REPORT

LUKE SYKES
AUTOSMART AUSTRALIA
COMPETITOR WEB SITE ANALYSIS
08.February.2013

Dear Luke,

We have spent a few days analysing your competitor's web sites, including both franchisee-based businesses, and other businesses that are of a similar nature to Autosmart. During this process, we have gleaned enough information to determine what design and content choices work and what ones do not work on their web sites.

I have provided you with two zip files containing JPGs. Each JPG contains a screenshot of the web site, along with some of our notes in the form of simple points. We have broken our notes down into pros, cons, and suggestions.

Through our analysis of all of the web sites, we were able to see some common trends in their design and content choices, and were also able to determine that in general, the web sites were of a 'good' standard, but certainly not great, or excellent. Many of the sites failed when it came to consistency and presentation of information and content. Inversely, several of the sites had good quality designs, and did present information in a way that would drive actionable results on the sites.

On the following pages, I have detailed our key findings.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT • LOGOS • GRAPHIC DESIGN • BRANDING • WEB HOSTING

NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Design Language & Colour Scheme Consistency

Many of the web sites failed on simple things such as a maintaining consistent colour scheme or 'design language'[1], where links would be illustrated in one colour in the main navigation, then change colour down below when used in buttons. This type of inconsistency reduces usability, and can lead to a user being confused, or worse, leaving the site. We always make sure that we colour our page elements according to function. So all 'clickable' elements have the same general colours, or calls to action have another colour. While it may seem trivial, maintaining this consistency across an entire site, especially one with many pages and levels, makes the site far more easy to navigate and use.

1. A Design language is a set of 'rules' that we as the designers adhere to for each project. These rules include the denoted colour palette, font families, fixed size spaces between content blocks, and subtle design techniques that are repeated for specific elements. Ultimately the design language ensures that common elements look and feel like they belong, and that the design/aesthetics remain consistent and 'make sense' as you go from page to page.

Information Heirarchy

Many sites also failed to maintain a solid, well structured information hierarchy, whereby the content on the page should have been broken down into rows and columns with the most important content higher on the page, falling to the least important content at the bottom. Ultimately, it's the header and the 'hero banner' that the customer/user will see first. It is here we need to present the user with a high impact message coupled with an emotive image, preferably photos with people as users will gravitate towards human faces more strongly than just inanimate objects. Directly below the hero banner should be major elements of content. This first row of content should be the main aspects of the business that you're trying to convey, or the major elements of the business that you know the client/user is looking for. In your case links to browse the MSDS's, Risk Assesments and perhaps your franchise information. Below that should be secondary content such as some featured products, awards, testimonials etc. Each row of content needs to be visibly separate, and make use of negative/white space to help guide the eye from section to section. Aesthetically, we use font weight and size variations, colour hue intensity variations and image/column size variations to apply more or less prominence to each block of content.

Hero Banners

While some of the sites we looked at did have a large hero banner area, some did not, while others misused the space. The hero banner is the primary focus and the first 'high impact' content area on the home page (and other pages where fitting). This space is to be used strategically, and best used to convey a strong message that both describes the business, and also helps drive an emotional response that ultimately, and ideally would lead to the user taking action on the site. With this in mind, it's important to include inside a hero banner a quality photograph (or several), along with a short text block or heading that describes the business and triggers said call to action. This text should be followed by a call to action link or button which enables the user to immediately move to a new page on the site that instantiates a conversion based on your business-goal metrics - such as signing up to a newsletter, creating an account, buying a product, downloading a file, or in your case, starting the process to become a franchisee. Several of the sites we looked at either didn't include all the necessary ingredients of a perfect hero banner, or misused the space by having large blocks of boring text, or poor quality photos.

General comments on what didn't work.

