E-commerce and web design for small businesses: Using blogs to build engaging consumer marketing

A Senior Project

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By

Emma Tomlin

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ABSTRACT

The following study explores how to develop a successful website for an E-Commerce store that is user-friendly and engaging to consumers. A key concept that this study will discuss, is how a blog can create engaging consumer marketing. This study is focused on Moondoggies Beach Club, a surf shop with two brick-and-mortar locations in San Luis Obispo, California. A Cal Poly student saw the need for their existing online presence to be reevaluated and recreated. This paper will address the importance of well-done web design for E-Commerce, including ways to achieve user-friendly, easily accessible, well thought out web design; as well as the impact of a blog for an E-Commerce business.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

E-Commerce has dramatically grown in the past decade. Consumers are now able to buy anything they want or need with just the simple click of a button. Several successful brick-and-mortar stores have created online platforms in order to reach a wider customer base. However, some of these businesses are struggling with creating a user-friendly website that is engaging to consumers. This study will focus on Moondoggies Beach Club’s online presence.

Background of the Problem

Moondoggies Beach Club is a surf shop with two locations in San Luis Obispo. Moondoggies has been highly successful with in-store shopping at their brick-and-mortar locations. Due to this success, their current website has not been their top priority, and hasn’t been updated accurately. With the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, Moondoggies, along with many other small businesses, were forced to close their doors to the public. Now, their priorities have been forced to shift to online. While they have added close to 80% of their merchandise to their current site, it doesn’t look or feel cohesive, and it is not very user-friendly or engaging.

The Moondoggies Beach Club target audience wasn’t being reached thoroughly with the existing web structure they had in place, therefore, they weren’t making significant sales online. The website needed to be reassessed and redone. The current E-Commerce platform they use does not suit their needs or wants, so I have switched them over to Shopify. Shopify is an E-
Commerce platform that allows you to create an online store and manage the backend of it (product collections, inventory, shipping, etc.) easily, even for a beginner.

**Purpose of the Study**

With E-Commerce expanding rapidly across the world, several companies are struggling to keep up with trends and stay relevant in the ever-so-changing industry. Townsend (2017) explains that “to respond to these challenges, marketers are being forced to reinvent their consumer-engagement model,” because now “consumers aren’t driven by price and convenience alone, but by the total experience that a brand offers.” When creating an online store, it is crucial to consider the experience that your customers are going to have when shopping. This study focuses on the value of user-friendly web design and blogging as powerful tools that not only help provide a pleasant experience for consumers, but also continuously keeps them engaged.

**Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo as a Senior Project. The Moondoggies Beach Club website will be created with Shopify.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were created to develop cohesive research on web design and E-Commerce. The research questions were designed to acquire the best methods for web design and blogging for an E-Commerce business.
1. What is the value of e-commerce? (what is is and how it is of value to e-commerce like Shopify)

2. What are the main factors to consider before beginning web design?

3. What are the most effective tools of web design?

4. What are the important elements of blogging?

5. What components of a blog do consumers react to well? How does e-commerce benefit from blogs?

6. How does media engagement create collaborative relationships between business and consumer? What is the uses and gratifications theory?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are presented to the reader to clarify repeating topics of the study.

**E-Commerce**: E-commerce (electronic commerce) is the buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmitting of funds or data, over an electronic network, primarily the internet.

(Rouse)

**Uses and Gratifications Theory**: Uses and gratifications theory asserts that people use media to gratify specific wants and needs. (Vinney, 2019)

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 includes a background of the study, a purpose of the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 will outline the value of E-Commerce, and what effective web design and blogging for an E-Commerce company looks like based on the scholarly literature and research.
conducts regarding the topic. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of the study. Chapter 4
will measure the outcome of the new website with feedback from professionals. Chapter 5 will
summarize the end of the study and include recommendations for future web design and
blogging strategies.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of the literature outlines the research findings on E-Commerce, web design, and blogging.

