

E-business Web Site Evaluation

Name: Bradley Korn

Date: 4/8/2005

Web address: <http://www.target.com>

Overview

Target is a traditional discount retailer of general merchandise and groceries. Target's corporate headquarters are located at 1000 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403. Until 2000, The Target Company was known as the Dayton-Hudson Company, having been founded in 1902. The company, until recently, owned and operated several chains, including Dayton's, Hudson's, and Marshall Fields. After those names were combined into a single Marshall Fields chain, it was sold to the May Department Stores Company in 2004. The Target Company is now a completely different company than what it was founded as. It no longer has any high- or mid- range stores, having also divested the Mervyn's department store chain. As of the end of fiscal 2003, the company operated 1553 Target discount stores and Target superstores. The company has been publicly held since 1967.

Target.com is the company's entrance into the e-commerce world. According to the information at hand, there is no clue that Target carries out any B2B e-commerce. Their operations are geared towards serving consumers. Their profit is primarily derived from markup, with the addition of shipping fees on online orders.

General Impressions

As Target is my preferred general merchandise discounter, I have been shopping at Target stores for quite a while, ever since they first appeared in the Miami, Florida area some 15 or so years ago. So when the Internet began changing the way consumers shop, I naturally looked to Target.com for a good shopping experience. Target's website is very well laid out, and navigation is fairly efficient. I encountered no dead links in the main site, only some that lead in circles in the corporate information area.

The merchandise that Target carries online is of a much broader assortment than what is carried in the physical store locations. This allows the online consumer a better possible shopping experience, although it can also complicate the shopping experience as well. The product catalog is fairly easy to navigate, although breadcrumbs are not always displayed on the page, and the customer is forced to use the browser's 'Back' button instead. Thumbnails provide a quick glimpse in search results, and larger pictures download upon the display of the item detail page.

Also included is an interactive circular ad. This ad gives the impression that it is completely linked with the online inventory, but I could not find any item advertised that was also available online, even though I could find some of the items through a basic search.

Suggestions for Improvement

There is no way to check stock on-hand in stores. Many online retailers who also operate physical stores provide a method for checking stock on hand in their physical stores. Providing such an option would greatly improve the online shopping experience at Target.com. One of the reasons Target does not have this ability is because they use Amazon.com's systems to drive their site. While Amazon is an excellent site, they have no experience linking the inventories of an online retailer, such as themselves, with the inventories of brick and mortar stores.

Going hand-in-hand with the previous suggestion, there should be a way to order merchandise online and pick-up at the store. Many large traditional retailers, such as Best Buy and Sears, have begun to allow customers the option of buying online and picking-up their purchase at the nearest store location. Although I am unsure of Target's technological abilities, of what I have seen in their stores, I can surmise that they probably have the ability to link their store inventory system with their website and allow online purchase with in-store pick-up.

Eliminate sounds from website, or provide a mechanism to turn them off. Sound on websites often cause delays for consumers using a dial-up connection, and it is just plain annoying to the rest of us on broadband connections, especially if the volume is turned up above a normal level. I realize that the sounds are all a part of the marketing mix on the website, but they can also turn people away. I personally avoid websites that have excessive sound that I cannot turn off, and I am sure I cannot be the only person who does so. If I request a video to be played, then I expect sound; but I don't expect sound on a regular basis. In any case, if sound is to be included, then a well designed website would include a method to mute or stop playing.

The interactive circular could use some help as well. If items that are advertised in the print ads are available online, they should be linked so that a customer can purchase directly from the interactive ad. A store shopping list function is also provided through the interactive ad, but unfortunately the customer cannot add items that are not present in the interactive circular. A lot of work needs to be done to the interactive circular.

Evaluation

	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Performance and Usability Does the site load quickly and completely with a standard dial-up modem?		I have not been able to actually try it on a dial-up connection, but this assessment is based on the speed it downloaded on a 2.8Mb DSL line.
If the site requires the user to have a special plug-in or application (i.e. Flash, Acrobat files) does the site provide a link or help for installing the plug-in?		The site requires Macromedia Flash to display several pages. I could not find a link to download the plug-in.
Is the home page well-organized and easy to read and understand?		Homepage organized in the usual right and then down pattern, following normal eye pattern, although with somewhat excessive content.
Are navigation choices clear and logical? Are they consistent and available on every page?		Breadcrumbs provided, uniform header, footer, and menu bars throughout
Is information organized in a logical and meaningful fashion? Can you find what you are looking for within three clicks?		Most things are very easily found, although this contributes to the excessive information on the homepage.
If a search engine is included in the site, does it provide quick, concise, and accurate results?		Results are somewhat concise, although the results of broad searches will often return many categories of results.
If no search engine is provided, is there a site map?		N/A There is a search engine, but I could not find a site map. A site map should be included in any event.
Is the site free of broken or bad links or other error messages?		I encountered some links that lead in circles in the corporate information areas.
Average	7	

