

User Experience Research Report: Comparative Analysis

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Executive Summary

For this report, we analyzed the website of Collage.com and compared the website to various competitors: CafePress, CG Pro Prints, Snapfish, Shutterfly, and Zazzle. We created categories and dimensions dealing with functionality, user interface, and products for comparison and evaluated the sites based off these dimensions. Our evaluations were then used to create comparative analysis matrices. By conducting a comparative analysis, we discovered the client's various areas of strength and places for improvement. After conducting the comparative analysis, we developed a series of findings and recommendations:

Key Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1: Collage.com currently has no interactive tutorial for users.

Recommendation: The website should provide clear instructions for users, especially for first-time users, in order to help them understand how to use the site.

Finding 2: No preview function while creating the product

Recommendation: Collage.com should provide a more accurate preview function to help users confirm the appearance and quality of their desired final product.

Finding 3: No customer reviews for products

Recommendation: Allowing users to provide product reviews gives Collage.com a chance to better communicate with customers and get their feedback for improvement.

Finding 4: No search function provided

Recommendation: Providing a search bar gives users an alternative way to navigate through the site's information architecture and provides users with more flexibility and convenience.

Finding 5: No product filter function to find items efficiently

Recommendation: Because of the large amount of products, Collage.com could implement a product filter function that allows users to find and pick products based off their inputted preferences.

Finding 6: No mobile application for the website

Recommendation: By implementing a mobile version of the site, it could possibly increase orders and strengthen customer loyalty by providing a more pervasive user experience.

Introduction

Collage.com is a website that allows users to create customized products using their own photos. Collage.com offers its users with a large variety of product options from blankets to puzzles and photo customization and editing tools.

Our team will be reviewing and analyzing the usability of Collage.com. Because Collage.com was initially intended for creating products with multiple photos, but a significant number of users are using only one photo, our overall research question is:

- How can the customer's experience of creating products using only one photo as opposed to the site's standard multiple photo option be improved?

For this phase of the assessment, we performed a comparative analysis between Collage.com and its competitors. We identified different types of competitors - direct, indirect, and partial - and created comparison matrices in order to analyze the features and functionalities that each competitor and the client provided. Our research questions for this specific assignment are:

- How do similar product customization websites' compare to Collage.com
- What are Collage.com's areas of strength and places for improvement?

By researching and evaluating competitors and comparing them to the client, we can create further informed recommendations for the client.



Methods




We conducted a comparative analysis of five competitors of Collage.com. We derived our competitors based off our stakeholder and user interviews. Our client contact previously conducted her own market research and comparative analysis for the company and identified five competitors: CafePress, CG Pro Prints, Snapfish, Shutterfly, and Zazzle. Two of our user interviews also shared that they previously used Shutterfly, which helped confirm Shutterfly as a competitor. All of the competitors are known for being photo product creation websites. Each group member was in charge of researching one competitor while the assignment's product manager was in charge of researching two competitors.

After identifying our competitors, we categorized them into different types of competitors:

- Direct: Offers the same functions in a similar manner to Collage.com
- Indirect: Offers the same functions in a different manner to Collage.com
- Partial: Offers some but not all of the functions as Collage.com

The following table provides a list of the evaluated competitors with their profile and main audience:

Competitors	Profile	Audience
Shutterfly (Direct) 	Shutterfly is a website that offers personalized photo products and services, such as prints, cards, stationery, and home decor. Users can use their own photos to create such products and are given free and unlimited photo storage.	The main audience is adults since many of the advertisements are targeted towards using wedding or baby photos or creating home products.
Zazzle (Partial) 	Zazzle is an online marketplace that allows designers and customers to create their own products with various manufacturers (clothing, posters, etc.), and use images from participating companies, such as Disney and Hallmark.	Anyone who wants to buy an existing customized product or customize themselves.
CafePress (Partial)	CafePress, Inc. is an online retailer of stock and user-customized products. They sell t-shirts, bags, mugs, wall clocks, calendars, and other products.	Anyone who wants to buy customized products and those want to print their

