

How to Start an Online Business?

Articles in this free guide are compiled from my posts published on my Blogs.

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Getting Started

Either you are selling your products online or creating a Web2.0 liked platform, both types of online business require a careful planning before you start. I don't believe in good name creates successful business but they are few things that you just shouldn't miss. It is also important to discuss about the business model before you get too busy with your business. Yes, Change is Pain! When your business grows, when you have less time for yourself, when you find it harder to meet your ever climbing running cost, it is harder to put a brake and change your direction at that moment. You will be surprised, the best web developer you've just engaged can only deliver a great website but not a successful business for you!

Domain Name

A Name for Your Online Business...

Your services, products, how the system works, customer support gives values to your domain name, not the other way round. When starting a new online business, we give no more than 2 days for a name, but countless night for the business planning.

Anyway, this does not mean that you should simply grab any name and start your online venture. A good name will somehow be able to go through the following filtering process.

1. buysonline.co.uk (Use .com for big dream)
2. buy-sell-online.com (avoid special character)
3. buysonline.com (too long)
4. buy-sell.com (Too generic)
5. dookia.com (nice)

buy-sell.com seems to be a good name to many people, but it is not always true (unlikely to get and it could be expensive to acquire). A search result in Google doesn't tell you how well is your business presence because the keyword 'buy-sell' matches not just your business, but thousand of other sites.

Run wild to get a name that matches none in search engines. dookia.com can be one such example. Find one with no more than 8 characters, easy to remember, etc. When your business grows to a legacy like Nike, you won't wish to have a name that sounds like 'Sport Shoes Inc'.

What is the value of the domain name 'Google.com' if it returns no accurate search result?

It's Never too Late to Change a Bad Name

I was reading our partner, Pat's Blog. Pat started Webmail.us and we have been working with him to provide email hosting services in Malaysia for more than 4 years!

Recently, they have changed their company name from, Webmail.us to Mailtrust! Through lot of time, energy and money were spent over the years for the branding of this domain, but the hard decision was made recently and this is what Pat wrote,

But then one of my business mentors said something I will never forget. He said, "Pat, it's never too late to change a bad name." He's right. As soon as I heard him say that, I never looked back.

The word Webmail is too generic as a brand by itself. It does not accumulate values over the years unlike many other names such as YouTube, Facebook, and a lot.

Good move, Pat!

New Domain Name

Do you know how to register for a car plate number? Or getting your first insurance policy without an insurance agent? Well, there are many things that we believe it is way too complicated and we usually leave it to others, and have them get it done for us.

This happens to domain name as well. Usually, this was done by web developers or your web & email hosting service providers. Therefore, a few things that you need to know for the very least!

1. Domain name ownership. How do you know if a domain name was registered under your name? Registration information of a domain name are freely available to the public through WHOIS. For all .my domain name owner, please use MyNIC's WHOIS for most updated information. For other domain names such as .com, you can try DNS Stuff's WHOIS. Enter your domain name and search. From the WHOIS result, make sure your name or company name are in the Administrator / Admin Contact section. You must make sure you can access to the email address listed under the Administrator section too!

2. Cost of registration. Generally speaking, .com cost around RM55 a year, while .com.my cost around RM100 a year. Your agent get commissions from the Registrar and their price to you should not exceed the said figures.

3. What is DNS address? When register any domain name, one need to provide the DNS address to complete the registration. Well, it is okay if you're not sure what is DNS, and your agents can handle this for you. This does not affect ownership. It is more on resolving

or pointing (layman terms) of your domain name to specific IP address.

4. Renewal. Well, a responsible agent should always remind you one month before the domain name expires. If you are those last minutes person, chances you can be safe with those slow registrar such as MyNIC (they allow at least 2 weeks before releasing your domain name to the public). While those strict one, will put you under retention and you may need to pay extra to unlock.

5. What documents do I need? Well, a .com domain name do not need any. Anyway, if you are registering a country-based domain name such as .com.my or .com.sg, you need ROC in most case. Well, the rules are continuously reviewed (to a more loosen process, for sure). Domain name is a lucrative business for all registrar, they want your business :)

Www - With or Without?

Most of the website can be accessed by adding a www to the front of domain name, and without. For example, you can visit technicalguy.org or www.technicalguy.org to visit the same website.

Technically speaking, website address is used to point to an IP. To direct visitors typing the URL to the correct web server located on different IP. You can view both URL as two different address, pointing to same IP.

In most case, you should define a master one, which I suggest to be the one with www. Then, point the one without to the main one using redirect 301, which is much friendly for search engines.

Business Model

Decide Your Business Model Today!

Think about this:

Group A: Hair stylists, web developers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, teacher, contractor, media planner, photographer, graphic designer...

(Group A's customers want a customize solution. The solution is unique to each of them. Skill of Group A improved but limited to the person who is offering the service. The value of that person who offer the solution increases)

Group B: Online florist, broadband service provider, medical supplier, Google, Jobstreet, housing developers, scientist...

(Group B come out with their solution first. They customers made their decision to choose or reject the solution. The solution itself get improved and the values of the solution increases.)

Decide today! You don't have many 5 or 10 years to change your business model!

Old Marketing Manager

You are in a book business for 30 years. Story of Amazon.com motivates you to extend your business online. You start to build a website and sell your books online. Your marketing manager busy adopting new marketing ideas including Blog, email newsletter, pay-per-click, etc.

But after a while, you start to think why the result was not as expected. Your cost acquiring new visitors is high, the Blog is not active, no one seems to use the tell-a-friend box in your website...

But, someone next door - without any experience in selling books, started an online book store. They have some funny story and people are spreading the news for them, their CEO can be reached anytime by an email, the way they reply the customer support email is fun.

Start an online business, never **extend** it from a conventional one!

Classified Companies



I was talking to my friend who worked in a Classified company. His company is into producing an inch thick printed classified and distributed free to businesses. The revenue model is simple, to get more companies to advertise, the better. You can choose from point form listing to full-page color advertisement, as long as you can pay for it.

We both agreed that this industries won't last long. My friend estimating it would last for another 10 years and will start to go down. Why?

1. Customers are getting smarter now. See, you can't pay Google for a clean high listing, but you can do it in Classified. Google use several method to find out the most useful and popular website and list them high, in a more technical term, PageRank. Yet, Classified companies

spent more time to recruit more sales rep to sell more ads than focusing in improving their Classified.

2. It wasn't hany. Printed classified is thick and heavy. It requires you to go through the whole Klang Valley to find one Plumber who is near your house. Search engines solv ed this problem, presenting you with a weight-less solution, as long as you are connected. You get information you need, most targeted and updated.

3. There are too many medias now. Google will not be as successful if they start their company as one that sell and allow people to subscribe to their pay per click model. See, you need a story, a story that is truly benefiting your visitors.

At least there are few things Classified companies can do to improve this

Colored and box listing are free for those who deserve it, those with lot of good testimonials, those offering responsible customer support service. Companies who advertised should somehow find a way to prove their are qualified for a listing of their rank. In fact, all listing should be free!

Then, how to keep this Classified company survive if not selling advertisement? I don't know actually, it can be many ways. Think about how to make your product useful to your customers and the readers of the Classified. Who knows, one day, the revenue could be from the selling of the Classified? Subscription fee? AdSense?

If you're sure what will happen in the 10 year time, why not change today? Afraid of short-term pains?

Website Development

Google's Web Design Company

If Google creates the most amazing website, why not they start their web design business?

When we work for someone, we get paid and at the same time we get the chance to acquire new skills. For example, a web designer creates an online store for someone and get paid for the time spent and the quality of work. Such relationship provides a very good platform for someone to learn.

The owner of the online store will not share the revenue with you. Every day, value is built into the project and this has nothing to do with you (The very most you get a portfolio). The web designer goes project after project, having bad time during year end when all companies had finished their budget, etc.

This does not happen to only individual, but businesses as well. Most successful companies change their business direction to have recurring sales than one-off profit. All these involve applying their skills in different ways.

