

and password, Electricco asks its customers to reorder automatically and increases the level of customer service to obtain customers' acceptance of online marketing, and Textileco depends on the nature of its product for customer acceptance.

Design, marketing, language, and cultural considerations are important tools for companies that want to use the Internet for their marketing activities. In line with the findings of Clarke and Flaherty (2003), Hamill and Gregory (1997), Herbig and Hale (1997), Hofacker (2001), Karayanni and Baltas (2003), Kotab and Helsen (2000), Poon and Swatman (1997), Quelch and Klien (1996), and Samiee (1998), we identified several design characteristics in this study as critical factors that contribute to the success of B2B IIM efforts. The respondents in this research believed that Web site factors were crucial in their strategies to develop their B2B IIM activities.

In accordance with the arguments of Clarke and Flaherty (2003), Hamill and Gregory (1997), Herbig and Hale (1997), Chaffey and colleagues (2000), and Haig (2001), a well-designed site has been found to play a critical role in the success of B2B IIM. As Haig notes, the most important design principle is to "keep it simple." Because, in general, business decision makers want to absorb information on a Web page in as short a time as possible, text and images should be used with strict restraint throughout a Web site. Similarly, ease of use (usability) is another design criterion that has been found to affect B2B IIM success. Without adhering to the principles of usability, it will be more difficult for B2B sites to achieve their objectives. Our research also confirms the findings of Evans and King (1999) and the argument of Herbig and Hale, who address the need for clear, organized Web sites and easy-to-navigate pages that enable smooth movement around the site. Accurate information is another criterion that has been found to have a critical effect on the quality of the Web site. This supports the work of Hamill and Gregory, who argue that information that is viewed as biased will not be taken seriously and will have a negative effect on the company's image. Furthermore, companies should provide information that meets different needs to encourage a mix of nationalities and cultures. They should take advantage of the highly interactive nature of Web sites by recognizing that users are active acquirers of information. Thus, as Chaffey and colleagues, Evans and King, and Hamill and Gregory note, the speed (i.e., of downloads) of the site has been found to have a critical effect on the quality of the Web site.

Our in-depth interviews endorsed this finding. However, each company identified several design characteristics as critical and used a different approach to design. For example, at Petrolco, good design, up to date, information, and ease of use were cited as the most important characteristics.

Web Site Factors

At Electricco, the e-commerce marketing manager defined quality, information, ease of use, and simplicity as the most important factors for Web site design. The managing director at Textileco cited only ease of use, speed of use, and information as the characteristics that affect the design of the Web site. Thus, although the interviewees agreed about some characteristics (i.e., information and ease of use), the criteria of a well-designed site varied from one company to another. However, this is related to the type of industry and the nature of the product. For example, the e-commerce marketing manager at Electricco noted,

[E]ase of use is more important than the design because a lot of our customers are design engineers, and they much rather would have a text on the page that gives them all the information they want rather than a nice-looking HTML page.

However, to confirm these observations, more research is needed in each industry to ascertain the real effect of individual product and industry requirements related to Web design criteria.

Petrolco hired an external company to develop its Web site, and Textileco used its own in-house resources to build its Web site. This supports Haig's (2001) argument that it is appropriate for small companies to develop a Web site using a specific Web design software, such as WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get), Microsoft Front Page, or Front Page Express, because it is cheaper than the average Web design agency. However, for larger companies, investing in Web design software may not be enough. Developing and updating content requires a serious investment in human resources, and this is what the three large companies have done. However, the characteristics of a well-designed site varied from one company to another, and the Web site was developed in different ways (see Table 3).

Another important factor is the effective promotion of the site. The findings of this research support the studies of Evans and King (1999) and Hamill and Gregory (1997), who state that the effective marketing of a Web site is crucial for B2B IIM to succeed. Each company in this research used different ways to promote its Web site. These included registering the site with different search engines, establishing reciprocal cross-linkages to other sites, and ensuring that the URL address is used in all company correspondence (letterhead and all advertising and other publicity materials).

