Table of Contents

Executive Summary......................................................................................................................3
Brand Context.............................................................................................................................3
Strategy Focus............................................................................................................................3
Competition.................................................................................................................................4
Research......................................................................................................................................5
Customer Profiles.......................................................................................................................6
Recommendations General Features..........................................................................................9
Executive Summary

Zappos.com has established a strong customer base by carving a rather large niche for itself in the world of online shoe retail in addition to clearly branding themselves as a service company that just happens to sell shoes among other things. However, Zappos is joined by many competitors in the online shoe retail market who not only have similar customer service strategies but do so with websites that integrate customer service principles that begins when the user first lands on their website and extends after the purchase and receipt of the product. Customer service is provided before, during and after a purchase. The analysis and recommendations within this information architecture strategy report seek to expand Zappos' customer service theme to improve the features and functionality of their website by focusing on the customer’s actions prior to purchase. This can be accomplished by providing a visually appealing interface for navigating, browsing and searching for products on the site to improve the customer experience, complement the Zappos brand, increase the sites credibility among new users and show their commitment to customer service for all.

Brand Context

Zappos is a service oriented e-commerce company that specializes in the sale of footwear for men, women and children. Their commitment to customer service, an expansive list of products and a focus on the niche shoe retail market have enabled them to become the leading seller of footwear on the internet. Their annual sales in 2007, for all product offerings, reached over $800 million and is projected to hit $1 billion in 2008. With over 7.5 million customers, Zappos can claim over 2.5% of the US population as customers. Zappos implements a loyalty business model and relationship marketing. As such, 60% of their customers are repeat customers, who purchase more frequently and spend more on average when compared to first time customers.

Given their commitment to becoming a service leader, Zappos promotes such benefits as:

- free shipping both ways
- 365-day return policy
- 24/7 customer service call center

Consistent with their slogan as “...a service company that happens to sell shoes. And handbags. And more...,” Zappos is looking to expand their product offering beyond shoes and apparel and is also planning to redesign their website.

Strategy Focus

Our focus for this information strategy report is to pinpoint select ways the website can facilitate customer service by improving the overall quality of experience for each visitor to the site. We seek to accomplish this by enhancing the visual appeal of the website and improving the site’s navigation to facilitate browsing and serendipity.

We also recognize the importance of maintaining Zappos’ place as the fastest loading e-commerce site and believe that our recommendations will support this going forward.
We have identified five pages we believe are important to this site and redesigned them to incorporate our stated strategic goals. Ultimately, this will lead to a mutually beneficial outcome for both the Zappos business through increased sales and the Zappos’ customer by providing a pleasant shopping experience where their needs are met.

**Competition**

Zappos is competing among a strong set of contenders in the online shoe retail market. We've identified three online retailers we felt offer the strongest competition as it relates to the strategic goals for this report: Search, navigation, browsability and visual layout. The following is a list of the competitors, who seek to provide the best selection of shoes, for men, women and children, and the best overall experience to their customers. Each site offers a 365 day returns, free two-way shipping and a 100% (or more) price match policy. The following sites are affiliated with very high performing and well respected companies whose shoe retail websites can draw from their existing customer base. We’ve taken care to highlight key aspects of their website that set them apart from Zappos.

**Endless.com**

Endless.com focuses on the sale of shoes and handbags. It is owned and operated by retail giant Amazon.com. High points of their website include a clean and elegant layout that facilitates browsing. The search feature on the site also seems to consistently return relevant results and provides the best option we’ve seen to narrow search results. They also offer a 110% price match on all their products. We’ve determined Endless.com to be at the top of the top competitors list for Zappos.

**Shoes.com**

Shoes.com is in the business of selling shoes and accessories. It is owned by the Brown Shoe company, a leading footwear company. Their website also offers a pleasing and simple visual layout. The search offered by Shoes.com did not perform at the same level as Endless.com. Shoes.com also offers a 110% price match for their products.

**Piperlime.com**

Piperlime.com sells shoes and women’s handbags and is owned by Gap Inc. Piperlime also boasts a simple, appealing visual presence. We’ve determined their search feature to perform better then Shoes.com but below Endless.com in their ability to narrow your search results. Browsing is made easy on Piperlime.com through use of their contextual navigation and their headliners section.

