

DON'T redesign

Save time, effort and money

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Este artículo en español: [NO rediseñe](#)

Internet is a magnet for fads and theories. Some recent and ephemeral, like Google Wave and Google Buzz, and others that were harder nuts to crack, as the annoying Flash splash screen, sponsored by "skip intro". Those who are a little older may remember some other, as push technologies, which crammed our desktops with supposedly valuable information, or portals with a little of everything and a lot of nothing, as StarMedia and El Sitio.

With time you learn that usually after a dramatic impact, with sayings like "who doesn't have a blog doesn't exist", or "if it doesn't give a netbook is not a promo," everything returns to its normal path: blogs are great and there are hundreds of thousands of them, but if you don't have a blog absolutely nothing happens. And netbooks are very good for many things, but with a small screen, a tiny keyboard barely bigger than your fingers, and a limited configuration, are far from a massive notebook replacement.

However there is an epidemic that is always fashionable, a virus that spreads out of control, taking the effort, time and money to those who build a site on the Web: the pandemic of redesign. Let us define concepts: a redesign is brand new project for an existing site, where a company starts again from scratch, places a white sheet on the table, and a new site is born to replace the previous one in a single move. The advertising agency is replaced, a new product is launched, the marketing manager changes or a new candidate wins, and everyone begins to feel the overwhelming power of redesign. The trash can begins to throb waiting for all the accumulated work that will be discarded without much analysis, only to be replaced by a new design, that presumably is much better than the older one.

Beware of creating sacred cows: everything can be replaced or removed if it's bad: graphic design, interaction model, whole areas of the site. Don't redesign isn't synonymous of little change or being shy, it only stands for **changing just what is wrong**.

Sorry for the maths

I apologize in advance for including a little basic arithmetic, but redesign strategic and economic equation fails any test, and it's imperative to show it.

Suppose your site is 70% wrong and 30% right, and you are going to spend \$ 100 on the new site. The reasonable strategy is to invest all the \$ 100 to make the 70% right. Not for redesign supporters. For them the best is first spending \$ 30 redoing what was right, and leave only \$ 70 for working on what was wrong¹.

But there is an additional consideration: who guarantees that what was right in the past will remain right after our redo? Let's be honest with ourselves: this site that is so bad, this site that has more than half of the wrong things, was also our work. It's not fair to assume that it will be 100% error free this time.

Suppose we make a significant effort and we improve the values and we are now twice better than in the past: now 60% of the time we are right and only 40% wrong. In that case, the first \$ 30 to spend are divided in \$ 18 to finance hits and \$ 12 to finance errors. That makes \$ -12 our starting point.

Now we spend the remaining \$ 70 on the remaining 70% with the same efficiency rate, what means

that \$ 42 finance hits and \$ 28 finance mistakes. That's all, we are now out of money. $42+18=60$, $12+28=40$.

Summary:

- We started from an organization that made 3 hits for each 7 mistakes.
We had therefore a site with 30% correct and 70% wrong.
- We worked hard to improve our organization, to have 6 hits for each 4 mistakes.
We decided a total redesign
- We invested all our money in redesigning and voila:
We now have a site with **60% correct and 40% wrong**.

The tweaking maths

Assume now that a miracle happens, our boss listens to us and we avoid the redesign, spending all the \$ 100 in changing what is bad, preserving what is right.

So we get down to work on our site riddled with errors, separating the good from the bad, leaving intact the 30% that's fine.

Now we invest \$ 70 to correct what was wrong, and as in the previous example \$ 42 finance hits and \$ 28 generate 28% of mistakes. But we still have 30 pesos in our pocket², so we invest in our remaining errors, always with 6 / 4 good to wrong rate, generating 17 hits and 11 errors. When we ran out of money, the situation is: $30+42+17=89$ on the side of what is right. And just 11 on the side of what is wrong.

Summary:

- We started from an organization that made 3 hits for each 7 mistakes.
We had therefore a site with 30% correct and 70% wrong.
- We worked hard to improve our organization, to have 6 hits for each 4 mistakes.
We managed to avoid total redesign, so we focused exclusively on correcting what was wrong.
- We invested all our money and this is the result:
- We now have a site with **89% correct and 11% wrong**.

Customers: the sunk cost

So far we stood on the side of the company that owns the site. What about customers and site visitors?

Redesign supporters think customers are going to be surprised to delight with the new design. They are profoundly mistaken.

Let's separate the analysis into two: new customers and existing customers.

New customers

New customers analysis is so easy that carries just a line: they will be more satisfied with a site that is 89% correct than one with just 60%. Who is encouraged to deny this?

Existing customers

Existing customers were those ones that enjoyed the miserable 30% correct and suffered all the rest. Now we propose a total redesign twice better than the old site, but what's right now is not the same as before. So everything they knew, everything they could easily find, from now on will not be of any

use.

If they want to remain our customers, we not only force them to cope with a site a lot worse than it could be, but we also do not have respect for the work they generously invested in our old site and force them to repeat it. The worst marketing strategy you can conceive.

Conversely, if Harry Potter bewitched the marketing manager, in a way that managed to avoid the redesign, not only we will propose the best site that we were able to build, but everything invested in the old site will still be useful, and they will be able to enjoy improvements on what bothered, slowed and frustrated them before.

Tweak, don't redesign³

In the best and most favorable terms, total redesign produces poor, pale results. More disappointing than grand promises made when redesign was presented to the directory. In all the other cases, it causes changes without any improvement.

The patient and methodical work of tweaking the bad and conserving the good produces the greatest benefit for both company and customers. Get rid of the redesign virus and start on the stubborn and merciless tweaking practice: you will never regret it.

¹ - We are simplifying assuming a proportional spending

² - The analysis can be accused of an oversimplification, because it assumes that the effectiveness is the same regardless of the size of the investment. It seems reasonable to assume that those details do not affect the core logic of the reasoning.

³ - "Tweak, don't redesign" is a registered trademark of Steve Krug, author of "Don't make me think" and "Rocket Surgery made easy", one of the most influential Usability specialists today. You can visit his site at <http://www.sensible.com/>

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