



Patricia Seybold Group

E-Business Consultants & Thought Leaders

Customers.com[®] Quality of Experience Benchmark

What Kind of Total Customer Experience Does Your E-Business Deliver?

*By Susan E. Aldrich and Ronni T. Marshak with
Martha M. Frey, Michael A. Goulde,
Jeffrey M. Lewis, and Patricia B. Seybold*



Customers.com® / Best Practices

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NETTING IT OUT

The source of value in today's customer economy is customer relationships. Customer relationships are built on trust, established through repeated good experiences with a company. The quality of the customer experience determines the customer's loyalty to the brand and to the company behind the brand. A positive total customer experience generates customer loyalty. A negative total customer experience engenders defection.

It is hardly news that the quality of a customer's experience with your e-business is dependent on thoughtful design, streamlined business processes, carefully respected policies, good customer service, and excellent execution.

The conundrum is, what constitutes thoughtful, streamlined, careful, good, and excellent? We have identified what we believe are today's differentiators, or markers, for superb customer experience. Using these elements, we have created what we hope is a useful benchmark for you to measure your e-business customer's quality of experience (QoE).

This QoE benchmark measures how well your e-business delivers the total customer experience. If you'll take the time to rate the quality of your total customer experience, you'll know what needs to be on your priority list for e-business and Web site investments.

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

We'd all like to think that our Web sites are enhancing our businesses, both bringing us new customers and getting us closer to our existing customers. We'd all like to think that, in spite of all the pitfalls, we got it right. We'd like to think it, but how can we really know it, especially this early in our e-business strategies?

The surest way to gauge how your company's Web site is doing is to actually go in and measure the results. But we don't mean just counting clicks and analyzing navigation (although this is important and should be done); nor do we mean only looking at visit-to-sale ratios (although this is also very important to measure). You need to assess the entire quality of experience that your customers have whenever they interact with you.

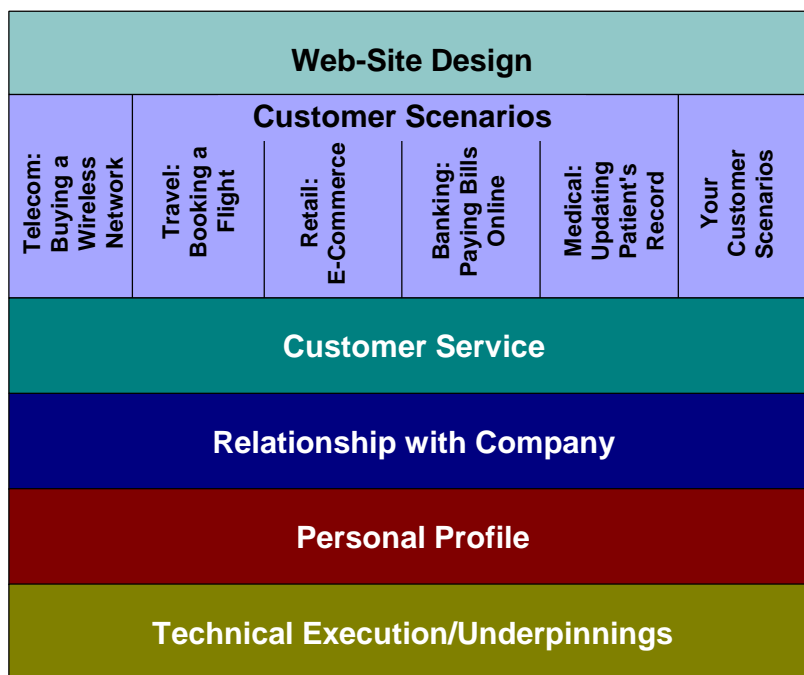
Offering a Benchmark

To that end, the Patricia Seybold Group has designed a simple benchmark in three parts that you can easily take. The benchmark includes an Executive Self-Assessment, a Customer Quick Assessment and Feedback section, and an Automated Measurement and Analysis of site performance.

