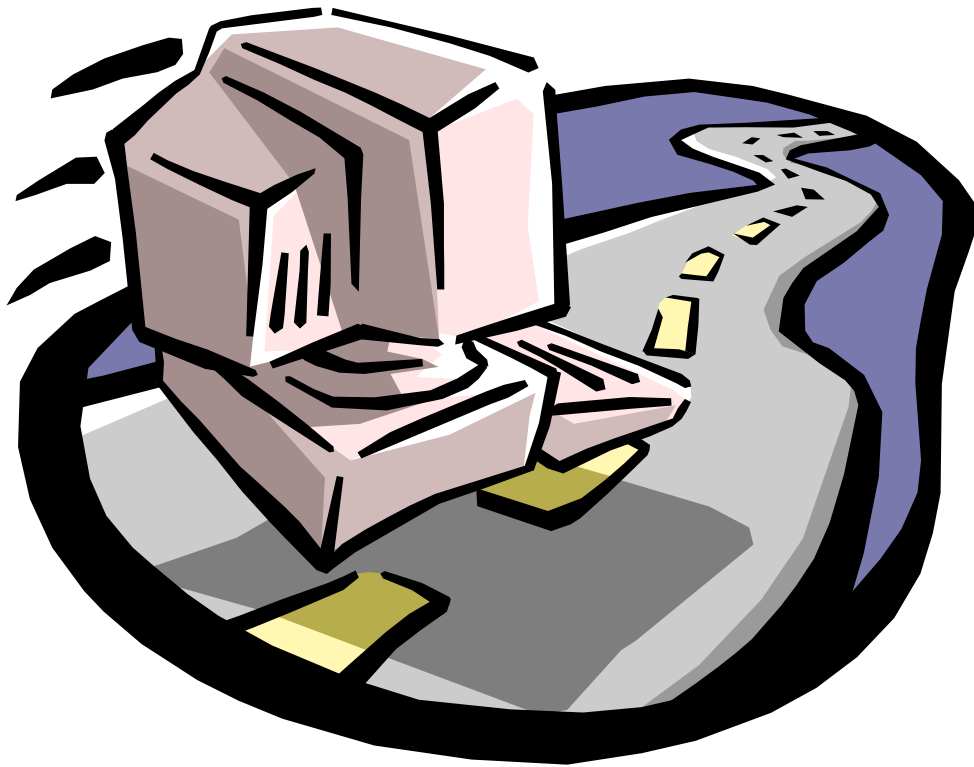


Car Rental Website Analysis

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I. Introduction

Industry Selected

The industry selected for this website analysis is the online car rental industry. The twelve websites originally selected for the evaluation consisted of the following:

1. Alamo.com
2. Hertz.com
3. Avis.com
4. Thrifty.com
5. CityRAC.com
6. Enterprise.com
7. AceRentACar.com
8. NationalCar.com
9. Budget.com
10. Cheepers.net
11. MidwestRentACar.USWestDex.com*
12. Dollar.com*

(Dollar Rent A Car and Midwest Rent A Car were not included in the evaluation process.)*

After determining that Midwest Rent A Car did not offer any type of online transaction process and that the same company that owns Thrifty Car Rental owns Dollar Rent A Car, the two sites were dropped from the evaluation.

Evaluation Explanation

The website evaluation consisted of three parts which included a technical, business, and overall evaluation of each site. Each of these areas was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

The technical evaluation rated areas such as content of the site, page design and layout, the usability of the site, and web features incorporated into the site.

The business evaluation rated the business characteristics that the site demonstrated. These areas included security of the site, methods of payment and reservation that were available, customer service, stickiness and value added by the site.

An overall rating was given to the selected car rental sites based on a combination of the final technical and business ratings.

The following process determined the overall ratings of the car rental sites. First, the individual category ratings from the technical evaluation were averaged to

come up with the final technical rating. Next, the individual business category ratings were averaged to calculate the final business rating. After the technical and business ratings were calculated, these two ratings were averaged to determine the overall rating of the web sites. The top five overall car rental sites were then selected based on their overall rating.

