CHAPTER 5 – Overcoming obstacles

THE LAST CHAPTER may have left you feeling warm and fuzzy about designing for emotion. It’s all jokes and monkeys, right? The brute reality is that not all brand personalities afford the liberal use of humor. There are times where we need to appeal to different emotions that inspire confidence and trust in our audience.

As we discovered in [Chapter 2](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-4), our brains break up complex situations into simple concepts so we can evaluate the costs and benefits of a decision. To protect ourselves from harm, we’re pre-programmed to be skeptical of new brands, products, situations, and even people.

Walk onto a used car lot, and your spidey-sense will tingle when the salesman approaches you with a pre-planned pitch. You can recognize a disingenuous brand trying to sell you a product that seems too good to be true. We can smell bullshit a mile away.

That’s what you’re up against when you try to convince your audience to click, sign up, or trust your brand. It’s you versus your audience’s gut. You’ll need to be persuasive without letting your marketing show when courting a skeptical, lazy, or apathetic audience. Before we can learn to overcome these obstacles, we need to dissect and examine the decision-making process.

GOING WITH YOUR GUT

We like to think that as the most highly evolved species to walk the planet, we navigate life with careful logic untainted by the baggage of emotion. It’s a noble idea, but one that diverges from the truth. In reality, we almost never have enough time to rely on complex reasoning to make decisions, so we rely on gut reaction. Recall the decisions you made today, and you’ll see that your gut is in the driver’s seat.

*What shirt should I wear? Hmmm, the blue one looks nice. What should I have for breakfast? I’m hungry for eggs and bacon. Crap, looks like there’s traffic ahead. Maybe I’ll take this exit to see if I can get around it.*

Intuition drives so many decisions we make each day. You’re wearing the shirt you have on now because you “just felt like it.” You had other appropriate options, but if you used logic to consider each and every one, you’d never make it out the door. The problem is that many times there are several logical options to choose from, and logic can leave us gridlocked, with no clear path to follow. Emotion is the tie-breaking vote when many options are equally valid. You use instinct to choose something that’s good enough when the best option is unclear. If it weren’t for gut decisions, we’d be lucky to get anything done.

So what would happen if emotion wasn’t helping us to make decisions? Antonio Damasio, Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Southern California, has studied people who have injured the areas of the brain responsible for emotion. Basic decisions vex them. Deciding when to schedule a doctor’s appointment triggers a circuitous internal debate on the merits of the various options. Similarly, choosing a restaurant for lunch proves impossible, as evaluating pros and cons never ends. Where there are many options of similar or equal merit, there’s nothing to push these people’s thought processes into a final decision. Without the tie-breaking vote the emotional gut response provides, they cannot decide.

As designers, we’re in a unique position to help users follow their gut instincts. Using common design tools like layout, color, line, typography, and contrast, we can help people more easily consume information and make a decision driven by instinct more than reason. Just as you chose the shirt you’re wearing because it felt right, we can help our audience sign up for a service or complete a task because their gut tells them it’s the right thing to do. Remember, we don’t have to make an exhaustive case for action because reason is not often the primary driving force our audience uses to decide. We just have to appeal to their emotions to make the benefits appear to outweigh the costs. (**FIG 5.1**).

**FIG 5.1**: To convince skeptics to act, you don’t have to make a brilliant case, you just have to offer more benefit than cost so people’s gut reaction to your design falls in your favor.

If you’ve ever designed a signup form, you’re familiar with the challenge of convincing someone to take action. Subtle changes to button design, language, or layout can sometimes make your conversion rates shoot up or down. But sometimes the secret to better conversion rates is not in the minutiae, but in the big picture. The way type, color, and layout fit together says a lot about a brand and shapes new users’ perceptions.

**Mint: money is no laughing matter**

The hugely popular money management web application, Mint ([http://mint.com](http://mint.com/)), had a heck of a challenge when they launched. A service that aggregates your financial information and requires you to share access to all of your bank accounts is bound to attract skeptics. For Mint to succeed, they had to inspire trust.

In theory, investors loved the idea of Mint. A free service that helps people understand how they’re spending their money could have real mass appeal, and could make a lot of money by recommending financial products that would help users save money. But venture capitalists had major reservations about Mint because trusting a free service (the word “free” invokes our inner skeptic) to share such personal data was unheard of.

