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UTILIZING INTERNET AS ON-LINE SALES TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This review focused on utilizing internet as on-line sales tool for empowerment of business education graduates in Nigeria. It revealed that the Internet has the capacity to offer employment opportunities for business education graduates. The integrated marketing communication objectives which business education graduates need to put in place before creating their Web sites and doing the real business was revealed. Furthermore, the potentials of the Internet as on-line sales tool were discussed. Similarly, the pitfalls of using the Internet for business were highlighted. The Internet makes itself a readily indispensable communications and sales tool for today's marketers and therefore, an efficient sales tool with the capacity to provide jobs for users. It was recommended that business education graduates should pursue the creation of communication and sales objectives for the effective utilization of the internet.

KEYWORDS

Utilizing Internet, On-line Sales, Empowerment, Business Education Graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Business education graduates are among the growing unemployed youth in Nigeria. Existing evidence from developing countries suggests that unemployment rate of youths in Africa of which Nigeria is one, stands at 25 per cent (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, and UNECA, 2012). Similarly, Ahiauzu (2010) stated that unemployment of labor occurs in the economy if there are people who are capable of working and who are qualified by age, law, custom and other factors to work, but who cannot find employment. Business education graduates are included among these unemployed who are presumably trained and now possess the skills and competencies required to adapt to real life situations including the performance of basic business jobs. This is so because business education according to Umoru (2013) is a course structured through its offerings to inculcate into business education students, traits of resourcefulness, endurance and innovation. That these graduates roam the streets in search of non-existing jobs is an indictment of the nation's education process. This should not be the case. The current trend in the world of work is the dominance of new global economy driven by technological change and globalization necessitating continual business education and training for relevant work skills and self-reliance. This is important because Nigeria is striving for sustainable development through her deliberate policy shifts such as the transformation agenda targeted at citizen engagement in wealth creation. Though, it could be argued that no nation has the capacity to fully engage all citizens that are qualified and ready for work, it must be realized that work, whether paid or self-employed, is a fundamental necessity for human existence and progress. In fact, alternative form of employment has become imperative in Nigeria as period of waiting for government and private sector to provide all the needed employment is over. With the high unemployment rate being witnessed in Nigeria today, graduates of business education by their training owes it as a duty to respond by empowering themselves through self-employment..

Empowerment was described by Narayan (2002) as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Similarly, Wikiinvest (2013) described empowerment as an attitudinal, structural and cultural, process whereby people gain ability, authority, and agency to make decision and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people.

The Internet is capable of empowering business education graduates for self employment thereby helping them sustain their families and at the same time contribute to the development of the economy. Advancement in technology has revolutionized the way business is conducted all over the world. The world is now a global village where physical boundaries have fallen and interaction between people become unrestricted. The Internet often called the NET is an integrated workstation where people, businesses and organizations log-on to enhance interaction that is both verbal and visual. The Internet is a collection of networks into a larger Wide Area Network (WAN).

According to Belch and Belch (2007), the Internet is a worldwide means of exchanging information and communication through a series of interconnected computers. Similarly, Eze (1999) defined the Internet as a conglomerate of thousands of computer networks utilizing a common set of technical protocols to create a worldwide communication medium. This facility is now accessible to anyone with a computer and a modem. While the most popular component of the Internet is the World Wide Web (WWW), there are other features such as E-mail, Usenet, Telnet, file transfer protocol (FTP) or hyper-text transfer protocol (HTTP), client server, Gopher and Wide Area Information Server (WAIS). For business education graduates and other marketers, it is the Web that has developed into a commercial component that enhances internet utility. The Internet makes itself a readily indispensable communications and sales tools for today's marketers. The website is the place where information is made available to the users of the Internet.

POTENTIALS OF INTERNET AS ON-LINE SALES TOOL

Business education graduates and marketers intending to market on the internet must have defined communications objectives that will help in achieving this purpose. When this is done, then they will be able to use the Internet as a direct response medium that will enable them purchase and sell products through e-commerce. The communications objectives marketers and marketing organizations would want to achieve are diverse. While the main objective of communication remains dissemination of valuable information for informed decision, it is now possible to create fancier graphics audio, and animation to arrest attention and influence choice in sales online. According to Belch and Belch (2007), the communications objectives of organizations may fall into one or more of the following perspectives:

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

One of the primary objectives of using the web is to provide in-depth information about a company's product and services. Having a website has become a necessity for marketers as more and more buyers expect that a company will have a site to provide full detail about its offerings. Such details as specifications, costs, delivery modes and dates, etc are given by consumer companies to their customers who are expected to visit the website for a possible follow up action.

