider how the needs of citizens change in time. One framework for understanding the changes in citizen needs over time is the citizen service life cycle (Baltac 2008).



Figure 2. The interaction with public services

In the requirements stage, citizens make decisions about their requirements. Clients coming to a website while in the requirements stage will have goals related to acquiring information. They will want to learn about the specific public institution, and the merits of it, as being a service provider.

In the interaction stage, citizens attempt to select the public service they need, pay for it, and if relevant, deliver the needed documents. Citizens at this stage know what they want, and they want to use the web to facilitate the process.

In the ownership stage citizens have previously interact with the website. They have often encountered some kind of problem with relation to their utilization of public service. These citizens arrive at the website with the goal of finding solutions to their problems.

Ultimately, creating a website that allows citizens to accomplish their goals is not enough. The website should also allow the public institution to accomplish important objectives, such as to enhance citizen's relationships. Fortunately, creating a website that allows citizens to accomplish their goals usually provides benefits to the public institutions. The implication is that Internet marketers need to set the objectives of their website to be consistent with the goals that citizens bring to the site.

Marketing and UCD have a great deal in common. Both emphasize understanding and serving human needs as part of their discipline's core philosophy. Furthermore, both the marketing and UCD literatures characterize human behavior as purposeful. Despite the similarities, there has been remarkably little cross-pollination between the two disciplines. Porter's (2005) model of perceived website value incorporates insights from both disciplines. In addition to the theoretical contributions that the field of user-centred design can offer marketing, there are practical contributions as well. User modelling tools (Clemmenssen, 2004) such as customer personas, customer scenarios, and task analysis, which are based on the notion that citizens are goal directed, hold significant promise for web marketers as practical means of developing websites that provide value to citizens. Ultimately, both disciplines would profit from further integration of knowledge, theory, and techniques designed to understand and meet the needs of goal-directed customers.

6. Conclusions

Conclusions drawn by the study shows that, at least in Romania, public institutions do not develop websites in order to be close to citizens but to respond to the legislative regulations. An exception to this rule are universities website, but this can be explained by the fact that many of their activities are funded by student fees as to their profile fits better to private institutions websites.

There is a high degree of consensus among marketing academics and practitioners that online customer/citizen behaviour is goal directed. However, the implications of the goal directed nature of customer behaviour online are less well understood. As a result, a large percentage of public institution websites fail to truly take advantage of the opportunities that technology allows for providing value to citizens. While marketers have been struggling with creating effective websites, UCD professionals have taken the lead in creating websites that meet the needs of goal-directed Web users. The model presented here represents an attempt to bridge the gap between two disciplines with the same agenda in order to better serve the needs of people.

The model of perceived website value conceptualizes citizens online value as a means end chain that integrates its goals, tasks with the tangible features, functions, and content of the website. The model has significant implications for Internet marketers. By understanding the citizen's online goals and related tasks, the web marketer is in a position to create a website that delivers value to citizens and provides high usability for the tasks that online visitors want to perform. Since citizens online goals represent the starting point for web design efforts (for public institutions), this article has attempted to highlight the nature and types of goals that e-marketers might consider when planning what their website should do in order to create online citizen values.

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PILIEČIŲ TIKSLAI INTERNETE

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Santrauka. Žinoti piliečių tikslus internete yra labai svarbu, nes jie parodo, ką institucija savo svetainėje dar turėtų arba galėtų patobulinti. E. marketingo specialistams iššūkis yra tai, kad daugelio agentūrų/institucijų svetainėse piliečiai lankosi turėdami, tikėtina, ne vieną tikslą. Pavyzdžiui, nacionalinio teatro svetainė yra vertinga žmonėms, kurie jau yra lankęsi jame, nes žino, kurios vietos geriausios, kas yra teatro aktoriai, etc. Vis dėlto yra ir kitų tikslų, kurie gali atvesti į šią svetainę, pavyzdžiui, įvairios klientams teikiamos paslaugos ar grįžtamasis ryšys. Jei svarbūs piliečių tikslai negali būti pasiekti remiantis svetainės informacija, institucijos rizikuoja prarasti daug laiko sprendamos tuos klausimus su klientais biure. Viešosios institucijos jaučia, kad turėtų suteikti prieigą internete, daugelis svetainių siūlo šiek tiek daugiau nei informaciją apie paslaugas. Šio straipsnio tikslas yra padėti viešųjų institucijų tinklalapių kūrėjams geriau suprasti piliečių tikslų internete pobūdį, kad jie galėtų sukurti piliečių poreikius tenkinančias svetaines.

Raktžodžiai: elektroninis, skaitmeninis ir kibernetinis marketingas.