

VitaminShoppe.com

Definition Document

AUGUST 13, 1999

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Introduction

VitaminShoppe and Sapiient have been working together since July 12, 1999 to define the vision and scope for the next version of VitaminShoppe.com. The teams have conducted a series of information gathering workshops over the last four weeks to understand and define the project at all levels. These workshops included:

- **Business Objectives Workshop** – This one-day workshop was conducted to understand the business drivers and strategy for VitaminShoppe.com 2.0.
- **Technical Assessment Workshop** – This three-day workshop was conducted to understand and assess VitaminShoppe’s current technical environment.
- **User Experience Workshop** – This one-day workshop was conducted to present Sapiient’s research on the Vitamin User Task Model and to understand the VitaminShoppe.com brand.

This document encapsulates the findings of these workshops and includes the technical, creative, and competitive assessments completed by the Sapiient team. These findings will provide a roadmap for designing a strategic solution for VitaminShoppe.com 2.0. This document is structured into the following sections:

1. VitaminShoppe – The Company

In this section, we describe the VitaminShoppe company background, industry background, vision and mission, legal issues, and organizational resource requirements.

2. VitaminShoppe.com – The Brand

In this section, we describe the VitaminShoppe.com brand position and personality. This section is based on the feedback gathered during the User Experience Workshop and will be the foundation for creating a brand strategy for VitaminShoppe.com.

3. Assessments of VitaminShoppe.com

In this section, we provide discipline-specific analysis of VitaminShoppe.com, as well as its digital competitors. These assessments cover Visual Design, Information Architecture, Content Strategy, and Technology.

Throughout this document, there are many references to “VitaminShoppe.” To clarify the entities, we refer to the parent company as The Vitamin Shoppe, the dot.com entity as VitaminShoppe, and specifically use VitaminShoppe.com when referring to the digital brand or the Web site.



VitaminShope

Company Background

The Vitamin Shoppe has been in the vitamin, mineral, and nutritional supplements (VMS) business for more than 20 years. Today, it has more than 60 retail stores in seven states across the Northeast with plans to expand into 200 locations by the end of 2000. In addition, The Vitamin Shoppe has built a national presence through its direct mail catalog business with 275,000 customers. Its Web site went live in 1998 and now attracts more than 300,000 unique visitors per month. More than half of the orders placed through the site are from new customers.

VitaminShope.com has recently been spun-off as a separate entity from the retail store and catalog businesses that make up The Vitamin Shoppe. Through a series of legal agreements between the two entities, the “dot.com” business (VitaminShope) will continue to be supported by The Vitamin Shoppe infrastructure. In addition, the other two sales channels will support the “dot.com” business by displaying the URL and promoting the online brand.



Industry Background

The VMS Market

The public's growing interest in self-care has created an increased demand for vitamins, minerals, and nutritional supplements. This demand has caught the attention of both traditional brick-and mortar establishments and .com start-ups looking to capitalize on customer needs in the virtual marketplace. Sales of VMS products are a \$12 billion business. With millions at stake for Internet sales, significant efforts are being made to lead in this space and VitaminShoppe is no exception.

VitaminShopper

Current Market Position

VitaminShopper.com is currently viewed as the market leader in online VMS sales. Its strengths include:

- A 22-year history
- Breadth and depth of product line
- Multiple sales channels
- Next-day fulfillment capabilities
- Customer loyalty
- 55% customer retention rate
- \$75-80 average order amount
- 3.8% conversion rate
- \$12 million in annual revenues for 1998
(\$15.7 million targeted for 1999; \$50 million for 2000)



VitaminShopper

Competitor Summary

The following list contains both existing and emerging competitors in the online VMS market:

Niche.com's

- Greentree.com
- Mothernature.com
- Vitamins.com
- VitaminLife.com
- eNutrition.com

Drug Stores and Mass Merchants

- PlanetRx.com/GNC
- Drugstore.com
- WalMart
- Amazon.com
- Soma.com/CVS
- MyBasics.com

A more thorough competitor evaluation is found in the Visual Design and Content Assessments.



