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This report is the culmination of a semester-long group project for the class GIT435, which focused on web management and e-commerce. Techniques to develop highly effective websites with measurable solutions were explored in reading, class discussions, as well as group and individual projects. Snowboard Connection, a full-service snowboard, skateboard, and surf shop based in Seattle, Washington, was the company selected as the client for this project. Opening with a company overview, this report extends to a deep analysis of the company’s online presence and marketing activities, and concludes with very specific recommendations.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate to the company Snowboard Connection that several areas of opportunity are waiting to be developed, refined and explored. A large percentage of this report was prepared as part of a larger group effort that included: Marye Odom, Alvin Moradi and myself, Nicole Cassis.
1 INTRODUCTION

This project revolved around analyzing the website and online activities of a specific e-commerce website, Snowboard Connection, with the purpose of offering measurable solutions to help the potential client develop a highly effective website.

1.1 PURPOSE
The purpose of this report is to demonstrate to Snowboard Connection that there are several areas of opportunity waiting to be developed, refined and explored.

1.2 SCOPE
This report begins with a company overview (from the perspective of someone not associated with the company), extends to a deep analysis of the company’s online presence and marketing activities, and concludes with very specific recommendations. The initial task was to choose a specific product (K2 snowboard), and then find a company ranked on the fifth or sixth search engine results page (SERP) that sold the product. Snowboard Connection was selected as the client because it sold K2 snowboards and ranked poorly in the SERPs.

1.3 LIMITATIONS
Several limitations presented themselves during the project. We did not have access to much of the specific web traffic data and not being part of the company we weren’t able to discuss specific goals so many assumptions had to be made.
2 COMPANY DESCRIPTION

Snowboard Connection is a full-service snowboard, skateboard, and surf shop that has been serving the Seattle, Washington area since 1990. SnoCon, as the company brands itself, offers a wide variety of products from the action sports world, and currently has three retail locations in the Washington area. A variety of brands are available for purchase via the site’s online store 24/7.

2.1 CIenteLe PrOFILE
According to New American Sports Data, stats show that participation and interest in action sports is at an all-time high. Snowboarding specifically has seen a 240 percent increase in participation over the last 10 years. The majority of SnoCon’s customers can be classified as young, hip, adventure seekers who thrive on exhilaration. They belong to the generation that was born attached to a computer, and therefore expect to find all the necessary information they seek on a company’s website. If they don’t find what they need, they simply go elsewhere, taking their business with them.

2.2 cOMPETITION oVERVIEW
Information on SnoCon’s competition provides a baseline for the industry, and also helps with search engine optimization. Typically, locating competitors is done by contacting the client and asking them who they view as their biggest competitors. In this case, we did not have the luxury of conversing with the client so we sought out competitors using search engines and keywords. A list of nearly 60 of our client’s direct competitors, all of whom ranked higher on the SERPs, can be found in Appendix 6.1: Competitors.

2.3 inDustry AnAlYSIS
To better understand market opportunity, we examined the content and online strategies of SnoCon and several of its competitors. Analyzing the industry helped us discover the intensity of competition, and the profitability and attractiveness of SnoCon’s marketing campaign.

SNOWBOARDER PROFILE 2010 CALENDAR YEAR

GENDER
Male: 72 percent, Female: 28 percent

AGE
Nearly 60% between the ages of 12-24

PRIMARY OCCUPATION
Student

% WITH COLLEGE DEGREE:
49 percent

AVG. PRICE PAID FOR A SNOWBOARD AT SPECIALTY SHOP
$270

AVG. PRICE PAID FOR BOOTS AT SPECIALTY SHOP
$127

AVG. # OF DAYS SNOWBOARDING
Male: 7.1 Female: 7.6

AVG. PRICE PAID FOR A WEEKEND LIFT TICKET
$44.36
2.4 Perceived Goals
Marketing campaigns are driven by goals. For this project, we were not able to consult closely with the customer to determine their site goals and percentages, which would be the appropriate course of action. An independent evaluation of SnoCon’s website showed the site goals to be:

- **Sell merchandise**
  Increasing profits by selling merchandise is the predominate goal of this website.

- **Provide information** (with a corollary goal of winning new customers/increasing customer loyalty). The site offers a snow pass cam (showing current weather conditions of slopes), events page, price and product page and blog.

- **Facilitate social interaction**
  SnoCon runs a blog, and has a link to its Facebook page. (A Twitter account exists, but this is not advertised anywhere on the site).

- **Increase brand awareness**
  Though all sites do this to some degree, this doesn’t seem to be a significant goal for this site. A logo is used at the top of the pages, but aside from that there isn’t much strengthening of the brand or core message occurring. The logo used on the blog page isn’t even the same as the one used on the homepage, and there is no consistency, or attempt at consistency, of maintaining a company color palette.

- **Push customers to the stores**
  Three storefront locations are mentioned, but there is nothing encouraging customers to shop there.

- **Recruit employees**
  SnoCon does not have a special location or a employment/career page to advertise job openings so this is clearly not a goal

- **Attract advertisers**
  Approximately 67 percent of the site’s real estate is devoted to logos and advertisements of various brands. If attracting advertisers isn’t already a goal, it should certainly be explored as there appears to be potential for exchanging links and possibly a sort of ad fee program (i.e. brands that donate a little cash or products could have logos placed more prominently).

Determining the site’s goals was a crucial step in the project because it told us how to position the site as we proceeded with our marketing strategy.

The graphic above breakdowns the goals. These percentages were based on looking at the site without consulting the “owner”. Although an individual goal percentage does not equal the percentage of pages used to address the goal, it does give an idea of how much time and resources should be spent on the goal.
In order to develop productive recommendations, it was necessary to investigate SnoCon’s online presence, from how it performed in search queries to more basic elements such as website structure, functionality and usability, and social media activities.

3.1 Website Analysis
Adjectives that describe the overall look and feel of http://www.snowboardconnection.com/ include: busy, flat, crowded, and unorganized. A cursory glance at the site reveals that the site was put together quickly or by an amateur – bottoms and tops of boxes (images, text, etc.) don’t align, a variety of fonts are used, and some of the fonts are small and thus difficult to read. The site doesn’t exhibit a cohesive feel. Having many items on a page is not always bad, but in this case almost all the items are given the same emphasis in terms of visual style and layout, which makes it difficult for the eye to decide where to go. When people first land on the page, they are initially confronted with a flat wall of clickable objects, all visually identical except for minor details.

What the site lacks in design aesthetics, it makes up for with unique features, such as a link to the weather cam of the pass, blog and multiple views/images of products available for purchase. The website does include basics necessary for carrying on e-commerce; it has a customer account login option and shipment tracking, as well as complete company details and an FAQ page answering questions about shipping, returns and exchanges.

Technology
The pages themselves make use of HTML, JavaScript and CSS styles to create the layout. The site does not use frames or Ajax, which is a good thing, because excess usage of these can decrease the visibility of a website in search engine results.
SITUATION ANALYSIS cont.

3.2 SEO Audit
Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via “natural” (organic) search results. The results of key components of the SEO audit are summarized below.

SnoCon’s current site is not search engine friendly. It did poorly in the search engine rankings and this can largely be attributed to the lack of content on the pages, but also to specific issues such as no headings and generic alt tags. There is also low keyword density and too general of keywords being used.

Domain Age
The age of a website is one of the major factors used to rank a website. Age can also increase the amount of money that can be made from advertising on the site. According to SEOlogs, snowboardconnection.com is 11 years old (created December 4, 1999).

HTML Validation
Validating web documents is an important step which can help improve and ensure the quality of a website. SnoCon had 104 errors.

Site Crawl
SnoCon’s homepage was checked with a site crawler simulator to see if the site can be crawled by the search engine bots. (If the web pages are not crawled, then the web pages won’t be listed out in the search engine database and won’t show up in the search engine results.) A simple check with Google Banned site checker shows that the site is being crawled (and that it is not banned by Google).

The higher the number of results (which is the number of pages indexed by Google), the better the ranking in search engines.

A DMOZ search tool was also employed to verify that the site was listed in the DMOZ directory (also known as the Open Directory Project, or ODP). DMOZ is important to SEO since many of the top search engines use the DMOZ listings as their directory listings, or as part of their search engine listings. SnoCon’s URL was listed in the DMOZ directory.
**Meta Data**

Meta tags, such as the meta keywords tag, have never been a guaranteed way to gain a top ranking on crawler-based search engines. Today, the most valuable feature they offer the website owner is the ability to control (to some degree) how the webpages are described by some search engines. For the most part most crawlers ignore this tag, but an examination of the metadata of the homepage shows what the client thought were the important keywords/phrases. A review of this tag also provided a starting point to determine what might be going wrong with the site’s optimization process (or what keywords might be missing that is losing them traffic). The header data is shown below.

**Site Map**

Site maps are essential for every website because they help to keep the site well linked; a good site infrastructure allows the search engine spiders to crawl the entire site and therefore ensure pages of the site are present in the indexes of major search engines.

SnoCon’s website does not appear to have a site map. A site map is critical to helping us understand what is currently on the site. There are programs available that will provide an instant site map of a web site. This will be discussed in more detail in the Recommendations section of this report.
Back Links
Back links play a large role in SERP because they indicate the popularity of the website by the number of users linking to the page. Appendix 6.2: Back Links lists the 73 unique sites linking back to SnoCon’s site. As a comparison, SnoCon’s similarly ranked competitor Eternal Snow has 140 back links, while another competitor skis.com has 106. K2snowboarding.com holds the number one search engine result and it has 209 back links.

Keywords
Wordle is an interesting way to analyze what keywords are really on a site. It is a unique visual analysis of the frequency of word use in a group of text. As shown in the image at the right, the word ‘Seattle’ is very prominent (correlating to a high number of occurrences in the content), but other words that one might expect such as snowboarding or K2 are either difficult to spot or not included at all. In addition to Wordle, Google Rankings “the Ultimate SEO Tool” was helpful in determining the frequency (density) of keywords on SnoCon’s pages. Though some of the keywords that you might expect to see were present, such as snowboard (3.99% density) and Seattle snowboard (1.15% density), these keywords are much too general. It is hard for a small website to compete with big companies when using broad keywords (see screenshot at right). The same keywords are used on all pages. One or two keywords per page need to be targeted. This will be examined in further detail in the Recommendations section.

