

An Evaluation of Popular Retail Clothing Websites for Young Adults:
A Proposal for their Success in Online Sales

Prepared for:
Charlotte Russe

Prepared by:
BWS Designs Inc.

April 30, 2019



Charlotte Russe
Branding Department
1764 Mill St
Philadelphia, PA 19019

April 10, 2019

Jada Baker
BWS Designs Inc.
2100 Fashion Blvd
Richmond VA, 23173

Dear Mrs. Baker:

Subject: The rebranding of Charlotte Russe

In the last two decades, the fashion industry has changed vastly with accessibility to the internet and fast fashion. Since 2015 Charlotte Russe has experienced a 0.5% decline per year in online sales, thus we are rebranding to increase our profit from online sales.

We would like to do this by increasing the quality of our pieces and focus less on quick trends. We would like to commission BWS Designs to evaluate and recommend 3 websites of mid-high range young adult fashion websites on the internet.

We would like to start implementing the new online phase for our store by June 20, 2019. To meet this deadline, we must receive your report by May 15, 2019.

We look forward to receiving your report. If you require further information, please feel free to contact Alec Reeves at 804-555-7670.

Yours Sincerely,

Brenda O'Connor

Brenda O'Connor
Branding Manager

BWS Designs Inc.

2100 Fashion Blvd
Richmond VA, 23173

May 25, 2019

Brenda O'Connor
Branding Department
1764 Mill St
Philadelphia, PA 19019

Dear Mrs. O'Connor:

Subject: Charlotte Russe rebranding proposal completion

I have attached the report evaluating several youthful clothing stores for their effectiveness in overall website appeal that you requested in your letter on April 10, 2019.

We have recommended three companies that illustrate a very efficient, user-friendly design that displays a wide range of products, as well as expresses an overall visually appealing aesthetic:

- **American Eagle**
- **Altar'd State**
- **Free People**

We are confident that these key components within these three websites will prove to be effective models for the rebranding of Charlotte Russe and its future business endeavors.

Our team has been delighted to take part in researching for this report. On behalf of our staff, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to enhance and modernize Charlotte Russe's fashion appeal to the everyday young adult. We would also like to thank all of your devoted customers and anyone who may have completed our companies' survey. Please set up a time to meet if you have any question or concerns regarding the report. We can be reached at our main office by phone at (555) 209-3482 or our company email BWSdesigns@fashion.net.

Yours sincerely,

Jada Baker

Jada Baker
Founder of BWS Designs Inc.

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Executive Summary

A decrease in the number of online sales has resulted in Charlotte Russe deciding to take the step to revamp their company's website. The website has not been updated since 2014 and is no longer bringing in the revenue it previously did. Charlotte Russe would like to change their website to appeal to young adult shoppers and increase online sales.

With the increasing amount of online shopping, it is crucial for competing clothing companies to make the online shopping experience easier and more convenient for their customers. Charlotte Russe's corporate office has requested the help of BWS Designs to recommend three successful clothing company websites that cater to young adults.

BWS Design took on this task by searching for clothing websites that were appealing, easy to use, and popular among the young adult population. As a part of the analysis, overall appearance, user friendliness, product details, and demographic reach were evaluated with the purpose of revamping Charlotte Russe's website to increase online sales.

Each website was analyzed using the following criteria:

- **Overall Appearance:** modern and appealing design, pleasing colors and graphics, organization
- **User Friendliness:** ease of navigation, useful functions, and product descriptions
- **Demographic Reach:** model inclusion, large range of sizes available

BWS Design surveyed 1,000 adults between the ages of 18-25 and asked which website they most frequently use to purchase their clothing. Based on the results of that survey, the following three clothing company websites were chosen to use for the analysis.

- American Eagle Outfitters
- Altar'd State
- Free People

The goal of this report is to provide examples and ideas from the websites of successful clothing companies in order to assist Charlotte Russe in the creation of their new website. The team at BWS Design are sure that our analysis and recommendations will successfully improve Charlotte Russe's website and increase online sales.

