

An Evaluation of Boutique Websites: A Proposal for their Effects on Customers and Increase Online Sales

Prepared for:
Lilac's Closet

Prepared by:
DLV Consulting

December 5th, 2019



Lilac's Closet
Designs Department
2314 Edmonds St
Farmville, VA 23901

March 18, 2018

Marissa Bridges
Principal Consultant
DVL Consulting
4563 Commonwealth Dr
Richmond, VA 23112

Dear Mrs. Bridges:

Subject: Evaluation of Boutique Websites

In the last few years, customers have taken to online shopping and have been using it more than in person shopping. Due to the increase in online shopping, stores are able to increase the number of sales by 65%. Lilac's Closet wishes to increase our online sales and presence, and eventually increase our revenue. We would like you, DLV Consulting, to examine three websites and create a report with strengths and weaknesses that we can use to improve our website design.

Lilac'scloset.com has not been updated since 2010 and currently, the lack of online presence from our customers and online sales has steadily declined. We wish to commission your team to deliver a report on how to improve Lilac'scloset.com with the goal of making it a truly modern website which will lead to an overall improvement in online sales, We wish to see the report submitted by no later than June 5th, 2018 and to be presented May 5, 2018.

We look forward to seeing your report and will gladly provide you with any additional information about our website's functionality. Feel free to contact me via my office phone at 343-657-9867 ext. 3

Yours sincerely,

Nicki Thomas

Nicki Thomas
Lilac's Closet Design Department Head

DLV Consulting
4563 Commonwealth Dr
Richmond, VA 23112

May 5, 2018

Nicki Thomas
Lilac's Closet Design Department
2314 Edmonds St
Farmville, VA 23901

Dear Mrs. Thomas:

Subject: Boutique website proposal completion

I have attached the report evaluating the following boutique websites for their effects of website appeal that you requested in your letter of March 18, 2018. We have recommended three websites that exemplify overall aesthetic design, ease of accessibility, and content display:

- Francesca's
- Sleeping Bee
- Penelope's

We are confident that these three sites represent the components that you would like to have included in your updated Lilac's Closet website to improve your online sales and customer presence.

We have thoroughly enjoyed researching information for this report. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to assist Lilac's Closet in updating the current website. We would also like to personally thank the staff for participating in our survey. If you have any questions or comments about the report, we will gladly meet with you. We can be reached by phone at 454-876-3245, ext. 2.

Yours sincerely,

Marissa Bridges

Marissa Bridges
Principal Consultant

Enclosure: Report on Boutique Websites

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Executive summary

A decrease in overall number of sales from Lilac's Closet website has resulted in Lilac's Closet wanting to improve their website's design. They remodeled their website in 2010; however, the number of sales has not increased.

With the increase in technology and online sales around the country, it is important that Lilac's Closet maintains a strong presence on their website to encourage customers to purchase products. Lilac's Closet Public Relations Officer asked DLV Consulting to recommend three boutique's websites that provide exemplary demonstrations of content.

DLV Consulting's task was to find websites with appealing color designs and layouts that would encourage customers to visit Lilac's Closet's website more frequently as well as purchase more products. As part of the analysis, overall aesthetic design, ease of accessibility, and content display were all evaluated with the end goal of increasing customer presence and sales.

Each website was analyzed and rated using the following criteria:

- **Overall Aesthetic Design:** modern design, appealing colors, organized presentation
- **Ease of Accessibility:** Easy navigation, search directory, minimal out linking
- **Content Display:** Pictures of products, Sizes of clothing, Customer reviews

The customers of Lilac's Closet were given a survey. Based on the results of that survey, the following three boutique websites were chosen on which to base out analysis:

- Francesca's
- The Sleeping Bee
- Penelope's

The focus of this report is to provide Lilac's Closet with creative and appealing examples to incorporate within their newly designed website. We at DLV Consulting are extremely confident that our analysis and recommendations will not only enhance Lilac's Closet's website but also significantly increase their number of online sales.

Introduction

Websites created for online shopping is intended to make it easy and user friendly to purchase products from their own homes. Online shopping needs to have clear labels for each section, clear labels on prices, and easy to find products.

Lilac's Closet, located in Charleston, South Carolina, was founded in 2014 by Nikki and Gavin Thomas. They began the business on Etsy in 2014, but then once sales were excelling, they soon opened their first store front shop, in 2016. The successful demand for products skyrocketed, causing Thomas' to create Lilac.com.

Lilac's Closet in store sales are phenomenal. Sadly, their website traffic is decreasing by 5% since 2018. The Thomas want to keep their business's success alive, which is why they hired DLV Consultants. DLV Consultants will be looking at the overall success, failure and anything in between to see how Lilac.com can improve.