SERP
Another important step was analyzing how the site did in searches with specific keywords. Searching for “K2 Snowboards” yielded results that placed SnoCon in 52nd place – far beyond what most people would look to in the results. (See Appendix 6.3: Search Results)
3.3 Social Media Presence

Participating in social media isn’t just about creating a page, making a blog post, or sending a tweet. Communication, conversation, interaction, and the mutual sharing of experiences all work to form the foundation of social media. These communities are based upon trust – and trust is not developed over night, to the chagrin of many companies.

The naturally occurring grouping of individuals around common interests has inherently created several networks of snowboarders across the globe. Each snowboarder represents either a current customer or a potential customer capable of impacting the business in both concrete and intangible ways. Snowboard Connection lacks a strong social media strategy. The keystone of success is active engagement; merely having a presence is not enough as the greatest benefits will be reaped when discussions are ongoing.

SnoCon has a presence on the two main social networking sites of the moment. However, with more carefully planned out strategies that interconnect and higher levels of engagement, the efforts across all social sites would likely result in greater impact. Customers and snowboarders are often eager to trade stories, photos, videos, and information. SnoCon needs to better capitalize on the nature of their customers to contribute content and interact with each other.

Facebook

Today, Facebook boasts more 400 million connectors and continues to grow still, superseding even Google, making it the most accessed website on earth. This fact alone makes Facebook a major player in the marketing world. What is important about this social channel is the way media is presented, which mimics how today’s youth (and specifically the snowboard generation) prefer to share their lives – mainly with videos, pictures, status updates, notes, discussions, etc.

SnoCon’s Facebook campaign serves its purpose of informing friends, supporters, and customers, but it doesn’t go “above and beyond”. The profile page itself is complete with links to the company’s website. The page has 620 fans (people who “like” it). Disappointingly, there are only seven photos, four of which are of a promotional nature, and even more surprisingly no videos posted. The frequency of posts averages out to about three per month, however, none of those posts were made by SnoCon. Judging by the fans’ responses, or the lack there of since there are no comments on any of the posts over the past year, it appears that none of the fans are motivated to connect with SnoCon in the social media sense.

From the blog page, there is a link to the company’s Facebook profile, but this is not visible from the main pages of the site. If a visitor happens to come through the site via an entryway other than the blog, the link won’t be seen.
SITUATION ANALYSIS cont.

**YouTube**
At present, SnoCon does not have its own YouTube Channel – but it should. As a group, snowboarders are likely to shoot their own videos, share videos, and seek out videos made by industry companies. With the ubiquitous nature of smart phones, and the ever increasing quality of video on these phones, this trend should continue to grow. Participation in the online video world will encourage customer participation with the brand.

**Twitter**
Twitter can be very beneficial to a company, but SnoCon is not using it to its full potential. The first obstacle is not having any link to the Twitter profile featured on the homepage. A search in Twitter for the company name does not turn up an account. However, by searching for “snocon,” the name in the company logo on the website, the Twitter account was discovered as @snocon. SnoCon’s Twitter campaign is similar in style and effort to its Facebook activity. Since the fall of 2010 SnoCon has not been an active in the Twitter community.

**Online Communities**
Community and forum sites continue to crop up, catering to every imaginable interest, hobby and topic. Members or participants of these groups have already displayed an interest that could potentially be acted upon by a related company. There are numerous mentions of K2 on these various forums, and though there doesn’t appear to be anyone from SnoCon jumping into the conversations it is hard to tell (since there is no reference or links back to SnoCon’s website). It is recommended that SnoCon actively engage in snowboarding-specific communities and forum sites. Users and visitors of these sites are past, present and prospective SnoCon customers – a concentrated grouping of prime target audience members.

SnoCon has yet to fully embrace the beauty of social networking by communicating with its customers on group sites targeting snowboarders. A sampling of the most popular and/or relevant online social networks for snowboarders currently includes:

- Snowboarding Forum  
  http://www.snowboardingforum.com/
- Shred Union  
  http://www.shredunion.com/
- ABC Snowboarding  
  http://www.abc-of-snowboarding.com/forum
- SnowRev  
  http://www.snowrev.com
- I-Shred.org  
  http://www.i-shred.org/forum.php

This is good!  
Aim to Increase #, but first set a goal
SITUATION ANALYSIS cont.

Competition
Some of the most successful Twitter campaigns executed by companies similar to Snowboard Connection involved a high-level of interaction between the company and the followers. For example, one of SnoCon’s competitors, K2 Snowboarding, tweets between 1 and 2 times per day to its followers and one of its most distinguishing characteristics is that K2’s tweets seem to be aimed at entertaining its followers. Some of the Facebook pages of SnoCon’s competitors were more highly trafficked, and included more activity and engagement – on the part of both the company and the followers.

A detailed analysis of the types and quality of selected competitors’ social media interactions is available. (See Appendix 6.4: Analysis of Competitors’ Social Network Activities and Appendix 6.5: Analysis of Competitors’ Twitter Use).
Implementing some of the changes outlined above doesn’t happen overnight, but a clear, detailed plan makes the process much easier. There are six main stages to the process:

1. Establish benchmark data
2. Define goals
3. Agree to the list of keywords
4. Make some changes to the existing website
5. Energize social media efforts
6. Measure changes

Specific recommendations for each phase, with some even including detailed proposals containing budget numbers and timelines, can be found in the appendix.

4.1 **Measuring Success**

Benchmark data is necessary and is for comparison to data collected after the marketing plan is put in place. It provides evidence of a plan’s success. It is important that the method of tracking be pre-established and not changed (without mutual agreement).

An analysis of SnoCon’s homepage source code shows that it is using the Urchin tracking program. Urchin is the software company and technology that Google acquired in 2005 that went on to become Google Analytics (GA). Google Analytics is a tool for collecting statistics about a web site’s activities. It can track how many users are coming to the site and where they are coming from, as well as set goals to see how often the site achieves a conversion. As a general guide, marketers prefer Google Analytics, IT departments prefer Urchin. For SnoCon, we recommend switching to Google Analytics because it is easier to implement, has a slicker user interface, and is maintenance free. Internal site-search reports are only available in GA. We also recommend customizing GA for e-commerce tracking. E-commerce tracking sends each user’s transaction information to the GA database as it occurs, which links a specific referral source to a conversion or purchase.
4.2 Website Suggestions

A successful user experience continues to be one of the main reasons clients return to a company or website. This section examines how SnoCon’s site can be made more user-friendly. Often, the results of a web redesign impact search engine ranking, as such, there is some overlap between this and the next section. A website redesign can be expanded or scaled back depending on time, resources and budget. Changes could be in three basic categories: Content, Design, and Architecture. Below is a sampling of some of the possibilities that could be explored.

Content

Addressing and auditing content is one of the first places to start since creating compelling and useful content will likely influence your website more than any of the other factor. SnoCon should consider adding more text, not only will this benefit visitors but it will help search engine rankings. Specific ideas include adding an opening paragraph at the top of each page that describes what the visitor will find on that page. The homepage has a small blurb of intro text, but it is in a tiny font and situated at the very bottom of the page just above the footer. This needs to be moved up to the top of the page.

There are differences between how users search the internet; anticipating these differences in behavior and accounting for them while writing content will lead to positive results (i.e. use a good mix of keyword phrases). Examples include using snowboarder and boarder interchangeably, or board and deck, etc.

Another component of content is organization, which site maps are great for and something SnoCon should have. A site map is a simple page on the site that displays the structure of the website, and usually consists of a hierarchical listing of the pages on the site. Visitors may visit this page if they are having problems finding pages on your site. Though site maps are mainly aimed at human visitors, these can help search engine rankings because it can increase crawl coverage.
**RECOMMENDATIONS cont.**

**Design**
SnoCon’s site is busy, flat, crowded, and unorganized. Even if you’re products are great and your content is enthralling, having a poorly designed site will scare away customers. E-commerce sites that appear amateurish can cause customers to worry about thing like site security. Is my credit card information safe if the person who designed the layout also designed the databases that hold my private information? SnoCon needs an updated look – one that is less busy. Remove some of the ads (30-60% off all snow gear), add in some content, make sure there is white space, and create a uniform look by selecting two fonts and sticking with it. Use heading tags to emphasize important text, which makes it easier to read and scan content.

**Architecture**
Site organization is very important, but it goes beyond just a “pretty” layout. Think of it from the user’s perspective and visualize it as an experience, rather than a collection of text and images. One of the first things that can be done with SnoCon’s site is to set and follow naming conventions. Create descriptive categories and filenames for the documents on the site; this will keep the site better organized, and it could also lead to better crawling of the documents by the search engines. It also creates more friendly URLs. Simple-to-understand URLs convey information much more easily than “ugly” URLs. When possible, avoid URL containing strange characters and numeric values.

Currently, when a visitor clicks on the Snow category, the URL that appears is: http://www.snowboardconnection.com/products.cfm?CatID=1

This could be changed to be more effective. Some users might link to your page using the URL of that page as the anchor text. If your URL contains relevant words, this provides users and search engines with more information about the page than an oddly named parameter would. The image to the left is a graphic that helps to visualize the structure of SnoCon’s site based on the pattern of HTML tags used in that particular site.
4.3 **Search Engine Optimization Tips**

After careful review of Snowboard Connection’s current website, it has been determined that the client would benefit from a Search Engine Optimization plan since it is a site that is open to everyone, with a main business goal of selling products. Successful optimization of Snocon’s site focuses on a few key areas:

- Keyword Research
- Competitor Analysis
- Content
- Site maps and XML
- Link building

(Section 3.2 of this report provides the necessary background information in the form of keyword research, competitor findings, content analysis, and more.)

SnoCon’s site contains many opportunities for quick SEO fixes, as well as more lengthy SEO projects. Simple fixes include the careful choices associated with appropriate Titles and Description tags (ideally each page on the site should have its own unique title and description), Alt tags, Headlines, and Category Pages. Specific optimization for high impact keywords should be performed on key landing pages (i.e., homepage, snowboard page, site info) at first, with additional optimization throughout to follow.

Additionally, the creation of more content, as advised with both the homepage and the blog page, as well as generally speaking, will ensure the creation of more keyword dense text and tags, as well as provide the opportunity to increase cross-links within the site exponentially.

Another recommendation would be starting a link building campaign; a site with more in-bound links makes the site a more attractive link prospect. Further, by promoting the site to its users, they too can contribute content which further helps SEO. *(See Appendix # 6.8: SEO Proposal)*
4.4 **Social Media Campaign**

Not every social media channel will bring about the positive feedback you desire. The recommendation is that SnoCon reverses its lack of social commitment by interacting on a more regular basis with followers on Twitter and Facebook. Given the content available, it is also highly advisable that the company starts a YouTube Channel and interacts on major snowboarding community sites. It may also be beneficial to get on Tumbler since there is talk about the K2 brand, but SnoCon isn’t there to monitor the brand. Another immediate quick fix is posting links to social media profiles prominently on the website and in multiple places.

