

Understanding how visitors use your site

Through the development of a Customer Journey Framework

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Introducing the Customer Journey Framework

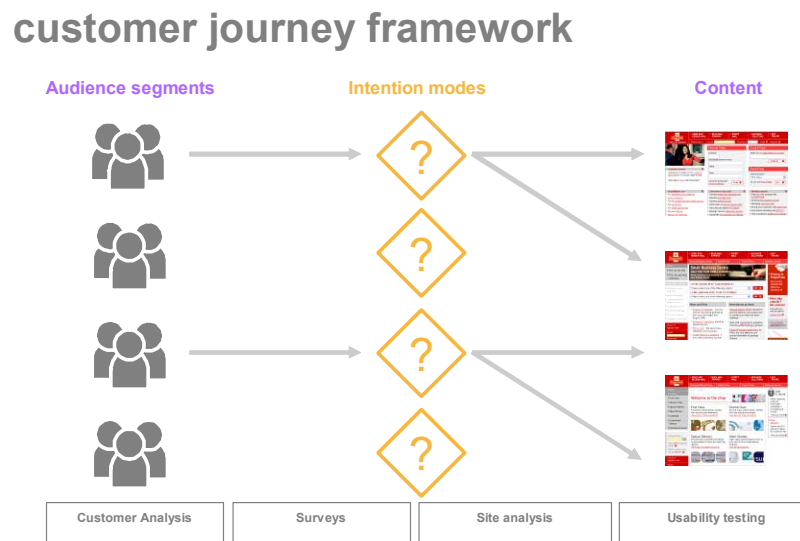
To help digital property owners understand how visitors use a site, Applied Insights has developed its Customer Journey Framework. This framework is an approach to help organisations understand which visitors are trying to use their site, how they are using it and whether they are being successful in their goals or not. It brings together a range of analytical approaches into a coherent framework for which can be used as a strategic input into site and content development processes.

The diagram below outlines in a conceptual way how the Customer Journey Framework works. It comprises of three key components:

- Understanding the different types of visitors that visit your site (Audience segments)
- Understanding why people visit the site (Intention modes)
- Understanding usage of the site and the consumption of different content (Content)

The challenge is to be able to link these strands together and to understand not only who is visiting the site, but also why they are visiting the site and what parts of the site they use. We call these "Key Customer Journeys". A Key Customer Journey is one group of visitors, coming to the site for a particular reason and interacting with a particular set of content.

There is no silver bullet here and we use the framework to bring together a variety of analytical tools and techniques. This may include analysing customer databases, running online surveys and the extensive analysis of site traffic behaviour from web analytic systems.



The three components of the Customer Journey Framework

Audience and customer segments

The first component of the framework is to have a sensible segmentation of the visitor or user base. Segmentation often means different things to different people but in essence what we are trying to do is to divide the overall user base into different types in a meaningful way. The different ways that you might typically segment visitors to your site might be by:

- Demographics: classifying visitors based on who people are or where they come from (ie gender, age, business type and so on)
- Behaviour: classifying along the lines of how users behave or what they do (ie new vs repeat visitors, type of content consumed, and regular vs infrequent visitors)
- Attitudes: classifying visitors by what people think or what their opinions are (ie brand loyal or not, satisfied or not)

Most often we find that demographic or behavioural segments are the most meaningful to work with. In some cases businesses have already established consumer or business segmentations that they want to work with or we may find interesting and useful segments based on an analysis of behaviour on the site.

Intention modes

Different people visit sites for different reasons at different times. Even on e-commerce sites where the primary purpose of the site is to *sell* things, people may not be coming with the intention to *buy*. They may be looking to do some product research, they may be looking to check prices or they may be in the market to buy something but they haven't made up their mind yet. We call these different states "Intention Modes".

The main way to identify Intention Modes is through the use of onsite surveys. Running the survey on entry to the site has the advantage of asking the question when it is fresh in their mind, rather than the visitor having to recall the reason they visited the site at the end of the visit or at a subsequent time. We may run a survey on exit from the site as well and link the two sets of answers together. This gives us the ability to not only understand why people are visiting the site but also what their experience was like and whether they were able to achieve their goals or not.

For many sites there are likely to be a range of different modes in operation. By using these survey techniques we are able to define what those modes are in more detail and also get a sense of the importance of each mode to the overall traffic.

Content consumption

The third component of the framework is to understand patterns in consumption of content and the use of different applications or functionality on the site. Broadly we believe that whilst visitors' individual journeys through the site are often unique, the overall patterns of behaviour are often able to be summarised and described in a more meaningful way.

Most web analytics tools look at paths through the site or the sequence of events, such as in a scenario or funnel report. However, what we are also interested in are the main patterns in behaviour that summarise most of the traffic on the site. Rather than tracking how many people went through a certain pre-defined sequence of events, it's about identifying the most common behaviours on the site and interpreting them. For example, are there certain groups of content that are often visited together in a visit, irrespective of the order in which they were visited?

For this type of analysis we tend to use pattern recognition tools and other statistical analysis techniques. Inevitably this means getting the visitor behaviour data exported from the web analytics tool and imported into something else.

Our approach is to build up a "profile" of each visit to the site within the time period that we are analysing. This profile will describe in summary the main attributes of the visit and also the key events that took place within the visit. We will then deploy data reduction, classification and segmentation techniques to establish the different types of journeys that can be observed on the site. For example, on an e-commerce site you may see different types of shopping journeys to different product categories and also a number of different styles of researching or browsing journeys. These different journey types are then profiled using the audience segments and intention modes to create the key Customer Journeys.

Pulling it all together

As you can see, the data that generates the insights into each component of the Customer Journey Framework comes from different sources and needs to be pulled together. Profiling users may come from customer or subscribers systems, understanding intention modes from analysis of survey data and understanding visitor behaviour on the site is done through the analysis of site-centric data. The challenge is to pull the strands together and to make the links. This can be done either through macro-level integration or micro-level integration.

In macro-level integration the linkages between the three components are made by looking at the aggregated or summarised data from the various data sources. The links are inferred by relating the results of the different analyses together. For example from the site analysis you may find there are particular combinations of content viewing that are particularly prevalent. In a survey you may have asked visitors which content they are likely to visit, look for those combinations and then look at the intentions and profile of people who intend to visit those combinations of content.

Increasingly to get more accurate results we look to use micro-level integration where possible. With micro-integration some or all of the data can be linked together at the visitor level, i.e. you create a way of combining the visit level from the site with the intentions data and/or segment data. This is most often achieved through the linking of the site behaviour data from a web analytics tool with the survey data. In this way the profile and intentions of people displaying certain behaviour can be generated directly from analysis of the associated survey results.

Conclusions

The Customer Journey Framework is a holistic approach to thinking about who is using your site, why they are using it and how they are using it. It pulls together a range of analytical techniques and approaches to provide that level of strategic insight.

The Customer Journey Framework creates the vision for the ongoing development of the site and also can be used to optimise acquisition and retention marketing activity.