Developing Strategies
for Beginning T-shirt Companies

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June 2011

ABSTRACT

This study explores the success of distributed print collateral to drive

potential markets to electronic commerce sites for T-shirt companies. It

also examines the trends in purchasing and distribution of T-shirt sales.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

REPRESENT REPRESENT is a new, upcoming T-shirt company that allows the consumers to express their beliefs through the clothes they wear. The mission of the company is to provide customers with clothing that serves a purpose, inviting people to be bold in their beliefs and ultimately, represent who they are. Designs are modern, bold, non-promotional, and incorporate illustrations to express their message. At initial start-up, strategies were developed to obtain a plan and goal. In order to sell REPRESENT REPRESENT merchandise, an electronic commerce website was developed for distribution. Printed media was used to inform target markets of REPRESENTREPRESENT.COM, and was distributed initially throughout California.

The study explores which graphic communication strategies are most effective for the branding of an online T-shirt company. Strategies are divided into two main categories: print and digital media. The multitude of print media options include, but are not limited to: direct mail, brochures, stickers, posters, and flyers. Digital media options include: videos, web advertising, email promotions, and website development. The purpose of this study explored and examined which print collateral provides the strongest response rates to a digital storefront. The results of the study were then be applied and tested by REPRESENT REPRESENT.

Distributed print marketing strategies can exist in many forms, but should be relevant to the company and projected market. REPRESENT REPRESENT relays the massage of standing up for

your community, beliefs, and for yourself. The target market would consist of men and women aged 16-36; likely with strong interests in music, clothing, and modern design. This market was targeted, and print media process choice was relevant to previous trends and interests. These interests and trends included distribution and sale in art and music festivals.

Distributed print media such as stickers, flyers, and posters to potential customers served as a brand notification and lead customers to an online transaction website. The use of Google Analytics served to monitor online activity rates and provide "insights into your website traffic and marketing effectiveness."(Google) By reviewing the analysis, adjustments in strategy can be made, in order to better establish brand identity, generate a client base for REPRESENT REPRESENT, and pinpoint which print medias are best for overall T-shirt company recognition.

CHAPTER TWO

Success in Electronic Commerce Sites

Over the past two decades the Internet has changed the way people make purchases. For a clothing company, an electronic commerce website allows the producers to distribute their clothing to a larger range of customers, without the high cost of opening multiple stores. An online transaction website instantly opens markets throughout different cities and states, and in most cases, internationally. The use of printed media, however, still plays a large role in informing target markets about an existing website.

Building trust with customers is crucial in early development stages of the website. As consumers read collected print media to learn about the website and T-shirt line, some were inspired to go online and find out more information. Once online, the design of the website should begin to gain their trust, allowing them to feel comfortable in making a purchase. This can prove to be difficult but according to "Theoretical and Empirical Study on Success Factors to Enhance Customer Trust in Electronic Commerce", an article written in part by Pan Jing, "economic views of trust appear to be firmly linked to the construct of reputation, which is, in effect, accumulated trust based on prior performance" (Jing). As customers view the website, confidence in previous successful sales provoke security. By setting up a message or comment center, this allows for previous customers to leave feedback, whether positive or negative, and can help ease the customer's comfort in purchasing. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) and communication with company members can also insure trust in an electronic commerce website.

Setting up a purchasing website poses security issues and doubts for the customer. In preliminary design stages, security must be initially built into the structure of the website, and can be developed through quality management strategies. Product quality management is a large assistance for success of a company. Each service has its own determinants of what should be measured and which quality initiatives should be taken to drive success. S. J. Barnes and R. Vidgen conducted a survey to bring out which factors were demanded by the users of electronic commerce websites; this study was called the E-Qual. The top three factors included "usability, information quality, and service interaction quality." (Xu) Expanding upon these terms, users desire a website that is easy to use, has updated and trustworthy information, and keeps their personal information secure.

A secondary survey was conducted by Hao Xu, Duo-lin Liu, and Zhi-jie Lu in 2010, using a process called exploratory factor analysis. This test was conducted similarly to E-Qual's and ensured the results from the previous survey. The top four demands of electronic commerce consumers from the poll are "information quality, design quality, assurance quality (personal security), and communication quality" (Xu). These results further confirm the user's expectancy of a website and introduce a fourth option: communication quality. The ability for users to communicate to the company through frequently asked questions, and to other purchasers, ensures trust in the company, and in the product that it sells.