	<p>Customers can upload their own graphics, logo or text to add to the product. CafePress also offers print services for wall art and stationery. The site also allows the user to have a virtual CafePress "shop" including an online storefront and website hosting, order management, fulfillment, payment processing, and customer service.</p>	<p>designs on products and sell them.</p>
<p>Snapfish (Partial)</p> 	<p>Snapfish is a web-based photo sharing and photo printing service owned by District Photo. Members can upload files for free and share photo albums or individual photos. Members can share via email, link,, and to various websites, such as Facebook and Blogger. Snapfish collects revenue from personalized photo products such as prints, photo books, cards and mugs.</p>	<p>The demographic group covers a wide range. All internet users could be potential users of Snapfish.</p>
<p>CG Pro Prints (Indirect)</p> 	<p>CG Pro Prints is a professional canvas prints, giclee, and wall decal website. Customers can wrap their photos in different ways, such as canvas wraps and leather wraps.</p>	<p>Mainly for adults and those who want to create photo canvases to hang it at home.</p>

After categorizing competitors and creating their profiles, we created dimensions in order to compare the competitors to Collage.com. We created our dimensions based off functionalities and features mentioned in our stakeholder and user interviews and based off any noteworthy features we noticed while individually analyzing the competitors' websites. We have three categories of dimensions:

- **Functionality**
 - This category focuses on evaluating various site features, such as core features (product creation, photo editing, etc.), miscellaneous features (product preview, tutorial, etc.), software (web, mobile), and marketing strategies (social media, commercials).
 - In order to compare, we marked whether the feature was present or not present.
- **User Interface**
 - This category focuses on evaluating the site's layout and navigation, visual design, and information architecture.

- We evaluated this category by ranking features on a 1-5 scale (1 being the worst usage of the feature, 5 being the best usage).
- Product-related
 - This category focuses on evaluating product-related specifications, such as product diversity and order cycle.
 - Product diversity relates to how many types of products the site offers. We ranked this feature on a 1-5 scale (1 having the least amount of products, 5 having the most amount of products).
 - Order cycle identifies how long it takes for a product to ship.

We started our evaluation by first evaluating Collage.com. As a group, we examined and evaluated the site. After evaluating the client, we individually evaluated the competitors we had researched prior to. We then created comparative analysis matrices that includes the various competitors, our dimensions and features, and our evaluations (see Appendix).

We then analyzed the comparative analysis matrices to identify differences and similarities between Collage.com and its competitors and to create well-informed findings and recommendations for the client.

Findings and Recommendations

Summary Results

Our comparative analysis highlighted various areas where Collage.com could improve in. We discussed and noted several features the competitors had and that Collage.com lacked. Our findings and recommendations are based off the analysis and aimed towards helping the client's usability. Our findings are presented below from highest to lowest priority.

Finding 1: No interactive tutorial for users

Having an interactive tutorial that teaches users how to customize their product step-by-step is important for quick learning. However, Collage.com only has instructions for how to start creating a product (Figure 1). After choosing which product to make, there are no further instructions for users. Users could only tell each function from the icons' label and try it by themselves. It might take some time for first-time users to find the functions they want.

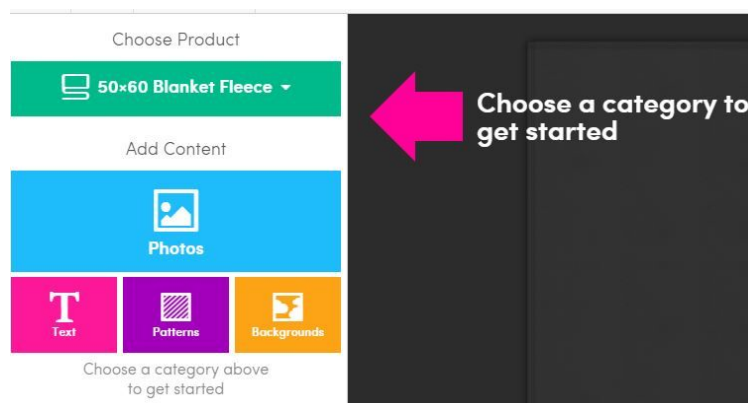


Figure 1

Recommendation:

