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Marketing Tactics Most Commonly Used by Small Internet-based Retailers to Sell Specialty Products

CAPSTONE REPORT

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Abstract

for

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The rapidly evolving nature of e-commerce presents Internet retailers (e-tailers) with a myriad of marketing choices, further complicated by a lack of industry-specific guidance (Biswas & Krishnan, 2004). Using content analysis of sources published between 2000 and 2006, this study documents and defines marketing tactics used by e-tailers. Tactics are synthesized into a list of best practices in three areas: consumer purchasing behaviors, e-tailer marketing practices, and traditional marketing practices adapted for e-commerce.

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Chapter I. Purpose of the Study

Brief Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify and define documented marketing tactics (Kotler and Keller, 2006) used in small-sized Internet retail businesses (United States Small Business Administration, 2006) selling *specialty products* (Kotler & Keller, 2006). The intended audience is both established and new small business e-tailers (Keen, et al., 2004) interested in better understanding of Web-based practices that have been reported to result in profits (Sprouse in DesMarteau and Cole, 2004).

This study is conducted as a literature review (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001) of sources published between 2000 and 2006 that are focused on the Web-based marketing practices of small-sized e-tailers with emphasis on those e-tailers who sell specialty products to niche markets (Ward, 2004). The literature review is used to focus this study on previously documented data existing in published research studies, professional and academic publications, and reliable business and government information sources on the World Wide Web (WWW).

Content analysis (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001) is used to identify data that is specifically cited within the context of the selected literature as a marketing tactic reported to be used by successful e-tailers. Once identified, the results of the content analysis are categorized according to type and sorted according to frequency of occurrence within the sample body of literature. The results are presented in two tables addressing the type of marketing tactic and its frequency of occurrence.

Data in these tables are then tabulated to determine most common practices (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001) among small-sized e-tailers. The final outcome of the study, designed for owners and managers of small e-tail businesses, presents the most common Web-based marketing

practices used among small-sized e-tailers, aligned with a set of *best practices* as defined by the Government of British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development (2006). The intent is that both established e-tailers and those who are just starting out in business can use these common practices as a foundation for building new practices in an effort to increase profitability.

Full Purpose

Marchini (2001) points out that “there is no question that maintaining a [business] presence on the Internet is vital. The retail research firm NPD Group reports that about 97 percent of consumers with Web access use the Internet to make purchases and decisions” (In Marchini, 2001, para. 2). With the increasing high popularity of online shopping, small web-based business success stories abound—as do those of failure (Castells, 2001, p. 64). When operating within the realm of tales of great successes and miserable failures, the issue of identifying and defining marketing tactics that have resulted in success for small Internet retail businesses—or “e-tailers” as Keen, et al. (2004, para.) colloquially use the term—is difficult to sort out. Therefore, it is this researcher's intention to mitigate risk and failure by documenting the marketing tactics of successful e-tailers.

“Although there is a tendency for academics and the media to slight the small retailers” (Grewal, Iyer, & Levy 2005, p. 705), Poon and Swatman (2003 in Chen et al.) state that small e-tail business ventures are continually starting based upon the growing belief that the Internet will be the primary means of advertising and sales and, thereby, a conduit for profits (p. 17). Grewal, Iyer, and Levy (2005) continue to describe the potential benefit of this pursuit:

“[Small businesses] pose one of the most interesting possibilities for e-tailing's future.

With low entry costs and constantly improving search engines and shopping bots, smaller

niche sources for hard-to-find products, collectibles and hobbies can expand their trade area to the world. These retailers may have established storefronts or play only in the Internet space” (p. 705).

Proponents of e-tailing and Web-based marketing, such as Sharma and Sheth (2004), say that the Internet is “a ubiquitous information platform, allowing internal and external customers to reduce costs for both firms and customers” (p. 696). Cost savings on both sides is just one of many tempting scenarios whereby the Internet should attract more customers and, thereby, more profits for e-tailers. Banham (2005) supports this claim, stating that “the Internet is an extremely effective low-cost channel” (p. 22).

Johnson (2005) provides further incentive to investigate the potential marketing success indicators for Web-based e-tailers when he reports that “the majority of Online sellers [are] profitable” (in Branham, 2005, p. 23). “Across the sector as a whole ... it's often smaller brands that are most willing to embrace the Web” (Dudley, 2005, p. 20), so with the proliferation of Web-based, small business retail sales and the documented claims of success and profitability, it is theoretically possible for a small business to succeed in selling specialty products to a niche market using only an Internet storefront (Keen, 2004, p. 694) (DesMarteau, 2004) (Dudley, 2005).

This study is designed as a literature review of articles, publications, studies, and other research related to the marketing of Internet retailers (e-tailers) with a focus on small e-tail businesses selling specialty products. The literature review methodology is “an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers” (Taylor & Proctor, 2005, para. 1) in an effort to express and describe “knowledge and ideas [that] have been established on a topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are” (Taylor & Proctor, 2005, para. 1).

Additionally, the literature review “describes theoretical perspectives and previous research findings related to the problem at hand” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 70).

Literature collection is focused on the following three areas:

- consumer behavior especially in relation to on-line shopping and purchasing practices;
- e-tailer marketing practices; and
- standard, accepted, or traditional marketing tactics especially in relation to how those have been changed or adapted to accommodate the electronic commerce boom.

Content analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001) (Krippendorff, 2004) (Palmquist, 2006) is used to identify specific textual data within the literature. Leedy and Ormrod’s (2001) definition of content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns [and] themes ... performed on *forms of human communication* [authors’ emphasis]” (p. 155) applies to this study. Krippendorff’s (2004) “problem- driven” plan of content analysis also informs the approach taken to content analysis in this study, as a way to address the apparent lack of readily available information in the area of small e-tail business marketing tactics and best practices (p. 340).

To provide a systematic procedure for analyzing the selected literature, Palmquist’s (2006) eight-step approach of “conceptual analysis” (p. 3) is used. Within these steps, data are first identified within the context of the literature as a *marketing tactic* used by successful e-tail businesses. For the purposes of this study, *marketing tactics* are defined by Kotler and Keller (2006) as actions taken to enable the “process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy

individual and organizational goals” (p. G5).

Once recorded and tabulated, the data are further analyzed using pattern analysis to identify and display the most common terms, themes, concepts, or practices. Results at this step are used to design a tool to be used by e-tail practitioners in an effort to improve their business. This final outcome is intended to facilitate the success of e-tailers with a set of best practices. The researcher hopes that owners, managers, and others actively involved in the business operation of selling retail products on the Internet will use this tool to compare with their current marketing tactics or provide insight into new marketing tactics that have been documented as successful.

Significance of the Study

The need for further research in the area of e-commerce and Internet retail sales and marketing is readily apparent in much of the literature reviewed for this study (Biswas & Krishnan, 2004). Keen, et al. (2004) asserts that “the growth of Internet technology and electronic commerce has not been matched by theoretically guided social science research” (p. 685). Additionally, with regard to the rapidly evolving e-tailer market environment, Brooks (2003) states that “target [markets] are, in fact, moving faster than the speed of research and therefore demand a new model” (p. 341). Biswas and Krishnan (2002) also recognize the need for more research. They write:

“The Internet will blur the distinctions between advertising, personal selling and distribution. Successful companies will adopt a more integrated view of the marketing function, translating into new organizational designs. New forms of organization will come into being and much research is needed to understand the organizational

evolution” (p. 281).

Furthermore, Dudley (2005) validates this study’s emphasis on small e-tail business by saying that “across the [retail] sector as a whole...it's often smaller brands that are most willing to embrace the Web” (p. 20). Mitra and Lin in Chaston and Mangles (2002) further this idea stating that “for the small firm, it can be concluded that e-commerce offers both a new promotional medium and an alternative channel through which to consummate the product sale and delivery process” (p. 345).

This study provides some of this needed research in the small e-tailer arena and is significant in the following two ways. First, documented marketing tactics used by *successful Internet retail businesses* (Banham, 2005) (Castells, 2001) (Chaston, 2002) (Filson, 2001) (Grewal, 2005) (Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002) are identified and defined. This provides both established e-tailers and those e-tailers that are just starting a base of recommendations or guidelines to adjust or change current marketing practices or implement new tactics in an effort to increase profitability (Lillo, 2004) (Keen, et al., 2004) (Filson, 2001). Second, this study may serve as a foundation for planning future research whereby its findings may be compared to experiences of those involved in operating small e-tail businesses (Lillo, 2004).

