

Site Abandonment

Luring Back Consumers with Personalized Communications

Although roughly 95 percent of travel site visitors do not make a purchase, most travel companies have not focused on winning back this large group of consumers.

Key Question

- What tactics can sites employ to win back consumers who have abandoned a site?

Key Finding

Consumers primarily abandon Web sites because they have customer service questions or pricing issues. Post-visit communications offer an efficient means to personalize online customer service without resorting to expensive and unproven site-side personalization.

Consumers Abandon Web Sites Because of Unanswered Technical Questions and to Compare Prices

According to a recent Jupiter Research Consumer Survey, two of the most common reasons online consumers contacted customer service (outside of shipping delays) were pricing issues and technical support questions. It is safe to infer that a greater percentage of consumers abandoned the site with similar questions without bothering to contact customer service. Most companies have attempted to address these issues with self-service tools on the Web site. However, the same survey found that consumers are less satisfied with FAQs and site search than they are with phone-based customer service. In fact, 73 percent of consumers who have used phone-based customer service said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service, while only 49 percent of FAQ users and 53 percent of site search



Research Topics

- Web Site Usability
- Customer Service

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users said the same. Using self-service to answer questions about complicated fare rules usually fails. US Airways, among others, reproduces the labyrinthine fare rules verbatim, leaving consumers bewildered and intimidated by trying to decipher instructions such as, “REPRICE THE CHANGED CONTINUING/RETURN FARE COMPONENTS WITH A COMBINABLE NONREFUNDABLE CURRENT FARE.”

Continental Airlines Takes an Innovative Approach to Curbing Customer Service-Related Abandonment

Fig. 1 Continental's Push-to-Talk Product



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Continental Airlines employs eStara’s voice-over-IP–based push-to-talk product to reduce abandonment from six pages on its Web site. Rather than placing the push-to-talk option on every page, Continental’s Web group worked with its customer support team to determine which pages and which customer activities were causing the highest levels of site abandonment. Moreover, the airline wanted to ensure that it was offering this option when consumers were closest to completing a sale. For example, it placed the push-to-talk option on the purchase completion page that appears when a customer types a credit card number incorrectly. In addition, if customers attempt to leave the site at this point, a prompt will ask them if they would like a customer service representative to phone them. Continental has reported two impressive metrics showing the efficacy of the tool: It converted 35 percent of push-to-talk calls into sales, and 22 percent of these callers said that without the option they would have abandoned the site.

Consumers also seek companies that offer a quick resolution to customer service issues. More than one-half (57 percent) of consumers responding to the recent survey said that efficiency of problem resolution had an effect on their decision to make future purchases on a site, and 51 percent said the availability of phone customer service had the same effect on future purchases. Push-to-talk offers both of these benefits to consumers while also slowing the abandonment rate from profitable sections of the site.

Hotwire's Investment in E-mail Marketing Has Won Back a Significant Number of Customers Who Previously Abandoned the Site

Fig. 2 Hotwire's Follow-Up E-mail with Price Decrease Notification

**Lower Fares to London,
Oct. 14-Oct. 21 >>> [BOOK NOW!](#)**

Dear Jared,

Airfares change all the time, and Hotwire is always working to find you the best deals. We thought you might like to know that we recently found an even lower Hot-Fare(R) for the **London** trip you searched on July 28 for flights departing on Oct. 14 and returning on Oct. 21!

YOUR QUOTED HOT-FARE: \$453.00

RECENTLY QUOTED HOT-FARE:* \$318.00

The \$318.00 Hot-Fare shown above was quoted to an actual Hotwire user during the past week, using the **same airports and dates** you previously searched.** Please keep in mind that fares are constantly changing -- good deals go fast! -- and this particular price may not be currently available.

Source: Jupiter Research (8/03)
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Working with e-mail service provider Yesmail, online agency Hotwire has created remarketing campaigns that Jupiter Research believes are not only ahead of the competition, but are among the best practices across all online marketing. The company sends some visitors who shop for a flight but do not purchase one an e-mail offering a hotel or a car rental for the city and dates the consumer searched. In addition, it sends price decrease notifications as the departure date nears. Hotwire reports that the latter mailings are up to 16 times as effective in generating conversions as its mass distribution mailings are.

Hotwire's success with these e-mails comes from customer segmentation and testing. The company segments consumers into four categories:

- **Active quoters.** Consumers who have been quoted an itinerary that has not yet departed.
- **Active prospects.** Consumers who have been quoted an itinerary that has already departed, but whose quote is less than three months old.
- **Inactive prospects.** Consumers who have initiated activity in the past four to 12 months.
- **Lapsed prospects.** Consumers who have not initiated any activity in more than 12 months.

The campaigns designed to fight abandonment focus on the first segment, because these consumers are highly engaged with the site and are most likely to purchase. The company then tests the optimal times to send e-mails to these consumers to determine how soon after a flight search a cross-sell e-mail should be sent and how far in advance of departure consumers are likely to purchase different products.

Creating an e-mail program to recapture consumers who have abandoned the site is difficult and requires endorsement from top leadership, because the up-front costs are significant in terms of both staff time and computing power. (Hotwire declined to give specifics.) It requires a travel company to invest in tools that serve not only the small percentage of visitors who do convert, but also the large majority of consumers who do not. Moreover, travel companies must be able to link personal profiles with individual itinerary searches—something Hotwire was able to do because until recently it required sign-in prior to searching. However, now that the programming is complete and business rules are in place, Hotwire incurs little additional cost to run the program. In almost every case, travel companies will be better served by investing in personalized database marketing programs than in multimillion dollar site personalization engines.