Knowing more about privacy makes users share less with Facebook and Google

A SimplicityLab™ Consumer Research Survey

About the survey

In a March 2012 SimplicityLab™ survey[1] of 403 respondents, we examined how well users understand the implications of Google and Facebook privacy policies. We evaluated the effectiveness of the policies on two dimensions—comprehension and perception.

The *Comprehension Index* measures the user's ability to understand factual information conveyed in the communication.

The *Perception Index* measures the user's response to the communication based on five pillars:

- **Clarity**—Easy to understand, jargon-free, well-organized, intuitive
- **Credibility**—Accurate, balanced, direct, transparent, trustworthy
- **Relevance**—Personalized, insightful, contemporary
- **Usefulness**—Comprehensive, helpful, informational and educational, easy to use and navigate, saves time
- **Engagement**—Supports action, decision making and compliance, respects the user and builds a relationship, aligns with the organization's brand promise

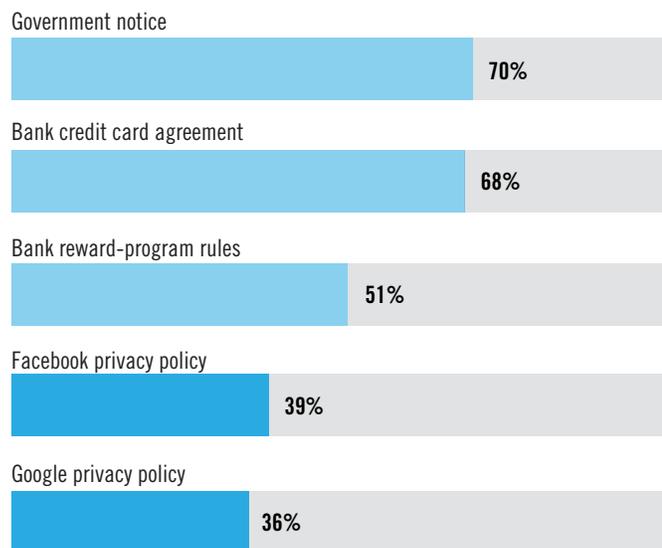[1]*Link to Siegel+Gale study: siegelgale.com/privacy*

What we found

Users understand banks and government agencies better than Facebook and Google

Privacy policies generally describe what information is collected, how it's collected, stored and shared, and how a person might manage such activities (by opting in or out, if possible). Facebook and Google privacy policies don't fully explain these topics in a way users can understand.

When we use SimplicityLab to test documents, we consider a score of 80 out of 100 to indicate adequate comprehension of a topic. Overall comprehension scores for Facebook and Google users were less than half that—39 and 36, respectively. Responses to individual comprehension questions rarely rose above 50 for both documents.

How comprehension of Facebook and Google privacy policies compares to complex documents from other organizations

Government notice

70%

Bank credit card agreement

68%

Bank reward-program rules

51%

Facebook privacy policy

39%

Google privacy policy

36%

Percentage of correct answers for each type of document

What users don't know jeopardizes privacy online

Only one question scored high on comprehension. When asked about how to limit the visibility of public information on Facebook, 83% of those surveyed correctly selected "Adjust my privacy settings," but only 37% selected "Customize my audience with the sharing icon each time I post content," which is also a correct answer.

Users surveyed don't understand which information is public:

- 23% understood that their Google profile is visible to anyone online.
- 30% understood that their Facebook username is always publicly available, regardless of privacy settings.
- 59% knew that information they choose to make public could be associated with them outside of Facebook.

Users surveyed don't understand how Facebook and Google track and store their information and activity:

- More than 80% didn't understand that even if you delete your Facebook account, information is scrubbed of anything personally identifiable, but remains on Facebook servers permanently.
- Only 38% understood that Google connects search activity to a user's IP address whether or not they sign into a Google account.
- More than half of Google users interviewed were not aware that the privacy policy applied to their use of Google Talk, Google Maps, YouTube and Blogger.