Decide who on the team will be in charge of executing your social media plan. Remember, it is not about the quantity, it is about the quality. It takes time and effort to be continuously involved in conversations, posts, chats and/or forums regarding Snocon’s products and services. A 12-month social media campaign has been prepared for Snowboard Connection that utilizes an integrated strategy to connect with groups of potential and current customers, locally and nationally. The proposed plan carefully articulates the steps and requirements for Snowboard Connection to make a successful and necessary entry into several of the most popular and relevant social networking sites and communities. (See Appendix 6.6: Social Media Proposal)

**Revitalize Twitter**

The overarching goal re-kicking off SnoCon’s Twitter campaign is to broaden the company’s network and drive more customers to the website, thus increasing sales. Twitter can assist with research and marketing analysis, networking, expanding the customer base, and reputation/brand management. Attracting followers takes time and is dependent upon the quality of the content tweeted. Followers, either consciously or unconsciously, judge a company’s tweets on whether or not the content is interesting and relevant to them. This makes “quality” king, with interactivity playing a huge supporting role. A very important tactic for this kick-off campaign is developing relationships with followers, responding to inquiries/comments, and retweeting messages – basically just join the conversations in the Twittersphere. This demonstrates that SnoCon is an active participant in the community and not seeking (solely) selfish gains.

Twitter is appropriate for SnoCon because the company has much to gain and a lot to offer the Twitter community. A search on Twitter shows that people are talking about SnoCon; this is a great opportunity for them to cash in on positive reviews and to restore good faith in those customers who had less than a positive experience with them. Relevant content at their fingertips that could be distributed to interested followers (blog, snowcam, etc.). (See Appendix 6.7: Twitter Proposal)

**Create YouTube Channel**

SnoCon should immediately implement a YouTube strategy. As a group, snowboarders are likely to shoot their own videos, share videos, and seek out videos made by industry companies. With the ubiquitous nature of smart phones, and the ever increasing quality of the video on these phones, this trend should continue to grow. Participation in the online video world will encourage customer participation with the brand.
Participate in Online Community Forums
With the internet’s roots based in social networking it is no surprise that social media sites have continued to grow and develop, flourishing today. Community and forum sites continue to crop up, catering to every imaginable interest, hobby and topic. But a relatively small number of businesses that have yet to tap into the pools of potential customers that these communities offer. Members or participants of these groups have already displayed an interest or a need that could potentially be acted upon by a related company. There are numerous mentions of the K2 brand on these various forums, and though there doesn’t appear to be anyone from SnoCon jumping into the conversations it is hard to tell (since there are no references to or links back to SnoCon’s website). It is our recommendation that SnoCon begins to immediately actively engage in snowboarding-specific communities and forum sites. Users and visitors of these sites are past, present and prospective SnoCon customers – a concentrated grouping of prime target audience members.

Fortify Facebook
The main suggestion for SnoCon is to start posting more comments, and responding to the posts of fans. When posting, use a viable conversation topic. SnoCon should be examining its “Insights” which has a wealth of rich statistics. The most visible app benchmark is Monthly Active Users (MAU); you can also look at number of fans, new fans, removed fans, wall posts, reviews, page views, etc. Add more photos (create albums that include team members at SnoCon, riders who use SnoCon equipment, etc.), and upload videos.

There is a great opportunity to cross-pollinate various social media profiles with existing content by using blog content as Facebook posts. Alternatively, a link could be posted on Facebook to the blog. A third more time-intensive step involves adding the Static FBML application to SnoCon’s page so that a customized Facebook “homepage” can be created. Anyone can build a fan page, but those who are doing it right are the ones who are actively engaging with customers. Some of the top-rated fan pages include: Pringles, Starbucks, and Adidas. Below is a screenshot of Starbucks custom-designed Facebook fan page.

4.5 Know Your Budget
Before you begin, estimate your budget. Many of the recommendations made within this report can be completed by in-house personnel, but if there isn’t the manpower to accomplish this then outside vendors must be hired. Have a clear idea of your goals and the results you would like to see before approaching web/SEO vendors.
APPENDIX 5.1: SnoCon’s Competitors

The names, url and link # (based on the Google SERPs for the search term: K2 snowboard) of SnoCon’s direct competitors are listed below:

1. K2 snowboarding - k2snowboarding.com/
2. Same company as #1 (K2 snowboarding) k2snowboarding.com/team/gretchen_bleiler
3. Same company as #1 (K2 snowboarding) k2snowboarding.com/snowboards/darkstar-wide
4. The House Boardshop - www.the-house.com/vendor-k2shop.html
5. Skis.com - www.skis.com › Snowboard
6. Outdoor Gear - www.usoutdoorstore.com/k2-snowboards.htm
7. Ripping Style - www.rippingstyle.com
8. REI - www.rei.com/brand/K2/c/40003930
10. Eternal - www.etrailsonline.com/brands/k2-snowboarding.html
12. Tactics - www.tactics.com
14. Same company as #1 (K2 snowboarding) k2snowboarding.com/team/eero_niemela
17. www.skichalet.com/Snowboards_s/5.htm
20. www.skipro.com
22. www.porterstahoe.com/brands/K2%20SB.asp
23. www.dogfunk.com/k2-believer-snowboard-k2s0608
25. www.sportchalet.com/category/shop+by+brand/k2.do
26. www.skigolf.com/
28. sporting-goods.shop.ebay.com/Snowboarding-/21247/i.html
29. www.djsboardshop.com/
30. www.skis.com › Snowboard › Snowboard Boots › Snowboard Boot
31. www.proboardshop.com › ... › Snowboard Bindings
32. store.christysports.com/catalog/board_shop/
33. www.smarter.com › ... › Snowboarding Gear
34. www.evo.com › ... › Snowboard Boots › K2 Snowboard Boots
35. www.tactics.com › ... › Snowboard Bindings › K
45. www.trails.com › ... › Snowboarding › Snowboard Bindings
50. www.skis.com › Snowboard › Snowboard Boots › Snowboard Boots
54. www.evo.com/shop/snowboard/bindings/k2.aspx (same as #16)
55. www.specialtysports.com/K2-snowboard-snowboarding.../231.htm
APPENDIX 5.2: Back Links

Total of 109, 73 unique (from Alexa)

- cgi.ebay.ca/BRAND-NEW-2010-GNU-Danny-Kass-Snowboard-155cm-C2-banana-370462633486?pt=Snowboarding&hash=item56414b2e0e
- faves.com/buzz/god
- www.mattcutts.com/blog/anti-google-claims-to-reply-or-not/
- Uncrate | The Buyer's Guide For Men
- Picsearch - tu máquina de búsqueda para imágenes
- Complex Magazine
- Volcom | Youth Against Establishment
- highsnobiety.com: Home
- Fluther: Tap the Collective
- www.avantlink.com/clients/merchant-details/10533/snowboardconnection/
- Silverfish Longboarding - Longboarding Reviews, Forums, Videos And More...
- Freethings,baby Coupons,diaper Coupons,freebabystuff,shopping Codes,formula Cou
- Seattle restaurants, events, shopping & classifieds | NWsource
- forums.skateperception.com/index.php?showtopic=176947
- Yo Beat Magazine 1997-2003 1024 X 768 420!
- community.burton.com/forums/thread/444788.aspx
- Uw Student Web Server
- The World’s Best Ever:design, fashion, art, music, photography, lifestyle,
- www.snowboardingforum.com/307854-post4.html
- coolmaterial.com/gear/burton-love-snowboards/
- www.formetocoupon.com/merchantsList
- jakeldaily.com/yes-im-still-alive-and-well/
- Change Yourself, Change Your Wealth
- Internet Marketing Online - Blog about SEO, PPC and Internet Marketing
- www.couponsaver.org/snowboard-connection-coupons-codes.html
- www.summitatsnoqualmie.com/Youth/Events/1370/Boxes-for-Days
- beerpla.net/2010/02/16/my-hands-on-review-of-2010
- Lib Tech Snowboards 2008-2009
- Junglecity.com
- Thirtytwo Advanced Snowboard Footwear
- Tech, Fun, This n That at www.Hem.com.np
- Joe Bartender - Mixed drink recipes and bartending guide
- 2007 / 2008 Snow & Skateboard Catalogs
- Mg Snowboard Foto - Trick - Freeride - Freestyle - Camp - Viaggi - Halfpipe
• www.avantshare.com/blog/category/avantlinkcom-new-merchants/page/10/
• www.boardriderlounge.com/merchants/item/snowboard-connection/
• GPT Sites and Tips | Get Paid to Sites | Free Paid Surveys
• neilhartmannlife.wordpress.com/2007/09/
• Gnu Snowboards
• Bones Bearings | Engineered For Skateboarding
• www.newsnotion.com/26-earned-from-moola/
• indie music and art - REDEFINE MAGAZINE
• Ashbury Eyewear
• Extreme Outdoor Adventure Sports Directory: Gravitydex.com
• e-cash-advance.net/index.php
• www.superfish.com/?src=logo
• Snocon
• Blogs is Watching - A Seattle hip-hop lifestyle blog.
• frequency :: The Snowboarders Journal - Snowboard
• www.ogeblog.com/
• www.sparkrandd.com/dealers/washington/
• www.yesnowboard.com/dealer-locator/
• South Lake Union
• www.smokinsnowboards.com/buynow/online-dealers
• www.paristruckco.com/contact/warranty-inquiries/
• Husky Winter Sports Online
• nitrosnowboards.fr/de-US/dealers/country/us
• sushi restaurants bars & recipes - SUSHI MONSTERS
• blog.seattlepi.com/snowboarding/index.asp?page=2
• www.northwestlongboarding.com/cgi-bin/nwlb/forum/display.html?mv_arg=TOP114072
• www.reigncity.com/about/
• shredunion.wordpress.com/
• skatelikeyagirl.com/
• snowboardmag.com/stories/boxes-days
• webnamelist.com/alexa/Alexa_88.html
• www.zuzupopo.com/xe/?mid=shop&page=2
• www.arborcollective.com/2010/10/
• www.specialsavings.com/forum/similarproducts/done.html
APPENDIX 5.3: Search Results

Search Results (Pages 1-6):
Product Search: Search Term: K2 Snowboard

1. k2snowboarding.com/
2. k2snowboarding.com/team/gretchen_bleiler
3. k2snowboarding.com/snowboards/darkstar-wide
4. www.the-house.com/vendor-k2shop.html
5. www.skis.com › Snowboard
6. www.usoutdoorstore.com/k2-snowboards.htm
7. www.rippingstyle.com
8. www.rei.com/brand/K2/c/40003930
9. www.k2sports.com/
10. www.eternalsnow.com/brands/k2-snowboarding.html
11. www.groundzeroboardshop.net/
12. www.tactics.com › Snowboard Shop › K2
14. k2snowboarding.com/team/eero_niemela
15. www.backcountry.com/k2-snowboards
17. www.skichalet.com/Snowboards_s/5.htm
18. www.trails.com › Snow & Ice Sports › Snowboarding › Snowboards
19. www.boardreviews.com/
20. www.skipro.com/
22. www.porterstahoe.com/brands/K2%20SB.asp
23. www.dogfunk.com/k2-believer-snowboard-k2s0608
24. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K2_Snowboards
25. www.sportchalet.com/category/shop+by+brand/k2.do
26. www.skigolf.com/
27. snowboardreviews.com/
28. sporting-goods.shop.ebay.com/Snowboarding-/21247/i.html
29. www.djsboardshop.com/
30. www.skis.com › Snowboard › Snowboard Boots › Snowboard Boot
31. www.proboardshop.com › ... › Snowboard Bindings
32. store.christysports.com/catalog/board_shop/
33. www.smarter.com › ... › Snowboarding Gear
34. www.evo.com › ... › Snowboard Boots › K2 Snowboard Boots
35. www.tactics.com › ... › Snowboard Bindings › K
APPENDIX 5.3: Search Results cont.