Limitations to the Research

For the purposes of this study, a limit of a publication date of 2000 or later is imposed on literature collection. This is due to the rapidly evolving state of Internet commerce. Of the literature found, some is selected based the author or authors’ evident expertise in a given content or topic area. This determination is made when a work is cited by at least two other sources or when authors are identified by a preponderance of evidence as being experts in their

particular field (e.g., expert as a practitioner or by virtue of title or position: CIO, CFO, or CEO of a successful company).

In order to differentiate between academic, scholarly, and empirical research and that of practitioner experts, this study refers to a practitioner expert as a subject matter expert (SME) (iSix Sigma, 2006, para. 1 & 2). This study indicates data specific to SMEs that is not found in academic literature. SME literature sources provide a set of best practices for small business e-tail marketing. No such set could be located within the academic literature.

Many academic sources reviewed for this study recognize the need for more empirically grounded e-tail marketing research as well as the phenomenon that e-commerce and Internet technology is changing at a rate that makes more long term, scholarly research difficult (Keen et al., 2004) (Brooks, 2003) (Biswas & Krishnan, 2002) (Filson, 2003) (Castells, 2001). Therefore, this study uses SME contributions to compensate for lack of scholarly research.

All non-SME literature must be from a peer reviewed or similar academically reliable source and must be aligned or focused within the content parameters of the study. All literature must be able to be reproduced in full text in either electronic or paper format.

This study is focused on marketing tactics used by successful small-sized e-tailers; therefore, the reviewed literature is limited to present practices employed by these enterprises and organizations and does not include literature that falls into the category of opinion-based recommendations or assumptions.

Following the general direction provided by Krippendorff (2004) regarding content analysis, the selected body of literature addressing the topic is first categorized into discreet “context units” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 101). Context units are then individually coded for their content of “recording units” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 99). The coding process used in this study

applies Palmquist's (2006) eight-step conceptual analysis procedure. This process determines the existence of successful marketing tactics used by e-tailers within the context of the work. In his eight-step conceptual analysis procedure, Palmquist (2006) uses the term *content unit* to generally describe the coded data; however, while this study follows Palmquist's (2006) strategy, Krippendorff's (2004) terminology of *context units* and *recording units* is used to address the contextual nature of the actual coding process.

Procedurally, the fact that there is no direct contact between this researcher and any of the small e-tail businesses upon which this study focuses could be construed as a negative effect on reliability. This lack of direct human-to-human communication and interaction does, in effect, exclude the input of those actively involved in managing and making the marketing decisions for small e-tail businesses. While collecting this data would indeed be valid to the problem at hand, it is outside the scope of this study's literature review methodology. The literature review is only intended to identify and define marketing tactics employed by successful e-tailers that are documented in the body of reviewed literature.

Definitions

Best practices as used in this study are best defined by the Government of British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development (2006) as "programs, initiatives or activities which are considered leading edge, [sic] or exceptional models for others to follow."

Conceptual analysis is defined by Palmquist (2006) as the process of "identifying research questions" and then "choosing a sample or samples" of literature to address the questions. The literature is then "coded into manageable content categories" using "selective reduction."

Through selective reduction, the literature is reduced “to categories consisting of a word, set of words or phrases.” Using these categories, “the researcher can focus on, and code for, specific words or patterns that are indicative of the research question ... and determine levels of analysis and generalization” (p. 3).

Content analysis is defined by Leedy and Ormrod, (2001) as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (p. 155).

Context unit is defined by Krippendorff (2004) as “units of textual matter that set limits on the information to be considered in the description of recording units” (p. 101). Additionally, context units “generally surround the recording units they help to identify” (p. 101).

e-tailer is a jargon term found often in reviewed literature that is used throughout this report. It is “a contraction of electronic retailer” (MSN Encarta, 2006) and is defined as a business that uses the Internet as a format or medium for selling retail products (Keen, et al., 2004).

E-tail Marketing is a term used in this study to define those marketing tactics used by Internet retailers (e-tailers) that are exclusive to the on-line shopping environment and “refer to the use of the Internet and related technologies to achieve marketing goals and objectives” (Bloomberg, 2006, p. 2).

Literature review is defined as a review of topic-related literature that “describes theoretical perspectives and previous research findings related to the problem at hand” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 70) and creates “an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers” in an effort to express and describe “knowledge and ideas [that] have been established on a topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are” (Taylor & Proctor, 2005, para. 1).

Marketing tactics is defined by Kotler and Keller (2006) as the “process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals” (p. G5).

Niche market is defined as “a focused, targetable portion of a market [wherein] a business that focuses on a niche market is addressing a need for a product or service that is not being addressed by mainstream providers . . . [in short] a narrowly defined group of potential customers” (Ward, 2004, para. 1-2).

Problem driven content analysis is defined as “content analyses [that] are motivated by epistemic questions about currently inaccessible phenomena, events, or processes that the analysts believe texts are able to answer. Analysts start from research questions and proceed to find analytical paths from the choice of suitable texts to their answers” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 340).

Recording Unit is defined by Krippendorff (2004) as “units that are distinguished for separate description, transcription, recording, or coding” (p. 99).

Small-sized Internet retail business is defined in size and scope by the Small Business Size Standards matched to North American Industry Classification System chart (United States Small Business Administration, 2006): “The Small Business Act states that a small business concern is ‘one that is independently owned and operated and which is not dominant in its field of operation.’ The law also states that in determining what constitutes a small business, the definition will vary from industry to industry to reflect industry differences accurately” (United States Small Business Administration, 2006, para. 1). For this study, the entire range of the “subsector 454: Non-store Retailers” (United States Small Business Administration, 2006) will be used to determine size and will include non-store retail businesses with a range of value from 1 dollar in gross annual sales to 23 million dollars in gross annual sales (United States Small Business Administration, 2006).

Specialty products are defined by Kotler and Keller (2006) as “goods that have unique characteristics or brand identification for which a sufficient number of buyers are willing to make a special purchasing effort” (p. G7) thus creating an opportunity where there is a “high probability that a company can profitably satisfy” these buyers’ specialized needs and interests (p. G5).

Subject Matter Expert (SME) is defined as “an individual who exhibits the highest level of expertise in performing a specialized job, task, or skill within [an] organization ... in short, anybody with in-depth knowledge of [a] subject” (Glossary, 2006, paras. 1-2).

Successful Internet Retail Business is generally defined by either specific example or within the context of a work as an e-tail enterprise that has sold enough products to allow it to either expand its endeavors or continue its present course of business operations without significant financial loss (Banham, 2005) (Castells, 2001) (Chaston, 2002) (Filson, 2001) (Grewal, 2005) (Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002).

Problem Area

It is undeniable that the Internet has changed the paradigm of retail sales for both consumers and business (Brooks, 2003) (Chaston, 2002) (Filson, 2001) (Keen, et al., 2004) (Grewal, 2005) (Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002) (Yang, Peterson, & Cai, 2003). Customers increasingly continue to purchase products on the Internet and demand higher levels of service from Internet retailers; in turn, e-tailers have recognized this potential for business success and are scrambling to obtain customers and meet their needs (Chaston, 2002) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002) (Dudley, 2005) (Yang, Peterson, & Cai, 2003). E-tailers are thereby spending large amounts of capital in the form of marketing efforts to reach these consumers, guide them to a website, and hopefully elicit a purchasing action (Grewal, 2005) (Filson, 2001) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002). While some e-tailers realize success in these efforts, many do not (Banham, 2005) (Castells, 2004) (Filson, 2001) (Grewal, 2005) (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002) (Sismeiro & Bucklin, 2004).

Part of the problem is that this relatively new phenomenon of e-commerce has created the need for changes in marketing tactics (Filson, 2001) (Grewal, 2005) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002). Researchers agree that there is a lack of empirical data and scholarly research on e-commerce in general and, more specifically, e-commerce marketing tactics (Filson, 2001)

(Grewal, 5) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002) (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). In an apparent effort to mitigate this information vacuum, recent studies have identified and evaluated three distinct dimensions of e-tail marketing. First, due to the technology and environment relating to the intrinsic nature of the Internet and e-commerce, much recent research has focused on the relatively new marketing tactics specific to the Internet and e-tailers (Corry, 2003) (DesMarteau, 2004) (Hamm-Greenawalt, 2000) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002) (Sen, 2005) (Sismeiro & Bucklin, 2004) (Song & Zahedi, 2005) (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006) (Yang, Peterson, & Cai, 2003).