After developing the top demands of users, websites can begin to be constructed, always relying back on the main quality components. According to Canchu Lin's article there are five principles to web design. These include "(1) building a dialogic loop between the organization and its audiences, (2) providing useful information, (3) generating return visits, (4) making the interface intuitive and easy to use, and (5) eliminating unnecessary links and ads to retain visitors" (Lin). Applying these five principles to the quality assurance techniques previously noted, they continue to follow a similar pattern of assuring the customer experience is clear and concise.

WebQual™ was developed to evaluate websites on how they effectively integrate quality into the website, proving or disproving the effectiveness of the previously noted quality initiatives (WebQual). WebQual™ uses statistical analysis of a website in five sections: usability, design, information, trust, and empathy. The application of a simple survey to customers, who rank their overall service based on the five sections, then determines that categories score. (WebQual) The use of WebQual ensured that all previously noted initiatives are allowing customers a safe and secure website experience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH OUTLINE

The purpose of this study is to analyze which graphic communication strategies are best for T-shirt company promotion. Graphic communication strategies being explored include distributed print collateral as a marketing tool for website promotion. To research online success of T-shirt company's electronic commerce site, three research methods were used: Elite and specialized interviews, descriptive research, and content analysis.

Elite and specialized interviews, which differ from a general questionnaire, "requires asking precise, open-ended questions, but questions that are open to refinement as the research and interview continues" (Levenson). It began by conducting interviews to small-run, local, T-shirt companies. By interviewing similar companies, with or without an electronic commerce website, I began to bring forth different methods that have been used to promote T-shirt companies. After the results of the interview have been sorted, descriptive research were used. Descriptive research is used "to describe, 'what exists' with respect to variables or conditions in a situation" (Levenson). By determining "what [strategies] exist" currently for the interviewed companies a list can be complied, narrowing down the most popular and successful marketing methods for these particular companies. Once the most common promotional materials were complied, they were used in combination with personal ideas and test them through the implementation and activation of REPRESENT REPRESENT's website. The use of this implementation further expressed which

method proved most successful in T-shirt company promotion. After a website is created to test the discoveries found from the interviews and descriptive research, content analysis was used; content analysis takes the results from my interviews and website, and counts them.

The interview process was conducted to T-shirt companies that follow a similar structure as REPRESENT REPRESENT, in the form of design objectives and target demographic. These companies also have recently found success in sales. The following was the generic interview asked to all recipients, which are listed here: Stay Up Movement, Laurie O'Brien, and local T-shirt companies. Alongside these questions, there are company specific questions that can be found below the description of each interview recipient.

Interview Prompt

1. What is the driving philosophy of the company?

2. How did the company first begin selling T-shirts?

3. Where did the company begin primarily selling products, and briefly describe the intended market?

4. When did the company experience their first sales?

5. What promotional material was initially used?

6. What print or digital collateral was used promotionally?

7. With which media did you see best response in T-shirt sales?

8. Which designs do you receive the most interest and purchases in? For example: Text based, image based, comical, serious, simple, complex.

9. Now that sales have been developed, has an electronic commerce site been created?

10. If an electronic commerce site has been developed, how do you plan to lead people to your site?

11. How did you gain customer's trust to make an online purchase?

Stay Up Movement (SUM) is a T-shirt company developed in San Luis Obispo, in 2010, and

their strategies are compared to those of REPRESENT REPRESENT. Only about a year old, they have developed a strong standing in San Luis Obispo County. Although done with a different approach and different message, REPRESENT REPRESENT and Stay Up Movement have many similarities. Both reaching out to communities, target markets and design initiatives were similar. Stay Up Movement's promotional material was valuable in determining an appropriate strategy for REPRESENT REPRESENT.

Laurie O'Brien, of Etsy, began screenprinting and selling her own T-shirts for the past five years. Recently, she has moved to online selling through a pre-made craft site: www.etsy.com. The interview with Laurie O'Brien expressed how in-person sales can differ from online selling, and if the use of a personally developed site benefit over the use of a site like www.etsy.com, which has built in competitors a click away. The following two questions were asked to Laurie O'Brien in addition to the previously noted.

Alternate Interview Questions

1. In a move from in-person selling to online selling, what trend did you notice in your T-shirt sales?

2. How did self marketing differ from in-person selling to online selling?

When the content analysis research is conducted it was done throughout three main areas: Oakland, California; Los Angeles, California; and San Luis Obispo, California. In order to better understand each market demands, and how they differ, interviews were conducted at 1-2 local stores around each area. They were prompted with the same interview questions as noted above, as well as the following two questions.