Jason Putorti, Mint’s designer, knew that design was going to be central to their success:

*Trust was the most critical barrier for us to overcome with potential users. It was an uphill battle raising venture capital because investors simply didn’t think people would ever share bank credentials. Trust is a gut feeling more than a rational process, and visual design affects emotions in a very powerful way, perhaps more than any other stimuli.*

Putorti designed Mint to stand out not only from primary competitors like Quicken and TurboTax, but also from other apps on the web. When Mint was founded in 2006, minimalist, function-driven design inspired by apps from 37Signals was the industry standard. With a design agency background, Putorti brought a different aesthetic to the project. Then, web app designers were leery of overusing images to create gradient effects or to render a font that wasn’t available to all users. Speed was the primary focus, and texture, illustrations, and typographic exploration were uncommon in web apps. But Putorti wasn’t carrying these preconceptions when he designed Mint.

In Mint you’ll notice a sense of light in the interface that’s created by glows, extensive gradients, and shadows. Though data rich, this isn’t your dad’s Excel spreadsheet. Charts protrude off the page with a bubbly gloss, inviting a lingering gaze. Remember, Gmail and Basecamp were the paragons of web app design in 2006, when Mint was released. Mint stood in stark contrast to the flat designs many web app users were accustomed to seeing (**FIG 5.2**).

**FIG 5.2**: Mint’s interface uses rich lighting, shadows, and a refined color palette to make it stand out from competitors, while engendering trust in a skeptical audience.

The carefully considered interface design and impeccable execution turned skeptics into signups. Mint presented engaging ways to view trends in one’s spending habits and offered ways to save money. These are compelling benefits to be sure. If that data were trapped in a poorly designed interface, as is the case with most financial software, the stories of one’s financial life would be hard to read, which diminishes the value. Without a strong value proposition, security concerns would almost certainly outweigh the benefits, decreasing the chance of converting skeptics. Design was critical to Mint’s success.

The care and consideration apparent in the design gives users the impression that equal attention is paid behind the scenes where Mint manages security and privacy. Sure, Mint makes it clear that your information is securely guarded, but rather than having to constantly reiterate the point in the copy, the design says it more effectively.

You’d trust a bodyguard in a perfectly-pressed black Armani suit more than a guy in cut-off jeans and a ripped Grateful Dead t-shirt, wouldn’t you? Appearance can greatly influence perceptions, and we carry that mental model with us when sizing up a website. Mint’s sharp design inspires just enough trust to help people value its benefits more than they fear its costs.

Putorti put a lot of stock in the idea that design could be a compelling enough reason to sign up for Mint. Though security was important, he saw it as a secondary challenge:

*Visual aesthetic was key. A financial management app is a different challenge; the information itself has to be presented in a useful way that also delights and excites the user.*

*Security is not the reason why people sign up for the service. Convenience and information about their money is. If you provide an overwhelming value to the user if they give up a bit of information, most people will do so.*

In the end, users’ gut reactions were that Mint seemed secure enough and the attractive charts and graphs held enough value that they were willing to take the risk and sign up. Though investor reservations about Mint were based on solid logic, Mint defied reason by appealing to users’ emotions. In November of 2009, Mint was acquired by Quicken—their primary competitor—proving to all that design and emotion are just as valuable as reason and logic, and sometimes maybe even more so.

We can woo skeptics with thoughtful design that serves a strong value proposition, but lazy users require a different line of thinking.

THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

Skepticism is not the only obstacle we confront when trying to entice our audience to act. Laziness is just as big a hurdle. In truth, people really aren’t as lazy as we like to think they are. They’re just looking for the path of least resistance to their destination. When people are reluctant to act, sometimes a little incentive gets them moving.

**Dropbox: bribery will get you everywhere**

Dropbox ([http://dropbox.com](http://dropbox.com/))—a service that offers synced file storage between computers, mobile devices, and the cloud—has little trouble enticing signups for a free account with 250MB of storage space. Their value proposition makes it easy for new customers to see that Dropbox’s benefits outweigh the cost. Free storage? What’s not to like about that? The initial gut reaction to Dropbox is positive.

There is, however, a small catch. To get started with Dropbox you have to install software on at least one computer—more if you’re syncing between machines—plus you must install the mobile app to access files on your phone. The getting started task sequence is disjointed. Though the individual workflow steps are relatively straightforward, you must jump from device to device to complete the setup process, so it’s easy for Dropbox to lose people along the way. As a new customer invests more time into getting started, the costs can start to seem greater than the benefits.

