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I partnered with Adaptive Path, a San Francisco-based consultancy, from 2004 through 2006 on many marketing initiatives. This case study was created based on several interviews with Adaptive Path, Blogger, and Stopdesign personnel. It is intentionally written in a familiar tone, consistent with Adaptive Path's branding.

Summary: Blogger came to Adaptive Path to determine how it could convert more new site visitors into Blogger users. Adaptive Path, in coordination with Stopdesign, completely overhauled Blogger's site and helped accomplish its goal.

Background

Google bought Blogger, a simple tool for publishing Web sites, in February 2003. When it was purchased, Blogger already had thousands of customers who used its tools for creating and maintaining their own blogs, or personal sites.

Clarifying the Problem

We met with Blogger's management and its Web team to identify their immediate needs and Blogger's long-term goals. Since growth was one of Blogger's key objectives, managers wanted to identify why sign-ups weren't increasing as much as projected and find out what they could do to correct the problem. Specifically, Blogger wanted to increase the number of visitors who clicked to register for blogs, completed the registration process, and ultimately posted to their new personal Web sites.

To understand current user behavior, Adaptive Path's Jeffrey Veen and Blogger's team reviewed Blogger.com's traffic patterns. Jeffrey and the team determined that a large number of new users were leaving after reaching the home page, and that many of these users dropped off at specific points in the registration process. Blogger's own support team validated what we surmised: Many of Blogger's new visitors didn't know what a blog was and couldn't provide the necessary technical information during registration.

Blogger's site needed to accommodate these new users. But to retain Blogger's existing customers, any changes had to simplify the site without weakening its powerful tools.

Adaptive Path's Process

Our next step was to bring in Doug Bowman of Stopdesign, a San Francisco-based design consultancy, to work as our partner in redesigning Blogger's site.

Jeffrey, Doug, and the Blogger team met face-to-face to undertake the redesign as a group. Approaching the project as a team, instead of three different companies, ensured that major issues were addressed before anyone moved forward in the wrong direction. Key decisions took into account the real constraints presented by technology, business, and design itself. This process prevented the team from pursuing unfeasible or costly options—it also saved everyone a tremendous amount of time.

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Triage and Interaction Design

Often, Web sites evolve without a clear plan. Developers add features or content because they can, not because it's necessary. When this happens, a site becomes jumbled and loses focus. "Triage" is our process of re-focusing a site's design to make it more consistent, and then laying out a clear plan for future growth.

During our face-to-face meetings with Stopdesign and Blogger, we catalogued Blogger's current content and identified what content to add. The team then reviewed the current site's features as well as the information they were requesting from new users during registration.

We pared down each page, particularly the registration forms. This considerably shortened the registration process. Wherever possible, technical terms were replaced with plain-language. Instead of asking users to choose a "template," for example, we asked how they wanted their blog to look.

Jeffrey recommended using common conventions, such as pull-down menus and text fields, which users would be comfortable operating. Internet users, particularly novices, expect certain conventions when navigating Web sites. They assume that new sites will work similarly to those they've encountered. Interaction design takes into account users' abilities, needs, and desires when designing interfaces. Creating novel, and possibly confusing, ways for Blogger's new users to input information would counteract the hard work we'd already done to simplify the site.

Why Standards?

One key decision that Blogger, Stopdesign, and Adaptive Path made was to build a standards-based Web site. This allowed Doug to create the visual presentation while Jeffrey worked on interaction design and Blogger produced the structural work-up. If we hadn't complied with standards, each part of the team would have had to wait for the others to finish before moving forward.

Checking Our Work: Usability Testing

After incorporating comments from Blogger's team into the near-final design, we needed to confirm that the new site would please Blogger's users. We worked with Blogger to segment its wide audience into three groups: those who had a blog already, those who knew what a blog was but didn't have one, and those who had no idea what a blog was.

We did a round of usability testing with users who fit each of the three profiles. Our findings:

- Experienced users simply logged in and went directly to their sites in seconds.
- Those who knew what a blog was were able to complete the registration process and post to their new sites in less than five minutes.



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- Users in the third group took the new online tour, which defined blogs, explained why someone would want one, and then showed how they could sign-up. Each of these users decided to sign-up, sailed easily through the new registration process, and posted in less than five minutes.

Other than a few minor tweaks that our users suggested, we were ready to launch.

Mission Accomplished

According to statistics collected from Blogger, the project was a smashing success!

- 15% *more* visitors clicked to register for a blog
- 67% of those completed the registration process
- 97% of those who registered created a new blog
- 76% of those who created a blog posted to it

Each percentage increase resulted in thousands of people signing up for and posting to their new blogs. Blogger's current users thought the redesign made the site even stronger, as well as more visually attractive and intuitive. In working with Blogger and Stopdesign, we created a best-of-breed, standards-compliant Web site that's easier to maintain and grow.