

# CHAPTER 01

Society has unwittingly fallen into a machine-centered orientation to life, one that emphasizes the needs of technology over those of people. [This forces] people into a supporting role, one for which we are most unsuited. [...]

The same analytical methods that work so well for mechanical things do not apply to people. [...] As a result, the technology that is intended to aid human cognition and enjoyment more often interferes and confuses than aids and clarifies.

—Dr. Donald Norman, *Things That Make Us Smart*

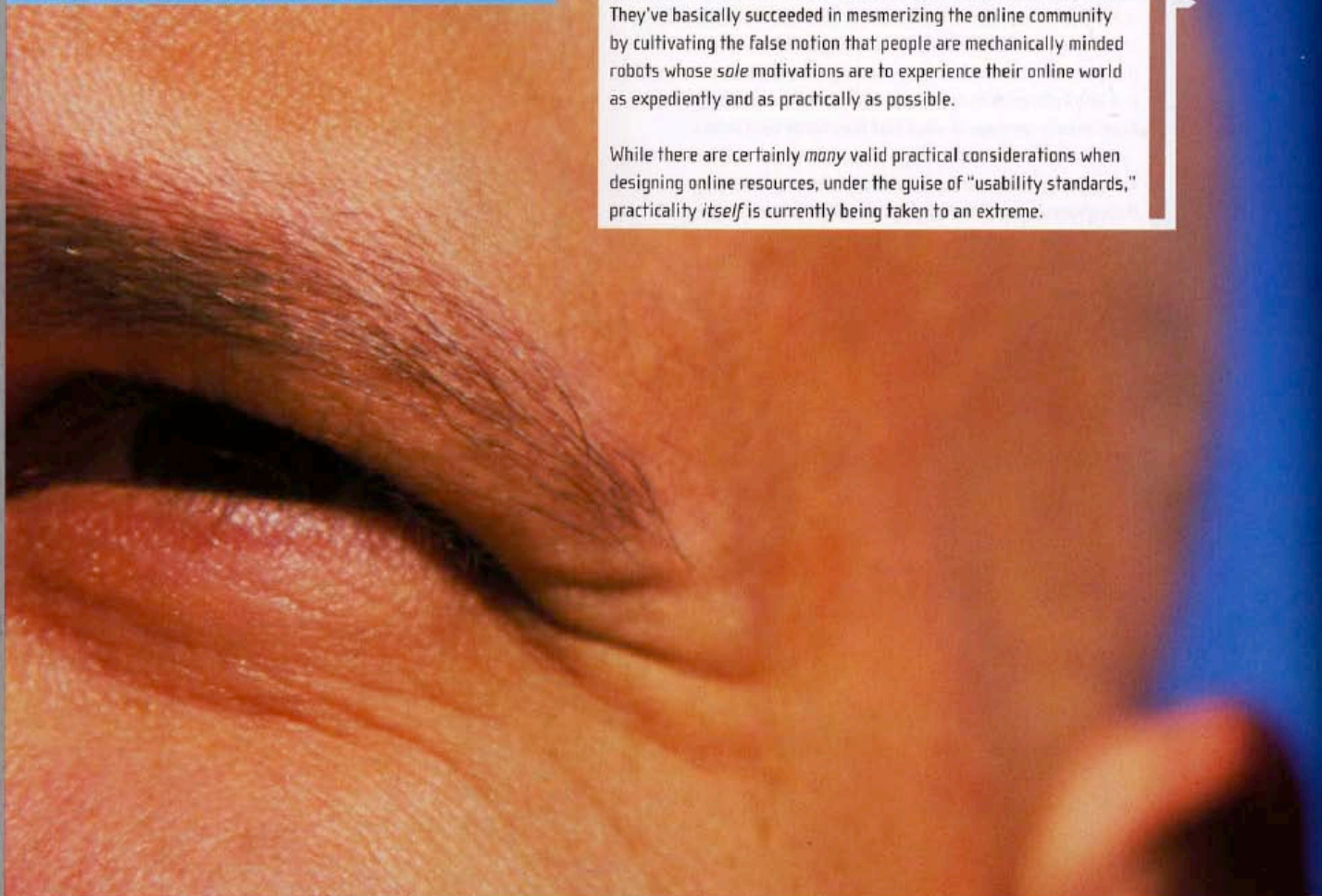
## 'Users' Versus People—

*Understanding What Motivates Online Behavior*

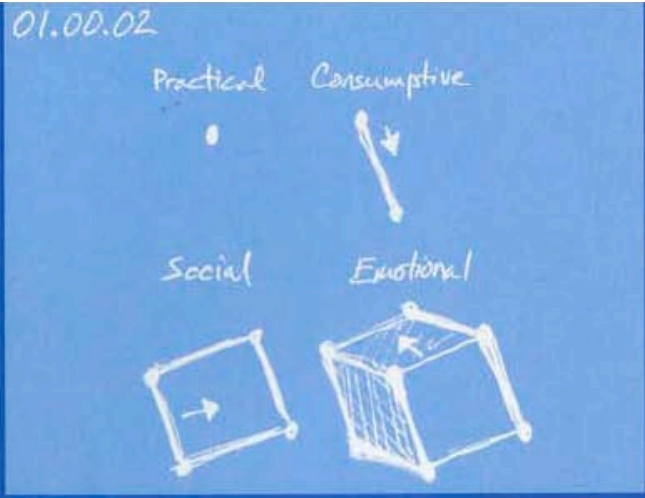
The people who interact with your Web enterprise through its online resources aren't users; that would make you—the person or organization responsible for the existence of these resources—a pusher. They're people and you function more like a facilitator. People don't *merely* use the information that they access; they perceive it, absorb it, try to comprehend it, are affected by it, and then decide how to respond to it.

With this guiding notion in mind, the intent of this chapter is to persuade you to stop listening to those Web usability consultants who recommend that you dull-down your online resources and focus solely on the practical aspects of experience design. These one-track-minded consultants are as much hypnotists as anything else. They've basically succeeded in mesmerizing the online community by cultivating the false notion that people are mechanically minded robots whose *sole* motivations are to experience their online world as expediently and as practically as possible.

While there are certainly *many* valid practical considerations when designing online resources, under the guise of "usability standards," practicality *itself* is currently being taken to an extreme.



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**01.00.01 Practicality is not an underlying human motivation.**  
Instead, people seek fulfillment through consumption, as well as through social interaction and emotional experiences. The Web can help us be more practical people, yes; but more importantly it has the capacity to help us become *better* people—to enhance our minds and our lives—to help us better understand each other, the world, and ourselves.

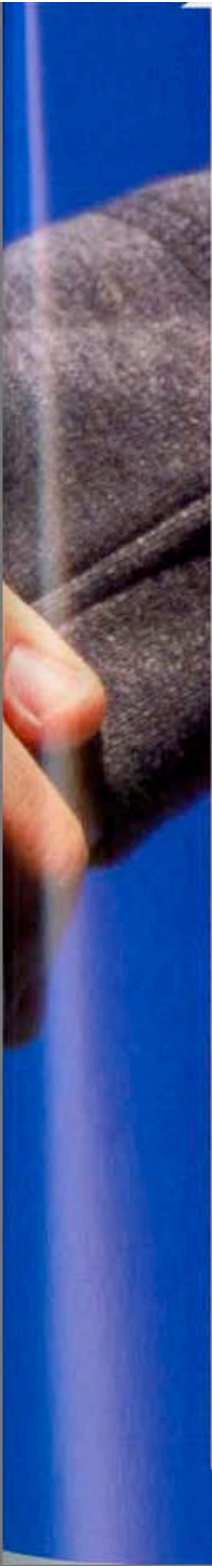
Although the *appropriate* application of practicality in the design of Web experiences can contribute to fulfilling our true human needs and desires, designing our online resources to be practical for the sake of being practical is a misguided and dangerously flawed idea. And most certainly—elevating practicality *above* all other design considerations goes far beyond necessity.

**01.00.02 Journeying along a well-conceived experiential pathway is what makes interacting with a Web enterprise compelling.**  
Because people are multidimensional, an effective Web experience is successful on many different levels. Consequently, *paving* this “experiential pathway” involves employing varied sets of principles that address our multidimensionality. This holistic design perspective should draw from and synthesize principles that are related to *psychology*, *understandability*<sup>1</sup>, and *creativity*.

Up until now, however, consultants who are more technically minded have **confused experience design with usability design**. Usability traditionally relates to a “user’s” ability to navigate through and find information quickly on the Web, and grapples with some, but not all issues relevant to understandability as I’ve framed it in this text. Although usability *does* try to help people avoid the detrimental emotions that accompany frustration, for the most part usability ignores broader issues related to the psychology of emotion, the cognition of perception and learning, as well as the very *real* human need for aesthetic gratification.

<sup>1</sup>When the ideas that we communicate through our online messages are understandable, they’re easy for people to attend to, comprehend, and remember.





**01.00.03** As arguably the most influential Web usability consultant, Jakob Nielsen has, through a narrow set of heuristics, succeeded in convincing Web enterprises to base their experience design policies on a single facet of people's experiential needs.

Dr. Nielsen has derived his heuristics—which are speculative formulations—largely from informal, context-specific Web usability testing. The conclusions drawn from years of conducting this testing have then been extrapolated by Nielsen and others to apply to all cases. The problem with this approach is that usability testing is geared toward determining the flaws in a specific interface through educated intuition rather than through empirical scientific testing.

