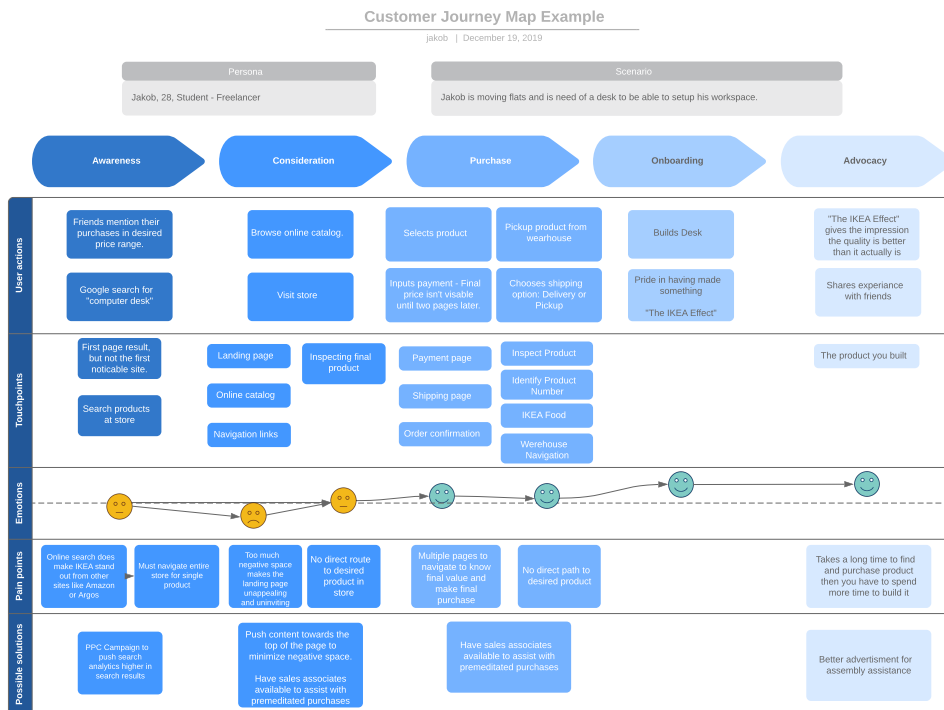


Analyzing the Customer End to End Journey

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Ingvar Kamprad started IKEA in 1943 in Älmhult, Sweden at the age of seventeen primarily selling fish. Over time he eventually moved IKEA over to selling household items and furniture that best suited the needs of people looking to buy. Ingvar's vision for IKEA was "To create a better everyday life for the many people by offering a wide range of well designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible would be able to afford them. We have decided once and for all to side with the many. What is good for our customers is also, in the long run, good for us." (Ingvar Kamprad)

IKEA has since become the number one furniture store in the world and continues to grow. Its success is due to its affordable prices in which customers buy a product unassembled, which is collected from a warehouse in a plain brown box, and then taken home and assembled by the customer. IKEA can save on costs of assembly, storage, packaging, and materials thus allowing them to further maintain such competitive prices. They have cleverly turned their stores into a massive collection of showrooms in which customers are guided down an intended path to experience the entire store much like a theme park. There is even a restaurant half way through each store, and a child care area at the start so parents can comfortably bring their children and activities be provided for them. IKEA has invested massively on its customer's touchpoints throughout the experience of their end to end journey. This model has been adopted in each store opened no matter the country which has been met with success but also some frustrations. In regard to those living in the London area a trip to IKEA could be more of a hassle than the enjoyable experience intended. And with the rise of companies like Amazon the online landscape is constantly growing, and with that growth comes a new realm of touchpoints to manage.



The end to end customer journey for someone living in London could potentially be a more frustrating experience than for one living outside of London. While delivery services are available and only one collection store exists within the M25, access to the main stores will typically take the average Londoner out of their way as it requires most people to drive if they wish to pay for the extra delivery. A potential customer who has not initially decided on shopping at IKEA might not be lead immediately to an IKEA webpage if they search for specific items using a Google search. IKEA will appear on the first page but not near the top of the page. One of IKEA's best forms of advertisement to bring in new customers is simply by word of mouth. Previous customers who have built their own furniture may experience in full "The IKEA" effect, and by being proud of something that you have accomplished you could be more likely to speak highly of shopping at IKEA to a friend who might bring up their need for new furniture in conversation. The recommendation is more likely to happen not just because of the quality of the product but also from the sense of pride one might have from building something. So the recommendation may be coming from a sense of "Hey look what I did!" But at the same time that provides free advertisement for IKEA.