VitaminShopper

Mission Statement

The vision of VitaminShopper is to be a leader in e-commerce. As a customer-centered organization, its goal is to build lifetime customer loyalty by providing the most engaging customer experience for buying VMS products online. VitaminShopper will achieve this vision by leveraging the assets, infrastructure and experience of the parent company, The VitaminShopper, whose strengths include:

Infrastructure

Unparalleled fulfillment capabilities, expertise in warehouse logistics, technology, industry knowledge capital, customer data and tools, vendor relationships, and multiple established sales channels.

Product selection and price

The Vitamin Shoppe stocks over 18,000 SKUs. Because of the breadth and depth of the product line, The Vitamin Shoppe is able to negotiate deep discounts with their vendors, thereby allowing them to offer a 20-40% discount on all products sold online.

Loyalty program

The Vitamin Shoppe has an 80% redemption rate, which is significantly higher than average for most loyalty programs.

Brand

The Vitamin Shoppe has a regional brand presence with 200 stores across the Northeast (by 12/2000) and a national catalog with an annual distribution of 13 million.

Content

Sponsorship of vitaminbuzz.com provides users with comprehensive product and health information, as well as links to online health and nutrition experts.

Investment capital

The Vitamin Shoppe is well-funded and VitaminShopper is securing new investors to fund this year's IPO.

Heritage

The Vitamin Shoppe has more than 20 years of experience as a VMS provider. This history positions them as a knowledgeable and trustworthy company.



Legal Issues

Combining Content and Commerce

One of the most important needs of VMS customers is relevant and useful information that supports a purchase decision. This can mean anything from general health and nutrition information, to expert opinions and decisions, to specific product information.

Because VMS products are not regulated by the FDA, strict regulatory guidelines have been established that restrict product claims that can be made on product packaging and in retail stores. The most recent legislation was issued in 1974 as the Dietary and Supplement Health Education Act (DSHEA). The guidelines established by DSHEA are very clear when applied to a traditional retail store environment. On the Web, however, these guidelines are less clear and open to a range of interpretations.

VitaminShoppe has made a concerted effort to maintain the most conservative interpretation of these guidelines by completely separating content from commerce on the Web. Vitaminbuzz.com, the information site sponsored by VitaminShoppe, is completely detached from VitaminShoppe.com by a separate domain. As VitaminShoppe strives to provide more support for their customers' buying decisions, they look for new ways to incorporate content into VitaminShoppe.com without violating the intent of DSHEA.



Organizational Resource Requirements

VitaminShoppe has plans to grow the organization to 30 employees by the end of 1999. To ensure the success of this project, the following resources should be brought into the organization by October 15, 1999. These resources will be necessary to support the implementation and ongoing maintenance of VitaminShoppe.com.





Executive Sponsor

Responsible for executive oversight of the project.

Project Manager

Responsible for fulfilling the company’s obligations for completing project deliverables.

Alliance Manager

Responsible for maintaining relationships with alliance partners, organizing special cross-site promotions, and resolving cross-customization and integration issues.

Web Merchandising Manager

Responsible for developing and managing product placement processes, product pricing protocols, and product vendor relationships.

System Administrator

Responsible for transitioning the system to VitaminShoppe and maintaining the system after its release. Must begin involvement at least mid-point in the project to gain sufficient system knowledge. Skill set must include experience in configuring and maintaining Sun or HP enterprise servers; knowledge in configuring and maintaining Solaris and/or HP-UX machines; and knowledge in configuring and maintaining data storage devices.

Legacy System Developers (2)

Responsible for working closely with the back-end developers to design and build legacy system interfaces. Must have thorough knowledge of VitaminShoppe.com applications and platforms including PICK, ACT, MarketWorks, and other systems.

Current System Developers (2)

Responsible for learning and helping build the current system configuration and software/hardware architectures. Must acquire knowledge of configuration and architectures to be able to maintain the system after going “live.” Skill set should include strong Java/C++ and DCOM/EJB/CORBA background and knowledge of transaction processing and distributed development, object and data modeling, and Windows NT/Unix.

Web Administrator

Responsible for overall maintenance of the site and its contents. Also responsible for crafting Web administration policies and procedures. Must have prior experience in Web administration and knowledge of the software and hardware platforms chosen for the site.

Web Developer

Responsible for maintaining and updating all server forward functionality. Must be proficient in HTML, JavaScript, ASP, UNIX, Oracle, SQL, CORBA, COM, DCOM, ODBC, TCP/IP, C++, Visual Basic, Java, PERL, and PICK. Must have working knowledge of CORBA, C++, and SQL.