Nielsen would himself likely be the first to admit that most Web usability testing lacks the rigor of scientific research. This makes the credence given to his Web usability heuristics as scientifically-proven fact all the more puzzling. It's frustrating for many Web experience designers who are trying to build inspiring online resources when they're blocked in their efforts by Nielsen's heuristics—which are accepted as absolute truths, when they're in fact only based on Nielsen's observations. The heuristics of Nielsen and others have taken on a glow of sanctified commandments—Thou Shalt Not Use Flash!—rather than being regarded as the potentially helpful but highly subjective design suggestions that they really are.

Usability experts rightly feel that if a person can't interact with an online resource easily, then that resource has likely failed. However the passionate conviction that makes them good advocates of interface logistics can sometimes blind them to the core purposes of an online resource. The most logistically predictable experience may not be the most engaging or the most persuasive or the most compelling one. Usability needs to support other design considerations, not replace them. A logistically appropriate, "practical" online resource that isn't at all compelling is just as big a failure as one that's compelling yet impractical.

Many of the design considerations that have traditionally fallen under the moniker of "usability" are important and should be considered when designing online resources. Some of Dr. Nielsen's observations can, when appropriately applied in a given situation, be quite helpful. Usability, however, is only one voice in the democracy of experience design, and therefore should only get one vote. There are many other types of observations, both subjective and scientific, that must be taken into account when settling on a particular experience design strategy for a given situation and needs (see Chapter Seven).

**01.00.04** Poor usability isn't the primary reason why Web enterprises have experienced widespread failure.

They've experienced failure because the organizations behind these Web enterprises haven't understood and fulfilled the needs of the people in the online marketplace holistically. By the online market's rejection of the 1990s crop of dot-coms, people have made it clear that they're no longer willing to subject themselves to bland, incomprehensible, poorly stylized, *marginally valuable*, OR difficult-to-use online resources. There are two reasons for this.

The first reason is that other forms of media such as TV, movies, and interactive games have trained people to have increasingly sophisticated expectations in terms of the emotional and aesthetic dynamics of the media that they consume. These media do a really great job of reaching people deeply on social and emotional levels.

The second reason is that conventional sources of needs fulfillment are beginning to combine the inherent social and emotional powers of live people and environments with progressive implementations of technology. The combined benefit in many cases provides a more compelling value proposition than their online competitors can offer.

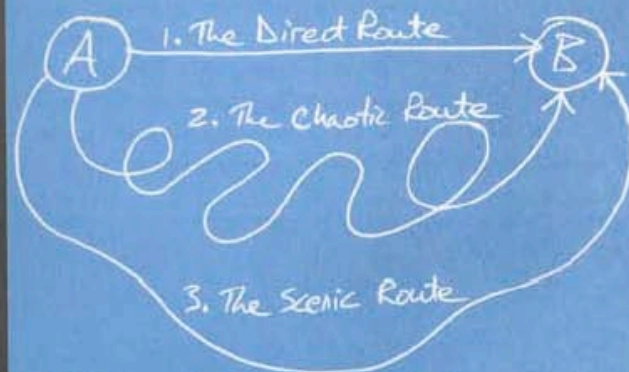
We've reached the point where people expect to be treated as well online as they're treated in physical consumptive settings. In light of this, we must stop expending all of our resources designing online experiences that, at best, try to be sensitive to navigational frustration and, at worst, ignore the broader body of people's experiential needs as a whole.

01.00.05 The core of an effective Web experience is NOT user-centered design but *person-centered design*.

Therefore, we must design every aspect of an online resource to align with a person's natural human needs and desires. Although one of our human desires is to avoid the frustrations of inefficiency and impediment, we also have very deep and primal needs to maintain a positive social and emotional relationship with our environment. When given a choice, people usually choose options that engender the most positive feeling [Reeves and Nass, *The Media Equation*].

In light of this fact, it's essential that in addition to designing our online resources to be efficient, we design them—whether austere or flamboyant—to be compelling as well. In a sense, the role of an experience design team is to pave the way for people to enjoy themselves as they make unimpeded progress in their quest for consumption, meaning, enjoyment, or—whatever. And although people are often most interested in the direct route, it's important that we don't barricade the scenic route for those who feel that "half the fun is in getting there."

01.00.05



1. Many usability consultants claim that the direct route is always the best.
2. They often assume that the alternative to the direct route is the route of chaos.
3. A non-direct route (scenic route) can often times be appreciated, however, as long as it's contributing to the meaning and value of the experience.



01.00.06 As consumers of online experiences are becoming more sophisticated and demanding, understanding and applying psychological and sociological principles in the design of online resources is becoming increasingly critical.

Psychologists and sociologists are becoming increasingly interested in *why* people go online and *how* they engage emotionally with Web enterprises. Some of the factors that these studies consider are whether people:

- > are aroused by an online resource and find it interesting
- > feel understood by a Web enterprise
- > identify areas of personal interest
- > make sense of the content
- > remember the ideas being presented
- > are invoked to respond to online messages
- > find a Web enterprise cumulatively helpful and engaging over time

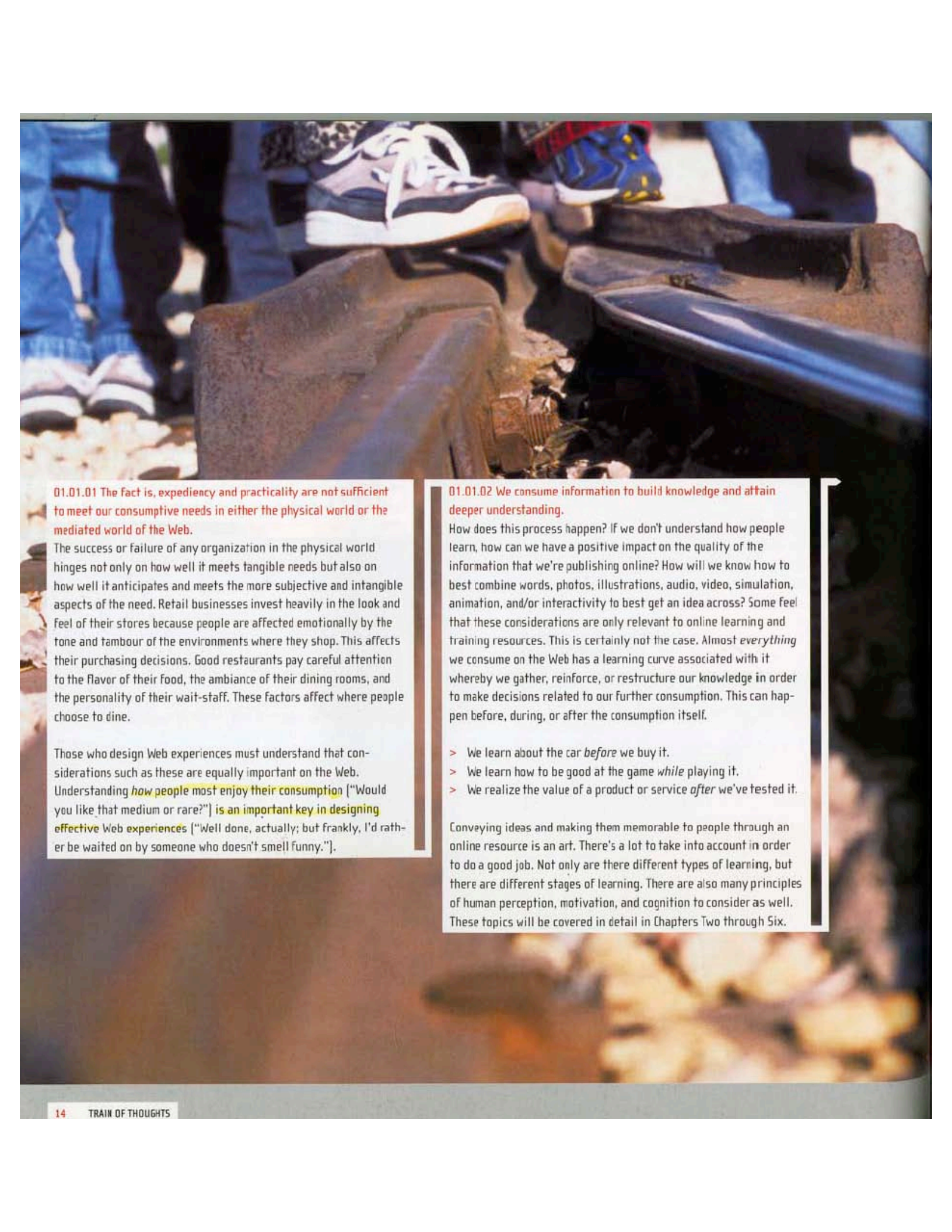
Online resources that are designed to address these factors will be successful not only in helping people *find* what they're looking for, but also in helping them attend to, understand, and relate emotionally to the content that these Web enterprises have to offer. Furthermore, when online resources meet basic human needs for consumptive, social, and emotional relevance, people will be more motivated to interact with them. Helping *people* be successful in this way will maximize a Web enterprise's chances of being successful in the online marketplace.