Second, consumer on-line shopping behavior is a dimension of e-tail marketing that has seen significant research based on Sharma & Sheth's (2004) statement that "the Internet changes the focus of marketing from a 'supplier perspective' to a 'customer perspective'" (p. 697). Research indicates that the Internet has allowed consumers access to critical price and service information making them far more savvy, fickle, and selective in the on-line shopping environment and, thus, creating heated competition between e-tailers (Keen, et al., 2004) (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006) (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006) (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). Keen, et al., (2004) identify the current situation of on-line customer behavior and the need for research stating:

"Although there has been much research to identify important attributes in the consumer decision-making process for shopping at retail stores and through catalogs, research has not yet focused on the drivers for consumer choices to use the Internet for product purchase. To identify the impact of e-commerce, consumer behavior research is needed to illustrate a more accurate representation of how consumers will make choices relative to available retail alternatives" (685).

Third, traditional marketing tactics have been tested and deemed successful through volumes of research over decades of world-wide business transactions; therefore, researchers have studied how these proven models have been or may be modified to accommodate the paradigm of e-tailing (Banham, 2005) (DesMarteau, 2004) (Keen, et al., 2004) (McPherson, 2003) (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). Banham (2005) displays how the traditional marketing tactic of print advertising is modified to draw attention to a business's new e-tail venture: "To ensure that people are aware of the site, [the e-tailer] prints the URL on everything it produces—on all advertising, [email], corporate collateral, shopping bags, and invoices distributed" (p. 2).

Each article selected for review for this study analyzes a single dimension or a combination of dimensions mentioned above and is determined to present value to e-tailers interested in increasing success through marketing tactics. However, this researcher found through preliminary review that no one study presents a concise list of e-tail marketing best practices. E-tail practitioners, both new and established, are concerned with making decisions that will help ensure the success of their business, and it is a reasonable assumption of this study that these practitioners actively involved in day-to-day business transactions may find difficulty in sorting through dozens of research documents in order to obtain insight into proven marketing tactics.

It is not this study's goal to create new information, but rather to identify, define, and compile past research results into a comprehensive list of e-tail marketing best practices. Torkzadeh & Dhillon's (2002) statement that "[e]ffective use of Internet technology is considered a major determinant of *competitive advantage*, *market penetration*, innovation, technology transfer, and even *management competency* [emphasis mine]" (p. 187) underscores the importance of e-tail

marketing tactics to e-tail practitioners. It is the hope of this study researcher to provide owners, managers, marketing professionals, and any person otherwise involved in the operation of e-tail businesses a set of recommended e-tail marketing best practices that may be implemented outright or compared to real-world experiences in an effort to increase profitability through changing present practices (Filson, 2003).

Chapter II. Review of References

The review of references is presented as an annotated bibliography of key works of literature that support the various portions this study. Along with its citation, each annotation of the ten selected references presented below contains a brief summary of its contents, its relevance to selected areas of this study, and the determiners for its selection and inclusion.

Biswas, A., & Krishnan, R. (2004). The Internet's impact on marketing: Introduction to the JBR special issue on "Marketing on the web—behavioral, strategy and practices and public policy." *Journal of Business Research*. 57-7, 681-684. Retrieved May 22, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

This article is an introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Business Research* obtained from the University of Oregon academic database that focuses on Internet retailing and marketing. The authors cite and synthesize the numerous, diverse yet interconnected articles that are contained within the special Internet marketing edition of this professional journal such as web-based marketing tactics, e-tailer business models, and shopping behavior of on-line consumers

This article is relevant to this study in several ways. First, it supports the purpose by providing what the authors term as "a roadmap for understanding the impact of [the] Internet on marketing" (681) whereby the Internet is considered and seen as a cost-effective way of operating a successful retail business. Second, Biswas and Krishnan also support the limitations portion of this study. Content is used to frame the three context units used for coding during content analysis, based on a summary of three dimensions of e-tailer marketing found throughout

the journal issue. Third, the paper supports the significance and problem area portions by asserting the need for further e-tail marketing research.

This article is selected for its academic reliability. Biswas is a professor at the Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge) who specializes in marketing and has published several articles in peer-reviewed professional journals. Krishnan is also a published professor of marketing and business at Cal Poly State University (San Louis Obispo, CA) whose work is cited by other academic authors.

Chaston, I., & Mangles, T. (2002). E-commerce in Small UK Manufacturing Firms: A Pilot Study on Internal Competencies. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 18(3/4), 341-360.

Retrieved March 22, 2006 from the Business Source Premier database.

This article focuses on discovering the organizational factors that enable growth in small e-tail businesses. Through their research, Chaston and Mangles (2002) develop “a competency model to define areas of capability that may influence the execution of an Internet marketing strategy” (341). These competencies “include positioning, funding, innovation, workforce management, productivity, service quality, and information management” (341).

Most importantly, the authors’ research supports the purpose, problem area, and method of this study by revealing that small e-tailers must do more than focus only on “pure marketing activities” (356) if success is to be realized. Their research suggests that e-tailers must also institute marketing tactics that address customer behavior and needs, use e-commerce-related technology to manage and enhance marketing the online shopping experience, and ensure that the business model provides proper support to e-commerce operations. Additionally for this study, this article supports the data analysis section by defining marketing tactics used by

successful e-tailers and thus is used in the coding process. The marketing tactics Filson discusses address the three context units of this study. The authors' education and professional experience form the basis for this article's academic reliability. Chaston is a professor of marketing and entrepreneurship at the University of Plymouth (Plymouth, UK) and has published numerous textbooks and articles in peer-reviewed publications. Mangles is a faculty member and lecturer at the University of Plymouth Business School (Plymouth, UK) and has co-authored several textbooks, professional interest books, and research articles.

Filson, D. (2003). The Impact of E-Commerce Strategies on Firm Value: Lessons from Amazon.com and Its Early Competitors. *Journal of Business—Supplement*, Vol. 77, S135-S155. Retrieved May 10, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

Filson's article examines the strategies that generate value in e-commerce by estimating the impacts of several competitive strategies on the values of Amazon.com and three of its early competitors. While the article does not focus on small e-tailers, results from analyzing strategies such as alliance formation, offline expansion, pricing, product line expansion, and service improvement provide insight into the usefulness of various ways e-tailers market products and compete in an e-commerce environment.

For this study, Filson's article supports the purpose and data analysis sections by defining and examining marketing tactics used by successful e-tailers. The marketing tactics Filson discusses address the three context units of this study. This paper also supports the significance and problem area sections by citing a lack of e-tail marketing research and the need for a better understanding of successful e-tail marketing tactics. Furthermore, Filson's use of Amazon.com

as a case study in successful e-tail marketing supports the reality-based requirements of the limitations section.

The credibility of this article is established through acknowledgement of Filson's experience as a published and cited professor of business and economics at Claremont Graduate University (Claremont, CA). Filson has published nine scholarly articles since 1998, has 18 working papers, and his work has been cited by numerous academic authors.

Grewal, D., Iyer, G., Levy, M. (2004). Internet retailing: enablers, limiters and market consequences. *Journal of Business Research*, 57-7, 703-714. Retrieved May 19, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

This research paper by Grewal, Iyer, and Levy (2004) examines and explains the factors that enable and hinder Internet retailing as well as the changes caused by e-tail marketing to traditional marketing strategies and the retail market in general. The authors point out that Internet retailing has not performed as predicted nor has it been as widely accepted as originally thought in the 1990s; therefore, their purpose is to identify indicators of e-tail success in an effort to improve e-tailer businesses.

The marketing tactics presented in this paper span this study's three context units. The paper is selected as one entry in the data set, coded in the data analysis process. In addition, this article supports the purpose by exploring marketing strategies designed to improve the performance of e-tailers as well as the problem area by pointing out a variety of structural and functional weaknesses inherent to Internet retailing—to include the lack of research and shifts in traditional marketing trends.

Grewal, Iyer, and Levy's combined professional qualifications are acknowledged to establish this article's academic reliability. Grewal and Levy are both published and cited professors of marketing at Babson College's Division of Marketing (Babson Park, MA). Iyer is an award-winning, published, and cited professor of marketing at Florida Atlantic University's Department of Marketing (Boca Raton, FL).

Keen, C., Wetzels, M., deRuyter, K. & Feinberg, R. (2004). E-tailers versus retailers: Which factors determine consumer preferences. *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 685-695. Retrieved May 19, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

Keen, et al.'s research project supports the purpose and problem area of this study by providing insight into what compels customers to make purchases from an e-tailer through a comparison with traditional retail store and catalog purchasing. While this research is limited to only two product categories, it addresses marketing tactics within the three context units of this study and is therefore selected as part of the data set, and coded in data analysis.

The authors find that the customer decision-making process is primarily based on choosing a sales format (i.e., the three formats mentioned) and the price they were willing to pay for the product. It is important to note that the study shows that the Internet retail format is not growing so rapidly that it threatens traditional stores or catalogs; however, it confirms that there is an obvious segment of customers who prefer the Internet over the other options. It is these customers that e-tail marketing tactics must target, and this paper helps to identify effective marketing tactics for e-businesses based on customer decision-making (behavior).

