

How to Improve Your Website With Behavioral Design

By DJ Sprague

Introduction

In the highly competitive world of ecommerce, with low conversion rates, averaging about 2.3% in the USA, understanding user behavior and influencing decision-making is crucial for success. This is where behavioral design emerges as a powerful tool.

By combining insights from psychology, neuroscience, and UX design, [BJ Fogg's](#) behavioral design principles enable ecommerce businesses to intentionally shape user behavior, optimize the user experience, and drive conversions.

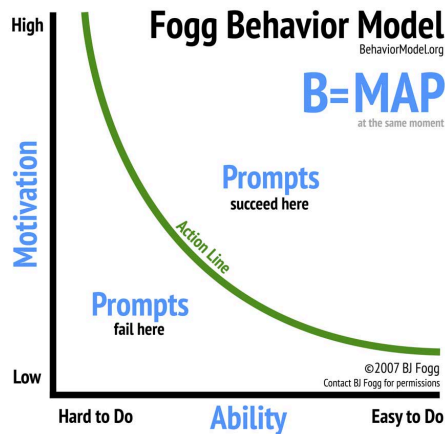
In this article, we will explore these principles and their effective use cases in ecommerce, along with specific examples of how you can leverage these basic human biases and instincts to help your business thrive in a competitive online marketplace.

What is Behavioral Design?

[Behavioral design](#), also known as behavioral architecture or behavioral economics, focuses on uncovering the psychological factors that influence human perception and decision-making. It acknowledges that people are not purely rational beings but are influenced by [cognitive biases](#), [heuristics](#), and [social factors](#). By understanding and leveraging these influences, behavioral design aims to guide users toward desired behaviors and actions.

What are the Guiding Principles?

BJ Fogg is a Behavior Scientist at Stanford University who studies why people do the things they do. His behavior model, known as "B=MAP," breaks a given behavior into its component variables. Where "B" stands for Behavior, these behavior-influencing variables are "M" for Motivation, "A" for Ability, and "P" for Prompt. These 3 variables work together to facilitate or inhibit a given behavior for an individual.



The [Online Influence Institute](#) is highly renowned for its online behavioral design academy which teaches how to apply these concepts, and the principles taught by [Dr. Robert Cialdini](#) in his book “[Influence](#)”, to grow your business. They have designed an entire course curriculum, and an extremely informative book, and put together a massive database of case studies showing the efficacy and specific usages of the Fogg Behavior Model to influence consumer behavior.

We highly recommend participating in their course and reading their book as it has been invaluable in our growth as well as the development of our most successful products. You can find their content [here](#). So let’s break down just exactly what these 3 principles entail.

What is Motivation?

In the Fogg Behavior Model, [motivation](#) refers to the level of desire or willingness a person has to perform a specific behavior. It recognizes that motivation can fluctuate and is influenced by various factors, such as personal goals, emotions, and external incentives. In the context of the Fogg Behavior Model, motivation intersects with ability and triggers to determine whether a behavior will occur.

If motivation is low, even with sufficient ability and prompts, the behavior may not be performed. Therefore, understanding and addressing motivation is crucial in designing effective interventions to encourage desired behaviors. Motivation is one of the most difficult aspects of the Fogg Behavior Model to influence, however, it is possible.

Evidence-Backed Ideas for Influencing User Motivation

Social Proof

[Social Proof](#) (a.k.a. Herd Behavior) is one of the most influential principles in the behavioral design toolkit. People feel more comfortable and safe when they belong to a group, tribe, or community, and they generally prefer to follow what others are doing or buying, especially when it’s a new or unknown product or experience. When it’s clear that many people are using, and

enjoying the use of, your product or service people become more motivated to participate as well. This can come in many forms.

- [Reviews](#)
 - One of the most common and effective forms of social proof comes from reviews left by verified customers. When a customer is comparing products, reviews weigh heavily on their perception of that product's value, and reviews from verified customers even more so. The more reviews you have, the more powerful the persuasive power.
- [Social Proof Widgets](#)
 - One way of using widgets would be to show how many other people are viewing a specific product. This might say "300 people are also viewing this product." This communicates to the user that other people are also interested in the product, increasing the user's motivation to purchase the product.
 - Another way to use social proof to influence motivation is to show that several people have already purchased this product. This can be over a specific time frame, in a nearby location, or in the user's specified demographic or group of interest.
- Using User-Specific Social Proof
 - Social proof is especially effective when the user can identify with the group being used for the social proof. Whether this is a grouping by location, interest, or some self-identified attribute, your users will be more influenced by evidence that someone that they relate to enjoyed your product, as opposed to someone of an unspecified demographic or one that they don't see themselves as a part of.

