

BOOK REVIEWS / CRITIQUE DE LIVRES

Designing the Digital Experience: How to Use Experience Design Tools and Techniques to Build Websites Customers Love. By David Lee King. Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2008. 182 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-0-910965-83-5. CAN\$27.95.

David Lee King is the digital branch manager at a Kansas public library. In the past 2 years, he has written extensively about Web site design and structure in the library literature and on his blog, www.davidleeking.com. *Designing the Digital Experience* is a thought-provoking book on Web site structure, design, and social networking. King introduces the book by saying, "Other books are great at helping improve the user experience on websites but miss the broader picture of designing digital experiences" (page xvi, Introduction).

King bases his arguments on the concept of the "experience economy" (p. 1), a business theory used to further delineate design in the digital and physical world. According to business consultants B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, the experience economy is a recent change. Pine and Gilmore claim that we have moved through an agrarian, an industrial, and a service economy, and that currently we are in an experience economy. In this new environment, it is important to provide the consumer with the opportunity to experience a product for effective promotion and marketing. Consumers can then be expected to pay more dearly for this experience. King expounds on this theory within the digital realm.

The book is composed of three parts. The first discusses "structural focus" (p. 11), the issues involved when developing a Web site. Three theories of Web site design or "digital experience design" (p. 19) are presented with examples and a list of additional resources. The second part discusses the Web site's users or "community" (p. 51) and how one can cater to that community in a meaningful way. The author provides a primer on using social networking to interact with the library community and demonstrates using five different types of social networking. The individual customer or user is the focus of the third part of the book. The author suggests design improvements to enhance customers' individual experiences with Web sites. He discusses his experiences with the Web sites of Marriott, Home Depot, Harley Davidson, and Starbucks to illustrate his points. Tools and techniques for getting to know customers are presented and include journey mapping, personas, improving webforms using cascading style sheets (CSS), and the use of labeling systems to test the usability of the Web site. At the end of the book there is a list of Web sites and suggestions for further reading. The book has a glossary.

I do have some issues with the book. In part 2 the author outlines the theories of Web site structure, but there is no in-depth analysis of how these theories have worked in practice and what makes them the best theories. Have they been proven to work, and do any statistics or usability tests show that the theories assist in creating a design with

the best "digital experience"? When I looked at the theorists more closely I found that one of them created Basecamp, an online project management Web site that is both user friendly and enjoyable. To me, the fact that one of the theorists created a successful digital design lends credibility to the book. There was no mention, however, of this point in King's overview. An explanation of how user experience began in the world of Web site design and information architecture would have been helpful. Who were the pioneers, who were the original theorists, and what prompted theory construction?

The author uses many real-life user experiences but most are from the world of commerce. Although I realize that consumers are very similar to public library patrons, I think there are some fundamental differences in how they relate to the institution behind the Web site. The library, especially the public library, is already part of a community. There is a built-in loyalty to the geographic community within which the library exists. Therefore, some of King's examples are not necessarily appropriate because there is no need to breed loyalty in libraries. The library patron doesn't have anywhere else to go, unless he or she works in a different community. And, even then, would the user's Web site experience really make them turn away from their community library? This disconnect with libraries can be further illustrated by the author's suggestion for using shopping carts; do any libraries use shopping carts on their Web site?

The straddle that librarians are making now between being traditional librarians, systems developers, Web managers, and electronic publishing experts is evident in this book. I think that this book would be an interesting read for Web designers, developers, and managers. King devotes about four pages to ideas for changing a library Web site. In those pages he does offer useful advice to improve the digital experience for customers, such as replacing lists of links with mashups, but I was expecting much more from this book. I would have liked to see examples of implementation of experience design from other libraries and (or) a discussion of problems or issues that King ran into when he tried to implement one of his ideas at his library.

This book is primarily about Web design and optimizing design for users. The intended audience is the novice Web designer who is interested in enhancing the user's Web site experience. To that end, the book contains some helpful pointers for Web site analysis and Web site design. Unfortunately, I am reluctant to recommend this book for librarians, especially medical librarians who might be struggling with a shrinking acquisitions budget.

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