Users don't understand how their information is shared and with whom:

- Less than 40% of Facebook users knew how an Application Programming Interface (API) can be used to access and view their public information.
- While 67% understood that Google shares non-personally identifiable information with affiliates, few understood that the same information can also be shared with other companies and U.S. and foreign government agencies.

If they don't understand these components of a privacy policy, how could users even begin to execute the remaining, and possibly most important, portion of the policy—managing privacy? If users don't understand what is collected, stored and shared, how can they effectively control their privacy? They can't.

And this bothers the users surveyed.

What we found—continued

After a closer look at policies, users may second-guess Google's "don't be evil" mantra

We measured users' perceptions of Facebook and Google before and after they read the policies and answered comprehension questions.

For some, the survey was so eye-opening that they thanked us—a first in all the surveys we've conducted over the years. That gratitude aside, many users shared a considerable amount of frustration and discomfort, sometimes outrage, with how little they know about their privacy online and what little they can do to control it.

Facebook and Google users experience similar discomfort with how their information is shared with third parties and affiliates. But beyond that, Google users expressed much more discomfort than Facebook users with the amount of information tracked, stored and shared after having read the policies:

- 47% feel less comfortable with how Google collects and stores information about activity (33% for Facebook users).
- 37% feel less comfortable with how Google stores information they provide (29% for Facebook users).
- 44% feel less comfortable with how Google uses their stored information to target advertising, recommendations or content (39% for Facebook users).

A possible reason for this disparity in perceptions could be that users go to Facebook to share information with others, so it's not as surprising what is collected and stored. However, users go to Google to *find* information, not necessarily share it, so learning about how much data Google tracks, stores and shares information could contribute to their discomfort.

Look out, Google and Facebook: Users plan to reduce the amount of info they share with you

After reading the policies and answering comprehension questions, 36% of Facebook users and 37% of Google users surveyed will change their behavior.

Of the options presented in the survey, most Facebook users plan to change their privacy settings and be more careful posting information in the future. Google users indicated they'd take a number of actions, including changing privacy settings and clearing search history. Fifty percent will use Google less, while only 35% will use Facebook less.

Google users may be more apt to reduce their use, since there are viable alternatives to many Google services (e.g., Bing, Worio and MapQuest). Facebook users don't have the same luxury. Today, no alternative social network of similar scale exists.

Change in user perceptions of Facebook after reading its privacy policy
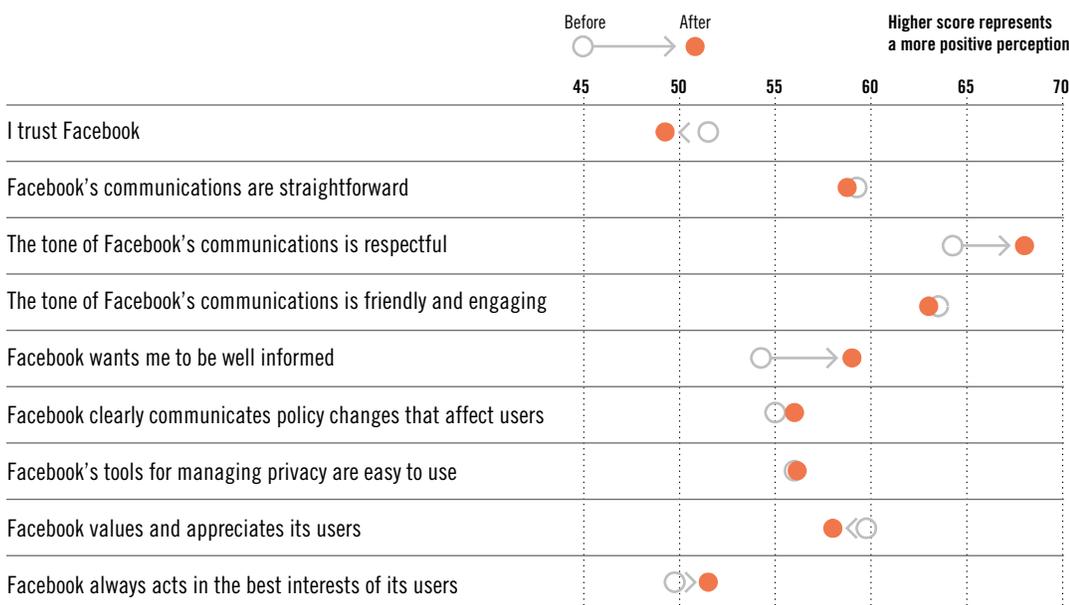
What we found—continued