The Executive Self-Assessment consists of six categories of effort and investment needed to create a high-quality experience:

1. Design of Web site and business scenarios
2. Customer scenario functionality (which is specific to industry and customer activity)
3. Customer service

The Customers.com® Quality of Experience Benchmark Executive Self-Assessment



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Illustration 1. The Customers.com® Quality of Experience Benchmark Executive Self-Assessment includes six sections, five of which apply to any business. Customer scenarios, however, differ depending on industry and customer goals.

4. Relationship with company
5. Personal profile
6. Technical underpinnings and operations

While most of the categories apply to any organization doing business online, the second category—customer scenario functionality—is industry and customer activity-specific.

WHAT IS A CUSTOMER SCENARIO? Customer scenarios are the processes that your customers go through to achieve their goals. A typical scenario for a travel site might be “plan my vacation” or “check my frequent flyer miles.” Both are commonly done on a site, yet each involves a very different set of tasks, information, and results.

In this Benchmark we focus on a single scenario, one we believe is the most common goal of online e-commerce customers: the shopping/buying process.

But remember that you can swap in your own scenarios to test how you are doing (see Illustration 1).

A Web Site Assessment

This benchmark focuses on the online experience—how your Web customers interact with you and how they feel about it. Remember, your customers don’t interact with you through only one media or touchpoint. If you are a clicks-and-mortar company, they consider your stores and your Web site to be part and parcel of the same entity. Even if you are a pure dot-com, your customers will call or write with their questions, problems, and comments. A number of questions in the benchmark concern the integration of touchpoints and the consistency of information and service available among them.

HOW CAN WE MEASURE CUSTOMER QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE (QOE)?

What Is QoE?

A customer experiences your e-business through your Web site, your ad campaigns, your interactive voice response unit, your direct mail and e-mail offers, your customer service and support staff, your sales representatives, your delivery and setup services, and your physical locations “(if you have any).

What the customer values is an experience that is not just pleasant but helps him complete his tasks quickly and with confidence. The information and services you offer and the responsiveness of your site and customer support department guide and reassure your customer at every step of his journey. All interactions with your company are consistent and accurately reflect your company’s image or brand. This means that everyone in your company is working from the same pool of information—about products, policies, and a customer’s relationship with the company.

The quality of a customer’s experience with your e-business is dependent on thoughtful design of your Web site, streamlined business processes that are designed to make the customer’s job easier, carefully respected policies, good customer service, and excellent operational execution.

The net results of excellent QoE are repeat business, higher revenues, and loyal customers, all of which generate rapid profit growth.

QOE CRITERIA

What Should Be Measured?

What do we measure to understand what type of experience we are delivering, whether the experience is getting better, and how it compares to any experiences our customers are having with other e-businesses?

Unfortunately, you can’t necessarily directly ask the questions you want answered. You can ask cus-

tomers about their behavior, but they may not know their motivations or be willing to articulate them. You certainly want to know why they’ve left your site—but you can’t ask them if they’ve already left. You can’t ask them why they are staying—because that might annoy them into leaving. If you ask how satisfied they are with your services, they may give you high marks even as they switch their loyalty to a company that offers them *more* of what they want and exceeds their expectations.

However, there is a considerable amount of data you can collect that will give you insight into what your customers are doing and what their experiences are like. With metrics like click-throughs, conversion rates, and download times (the Web equivalent of call center on-hold times), sites can start out with initial assumptions and iteratively refine their analyses. Click-

stream analysis can provide insight into how customers used your site, where they spent time, what paths they took through the site, and what page they left from.

Today these analyses are expensive and difficult. Most companies are just beginning to invest in the tools, the data, and the analytic staff to gain these insights. Still, we can take quite a few useful measurements that help us infer behavior and observe trends. It makes sense to look at what type of experience we want customers to have, what we’d like to measure, and, as a practical matter, what measurements are possible today. The six categories are:

1. Design of Web Site and Business Scenarios

A Web site should be designed around the tasks that your *target customers* are trying to accomplish. Since you can’t satisfy everyone, you should make sure that you satisfy your targeted customers. The scenario you design must take into account the interactions with your channel partners, if you have them; you can’t let channel partners waste your customers’ time or allow your own design to contribute to inefficiency.

