

Is your business prepared for digital consumers?

By Emerson Murakami*

Digital consumers, whether born in the last 15 years or virtual immigrants, like us, definitively impact the manner through which companies design their businesses and their interfaces with the market. I do not speak solely of digital business, the “pure players”, in which this new consumer is essential. This also extends to all models that, in a greater or lesser scale, use the web as a channel for relationships, transactions, research, brand strengthening, as well as online sales.

What do these examples have in common? The challenge of needing to be prepared for a new standard of consumption and user expression, brought about by the democratization of access to technologies and by the possibilities of interactivity.

New consumers are already “multi-task” and are present simultaneously in many places and mediums... Mapping where they go, with whom they interact, and what they like has become the great challenge of campaigns focused on brands or products.

At the same time that they access their favorite sites, they download MP3 music, follow someone in Twitter, chat on MSN, and think that e-mail is a thing of the past, for the simple fact that it is not in “real time”. Accustomed to navigating, these digital users already have references about standards of design, usability, and performance of the sites they frequent. And everything that falls outside of their comfort zone or quality, they will be ready to criticize: be it in the Blog, in the “I hate such and such a brand” community, or in the telephone or virtual customer services.

Actually, what they are searching for is the relevance in the content (according to their interests and logic) and useful services. They not only search for what they want, but also read the commentaries from other users who have entered the same site and tested a product before them. The unknown user of yesterday becomes the opinion former today, taking on a greater credibility than any company or institutional ranking. These are the consumers that interact, give opinions, elect, and exclude brands. They are social and participate in Orkut communities, search for information on the web, elect the best article on Digg, while they use the remote control like a browser.

This “new world”, restricted to maniac technology users until only a short time ago, is now becoming commonplace. People can already buy a computer in 24 installments at physical “retail” stores, which explains the fact that the C class already accounts for 37% of Brazilian internet users – a new standard that will be even more strengthened by the small, yet continuous growth of access to broad band as well as to technological products with infinite credit lenders...

This reality is becoming so simple and about to become everyday habit, like a person who buys CDs in a large retail site, like those that research real estate on the web or those that directly apply their savings through virtual real estates agencies. All of this would seem to be science fiction for the majority of the public a little more than 6 years ago.

The challenge of the sites – In such a competitive and full of brand advocacy, the internet had to become more professional at an even faster pace. Nothing is risked for a simple hobby without having a minimum level of management of the variables to which your clients or their virtual products are submitted. The users’ experience is a determining factor for them to either remain in the site or search for a new address in the search bar, already installed in their desktops. To lose them, they only need to “think” about the click, and in a second, they are gone...

What can be said of such basic feelings about availability and performance of sites? Today, it is unconceivable for a page to be unavailable, that a transaction cannot be done due to the mere high volume of accesses: loss of business and of reputation.

The professional internet requires metering, ROI indicators, “web-based managers”, like monitoring and solution tools... Finding available and quick sites has become essential, because new consumers have acquired memory. They compare each virtual experience to the others they have had. They do not have any more time to give to time to their business!

**Emerson Murakami is the COO of Dimension Data Brazil*