How high is your website's barrier to entry?

Recently, I came across an article about how the Jewish online magazine Tablet is dealing with comments. It has decided to charge a fee to allow people to comment in order to make it harder for trolls to post obnoxious (and often anti-Semitic) comments. But there is an unintended consequence, and that is that legitimate commenters will now be dissuaded from commenting as well. The barrier to entry may prove too high.

Have you ever thought about how a visitor interacts with your website? What does that person need to do to find what he or she is looking for? What information is crucial and how easy is it to access it?

If you have been seeing a low conversion rate on your website, a drop in visitors, or a high bounce rate, perhaps you need to examine whether you have created an unintended (and intangible) barrier to entry or have built a barrier to entry that is too high.

Many websites have barriers to entry. Some are easily "climbed" and some are like Mount Everest, impossible. Generally, these barriers include "mechanical" barriers such as subscription fees, sign up forms, or registration requirements. Some barriers are more subtle, intangible, but still make it hard for visitors to access your content.

Mechanical barriers: High, medium and low walls to climb

In an effort to generate revenue from online readers, newspapers have added online **subscription fees.** That's a high

barrier to entry, since visitors will not only have to sign up, but provide payment. Some websites require **registration**, generally your email and a password. That's also a medium barrier to entry. Yet other websites splash a newsletter **sign-up** before you can read the content, but generally you can close that out making it a low barrier to entry.

There are good reasons to create these barriers. After all, you may want to grow your marketing database or get some insight into who is visiting your website, or like many newspapers, you are looking for a source of revenue.

Intangible barriers: Creating a psychological "wall"

But barriers are not just mechanical or even visible. Your barriers to entry may be intangible and psychological. By that I mean that your barriers are tripping visitors' heads. For example, your **website navigation** may not be intuitive or clear and may make it hard to for visitors to find what they are looking for.

Another hard-to-quantify barrier is the **language** that you choose to use on your website. Many tech and government websites are flush with jargon that is *nearly unintelligible* to an outsider.

Some websites make it hard for visitors by having too much **content** or information to sort through. Have you ever landed on a page that made your eyes and head hurt from information overload (or worse, visual overload)? Then you probably know what I mean, and I bet you just went elsewhere.

How would you classify your website in terms of barrier to entry? High, medium or low? Is it what

you want or are you unintentionally turning visitors away?