Value of E-Commerce

According to What’s the Value of E-Commerce, E-Commerce has opened up new opportunities for old business models. Brands that can create a unified and consistent experience, regardless of where the consumer is, will succeed in driving retention and conversion rates. After all, consumers aren’t driven by price and convenience alone, but by the total experience that a brand offers. It points to the underlying principle that the way to engage with the consumer is to respond to their evolving expectations. According to E-Commerce: History and Impact on the Business and Consumers, as E-commerce and globalization have become more intertwined, buyers and sellers are increasing their connectivity and the speed with which they conduct sales transactions, therefore E-commerce can influence demand patterns of the global economy. Furthermore, E-commerce has shown a great impact on consumer buying patterns. With the development of E-commerce, consumers can easily purchase anything online with the click of a button. E-commerce makes it easier for businesses to reach a much wider audience at less expense than would be required if the traditional retail method was to be applied. Hermogeno concludes the effects of E-commerce to be: wide variety of products, lower cost than traditional shopping and selling, less time consuming and faster consumer consumption, transparent business system, transparent business system, faster business expansion, more employment
opportunities, enhancement in digital products and services production, low maintenance cost, and a personalized customer experience.

**Factors of Web Design**

According to *Millennial Consumer Preferences in Social Commerce Web Design*, web design determines a customer’s perceptions of quality of product and their intention to buy. The four key factors to consider during web design is usability, functionality, and sociability. Usability is measured by the following attributes: ease of use, esthetics, organization, accessibility, adaptability, simplicity, and information quality. Functionality is measured by the following attributes: response time, information usefulness, contact methods, help and search functions, payment security, information protection, and consumer satisfaction. Sociability of a site is measured with the following attributes: social communities, recommendation systems, creation of social connections, content generation and distribution, establishing conversations, and consumer participation.

**Effective Web Design**

*The impact of website designing factors on online purchase intention: Evidence from fashion brands* claims that web design has a more important role in consumer satisfaction than product variants. According to *E-Commerce Web design: The importance of a first impression*, aesthetics and usability are the two most important design approaches to consider for a successful e-commerce website. Usability of a website is a major variable that shapes a customer’s first impression. Users have similar patterns when they navigate a site which creates
areas of interest, the main ones being: the upper left corner, home page and the upper header.

These areas of interests need special attention to detail when designing. According to How to structure product pages for E-Commerce success, to create more informative experiences, bulleted features are 83% stronger than their effects on any other experience dimension, while a comparison matrix is 62% more effective, and descriptive detail is 54% more effective. In The Definitive Guide to Shopify Themes, Ballard states that the product page is the most important page for an e-commerce store. It’s where a customer evaluates an offering and makes the crucial decision to purchase. It needs to convey a lot of information to visitors—core information like what your product is, does, and looks like; how much it costs; what configuration options are available; and supplementary information like size guides, shipping details, product guides, and customer reviews.

Elements of Blogging

According to Engagement Marketing: The Innovative Perspective to Enhance the Viewer’s Loyalty in Social Media and Blogging E-Commerce Websites, Blogging is an internet-based activity through which bloggers share ideas, videos, text images and links of other websites, information sources and videos easily. According to Five Reasons Why Blogging Is Important for Your eCommerce Business, with an E-commerce blog you can invite guest bloggers which adds to your credibility, keeps your content fresh, and entices your audience. The article also states important blogging tips such as: readable and engaging content, internal and external links, and well incorporated SEO content. According to The 8 Essential Elements of a Successful Blog Post, the most valuable elements for a successful blog post include: a magnetic
headline, a compelling lead, informative and engaging body, appealing graphics, powerful call-to-action, relevant internal link, and good meta description. According to *What is a Business Blog – And Why They’re Essential for E-commerce Success*, each business should maintain a blog because where there’s a business, there are people who want to learn about it, and a blog increases a website’s online “footprint”. A successful blog should be updated often, and be promoted through social media and email marketing.

