



# Web Experience Excellence:

Driving Profitability...From Customer Acquisition to Advocacy

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

## I Recommend ...

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We've all bought one-size-fits-all socks, even if we prefer clothes sized to fit perfectly, or we've agreed to a plain cheese pizza when our favorite is actually anchovies, olives, roasted peppers and extra basil. In other words, sometimes we settle, but ultimately we prefer products that are tailored to our tastes.

Engaging with a Web site is no different. If people do not have their expectations met and their questions promptly answered, they abandon the site. A survey published in *The Wall Street Journal* indicates that 83% of all Internet searchers are frustrated, which reduces the opportunity conversion rate of those who are selling a product or service to about 17%. Let's face it — that's really low.

So what does it mean to serve the expectations of an online user? Is it as simple as offering Madonna's latest album to someone who has just purchased one of her other CDs?

Recommendations are quite common on the Internet. When we access sites like Amazon or iTunes, we are immediately presented with recommendations based upon our last purchase, and when we select an item to purchase, we are promptly provided with other similar suggestions. This technology is quite simple; the offerings need only be classified according to a taxonomy and recommendations are made by category match.

For example: If I buy a science fiction book, I will be provided with suggestions of other books to purchase from the same author, or from other authors in the genre. The same applies for online advertisements; they are matched to keywords from content on the page. But more recommendations do not necessarily mean more interested or engaged online users. When we browse the Web we are seeking valuable, relevant experiences, not more spam. While this is easy to propose, it is incredibly hard to execute.

Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that sites generally make recommendations based upon *past* choices for the things we seek in real time. Modern recommendation technology, on the other hand, customizes recommendations to focus on what an online user would probably be interested in now — in real time — or in the near future.

For instance, modern recommendation technology helps people discover books that they would probably like to read, but might not be expressly aware of. Without the intelligent help of the Web site, a reader might not discover books that go on to become favorites. To provide that positive experience, the algorithms and the intelligent search engines need to understand a user's intentions, decipher the clues left by the user, interpret them and then finally find the relevant content to serve them.

The path taken by an online user when clicking through a Web site provides numerous clues. If the algorithm can discover which URL the user has navigated from, that is a clue, too. Each click is an important clue. When you compare these clues with similar click-paths followed by other online users in similar instances, you start to get a much clearer idea of similar customers' online needs. For instance, if you compare the purchase path of various online users, you may find that a user who buys a bottle of French wine on a supermarket site usually also buys Swiss cheese. If that's the case, then Swiss cheese should be the item recommended to French wine buyers — not wines similar to the selected wine, as might be expected.

Recommendations technology is becoming an e-commerce revolution. Now, equipped with powerful software, savvy online marketers are trying to understand our needs in order to offer us complimentary products that we're not expressly thinking about, but which we unconsciously wish for.

It may seem a bit like magic — like the site knew what you wanted even before you did, but it's not magic. It's powerful new technology at work. The goal is not to simply push more things at us that we don't want or need, but to find that perfect combination of things that perhaps even we didn't know we wanted.