

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

USABILITY AND DESIGN

Making the User Experience Great

BY DANIELA FORTE

It's the season for a website redesign. Retailers are finding different ways to make their websites more usable for shoppers by doing a complete redesign or simply making minor adjustments.



Overstockart.com, for example, is going through a complete redesign of its website. Amitai Sasson, vice president of marketing and development for overstockart.com, said the company is basically working out of Yahoo Stores, and going to a completely customized store.

"One of the biggest for us is to show art with a frame, that has been a huge focus for us," said Sasson. "It is just about to be done. We're redesigning for desktop, tablet and mobile."

Sasson said it would be completely responsive design. Overstockart.com previously had desktop and mobile site, and while their new responsive design site has gone live, the company is still working on making a complete transition to their main site. The transition is expected to be completed by April. The main point of the move from a customer-focused perspective, were bigger images of the art and frame, better representing what customers will be getting and a better experience for shopping for art.

According to the MCM Outlook 2014 survey, 56% of retailers said within the next 12 months they would be doing a complete redesign of their websites.

Victor Castro, director of ecommerce for Zachy's Wine and Liquor, said they are in the process of re-platforming. He said



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Zachy's has plans to launch a new website on the Magento Enterprise. The new website will have wishlists, multi-address shipping, social login and an improved user experience.

"We were in the outdated system and we wanted to bring it up to standard," said Castro.

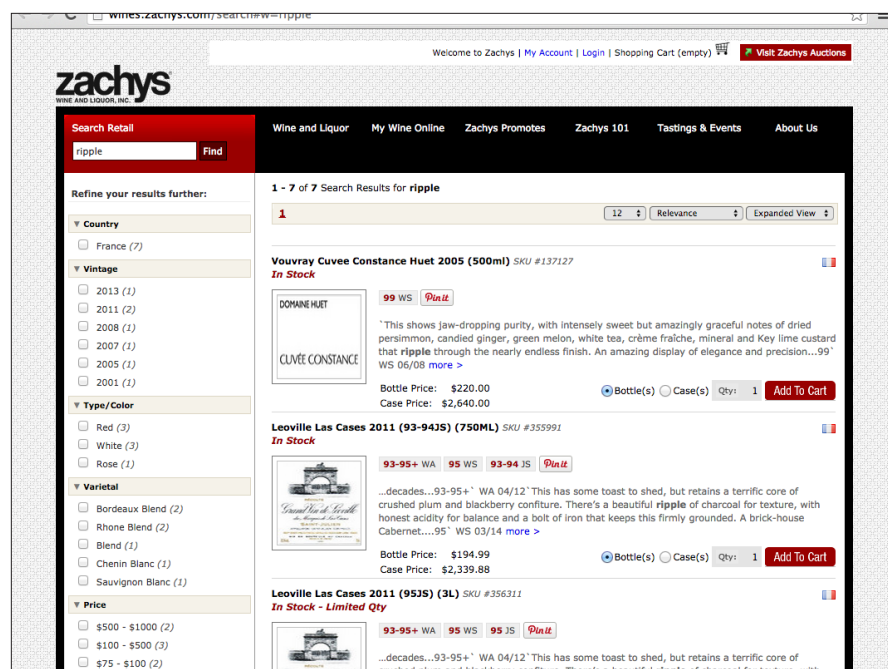
The MCM Outlook 2014 survey results showed that the top three reasons for a redesign was to update or refresh the look of the site (64.7%), increase conversion rates (52.9%) and to have a mobile and responsive site (52.9%).

Making a Site Usable

Making your site user friendly for customers is important if you want them to purchase your products. That is why retailers are constantly tweaking and changing the tiniest of details to make sure the customer has the best user experience.



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"We are constantly battling on content, to make sure the content is good, is it good keywords, is the copy good enough, are there enough details," said Minix. "Left-hand filters are big on our website, those are different per product categories."



Colin Hynes, partner at UX Strategy and Research, said the smart retailers are listening to their customers in a multitude of ways, both passively through tapping into services that can synthesize the buzz out in the digital world about their brand or product or actively by reaching out directly to their customers to get feedback.

User Testing

User testing provides retailers the knowledge they need, before moving forward

with any adjustments to the website.



Cal Bouchard, director of ecommerce for The North Face, said the company has done some in-lab user testing on the entire site on all devices.

"We've done remote/webcam testing on users to focus on a few aspects of our navigation on certain devices and we've done some in-store intercepts to work with brick-and-mortar customers and how they'd shop on a tablet on our site in store," said Bouchard.

She said all user tests have been beneficial in their own way, but it takes a lot of time, energy and planning to get good results.



Scott Cohn, vice president of ecommerce for Chinese Laundry, said they have done a little bit of user testing with college-aged young adults that are

within the company's demographic.