**Benefits of Blogging for E-Commerce**

According to *How to structure product pages for E-Commerce success*, more social experiences should be built by employing a conversational linguistic style and lifestyle photos, which are 139% and 134% more effective in shaping this compared to any other experience dimension, respectively. Sensory experiences are also beneficial and can be built through product videos and product feature crops, which are 106% and 29% stronger in building this compared to any other experience dimension, respectively. According to *Engagement Marketing: The Innovative Perspective to Enhance the Viewer’s Loyalty in Social Media and Blogging E-Commerce Websites*, every business needs to show its presence online and attain competence in the field of e-commerce and blogging for sustainable performance and business growth. *Five Reasons Why Blogging Is Important for Your eCommerce Business* states that blogging boosts your Google ranking, it engages your customers, promotes brand loyalty, and increases your online presence which is crucial in the growing industry. The article also states that blogging allows companies to tell stories that could convert visitors into customers, and make readers feel like they’re a part of a community.
How Media Engagement Creates Collaborative Relationships Between Business and Consumer

According to *Engagement Marketing: The Innovative Perspective to Enhance the Viewer’s Loyalty in Social Media and Blogging E-Commerce Websites*, bloggers are always counting on their visitors or customers and want to find out effective ways to enchant them to visit their websites, thus winning their customers' loyalty. Facebook and many other social media websites are also reckoned as a blog because they provide the services and facility to their users to share contact information, text, images, and videos with others very conveniently and appropriately, and visitors could get the latest and up-to-date information related to their area of interest. According to *The Stories We Wear: Mending and Blogging Patagonia Brand Apparel*, Patagonia encourages its customers to take part in a dialog of anti-consumption via the blog in which readers and authors of the posts can both engage with the brand and create their own sustainable identity. This study found that Patagonia’s blog is a positive marketing strategy that promotes company, customer, and societal values of sustainability. The concept of Patagonia’s blog can be utilized by other companies seeking to enhance customer engagement with their products.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will be used to discuss the methods of data collection including sources, collection and presentation of the information, and delimitations of the project. The questions were designed to add data to the initial research questions.

Data Sources

For this study, participants are asked to complete a survey regarding the old Moondoggies Beach Club website compared to the new Moondoggies Beach Club Site.

Participants

The participants of this survey were carefully selected to be mainly from the various Moondoggies target markets including college students and local residents, as well as Cal Poly professors and faculty who are knowledgeable in the web design field. Participants range from ages 20 to 60 years old. In total there were 18 responses, with 50% coming from the 20-30 year old age range.

Survey Design

The survey was designed through the online platform, Typeform, to gather information on the level of improvements of the site, as well as suggestions for the future of the site. I was particularly curious how participants would react to the blog section. The survey starts off by
asking participants to view the old Moondoggies website and the new Moondoggies website. The questions follow like this:

1) What is your age?

2) How would you rate the OLD Moondoggies site?
   a) Overall design (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)
   b) Product photos (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)
   c) Navigation (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)

3) How would you rate the NEW Moondoggies site?
   a) Overall design (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)
   b) Product photos (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)
   c) Navigation (scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.)

4) Do you believe the blog on the new site is valuable for the Moondoggies brand? Why or why not? Would you follow it? If so, what content would you be interested in seeing/reading about?

5) Any further suggestions?

Data Collection

This survey was emailed to professors and faculty of Cal Poly, fellow students of mine, and families in the area. The survey mainly focused on gathering qualitative information regarding the participants opinion on the improvements in the site, their feedback on the blog, and any further suggestions. The purpose of the survey was to receive helpful, critical feedback
for Moondoggies Beach Club to take in account when moving forward on their website in the future.

Data Presentation

The collected data from the survey was entered into a data table to clearly see the results of the website. *See Chapter 4 Table 1 and Table 2.*

Limitations

There are limitations to this study based on the amount of time to conduct this project and the current status of Cal Poly. Due to COVID-19, the academic quarter was shortened by a week which in turn shortened the amount of time allotted to complete the project. Also, it was difficult to gather responses from each person I sent the survey to since the climate of the town isn’t what it typically is. Without having access directly to speak to Cal Poly professors it was difficult to explain my timeline and the urgency of the survey to be completed. However, I still gathered plenty of responses in the populations that I was aiming for.