For a customized product website, the most important point is that users should know how to customize their product. The whole customization process should have clear instructions. If the users cannot understand how to customize their product, they might feel frustrated. This frustration might decrease their user experience and negatively influence their willingness to use the website. Zazzle (Figure 2) and CafePress (Figure 3) have interactive tutorials for users while designing products. This could help first-time users familiarize with the website quickly. Thus, Collage.com should consider implementing an interactive tutorial.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Finding 2: No preview function while creating the product

A preview function is necessary for users to ensure the final product is the product they want to buy. Collage.com doesn't provide an accurate or realistic preview function for users. For example, when creating a customized mug on Collage.com, the site only shows one frontal angle of the product for the user to view while editing (Figure 4). Even while in the checkout section, users still can only see the front image with no comprehensive dimensions for the final product provided.

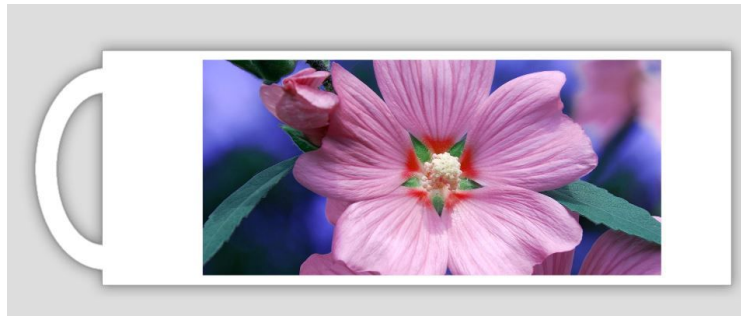


Figure 4

Recommendation:

Collage.com can provide a more comprehensive preview function to help customers confirm their final product. Zazzle provides views from every angle of the product (Figure 5). The user can choose to view from the right, left, center, or the handle. Furthermore, CG Pro Prints (Figure 6) and Shutterfly (Figure 7) provide a 3D preview of the product. A 3D preview provides a more accurate and realistic product image for users to view and to ensure the quality of final product. Collage.com should consider providing a 3D preview, or at least more accurate product preview.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Finding 3: No customer reviews for products

For websites providing products and services, customer reviews serve as a significant factor by influencing customers' preconceptions about a product they may have an interest in. It also provides a way for customers to share their opinions on products, which can help the company improve their service. Both Shutterfly and Zazzle have a customer review section on each of the customizable products' pages (Figure 9). Such function is not deployed on Collage.com yet.

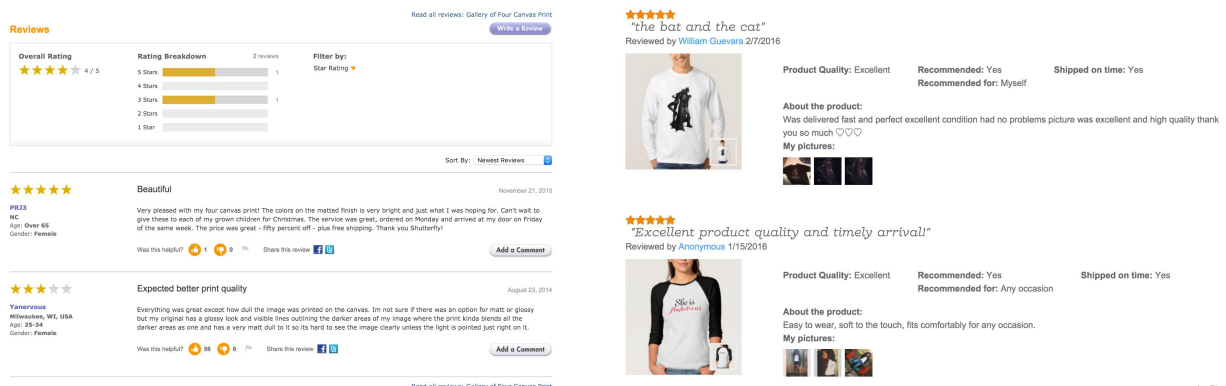


Figure 9

Recommendation:

To better communicate with customers and get their feedback for improvement purposes, Collage.com could consider including a customer review section for every kind of customizable product. By doing so, customers can have a more objective resource of information based on which they will be more likely to trust the product enough to create and order the product.

