



# Turning Errors into Opportunities

How marketers can turn inevitable  
website errors into invaluable insights

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# Oops!

## Website Errors impact



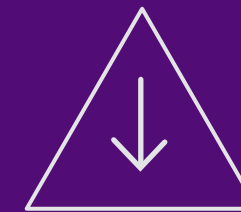
— Web users

Frustration and confusion



— Marketers

Hurt conversion rate and KPI's



— Business owners

Damage trust and revenue

# Executive Summary

As web visitors, we encounter and are frustrated by website errors. As website owners, we understand that they annoy our customers, lower conversions, and negatively impact revenues. But as marketers, we tend to see web site errors as a sort of *force majeure* – something to be (hopefully) discovered, and then kicked down the line to be rectified.

Today's advanced marketing toolbox means that website errors are no longer beyond the reach of marketers. Today, we can not only discover them, but also evaluate their potential impact and prioritize remediation. Moreover, we can not only play a role in eliminating website errors – we can actually gain from them.

The key to catching elusive website errors is simply to focus on the very people we work so hard to bring to our site and answer our calls to action: the visitors.

Marketers need to adopt a behavioral perspective about website errors. By focusing on what users are doing on our sites, we can catch common behavior patterns of visitor dropoff or abandonment that traditional tools simply cannot see. Once we find usability-related error patterns, we can pinpoint the errors themselves. Then, the actual impact of a given error on user experience and conversions can be assessed, its correction prioritized, and the usability and user experience takeaways evaluated.

Once the exclusive domain of IT, a new generation of enterprise user experience solutions marketers can now play a direct role in website error identification and the prioritization of remediation efforts.

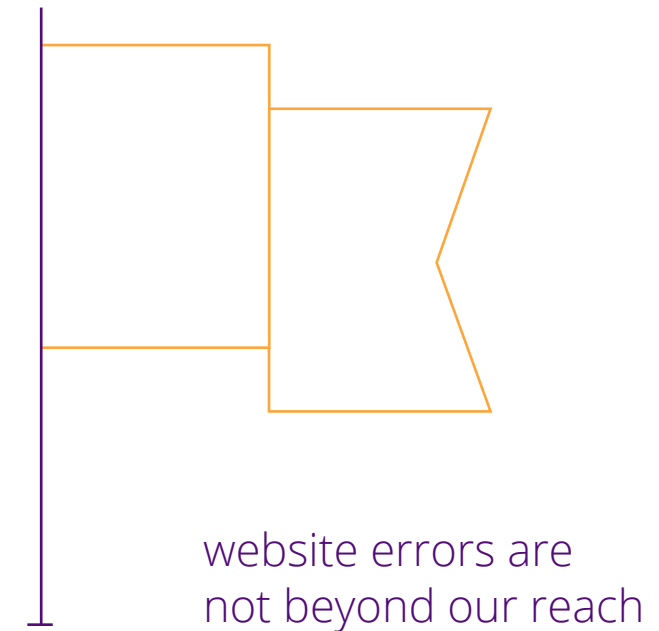
In addition to ongoing efforts to correct and avoid errors, by examining individual user responses to errors, and adjusting our attitudes and tactics from reactive error fixing to proactive revenue and loyalty recapture, we can both recover the overall user loyalty and maximize KPIs.

# Errors: They Happen and They Hurt

Website errors. They happen. As web visitors, we encounter and are frustrated by them. As website owners, we understand that they annoy our customers, lower conversions, and negatively impact revenues. But as marketers, we tend to see website errors as a sort of *force majeure* – something to be (hopefully) discovered, and then kicked down the line to be rectified.

It's not that website errors don't sting us, as marketers. All our work – carefully segmenting audiences, choosing a strategy to drive traffic, designing ads, purchasing prime locations, and building the ultimate landing page – can go down the drain due to one poorly-implemented form or other client-side error. It hurts. And the negative impact on our KPIs, revenues, and downstream customer lifetime value hurt, too.

But here's the thing: website errors are not beyond our reach. Today's advanced marketing toolbox lets us not only discover them, but also evaluate their potential impact and prioritize remediation. With the tools we have today, we can not only play a role in eliminating website errors – we can actually gain from them.



# Why Traditional Tools Fall Short

## SERVER-SIDE ERRORS: Traditional Solutions Disregard Valuable Information

From the visitor perspective, server-side errors such as 404s and 501s happen completely without explanation. They're not perceived by visitors as their fault, but they suffer from them, nonetheless. Visitors see only your error page, and then have a choice of how to react.