Alternate Interview Questions

1. Have you ever tried to sell T-shirts outside of your local demographic?

2. If so, what differences did you notice in how you needed to market your company?

Descriptive Research

The second method of research was conducted using descriptive research. An electronic commerce site was produced for the sale of REPRESENT REPRESENT's T-shirt line. Through the use of distributed print media in arts and craft shows, local events, and farmers markets, success was measured upon site activity after each distribution. This was monitored through a site counter and Google Analytics. Google Analytics measured how often the site is visited, and what the users are viewing most on the website using a site path and clicks. Three main marketing methods and target markets were examined; exploring which strategy is appropriate for each market.

Website Creation

To begin the descriptive research, a website must first be built. The design aspects of the site are to keep it simple, use primary navigation, and clean colors (blues, white background, and one primary contrast color). The structure of the site was built using HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to style. The structure consisted of a main entry page with three boxes of navigation and footer. The three boxes for navigation were consistent through choosing a shirt, narrowing down the choices for the user. At any point in time, the website offers three different shirt options: one logo, one graphic, and one text based. Each month the designs and shirt options will switch, depending on leftover inventory.

Due to the fact that the website will be undergoing constant changes and alterations, the web developer might not always be the same person. To assist the consistency in the changes comments and notes were made throughout the HTML and CSS code. This will allow for each web developer, whether the same or different as the previous, to be able to accurately change the site each month. When development occurs, it should be done with anticipated growth. Comments are success tool that help set up REPRESENT REPRESENT ease into expansion and growth in the future.

The implementation of electronic commerce capability offers many different options in setting up a purchasing capability. There are many online shopping cart programs, both free and

with fees. REPRESENT REPRESENT began using PayPal for its ease of use and safety for both the seller and purchaser. This allows users to feel confident in making a purchase from an initially unknown site. The initial problem with PayPal is that the user must have an account to make a purchase. Although free for the user to create an account, some people are skeptical about creating accounts, thus making them unable to make a purchase on REPRESENTREPRESENT.COM. Upon growth, the website will move to an alternative shopping cart program, where users will not need a PayPal account.

To test the accuracy and usability of the website, it was tested on Windows Internet Explorer 6-9, and Windows and Macintosh's Firefox 3.6, Chrome 8.0, and Safari 5 browsers to apply to the 97% of web users (w3schools). The site was tested these on my personal computer, as well as computers at Cal Poly.

Media Distribution

After the site was developed and tested market distribution were conducted. Three main marketing methods and target markets were examined. The primary location in which the collateral was distributed was in San Luis Obispo, California. In San Luis Obispo, media was distributed at the local farmers market and local concerts. With each location there is a different target market, so initiative must be taken with the market demands in mind. To begin, a small card was distributed through the site, with more added after conducted interview results. The two cards consisted of brand name, website, and a tagline. Minimal content provoked curiosity, hopefully leading the user to the site.

Content Analysis

Content analysis for the elite and specialized interviews was used to count and quantify which methods are used most predominantly and have shown most success with the interviewed companies. After the determined printed media is distributed, the use of Google Analytics and

a site counter expressed the success rate of each component by measuring site activity after each event. This showed which strategies proved most effective for the use of a T-shirt company.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEACH ANALYSIS

On April 18th 2011, one hundred people were surveyed through the use of an online question-naire. The survey was distributed to over 400 people through the use of Facebook and email and provided insight to buying trends and design preference of the anticipated target market for REPRESENT REPRESENT.

The demographics showed that 41 males and 59 females took the survey. 74% of the re-sponders were aged between 21 and 25, 14% were aged 16-20, and 6% were aged 25-36. A total of 94% of the survey takers fit within the previously anticipated target market, this demonstrates that the following opinions and responses will be an accurate portrayal of those in the target market.

The following three charts (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3) explain the previous buying experience of the survey takers. To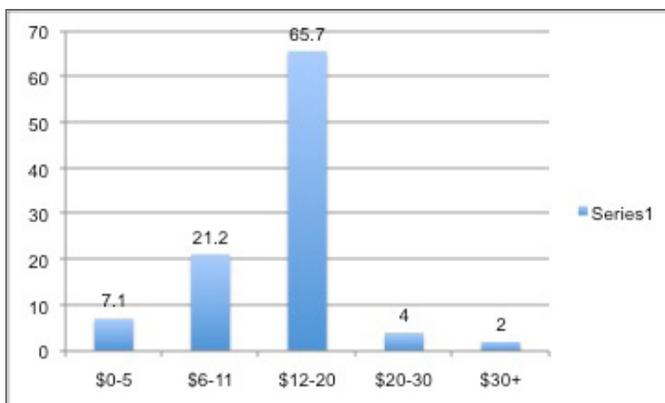 discover pricing information, the first question asked "How much do you usually pay for a T-shirt?" (SurveyMonkey) The responses are shown in Figure 1. The results are largely skewed to favor the $12-20 price range. 65.7% of survey takers stated that they generally pay $12-20 for a T-shirt. These results confirm the pricing set up