Finding 4: No search function provided

Including a search bar on the website's home page provides a way for users to self-navigate. The navigation bar is usually for users who can follow a task-oriented path to achieve their goal. However, if the user already has a clear idea of what they want to find, the search function can directly lead them to where they want to go. Also, it can be convenient for first-time users who are unfamiliar with the website's information architecture. For Shutterfly, Zazzle and CafePress, they include a search bar on their home page (Figure 10). Such feature does not exist on Collage.com.

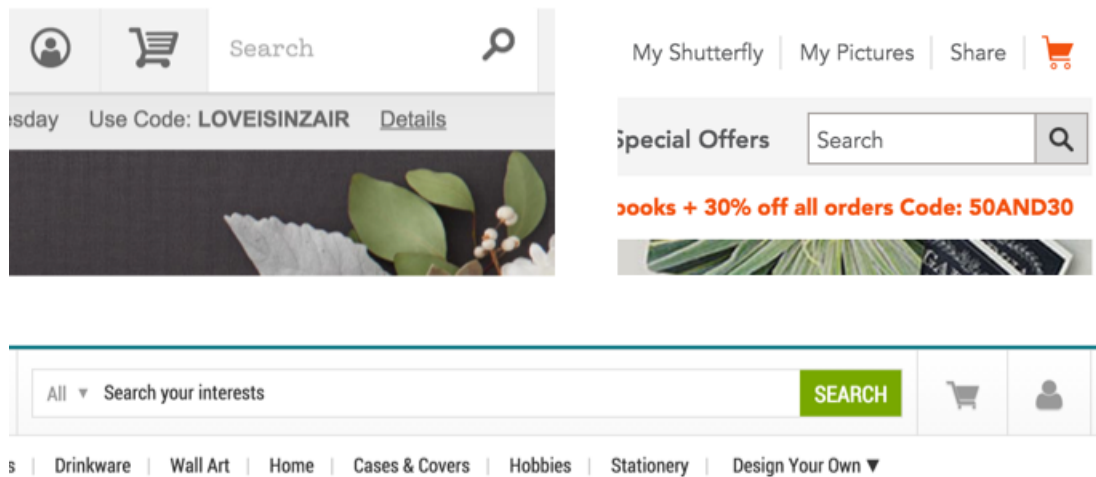


Figure 10

Recommendation:

To provide an alternative way of navigating for users who are not familiar with Collage.com, it could be practical to include a search bar on the home page, which enables customers to access information in a more convenient and flexible way. Moreover, this will be especially valuable with the increasing complexity of information architecture of Collage.com as it grows bigger and provides more categories of products and services.

Finding 5: No product filter function to find the item efficiently

Collage.com provides a product list for users to choose or switch the products in editing page (Figure 11), or users can browse each category on the website (Figure 12). However, users cannot filter the possible choices to find out the most suitable product to customize while browsing.