Ideally, site design should take into account the customer business process that the task fits into. Of

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course, you need to test your scenarios and Web design with customers. Ideally, the customer's experience should be consistent with the expectation established by the brand. Navigation should be straightforward and consistent. The site should offer reassurance to hesitant users.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured. You should measure the time it takes to reach the first step of the desired scenario, abandonment or retracing due to confusion, abandonment because expected information or advertised offers are not on the site, abandonment due to slow or erratic response times, and inability to connect to the desired scenario.

Practical Measurements.

Lacking clairvoyance, we can't actually take the above measurements. But we can infer a lot from analyses of customer click-stream behavior and by measuring elapsed times and availability of key customer scenarios. We can learn even more by asking ourselves whether we considered the most important customer experience criteria when we designed the site. These criteria are reflected in the design section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1.

2. Customer Scenario Functionality

Customer scenarios are those interactions with your e-business as customers execute their own business processes. Your business process is likely to play only a part in the customer's complete scenario. For example, a customer who is doing cash flow planning may visit American Express to check his credit card balance and the status of his merchant account. The business process is cash flow planning; collecting information is the customer scenario. The more you understand the customer's business process, the better the QoE you can deliver. Interestingly, once you understand where you fit in your customer's business processes, your cross-selling results improve dramatically because you can make relevant and timely offers.

Visitors need swift and direct execution of tasks, adequate support for their business activities, appropriate and consistent offerings, and effective and supportive search capabilities. Customer scenarios

are specific to industries. This benchmark focuses on one e-commerce scenario: buying something (as either consumer or business). Steps in the buying process include search, select, approve, order, track, change, receive, return or exchange, and reorder. The bottom line for e-commerce is that customers can quickly find the goods, there is enough information on the site (in combination with what's on your partners' sites) to support the buying decision, and your e-business is organized to deliver the expected goods at the expected time.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured. In general, these are the key customer tasks or activities interacting with an e-business. You should measure how satisfied are customers and whether they come back. What is the percent of repeat customers? Simple measures include the number of clicks per task, elapsed time per

task, number of calls to support center for help with task, complaints per task, and percent of tasks requiring help. Are these measures increasing or decreasing over time?

For our buying scenario, the most common e-commerce success measurement today is the conversion rate, that is, the percent of visits that result in orders. This provides great input for planning but is not necessarily a marker for customer experience. An increase in this rate could mean that you are attracting fewer people who are here by mistake or who have no interest in your products but wanted to read your 10K filing or register for a free cap. It's not a useless measurement, but it requires a lot of thought and analysis to guess what it means.

In the e-commerce scenario we focus on buying and fulfillment. There are key measures specific to e-commerce buying, for example, repeat business, frequency of order, and recency of order. You also want to know why people left the site, why they decided to buy, why they filled a shopping cart, and why they left the cart. You also need to know how many visits/touches customers require to complete an order and receive the goods, what is the elapsed time for the customer to complete the buy, and whether these measures are trending up or down. Two useful measures of your fulfillment process are percent of orders delivered correctly and on time and

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percent of exchanges or returns. The latter also measures your merchandising skill. You want to know about failed searches versus successful searches. You need to be able to track cross-channel behavior such as researching via paper catalog, talking to a salesperson, and buying online.

Practical Measures. Other than the two “why” questions, these measurements are technically possible. For most businesses, however, they are not practical or feasible to measure because most businesses lack the underlying systems. Counting per-customer activity requires customer relationship management (CRM) systems or, at the very least, a common customer identifier across all your systems. We can fall back on measuring download times and elapsed times for key scenarios and the percent of time the scenario completes successfully by running a test transaction every hour of the day. You can determine whether your e-business is offering the elements that provide superb customer experience by referring to the E-Commerce Customer Scenario section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1.