Web designers venture into their own online business; contractors build their own housing project; programmer develop their own software for sale, etc. Remember, the moment you start, you are accumulating your values into somewhere. When you wake up tomorrow, it still still with you, Through you have much more to worry such as operation & marketing.

If you are Google now, would you want to start your web design business?

How Much is eBay?

News like YouTube sold for 1.6 billion USD to Google, eBay acquired Skype for 2.6 billion often get all of us so excited and usually make us start to wonder about how we too can start something similar. Incidentally, AirAsia with their online booking system, grew their flight business continuously in the last 5 years. AirAsia outsourced their booking engine to a third party solution provider, but we've never heard Larry of Google or Steve Chen of YouTube engaged similar strategy to develop the online business for them. Instead, their solution is "home-brewed".

This is because AirAsia's core business is to provide affordable flight (Every one Can Fly!) and the booking engine is just a medium for the public to book their tickets. No matter how well they design the entire booking system, it is more important to have a well managed airline system. Outsourcing the ticket booking system can allow Tony to concentrate more on the airline business itself.

So, let's look at a scenario here where Ah Beng wants to build a second eBay.

He proposed to us that he wants to build a platform like eBay and then asked us for a full-fledge proposal of the entire system. These people either do not understand what it cost to build a successful online business and instead of them providing us the specifications,

they are asking us to do it for them. It's like asking the architect to find me a good location for my next restaurant.

You might ask then, what kind of services we provide, since we don't help people build their second eBay?

After Ah Beng realized how a second eBay wouldn't work as he'd planned, he then started his own restaurant business in Klang Valley. Business grew by leaps and bounds. Reservations of table through the receptionist became a bottleneck with the increment of business volume. He then came to us again after realizing how an online reservation system can help him clear the bottleneck and at the same time how he can use the online medium to expand his market reach.

After outsourcing his entire online presence to us, Ah Beng can then continue to concentrate on his restaurant business, where his expertise lies in. From this experience, Ah Beng realized that a successful online strategy is very much like a good restaurant, where the owner must himself understand how the restaurant business works.

Blog Kills Web Developers

WordPress is a free publishing platform. It will turn 5 years soon and you will be amazed of how many people are using it now, especially as Blog. Blog works so well for everyone to share personal journal on the web. You can sign up one for free and start blogging almost instantly!

Yes, Blog is free! Free is not good - at least for businesses. That is why, blogging spread like fire among individual users than businesses. It has becoming a New Marketing way for most businesses. Old corporate managers do not want to miss this new marketing opportunity, ended up setting one official corporate website together with an official Blog.

It was never easy to tell my customers that Blog and corporate website are the same. Fancy design still remains as the top-most-wanted feature for most of my customer. It was designed as like to please just the corporate website owner than people visiting it. Or, it may be the idea of web developer to push for beautiful layout, which in most case, the same result can be delivered by a page simple as Google main page.

WordPress has done so well in keeping the design separated from the content. It works like the theme in your Nokia Phone. You can choose to change the look and feel of your screen without entering all your contact in your address book again. This sounds simple but challenge is everyone has to adapt to a single format (post title, post slug, categories) of content, yet work in any page!

We have changed the look and feel of our corporate website several times, without worrying about rebuilding the content. But, you will be surprised with number of corporate websites still built with both content and design combined and ready to have them built from scratch again in their next revamp.

Bloggers are paving the way for the change of corporate website. They take the risk of change, trying up how the new format of

content definition should work. Bloggers do not have website in the past. Creating a Blog is not a revamp to them, but something new.

But, for a company with already spending so much in the past in their website, it is hard for them to make the change. They choose not to make immediate decision. They are still on the look-and-see state, but will eventually follow!

There are three things happening now,

1. Businesses are starting to understand the importance of the goal of creating a website. A goal must be measurable, it can be number of order, number of people downloading your location map, number of support email received, except branding :)

2. The platform of Blog, such as WordPress, after a long 5 years of development are now ready to prove that the technology is mature yet simple to user now.

3. All of us are no longer limiting to our own job of scope. My partner just login to our corporate website, edited one of a page posted months ago and approved some comments. In that 5 minutes works, he turned himself into editor, proof reader, comment moderator, etc. The rules changed. You are taking over works of airline booking agent because you know it can be done online, faster and cheaper.

Business will soon no longer need a web developer!

Criteria For Selecting Good Web Developer

1. understand what is the goal of your website
2. never promise you a top-most ranking in Google
3. Will not come out with mock up during pitching
4. tells you what is conversion and visitors
5. has their own website with high PageRank
6. do not charge by number of pages
7. read Seth Godin's book
8. use WordPress

How Much Does It Cost to Revamp a Website?

Customers are good at judging the value of a product they are buying if it is a tangible item. It is going to cost you around RM2,000 for a brand new iPhone. The amount of money paid can easily justified because you know exactly how handy can be an iPhone while you are on the move, and how it can become the toys of entertainment that you might not want to leave it at home on vacation!

Yet, this is not always true when comes to revamping a website. Customers doesn't always look into the values of the website - the goal of creating a website and how it can benefit your business.

Instead, the cost of revamping, usually relates directly to number of

pages, or time spent by your web designers for its design. Since website is intangible items and most of us are just too excited with news of million-dollar acquisition of dot com companies, it is always norm that pricing of a website doesn't include studies, planning, marketing and operations.

Customer expect money paid, in return for a website, not for its values!

So, how much does it cost to revamp a website? Whatever you feel the iPhone worth to you, so as a website!

Web Design Budget: Revenue

If this is a revamp of your current website, I bet you wish to see some improvement. Sadly to say, face lit upgrade has becoming the de facto measurement to the result of the revamp. Key important parameters including number of visitors and conversion rate are not taken into consideration.

Ask website owners around you, most of them do not even have a solid idea of the goal of their website. Make sure your goal is measurable. Number of online order or inquiry are good example of goal.

Ok, now if we have a goal, it would be much easier. If you have 100 visitors a month, and 10 out of them make an online order. That means, you have 10% conversion rate in that particular month. If you are revamping, you should have some figures in mind. Example, you

might be looking at 1,000 visitors after the revamp and probably to increase the conversion rate to 20%.

If every thing works (no shortcut, lot of hardwork for sure), you will be getting 200 orders a month. If each new sales generates RM10 revenue, that means your monthly revenue would be around RM2,000 a month.

See, it is never hard to estimate a budget. Just make sure you are clear about the purpose of revamp, in a MEASURABLE way!

(Using website to reduce your operation cost is another way to determine your budget, we will talk about this in my next post)

What is Good Website?

Driving Visitors

If a website is new, without much traffic and returning visitors - a 'good' website should be simple and take less time to develop. More time should be spent on the marketing, to drive more visitors to your website.

Increase Conversion

Once a website is getting enough traffic (in our terms, above 500 visitors a day), you should have enough feedback to build a website closer to what your visitors want. In this case, 'good' websites are those with intuitive layout, content what your visitors like, etc! In one word, higher conversion rate!

Website is Expensive!

By simply looking at the amount of work involved to build a website, I can not stop thinking why most of my customers believe that website can be done in one or two thousands or even less! Perhaps, the magical brochure emerged from the red ocean works, or simply because web design companies are not doing the job right!?

How can you tell if you have just chosen another one-man-show company or a team?

1. Graphic designer talking to customers directly. Only project manager understand both the language of customer and designer. Designer should get less distraction.
2. Programming logics starts before the HTML interface ready. This jump over eventually sacrifice the user intuitiveness!
3. Designer turn your mock up into HTML version with what-you-see-is-what-you-get tools.. chances is that you never get what you want :)

To be fair, creating a website is really not an easy task, it is kind of design work plus technical skill to make everything fully integrated and right!

Website Mockup

We had a humble beginning when we just started our web design business 6 years ago. Some customers asked for mockup before project confirmation.

Yes, you have a test drive before you buy a car, some sample to test before you order something. But this should never happen to a web design project.

What is a mockup? Mockup is the draft design of the website that you are going to produce later. Customer feel that by looking at the mockup, they can judge how good is a web design company, and then only to confirm.

There is a cost to develop a mockup. Mockup is a result of detail study of customer's service and products, understand how to present the website and to make it interesting. It is part of the development, and there is cost associated with it.