II. Technical Analysis

Technical Criteria

The Criteria used to evaluate the technical aspects of the website were chosen based on factors that enhance website performance and usability.

- **Content** - The Content criteria were based on what information was on the site. It was broken down into information on the company, the cars they offered, and any current information available on the site such as promotions, or links to other relevant information.
- **Ease of Use** - The Ease of Use criteria was based on how easy it was to use the site. This looked how long it took to find what we were looking for. This included information available on the site, how easy it was to use the reservation process, and if the help options available were helpful and easy to use.
- **Design and Layout** - The design and layout of the website was evaluated based on the look and feel of the site. We looked at color schemes, font selections, and the layout of the information available.
- **Use of Web Features** - The website's dynamic content was based on how they added to the sites usability. This also tied into page load times because the more media and dynamic content a site had the harder it was to get it to load quickly.
- **Other** - The other criteria used was based on the standardization of the pages, and what type of international dimension the website had. It also looked at security and privacy policies.

Each website was visited and tested on the specified criteria. They were opened in multiple browsers and tested in different resolutions. We tried to remain as objective as possible when reviewing the different websites trying not to let previous sites affect our judgment.

Technical Website Evaluations

Alamo.com – This was the first site visited. The site contained plenty of useful information, and was easy to use and navigate. The page fell short when it came to dealing with the layout and color scheme of the site. It was best viewed in 1024 X 768 resolution and did not look well in smaller resolutions. The first tool bar drop down was only available in Explorer and could have provided some better dynamic content. The website offered Global rentals, but the information was only in English. There was no security on the web page, but it only required a name and e-mail address to reserve a car. The only invalid link was the financial restructuring link in the company information section.

Hertz.com – Hertz.com was unavailable the first time we tried to evaluate it. When we tried the next day it was up and ready for business. It looked great in both 1024 X 768 and 800 X 600 resolutions. The site featured plenty of useful information and was very easy to navigate. The site was very secure and started using 128 bit SSL the moment you went into the reservation system. The reservation system is user friendly and has useful options like canceling a reservation.

Avis.com – Avis.com was an excellent international website. It had links to many international sites in native language. The site featured a good use of discounts and memberships to promote customer loyalty. The site featured very little dynamic content. There was very little to describe the type of cars and options available. The homepage is a little big for even 1024 X768 resolution, and had to be scrolled to see all of the options.

Thrifty.com – This site has an excellent description of the types of cars available to rent. A problem found on the main page was that a picture overlapped words in the “location” search box, but was fixed by the next time the site was visited. The site had links to different international locations and was also available in French. The initial rental information is gathered on the main page making it easy to access.

CitrRAC.com – This is a great local website for the San Diego area. The site had information on many types of specialty cars available. Their reservation system allowed for price quote options making it easy to just check their prices. One of the problems I found on the main page was that the car selections and rates buttons link to same page. The site is kept current by offering local tourist and travel information on the site.

Enterprise.com – This site had a very nice color scheme that was present throughout the site. There were several ways to get to the car reservation page depending on what you wanted. The only language available was English and the only rented in the US and Canada. The entire site was very simple and easy to use.

AceRentACar.com – This is a fairly regional website that offers reservations in most of the United States. The site is very simple and makes it easy to reserve a car, find a location, check rates, or view or change a reservation. There was very little information about the types of cars available, and little to no information about the company in general.

NationalCar.com – This site is great for getting a reservation and their dynamic features on the left menu bar make it easy to find a location and choose a date you want to rent. There was very little to describe the type of car available. The site did very little besides let people reserve a car. There is no company information available on the site.

Budget.com – This was an all around good site. The dynamic content was very helpful and well placed. The color scheme was nice and the layout was intuitive.

Cheepers.net – This site looked like it had been ignored for years. It is the only Omaha area car rental website that would accept online reservations. The reservation system consisted of a form submitted to a server that might not be operational anymore. None of the reservation requests submitted would go through. The page looks like it was never fully completed the About Us link lead to a blank page and the web counter does not work. The web site is fairly easy to use, but doesn't draw much attention.