Real-world implications of online privacy shocks users

We provided a list of recent privacy-related news headlines and asked users which headlines could be true:
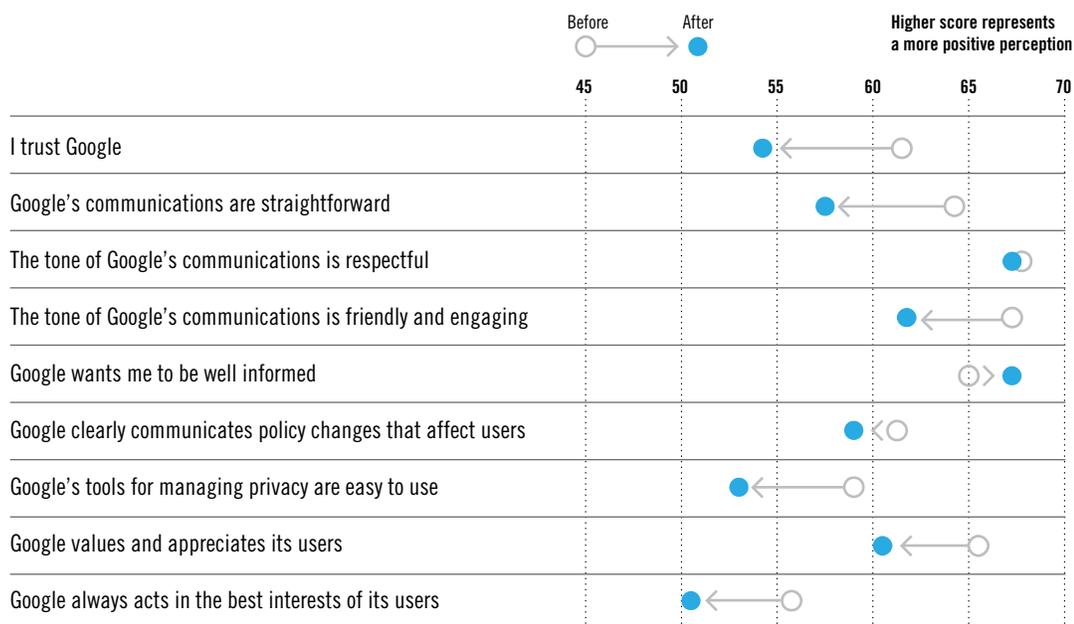
- Banks have begun using customers' social media profiles to evaluate creditworthiness.
- Law enforcement uses information about parties posted on Facebook to target their efforts in reducing crime.
- In the UK, people can be served subpoenas for court on Facebook.
- Google wrote code to trick Apple's Safari browser into letting them monitor many users on iPhones, iPads and Mac computers.

Users were largely unaware of most stories (with the exception of the law enforcement story). When they were informed that all the news headlines were real, they responded with shock and dismay. One user expressed a desire to "move to a cave in Tibet to be rid of an overly intrusive world," while another user kept it short and sweet with a simple "holy f**k."

And keep in mind that this survey occurred before news broke of the scandal involving Facebook, Foursquare and Girls Around Me, a mobile app that shares the exact location of women—without the women knowing! Women "checking in" on Facebook or Foursquare unknowingly broadcast their location, and possibly their entire profile and photos (if publicly available), to Girls Around Me users.

Since news of the scandal broke, Foursquare cut ties with the app, but Facebook has not.

