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## **Four Design Tips for Increasing Website Return on Investment**

When designers look to tackle a new website or refurbish an old one, they are doomed to lackluster results and underperformance - that is, unless they follow these four guidelines. Forrester Research ([www.forrester.com](http://www.forrester.com)), in a recent report examining the best website design firms, finds that in order to improve ROI, companies must:

\* Focus on understanding users. The key here, Forrester says, is creating and implementing customer personas to guide the design effort. The use of personas helps companies focus on serving the most important goals of their most important customers. The result is shorter design cycles and improved site quality.

\* Adopt a scenario-based methodology. Forrester says that customers and prospects arrive at sites with goals in mind. By crafting clear paths to content and function that satisfy those goals, companies quickly see their ROI increase. The key here, Forrester says, is to design, build, and test sites for the actual user scenarios they must support. How long does it take to get from making a buying decision to finishing up an actual purchase? The best sites make key tasks easy and intuitive to accomplish.

\* Cultivate design smarts across the whole team. Forrester says that everyone involved in the design process - from HTML coders all the way up to the CEO or executive champion - should know the site's target users and their most critical goals. Even lower-level team members, including stakeholders from IT and marketing, should be able to draw lines from business goals (like generating qualified leads) to corresponding user goals (like configuring the right product and then finding a dealer who sells it). Project managers must be able to defend content, navigation, and presentation decisions based on how well they support user scenarios.

\* Exercise project discipline. When looking to design or retool an existing site, focus on the flaws with the highest impact on the customer, and then test and optimize the fixes. Make sure any change you make is focused on your customers, and continually revisit those changes to ensure they support the site's overall goals.