Introduction

The amount of online shoppers in the United States is steadily increasing. It is crucial for retail clothing companies keep up with this high demand for fast and convenient shopping. In order to make a profit against competing companies, clothing companies must offer a website that is appealing, modern, and easy for customers to use.

Charlotte Russe is a American retail clothing company that sells clothing geared for women in their teens and twenties. The San Francisco based company owns and operates stores across 45 states in the U.S. Charlotte Russe strives to provide the best deals on fashion and beauty trends, to allow young women to express their unique style.

In 2002, Charlotte Russe first launched their online website and saw a dramatic increase in overall sales. The company experienced a steady increase in revenue until 2015. Each year since, Charlotte Russe has seen a 0.5% decrease in revenue in online sales. The company has also experienced a large drop in online traffic, with their annual report showing 250,000 less viewers than the previous year's report.

BWS Designs was chosen by Charlotte Russe due to its notable reputation. BWS Designs is known for creating websites that appeal to consumers and increase online profits. BWS hires employees who are experts in online trends, design, and software programming. BWS has operated for over 12 years and designed websites for over 10,000 companies across the U.S. BWS Designs strives to provide websites that allow businesses to thrive in a world of changing technology.

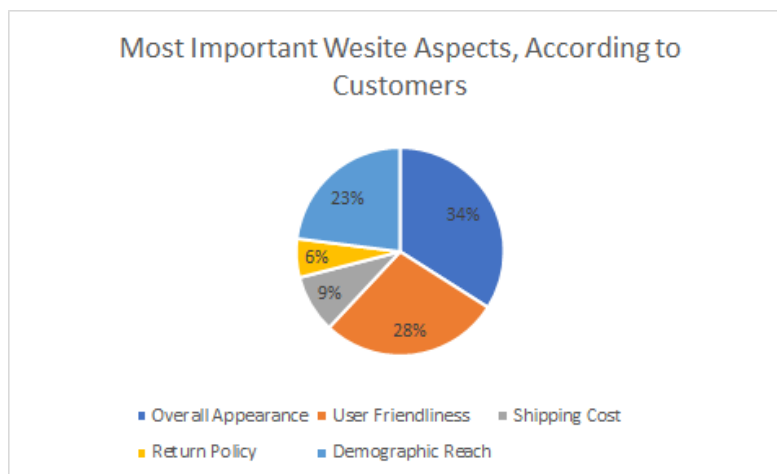


Figure 1

To assist Charlotte Russe in the redesign of their website, BWS Designs started by surveying 1,000 adults between the ages of 18-25 who claim they frequently shop for their clothes online.

The survey asked participants to choose which aspect is most important to them when purchasing clothes online. The participants were given five options; overall appearance, user friendliness, shipping cost, return policy, and demographic reach. The results of this survey can be seen in Figure 1.

As the focus of our analysis, we used the three aspects that were most chosen by participants to analyze American Eagle, Altar'd State, and Free People. The three aspects we used as our criteria are:

- **Overall Appearance:** modern and appealing design, pleasing colors and graphics, organization
- **User Friendliness:** ease of navigation, useful functions, and product descriptions
- **Demographic Reach:** model inclusion, large range of sizes available

A second survey was given to the same participants, in which they were asked to rate the websites of American Eagle, Altar'd State, and Free People based on the above criteria. The data collected from the survey helped BWS Designs to determine which aspects of the websites Charlotte Russe should use to model their new website after.

Analysis of American Eagle

www.ae.com

Overall Appearance

At first glance, American Eagle’s website is eye-catching and grabs your attention. The website uses several photographs with bright, contrasting colors. These photos seem to pop, as they are placed on a plain white background. This pop of color is interesting, but may not be as aesthetically pleasing as the calm, neutral colors seen on the other websites in this report.