My personal experience of dealing with customers who wish to have a mock up...

99.99% you don't get the deal, see :)

A Must-Have Feature for Your Website!

Most of the website owners are able to tell us what they want when come to the design of their websites. Their preferences run wild from font-size to the colors used in the web layout!

We started by asking them who and what is the reason for someone to visit their website. Not *everyone*, please. Until now, they seem to understand pretty well about their visitors.

They continue to propose features which they want. This is where they stray away from their objective. Sadly to say, it sounds that those features are of what the site owners want, than their visitors.

It comes into a long list, from content management system to online payment. If your customers are businesses who prefer dealing with you by check, or group of people who never buy online - how much would this online payment help!?

The simple rule is, starting from something simpler. Do not worry about what features your customers might want to have, because they are the one who will let you know. The site owner, only represents *one of the visitor*, not every one!

If there is only one feature you will need to include in your website, it would be **how to make the life of customers easier!**

Marketing

It is interesting to know that most website or online business owners care more on the background color of their website than the two most important measurements- Visitors & Conversions. Successful business drives increasing number of targeted visitors to their website and convert them into customers.

Wait, before we proceed...

If you visit <http://sunbears.wildlifedirect.org> now, you will add one visitor to Wong's Sun Bear Project. If you choose to donate 5USD through the website, that would be a meaningful conversion.



Save world's smallest bear, the Malayan Sun Bear

Under the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Program, developed jointly with Sabah Wildlife Department and Sabah Forestry Department, a Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre (BSBCC) will be established at Sepilok, Sabah. It will be used to house Sun Bears which have been rescued from captivity before being released.

Donate Now (USD5)
<http://sunbears.wildlifedirect.org>

Visitors

Top Search Engine Ranking?

My friend asked me, "how to make a website appears on the top of search engines?"

The very first thing I can answer to her is, there is no quick for of doing this! Well, More than 50% of site visitors are directed from search engines.

Passive

Passive in a way, this is nothing new but a lot of passion needed, and often can and must be done on your end. There are unlimited kind of key words which people used to find your website. In the simplest way, key words are used by search engines to match content on your website. Now, do you think using key word '石头汤' can find my Blog, no way! Simply because I don't have the Chinese translation. What about '石头羹', '石頭湯'?

Active

Google sorts website using their patent-pending-never-disclose methodology. One of them, the PageRank, remain mystery but you can always interpret it to 'the more links pointing to your website, the more popular your website is, eventually you deserve a higher seat'. Question, how to many many website pointing to you? This again, nothing new, not rocket science but a long term effort of making this to happen.

This first-class seat is not available for quick booking, you can only make your way to it!

Passing Traffic



Online business is about passing traffic from website to website. It is one of the reasons why YouTube was acquired! Example of how AirAsia expands and monetizes from their traffic (ignore sequence)!

AirAsia -> Snack Attack -> GoInsure -> Xpress Boarding -> AirAsia X -> AirAsia Games -> Tune Money -> Tune Hotels -> ??

Business Blog

What is business Blog? Usually, it refers to the second website after the main official website of a business. Perhaps, it is a hard decision to replace official website with a Blog. Therefore, setting the business Blog sounds like more tolerate and 'unofficial' alternative.

Just look at [Stemlife & Stemlife Blog](#) or [Malaysia Airlines](#) and its [Malaysia Airlines Blog](#), this growing trend means you will see more business owners adding Blog to their main menu in the website.

Google treats everyone as personal. That is why you are not asked to enter your company information. See, one can work for more than one company, or even own a few companies. How many times you are asked to answer your income range or your age or your area of interest in those drop down forms? It is, in other words of saying - your age and income will *never change*. Or, what is the point of asking?

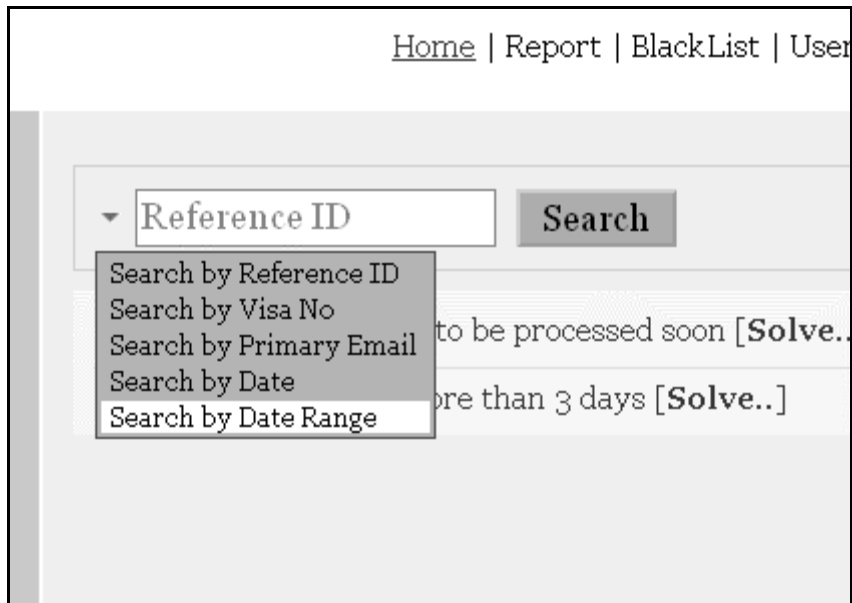
Well, behind business Blog, I'm sure you can find someone, or a group of people who is managing it. They are real people and the business Blog is actually personal to them, so the official website :)

Conversions

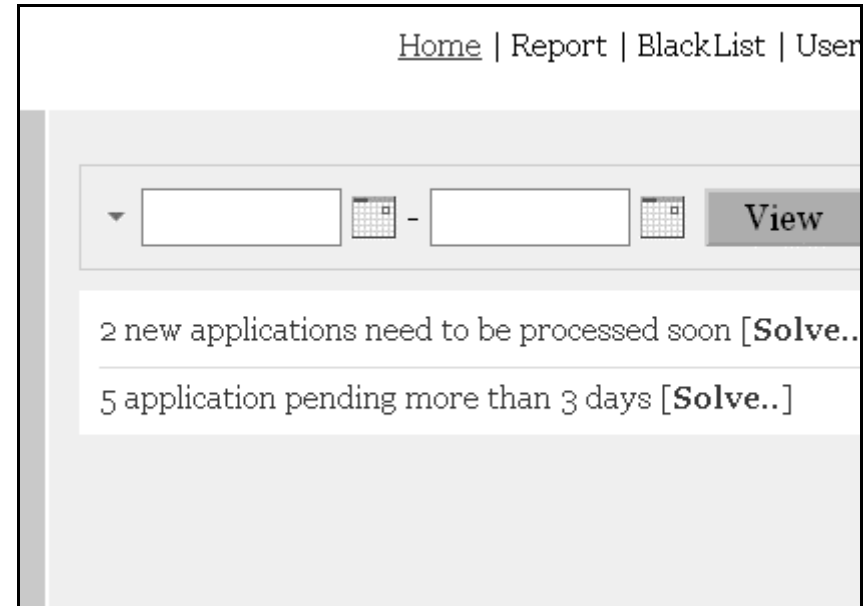
What's System Design to do with Marketing?

Behind an online business, backend system works silently, handle operation issues, customer support, making your online experience a most wonderful one. They are a part of the business! Spending more time in your operation means you have less time for your marketing.

It is one of the reason why we are never happy about our supporting system. Apparently, we revamp our system very often (Yes, complete revamp). New interface are tested before actual coding. Our programmers are tested in every revamp to make the interface even better.