It is important for Zappos to understand the strengths of their competitors. For Zappos to continue to be the number one shoe retailer on the web it is important for them to understand the service their competitors provide and how they can improve their site to compete. All but Shoes.com seem to have developed after the popularity of Zappos but each have taken the Zappos model for customer service policies and expanded on it. We believe for Zappos to maintain their number one status they must improve on the key strategic points we’ve indicated in this report so that all aspects of their site perform at the highest level.
Research

This information architecture strategy is based on user experience research and analysis completed using the following methods: comparative analysis, web credibility evaluation, heuristic evaluation, a user survey and company research.

The heuristic evaluation based on Jakob Nielsen’s ten usability heuristics and other guidelines revealed key usability issues with the Zappos site that fell under the following components of the site: navigation, search and browsing and visual layout. The findings from this evaluation supported findings from previous analysis and were further confirmed by the subsequent evaluation methods including customer interviews.

Navigation on the Zappos site is often impeded by the duplication of labels, content and contextual links on the site. Results from our user survey indicated that first-time users are often overwhelmed by the number of navigational options to choose from. These contextual links clutter much of the homepage, take away from any organizational scheme and negatively impact the "browsability" of the site for both first-time and returning users. Additionally, Zappos does not offer a persistent navigation related to the specific sections of the site, which further hinders browsing.

The complexity of the search feature is another usability issue that surfaced during our evaluation. Zappos’ search screen includes multiple tabs, one for each product category and three to four search options per tab for women’s, men’s, kid’s and brand. For an advanced search, the multiple screens and search boxes over complicate what should be an easy search process for users.

Beyond the functionality of the features on the site, the Zappos site also lacks a visual presence. Results from our customer survey indicated that the current visual design gives users a "discount-store" feel instead of portraying a "service company" that houses some of the most fashion forward brands in the shoe retail market. Building credibility through customer service is a great way to retain customers, but the visual layout is also a way to market to new customers prior to gaining their loyalty.

Finally, we discovered that customers recognized and valued the breadth of products offered by the site, the ability to read customer reviews to inform their purchase, and the excellent categorization of products. However, a few less then desirable themes emerged such as Zappos is not browseable and the pages are cluttered. One individual confessed "if you are just browsing for nothing in particular, it is too much information." Another indicated "the selection is so huge it's hard to just browse." Survey responses also indicated that there is too much information on the home page, users are overwhelmed and not sure where to look, and excessive scrolling is uninviting.
Customer Profiles

Based on our contextual inquiry (company and market research and customer interviews), we identified 3 types of customers of the Zappos site - the frequent visitor, the casual by-passer, and the first timer. Each of these had distinct needs from the website.

Christopher Parker – First Time Shopper

Who is Chris?
- Dentist
- Single
- Age - 28
- No children
- Highly Educated
- Average Household Income - $100K+

What are his needs?
- I mostly browse but I also want to be able to find exactly what I need when looking for something specific.
- Simplify the experience and make it easy for me.
- Help me shop as I would in a physical store.

What are his attitudes and psyche?
- He is experiencing life as it comes with no responsibilities and no inhibitions.
- He is no computer wiz, but is fairly comfortable with technology.
- He is drawn to trends and good deals.

Shopping Profile:
- He’s not a big shopper but is drawn to trends and good deals.
- Though he’d prefer to buy shoes in a physical store, he’d also love to avoid overwhelming crowded malls and shopping centers.
- He mostly only shops on online stores that have physical stores and sizes he’s familiar with.

Relationship with Zappos.com
- Chris was referred to Zappos from a friend and is a first time shopper at Zappos
- Chris likes Zappos’ free shipping and 365 day return policies, so he can return things that don’t fit.
Janet Smith – Regular Online Shopper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is Janet?</th>
<th>What are her needs?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Senior manager at Accenture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Age – 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Likely to have children aged 13 to 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highly Educated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Average Household Income - $ 200K+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I know exactly what I need, and expect to find that easily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I need quick and efficient service.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help me find a store that will let me do things as they are convenient for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I do not like to invest much time, and need a one-stop shop for what I buy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are her attitudes and psyche?

