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Interactive Web Design
Assignment 1 – Web Review Report

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INTRODUCTION

Let's Get Started

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The intent is obvious and straightforward. Before you do something, you look at how things are being done. You look at how others are doing things. You learn from them, both good and bad. You then try to do it yourself, try to do it better, and eventually, you do it your way and develop your own style.

This is precisely what I am doing here. I look at websites, in this case, I look at websites belonging to tech or electronics stores. I look at how information is presented and I look at how each site is designed.

The project needs to have focus. To ensure objectivity, I cannot be reviewing websites without having clear goals or criteria. To determine how well information is presented on a website, I focus on its **intended audience, purpose, accuracy and credibility**. Whereas **loading speed, ease of navigation, visual appeal, layout, readability** and the **use of colour** lay the framework to evaluate the overall design of a website. These 10 aspects will sieve out the fine ones and differentiate the good from the not-so-good.

Websites that got me looking, thinking and talking

There is no lacking of websites belonging to tech or electronics stores on the internet. The tech revolution has brought about the proliferation of gadgets and devices, and every store desires to be the honoured one to place its products into the hands of their valued customers, who are becoming more and more tech-savvy each day.

In this digital age, when everyone searches for information on the internet, the website of a company is usually its first encounter with its customers and gives an impression of how credible the company is. From where I have looked on the internet, some websites are simply pleasing, while some are really a pain, and in my frank opinion, insincere in engaging its customers online and not at all forward looking.

Some of the names thrown up by the search engine include the big boys in the local fraternity like **Best Denki, Challenger** and **Gain City**. There are also smaller players like **Audio House, Lucky Store, Mega Discount Store** and **Parisilk**, who boast substantial and significant web presence. The project will mainly review websites belonging to stores that have establishments set up in Singapore, while keeping tabs on major global players like **Best Buy** in the United States, **Currys** in the United Kingdom and **MediaMarkt** in Germany.

The URLs of the respective websites are as follow:

Best Denki: <https://www.bestdenki.com.sg/>

Challenger: <https://www.challenger.com.sg/>

Gain City: <https://www.gaincity.com/>

Audio House: <http://www.audiohouse.com.sg/>

Lucky Store: <http://luckystore.com.sg/>

Mega Discount Store: <https://www.megadiscountstore.com.sg/>

Parisilk: <http://www.parisilk.com/>

WEB INFORMATION EVALUATION

1. Intended Audience: You Need to Know Who You Are Talking To

To be able to connect to the people whom you like to engage, you have to speak their language. There is no point in playing the zither to the cow. The audience or customers need to understand and be interested in the information that you like to convey.

When it comes to information being presented on the website, it is crucial to take into consideration of the **users' age, gender and educational level**. Technical information like the **Operating System (OS)** or the **browser** that they use, or the more popular **screen resolution** adopted, are important user preferences that will determine the way how information is organised and presented. For example, if the audience is predominantly middle-aged male and receives some form of tertiary education, it would be appropriate to present the information in a more serious and mature manner, providing facts and technical specifications in crisp and concise statements.

According to StatCounter, **66% of the desktop users in Singapore browses the web using Chrome** and a high **69% uses Safari when they are browsing on their tablets**. However, when it comes to **mobile browsers, Safari and Chrome are more evenly utilised, garnering 30% and 36% of Singaporean users respectively**. This implies that if I would develop a website targeting the Singapore market, I would have to make sure that the website is at least tested and works properly on popular web browsers like Chrome and Safari.

When I run through the websites of the various electronics stores through Chrome on my laptop, all seem to work and render properly. However, when I try to view them again on my iPhone using Safari, things are not as smooth sailing. The **dropdown menu on the homepage of Gain City is not displayed properly** and I am unable to select the options.

There is a particularly pleasing website that I come across. It belongs to a relatively smaller player in Singapore. Mega Discount Store, as it is called, has only 2 stores, while Challenger has 24 stores island wide. The **website of Mega Discount Store displays beautifully without glitches on both desktop and mobile browsers**. And to the delight of users who surf on mobile devices, its website has a **responsive design** and has been optimised for mobile users.

2. Purpose: Going All Out to Woo the Customer

The secret to success is constancy to purpose. Web developers should never lose sight of the **main function** that their websites are serving. They must be well aware of what should or should not be included.

According to the insight report by CivicScience on the buying preferences of customers in personal electronics retail, people value **access to consumer reviews** the most, followed by **ease of price comparisons**.

I would add a few more items that I think should also be included in a website of an electronics store. People usually have an electronic product in mind when they are searching for it on the internet so it is important to inform them of **which products are available at the stores**. As people are unable to touch or experience the physical item on the internet, they also need to rely on **clear product details or technical specifications** that relate product features, performance, dimensions, etc. When people are searching through hundreds or thousands of products on the website of an electronics store, the **products have to be systematically organised into different categories**, price points, brands or features. Finally, when they have decided to purchase the product, they need to know **where** and **how** to get them.