CREATION OF AWARENESS

Advertising on the web can be useful in creating awareness of an organization as well as its specific product and service offerings. Companies whose budgets are lean now rely on the Internet to create awareness beyond what can be achieved through the traditional media that are even prohibitive. In the same vein, international business is now possible through the use of the web.

GATHERING RESEARCH INFORMATION

Marketers can use the web to gain audience profile information. It can be used to research the market place and to gather competitive information. Even though information maybe gathered without the knowledge of other users which can be disturbing, other general but valuable and positive information are available to aid business.

CREATING AN IMAGE

Many websites are designed to reflect the image a company wants to portray. Images that can be found in the Internet are by far more exquisite and organized than any kind of bill-board or motion advertisement. Marketers should aim at branding and image-creating strategies which can be posted on the Internet.

STIMULATING TRIAL

Marketing organizations can offer electronic coupons in an attempt to stimulate trial of their products. Through frequency of advertisements on the Web, marketers encourage visits to their sites. The case of trying a site by clicking on a link is attractive to time-starved users and could be a formidable technique of selling.

IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

By providing information, answering inquiries and offering an opportunity to registered complaints, many companies can find websites useful for improving customer service and building relationship. Some high-technology companies can use their websites to present information that previously was in instruction manuals.

INCREASED DISTRIBUTION

While some companies can use their sites to promote e-commerce, that is, sales through the Internet, others may use them to distribute coupons and samples. Through affiliations, a relationship among websites in which companies cross-promote one another's products and each is credited for sales that accrue through its site, companies may increase their exposure base as well as distributing products.

E-COMMERCE

As already noted, e-commerce is the direct selling of goods and services. The Internet offers marketers the opportunity to mail directly to customers in both the consumer market and the business-to-business market. Many organizations have set up networks on line where potential workers go directly to gather information. The system directs them to the nearest participating dealer.

In order to tap into e-commerce, business education graduates should set up their companies and post them in their Web sites. Marketing organizations with well-defined communications objectives as discussed above can utilize the internet to make sales. Any organization that wishes to make sales must have the greatest impact on consumers. Companies and organizations wishing to promote their products and services must consider the Internets as the most appropriate medium. The Internet both supports advertising and relies on advertising for its own success. According to Hamman-Greenwalt (1999) in 1999 alone over \$4 billion was spent by advertisers on the Internet to promote and sell its products. At the same time, internet news (1999) reported that Internet companies have been a boom to traditional media, spending over 1\$ billion in these media, to promote their sites. A report by Cheng (2009) that on the January 2009 Super bowl broadcast, 50 percent of advertisements were for "dot-com" companies that paid as much as \$2million per spot to promote themselves indicates the enormous potentials of the internet to marketers.

The most common form of advertising on the Web is banner advertisements, sponsorships, pop-ups, interstitials, links and push technologies. The banner is an advertisement on a web page that may be "hot-linked" to the advertiser's site and used to create an awareness, recognition or for direct marketing objectives. Initially, banner advertisements constituted major part of advertisements on the NET but its effectiveness have been questionable. However, Kranhold (1999) stated that banner advertisements do have an impact, and this finding may lead to increased use of this method of advertising in the future.

Sponsorships mean payment by a company to sponsor a section of a site. A more involving type of sponsorship is the content sponsorship where the company not only pays for name association but also participates in providing the content itself. Pop-ups are advertisement but smaller than a full screen. Interstitials are advertisements that appear on the screen while awaiting a site content to download. Link is an electronic connection between two websites, while push-technologies allow a company to "push" a message to the consumer through the Internet rather than waiting for them to find it.

Sales promotion on the internet has become the most frequently used methods of encouraging repeat visits. This is because sites offer everything from free e-mail to instant message to telephone services. Coupon delivery in the Internet is another rapidly growing use of sales promotion. According to Belch and Belch (2007), Excite and e-centives.com (a provider of sales promotions for Internet applications) have entered a marketing alliance that gives Excite users access to an online composting system very similar to that in the real world. They explained that at www.coolsavings.com, marketers can access the site directly to update their promotion offers and to promote various products and services. D'Antoni (1999) reported that consumer's awareness of online coupons is nearly 80 percent. The study also revealed that 30 percent of the web users continue to increase. A report by Parker (2010) that Sebstakes.com has taken its online sweepstakes and promotions to Japan, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, is an evidence that companies with integrated marketing combinations can effectively incorporate its sales promotion strategies into the web.