DLV Consultants began by sending surveys to the customers of Lilac.com. The survey asked a variety of questions regarding the website. The question that DLV Consultants focused was how usable Lilac's closet.com was. In figure 1A, 64.7% of users said that the website was easy to use, while 35.3% said it was difficult to use. Although there is more than half of the users that find the website easy to use, Lilac's Closet would like to increase that percentage.

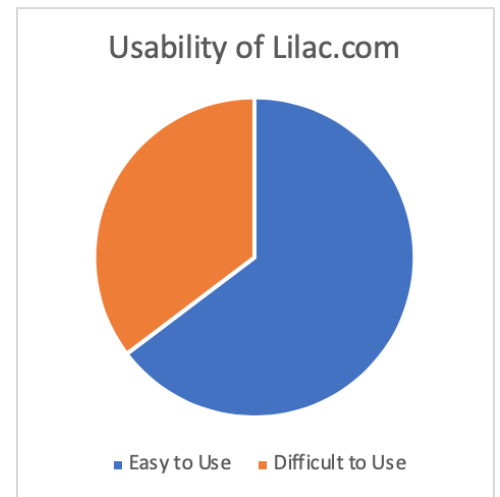


Figure 1A

Analysis of Francesca's

www.francescas.com

Overall Aesthetic Design

The overall design of Francesca's website shows off its Christmas themed colors with a number of deals included. It can be overwhelming to the eye and prove to be too much. Although the color is complementary to the theme, they have a clear overall theme. If you return to the website it changed from red to silver. The outfits and accessories are all color themed and it is appealing.

The home page has sales in big font sizes and flashing lights to demonstrate the biggest sales. If you scroll down to the bottom of the page, there are only photos of girls in outfits. Once you click on the picture you only get one piece of clothing opposed to the entire outfit choice. They have a clear way of finding help if needed by having their number listed 5 times. Their company name is in small font, it is hard to locate what company you are shopping. The screen also gets awkward when you use the pulldown tab and you are limited to only opening one tab as opposed to being able to open every tab.

The gallery of pictures doesn't change and stays the same, they don't have anything rotating and for certain clothes they don't have pictures on models. They do have at least 3 pictures per item of clothing.

Change of Theme

Francesca's changes their layout and theme of the website, every week they change the color pallet and one week it is blue with gold trimming while another week is green and red with Christmas trees that have twinkling lights. Their layout pays a lot of attention to sales and deals and what is included in the sale.

● Favored Theme Changes ● Did not favor Theme Changes

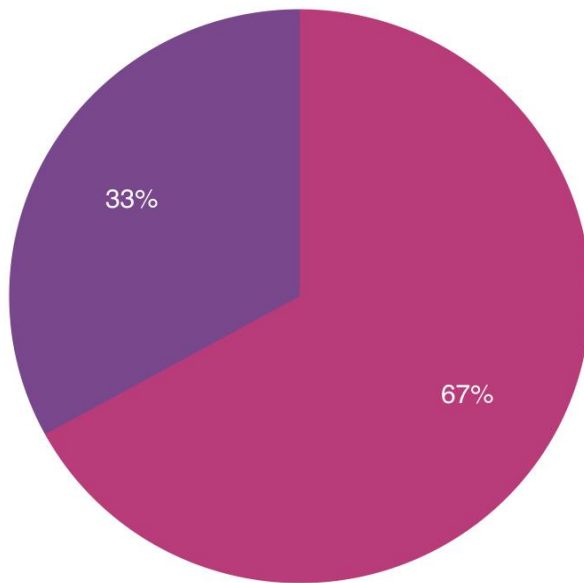


Figure 2a. These graphs show the percentage of people that like the changing theme vs. people who would rather it stay the same.

Ease of Accessibility

Francesca's site is generally easy to navigate, the basics are there regarding a homepage on every page. They included likes on their outfits to not only show how popular their clothing is, but it has a section where people can take pictures in the clothing and give people an idea of what the merchandise could look on them. The only disadvantage to this is they also have a five-star rating on the merchandise, but you can get conflicted with what rating is the more accurate on and true to its rating. It also begs the question of who is rating the 5 stars?

They make it clear on which product is included in the variety of sales they have displayed on their homepage. They tell you what is 50% off and what the item is once you put it in checkout. They also display their social media on every page. They also have a sidebar that allows you to refine the search based on colors and patterns.

The home button is very small and could be larger but if you don't scroll or click on anything on the website glitches and tells you that the page isn't accessible. This can end a sale on merchandise.

Analysis of The Sleeping Bee

<https://thesleepingbee.com/>

Overall Aesthetic Design

The overall design of the Sleeping Bee website is simplistic and pleasing to the eye. The website is personalized with a drawing of the store front and has colors that are appealing to look at without being too busy for the viewer. The colors are simple and nice to look at, the customers would not be too overwhelmed looking at the websites home page.