The professional qualifications of the authors represent an international collaboration of academic business expertise. Keen is the vice president of research and client services for a

private consulting firm and also publishes work through Fairfield University's Charles F. Dolan School of Business (Fairfield, CT). Additionally, aside from publishing both academic and private-sector works, she is also cited by other academic authors. Wetzels is a professor at the Technical University of Eindhoven (Eindhoven, The Netherlands) and is the chairman of the marketing department. He is widely published and cited by other academic authors. DeRuyter is also a Dutch professor of business and marketing working out of Maastricht University (Maastricht, The Netherlands). He has published numerous academic articles (many in partnership with Wetzels) and is cited by other academic authors. Feinberg is a professor and consumer psychologist at Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN) who has published numerous academic articles on customer on-line shopping behavior.

Palmquist, M. (2006). Overview: Content Analysis. *Colorado State University Conducting Content Analysis Writing Guide* [On-line]. Available: <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/content/index.cfm> [2006, March 17].

Palmquist's (2006) eight-step conceptual analysis procedure of the content analysis research method is utilized to drive this study's data analysis. Palmquist's method is used because it offers the flexibility in data coding that is required to achieve this study's outcome by allowing the researcher to code interactively. Additionally, due to the complex data analysis process of coding for semantic and context-based data, Palmquist's method serves as a systematic guide that helps ensure reliability.

Palmquist's education, experience, and professional performance establish the credibility of his work and research methodology. He is a widely published and award-winning professor at Colorado State University who is often cited by other academic authors for his work in the area

of content analysis research methodology. Palmquist has also developed two software programs focused on research writing and his systematic approach to content analysis.

Saeed, K., Hwang, Y, & Grover, V. (2002), Investigating the Impact of Web Site Value and Advertising on Firm Performance in Electronic commerce. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, Vol. 7, No. 2. Retrieved March 22, 2006 from the Business Source Premier database.

The primary purpose of these authors' research is to empirically analyze the relationship between website user interface (UI) and advertising as well as website UI and business profitability. The goal is to understand how advertising is a moderator between value-added services offered through website UI (e.g., services that enhance a customer's shopping experience and contribute to making a purchase) and successful business performance. The authors assert that while the traditional marketing tactic of advertising is a reliable method of attracting customers to a website, it is the online shopping experience (facilitated by value-added services on the website) that compels shoppers to become customers and increases profits for the e-tailer.

Website UI is selected as one of three context units in this study, i.e., an e-tailer specific marketing tactic. As a result, the reference supports construction of both the purpose and method. Additionally, the authors help to define a second context unit for this study by discussing traditional advertising methods that have been modified to suit the needs of e-tailers. This article is also selected as one entry in the data set, and coded in the data analysis of this.

This article's credibility is established through acknowledgement of the combination of its authors' experience and education. Saeed and Hwang, at the time of the article's publication,

were doctoral candidates at the University of South Carolina, and both held MBAs from foreign universities. Grover is a widely published, cited, and award-winning professor of Information Systems at Clemson University (Clemson, SC) who has published over 100 articles in a variety of peer-reviewed professional journals.

Sharma, A., & Sheth, J. (2004). Web-based marketing: The coming revolution in marketing thought and strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, 57-7, 696-703. Retrieved May 19, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

Sharma and Sheth (2004) present the concept that supports the purpose, significance, and problem area segments of this study by asserting that the Internet is a rapidly evolving entity that is constantly and significantly impacting the behaviors of consumers and businesses. The authors state that the Internet will not cease to change and, therefore, will continue to affect marketing thought and practice. Due to this assumption, the authors posit that “the web-based markets of tomorrow may have little resemblance to those of today” (Sharma & Sheth, 2004, p. 696), and, therefore, the limited e-tail marketing research must expand and continue.

The paper discusses two of this study’s context units: the emergence of new, e-tail focused marketing strategies such as reverse marketing, customer-centric marketing, effective-efficiency, adaptation, expectation management, marketing process focus, and fixed-cost marketing. In addition, the paper examines emerging e-commerce customer behaviors such as "cocreation, universal availability, use of infomediaries, temporal shifts, open pricing and a move toward bricks to clicks" (Sharma & Sheth, 2004, p. 696). Sharma and Sheth provide insight into current e-tailer marketing tactics along with research-based assessments of those that are on the cusp of e-tailing’s future. Because the paper provides important insight into

identifiable factors that contribute to an e-tailer's success, it is selected as one entry in the data set, and coded in the data analysis of this study.

The academic credentials of both authors of this article are acknowledged in support of credibility. Sharma is a professor of marketing at the University of Miami (Miami, FL) and has published numerous works in a variety of academic and professional journals. Additionally, he is a marketing consultant to a number of Fortune 500 companies as well as other large, successful corporations. Sheth is an award-winning professor of marketing at Emory University (Atlanta, GA). Sheth has published numerous articles in academic and professional journals and is a marketing consultant for several Fortune 500 companies and other large corporations.

Yang, Z., Peterson, R., & Cai, S. (2003). Services quality dimension of Internet retailing: an exploratory analysis. *Journal of Services Marketing*. 17-6/7, 685-701. Retrieved May 10th, 2004 from Business Source Premier database.

Yang, Peterson, and Cai (2003) analyze and describe customer service aspects of Internet retailing and how they relate to customers making online purchases. Based on a content analysis performed on 1,078 "consumer anecdotes of online shopping experiences" in 2003, the authors identify 14 "service quality dimensions" (Yang, Peterson, & Cai, 2003, p. 685). The authors then examine and discuss the individual concepts of each of these service quality dimensions and how they relate to Internet commerce, including several factors produced by their analysis that contribute to consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction that ultimately lead to customer purchasing behavior. The authors provide various suggestions and recommendations based on their research that are intended to serve as recommendations for improving customer service quality in Internet retailing and, thus, improving the success of e-tailers. This paper supports the

purpose, significance, and problem area of this study through its identification of the need for more research due to the rapid advancement of e-commerce and its recommendation of several distinct, customer-behavior-related marketing tactics. Due to this paper's inclusion of these marketing tactics, it is selected as part of the data set, and coded in the data analysis process.

This article's academic credibility is established through review of the professional credentials of its three authors. Yang, Peterson, and Cai's combined efforts form an international collaboration of business and marketing expertise. Yang (at the time of publication) was an assistant professor of marketing at the City University of Hong Kong at Kowloon (Hong Kong, China). Yang is cited by other academic authors and has published numerous articles in academic and professional journals. Additionally, he has often collaborated with Western authors. Peterson is a distinguished professor of business and economics at New Mexico State University (Las Cruces, NM). He has published numerous articles in academic and professional journals and is cited by other academic authors. Cai is an assistant professor of operations management at Lakehead University (Ontario, Canada). He has published numerous peer-reviewed articles and conference proceedings in academic and professional journals.

Wilson, R. (2002). Web Marketing Checklist: 31 Ways to Promote Your Website. *Web Marketing Today*, Issue 113 [Online]. Available <http://www.wilsonweb.com/articles/checklist.htm> [2003, February 23].

Wilson is a marketing consultant who offers nation-wide seminars and sells marketing packages. Wilson is an example of a SME source used in this study as he (and his organization: Web Marketing Today) appears to be an authority on current e-tail and Web-based marketing and e-commerce. Aside from the information available via his corporate website, his articles

appeared throughout many other WWW searches as well as a few academic databases. Like many SME sources, Wilson's website and organization are obviously intended to be a revenue-generating resource; nevertheless, Wilson supports e-tailers by allowing free use of an article database whereby "each month our team of link editors scours dozens of online periodicals and resources to find key information on e-commerce and Web marketing" (On-line: no page number listed).

In this particular article, Wilson (2002) presents a "checklist" of 31 marketing tactics that identify a variety of both e-tail specific and modified traditional marketing tactics. Information from this article is used to support the purpose and method of this study. The article is also selected as an entry in the data set, and coded in the data analysis process.

Chapter III. Method

Larger Method of Study

This study uses the literature review research methodology as defined by Leedy & Ormrod (2001) as its primary method of study. Literature review is the chosen research method for this study because its goal is to provide a set of e-tail marketing best practices derived from the analysis of commonly used e-tail marketing tactics within a body of literature. Taylor & Proctor (2005) provide support for this rationale by stating that literature review is “an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers” in an effort to express and describe “knowledge and ideas [that] have been established on a topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are” (para. 1).