Top 5 Technical Websites

The top five websites selected were based on the overall technical rating averages. The pages in the top five had the best all around website that was easy to use, secure, and provided comprehensive information to its customers.

The top five technical car rental websites along with their technical ratings have been listed in the chart below. For a complete listing of the technical ratings please see table 1 in the appendix.

Top 5 Car Rental Websites – Technical Analysis

Rank	Website	Business Rating (5 max.)
1	Hertz.com	4.67
2	Budget.com	4.13
3	Enterprise.com	4.07
4	Thrifty.com	3.93
5	Alamo.com	3.80

III. Business Analysis

Business Criteria

The analysis of the business aspects of each car rental web site rated the sites according to four major categories. These categories include the web strategy used, the value added by each web site, the security and usability of the web site and other business characteristics.

The “Web Strategy” and “Value Added” categories are used to evaluate the industry as a whole, and therefore are not used when comparing each individual web site to one another.

The “Web Strategy” category describes what the major purpose of the site is and what the company is trying to achieve with their presence on the Internet. The three web strategies chosen from include: evolutionary, entrepreneurial and pioneer. Each strategy, along with a short description of the strategy, can be found in the list below.

- **Evolutionary** – Pursued by existing business in order to find new channels for their products or services, expand customer service options or to improve their business infrastructure.
- **Entrepreneurial** – Pursued by new businesses that wish to “take advantage of e-commerce opportunities on the web without being constrained by the business practices of an existing firm”. (Khazanchi)
- **Pioneer** – Pursued by firms willing to take large risks by attempting to implement new, unproven business concepts with the tools provided by the word wide web.

The “Value Added” category is based on a study performed by James K. Ho, which rates the websites “from a customer’s perspective of value added”. (Ho) This rating technique reveals the value created by the industry with its web presence. To do this a 4x3 matrix is used to measure how timely, custom, logistic and sensational features add to the promotion, provision and processing aspects of the company.

The “Security and Usability” category consists of four sub-categories, which have been listed and described below. When evaluating each web site, a rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, was given for each sub-category based on the characteristics of the site. These ratings were then averaged to calculate the final security and usability rating.

- **Security** – This category rates the level of security used to protect personal customer and reservation information when renting a vehicle online. A rating of 5 was given to sites that implemented SSL or other security services such as VeriSign throughout their site and made these features visible to the customer. The lowest rating, of 1, was given to sites that failed to use any form of security when collecting personal or reservation information from the customer.
- **Customer Confidence** – This rates the level of confidence that a customer would have when reserving a car online. A rating of 5 was given to sites that had a professional feel to them, provided the customer with a confirmation number, sent a verification e-mail and provided a feature where the customer could view their reservation online. A rating of 1 was given to sites that lacked professional quality or failed to confirm rental reservations with the customer in any way.
- **Payment Methods** – This category rates the methods that were available to the customer in order to guarantee or pay for a reservation. Not every site accepted payments online so this category only applied to several sites. A rating of 5 was given to sites that accepted major credited cards such as Visa and MasterCard as well as a variety of other cards, while a rating of 3 was given to sites that accepted, at the minimum, Visa and MasterCard.
- **Ease of Reservation** – This rated the ease at which the customer could complete a rental reservation online. A rating of 5 was given to sites that used a well designed, GUI reservation system that provided the user with good feedback and took a minimal amount of time to complete. A rating of 1 was given to sites that did not provide a well-designed interface and used a system that might be confusing to the customer.

The “Other Business Characteristics” category also consisted of four sub-categories, which have been listed and described below. A rating scale of 1 to 5 was used, with 5 being the highest rating given. The average of the sub-category ratings was used to determine the overall “Other Business” rating.

- **Search Engine Rating** - This category rated the search engine rating each site received by performing searches using “car rental” as the keywords. The searches were performed using Yahoo.com, Lycos.com, Google.com and MSN.com. Car rental sites that only serve a local area were rated using “car rental *City_Name*” as the keywords in the same search engines listed above. A rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, was given to the websites based on how high each one appeared on the search results lists.

