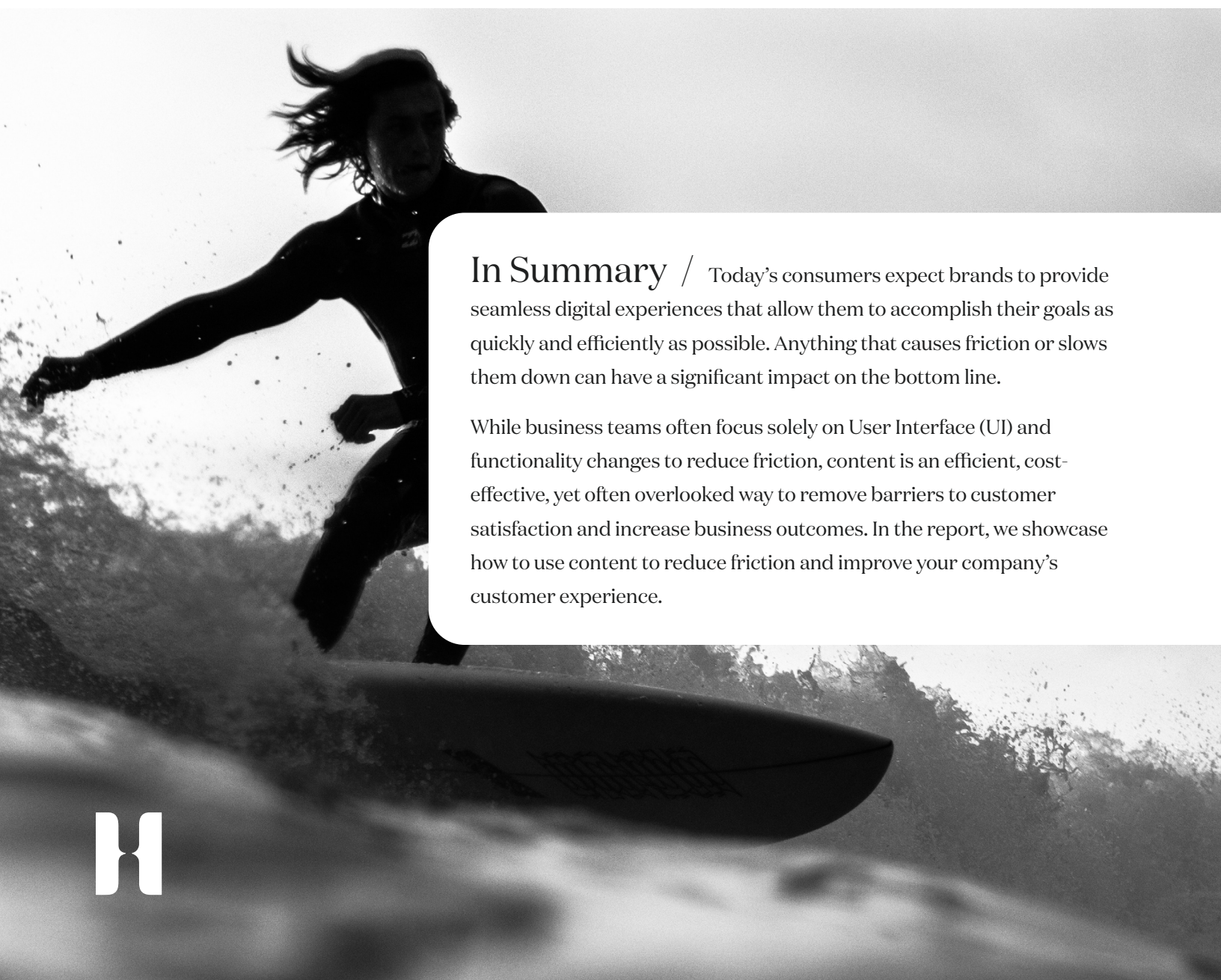


Reducing CX Friction with Content

How to use content to increase customer satisfaction, improve conversions, and build brand loyalty

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In Summary / Today's consumers expect brands to provide seamless digital experiences that allow them to accomplish their goals as quickly and efficiently as possible. Anything that causes friction or slows them down can have a significant impact on the bottom line.