37. answers.yahoo.com › ... › Sports › Winter Sports › Other - Winter Sports
38. twitter.com/k2snowboarding - Cached
39. www.amazon.com/K2-ShSB-Shooter-Snowboard.../B002JUG11G
41. www.grindtv.com › Brands › Snow
42. k2skis.com/helmets/clutch
43. www.consumeraffairs.com/recalls04/2008/k2Bindings.html
44. fresh.snowboardermag.com/feature/best-of-test-2011-3-k2-fastplant/
45. www.trails.com › ... › Snowboarding › Snowboard Bindings
46. www.snowboarder.com/snowboarder/k2-believer-snowboard
47. www.epinions.com › Sports & Outdoors › Sport and Outdoor
48. www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKcVq4swMM
49. www.techbargains.com/news_displayItem.cfm/240609
50. www.skis.com › Snowboard › Snowboard Boots › Snowboard Boots
52. www.snowboardconnection.com/brands.cfm?Brand=K2 -- Selected as our “client”
53. www.coolhunting.com/design/k2-snowboards-x.php
55. www.specialtysports.com/K2-snowboard-snowboarding.../231.htm
56. www.eternalsnow.com/.../k2-snowboarding/mens-k2-snowboards.html
57. issuu.com/sportive/docs/2011_k2snowboardsnz_catalogue
58. www.tactics.com/k2
The social network activities of five of Snow Connection’s competitors are analyzed below in case study format. The following competitors are analyzed:

1. Eternal Snow
2. K2 Snowboarding
3. Skis.com

CASE STUDY 1: ETERNAL SNOW

Overview:
Eternal Snow is primarily active on Facebook and Twitter. The campaigns are relatively similar and revolve around short announcements about sales at the store and contests the store is running. Occasionally the weather and snow conditions are mentioned too. The main goal seems to be to provide a presence in the social media sphere for the company, but it seems as if the company is not entirely sure what to do besides the continuing strategy of announcements and sales. Occasionally the company asks its customers for their input about snowboard related questions and then a flurry of interaction ensues.

Eternal Snow’s Facebook page is respectable. There are 1825 people on Facebook who “like” the page/company, as well as some use of the photo album capability. For instance, Eternal Snow attended a movie premiere and documented their presence through the photo album. Posts come in small bursts, a handful on a given day, then skip a few days. This frequency seems consistent except that there was no activity during January, a key month during snowboarding season.

Twitter (http://twitter.com/eternalsnowcom):
Eternal Snow’s Twitter activity mirrors its Facebook activity. They have 587 followers. The posts are fairly consistently a few times a week. Again, the use of Twitter is mostly to make announcements about the shop and its sales, as well as to announce contests and encourage customers to participate and to come into the store.

MySpace (http://www.myspace.com/23444844):
The Myspace page for Eternal Snow has been filled out and a profile set up. The content is minimal and repeats what is found on the main company website’s “About” page. There are no friends and no posts/blogs beyond the bare essentials of the profile page.
APPENDIX 5.4: Competitors’ Social Network Activities cont.

Snowboarding Oriented Community Sites:
Eternal Snow has a page on the community site SnowRev http://www.snowrev.com/Blogs/All/Proper-Places-Eternal-Snowboard-Shop. This site is specifically for snowboarding enthusiasts to interact. However, no other activity or post updates are present. The company appears to have become a sponsor of another community site, I-Shred.org (http://www.i-shred.org, http://www.i-shred.org/forumdisplay.php?13-EternalSnow.com) back in the Fall of 2010. However, participation by the company in the community appears limited to three posts.

Areas of Opportunity:
Increasing the types of posts which encourage consumer participation across both Facebook and Twitter is an immediate way the company can boost its social media strategy. The two sites are already decently utilized and followed, so it makes sense to build on those strengths. Because they are a snowboarding company, recommendations include to make use of Vimeo and YouTube. The sport of snowboarding is well represented in the online video world, and Eternal Snow even posts some of these videos, made by other companies, on their own blog. At minimum, Eternal Snow should have a branded YouTube channel featuring its own team riders and to foster interaction from other snowboarders via video. These videos can then be announced on Facebook and Twitter, and therefore increase their page views on all sites involved. The lack of a LinkedIn page seems an oversight for a company like Eternal Snow. As a major retail store and online store, the business could benefit from networking with other businesses in the industry, as well as riders.

Lastly, while it is certainly beneficial to have even a small presence on some snowboarding community sites, those profiles/blogs need to be updated from time to time. The same updated on at least a quarterly basis. This is especially true if participation on these sites is merely to have a presence. Participation should increase if the goals for being on these sites include building relationships with more potential customers and to increase brand awareness. The same is true for the MySpace profile page. Lastly, research should be done to determine the busiest and/or most relevant social networks online for snowboarders. If the time is going to be spent on these types of sites, it is logical to spend that time where the effort will have the greatest reach or the largest impact.

Conclusion:
Eternal Snow has a respectable presence on the two main social networking sites of the moment. However, with more carefully planned out strategies that interconnect (adding video to YouTube for instance), the efforts across all social sites would likely result in greater impact. Customers and participants in snowboarding are often eager to trade stories, photos, videos, and information. Eternal Snow needs to better capitalize on the nature of their customers to contribute content and interact with each other and relevant companies.
APPENDIX 5.4: Competitors’ Social Network Activities cont.

CASE STUDY 2: K2 SNOWBOARDING

Overview:
K2 Snowboarding is active on the two most (currently) popular social networking sites Face-
book and Twitter. Though the company also has a YouTube channel and a MySpace profile, activity on these sites can best be described as a “presence” since the communication is irregular with only far and few between updates. The company has yet to fully embrace the beauty of social networking by communicating with its customers on the less popular (at least at the moment) group sites targeted at the niche of snowboarders.

Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/k2snowboarding):
K2 Snowboarding runs a Facebook campaign that serves its purpose of informing friends/supporters/customers, but it doesn’t go “above and beyond”. Links to the Facebook page are featured prominently on the homepage, including the number of fans and a button to easily “like” the company, but there is only one other page within the site (the blog page) that links to or even informs a visitor that the company has a Facebook page. If a visitor happens to come through the site via an entryway other than the homepage, he or she will not see the Facebook link.

The Facebook profile page itself is complete, professional and up-to-date with links to the company’s website, Twitter profile, and a K2 Women’s Alliance Facebook page. The page has 25,730 fans (people who “like” it), 20 photo albums, and 25 videos posted. Over the past month, the frequency of posts averages out to about one per day, however, the pattern is more like post a couple one day, skip a few days, then post a few more. Judging by the fans’ responses (comments and the number of “likes”), it appears that fans enjoy the posts. For each post K2 Snowboarding made, at least six people liked with upwards of 40 people sometimes liking a post. The most interesting aspect of the company’s Facebook campaign is the lack of interaction. K2 Snowboarding does its job of posting, the fans do their job of responding, but K2 Snowboarding never responds back to people’s comments.

Twitter (http://twitter.com/K2snowboarding):
Twitter can be very beneficial to a company, but I don’t think K2 Snowboarding is using it to its full potential. The first obstacle is not having any link to the Twitter profile featured on the homepage. K2 Snowboarding’s Twitter campaign is similar in style and effort to its Facebook activity. K2 Snowboarding tweets between 1 and 2 times per day to its followers. Compared to other companies using Twitter, K2 snowboarding tweets seem to be aimed at entertaining its followers. An analysis of a two-week period showed every tweet contained a link, but these links weren’t to the company’s homepage. The links were to snowboarding videos, interviews, polls/surveys, magazine stories, etc. The followers of K2snowboarding know that they can expect
links that are actually of interest to them (and not shameless promotional plugs). But with that being said, there is a certain lack of “quality” to the links and not much personality. K2 doesn’t respond to other people, send @ messages to others, or do much retweeting. All their messaging is pretty one directional. There isn’t much of a conversation between K2 and its followers.

YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/K2SNOWBOARDING):
Running a YouTube channel is great, but it is even better when you keep it current. The last time that the profile was visited/updated was three months ago. The channel has 12 uploads, 23175 is the video with the most views (least views on one of their videos is 464), 4382 channel views, 223 subscribers and 35 friends. The creation of the page does show effort, but adding new content would benefit them greatly.

MySpace (http://www.myspace.com/k2snowboarding):
At one point the company had an active MySpace profile, but now it is nearly defunct. The last comment from a friend was 123 days ago. The number of friends stands at 4209. It would be worth the time and effort to sign back in and redirect all those old friends (who are actually still active on MySpace) to the Facebook page or Twitter profile.

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/company/k2-sports):
K2 Sports, which is the overarching company over the brand K2 Snowboarding, does have a LinkedIn profile that includes 442 followers and 131 employees.