Cohn said this allows Chinese Laundry to get feedback and make the appropriate changes to see where people get lost. The company will look at heat maps; they will use a heat map service that is useful in terms of understanding where people are clicking and how to adjust the call-to-action and where people are clicking on.

"What [user testing] gives us [is] a very deep look at click-paths and where people have gone and the results of it," said Cohn. "Make sure you have the basics before you get fancy, like understanding search results, a lot of it is understanding analytics that everyone has access to and utilizing that."

Hynes said when it comes to user testing, it all comes back to the learning goals of the retailer and what kind of goals the users have, what they are trying to accomplish.

"There are a number of different types of tests that can be conducted even before a site is built," said Hynes.

This includes taxonomy exercises that help set the foundation of structure of the site itself. Hynes said a number of tools can help bring the user into the conversation, which categories should be created and what sub-categories or products should live in those categories and then what those categories should be called.

Hynes recommends a minimum of two rounds of testing. The first round is early in the process when the ideas are starting to take shape in the form of low-fidelity designs, which includes sketches and wire frames, and the second test is later in the process when the experience is a higher fidelity test and includes visual design and "real feeling functionality."

"It's important that both are included because you don't want to wait too long in the process to put users in front of an experience, because the cost of making changes later can be so great," said Hynes.

Site Search and Marketing Campaigns

While it may not be the first aspect of

your website retailers think about, the site search is an integral part of the overall user experience. It provides retailers insight into what the customer is looking for when they visit the site. Site search is an excellent selling tool for retailers to leverage.

Castro said by utilizing site search for their marketing campaigns, they have seen a big increase in conversion for those customers who have used search.

"We leverage site search to generate dynamic landing pages for multiple marketing campaigns, every time you click on a marketing campaign from us, you land on an actual site search results page that has been optimized with content to match the marketing campaign and optimized to increase conversions," said Castro.

Bouchard said at The North Face, they look at on-site search terms every week and try to adjust for misspellings and re-directs and take queues to other parts of the organization, but they haven't seen a ton of benefit on any one campaign.

Cohn said site search allows Chinese Laundry to understand what people are looking for, which helps build out keywords for SEO and to build landing pages.

"In some cases, if they continue to look for something, it will even impact color purchases," said Cohn.

Hynes said search is a critical component to most websites; search has started to blend in with a browse behavior by virtue of prevalence of guided navigation, which essentially lets you categorize different areas of somebody's search to help people find what they need.

"It raises an intelligent browse structure based on the search the user conducted, it starts to raise the level of importance of ensuring that a retailer's taxonomy is user centered and most closely matches the need that they have at that point in their experience.

Add-Ons to the Website

Making small changes here and there is vital to keep your website up-to-date. Retailers are finding various ways to make the overall user experience a pleasant one.

Cohn said since August, the company has added the "Love" functionality to replace the wish list. He said no one was using the wish list, so the company thought to create something more relevant to its customer base.

"It is live now, but we're still working through the usability, and try to understand what people are doing and how to make it better," said Cohn. "That will actually be our next test."

Cohn said they have also integrated PayPal into the site as well.



John Bergquist, connector at Saddleback Leather, said they would have an interactive blog and a new tool where customers can post stories. The blog will be geared toward the customer and the brand's culture.

"We are trying a community approach in a different way where we don't see anyone else doing," said Bergquist.

Saddleback Leather is also working on the back-ordering process, which is currently in the testing phase.

According to the MCM Outlook 2014 survey, within the next 12 months, the top three website add-ons include triggered emails (40.7%), video (37.7%) and more analytic tools (37%).

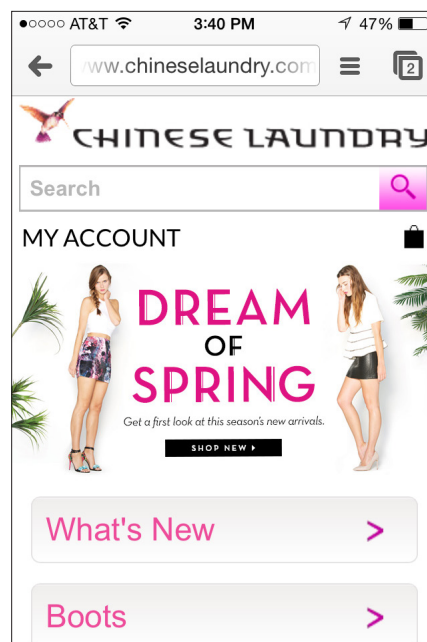
Minix said they are rolling out an item recommender, which is a big change for them. It will be on the homepage, product and shopping cart pages.

They also plan to have a "back-in-stock" functionality, which will send an email to a customer that will notify them when an item is back in stock.

A year ago, the company provided the ability to donate in the shopping cart, along with gift cards and gift wrap options as well.

Bouchard said in 2014 they did a check-out optimization project and added PayPal and they are working on their filters to make it easier to search by size.