• She balances work and family, and simplifies things as much as possible.
• She is very comfortable with technology.
• She keeps up with fashion trends regularly.

Value Proposition

• Delight me with fast and efficient service, and a hassle-free shopping experience.
• I like very specific brands of shoes, and finding them all in one place is highly desirable.

Relationship with Zappos.com

• Janet likes the fact that Zappos has a 365 day return policy, so she that she can evaluate her purchase and possibly return it at her convenience.
• She enjoys shopping from the wide variety of shoes offered by Zappos, and is a repeat customer.
**Who is Renee?**

- High School science teacher
- Single
- Age - 26
- No children
- Educated
- Average Household Income - $55K

**What are her needs?**

- I like to window shop and compare products before I buy to be sure I get exactly what I need and feel good about it.
- I enjoy shopping but don’t want to work for it.
- Show me cute shoes that can fit my wide feet.

**What are her attitudes and psyche?**

- She is committed to the success of her students and gives freely of her time.
- She enjoys fashion and likes to see what the trends are yet follows her own style.
- She enjoys spending time with friends which often involves browsing the shops in town.

**Shopping Profile:**

- Renee loves finding deals and prides her skills as a bargain shopper.
- Renee shops online often but is very conscious of how much she spends.
- Renee has a favorite set of websites she likes and trusts; rarely does she expand to other sites.

**Relationship with Zappos.com**

- While searching for a specific shoe style with a wider foot cavity she stumbled on Zappos but has not purchased from the site.
Recommendations

General Features

The following are a list of general information architecture recommendations that should be applied to the entire Zappos site:

- Refine global top navigation to clearly be the central indicator of where the user is, where the user has been and where the user can go
- Provide consistent local navigation systems to enable users to explore the immediate areas such as product category pages
- Simplify the page layout and reduce clutter
- Increase the efficiency of the search algorithm to provide users with better results
Home Page

Key Features:

- Eliminate clutter on home page by reducing the excessive duplication of content to make the page aesthetically appealing and increase credibility.
- Increase width of the screen real estate to help add strategic whitespace and reduce clutter. This also allows more meaningful information to be present on the screen and gives the customer a better experience.
- Prominently display the featured content of the site. This will attract new users, as well as help draw attention to the various products offered by Zappos, thereby increasing sales.
Search Page

Key Features:

- Integrate Zappos’ current search features into one global advanced search page for all products to reduce confusion by eliminating the need to switch between tabs.
- Tailor search options based on the selected category.
- Include the ability to filter results by a price range set by the customer so that the user is not restricted to the choices offered by the system.

Advanced Search

Category: Women's Shoes

Style: Casual

Brand: Find Brand

Currently Selected Brand: 7 for all mankind

Color or Color Family

Size

Width: Narrow

Price Range: $10 to $150

Reset Selection

Submit
Search Results Page

Key Features:

- Provide relatively large pictures of search results, which will help the customer see more detail of the product.
- Present a concise product summary to reduce clutter and make the page more visually appealing.
- Include features that allow the user to compare products to reduce the cognitive load, make the decision process easier and make large search results more manageable.
- Incorporate a feature to narrow or redefine the search, which allows the customer to refine their search for better results. This will ensure that the customer does not leave the site if they are unable to find what they are looking for in their first query, support browsing through the search results and eliminate the need to go back to the search page to continue searching.
Section Page

Key Features:

- Incorporate a persistent left navigation bar to allow the customer to easily view and explore the content provided in each section.
- Prominently display featured content of the section. This will allow the customer to connect with the site and draw their attention to the various products offered by Zappos, that may otherwise be hidden.
Product Detail Page

Key Features:

• Bring the option to see multiple views of the product above the fold to easily display this well liked functionality and increase customer interaction with the site.
• Provide breadcrumbs to give context on where the customer is in the site to allow re-finding of the product or to easily identify where to find similar products.
• Include a more prominent option to "view more by brand" that is easy to identify.
• Maintain the "continue shopping" option to return user to their previous location.
• Maintain the customer reviews section but reduce the number shown on this page by allowing the customer to "view more" via an accordion view or through opening a small window taking care not to navigate away from the product page.
• Maintain "Fit Survey" & summary of "Customer Ratings" section in one location to avoid repetition below the product image but above the customer review section.