Change in user perception of Google after reading its privacy policy

	Before	After	Higher score represents a more positive perception

	45	50	55	60	65	70
I trust Google			● ← ○			
Google's communications are straightforward			● ← ○			
The tone of Google's communications is respectful					◐	
The tone of Google's communications is friendly and engaging				● ← ○		
Google wants me to be well informed				○ ▷ ●		
Google clearly communicates policy changes that affect users			● ◁ ○			
Google's tools for managing privacy are easy to use		● ← ○				
Google values and appreciates its users				● ← ○		
Google always acts in the best interests of its users		● ← ○				

What we found—continued

Knowing more about privacy makes users share less

HOW WILL YOU CHANGE THE WAY YOU USE FACEBOOK?

Change my privacy settings
75%

Be more careful about what I post in the future
69%

Delete previous posts or photos
18%

Ask friends to delete posts or photos
15%

Use Facebook less
35%

Delete my account
7%

Deactivate my account
6%

Other: **0%**
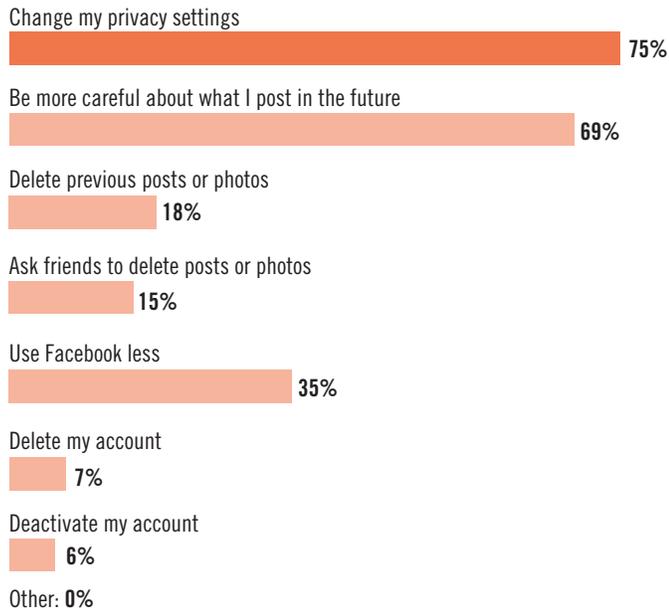
HOW WILL YOU CHANGE THE WAY YOU USE GOOGLE?

Change my privacy settings
55%

Be more careful about using Google services in the future
63%

Delete previous emails, photos, videos, etc.
31%

Clear my search history
57%

Use Google less
50%

Delete my account(s)
16%

Modify public information in my Google profile
40%

Other
1%
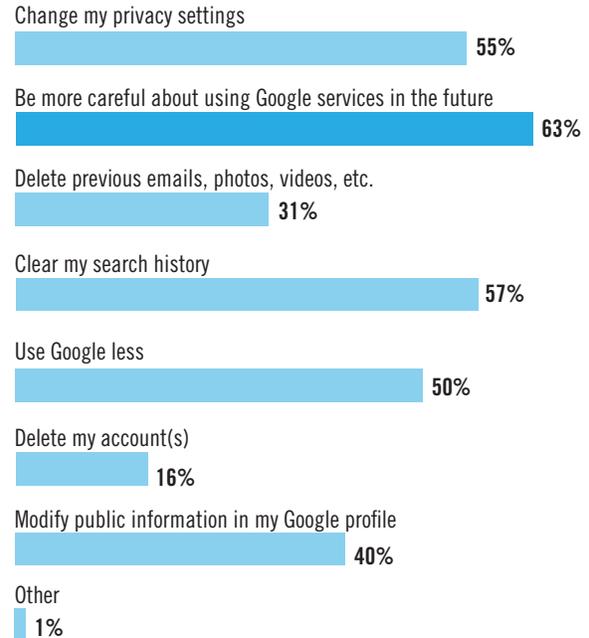
Amount of time spent reading Google's privacy information: *2 hours and 55 minutes*

