Common Dark Patterns and How to Avoid Them

Nagging
Nagging occurs when a user repeatedly intercepts communications from a web site or app. For example, multiple pop-ups, email follow-ups, or setting up modules that automatically refresh your page to check for new updates.

Instead
Distinguish ads clearly so that customers will recognize them for what they are. Tricking customers into clicking on ads that look like the host website’s call-to-action button.

Interference
An interference is designed to be something that customers expect. Be honest about product or service availability and features. Customers expect a smartphone that leads to a product page for a more basic smartphone that has been unsubscribed, will suffice.

Instead
Notify customers that their trials have expired and let them choose whether to continue subscribing. Don’t renew the service until customers confirm their choice to continue.

Disguised Ads
Disguised ads are advertisements designed to blend in with the rest of an interface in order to trick customers into clicking on them. For example, making an advertisement button look exactly like the host website’s call-to-action button.

Instead
Show the benefits of plans and services, and make informed decisions. For example, forcing a customer to add items to their shopping cart to see the cost, leaving them vulnerable to accidentally purchasing it later if they forget.

Price Comparison Prevention
Price comparison prevention stops customers from comparing prices, making it difficult for them to make decisions that optimize for cost. An example is an online subscription that can only be canceled by phone.

Instead
Make it easy for customers to unsubscribe from their account pages. Consider offering a retention package to customers as a discount for their loyalty.

Basket Sneaking
Basket sneaking is the practice of adding items to a shopper’s cart that they didn’t select themselves. For example, a customer might be shopping for cosmetic items, only to find out that extra sample products were added for $5 each.

Instead
Present additional items as suggestions on the shopping cart page and allow customers to be easily added to the order or removed.

Privacy Deception
Privacy deception involves tricking people into sharing more information than they intend to. For example, a website may require customers to show all of the steps that information will be used for.

Instead
Let customers decide whether or not they want to give away personal information. Information gathering should be for a specific purpose.

Conform Shaming
Conform shaming attempts to use guilt as a way to make customers comply. For example, phrasing the option to unsubscribe from a discounts mailing list as “No, I REALLY hate saving money.”

Instead
Write copy in plain, straightforward language. Be honest about pricing and service availability and features.

Roach Motel
A roach motel is a service that is easy to sign up for but difficult to cancel. An example is a website that automatically charges customers for a service until customers confirm their choice to continue.

Instead
Notify customers that they have been opted in and offer them the option to unsubscribe from the website.

Basket Sneaking
Basket sneaking is the practice of adding items to a shopper’s cart that they didn’t select themselves. For example, a customer might be shopping for cosmetic items, only to find out that extra sample products were added for $5 each.

Instead
Present additional items as suggestions on the shopping cart page and allow customers to be easily added to the order or removed.

Privacy Deception
Privacy deception involves tricking people into sharing more information than they intend to. For example, a website may require customers to show all of the steps that information will be used for.

Instead
Let customers decide whether or not they want to give away personal information. Information gathering should be for a specific purpose.

Conform Shaming
Conform shaming attempts to use guilt as a way to make customers comply. For example, phrasing the option to unsubscribe from a discounts mailing list as “No, I REALLY hate saving money.”

Instead
Write copy in plain, straightforward language. Be honest about pricing and service availability and features.

Roach Motel
A roach motel is a service that is easy to sign up for but difficult to cancel. An example is a website that automatically charges customers for a service until customers confirm their choice to continue.

Instead
Notify customers that they have been opted in and offer them the option to unsubscribe from the website.

Basket Sneaking
Basket sneaking is the practice of adding items to a shopper’s cart that they didn’t select themselves. For example, a customer might be shopping for cosmetic items, only to find out that extra sample products were added for $5 each.

Instead
Present additional items as suggestions on the shopping cart page and allow customers to be easily added to the order or removed.

Privacy Deception
Privacy deception involves tricking people into sharing more information than they intend to. For example, a website may require customers to show all of the steps that information will be used for.

Instead
Let customers decide whether or not they want to give away personal information. Information gathering should be for a specific purpose.

Conform Shaming
Conform shaming attempts to use guilt as a way to make customers comply. For example, phrasing the option to unsubscribe from a discounts mailing list as “No, I REALLY hate saving money.”

Instead
Write copy in plain, straightforward language. Be honest about pricing and service availability and features.

Roach Motel
A roach motel is a service that is easy to sign up for but difficult to cancel. An example is a website that automatically charges customers for a service until customers confirm their choice to continue.

Instead
Notify customers that they have been opted in and offer them the option to unsubscribe from the website.

Basket Sneaking
Basket sneaking is the practice of adding items to a shopper’s cart that they didn’t select themselves. For example, a customer might be shopping for cosmetic items, only to find out that extra sample products were added for $5 each.

Instead
Present additional items as suggestions on the shopping cart page and allow customers to be easily added to the order or removed.

Privacy Deception
Privacy deception involves tricking people into sharing more information than they intend to. For example, a website may require customers to show all of the steps that information will be used for.

Instead
Let customers decide whether or not they want to give away personal information. Information gathering should be for a specific purpose.

Conform Shaming
Conform shaming attempts to use guilt as a way to make customers comply. For example, phrasing the option to unsubscribe from a discounts mailing list as “No, I REALLY hate saving money.”

Instead
Write copy in plain, straightforward language. Be honest about pricing and service availability and features.