Dropbox is also not your typical software as a service. It’s a web app, but it’s also a desktop and mobile app at the same time. That’s new territory for a lot of people, and there’s a learning curve to using the service as well as understanding how it will make your life easier. Getting people in the door is easy for Dropbox. It’s retaining users and getting them invested that’s tricky.

Dropbox has a novel approach to getting their audience invested immediately on sign up. They’ve created a game with a handsome reward awaiting those who complete it. When a new customer logs into Dropbox, they’re presented with six simple tasks (**FIG 5.3**).

**FIG 5.3**: Dropbox helps new users become invested in their system with a game that rewards those who complete it with free additional storage space.

To win more storage space, users must take a tour, install Dropbox on their computer, put files in their Dropbox folder, install the software on other machines, share folders with friends, and then tell others about the service. A meter indicating task completion and progress toward the 250MB storage space reward accompanies the tasks. It feels like a game to the user, but Dropbox is decreasing the chance of account abandonment by educating people on how to use the system, and its value to their digital life. Once your files are in Dropbox, and you’ve shared them with friends, the cost of canceling is higher than continuing to use the service.

Call it bribery, call it game theory. The result is the same. Users feel a sense of accomplishment when they’ve completed the required tasks (**FIG 5.4**), and with more free space, they’re excited to drop more stuff into Dropbox. The game of earning free space continues when users post to Twitter and Facebook about the service to encourage others to sign up. As we’ll see in the final chapter, game theory, bribery, and achievement works on brochureware websites, too.

**FIG 5.4**: The meter on the left fills to display the Dropbox logo upon completion of the tasks.

Dealing with skeptics is difficult, but at least they’re paying attention to your message. What do you do if your audience just isn’t that into you?

APATHY

Skepticism and laziness are troubling obstacles to confront, but apathy is worse. It’s demoralizing to launch a website or app that you’ve spent countless hours designing and building, only to see your hard work adrift on a sea of indifference.

Users react apathetically to websites when the content is irrelevant to their interests, or when content is poorly presented. Content strategy will help you create the right content for your audience. It’s beyond our present scope, but read Erin Kissane’s book *The Elements of Content Strategy* if content creation is a stumbling point for you (<http://bkaprt.com/cs>).

In the examples we’ve seen so far in this book, great content was always at the core. Intelligent delivery methods complemented the content by either providing new, engaging pathways into the content, or by retaining audience interest. Great content delivered in an emotionally engaging manner is like kryptonite for apathy.

Let’s return to examples from previous chapters. Do you remember [Betabrand from Chapter 1](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-3" \l "idx-betabrand)? It’s an ecommerce site that sells men’s clothing, which is a competitive market sector. Betabrand keeps their audience interested through well-crafted content. They have nearly thirty minutes of hilarious content for each product line. Their customers buy because the content makes them feel good, and they return because the site experience is memorable. Betabrand’s audience is anything but apathetic.

In the [Housing Works example from Chapter 3](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-5#housingworks), content was at the heart of their emotional design strategy. First-person stories and client portraits help the audience to create an emotional connection to the organization. Human stories are what draw their audience into the website, and get people involved in their cause.

Don’t despair if your audience is less than enthusiastic about your site. In the next section I’ll help you get things back on track.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON’T SUCCEED...

If after implementing this book’s ideas and recommendations your audience is still apathetic toward your site, ask yourself these questions:

* Is the personality I’ve created for my brand authentic and well matched to the profile of my audience?
* Is my brand personality too similar to those of my competitors?
* Is my content well written and relevant to my audience’s needs and interests?
* Do the emotional design methods I’m using interfere with the base layers of the user’s hierarchy of needs (making the site less functional, reliable, usable)?

You may have a hard time answering these questions honestly, in which case you might conduct simple user research and usability tests to evaluate your assumptions. Do you have access to people in your target audience? Round up three to six people to meet in person or via Skype ([http://skype.com](http://skype.com/)) or GoToMeeting ([http://gotomeeting.com](http://gotomeeting.com/)). Ask your users open-ended questions that will give you the insights you seek. You might ask things like:

* Describe your initial reactions to the website.
* How does the website make you feel?
* If this website were a person, who would it be and why?
* Would you recommend this site to a friend? Why or why not?
* Are there site sections or features that are more important to you than others? Less important? Why?

Avoid asking questions that bait the user into answering in a particular way. For instance, a question like “Do you think this website has a pleasant personality?” skews answers toward the affirmative, because the question’s language primes the user’s perceptions. Remember those priming techniques discussed in the previous chapter? You want to avoid them here so you can collect honest and accurate insights about your website.

