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Chapter I

Assessing Web-Enabled Interactivity: An Audit Tool

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Abstract

As business models evolve to integrate technology with organizational strategy and marketing, the application of Web technology to facilitate end-user interactions, or what we call Web-enabled interactivity*, has become increasingly important to customer relationships. This article develops and introduces the Web-enabled Interactivity Self-Evaluation tool (referred to as WISE). Two case studies are used to illustrate how managers can use WISE to develop a thorough, easily communicated profile of their Web-enabled interactivity capabilities upon which competitive positioning assessments can also be made. The information generated by the audit process is intended to help firms enhance their interactive communication with Web site users in a market-oriented manner.*

Background

As business models evolve to integrate technology with organizational strategy and marketing, the application of Web technology to facilitate end-user interactions, or what we call *Web-enabled interactivity*, is increasingly important to customer relationship management. Perhaps not surprisingly, recognition of the power of online interaction has been paralleled by growing interest in understanding end-user online behavior (e.g., Hodkinson & Kiel, 2003; Koufaris, 2002), user perceptions of Web site quality (Wang & Tang, 2003), and user satisfaction with Web sites (Huizingh & Hoekstra, 2003; McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Otto, Najdawi, & Caron, 2000). For example, Otto et al. (2000) examine customer perceptions of Web site download time and their satisfaction regarding site content, format, graphics, ease of use, and responsiveness.

While such research has generated useful insights to a new phenomenon, we believe that it is equally important to assess firm behavior on the Web particularly in terms of organizational efforts to facilitate interactivity with Web site users. This is because the interactive communication process provides the organization with a market-oriented mechanism to uncover and satisfy customer needs. As argued by Min, Song, and Keebler (2002) and Trim (2002), the firm that utilizes tools such as the Web to generate, disseminate, and respond to market information will benefit from improved business performance and enhanced competitive advantage. It is notable, therefore, that in spite of increasing interest in customer-focused research and Web site interactions, as well as the implicit need to be market-oriented in Web site development, we are unable to identify any tool specifically designed to help managers assess their Web site in the context of the processes surrounding interactive communication and market orientation. Rather, tools directed toward internal (managerial) analysis have been focused on either the general functional quality of the Web site (Evans & King, 1999; Selz & Schubert, 1997) or on a more focused topic such as identifying and measuring factors influencing Internet purchases in terms of customer objectives (Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002). To link site design with performance, Agarwal and Venkatesh (2002) and Palmer (2002) also examine Web site usability by measuring issues ranging from site content and navigation to the customization and responsiveness possibilities of the site or the extent to which emotional responses are triggered through site use. Again however, while these studies have usefully advanced the variety of metrics available for e-business research (see Straub, Hoffman, Weber, & Steinfield, 2002a, 2002b for a review), their conceptual underpinnings lie outside interactive communication and market orientation.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to introduce a diagnostic audit tool that provides organizations with a mechanism for systematically assessing the Web-enabled interactivity of their site, based on the underlying principles related to