

Website evaluation – apple store



In the recent years, electronic business becomes more widespread, and rapidly growing in the whole world. Because of the cost efficiency and coverage, many companies build a website to sell their products on the Internet. One of the most famous worldwide consumer electronic company, Apple Inc. also established an online store which called Apple Store (<http://store.apple.com>) to sell different products on the Internet from 1997 (Technical Update, 1997). The website is widely use in buying the products of Apple Inc. by the customers in worldwide. Therefore, the quality of the website has to be good enough for to numbers of customers. This essay is going to evaluate, discuss and conclude about the Apple Store and its e-commerce operation by using different methods of evaluation.

Website Purpose Outline

Company Background

Apple Inc. is one of the biggest consumer electronic and computer company in the world. It provides many famous hardware products including the iPhone, the iPod series, the iPad and the Mac hardware products to different types of customers (Apple Inc. Annual Report, 2010). The company sells its products in more than 300 retail stores in various countries from 2010 (Spence, 2010). Other than the website and the retail store, Apple Inc. sells its products by wholesalers, retailers from other company, direct sales force, third-party cellular network carriers, and value added resellers at the same time (Apple Inc. Annual Report, 2010).

Website Functions

Apple Store is a website provides various services to customers, which are products description, software download, products selling and after sales services.

Product Description

Finding and filtering information for the customers is important to a successful electronic system since the customers would like to find the products and services in the easiest way (Ng, Yan and Lim, 2000). Therefore, a good e-business website must have a good production description. Apple Store describes the information of different products in detail for the customers understanding the functions and usefulness of the products.

Diverse products like the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, the Mac hardware products, software and accessories are being introduced by words, videos and pictures in different languages in the website. For the iPod, iPhone, iPad and Apples computers, those features, outlook and technical specifications is being showed in the site. The website even uses video to explain how to use the products in detail to attract the consumers. At the same time, in every description page we can see a " Buy Now" button which is a link to the product selling part to make the purchasing process easier (Apple Store, 2010).

Software Download

Apple Store provides many types of software for different products. There are both free and paid software for the customers to better use their hardware products. Like many software production companies, customers

can choose to buy the software in the normal stores or on the online store. And the software update can be found on the website for providing new features and fixing the bugs on the products. Also, the software can be downloaded in various languages in the world.

Product Selling

The online Apple Store is a channel of product selling to various customers in the world. Customers can buy anything which can be bought in the Apple retail store including hardware, Apple software, third party software and selected third party accessories on the website. They even can buy the certified refurbished products and the old type products which cannot be bought in the normal store on the online store in a cheaper than normal price (Apple Store, 2010). For the customers who buy the goods on the Apple online store, they can buy the goods on installments without interest.

After Sales Services

The Apple Inc. provides many after sales services to the customers if they bought the products on the Apple Store. They can check the delivery status on the website in order to know the process of delivery. When the customers take the product to repair in the repair department of Apple, they can check the repair status on the site. And they can get support if they have any problem of using the product. The website provides many product using problem solutions to the users (Apple Store, 2010). Therefore, the customers can get help easily from the Apple store website if they have any problem.

Website Analyses

Web Accessibility

Users with disabilities have to use the website. Therefore, a good website should be able to let them to utilize it easily. Web Accessibility is a standard for checking that whether the users with disabilities can perceive, follow, control, communicate with and contribute to the website (W3C, 2005). For a website, if it is sufficiently flexible to be used by all of assistive technologies, it can be called as an accessible website (Slatin & Rush, 2003). For the Apple Store, web accessibility will be evaluated by whether the website has the essential components if it is accessible to people with disabilities (W3C, 2005).

In content, the basic text and images introduce the product and the purchasing instruction. For the people who have blurry vision, they cannot read unless the text is very large (Thatcher, 2005, P. 3). By the way, the text size and color cannot be change in each page in the Apple Store website. The minor visual disability people cannot change the text size to what they need when they want to see that page.

However, for the product introduction, the Apple Store uses some videos to introduce the major functions and special features of the products, the visual disability people, even the blindness who is completely sightless (Paciello, 2000, P. 8), can know more about the product by listening the voice in the videos. But for the auditory people, there is no subtitle in the videos for them to understand what is about on the video. At the same time, for the visual disability people who want to make transaction in the website, there is no instruction video or audio about the process of transaction for those people who need it. And even in the transaction page, no access for the visual

disability people to make a transaction. Therefore, Apple Store does not provide enough access to disability people.

