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WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

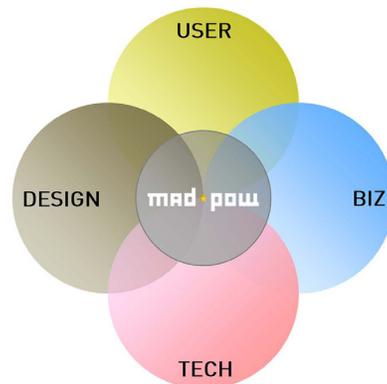
Prioritizing Web Projects

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IDENTIFYING THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR WEB DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES BALANCING ALL ELEMENTS - CUSTOMER NEEDS, BUSINESS VALUE AND TECHNICAL IMPLICATIONS, EACH OF WHICH INFORM THE OVERALL DESIGN.

As a company with an existing web offering, there are likely a large number of potential changes or feature additions that you could add to your site. In fact, the number of projects you could undertake may seem overwhelming. The challenge you face is not brainstorming new opportunities, but rather prioritizing all of the different options you have for upgrading or redesigning your site given your resources.

We define the user experience of an online offering as the intersection of business needs, technology, design and user goals. Instead of looking at the combination of these aspects holistically, we often see that direction for developing a web offering is pulled in one of these directions too heavily based on the influence of certain stakeholder groups.



For example, customer research can help you understand customer needs. However, satisfying top customer needs doesn't always help you achieve your business goals, and some customer requests are expensive and time consuming and deliver low ROI. Alternatively, focusing primarily on business value may lead you to develop options that are

not useful or valuable to customers. Identifying the top priorities for web development involves balancing all elements - customer needs, business value and technical implications, each of which inform the overall design.

In our work, we've found that a feature matrix comparison of each of these elements helps prioritize development efforts and define a site roadmap. The key to success of such a matrix is understanding how to assign values to customer needs, business value and technical considerations for each feature.

CUSTOMER NEEDS

Research with actual users of the site is the key to understanding their needs. Qualitative research methods such as interviews, usability studies, contextual observations or focus groups are a great start to develop a general understanding of customers and what they would like out of your site. Generally, after conducting this type of research, you will have enough insight to assign relative values to the customer needs column of the feature matrix. For example, you can assign a 1/2/3 or low/medium/high designation to the customer value for each feature. If you have multiple people on a project team who participated in or reviewed the research, they can each rank the customer needs for the different features individually, and then combine their results and discuss any differences.

To more rigorously assign values to customer needs, you can conduct quantitative analysis using surveys. For this type of analysis, look for a key measure that is an overall indicator of customer success with the site. Examples of these types of measures are Net Promoter

Score (NPS) or the American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), each of which set a baseline for customer satisfaction through a key question such as "How likely is it that you would recommend the site to a friend or colleague?" In your surveys, in addition to this key question, ask other questions about the experience on your site and the potential feature additions, and correlate which features have the biggest impact on the overall satisfaction. You can then assign values to the customer need column in the feature matrix.

BUSINESS VALUE

To assign a business value for each feature, review the original goals for the site and both the impact on customer behavior and the impact on internal processes. For customer behavior, focus on specific conversion events that you are trying to achieve with the site. For example, are you trying to get visitors to sign up for a newsletter, purchase a product, or contact a sales representative? With each feature in the matrix, you can assign a value to the business by evaluating the bottom line impact it may have on the frequency of conversions and multiply that by the estimated value of each conversion. The impact on internal processes can also be quantified in the matrix. Assign a business value for a particular feature by calculating the impact it may have on decreased cost or increased productivity.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Assigning a value for the technical column in the feature matrix is essentially an exercise to assign a cost of development and implementation for each feature. Generally, it is best if this type of assessment is done after the customer research phase, so the technical team can have a complete understanding of how each feature would need to function so they can accurately assign a cost. In addition, it is helpful to look at all of the features in the matrix as a group – often development costs

associated with one feature can accommodate others. In the feature matrix, technical costs can be entered in dollars, implementation time, or relative value.

Adding together the customer needs, business value and technical cost of each potential feature in your matrix can reveal a clear picture of a development roadmap for your site. The features that are most important for your customers, have the biggest impact on your business and are easiest to implement will surface to the top of the list.

IN ADDITION, IT IS HELPFUL TO LOOK AT ALL OF THE FEATURES IN THE MATRIX AS A GROUP - OFTEN DEVELOPMENT COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH ONE FEATURE CAN ACCOMMODATE OTHERS. IN THE FEATURE MATRIX, TECHNICAL COSTS CAN BE ENTERED IN DOLLARS, IMPLEMENTATION TIME, OR RELATIVE VALUE.