3. Customer Service

You need to provide customers with enough information and guidance to perform their tasks through Web site and employee interactions that are designed to expedite and reassure. Assistance should be accessible from every page. Assistance should be courteous and accurate, and should match information provided on site and in print. Support staff should have the customer’s history at their fingertips, and should be able to track a single problem across multiple contacts. Call center reporting should be in place to identify open problems by age. Consistent and correct answers should be delivered. When your staff need to call on other experts, you should effect a warm transfer of a call or e-mail to partners, including sharing of personal profile (with the customer’s approval), and then you should track the incident to resolution.

You need to provide customers with enough information and guidance to perform their tasks through Web site and employee interactions that are designed to expedite and reassure.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured. First, you need to know if the service levels you have established actually satisfy customer requirements. Meeting e-mail response promises of 24 hours is no help to customers who need an answer in 20 minutes. Next, measure whether service levels are met. You need to know that the customer got the right answer, advice, or guidance; that he was able to use this help effectively; and that he is still happy to be your customer. You should be tracking the average

number of calls per customer, per order, and per customer incident. That is, 10 calls to find out when an order is being delivered is one incident to the customer (and an incident that required 10 phone calls to resolve). You can’t (but you perhaps you do) measure that sequence as 10 calls swiftly resolved with the answer, “Don’t know! Probably tomorrow!” You want to know how much time the customer spends waiting for or getting

help, including preparing e-mail questions, gathering necessary information, and waiting for e-mail responses. This is part of your customer’s investment in doing business with you. It’s a measure of how much he values you, and you need to minimize this investment to demonstrate how much you value him.

Practical Measures. Accomplishing this requires solid call center management reporting, customer surveys during the support activity (online or on the phone), and some additional analysis of call center data. I think the challenge is in finding the time to think about these metrics and what they mean to your business, sorting out the important data from the easy-to-get data, and deciding just how superb you can afford to be. Your call center reporting probably tells you the number of minutes per call per agent and how many calls came in this month. This tells you what a support call costs but not what it’s worth to the customer, to the lifetime value of the customer, or to the short-term revenue for the relationship.

The Customer Service section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1 provides two questions that pinpoint the quality of your customer service.

4. Relationship with Company

Customers want to know the policies that affect their relationship with the e-business. They also want to understand the business rules that apply to them and how you are going to use information about your relationship and about them. These policies touch on privacy, satisfaction guarantees, credit terms, new customer registration, partner certification, the way change of ownership affects warranties or service contracts, the way returns and cancellations are handled, and a host of other established rules of the business.

In addition, customers need assurance that the policies will be honored without fail by all employees, partners, successors, and subsidiaries of the e-business. Finally, someone in the organization must have the responsibility and authority to ensure the quality of the customer experience. By this we mean that a single customer has a single person to turn to, such as an advocate or ombudsman, who can fix his problem with any aspect of your business relationship and take steps to prevent anyone else from having that problem.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured. You should measure your customers' understanding of your policies, establish employee and partner compliance certification, and audit compliance. You also need to ask yourselves—and your customers—which employee is responsible for the customer experience with your e-business.

Practical Measures. These measures are not terribly difficult, but require mostly manual effort. (Refer to the Relationship with Company section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1 for a quick assessment of how you are doing.)

5. Personal Profile

You need to let customers see and update their personal information kept by the site. In particular, customers need to be able to see their account histories including orders placed by phone, Web, mail, and store. Full details need to be provided on each

order. Customers also want the opportunity to specify, to the degree appropriate, the business rules that should apply to them. For example, customers may prefer bills and special offers to be sent by e-mail with no soliciting phone calls.

Right now you're thinking, "How will we ever sell to customers if we agree not to call them?" May I suggest that if a customer has told you she doesn't want soliciting phone calls, she isn't going to listen to the offer when you call? Why would you waste

your money annoying your customers? This bewilders me. I think it's a result of some of those statistics that planners love (i.e., 0.5 percent of our calls succeed in selling, therefore the more calls the more successes). The concept that eliminating fruitless calls will drive up the percent may be too revolutionary for the marketing mind. Or is it possible

that the people who run marketing campaigns find themselves to be absolute suckers for phone solicitation, even after they have demanded to be left alone, and they imagine that the rest of us behave the same way? It's a mystery to us.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured Is also Practical to Measure. This is a simple set of metrics—are your customers able to view and update their profiles? They need access to account history (online and offline) and terms and conditions. They need to be able to edit contact information and contact preferences. We'd also argue that they should be able to view the customer segment you've assigned them to and, if not update it, at least be able to suggest a change. My aged brother, an AARP member, has recently become a "young father" and has lost interest in retirement-living offers. Our vendors can take better care of us if they are aware of these changes. (The relevant questions are reflected in the Personal Profile section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1.)