Ultimately what didn't work on most of the sites was that they missed opportunities to use crucial content space to help drive conversions. Inconsistency in layout and colours detracted from both the user experience (UX) and the usability of the sites. Text that was too small when it should have been bigger meant that important information was lost, and was less engaging than it should have been. For the most part, the sites were too cluttered, with poor use of negative space to help guide the eye across and down the page. This was also hindered by a poor content structure on most of the sites, but not all. Midas, Superfinish, Autobarn and Sigma-Aldrich all did fairly well with their content heirarchy, but still didn't nail crucial design elements like font sizes and spacing.

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT • LOGOS • GRAPHIC DESIGN • BRANDING • WEB HOSTING

WHAT WORKED

POSITIVE ASPECTS

Photography

Several of the web sites made use of quality photography for both their hero banner image(s) and their content images below. We quantify a 'quality' image as one that not only has a professional appearance through good framing and lighting, but one that also serves its purpose well. In the case of these franchise web sites, ideal photos are of people as your users will resonate most with a human face. With that in mind, photographs of your staff and/or franchise owners dealing with customers. Several of your competitor's web sites included such photos, and they worked well. Particularly, some sites had large hero photos which occupied the full width of the frame of the web site. With regards content photos below the hero banner, some sites did a good job of including relevant and appealing images. Where possible, more human photos were used. When it comes to products, consistently lit and framed shots are best.

Functionality

Several of the web sites included additional functionality on their home pages and franchise pages which allowed for faster browsing. For example, dealer locator search boxes. These types of simple tools allow the user to access what they want faster and we consider these to be highly beneficial. On your site, an example of a similar feature may be a search field for MSDS files allowing the user to find data-sheets without even leaving the page.

Benefit Lists

We found that some of the web sites included a list of benefits for becoming a franchisee. We feel that this is a highly important element to a franchise web site, and allows the user to quickly learn the benefits without the need to read a long block of text. We note that a user is more inclined to read short lists, points, and large headings before they will read a body of text in a paragraph. This is why it is important to provide a large, point-form list as a way to grab attention, and then flow the eye down or across to more information.

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT • LOGOS • GRAPHIC DESIGN • BRANDING • WEB HOSTING

General comments on what worked.

In summary, each of the sites had a few elements that really worked. The sites that had high quality hero photography were immediately more appealing and compelling than those that didn't. Some of the sites had quite strong graphic design, while others had poor design. So there is a disparity in quality amongst the sites. Looking at the Franchisee specific pages, Autobarn's simple page worked well due to its simplicity and clear call to action with the button. Super Finish worked well as it had nice, clean design, and the list of benefits was nice and prominent. It too, had a big button to get you moving, although it needs improving. Autobarn's main home page also worked well, particularly in pushing the franchising opportunities, and it also had nice product images in the content area.

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT   •   LOGOS   •   GRAPHIC DESIGN   •   BRANDING   •   WEB HOSTING

FINAL COMMENTS
& SUMMARY

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT • LOGOS • GRAPHIC DESIGN • BRANDING • WEB HOSTING

SUMMARY

Final Thoughts

Through our analysis of your competitor's web sites, we can see that it is important to include clear and obvious information on franchising opportunities, as well as include a clear 'call to action' button or link to allow the user to take action on becoming a franchisee. The most appealing competitor web sites made greater use of white spaces, maintained a fairly strict colour scheme, and utilized larger fonts. The best of the sites included a full sized hero banner photo along with additional functionality like dealer locator search fields. While all of the sites had positive things going for them, we feel that none of them met all of our criteria for a web site of 'excellent' standard. With this in mind, it leaves us feeling extremely confident that we'll be able to not only employ all the best elements of your competitor's web sites, but also include all of the important features, elements, and content that your competitor's have not included on their home page, such as:

- Consistent Design Language
- MSDS/Assessment Real-Time Search Function
- Structured content layout with defined rows and columns
- Information Hierarchy with primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of content
- Large hero banner text/heading with clear meaning
- mobile optimisations
- and more

I look forward to your thoughts on the above and the images I have provided. If you have any questions on any of the above, please don't hesitate to phone or email.

Kind regards,

Scott Richardson

Creative & Technical Director

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT   •   LOGOS   •   GRAPHIC DESIGN   •   BRANDING   •   WEB HOSTING