Traditional system monitoring solutions simply count the number of error pages encountered, try to discover the source of the broken links, and create reports to facilitate mitigation. This approach, while not lacking merit, is based on a purely technological perspective.

From a visitor experience point of view, traditional solutions basically close the barnyard gate after the cows have left, and never go looking for the cows. Traditional solutions miss the chance to gain invaluable user experience insight from server-side errors, and also to potentially recapture lost revenues.

## CLIENT-SIDE ERRORS: Traditional Solutions are Completely Blindsided

Client-side errors (most often resulting from JavaScript or other client-side scripting errors) are sneaky. They occur in-page, and users may never even know they happened. An operation simply fails, with no notice, leading to mysterious dropoff at a key point in the conversion funnel. Moreover, what happens to one visitor, on a given platform or device, may not happen to another visitor. Some examples we've all experienced include:

- Payment processing hiccups during checkouts
- Search and other functions not behaving as intended
- Buttons that are supposed to be clickable but aren't
- And so many, many more...

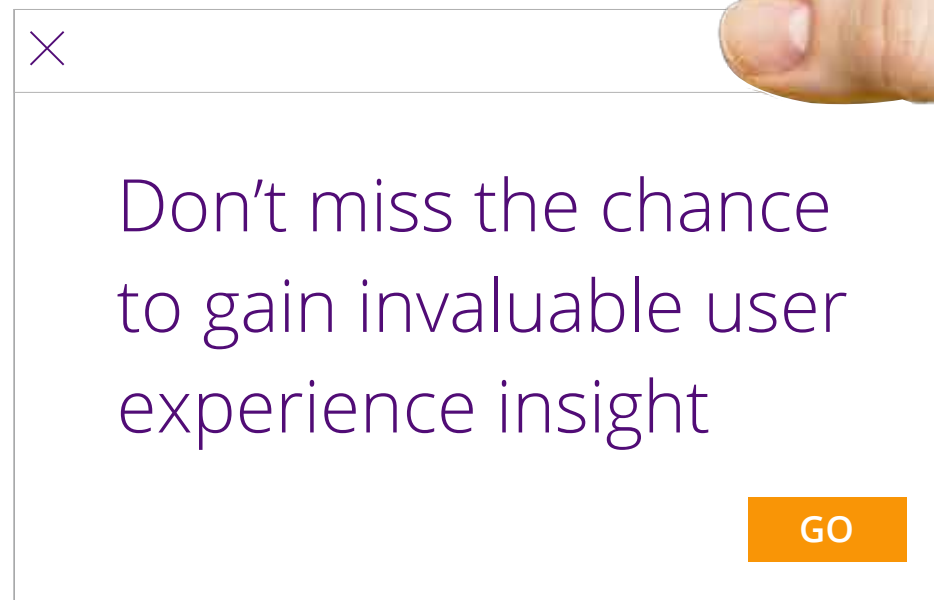
A major challenge with client-side errors, therefore, is to simply and reliably identify them. Traditional web analytics solutions don't report details on client-side errors. What's more, given the vast number of dynamic variables and behaviors, traditional user experience solutions often fall short here, too.

## BUSINESS AND DESIGN ERRORS: Totally Invisible to Traditional Solutions

What happens when the website performs exactly as designed, but errors still occur? A wide range of business and design errors can dramatically impact the customer experience and revenue, yet remain completely invisible to

mainstream web analytics and user experience solutions due to their highly dynamic nature. For example:

- Out of stock products
- Incorrect or inconsistent prices or promotions
- Poor design that leads to user confusion and dropoff
- And more...



# Catching Errors: Marketers to the Rescue!

Obviously, marketers and IT – and the enterprise as a whole – have a vested interest in finding and fixing website errors. And your IT department, like most, probably invests significant efforts in doing so.

But with two-thirds of website errors potentially undetectable by traditional means, we need to start thinking about how we, as marketers, can contribute to discovering website errors, evaluating their impact, and mitigating their damage.

Moreover, we need to accept the hard reality that no matter what we do, some amount of website errors are going to happen. We need to figure out how to learn from errors, and turn them to our advantage.

## The Key to Catching Website Errors

The key to catching elusive website errors is simply to focus on the very people we work so hard to bring to our site and answer our calls to action: the visitors.

Marketers need to adopt a more behavioral perspective about website errors. By focusing on what visitors are doing on our sites, we can catch common behavior patterns of user dropoff or abandonment that traditional tools simply cannot see. Once we find usability-related error patterns, we can pinpoint the errors themselves. Then (as we'll see in the coming pages), the actual impact of a given error on user experience and conversions can be assessed, its correction prioritized, and the usability and user experience takeaways evaluated.

