Renny Gleeson

404, the story of a page not found

So what I want to try to do is tell a quick story about a 404 page and a lesson that was learned as a result of it. But to start it probably helps to have an understanding of what a 404 page actually is.

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The 404 page is that. It's that broken experience on the Web. It's effectively the default page when you ask a website for something and it can't find it. And it serves you the 404 page. It's inherently a feeling of being broken when you go through it. And I just want you to think a little bit about, remember for yourself, it's annoying when you hit this thing. Because it's the feeling of a broken relationship.

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And that's where it's actually also interesting to think about, where does 404 come from? It's from a family of errors actually -- a whole set of relationship errors, which, when I started digging into them,it looks almost like a checklist for a sex therapist or a couples counselor. You sort of get down there to the bottom and things get really dicey.

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Yes.

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But these things are everywhere. They're on sites big, they're on sites small. This is a global experience.

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What a 404 page tells you is that you fell through the cracks. And that's not a good experience when you're used to experiences like this. You can get on your Kinect and you can have unicorns dancingand rainbows spraying out of your mobile phone. A 404 page is not what you're looking for. You get that, and it's like a slap in the face. Trying to think about how a 404 felt, and it would be like if you went to Starbucks and there's the guy behind the counter and you're over there and there's no skim milk. And you say, "Hey, could you bring the skim milk?" And they walk out from behind the counter and they've got no pants on. And you're like, "Oh, I didn't want to see that." That's the 404 feeling.

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I mean, I've heard about that.

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So where this comes into play and why this is important is I head up a technology incubator, and we had eight startups sitting around there. And those startups are focused on what they are, not what they're not, until one day Athletepath, which is a website that focuses on services for extreme athletes, found this video.

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(Video) Guy: Joey!

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Crowd: Whoa!

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Renny Gleeson: You just ... no, he's not okay. They took that video and they embedded it in their 404 page and it was like a light bulb went off for everybody in the place. Because finally there was a page that actually felt like what it felt like to hit a 404.

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So this turned into a contest. Dailypath that offers inspiration put inspiration on their 404 page.Stayhound, which helps you find pet sitters through your social network, commiserated with your pet. Each one of them found this. It turned into a 24-hour contest. At 4:04 the next day, we gave out $404 in cash. And what they learned was that those little things, done right, actually matter, and that well-designed moments can build brands. So you take a look out in the real world, and the fun thing is you can actually hack these yourself. You can type in an URL and put in a 404 and these will pop.This is one that commiserates with you. This is one that blames you. This is one that I loved. This is an error page, but what if this error page was also an opportunity?

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So it was a moment in time where all of these startups had to sit and think and got really excited about what they could be. Because back to the whole relationship issue, what they figured out through this exercise was that a simple mistake can tell me what you're not, or it can remind me of why I should love you.

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Thank you