Delimitations

Due to financial constraints and time, delimitations were also present in this study. For one, the product photos were completed by two Cal Poly students, myself and a friend, because we didn’t have the financial resources to hire a professional photographer. The photos turned out decent, but there could be minor improvements made overall on future product shots. If more time and a larger budget was provided, the product photos would possibly be stronger.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter will clearly explain the results from the survey that Chapter 3 introduced.

Results and Findings

The survey results show that overall, the participants believe that the design, product photos, and navigation is an improvement to the site (see Table 1 below). As Chapter 3 explained, the survey was based on a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being the best and 1 being the worst. For the old site, over 60% of responses were in the 1-3 range. For the new site, there were 0 responses in the 1-3 range. The qualitative results (see Table 2 below), were from the question regarding the blog. There were mixed responses from participants, but over 65% said they would be interested in the blog and many agreed it would be engaging for customers. Interestingly there aren't any distinct takeaways from certain age groups. Answers were fairly equal amongst each age. The only thing noticeable is the qualitative results from Table 2. A majority of the answers that were neutral or against the blog came from the 20-30, and 30-40 age range. This could be an indication that older ages would be more interested in keeping up with the blog in the future.

Table 1: Quantitative survey results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your age?</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Qualitative survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the old Moondoggies site’s design?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the old Moondoggies site’s product photos?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the old Moondoggies site’s navigation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the new Moondoggies site’s design?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the new Moondoggies site’s product photos?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the new Moondoggies site’s navigation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel like the blog on the new site is valuable for the brand? Why or why not? Would you follow it? If so, what content would you be interested in seeing/reading about?

I do not think it is necessary but could be done as a trial and see how people react or follow it. Content about the store and Central Coast would work well.

No, but it's useful for SEO even if no one reads it. You could use it to share event information, but that would also make more sense as its own tab.

No, I honestly probably wouldn’t follow it.

The only reason I would follow the blog is to keep in touch with my friend’s business. I do not see many other people, especially strangers, being interested in a blog.

Yes it is valuable to the brand. Personally, I would not follow it, but maybe some people would.

Yes, I love the blog idea. I think it would help engage customers. Obviously not all shoppers would be interested but I believe enough would if you marketed it correctly. The idea reminds me of the Patagonia blog. I think that Central Coast surf history, surfboard reviews, the newest technology in surfing, etc are all cool topic ideas I would be interested in.

Yes, I think it's important. It's a great place to share info related to events in the area, ones that relate to what Moondoggies is about-surf, skate, community, family. It's also fun to read stories about people that inspire or embody who moondoggies is and stands for. I like the lifestyle look of the new website and would want to follow it. I
Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

Summary

The Moondoggies Beach Club website was developed by a Cal Poly Journalism student who not only saw a need for an updated, user-friendly site, but the need for a blog to engage customers and elevate the brand. The Moondoggies Beach Club target audience wasn’t being reached thoroughly with the existing web structure they had in place, and in turn, they weren’t making significant sales online. E-Commerce is a huge industry, and if done properly, it can have great results.

Findings

Through the survey results from Chapter 4, it’s clear that the new site is an improvement. The blog concept was overall well-regarded however, 35% of viewers didn’t believe it had much of an impact on the brand. A majority of the answers that were neutral or against the blog came from the 20-30, and 30-40 age range. This could be an indication that older ages would be more interested in keeping up with the blog in the future. Perhaps either older age ranges are retired and have more time on their hands to follow the blog. Or maybe it’s the fact that older age ranges have known the brand for longer and want to stay connected as it grows. Moondoggies Beach Club will keep the blog as a trial, and in six months they will reassess the value it holds for the business.
Conclusion

E-Commerce has dramatically grown in the past decade. Consumers are now able to buy anything they want or need with just the simple click of a button. Several successful brick-and-mortar stores have created online platforms in order to reach a wider customer base. However, some of these businesses are struggling with creating a user-friendly website that is engaging to consumers. Moondoggies Beach Club was one of these companies struggling to keep up with the trends in E-Commerce.