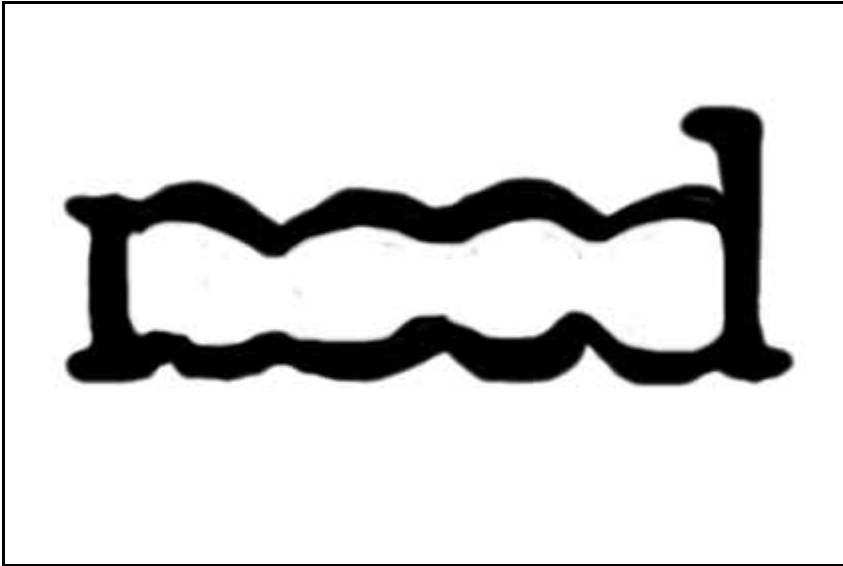


Instead of presenting few dropdowns for different search options, we have included arrow button to click for various search options. Don't ask me why the arrow is before the text field, why not after? Funny enough, such important details is never being discussed in the Request for Proposal documents or quotations. Clients tend to just want a system done, rather than getting it done the right way!



Thanks to Weikiat, our best *reduce-operation-increase-marketing* engineer!

What is the Word?



Can you tell me what is the word of the picture above?

I just had a very interesting talk to three students (Chekey, Chailee and Ryanne), having their internship training here. Well, they are asked to think of the main page interface for one of the new system we want to develop soon. Through they are new, but I would say that they perform really very well in this task!

When come to interface, it is not best programmer or best designer can do the best job. It is one who can think from many different angles, making less choice for your visitors. Best possible, a Physiologist!

A lot of time, the intuitiveness of a system is achieved by understanding how human reacts and interpretes a design, I found

this very interesting! Bill gates invented the best intuitive interface at his time, he deserves what he get today!

Truly First Come First Serve System Must be Discriminative!

Over the counter, banks use queue ticket system to manage their crowd.

However, as with human nature, not all counters can solve each customer's request in the same time duration.

Incorrect form entries, forgetting a company stamp, signature mismatch, and all other kinds of human-prone errors are bound to happen! This is where the queue system cannot easily filter out, making it half as efficient as it should have been.

To fix this little margin of "humanity-error", we have implemented an "approval-based system".

It's quite simple really. The approval process kicks in the moment the first customer start queueing. The duty of the approval team will filter out the customers with problems and direct those who are error-free straight to the counter. Those with errors will be directed to the error-fixing team, where a dedicated trouble-shooting team will attend to them personally.

It's not to be seen as a system to penalize customers with errors, but rather, it's to reward well-prepared customers who gets their documents right and speed up the process for them.

In the end, both the erroneous customer and the error-free customer will be happy .

Don't Make a Choice

The less choice for your site visitors, the higher the conversion!

Upon landing on your website, your visitors are expecting that you, the site owner is making the best arrangement for them. Just like how we trust Google. You believe Google returned the MOST relevant result to you, don't you? Or at least, the is the best Google can provide to you.

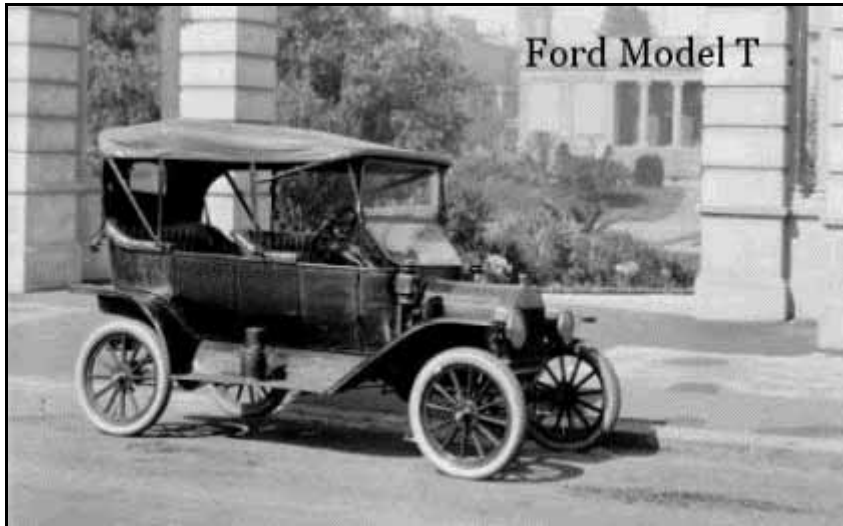
But still, many websites are designed to give you the choices of you don't want. Do you buy Cambodia and Bahrain travel guide at the same time? If not, why shopping cart are provided? Yes, it gives you the convenience of shopping around, but it also creates more steps to complete a deal.

The tricky part (it is nothing but test & measure), it is how you divert them to their choice before they make a choice! The best is, this is done indirectly, without their awareness. You won't be pleased to be asked for your shoe size immediately when entering a boutique...



Cambodie e-Visa allows travelers to apply their Travel Visa to Cambodia. If the applications come from travelers themselves, chances that they're applying for no more than 5 applications at a time. The first part of the application form was designed to filter the applicants and provide them with the best experience while submitting their details.

I Want a Faster Horse!



Steve Jobs said he never listens to people. People would have said they want a faster horse (Henry Ford). Companies do it more as gestures, more than mining people for their ideas.

Lot of time, people don't know what they want until you have get put the final product in front of them! If Akio Morita listen to their customers, we will never get the Walkman today.

Why? Steve and Akio Morita doesn't spend time to study their users, because they themselves are already the best user experience expert!

When asked why iTunes works? Steve explained that illegal download through is free but taking some time to find the right song. iTunes, provides a better User Experience and you are assured with song quality and reliability. We can't talk someone to stop downloading songs illegally, but we can give you Carrot. "Our carrot

is, better User Experience... and that will cost you USD1 only," said Steve.

Recently, we are revamping our travel guidebook. It is not rocket science or any marketing research on age-group of our travelers, or any 'convenient' information to fill in the guidebook - it is User Experience, to spent less than 3USD before the trip.

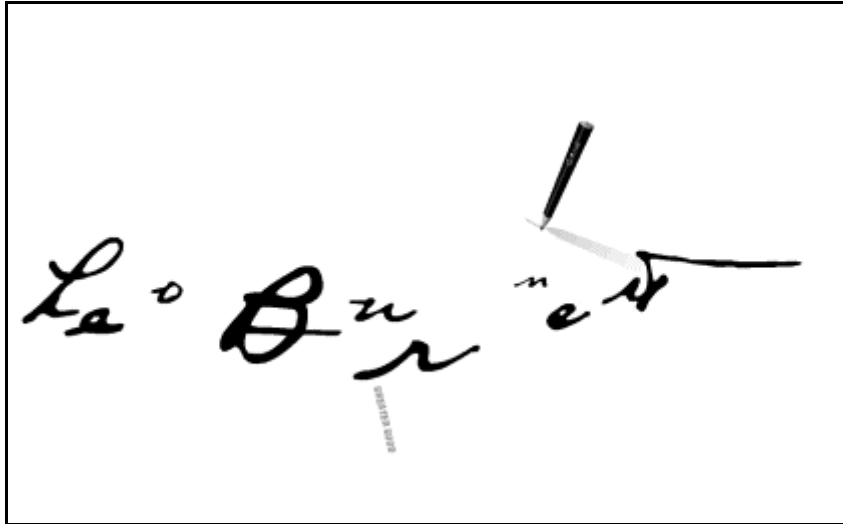
"I want a 'car'!", said Pin

I Hate Big Pencil



I used to think of how those amazing company still indulged themselves in their own sweet dream of having many years of existence, in decades. It doesn't take Friendster or WordPress long to

become successful. If you need a more solid example, check out [Google](#).