Figure 1

for the REPRESENT REPRESENT clothing line so far. Currently T-shirts are priced at $17. Due to the fact that the remaining results were dominantly on the lower prices, it should be taken into consideration to lower the price from $17. The remaining votes totaled 28.3% and stated they were willing to pay between $0-11 for a T-shirt.

After looking into pricing, it is important to see how often the anticipated target market is wearing shirts, which likely will correlate with how often they purchase T-shirts. Figure 2 displays how often the survey respondents wear T-shirts. 67% of responses stated that they wear T-shirts between 4-7 times a week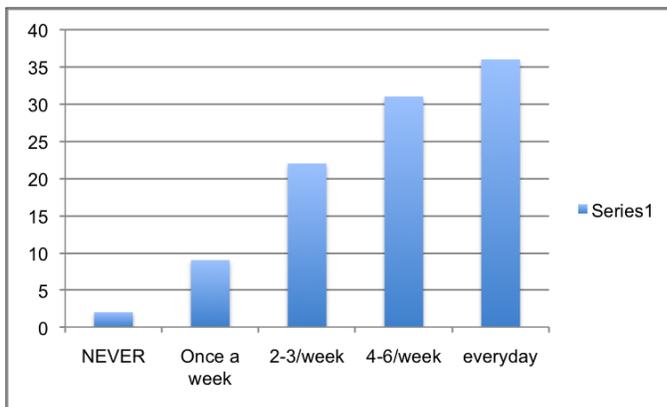, with 36% of those responses stating they wear them everyday. Only 11% of the surveyed population wear T-shirts 0-1 time a week. This is ideal for the target market, as there is likely a correlation on how often they wear shirts with how likely they are to buy new ones, increasing demand.

Figure 2

Both these points help to view what the current trends in purchasing are for demand and value. With this information, the next question asked to the user was, "Where do you most commonly purchase shirts?" (SurveyMonkey) Users were allowed to select as many options as they felt applied to their purchasing style. Measuring the success of T-shirt companies on electronic commerce sites, the results to this question demonstrated that the most common way to purchase T-shirts was in-person or in stores. 87 responses stated that this was the prominent location where they made purchases. Only 24 responses stated that they most commonly purchased T-shirts through the use on online
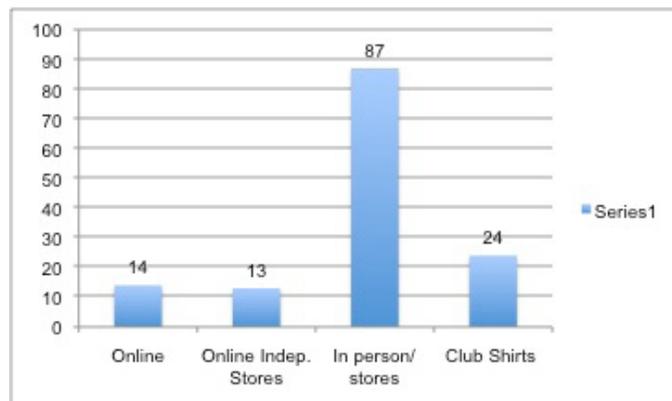

Figure 3

stores (including independent stores). Although lower than the responses for in person purchases, it still shows that almost one in three shoppers would make purchases online. In respect to REPRESENT REPRESENT, the use of in person sales should be the primary source of sales, with the in person contact leading to website promotion. These results parallel the statements from Laurie O'Brien and Stay Up Movement. In an interview Laurie O'Brien stated that she found most success and had most of her sales with in-person contact. She also stated that when she decided to change away from selling in-person she began to "sell them in stores [which] opportunities were from face-to-face conversations" (O'Brien). Similarly, Stay Up Movement, have found most of their success selling clothing at music festivals and events, as they were primarily surrounded by their target market. (SUM) A combination of these two methods will need to be used when selling REPRESENT REPRESENT T-shirts.