Our study also supports the findings of Hofacker (2001), Wilson and Abel (2002), Kotab and Helsen (2000), and Quelch and Klein (1996) that language and communication are big

Company	Web Design Characteristics	Consultant	Developed
Petrolco	•Design	Australian company (Adweb)	Externally
	•Up to date		Internally
	•Information		(Internet manager)
	•Easy to use		
Electricco	•Easy to search	South African company	Outsourced
	•Quality		
	•Information		
	•Easy to use		
	•Simplicity		
Textileco	•Ease of use	U.K. company	Internally (package)
	•Speed of use		
	•Information		

Table 3.
Web Design Characteristics in
Participating Companies

challenges for companies that use the Internet for their B2B marketing. Similarly, consistent with the findings of Quelch and Klien (1996), Samiee (1998), Simeon (1999), and Wood and Robertson (2000), culture plays a crucial role in B2B IIM. This is consistent with the idea that a company's approach to attracting, informing, and positioning is greatly affected by the social and cultural environment in which it operates (Simeon 1999). All the interviewees in this research pointed out that they did a lot of work to understand the culture in foreign markets. However, whereas Petrolco and Electricco used local branches or offices as a tool to study the foreign markets, Textileco used its sales representative, local distributors, and export manager to collect the required information about the culture of the foreign markets.

This study has taken an in-depth approach to investigating the ways that several B2B companies have responded to IIM. In particular, the questions raised in this article were related to how far the critical success factors, which we derived from the literature review, have been addressed to guide practitioners in responding to the new phenomenon of Internet marketing.

The case studies we present in this article examine the critical success factors used by three companies in the petroleum, textile, and electrical industries. The critical success factors have been introduced under the four subheadings of marketing strategy factors, internal factors, market factors, and Web site factors. Although we obtained these findings through the use of a cross- and within-case analysis, we found several dimensions to be common among these companies. We considered and analyzed similarities and differences among the experiences of B2B IIM in three companies.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The description of these companies' experiences of the factors that affect the success of B2B IM has provided many insights.

The preliminary study has many potential implications for further research that pertain both to methodology employed in collecting and analyzing the data and to the substantive findings of the research effort. However, during the course of this study, several findings indicated the need for further investigation. First, testing the developed conceptual framework using a large-scale sample will strengthen knowledge of the B2B IM critical success factors. Second, it would be worthwhile to conduct a similar study of B2C companies on a comparative basis with the findings of the current study (which used B2B companies). The same proposed factors we developed for the current study could be employed in such a study. Third, another potentially fruitful area to develop is the quantification of these critical success factors into a "code-of-practice index" in a company to determine the level of performance on a time-based approach, such as year to year. The results from the index could pinpoint areas that need attention and improvement. Finally, each critical success factor we discussed in this study warrants more in-depth study. Although some critical success factors are recurring issues in marketing, information technology, and MIS research, their implications to Internet marketing require a new perspective. Further research could reveal the need to focus on one or more of the critical success factors to provide both theoretical and practical applications. On the one hand, researchers could use these factors to assess the success of B2B companies. On the other hand, these critical success factors must be subjected to review, critique, and discussion for an extended period before gaining general acceptance. Additional items might be tried in each category.

Finally, as with any study, there are certain limitations that should be recognized. As we established previously, B2B IM is an area of research in which theory is still under development. Thus, we opted to follow an exploratory approach in this study. This was necessary because the research must develop a holistic and integrative understanding of B2B IM, a feature that demands broadening the scope of the study in reviewing a large body of relevant literature and collecting a huge set of appropriate data. Although we attempted to meet this requirement by reviewing various bodies of literature (marketing, information technology, and MIS) and seeking different types of data from both primary and secondary sources, it is not possible to claim that the empirical investigation in this study covered all the issues related to this perspective, at least the issues presented in the literature. Time frame and limited access to organizational information are the main constraints.