PRIVACY POLICY

ADVERTISING PRIVACY FAQ

PRIVACY PRINCIPLES

PRIVACY TOOLS

Incognito mode in Google Chrome

Dashboard, includes time to manage settings for 16 Google products

Data liberation
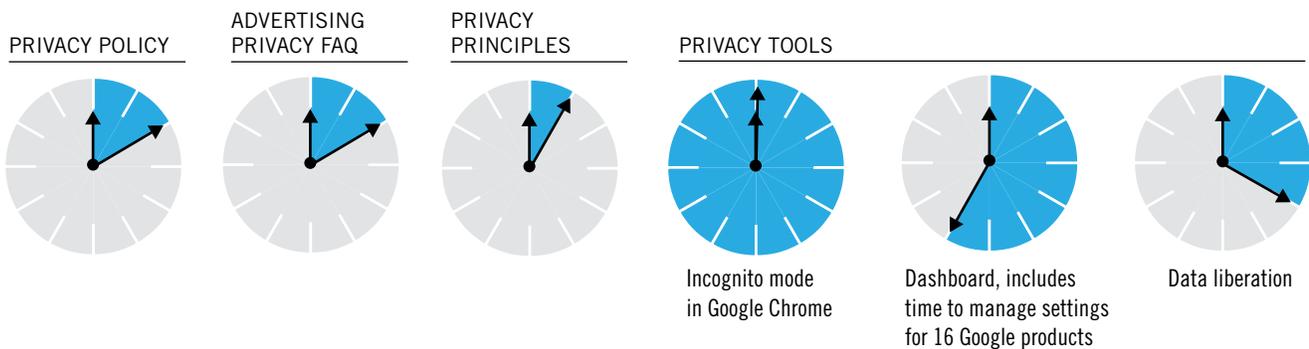
PRIVACY TOOLS—continued

Ads preferences manager

Off-the-record Gmail chats

Search personalization opt-out

Unlisted and private videos on YouTube

Street view blurring and takedowns

Note: Privacy tools that are not listed here didn't contain significant reading material.

What can be done

Users lack an understanding of Google and Facebook privacy basics and that makes many uncomfortable. So, what can be done about it?

Multiple parties shoulder the responsibility of preserving privacy and increasing user literacy on this topic. Legislators, educators, employers, parents, the "big data" industry, interaction designers, developers and back-end programmers each play a role. Here are a few ways these groups could do their part to protect and promote privacy online. If nothing else, we hope these ideas spark a conversation that contributes to an eventual solution.

Use simpler policies that inform and educate

All privacy policies, not just Facebook's and Google's, need to convey three main types of information:

- What information is collected and how
- How the information is stored and shared
- How a user can manage their privacy

The information in these categories should be clear, succinct and easy to understand. Esoteric concepts and functions should be explained in terms using examples that a basic user can understand.

Facebook sends users to their Graph API to see their public information, but you need to be a developer to understand it. Not good enough. Explain it as you would to your grandmother.

Google touted its new privacy policy that went into effect March 1 as a demonstration of their commitment to simplicity. They combined 60 policies into one—but consolidation alone is not simplification, especially not if it comes at the cost of clarity and context. Some sections about which information is collected and what constitutes public information were so vague that the Siegel+Gale experts writing the survey found it impossible to write an adequate comprehension question for these topics.

Standardize policies to save time and money

Privacy policies shouldn't just be clear, succinct and easy to understand. They should be standardized (and the government could regulate this), so that users can quickly assess the privacy implications of use. A 2008 study[2] published by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University estimates that it would take 76 work days (until April 13 if you started January 1) for a person to read the privacy policies they encounter in a year, an amount of time that adds up to a cost of about $781 billion for the U.S. In other words, managing privacy online could be affecting our economy.

Government could play a critical role in advocating for users' privacy online—and the way to do so doesn't even need to be revolutionary. Borrow from what already exists—nutrition facts labels on foods, for one example. They're the same on every package. This allows a consumer to quickly find out whether the food they're about to purchase is healthy or not. It also facilitates easy comparison of products, so a consumer can choose the one that suits them best. Internet users deserve the same information and tools for decision making and managing their privacy online.