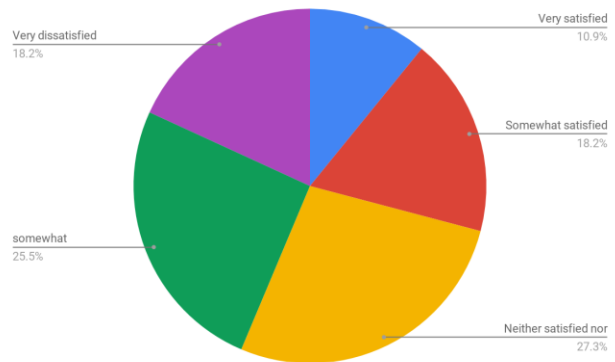


Figure 2.1

The photos picture models in American Eagle clothing, doing different activities. There is an abundance of photos across the entire website, most notably on the homepage. The photos are scattered randomly on the page, which can be distracting and overwhelming to customers. Many of the pictures are overlapped and move when the user scrolls in different directions. This can be confusing, especially to those who are new to the site. The conducted survey indicated that less over 43% of participants where either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the overall appearance of the American Eagle website. Figure 2.1 includes the results of the survey regarding customer satisfaction of the website’s overall appearance. While the images on the American Eagle website may be fun and exciting, they seem to take away from the purpose of the website and could possibly confuse users.

User Friendliness

The American Eagle website is extremely simple and easy to use. Across the top of the site, users can find a bar that offers general categories. When these categories are scrolled over, a drop-down menu is shown with more specific categories that can be clicked on. For example, if you scroll over women, the drop-down menu provides options for women’s clothing, including tops, jeans, dresses, etc.

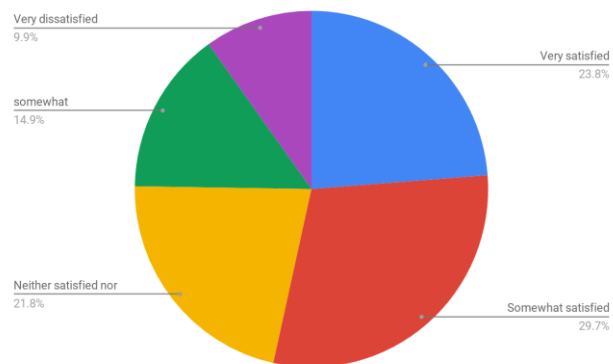


Figure 2.2

Another convenient aspect of the website is the functions it provides. The quick-view option can easily be used by customers who want to browse the website quickly. To use this function, the user would simply click on the plus sign at the bottom right corner of the item they want to view.

From there, a box appears on the side of the page that allows the user to view pictures of the item, brief details about it, and sizes available. The customer also has to option to add the item to their bag and continue shopping. Another helpful function the website provides it the filter option. This allows customers to narrow their search by the color, size, brand, or price of the item.

American does a great job of providing sufficient details about their products for sale. Each item is shown with two-four pictures. The pictures show the articles of clothing from different angles, and show a model wearing the article with a complete outfit. Underneath the picture, the website includes details about the clothing. It includes details such as the materials used, care instructions, and the fit of the item. A sizing chart with measurements is also provided to assist customers in purchasing the correct size.

Figure 2.2 includes data taken from a survey regarding customer’s overall satisfaction of American Eagle’s user friendliness. It indicates that more than half of surveyor’s were somewhat or very satisfied, which indicates that American Eagle is excelling in this area.

Demographic Reach

Of the websites evaluated in this report, American Eagle is the most effective at targeting a variety of demographics. The models used by the company represent a wide range of skin colors and body types. This aspect is very important to customers who want to see what the clothes would look like with their skin tone or body type before purchasing. American Eagle also offers a wide range of sizes to their customers. For example, the website sell women’s jeans from sizes 00-20, each size with a length option ranging from extra short to extra long. Tops and dressed are available from sizes XXS-XXL. With these sizing options, customers of all shapes and sizes will have an easier time finding clothes that fit them correctly.