Oops!!!



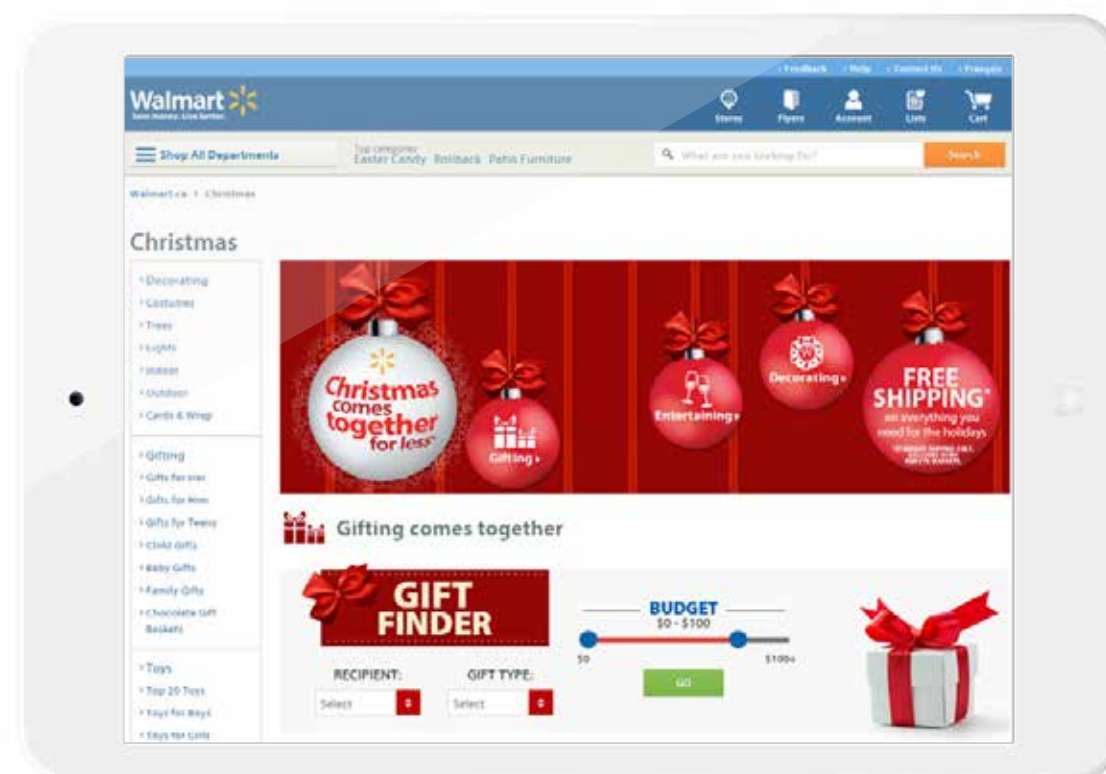
# Case in Point: Client-Side Errors on Walmart.com

To make the most out of the Holiday Season – the most revenue critical time of the year -ClickTale client Walmart launched a special Gift and Toy Finder tool for increasing sales and optimizing customer interactions with the seasonal offerings.

Walmart invested significant funds to drive traffic to the holiday web pages. Alas, quantitative analysis showed that the Gift and Toy Finder tools seemed to be getting subpar adoption. The traditional insights could not uncover why this was happening. That is when ClickTale's session Replay recordings revealed that a significant number of visitors were struggling and unable to use the Gift and Toy Finder tool. When potential click on the call to action button they encountered a JavaScript error that prevented them from receiving search results.