Conduct simple usability tests with three users by following Steve Krug’s methods from his best-selling book *Don’t Make Me Think.* The results will help you better understand whether or not your emotional design strategies are impeding your site’s usability, reliability, or functionality. Krug recommends rounding up site users, buying some nice snacks, inviting the head honchos of your organization, and conducting very simple usability tests that direct users through workflows that you want to evaluate. Record the sessions with software like Silverback ([http://silverbackapp.com](http://silverbackapp.com/)), and review the videos to evaluate the user’s facial expression at key points in the interface. Did they smile at that point of surprise and delight or did they simply ignore it and move on?

Keep these tests simple and practical to ensure you actually do them and get the insights that will help you improve your website. Though less scientific than targeting people in your audience, you could simply visit your local coffee shop and offer a latté and a muffin to a few patrons for ten minutes of their time. When it comes down to it, any testing is better than no testing.

Disinterest in your site can be vexing, but most of the time you can understand that disinterest by talking to your audience. Sure, finding time to talk to real people in your audience can be tough. But when you’re hitting a wall of apathy, it can be the best way to correct your course and move forward.

MEA CULPA

Emotional design is not just about creating positive experiences and overcoming obstacles. It can also help us deal with difficult situations like server downtime, lost data, or bugs that affect a user’s workflow. Mistakes happen. Things go wrong. But a well-crafted response, and the cache of trust you accrue with your audience through prolonged emotional engagement, can save you in times of trouble, as we’ll see in the coming chapter.

CHAPTER 6 - FORGIVENESS

SOONER OR LATER, something will go wrong with your website. Servers go down, people make mistakes, and the unforeseeable happens. In such situations, it’s helpful to have your audience’s goodwill on your side so they will more easily overlook a temporary shortcoming and maintain trust in your brand.

As we’ve seen in previous chapters, your audience performs an internal cost/benefit analysis every time you ask them to complete a task. The results of this internal assessment determine whether or not a user acts. When something goes awry and your audience is inconvenienced, there is a risk that users will suddenly perceive the costs of using your site as greater than the benefits. Emotional engagement before and even during a major event can help mitigate the risk of losing your audience.

In fact, when you create a compelling experience, your audience will often forget about the inconveniences they’ve encountered over time and just remember the good things about your brand. So long as the good outweighs the bad, you win. That’s why you must accrue goodwill as an insurance policy for the problems that are certain to occur.

Flickr knows from first-hand experience that a good response to a bad situation is critical. It doesn’t hurt to have a fanatical fan base too, as we’ll see.

FLICKR: TURNING LEMONS INTO LEMONADE

In July 2006, a storage failure struck Flickr, the popular photo sharing service. Though photos were safe and no data was lost, thousands of enthusiastic users were inconvenienced as their favorite photo site took a temporary nap (roughly three hours). Tensions ran high as engineers worked to bring the site back online. Inquiries from concerned users poured in.

During the crisis, the Flickr team had a stroke of genius. Thinking like a veteran parent trying to keep an antsy kid occupied while waiting for food in a restaurant, they applied the art of redirection and ran a coloring contest. They posted a message that explained the outage, asked users to print the page, and do something creative with it to win a free, one-year Flickr Pro account (**FIG 6.1**).

**FIG 6.1**: During a major outage in July of 2006, Flickr ran a coloring contest that turned stressed users into content contestants.

Rather than brooding over their missing photo library, users brainstormed ways to win the prize. Hundreds of entries were submitted—some of which were very clever (**FIG 6.2**).

**FIG 6.2**: People went nuts over the Flickr coloring contest, submitting clever entries that won a select few a free Pro account. Photos by KC Soon (<http://bkaprt.com/de/9>, left) and Bart Kung (<http://bkaprt.com/de/10>, right).

Though the site was down and many were inconvenienced, Flickr users remember the fun they had participating in the coloring contest, and for some, how great it was to win a free year of Pro service.

All’s well that ends well, but there are lessons we can learn from Flickr’s experience as we confront our own errors and struggle to suppress customer mutiny. Confronting the negative emotions that arise in situations like this is important, and the experience you’ve designed around your site just might save you.

Flickr worked through the stressful situation by communicating calmly and honestly with their users. Let’s take a closer look at how Flickr handled the event to learn how emotional design shaped user reactions.