Webqual 2.0

Research Design

Finding the domain which can reflect the situation in reality is better than doing artificial laboratory-based experiment (Barnes & Vidgen, 2001). By the way, only analyze one data about the domain is not enough for the website evaluation. Therefore, compare the domain with the major competitors is the best way to evaluate the quality of the website. In the market, there are many competitors of Apple having an online store to sell consumer electronic products (Apple Inc. Annual Report, 2010). The major competitors which are chosen to be evaluated with Apple Store are the Sony Style online store (<http://www.sonystyle.com>), and the HP online store (<http://www.shopping.hp.com>). The reasons why those websites are being chosen to be compared are because both of them are selling consumer electronic and computer products. At the same time, both three of them are recommended by the UK consumers (Satmetrix, 2010).

Sony is the biggest multinational conglomerate corporation in Japanese. It is one of the leading company of selling consumer electronic and computer products. Playstation, Sony music products and Sony laptops are some example of the famous electronic product of Sony (Sony Style, 2010). Sony Style online store is a channel of distribution on the Internet.

HP (Hewlett-Packard) is another major competitor of consumer electronic and computer products of Apple Inc. It is a multinational information

technology corporation in USA which is famous by its computer products. HP is famed for selling different types of hardware product.

Methodology

40 questionnaires have been done from the user of Internet in the worldwide. Questions in the questionnaires are distributed to different countries, different age and different gender people by Internet. The questionnaire is mainly divided into 2 parts to measure those three websites' quality and their view of the importance of the criteria. First part is about their basic information, which is about their age group, gender, and most importantly, whether they have visited those three websites. The data of the interviewees who have not visited those websites are not going to be count in the analysis. The second part is different descriptions of the websites. Each of them uses the scale 1 to 5 to elaborate the interviewees' agreeability of the descriptions (Barnes & Vidgen, 2001). And the description importance for evaluation is also asked in the questionnaire, in order to know how they feel about the importance of those descriptions.

Data Analysis

In the 40 interviewees, 28 of them have visited those Apple Store, Sony Style online store and HP online store. Therefore, only this 28 interviewees' questionnaire results are being counted in the analysis. All data which are collected are summarized in Table 1 in the appendix page. The marks counted are the average marks of the 28 interviewees in each question. All marks are round up to 2 decimal places for evaluation conveniently.

According to Barnes, the Webqual can be divided into different categories in <https://assignbuster.com/website-evaluation-apple-store/>

SERVQUAL which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Barnes & Vidgen, 2001). They are going to be the criteria to see how the quality of those three websites is.

Importance of specific question for user

At the beginning, the importance of each description is going to be analyzed first. From the table, we can see the average marks of importance in different descriptions are quite high. Therefore, most of the descriptions of Webqual are important for the interviewees.

In aesthetics, the interviewees think having a good outlook is quite important to them (Description 1). It can attract them to stay in the website for a longer time. However, having an appropriate design and audio-visual effect (Descriptions 2, 3) are not as important as other criteria, since they are not the critical element for them to stay in the website. Then, reliable (Descriptions 4-6), responsiveness (Descriptions 7-8), competence (Descriptions 9-10), credibility (Descriptions 14-15), and security (Descriptions 16-17) are quite important for the website users. It is because both of the criteria are about the safety of the transaction on that website. The users of website most concern the trust and dependability of it (Jones, Wllikens, Morris and Masera, 2000). However, for navigation (Descriptions 11-13), whether the websites are easy to find and to return to and find your way around are not important for the interviewees. Only the website has things where they expect to find them is important for the interviewees. Whether the website is easy to give feedback (Description 18) is quite important for the interviewees. For the empathy of the website, websites are

quite good in communication (Descriptions 19-21) and their understanding the individual (Descriptions 22-24) are not as important as others.

Descriptions Comparison between Three Websites

Referring to Table 1, the evaluation of interviewees can show the differences between those three websites. In terms of aesthetics, the users think that the Apple Store looks much better than the Sony Style online store and HP online store. As we can see in those websites, Apple Store provides more pictures and a better looking homepage between those three websites. At the same time, both of them have an appropriate style of design for site type. By the way, only Apple Store creates an audio-visual experience for the users. In the Apple Store website, there are some videos to introduce the major functions and special features of the products. So the Apple Store has a higher overall score of aesthetics.

For the navigation, which is the description that the users think it is not that important, we can see Apple Store and Sony Style online store have a higher mark of whether it is easy to find and to return to and Apple Store gets a higher mark in it is easy to find your way around. It shows that the Apple Store is easier for the user to find and use. At the same time, the interviewees claim that the three websites have things what they expected to find them.

For the reliability, the marks between three websites are quite similar. It is because both three websites are run by big companies, which are Apple, Sony and HP. They have to make their websites free from error in order to maintain their credibility. Only about the description about providing up-to-

date information, Apple Store get a higher average marks between three websites. It is because after the press conference of the new products, the new products' features will be updated immediately on the website next day while the other two websites do not do this kind of update.

