

An Evaluation of the Fashion Web Sites in New Zealand

Winnie Wing Man Hui, John Paynter
Department of Information Systems & Operations Management
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland,
New Zealand.
E-mail: winniewingman@gmail.com; j.paynter@auckland.ac.nz

Abstract: A fashion web site provides consumers with the opportunity to search for information. It also enables them to shop unconstrained by time or location. This research evaluates the performance of the fashion web sites in New Zealand and examines how the web sites can improve. Forty New Zealand fashion web sites were examined using the web site evaluation model tailored for fashion sites. The results show that the majority of New Zealand fashion web sites are informational rather than transactional. Fashion web sites should focus on how to improve their web site quality and web site content in order to attract more potential consumers.

Keywords: Internet Marketing & Advertising, E-commerce.

I. Introduction

The number of Internet users is growing rapidly throughout the world. Growth in electronic commerce is explosive. Electronic commerce has impacts on how business is conducted and offers the possibility of extending or reinventing existing business models based on the openness and connectivity of the Internet [16]. Apparel products have become the third largest retail sales category on the Internet [5]. Many consumers are lured by the simplicity of online shopping experience from just browsing for fashion information to buying fashion products. New Zealand fashion organisations realise the importance of the Internet and that improvements in their web site are necessary to ensure they stay solvent. The Internet allows fashion organisations to establish themselves, promote their brand name and products. Fashion web sites need to attract those consumers most likely to buy in order to cover the costs of e-commerce and make a profit. Although some research on Internet fashion shopping behaviour has emerged, little attention has been devoted specifically to New Zealand fashion web sites. The purposes of this study are to evaluate the performance of New Zealand fashion web sites and to examine web site quality.

II. Literature Review

Not surprisingly, the number of Internet users around the

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world is growing tremendously. The worldwide number of Internet users are projected an increase to 1.46 billion in 2007 [4]. Current figures indicate that the New Zealand Internet population has reached 2.34 million and this figure is anticipated to continue to increase [4]. New Zealand has a small domestic market and a high degree of technology adoption when compared to other developed countries [17].

Academic research indicated that the consumer is more inclined to look beyond traditional retail venues for shopping alternatives [2]. The New Zealand Official Yearbook (cited in [10]) states that 79% of New Zealand businesses have Internet access, which is higher than averages found in comparable Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries such as Australia and Canada. Nearly every company web site in New Zealand provides lists of products and services and most companies in New Zealand prefer to use the Internet as a means of providing information to customers and suppliers [15].

The New Zealand online fashion industry, although still in its infancy, is very much alive and will grow rapidly over the next few years [9]. This growth will result from the combination of an increasingly large number of online consumers and the growing number of fashion web sites. In evaluating the Internet as a fashion retail channel, a number of advantages added to the retailer have been identified by different scholars. These include direct communication with customers, access to a wider audience, cost savings and product selling available to consumers all the time [8] [6] [7] [13]. Additional advantages added to the online consumers include in-depth product information, two-way communication, demonstration of products in real time and up-to-date online information [14] [13].

A survey by Greenfield Online found that 58 percent of respondents shopped online to avoid crowded offline stores and 57 said Internet shopping saves time [1]. Availability of products/services, as in access to variety, the ability to scan more products and compare prices are significant reasons for shopping online [2].

III. Research Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to evaluate the performance of New Zealand fashion web sites and thereby to gain an understanding of how New Zealand fashion web sites can improve. As online content is expanding, there is an increasing need to control and manage the quality of the web

site content. Fashion web sites continue to grow in complexity, placing additional challenges for web designers. For fashion organisations that want to be online, meeting customer expectations is critical. Customers require timely, accurate information. Content analysis was used to assess and rank fashion web sites capabilities against the proposed model that serves as a benchmark. In this study, web site content analysis is carried out to measure the effectiveness of selected New Zealand fashion web sites. In order to gather appropriate dimensions and related attributes, we developed a tailored web site evaluation model to specifically analyse New Zealand fashion web sites adopting Ian Hersey's model (cited in [18]). Table 1 listed the categories and their related elements that are used to evaluate the fashion sites. They are in four categories namely Information, Transaction Service, Trust, and Non-Functional requirements. Table 1 has also listed the related elements that will be tested for appearance.

Information Category	Transaction Service Category	Trust Category	Non-Functional Requirements Category
Company Information	Negotiation	Legal Disclaimer	Aesthetic effect
Consumer Information	Payment	Privacy statement	Ease of use
Product Information	Order	Security	Innovation
	Delivery		Community
	After-sale service		
	Help		

Table 1: Categories & Elements of the Tailored Web Site Evaluation Model

IV. Results

Content analysis was conducted based on the tailored web site evaluation model. The sample fashion sites were evaluated by assigning a 0 or 1 score based on the presence or absence of the elements at the web site. A "1" score is assigned if the element is present or "0" score is assigned if the element is absent at the site. Forty New Zealand fashion web sites were selected for content analysis. Table 2 below presents the scores of the top twelve New Zealand fashion web sites.

