



# Analysis of Quality of a Carrier's Website to Increase Loyalty of Individual Customers



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## ABSTRACT

During the pandemic, the competition for the consumer has moved from the format of live communication to the plane of remote interaction in the global environment. The sphere of cargo transportation makes no exception for that, since a highly competitive market is characterized by the presence of many transport and logistics companies that to struggle for a client actively use remote technologies, the leading place among which belongs to the company's website. From a marketing standpoint, the website is recognized as one of the leading sales tools. Freight carriers that base their activities on the principles of customer focus give priority attention to quality of their own website, and therefore development of a methodology for its assessment, which is the purpose of this study, is of relevance.

The website of a leading company was chosen as the object of the study, while the section of the website dedicated to providing service for transportation of groupage cargo

under contracts with individual shippers was its subject.

The article proposes the author's method of assessing quality of the website of freight carriers from the standpoint of customer focus. The methodology is based on the author's system of general and special criteria describing quality of the website and assessed according to a 100-point scale of values and a ten-point scale of significance for a respondent. The assessment method is an open survey of consumers in the Global Network. The developed methodology is universal and can be used by any cargo carrier to improve quality of transport services.

Within the framework of the methodology suggested in the article, it is possible to diagnose, based on customers' opinions, the «bottlenecks» of the section of a company's website devoted to providing the service. Reducing customers' comments regarding the points awarded allowed the author to identify the reasons for lower ratings and to propose reasonable measures to update corporate website to improve quality of transport services.

**Keywords:** transport, quality of the website of a transport company, quality criteria, freight transportation, customer focus, groupage cargo.

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Article received 05.09.2020, accepted 03.11.2020.

**For the original Russian text of the article please see p. 140.**

### Problem's scope

The worldwide surge in development of remote technologies for working with clients during the pandemic affected all areas of business. The competitive struggle for the consumer has moved from the format of live communication to the plane of remote interaction in the global space. In this regard, the business model of business entities around the world is undergoing serious transformations, adapting to new conditions, where development of digital resources plays a primary role in shaping corporate financial results.

Cargo transportation is not an exception, since its highly competitive market is characterized by the presence of a large number of transportation and logistics companies that actively use remote technologies to struggle to get a client, and corporate website, as a digital image of a company in the business world plays the leading role to promote remote technologies offered to customers. The website, from the marketing position, is one of the leading sales tools. Freight carriers that base their activities on the principles of customer focus give priority attention to quality of their own website, so development of a methodology for its assessment, which is the *purpose* of this study, is quite relevant.

The problem of quality of provision of services for transportation of groupage cargo was studied by the author during other research prior to that publication [1]. An original author's system of criteria for assessing quality of cargo transportation for individual customers with a focus on customer-oriented parameters was proposed, and a methodology for their assessment based on survey of opinions of customers themselves was developed. The method has also found practical application in the analysis of the service when concluding contracts with individual shippers for transportation of groupage cargo.

As a result, a number of «bottlenecks» of the service were identified, that particularly comprised unsatisfactory assessment by consumers of the possibility of remote ordering of services [2–4] through the company's website. The objective of this article is to develop the author's methodology for assessing quality of a transportation

company's website, to conduct in-depth analysis of the reasons for quality rating of this resource by service users, and to develop reasonable ways to improve the services provided using digital format.

Achieving the designated objective sets several tasks for the researcher, including:

- Substantiation of the system of criteria for assessing quality of the website of a freight carrier.
- Development of a methodology for the assessment of the compliance with those criteria.
- Formation of focus groups for expert assessment.
- Conducting a survey among individual respondents.
- SWOT analysis and evaluation of its results, development of conclusions and proposals.