## 01.01 People Go Online to Consume

- > A researcher is writing a report for work and needs to gather appropriate information.
- > An accountant just met a big deadline and wants to "get mindless" playing a game for a while.
- > A teenager wants to customize his own tennis shoes or find a really "cool" new skateboard.
- > That same teenager wants to find a great place to wear those tennis shoes or ride that skateboard (<http://www.3rdlair.com>).
- > A couple wants to find a more progressive pediatrician.
- > That same couple wants to find a reliable financial advisor that can help them plan for their children's education.

We don't always think about it this way, but these examples all relate to various forms of consumption. When we think about what we can "get out of" the Web, these are the types of things that typically come to mind. We're **consumers of information, entertainment, products, and services**. It seems really simple—cut-and-dried and very practical. But how cut-and-dried is it really? Is the role of an effective online resource to provide the most expedient, most practical way to get people from point A to point B? If you listen to some usability consultants, you get that distinct impression. They represent the group of experts who try to understand *what* people want while ignoring *why* people want.



01.01.01 The fact is, expediency and practicality are not sufficient to meet our consumptive needs in either the physical world or the mediated world of the Web.

The success or failure of any organization in the physical world hinges not only on how well it meets tangible needs but also on how well it anticipates and meets the more subjective and intangible aspects of the need. Retail businesses invest heavily in the look and feel of their stores because people are affected emotionally by the tone and ambience of the environments where they shop. This affects their purchasing decisions. Good restaurants pay careful attention to the flavor of their food, the ambience of their dining rooms, and the personality of their wait-staff. These factors affect where people choose to dine.

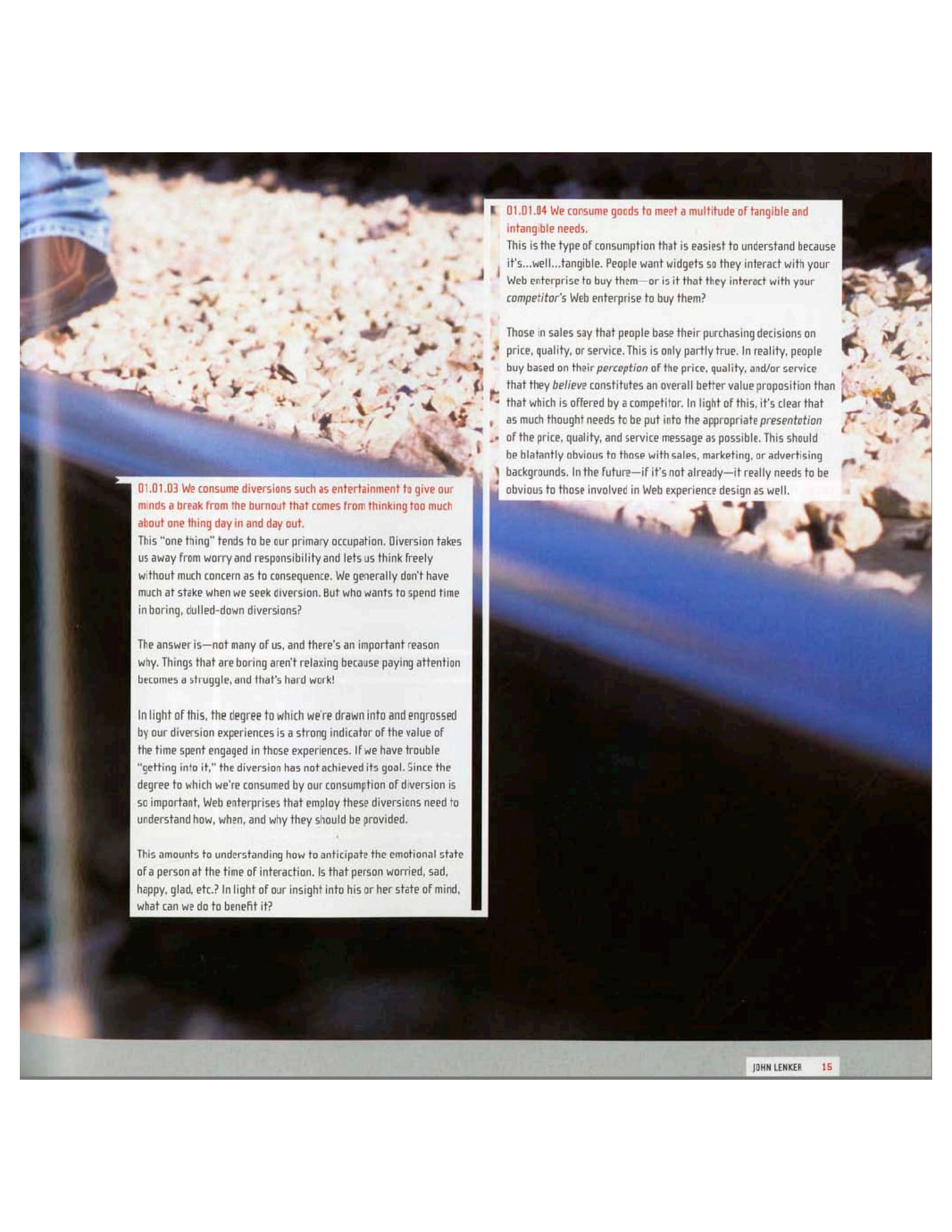
Those who design Web experiences must understand that considerations such as these are equally important on the Web. Understanding *how people most enjoy their consumption* ["Would you like that medium or rare?"] is an important key in designing effective Web experiences ["Well done, actually; but frankly, I'd rather be waited on by someone who doesn't smell funny."].

01.01.02 We consume information to build knowledge and attain deeper understanding.

How does this process happen? If we don't understand how people learn, how can we have a positive impact on the quality of the information that we're publishing online? How will we know how to best combine words, photos, illustrations, audio, video, simulation, animation, and/or interactivity to best get an idea across? Some feel that these considerations are only relevant to online learning and training resources. This is certainly not the case. Almost *everything* we consume on the Web has a learning curve associated with it whereby we gather, reinforce, or restructure our knowledge in order to make decisions related to our further consumption. This can happen before, during, or after the consumption itself.

- > We learn about the car *before* we buy it.
- > We learn how to be good at the game *while* playing it.
- > We realize the value of a product or service *after* we've tested it.

Conveying ideas and making them memorable to people through an online resource is an art. There's a lot to take into account in order to do a good job. Not only are there different types of learning, but there are different stages of learning. There are also many principles of human perception, motivation, and cognition to consider as well. These topics will be covered in detail in Chapters Two through Six.



**01.01.03 We consume diversions such as entertainment to give our minds a break from the burnout that comes from thinking too much about one thing day in and day out.**

This “one thing” tends to be our primary occupation. Diversion takes us away from worry and responsibility and lets us think freely without much concern as to consequence. We generally don’t have much at stake when we seek diversion. But who wants to spend time in boring, dulled-down diversions?

The answer is—not many of us, and there’s an important reason why. Things that are boring aren’t relaxing because paying attention becomes a struggle, and that’s hard work!

In light of this, the degree to which we’re drawn into and engrossed by our diversion experiences is a strong indicator of the value of the time spent engaged in those experiences. If we have trouble “getting into it,” the diversion has not achieved its goal. Since the degree to which we’re consumed by our consumption of diversion is so important, Web enterprises that employ these diversions need to understand how, when, and why they should be provided.

This amounts to understanding how to anticipate the emotional state of a person at the time of interaction. Is that person worried, sad, happy, glad, etc.? In light of our insight into his or her state of mind, what can we do to benefit it?

**01.01.04 We consume goods to meet a multitude of tangible and intangible needs.**

This is the type of consumption that is easiest to understand because it’s...well...tangible. People want widgets so they interact with your Web enterprise to buy them—or is it that they interact with your competitor’s Web enterprise to buy them?

Those in sales say that people base their purchasing decisions on price, quality, or service. This is only partly true. In reality, people buy based on their *perception* of the price, quality, and/or service that they *believe* constitutes an overall better value proposition than that which is offered by a competitor. In light of this, it’s clear that as much thought needs to be put into the appropriate *presentation* of the price, quality, and service message as possible. This should be blatantly obvious to those with sales, marketing, or advertising backgrounds. In the future—if it’s not already—it really needs to be obvious to those involved in Web experience design as well.

# CASE STUDY 1A

## Express Fashion

Address: <http://www.expressfashion.com>

Client: The Limited, Inc.—Express

Experience Designers: Ten/Resource

Expressfashion.com is not a Web “site;” it is a Web Experience.

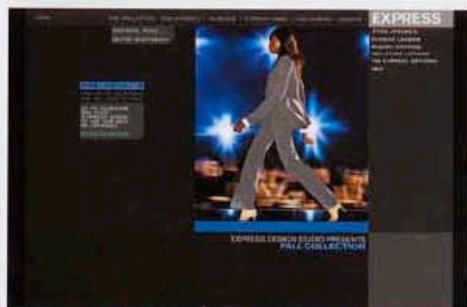
Expressfashion.com, as part of The Limited, Inc. retail clothing store group, is the Web presence for Express stores. The marketing focus behind Express is geared to the modern woman—a brand loyalist who is fashion-forward and techno-savvy. For the redevelopment of their design, the goal was to allow customers to LIVE the high-energy, fashion-forward brand, not just shop it. According to their outstanding and “high-energy” design team:

“The design of the site is critical in connecting the total brand picture. It captures the electricity of the brand through the visuals, the motion, and the music, and then it offers interactive tools that create a virile energy that gets people spreading the word and talking about fashion and EXPRESS. The fact that people have included Expressfashion.com as a must see site on their own personal web pages seems to say it all.”