6. Technical Underpinnings and Operations

Customers need a site that is open for business when they want to use it and that offers consistent and adequate speed. To personalize the site such that you can make appropriate offers to customers, you

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need content, business rules, and personalization engines that work together to automatically make the best choices.

What, Ideally, Should Be Measured. It would be terrific to know what your top customers experience when using the applications on your site, particularly download times (a.k.a. response times) and availability, elapsed time for key customer scenarios, variations in response time across time of day and across steps. You also want to know if you are making your best offers for their situation in terms of price, quality, completeness, and timeliness. Response times for back-end processes also need to be measured, such as search execution, credit card processing, elapsed time to send an order confirmation, and elapsed time to ship the order.

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the applications on your site.*

Practical Measures. It is possible to measure response time and availability for interactions with top customers, but it is more practical to measure response time and availability of a representative transaction that is reported every hour of every day. This measurement should be made from the customer's perspective, that is, from a machine connected to the Internet in the way that your target customers tend to be connected. These measurements can be made using automated Web site measurement services, and they are inspected in somewhat more detail in the section of this report, "Automated Service Measurements of the Site." (Questions relevant to the other operations and architecture issues are reflected in the Technical Underpinnings section of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1.)

A SIMPLE BENCHMARK IN THREE PARTS

Lacking the electrodes that bring direct customer feedback or a comprehensive system of data collection and analysis, a simple benchmark can help us assess what QoE our e-business delivers.

The Patricia Seybold Group Customers.com® E-business Customer Quality of Experience Benchmark contains the following three parts:

1. **E-Business Self-Assessment.** The Self-Assessment Questionnaire in Table 1 provides the e-business executive with a means to determine her e-business's customer QoE rating.

2. **Customer Mini-Assessment and Feedback.** Asking executives what customers think is just not as reliable a measure as asking customers is. Instead, we ask the executive which customers he wants to hear from and at what point in the scenario he wants the feedback. We'd like to ask and ask, but customers are quickly annoyed or bored so we've limited the number of questions in this section. The Mini-Assessment is a subset of the Customer Scenario section in the self-assessment. There are 10 questions, worded from the customer's point of view.

Even with these few questions, we recommend that you offer the Mini-Assessment to members of your Customer Advisory Board or other identified group of willing and committed customers. For all customers, we suggest you limit the customer feedback survey to five questions. The Mini-Assessment and Customer Feedback Survey are included in Table 2.

3. **Automated Measurement and Analysis.** The only way to know how well your Web site presents your business is to measure it over the course of several days or months (although forever would be a good time frame). Several companies provide a service that runs your top customer scenarios several times an hour to measure speed and availability of your key e-business activities.

Rating and Reacting. We have settled on a rating method that assures that comparisons are relevant, even if questions are added, changed over time, or ignored by respondents. Your rating will be a number from 1 to 5, where 5 is perfect. You can tabulate your rating for each of the three steps, for the total of all three, and for individual sections of the self-assessment. This will help you determine where your strengths are and where you need to invest more. Patricia Seybold Group can help you with ad-

vice and information if you embark on an improvement project.

E-BUSINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

The benchmark contains measures that apply to most e-businesses plus measures specific to a customer scenario. This version of the QoE benchmark is specialized, with scenarios for retail and B2B buying. If that scenario does not apply to your e-business, please ignore those questions.

Answering the Questions: Answer each question with a number between 1 and 5, where 1 is com-

pletely no and 5 is completely yes. Why 1 through 5 instead of either 0 or 1? Well, the questions really lend themselves to answers that include “usually,” “sort of,” and “sometimes.”