Rating Comments		
Web Design		
Are graphic files small enough to download quickly?		Yes, most graphics are not very large.
If screen elements, such as animated gifs and ticker tapes, are used, are they effective without being distracting?	10	The animations I encountered were in Flash format, and were well placed to catch the attention.
Is there a balance between design and functionality?	10	Very good balance between design and functionality.
Do the pages fit completely within your browser, or do you need to scroll in order to see the entire page?		This is the one area where most websites fall down, and Target follows suit. Pages are far too large, much longer than a 1024x768 screen, containing too much content.
Are the typefaces and font sizes easy to see and read?	9	Fonts are well chosen, but point-size is sometimes too small.
Does the site make good use of colors?	10	Target's flagship red color scheme is maintained throughout the site.
Does the site project a good image of the company?	9	A very positive image is projected.
Average	8.5714	

Rating Comments		
Shopping Experience		
Is the site equally effective for the shopper who wishes to browse and for the one who wants to find an item and get out?	10	Effective for both browsers and quick shoppers.
Is the language clear, descriptive, concise, and easy to understand? Is it jargon-free? Is the general tone professional and friendly?	10	Language is clear, concise, and to-the-point.
Is additional information provided to support the customer?		Customer support information is spread over several pages, including shipping information, order tracking and updating, return information, recall and rebate information, and contact information.
Average	9.6667	

Rating Comments		
Catalog Organization		
Is the product catalog easy to access from the home page?	10	Extremely easy, which adds to the clutter of the homepage.
Are product categories easy to understand?	10	Clear-cut categories.
Is catalog information organized in a logical and meaningful fashion?	10	Broad categories to narrowed sub-categories organize products well.
Is the catalog easy to navigate?	9	Very easy navigation.
Is the product information useful and informative? Is it adequate? Does it encourage viewers to buy?	8	Product information is fairly detailed, although some details I was looking for were missing.
Are product photos provided? Do they download quickly?	10	Yes photos are provided and they download quickly, along with larger versions.
Average	9.5	

Rating Comments		
Shopping-Cart Implementation		
Is the shopping cart easy to use and understand? Are shopping-cart features clearly explained to the consumer?	10	Shopping cart is easy-to-use and straightforward.
Can the customer easily add items to and delete items from the shopping cart?	10	Quantity adjust and remove link provided for each item, along with save for later function.
When adding an item or items to your shopping cart, can the customer view the contents of the cart?	10	Contents of cart automatically displayed for customer when items added.
Is there an obvious click path to the check-out process?	10	Checkout button prominently displayed on shopping cart summary, at the top in clear view of the customer.
Is product inventory/availability information provided?	10	Provided on each product detail page, and again on the cart summary page.
Average	10	

	Rating	Comments
Transaction Processing		
Does the site support secure credit card transactions? (If not, how payment is handled.)	10	Secure transactions.
Is the order form easy to understand and complete?	10	Straightforward order form.
Does the site indicate what it does with personal information about customers, if it is requested?	10	Privacy policy available from footer bar of each page.
Are payments processed in real time?	10	Credit card payments are processed immediately.
Is the transaction completed quickly?	10	Fast transaction.
Is adequate information provided as confirmation of a successfully completed transaction?	10	Confirmation page is displayed, and confirmation email is sent upon order processing.
Is there a follow-up e-mail confirmation?	10	Follow-ups are sent after order shipping.
Average	10	

		Rating	Comments
Customer Service			
Does the site have a privacy policy? If yes, is it easily accessible from the home page? Is it accessible from other areas of the site that ask customers for personal information?		10	Privacy policy available from footer bar of each page.
Does the site clearly explain shipping and handling procedures? Return policies? Product or service guarantees?		10	Shipping policy and order information available from footer bar on any page.
Does the site provide contact information for customers who prefer to order offline or for use in the event of technical or other problems?		8	Store location information is provided, but that is the extent.
Does the site allow international orders?		0	International orders are not accepted.
Does the site have a separate customer-service section or clearly labeled customer-service information?		8	Listed as the "Help" section in the footer bar of each page. Could be somewhat confusing.
Does the site allow users to track orders and account activity?		10	Yes order status and account management is easily accessible from the header and footer bars of any page.
Does the site make it easy for you to provide feedback/comments?		9	Through the somewhat misleading "Help" section of the footer bar.
Does the site provide a forum/chat feature? Does it appear to support the primary purpose of the site?		8	No forum for chat is provided, although this probably unnecessary.
Does the site give customers the opportunity to subscribe/unsubscribe to e-mail alerts or mailing-list discussions?		10	Yes, the email list subscription is available from advertised products page.
Does the site offer other value-added features?		10	Gift cards, store locator, interactive circulars, credit card account information, gift registries, and personal gift lists.
Is the customer experience quick and easy enough to bring the customer back, and keep him or her from going to competitors?		9	Very straightforward shopping experience provided.
Average		8.3636	

Overall Average

9.01