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Recommendation for Website Consolidation

Maintaining four different websites quadruples our company's efforts to maintain those websites. Sales, user accounts, and inventories must be maintained on four different systems. The fact that our number of identified visitors differs so dramatically between websites indicates that the four systems are not sharing data as effectively as a single system would. This quadrupling of effort, combined with the increasing complexity and resources required to manage these four different web sites are why I am recommending we consolidate them into a single online application that harnesses the best practices and advantages of each system.

Of primary concern is security. Maintaining four different websites means maintaining four different sets of user accounts, four different logons for those users, and four different sets of security models to protect user data. This increase in redundancy of data and programming efforts means that a security breach on one system could expose user accounts on the other three systems to exploitation, as many customers use the same logon and password for all three systems. By consolidating all four systems into one, security can be maintained by a smaller number of personnel, and, in the event that a way to exploit the system is discovered, security personnel can focus their efforts on blocking the method on one system rather than several systems using different security.

From an ethical standpoint, offering four different web sites to customers presents four different corporate branding strategies to them as well. Our most loyal customers adhere to our Contemporary website, spending \$1,000 per sale and never abandoning their shopping carts. The Contemporary look and feel of the website offers visitors a

feeling of security and consistency, which brings them back for repeat business. If these customers were to stumble upon our New Age website, which has the highest bounce rate and lowest customer loyalty, they might lose confidence in our brand. We have an ethical responsibility to present a consistent business front to our customers, and not confuse them with different websites employing different sales strategies.

It is important to remember that consolidation itself can present some ethical and security issues as well. Mapping all user accounts to a single system carries a significant degree of complexity, and, therefore, a security risk. We have a responsibility to the customer to ensure their data remains private, and that issues with integrating one system's user data does not expose that account to exploitation.

Similarly, any form of consolidation will result in changes to the user interface. This will have the biggest impact on our Contemporary website, where the users appear to value its stability. We must make sure that all changes to the interface are accompanied by sufficient help documentation and customer support to provide as smooth a transition as possible. Guided tours should be provided to identified visitors to invite them to explore the new features our web site will provide.

All this being said, the question arises, which website should provide the standard for our users?

The New Age website generates more traffic than the other three combined; however, this is overwhelmingly "bounce" traffic, visitors who stumbled upon the site, didn't find what they were looking for immediately, and clicked away. Evidence for this behavior comes from the fact that the site experiences 5,000 abandoned shopping carts a day out of 8,000 unique visitors. When customers do carry through with a purchase, they

only spend \$50 on average. The New Age website appears to have the best Search Engine Optimization; however, that does not translate into best sales.

As was mentioned before, the Contemporary website generates the most customer loyalty. Users spend an average of one hour at the site, spending \$1,000 each, never abandoning their shopping carts, and incurring 100 percent repeat business. However, this increase in customer loyalty comes at the expense of visibility. New customers are not finding the Contemporary web site, and, without new customers to provide growth, any website is ultimately going to fail.

Using the New Age and the Contemporary websites as the two extremes, the Traditional and Classic websites appear to offer the best balance of generating new customers while garnering repeat business. The Traditional website skews slightly more to customer loyalty while the Classic skews more towards increased visibility. Striking a balance between the two in a single website that consolidates our security, corporate branding, and customers will possibly reduce maintenance costs and complexity to 25 percent of their original values.