Works of literature are selected using topic-based key words and a cursory analysis of relevancy to this study’s basic research question: “What are the most common marketing tactics used by small Internet-based retailers that sell specialty products?” Literature to be reviewed is collected from the following list of sources: University of Oregon library database, Business Source Premier electronic academic database, Proquest and other electronic academic databases accessible through the University of Oregon Knight Library, textbooks used during course work in the University of Oregon’s Applied Information Management graduate degree program, small business special interest Internet sites (both private and government); and the World Wide Web (WWW) in general using search engines such as Google and Google Scholar.

To enhance information reliability and integrity, several limitations are applied to the literature search and collection process. First, due to the ever-changing state of Internet technology and e-commerce, literature is limited by currency (2000 to present). Second, to ensure the integrity of the data and the outcome of this study, literature is limited by validity

(academic reliability). Third, since the outcome of this study is intended to be used by e-tail practitioners actively involved in business endeavors, the literature is limited to empirical or experienced-based data (opinion and assumption-based information is omitted). Ultimately, the literature review methodology enables this study to analyze previously published e-tail marketing tactics and compile the data into a checklist of documented best practices.

Literature Collection

Literature collection is concentrated on works that addressed specific marketing tactics used by e-tailers with a focus on successful small-sized e-tailers selling specialty products. Since this study's intended outcome is to provide actionable, documented marketing recommendations and best practices to e-tailers, the review does not include literature with opinion-based or untested marketing tactics.

The literature collection is also limited by currency and academic reliability. These limitations are important to this study due to ever-present changes in technology and On-line consumer buying practices and the limited quantity of previous scholarly research on this topic (Biswas & Krishnan, 2002) (Castells, 2001) (Dudley, 2005) (Filson, 2001) (Sharma and Sheth, 2004). Regarding currency, the publication range of 2000 to present is used because while multiple works challenging and discounting Internet marketing practices of the 1990s were found during the literature search, very few works attempted to discredit the more modern e-tailer marketing practices of the 21st Century. It should be noted, however, that many works published in 2000 or later, while not challenging current marketing tactics, did express dissatisfaction with the level of current e-tail marketing research and indicated that technology and consumer trends were outpacing scholarly research efforts (Biswas and Krishnan, 2002) (Brooks, 2003), (Filson,

2001) (Keen, et al., 2004).

Regarding academic reliability, this researcher's initial review of the literature indicated that there is a lack of scholarly sources that specifically address best practices for marketing in small e-tail businesses selling specialty products. Therefore, non-academic SME sources are used to supplement academic data. SME sources are an important aspect of this study because these practitioners possess a high level of knowledge gained from both education and actual experience working in a given field—in the case of this study, SME sources are mostly actively engaged in the operation of small e-tail businesses or are e-tail marketing consultants. While SMEs do not routinely publish scholarly works at the university level, SMEs used in this study such as Bloomberg (2006), Corry (2001), Gould (2006), Sherman (2006), Seda (2005), and Wilson (2004) do contribute documentation of their training and experiences in trade and professional websites, corporate or advisory websites, and other professional publications.

This study uses several different sources to locate and acquire the body of literature to be reviewed. Primarily, the University of Oregon On-line Library portal (located via the WWW at URL: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/index.php>) is used to access a variety of databases. The majority of academic articles used in this study were obtained from the Business Source Premier database as this database produced the search results using this study's set of key words (discussed below). ABI_INFORM, Proquest, LexisNexis, and the University of Oregon Knight Library Catalog were also used to gather scholarly works. For SME sources and a few academic sources, the Internet search engines Google (located via the WWW at URL: <http://www.google.com>) and Google Scholar (located via the WWW at URL: <http://scholar.google.com/>) are used.

In addition to the Google search engines, the following websites in are used to gather SME literature:

- **Affiliateprimer.com: The Affiliate Marketing Primer**
<http://www.affiliateprimer.com/>
- **Allbusiness.com: Small E-tailer Resources**
<http://www.allbusiness.com/periodicals/issue/90686-1-2.html>
- **American Marketing Association**
<http://www.marketingpower.com/>
- **Concept Marketing Group, Inc.**
<http://www.marketingsource.com>
- **BizTech Network**
<http://www.brint.com/>
- **Clickz Network Internet Marketing Solutions**
<http://www.clickz.com/>
- **Nowsell.com Web Marketing Strategy**
http://www.nowsell.com/site_promotion/index.html
- **Web Marketing Today**
<http://www.wilsonweb.com/>

A set of key words is used to search electronic databases for topic-related literature. Key terms are first determined based on the researcher's experience as the owner of a small e-tail business. As preliminary literature is collected, key words are formalized based on common indexing options. Table 1 displays the key terms used in this study.

Table 1. Key Words Used in Literature Search	
Best practices	Internet commerce
Business processes	Internet marketing
Consumer behavior	Internet retailing
Consumer decision-making	Marketing strategy
Consumer preferences	Niche market
Electronic commerce	Online
e-commerce	Online consumer behavior
e-retailing	Small Business
e-tailing	Specialty product retailing
Internet advertising	Web-based marketing

During the initial search, use of single words such as *marketing*, *Internet*, *e-commerce*, etc. produced thousands of documents and a range far too broad for this study. Therefore, advanced searches that combined several key terms with Boolean operators are used. The following is an example of an advanced search used in this study (this example is not database specific since all databases used to search for literature in this study offered advanced search options): “Internet marketing” AND “small business” AND “specialty product” OR “niche market” found anywhere within the text and limited to a publication date 2000 to present with full-text availability. Using a combination of key words in this advanced search produced a reasonable sample of topic-related literature for further review. The researcher examined the title and abstract from the initial search results to determine relevancy and to omit opinion and assumption-based literature.

Works of literature are first identified as having content relating to the topic of *marketing tactics* used by successful e-tail businesses. For the purposes of this study, *marketing tactics* are defined by Kotler and Keller (2006) as actions taken to enable the “process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals” (p. G5).

Once materials are identified that meet the criteria stated above, they are then categorized into the following *context units* (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 101) to be certain that they meet the needs of the data analysis process:

- marketing tactics designed to influence the behavior of customers who shop and purchase products online;
- e-tailer marketing tactics, especially those used by e-tailers who sell specialty products; and
- traditional (not e-commerce specific) marketing tactics, especially in relation to how they have been changed or adapted to accommodate the e-commerce boom.

These three context units comprise what appear to this researcher to be a logical categorization scheme based on a review of works’ titles and abstracts during the initial literature search.

Data Collection and Analysis

A final set of references for use as the data analysis set is obtained, consisting of 37 sources. Sources in the data set are listed in Appendix A.

Examination of the content within the literature is the primary tool for collecting data for analysis. Several descriptions of content analysis are consulted for general information pertaining to the selected data analysis approach – content analysis – including Leedy & Ormrod

(2001), Krippendorff (2004), and Palmquist et al. on the CSU Writing Lab website (2006). Data analysis for this study is specifically guided by Krippendorff's (2004) "problem-driven" (p. 340) content analysis design and conducted using a conceptual analysis process as described by Palmquist on the Colorado State University Writing Lab website (Palmquist, 2006). Thus, this study follows the eight steps of conceptual analysis as prescribed by Palmquist (2006).

Palmquist's (2006) system consists of the following steps: Step 1—determine level of analysis, Step 2—determine the number of concepts for coding, Step 3—code for existence or frequency, Step 4—decide level of generalization, Step 5—decide rules for coding, Step 6—determine handling of irrelevant information, Step 7—determine text coding procedures, and Step 8—analyze for results.

Within these steps, data are identified within the context of the literature initially as they relate to same three broad concepts listed above (Step 1). The three broad concepts are used to guide the reading of the literature, in order to identify marketing tactics. They serve as *context units*, and include: 1) marketing tactics designed to influence the behavior of customers who shop and purchase products online; 2) e-tailer marketing tactics, especially those used by e-tailers who sell specialty products to niche markets; and 3) traditional (not e-commerce specific) marketing tactics, especially in relation to how they have been changed or adapted to accommodate the e-commerce boom (Step 2) (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 99). Context unit descriptions are simplified into a set of three as *recording units* (Step 3) (Krippendorff, p. 101). Recording units are noted by both existence and counting their frequency of occurrence within the body of literature as a whole (Step 3). The level of generalization is determined by careful association to the initial descriptions of each of the three larger context units, and by the emerging set of recording units, in an iterative manner (Step 4). Information dealing with

marketing tactics viewed as outside of the bounds of the three initial context units or based solely on opinion and assumption is omitted from analysis (Step 5 and Step 6). The set of terms and concepts that build to form the final set of recording units is noted during the reading of the literature by hand, and then entered into a spreadsheet table (Step 7). A detailed description of each step is discussed below.