Areas of Opportunity:
There are several areas of opportunity that K2 Snowboarding is missing out on that could help its online social presence. They might consider getting on Tumblr since there is talk about the K2 brand, but the company isn’t there to monitor the brand. They might also seek to get involved in Snowboarding forums such as “Snowboarding Forum - Snowboard Enthusiast Forums” (http://www.snowboardingforum.com/), Shred Union (http://www.shredunion.com/), and ABC Snowboarding Forum (http://www.abc-of-snowboarding.com/forum/gear-equipment/default.asp). There are several mentions of the K2 brand on these various forums, and though there doesn’t appear to be anyone from K2 Snowboarding jumping into the conversations it is hard to tell (since there are any links provided that direct back to K2 Snowboarding’s site). There is a lot of opportunity on Shred Union, another large snowboarding forum. The company should be reviewing the K2 brand and trying to improve image (i.e. look at bad ratings and learn, and/or try to assuage issues.)

Conclusion:
K2 Snowboarding is putting forth only the bare minimum. There are many other avenues that they could pursue and engage in to strengthen their online brand identity.
CASE STUDY 3: SKIS.COM

Overview:
Similar to most sports companies today, skis.com provides a presence on Twitter and Facebook. Unique however, may be their presence on YouTube; more about that soon. Firstly, regarding the common presence in the social-sphere, not much can be said other than a big lack of social commitment. Instead, most of the inputs seem to imply a rather official (i.e. advertising) commitment more so than even a courteous business presence (i.e. non-sale notifications). It is absolutely evident that the main purpose of their social presence is to have yet another place to put their coupons etc., at least the impression is as such. Of course, given the nature of the platform, one might spot an occasional shout-out, blog style question or newsworthy note. But being merely few and far apart, one might consider the forced “employee” facebook’ing or tweet’ing to be somewhat tedious potentially degrading as a social follower.

Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Skiscom/178528338207?sk=wall):
In contrast to the remainder of the companies by with our projects have evolved, it is rather safe to assume of weak marketing strategy for this company as they have been around much longer yet defend with a substantially less follower and like’r base. With just around 600 like’rs, the number is far shyer than what qualifies for competitive success within that particular social realm. Their trivial 11 wall posts within the last month out of which only three were socially “friendly” could reflect this lack “friendshippers”. Furthermore, out of those 3 only five like’r comments could be found, out which 1 replied: “Nothing will affect my snow day, but since you asked, YOUR COMPANY HAS PUT A DARK CLOUD over it. Your CUSTOMER SERVICE SUCKS!”

Twitter (http://twitter.com/skisdotcom):
The big lack of effort in the social-sphere can yet again be presented by evidence of their Twitter followers. At a staggering low number of 300, half of even their already low bid of followers on Facebook one might wonder if there is any success in the company at all. The tracking history of nearly 14 years for any company should likely have produced a better result. In regards to their tweets however, there is a feeling that the host author is different from whoever maintains their Facebook account. It certainly has a warmer welcome to it, less sales pitching and more connecting. There is plenty more interaction with followers all the while “friendly” updates are more frequent. Within the last month the scope of tweets is 20 long, doubled that of Facebook but with half the fans. Albeit, out of those 20 tweets, 10 were logged over a total of three days; an effort implying a severe absence of interaction.

YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/skisdotcom):
Aside from the lack of proper editing, these videos are very refreshing. Nevertheless, a lack of
regularity makes their YouTube page a quick fly by. There were three featurettes, all of which were uploaded within the same month. Even though a slight drawback, two of the videos that were suggesting the same thing were still aimed towards different audiences. Out of all the social choices for the company, this is certainly the stand-apart “wow” factor and embellishes both a freshly professional look as well as a “friendly” helpful outreach to users.

Areas of Opportunity:
When reviewing most of Skis.com’s social ventures, the big hitter for me was certainly the impression I attained with the browsing of their brief, vagabond YouTube presence. However, let’s take a step back and start with the Facebook agenda. While keeping in mind two audience categories, NEW and CURRENT, a quick mission be can extrapolated for both.

FACEBOOK: NEW is a category that really needs improvement. Once a new client finds themselves on the company’s Facebook site it should be noted that there is absolutely nothing of interest there. Not only will the stay be interruptedly short but it will also leave the most insignificant impression possible. Hopefully a new user will like the page, but let assume the “not” factor. Desperately needed are more pictures, after all, isn’t that what Facebook is about? There’s a few posted already but they are random and have little significance to the idea of the page or ideology of the company; more of skiing, snowboarding, events and possibly cool products. First impression is everything!

FACEBOOK: CURRENT is the more important sub category. One “wow” factor for the new user is to see a level of commitment by current users; therefore maintaining current users is somewhat like a catch 22 for attracting new users. The given category menu shows items for Photos, Reviews, Discussions and Notes. Only one category is actually being used. While attending events, more pictures should be taken of fellow skiers (who would gladly join to view their own pictures). This way, new users would not only be invited indirectly by photographed peers, but would also enjoy seeing the social engagement effort by skis.com. Additionally, as for reviews, a certain number of them could be requested from employees considering as they should supposedly recommend products and ski venues with respect to the company’s interests. This would in return likely attract follower reviews. Thirdly, the discussion is just simply not going to be initiated by any random follower. Understandably, this should be afforded an input by the company just as should the Notes management.

TWITTER: BOTH. This category has been sufficiently covered with respect to the social follower and audience variety. Nevertheless, digressing from the positives at hand, one might consider the marketing agenda for a minute. Not short from the small amount of tweets per day while infrequent on daily basis, there is just too much suggestive selling present. Due a neglect to the
follower's prerogative, the company bluntly pursues a strong and frequent intermediate sales gimmick and therefore possibly rewards themselves with a high turn over ratio rather than keeping current followers at the same time as attracting new ones. Being that the follower number is so low and given the possible length of domicile at twitter indicates such a growth stagnation. The immediate conclusion here is to balance the sales with more/regular tweets.

YOUTUBE: BOTH. Lastly, a strong player in marketing: motion. Considering the type of media most of us pay attention to, be it intentionally or not, audio and video must simply be of a paramount influence. It is very interesting how a few videos on a company’s online presentation bears such a colorful change in impression. I think the company should change two things above all. It should post more videos, even if reviewing products, as it is appealing and sales friendly to any arbitrary user. Primarily though, it should come to a strong consideration that the social links on the company website, including their location should be more pronounced and that random video feeds from the Skis.com YouTube listing should be shown on the main page. This way, more motion (oddly simulating dynamic interaction) is available on the main page and when clicking on the video the user is redirected to the company’s YouTube listing of videos and product reviews. Obviously, subliminally positive product videos will be on the menu where hence one might hope to find the user back at skis.com for some shopping.

Summary:
With a swift attention to details of the track record of the company’s social campaign, it should be considered that the broad presence is less important than a strong delivery of each respective social communication tool. Even if temporarily leaving Facebook and Twitter as they are interacted with currently, a focus on the above mentioned YouTube ideas could be effective. Second to that, the tweets and like’s can be improved with a more varied content with references to those videos from both the other tools.
The Twitter campaigns of five of Snow Connection’s competitors are analyzed below in case study format. The following competitors are analyzed:

1. K2 Snowboarding
2. Backcountrycom
3. The-House
4. Eternal Snow
5. Skis.com

CASE STUDY 1: K2 SNOWBOARDING

Website: http://k2snowboarding.com/
Twitter handle: @K2snowboarding

Followers: 6,272

Single Minded Message:
We create original concepts and technology that drives snowboarding forward.

Description:
Born in the Pacific Northwest in the shadows of the Cascade Mountains, K2 Snowboarding was raised in the backcountry of Baker. From the beginning, our goal has been to create original concepts and technology that drives snowboarding forward. 20 years later, we continue to innovate and progress the sport from the backcountry to the parks…and everything in between.

Campaign Summary:
K2 Snowboarding tweets between 1 and 2 times per day to its followers. Compared to other companies using Twitter, K2 snowboarding tweets seem to be aimed at entertaining its followers. An analysis of a two-week period showed every tweet contained a link, but these links weren’t to the company’s homepage. The links were to snowboarding videos, interviews, polls/surveys, magazine stories, etc.

The link to the survey that K2 tweeted has already been viewed 3500+ times so they are definitely getting the word out. The followers of K2snowboarding know that they can expect links that are actually of interest to them (and not shameless promotional plugs). But with that being said, there is a certain lack of “quality” to the links and not much personality. K2 doesn’t respond to other people, send @ messages to others, or do much retweeting. All their messaging is pretty one directional. There isn’t much of a conversation between K2 and its followers.
CASE STUDY 2: BACKCOUNTRY

Website: http://www.backcountry.com/
Twitter handle: @backcountrycom

Followers: 8,292

Single Minded Message:
Where the passion-addicted outdoor fanatics go to buy gear

Description:
This is where it all started. Our roots were simple but our vision was and still is clear; Backcountry.com is dedicated to being the best online retailer of the best built outdoor and backcountry gear on the planet. From the start our founders were intent on selling quality gear over the Web and what they found was that if the content is good and the products of the finest quality that people will come. If you’re as intense about your gear as you are about your adventures then you’re in the right store. Our buyers have been intense about scouring the planet for the top gear you demand. In our store, you’ll find the best gear from top brands like The North Face, Black Diamond, Petzl, Mountain Hardwear, Arc’teryx, Salomon, and more. With over 250 brands and nearly 50,000 products, Backcountry.com offers a wide array of the absolute best-made gear including backpacking, camping, skiing, snowboarding, rock climbing, kayaking, mountaineering gear and more, all at competitive prices. If you can’t find a piece of gear on Backcountry.com, it’s likely not a piece of gear you really need. The type of gear found on Backcountry.com is indicative of the types of employees we have and attract. This passion for climbing, skiing, snowboarding, trail running, and a list of other outdoor sports crosses over to our desire to excel and succeed as a company team. It’s evident in all we do and has translated to our continued success. (http://www.backcountrycorp.com/corporate/section/1/store/bcs/store_detail.html)

Campaign Summary:
Backcountry.com is an active twitterer, averaging about 8 tweets per weekday (and about one on the weekends). This company’s twittering technique relied heavily upon retweets and links to videos, articles as well as links back to their site for sales/offers. Backcountry.com took a much more person approach. It felt like a “real person” was behind the Twitter profile, someone with opinions, personality and a genuine interest. Backcountry.com responded to customer questions, replied to people’s tweets, and gave snow updates.
This tweet is an example of the “personal” style that the backcountrycom takes. An opinion is stated and is a retweeted link (from someone with 9600+ followers) to a fun video.