Following the awareness phase is the consideration phase, with the primarily options being viewing their online catalog, and visiting an IKEA store. The customer experience at the very start could be considered by some to be a frustrating experience, especially if you know exactly what you need. The webpages do not show at the top search results of Google, and going to a store will have to experience the entire store to finally find that one item you were looking for. In IKEA's benefit the layout of their store encourages additional spontaneous

purchases. But once you finally get to the point of making the purchase is when the experience becomes a more enjoyable one. While the website is not quite as streamlined as sites like Amazon, the store experience at the point of purchase is a smoother one. After having acquired your item from the store warehouse which you will find in a flat cardboard box, conveniently package and made easy for transportation. From then on you make your purchase, load up your item, or arrange for your item to be delivered.

The next part is arguably where the magic of IKEA happens, onboarding the product. After having your item arrive at your home the next step is to build it. This is when the “The IKEA Effect” occurs. The most purchased item purchased from IKEA is the Billy Bookcase, a very plain yet modern and modest looking bookcase. According to The New York Times a Billy Bookcase sells every ten seconds. Customers then feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in having made something themselves and will attribute a higher quality to it because of the emotional connection made. Then when that connection is made the circle continues back to advertisement through word of mouth. You are proud of something you have done therefore you want to tell others about what you have done.

The touchpoints along this journey highly favor their in store side over their online presence. Which isn’t surprising because their in-store experience is what has made them as famous as they are today. The part of the store experience that seems to be the worst part in the process all takes place in the initial phases. The laborious effort of making your way out to the store, taking the time to navigate the guided layout of the store to finally find the area you are looking for, and finding the product you wish to purchase. Once you have done that you then need to write down the aisle and bin numbers for where you can find the product in the warehouse, you also need to do this for any other furniture items you wish to purchase. You then need to navigate the rest of the pre-determined path to then finally make it to the warehouse section of the store where you can then pick up your items. Once you have your item with you you’re able to checkout, but not before navigating through another pathway of stocks of household items available to purchase. After having gone through this entire process then you still have to actually build what you bought. These touchpoints could have potential risk of deterring potential customers that may simply not have the time to go through this process. Busy Londoners may prefer to do their shopping online while on the go as to avoid the time consuming pilgrimage of going to an IKEA store. According to IKEA’s UK Annual Summary online sales rose by 27% compared to the previous year, and online sales made up 19% of the overall sales made in the UK. While a new customer may find them in a furniture wonderland by visiting a store for the first time, new customers that only look online are in for a far less wondrous experience.