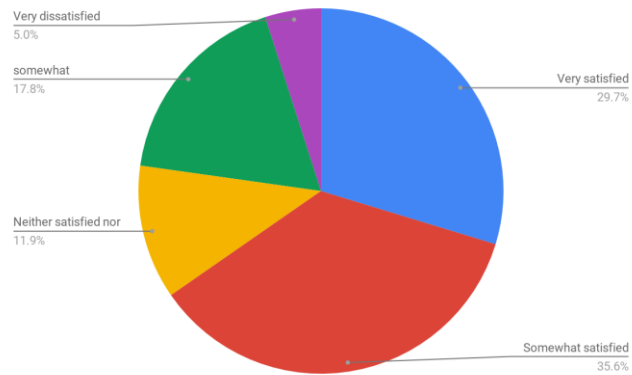


Figure 2.3

Figure 2.3 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of American Eagle’s demographic reach. It indicates that more than half were either somewhat or very satisfied.

Analysis of Altar'd State

altardstate.com

Overall Appearance

Upon opening Altar'd State's website, the user is welcomed with warm, earthy tones. The main background is a warm light grey, a change from the basic white most brands tend to stick with, and forest green lettering. The warm background is easier on the consumer's eyes as they shop online, making it more likely that they will spend more time on the site. The pictures featured on the homepage largely feature nature scenes with strategic pops of pink and purple. As this is a Christian company, there is a strong religious theme and all of the featured clothes are fairly modest.

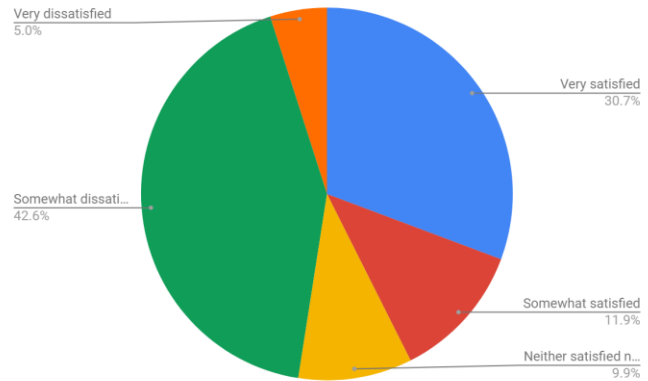


Figure 3.1

On the other hand, there are many pictures and moving banners with vibrant colors that conflict with each other. Additionally, each picture is covered in writing, making it confusing to know what is important and what isn't. Each of these aspects makes the homepage overwhelming and confusing, meaning consumers will not want to spend time there, and will miss promotions that could have increased sales.

The sections are laid out in the banner in a very accessible manner that makes sense. The "lookbook" is an especially useful feature that not only helps the client get ideas on how to style the clothes, but also helps promote further sales.

Figure 3.1 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Altar'd State's overall appearance. It indicates that nearly half of the surveyors were dissatisfied.

User friendliness

The website is very easy to navigate. Within the banner, applicable links have a drop-down bar when hovered over. The drop-down separates a large category into smaller categories, making it easier to find exactly what the consumer is looking for. Clicking on a heading, one can select the number of items they want to see per page, and filter their results by color, price, and style.

When a picture is hovered over, the image changes to provide another angle of the item as well as another color. This feature is paired with “quick view” which makes it easier for the consumer to add the item to their cart, as well as see a larger picture. However, this function does not allow the user to view other colors, angles, or a description.

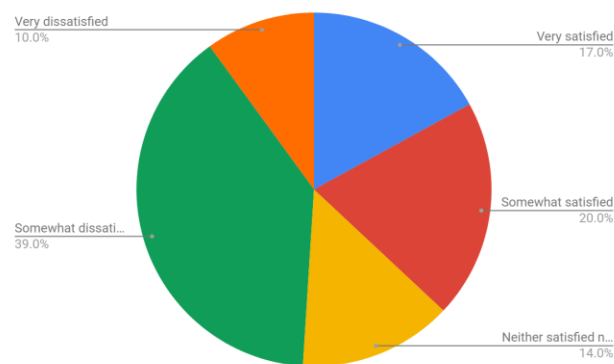


Figure 3.2

Altar'd state does a great job of representing their merchandise. Each item has many pictures of fully styled outfits in each color it is available in.