Scarcity

[Scarcity](#) refers to the perception that something is limited or in short supply, which creates a sense of urgency and increased value for that item or opportunity. When people believe that something is scarce, they are more motivated to acquire it to avoid missing out (FOMO or Fear of Missing Out) or to gain a perceived advantage. Scarcity can influence behavior by triggering the fear of loss, competition, and the desire to possess something exclusive or rare. It can lead to increased demand, faster decision-making, and a higher likelihood of taking action to secure a scarce resource or opportunity. Below are some examples of how you can use scarcity to influence the motivation of your users.

- Limited supply
 - Showing the number of available units while someone is viewing your product can communicate that this product will not be available forever. This can increase the user's motivation as they may not be able to purchase the product later on
 - Bonus: This can also communicate social proof as it shows that the product has been purchased often enough to be in low stock.
- Uniqueness

- Displaying how your product is unique from competitors with language like “the only” or “exclusive” can show that the attributes of your product are scarce in the market they are shopping for.
- Limited Time
 - Showing a countdown on your website for a specific deal or shipping window can increase the level of urgency and therefore increase motivation for the user to purchase during this time window where they qualify for the deal or benefit offered.

Think about the chokehold that Black Friday has on American consumers. Why? Scarcity. The deals are “While supplies last, today only” showing limited supply and limited time, and they are only offered on Black Friday, which is a perfect example of a limited-time offer.

Perceived Value

Perceived value refers to the subjective evaluation an individual places on an object, service, or experience. When people perceive something as valuable or beneficial, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that align with obtaining or experiencing it. By highlighting and effectively communicating the value and benefits of a product or service, businesses can positively influence consumer behavior and increase the likelihood of desired actions, such as making a purchase or taking a specific course of action. Here are a few ways that you can leverage Perceived Value to increase conversion rates in your business.

- Ask your visitors to put in a small amount of effort
 - When someone has put in a small amount of effort for something, they are far more likely to complete whatever action this effort is tied to. Asking a user to configure a product or solve a puzzle to get to a deal or offer can increase the likelihood that they will follow through with whatever action you are wanting them to take.
 - Be careful not to make this too hard, or the ability to perform the actual desired action will decrease to a level that might turn the user away.
- Show your visitors the effort you put in
 - This can come in many forms; from surfacing a loading icon to show you are searching through your massive database for the best option for them, stating the number of production hours for a specific product, telling the story of how your business came to sell your product, etc. When a user sees that you have put in substantial effort, they are more likely to perceive your product as more valuable, and therefore be motivated to purchase it.

Trust Signals

In an online marketplace, one of the biggest hesitations for users is trust. Using [Trust Signals](#) can show a user that your business is reputable, trustworthy, and safe. This relieves the anxiety of shopping online and allows the user to navigate more with the subconscious [System 1](#) and less with the laborious and effortful System 2. This decrease in mental effort increases both the user’s motivation and ability to complete the desired behavior.

- Using Security seals and Social Proof
 - Showing that your website is secure is one of the most important factors in making sure your users feel they can trust you with their personal information. Using a reputable security seal can show the user that this website has been verified by a third party as safe and secure.
 - Showing well-known companies that trust or support your business is another way of using Social Proof to increase trust and confidence in your user base. See the [Shopper Approved home page](#) for a great example of how this can be used to instill trust in your website.

Ability

[Ability](#) refers to the ease or difficulty of performing a specific behavior. Ability encompasses the user's capability, resources, time, and effort required to complete the desired action. According to the model, behavior is more likely to occur when the required ability is high and obstacles or barriers are minimized. Designing for high ability involves simplifying tasks, reducing cognitive load, providing clear instructions, and ensuring that users have the necessary skills, tools, and support to perform the behavior successfully. Using tools such as the Jenga Technique, using Defaults, and Reversibility, you can increase the ability of your users to perform the desired behavior.

What are the Best Techniques for Increasing User Ability?

The Jenga Technique

The Jenga technique refers to a protocol for creating clear, concise, and readable verbiage for your website. The process involves taking any tagline, CTA label, or paragraph of text and removing words until the text has become as short, simple, and concise as possible, without losing precious clarity. This increases user ability by decreasing the perceived effort necessary to understand whatever text you are displaying.

Using Defaults to Influence User Behavior

When you have multiple options displayed, it is much easier for the user to decide if you select one of them by default. This can facilitate System 1 thinking as the user moves through a form or option set, decreasing effort for the user and increasing the likelihood of the desired option being chosen.