Visual Designer

Responsible for the maintenance and creation of graphical and multimedia assets for site. Must be proficient in Photoshop, Illustrator, ImageReady, Flash, Director, and Acrobat. Must also have strong understanding of the established visual language of the site, as well as the concepts and practices of Information Architecture, Interaction Design, and User-Centered Design techniques.

Content Manager

Responsible for maintaining all functionality associated with the Content Management System, including content syndication, banner ad refreshes, site refreshes, personalization and customization decision support, content workflow management, content archiving, ad serving, and customer lifecycle analysis.

Content Developer/Writer

Responsible for creating and updating all copy posted to the site. Must have a strong understanding of the Web medium, have a solid understanding of the site’s voice, must be able to produce copy on a tight deadline, write for multiple audiences and interest levels, and understand the content management package.

Editor

Responsible for ensuring that all copy meets established spelling, formatting, grammatical, and contextual standards. Must be able to deliver high quality work under tight deadlines, have a strong understanding of the Web medium, and thoroughly understand the site’s voice.

The Vitamin Shoppe is unique

The Vitamin Shoppe is a distinctive company with a distinctive brand. For more than 20 years, its customers have come to know it through its reputation, people, stores, and communications. Now, The Vitamin Shoppe competes in digital media where it must position itself clearly in customers' minds to maintain its leadership in this new marketplace.

This assessment defines the VitaminShoppe.com brand and articulates how to represent The Vitamin Shoppe in digital media. Since Sapien will be validating the brand position and personality with customers through continued research, it provides a starting point for the redesign of VitaminShoppe.com.



VitaminShoppe.com's brand

Brand

A brand represents a product, person, or company in a person's mind. Brands are derived from consumer perceptions of tangible and intangible attributes. They are created to provide a simple way of remembering how a company (or product or person) wants to be known.

Brands have three basic components:

Personality

The qualities that customers associate with the brand.

Identity

How the brand looks and behaves, and sounds.

Position

A clear connection between the company and its perceived quality in the customer's mind.

Remember, a brand is not a product, a person, or a company but can represent any of these.

The brand is based on the perceptions of people outside the company. The brand owns a position in customers' minds based on their customer experiences with VitaminShoppe.com. Each customer experience should reinforce the brand position that VitaminShoppe wants to achieve.



Brand personality

Brand personality

Brand personality is the set of qualities that customers attribute to a given brand. Brands can be perceived as being conservative, youthful, smart, etc. Brand personality is usually described by a set of human traits that depict the character of a brand.

A brand personality is comprised of all the qualities that people associate with a brand. The findings from the User Experience Workshop and Sapient's evaluation of the VitaminShopper.com brand identified the following qualities of the VitaminShopper.com brand personality.

VitaminShopper.com is personal, knowledgeable, reliable, credible, responsive, and a leader.

These attributes are not a list of approved words that must be used in all interpretations of the brand. Rather they are the associations that we want customers to make, whenever they interact with the VitaminShopper.com brand.



VitaminShopper.com is Personal

The Vitamin Shoppe has been customer-focused for more than 20 years. Everyday, in its retail stores, it shows a friendly, personal face to its customers. VitaminShopper.com extends this personal customer experience to the digital space. Improvements to VitaminShopper.com are focused on better customer service and making the site a more personal customer experience.



VitaminShopper.com is

Knowledgeable

The Vitamin Shoppe has a more than 20-year legacy in the VMS industry. The name alone evokes a level of trust. The breadth and depth of its product selection is based on this extensive industry experience. Access to information, such as vitaminbuzz.com, provides customers with trustworthy health information. As a trusted information source, it provides a valuable online customer experience.



VitaminShopper.com is

Reliable

The Vitamin Shoppe has been a trustworthy source for VMS and other healthcare products for more than 20 years. Its comprehensive selection and prompt product delivery make it the most popular name in the industry. It even backs the quality and value of its product with a 30-day satisfaction guarantee. The Vitamin Shoppe's commitment to improved customer service, combined with its legacy of offering a comprehensive selection of quality products, provides customers with a level of trust unmatched by its digital competitors.