The main page has a rotating photo gallery of the different rooms within the store. This has not been updated to show what new products are for sale. There are only eight photos showcasing what is being displayed in the store and no close-up pictures of specific products. Another pro of the Sleep Bee website is the list of brands that they offer their customers. These brands are popular brands that customers will know and want to buy the product.

The website only has two-tab options, “home” and “contact us.” There are no tabs that offer customers to view what products they have in store or what other products they might offer. The pictures on the home page show what items they have for sale; however, it is important for websites to provide different menu options for customers. Having menu options for home décor, clothing, and other items would make the website easier to navigate.

There are positive quotations on the bottom of the home page. However, they do not state who said these comments therefore they lose some credibility.

Under the “Contact Us” tab, the address of the store is listed as well as the store’s phone number and hours of operations. This is important information for customers to have if they would like to visit the store. The website also has a link to their Facebook page. This offers the Sleeping Bee the ability to reach more social media platforms. There is also a map that customers can use to get full directions to the store. Finally, there is a place for customers to leave their name, email, and a brief question or statement and one of the employees will respond to the customer. This makes it easy for the customer to have quick questions answered.

Ease of Accessibility

The Sleeping Bee website is easy to use. There are not a lot of tabs and other pages that users would have trouble finding information on products. The link for the Facebook page is easy to click and send the customer directly to the page. The link to their Facebook page offers more information about deals and other products that The Sleeping Bee can offer their customers. Their Facebook page also allows customers to leave reviews. This is beneficial for new customers to see how current customers feel about the store and their products. Their Facebook page is important because The Sleeping Bee is a local boutique and is not able to update their website as frequently as chain boutiques, the Facebook page allows The Sleeping Bee to keep their customers informed about the store. The Sleeping Bee Facebook pages allows customers to send a message, which is more effective than the contact us tab. It is more likely that the employees will reply to a Facebook message than the contact us form on the website.

Content Display

The Sleeping Bee offers a wide variety of products for its consumers. There are a few brands that are well known such as Yeti and Tervis. These are desired products that consumers will want to purchase. They offer customization of the Tervis cups, so they can be personalized for an individual as a gift. The Sleeping Bee website has a rotating picture gallery that displays these high demanded brands, this is important for customers to see because they will know that these brands are offered, making the boutique more desirable. These products should be advertised extensively to improve customer return to their website.

Analysis of Penelope.com

www.penelope.com

Overall Aesthetic Design

The overall design of Penelope's website is chaotic. There is a lot of empty white space and text in random sections. There does not seem to be a theme except for white space everywhere. This makes the viewer confused and uneasy. The website does not match the aesthetic that goes with the store and company.

The very first thing that is noticed is the fast-moving slide show of their products. It is unappealing and chaotic. Although it is clear what they are advertising, it is not tastefully done. If the slide show moved at a slower pace, it would allow the viewer to focus better on the products. The slides also move in a rapid motion. The rapid transition also varies, if it were more consistent on the motion, it would be more attractive to the eye.

The new products seem to be randomly placed underneath the slide show of products. It would make more sense to move the new product section to the slide show. That would allow the viewer to focus on one thing at a time. Otherwise it is a lot to see at once. Under the new products are the "Brands We Sell" category. This section is organized alphabetically, allowing an easier way for customers to find exactly what they are looking for.

Next there is the sales and promotions section. This is a lot to look at considering that there are small paragraphs, then a "read full post" link. It would be more appealing to the eye to have it only say the date and type of sale or promotion, then a link for more details. That would allow the screen to not be cluttered by unnecessary words. The very bottom is clean and organized. It has a good use of space for the sections as well as an area to sign up for newsletters, as well as their social media accounts are listed.

Ease of Accessibility

Penelope's website is not the most viewer and user friendly. It repeats a lot of information and tabs, creating unnecessary space used up on the website. There are not a lot of pictures being used on the home page, creating a plain and boring page. The pictures that are being used are done in a tasteless manner.

The menu at the top of the page is done in an organized manner. The menu sections off the products in an effective manner. The tabs are listed in the following order; home, brands, sterling silver jewelry, fashion jewelry, personalized, clothing, accessories, gift cards, and sales. This layout is done well because the viewer is able to figure out where they need to go for each product. Within the menu, there are drop down menus for subcategories. The subcategories allow

the user to be able to find what they are looking for in a more effective manner rather than searching and browsing longer than they anticipate.