While the site excels in these areas, there are some functions that lack purpose. There is a sidebar that offers the ability to sort clothes by: name, color, price, and style. When “name” is selected, nothing changes because each item is titled “Altar'd State...” followed by the specific item. When “color” is selected, there isn't a way to select a specific color, nor does the website organize the items into color-coordinated groups. When “price” or “style” are selected, nothing changes in the order of items. Each of these filters should alter the search results, but none of them function properly. This communicates to the consumer that the company doesn't care, or that they're lazy which is a message they may translate over to the clothing, resulting in them spending their money elsewhere.

In addition, the quick view function does not work efficiently. When the window is opened, only one image of the item is available, it is not possible to view it in other colors, and no product details are available. In order to gain access to the details named above, the consumer must go to the item's page, which resets their browsing and defeats the purpose of having a quick view function.

Figure 3.2 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Altar'd State's user friendliness. It indicates that nearly half of the surveyor's were dissatisfied.

Demographic Reach

Altar'd State's website is not particularly inclusive of diversity. On the homepage, customers are greeted solely by fair-skinned, tall, thin women. Having this as their main page may make customers who do not match that description feel unwelcome, resulting in fewer sales. Additionally, customers value being able to see what colors and styles would look like on their body type and skin tone. In addition to the models lacking diversity, so does their sizing. The only options offered are small, medium, and large. These options are inaccessible to people who

lie on either end of the spectrum; those who need extra small and those who need larger sizes won't be able to shop at Altar'd State, which is potentially a huge loss of market.

Figure 3.3 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Altar'd State's demographic reach. It indicates that nearly half of the surveyors were dissatisfied.

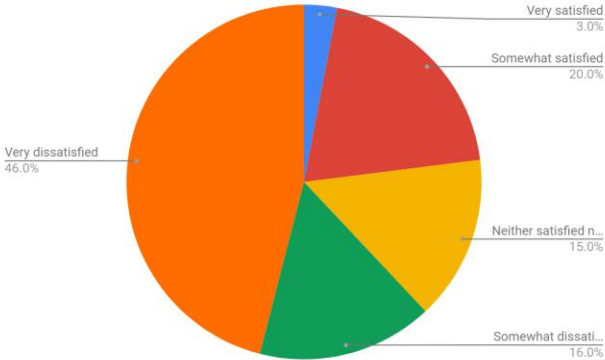


Figure 3.3

Analysis of Free People

www.freepeople.com

Overall Appearance

The homepage of the Free People website is instantly eye-catching. With core themes of nature and simplicity, it is overall aesthetically pleasing. The colors that are the most predominant are mainly earth tones such as green, beige, yellow, brown, and blue. There is a lot of foliage in the photos selected on their homepage, making their brand appear wholesome and tranquil.

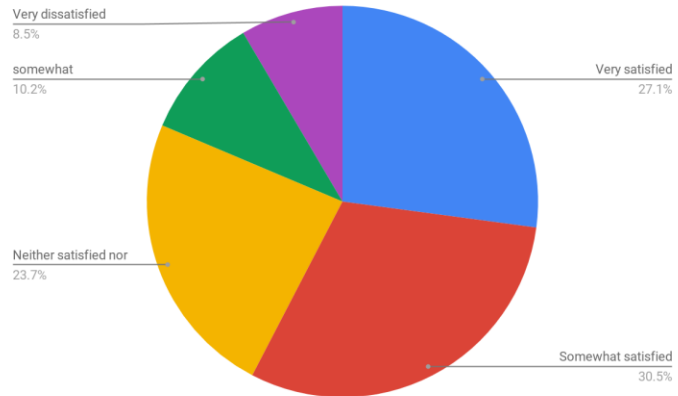


Figure 4.1

For each category of clothing there are an array of styles and options for the user to view. They also have a nifty function on their homepage where the user may click on a photo and the website will direct said user to more styles that are similar to the one that they selected. This displays a better and individualized search that guides the user to find more items that suits their own creative style.