In a nutshell, the purpose of the website of an electronics store should inform visitors of the available products, technical specifications or features of the products, store locations or contact details, enable them to search for products on various aspects, provide them with consumer reviews and allow them to compare products easily.

From the list of websites of electronics stores reviewed, all of them have their own online store. The products are systematically organised and I am able to find a specific product with ease.

However, the website of Audio House will score quite low in terms of purpose. Although there is some information provided on which products are available, product details or specifications are limited.

The website of one of the other big boys, Best Denki, is decent but it provides little information on product details and their specifications too.

Personally, I find the **websites of Parisilk and Mega Discount Store informative and purposeful**. I would award high scores for their websites in terms of purpose. Finding information on products is a breeze, and there is clear information on their store locations and contact details too. The website of Mega Discount Store will go one up as it has a blog, which features some useful information on how to select certain products.

However, when it comes to competing with global players like Best Buy, Currys or MediaMarkt, the Singaporean hopefuls have a long way to go. Not only that the websites of these global giants are informative, they are also interactive. The consumer review platform is very robust and engaging. There is a lot to learn for the electronics stores in Singapore.

3. Accuracy: Hitting the Right Notes

Accuracy refers to how relevant or concise is the information on the website presented.

Except for Challenger, the information presented by the websites reviewed is fairly accurate. At least I cannot recall seeing specifications of undergarments on the websites of the electronics stores.

4. Credibility: Where Trust is Built Upon

It may not be easy to assess the credibility of a website. Although this may not be conclusive, there are a few things that I will look for. Things like **date of website**, **domain name**, **site design** and **contact details** are important to me.

From the websites reviewed, all of them seem to be up to date except for Best Denki, which is still copyrighted in 2011 (by the way, we are already halfway through 2017).

All have credible domain names that bear their company names, and they adopt gTLD like *.com* and most of them use country-code TLD *.sg* too.

All site designs are decent.

All of them have physical stores and provide clear information on their store locations and contact details. This makes the websites very credible as there is accountability and the company is willing to stand behind the information presented.

WEB DESIGN EVALUATION

5. Loading Speed: Here There Is No Speed Limit

I was told **2 seconds is the threshold for website acceptability**. According to Forrester Consulting, 47% of the consumers expect a webpage to load in 2 seconds or less. 40% will wait no more than 3 seconds for a webpage to render before abandoning the site.

The perceived load time of all the websites reviewed falls within the 2-second threshold, with Parisilk and Challenger leading the pack. Best Denki and Gain City trail the rest, and the homepage of Gain City takes more than 4 seconds on a broadband connection to load completely.

6. Navigation: Clear Directions Bring You to Your Intended Destination

When it comes to moving around in a website, the **ease of navigation** tops the list. There must be **clear, obvious and consistent navigation bars**. **Breadcrumb trails**, which indicate the path of webpages viewed, are desired inclusions in larger websites. If graphics have been used to provide navigation, an **alternate text description** should be configured for each image. **Dynamic navigation**, like displaying a dropdown menu when the mouse cursor moves over an item, helps to offer choices without overwhelming visitors. A **site map** comes in handy to provide an outline of the organisation of the website to visitors who sometimes lose their way on larger websites. Finally, if all things fail, there is a **site search feature** to help visitors to find the information that they need.

All the reviewed websites have clear, obvious and consistent navigation bars that display dropdown menus dynamically for some of their options. Text, instead of graphics, is used in their navigation bars.

Ease of navigation on the website of Challenger is found wanting. Comparing to the other reviewed sites, it does not have a site search feature and it does not even have a site map. The website lacks breadcrumb navigation too. The omission of various navigation tools may be due to the relatively smaller size of its website.

The website of Best Denki is the other one, which does not have breadcrumb navigation as well.

7. Visual Appeal: Beauty Lies in the Eyes of the Beholder

Although visual appeal is subjective, there are several principles that I look for in a website. Firstly, there must be **repetition or design flow**, which means visual components are repeated throughout the website. Secondly, there must be **contrast** between page elements so as to add visual excitement and attract the visitors. Thirdly, principle of **proximity** must be applied so that related items are placed close to one another. Lastly, a cohesive website needs **alignment** so as to create visual unity.

Based on the 4 design principles, all websites reviewed are “visually appealing” as repetition, contrast, proximity and proper alignment are evident. If I would have to pick a winner, personally, I like the one from Mega Discount Store (see Figure 1). It has this extra element of merrymaking and vibrancy that makes me want to visit their store or place an order with them. Websites from Parisilk and Best Denki are not far behind too.

However, I find the website of Lucky Store lacklustre and uninspiring. It is clean and decent but somehow, it does not create excitement and I think I miss its definitive call to action.

