Chapter 4.5
The Web Strategy Development in the Automotive Sector

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ABSTRACT

Especially in recent years, a transformation is ongoing: the Web, besides being a means of information sharing (internal-external), becomes a powerful tool for saving costs, reducing the distribution structure, initiating distance transactions, and ever more, becomes a mechanism of integration with the external environment and a catalyst of experiences for all stakeholders. Starting from the identification of the key elements, potentialities, and of the impact of the Internet on firms’ performance, competitiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency, this chapter is focused on the changes in the automotive sector due to the integration between business strategy and Web strategy. Therefore, starting from the consideration of a clear identification and subsequent sharing need of strategic goals, a research work will be presented exploring, on the basis of an interpretative model, the Internet potential in the automotive sector in order to achieve the identification of an optimal path definition and development of Web strategy. This objective will be developed through a desk analysis focused on the strategic positioning of the current businesses in the automotive sector (i.e., complexity evaluation of the presence on the Internet, strategic architecture, quality, and effectiveness of this presence).

INTRODUCTION

I need a new car!

Centy, as I affectionately call my old car, is gasping its last breaths. The “poor thing” has really had it, but then, it is really old; 10 years have passed from that happy day it made its entry in our family.

However, I am not so sure I like the idea of searching for a worthy successor. I am not an automobile fan, and my knowledge of them is rather limited. I am, however, sensitive to environmental problems, and I try my best to reduce the impact of my own person on the ecosystem as much as I can, considering its balance has already been seriously damaged.

What bothers me most is the idea of the long search ahead of me. I do not have any particularly difficult requests, but I want to consider such an
important purchase very carefully, avoiding hurried
decisions. I need a sensible family vehicle, with a
good balance between performance, consumption,
and above all cost. I need to acquire information,
but just the idea of going from one dealer to another
puts me in a bad mood. I can not stand having to
waste time on this, and above all, having to pollute
for a car I do not even own yet!

Also, interaction with the dealers is more
often than not rather uncomfortable. At times—
especially the more prestigious brand dealers—
they treat you with a presumptuousness as if you
were a nuisance, a matter that needs to be settled
as quickly as possible. Other times, for the more
sporty brands, they give you so many figures and
acronyms, that they make you feel like “you did
not do your homework” as in your school days.
Lastly, with some there is feeling of a lack of
transparency, something like “tell ‘m everything
but not really the truth.”

Of course I do not want to demonize all car
dealers. These are only impressions, and on top
of that, only personal ones. But I do believe that,
at least once, we have all felt the uneasiness I
described above, either completely or in part.

I am holding the yellow pages in my hands,
ready to copy my city’s car dealers addresses on
a piece of paper, but then a question just comes
to mind, popping up almost unconsciously: “Why
not use the Internet?”

I do most of my work nowadays through the
Web: I keep in touch with my friends scattered
around the world, I keep my bank account, book
my holidays, buy music, and lately I have also
taken care of my physical well-being using the
telemedicine services offered by my city’s health
department. But then I say to myself: “But for a
car it is different!” But is it really? Why would the
Internet not have brought about the same changes
in life style, in the way of thinking, of buying, in
the automotive sector as it did in other areas?

I start my Web search by typing the word
“car” into the search engine. Promptly a long list
appears with sites specialized in online car sales.

I am starting to question my beliefs. Some sites
only offer general information, deferring the sale
to a moment of real interaction. There are some
sites though that are true virtual car dealerships,
and allow you to get through the whole buying
procedure on their site, with even a home delivery
service of the newly purchased car. So after all
I would not spend too much time, as I did with
Centy.

However, I do not feel ready for an online
purchase. I have identified the model that seems
right for me, but I need some extra information.
Through the faithful search engine, I reach the Web
site of the car manufacturer. I am welcomed into
a very sophisticated ambient. I click on “Product
Range” and I find myself in a virtual car dealer
showroom.

The models are well-presented, with clear
3D images. The technical features provided are
exhaustive for each model. I discover the “car
configurator,” a very interesting tool that allows
you to configure your car by choosing the color,
the interior, the optional features, and, once the
final price has been determined, to have access
to another service that allows one to request per-
sonalized financial options.

It is also possible to print out a customized
brochure showing the specific car model with the
chosen color, interior, and optional extras. I find
out that the site offers me the possibility to not
only get to know my local dealer, but also book
a test-drive at my pleasure.

And there is more! The site offers a whole se-
ries of services that I would never have imagined
that go well beyond the usual general information
about the manufacturer. I realize that the contents
vary according to the phase of the purchasing
process: when the customer is in the process of
choosing a car, the customer can benefit from tools
that compare the models and optional extras, and
that allow people to create the car that is closest
to their expectations. Afterwards, some gadgets
that make the car look closer and more real, can
be downloaded (pictures and videos). Once the