I was talking to one of the biggest property developer in Malaysia recently, over the revamp of their website. This is the second revamp after 4 years time, and I expect them to have clearer understanding on the importance of what to achieve now. Change is pain, and when every web developers walk in and tell you the same thing about mockup, fancy flash animation, they have finally chosen to measure something unmeasurable - branding.

They have chosen [Leo Burnett](#), one of the famous creative company. I'm not sure how much opportunity cost will be lost to this property developer after visiting Leo Burnett's website. My mouse turned into a big pencil, to match with their tag line 'All big ideas come out from big pencil'. What has this to do with me? The website is in ALL-Flash version. The navigation does not impress me at all (perhaps, to the group's decision maker, yes).

Creative agencies are in the market for many years, long before any web design company. In those days, TV, Radio and other non-online media are the main advertising channel. Over the years, creative agencies are moving into the online channel and this directly put themselves as the role of web developers, without knowing what and how website can really help - another example of Meatball Sundae.

It is not that you are big and the golden words 'starting since 18xx' that makes you outstanding. It is about change!



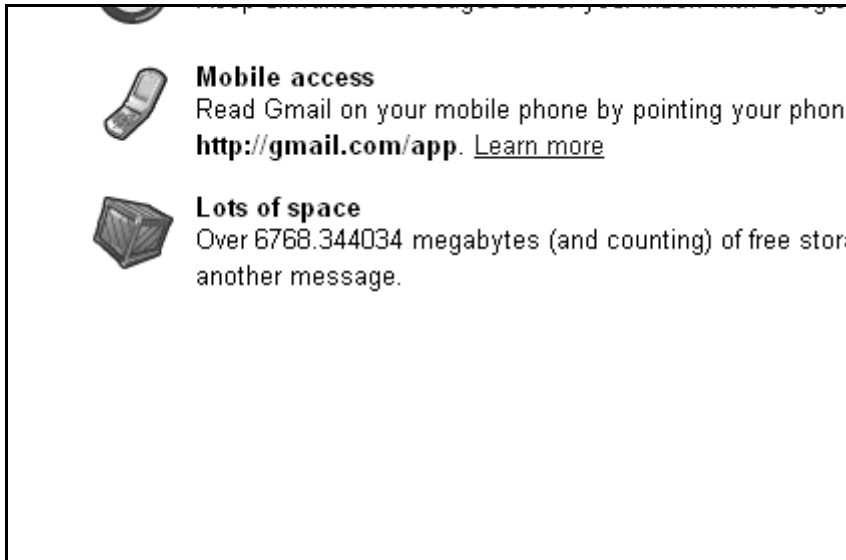
[Nokia](#) wants to transform itself into a next-generation entertainment company. Last August, Nokia, the world's largest cellphone maker, created Ovi, an Internet service and online music store. Its intent, analysts say, is to compete directly against Apple.

This is unfamiliar territory for Nokia, which got its start in the mid-1800s as a paper maker. But as Mr. Ojanpera explained, companies like his have no choice. "**Change is painful**, but you have to figure

this out in order to be successful,” said Mr. Ojanpera, who is based in White Plains. “The question is, are you willing to play by the new rules?”

Reward or Penalty?

Yahoo suspend your Yahoo Mail account if you don't login for long. While, Gmail - reward you to stay longer and login more frequent by counting and increase your email storage while you are logging in!



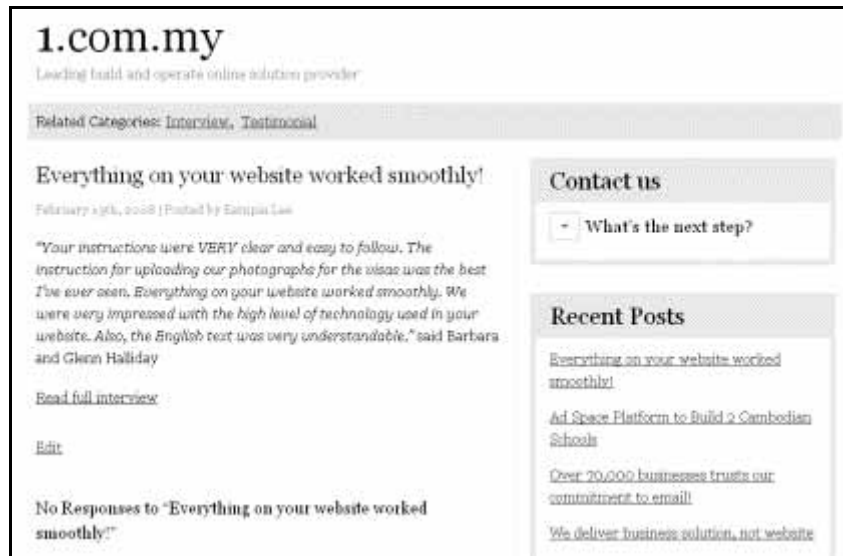
Fly Faster

It takes about two hours to fly from Kuala Lumpur to Siem Reap. Why not one hour or 30 mins? Why are we not writing to Airbus and give a feedback to make the plane fly faster?

Understanding how a plane works is no easy task (at least to me), let alone building one.

Similarly, when creating an online system, do not expect your users to suggest 'major changes'. The average users can give feedback on their experience but to get them to tell you why you should start implementing full-text indexing for your database is probably way too far-fetched for them.

All Subpages are Main Page!



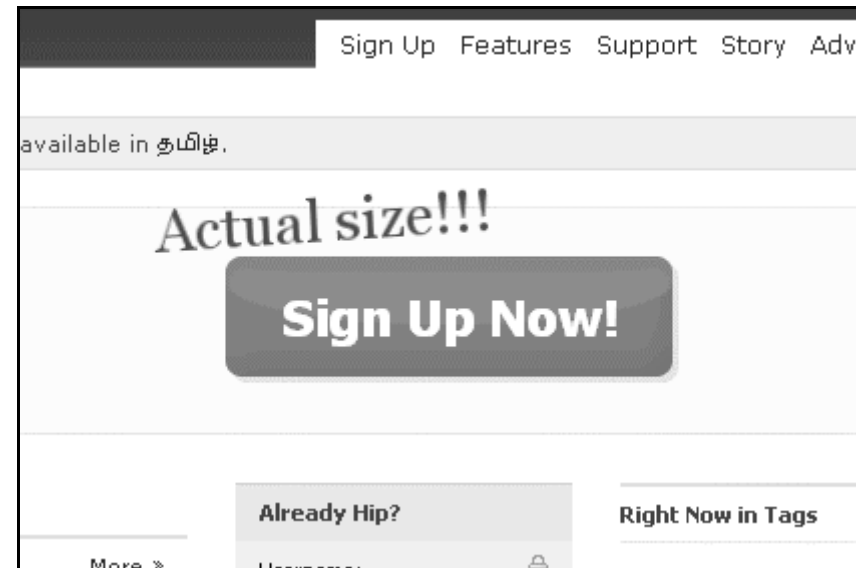
Visitors use specific key words. Their landing page is no more main page, in most case. For example, if I am looking for an Internship job at a web design company, I will use key word 'internship web design'. Search engine returns result that direct me to the subpage describing the internship program of a company, instead of their main page.

What is important for a subpage then? Limit number of subpage you have. The less the better. You need to be very sure about the goal or the conversion you want for each subpage. Convert them to your customers.

Subpage should have a brief introduction that tells your customer what you are doing, I bet you have this in your main page too.

Remember, every subpage initiates a process to be completed!

The bigger, The Better!



Most successful websites are not stingy with space allocated for their sign up button. WordPress, as one of the most widely used Blog platform, firmly believe the size of the sign up button has a lot to do with the conversion. And most importantly, conversion is the best measurement of how successful a website, rather than fancy flash animation flying around in your website!



See, even the words used in the button has a lot to do with Google. Imagine if your Sign up now button is in graphical format, not text version...

Problem is Improvement



What happen if y our fridge is not working? You turn off the power, remove everything and send it to repair. You got it back, working perfectly after two days.