Figure 4.1 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Free People's overall appearance. It indicates that more than half of the surveyors were satisfied.

User Friendliness

The overall user-friendliness of the Free People website is exceptional. Varieties of clothing are offered on different tabs to create an organized and clean design. Upon selecting a tab, specialized sub-categories appear to the user to enable a narrower search.

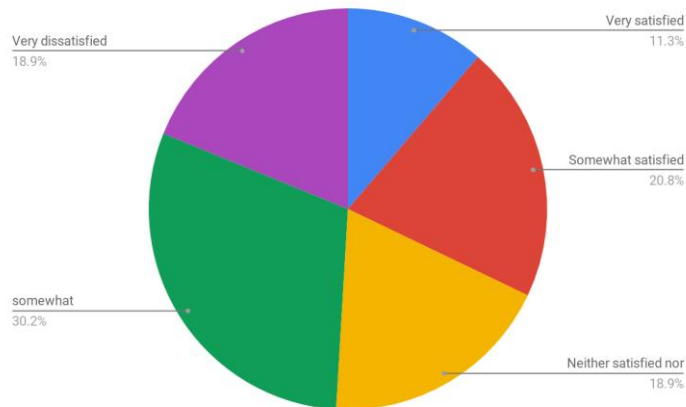


Figure 4.2

When the user chooses an item, they will be prompted to select their preferred color which normally ranges from about two to six colors. However, one critique of the website's user friendliness is their shoe sizing. The clothing sizes are self-explanatory for

U.S. sizes (XS, S, M, L, XL), although their shoe sizes are broken up into EU 36-41. This is very confusing for majority of U.S. customers, which is where most of their business is directed.

The checkout process on the Free People website is simple and convenient. Users are provided a payment option of either a credit/debit card, PayPal, and afterpay. Paypal is preferred by many online shoppers because of its security and reliability. Afterpay is a payment plan feature on the Free People website which allows users to break up their overall payment into several smaller payments to pay overtime. This is a very attractive features for users who want to give business to Free People, but may not have the cash upfront to afford its high-end products.

Figure 4.2 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Free People’s user friendliness. It indicates that nearly half of the surveyor’s were dissatisfied.

Demographic Reach

The Free People website is not very inclusive in terms of race/ethnicity and body type/size. Every photo displayed on their homepage is of a fair-skinned, tall, thin, light-haired girl. They don’t have very many models of different ethnicities. Free People strictly targets their clothing to women, so there are no mens styles available.

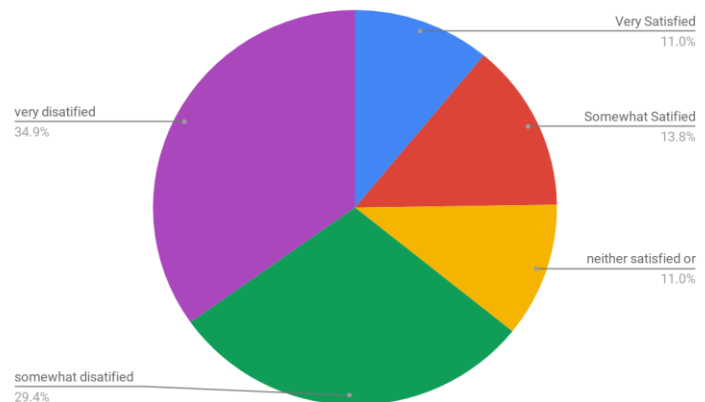


Figure 4.3

The sizing options are very limited to only women of smaller body types. On their average sizing chart, the largest size is an extra large (XL). The denim sizes range from 24-31, which are not inclusive at all for curvier women. The website does have an option for CRVY (curvy) jeans; however, the sizing only goes up to 35. A larger range of sizes is necessary to be completely inclusive and not discourage users from shopping at their stores.

