A online business expansion proposal essay example

Business, Company

Summary

The term global village was a product of the developments that were made in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. The need to communicate and communicate speedily while maintaining the integrity of the information being passed prompted the invention of the Internet and the World Wide Web (Albert, 2006). This is a network built out of wirelessly connecting computers all over the world under one central server.

With the Internet in place, further developments occurred, which included the invention of websites. These are small pages built by individuals and made available to the general Internet public. They provide information about a subject of interest that a person would like to share with the public (Weinhardt et al., 2008). Today, the level of Internet penetration has massively improved, with even the most remote parts of Africa and Asia being key participants in the development and growth of online trade. In America, it is approximated that there is ninety seven percent access to the Internet.

These developments in the ICT sector boosted trade and business, leading to the development of the term e- business or electronic business. This is a type of a business that is carried out in the Internet where the buyer and the seller do not truly need to have a face to face interaction in order for the sale of goods and services to take place effectively and safely (Jiaming, 2008). This type of trade has made the world a very small place, all thanks to the development of these effective communication channels.

E- Business comes in very many forms. Any type of business that uses the Internet for whichever function engages in E- Business. The level of Internet use varies, depending on the nature of the business that a given company would engage in. Some simply use the Internet to advertise themselves; thus, improving their brand visibility, while others use the Internet as the marketplace where sellers meet clients and goods and where money is exchanged without the two parties coming into physical contact. This is, of course, made possible by the use of such services as online payment mechanisms and to this day, a number of such service providers are already available, one of which is Pay Pal (Psailla, 2008).

The Internet offers endless possibilities, all depending on the creativity of individuals. How market players make use of this wonderful invention is really up to them. With the Internet, a person living in Sydney, Australia can go shopping in a store in Atlanta, Georgia without leaving the comforts of his home. He is also assured of getting the goods in real time; indeed, making the world seem like it's only a village where everything is simply a click away.

Viability of the product or service that the business offers in an online environment

Tourism in Los Angeles has been assumed to be the strongest pillar of the city. Millions of tourists come to the city annually to attend a variety of Hollywood events. In 2011 alone, Forbes Magazine reported an average of eleven million tourists in the city. As such, an evaluation is necessary if a company in this industry does not do as well as expected.

TrailFinders (2012) Safaris is a tour firm with its ownership roots traceable to Kenya, an East African country. Its poor performance in the last three fiscal years can be attributed to its business operations. The operations in the firm are automated where online communication channels are used. E-mails are filed and considered official communication documents, which is unlike many other firms that take emails for granted.

The company has a website that is run and maintained by a team of professional information technology experts. Its office is a state- of-the- art facility that maximizes the use of ICT and occupies two floors of a sixty-three storey building in the city. It has a high speed Local Area Network that facilitates the easy access of documents where every workstation stays online twenty four hours a day. There is a centralized printing service per floor and this is meant to ease the filling system in the firm. The physical files complement the soft copies of these files and are mostly used to offer legal evidence (Psailla, 2008).

Some of the online services that the company offers its clients include the booking and reservations for hotels, parks, and other tourist attraction sites. The company has envisioned itself as being the link that would connect Europe, The Americas, and Africa. It has offices in London, Nairobi, Kenya, and Tanzania and has in mind the fact that it would send American tourists down to Africa. This would also enable them to get hold of more tourists before they leave America. In addition, the African offices serve as bureaus through which those visiting the States and Europe would be linked to the

American and European branches. How the company came to perform poorly is a matter that leaves room for speculation (Cruz-Cunha & Varajão, 2011).

Current online competitor assessment

The tourism industry is one of the easiest to enter. It requires a low start-up capital, and as such there has been an increase in the number of tour firms across America. With everything now going digital, all players in the hospitality industry have gone online, too. Hotel bookings and reservations are now done online; park entrance fees are paid online; and virtually every other travel transaction can be accomplished online. This therefore meant that players in this sector have taken their competition online and this is where the game has now heightened.

There are indeed a lot of companies offering tour services in the United States. With the Internet imposing no geographical limitations in the search for results, tourists use search engines to look for tour firms within the United States (Cruz-Cunha & Varajão, 2011). This provides the industry with a broader market, which in turn worsens the situation for the market players.