"We also added reviews to our sub-category pages so shoppers can see stars as they browse and added user-generated In-



Chinese Laundry launched a mobile ecommerce site in August and was working toward a redesign by the holidays.

stagram photos to our product detail pages so that consumers can see the items worn by other consumers," said Bouchard.

Mobile: Website Design and Email Marketing

Viewing a retailer's website on various mobile devices has become the norm and retailers are listening.

Bouchard said for The North Face, it is a slow process to change the organization to focus on mobile, but the company is finally learning to ensure it is part of all of its decisions.

"It's over 50% of our traffic (tablet and phone) so obviously it has made a huge impact," said Bouchard. "Right now we optimized our desktop site for tablet as well and we have a separate mobile optimized site (m.site) that ensures phone users have a good experience, but the downside to that is managing content on two sites."

Cohn said from a tablet point-of-view, they have a desktop and m.dot site. Their platform has not come out with a responsive design yet.

“We made sure that our site functions nicely on the tablet, especially with navigating through images, based on small tablets and large phones where people want to render the site as the full site rather than the m.dot site,” said Cohn.

Cohn said weekend traffic on the smartphone has been the device choice since Memorial Day. There are days where mobile is the number one device type. The company launched a mobile site in August and is working toward a redesign by the holidays.

When it comes to email marketing, Sasson said they are shifting all of their emails to mobile and desktop-friendly designs since more customers are opening their emails on mobile devices and click-throughs are coming from mobile sites.

At Zachy’s, Castro said they have migrated to a responsive email design, and while it is hard to view full results, the company has seen an increase in opens since the shift.

Minix said mobile has impacted email marketing when it came to the design of the email. The company is continually trying to simplify and make sure there is enough text, if images aren’t shown by default.

Ratings and Reviews

Customers love to know what other customers think of a product when it comes to making a purchase. That is why retailers are making ratings and reviews part of the website experience.



David Meidam, information system manager at Saddleback Leather, said the ratings and reviews have been performing well for the company. Customer comments both positive and negative alike help their purchasing choices.

“We believe in our designs and products and we wanted people to find that easily and give feedback,” said Bergquist. “We put very little money in advertising so we believe in customer’s advocacy.

Bergquist said he would like to enhance customer advocacy by allowing customers to not only share their review, but also share it anywhere they want. One way is to have social login; whatever they are doing on the site, that they are plugged into the tool.

Minix said ratings and reviews are used everywhere the company can. This includes email campaigns and recommenders. The company uses it to monitor internally and sending it off to merchants to fix whatever people aren’t liking.

Hynes said in recent years, ratings and reviews continue to be an extremely important part of the shopping process itself. It gives users the ability to trade-off in the decision-making process.

“What I have seen more recently is their use in marketing both online and offline,” said Hynes. “For example, using ratings and reviews that are gathered online are being leveraged in the physical retail environment.”

Hynes said both positive and negative reviews build credibility for a retailer. The old-school thinking of hiding negative reviews of a product has gone by the wayside for more progressive retailers.

“They realize showing a balanced approach of the pros and cons of a product is what users want and expect,” said Hynes.

Hynes said often times users are looking for the downside of a product and weighing in whether that downside is applicable to them. Or is it enough of a downside that they should care about it and should it influence the decision on the product until they realize every product has a downside.

Hynes added that the negative reviews of a product help the customer in the decision-making process and reinforces that the retailer values transparency.

“We’ve had them for a long time on our site, on our product detail pages and believe they are making a huge impact on conversion,” said Bouchard. “Recently we worked on increasing volume and coverage so we can have as many products as possible with at least one review.”

The North Face hears from customers all the time that they trust what other customers have to say about their products more than the company itself, added Bouchard.

“Make sure that customers can easily see both good and bad reviews, being able to sort by ratings, and provide both visual cues as well as the full content of reviews,” said Bouchard.

Inside the Shopping Cart

The shopping cart closes the deal. So this is why it is important that the user experience is an easy one, because customers will easily leave the website at the very end without making a purchase. Is your shopping cart user friendly?

Minix said the shopping cart is the most important page, it is the most difficult from a technical standpoint and it is a complex page.

“For us, we still have a four-step checkout process where you are presented with a different screen for each step, we mull around to see if we should get to a one-page check out or maybe two,” said Minix. “Cart abandonment is still high for everyone, you can never drive it down to a low number, because people use it as a scratch pad.”

Hynes said usability and design are critical in a shopping cart. What his company has found is that transparency is key to a shopping cart and there are still sites out there that do not disclose the full charge that a customer will pay, yet they ask the customer for commitment to begin a process to which they will be giving that retailer personal payment information.

Bouchard said usability and design helped when they implemented a new cart flow this year after user testing as well as a usability audit the company had done by experts in the field.

“We are seeing good returns so far on reducing cart abandonment rates,” said Bouchard. “The key is to make it as easy as possible for consumers to check out and provide all the information they need along the way.” ■