You will notice one thing, y our fridge is cleaner now, with all rubbish clear and things are in order! I bet you won't clean it if the fridge doesn't go wrong.

How to apply this to online business?

Create problem virtually! Assumming y our customer complaint at you, someone hacking into y our website, broken link, page whacked, etc - all these bring positiv e result!

Operation

Never assume that an online business will drive auto-pilot. If you think your conventional customer support is all about picking up a phone call like what you have done in the past, read on...

Email

Love Letter

Love letter I

Darling,

1. I miss you so much!
2. When can I see you again?
3. Good night

Pin

Love letter II

Darling,

I miss you so much and can't wait to see you again. Good night!

—<-@

Pin

The way you write can make a difference. **Bullet** is for shooting, not for emailing :)

Email is Monotonous

“Email is monotonous,” said my friend during our discussion today. Email delivers a message in a single tone unlike a conversation. My business nature requires me to answer many emails a day.

My email reflects me, it is just another form of conversation, in text. We love our work - so I have to think of some way to reflect this well in my email:

1. *Thanks* means *Thanks*, but *Thanks :)* means *Thanks and I'm smiling happily*. Will you love someone when she is hiding all her feelings from you?
2. You have more than one hundred ways to tell your sender that you are a human. This is me!
3. Make your email short. Long email is just like your mom nagging on you! Do you ask your lecturer 10 questions at a time and expecting 10 answers together?
4. Skip this if you are that kind of person who will never stop and offer help to someone with a broken car beside the road. Don't just reply for the sake of replying. Offer your help, feedback or any suggestion in your email!
5. Though this has something to do with the default setting of Outlook Express to mark message read automatically after 5 seconds - Never ignore an email. Give a precise answer. It is just a Yes or No. Not hearing from you is either not a Yes or No, but being impolite. Imagine you are talking to someone face to face but he ignores you and walk away, this is exactly the same feeling.

Sorry, I'll Reply You in 2 Days!

Thank you for contacting XYZ. We have received your e-mail and our Customer Service personnel will respond to your inquiry soon. Generally, we respond within 48 hours. If you require immediate attention, please call us and our Customer Service personnel will be happy to assist you. Our office hours are from 8:30pm to 5:30am, EST or 1:30am to 10:30am, GMT/UTC, Mondays to Fridays.

Generally speaking, responding in 2 days to your potential customer shouldn't be something you should be proud of. By including this statement in every one of your auto-responders only makes it worse. Email support, one of the most important elements in every online store, should and must allow online sales to take place even during non-office hours.

Another common issue prominent in most websites is this disclaimer “My website is best viewed with 1024 x 768 resolution.” When building the website, shouldn't multiple resolutions be taken into account in the first place? By limiting your website to specific browsers and screen sizes, what you are also doing is limiting the number of people who is experiencing a satisfactory shopping experience on your online store.

We are not even talking about accessibility issues yet, such as how to make your website friendly to blind visitors!

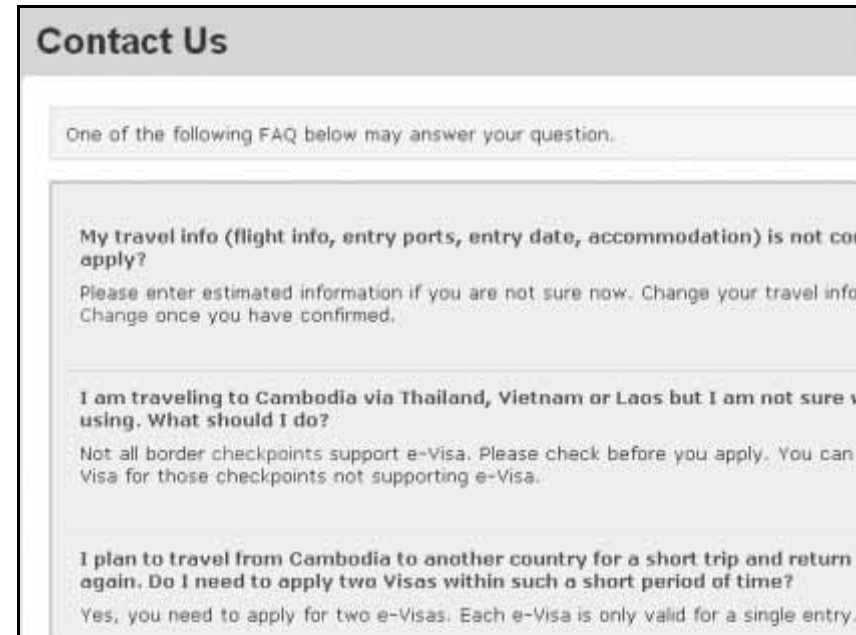
Sadly, many budding website owners still emphasize on nice-to-have features like shopping cart and membership systems, without a proper understanding of their target audience.

Reducing Enquiries and Support-Related Emails

Even if you have a FAQ section, you are bound to receive many enquiries or support-related emails. One possible solution to this can be shown with the example below:



In the Cambodia e-Visa website, visitors will be asked if they have read the FAQ. If the answer is no, they will be redirected to the FAQ page, else they will proceed to the next screen.



A list of frequently asked questions extracted from the FAQ page are listed in this screen. Most questions can be answered in this page.

Name

Email Address

Reference or Passport No. (optional)

Message

Verification Code 4243

Finally, if all else fails and there were no answers to the visitor's questions, visitors will be redirected to the Contact Us form. A verification code applet was installed to filter Spam enquiries as well.

Generic Email for Your Business

Most businesses publish a more general mailbox such as sales@xxx.com or technical@xxx.com in their website or printed materials.

SUPREME OEA SERVICES SDN. BHD. (332840-V)

No. 5, Jalan Gopeng,
Off Jalan Pasar,
41400 Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan,
Malaysia.

Tel: 603 - 3342 2459, 3342 2448, 3341 4222, 3341 5709
Fax: 603 - 3341 6768, 3344 3325
Email: support@supremeoea.com

Always use Aliases for your general mailbox. Aliases receive email and automatically redirect to other email addresses that you specify. This is usually free and unlimited from your email hosting service provider. Check with them to find out the number of maximum email addresses you can specify (both outside domains and internals).

Imagine you have five sales representatives. Try to direct all emails from sales@xxx.com to every one of them at their individual mailboxes. Remember to add sales@xxx.com to the Bcc field when sending out emails from your sales representatives. On resignation (if any), what you have to do is to update the Aliases and make sure you forward it to the right person.

Maintenance

Is Your Website Loading Slow?

If your web hosting costs you around RM200-300 a year, chances are that it's a shared basis. Perhaps I'm wrong. Dividing the yearly price to 12 months, I doubt how an average of RM20 monthly web hosting fee is enough to cover the cost of server hardware, bandwidth, co-location and even the unlimited mailbox account offered. That is barely enough for a McD set.

Where goes wrong then?

Forget about the page-long list of feature of those web hosting plan. Look for 'Monthly data transfer' and 'No of website per server'. If you can find them, chances that you are in the right direction. Vaguely still, both offering tricky measurement which sounds to me like finding a virgin in a brothel.

It would be easier to put it this way

- 1) First offer allows you to stay in a hotel for X amount of days in a month. But didn't tell you the fact that another 100 people are getting the same offer, and the hotel has just one room! - Monthly data transfer
- 2) Second offer limits to X amount of people who get the offer, but didn't mention about the number of day each person will stay in this one-room hotel - No of website per server

What can I do?

Find out number of rooms. In this case, it is the dedicated bandwidth assigned to each website, not server. Remember, shared basis servers host not just your website. It makes huge differences here. A shared 1Mbps for 10 websites may be slower than single website with dedicated 256Kbps bandwidth.

Find out number of days one can stay in your second offer. In this case, check out the 'Compute Cycles' offered. It measures how much the processing time your application required in a server. 10,000 compute cycles are roughly equivalent to the monthly capacity of a server with a server with 1.2GHz modern processor. For example, a website with only static pages consumes less compute cycle than a website with shopping cart applications.

Is your website loading slow?