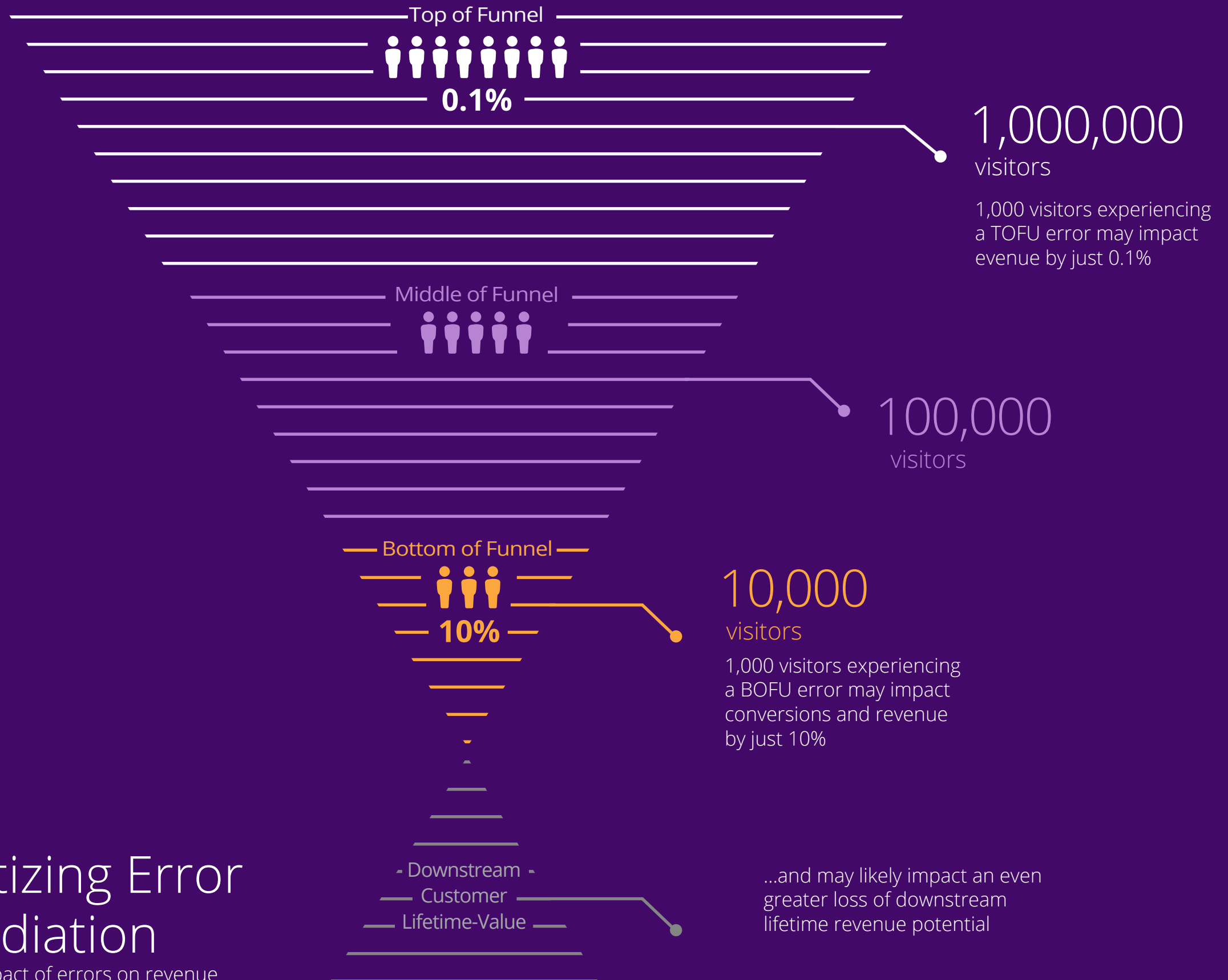
Customers could be seen in the session replays clicking on the button multiple times in frustration. The potential for loss of mission-critical revenue cannot be understated.



To learn how Walmart leveraged ClickTale to identify the client-side error and optimize the holiday shopping experience, please see the full case study [here](#).

# Prioritizing Error Remediation

Non-linear impact of errors on revenue



# Prioritizing Error Remediation

All website errors are bad, but all errors were *not* created equal. As the diagram below illustrates, TOFU (Top of the Funnel) errors impact revenues less than BOFU (Bottom of the Funnel) errors – which also can damage downstream customer lifetime value. Even a relatively small number of website visitors experiencing a BOFU error can impact a high percentage of potential revenue.


As the gatekeepers of the funnel, what this means for marketers is clear: when there are limited resources available for error remediation, BOFU errors should take priority. By keeping a close watch on where in the funnel errors appear, and providing clear prioritization guidance to technical resources, we can lower the overall revenue impact of errors more effectively.



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Keeping a close watch on where in the funnel errors appear

# Error 404



x

Do visitors contact  
the call center?

x

Do visitors try to  
re-load the page  
multiple times?

x

Do visitors complain  
on social media?

x

Do visitors complete  
their purchase  
despite the error?

x

Do visitors eventually  
leave the site altogether?

x

Do visitors re-search  
from the error page itself?

# What Does the Visitor do NEXT? Learning from Errors

Once we've identified and prioritized website errors for remediation, there is still a lot we can learn from them.

Consider something that the traditional technological approach to dealing with errors ignores completely: what does the visitor do next, after receiving the error message or page?

Why is this question important? Because it is the visitor's behavioral response to errors – as much as the errors themselves – that impact critical site KPIs like conversions and sales, not to mention customer loyalty and return sales.