While business teams often focus solely on User Interface (UI) and functionality changes to reduce friction, content is an efficient, cost-effective, yet often overlooked way to remove barriers to customer satisfaction and increase business outcomes. In the report, we showcase how to use content to reduce friction and improve your company's customer experience.



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Andrew leads Hero Digital's content strategy practice, helping clients think strategically about how they create, manage, and optimize content across the customer journey. With 15 years of experience across multiple industries and service categories, he is passionate about building content that drives revenue, builds brand loyalty, and increases efficiency.



Frictionless CX: Overview

When it comes to creating seamless digital experiences that meet customers' ever-increasing expectations, no word strikes fear into the hearts of organizations more than *friction*.

Friction is what keeps users from signing up for your SaaS platform. Friction is what makes users abandon their shopping cart without making a purchase. Friction is what keeps your customers from fully utilizing that killer new feature you just shipped. But when it comes to figuring out ways to reduce friction, design, and product teams often focus solely on UI and functionality changes.

But the true secret weapon for helping users overcome friction?

Content.

The concept of friction is relatively simple: anything that prevents a user from accomplishing a desired action—whether that's checking their bank balance on their smartphone or booking a trip around the world. The challenge is how to identify the cause (or causes) of the friction so you can start working on solutions.

Friction is anything that prevents a user from accomplishing a desired action.



How to Identify Content Friction

How do we accurately identify those content friction points? Like most things in user interface design, the best way to surface opportunities to reduce friction is by observing real users interacting with your digital content. Moderated (or unmoderated) usability research can show you much more than an analytics dashboard.

Data can only tell you what happened. It can't tell you why it happened.

For all its importance and hype, data can only tell you what happened. It can't tell you why it happened. Sure, it can help you identify areas that might be causing users trouble. But watching users run into issues and having them explain their frustrations and challenges in real-time produce insights that you might never have considered.

OFTEN, FRICTION POINTS ARE PRETTY EASY TO DIAGNOSE

- » If your website takes 10 seconds to load a page, it's likely that people are going to abandon your site before you even get a chance to make your pitch.
- » If you're bombarding your customers with sales emails for products they aren't interested in, they're going to inevitably start looking for the unsubscribe button.
- » If a regular customer with a consistent purchasing history has to recreate their order manually every time rather than having the option to easily buy it again, you're going to increase the chance that they'll start looking for an easier option.



SOMETIMES, THE CAUSE OF THE FRICTION ISN'T CLEAR-CUT

- » Is the friction being caused by having too many form fields on a contact form, or is it that we haven't adequately communicated how that additional information will help them get a more detailed, quicker response?
- » Is the friction being caused by having too many steps in a conversion flow, or is it that we haven't clearly set expectations for how long the process will take?
- » Is the friction being caused by the size or color of a button, or is it that we haven't given the user enough information on what they're going to get by clicking?



- » Is the friction being caused by an ugly and cluttered landing page design, or is it that you haven't given the user enough reasons to trust your company and products (through reviews, testimonials, and other social proof)?