Step 1: Level of analysis. During the initial literature search, this researcher found Internet retailer (e-tailer) marketing strategy research to be closely related to research on consumer behavior—specifically online shopping—and research involving the modification of traditional marketing tactics to accommodate the e-tailer environment. This relationship is typically revealed by the title of the article or in its abstract. The level of analysis is two-tiered: the above concept forms a *context unit* (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 101) that drives the contextual reading of selected literature. A simplified set of *recording units* (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 99) listed in Step 2 drive the actual coding process.

Step 2: Number of concepts for coding. The three larger and interrelated concepts framed by the context units are simplified and applied in an interactive coding method meaning that the coding concepts are developed during the coding process (Palmquist, 2006, p. 4). Due to the vast lexicon and linguistic complexity of the English language, it is unrealistic for the researcher to predetermine every semantic and contextual possibility that an author may use to express or describe the success of a particular marketing tactic. The interactive coding process allows for this necessary flexibility during coding. The interactive recording units are: *Customer Behavior*, *E-tail Marketing*, and *Modified Traditional Marketing*.

Step 3: Coding for existence or frequency. The goal of the conceptual analysis is to establish the marketing tactics that are most commonly cited within the body of literature as a

whole; therefore, the interest lies in appropriate contextual identification of a concept as a successful marketing tactic as well as noting the number of times a concept or concept term is mentioned within a single work. Therefore, data are coded for both existence (of concepts in individual works) and frequency (with which these concepts appear within the body of literature) (Palmquist, 2006).

Step 4: Level of generalization. As indicated in Step 2, this coding process for this study is interactive and context based. Therefore, marketing tactics within the three recording units mentioned in Step 2 are identified through terminological context of the work and are coded as *successful* when semantic and contextual words or phrases describe the marketing tactic in a positive manner through the use of empirical data or experienced-based examples.

Step 5: Rules for coding. The three recording units noted in Step 2 are simplified into the three shorthand phrases of *Customer Behavior*, *E-tail Marketing*, and *Modified Traditional Marketing* respectively. The distribution of these recording units within each work of literature used in the sample is recorded (see Table 2).

For use during coding, words and phrases that describe successful marketing tactics within the context of each work are applied to these recording units using the guidelines in Step 4. Once identified, each successful marketing tactic is tabulated under the recording unit in which it is found. Successful marketing tactics are counted when multiple works within a recording unit identify the same tactic. The sum of each marketing tactic frequency of occurrence is recorded and tabulated (see Table 3).

Step 6: Handling of irrelevant information. This study is concerned with eliminating all information that, through review of semantic context (determined solely on this researcher's opinion) does not meet the definition of or discussion about a marketing tactic that is reported to

be successful for e-tailers. The nature of the initial literature search (using topic-based key words to search for academic or SME sources) is designed to prevent inclusion of irrelevant documents.

Step 7: Text coding procedures. Coding for this study is done manually by the researcher. Each work of selected literature is read and analyzed for the existence of context units. Once all sources have been categorized into context units, they are analyzed for the existence of recording units, as defined in Step 5. Once all works are examined and recording units noted, the researcher counts the number of recording units within each context unit and tabulates the data.

Negative case analysis is used, when possible, to ensure credibility of the data (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p. 106). The negative case analysis verification method is used to “actively look for cases that contradict the existing hypotheses” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p. 106). Specific marketing tactics cited as being unsuccessful within the context of one work of literature while conversely being cited as successful in another are noted in a separate table if applicable. This table makes a side-by-side numerical comparison between the number of sources citing the marketing tactic as successful and the number of those citing it as unsuccessful. Additionally and when applicable, a footnote is added to the best practice list to indicate when a specific marketing tactic deemed to be successful by several sources is contradicted by another or others. The footnote provides the title, author, and URL (if applicable) of the contradicting source.

Data Presentation

Step 8: Analysis of results. The results from the conceptual analysis are first categorized within the three marketing tactic recording units (consumer behavior, e-tail marketing, and modified traditional marketing) and presented in a table (see Table 3). The number of occurrences for each recording unit within individual context units is then tabulated (see Table 3). Figure A displays an example of the reporting table structure for this tabulation. The data support and define each context unit.

Figure A. Example of Context Unit Coding Results	
Context Unit 1 Marketing Tactics Designed to Influence Customer Behavior	Recording Unit Frequency of Occurrence Within Context Unit
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X
Context Unit 2 E-tailer Specific Marketing Tactics	
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X
Context Unit 3 Traditional Marketing Tactics Adopted for E-commerce	
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X
Marketing Tactic	X

The three recording units are then framed into the final outcome of the study—a set of best practices to be used by e-tailers who may wish to compare these to their current tactics or implement them as new tactics (see Table 4). Once tabulated within each context unit, the recording units are then combined where possible and counted within the body of literature as a whole. This tabulation, as displayed by Table 3, shows in descending order the recording units

that are most common throughout the body of literature and is the basis for the best practice checklist (Table 4).

The design template for Table 4 is developed in Figure B to introduce the use of the set of best practices defined by the Government of British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development (2006) as "programs, initiatives or activities which are considered leading edge, [sic] or exceptional models for others to follow" (p. 1). Due to the variation of definitions for *best practice* found by the researcher, this study uses British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development's particular definition because along with it being published by the government of a first-world nation, its verbiage establishes the concept that a best practice may increase the chances for success. In the case of this study, best practices are established through data analysis by identifying common trends in marketing tactics used by successful e-tailers within the three context units. The consolidated results of the three context units forms the overall best practices list.

Figure B. Example of Best Marketing Practices for E-tailers
Customer Behavior-Focused Marketing Tactics
Best Practice 1: Best Practice 2: Best Practice 3:
E-Tail Marketing Tactics
Best Practice 1: Best Practice 2: Best Practice 3:
Modified Traditional Marketing Tactics
Best Practice 1: Best Practice 2: Best Practice 3:
Overall Best Practices Based Upon Frequency of Citation Within Literature Sample
Overall Best Practice 1: Overall Best Practice 2: Overall Best Practice 3:
Contradictory Data Notes (if applicable)
Footnote 1

Chapter IV. Analysis of Data

The eight-step data analysis process defined in Chapter 3 of this study resulted in three data sets. Data set 1 consists of the total body of 37 works of literature used in the data analysis process (see Appendix A). These are works that discuss e-tail marketing in the terms of one or more of the three context units: customer behavior, e-tail Marketing, and modified traditional. These documents are read and interactively coded for recording units that contextually reveal successful marketing tactics as described in Steps 3 and 4 of Chapter 3.

Once identified, different marketing tactics are noted and tabulated within each of the three context units. The results of this analysis form data set 2. Data set 2 reveals that of the 37 separate documents used in coding, 25 mention customer behavior as a factor of marketing success, 31 mention e-tail Marketing, and 16 mention modified traditional marketing tactics. Table 2 displays the distribution of the three broad marketing category context units throughout the literature sample.

Sources	Customer Behavior Marketing Tactics	E-tail Marketing Tactics	Modified Traditional Marketing Tactics
Allen		X	
Biswas & Krishnan	X	X	X
Banham		X	X
Bloomberg	X	X	X
Brooks	X		
Chaston & Mangles	X	X	X
Chen, et al.	X	X	X
Corry (2003)		X	X
Corry (2001)			X
DesMarteau & Cole	X	X	
Dudley	X	X	X
Filson	X	X	X
Gordon		X	
Gould		X	
Grewal, Iyer, & Levy	X	X	X
Hamm-Greenawalt		X	
Keen, et al.	X		
Lillo	X	X	
Malortha		X	X
Marchini		X	
McPherson	X	X	X
Pavlou & Fygenson	X	X	X
Petre, Minocha, & Roberts	X	X	X
Poon	X		
Poon & Joseph	X		X
Saeed, Hwang, & Grover	X	X	
Seda		X	
Sen		X	
Sharma & Sheth	X	X	X
Sherman	X	X	
Sismeiro & Bucklin	X		
Song & Zahedi		X	
Torkzadeh & Dhillon	X	X	
Van den Poel & Buckinx	X	X	
Vrechopoulos, et al.		X	
Yang, Peterson, & Cai	X	X	
Zhang & Prybutok	X	X	

The different marketing tactics (recording units) are tabulated within each context unit. Due to the wide variety of semantic variance used by different authors, the marketing tactics are compared and combined when contextually similar. The frequency of occurrence of each marketing tactic is then counted. The results of this analysis form data set 3. Data set 3 displays the marketing tactics that are mentioned within each context unit in descending order by frequency of occurrence as seen in Table 3. Data set three is the basis for the development of the outcome of this study. The three most frequently mentioned marketing tactics from each context unit are chosen to form the list of e-tail marketing best practices. These marketing tactics are presented and described in the Conclusion chapter of this paper.