The creative team at Ten/Resource worked hard to develop creative, interactive ways for customers to become part of the Express experience. Through consumer research, they found that increased interaction and engagement with a Web enterprise will create a deeper emotional connection to a brand. The team designed Expressfashion.com to capture the emotion of the Express brand online through the use of motion, music, and interactivity. Features include the Groove Music Box, offering six music samples from the retail store, customized menu configuration, and QuickTime runway videos.

Read our interview with Ten/Resource online at:

<http://www.trainofthoughts.com>



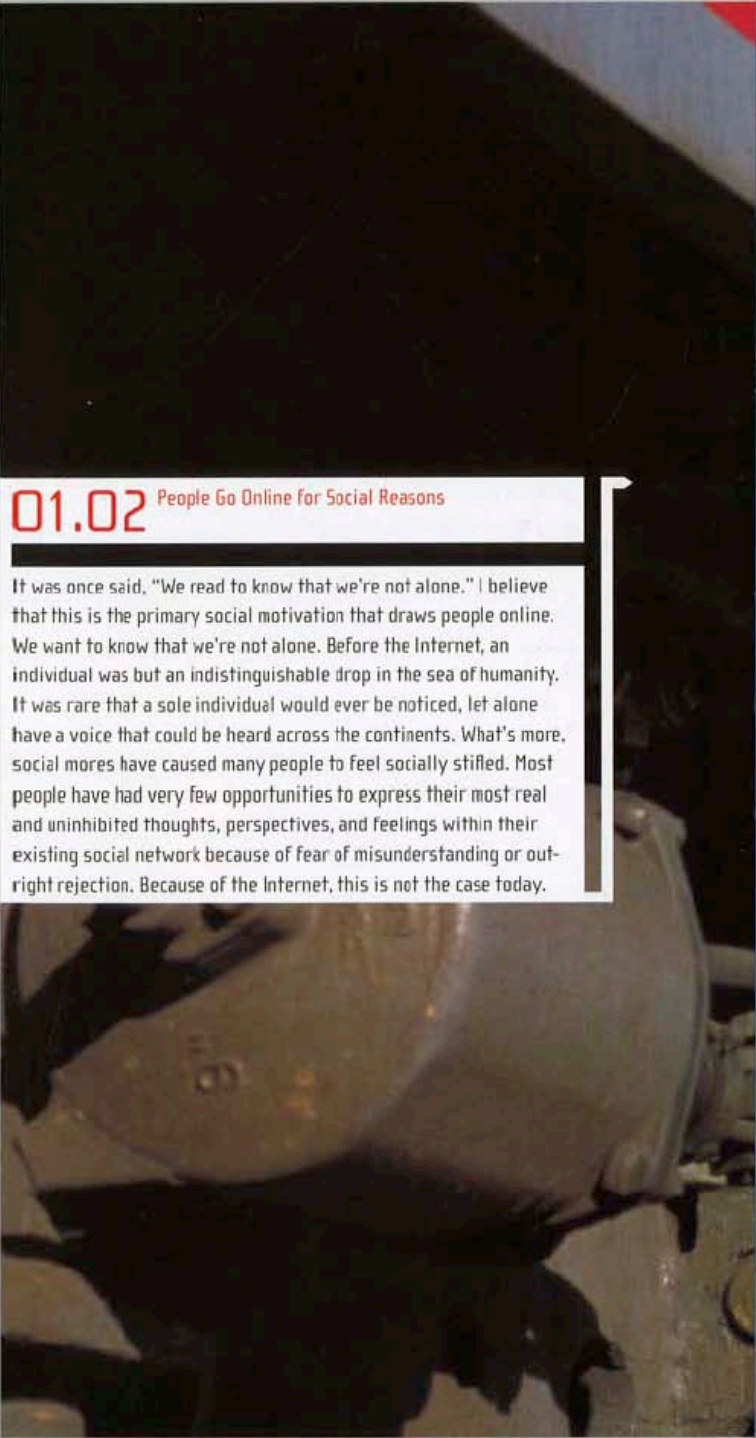




#### 01.01.05 We consume services to ease our burdens.

How we value services is different from how we value products in that there tends to be a greater degree to which we value the relationships that accompany the benefit that services provide. Because of this, a purchasing decision is based as much on the intangibles of factors such as personality, values, and integrity as it is on the more tangible aspects of the service. A person isn't just purchasing a completed tax return, but the security, comfort, and flexibility of a reliable advisor who wants what's best for him or her. A widget can't do that. Only a person can.

When selling a service online, it's essential that the intangibles be addressed. It's often said, "People buy from people." This is true. What's more, when given a choice, **people will buy from people they like and believe will help them by making helpful recommendations.** Web enterprises that sell services need to understand the cognitive and emotional triggers that cause people to put confidence in others and then design their interactions to incorporate these triggers. For an in-depth look at what these triggers are, read *The Media Equation* by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass.



#### 01.02 People Go Online for Social Reasons

It was once said, "We read to know that we're not alone." I believe that this is the primary social motivation that draws people online. We want to know that we're not alone. Before the Internet, an individual was but an indistinguishable drop in the sea of humanity. It was rare that a sole individual would ever be noticed, let alone have a voice that could be heard across the continents. What's more, social mores have caused many people to feel socially stifled. Most people have had very few opportunities to express their most real and uninhibited thoughts, perspectives, and feelings within their existing social network because of fear of misunderstanding or outright rejection. Because of the Internet, this is not the case today.



**01.02.01 We go online to fulfill the social desire to find people, places, and things with which we can identify.**

The reason is that we as people have a strong internal need to reinforce our sense of self. We feel drawn to things that we can identify with because it makes us feel like we're okay and that somehow we fit into the bigger picture. In their book *The Media Equation*, Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass state:

"People like to interact with personalities that resemble their own. In psychology, this is known as the 'law of similarity-attraction.' Despite the folk wisdom that opposites attract, there is strong empirical support for attraction based on similarity."

In his book *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, Richard Harris sheds further light:

"The emotional involvement that we have [interacting with media] depends in part on **how much we identify with the character** [i.e., mentally compare ourselves to and imagine ourselves to be the lead character]. It is easier to identify with characters with whom we have more in common.

"When we have the ability to understand and feel what another feels, we experience empathy. Empathy may be seen as emotional identification, and it is a **very important factor in the enjoyment of [our consumption of] media.**"

The desire we have to identify with others has *intellectual, ideological, and emotional* dimensions.

**01.02.02 We seek intellectual identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who thinks the way I do? Am I intellectually alone?"**

The intellect has to do with our rational mind, our self-directed thinking. This is the part of our mind that seeks to define reality. It wants to know what the facts are by reasoning with the evidence. Part of how we develop our intellect is by absorbing the ideas of others and by reflecting upon and restructuring what we understand those ideas to be. By doing this we channel the original thinking of others through our own experiential filters and reformulate our perception of their thoughts into our own knowledge structures. This process happens throughout our lives as we observe our parents, our friends, our teachers, and even the media.

Our exposure to the input of others is what stimulates our thinking the most. Until the Internet came along, however, we were very restricted in terms of the times, places, and ways that we were able to expose ourselves to the thinking of people outside our everyday circles. Even though books and other printed literature have always been available to us in modern times, discovering material that has deep personal significance was often a lengthy and frustrating process. Most of us often didn't have a clue as to what material to look for in pursuit of expanding our intellectual identity or where to look for it, if in fact we had an inkling as to what our undiscovered interests were. In many instances, our success with finding these influences has been the result of chance. Consequently, society has by and large taken the role of choosing when and how our intellectual frameworks were to be cultivated by default:

- > We went to school at a certain time and learned what the school board decided we should learn.
- > We watched the programming on TV that the networks decided we should watch and when they decided we should watch it.
- > We learned the values that our parents wanted us to believe.

Although we chose some of our own friends and would sometimes have "deep" conversations, those discussions were limited to the combined knowledge of people who were from similar circles and who had similar experiences. This is not the case today.