Personal selling on the internet has been criticized by those in business-to-business market as having the propensity to take away job opportunities. But websites can be used to enhance and support the selling effort. The Web is a primary source of information for consumer and business-to-business markets. Thus visitors to the Web gain information about a company's products and services and they become valuable source of leads that sale persons can follow up. Trial demonstrations and samples offered online is an opportunity for customers to decide whether such offerings meet their needs. If they do, they may request a personal sales call and in this way, cost and time savings are gained.

In marketing, public relations are important and influences sales volume of a given organization. The Internet is a useful medium for conducting public relations activities. Information provided in the Internet about the company, its philanthropic activities, staff welfare activities, etc relate to public relations. These activities are posted in the Internet in exiting manners that enhance the image of the companies involved. Business education graduates whose companies use this public relations method are ensured of increased business volumes.

Marketing organizations that utilize the internet stand to benefit in a number of ways. The Internet has the ability to target specific groups or individuals as those interested in products or services provided will visit the site. In consumer market, customers can use personalization, i.e., personalizing their sites to request for specific information. The interactive capabilities of the net make it possible to carry on one-to-one marketing with increased success. This is achieved through providing message designed to appeal to a specific audience. According to Singer (2002) since the internet is interactive, it provides strong potential for increasing customer involvement and satisfaction and almost immediate feedback for buyers and sellers. The availability of the internet is an information source where customers visit the search engines that provide a plethora of information on any topic. The Internet is creative. Creatively designed sites enhance company image and positions the organization in the consumer's mind. The speed with which information can be obtained in the internet is an advantage for users.

PROBLEM OF UTILIZING THE INTERNET

The internet is a potentially effective medium for marketers but there are some pitfalls which users need to know. One of the greatest problems posed by the Internet probably is the lack of validity and reliability of the research numbers generated. A quick review of forecasts and evidence profiles provide a great deal of variance. Brekke (2009) referred to the heavily cited Internet research company and the numbers it provides as "scary". Menn (2010) similarly stressed concerns over the fact that most sites' figures are not audited, which may lead to rampant cheating in respect to the numbers reported. Sometimes, to download information from the Net takes a long time. When there are many visitors, the time spent to download increases and some sites may actually be inaccessible. The likelihood for some advertisements not being noticed is there as the proliferation of advertisements continues. This can be irritating.

The Web has the potential to deceive and sometimes deprave. While children may be subtle target, the Web is capable of collecting data without the knowledge of the visitor or their permission. There is also the rumor of credit card theft and immoral posting of nude ladies, etc in the Internet.

The cost of doing business in the Internet is daily increasing. While it is easy to establish a site, to have a "world-class" site and maintain it is costly. It is higher than that done in traditional media. While the Internet numbers are growing, its reach is still far behind. According to Cox (2009), statistics show that only a small percentage of sites on the Internet are captured by search engines and the top 50 sites listed account for 95 per cent of the sites visited.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the Internet as an information technology has reshaped the conduct of business all over the world. Business education graduates are presented with the Internet technology that makes it easy to put in place an effective integrated marketing communications strategy. When this objective is achieved, the Internet becomes an efficient sales tool that they can employ to realize their goals of increased sales volume and not only gain well paid employment but also employ others thereby reducing unemployment in Nigeria. . The gains of the Internet are numerous among which are target marketing, message tailoring, information access, creativity and speed of doing business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Business education graduates should look beyond disseminations of information and pursue the creation of communications and sales objectives which is needed for the effective utilization of the Internet so as to create big businesses for themselves.
2. Business education graduates should pursue a more purposeful use of Internet as a direct-response medium of purchasing and selling products.
3. Marketers should use personalization to request the kinds of specific information they are most interested in obtaining.
4. They should effectively maintain their websites. Images, advertisements, banners, etc., should be changed or updated to fit into the trend of business being transacted.
5. A more cohesive and integrated advertisement of products and services should be adopted by showing how consumers stand to benefit.
6. Business graduates should be careful not to rely totally on research numbers reported on the NET without verification as such reports may lack validity and reliability.

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