



University of Wisconsin-Madison

UW E-Business Consortium

"Helping Industry Gain Competitive Advantage Through E-Commerce and E-Business"

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Project Report
(Abridged Version)

Web Site Accessibility Evaluation and Online Conversion Analytics Benchmarking

Project Sponsor

TDS Telecom

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Executive Summary

TDS Telecom (TDS) uses the Web as an important channel of communication and commerce. One of their main focuses is to make enhancements to their Web channel and marketing. The objectives of this student team were two fold: to assist TDS Telecom in developing a strategy for improving Website accessibility, and to compile benchmarks and research leading practices to grow opt-in email, increase conversion rates and decrease shopping cart abandonment rate

There are about 36.9 million people in the United States, 13 percent of the population, with a disability. In addition to the registered and identified individuals with disabilities in this country, there is a continuously growing aging population. Also, Section 508 is the only comprehensive guideline that requires electronic and information technology to be accessible by people with disabilities. Therefore, Web accessibility has come to the forefront as a major concern as companies are trying to capture a large share of the market in order to stay competitive with other companies.

In order to develop a strategy for improving Website accessibility for TDS, the group researched Section 508 requirements and used best practices from UW-Madison's Division of Information Technology (DoIT) and the Trace Research and Development Center. Six pages were tested on Section 508 requirements from the TDS Website using the online accessibility evaluation tool, Truwex. Interviews and observations of two blind individuals were conducted in order to gain a perspective and understanding of problems with the TDS Website using a screen reader.

Using the information gathered from the research, eight prioritized action items were developed for TDS to follow for improving their Website accessibility. The eight action items, in order of necessity, include adding alternative tags to all clickable images; providing correct labels to all form fields (i.e., Address 2); improving the system of portal login (i.e., style & CAPTCHA); ensuring javascript functionality; correlating titles and labels; supplying table headers as needed or labeling blank headers appropriately; labeling all form fields separately (i.e., phone number); and using color appropriately.

The second part of the project was to focus on two areas to improve TDS' online marketing strategies: growing the opt-in email list and improving the conversion rates on the TDS Website. To do this, the team benchmarked email open rates, email click through rates, conversion rates, and shopping cart abandonment rates. This was done through extensive online research and interviews with seven University of Wisconsin E-Business Consortium (UWEEBC) member companies.

Based on the research, we compiled several leading practices that can help a company improve the effectiveness of its online marketing. The five best practices to grow an opt-in email list include promising not to share customer information, having incentives to opt-in, allowing customers to customize, asking customers to recommend a friend, and making an interesting and useful newsletter. The top five methods to increase conversion rates are to reveal shipping costs early, keep terms of service simple and unambiguous, and decrease the number of steps required for the transaction, avoid distracting links, and welcome repeat visitors by name. The best methods to decrease shopping cart abandonment rates include not having hidden costs, reminding customers of an abandoned cart, assisting customers through the checkout process, including security icons and information, and performing tests on shopping carts. These recommendations can be taken to substantially improve the effectiveness of e-marketing strategies.

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