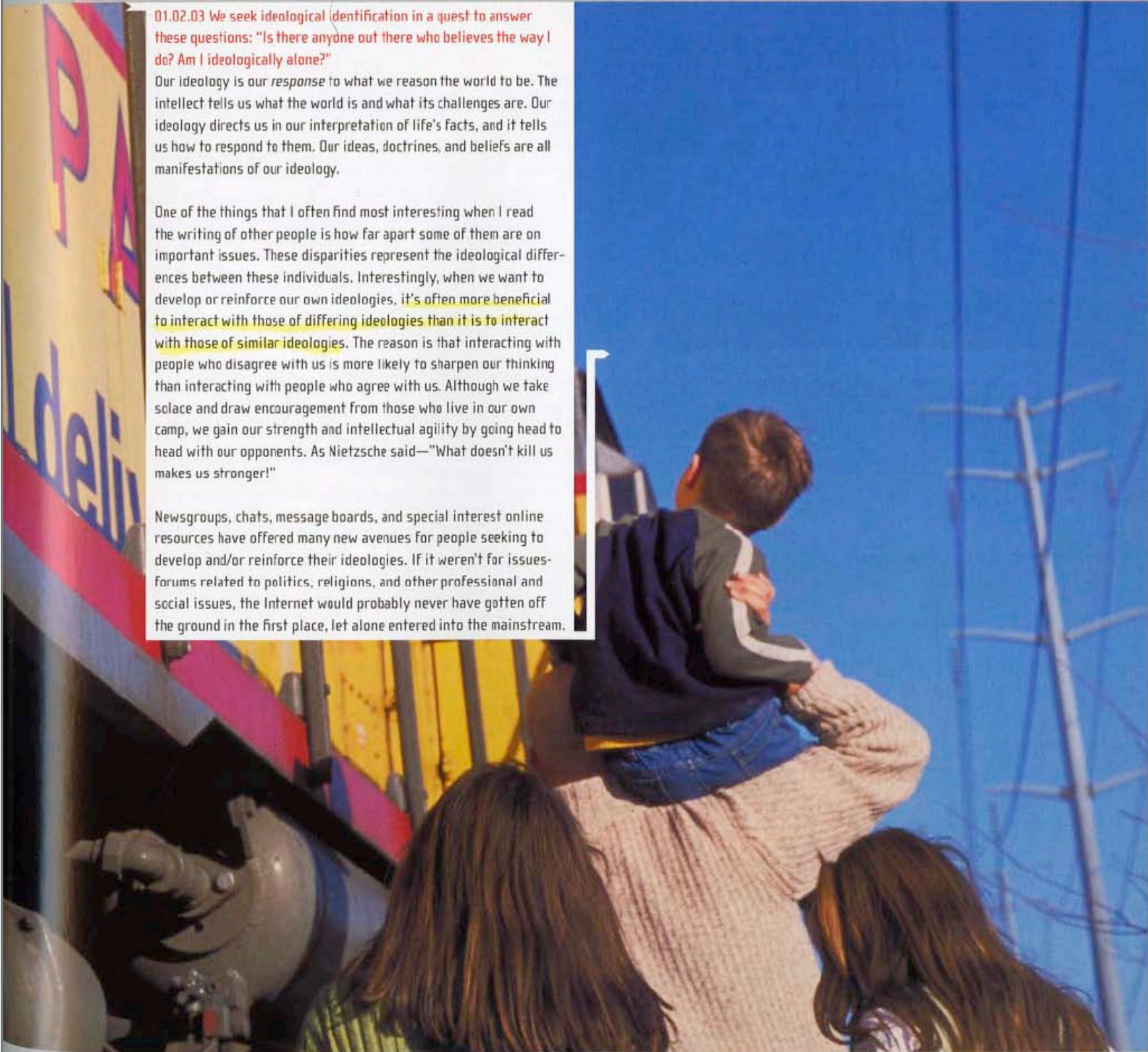
The Web has given people the opportunity to dig deep into their thoughts and interests at any time, any place, and in an almost limitless fashion—and this within the safe confines of anonymity, which the Web affords them. Even a very young person—and this most certainly can be a danger—can take the initiative to learn about advanced topics in a self-directed and self-paced manner. Those people who learn to take advantage of these unlimited opportunities gain exposure to some of the greatest thinking on any subject.

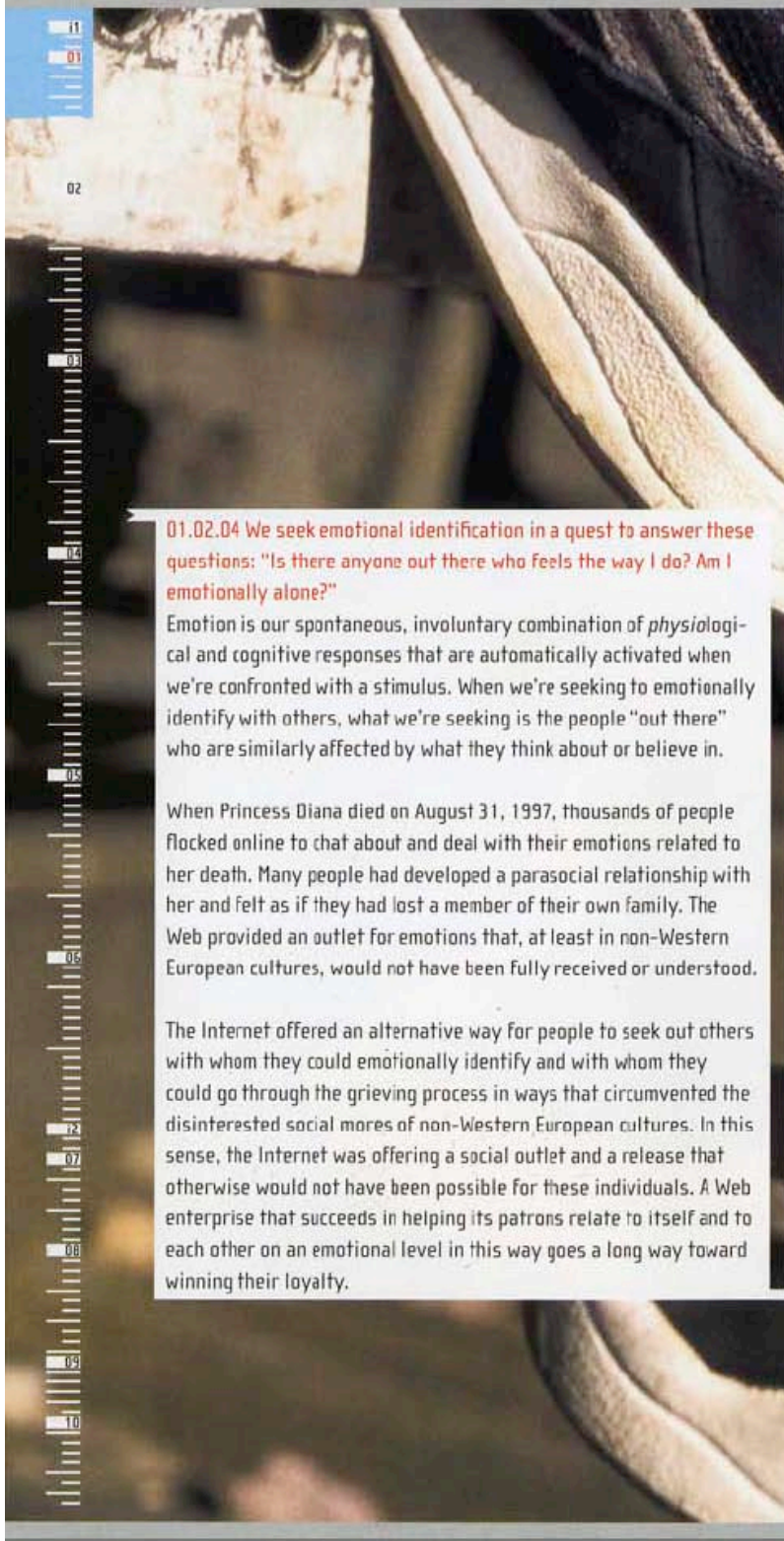
01.02.03 We seek ideological identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who believes the way I do? Am I ideologically alone?"

Our ideology is our *response* to what we reason the world to be. The intellect tells us what the world is and what its challenges are. Our ideology directs us in our interpretation of life's facts, and it tells us how to respond to them. Our ideas, doctrines, and beliefs are all manifestations of our ideology.

One of the things that I often find most interesting when I read the writing of other people is how far apart some of them are on important issues. These disparities represent the ideological differences between these individuals. Interestingly, when we want to develop or reinforce our own ideologies, it's often more beneficial to interact with those of differing ideologies than it is to interact with those of similar ideologies. The reason is that interacting with people who disagree with us is more likely to sharpen our thinking than interacting with people who agree with us. Although we take solace and draw encouragement from those who live in our own camp, we gain our strength and intellectual agility by going head to head with our opponents. As Nietzsche said—"What doesn't kill us makes us stronger!"

Newsgroups, chats, message boards, and special interest online resources have offered many new avenues for people seeking to develop and/or reinforce their ideologies. If it weren't for issues-forums related to politics, religions, and other professional and social issues, the Internet would probably never have gotten off the ground in the first place, let alone entered into the mainstream.





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**01.02.04 We seek emotional identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who feels the way I do? Am I emotionally alone?"**

Emotion is our spontaneous, involuntary combination of *physiological* and cognitive responses that are automatically activated when we're confronted with a stimulus. When we're seeking to emotionally identify with others, what we're seeking is the people "out there" who are similarly affected by what they think about or believe in.

When Princess Diana died on August 31, 1997, thousands of people flocked online to chat about and deal with their emotions related to her death. Many people had developed a parasocial relationship with her and felt as if they had lost a member of their own family. The Web provided an outlet for emotions that, at least in non-Western European cultures, would not have been fully received or understood.