Three of the competitors of TrailFinders Safaris include One Nation Travel Agency (n. d.), Tours4Fun (2012), and Travel Express LA (2012). Although there are many possible points of comparison among these sites, along with TrailFinders Safaris, three that stand out are the web layout, social media integration, and international considerations.

All four company websites have nice layouts where there is a balanced use of text and images. The different sections of the web pages are also distinct

from each other, enabling the user to easily navigate the website. All four companies also offer international flights, which includes international travelers in their target market. However, it's noticeable how the TrailFinders Safaris and One Nation Travel websites don't have any links to their social media accounts on their websites. On the other hand, Travel Express LA prominently displays a button that links to their Facebook page. Even the Tuours4Fun website displays links to their accounts on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and others.

Criteria

Trail Finders

One Nation Travel

Tours4Fun

Travel Express LA

Top of the Funnel (Interesting Content)

Middle of the Funnel (Effective use of social media, marketing, conversion forms, and landing pages)

Analytics (Measurement of successes and failures)

These results show that although TrailFinders does not completely fall behind its competitors, there are definitely a lot of things that can be improved. In particular, the website's content can be improved, as well as its use of the social media and its marketing strategies. As well, these results show that the online presence of TrailFinders is below par.

Online marketing suggestions and strategies

Search engine optimization strategies should be employed to make the website rank higher on searchers, enabling users to easily find the site. Social media should also be integrated on the company website by providing links to the company's Facebook, Twitter, and other social media accounts. This enables the company's customers to easily get updates about the company. It also enables the company to easily communicate with its customers.

In addition, customer relationship should be efficiently managed with the use of an online CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software that enables the efficient management of customer data, in turn attracting more customers and retaining old ones. E-commerce solutions should also be provided to enable customers to make online transactions such as purchasing tickets or making reservations online. Finally, international considerations may include having the web page available in several of the major languages. This will attract more customers, especially from other countries, who may not be proficient in the English language.

That said, the following strategies can be employed to improve website's online presence:

Improve page rank. This can be accomplished by using better keywords, that is, keywords that more users search for and that less websites use. Page rank can also be increased through link building and article syndication. In particular, articles that are related to the website should be written and submitted to article directories such as Buzzle. com and ezinearticles. com

where each article contains a link back to the site. In addition, page rank can be improved by constantly adding content to the website. This can be done by adding information about tourist destinations or international news on the site that may be relevant to travelers. As well, a blog that's regularly updated may be added to the site.

Improve the company's social media presence. After creating accounts on the popular social media websites, company personnel should be tasked with regularly updating the status of the company or with communicating company updates with the company's followers. This employee should also be responsible for responding to follower comments and questions in a timely manner. As well, the personnel should start and keep conversations in these social media websites going in order to further promote the company.

Keep the website updated. The company website should be constantly updated to provide users with new and enhanced features that would improve the user's experience when navigating through the site.

Evaluate processes. Business processes – both online and offline – should be regularly evaluated in order to identify bottlenecks and in order to identify areas that can be improved. It would also help to solicit and consider customer feedback fort this initiative.

1) Search engine considerations and optimization strategies

It is upon the owners of the business to ensure that their firm is found by whichever search engine that a client would use. The owner of the business should put himself or herself in the shoes of a complete stranger visiting the

country for the first time and all he has is the Internet to offer all the information. There are very many search engines in the market today but the leading players are Google and Bing (Albert, 2006). A website must be designed so as to ensure that whichever search phrase or search engine that the client uses would fetch the company's link. Most clients also read only the company profiles for the first two or three companies that the search engine fetches, so it is up to the designers to ensure that they strengthen the company's visibility This in turn ensures that that the website ranks high on the SERP (Search Engine Results Page) regardless of the keyword that the user enters.

Some of the many strategies that can be employed for optimizing a website for search engines would include the use of better keywords where Google Adwords can be used for identifying possible keywords. The addition of viral content to the site; link building; viral marketing strategies such as link and social media marketing techniques (Online Marketing," n. d), and others.