Table 3. Data Set 3	
Customer Behavior	Marketing Tactic Frequency of Occurrence
Focus on Customer Empowerment and/or Communication	25
Ensure Website Ease-of-Use and Interactivity/Personalization	10
Portray and Ensure Security and Trustworthiness	6
Foster Brand Loyalty with On-line Marketing	4
Order Processing	2
Know Customer Search Behavior	2
Provide Access to Price Information	2
Ensure Prompt Service Delivery Channels	1
E-tail Marketing	
Include SEO/PPC/SEP/Sponsored Links/Banner Ads/Combination of These	18
Optimize Website	15
Use Customer Data Mining/Click stream Data/Target Customers	12
Build Partnerships/Strategic Alliances/Affiliate Marketing	9
Employ Email Advertising (opt-in)	3
Automate Business Processes Using IT	2
Include Testimonials on Website	1
Create Web log Exposure	1
Use of Auction Brokers	1
Outsource Web Design and Marketing to SMEs	2
Modified Traditional Marketing	
Integrate Online Presence with Print Marketing	8
Maintain Flexible E-commerce Marketing Plan	5
Expand Product Line	3
Create Traditional Strategic Alliances On-line	2
Exploit On-line Niche Markets	2
Foster Value and Trust via On-line Presence and UI	2
Implement Step-based E-commerce Marketing Plan	1
Market Competitive Pricing	1

Chapter V. Conclusions

Each marketing tactic listed in data set 3 (Table 3) represents a summary of a number of similar concepts identified by this researcher in the literature. The top three marketing tactics (determined by frequency of occurrence) in each of the three areas analyzed are chosen to exemplify those tactics that the majority of academic and SME sources consider to be successful. These tactics comprise a list of best practices. While most authors and researchers focused on unique facets of e-tail marketing, the similarities among the basic principles of the research within the literature sample are such that common themes are developed for use in this study. The following discussion defines each of the three larger areas (customer behavior, e-tail marketing, and modified traditional marketing) and includes a description of each of the top three marketing tactics. These nine marketing tactics, along with a final set of the best three overall tactics based on frequency of occurrence within the literature, comprise the best practice list as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Best Marketing Practices for Small E-tailers
Customer Behavior Marketing Tactics
Focus on Customer Empowerment and/or Communication Ensure Website Ease-of-Use and Interactivity/Personalization Portray and Ensure Security and Trustworthiness
E-Tail Marketing Tactics
Include SEO/PPC/SEP/Sponsored Links/Banner Ads/Combinations Optimize Website Use Customer Data Mining/Click stream Data/Target Customers
Modified Traditional Marketing Tactics
Integrate Online Presence with Print Marketing Maintain Flexible E-commerce Marketing Plan Expand Product Line
Overall Best Practices Based Upon Frequency of Occurrence Within Literature
Focus on Customer Empowerment and/or Communication Include SEO/PPC/SEP/Sponsored Links/Banner Ads/Combination of These Optimize Website

Discussion of Small E-tailer Best Practices in Three Areas

Area #1: Customer Behavior Best Practices

Two-thirds of the articles reviewed for this study recommend in some way that e-tailers strongly consider online customer shopping behavior when marketing their products. Authors posited that the rise of e-commerce has changed the manner in which customers behave when shopping online and, therefore, e-tailers must accommodate this new breed of consumer if they are to be successful (Dudley, 2005) (Filson, 2001) (Grewal, 2005) (Keen, et al., 2004) (Pavlou & Fygenon, 2006) (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006) (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002) (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). The top three contextually similar topics are grouped into the following sub-categories: customer empowerment and/or communication, website ease-of-use and

interactivity/personalization, and the assurance of security and trustworthiness.

Focus on Customer Empowerment and/or Communication. All (100-percent) of the customer behavior literature selected for analysis discussed the need to involve the customer in the marketing process and allow for easy communication between the e-tailer and the customer. As Brooks (2003) explains: “With the rise of the internet, dialogue [has become] an even more basic expectation of the savvy consumer. The Internet allowed consumers to create a dialogue with anyone, with anything – raising their expectations [of e-tailers]” (p. 339). Yang and Cai (2003) also emphasize the need for a readily available and prompt communication channel by stating, “Many consumers whose e-mail inquiries were delayed or ignored tended to be disappointed” (p. 692) and cite “responsiveness [to customer inquiries and needs]” (p. 692) as the top factor for customer satisfaction.

Sharma and Sheth (2004) use the term “cocreation” (p, 699) to describe the customer empowerment concept: “With an increase in usage of the Internet, [the] customer will take an increasing role in the fulfillment process, leading to ‘cocreation.’ Cocreation involves both customers and marketers interacting in aspects of design, production and consumption of the product or service” (p. 699).

Ensure Website Ease-of-Use and Interactivity/Personalization. As their statement above shows, Sharma and Sheth’s cocreation idea also addresses, and is an appropriate segue into, the second most significant factor in the customer behavior context unit: website ease-of-use, interactivity, and personalization. Over one-third of authors discussed the need for e-tailers to incorporate at least some level of interactivity and personalization into their company websites. Researchers such as Sismeiro and Bucklin (2004), Zhang and Prybutok (2004), and Van den Poel and Buckinx (2003) produced studies to predict the purchasing behavior of online

shoppers and found that the ability for a customer to personalize the shopping experience via the website user interface (UI) is a significant factor in eliciting purchasing behavior. Sismeiro and Bucklin (2004) point out the benefits of this tactic saying, “By ‘personalizing’ the advertising content of the site [for individual customers], managers can augment their revenue with the sales of ad impressions” (p. 321) as well as targeting marketing efforts more effectively.

Regarding the effect of website ease-of-use on customer purchasing behavior, Saeed, Hwang, and Grover (2002)—who focused on the impact that advertising and website features designed to elicit customer purchases have on e-tailer performance—stated:

“Web site interface is the primary point of contact between the consumer and the e-tailing company. Companies that provide a superior shopping experience by developing Web site features that cater to the consumer's purchase-related task requirements enhance the overall value consumers derive from their purchases. This can induce purchases and also lead to customer retention” (p. 137)

This and several customer behavior related studies (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006) (Poon, 2000) posited that customers whose shopping experience is “complemented by Web site features that facilitate product search, product choice, and the product-ownership experience” (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002, p. 137) are more apt to make a purchase.

Portray and Ensure Security and Trustworthiness. This third-ranked customer behavior best practice tactic is supported by nearly one-fourth of the literature within the context unit. The general concept is summarized by Zhang and Prybutok’s (2004) assertion:

“E-commerce promises consumers numerous advantages over more traditional shopping channels [and] at the same time it brings new risks. Because [sic] transactions are not conducted through face-to-face contact, people have to believe that they are safe from

hackers and that their personal information will be safeguarded” (p. 4).

Additionally, in their studies relating to how a customer’s beliefs and perceptions affect online shopping behavior, Petre, Minocha, and Roberts (2006) and Pavlou and Fygenon (2006) further establish that the website must “give cues to enhance trustworthiness” (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006, p. 196) among customers. Some examples of these cues are keeping the site current, providing multiple communication channels for customer service, providing and advertising secure order processing features, and prominently displaying all costs associated with the order (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006).

Area #2: E-tail Marketing Best Practices

With over eighty-percent of works citing it, e-tail marketing is the most widely mentioned context unit among the literature analyzed for this study. E-tail marketing—in the terms of this study—is defined by Bloomberg (2006) as those marketing tactics that make “use of the Internet and related technologies to achieve marketing goals and objectives” (p. 2). E-tail marketing tactics are developed and modified through advances in technology and use the Internet as the conduit to deliver advertisements, goods, and services to the target market (Allen, Online, No Date) (Biswas, 2004) (Gould, 2006).

The following three sub-categories are the most frequently mentioned as successful marketing tactics in the literature: include SEO, PPC, SEP, sponsored links, banner ads, or a combination of these tactics; optimize the company website; and use customer data mining and click stream data to establish target customers.

Include SEO/PPC/SEP/Sponsored Links/Banner Ads/Combination of These. Search engine optimization (SEO) that Sen (2005) explained as the modification of “[web] site codes to

make them more relevant and therefore more search-engine compatible” (p. 10) and search engine placement (SEP) whereby e-tailers “pay the search engine for placement in the sponsored section of the search-results pages” (Sen, 2005, p. 10) are similar marketing tactics that utilize the services of search engine providers such as Google and Yahoo.