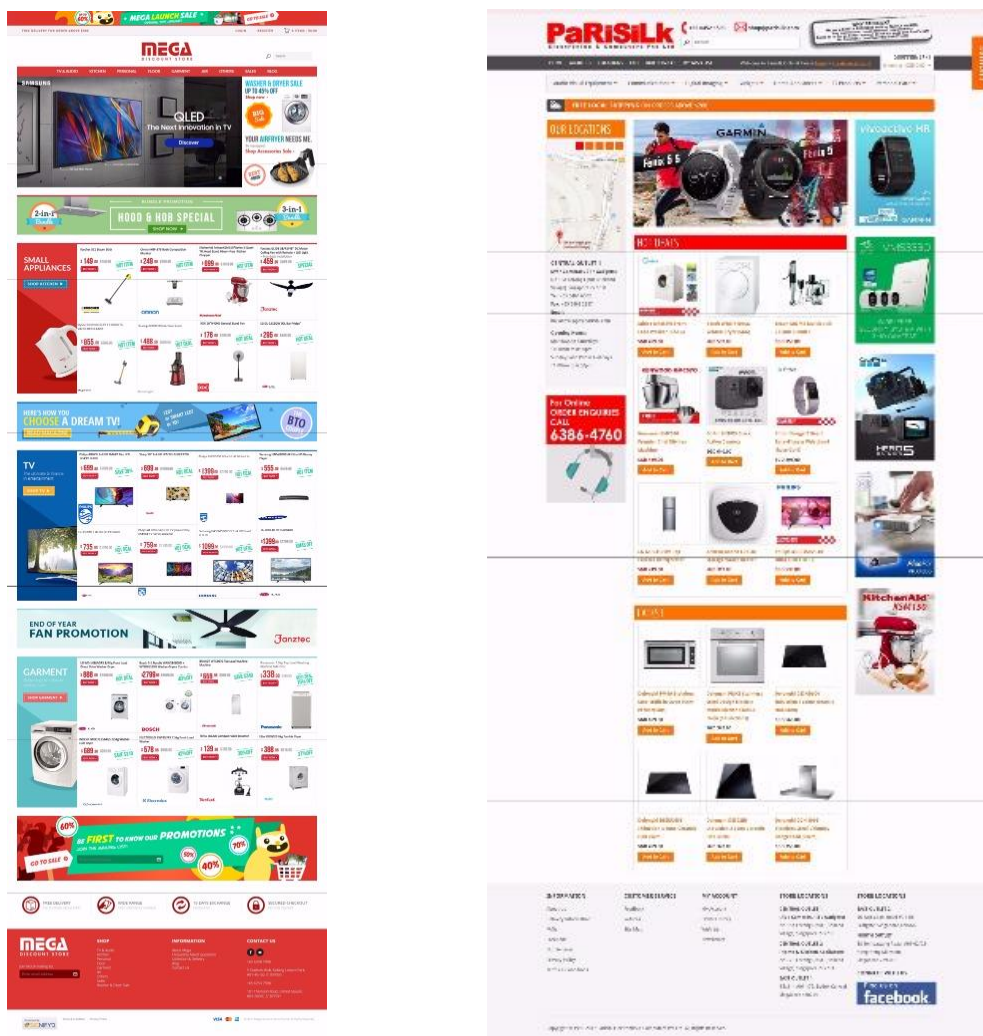


Figure 1: Homepages of Mega Discount Store (Left) & Parisilk (Right)

8. Layout & Placement of Elements: Finding a Regular Place in the Hearts & Minds of the Visitors

Again, this is quite similar to the principle of proximity and alignment that will appeal to the visitors visually. **Consistency** and **cohesiveness** play major roles in determining good website design.

The websites, which are reviewed, display good layout and elements are placed in an easy-to-read manner.

9. Readability: The Most Serious Communication Problem

If the visitors cannot make out what is presented, you might as well shut down the website. When it comes to readability, some of the considerations include **type of fonts used, font size, font weight, font colour for contrast, line length or paragraph length, text alignment and content organisation**.

From all the websites reviewed, although the font size is sometimes a little small, the content is generally legible and understandable. There is no particular website to highlight or single out.

10. Use of Colour: Food for the Human Spirit

A powerful colour scheme can attract and engage web visitors. Monochromatic, analogous, complementary, split complementary, triadic and tetradic are some of the colour schemes. A colour scheme can also be based on an image.

All the websites reviewed do not seem to adopt a distinctive colour scheme but there is a trend of using their corporate or logo colours in designing their websites.

I particularly like the use of colours by Mega Discount Store and Parisilk. They are fun, vibrant and cheerful.

Colours used by Best Denki and Lucky Store are more serious and sombre. Whereas, Gain City has a strange combination or peculiar taste that does not quite resonate with mine.

Conclusion

A good website should present relevant, purposeful and credible content with appealing, consistent, cohesive and usable design.

Based on the 10 criteria, websites of Mega Discount Store and Parisilk lead the pack and top the list. Websites of Best Denki and Lucky Store, however, look a bit dated and have substantial room for improvement.