Design a feedback loop into digital interfaces

Simpler privacy policies only go so far in informing and educating users about privacy. Designers of websites and applications should integrate feedback into their interfaces to raise awareness and inform users of potential privacy issues as they occur during use.

For example, when a user is about to post a photo on Facebook, the site could tell the user how many people they're potentially sharing the photo with based on their privacy settings.

Let's put this in context with a real-world example. A woman who works at Siegel+Gale had her settings so that photos she posted to Facebook were visible to "Friends and Friends of Friends." That might seem fairly innocuous, but it means she'd unknowingly been sharing photos with more than 71,000 people. After that startling realization, she immediately adjusted her settings to "Friends Only," a more manageable group of 596 people with whom she felt comfortable sharing her photos.

Facebook could easily compute those numbers and show them to users when they change settings or prepare a post. Instant feedback like this would create much-needed transparency regarding the privacy implications of sharing. What takes a human brain two hours to calculate, Facebook can do in nanoseconds all the time for every user. Facebook and all other sites and apps where users share information should provide this feedback, so users have the right information to make the best decisions for themselves.

Let users opt in to sharing and publicizing information

The Obama administration recently announced a plan to make it easier for users to control online tracking of their personal information. Only 22% of users surveyed heard of this plan, but 75% would like to have this as an option. Such technology will take a while to develop, but users' privacy doesn't have to be compromised until this occurs. Any site or application tracking, storing or sharing users' information could default to the most conservative privacy settings, and only after education and conspicuous consent would the user be able to opt in to more liberal tracking, storing and sharing of their information.

[2]*Link to CMU study: mendeley.com/research/the-cost-of-reading-privacy-policies/*

Never-ending web of privacy policies

If you're using Internet Explorer to access Google services, you find yourself in a web of policies from numerous organizations, and just as many privacy tools and settings you must manage to guard your privacy online.

Google

Google's privacy policy

- Dashboard
- Ads preferences
- Manage Google profile
- Sharing information settings
- Data liberation

Chrome/Frame privacy policy

- Book privacy policy
- Wallet privacy policy

Incognito mode
- Pause web history tracking
- Safe browsing
- Guest browsing

Privacy preferences
- Address bar predictions
  - Delete browser history
  - Chrome instant
- Phishing and malware protection
- Suggestions for navigation errors
- Usage stats and crash reports

Clear browser data
- Clear download history
- Manage website passwords
- Manage cookies
- Specific autofill entries
  - Manage autofill entries
  - Delete form data
  - Enable/Disable autofill

Manage privacy
- JavaScript
- Plug-ins
- Pop-ups
- Location requests

Opting out of ad personalization

Internet Explorer's privacy statement

Microsoft

Features that connect you to online services
- Accelerators
- Auto search
- Web slices

Features that use Microsoft online services
- Location services
- Send feedback tool
- Smart screen filter
- Suggested sites

Controlling your data
- Delete browsing history
- InPrivate browsing
- Tracking protecting
- P3P privacy policies

Web browsing features that store data
- ActiveX filtering
- Auto complete
- Automatic crash recovery
- Compatibility view
- Controlling cookies
- Manage add-ons
- Pop-up blocker

Microsoft Online Privacy Statement

- Manage Microsoft profile
- Manage billing profile
- Manage Connect profile
- Manage Windows Live profile
- Manage partner programs profile
- Communication preferences
- Display of advertising opt-out