I see big corporate website paying as little as RM20 a month for their online infrastructure including email & web hosting (some with domain as well). I bet this amazing offer answer to the question above.

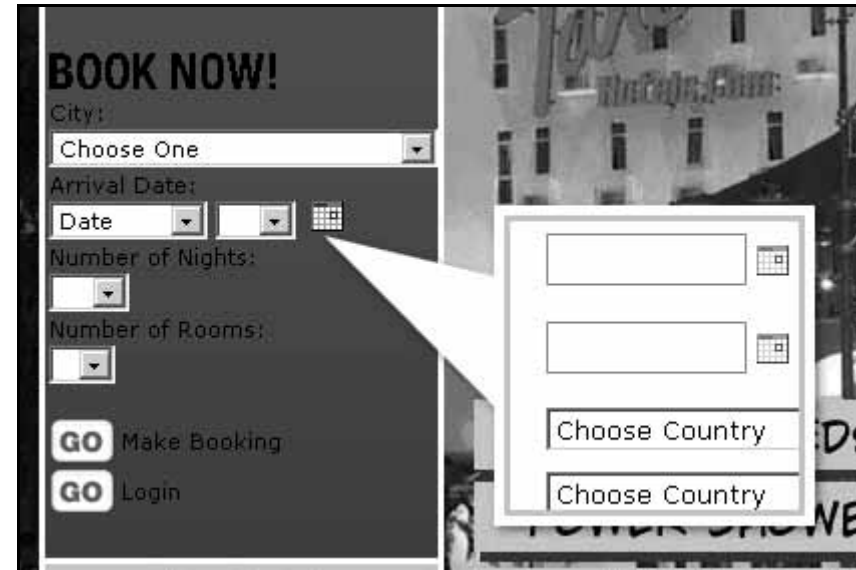
Website Critics

Reviews

Fine-tuning TuneHotels.com

Upon landing in Kuala Lumpur, my French friends who just came back from Cambodia are looking for a place to unpack their luggage and quick rest. They wanted some place near the heart of the city. With their budget and location preferences in mind, I decided to bring them over to Tune Hotels. Furthermore, I've always wanted to see how the "Booking" system works in Asia's 1st No Frill Hotel.

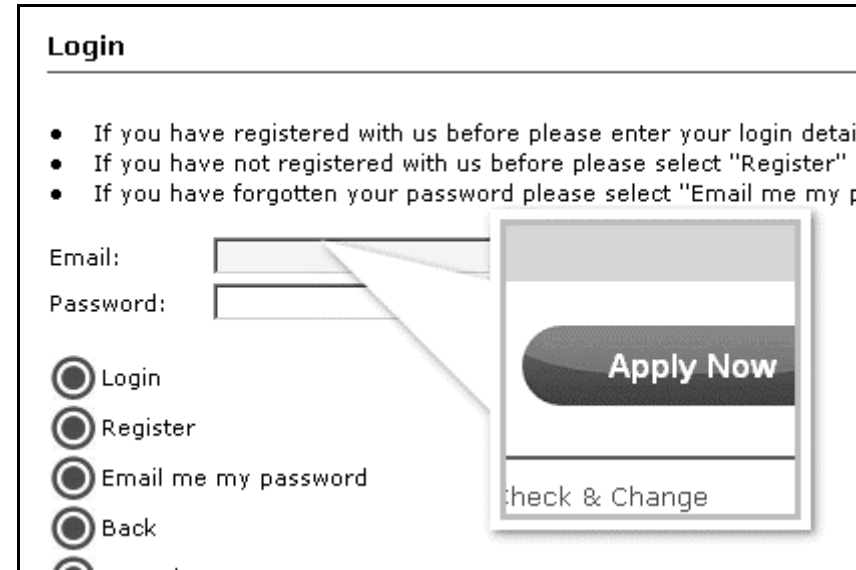
Upon reaching the nearest computer terminal en route Tune Hotels, which "co-incidentally" happened to be my office, I finally got the chance to look at how the whole booking process works. The entire booking process is performed "live" by my friends. Bear in mind that this "live performance" is purely executed from the point of a non-English speaking user.



Bigger input fields and making the Booking Now stand out prominently can mean a lot of difference. The rule is simple, important element should always stand out visually from the rest. In this case, it's not the Login button.

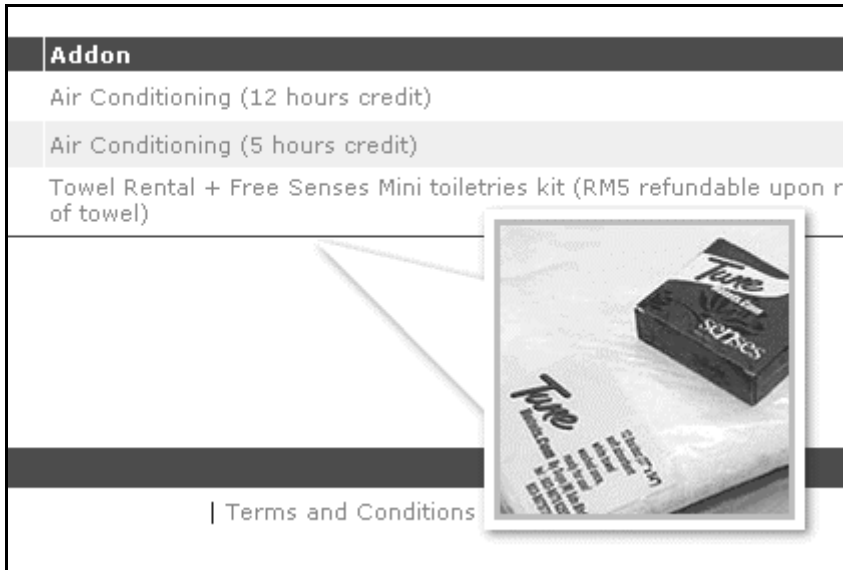


Most visitors jump into the form without spending much time browsing the entire website. Obviously, the main conversion of the website is online booking, hence creating other pages such as “About Us”, “Corporate Information” and various hotel guest-unrelated information would be counter-productive. Instead, content that is important is build alongside the form structure. Notice in this example above, it would be difficult to explain in text how comfortable the mattress is. A picture speaks a thousand words.



However, after my friend finish filling up all the booking details, as he was proceeding to the credit card payment phase, he was annoyingly greeted with an obstrusive “Member Sign Up” form. This part of the process was not executed as elegantly as I expected. As a rule of thumb, never add unnecessary processes in between the starting point and the goal- always use the Shortest Path Algorithm.

You can always include the “Member Sign Up” phase in the confirmation e-mail later, which in my opinion is much more relevant. And one can’t help but feel that the UI designer decided to take the easy way out by putting 5 equally prominent red bullets for the “Login”, “Register”, “Email me my password”, and “Back”. Hard work doesn’t always pay off now, but laziness almost always pay off instantly. The user could have been guided better and faster with a better layout design.



Lost in translation! Yup, Tune Hotels lost RM 5 just because some of the items listed in the website is not easily understood and was easily passed over by my friend. The word 'Towel' which is written only in English proves to be a headache for my friends who could have mistaken it as sanitary napkins. An icon would have done the job much better!

Maybank2U 2.0 Sneak Preview: Maybank2Me

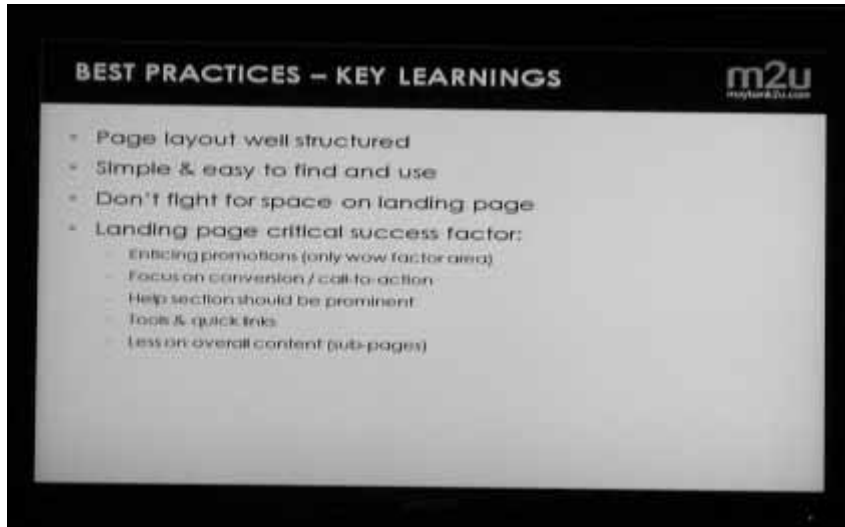
A product in its final stage limits the way users think. The almost-done Maybank2U website will surely get a lot of useful feedback, but I bet not much on the fundamental which is crucial to get the magic numbers mentioned by [Shareza](#).