Along the same lines are “performance based” (Allen, Online, No Date, p. 1) pay-per-click (PPC) advertisements, sponsored links, and banner advertisements (Allen, Online, No Date), (Biswas & Krishnan, 2004) (Bloomberg, 2006) (Marchini, 2001). While these may also be used with search engine providers, these are essentially advertisements in the form of graphics and active web links that are placed on the website of another business to attract customers to an e-tailer’s website (Chen, et al., 2003) (Gould, 2006) (Hamm-Greenawalt, 2000) (Marchini, 2001).

Several researchers and SMEs proposed that the most successful use of these marketing tactics is to employ them in combination with each other (Allen, Online, No Date) (Gould, 2006) (Marchini, 2001) (Sherman, 2006) (Sen, 2005). Allen (Online, No Date) and Chen et al. (2003) suggest that an e-tail business must weigh the cost of this combined method (which may become rather expensive), but the overall consensus in the literature is that combining one or more of the search engine tactics with sponsored links, PPC, and banner advertisements is the best recipe for increased market exposure and e-business success.

Optimize Website. As mentioned above in the customer behavior section, an e-tailer’s website is the primary storefront that customers interact with. Website optimization is a term used to summarize measures taken to enhance website usability and make the website more conducive to the e-commerce environment (Saeed, Hwang, & Grover, 2002). Website optimization appeared to be a significant marketing tactic, with nearly half of the authors citing it

as a key to e-tail success.

While researchers covered a variety of recommendations, the most commonly mentioned website optimization concepts include minimalist graphic design that appears professional and exhibits the quality and uniqueness of the product(s) sold, easily recognized navigation instruments, minimized download delay (e.g., removing bandwidth intensive images, sounds, and videos), and a uncomplicated ordering process (Biswas & Krishnan, 2004) (Chaston & Mangles, 2002) (Chen, et al., 2003) (DesMarteau & Cole, 2004) (Grewal, Iyer, & Levy, 2004) (Malortha, 2000) (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006) (Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006) (Sen, 2005) (Song & Zahedi, 2005) Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002).

Use Customer Data Mining/Click stream Data/Target Customers. This sub-category is the third most mentioned e-tail marketing tactic cited by 12 of the 31 sources in this area. The mining of customer and click stream data involves the use of computer software to collect customer information and customer activity on the e-tail website and may be described as both overt and covert marketing activities (Bloomberg, 2006) (McPherson, 2003) (Van den Poel & Buckinx 2003) (Vrechopoulos, et al., 2003).

One commonly mentioned overt tactic is to provide customers with the option to opt-in to email marketing programs by inputting specific data that is stored by the e-tailer in a database (McPherson, 2003). The automated, customer-driven process allows the e-tailer to not only tailor marketing efforts to specific customer needs, it also provides insight into target market demographics that may be used to enhance marketing plans (Allen, Online, No Date) (Bloomberg, 2006) (Malhotra, 2000) (McPherson, 2003).

Click-stream data mining is an example of covert collection as this software runs in the background typically without the recognition of the customer (Van den Poel & Buckinx 2003)

(Vrechopoulos, et al., 2003). Click-stream mining technology records the navigation patterns and activity of each website visitor in a database that may be accessed and manipulated by the e-tailer (Sharma, & Sheth, 2004) (Van den Poel & Buckinx 2003) (Vrechopoulos, et al., 2003). Multiple studies have indicated that customer purchasing behavior can be predicted by the recorded navigation pathways through the website; therefore, several authors recommend that e-tailers employ click stream mining software to assess and improve website functionality and gather additional information on target markets (Sharma, & Sheth, 2004) (Van den Poel & Buckinx 2003) (Vrechopoulos, et al., 2003).

Areas #3: Modified Traditional Best Practices

Bloomberg (2006) states, “Many traditional elements of marketing easily translate into Internet marketing” (p. 3); however, the modified traditional context unit was the least mentioned among the literature. For purposes of this study, though, the fact that modified traditional marketing is cited by over half of the authors in the literature sample makes it significant enough that it should not be ignored.

As Bloomberg’s (2006) statement implies, this context unit describes how traditional marketing tactics are altered or adapted to accommodate the needs of e-commerce. Due to the proliferation of e-commerce, many authors spoke of the need to modify traditional marketing tactics, but fewer went further and expanded on this concept. Among those authors who did, the following three sub-categories were cited most often: integrate online presence with print marketing, maintain a flexible e-commerce marketing plan, and expand the product line.

Integrate Online Presence with Print Marketing. This is the most commonly mentioned sub-category in the modified traditional area, with half of the authors citing it as a key

to e-tail success. The concept is two-fold: advertise the business's online presence through traditional marketing conduits such as magazines, news papers, television, and radio and "print the URL [i.e., website address] on everything [the e-tailer] produces—on all advertising, POP [*post office protocol*—i.e., e-mail), corporate collateral, shopping bags, and invoices distributed" (McPherson, 2003).

While marketing through traditional conduits is a recommended tactic, it is also costly; however, the cost of including a web address on otherwise standard corporate print media and e-mail is negligible (McPherson, 2003). Therefore, authors recommend a combination of these two methods and, at a minimum, placement of the web address on all company documents and e-mail correspondence (Bloomberg, 2006) (McPherson, 2003) (Poon, 2000).

Maintain Flexible E-commerce Marketing Plan. Due to the ever-changing nature of technology and e-commerce that is commonly cited throughout the literature, several researchers recommend that e-tailers design a marketing plan that is highly flexible and easily changed (Corry, 2003) (Corry, 2001) (Malhotra, 2000). Malhotra (2000) asserts that e-commerce business models and marketing strategies should change as the situation evolves rather than following traditional method of staying with a pre-made plan or set of rules.

Additionally, the E-tail marketing environment appears to be considered so specialized and volatile by some authors that they suggest hiring employees dedicated to managing e-commerce marketing operations (Chaston & Mangles, 2002) (Malhotra, 2000). Chen, et al. (2003) go so far as to recommend that e-commerce marketing operations be outsourced to SMEs. While these options may not be financially viable for some smaller businesses, the concept of maintaining market vigilance and having the capability to quickly change marketing plans is the tactic validated by the authors within this sub-category.

Expand Product Line. Product line expansion is a commonly known, traditional, and validated marketing tactic that a wide variety of businesses have successfully used by for some time. While urging e-tailers to exploit market niches with specialty products, authors citing this marketing tactic also emphasize that even if a successful market niche is found, product line expansion must be considered to keep the business successful (Chaston & Mangles, 2002) (Grewal, Iyer, & Levy, 2004).

Filson (2003) used Amazon.com as an example to show how this company broadly outpaced its rivals during the fierce competition of its early years with strategic product line expansion. While Amazon.com is a large, public corporation, Filson's (2003) findings are valid and applicable to smaller e-tailers. His study is framed by the intense degree of business competition that is standard for any for-profit company in a capitalist economy and should be expected and mitigated regardless of business size.

Summary

Using contextual analysis, this study reveals that the nine marketing tactics discussed above are the most commonly mentioned among both academic researchers and SMEs. This study uses a relatively large body of sample literature (37 works) to mitigate assumptions and opinions and ensure that its results are validated by a variety of disparate authors. This is done so that e-tailers may feel confident in utilizing the list of best practices in real-world business activities. While this study discusses the nine best marketing tactic practices in some detail, it is the researcher's recommendation that e-tail business owners and marketing managers conduct further research into these tactics to become informed and educated on their technical idiosyncrasies prior to actual implementation.

Appendix A: Data Set 1 Content Analysis Data Set

Allen, S. F. (No Date). Internet Marketing Roadmap: the Truth for a Change

Biswas, A., & Krishnan, R. (2004). The Internet's impact on marketing: Introduction to the JBR special issue on "Marketing on the web—behavioral, strategy and practices and public policy."

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Corry, A. (2001). The Real Secret to Success

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Dudley, D. (2005). Wealth of opportunity

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Appendix A: Continued

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- Sen, R. (2005). Optimal Search Engine Marketing Strategy

Appendix A: Continued

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Song, J. & Zahedi, F. (2005). A Theoretical Approach to Web Design in E-Commerce: A Belief Reinforcement Model

Torkzadeh, G. & Dhillon, G. (2002). Measuring Factors that Influence the Success of Internet Commerce

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Vrechopoulos, et al. (2003). An Internet Retailing Data Framework for Supporting Consumers and Business Processes

Yang, Z., Peterson, R., & Cai, S., (2003). Services quality dimension of Internet retailing: an exploratory analysis

Zhang, X. & Prybutok, V. (2004). An Empirical Study of Online Shopping: A Service Perspective

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