- **Stickiness** – This rates the features provided by the car rental web site that would keep the customer at the site longer than they intended to be and therefore increasing the likelihood of the customer making a rental. A rating of 5 was given to sites that provided additional features such as driving directions, weather forecasts or detailed car descriptions. A rating of 1 was given to sites that provided no features in addition to the reservation services provided.
- **Customer Service** – This category rates the customer service features provided to the customers via the car rental web site. A rating of 5 was given to sites that provided addresses, phone numbers, and online feedback forms in addition to membership services. A rating of 1 was given to sites that lacked contact information, provided no feedback forms and offered no membership services.
- **Willingness to Return** – This rates the likelihood that a customer or visitor will return to the car rental site after visiting or renting for the first time. A rating of 5 was given to sites that provided a pleasant experience and provided features or benefits that would persuade a visitor or customer to return to the site. A rating of 1 was given to sites that were unattractive, unorganized and provided no reason for a visitor or customer to return to the site.

Business Website Evaluations

The 10 car rental web sites selected for this project have been evaluated according to the pre-defined business characteristics. The results of the evaluations can be found below.

Web Strategy

The web Strategy used by each of the web sites evaluated was the “Evolutionary Strategy”. This is because each of the car rental companies is expanding their reservation department from their traditional “brick and mortar” location to the World Wide Web. By making a presence on the Internet, car rental companies can allow customers to complete most of the reservation tasks from the comfort of their own home or office. The customer will then only have to show up to the rental location to check-in and pick up their car.

Value Added

After evaluating all of the car rental sites several areas were identified where car rental site provide added value. The major areas include timely value in promotion, custom value in processing and logistic value in promotion. A description of how value is added in each area can be found below.

- **Timely Value in Promotion** – The home page of %70 of the car rental sites evaluated contained special promotion or advertising links. This allows the companies to deliver promotional information to potential customers as soon as they enter the site.
- **Custom Value in Processing** – 70% of the car rental sites allow the users to customize their orders by selecting a specific car model as well as additional rental options such as insurance and other options.
- **Logistic Value in Promotion** – 80% of the car rental site included options that allowed the user to contact customer service through online forms and also allows customers to view the status of their reservations.

A complete listing of the value added analysis can be found in the chart below.

Value Added by Online Car Rental Sites

Value\Purpose	Promotion	Provision	Processing
Timely	70%	60%	0%
Custom	0%	0%	70%
Logistic	100%	10%	80%
Sensational	10%	10%	0%

Site Ratings

The final business ratings along with the features that determined the ratings can be found below.

Alamo.com – *Business Rating = 4.38*

Security & Usability – Alamo.com uses VeriSign to protect personal information. The reservation system uses a descriptive interface with graphic icons and some error prevention. No payments are accepted online but a confirmation number and e-mail are sent to the customer.

Other Characteristics – Alamo.com was listed in the top 10 of four major search engine listings. One of the best sections of Alamo.com was their “Travel Tools” section which included driving directions, children’s activities and weather forecasts. These features along with good customer service options would persuade a user or visitor to return to the site at a later date.

Hertz.com – *Business Rating = 3.50*

Security & Usability – Hertz.com uses SSL to secure information during the reservation process. A wide variety of credit cards, including Visa and MasterCard are accepted to guarantee reservations. The reservation system uses a form based, step by step process with error detection. A confirmation number and e-mail are given to renters to help customer confidence.

Other Characteristics – Hertz.com was listed in the top ten on 3 out of 4 major search engine tests. The site did not offer any features to keep the user in their site longer, but did offer good customer service options. A user would probably only return to this site to make another reservation or view/modify an existing reservation.

Avis.com – *Business Rating = 4.25*

Security & Usability – Avis.com uses SSL for its entire site but did not display this feature to the user. No payment methods were accepted but a simple form-based reservation system with error detection was used. Rentals are confirmed with a confirmation number and verification e-mail which helps customer confidence.