Just look at my earlier post on [Jo-jo's Challenge](#). We have collected about 33 feedbacks for just one form, extracted from an online hotel booking website.



This is the current website of Maybank2U. The Maybank2U team did a great work to build this from scratch. It is not easy, especially when you're dealing with a large number of users and important data. The decision to revamp came at the right time. If the old website was built to attract more visitors (during those days when it was new), the revamped version should have focused in the conversion rate or

meeting goals. In short, to increase Maybank's revenue and to decrease Maybank's operating cost!



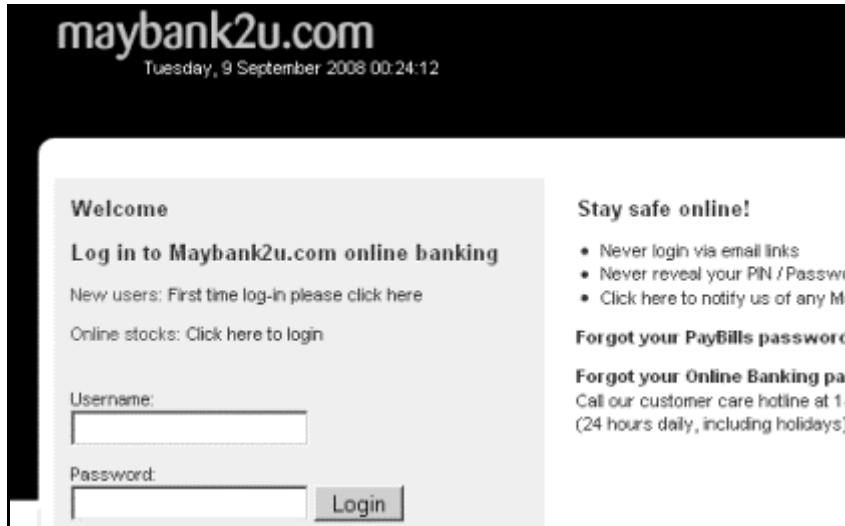
I managed to take this picture showing some important practices during the presentation. Too bad, the pages in the new website are still fighting for space :)



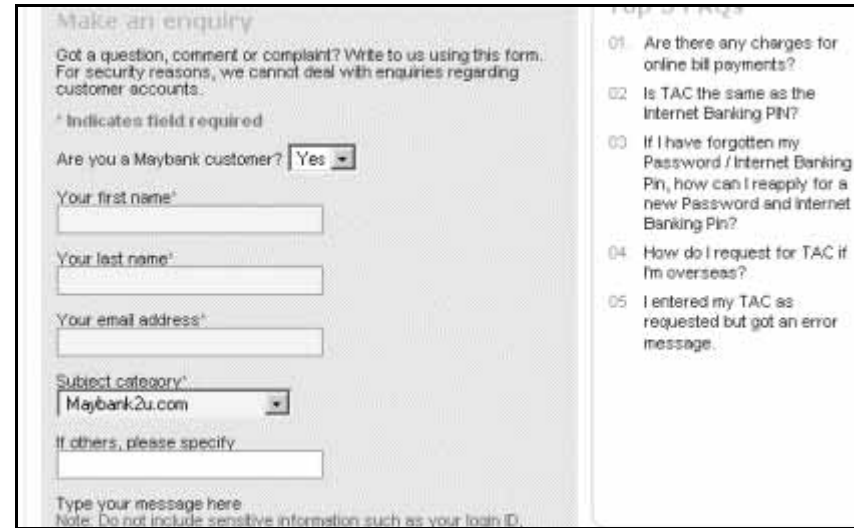
Allow me to quickly go through some of my humble and nothing-new feedbacks. I would love to jump to the end of the post which I am going to propose and touch the painful part of the change - The Fundamental!



Don't be surprised, many visitors can not tell the difference between the two pictures in quick.



I couldn't find the login box in the main page like what we have in Paypal? A touching personalization can be redundant. Quick math, if you will to login 100 times to Maybank2U in your lifetime, that means the New User link will appear 99 times to you unused. Not just that, you have just forced someone to make 99 decisions of not clicking on that particular link. Don't make a choice.



Most often, user experience has a lot to do with the Contact us form. Imagine, it serves as the best time and place where you can turn someone's experience of using your website better. They can be your best friend who promote the website for you, not of fancy technology but some little nice experience. A good form receives fewer support request, saving operational cost greatly. I have reviewed the Contact us form of Alliance Bank in the past, check it out. An example of Contact us form in good use.

Get started

Ready to experience a whole new level of banking? First, choose a profile that fits you best:

- I'm a Maybank customer with a Maybank ATM/credit card >
- I'm a Maybank customer without a Maybank ATM/credit card >
- I'm a new customer >
- I'm an existing Maybank2u.com customer who wants to pay bills with any credit card >
- I don't have a Maybank account but want to pay bills with any credit card >
- I'm an existing PayBills customer who wants to use Maybank2u.com services >

I'm a Maybank customer with a Maybank

Sign up form - one of the most important page where visitors are converted into Maybank2U users. Yet, too many options, and I wonder why the online method should not be given priority as like the big button in WordPress. Yet, this is not much different from the first version. This explains why 1,500 pages are way too difficult to focus your bullet (budget and time) on. Probably that answer to Yowchuan's question on how much is the cost of revamp during the preview launch today.

AEON BUKIT TINGGI SSC

Branch	Branch Information
Lot G-50, Ground Floor AEON Bukit Tinggi Shopping Centre 1 Persiaran Batu Nilam 1,KS 6 Bandar Bukit Tinggi 2 42100 Klang Selangor	General 03-3326 2451 03-3326 2452 03-3326 2453 03-3326 2454
Facilities ATM at branch Branches	Manager 03-3326 2450
	Fax 03-3326 2455

BALAKONG SSC

I would love to have location map if this is not too much of work :)

The Fundamental Feedback?

My Maybank2Me directs me to a secure page with big login button. There is a clear instruction to tell people how to ensure they are landed in the non-phishing page. I don't have to choose if I am a new user, the system will do this dirty job for me. My online system reminds me if there is a recurring payment to make such as rental and the list go on...

The rest of information such as banking, credit card, lifestyles updates, promotions, sign up instructions and contact us form are separated from the online banking system.

Who knows, I could have one version for people like my dad? Lite, easy to use, and probably they could belong to the last group of users who will continue 'supporting' the physical banks :)

Keep it up, Maybank2U Team!

I must be kidding. Yes, I don't have a Maybank2U account.

Acmamall.com, More Stones Needed

I was reading a post and that was how I was introduced to this interesting Malaysia home-grown online shopping mall running since 2000. A very bad habit I have developed over the years of online experience can not stop me from checking the PageRank of this website - 3 out of 10.

Personally, I don't know Quek. I admire his passion to continue running this store for more than 7 years. These are few humble suggestions from myself to improve the conversion (converting more visitors to customers),

1. Remove 'Best viewed using IE...'. The compatibility issues is a challenge to store owner, not an instruction to our potential buyers.
2. On average, most visitors decide if they are to continue browsing on first page. The current landing page do nothing more than decreasing your conversion rate!
3. Make your site simpler. The current one is creating too many loops to discourage conversion to take place.
4. Use permalinks rather than dynamic page. Most of your pages does not maintain PageRank over the years.