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Usage and effectiveness of online marketing tools among Business-to-Consumer (B2C) firms in Singapore

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Abstract

This study seeks to identify the extent of usage and perceived effectiveness of various online marketing tools among Business-to-Consumer (B2C) firms in Singapore. The findings reveal that there are some significant differences between the extent to which websites utilize the various online marketing tools and the perceived effectiveness of such tools. Implications of the results are discussed and the results should be useful in helping B2C firms decide on the appropriate marketing tools to implement.

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1. Introduction

Businesses are increasingly using the Internet for commercial activities. The ubiquitous nature of the Internet and its wide global access has made it an extremely effective mode of communication between businesses and customers (Rowley, 2001). The growth of Internet technology has enormous potential as it reduces the costs of product and service delivery and extends geographical boundaries in bringing buyers and sellers together. The Internet also allows small businesses to access markets and to maintain a presence that help them to compete against

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industry giants. In fact, the Internet has changed the face of marketing with its instant yet personalized reach to a global audience.

Although more and more firms are realizing the importance of leveraging on the Internet to conduct their businesses, corporate leaders are finding it difficult to keep up with fast moving markets and the customer conditions that are the hallmark of the Internet (Aldridge, Forcht, & Pierson, 1997). Literature on Web theory is scant because it is a relatively a new area and the technologists at the forefront of Web design are typically not sufficiently academically inclined to formulate the relevant theories (Day, 1997).

While previous research has examined Internet usage (Teo, Lim, & Lai, 1999), online shopping (Teo & Yu, 2004), commercial websites (Gonzalez & Palacios, 2004), website design (Kim, Shaw, & Schneider, 2003), and website effectiveness from the consumers' perspective (Bell & Tang, 1998), there is a general lack of research on specific online marketing tools and the effectiveness of these tools. Hence, this study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the extent of usage of various online marketing tools by Business-to-consumer (B2C) firms and their perceived effectiveness.

2. Digital marketing model

The conceptual framework used in this study is based on the Digital Marketing Framework introduced by Kierzkowski, McQuade, Waitman, and Zeisser (1996). The Digital Marketing Framework revolves around five essential elements for success in digital marketing, namely, attract users, engage users' interest and participation, retain users, learn about their preferences and lastly, relate back to users to provide customised interactions. Each of the five elements entails several issues and practices that determine marketers' success in their online marketing efforts.

3. Method

The questionnaire comprises items describing various online marketing tools used in the five elements: attract, engage, retain, learn and relate of the Digital Marketing Framework. For each item, the extent of usage and effectiveness is rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from (1) not used to (5) extensively used; and (1) not effective to (7) extremely effective.

The questionnaire was pretested with ten working adults employed in the B2C industry. The questionnaire was amended iteratively by adding more explanations or definitions of certain terms deemed to be ambiguous by the respondents. The final questionnaire was sent via mail to online marketing managers or CEOs of 400 B2C firms generated from three search engines Lycosasia (www.lycosasia.com), Yahoo Singapore (www.yahoo.com.sg) and Catcha (www.catcha.com). Three weeks later, a second mailing was done. Twenty-two firms declined participation citing reasons such as the lack of plans to carry out online marketing and the busy schedules of managers. Eliminating these firms, a total of 92 out of 378, or 24.3 percent of B2C firms responded to the study. A non-respondent bias test indicated no differences between respondents and non-respondents. After preliminary findings were obtained, in-depth interviews with 12 firms surveyed were carried out to gain more insights into the research findings.

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