5 Simple Customer Research Tools to Improve Your Website By Brad Smith

If you don't know everything about your customers (like their roles, their characteristics, and their personalities), then **your business will struggle,** and there's no amount of promotional marketing or advertising tricks that will save you.

We recently discussed why customer research matters for marketing. And then we uncovered the ways in which psychology is (and always has been) impacting the sales cycle. In the words of 1950's researcher Martineau,

"In an intelligent, normal person, virtually everything is motivated by subtle reference to the person's self-ideal—the kind of character ideal he wants to become. …In this yearning for self-expression, we reach for products, for brands, for institutions which will be compatible with our schemes of what we are or want to be" (Martineau, 1957, pp. 45-46).

With this in mind, you can gather information that will tell you more about your customers' wants and desires.

And once that's pretty well dialled-in, THEN you can begin to successfully market your products/services to these individuals.

The next 5 customer research tools will help you drastically improve your website and marketing results.

#1: Gather Emails for Insights

Despite the popularity of social media, email marketing is still the best way to reach people (and ultimately get them to buy).

Because if someone is willing to give you their email address, they're probably either already a customer or about to become one.
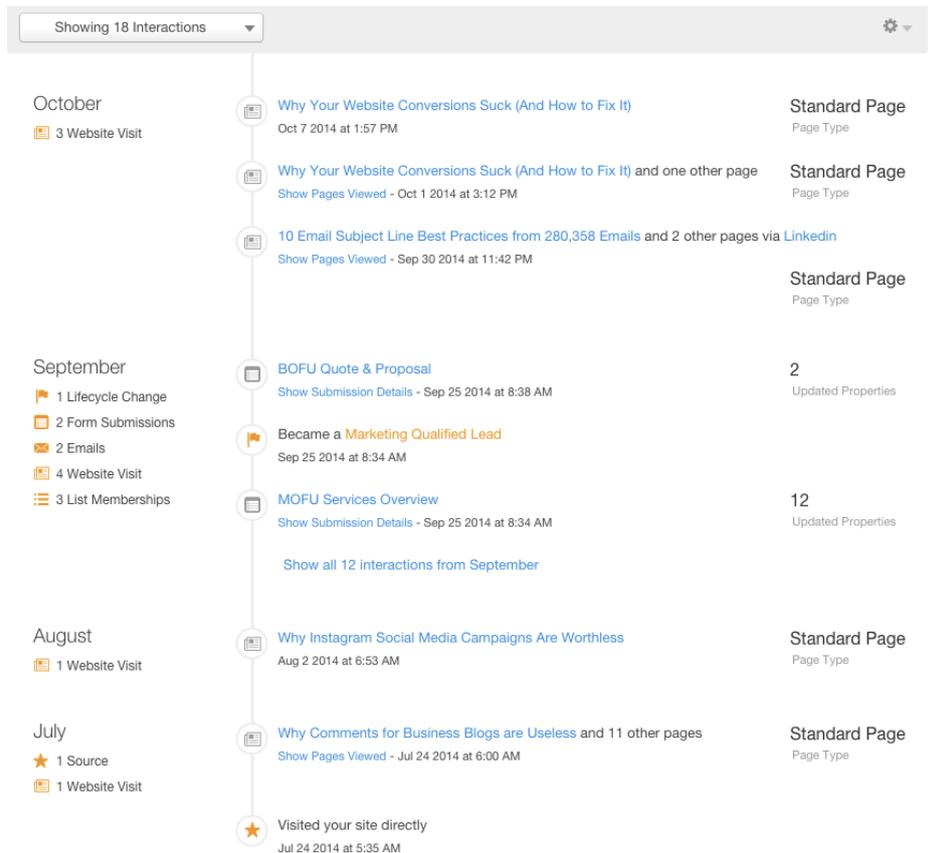
We spend so much time and money on acquiring NEW people, but many times we neglect to *foster the connection you already have with your existing ones.*

Focus on what you already know about these people based on your past interactions and further the relationship accordingly. For example, mine your own email database for new insights based on what these individuals like, love, or hate.

Once you do, you'll be amazed at how powerful the simple act of **gathering an email address** will be in the long run.

Example: HubSpot
Email marketing data on its own is only slightly helpful. But if you start to combine it with a rich profile of WHO the customer is, and WHAT they're looking for, then you can begin to glean incredible insight. Marketing automation software, like HubSpot, can help you take the raw data further and turn it into something more *actionable* that can guide your next promotional moves.

#2: Get Consistent, Qualitative Feedback
Once people are better acquainted with your company, you can begin running short and informal surveys on a fairly frequent basis.

But let's be honest – *you're probably not going to get the amount of responses you're hoping for.*
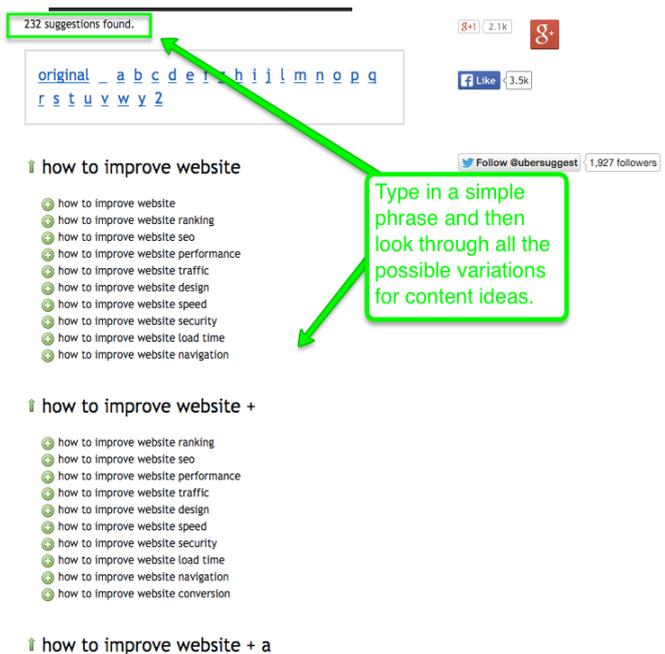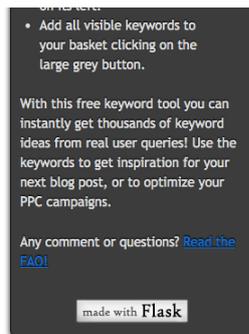
No one likes filling out surveys. Most of them are too long, boring, and focused on things that the consumer couldn't care less about. So instead of asking questions that directly relate to your brand, **focus on subjects that your customers actually care about.**