Backcountrycom seems to be running a much more interactive twitter campaign than the one run by K2snowboarding. As you scroll through the tweets of Backcountrycom, the high-level of interaction with and between its followers. Backcountrycom has several different users commenting on their tweets, sending replies, retweeting messages, and more. This is an important tell-tale sign suggesting that Backcountrycom’s followers might be more interested/invested in the company than K2snowboarding’s followers. It is important for their to be multi-direction communication and Backcountrycom does is doing something right to initiate this.

**CASE STUDY 3: THE HOUSE**

Website: [http://www.the-house.com](http://www.the-house.com)
Twitter handle: @houseboardshop

Followers: 1659

Single Minded Message:
“Where Attitude is Everything” (this is their actual tagline and fits the brand)

Description:
The House is a large online e-tailer and brick and mortar store selling board sport gear. The company focuses on snowboards and related gear, but also sells skis, kayaks and other water sport related equipment, as well as bikes.

In business since 1982, the company prides itself on its long history in the snowboarding industry and also on its massive size. They have a large variety of snowboards and equipment for sale, and seek to convey the message that they are real and passionate about the sport, and have been before it exploded into the mainstream phenomenon that it is today.

Campaign Summary:
The House includes easy-to-find social media links, including Twitter, at the top right area of the home page.

Sample Tweets:
Am Riders & Videographers! Only 6 more days to enter @snowboardMag’s Am Throwdown!
**APPENDIX 5.5: Competitors’ Twitter Use cont.**


We’re headed to SIA tradeshow this week to scope out all of next years new product! What brands are you most stoked to hear about? 4:26 PM Jan 25th via Tweetie for Mac

We still have a @burtonsnowboard down jacket to give away on #FF! Follow & Mention @houseboardshop for a chance to win! http://bit.ly/fHnlHd 3:00 PM Jan 24th via Tweetie for Mac

Couple more hours left in our weekly facebook humpday contest. Git’ on it! http://www.facebook.com/#!/HouseBoardshop 3:19 PM Jan 19th via Tweetie for Mac

The-House Tweets 2-3 times per day several days per week. The Tweets are aimed at encouraging customer and potential customer participation in various company related giveaways and contests, and sometimes link to the Facebook page for the company as well. These efforts serve to keep customers engaged with the company’s social element of marketing. By tweeting often and having multiple giveaways and contests, they can keep the same customers participating over time. By involving other social media sites like Facebook, they can gather more potential customers through activity on their Facebook page.

Other Tweets often found are for contests at industry related companies such as Snowboard Magazine and about the company’s activities like attending a trade show or having a professional rider visit their physical store. These types of tweets spread The-House’s name around the industry where similar customers are likely to congregate, thus broadening their reach and potential customer base.

Combining various types of Tweets, The-House supports its main message “Attitude is Everything” by showing that it is active across the industry, that it is a real business interacting with real athletes in snowboarding, and by encouraging participation by the everyday snowboarder as well.

**CASE STUDY 4: ETERNAL SNOW**
Website: http://www.eternalsnow.com
Twitter handle: @eternalsnow

Followers: 581
APPENDIX 5.5: Competitors’ Twitter Use cont.

Single Minded Message:
“Snowboarding to the Core”

Description:
Eternal Snow is an online ecommerce sight for snowboards and gear, as well as a bricks and mortar store in Reno, NV. The company has been in business since 1994. It describes itself as being snowboarder owned and operated, and ensures customers that it only sells equipment they actually use and can recommend from experience. Their location near snowboarding hotspot Lake Tahoe, CA further lends credibility to the company and its employees. Additionally, the company only sells true snowboarding gear, what they describe as “core,” meaning that the products stocked come from companies dedicated to snowboarding, not those who got into the industry late or as an off shoot of a ski company.

Campaign Summary:
Eternal Snow generally tweets less often than The House. The tweets tend to come in flurries, 3-4 on a day, then they will go a few days without tweeting. The tweets include personal types of tweets and small conversations with other users on Twitter, including those participating in company giveaways. Sample tweets of this nature include the following:

@chrischamp shoot your address over - check messages for email addy Wednesday, February 02, 2011 11:11:28 AM via HootSuite in reply to ChrisChamp

Shaun_White is a cone killer! I say nice. You? RT @GrindTVSnow Bf goodrich and @Shaun_white ... Thoughts?? http://yfrog.com/h5vypdukj 5:52 PM Jan 26th via web

lmfao RT @tonyhawk My 2-year-old daughter just told me she has 2 turntables & a microphone. She isn’t sure where it’s at though... Wednesday, February 02, 2011 9:57:30 AM via HootSuite

On the company’s home page, they have a running display of their Twitter activity as seen here:

The company encourages user participation through Twitter by offering quick small contests as seen here:

first three people to retweet my next tweet get a free volcom trucker hat! 9:38 AM Feb 2nd via HootSuite

This type of little contest or giveaway happens every few days and ensures at least some
retweeting and spreading of the company’s presence across Twitter and potentially other social media. These Tweets also encourage customers and potential customers to check back often.

Tweets that point to videos and other industry related sites are also present:

first three people to retweet my next tweet get a free volcom trucker hat! 9:38 AM Feb 2nd via HootSuite

The company’s message of “snowboarding to the core” is supported through Twitter efforts in that the constant tone of the Tweets stays in step with the cultural attitude of the sport at large. Encouraging repeat customer visits and retweets serves to help spread the company's reach across social media and through the industry. Lastly, including the Twitter flow on their company home page indicates that Twitter is a focused element of their marketing plan, and allows customers to visit the web site while at the same time keeping them informed of contests, etc. through Twitter.

CASE STUDY 5: SKIS.COM

Website: http://www.skis.com
Twitter handle: @skisdotcom

Followers: 294

Single Minded Message:
The Ultimate Online Ski Shop

Description:
Skis.com is a retailer that has been in the skiing industry since 1990. The company owns and operates a number of retail stores and they have been using the Internet as an extension of their retail shops since 1997, that’s an amazing 14 years of experience on the Internet! They hope that people will find anything and everything they need for skiing right there at Skis.com.

Campaign Summary:
Skis.com seems to tweet about 2-3 times per day to its followers. Although it uses twitter as social outreach, its strategy isn't all too unfamiliar. It uses a mix of friendly messages with intermediate deals. I noticed however, that despite a standard but effective campaign such as showing current tweets activity on the company’s main website ‘skis.com’ is moving along hoping for an extravagant presence like so many others. The follower base is very small I
think, partially because of this reason. Another reason may equally be that the social invite is promoted at the very bottom of the page (which furthermore must be scrolled down to).

Nevertheless, an important fact to realize is that some of the followers interact avidly with the company tweeter (who seems to be a single individual). Albeit, I don’t think this is enough to denote a definite, proactive social marketing presence.

Company Sample Tweets:

Ski deals exposed! http://is.gd/RM9Aoe

Hey hey! How was everyone’s snow day? We see some of our followers hit the slopes! Tell us about it! [DO THEY REALLY?-Alvin]

Free shipping? Sure! Find out how to get free shipping on all of your orders this week. http://is.gd/xYv2KI
1. Statement of Purpose
The naturally occurring grouping of individuals around common interests has inherently cre-
ated several networks of snowboarders across the globe. Each snowboarder represents either
a current customer or a potential customer capable of impacting the business in both concrete
and intangible ways. The 12-month social media campaign presented here for Snowboard Con-
nection seeks to utilize an integrated strategy to connect with groups of potential and current
customers, locally and nationally. This proposal includes performance goals, objectives, case
studies, and a budget.

2. Goals
Four main goals are the target of a year-long social media campaign:
   a. Increase brand awareness and reach.
   b. Manage brand image across the snowboarding community.
   c. Establish and maintain credibility.
   d. Improved customer service and sales.

These four goals create an ongoing cycle and ecosystem of influence and results once they are
established.

Recommended plans for social media activities on 3 different networks:
1. YouTube
2. Community Forum sites
3. Facebook

YOU TUBE CAMPAIGN (ODOM)
Overview:
A snowboard shop such as Snowboard Connection should immediately implement a You Tube
strategy. As a group, snowboarders are likely to shoot their own videos, share videos, and seek
out videos made by industry companies. With the ubiquitous nature of smart phones, and the
ever increasing quality of the video on these phones, this trend should continue to grow. Partici-
pation in the online video world will encourage customer participation with the brand.

Goals:
Direct outcomes expected from the You Tube campaign are:

1. Increase brand awareness across a potential customer base. Over time, increased sales and
   word of mouth among snowboarders will result.
2. Drive immediate foot traffic into the retail location by announcing, via video, equipment giveaways. By augmenting Facebook or Twitter announcements of giveaways and contests with video, customers and potential customers are more likely to come into the store. Video offers a chance to see equipment in addition to merely reading about it, thus increasing customer interest.

3. Personalizing the staff and the online presence, which creates trust and credibility among potential customers. These types of videos might include “how-to,” equipment reviews, as well as team videos showing riders actually out on the mountain using equipment from the store.

Schedule:
1. Create a YouTube channel immediately. This can be done by the same person responsible for the online shop. Setting up a channel is relatively simple, and the company can incorporate its already striking logo, much as competitor “The House Snowboard Shop” has done.

An Example: The House is a major online board shop. Its YouTube channel reflects its web site logo clearly. At over 2000 subscribers, The House has more than 120,000 channel views, and more than 2.5 million upload views. Activity on the channel is consistent, both by the company and the users. Notice also the announcements regarding giveaways and equipment reviews.

2. Upload on a monthly basis a personalizing style video. A “how-to” or equipment review video, less than five minutes long, requires basic video and editing skills. As such, employees can shoot and edit the videos, and take turns starring in the videos. This way, costs are saved versus hiring a video production crew, and the employees will become known via the videos.

An Example: Surfside Sports shows how to repair a snowboard. 8 minutes long. Basic production value. This local ride shop has 103 subscribers, over 4000 channel views, and over 140,000 upload views.

3. Upload on a quarterly basis a more feature oriented video. This may take the form of team riders out on the slopes, equipment testing videos also performed on the slopes, as well as more “behind the scenes” styles of videos in which the team riders are interviewed individually. These videos will require more professional production, or more professional equipment.

4. Semi annually, upload a video that details a broad overview of advances in snowboarding technology and introduces new product brought into the store.

5. Upload short 30 second videos announcing contests and showing the winning gear. These take only a few moments to make and can again be done by staff on hand. The schedule for these types of videos is looser, and may follow the inflow of new inventory, or the changing of
the seasons. Right before and during snowboarding season are clear times to upload this kind of video. 12 videos should be the goal for the first year.