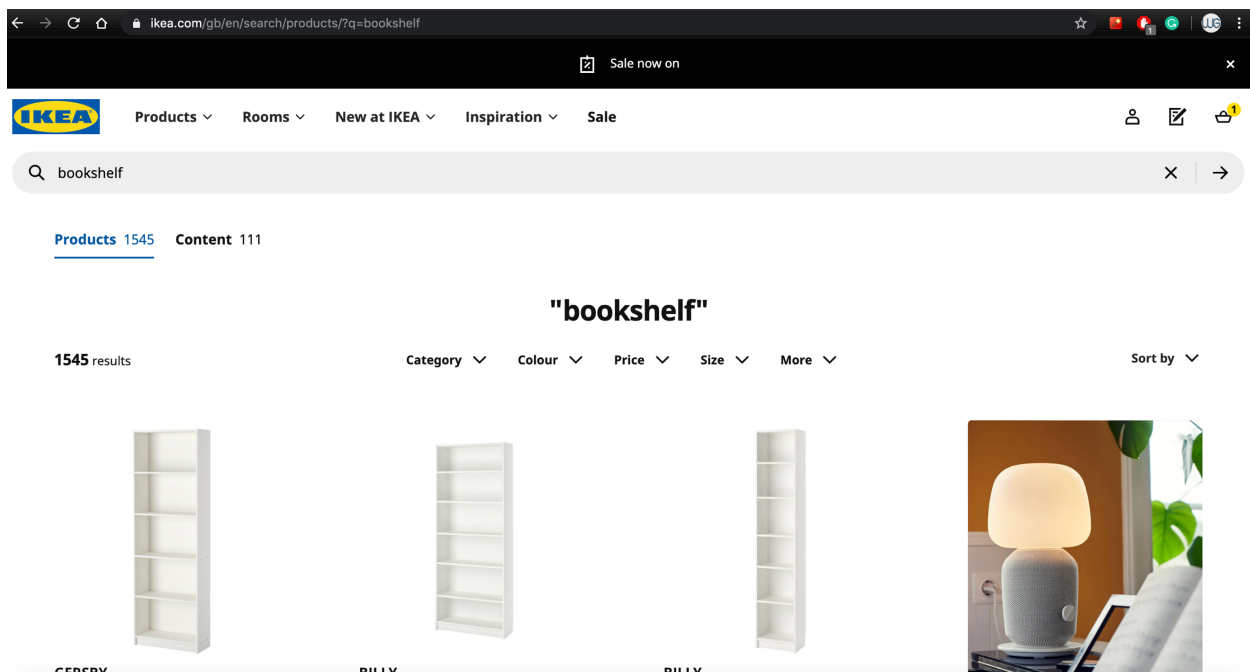
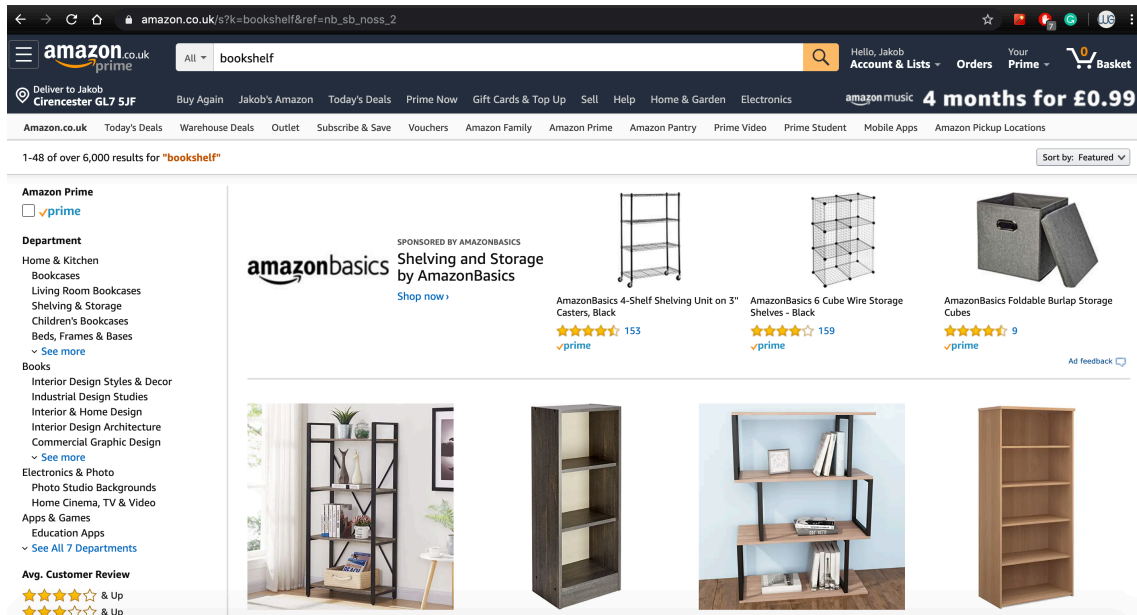
The online experience is by no means a difficult or troublesome one, but it just doesn’t feel like it has been given the effort put into that the meticulously laid out store have. Many pages have large areas of negative space which makes the site feel uninviting, and in some cases unprofessional or incomplete. Exploring the end to end journey of a customer shopping online with IKEA is not much different then shopping at other online retailers. However, for newer customers the end to end journey could be initially off-putting, and could potentially

perform very poorly if it were not for the reputation of the IKEA name. A new customer may search for a computer desk by doing a Google search, and they are met immediately with images and links to sites like Amazon and Argos. If you're not searching for commonly purchased IKEA items you may not see an IKEA result at the top of the list at all. Again this example is being viewed from the perspective of someone who have never bought anything from IKEA prior. Taking the example of searching for a computer desk from Google search to purchase it takes an average of five clicks, five different pages to navigate, to complete your order when buying through Amazon. Performing the same search it took an average of eight clicks to get the order completed. While this is certainly not a massive offense it offers support that web design and online purchasing, while available, is not the priority of IKEA. However, in regarding again the 2019 Annual UK Report showing that there is a clear interest in online purchasing should give IKEA some motivation to make that experience a more inviting one. When using their site to search through their catalog of products the pages just feel barren, and does not use any design techniques to draw the eye or highlight the products. When searching for a bookshelf on their site the same white page layout was used with many bookshelves being white themselves. This potentially can create a very uncomfortable experience for customers shopping online as the lack of color, border, and header design could lead to a lack of engagement. The page layout also ironically is the exact opposite of their philosophy of their store layouts. Their stores are an experience and very engaging by having fully designed and decorated rooms to explore in the layout of which you would find in a home. The websites layout and design however is equivocal to if the store was nothing more than just the warehouse portion of the store. It's uninviting, unengaging, and does not encourage customers to continue browsing their site and making additional purchases.