For the competence, interviewees think that those websites can provide them with professional and competent image and believe they can process transactions competently, again, because both three website are run by the big company. Professional and process transactions competently are important for the credibility for them.

For responsiveness, HP online store gives a more clear time for delivery for products or services. It shows what the exact day is for the customers receive the product, while the Apple and Sony website only show the estimate day of delivery which is not enough for the customers. At the same time, the access of three websites is good for the interviewees, both of them are easy to give feedback or contact the company.

By the way, for the credibility and security, Apple Store has a higher mark compare with other two websites. It is because the Apple website is more famous in dealing with online trading and many of the interviewees have done the transaction through Apple website. Therefore, it has a higher mark in compare with the two other websites. For the empathy, both websites does not have a good mark since the website does not convey this culture to the website users.

In conclusion, Apple Store gets the highest marks between three websites in the evaluation. Therefore we can see Apple website is the best in the group of consumer products websites.

E-commerce Operation Evaluation

Value Creation model

Value Creation is important for a company. According to Mathur and Kenyon, it is about the design of future competitive offerings for the financial success of a company (Mathur and Kenyon, 2001) and the company have to beat the competitor by the value creation (Phillips, 2003).

Novelty

Apple.com provides a feature that the customers can order the products in multiple configurations. They can customize what they buy on the website. For example, when a customer orders a Macbook Pro, he can choose the processor, memory, graphics card, hard drive he like. This feature is a novelty in the online store market when it was first revealed. It creates value by eliminating inefficiencies in buying process for the customers. Because the customers can chose the product configurations according to their personal needs. So it is easier for them to purchase on the Internet.

Customers can buy certified refurbished products on the Apple online store. The certified refurbished products are the products which undergo a rigorous refurbishment process prior to being offered for sale in a price which is cheaper than the normal price. It creates value by creating entirely new markets which is the market of the customers who like buying cheaper

product. At the same time, it can help the company to sell the refurbished products. And because it is selling on the official website, it is more reliable for the consumers.

The Apple Store let the customers engraving their iPod if they make an order on the website. They can make some personalized words on their iPod by the laser engraving. The text will be engraved near the top, on the back of the iPod. Any different types of iPod can use this service if the customers buy the iPod on the apple website. It creates values by capturing latent consumer need which is personalized design of their iPod.

Efficiency

The Apple online store provides the consumers with efficiency in different aspects. First of all, the information asymmetries between the Apple online store and the buyer have been reduced since the website provides all information which the buyer need in deciding whether purchasing, including the price of all different product, all possible discount, the price of adding different customize part in the products. Unlike in the normal store, the buyers have enough information in making the decision on buying a product or not. Therefore, we can say the information asymmetries between each group have been reduced.

At the same time, the searching and bargaining cost of the buyer has been reduced by using the Apple online store. They do not have to search in different store since the price of the Apple Store is unified in the market. Therefore, their decision making pace will be faster than in the normal store since they have enough information to making the purchasing decision.

Complementarities

Apple Store provides with vertical complementarities to the customers which are after sales services. On the website, when you login your purchasing account, many individual information about your purchasing can be shown on the webpage. Delivery status, repair status can be checked on the site. Then the buyers can easily organize the usage of their products after the purchase. If they have any problem of using the product, many supporting service are available on the website for the buyers. They can browse the instructions about the using problem on the website. And also read the guideline from the website.

For the horizontal complementarities, in some promotion, the buyers can buy the computer with the printer of the partner firms. This cooperation between the company helps to create value that the customers can have the bundle of products and get the value create from the cooperation.

Lock-In

In the Apple online store, it provides many services that create value for the customers. For the customers who have purchased in the Apple online store, they will receive the email about the latest news about the store, which is about the latest products, latest software download or some news about the company. When the customers can see the email regularly, they will be locked in with the company. And the email have the link for the customers to know more further information about the new, which make some potential purchasing for the company.

Also, personalization for the customers appears in the Apple online store. After the first transaction between the customer and Apple store, the customer can turn the one click ordering function in the website with entering the credit card and personal information in the website. The customer is then allowed to purchase anything on the Apple Store with single click on the website (Apple Store, 2010). This personalization service for the customers let them to purchase in the website easier and increase the sales of the Apple Store.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Apple Store is one of the best electronic business website. In the evaluation, we can see the website quality of Apple Store is on the top in between the competition. At the same time, it provides with values in different aspects. By the way, the web accessibility is not good enough for the use of disability. The company has to put more effort in this aspect.

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