Total Videos Uploaded for the First Year: 30
Budget: $5000 total for the year. The bulk of this will go towards producing the four feature videos uploaded quarterly. A shift of duties at the staff level, to accommodate video responsibilities, will cover the other simpler, smaller videos and editing. For instance, scheduling staff members for video shooting during down times at the retail store, would allow the product reviews and contest giveaway videos to be accomplished on the clock.

Man Hours:
4 hours/month for “how-to” videos, including editing. Developing a formula will be key. 48 hours/year.
48 hours quarterly for feature video. 192 hours/year.
12 hours semi annually for product introductions. 24 hours/year
2 hours per month on contest and giveaway announcement videos. 24 hours/year.
4 hours per week maintaining the video presence online. This includes responding to questions and comments, and cross marketing on Facebook and Twitter. This also includes analysis on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis to determine the reach and impact the videos have, and to determine what changes to the campaign might be in order.

Conclusion of You Tube Campaign:
Careful planning, including scheduling, budgeting, timing, and resource allocation, will enable Snowboard Connection to make a smooth, and expected entry, into the online video social network. The most important result will be increased personalization and credibility of the brand, which in turn will encourage more subscribers and followers, thus extending the brand’s name recognition and customer/potential customer base. Additionally, by allowing customer interaction in this way, the opportunity is given to respond to customer wishes and concerns at a quick pace, and to stay on top of trends among snowboarders. With its ease of use, posting videos, then linking to them from other network sites, will increase their reach.

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SNOWBOARDING COMMUNITY/FORUM SITES (CASSIS)

Overview:
With the internet’s roots based in social networking – bulletin boards (BBC) – it is no surprise that social media sites have continued to grow and develop, flourishing today. Numerous community and forum sites continue to crop up, catering to every imaginable interest, hobby and
topic. What is surprising, though, is the relatively small number of businesses that have yet to tap into the pools of potential customers that these communities offer. Members or participants of these groups have already displayed an interest or a need that could potentially be acted upon by a related company.

A sampling of the most popular and/or relevant online social networks for snowboarders, the target audience of Snowboarding Connection, currently includes:

• Snowboarding Forum – (http://www.snowboardingforum.com/)
• Shred Union – (http://www.shredunion.com/)
• SnowRev – (http://www.snowrev.com)
• I-Shred.org – (http://www.i-shred.org/forum.php)

There are numerous mentions of the K2 brand on these various forums, and though there doesn’t appear to be anyone from SnoCon jumping into the conversations it is hard to tell (since there is no reference or links back to SnoCon’s website). It is our recommendation that SnoCon begins to immediately actively engage in snowboarding-specific communities and forum sites. Users and visitors of these sites are past, present and prospective SnoCon customers – a concentrated grouping of prime target audience members.

Goals:
Participation in these snowboarding-centered communities can come in many forms to serve a variety of goals, such as:

• Image Management – By actively engaging in these communities, SnoCon can intercept and remedy potential problems. Bad reviews get circulated much more often that good reviews, hence it is important to catch these early and remedy the situation. This is done by being involved in various community/forum sites and responding to complaints about products or service. The goal is to catch and respond to negative comments within 24 hours, but if that is not possible, responding at least within the week would work.
• Increase brand awareness – Generating “buzz” around SnoCon is easily accomplished by periodically and strategically mentioning the name of the company, linking to the company site (Facebook page, YouTube channel, etc.), and showing photos of the product.
• Establish credibility – SnoCon can become known as a reliable expert in the field of snowboarding by answer questions related to gear or giving opinions on best places to snowboard. Credibility will lead to both new and strengthened relationships with prospective and current/past customers.
APPENDIX 5.6: Social Media Proposal cont.

- Generate site traffic – One of the single most important of online sales is getting potential customers to the website. By interacting in online snowboarding communities and forums, links to the site can be shared, which will in turn drive visitors to the site.

Several opportunities exist for SnoCon to insert itself in online communities. As shown here in the main page of ABC, a variety of categories exist with significant opportunities for interacting with potential and existing customers.

Schedule:

Part 1: Build Up
- Month 1: Reconnaissance – Before jumping in to post and respond, it is important to study the interactions that are currently taking place. What are community members talking about? How do they talk to each other? How quickly do they respond to one another? Are they accepting of newcomers? Which, if any, competitors can you identify? One month should be spent getting acclimated to the targeted community sites/forums.
- Month 2: Answer – Begin by answering questions. It is important that SnoCon not be too pushy (by dropping the company name and including links too often) during the first few months. Respond to at least one question per day for a month and analyze how the community responds. Try to build rapport amongst users by making small talk and agreeing to general comments.
- Month 3: Manage – In addition to answering one question per day, begin searching for negative comments/poor reviews about SnoCon or its products and respond in a manner that attempts to resolve the issue at hand. (Work with a customer service rep if there are questions). It would also be acceptable to start offering your opinion on gear and related topics.
- Month 4: Insert – By this time, your presence is the community is accepted and you could start inserting the company name/links into the conversation, but not more than three times per week. You don’t want to seem like a spammer or lose your credibility as no one wants to feel “marketed to”.
- Month 5: Expand – Now that you are comfortable navigating and engaging in your targeted communities and forums, it is time to expand to a greater pool of potential customers. Many internet users rely upon sites such as Ask.com, Yahoo!Answers and ChaCha to find answers to their questions. A recent online search shows that “K2 snowboards” shows up several times in these popular “question-answer” sites. SnoCon should add these sites to their watch list and begin responding to questions when they appear. Setting a simple Google Alert would be a great way to stay notified of whenever the keyword “K2 snowboard” is used. The examples below show how SnoCon could respond to questions and add links that go back to the website.
APPENDIX 5.6: Social Media Proposal cont.

Part 2: Continuation

• Month 6-12: Business as usual – With the build-up stage complete, SnoCon can focus on continuing on the same path set forth in the previous six months, with a focus on the quality of the posts.

Man hours:
Each month, the same amount of time should be spent engaging in the online communities and forums. A minimum of 15 hours per week would ensure that all the steps above are covered (with high quality posts). Going above and beyond the 15-hour minimum would only increase the positive effects.

Budget:
Financing this portion of the social networking proposal depends on staffing. If someone who manages web and social media tactics is already employed by SnoCon, no extra money would be required for this particular strategy. If SnoCon doesn’t have someone to fill this duty, then the company might consider hiring a part-time worker, or full-time depending on other related needs.

FACEBOOK PRESENCE (MORADI)

Attracting customers:
Although campaigns over YouTube and forums are maintained, one other channel seemingly bears a larger importance. Today, Facebook retains some mind boggling 350 million connectors and continues to grow still, superseding even Google, makes it the most accessed website on earth. This fact alone makes Facebook a major player in the marketing world and also makes it paramount to our cause. What is important about this social channel is the way media is presented, namely exactly how today’s youth, a.k.a. a snowboard generation prefer to share their lives. Videos, Pictures, Status, Discussion; all of what other social tools have to offer plus a little more.

Goals:

• Increase followers as obviously, there are more snowboarders and Facebook users
• Increase awareness of SnoCon, culture presence and daring attitude
• Attract consumers to store locations (through proper presentation)
• Prove the company’s willingness to port social connection
APPENDIX 5.6: Social Media Proposal cont.

Scheduling:
(1) The next step for the companies is to compare their sites and social connections with others. First part is to add a proper menu. Once an element has become too common, it is hard to make it noteworthy. One example is the menu’s provided in Facebook. Most of us know what that looks like when enter, the standard “Wall, Info, Photos, Videos” line up. The bigger problem with SnoCon’s however, is that it’s missing entirely. Example:

As can be seen in the first pic above, The House also has an additional menu item above the standard, i.e. “The Big Idea” Although empty, definitely calls ones attention more as most don’t have those extravagant sections. Additionally, a top menu is more visible than what is seen to the left at SnoCon:

(2) All menu items that are available should either be used or removed. Looking at the image above, seasoned facebook users would quickly notice the little gray numbered parenthesis after each menu element. Most people would inherently attain a feeling of lack of “attendance” when visiting any venue, site or event that is noticeably half empty. The House, once again a prime example has more menu categories populated than most other Facebook pages regarding snow sports. While some of our known competitors are truly lacking within this field, with only photos and wall to show for their progress; it truly allows us a big advantage should SnoCon fill these menu categories in properly.

(3) The most important part for improvement looking at the picture above, though small, is definitely the brief information section (e.g The House):

When a visitor views the site, should it not be immediately presented where we are located for people to realize: “Oh, they’re right up the street from us, let me browse a little more. Wow, I guess the snowboard I was buying has bad reviews here. Ok, I’ll call them to see what they suggest.” To summarize, the former sentence about location is unknown at first impression. On top of that, SnoCon provides little reasons for a professional understanding about the subject at hand. Anybody can post pictures and maintain a wall about snowboarding. So not only should we present a little more information on the main Facebook page, but is should also been known via reviews, suggestions and video links to the youtube page suggested in the previous category; that SnoCon is a wealthy knowledge base.

Labor & Budget:
Surprisingly, unlike the two previous categories, i.e. forums and videos, Facebook is more widely used and in the truest sense, requires a lot less effort.
APPENDIX 5.6: Social Media Proposal cont.

Labor
- 2 different users to update the website plus 1 to initiate the reviews.
- 1 hr. respectively for updating and 2 hrs. for reviews.
- 2 users á 1hr/wk. to maintain all menu categories and 1 user á 2hrs/wk. for reviews
- One additional man hr./wk. to research info with gathering of, including pictures.

Budget (very highball)
- Initial fix-up work of 4hrs á $15/hr, ca $60.
- Weekly maintenance 3hrs á $15/hr, ca $45, yearly $2340.
- Weekly pictures and info gathering 1hr á $15/hr, ca $15, yearly $780.

7. Budget Summary
After a year of running a well-planned campaign, the efforts will have attracted online attention to compete with SnoCon’s competitors as SnoCon will have covered all and conclusively more aspects of social engagement than what can be noted for each individual competitor. Nearly 50 hours of online videos regarding notices and reviews, a likely 1500 informational and communicative threads accounting for about 30mins total on each thread in responses and initiation over a year’s time. This equates to 6 responses per thread per day, ongoing for 30 days continuously; assuming that is the life expectancy of any particular thread; and that is still superfluous at a staggering 120 responses total per thread. Furthermore, a Facebook fan page with a possible 2000 pictures and 4000 comments, accounting for 10 pictures and 20 comments per work hour including the gathering of pictures for 1 hr total per week as auxiliary and accumulated hrs added to any particular event. This is all on top of all the cross marketing performed between these social tools. Cross marketing will be done frequently at an intermediary basis totaling 1 hour per week.