Research has shown that when creating an online store, it is crucial to consider the experience that your customers are going to have when shopping. User-friendly design that is accessible and welcoming has proven to be extremely important. Overall, Moondoggies Beach Club’s new website has had positive feedback from the target audiences in the specific areas of design, navigation, and product photos. The new site has created further engagement and increased accessibility for online shoppers of all ages.

However, like in any study, there are still unknowns. For one, how does the website differ on different devices in negative or positive ways? How would users rate the experience shopping on a mobile phone versus shopping on a laptop or desktop? How often should the blog be updated per week in order to hold value for the brand? Is there a sole target market that is viewing the blog? If so, what should the blog consist of to keep this certain market engaged in a positive way. There are many questions that the future holds but for the time being, Moondoggies has taken a huge step forward towards their online E-Commerce success.
References


Figures

BLOG

IT’S HERE...
MOONDOGGIES 3RD ANNUAL
‘FALL CLASSIC’

2 DAY EVENT AT STUDIOS.
SEPT 30 & OCT 1 (SATURDAY AND SUNDAY)

ENTRY FEE: $20.00 INCLUDES TEE AND PRIZES
TROPHIES: 1ST 2ND, 3RD & 4TH PLACE
DIVISIONS:
• BOYS • MENS • LONGBOARDERS
• JUNIORS • MASTERS • BODY BOARDERS

* NO BEACH ENTRIES *

BLAST FROM THE PAST
5 DAYS AGO
Back in the 90s, we would host Moondoggies surf contests. We recently stumbled across these old flyers from the events, and got inspired to bring them back in the near future.

READ MORE

Figure 1: Moondoggies Beach Club blog page
Contrary to popular belief, the Moondoggies Beach Club logo is not shop owner Randy Adler. The logo was actually modeled after this iconic photo of Tom Blake taken in Hawaii of 1928. We sat down with Randy to uncover the full story behind the brand, and what transpired was a conversation that delved much deeper into surf history and culture than expected. We couldn’t resist sharing it with you.

From Randy: “The idea for Moondoggies Beach Club started when I contacted a good friend of mine, Bill Stansfield, who was a surfing partner and a fellow graduate from SLO High and Cal Poly. Bill and I brainstormed ‘what’s the most important thing about a logo?’ My goal was to have something that truly highlighted the history of surfing. As we looked at different figures throughout surfing’s history, we came across a gentleman by the name of Tom Blake.

Tom was the true embodiment of surfing. As a mainlander, he devoted his life to the sport of surfing in the Hawaiian Islands. He even sailed there on a clipper ship long before there were airplanes. His greatest contribution to the sport of surfing was being the first person to put a fin on a surfboard. When Tom arrived in Hawaii, native Hawaiians were riding long wooden surfboards with no fins. He eventually proposed adding a fin to the bottom of these boards to enable much easier turning. This changed the course of surfing. We thought, what better way to represent surfing in our logo than with a person so unknown and so humble, yet so accomplished, who fundamentally changed the art of surfing?

Once we had Tom Blake as our figure head, I moved on to finding a name that would reflect my mission. I wanted to embrace not only people who surf, but everyone who enjoys the ocean life, so I decided to call the shop a Beach Club. I wanted to make sure that you didn’t have to surf to be associated with Moondoggies, all you needed was a love for the ocean.

Now the Moondoggies part is different. Moondoggies was inspired by the movie Gidget. Moondoggie was a fictional character from the movie and we saw the name as something so iconic that we ran with it.”

Figure 2: Example of a Moondoggies Beach Club blog
https://8c9j610iq2fcq2h9-37424332932.shopifypreview.com

Figure 3: Link for updated Moondoggies Beach Club website. (Note: The site is accessible to preview under the Shopify URL because Moondoggies is not currently ready to publish the new site at this time. In the future, it will be able to be found under: https://www.moondoggiesbeachclub.com/)