**Responding to events: facts before fun**

During events like the one Flickr experienced, the right tone is essential to ease concerns. When people are deeply stressed by an outage or a mistake you’ve made, you must explain what happened swiftly, honestly, and clearly. Give people the facts of the event, communicate that you’re doing your best to resolve things, then update users regularly, even if not much has changed. That’s exactly what Flickr did via their blog as the event unfolded (<http://bkaprt.com/de/8>).

Updates let people know you’re still focusing all of your attention on resolving the problem. They give you another opportunity to apologize for the inconvenience and reassure your users that you’ll fix the problem as quickly as possible.

Once you’ve done your best to soften emotions, you might consider a redirection like Flickr’s. Giving users something for free can rekindle the good will you’ve worked so hard to cultivate and gives them something else to focus on while you do your best to fix the problem. If giving something to everyone isn’t possible, a contest is a nice way to achieve the same redirection effect while limiting the expenses you may incur.

In high-stress situations, your top priority must be to tame negative emotions as best you can and, if possible, shift them back to the positive.

Although their clever response to the outage helped save the day for Flickr, it wasn’t the only reason their users stuck with them in a time of crisis.

**The unsung hero in Flickr’s outage recovery**

What really saved Flickr on July 19, 2006, was not just a clever coloring contest, it was the emotional design in their website that has accrued user devotion. Flickr is an icon in emotional design, creating an informal and human personality within the interface that makes it a joy to use. We all love the multilingual greetings we see upon signing in and it’s always a hoot when cuddly panda bears appear in the interface. The coloring contest was simply another way for the design persona that has earned them a devoted following to manifest itself. Sure, people get upset when they can’t access one of their favorite web apps, but a long history of great experiences with the site trumps the inconvenience of an outage.

Emotional design is your insurance to maintain audience trust when things aren’t going your way. If you’ve ever been emotionally committed to someone who has hurt you, you know that the human response to such situations is driven by gut feeling more than by logic. You don’t add up the good and bad experiences in your mind and do a detailed comparison before deciding whether or not to maintain ties with the person. You simply respond based on the strength of your emotional commitment. We react similarly to products and services.

Emotional engagement can help us look past even the most serious infractions, leaving the good more prominent in our mind than the bad. Psychologists call this phenomenon of positive recollection the rosy effect. As time passes, memories of inconveniences and transgressions fade, leaving only positive memories to shape our perceptions.

This is good news for designers, as it means that the inevitable imperfections in our work don’t necessarily lead to mass user exodus. In his article entitled “Memory is more important than actuality” (<http://bkaprt.com/de/11>), Donald Norman points out that pursuing perfection is a spurious goal, as the total experience we’re creating will shape our users’ memories of our work in the end.

*As interaction designers, we strive to eliminate confusion, difficulty, and above all, bad experiences. But you know what? Life is filled with bad experiences. Not only do we survive them, but in our remembrance of events, we often minimize the bad and amplify the good.*

*We should not be devoting all of our time to provide a perfect experience. Why not? Well, perfection is seldom possible. More importantly, perfection is seldom worth the effort. So what if people have some problems with an application, a website, a product, or a service? What matters is the total experience. Furthermore, the actual experience is not as important as the way it is remembered.*

Though carefully and considerately responding to site mistakes and problems will help get you out of hot water, the emotional design groundwork you lay before an event will keep your audience committed to your brand. The forgiveness we earn through careful emotional design can prevent considerable losses in customers and revenues, which is alone a compelling enough reason to incorporate it into our design process.

In the next and final chapter, we’ll confront the risks we run when we design for emotion, and see concrete evidence that the rewards make very good business sense.

CHAPTER 7 – RISK + REWARD

SHOWING EMOTION IN DESIGN, as in life, is risky. Some people won’t get it. Some people will even hate it. But that’s okay. An emotional response to your design is far better than indifference.

Emotional design does more than entice and keep your audience, it helps ensure you’re talking to the right people. Not every customer is right for your business. Some will be so high maintenance that they will cost you more than they contribute. That can be a real morale and financial drag.

If people complain about how your product, service, or brand are unlike your competitors’, then you’re doing something right (so long as they’re not complaining about service quality, reliability, etc.). The people who don’t understand you will come around as the passion for your brand increases. Certain people just need others’ validation before they can fall in love with a product or service. Though our instincts might tell us that it’s risky being different, the greater risk is in being the same as your competitors, as you make it harder for people to understand why your brand is the better choice.