For example, you might want to know how well your service offerings are matching up with your customers' needs. Instead of asking, "On a scale of 1 – 10, how would you rate the variety

of our service offerings?" You should instead ask questions like, "What are your business goals and objectives for the next year? Why haven't you reached those goals already?" From there, it's up to you to figure out how to connect those dots.

Example: Qualaroo
Qualaroo is a simple tool that prompts visitors to answer a relevant question while looking at a specific page. You can also use it to tailor questions based on that visitor's individual history. Like with HubSpot

above, whenever you can ask the right question, to the right person, at the right time, your performance will skyrocket.

Qualaroo also offers sophisticated branching logic to gather information in the least obtrusive way possible.

#3: Use Proper Messaging
Once you have a pretty good idea of who your customers are and what they want, focus on creating promotional messages that will appeal to them.

That doesn't mean just talking about your products or brand. By developing compelling, "unbranded" content that focuses on developing a need (and demonstrating how it can be

fulfilled), consumers will be far more likely to find you earlier in the buying cycle (*before* they start price shopping).

One of the best frameworks we use is the **Problem, Agitate, Solution** formula. Every blog post, Twitter update, or advertisement needs to start with (a) identifying the problem or root cause, then (b) explaining various pain points and symptoms of those problems, while finally (c) providing a simple solution for people to take action.

Type in a simple phrase and then look through all the possible variations for content ideas.

We start with focusing on the problem because that's what *truly resonates* with people and gets their attention. And many times, we don't even mention the brand as the "Solution", because the way it's positioned makes it obvious.

Example: Ubersuggest
Type in a basic, open ended phrase into Ubersuggest and it will provide *hundreds* of related topic ideas to choose from.

Take the exact words or phrasing from your customers to see what other pain points or symptoms might be relevant. Or you can use your own hypotheses and quickly validate which areas of interest have the most demand or "need

awareness" from the customer's point of view.

#4: Shore Up Website "Leaks"
95% of the people who land on your website will leave within only a few seconds, *never to return again.*

The majority of people "bounce" (or leave your site quickly) because your site doesn't match their expectations. This decision (usually made in less than a minute) is often based on things that may seem superficial or inconsequential.

What's also interesting, is that companies and prospects look at a website from completely different angles. Companies tend to obsess over things like colour schemes, images, etc. While prospects are often more concerned with form and function.

With the right information, you can create a site that jives well with the interests and personality of your target audience. And when every aspect of your site corresponds to what you know about them, a substantially greater number of people will stick around long enough to give you a chance.

The best advice? *Observe* how people are using your site, and then *mimic* their behaviour to uncover issues. Then test, test, test.

Tool Example: CrazyEgg
CrazyEgg is a simple tool that can help you figure out how people are interacting with your web pages. For example, you can view a Scrollmap to see if people are consuming all of the content on a page. This can help you figure out if you're providing enough information for people on a particular topic, or if you should make it shorter and more *to-the-point.* Their Heatmap feature will also help you to see how people are interacting with different elements of your site, and if there is anything causing confusion or distracting them from the ultimate goal.

#5: Connect Search + Social
No matter what your business is, there's a social media network that it will fit into perfectly.

But here's the thing… forget networks like Facebook and Twitter for a second, and broaden your horizons to other "social" communities that have a HUGE impact on whether people buy from you or not. (We like to call these influential, 3rd party websites and marketplaces "satellites".)

For example, TripAdvisor for hotels or Yelp for local businesses.

While Twitter and Facebook are great for new brand awareness or retention, these other sites will have a MUCH bigger impact on your bottom line. Because people use these things *specifically* to evaluate alternatives directly before purchasing.

One of the best ways to use social media to influence sales is to optimize your presence on these influential *satellites* to improve (a) visibility, (b) discoverability and (c) integration. Not sure how? Start here and here

Example: Open Site Explorer
Open Site Explorer provides link data for websites (i.e. people linking to your website and individual web pages). You can use it to quickly identify the top referring websites (and specifically, *how* they're referring traffic to you). Or you can also use it to "spy" on your competitors and see which websites are the most important to their success. Then you can reverse engineer what they're

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doing and come up with ways to combine tactics to benchmark and eventually outperform.

In Summary
Websites (and marketing in general) suffer when they're too generic, vague, and vanilla. The best results come when you're SPECIFICALLY targeting customer personas with elements that appeal directly to their wants, needs, desires, and fears.

Take advantage of the plethora of simple tools available to help you gather the necessary insight. So then all you'll have to focus on is taking action.

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About the Author
FixCourse is an online publication that teaches organizations how to grow using internet marketing. Their free weekly email newsletter will teach you how to get more traffic, leads and sales. Visit: http://fixcourse.com/newsletter/ for details.

FixCourse was founded by Brad Smith. Brad is an entrepreneur and digital marketing consultant who has worked with clients in a variety of industries including software, insurance, real estate, journalism and travel: everything from start-ups to the Fortune 500.

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