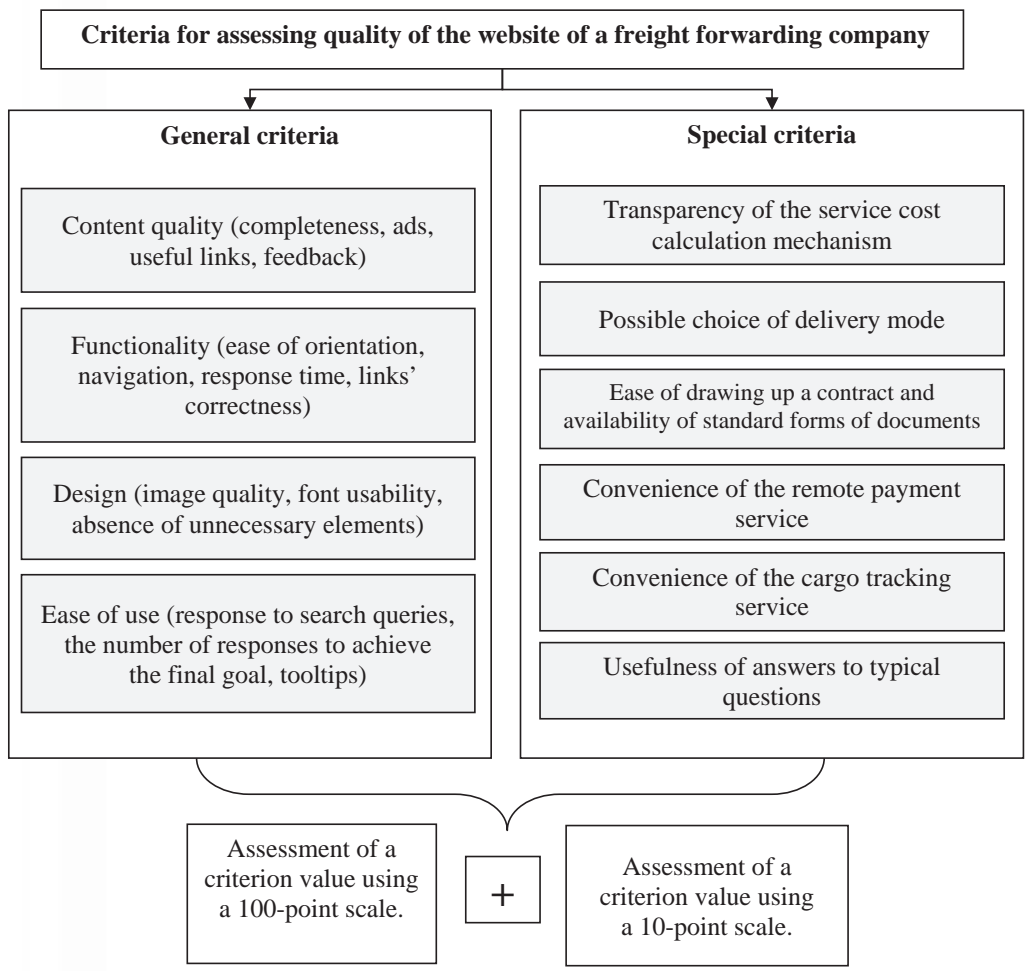
### Development of criteria system

According to the author, the system of criteria for assessing quality of the website should be built in such a way that the experts could assess general characteristics of the website, on the one hand, and its specific content, explained by the type of services provided (which in the considered case is transportation of groupage cargo under contracts with individual shippers) on the other hand. Therefore, the author decided to differentiate the characteristics into two groups (general and specific ones), as their assessment will provide the most complete study of the customer focus of a transportation company's website.

Since there are no universal criteria for assessing quality of a website from the standpoint of customer focus, the author, based on [5], has formulated groups of characteristics that are most understandable for a user who is a potential client of a freight company. The system of special criteria was based on the mechanism of providing services for transportation of groupage cargo under contracts with individual shippers, including a preliminary calculation of the cost on the carrier's website, signing of a transportation contract, ordering additional services, payment, tracking the cargo.

The criteria proposed by the author in the framework of the client-oriented approach are shown in Pic. 1.