We’ve looked at many techniques and examples in this book, but nothing communicates emotional design’s value better than hard data. As we wrap up, I’d like to leave you with some empirical evidence that can help you influence your boss and colleagues into taking a calculated risk with emotional design.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

I hope that you’re fired up about designing stuff that will have a lasting influence on your audience. But, it may be difficult to channel your passions into your work if your boss doesn’t see the value in designing for emotion. When your boss or client says, “I don’t know. This emotional design stuff sounds risky,” you need to be ready with case studies and an action plan that will make even the staunchest skeptic see that your ideas are good for the bottom line. Before we hatch a plan that will win over the folks in charge, let’s look at three real-world examples with hard data to bolster your arguments and silence your critics.

**Starting small: CoffeeCup Software**

To design for emotion, you don’t have to redesign your site or rebrand. It’s okay, and even advisable, to start small. Try simple experiments in a section of your site and limit them to a short time period. That’s exactly what CoffeeCup Software ([http://coffeecup.com](http://coffeecup.com/)) did in the spring of 2010.

With Easter approaching, CoffeeCup created a fun easter egg hunt on their site. Their goals were very simple. They wanted to attract more traffic and increase sales. Their expectations were very business focused, but modest.

Their team scurried about the site like little bunnies cleverly hiding easter eggs that would only be displayed at certain times of the day, or only after a set number of page views (**FIG 7.1**). This was no kindergarten egg hunt; it took some real searching to find a winning egg. Those that did find one were rewarded with free software packs or cash.

**FIG 7.1**: CoffeeCup Software ran an easter egg hunt on their site, and saw some amazing results.

J. Cornelius, CoffeeCup’s VP of Operations, kicked off the hunt with a quick tweet (**FIG 7.2**).

**FIG 7.2**: The CoffeeCup easter egg hunt was kicked off by a tweet from the VP of Operations, J. Cornelius.

Shortly thereafter, word spread on Twitter and Facebook, and site traffic began to swell. In the first three days, traffic tripled. Before the egg hunt, CoffeeCup would typically get about five page views per visitor, but once the egg hunt began, they saw an average of 30 page views per visitor. People spent hours and hours on the site in search of a winning egg. One user confessed on the Facebook fan page that she spent five hours searching for a winning egg, and in the end, it turned her into a customer:

*So pleased to have found this software. I’ve wanted it for a while and was saving up. Now I can treat myself to some of the other software I have been studying and trying during my 5 hour egg hunt.*

Check out what forum user “paintbrush” had to say about her reaction to the contest (<http://bkaprt.com/de/12>):

*Just can’t let it go. Into 3rd day now. Ashamed of how many hours I’ve spent. By the way, I’ve clicked on every egg I saw - right from the beginning (started at 10:15 Mon.) - all taken!*

When could any of us say we had a single visitor spend three days on our site? CoffeeCup’s forums exploded with chatter about the promotion. More than 3,700 posts were made, which received more than 55,000 views.

The egg hunt had a lasting effect on CoffeeCup’s social networking reach. They had a 217% increase in Facebook fans and a 170% increase in Twitter followers. Because of their experiment, they’ve been able to stay in touch with more customers.

CoffeeCup’s promotion statistics are staggering. They used many of the design principles we saw in earlier chapters, including variable rewards, anticipation, the velvet rope effect, and status, creating a very powerful effect. Though the numbers are kept private, they did indeed see a sales spike.

CoffeeCup ran the experiment for a limited time, after which the site returned to its old self, and the risks of the emotional design principles they used faded. However, we can agree that the risk they faced didn’t compare to what they gained.

The same holds true for Blue Sky Resumes, a company that took a chance on emotional design, and won big.

**Going big: Blue Sky Resumes’ redesign**

If you’re starting a new site, and you have the stones to go further, you can weave brand, design, and message together into a broader emotional design strategy. Blue Sky Resumes (<http://blueskyresumes.com/>), a service that helps people craft a great resume, did just that in their 2010 website redesign. Squared Eye, ([http://squaredeye.com](http://squaredeye.com/)), a South Carolina-based design agency headed by Matthew Smith, led the redesign.

Before starting, Squared Eye looked at the websites of Blue Sky Resumes’ competitors. Many had a similar look, with cheesy stock photography, stodgy type and colors, and an overall generic feel. They all had a milquetoast personality, which doesn’t exactly inspire confidence in a company that could play a central role in your career.

