

Business information systems assignment

[Business](#), [Management](#)



An evaluation of Apple Inc's use of information systems through its website [http://www. apple. com/](http://www.apple.com/) Introduction In the highly competitive world of business the ability to understand and make use of information systems can provide substantial benefits to an organization. The diversification of consumer taste and competition has put pressure on organizations to focus on customer involvement and business information systems have proven to be a versatile and useful tool in order to achieve this.

Strategic information systems have the potential to allow an organization to gain a competitive advantage by accessing new markets and providing a more efficient and faster form of communication between managers. By improving communication within the organization, strategic information systems have the potential to reduce the cost of advertising, delivery, design and manufacturing. The purpose of this essay is to evaluate the use of information systems in consideration of Apple Incorporated's website. About Apple Inc.

Founded by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, the company was incorporated on January 3, 1977, under the company name Apple Computers. Initially the multinational company predominantly dealt as a manufacturer of personal computers, however in 2001 following the successful release of the iPod, the company established itself as a credible competitor within the consumer electronics industry. By 2010 Apple Inc had surpassed Microsoft in terms of market capitalization to become the largest technology company in the world.

Apple Inc now provides 13 core products, including desktop computers, laptop computers, a tablet computer, a mobile phone range, a range of portable media players and a home media player. In addition, the company also provides accessories for all of its core products, as well as server and networking solutions. Furthermore Apple Inc provides both tangible products, as listed above, and intangible digital media through its software ‘ iTunes’ and more recently via the newly launched ‘ App Store’.

Over 10 billion songs and applications have been downloaded via Apples software based digital media outlet and within the first quarter of 2010 Apple had sold 3.36 million Macintosh computers, 8.7 million iPhones and 21 million iPods (Apple Inc.). As with other consumer electronics companies Apple Inc provides a comprehensive after sale support service including hardware, software and educational services through its websites and retail outlets. Apples main manufacturing facilities are located within China along with the majority of its suppliers of electrical components such as Foxconn Technology Group.

The company has in excess of 70 offices worldwide with 46,600 permanent employees (United State Securities and Exchange Commission, 2010). Apple Inc’s current business model encompasses three broad categories those being, software engineering, hardware manufacturing and retail. The company operates across a multi-channel platform of commerce selling to customers through the use of its website, software based digital media outlet, official retail stores and franchised retail stores.

In terms of e-commerce Apple acts as a content provider through iTunes & the App Store, an online service provider through its 'mobile me' subscription service, an online marketplace providing an environment in which buyers and sellers can meet to procure apple targeted accessories, e-tailing in providing official apple products and social networking services through 'Ping' as well as its online support discussion boards.

The company is also actively involved in M-commerce through mobile software on its portable media players, tablet computers and mobile devices using the iTunes store and App Store. In order to reduce time between the point of sale and delivery, Apple has made use of a Just In Time approach, in turn reducing inventory costs. The JIT production technique is an integrated socio-technical inventory management system famously pioneered by the Toyota Motor Corporation. Website interface and usability

Apples website makes use of a monochromatic colour scheme providing a white backdrop whilst displaying product images in colour. This enables Apple to draw its customers towards the products rather than distracting them with an overly complex or distracting layout, a technique mirrored in their advertising campaigns. The aesthetics of their website closely follows the design of their core products with the use of monochromatic colours and gentle gradients to give the illusion of aluminium.

Apple has strived to provide simplistic and stylish design and their website is no exception. The design of the website is a conscious effort in an attempt to unify the sense of style and design across Apples product lines and points of customer contact whilst giving the user the perception that the interface is

simplistic and easily accessible. Individual pages are well structured giving the user the perception that the information displayed on the page flows which in turn reduces the likelihood that the user will lose interest or have difficulties in navigating the site.

Apple is extremely successful and well known for its marketing techniques, its website is used as another point of contact for customers providing a medium to display its marketing prowess. Individual pages for core products normally begin with a large image or set of images of the product with headlines, the choice to watch an advertisement or feature video directly below and directly under this, smaller images accompanied with key features or unique selling points.

Apple structures each page by showing key features and images of the product drawing the customer in and providing easy to navigate links to find out more on greater detailed pages followed by the ability to purchase resulting in a flowing chain of information leading the buyer from the hard sell, to the product information, to the sale itself. Navigation on the site centres around its navigation bar which remains fixed at the top of each page on the website providing consistency to the site. [pic].

The bar consists of separate segments focused towards its main products followed by a support option and finally a search feature. The company also makes use of this fixed banner for branding purposes with the apple logo embedded on the left hand side of the bar. Once an option is chosen the user is then taken to a more detailed page containing sub sections, these

secondary pages normally have their own navigation sections to explore the issue further, in the case of the online store making use of a sidebar.

Apples search feature on the navigation bar compliments the websites simple and flowing design very well in that it enables users to search and skip to the information they require straight away. The search bar uses AJAX live search results providing a benefit over traditional searching as results are shown as the customer types, narrowed as he or she continues and if the results become too narrow the user is able to delete words to broaden the search horizon. The search results are grouped in a drop down window below the search bar in an easy to understand manner.