Rating the Result: Calculating your score is simple. For each section, you add the numbers and divide by the number of questions you answered. (There is no penalty for not answering a question that you believe does not apply to you.) At the end add the rating for each section, divide by 6, and that’s your summary rating.

Customer Quality of Experience E-Business Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Your Rating	Customer Experience Element	Point scheme: 5 = yes, always, completely 4 = usually, mostly 3 = often, sort of 2 = sometimes, not very 1 = no, never, not at all
Design		Rating for Design: _____ (points/answers)
	1. Have you identified the leading scenarios (i.e., purposes of interaction) for your target customers and designed your site (and your channel partner interactions) to satisfy them?	
	2. Have you tested your scenarios and Web design with actual customers?	
	3. Does the site's look-and-feel reinforce your company's brand positioning and resonate with your target market? Is the site's look-and-feel consistent with printed materials, ads, and phone interactions?	
E-Commerce Customer Scenario: Buying		Rating for Scenario: _____ (points/answers)
Search		
	4. If a customer's search is ineffective, do you offer help in redefining the search?	
	5. Do you assess customer searches and search results daily and improve search algorithms and search data in response to trends?	
	6. Do you track your performance against a goal for how quickly a search should be completed?	
Select		
	7. Are promotions and featured items consistent with print, TV, radio, and store promotions?	
	8. Are customers offered enough information to make a purchase decision including comparisons, pictures, prices, and availability?	
	9. While a customer is comparing options, do you offer more complete, less expensive, and more expensive solutions appropriate to his situation and needs?	
	10. Is your discount structure designed to match the way your customers want to do business with you?	
Approve		
	11. Do you support persistent shopping carts or allow a customer to print his shopping cart or e-mail it to a colleague for review?	
Order		
	12. Do you provide an order confirmation including expected ship dates and quantities and backorder notification?	
	13. Do you offer toll-free telephone ordering?	

Customer Quality of Experience E-Business Self-Assessment Questionnaire <i>(continued)</i>	
Your Rating	Customer Experience Element Point scheme: 5 = yes, always, completely 4 = usually, mostly 3 = often, sort of 2 = sometimes, not very 1 = no, never, not at all
	Track
	14. Can you provide real-time or near-real-time connections to your in-house and/or third-party fulfillment operations so that customers can get up-to-date status of fulfillment and shipment?
	Change
	15. Do you clearly state when order changes can no longer be accepted?
	Receive
	16. Do you manage setup (product installation) or (account) activation for your customers?
	Return/Exchange
	17. Do you offer local service centers for returns and exchanges?
	Reorder
	18. Do you offer reorder-point or upgrade notification?
Customer Service Rating for Customer Service: _____ (points/answers)	
	19. Are call center, Web, sales, channel, and other touchpoints integrated to provide up-to-date and accurate information at any point in the customer experience?
	20. Is your e-mail response time goal measured in minutes?
Relationship with Company Rating for Relationship: _____ (points/answers)	
	21. Do you have an identified senior-level person who owns the customer experience for all customer segments across products, divisions, and channel partners?
	22. Are all policies clearly stated to customers, employees, and channel partners?
	23. Do you monitor policy compliance by employees and partners?
Personal Profile Rating for Personal Profile: _____ (points/answers)	
	24. Can my customers tell me how they want to interact with me—via Web, e-mail, direct mail, or phone?
	25. Do customers have access to all account histories, whether via Web, store, channel partner, or call center?
Technical Execution/Underpinnings Rating for Underpinnings: _____ (points/answers)	
	26. Do you have goals for the performance and availability of key customer scenarios, such as average elapsed time for the steps in placing an order?
	27. Do you have a system in place to monitor the performance and availability of key customer scenarios taking place on your site and your channel partners' sites?
	28. Do you have a business rules engine or a personalization engine in place that is usable by your business end users? Does it allow your business people to quickly adjust the rules that govern product pricing and special offers as well as adjust which offers and content to show to each set of customers?
Summary Rating Average of Ratings: _____ (sum of ratings/6)	

Table 1. This questionnaire measures the quality of customer experience your e-business can deliver.