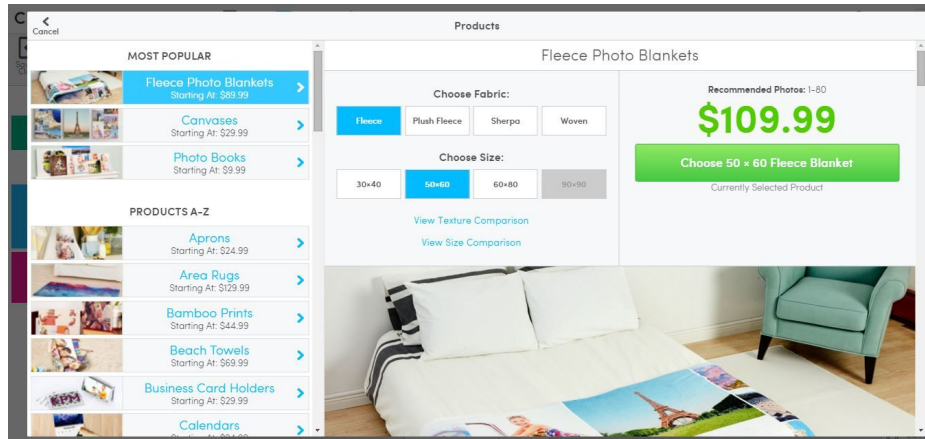


Figure 11

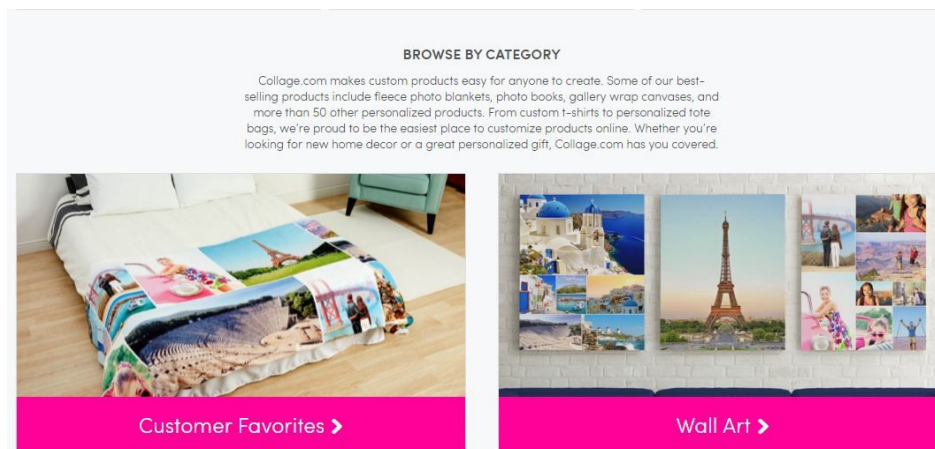


Figure 12

Recommendation:

Due to the large amount of the products, Collage.com could add a filter function in the product browsing page. By doing so, users can follow their preferences to find a product they want efficiently instead of viewing all the categories. For example, the filter function of Zazzle and Shutterfly is well-designed (Figure 13,14).

Women

[T-Shirts 35](#)
[Underwear 13](#)
[Leggings 12](#)
[Flip Flops 10](#)
[Activewear 8](#)
[Tank Tops 8](#)
[Hoodies 6](#)
[Maternity 4](#)
[Shoes 3](#)
[Dresses 2](#)
[Jackets 2](#)
[Jerseys 2](#)
[Sweatshirts 2](#)
[Polos 1](#)

Price

☐ \$5 to \$15
☐ \$15 to \$25
☐ \$25 to \$50
☐ \$50 to \$75
☐ \$75 to \$100

Figure 13

Ceramic Mugs

Refine your choices [Reset](#)

☐ **Featured**

- ☐ Art Library (7)
- ☐ Regalos Familia y Hogar (10)

☐ **Mug type**

 Ceramic Mugs
  Stainless Steel Travel Mugs

 Acrylic Travel Mugs

☐ **Mug size (ounces)**

☒ 11
 ☒ 15
 ☐ 16
 ☐ 20

☐ **Gift add-on**

 Chocolate
 ☐ None

☐ **Mug color**

☐ 
☐ 
☐ 
☐ 
☐ 
☐ 

Figure 14

Finding 6: No mobile application for this website

In recent years, surfing the Internet has shifted from desktop and laptop to handheld devices everywhere. Shutterfly, Zazzle, and Snapfish deploy their systems on both web and mobile platforms including Android and iOS (Figure 8). Collage.com does not have a mobile application for their service.