The results from the question "What types of shirts do you most commonly wear?" (SurveyMonkey) expressed how stylistically, demands of T-shirts vary greatly. The four most common answers for this question were, from most popular to least: plain, colorful, artistic, and typographical. Due to medium and high demand in all areas, the results of the individual design questions will help to express which design is most likely to produce sales. Figures 4-6 were listed as the three potential design options and survey takers were given the following rating options: would purchase, might purchase, would not purchase, or liked the design but would not purchase. Reviewing all the results, the design from Figure 4 was most favored. Totalling the percentages from would and might buy, 55.6% of perspective buyers would think about purchasing this T-shirt. Aside from those purchasers, 20% of the remaining votes were given to "I like the design, but would not buy". Secondly, the voters preferred the design of Figure 4. 36% stated that they might or would buy the design in Figure 4; however, 28% of people stated that they "liked the design, but would not buy [it]", which is 8% more than Figure 6.

Collecting on the various data, the demands of current markets who own and wear T-shirts has been shown. Through the interviews with Laurie O'Brien and Stay Up Movement,
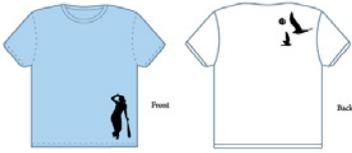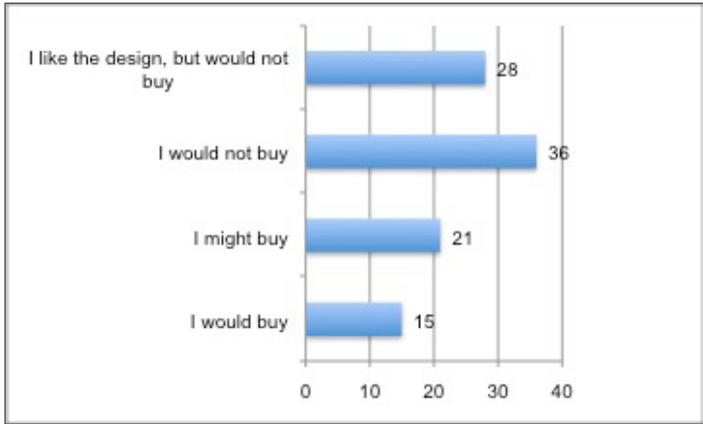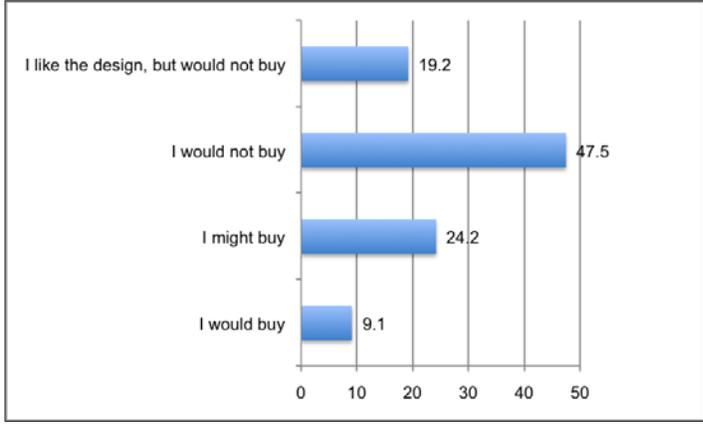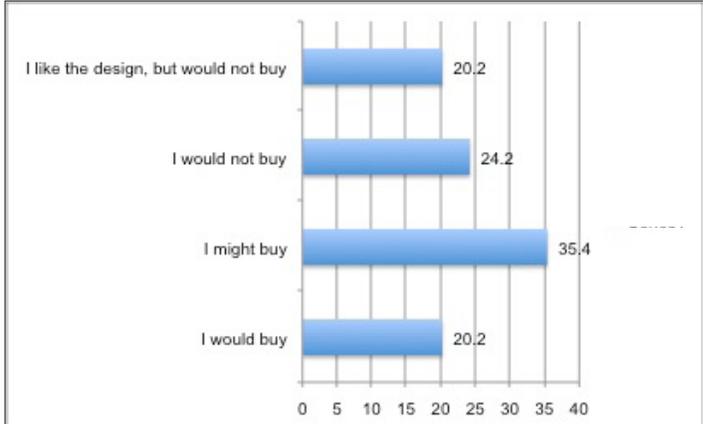
Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

in correlation of the results from Figure 6, success has proven to be found from in-store purchasing and from in-person communications for beginning T-shirt companies. Translating this into website promotions of electronic commerce sites for the sale of T-shirts, it lends back to the demand of print media as a promotion. Through the interactions and conversations that are brought upon printed media distribution, brand recognition and safety is built. The likelihood of online purchases of T-shirts without prebuilt rapport, is quite low. Only 13% of users responded on the survey that they use online business when ordering T-shirts.

