

# Commercial Websites: A Focus on the Essential

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## INTRODUCTION

Even “small online business” (with non-transactional websites, consisting of approximately 10–20 pages with some basic content management and social media widgets), incur in costs associated with designing, developing and building a website. Just to report some indicative numbers (for some interesting data please see: <http://www.executionists.com/blog/cost-to-build-websites-2014/> or <http://www.webpagefx.com/How-much-should-web-site-cost.html>, for instance), a small business will normally contact a Web developer to discuss the site content and design, with the developer offering a quote to deliver the site. Non-transactional sites can be delivered in a huge range of budgets. A five-page small-business site could cost as little as \$500, while a five-page site for a major firm could have a \$100,000 budget. The difference in budget relates to the complexity of design, cost of custom photography, motion graphics, animation and interactive tools. A simple but professional non-transactional website can usually be produced starting at \$2,500, plus basic Web hosting.

When referring to transactional websites, costs can increase quite drastically with every extra functionality or modules of functionalities. A Custom Content Management System cost – for clients who want to manage their own content – can range from \$2,000 to \$20,000, while the costs of e-commerce shopping carts, catalogs, payment processing range from \$1,500 to \$5,000 (or more, depending on requirements) and the creation and management of a social media network profile such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Google+*, *LinkedIn* etc., range from \$500 to \$2,000.

In spite of the fact that it is expectable to pay a lot more on a brick and mortar retail shop (which include inventory, interior design, furniture, rent, utilities, staff, equipment, insurance, etc.), the presented numbers (that do not include any maintenance costs) are not irrelevant, especially when it concerns businesses (small or not) baring financial restrictions.

As the success of a commercial internet presence is strongly affected by its functionalities, it is important to find out which of available functionalities for a commercial internet presence (or commercial website) are more relevant to online buyers, thus helping managers to prioritize their website investments (whether reducing software development costs or software acquisition costs) and aiding them to make the decision to spend the money where it counts more, according to their financial restrictions.

The novelty of this research is a science-based prioritization of the functionalities that can be implemented on websites, according to a rationale based on the perceived importance of online consumers (or e-consumers), regarding web shopping (rather than mere “gut-feelings” or even misleading advertising from web design companies). The intents of this research aim at a deeper understanding of online shopping in general and Portuguese online shopping, in particular.

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As online shopping refers to a non-presencial environment, the interaction between costumers and online sellers relies on the available functionalities of the commercial presence solutions, which try to mimic human interaction. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on how to classify or to aggregate any possible functionality to implement within a commercial internet presence (which we will refer, so forth, simply as web presence) and it is recognized that the proper design of the functionalities is directly related to a web presence success (Ramanathan, 2010; Tucker, 2008).

To this matter, rather than describing which functionalities a web presence should provide, literature focus much more on describing large sets of functionalities or abstract attributes that should be implemented, thus lacking a greater level of detail. Within this context, this work sets out to bridge the gap between literature review and the need to aid people (i.e. managers and programmers) in choosing the right functionalities to implement a proper and rational web presence of a company. In addition, it is also intended to help developers in adjusting software packages, according to the possibility for a wider modular offer, adapted to the needs of very small businesses or to the ones of large corporations, trying to reduce risks and promote sustainability of web presences (Alt & Klein, 2011).

To do so, this study (though only focusing on internet acquisition of physical goods) is built on the functionalities identified by Schuh, Kegel, and Bistricky (2009), as their study is likely to include the most extensive set of identified web presence functionalities and also the vast majority of identified functionalities within the literature review (for a comparative analysis please see Ferreira & Antunes, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The study used an iterative approach, as described in the following subsections. After an initial online survey, the second phase of the study regarded an exploratory factor analysis, based on the obtained results, by using principal component analysis with *Varimax* rotation and the software *SPSS Statistics* – v.21, IBM SPSS. In the last stage, a confirmatory factor analysis was used, by applying structural equation modeling analysis and using the software *AMOS* v.21, IBM SPSS.

### Survey Instrument and Sample

The attributes were summarized into various items and a survey instrument was created (please see Appendix). This instrument, implemented as an online survey using *GoogleDocs* (<https://docs.google.com>), asked the respondents to identify the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with these items in relation to their experience in shopping from web sites. Respondents rated each item using a Lickert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 7, “strongly agree”.

Although websites should cater to experienced and less experienced consumers, this research focuses on the perceptions of experienced users to benefit from their knowledge in repeated experiences. Therefore, the survey was administered to a sample of heterogeneous Portuguese higher education teachers, as they usually have web-shopping experience of physical goods (e.g. books, printing supplies, electronics, etc.) and they are easily targeted using their e-mails, as the vast majority of them are publically available at the websites of their institutions.

In spite of the fact that the selection of Portuguese higher education teachers indeed carried an element of convenience (in terms of time, effort and money in data gathering), the sample selection was not without further thought. In order to achieve the purposes of the research, the target users needed to possess a set of intrinsic characteristics, beyond usual geographic and demographic dispersion (in

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