**Pic. 1. System of criteria for assessment of the website of a freight carrier (developed by the author).**

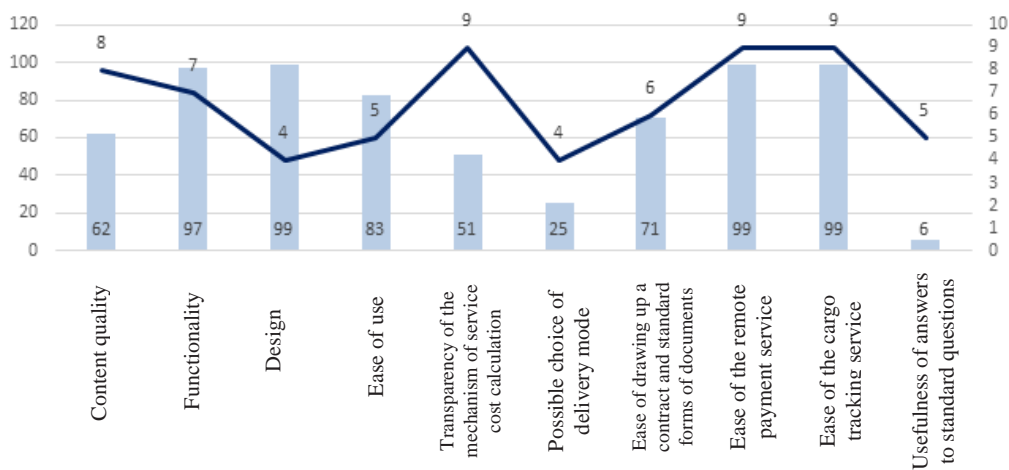
**Approbation of the technique**

The system of criteria presented in the picture served as the basis for a survey organized in the Global Network among users of the groupage cargo transportation service for individual shippers through the Google Forms service. The questionnaire was offered to 135 respondents who used services of one of the largest companies in the field of transportation of groupage cargo in April–June 2020. The experts evaluated the website compliance with quality criteria using a 100-point scale, as well as the significance of criteria using a 10-point scale, where 0 meant low significance, and 10 meant high significance. If the respondents were awarding a score below 100 points, they were asked to leave a comment in a free field. The subsequent processing of these comments made it possible

to assess objectivity of ratings, highlight the most common remarks, analyse their essence, and thus form the most accurate recommendations for improving corporate websites. The formulation of criteria was carried out by the author in such a way as to make them understandable for individual respondents, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to make it possible to assess quality of the service provided and identify the problems that need to be addressed from the point of view of consumers [1; 6–7].

The results of the survey are presented graphically in Pic. 2.

The survey made it possible to identify a number of strengths and weaknesses in the client’s assessment of quality of the websites providing the considered service. Experts highly appreciated such criteria as functionality (ease of orientation, navigation, response



**Pic. 2. Results of the survey among respondents (compiled by the author based on the survey results).**

time, correct links), design (image quality, font usability, presence of redundant elements), remote payment service (it is enough to enter the order number and card payment data) and cargo tracking (using order number), and the last two criteria were assessed as highly significant for consumers (9 points on a 10-point scale).

With the help of expert assessment, it was possible to identify a number of problems in perception of quality of a company's website by consumers, among them:

- «Content quality» got 62 points from customers, while its significance received 8 points.
- «Transparency of the mechanism for calculating the cost of the service» got 51 points, while its significance received 9 points.
- «Possibility of choosing a delivery mode» got 25 points, while its significance received 4 points.
- «Usefulness of answers to standard questions» got 6 points, while its significance received 5 points.

Due to the fact that the characteristics of «Content quality» (content completeness, advertising, useful links, feedback) and «Transparency of the mechanism for calculating the cost of a service» turned to be the most significant for the respondents, it is worth investigating the reasons for their low rating.

To achieve this goal the author had to solve a number of tasks:

- To study the comments of respondents made in the free field of the questionnaire.

- To proceed with their interpretation, verification of their truthfulness (when they contained comparisons with competitors' websites, etc.).

- To highlight the most frequent answers, excluding comments of a single nature.
- To systemise the comments.

The conducted research allows us to conclude that the comments of users to assessment of criteria «Content quality» and «Transparency of the service cost calculation mechanism» are similar, for this reason it was decided to combine them into a single block. The author studied in detail the content of the comments left. Some of them contained complaints, dissatisfaction with quality of services, names of other carriers, references to the websites of other transportation and logistics companies. The information in the comments was checked, and unfounded emotional claims were not considered when processing the survey results.