After Able Design ([http://designedbyable.com](http://designedbyable.com/)) rebranded Blue Sky, Squared Eye designed a website showing Blue Sky Resumes as a clear choice for young, tech-savvy professionals who don’t want to be just another applicant in a pile of resumes. By narrowing down the audience, Squared Eye enjoyed creative latitude to design a brand personality, avoiding the generic, design-for-everyone approach that so many other résumé services cling to.

Playing off the company name, the site design (**FIG 7.3**) conveys a hopeful future, which is a powerful message especially since the global recession had left many unemployed.

**FIG 7.3**: When Blue Sky Resumes site redesign created an informal and fun personality, it dramatically improved conversions.

The header’s gently floating clouds, witty copy, and the strong but informal slab serif heading font are a few site design elements that let visitors know that like them, Blue Sky Resumes is unique. Matthew Smith describes his process:

*I wanted to incorporate not only a fresh fun design, but also techniques that would be used and loved by the modern web, and so we introduced the use of*@font-face*, and an uncommon layout system to enhance the design personality. All of these techniques combined with strong photography and clever moments of fun made for a site that felt enjoyable and energetic. We tested our hypothesis against some of Blue Sky Resumes’ clientele and it was getting rave reviews.*

When Blue Sky launched their new website, they felt confident it would help their business, but didn’t anticipate the results they saw. The new website increased the number of monthly proposal requests by 15%. The average revenue earned from each client grew by 15%. They saw a 65% increase in clients each month, and a staggering 85% increase in total revenues. Their conversion rate climbed from an already good 25% to 36%.

In short, with their new website, Blue Sky Resumes boosted business by reaching the right people with which to forge lasting relationships. Here’s what’s really impressive about these stats: Blue Sky Resumes changed *nothing else* about their marketing. Their improved conversion rates and increased revenues are all because of a redesign that made emotional design a priority.

Louise Fletcher, co-founder of Blue Sky Resumes, has some interesting insight into why their numbers shot up so impressively after the redesign.

*These numbers show that the biggest impact the site design made has been to pre-convert prospects into clients—in other words, they are already convinced before they contact us. Hence the almost 50% boost in our conversion rate.*

Shortly after the redesign, *Oprah Magazine*’s Creative Director contacted Blue Sky Resumes asking to feature them in an article about performing a career makeover for some deserving women. Why did *Oprah Magazine* pick Blue Sky? Because their website presented them as a human company that has its customers’ best interests at heart. They don’t come across like their competitors who churn through as many résumés as possible to make a buck. Blue Sky Resumes appreciates the individual, and their site design shows it.

There were times when Blue Sky was a little nervous about Squared Eye’s design direction. It felt risky because it was so different from what they were used to. But in the end, expressing the personality of the business is what boosted Blue Sky Resumes’ business.

Blue Sky Resumes went all in with their redesign and CoffeeCup took a measured, temporary approach. There is a third option that sits somewhere in between.

**Middle ground: progressively enhance**

You can experiment with emotional design with small, temporary changes like we saw with CoffeeCup Software, or you can go all the way in a rebrand and redesign as Blue Sky Resumes did. There’s another alternative you can explore when designing for emotion. If you read *A List Apart,* a magazine for people who make websites, you already know about progressive enhancement (<http://bkaprt.com/de/13>), a concept that encourages building websites to serve the needs of many, while layering enhancements atop a solid foundation to offer a rich experience for those with a more capable browser.

Progressive enhancement is second nature to those of us who build standards-based websites. It’s a concept that translates to user experience design as well.

In [Chapter 4](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-6), I shared some insight about the emotional design techniques we’ve employed in MailChimp’s interface. The humor and fun we’ve laced into the experience has built us a loyal following, but there’s another side to that story. Though most people get a kick out of it, some people flat out hate the jokes in the app. It’s just not their style. Just as similar personalities can unite to create symbiotic bliss, other personalities are incompatible like oil and water.

Though we weren’t willing to forfeit our brand personality because some people don’t identify with it, we found a solution that quieted the occasional tweet or support ticket complaining about the design persona. We created an option in the app settings that allows users to disable the fun stuff by turning on “party pooper mode.” It turns off all greetings and buttons up the informal language peppered throughout the interface, making it straight-laced enough for those afraid their clients won’t get the jokes and for people who are just fuddy duddies.

I’ll be honest with you: on principle, I was opposed to creating party pooper mode to appease occasional complaints. It felt like we were giving up the thing that made us most unique to be everything to everyone. Though my reservations came from the right place, my concerns about how it would change our brand were wrong.