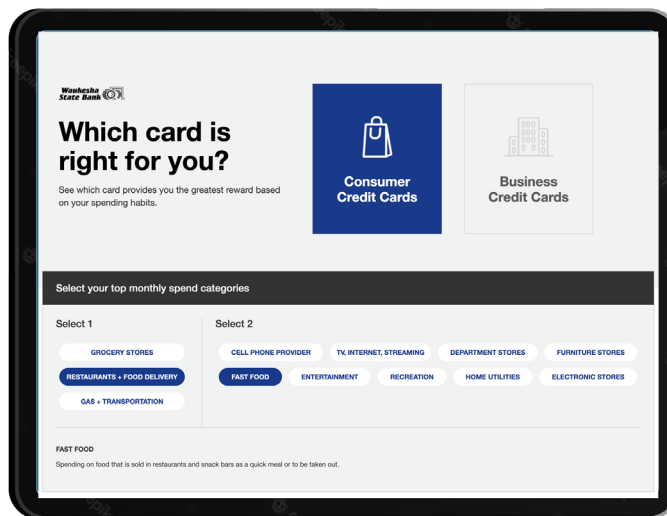
That's why it's important to look at multiple factors before jumping to conclusions about what's tripping up your customers. So before you send that email to your web designer to make the button bigger, consider a few of the ways that content could be hindering or helping your audience achieve their goals.



Contextual Content

A common mistake that companies often make is assuming that, because a piece of content exists somewhere on the website, users will find it. Too many websites end up with an FAQ page or Help Center that just becomes a dumping ground for content that doesn't fit naturally anywhere else.

Now I'm not advocating for getting rid of these types of sections, as they can be useful for users in certain situations. But if a user is in an action-oriented situation such as comparing products, selecting features, or trying to check out, making them go to a separate page to search for an answer to a question is inevitably going to result in frustration and possible abandonment.



The solution? Make sure you're able to surface help information contextually at the point of need. If a user is entering their billing information and they have a question about your return policy, a tooltip or even a few short lines of copy above the form can help ease their worries and make it quicker for them to move on to the next step.

When you hover over a category, it shows you the types of spending that are included, contextually.

If a user is hesitant to sign up for your newsletter or company alerts because they're worried they'll get inundated with sale emails, reassure them by explicitly stating how often you typically send out emails, and the type of content they're likely to get.

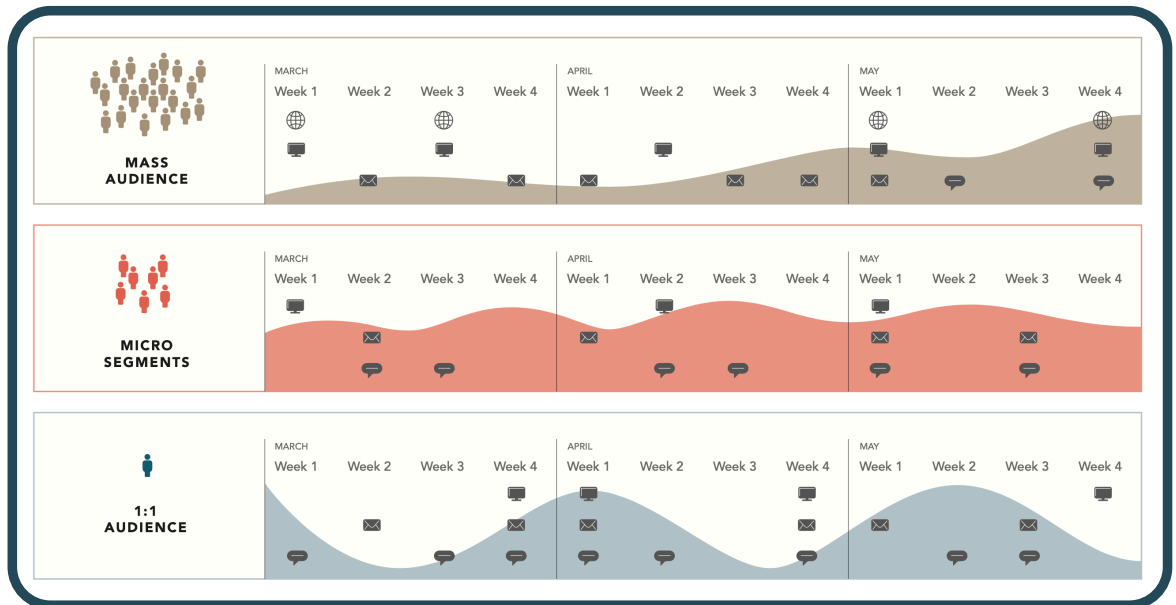
Contextual content is a great way to address the emotional friction that can come from not having enough information to feel confident about taking an action.