VitaminShoppe.com is

Credible

The Vitamin Shoppe has earned its reputation for being a credible source for health and VMS products and information. Its initial separation of vitaminbuzz.com and VitaminShoppe.com, choice of reputable site partners, and product guarantees support its credibility in an industry that has yet to gain mainstream acceptance. As a champion for the customer, it has not been quick to integrate content for the sake of a sale.



VitaminShopper.com is

Responsive

The Vitamin Shoppe's goal to be the leader in digital customer service has made it responsive to the rapidly changing needs of its customers. In the dirt world, The Vitamin Shoppe has responded to its customers' needs for more than 20 years. It is doing the same in the digital space by continuing to shape VitaminShopper.com according to customer needs. It has always offered customers prompt sale and delivery of VMS products and credible information to support the sale. Now, VitaminShopper.com will also offer the online customer more personalized service and increased health and product information.



VitaminShopper.com is

A Leader

The Vitamin Shoppe is the industry leader, both online and offline, among sellers of VMS products. It has achieved this position by offering a comprehensive selection of quality products and unmatched customer value and service for more than 20 years. Unlike its digital competitors, The Vitamin Shoppe supports its customers through multiple sales channels – Web, retail stores, and direct mail catalog.



Brand positioning statement

Brand positioning statement

A brand positioning statement gives a brief summary of the promise the brand makes to the customer. This articulation, from a customer's point of view, identifies the need the brand meets and provides a way for customers to easily identify themselves with the brand.

The VitaminShoppe.com brand is further defined by its positioning—the place that it occupies in the minds of customers. A brand positioning statement summarizes how the brand is differentiated from other brands.

To develop a brand positioning statement, there are four important elements to consider:

- **Audience** — Who will buy the brand?
- **Category of products or services** — What does the company offer?
- **Value proposition** — What is the value of the product or service it delivers?
- **Differentiation** — What sets the brand apart?

A few brand positioning statements have been crafted for VitaminShoppe.com. Research will help solidify the final positioning statement.



Brand positioning statement 1

VitaminShoppe.com's focus on customer service has made it the leading online provider of quality vitamins and nutritional products for health-conscious consumers, offering the most comprehensive selection and backed by more than 20 years of experience.

Audience—Health-conscious consumers

Category of products or services—Quality vitamins and nutritional products

Value proposition—Focus on customer service

Differentiation—Comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience

Brand positioning statement 2

From the nutritional enthusiast to the daily vitamin consumer, VitaminShoppe.com is committed to supporting the health and wellness of its customers by delivering the widest selection of quality products, superior customer service, and the best tools and information, backed by more than 20 years of experience and trust.

Audience—Nutritional enthusiast to the daily vitamin consumer

Category of products or services—Quality products (vitamins and nutritional supplements)

Value proposition—Superior customer service

Differentiation—Comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience and trust



Brand positioning statement 3

As an online provider of quality products and services that support healthy living, VitaminShoppe.com focuses on the needs of its customers through unparalleled service, backed by a comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience.

- Audience**—Consumers concerned with healthy living
- Category of products or services**—Quality products (vitamins and nutritional supplements)
- Value proposition**—Unparalleled customer service
- Differentiation**—Comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience

Brand positioning statement 4

As an online provider of quality vitamins and nutritional supplements, VitaminShoppe.com is committed to supporting the health and wellness of its customers with the highest levels of service, backed by a comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience.

- Audience**—Customers concerned with health and wellness
- Category of products or services**—Quality vitamins and nutritional supplements
- Value proposition**—Highest levels of customer service
- Differentiation**—Comprehensive product selection and more than 20 years of experience



Brand identity

While The Vitamin Shoppe's key messages should be the same across all media, the VitaminShoppe.com brand personality will be interpreted in unique ways. This section identifies elements and standards for the brand in digital media.



VitaminShoppe.com differentiates itself from its competitors through its visual design. These guidelines ensure that the most important and influential aspects of VitaminShoppe.com’s identity are conveyed accurately in digital media.

VitaminShoppe.com’s visual design should:

- Provide customers with a consistent, engaging, and valuable experience
- Support their understanding of the site’s editorial content, features, and functionality; and
- Express the VitaminShoppe.com brand and create a strong personality for VitaminShoppe.com.

