
ESSAY AND DISCUSSION ON MASS CUSTOMIZATION

Many companies that sell goods (motorcycles, bags, jeans, mugs etc.) on the Web allow the buyers to customize a product. Working from a “basic” model, the customer can choose from an assortment of textiles, prints, colors, covers, designs, accessories, and so on. Many of the web sites are set up so that the customer cannot only select from the extensive list of accessories but also see exactly what the final product will look like.

There are two different ways to complete this assignment. See OPTION A and OPTION B below. Choose only one of these options and write your essay accordingly.

OPTION A: CUSTOMIZE A PRODUCT

Below is a list of websites where you can purchase a customized product.

- “Build and price your own BMW” -- You can build your own car at <https://www.bmwusa.com/byo.html#!/>
- “Customize a bag”-- You can choose the design of your own bag at <http://www.timbuk2.com/customizer>

Write an essay about one of the companies from this list or another company that sells configured/customized goods online. You will start with visiting the web site of the company. In your essay, you should answer the following questions:

1. Which company’s web site did you visit? Provide the URL.
2. Choose one line of product (e.g. 2 Series Coupe model at BMW or messenger bags at Timbuk2).
3. Explain how you configure your own product? What types of choices do you have? Be specific. Answer these questions by explaining the customization process step by step.
4. Tell us how satisfied you were with the customization experience. If you were dissatisfied, what factors (e.g. design of the web page and ease of navigation, limited options for customization) contributed to your dissatisfaction?
5. How important is customization for the company? Can you describe the company’s business strategy and how mass customization fits this strategy?

OPTION B: SHARE YOUR PAST EXPERIENCE

If you purchased/ordered a mass-customized product from a company in the past, share your own experience with us. Answer the following questions:

1. What is the name of the company that sold you the customized product? Provide brief information about the company and their industry. Provide URL, if applicable. When did you purchase the product?
2. What was the product that you purchased? Did it belong to a particular product line?
3. How did you customized/configured your product? What choices were available? Explain the process step by step.
4. Tell us how satisfied you were with the experience. If you were dissatisfied, what factors (e.g. product quality, limited options for customization, late shipment, poor customer service) contributed to your dissatisfaction?
5. How important is customization for the company? Can you describe the company's business strategy and how mass customization fits this strategy?

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- You MUST submit an electronic copy of your essay to the Blackboard.
- You MUST type your name in your paper.
- Your essay should be no more than two pages; about 750 words in total.
- If you rely on any external sources for information, make sure you include a list of references and acknowledge the sources appropriately. References do not count towards the word limit.
- Make sure you answer all the questions in your essay.
- You should proofread and polish your writing before submitting it to Blackboard.
- This is an individual assignment, NOT a team or group project.

SPECIAL NOTE

Your essay reflects your own opinions and experience, and should not reflect somebody else's work. You should not cut and paste text from an article/book/blog/forum etc. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you rely on information provided on the internet (e.g. the slate.com article, company websites), acknowledge the source of the information, provide a link, and summarize the information/facts.

GRADING (Max possible = 100 points)

10 points	Quality of writing and meeting the guidelines (Your entry reads well, is free of grammatical errors and typos, is well-formatted, and your name is typed in the document, all references are included, ...)
90 points	Quality of answers to each of the questions (5 questions x 18 points each = 90 points)

NOTE: Late submission will result in reduced credit (25 points per day).

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION IN CLASS

After you complete your assignment, we will have a discussion in class. Read the following articles and/or do a search for additional information on mass customization online.

- “Cracking the Code of Mass Customization” (MIT SMR article; available on Blackboard)
- “Mass customization” (The Economist article; <http://www.economist.com/node/14299807>)

Be ready to answer the questions below (orally in class, NOT in writing):

1. What exactly is mass customization? How would you define it in one sentence?
2. What are the pros and cons of a mass customization strategy for a seller?
3. What are the pros and cons of a mass-customized product/service to the consumer?