Above the menu is the shopping cart, with the total price directly next to it. Under the shopping cart is my account, my wish list, checkout, log in, and gift card balance. It is convenient to have a wish list for a store's website. This allows a customer to save their item and then find it again in an easy manner. It is redundant to have my account and log in next to each other; it is a waste of space. Under those tabs is a search bar for the entire store. This is an effective use of space. It allows the user to find exactly what they are looking for in a matter of seconds

The very top and very bottom of the website have the same links. This is a redundant use of space, as well as a waste of time for the user. The bottom is where there are three sections; jewelry and accessories, our shops, and account. The "jewelry and accessories" section is unnecessary. It is everything that was listed already at the top in the individual tabs. The "our shops" section is well organized and easy to find the location of stores. However, the locations are already listed at the very top of the page. To enhance the website, one should be removed. The account section is useful, but once again repeated.

The bottom also has a section to sign up for the newsletter. This is a good place, someone that is uninterested in Penelope's website would not be all the way at the bottom. This is for the customers that intend to purchase something. The same applies for the social media aspect. There is a Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, and Instagram link. The Facebook link is put twice, the first one is a like button. It shows that Penelope's really wants their customers to be active on their social media. One of the last things shown is the type of card that are shown. I do not believe that many customers notice this, but it is also in the checkout area too. This seems like a waste of space.

Conclusions

Lilac is always in the process of improving their website, Lilac.com. Since the beginning of the company, Lilac has been looking for new and better aspects for their website. The boutique has been making the website as user friendly as possible. Which is why Lilac.com will be introducing a feedback aspect at the bottom of their website. This will allow customers to give Lilac recommendations on how to make Lilac.com the most efficient and easy website possible.

Many websites lose customers due to the website being chaotic and confusing. Allowing the customers of Lilac to give feedback will create an easy and efficient process for improvement. Having clear and bold titles will allow the customer to find what they are looking for in a timely manner. Using different colors and texts will help the customer to find what they want, as well as separating the different products. This will prevent any confusion that may occur for the user.

DLV Consulting helped advise Lilac boutiques by researching similar boutique's websites. The following three websites were looked at for their strongest and weakest

aspects:

Francescas.com, Thesleepingbee.com, Penelope.com.

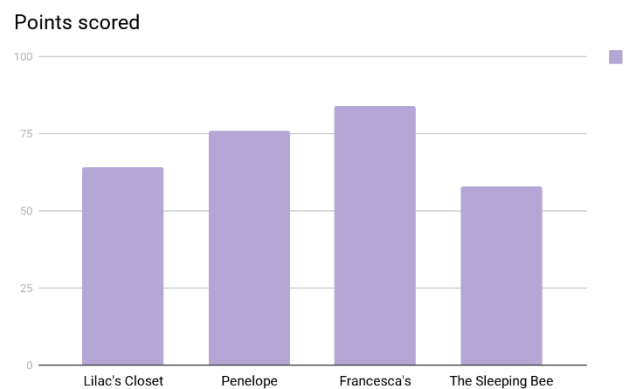


Figure 3A

Using the following websites allowed DLV Consulting to look at various details and aspects that created the best websites. In Figure 3A, we have learned what aspects of websites customers find to be the most appealing, as well as the most useful to find what they are looking for.

Recommendations

We recommend that Lilac'sCloset.com should enhance the website by taking from the strengths and weaknesses of Francesca.com, Penelope.com, and Thesleepingbee.com. Lilac'scloset.com can enhance by doing the following:

- Having a good color scheme and fonts throughout the entire website. This allows the viewers to not be overwhelmed with colors and fonts.
- Using pictures in an effective manner. If there is a slide show, do not have fast and rapid movements. Keep it appealing to the eyes.
- Do not repeat information. This takes up unnecessary space on the website.
- Have a link to social media, such as Facebook or Instagram to keep customers updated on deals and new products.

Appendix A: Lilac's Closet Customer Survey on Opinions of Current Website

This survey was authorized by the Lilac's Closet Design Department for dissemination amongst the current customers of Lilac's Closet. It was used to determine which elements of the current website customers enjoyed and which elements needed to be changed.

1. The colors of Lilac's Closet website are pleasing to look at

Agree

Disagree

2. Lilac's Closet website is easy to navigate

Agree

Disagree

3. It was easy to find store hours for Lilac's Closet

Agree

Disagree

4. There was an adequate list of products that Lilac's Closet offers

Agree

Disagree

5. You were satisfied with your experience on Lilac's Closet's website

Agree

Disagree

Appendix B: Customer Survey on Current Website Design Results

Out of 1,000 surveys sent out 500 were returned. The following table showcases the results:

	Agree	Disagree
Enjoyed the colors of the website	52%	48%
The website was easy to navigate	36%	64%
It was easy to find the store hours	39%	61%
List of products sold was adequate	51%	49%
Satisfied with their experience on the website	45%	55%