The following guidelines explain the components that will make up VitaminShoppe.com’s visual design. It is important to note that the seamless integration of digital and offline design elements is seldom possible or desirable due to limitations in technology. A portion of VitaminShoppe.com’s existing design elements will be adapted for use in digital media, and some new elements will be introduced.

Graphic symbol and logotype

The VitaminShoppe.com logo is being modified slightly to function more effectively and to better reflect the brand in the digital medium.

Color palette

The brand identity should emphasize clarity, consistency, and simplicity. The color palette used in digital media should mirror the color palette used in The Vitamin Shoppe’s offline communications. However, because of the limitations of digital media, there are slight variations in the colors recommended for use on the Web.

Although some customers will have the capability to view colors outside the 216-color Web-safe palette, VitaminShoppe should limit its choice of colors to those within this palette. This will allow more flexibility for the visual design.

Typography system

To the extent possible, VitaminShoppe.com’s digital typography should leverage that used offline. However, since the presentation of typography varies according to the customer’s browser, digital typography systems need to allow for flexibility.

When possible, VitaminShoppe should attempt to control typography in digital media so that VitaminShoppe.com’s identity is consistent. Specifically, new versions of Web browsers, such as Netscape and IE 4.0 and above, understand not only the fonts, but also size, leading, letter spacing, color, weight, justification, and position.

To take full advantage of available type control and reinforce its personality accurately, VitaminShoppe.com should use accurate browser detection and deliver the appropriate code to each customer.

Imagery

While illustrations and photography are often desirable design elements, VitaminShoppe should avoid using stock photography, illustrations, or images since their generic nature may dilute VitaminShoppe.com’s brand identity. If custom imagery is not possible, selected imagery still needs to appropriately reflect the brand.

Animation

Animation may be used but should only be implemented to make the interface easier to use. Gratuitous animation should be avoided.



The substance, selection, and tone of VitaminShoppe’s digital content will differentiate VitaminShoppe from its competitors. When developing content, all decisions must ensure that customers perceive the VitaminShoppe.com brand attributes: personal, knowledgeable, reliable, credible, responsive, a leader. The following are important guidelines to ensure that digital content communicates and reinforces the VitaminShoppe.com brand.

Timely, relevant content

By making content timely, useful, and accurate, VitaminShoppe.com can reveal its reliable and credible brand personality.

Intuitive content structures

Content and tools that are most important to the user should be surfaced at the highest levels of the site. Customers should be able to customize content that is surfaced on a homepage so that their experience in digital media can be as personal as possible.

Consistent, clear voice

VitaminShoppe should use a natural and straightforward voice in digital media. This can be accomplished using short, to-the-point sentences and active voice. This will ensure that customers do not perceive that VitaminShoppe is trying to deceive them with confusing language. This voice must complement The Vitamin Shoppe’s voice in other media and be consistent throughout the site.

Web events and community

If VitaminShoppe decides to feature Web events or communities, the following guidelines should be considered. Web events should only be conducted if these events educate and provide health or product knowledge to customers and when customers can execute them with minimum effort.

Content alliances

If VitaminShoppe enters into content alliances, the following principles should be kept in mind: Content alliances should only be developed to compensate for areas of content or decision support that VitaminShoppe cannot generate on its own. Alliances and co-branding opportunities should always support VitaminShoppe.com’s positioning in the market and should always be relevant to customer needs. Alliances should only be created with companies that have similar personality traits or have characteristics that VitaminShoppe wants to associate itself with but cannot fully represent on its own.



Brand performance

In addition to content and visual design, there are several unique opportunities to brand the customer experience through usability, technology, service, and security. The following guidelines describe how these aspects of the VitaminShoppe.com brand may be represented in digital media.



Usability

The performance of the brand in digital media can be measured by how easy or difficult it is for a customer to interact with VitaminShoppe.com. On the Web, customers often make instant judgments about a brand based on how quickly they can accomplish a task or obtain information. For customers to perceive VitaminShoppe.com as personal, reliable, and credible, VitaminShoppe.com should provide:

Useful tools

Tools should be developed to streamline a customer’s experience.

Clear, intuitive navigation

Navigation should be consistent throughout the site and scalable or flexible enough to accommodate the expansion of new content areas. Customers should easily understand how tasks are mapped or how related tools are grouped.