The touchpoints for the online experience is heavily neglected in favor of getting customers to come to the store. Addressing the main question of this report, 'to maximize customer satisfaction, companies have long emphasized touchpoints. But doing so can divert attention from the more important issue: the customer's end-to-end journey,' (Neher et al, March 2016.) IKEA has put more focus it seems on the end to end journey with their online platform. It exists, it is simple to use, but that is about it. The website is easy to navigate with easy to read search functions, which should be the most important thing being ease of use. But it lacks that same IKEA enjoyment that shopping at the store has. By simply breaking up the negative space, having less white, could go above and beyond for the web design. By breaking up that negative space you make the experience more inviting, and comfortable on the eyes to explore. You may ask, well Amazon pages typically have a lot of white space? Yes, it is true, but the thing Amazon has in its web design that IKEA struggles with is compositional balance.

According to Lumen Learning Compositional balance refers to the placement of the artistic elements in relation to each other within a work of art. "Positive space" refers to the space of the defined shape, or figure. Typically, the positive space is the subject of an artwork. "Negative space" refers to the space that exists around and between one or more shapes. This applies to web design in that the Positive space being the products for sale, and navigation tools with the negative space providing a boarder and distinction between the elements on the page, thus creating a compositional balance. Take a look at the examples below to see a

comparison between the compositional balance between the web design of IKEA and Amazon. The examples listed below demonstrate the “first impression” of the page. Without doing any scrolling down the page this is the immediate pages you are presented with after hitting “search.”



As you can see the Amazon page has clear page breaks providing a border between navigation menus and products, with the main header navigation tools in its own color to distinguish it from the rest of the page. This creates a clear and visual understanding that the

portion of the page colored in blue is for the navigation higher order functions that being, beginning a new search, navigation to home pages, navigation to other Amazon services, and account management. While the portion of the page below the header is specific to the search functions that are being made. The negative space on the Amazon provides clear distinction between tools and products while also using line breaks to provide a “frame” for the products.

Looking at the IKEA page text and images just seem to float in a void. There is no distinction other than the text itself to what is specific for the current search and higher web navigation functions, there is nothing to grab the eye of the customer. Even the desks on the page are a solid white color creating the illusion that there is even more negative space then what is there. A simple solution to solve having a white desk on a white background is to simply do a photoshoot of the desk clearly as the subject in a showroom setting with other colors to break up the amount of white on the page, similarly to what has been done with the photos on the Amazon landing page.

While the website is lacking some touchups the mobile app however clearly shows that they have put more attention to the ease of use and touchpoints for mobile users. Within the app you can browse showroom images, or “room inspirations” as they refer to it. Within the image of the room inspiration every item in the photo has a clickable annotation that when clicked does not navigate you away from the current page but instead opens a small annotation box with the name and price of the item associated with that annotation. This feature is a great touchpoint for customers (Pun intended) who are interested in browsing a catalog of potential new furniture. Not only does the furniture have annotation but the décor as well. This feature would go very well if incorporated into the main websites features effectively bringing a “showroom” like experience to your home.



As stated in their annual report IKEA in the UK market seem very keen on increasing website and mobile functionality to further support this growth. “Our digital sales rose by 27% on last year, as customers increasingly find it more convenient to order from us online. Driven by data and customer insights, we are investing in digital capabilities for our website which will give customers the flexibility, ease of navigation and visual inspiration they are looking for. Our ambition is for customers to be able to search, find and buy from us online within five minutes. As customer shopping habits change, our mobile proposition is also evolving, with updates to the IKEA app bringing improved access to our range by making more of it available online and helping customers plan their store visit.”

The touchpoints that IKEA has incorporated into their model makes the customer's end to end experience a unique one. And with the UK market in mind it's clear that a one shoe fits all approach may not always work. The focus on online sales is on the rise, and with that growth IKEA's online experience needs to evolve with that growth or run the risk of stagnation. Customers like to feel like they can choose how to consume the products they purchase, whether that be go to a brick and mortar store, or to shop online. By updating its online and mobile experience to one that is show the same amount of care and attention as the in store experience that growth will only continue.

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