The text on the website is easily readable and headings are easily ascertainable. Apples website can be optimized for user compatibility by changing language and country as well as providing clear links to an education store and business orientated store. The website also makes great use of white space to separate images and texts making product information and images stand out without distraction. In most cases the website accompanies text with images in order to maintain the customers attention to the product and its unique selling points.

Use of Databases Apple successfully incorporates a variety of databases into its website design allowing customers to navigate, search and input data such as order information, tracking information and in the case of support, product information. As a result Apple is able to align inventory and sales to appropriately manage supply and demand across its supply chain. Through the use of variable field and searchable databases Apple also allows its users

to make use of unique product numbers tailoring online support to customers specific needs.

This type of searchable database results in a quick and efficient way in which customers are able to get the help and support they need. Apple also makes use of relational databases throughout its website design for instance in the case of its product pages and online store. By clicking on the primary key ‘Mac accessories’ a customer is then taken to another page featuring a database of information with similar links enabling the customer to successfully navigate and browse the online store until they find their preferred product.

Apple also collates its products under sub categories or databases as in the case of ‘top sellers’ ‘top rated’ and ‘just added’ products options. A conscious effort by Apple to increase usability and minimize data redundancy ensuring the site is quick and easy to navigate. The majority of the primary keys on the store relate to Apples core products making them a useful tool in navigating the databases across the site. Apples website uses SQL [Structured Query Language] to manage its relational database management systems.

Over the years Apples website has been tested by a string of SQL injection attacks creating hyperlinks to malicious sites from legitimate links on the website (CGIsecurity. com, 2010). The online databases must be updated in accordance with supply levels, with the addition of new products and the retraction of old. Apple’s fully integrated enterprise business information system and use of its JIT inventory approach enables a fully interactive

supply chain, however with the use of the Apple online store as an e-marketplace the supply of products from other suppliers not fully integrated may distort the efficiency of current databases.

Integration of business information systems Through its website Apple Inc provides its customers with the ability to personalise and configure their products prior to purchase. In addition, they are then able to their track orders, download manuals and driver support as well as receiving support via an online interactive library or alternative methods of contact such as online reservations to see certified staff in store, by email, phone or live chat.

The website also provides discussion boards to resolve issues with other customers, online training and a self-service repair feature enabling customers to track and monitor product repairs as well as checking their entitlement under their personalised service and support packages. [pic]

Apple has successfully integrated information systems across its business enabling the company to coordinate its e-commerce across its global operations and supply chain benefiting from real time information.

Orders, reservations and requests placed on Apples fully interactive site are integrated with Apples procurement, manufacturing, management, retail and stock control systems providing information to the relevant departments automatically. This in turn allows managers to assess the demands and needs of the organization in real time. To do this successfully Apple's website provides computer generated billing, personalised product configuration, secure document management and a secure payment system to its customers.

Historically Apples information system was based on a legacy platform distributed across 16-legacy applications. In January 1999 however, Apple successfully implemented an Enterprise Resource Planning system called SAP Business One into its business model enabling them to integrate their manufacturing, finance, sales and distribution sectors together, present day Apple manages a fully integrated Enterprise Resource Planning system.

Security and Privacy Apple Inc has a legal obligation to protect its customers and users privacy whilst ensuring transactions are kept secure.

Apple provides an extensive privacy policy and also provides explicit terms of use for the site. In addition its online store uses industry-standard encryption to protect customers confidentiality when checking out as well as a 128-bit Extended Validation Secure Socket Layer (EV SSL) encryption technique to protect information in transit from the customer to the company following a purchase online. This can be seen in the web address during checkout as sites featuring SSL technology begin with ' https://' as apposed to ' http://'.

TRUSTe, one of the worlds leading online privacy companies, independently verifies Apple's online privacy standards to ensure they meet an industry standard and protect their consumers. Customers are able to create accounts for ease of future transactions called Apple ID's. An apple ID allows consumers to personalise their online shopping experience giving customers a unified account to be able to purchase products online including downloadable content, the ability to make reservations in store and or tailor

online learning, access support and register Apple products for added security.

All information held within your Apple ID is protected under Apples comprehensive privacy policy and the user information is protected through user personalised security protocols such as security questions and passwords. Apples privacy policy also extends to information stored in cookies upon visiting and revisiting the site through a web browser. Although Apple reserves the right to share information with third party affiliates any information shared as a result of its e-market business is also explicitly covered by its extensive online privacy policy and data protection technology during transit. Conclusion

Apple employs consistent, coherent and unified branding across its website by mirroring the look of its hardware and software with the use of monochromatic colours and subtle shading. The website is modern, sleek, user friendly and has an emphasis on the visual experience providing rich content against a minimalistic background making great use of white space. The consistent use of varied databases, the AJAX live search system and a central navigation bar offers a user-friendly experience. The sites security is of an industry standard however it has still proven vulnerable to malicious attacks proving the website is not without its flaws.

With that being said Apple's website bears example to a successful integration of information systems across a business enabling the company to coordinate its e-commerce across its global operations and supply chain efficiently and effectively. Bibliography Apple Inc. (n. d.). Apple Reports First

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