Concise, intuitive instructions

When reading on screen, customers have a short attention span and will prefer to be instructed by the machine through concise commands and questions. Such language will increase usability, bolstering customers’ perception of VitaminShoppe.com as helpful.

Fast-loading data and applications

VitaminShoppe.com should to be easy to access, with quickly downloading pages, data, and applications. Cumbersome, time-consuming graphics or technologies will have a negative effect on usability while the careful, efficient, and optimal use of technology will strengthen the digital brand.

Clear, hierarchical information structures

The architecture of data should always be consistent with customers’ needs. VitaminShoppe.com’s architecture should represent a clear hierarchy of information with logical paths from general to detailed information. VitaminShoppe should always test the hierarchy of information against the needs of the customer.

In addition, the architecture should be a rational, scalable system that can accommodate new content areas and features without altering the established patterns—bookmarks, login processes—of legacy or expert customers.

Technology

New technologies introduce innovative and unique possibilities to reinforce the VitaminShoppe.com brand. VitaminShoppe must carefully calculate its use of new technologies in order to be perceived as reliable and personal. VitaminShoppe.com should provide:

Relevant, high-performing functionality

New front-end technologies should only be used if they increase usability and are universally compatible with the customer’s delivery platforms.

Any features that require a plug-in not included in most browsers should be avoided. New technologies come and go very rapidly and should be, to some degree, time-tested before VitaminShoppe uses them. Innovation for VitaminShoppe should be defined as discovering new ways to use proven technology.

Experience-enhancing media

Video and sound should only be used when it helps the customer by making the experience of VitaminShoppe.com easier or more personal. The use of video and sound must be balanced with bandwidth and technology constraints: if the quality of the media is deteriorated because of bandwidth or connectivity, then it will dilute the customer’s perception of VitaminShoppe.com.

Personalized automation

VitaminShoppe.com must provide customized, personal experiences to both current and potential customers.

Service

Customers expect a higher level of service due to the increased speed of digital transactions. To be perceived as personal, reliable, and responsive when providing digital-based services, VitaminShoppe.com must offer:

Continuous, personal feedback

Feedback should be given to customers during both transactional and informational requests. This feedback may come in many different forms, including visual cues. Feedback should always introduce elements of personalization to the greatest extent possible.

Clear information about request processing

Fulfillment of both transactional and informational requests should be as clear and simple as possible. VitaminShoppe.com should provide immediate user feedback after each step of a transaction or request via the Web, email, telephone, or fax, depending on what is appropriate to the user and the transaction.

Security

Security will be a primary concern of VitaminShoppe’s customers. To meet customers’ expectations of VitaminShoppe’s reliability in digital media, VitaminShoppe.com must provide:

Assured security

Given VitaminShoppe’s business and the needs of its customers, VitaminShoppe.com should constantly reassure its customers about the level of security it offers via the Web using visual, textual, and functional cues.



Key Findings

Navigation Assessment

Information Architecture

- Users must follow an inefficient process to access and purchase products.
- The search mechanisms do not effectively meet common user tasks.
- No capability currently exists for users to browse the product selections.
- Access among the site's functional domains is fragmented and confusing.
- The site's domains are not unified and integrated.

Navigation

- Moving between the site's domains is difficult from anywhere in the site.
- No strong capability exists to move from page to page within a domain.
- The design of the navigation interactivity is often inconsistent in behavior and visualization.
- The flow of the navigation is inefficient.
- The navigation system does not map effectively to the information architecture.

Content Strategy Assessment

- The content and related messages are product-centric and need to be more customer-centric.
- VitaminShopper's competitors use health-related content to encourage sales. (Some of this content is the same content licensed on vitaminbuzz.)
- VitaminShopper's competitors use personalized products or features to deepen the customer relationship.
- VitaminShopper's competitors' efforts at community building have not been particularly successful.
- Product descriptions are not very readable or scannable.
- Effective and consistent placement and integration of partner content needs to be considered.
- Implementation of a content management system will help ensure control, efficiency, and consistency of content elements.

Visual Systems Assessment

- No cohesive graphic identity exists for all of The Vitamin Shoppe entities.
- The overall look of the current site lacks a definitive personality.
- Product brand and product display are inconsistently integrated.
- The brand position is not apparent throughout the site.
- The look and feel of the site's imagery and graphical user interface (GUI) is not inspired by, nor does it leverage, the current brand position.
- The product descriptions are awkward and appear to have grown unsystematically.