Figure 8

Recommendation:

To adapt to the mobile era, it would be a good idea for Collage.com to build a mobile application for users to customize their products on their mobile device. In such, there is a great chance to increase orders and strengthen customer loyalty by providing a more pervasive and convenient user experience.

Discussion

While conducting this phase of the assessment, several factors may have influenced or limited our analysis and evaluation. Firstly, while ranking the user interface features for the comparative analysis matrices, we realized it would be difficult to rank the features because ranking features, such as visual design, is quite subjective. For example, two people may have vastly different opinions of what constitutes as good usage of color. It is hard to eliminate our own biases from such a subjective scale.

Secondly, we only examined competitors that specialized in customized photo products and were highly influenced by the competitor research and feedback we received from our stakeholder and user interviews. As a result, we did not conduct completely comprehensive research into potential competitors for Collage.com. If we had or if we had explored any parallel or analogous competitors, such as general customization product places, our analysis may have resulted in different findings.

Lastly, we only looked at the general usability of each website instead of exploring the single photo usability problem our client has. Since this problem stems from the client's own user research, we are unsure if whether any of the companies we looked at have a similar problem. Therefore, it would be difficult to evaluate the single photo usability problem for the comparative analysis. By conducting surveys with actual Collage.com users and performing usability tests, we can hopefully better understand the client's usability problem and provide recommendations.

Conclusion

By conducting a comparative analysis with Collage.com and five of its competitors, we discovered various areas of strength and potential improvement for the client. Based off the comparative analysis, Collage.com could incorporate several features that their competitors have already implemented in order to improve its overall usability and user experience. Such features include an interactive tutorial, an accurate preview, a mobile site version, a customer review section, and a product filter.

For the next phase of the assessment, we will conduct surveys with actual Collage.com to better understand their needs and the client's usability problem. We hope to further create more well-informed recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Comparative Analysis Matrices

Table 1 - Functionality

✓ = function is present, ✗ = function is not present

Products	Collage	Shutterfly	Zazzle	CafePress	Snapfish	CG Pro Prints
Competition Type	(Client)	Direct	Partial	Partial	Partial	Indirect
Core Features						
Make/Create product	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shop/Store	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Sales/Deal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Cart	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Search	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Photo editing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Miscellaneous Features						
Sign in	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interactive Tutorial	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Product Preview	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sell Your Own Design	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Item filter	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Customer Review	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Software Type						
Web-Based	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mobile-iOS	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Mobile-Android	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Marketing Strategies						
Commercial	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Social Media	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 - User Interface Evaluation

1-5 points (1 having the worst usage of, 5 having the best)

Products	Collage	Shutterfly	Zazzle	Cafepress	Snapfish	CG Pro Prints
Competition Type	(Client)	Direct	Partial	Partial	Partial	Indirect
Layout & Navigation						
Ease of Navigation	5 	4 	4 	4 	3 	5
Clarity & Simplicity of Layout	5 	3 	4 	4 	5 	5
Use of Page Space	4 	4 	5 	4 	4 	4



























































Visual Design						
Consistency across the page	4 	4 	4 	4 	4 	5 
Visual Distinction between Sections	5 	4 	4 	5 	3 	4 
Appropriateness of Fonts	3 	3 	5 	4 	5 	4 
Color Usage	3 	3 	3 	4 	4 	5 
Readability	3 	3 	3 	5 	5 	4 
Information Architecture						
Classification of Information	5 	4 	5 	5 	4 	4 
Terminology	4 	4 	5 	5 	5 	4 
Amount of Information	4 	3 	4 	4 	4 	3 

Table 3 - Product Related Evaluation

1-5 points (1 being the lowest, 5 being the most)

Products	Collage	Shutterfly	Zazzle	Cafepress	Snapfish	CG Pro Print
Competition Type	(Client)	Direct	Partial	Partial	Partial	Indirect
Diversity	5 	5 	5 	5 	5 	1 
Order Cycle	7-13 days 	8-14 days 	3-10 days 	5-14 days 	1-7 days 	1-5 days 