Other Characteristics – Avis.com ranked number one on 3 out of 4 search engine tests. Special promotions and a renter's guide would help keep visitors in the site longer while the customer service options and member services would tempt customers or visitors to return to the site.

Thrifty.com – *Business Rating = 3.71*

Security & Usability – Thrifty.com uses SSL when collecting personal information. No payment methods are accepted but a descriptive 5-step reservation system is used. Customers can be confident in their reservation by keeping their confirmation number and e-mail that they receive.

Other Characteristics – Thrifty.com was listed in the top ten of 4 major search engine searches. Member benefits and online feedback forms provide good customer service. Special promotions and a car information section will help visitors to stay in the site longer and the ability to check/modify existing reservations might tempt customers to return to the site.

CityRAC.com – *Business Rating = 2.75*

Security & Usability – This site did not secure any information. No payments were accepted online and a short form-based reservation system was used. Customer confidence in this site is probably low due to the lack of professional quality and security. A verification number and e-mail were given to rental customers.

Other Characteristics – This site was listed on the first page of results when doing a local car rental search. Customer service was only administered online through the use of e-mail. The site provided local attractions information that would help visitors to stay in the site longer and may even convince visitors to return to the site.

Enterprise.com – *Business Rating = 3.25*

Security & Usability – Enterprise.com did not use any security on the site but only collect the name and e-mail address of the customer. No payment methods were accepted and a descriptive, GUI-based reservation system was used. The site was approved by the BBB Online which helps customer confidence.

Other Characteristics – Enterprise.com was listed in the top ten of 4 major search engine searches. A car descriptions area and a feedback section provide good customer service and a reason for customers to return to the site.

AceRentACar.com – *Business Rating = 2.33*

Security & Usability – Ace uses SSL when collecting information but makes it confusing to find the reservation section since it is actually listed under “Request Quote”. The system does send a confirmation number and e-mail to the customer.

Other Characteristics – Ace did not show up in any search engine results. No contact address or phone numbers were given to visitors and there were not features that would tempt a visitor to stay on the site or return at a later date.

National.com – *Business Rating = 4.00*

Security & Usability – This site offered a secure login for registered members but not for visitors. No payment methods were accepted but a very user friendly and descriptive reservation system is used. E-mail verification and a confirmation number are sent to customers.

Other Characteristics – National car rental showed up in the top five of 3 out of 4 search results. Customer feedback options and Member services along with detailed car information provide reasons for customers to stick around and visit the site at a later date.

Budget.com – *Business Rating = 3.50*

Security & Usability – Budget uses SSL throughout most of its site. A simple 3-step reservation process is used. All major credit cards are accepted to guarantee reservations online and a confirmation e-mail and number are sent to customers.

Other Characteristics – The site showed up on the second page of search result for 4 major search engines. Online feedback forms and several member options along with car information help to keep customers in the site and may tempt them to visit again.

Cheepers.com – *Business Rating = 1.58*

Security & Usability – This local site used no security and accepted no payment online. A single form was used to reserve a rental car, but did not allow very many options for the renter. No confirmation number or e-mail was used to verify reservation, making customer confidence very low.

Other Characteristics - A local search resulted in no listings for this site and a basic address and phone number was the only way to contact the business. No additional services were provided which give the customer no other reasons to return to the site.

A complete listing of the ratings for the above sites can be found in Table 3 in the appendix.

Top 5 Business Websites

The top 5 sites according to the Business Evaluation, along with their business rating, have been listed below from highest to lowest.

Top 5 Car Rental Sites – Business Characteristics

Rank	Website	Business Rating (5 max.)
1	Alamo.com	4.38
2	Avis.com	4.25
3	NationalCar.com	4.00
4	Thrifty.com	3.71
5	Hertz.com	3.50*
	Budget.com	3.50*

(* Hertz.com and Budget.com tied for 5th place with a business rating of 3.50)

IV. Conclusion

Top 5 Car Rental Websites

The overall top 5 car rental web sites have been selected based on the results of the both the technical and business evaluations. A listing of the top 5 sites and their overall ratings can be found below. For a listing of all of the overall ratings of the web sites evaluated, please refer to Table 4, in the appendix.