The average score of all the 40 fashion sites is 14.8 out of 25 (59%), the median total score is 17 out of 25 (68%). With a possible total score of 25, a score of at least 12.5 (i.e. 50%) represents the elements required in order to achieve a 'pass'. 60% of the sample web sites scored more than 50%. These figures reflect a moderately high adoption of elements in the tailored web site evaluation model by the sampled New Zealand fashion web sites. 58% of the sample web sites are positioned as full e-commerce capability sites. Some of the high scoring sites are large organisations and some of the low scoring sites are large organisations too. That is, there is no relationship between a good web site and the size of the

organisations.

Rank	NZ Fashion Web Site	I	TS	T	NF	Total
1	Canterbury of New Zealand	7	10	3	3	23
1	Thread	7	9	3	4	23
2	Beggs Clothing	7	10	3	2	22
2	Ezibuy NZ Ltd.	7	10	3	2	22
2	Pumpkin Patch	7	10	3	2	22
2	NZ Pacific Jewellery, Skincare & Clothing	7	10	3	2	22
2	Christies Jewellery	7	9	2	4	22
3	Line 7	6	10	3	2	21
4	Shirleys Shoes	6	10	2	2	20
4	Sunsational Swimwear	6	10	2	2	20
4	Susanna Bernard	5	10	3	2	20
5	Fashion Factory	6	10	1	2	19

Table 2: Top 5 Scored New Zealand fashion web sites

V. Discussion

The majority of New Zealand fashion web sites are informational rather than transactional. This is consistent with the literature that most companies in New Zealand prefer to use the Internet as a means of providing information to customers, rather than for online sales [15].

After examining the forty sample New Zealand fashion web sites, we found that 58% of the web sites are positioned as full e-commerce capability sites. This closely matches previous similar research done by Paynter, Satikit and Chung (cited in [12]). Content analysis results show that the overall performance of the sample fashion web sites in the information category is relatively high with an average total score of 72% in this category. The results support the view that fashion organisations are utilising the Internet mainly as a platform for information distribution or product promotion rather than electronic retailing. Almost all of the sample fashion web sites provide information on the company's background, physical address and contact details. This is not a surprising result since consumers want to know with whom they are dealing and this is especially important for new virtual fashion organisations solely operating on the Internet. A very similar result was found in research by Paynter et al. (2001), where 74% of New Zealand e-tailing sites provided informational rather than transactional capability. Three of the thirty e-tailing sites examined were fashion ones, namely Pumpkin Patch, Farmers and Ezibuy. The average total score of the three fashion web sites in their study is 71.2% and the average total score of all thirty e-tailing web sites in their study is 70.2%. The content analysis results from our tailored web site evaluation model reveals that the average total score of all the forty sample fashion sites is 59% and the median total score is 68% which closely matches with previous similar research. Although pleasing results were found in the information category, New Zealand fashion web sites need to be more concerned in the trust and non-functional requirements category. Given the low average score (39%) in the trust category, fashion web sites did poorly in addressing privacy, security and legal (disclaimer) issues. The majority of fashion web sites asked

consumers for their personal information, this is consistent with previous research by Chung (cited in [3]) that 80% of New Zealand fashion web sites collected personal data and only small numbers of fashion sites provided a privacy statement. Consumers want to be connected to the Internet for a unique experience and they expect an interactive linkage to the Internet [11]. With an average score of 47% in the non-functional requirements category, New Zealand fashion web sites did not perform very well in this category. Although all of the fashion web sites performed very well in the aesthetic effect and ease of use elements, only a few fashion web sites implement advanced innovative features, online community and have entertainment value.

VI. Conclusion

The use of the Internet for the glamorous fashion industry has generated great excitement because it allows up-to-the minute information delivery, allowing the industry to broaden its market. Content analysis of the web sites of 40 New Zealand fashion organisations revealed their information, transactional service, trust and non-functional requirements. Content analysis looks at the components of the web sites and how they are used by the organisations to enhance their business. The result implies that there is a moderately high adoption of elements in the tailored web site evaluation model by the sample New Zealand fashion web sites. There is no relationship between a good fashion web site and the size of an organisation as we found in the results of content analysis. Fashion organisations are utilising the Internet mainly as a platform for information distribution or product promotion rather than electronic retailing.

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