

Do not reply

GREGOR WEGBERG – DON'T BE IN MY WAY!

As for most of the people my age, using the Internet is an integral part of my daily life. I love it, it is fun, interesting, and seems to make everything easier. For example, I buy my books, gadgets, tickets, and so on in online shops. And there is one thing I just hate about it. It is small and for most of us just the way it is. However, this should not be and can be solved surprisingly easy.

Let me start with an example. So, last week I ordered a circus ticket in an online shop. Nothing special, you select the event, a date, a nice seat, provide your personal information and pay for it with your credit card. All went fine until I got the confirmation e-mail. From here on, it got complicated. I noticed that there was a mistake in the address. The postcode was completely wrong for some reason. It missed the "Switzerland" at the end, which is important for ordering something from Germany and expecting it to be shipped to Switzerland. Further, the price of the tickets was much higher than in the shopping cart. Using my deductive skills, I found out that the ticket was a normal priced one in the e-mail and not one for students. The rest, I have no idea. Okay, so, what do you do in this situation? Right! Just contact the shop and let them fix it. No problem, right? And I did try, let me tell you, but I failed horribly. Of course I couldn't change anything using the web interface. This makes sense, as I already paid for it using my credit card. My next thought was "hey, let's just answer the confirmation mail and it will get to the right people". A nice idea and this must work always, but it doesn't for most online services.

The sender's e-mail was, of course, do_not_reply@someshop.de. Well, a problem.

As all of us will likely end up as some kind of a computer professional, I beg you to think about your customers. Think really hard. Don't put obstacles in their way and make their life miserable. Yes, I know, I exaggerate, but do think about the implication of not allowing your customers to answer an automatically generated message. Just use as a sender an e-mail address that is used by your first-level support, or some group that can redirect it to the right people. This is also good for your business! The person trying to contact you does not get a negative feeling/emotion that will forever be connected to your brand.

This is not just an opinion, but something I tried and it worked very well. As you may know VIS runs a web portal called "VISIT". Its target audience are companies interested in ordering Visionen ads, post a job offer, and most importantly for booking a table at the Kontaktparty. Maybe you even heard that we launched a completely new version of this portal and I made sure all e-mails sent by the system are sent from

a real e-mail address. So, confused customers can just answer any of the automatically generated e-mails and they get help. Interestingly, most support inquiries we got over the last couple of weeks were answers to such messages. Only general questions, not connected to the platform itself, were sent to an e-mail address that can be found on our contact page.

A nice additional feature is the content that is automatically sent with the question. By answering an e-mail, the original e-mail is quoted and part of the answer. As the first-level supporter for VISIT I always got all the information, and even more, to solve any problem that was

thrown at me. Such a simple, logical and apparent change with great usability impact for us, as the administration side and for our customers making sure they do not spend time searching for the contact page!

Let me finish the initial story. The final solution was to call them during very specific office hours (2 PM until 4 PM). I sent all the messages through the contact web form and some e-mail addresses I found well hidden on the web page; none of them did the trick and seemed to be lost on their way. This, of course, is even worse than just denying to answer an e-mail. ♣

Bildnachweise

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