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Project Report

Product Image and Content Analysis for Colony Brands

Project Sponsor

Colony Brands

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Executive Summary

Colony Brands is a Monroe based direct retailer which began as a premier mail-order cheese company called The Swiss Colony and evolved into a very successful catalog company. Colony Brands approached the UWEBC looking to gain insight on how product images and information affect a consumer's purchase decision. Colony Brands also requested a summary of industry practices as well as a highlight of new and innovative e-commerce ideas.

Colony Brands provided guidelines for the project based on what they were looking to achieve. The project was then divided into two distinct sections: a competitive analysis and a usability test. Each of the two tasks required planning, execution, and analysis phases.

The competitive analysis involved two phases. The first phase involved analyzing the competitor websites from a basic set of criteria and provided general findings of industry trends. Phase 1 allowed the student team to decide which aspects of the analysis should receive a more in depth look in the second phase and also provided some key general findings. For instance, a majority of competitors offered a proprietary credit card and utilized fly down headers on their home page. Phase 2 of the competitive analysis involved a more in depth analysis of all 21 websites, this time with results broken down individually by the 7 different product types. Some of the key findings were that websites varied by product type and the majority did use consistent sizing of the thumbnail images but not consistent photography.

The usability testing determined consumer's preferences relating to product images and information and involved recruiting participants, developing the template and tasks for the test, and doing a trial run before doing the actual testing in mid-November. The student team was able to perform the usability test on ten participants from different demographics. The test consisted of three main components: participant profile, product image, and product page information. The participant profile section allowed the student team to understand the likes and dislikes of an online shopping customer while also allowing the participant to become familiar with talking out lout. The product image looked at two websites, Ginny's and Home at Five, and asked the participant to choose one product between the two sites based only on thumbnail image. They then had to perform a similar task on Monroe and Main to pick out one item in each given category. The last section, product page information, consisted of a feedback questionnaire about the information a customer would like to see before making an online purchase. From this testing the team drew several conclusions about how the angle, background setting, use of model, and image quality influence the customer, and what product information is most helpful for customers when they are making a purchase online.

Overall the competitive analysis provided some standard practices and highlighted innovative ideas while the usability test presented findings about user preferences regarding product image and content. Together these findings can be used by Colony Brands to help keep their websites competitive and provide suggestions for improving their thumbnail images and product pages to meet customers' needs.

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