Viral content refers to having interesting and useful content on the website, which would catch the interest of users, in turn increasing the website's traffic as well as the links to the site. This can include content such as trivia about travel destinations and tips that would travelers would find helpful. Content should also be regularly added to the site as more content means a higher page rank, which can in turn lead to higher SERP rank. Search engines would usually attribute higher SERP ranks on sites that have more and updated content.

With good content, other users will also want to link to the site, which is part of the link building strategy. The more sites link to the website, the higher the website's page rank will be. To further build links to the site, article syndication can be employed. This involves submitting articles to article directories where these articles are related to the website and where the articles also contain a link to the website. These articles should also contain interesting information so that other users would want to republish it; hence, increasing the number of links that point to the company website.

Viral marketing techniques, on the other hand, include getting media coverage, having the site added on bookmarking sites like StumbleUpon and Delicious and having a blogger write about the website. To accomplish this, it would help to having an active social media presence by making sure that the company's status is constantly updated and that followers' comments and questions are addressed in a timely manner. Having Share links on the company website would also enable users to easily spread the word on whatever interesting they see on the website. In addition, it would help to foster a relationship with the press in order to get media coverage.

2) Social media integration

Social media has been described as the next Internet revolution. There are countless of these including Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Skype, and others. They are web based mobile technologies that allow online communication to be turned into a heavily interactive one (Cruz-Cunha & VarajÃ£o, 2011). The use of social media in marketing has far reaching positive results. They enable individuals to create accounts that they then fill with friends with

whom they communicate thorough chat. A person can post messages to which their friends can comment on or respond.

The structures of these sites enable connections to easily be made. A user needs only to open an account using the name of the firm then go about soliciting friends by sending friend requests. For one to accept a friend request, he or she would usually read through the profile of the person sending the request, and in this manner, the latter gets to read about the company's profile. After building a small friends empire, the real job of selling the firm's products and services begins.

TrailFinders has two Facebook accounts, each having well over a million friends each. These are people who have learnt of the firm's existence in one way or another and who have actually received services from the company. The sites are maintained through the constant addition of new posts, which the friends like and comment on; thus, keeping the sites active.

In retrospect, online marketing involves a little more than the conventional ways of carrying out marketing activities. Some of the strategies that would ensure high returns from online marketing include constantly being online especially on the social sites and literally soliciting for clients, which can be accomplished by writing posts that give hints to potential clients. Maintaining blogs that provide news and information on tourism would be a good way to kick start the campaign as a lot of nature lovers would read the blogs.

Online customer relationship management

This is one aspect of the e-business that determines the success of the business for a company to develop and grow in this era where there exists lots of online competition one is required to keep a breast with its customer. The company in question knows this so well. They formed an online database of the clients of the firm and are always at speed trying to update this on daily basis. New customers are added to the list with the frequent ones being offered some incentives as they come.

Customers must be attracted to the firm and some of the key attractors to the firm include such things as incentives. Incentives that the firm offers her customer include complimentary game drives especially in Africa and the rates in the firth are often reduced in the low season when tourism is slow (Jiaming, 2008).. The currency in the African countries that it operates in are very weak compared to the American dollar this implies that they thus offer the best possible African comfort at very low rate and this is a trend that is responsible for the development that the firm received in the years before their down ward trend in the last three fiscal years.

E-commerce solutions

E- Commerce offers solutions that are relevant to tourism. For the company TrailFinders Safari to stay ahead of its competitors in the online market it has to make real some of the proposals that it had taken to undertake. Online ticketing is one of those milestones steps that it will have to introduce (Cruz-Cunha & VarajÃ£o, 2011). The firm must make use of online payment mechanisms. Currently it heavily relies only on online booking after which a

client is to physically present himself to the company's premises to make payment. This drags processes and heightens security concerns for the clients.

Online payment mechanisms such as the used of master cards and other accounts such as pay pal and wired transfers are safe and do not endanger the lives if the client at whichever cost. Tourists fear walking around with lots of money stashed in small bags around their waists s as they did in the 1800s and early 1990s. They would like to walk around with card and make payments from the very cards. There are several online and universally accepted cards: JCB, VISA, Master among others offer these services and the fact that the firm in question has been slow in coming to terms with the fact that technology is changing business around them has continued and will continue to deny them fair market in a long time.