Communicating Reversibility to Ease User Anxiety

Reversibility refers to the communication of the ability to go back if the user does something that they would like to undo. This can be something like surfacing a lenient return policy on an item, a free trial option, a satisfaction-based money-back guarantee, or a back button on a multi-step form making it easy to return to a previous page to update details that may have been entered by accident.

All of these tools, if implemented effectively, can increase the user's perceived and actual ability to complete the behavior that is desired.

Prompt

[Prompt](#) refers to a cue or trigger that motivates a person to take a specific action. In the context of the Fogg Behavior Model, a prompt is an external stimulus that triggers a behavior when it intersects with a person's motivation and ability to perform that behavior. It can be in the form of direct instruction, a visual cue, a notification, or any other stimulus that prompts the desired action. The effectiveness of a prompt depends on its timing, relevance, and ability to capture the person's attention and motivate them to act. The prompt is the initiator, and as such, it is one of the most important components of the Fogg Behavior model.

What makes a Prompt Effective?

Affordance

[Affordance](#) refers to the perceived action possibilities or functionalities of an object or interface. It is a concept coined by psychologist James J. Gibson. Affordances are the characteristics or cues that suggest how an object or interface should be interacted with or used. On a website, affordance can be used by designing buttons that are clearly meant to be clicked. This would include the visual appearance and naming the desired behavior literally in the caption as well. Showing a button that is clearly a button with a caption that says click here, makes it very clear and decreases the amount of conscious thought necessary to complete the desired action.

Communicating the Desired Behavior Effectively

Many prompts come in the form of a Call-to-Action (CTA) button. These CTA buttons often have text on them, this text should be as literally descriptive as possible. This might mean replacing the text on a button from, "Discover the Benefits," to "Click Here." By stating the desired behavior literally you are alerting the user's System 1 thought to an easy and completable action. This makes the action more automatic and removes the necessity for the user to think as much.

Removing Competing Prompts

Competing prompts refer to situations where users are simultaneously exposed to multiple cues or triggers that prompt different behaviors. These prompts create a conflict in decision-making as individuals must choose between competing options. The effectiveness of competing prompts depends on factors such as the strength of each prompt, the individual's motivations and priorities, and the perceived value or consequences associated with each behavior. To increase the power of one specific prompt, you have to be careful with having too many competing prompts around it.

How Shopper Approved Uses Behavioral Design to Help You

Shopper Approved incorporates behavioral design principles to optimize the customer experience and drive conversions.

1. Ease of Use
 - a. Shopper Approved's platform is designed with a focus on simplicity and user-friendliness. It ensures a smooth and intuitive customer journey, making it easy for customers to provide reviews and ratings. By reducing friction and simplifying the process, Shopper Approved encourages higher participation rates and generates more valuable feedback.
2. Timely Review Requests
 - a. Shopper Approved utilizes strategic timing to request customer reviews. By sending review requests at specific touchpoints, such as after a purchase or when a customer has had a positive experience, Shopper Approved taps into the peak of customer satisfaction. This increases the likelihood of receiving positive reviews and testimonials, which can influence potential customers' decision-making process.
3. Social Proof and Influence
 - a. Shopper Approved understands the power of social proof in influencing consumer behavior. By displaying customer reviews, ratings, and testimonials prominently on websites, Shopper Approved leverages the principle of social proof to build trust and credibility. Seeing positive feedback from others can sway potential customers to make a purchase, boosting conversions.
4. Trust and Security
 - a. Behavioral design principles are employed to enhance trust and security within the Shopper Approved platform. Trust seals and badges are utilized to signal to customers that their information is secure and that the business is reputable. These visual cues alleviate concerns and build confidence, reducing barriers to conversion.
5. Personalization and Customization
 - a. Shopper Approved allows businesses to personalize their review request emails and widgets, tailoring the messaging and design to align with their brand and target audience. By customizing communication, a business can establish a stronger connection with customers, increasing the likelihood of engagement and conversions.

By integrating behavioral design principles into its platform and services, Shopper Approved aims to create an environment that engages customers, builds trust, and influences their behavior positively. This ultimately contributes to higher conversion rates and business growth for their customers. [Learn more](#) about how Shopper Approved can help your ecommerce business grow.

Conclusion

Behavioral Design is one of the most effective tools that can be leveraged to increase desired behavior on your website. Understanding the cognitive biases, mental heuristics, and subconscious protocols that people use to make split-second decisions can drive up conversion rates, and in turn, help grow your online business. [Learn more about how Shopper Approved can help you manage your online presence and increase conversions through Behavioral Design principles.](#)