The analysis of the respondents' answers allowed the author to systematise the client requirements for the websites in terms of transportation of groupage cargo under contracts with individual shippers (conditionally called «bottlenecks» of relevant websites):

- Providing customers with the opportunity to indicate the nature of groupage cargo (for example, furniture, spare parts, equipment, glass products, etc.) and its special characteristics (fragile, bulk, liquid, etc.) with a preliminary calculation of the cost of transportation based on the drop-down list,





<https://old-visual.rzd.ru/dbmm/images/56/12488/50389>

which will allow the customers to determine its rate more accurately, to assess the competitiveness of a company's proposal, and to make an informed decision.

- Indication of the number of packages since it is important for the client to understand the influence of the number of pieces on the cost of transportation and to answer the question whether it is worth repackaging the cargo before shipment to reduce price or combining the pieces will lead to an increase in weight and change the category of cargo to «oversized».

- Inclusion of an online calculator of cargo volume into the graphical interface of the website.

- When calculating the cost of an order, it is important to get a possibility to indicate the declared value of cargo, which allows the client to decide either in favour of a high declared value or in favour of cargo insurance.

- Choice through the website of additional services based on the proposed list and inclusion of their cost in the order already at the stage of preliminary self-calculation. This refers to such services mentioned in the comments of the interviewed experts as: arrival at the site of acceptance and delivery of goods, loading and unloading operations, shipping during off-hours, arrival at a second address, packaging (pallet board, wooden crate, rigid

box, bags, additional packaging, bubble wrap, cardboard boxes, special packaging for auto glass, special packaging for auto parts), labelling, storage, insurance, forwarding. The reference to the need to include additional services in the calculation of the cost of ordering was found most often in the comments.

Analysis of the survey results presented in Pic. 2 also indicates low consumer satisfaction with the «Possibility of choosing a delivery mode» (25 points awarded with a significance evaluated at 4 points) and «Usefulness of answers to standard questions» (6 points with a significance of 5 points).

As for the first characteristic, according to the results of the analysis of the respondents' comments, the author formed an opinion about advisability of additional segmentation of customers by the companies, of identification of their unique needs according to the priorities of delivery speed (e.g., regular, expedited, express delivery). This will help increase their loyalty.

The criterion «Usefulness of answers to standard questions» now refers to the assessment of the section which constitutes an integral part of the customer loyalty development program for any company, simplifies remote interaction, speeds up decision making by a potential customer, and broadcasts a

company's customer focus to an unlimited number of people.

In the comments to the answers to the questions, the experts positively assessed the characteristics of simplicity of working with a company's website and ease of orientation, those features were reflected in high scores of criteria assessing usability, functionality, and design. The essence of these comments was not considered in detail within the framework of the article due to the balanced ratio of assessment score and significance of indicators. However, it should be noted that users' comments contained requests to reduce the number of transitions to achieve the goal, to expand the list of standard documentation on the website, and to organise remote service without a visit to the office.

### Conclusions.

The author's methodology for assessing quality of the website from the standpoint of customer focus presented in the article seems to be of universal nature and can be used by any freight carrier to improve quality of service provided.

The methodology is based on the general and specific criteria proposed by the author. Their expert assessment through an open survey among customers in the Global Network made it possible to diagnose bottlenecks (as they are seen by customers) in the sections of websites of a typical company operating in the field of transportation of groupage cargo. Problems were identified in such characteristics as content, calculation of the cost of services, choice of delivery mode, answers to standard questions. Reducing customers' comments regarding the points awarded allowed the researcher to identify the reasons for low rating and to propose reasonable measures to update companies' websites to improve quality of transportation services.

The author's methodology, which is the content of this article, can be used to assess quality of websites of international transport and logistics companies, comprising the leading ones: DHL, UPS, Federal Express, SNCF, Kuehne + Nagel International AG, DB Schenker, Nippon Express Co, C.H. Robinson, Panalpina. The study showed that the logic of building their websites corresponds to that described by specific criteria for assessing

quality. A special feature is that transportation they carry out is, as a rule, of international nature, so the potential client is invited to choose a delivery mode among air, road, sea, railway modes of transportation. Besides, when costing the service, it is necessary to additionally assess the presence on a company's website of a drop-down list of additional charges for delivery to remote regions, as well as fuel surcharges, the rate of which depends on the price of aviation fuel.

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