Labor cost (rounded over the year)
- Videos - production, uploads and maintenance: ~290hrs
- Forums - initial and thread responses: ~780hrs
- Facebook - uploads, link preparations and comments: ~210hrs
- Cross Marketing - referencing and category setups: ~50hrs

Budget cost (rounded over the year)
- Videos - production, uploads and maintenance: ~$5000 @ $17/h
- Forums - initial and thread responses: ~$0 @ $0/hr (inclusive by all media employees)
- Facebook - uploads, link preparations and comments: ~$3120 @ $15/hr
- Cross Marketing - referencing and category setups: ~$0 @ $0/hr (by media employee)

Total cost for 12-month campaign: $8120
APPENDIX 5.6: Social Media Proposal cont.

8. Conclusion
A snowboard shop such as Snowboard Connection should immediately implement a strong social media strategy. The proposed plan detailed above carefully articulates the steps and requirements for Snowboard Connection to make a successful and necessary entry into several of the most popular and relevant social networking sites and communities. The keystone of this proposal is active engagement; merely having a presence is not enough as the greatest benefits will be reaped when discussions are ongoing (not just few and far between). For a relatively small cost, about $8000, SnoCon will experience remarkable results, including increased brand recognition, more web traffic, and improved customer service, all of which will lead to a broader customer base, and potentially, more sales.
APPENDIX 5.7: Twitter Proposal

The Snowboard Connection website (http://www.snowboardconnection.com/) provides gear and accessories for outdoor enthusiasts running the gamut from snowboarders and skaters to surfers. A wide-variety of products and brands are available for purchase via the site’s online ordering system, which includes a customer account login option and shipment tracking. Complete company details, including telephone for ordering, are available.

What the site lacks in design aesthetics (some of the fonts are very small and the layout could use a tweak), it makes up for with unique features, such as a link to the weather cam of the pass, blog and multiple views/images of products available for purchase. From the blog page, there is a link to the company’s Facebook profile, but this is not visible from the main pages of the site. It is also lacking promotion of another social media marketing strategy: Twitter. Snowboard Connection does not have a Twitter account linked to its webpage, and you can only find it in Twitter under it’s logo name (@snocon). Below I outline the strategy for a Twitter “Kick Off” Campaign.

Premise: The overarching goal of this campaign is to broaden the company’s network and drive more customers to the website, thus increasing sales. This can be done by re-kicking off its Twitter campaign (since fall the company has not been an active twitterer).

Tactics:
The ultimate goal of driving customers to the website can be accomplished by using Twitter to assist with research and marketing analysis, networking, expanding the customer base, and reputation/brand management. Attracting followers takes time and is dependent upon the quality of the content tweeted. Followers, either consciously or unconsciously, judge a company’s tweets on whether or not the content is interesting and relevant to them. This makes “quality” king, with interactivity playing a huge supporting role.

Snowboard Connection could use Twitter in several different ways to generate more traffic to the site and increase sales. In the fall, it used to Twitter to announce events, which was a good start but no activity has occurred over the past few months. One of the first tactics is to create and distribute a link to a poll (i.e. What types of glove are the best for snowboarders? Which boards handle powder best?), which creates an interactive environment for the followers and generates information on customers’ preferences/likes/dislikes. Snowboard Connection could also use Twitter to broadcast newsworthy links, such as snowboarders profiled in magazines, results at competitions, or YouTube videos. Linking to cool snowboarding videos would be a type of content that would engage the company’s targeted audience since it would be highly relevant to them. Other ideas for content include: pointing to useful snowboarding resources (product reviews), promoting upcoming events or job openings, repurposing material published
in the company’s blog, answering questions/giving feedback or advice on snowboarding or equipment, and sending links to the weather webcam and company’s Facebook page.

Some of the most successful Twitter campaigns executed by companies similar to Snowboard Connection involved a high-level of interaction between the company and the followers. Communication should not be one-way as Twitter is not designed as a broadcast medium. A very important tactic for this kick-off campaign is developing relationships with followers, responding to questions/comments, and retweeting messages – basically just join the conversations in the Twittersphere. This demonstrates that Snowboard Connection is an active participant in the community and not seeking (solely) selfish gains.

Another tenet of the re-kick-off campaign includes Snowboard Connection using Twitter as a brand monitoring tool. By actively searching for its name in the Twitter Search, Snowboard Connection can thwart customer service problems by replying to those users who tweet negatively about the company/website.

Cross-pollination of information and promotion is another key to success. Content can be reused – and should be reused. Snowboard Connection operates a blog and Twitter would be a great tool for circulating some of that content (which would later get the followers back to the blog and eventually the website). To some degree it appears that this is already happening between the Facebook account and the blog. Cross promotion is a useful tactic that involves asking a Twitterer to mention Snowboard Connection or its products in a tweet, and this favor is reciprocated by Snowboard Connection.

Why this approach is appropriate:
Using Twitter more prominently would be appropriate for Snowboard Connection because the company has much to gain and a lot to offer the Twitter community. A search on Twitter shows that people are talking about Snowboard Connection; this is a great opportunity for Snowboard Connection to cash in on positive reviews and to restore good faith in those customers who had less than a positive experience with them. Snowboard Connection has relevant content at their fingertips that could be distributed to interested followers (blog, snowcam, etc.).
After careful review of Snowboard Connection’s current website, we have determined that the client would benefit from a Search Engine Optimization plan since it is a site that is open to everyone, with a main business goal of selling products. Here are some, but not all, key points our team wishes to address:

• The current site is not search engine friendly. It did poorly in the search engine rankings and this can largely be attributed to the lack of content on the pages, but also to specific issues such as no headings and generic alt tags.
• Specific optimization for high impact keywords should be performed on key landing pages at first, with additional optimization throughout to follow. The addition of keyword dense content, cross linking between pages, as well as the previously mentioned implementation of heading and alt tags will increase visibility within search engines.
• Other Suggestions: There are several other suggestions we have, including revamping and strengthening your existing social media campaign, and including more useful information for your potential customers. Twitter, Facebook, and You Tube, along with some emphasis on major snowboarding community sites should be performed on a more regular basis.

Overview
We are proposing to work with SnoCon’s web team to optimize the site. This website will be search engine optimized and built to attract customers and encourage purchases. The overall goal of the site, like most other e-commerce sites, is to increase profits through online sales. Optimizing a website is one way to reach that goal faster. SEO works because it brings to the site a larger quantity of high quality visitors. In SnoCon’s case, this audience is comprised mostly of the 18-25 age range who enjoy high-adrenaline activities.

Objectives
These are the main objectives we will focus on in order of importance. If you want to add, delete, or change any objectives please let us know so we can adjust the project accordingly.

• Develop a website that attracts customers via ‘natural’ (organic) search engine marketing. Organic marketing results in customers who are typically more interested in your specific site and products, and thus arrive at the site already warmed to the idea of potentially making a purchase. Research shows that the customer base is often local, but the opportunity to broaden the company’s reach exists.
• Rework the website’s content to encourage customers to take an action (e.g. purchase gear).
• Revise the website so that it contains dynamic information.
Baseline/parameters
Before starting any marketing work for a new customer, it is important to establish some baseline data. The data will be used for comparison to data collected after the marketing plan is put in place. SnoCon is using Urchin (the precursor to Google Analytics) as its tracking mechanism. Baseline stats such as number of visits per day need to be recorded and saved.

SEO / Website Components
This project will mostly consist of revising SnoCon’s existing website to increase its market share. Here are some specific SEO steps that will be employed in this project. Note: this is not a comprehensive list, only the most important aspects are included.

• Keyword research and analysis for a maximum of 20 keywords or phrases.
• Competitive analysis for main keywords/phrases.
• Analysis of site architecture and linking structure.
• Analysis of HTML and page design structure.
• Content analysis and SEO copywriting.
• Recommendations for all of the above, as well as for necessary modifications to essential page text elements.
• Recommendations for improvement of page titles and meta tags for four (4) site pages.
• Hand submission of web site to major search engines and/or directories.
• Analysis and recommendations for external links to site.

Several types of SEO tools will be employed to help meet our objectives. We will use data and information from Google Insights and Rankings, Alexa, and a variety of other tools including: back link checker, search engine spider simulator, backlink anchor text analysis checker, keyword density checker, and more.

Deliverables
We would like to change things such as: URLs, default product listing on the Snow page, fully utilize content (from blog to social media sites), remove the IFRAME, etc.

Method of Tracking
The method of tracking must be pre-established and cannot be changed without mutual agreement. SnoCon is currently using Urchin as its tracking tool. Our suggestion is that Google Analytics be used the collection tool. This is what we selected as our tracking method because it measures thing such as:
How many visitors per day?
Where did they come from?
How long did they stay
Which pages did they visit

Project Cost
We would be charging the hourly rate of $100, with a maximum of 20 hours (a project total of $2000, but that if it was necessary we would continue working on an hourly basis of $100/hr.

Terms and Conditions
Please review some of the highlighted terms and conditions listed below. Please see the attached contract for more detailed information, especially in regards to payment.

• Guidelines
  ◦ The client understands that it is important that we receive any information (content) requested within 3-4 business days in order to stay on schedule.
  ◦ The client will supply our team FTP access to the SnoCon hosting server as well as web statistics software for the website (i.e. Urchin/Google Analytics)
• Payment schedule
  ◦ Prompt payment is required according to the schedule.
  ◦ An initial payment of 50% of the final estimated fee is due prior to work on the project being.
  ◦ If the project is in progress and then cancelled, the funds paid up until that time are non-refundable.
  ◦ If additional project goals cause the project to last longer than originally estimated, the cost will be $100/hour.
• Deliverables
  ◦ We cannot guarantee a definite number of hits per day, but we are confident you will see a dramatic increase in your online marketing efforts. You may have to be patient as results do not happen the day after optimization strategies are put in place.
  ◦ No web applications or web scripting are included in this project, if you wish to receive these services they must be discussed separately.

On-going Maintenance
On-going Maintenance can be done on a monthly basis. If the client would like, monitoring the performance of the pages in the search engines can be done more often, and detailed reports can be generated. At minimum, it is recommended that the site’s homepage and main subpages be monitored on a monthly basis. It is recommended that additional keyword research be performed on a monthly basis to ensure that any shifts in search term popularity are addressed. Additionally, regular (weekly if possible) research should be done to ensure that appropriate, timely keywords are being used within blog posts. This will enable the site to have more opportunity to capitalize on trends among customers.
web design • SEO • graphic design • branding • social media • public relations • visual communication • logo • editing • marketing • and more!

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