Customer Feedback Survey

Rating	Measures
5 = yes, always, completely 4 = usually, mostly 3 = often, moderately so 2 = sometimes, not very 1 = no, never, not at all	
	1. Would I come back to do business again?
	2. Would I recommend this business to my associates or friends?
	3. Do I feel confident at all points that the business is responding correctly to my requirements?
	4. Did I get what I wanted?
	5. Was it easy?

Table 2. These are the five questions—and you shouldn't ask more than five—that will tell you what type of customer experience your e-business is actually delivering.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ASSESSMENT

Customer assessments should be collected directly from customers chosen by the e-business executive. Ideally, an e-mail goes to designated customers during critical points in the key scenarios. For example, the top 100 accounts might be selected and their feedback solicited just after placing an order and again after receipt of goods. This e-mail feedback can then be tallied to provide the rating for customer feedback.

I also recommend that companies set up customer councils—a group of 10 customers to advise them on Web site issues. This council should be on-call for 12 months, then be retired. After 12 months the council loses its objectivity. The QoE survey could be filled out by council members (perhaps we could call it the QoE council) once every 3 months. In addition to the customer feedback survey, the QoE council could be called upon to complete a detailed assessment of the top customer scenarios. For the e-commerce scenario, the questions are as follows:

Search

1. If my search is ineffective (i.e., does not bring the anticipated results) can I refine it?

Select

2. Am I offered enough information to make a purchase decision including comparisons, pictures, prices, and availability?

3. When I am comparing options am I offered more complete, less expensive, and more expensive solutions appropriate to my situation and needs?

Approve

4. Does the site support persistent shopping carts or allow me to print my shopping cart or e-mail it to a colleague for review?

Order

5. Do I receive confirmation of orders including expected ship dates and quantities and backorder notification?
6. Am I offered toll-free telephone ordering?

Track

7. Can I connect to the company's in-house and/or third-party fulfillment operations in real time or near-real-time connections to get up-to-date status of fulfillment and shipment?

Change

8. Does the site clearly state when order changes can no longer be accepted?

Return/Exchange

9. Can I return or exchange merchandise at a local service center if I purchased it online?

Reorder

10. Am I notified when it's time to reorder or when a product upgrade is available?

AUTOMATED SERVICE MEASUREMENTS OF THE SITE

Automated service measurements rate your technical execution. They answer the following questions:

- Does the site offer decent performance and availability? Can customers get their tasks done quickly any time they come?
- Does the site offer visitors an experience that is consistent from hour to hour and from page to page? It is very annoying to have sequences with many short page times interspersed with very long times. It disturbs your rhythm and makes you wonder if something is broken.

The measurements are effected by running test transactions. These tests are based on key scenarios that you have identified for your business and the navigation paths you have specified. For example, a scenario at Amazon.com might be buying the right beach novel and the path is finding the bestseller list, choosing a book, and ordering it. A path at W.W. Grainger might be selecting the correct type of motor, comparing vendors and models, and ordering eight for delivery to three locations. You define the path that a user takes to accomplish the scenario, then these scenarios are run repeatedly over a period of time. Response time, availability, and variability are calculated from the results.

Where to Measure and How Often. You must measure from your customer's viewpoint. This means measuring from machines at several points on the Internet backbone. National and global businesses will need to measure from several different points around the globe that reflect their customers' locations. The machines should be connected in the ways your customers are generally connected, whether it is a very slow dial-up, 56K, T1, DSL, or faster. You really should measure several times an hour around the clock to track variations and to understand availability.

What's important initially is not how well you perform but how well you understand the goal for customer experience.

Who Should Be Thinking about the Results? We think you should be very interested in the trends in these measurements and in correlating site response time to some business measure such as order rate. You should also care about the actual numbers; you need to know that it takes 11 minutes to complete a simplified scenario, which fails once every 100 tries.

How to React. Understanding performance and availability might cause you to redesign some pages or offer more fax and phone support during critical times. It may induce you to make some improvements in your service management procedures. You may discover that your customers are getting poor service due to problems outside your control, such as ISP services or excessive network traffic. This doesn't absolve you of responsibility; it just limits the steps you can take. You can at least work with your providers to offer better service and tell your customers how to avoid delays in interacting with your business.

acting with your business.