Personalized Content

The holy grail of digital marketing has always been the ability to have a 1-1 relationship with every customer—to know so much about them that you can anticipate their needs, proactively address their challenges, and deliver an experience that seamlessly helps them achieve their goals. And while there is a vigorous debate to be had around privacy and the ethics of digital tracking, done well and with careful consideration, the ability to deliver personalized content at scale can offer tremendous value to both customers and marketers.

The benefits of personalized content are pretty clear when it comes to driving sales.



Gartner reports that the typical buying group for a complex B2B solution involves six to 10 decision makers.¹

But what's often overlooked is its potential to help reduce friction across the buyer's journey—especially in B2B industries with complex product and services offerings and long sales cycles.



In many cases, companies need to be able to engage with multiple audiences across an organization in order to close a sale. In fact, Gartner reports that the typical buying group for a complex B2B solution involves six to 10 decision makers.¹ And given that each of these audiences often has different priorities and incentives, the ability to deliver relevant content to each member of a buying team individually can be incredibly effective at driving awareness, nurturing relationships, and helping build consensus across the organization.

And while the software and frameworks for delivering personalized digital content are more accessible than ever, taking full advantage of these tools often requires organizations to radically change how they talk to potential customers. Instead of focusing solely on their own key messages and feature talking points, they need to start doing the difficult work of truly understanding the behaviors and motivations of their key audiences and translating that into content that's helpful and relevant.



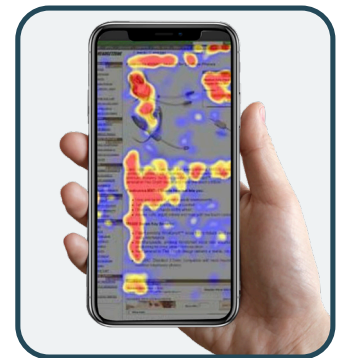
Consumable Content

Cognitive friction, which occurs when an interface requires the user to absorb and process too much information at once, is often one of the most difficult types of

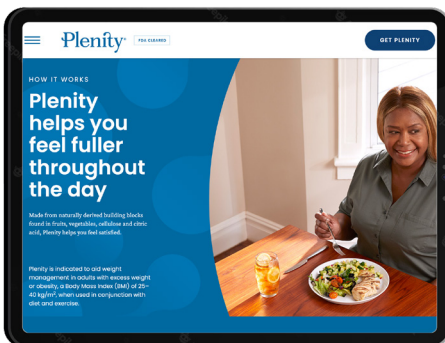
Cognitive friction occurs when an interface requires the user to absorb and process too much information at once

friction to measure and address—as it takes a clear understanding of your audience’s mental model and past experiences with similar systems. And while cognitive friction can come from a myriad of UX issues, one of the most common ways that digital interfaces can overwhelm users is through content.

Studies have shown again and again that people consume content differently online than they do in the analog world. Instead of starting by reading every word from top to bottom, they typically scan the page first (often in an F-shaped pattern) in order to find the content they’re interested in as quickly as possible.²



Heat map studies show people scan in an F-shaped pattern.



If content is presented in dense paragraphs without any styling or callouts to key information, users are more likely to move on to a website that makes it easier to find what they’re looking for. That’s why things such as heading and subheading structure, bulleted lists, pull quotes, engaging visuals, and appropriate paragraph length are so important for helping users consume your content.

Another way that content can cause friction is if it doesn’t match your audience’s expectations or understanding. For instance, copy that’s supposed to speak to a gen-pop audience shouldn’t be written like an academic research paper. And copy that’s supposed to speak to a highly-educated and technical audience shouldn’t be written for a general audience. I know it may seem like common sense. But the reality is that too many marketers end up creating what they’d like to hear, rather than what their audience will relate to.



