

Is your website a Derby or a Grand National?

In the horse racing world the Derby is a flat race – a smooth ride to the finish line. The Grand National is one obstacle after another, some of them so huge that only a few of the riders manage to land safely on the other side. So how many obstacles do visitors to your website have to get past to arrive safely at the point where they have the information they need to make a decision to contact you?

What sort of obstacles am I talking about? Let's start at the beginning.

The splash page is the first fence people fall at. This page can be fraught with all sorts of obstacles which include:

- Taking too long too load – your visitor gets impatient and hits the back button.
- Nothing that tempts the visitor to find out more – it doesn't connect with some of the visitors strongly enough for them to bother pursuing things any further.
- Lots of snazzy flash animation, but no obvious means of getting into the website – most people will be frustrated not to

be able to see where to click to get in, a few will click randomly on the visuals, and some will find the faint 'enter here' words tucked away to one side!

The next fence is the home page:

- The biggest thing on the home page is 'Welcome to our home page', but there is no headline – your visitor can't immediately tell whether your site addresses the issues they are trying to resolve and a few won't bother to try any harder and hit the back button.
- The home page has lots of boxes with graphics and information about all sorts of things – there's so much information on this patchwork quilt that they are overwhelmed and go back to the search engine list for something 'easier'.
- There's lots of text and nearly every paragraph starts with 'we' – your visitor gets bored reading about you and quickly tunes out and leaves to find something that tells them more about what they get than about what you do!
- They get to the bottom of the home page and it says 'visit our services page' to find out more. As there's no hyperlink available, to do that the visitor has to scroll back up to the top, find the services choice on the menu and click – some won't bother.

Fence number three is the menu.

- Is there one menu, or two, or even three? For every menu more than one you're providing opportunities for your impatient visitor to not immediately see the choice they want and give up.
- How many are there choices on your menu? More than eight or nine and you're giving your visitors too many choices – they won't know where to start; some won't bother.

- What are the choices on the menu? Are they straightforward like 'About us' or something more gimmicky like 'Who we are?' Is it 'Contact us' or 'Where we're at'? Anything that requires your visitor to think creates another point at which some won't – they'll just leave.

Let's assume they've scrambled over all these fences and arrived at your services/products page. The same applies as to any other page on your website, you need a headline and straightforward easy menu choices, so what else could create fences for your visitor to tackle?

- Lots of copy about the services or products but not much information on what the services or products will do for the potential customer, leaves the visitor with no real reason to explore any further. The tendency to 'think about it' is strong and they mean to come back later, but don't.
- If you have a lot of products and services your visitor has to scroll down and scroll down to find what they want. They'll lose interest before they've gone far – sort your products and services into categories and create sub pages that make it easier for people to find what they want.

Your visitor has taken a look at your products or services and decided you have got what they were looking for – but so have some of the other websites they've visited. They decide to take a look at your 'about us' page and find out who you are.

- The page lays out how long you've been in business, what you do and some more about the products and services you offer. Nothing new there – your visitor leaves and types a new search into the search engine.
- There's no sign of who you really are, your founder, president, chief executive or the person who is behind the company. There's nothing that tells the visitor enough to make a decision whether there's something that creates a connection between you; no beliefs, no values, no passion, no quotes. A boring page – and no reason to stay.

These are just a few of the fences that website put in front of their visitors – and then they're surprised that few people contact them from their website. #

Search engine optimisation is great for bringing people to your website – but then you have to keep them there long enough to want to do business with you. Every time you put a fence in their path, some of them will leave. You're reducing the possibilities of people finding out enough to buy what they want – from you.

Get smart and dismantle the fences and turn your Grand National into a Derby – a straight run to the winning post.

... and finally

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