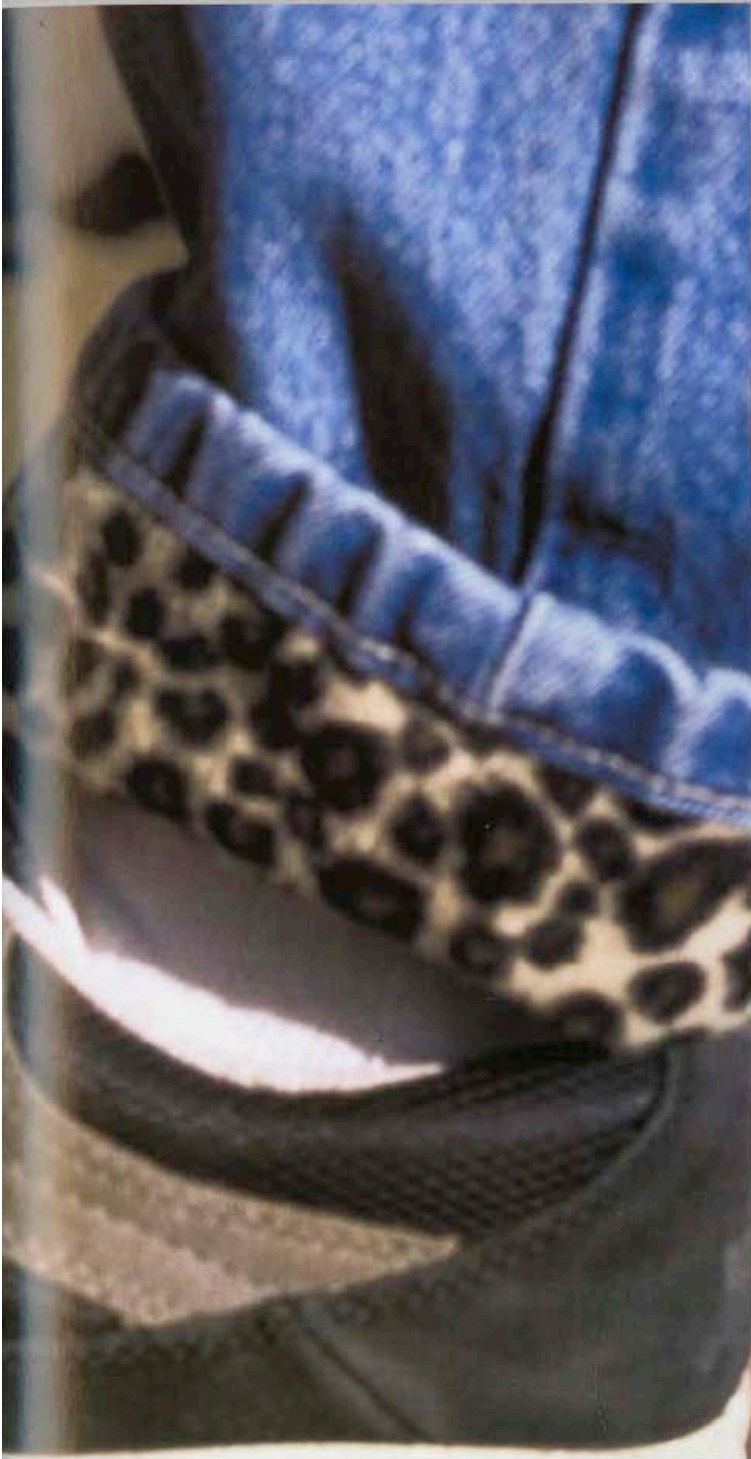
The Internet offered an alternative way for people to seek out others with whom they could emotionally identify and with whom they could go through the grieving process in ways that circumvented the disinterested social mores of non-Western European cultures. In this sense, the Internet was offering a social outlet and a release that otherwise would not have been possible for these individuals. A Web enterprise that succeeds in helping its patrons relate to itself and to each other on an emotional level in this way goes a long way toward winning their loyalty.

**01.02.05 We seek social interaction and acceptance in a quest to answer this question: "How will the world embrace my intellectual, ideological, and emotional uniqueness?"**

We all seek acceptance. Acceptance occurs as a result of being embraced by those with whom we identify. People don't generally care if someone outside their group doesn't care for them, but if the people inside their group don't care for them, this becomes a really big problem. This is further complicated by a dynamic known as *group-think*.

Group-think is the process by which a group of people come to a common equilibrium that tends to represent a moderate overall averaging of opinions among its members. The problem is that the outliers of the group—those who don't fit within the norm—can often feel unable to express their true feelings for fear of social rejection and isolation. Not surprisingly, we all have a sense of being on the outside of the norm in some area of our lives. These are the areas that we are most likely to repress our feelings in. The need to release these feelings is something that applies to everybody.

One of the motivations that people have in going online is to find opportunities where they can identify with others while at the same time maintain their own sense of identity. Specifically, because of the inherent anonymity of the Internet, people are willing to take more risks in terms of expressing their true inner feelings within the membership of an online community. The cost of social faux pas seems low enough to the average person that they're willing to accept social failure more often than in "real life." What's often gained in the online community is a sense of social interaction and acceptance that's unmatched in unmediated social equivalents.



### 01.03 People Go Online for Emotional Reasons

When a person's mind opens to an experience, it's like a floodgate opens—a river of meaning begins to flow into the mind. This meaning appeals not only to our cognitive sensibilities (how we think about things) but also to our emotional sensibilities (how we *feel* about things). In *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, Dr. Richard Harris describes emotion:

"There are two components of emotion, the physiological, and the cognitive. When we are aroused, there are certain changes in our bodies, such as increased heart rate, sweating, and changes in electrodermal [skin] measures. We also *think* about our feelings and attribute causes and interpretations to them. The emotions we feel are a product of both our bodily state and our cognitive appraisal of that state."



01.03.01 It's impossible to design effective Web experiences without taking human emotion into consideration.

Emotion is a big part of who we are and how we interpret the world around us. If an organization makes an online resource easy to navigate, an individual *might* have a good experience. If an organization makes their Web enterprise easy to relate to, however, the way is cleared for an individual to have an even greater experience because he or she is able to participate emotionally with the Web enterprise. Dr. Harris continues:

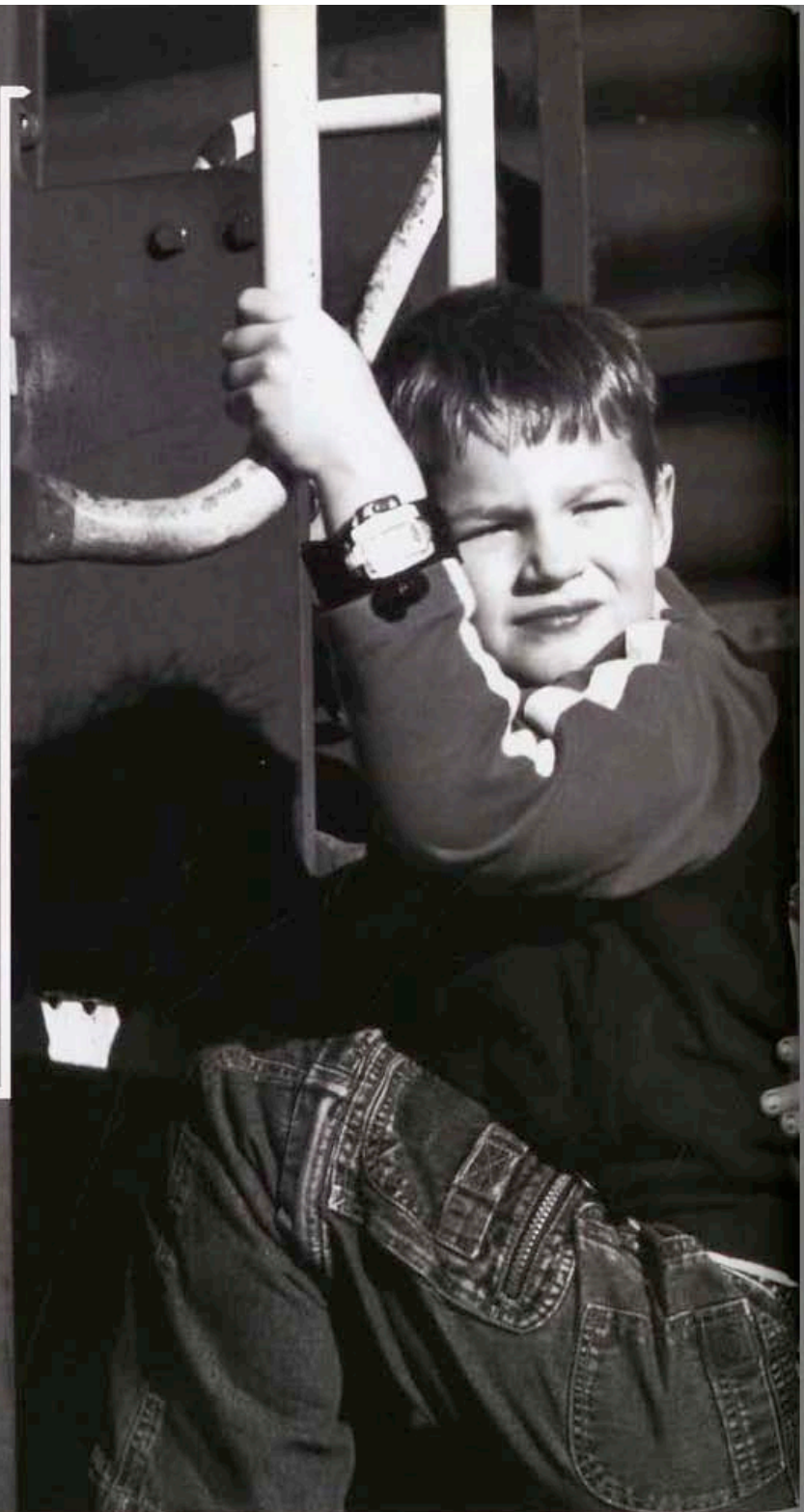
"Emotions are an integral part of the appreciation of media. [...] What we feel while watching or listening is a central part of the whole [experience]. If the emotional aspect is absent, we miss an important dimension of the experience."

