

Web shoppers are site-sensitive

Japanese want pizzazz, Germans no-nonsense, and we're in between

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VANCOUVER - The Germans like their websites straightforward, fairly colourless or even monochromatic, and with as few bells and whistles as possible.

The Japanese like their websites to have lots of warm, bright colours, plenty of animation, pretty photographs and a sense of friendliness about them.

And the North Americans -- Canadians and Americans -- like something in between.

These, at least, are the findings of a study into the vagaries of online shopping by Simon Fraser University professor of management and technology Dianne Cyr.

Cyr and her co-author and colleague, Hector Larios, studied the reactions of 120 people representing four nationalities to different websites prepared by the electronics giant, Samsung.

Last year, they conducted a series of tests and interviews among 30 people in Munich, 30 people in Boston, 30 people in Tokyo and 30 people in Vancouver to determine what they liked and disliked about the Samsung website.

They wanted to find out how comfortable people of different nationalities were in shopping online and whether customs and cultural predilections play a part in so-called "e-loyalty" the way they do in face-to-face business.

What they found, she said, is that of the four nationalities, Canadians and Americans are the most comfortable shopping online and the most likely to buy products from a website. (Books, music and videos are the most popular products bought online, though of the four nationalities, Canadians are the most likely to buy their groceries via a machine.)

They were followed in order by the Germans and Japanese, with the latter least likely to trust online shopping and the most suspicious of web security.

"Japanese tend to be the least trusting," Cyr said in an interview Wednesday. "They don't have as much online buying experience as North Americans do."

They also preferred eye-catching websites with warm colours, lots of animation, and

pleasant photographs of people, a very "personalized site," said Cyr.

By contrast, the Germans had little truck with such frippery. "The Germans liked professional colours like pale blues and greys, and they weren't interested in animation," Cyr said. "They were focused on getting into the site, getting their information and making a purchase."

Canadians and Americans fall somewhere in between. We like some pizzazz, but not too much. Colours should be appropriate and animation, if it exists at all, should never be distracting.

Canadians also have the greatest faith in using credit cards online. In fact, credit cards represent the most trusted method of payment for us, says the study.

Not so the Americans, Germans and especially the Japanese. They are much less trusting of credit-card payments, and prefer other ways of paying instead.

For the Germans and Japanese, a company's good name and reputation are the most important elements in determining the trustworthiness of a website and the product for sale. If they don't know about a company, says the report, they will seek out other people's opinions of it.

Here in North America, we are more likely to search for that kind of information on the web.

What Germans and Canadians do share is a conviction the price of a product is also considered as a measure of quality.

By contrast, the Americans and Japanese cite a product's brand as a more important factor in determining its quality.

What emerged from the study, said Cyr, is that people of different cultures and nationalities experience online trust in different ways, and that is something companies should keep in mind when they prepare websites for different audiences.

Full results are at www.loyalty.ca

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