Automated measurements collect the following data:

- What is the elapsed time for common scenarios?
- What is the average download time in key scenarios?
- What is the range of download times across the scenario?
- What is the range of download times across time of day?
- How far off the average is the range? How broad is the range (or how many standard deviations)?

Goals. Let's set some goals. Three seconds for a page download is an ideal that you may not ever achieve, but it is what your customers want. If your customers are connected at 56K, you need to work that much harder to achieve three seconds than if they are mostly DSL users.

If you've streamlined your scenarios, business customers should be able to find, compare, and se-

lect a product in five minutes. Consumers should be able to find and buy in two minutes. The closer you come to those goals, the happier your customers will be. There is obviously a big difference between buying a book whose title you know and configuring an industrial valve, so you should set your own goals for your scenarios. Just make sure your goal is designed to be comfortable for your customer, not your IT department.

Another element of your Web site's overall performance is its predictability. Do response times vary so customers don't know what to expect when they click? Are there times when a task can't be performed at all? Customers lose patience and faith if your site doesn't seem to be working. We recommend setting goals for the percentage of scenarios that complete successfully and for recognizing and resolving failures that interfere with these scenarios. Finally, how effective are you at managing your technology underpinnings? You need to track how often you meet your goals. And you should have a plan to move toward perfect scores in all these measurements.

Rating. The scoring of automated measurements is based on a table of goals presented in Table 3. The numbers provided in this table are pegged to best practices in the U.S. today.

FUTURE OF THE BENCHMARK

We look forward to the day when more of the QoE measurements can be analyzed and/or automated and when the questions in the Self-

Assessment effectively raise the bar for supreme QoE even higher.

The customer scenario in this Self-Assessment Questionnaire is focused on e-commerce buying. Additional customer scenarios can be developed for e-commerce, such as e-commerce customer service, and for other industries, such as financial services, ASP, ISPs, nonprofits, service companies, and hospitals. Let us know what you want.

Another valuable addition to QoE benchmarking would be comparisons with other companies in your industry, in your region, or in general. Such comparisons require a bank of data, which only you can provide. Here are some comparative points that can be supported with a rich data bank:

- What is the comparative elapsed time for my scenarios?
- What is the comparative download time for my scenarios?
- Are my competitors offering an experience that is more consistent from hour to hour and from page to page?
- What are my scores versus all scores?
- What are my scores versus my industry?
- What are my scores versus a specific company?

Rating the Automated Service Measurements

Points	5	4	3	2	1
What percentage of pages in your key scenarios load in less than 3 seconds?	>90%	>80%	>70%	>60%	<60%
What percentage of the time do your top scenarios meet your goals for elapsed time?	>99%	>90%	>80%	>70%	<70%
How often does the scenario execute correctly?	>99.99%	>99%	>98%	>97%	<97%
What percentage of problems preventing scenario completion are resolved in less than 10 minutes?	>90%	>80%	>70%	>60%	<60%
What percentage of days in a month are all of these goals met?	>90%	>80%	>70%	>60%	<60%

Table 3. This table presents a QoE rating for Web site performance and availability.

Not all useful comparisons require a data bank; on your own you can assess and compare first-time site visitor scores versus repeat customer scores. Finally, are your customer feedback and automated measurement scores getting better or worse?

CONCLUSION

What's important initially is not how well you perform but how well you understand the goal for customer experience. If you don't understand the goal, only luck will cause you to deliver great customer experience.

We hope this benchmark helps you understand the principles to use in a successful e-commerce (customer-oriented) solution and introduces metrics you should use to drive your e-business.

Finally, it is not enough to look at QoE once. You should reassess it regularly, because your exe-

cution may have deteriorated. And you have to reassess because customer expectations keep climbing, and what a customer encounters with some other company sets his expectations of how your e-business should serve him.

Sorry, no resting on your laurels, assuming you've achieved them. And no giving up if you haven't. Excellence is just over the next hill.

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