Facebook

Facebook's privacy policy

- Bing privacy supplement
- Windows-Media.com
- CRM Online
- Xbox LIVE, Windows LIVE games, Xbox.com
- Microsoft Employment Candidates
- Microsoft Tag Reader
- Messenger
- Zune
- Maps and Location Services
- Windows Live
- Windows Marketplace
- Windows Live ID
- MSN
- Microsoft Advertising
- Support Services
- Office.com

| Eventbrite | Moviefone | ShoeDazzle | TripAdvisor | Mensing | Wooga | King.com | OMGPOP | Tradable-Bits | Oodle | Clicker or CBS Interactive | Social Genius | Huffington Post | Foodspotting | Causes | Artez Interactive | FundRazr or Connection Point | Zeebox | shopkick | Viddy | Pixable | Game On! Sports, Inc. | Chegg |

| Sporting News | Flipboard | Airbnb | Pinterest | Woobox | Microsoft | My Calendar | RootMusic | Rovio | Yelp | Scribd | BranchOut | Foodily | BuzzFeed | GiftRocket | Lyst, Citrus Boston Marketing Group | Where I've Been | s[edition] | The Onion | The Post Game or Sports Media Ventures | Foursquare | Endomondo | Hulu |

| Goodreads | The Guardian | Pose | Zynga | Electronic Arts | Yahoo! | Telaxo | Playdom | Pandora | Rotten Tomatoes | Docs or Microsoft FUSE Labs Docs Beta | Flixster or Warner Bros. Entertainment Group | Turntable.fm | Payvment | LivingSocial | Gogobot | Polyvore | Amen Internet | VEVO | Fandango | Today.com or MSN | iHeartRadio or Clear Channel | Snooth |

Appendix

About SimplicityLab

A proprietary evaluation methodology and index for measuring the effectiveness of all forms of communication, SimplicityLab transforms customer experience through clarity, transparency and accessibility.

Customer communications often get caught in a tangled web of complex products and services, regulations and legacy systems. Our unique methodology cuts through the volume and complexity of information and provides a rationale for reorganizing, customizing and streamlining both print and electronic communications to make them clear and relevant to customers.

What does SimplicityLab do?

SimplicityLab diagnoses the effectiveness of a given brand touchpoint (e.g., customer communications) against an index based on two key dimensions—comprehension and perception.

Comprehension—Does the touchpoint accomplish its purpose?

Perception—Does the touchpoint positively impact the perceptions of the issues/brand/institution?

Our research shows that these two dimensions correlate most strongly in generating:

- Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Cost savings through increased efficiency of communication

The typical communication today scores no better than a 60 on each index.

The SimplicityLab research suite

The SimplicityLab methodology provides a standardized benchmark to evaluate work across touchpoints. It is also customized for each touchpoint to provide an accurate and relevant metric and direction for refinements:

- Document
- Interactive
- Environment
- Packaging
- Brand architecture

How does SimplicityLab work?

SimplicityLab is a quantitative online survey tool that utilizes panels or client samples and tracks respondents' reactions to stimuli. The tool leverages a highly visual interface that improves respondent engagement and provides maximum flexibility to test executions in simulated real-life environments.

We offer methodologies customized to specific touchpoints, including click-testing, heat-mapping, 3-D modeling, virtual markup/editing, timed comprehension and more.

Why SimplicityLab?

It's fast—A standing consumer panel can recruit for virtually any customer segment; takes as little as four weeks to design, field and report findings

It's inexpensive—Significantly lower cost than in-person or custom research

Results are actionable and iterative—Designed to provide valuable feedback and prescribe changes during the design and development phase

About Siegel+Gale

Siegel+Gale is a global strategic branding firm committed to building world-class brands through elegantly simple, unexpectedly fresh strategies, stories and experiences. With Simple is Smart as its operating philosophy, Siegel+Gale delivers powerful services in brand development, simplification, research and digital strategy.

Since its founding by branding pioneer Alan Siegel in 1969, Siegel+Gale has helped drive business results for brands such as Aetna, American Express, Bank of America, China Youth Development Foundation, Dell, Dow Chemical Company, The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, the Internal Revenue Service, The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Microsoft, Motorola, Pfizer, Qatar Telecom, SAP, Sony PlayStation, Yahoo! and the YMCA.

Siegel+Gale has offices in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, Hamburg, Dubai, Shanghai and Beijing and strategic partnerships around the world as a member of the Omnicom Group of companies.

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