In *The Media Equation*, Reeves and Nass state:

"Media have evolved to capitalize on fundamental human responses to them. [...] By trial and error, people who design media are gradually discovering the intricacies of how media work [on the human psyche.]"

It's inevitable that Web enterprises will come to embrace emotional design sensibilities such as those that have evolved in television and in other media industries. In the case of the Web, however, it shouldn't have to come through as much "trial and error" as has been the case with traditional media. There are well-established psychological principles in television, radio, and print mediums that, according to Dr. Richard Harris, "apply equally well to all media." Dr. Harris concludes:

"Our relationship with the media is [...] profound. [This] is precisely because it meets some of our deepest psychological needs and contributes naturally to our ongoing psychological development."





#### 01.03.02 The Web is a vehicle for emotional fulfillment.

The Web *can* help us complete tasks more efficiently, but what is perhaps of even *greater* significance is that it can make us feel more complete emotionally. We look to the Web to help us find this emotional completion in many ways:

- > We're empty and seek fulfillment.
- > We're overburdened and seek enjoyment.
- > We're under stimulated and seek intensity.
- > We're underwhelmed with our own lives and seek catharsis.
- > We feel ordinary and seek to experience the emotions of a life that's more dramatic.

#### 01.03.03 We seek to fill an emotional void on the Web.

All people who go online are seeking the same thing—every single one of us. Perhaps you're thinking, "That's not true! With all the possibilities on the Web, how can we possibly know what an individual person is seeking?" It's true that there are variations in the primary needs, but there's a commonality in the secondary need.

All people seeking a restaurant to spend an evening at, for example, are seeking the same secondary fulfillment. They may *feel like* eating steak, or they may be *in the mood for* good conversation—two very tangible and distinguishable desires. They do, none-the-less, have the same secondary desire—the emotional fulfillment that accompanies the process of satisfying these primary needs. Although many Web enterprises may represent restaurants that offer the same tangible opportunities for consumptive or social fulfillment—which are primary—the ones that speak to the "feel like" and "in the mood for" components of the need will generate the greatest response.

The reason is that people go online to find more than mere tangible items like information about places that serve great steak or that provide environments conducive to good conversation. They go online to build emotional confidence that the choices that they're making will lead to the fulfillment that they believe these tangible choices will bring them. It's not merely a practical hunger that they're trying to satisfy but an emotional hunger as well. They wonder, "If I choose this restaurant, will I have a good time?"

When considering Web experience design, it's the quality of our effort to identify, amplify, and satisfy these emotional hungers that will ultimately lead people to choose our Web enterprises in the search to fill their primary needs.

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#### 01.03.04 We seek enjoyment on the Web.

These days, life is very stressful. We work our minds as hard in the information age as our forefathers worked their bodies in the industrial age. Our brains are very active analyzing, experimenting, problem solving, and reflecting (trying to make sense of things) all day long. It's important to understand that, although our computers are great "business tools," when we go online our computers play more than just a business role. They suddenly become windows by which we travel through time and space to take in the experiences that the universe has to offer.

Although we may have practical tasks to perform, there's a part of us that wants to transform these tasks into opportunities to have fun. We want to find, tap into, and pursue interests that are more than just practical, even if they are, well—practical. When we talk about the "entertainment value" of an online resource, we're talking about the degree to which a Web enterprise makes routine operations rise above the level of the mundane—even if the *purpose* of the Web enterprise is not necessarily to entertain.

#### 01.03.05



#### 01.03.05 We seek intensity on the Web.

How much we enjoy a Web experience depends on the *degree* to which we find it arousing. Is it just "good," or is it "really, really good?" Is it merely "bad," or is it "terrible"? Reeves and Nass use the word "**valence**" to refer to the judgment we make about something being either good or bad. "**Arousal**" is used to indicate the level of intensity that we attribute to the valence. They state: "Valence and arousal are essentially biological." Taken together, they're the "two basic dimensions of emotion." Reeves and Nass offer these examples:

"Flowers, a cute baby, and erotica all have positive *valence*, but they have distinctly different levels of *arousal*: Erotica ranks highest and flowers, lowest. Similarly, a funeral procession and mutilated bodies are both negative, but only [mutilated bodies] will produce significant arousal.

"As things get arousing, they also are more likely to be either good or bad. **Neutrality, it turns out, is not a big part of excitement.** It is also difficult to find material that is extremely good or bad and totally un-arousing—it's hard to be blasé about highly valenced material."

Reeves and Nass have done an exceptional job explaining *how* we get excited. What's even more significant is their reason for *why* getting people excited is important. When we get excited about an experience we have, we pay closer attention and tend to remember the details of that experience more than we would if the experience had been blasé. In a nutshell, **excitement can be used as an effective memory aid.** Isn't this one of the chief aims of any online marketing or communications initiative—to make a message as memorable as possible? As it turns out, **designing our online resource to be emotionally engaging isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.** Of course, people in sales and advertising have known this for many years, as Reeves and Nass plainly state in their book:

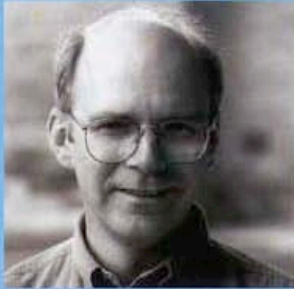
"The basis for the success of websites, in addition to their usability and efficiency, is often the potential to arouse. This may require changes in the ways that websites are evaluated."

This is something that both usability and experience design specialists need to understand.



# SPOTLIGHT ON:

## DR. BYRON REEVES



Dr. Byron Reeves, a professor in the Department of Communications who conducts psychological studies at Stanford University, is one of the most frequently quoted authorities regarding the psychological effects that various media have on people. Together with collaborating researcher Dr. Clifford Nass (also of Stanford), he wrote *The Media Equation*, which documents their extensive scientific studies.

Their book has provided some of the most intriguing revelations regarding human-computer interaction published to date. Their studies have ranged from gauging people's sense of social connection through media, to measuring how their level of enjoyment influences long-term memory. The following are his answers to some questions I posed based upon the ideas presented in this chapter:

**Lenker:** How is the Web's role growing in the way people are forming their social, emotional, and intellectual identities?

**Reeves:** The most important development since the Web's inception is the fact that it is now able to carry symbol systems that are capable of influencing social and emotional responses. Now that bandwidth limitations are not so constrained, the utilization of multimedia elements, rather than mere words alone, is having a significant effect on people's ability to find emotional and social significance online.

**Lenker:** Why are people so interested in interacting with Web media?

**Reeves:** Shopping, for example, is inherently a social experience. More than mere economic transactions, it involves social transactions. The cues that *people* add to a transaction are tremendous. When we use Web media to introduce a greater manifestation of these very human social cues, people find more enjoyment in and put more confidence in the online resources.

**Lenker:** What will contribute the most to making Web enterprises of the future more successful than those of the late 1990s?

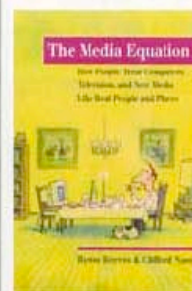
**Reeves:** I actually think that it won't so much be a matter of making interfaces better, although that in itself is important, but it will be a matter of making content more effective for people.

**Lenker:** How do you respond to critics who say that trying to make online resources behave socially and emotionally will always result in experiences that are bogged down in excessive dialogue?

**Reeves:** The thing that these critics don't realize is that just because social and emotional cues are incorporated in a virtual interaction with an online resource, that doesn't mean that these cues need to be intrusive. These critics are in reality probably reacting to examples they've seen where experience designers try to make their Web enterprises social in an excessive or inappropriate way. Trying to "yuk it up" too much, or being a little too clever with dialogue, are examples of this. Being successful at incorporating social cues isn't about doing *everything* that can be done, but doing what's appropriate. This can be measured through researching feedback from representatives from the target population.

The key to success is in how we design and program these systems to behave. We shouldn't design them to "run off at the mouth." We want to be as appropriate in an interaction as would be expected in real life. The point is that when we decide that we're going to attend to social features, what we're doing is deciding to have more of a tangible presence for the purpose of gaining more social control over people's impression. Just as in real life, this is something that must be worked at and refined over time.

**Lenker:** Can an online resource still succeed if social cues [...]



Read the entire interview online at:

<http://www.trainofthoughts.com>

Learn more about Dr. Byron Reeves at:

<http://www.stanford.edu/%?Ereeves/>

Buy *The Media Equation* today at:

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#### 01.03.06 We seek catharsis on the Web.

It's important to understand that one major way people seek emotional satisfaction when they go online is through a notion taken from psychodynamic theory known as *catharsis*.

