Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Explain the seven elements of the customer interface.
2. Describe the alternative "look-and-feel" approaches to design.
3. Describe the three content classifications.
4. Explain why there should be concern for community.
5. Discuss some of the features used to customize a website.
6. Summarize how a company connects with other businesses.
7. Differentiate between branding and market communications.
8. Describe the four categories of market communications.
9. Explain what constitutes a good brand.
10. Discuss the 10-step branding process.

Unit Summary

While online companies continue to utilize traditional offline interfaces with customers (e.g. catalogs and call centers), they primarily rely on their virtual stores on the Internet. This unit examines in detail the tools managers can use to create competitive advantage using customer interface design.

Among other things, an effective site should communicate a firm's value proposition, be consistent with its business model, and attract target customers. In order to accomplish this, the e-commerce manager faces seven design choices - the 7 Cs of customer interface.

A website's context focuses on how a site is designed - its "look and feel." Content choices focus on presentation, including graphics and audio. Community refers to interaction among users (e.g. chat rooms). Customization is tailoring the website to the user. Communication refers to the connection or dialogue between the site and users. Connection is the links the website has to other sites. Finally, commerce features allow the website to perform sales transactions. The success of the online firm will depend on the choices made in these areas in addition to how well these design elements work together.

Once an effective website is designed, an e-business must motivate the consumer to visit its website and purchase its goods and services. Two levers managers use to accomplish this are communications and branding. This unit will review the link between communications and branding, introduce a simple framework for marketing communications, and discuss methods for building brands.

Marketing communications in the networked economy include both online and offline approaches. In order to attract customers, online companies use a combination of strategies, including general online communications, personalized communications, traditional mass marketing, and direct communications.
Branding starts with the customer's perception about the product or service. Good online branding should provide a clear message about the product or service, and should be differentiated from other brands in the same category. In order to do this, an e-business can follow a simple 10-step branding process that centers on building the value cluster and an integrated campaign.