Clients of Trail finders will use on line payment mechanisms to book safaris and pay for reservations in most of the parks that they plan to visit. The company will accept the use of some of the leading cards such as Visa, JCB and the Master card. This will most definitely expand their market as it does away with the limitations of geographical barriers.

With an ecommerce solution in place, users should be able to register so that they can easily make future bookings and purchases. This will also enable them to track the status of their flights and purchases. Upon registration, the user will then be able to easily view the available flights and tour packages. They can also easily book for a flight and purchase tickets as their payment

details are already registered. In addition, users will be easily informed if their desired flight has no more seats available. Upon completion of the booking or purchase, the user receives a confirmation email containing the details of the flight. The email would also contain information on how they can get in touch with Customer Support if necessary.

International considerations (e. g., market, strategy, organizational, language, cultural, infrastructure)

TrailFinders is indeed an international company, with offices in both Europe and Africa. It has gone global and this makes it mandatory that they begin operating as such. There is a need to abandon the old universal ways of advertising, and the best way that the company can improve its visibility is through an involvement in the social affairs of the society (Jiaming, 2008). Businesses exist right in the midst of the society and it therefore becomes mandatory for a sound minded investor to practice socially responsible investing. This is normally achieved through the firm getting involved in promoting the societies in which they operate. Others call this process " giving back to the society".

Being a tourism firm, this company should be at the forefront, calling for a cleaner environment and championing for the abolition of activities that pollute the environment. The firm can thus get down in Africa and donate vehicles to the governments in the countries where they operate to help boost the efforts of these governments in putting a stop to poaching activities and the illegal felling of trees (Albert, 2006).

It would also be important to keep the site culturally sensitive by making use of neutral colors whenever possible as some colors may have different implications for different people (Arno, 2010). For example, black may be taken to denote death and red to denote danger. The type of images used should also be taken into consideration given the international audience of the website. For example, pictures of scantily clad models may be offensive to some cultures. In addition, it should be considered that not all countries and not all users have high-speed Internet connections, so it is important to keep the website as graphically light as possible or just provide the users with an option for an HTML version, which will load more quickly.

Projected web development and maintenance costs

No

Item

Price ($)

Period

Web hosting

$100

Every month

Web design and web development (In-house web developer/web designer)

$6500/employee

Every month

Web content (In house content writer)

$5000/employee

Every month

Technical support/Customer support (online customer service and IT

personnel)

$6400/employee

Every month

A third-party web hosting service should be acquired to host the company's

websites. Although smaller packages – in the range of $10-$25 – packages

exist, it would be better to host more advanced packages that cost around

$100 or so as these packages come with more features that will be

necessary for setting up an ecommerce website. The website is also bound

to grow quickly; thus, it's better to allocate sufficient space for it at the onset

than having to make adjustments later on.

It is also better to have an in-house web developer or team of developers

rather than contracting this service as these developers will be responsible

not only for developing but also for maintaining the site, which can include

developing new features and enhancements to existing features, as well as

fixing defects that may be encountered with the system. $6500 is the

average monthly wage for web developers, and this would be a worthwhile

investment as a large part of the business is being conducted using web

applications. Having in-house web developers would also enable them to

develop an expertise of the company's systems and operations. This would enable them to better understand the company's and the customer's needs, in turn enabling them to develop better applications to address those needs.

As content is also a major part of the website's success, employing an in-house writer would be preferred as the writer can be tasked with not only writing content for the websites but also for maintaining the company's social media presence, that is, for posting status updates and responding to followers' comments and questions. By having an in-house writer, it is also ensured that all company information is kept confidential, as opposed to contracting the service where there's a possibility of sensitive company information being leaked. The average salary for a web content writer is $5000.

In addition, it is important to have technical and customer support staff. The technical support staff would be responsible for ensuring that all systems are running, which in turn ensures that interruptions in the operations are prevented. On the other hand, the customer support staff would be needed for addressing customer concerns either via phone or instant messages. They should be available 24/7 in order to cater to customers from all over.

Create a website index for the online expansion you proposed

Website index

Home page

About us

Services

Booking

Contact Us

Booking

Ticket acquisition

Provide a design mock-up of three website pages based on the proposed

online business expansion strategy.

(See the attached PowerPoint presentation.)

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