Figure 4.3 includes data taken from a survey of 1,000 people regarding the satisfaction of Free People’s demographic reach. It indicates that less than 25% of the surveyors were satisfied.

Conclusions

Since 2010 Charlotte Russe has experienced a 0.5% decline per year in online sales. The company believes they may improve their online presence and boost their sales by revamping their website to be more similar to those of highly successful clothing companies.

Many thriving clothing companies lose sales from their online stores due to a poor website design and layout. A clothing website that is properly formatted will have a strong overall appearance, it will be very user-friendly and easy to navigate, and it will appeal to a diverse demographic reach. These qualities prove to be an effective marketing tool and help to promote business via the internet. The amount of new online shoppers from this remodeling process would range from 35% and 40%, which would increase annual sales by 1.5% to 2% from the year prior.

BWS Designs Inc. concluded through customer surveys of participant's favorite online clothing stores that the three best websites which display the qualities listed above are the following:

AE.com (American Eagle), altardstate.com, and freepeople.com

With the assistance of further survey methods, BWS Designs has concluded that while each website is very effective in boosting online sales, some possessed qualities that excelled the others. American Eagle Outfitters scored best in both demographic reach due to their variety of inclusive lines, as well as overall user-friendliness compared to the other two websites. Both Altar'd State and Free People however were considered to have the best overall appearance. This is due to their effective use of simple and nature-based photos, along with soothing and aesthetically pleasing colors.

American Eagle is overall the most efficient based off the three grading criteria. However, it is lacking in overall appearance because of their jumbled photos and crowded layout. All three marketing tools are crucial to increase online sales, therefore qualities from each of the three websites should be implemented to create the most effective clothing website design.

Recommendations

BWS Designs Inc. recommends that Charlotte Russe implements effective marketing techniques from all three websites analyzed. Specifically, Charlotte Russe should mimic the strongest elements from each website as such:

- A visually appealing website design that has an effective overall appearance to boost sales with coordinating photos and colors like both Altar'd State and Free People
- A tab that separates into subcategories with extensive options like American Eagle Outfitters
 - Detailed product descriptions
 - Simple filter feature
 - Easy Quick View feature
- A wide range demographic reach that is inclusive of shoppers of different races/ethnicities, sizes, and genders like American Eagle

Appendix A: Customer Survey on Important Website Aspects

This survey was conducted by the employees of BWS Designs, Inc. and was administered to 1,000 adults between the ages of 18-25 who purchase their clothes online. The participants were asked to pick one option that was most important to them when shopping online. This survey was used to determine which aspect to focus on when analyzing the three clothing company website, American Eagle, Altar'd State, and Free People.

Which aspect is most important to you when shopping for clothes online? Please Check One

_____ Overall Appearance (The website has a modern and appealing design with pleasing colors and graphics. The website is well organized)

_____ Shipping Cost (The website offers reasonable shipping prices or options for free shipping)

_____ User Friendliness (The website is easy to navigate. It provides useful functions for easy shopping. The products for sale are accompanied with sufficient details and descriptions)

_____ Return Policy (The website has a return policy that is easy to find. The return policy is easily understood and is not restrictive)

_____ Demographic Reach (The website includes models of different sizes and skin tones. There large range of sizes available to purchase)

Appendix B: Customer Survey on Website Improvement Options

This survey was conducted by the employees of BWS Designs, Inc. and was administered to 1,000 adults between the ages of 18-25 who purchase their clothes online. The below set of nine questions was used for each of three analyzed websites, American Eagle, Alatr'd Satte, and Free People. The survey was used to determine what aspects customers liked or disliked about each website. The data collected from the survey helped to decide which aspects Charlotte Russe should use in the design of their new website.