Taking a behavioral approach to errors leads us to ask questions like:

- When visitors encounter a server-side error on your site, do they generally click away altogether, in disgust? Do they go back to the home page, and work their way through the navigation to the page they were originally looking for? Do they re-search, from the error page itself?
- For JavaScript errors, do visitors try to re-load the page multiple times, in frustration? Do they generally abandon the action they were attempting?
- How does the stage at which an error page is encountered affect visitor response? If an error is encountered early in the funnel, does it lead to more or less abandonment than a later error? Are visitors completing their transactions despite the error?

These questions impact not only how we deal with errors, but also how we look at the entire user experience.

# Recapturing Revenue and Loyalty

As any couple knows, the best part of any disagreement is the making up. Even as we're focusing on identifying errors, prioritizing their remediation, and gaining valuable user experience insights they provide – we should always keep KPIs, lifetime value, and (of course) revenues in mind.

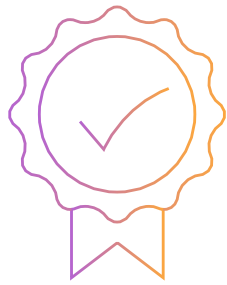
As marketers, it is our imperative to bring website visitors that experienced trouble back into the fold. We need to make it up to them. Once we've identified them, and the errors they encountered, we can take number of different actions, including:

- Retargeting abandoned shopping activity
- Apologizing and remedying customer frustration with appropriate gestures and offers
- Varying responses from simple emails for low impact issues, to an outbound call center call when issues had high impact on the individual
- Rewarding highly engaged customers that persevered through the website issues to complete their transaction

With the right tools, taking a proactive approach to recovering business lost to errors is fairly simple. Just feed data from your enterprise customer experience analytics solution into your marketing automation system, and orchestrate action!



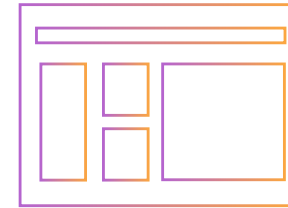
## Key Takeaways



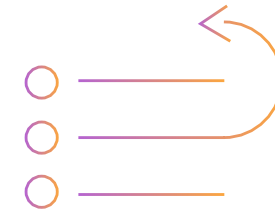
Reward Loyal  
Visitors



Make it up to  
Impacted Visitors



Fault tolerant  
website design



Prioritize  
Efforts

# Key Takeaways

Visitor frustration from errors can lead to brand damage, dropoff, lower revenues, missed opportunities, and reduced lifetime customer value. Resolving errors can dramatically impact KPIs and revenues.

Once the exclusive domain of IT, a new generation of enterprise user experience solutions marketers can now play a direct role in website error identification and the prioritization of remediation efforts. Beyond this, marketers can gain valuable user experience insights by taking a behavioral approach to website errors.

In addition to ongoing efforts to correct and avoid errors, by examining individual visitor responses to errors, and adjusting our attitudes and tactics from reactive error fixing to proactive revenue and loyalty recapture, we can both recover the overall user loyalty and maximize KPIs. Here are some key takeaways:

## Reward Loyal Visitors

Visitors who encounter errors and persist in looking for what they want are highly-qualified. They must really want what you're offering. Take note of this, and consider proactively

incentivizing them to continue looking or reward them for persistence when they do convert.

## Make it up to Impacted Visitors

Visitors who were failed by errors on the site are at risk. Rebuild lost loyalties to protect your downstream customer lifetime value.

## Fault tolerant website design

From a navigation perspective, every point in your site should be accessible from multiple, alternative paths. Use what you learn from errors to ensure that a secondary path of least resistance is always available to your visitors, especially to strategically-important locations.

## Prioritize Efforts

Errors are inevitable, so weigh the resources you invest in mitigating them based on their business impact. Instead of randomly trying to correct every error, optimize your website to keep visitors moving through the funnel.

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# How ClickTale Can Help

Traditional web analytics solutions were designed for overall quantitative reporting but not for delivering behavioral insights at the customer experience level. By combining traditional analytics with customer experience analytics, the answers to these questions and many more can be revealed.

ClickTale provides the world's leading brands with deep and actionable customer behavior insights. In the past decade, we've grown conversions for our Fortune 500 customers by over 300%. Our technology, innovation, and expertise provide a uniquely personal perspective on what resonates best with your users and how to improve the digital customer experience.

[See a demo](#) of how ClickTale's Digital Customer Experience Solution can help your company increase revenue with better insights into website errors.

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