After party pooper mode had been out for over a year, we wondered how many of our users actually turned it on. I was half scared to find out, because if it were a majority, it would be a referendum on the design persona we had painstakingly constructed. As it turns out, only 0.007% of users actually turn on party pooper mode. What we learned is that even though there are a few vocal party poopers who don’t get the MailChimp brand, there are far more people who *do* get it and love the moments of joy the application brings. In my opinion, that’s well worth a little risk.

Progressive enhancement may be a worthwhile option in your design as well. It can mitigate client or boss concerns, quieting those who don’t understand your personality.

The numbers are in. We’ve seen hard evidence of emotional design’s value, but there’s just one problem left to solve. How do you convince your boss to give it a shot?

CONVINCING YOUR BOSS

Convincing your boss or client to sign off on site changes that may have a big effect on the organization can be tough, and maybe even a little scary. Now that you have some detailed case studies with compelling data to bolster your arguments, all you need is a plan.

Let’s start with the big picture. Is your organization or client willing and able to rebrand or redesign the website to build a better connection to your audience? If a total redesign is out, would smaller changes to refine the brand or site design be viable? If you answered yes to either of these questions, start with a design persona as discussed in [Chapter 3](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-5).

Even if your brand is already connecting with your audience, a design persona can be a good exercise to focus you on the relationship you want to build with your audience and the relationship they want to build with you. It’s a nice tool to have as you kick off discussions with your boss about your ideas for emotional design. Instead of making a case by saying, “I think it would be great if we...,” you can reference your design persona document and say, “Our brand personality is this..., and by doing this...we’ll stand out from competitors while building a much better connection with our customers.” Connect your ideas to business goals and avoid opinion-based arguments. You’ll make a strong case that will be harder to dismiss.

Science and psychology have figured prominently in the examples we’ve seen in this book. As you pitch your ideas to those in charge, don’t be afraid to reference the principles you’ve learned. We know that emotional design isn’t about nice-to-have warm fuzzy experiences: it’s central to daily life and the decision-making process for consumers. The more effectively you can employ emotional design in your site, the better conversion rates and sales will be.

Use the case studies in this book as a starting point for the conversation. Showing your boss that you’ve been doing independent research about how to improve the site you work on demonstrates admirable chutzpah, starting the conversation with an immediate win in your column. Raise please! Tie a case study or two to some stuff you’ve been working on and the head honcho will see the relevance to your organization. Make sure your examples are brand-appropriate for your organization so your boss stays focused on your concepts and doesn’t get lost in the details of implementation. Remember, emotional design should never interfere with usability, functionality, or reliability.

Rather than trying to revolutionize everything on the site at once, pick one key metric you’d like to improve, such as average time on the site, or the number of sales inquiries. Tweak the interface using principles of emotional design, then use something like Google Site Optimizer (<http://bkaprt.com/de/14>) to test the changes against the original design. If your target metric improves, you have a rock solid case to present to your boss for implementing emotional design in other places in the site. You can’t argue with numbers.

When you’re the person in charge, change almost always smells of risk. Your job is to communicate the great gains your organization can achieve, and show that small risks are well worth it.

CONCLUSION

We’ve come a long way in this little volume, through design and psychology principles applied by Wufoo, Betabrand, Housing Works, Mint, Flickr, and Blue Sky Resumes, to name a few. Despite the vast differences in audience, content, and design, there is a common thread to them all. Each site we’ve seen values craft and a strong sense of personality that lets their users see the humans at the other end of the connection.

Carefully considered content and well-executed design work in concert in these websites. Though functional, reliable, and usable, the sites we’ve seen go a step further to create a pleasurable experience. Emotional design connects with an audience in ways we could have never fathomed when we were designing websites that inflated our public persona with an insincere facade that nobody gave a damn about. Today, we can channel our own personality into our work so our users can feel like they’re interacting with a real human—not a corporate avatar. They love us for our sincerity, they trust us because they see themselves in our brand, and when we make inevitable mistakes, they’ll be more likely to forgive us because our earnestness is visible.

In [Chapter 3](http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/9780133052954/navpoint-5), I asked you to recall an encounter with a person that made a strong impression on you when you first met. You had so much in common that it was easy to share a joke or a personal story. You left feeling that you’d just made a real human connection. Do you still have that memory? I hope so, because that’s your standard as you begin to design for emotion.

We’re not just designing pages. We’re designing human experiences. Like the visionaries of the Arts and Crafts movement, we know that preserving the human touch and showing ourselves in our work isn’t optional: *it’s essential.*