Please rate each website based on the questions below.

Overall appearance:

1. How pleasing is the color scheme?

Very Pleasing	Somewhat Pleasing	Neutral	Somewhat unpleasing	Very Unpleasing
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2. How does the number and layout of pictures make you feel?

Very Calm	Somewhat calm	Neutral	Somewhat overwhelmed	Very overwhelmed
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User friendliness:

3. How easy is the website to navigate?

Very easy	Somewhat easy	Neutral	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult
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4. How helpful was the filter function?

Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Neutral	Somewhat not helpful	Not helpful at all
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5. How useful is the quick view function?

Very useful	Somewhat useful	Neutral	Somewhat not useful	Not useful at all
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6. How well did the product description explain the item?

Very detailed	Somewhat detailed	Neutral	Somewhat vague	Very vague
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Demographic reach:

7. How diverse does this website appear via their models, ethnicity wise?

Very diverse	Somewhat diverse	Neutral	Somewhat not diverse	Not diverse at all
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8. How diverse does this appear via their models, size wise?

Very diverse	Somewhat diverse	Neutral	Somewhat not diverse	Not diverse at all
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9. In your opinion, how inclusive are the sizing options provided?

Very inclusive	Somewhat inclusive	Neutral	Somewhat exclusive	Very exclusive
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Appendix C: Customer Survey on Website Improvement Options Results

	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
American Eagle					
Overall appearance	18.2%	25.5	27.3%	18.2%	10.9%
User friendliness	9.9%	14.9%	21.8%	29.7%	23.8%
Demographic reach	5.0%	17.8%	11.9%	35.6%	29.7%
Altar'd State					
Overall appearance	5.0%	42.6%	9.9%	11.9%	30.7%
User friendliness	10.1%	39.4%	14.2%	20.6%	17.3%
Demographic reach	46.2%	16.6%	15.1%	20.4%	3.5%
Free People					
Overall appearance	8.5%	10.2%	23.7%	30.5%	27.1%
User friendliness	18.9%	30.2%	18.9%	20.8%	11.3%
Demographic reach	34.9%	29.4%	11.0%	13.8%	11.0%

Appendix D: Minutes

BWS Designs Inc.
Weekly Progress Meeting
Grainger 116
Wednesday, April 10, 2019, 3:00 PM

AGENDA

- I. **Call to Order**- 3:15 PM
 - A. **Present**- Colleen Weber, Cortney Sullivan, and Hannah Bozarth
 - B. **Recording Secretary**: Hannah Bozarth
- II. **Approval of Agenda**: Hannah moved, seconded by Cortney. Passed unanimously.
- III. **Previous Minutes**

Approval of minutes of last meeting. Hannah moved, seconded by Colleen. Passed unanimously.

 - A. Items arising from minutes (if any): None
- IV. **Designers report** (Cortney)

Cortney reported that the layout of the report needed revision. She presented the correct formatting technique to the group.

 - A. The company plans to use it on future documents and reports.
 - B. The Executive Summary of the report will be done next week.
- V. **Programmer's report** (Colleen)

The survey is being completed. It will be published on Friday at 11:59 PM.

 - A. Colleen asks group members to distribute the surveys to their peers.
- VI. **Other Items**
- VII. **Next Meeting** (Hannah)

Meeting will be held on Monday, April 15 at 1:30 PM.

 - A. The group voted on whether the meeting should be held in the Upchurch student lounge or online. Online won 3 votes out of 3. The meeting will be held online via Google docs at 1:30 PM. Each group member is expected to present their findings.
 - B. Each member will present their completed assignments for the week. The group will review and make edits to the report together before next week's tasks are assigned. If the online meeting does not accomplish what needs to be done, another meeting will be scheduled. This was agreed on unanimously.
- VIII. **New Business**

The group did not have any new business.
- IX. **Adjournment**

Cortney moved that the meeting be adjourned. Passed unanimously. Meeting ended at 3:44 PM.