Catharsis is the emotional release of tension that we feel when we watch others (in media or otherwise) experience or express something that we ourselves are inhibited from feeling or expressing in real life. Closely associated with this notion is the notion of *vicarious* release, whereby we live out our own fantasies through the lives of others. We live vicariously through those we know; like our children, for example, when we push them in sports to achieve goals that we ourselves were not able to achieve. We can also live vicariously through fictionalized characters such as those in fantasy role-playing games such as EverQuest. In both cases, we have the opportunity to experience catharsis if the stimulus that we're experiencing is sufficient to draw our minds into the illusion and trap us there. Richard Harris writes in *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*:


"Many emotions are enjoyable to experience vicariously. Many TV sitcoms show people in embarrassing situations that are really only funny when happening to someone else. TV characters may do things we would like to do but have moral or ethical proscriptions against."

#### 01.03.07 We seek drama on the Web.

Sigmund Freud said, "We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things." What Freud is saying is that for people to get excited about something, it has to rise above the drone of everyday life.

For most people, life seems typical, drab, and sometimes downright boring. The cure for this sense of the mundane is *drama*. The mechanism that is the vehicle for the range of emotions that we experience through catharsis is known as *dramatization*. We're fascinated by the intrigues of the seedier side of life—thus the popularity of romance fiction and reality entertainment. Often people go online to add a more interactive dimension to the drama they experience through television or films. The Web offers organizations the ability to allow people to choose the aspects of a storyline that they want to dramatize. Krome Barratt writes in *Logic & Design in Art, Science & Mathematics*:

"Dramatization is the process of making an experience more exciting, vivid, emotionally stirring, and memorable. [Dramatization is] achieved by emphasizing some aspect of an experience at the expense of others. Selection, abstraction and hierarchy are of its essence, and these to be reordered, grouped and juxtaposed to maximum effect. [...] Drama is a meeting and rivalry of human antithesis. In counterpoint, two contrasting themes which share a common space-time scale discuss, compete, debate, argue, fight for their point of view."



**01.03.08 Sterilizing Web experiences is a seriously flawed experience design strategy.**

If the only way people can experience intense enjoyment is through rising above the drone of everyday life, how can it make sense to ask Web enterprises to standardize on a design status quo that strips out every component that can lead to emotional fulfillment?

When we sterilize the material that our Web enterprises present, it puts MORE burdens on the people interacting with them, not fewer. Is this a practical approach to designing Web experiences? Hardly. As I mentioned in 01.01.03, it's actually quite difficult to pay attention to things that bore us to death! People want more out of their consumptive, social, and emotional exploration on the Web than merely getting it over with. **They want to find satisfaction throughout the experience, not merely as a result of the experience.** This notion seems so intuitive; how has our industry gotten so far off track?

## 01.04 Grappling with Our Misdirection

The bottom line in developing effective Web experiences is that practical considerations are just *one* of the several categories of considerations that must be employed in the design of online resources that properly address a visitor's consumptive, social, and emotional needs. Sure, we want people to know where to type in their credit card numbers when transacting with our Web enterprises. I don't argue points such as this. But before they're going to care about where to enter in their credit card numbers, we're going to have to somehow help them care about what it is we're trying to sell them! In light of this, why is it that many usability consultants give preferential and sometimes *exclusive* consideration to the practical aspects of experience design and then condemn those of us who attempt to design more holistic experiences?

One explanation lies in the word *attempt*. Historically, most who have attempted to go beyond mere practicality with Web experience design have failed. The fact is that amateurs design most online resources, and we're ALL amateurs when we start. The industry has only been viable since about 1995, for heaven's sake! Many organizations simply haven't attained enough insight to do a proper job of designing effective Web experiences yet. Many, in fact, have innocently or naively created online resources that appeal to their own, unrefined sense of aesthetics. As a result, the experiences they design use media and interactivity inappropriately to emphasize the wrong types of things.

The practical result is that their online resources are hard to navigate, take forever to download, and in the end haven't succeeded in using media or interactivity to add much value to a person's overall experience. We've all been guilty of this, but this is no time to give up on our ideals. It's time to apply ourselves as serious students of the arts and sciences whose disciplines we employ in our pursuit of crafting appropriate, elegant, and effective Web-based interactive multimedia. We can do better than we have done in the past. We've learned and are learning from our mistakes. The purpose of this book is to aid in that learning process. :-)

**01.04.01** Our industry will evolve just like every other industry has before us—through the natural selection of a free-market economy.

Do bad television shows, commercials, films, or video games ever get produced? The answer is yes—but they don't last long because they prove to be ineffective. More successful efforts rise to the top and extinguish the others. And although certain projects will always stand out as both positive and negative examples, eventually all efforts will settle into an overall equilibrium where quality is more homogenized. It will be the same with Web enterprises. Let's just make sure that that homogenized equilibrium isn't as boring as usability standards are currently constraining it to be.

In light of this, it seems inappropriate for usability consultants to tell designers to stop using rich media and interactivity based on the fact that others have used it and have failed. Can you imagine where the entertainment industry would be if, for example, sci-fi movies were never allowed to evolve into a legitimate art form simply because some early attempts weren't very convincing?

No; usability consultants shouldn't be pressuring Web enterprises to quit trying to make online experiences more dynamic, engaging, and therefore more meaningful. Instead, these experts should instead be drawing upon their own experience with and wisdom regarding the studies of perception, cognition, emotion, persuasion, and the philosophy of aesthetics (if any) to show Web enterprises how to properly employ the more elegant aspects of experience design.

The laws of natural selection do apply to the Web just as they do to real life; and the fact is that natural selection favors the strong and the beautiful. The Web enterprises that see it this way will be the ones that will not only survive, but thrive.

01.04.02 We must stay on the road of progress and out of the ditches of mediocrity.

My gripe with those who condemn the use of sophisticated media and interactivity on the Web is that they offer nothing better than a fleshless skeleton as an alternative. They're in effect pressuring the industry to exchange one set of mediocrity for another—to drive from the ditch on one side of the road right smack-dab into the other!

The Web development world is oversaturated with consultants who are experts at efficiently *getting* people to relevant content but are amateurs at helping people either relate to or make sense out of that content. Why is this? For every usability expert advocating sterile, stifling Web experience design, there are at least as many credible design and interactivity experts advocating experiences that reach deeper inside people. It's an injustice on the part of usability experts when they group design and interactivity experts with the amateur crowd and blanketly condemn all attempts to employ high-concept media or sophisticated interactivity.

We can do better than we have done—and we will. Not because we *limit* the scope of our work, but because we *refine* the quality of our understanding. We must therefore do the hard work that's necessary to hone our abilities to represent our ideas on the Web with passion, meaning, elegance, and clarity.

01.04.03 We must qualify our experience design recommendations with appropriate analysis.

To put it simply, good design is good design no matter what it consists of—be it simple or elaborate. The same can be said for bad design. But what makes a design good versus bad? What are the criteria? The purpose of this book is to explore these questions.

In order to judge the quality or value of an experience design, we must be at least somewhat familiar with the various disciplines that are employed to formulate that design. In our exploration of these disciplines, it's important that we keep an open mind. The important thing to remember is that there's no one solution to every problem. Our solutions should be *situationally appropriate*.

Is HTML text better than rendered-graphic text? Are full-color animated images preferable to monochromatic stick figures? The answer is—it depends on the situation. What's the purpose of the online resource? Who are the primary audience sets and subsets? What's the nature of the content? How engaging is the content on its own? How difficult is the subject for the average person to comprehend?

The answers to these types of questions have a lot to do not only with determining how content elements relate to one another, but also with how the content chunks themselves are put together.

01.04.04 As Dr. Donald Norman says, humans are 'active, creative, social beings.'

Dr. Donald Norman of the Nielsen/Norman Group offers some good insights in his book, *Things That Make Us Smart*, that should give other usability consultants some food for thought:

"We humans are thinking, interpreting creatures. The mind tends to seek explanations, to interpret, to make suggestions. We are active, creative, social beings. We seek interaction with others. All of these natural tendencies are thwarted by the efforts of the engineering approach to efficiency. The danger is that things that cannot be measured play no role in scientific work and are judged to be of little importance."—Chapter One

"If we are to be able to use [digital media] easily and efficiently, the designers have to provide us with assistance, with an understandable, coherent structure. Design should be like telling a story. The design team should start by considering the task that the artifact is intended to serve and the people who will use it. To accomplish this, the design team must include expertise in human cognition, in social interaction, in the task that is to be supported, and in the technologies that will be used."—Chapter Four

"It is also the social side of technology that is least well supported. After all, the technologists are not social scientists or humanists; they are researchers and engineers. They can be excused for not understanding the social side of their handiwork. However, they [can't] be excused for not acknowledging their own lack of understanding and having some social experts join their team."—Chapter Eight

## 01.05 Summary

Yes—people *use* online resources, but we're more than mere "users" and are motivated by more than mere practical considerations. Far from it. As people, we have very complicated and interrelated, consumptive, social, and emotional motivations which we desire to somehow satisfy *through* more holistic online experiences.

- > What do these motivations lead us to desire?
- > How can we satisfy these desires through Web experience design?
- > What are the broader cognitive, social, and emotional principles that we must consider?

Web enterprises must begin to grapple with and answer questions like these if they're ever to pave *experiential pathways* that are not only easy to follow but also are natural, meaningful, and enjoyable for people to journey along in pursuit of their goals.