After discussion with Laurie O'Brien, the movement of social interactions to in-store selling and online selling through previously tested sites such as Etsy or Threadless, can help to build this initial brand security in develping T-shirt companies. The following was done to test this method and measure response rates of the distribtuted print media using content analysis. On May 12th one-hundred of the prespective cards (Figure 7 at 75% actual size) were distributed at the local San Luis Obispo farmer's market and within local businesses. Of the one-hunderded cards, approximately fifteen were combined with person-to-person interactions between myself and prospective clients. This provoked conversation about what the company presents, and details on the project. Before the cards had been distributed a site counter and tracker was implemented to measure site activity. This activity was monitered in the days following distribution. Eliminating outside site visits, such as my own computer and six other computers used for testing and assistance, REPRESENTREPRESENT.COM aquired twelve site visits over the tim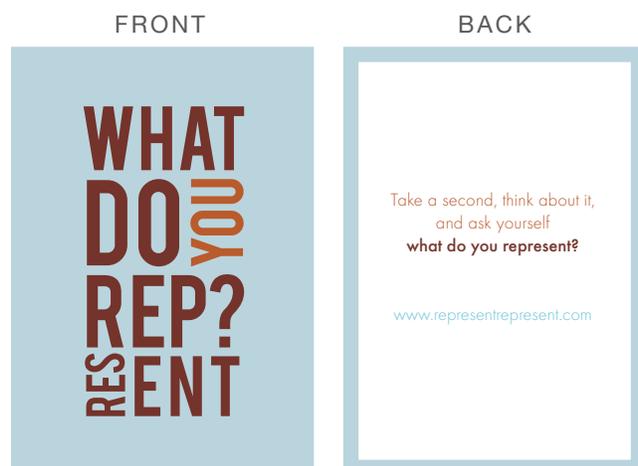e span of four days. Further measuring site visits, they Etsy site was measured for site visits as well. Each T-shirt link gained between five and seven hits over the same time span.

FRONT   BACK

Figure 7

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the results from the interviews, survey, and experimentation, results have been found in two separates forms. With specific focus on T-shirt sales, success has been found from in-person and store purchases. Although electronic commerce sites can further advance sales, it should be done in conjunction with another process. Through the use of experimentation, conversations were formed with a variety of people aged directly in the previously noted 16-36 age range of the target market. Interest was shown within these age groups, further concreting the target market for REPRESENT REPRESENT. With the confirmation of the target market and in-person sales, the distribution and sale of T-shirts should be initially performed at locations in which large groups of target market are present. This includes art fairs, music festivals, and crafts shows.

When a customer has the interaction with the person they are thinking about make a purchase from, it unintentionally presents a slight pressure. The growing comfort with web surfing eliminates this pressure and makes it easier for a customer to pass on a purchase. Secondly, the time dedication spent on a web page is significantly less than a personal conversation about the specific clothing line and pieces. Of the views on REPRESENTREPRESENT.COM, only 11.5% of people viewed the T-shirt links. This shows the fast-paced web browsing that occurs today. By eliminating this process, and primarily using in-person interactions, customers are able to learn

and view all designs without the need to view a separate web page. It is this communication and interaction that has driven the success of in-person T-shirt sales.

Through the use of experimentation, success was found with the use of distributed print media to drive visits on unknown web sites. After cards were distributed at San Luis Obispo's farmers market, hits on REPRESENTREPRESENT.COM rapidly grew. Print distribution sparks curiosity in the readers, which ultimately can lead them to view the site. A return rate of 12% is high in comparison to that of mailed print media, but was combined with the previously noted conversations with customers. This builds trust with the customer and eliminates the fear of attending an unknown web site, that some web users experience.

Overall, this study has proven that, although they do not cause any disadvantages, there is a slim correlation between T-shirt company success and the implementation of an electronic commerce site. Success is grown through human interactions and conversation for promotion. Primary focus should be set on these conversations to build company recognition and trust, which will ultimately lead to a loyal following of customers. A large basis of T-shirt choice was built on brand recognition, which is done successfully through these techniques.

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