

Customize to Simplify, Reduce Costs, and Be More Effective: Turn Ruby Slippers into Traveling Shoes

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy flies in her family home propelled by a tornado until she arrives in the magical land of Oz. But Dorothy doesn't want to be in Oz; she wants to get back to Kansas. When Dorothy's house lands, the Wicked Witch of the East is crushed. The witch disappears, leaving only her ruby slippers. Glenda, the good witch, tells Dorothy to wear the ruby slippers and keep them safe. Near the end of the story, Glenda tells Dorothy that she can go back to Kansas anytime she wants. All Dorothy has to do is to click her ruby slippered heels together. If Glenda had customized her advice to provide Dorothy with that simple solution sooner, Dorothy would have been reunited with her family earlier in the story. In the same way, many steps can be turned into simpler, but higher potential, operations through customization. Here's an example: Enormous numbers of entrepreneurs want to make their fortune on the Internet. Most believe that they cannot hope to succeed without developing a list of people who are interested in receiving their offerings. With great effort and skill, such entrepreneurs succeed in adding e-mail addresses to their lists. What's the result of all this solicitation? E-mail recipients' accounts are clogged with more and more solicitations, the modern version of direct mail offerings from magazine publishers whose offerings you once subscribed to. What do most e-mail users really want? They would like to receive only offers and information that are relevant and interesting to them. Most won't send an "unsubscribe me" e-mail though; that's too much trouble. It's simpler and easier to just change e-mail addresses every so often and leave the old address's junk e-mails behind. There's an opportunity here for some smart Internet entrepreneur: Provide a service to attract offers and information that are more relevant to people while screening out ones that are less relevant. Presumably this service would work by developing a more complete profile of what the customer is and isn't interested in and updating that information fairly frequently through interaction with the customer. This profiling has to be done, of course, in a way that limits the time and effort the customer has to make. Spam filters are used to partially fulfill this purpose now, but you usually find yourself needing to review hundreds of such junk e-mails in the file of suspected spam to be sure you don't miss one communication that you wanted to receive. Through providing this simplifying innovation, the customer doesn't have to fill out forms to register for various things, spends less time deleting unwanted material, and gains access to more relevant and interesting material. The key will be for the customer to create a document that's somewhat like the common admission application that many colleges require. Fill the common college application out once, and applications for most schools are greatly expedited while the amount of work is decreased by 50 to 80 percent. A key element for successful customizing is to provide the beneficiary, customer, or user with the outcome that's desired without needing to spell what is wanted in very much detail. This objective requires simplifying the choices. Henry Ford didn't expect his customers to pick out each part for their cars and trucks. Make it simple for people to figure out what they want and order that result, and you will sell more. You shouldn't require your beneficiaries, customers or users to get into such details either . . . unless, of course, they crave that choice. So be sure that you allow people to order choices that many people want. Some hotels and restaurants will tell the host or hostess considering a private function room that table service for a large party is only available in the main dining room. If the host or hostess doesn't want the meal or event to be in the main dining room but wants table service, chances are the event will be held elsewhere. Don't let that missed opportunity happen your business!

About the Author

Donald Mitchell is an author of seven books including *Adventures of an Optimist*, *The 2,000 Percent Squared Solution*, *The 2,000 Percent Solution*, *The 2,000 Percent Solution Workbook*, *The Irresistible Growth Enterprise*, and *The Ultimate Competitive Advantage*. Read about creating [breakthroughs through 2,000 percent solutions and receive tips by e-mail](http://www.2000percentsolution.com) by registering for free at <http://www.2000percentsolution.com> .

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