Top 5 Car Rental Web Sites

Rank	Website	Overall Rating (5 max.)
1	Alamo.com	4.09
2	Hertz.com	4.08
3	Avis.com	3.99
4	Thrifty.com	3.82
5	Budget.com	3.82

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Appendix

Table 1 -Technical Evaluation Results

	Alamo	Hertz	Avis	Thrifty	CityRAC	Enterprise	Ace	National	Budget	Cheepers
Content										
company info	5	5	4	5	1	5	1	1	4	1
car info	5	5	3	5	5	4	1	1	5	2
current info	4	5	4	4	3	5	2	2	5	2
Total Content Rating	4.67	5.00	3.67	4.67	3.00	4.67	1.33	1.33	4.67	1.67
Ease of Use										
find information	4	5	4	4	2	5	4	2	4	3
reserve car	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	3
help options	5	5	3	3	2	5	2	3	5	1
Total Ease of Use Rating	4.67	5.00	3.67	4.00	3.00	4.67	3.33	3.00	4.33	2.33
Design and Layout										
easy to read	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	3
pleasing to the eye	3	4	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	2
multiple resolutions	3	5	2	3	5	4	4	4	5	2
Total Design & Layout Rating	3.00	4.33	3.00	3.33	4.67	4.00	3.67	3.33	4.33	2.33
Use of Web Features										
page loads fast	3	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4
dynamic content	4	4	2	2	2	4	2	4	4	1
browser compatibility	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5
Total Web Use Rating	3.67	4.67	3.67	3.67	3.67	4.33	4.00	4.33	3.67	3.33
Other										
standardized	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
international	3	3	5	4	0	2	0	4	3	0
security	2	5	5	5	2	2	4	2	5	0
Total Other Rating	3.00	4.33	4.67	4.00	2.00	2.67	2.67	3.00	3.67	1.00
Final Technical Rating	3.80	4.67	3.73	3.93	3.27	4.07	3.00	3.00	4.13	2.13
Final Technical Ranking	5	1	6	4	7	3	8	9	2	10

Table 3 - Business Evaluation Results

	Alamo	Hertz	Avis	Thrifty	CityRAC	Enterprise	Ace	National	Budget	Cheepers
Security & Usability										
security	5	4	4	3	1	2	3	3	4	1
customer confidence	4	3	4	4	2	4	3	4	3	1
payment methods	n/a	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	n/a
ease of reservation	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	5	4	3
Total Sec. & Usab. Rating	4.00	3.75	4.00	3.67	2.00	3.00	2.67	4.00	3.75	1.67
Other										
search engine rating	5	3	5	4	4	4	1	5	3	1
stickiness	5	3	4	4	4	3	2	4	3	2
customer service	4	4	5	4	3	4	2	4	4	2
willingness to return	5	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	1
Total Other Criteria Rating	4.75	3.25	4.50	3.75	3.50	3.50	2.00	4.00	3.25	1.50
Final Business Rating	4.38	3.50	4.25	3.71	2.75	3.25	2.33	4.00	3.50	1.58
Business Ranking	1	5	2	4	8	7	9	3	6	10

Table 2 - Value Added by Online Car Rental Sites

Value\Purpose	Promotion	Provision	Processing
Timely	70%	60%	0%
Custom	0%	0%	70%
Logistic	100%	10%	80%
Sensational	10%	10%	0%

Table 4 - Final Car Rental Website Evaluation Results

	Alamo	Hertz	Avis	Thrifty	CityRAC	Enterprise	Ace	National	Budget	Cheepers
Final Technical Rating	3.80	4.67	3.73	3.93	3.27	4.07	3.00	3.00	4.13	2.13
Final Business Rating	4.38	3.50	4.25	3.71	2.75	3.25	2.33	4.00	3.50	1.58
Final Overall Rating	4.09	4.08	3.99	3.82	3.01	3.66	2.67	3.50	3.82	1.86
Final Ranking	1	2	3	4	8	6	9	7	5	10