Accessible Content

While website accessibility is often thought of as a nice-to-have, smart organizations know that making accessibility a priority can be a smart move for driving growth and revenue. With one billion people across the globe (15%) having a recognized disability³, and their total discretionary spending estimated at nearly \$7 Trillion globally,⁴ it's a wonder that some organizations still don't invest in reducing friction for disabled users and customers.



One billion people world-wide have a recognized disability with 7 trillion in discretionary spending.³

One of the most important areas of accessibility is content. Tactics like providing alternative text for images, adding aria labels to help screen readers, and improving color contrast for low-sighted users, are becoming increasingly ubiquitous by the day. But there are a few less well known ways

that content can help reduce friction for disabled users.

Plain language guidelines

 <p>Write for Your Audience</p> <p>Make sure that you are considering your audience's level of knowledge and familiarity of InfoSec when creating content.</p>	 <p>Choose the Right Words</p> <p>Prioritize simplicity and comprehension when choosing which words to use.</p>	 <p>Eliminate Unnecessary Words</p> <p>Avoid unnecessary modifiers and redundant words to make your writing more concise and easier to understand.</p>	 <p>Use Active Voice</p> <p>Write in the active voice to increase clarity and specificity and to use fewer words.</p>
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For instance, keeping your content at an appropriate reading level can make it easier for users with cognitive disabilities to access your content.⁵ Not only that, following plain language guidelines can help make your content easier to digest for all of your users, not just those with disabilities.⁶ And with today's shortened attention spans, being able to get your message across as quickly and accurately as possible can be a huge differentiator.



Another area that can cause friction and confusion is the reliance on sensory characteristics to understand the content—things like shape, color, size, visual location, orientation, or sound. Asking a user to *click the button on the right* or *fill out the form below* assumes that they can see the screen well enough to understand your directions. Color-coding data in a table is another example of how we end up making it harder for low-sighted users to interpret our content.



Consistent Content

Modern enterprise websites are often powered by design systems that help standardize the look and feel of pages and templates across the site. And those systems are typically made up of a component library that users can choose from to display their content.

The problem is that these components are often created and named based on the layout and position of the elements (e.g. 50/50 Image Left, 3-card Feature, Hero section) rather than the purpose they're trying to serve. If you have multiple stakeholders authoring content and choosing components just based on whether they can accommodate the specific amount of words or images they need to show, this can lead to inconsistencies in how similar content gets displayed across the site.

Consistency is one of the top 10 usability heuristics for interface design.⁷

Although it might not seem like a big deal to have the same type of content displayed in different ways, it can have a subtle, yet meaningful impact on how quickly users can process information on your site. In fact, consistency is one of the top 10 usability heuristics for interface design⁷. Websites that maintain internal consistency are easier to learn and use.

One way to help build alignment and consistency in CMS authors is to name components based on common content patterns—repeatable content chunks that serve the same purpose (e.g. Testimonials, Product Spotlights, Reviews). Identifying and integrating content patterns into your design system can help improve consistency, efficiency, and reusability. Instead of spending time searching for a component that can accommodate the content you need to publish, you can choose one that's built specifically for that purpose.



Content Matters

There's no doubt that CX-driven web technologies and innovations have done wonders for reducing customer friction and providing more seamless digital experiences. From single sign-on authentication and biometric logins to social sharing and the (much-maligned) QR code, the web continues to come up with ways to improve digital experiences.

But if you're only focused on these technology-driven solutions, you can end up overlooking a variety of impactful, cost-effective solutions to drive CX excellence through a strategic, user-focused approach to content.

Thanks for reading about how content can reduce friction and improve customer experience.

As you seek to identify friction in your company's customer experience and implement solutions, Hero Digital can help you utilize the power of content to create a smooth path for your customers.

TAKE
ACTION

Reach out for a consultation.



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Citations

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