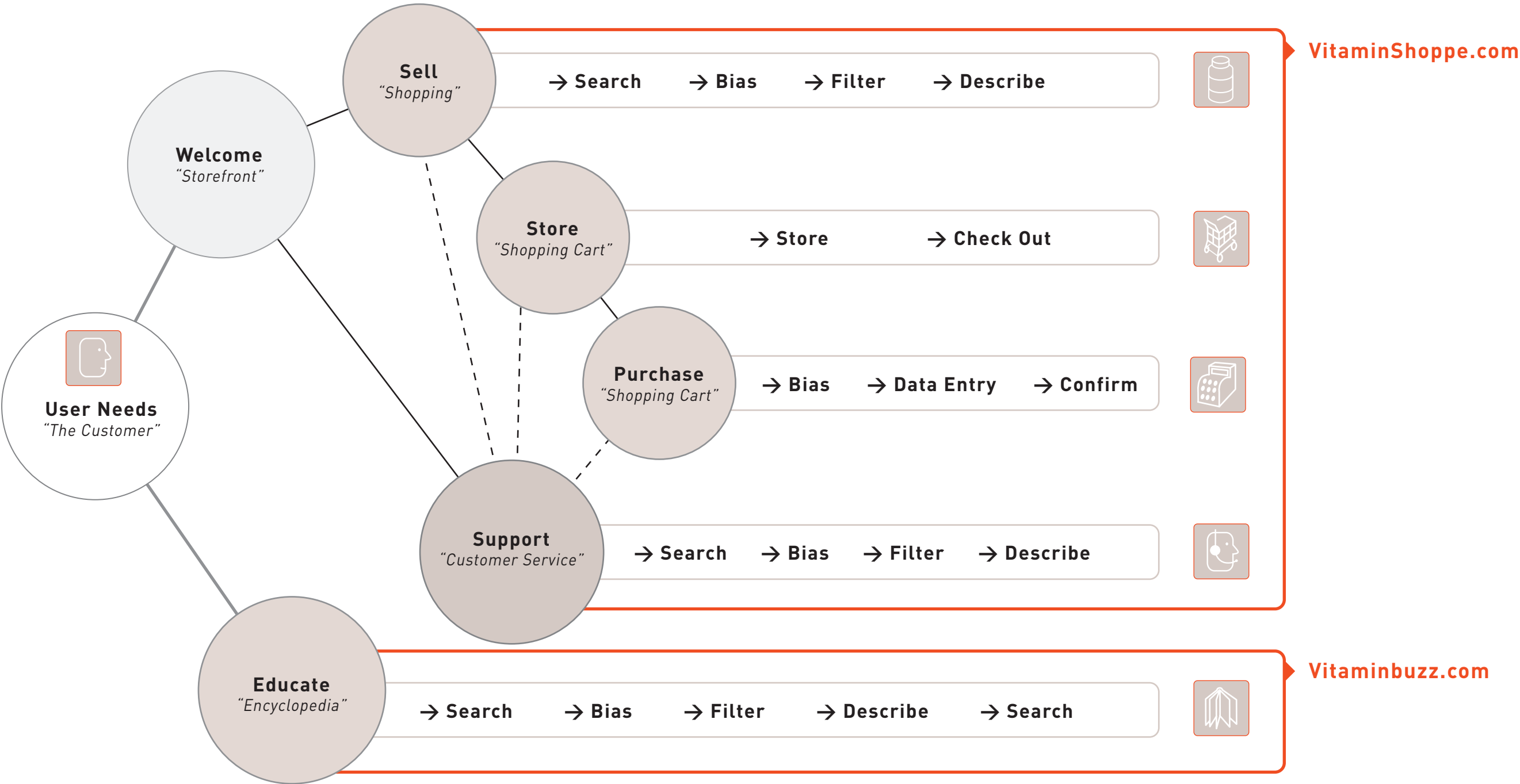
Technology Summary

- Orders from the current site are batched rather than translated in real time to the back office.
- Information from the back office is outdated or not available.
- The site cannot store and display more than one catalog's prices.
- The site is capturing a limited amount of information about visitors.
- Security is not implemented in all aspects of the site.



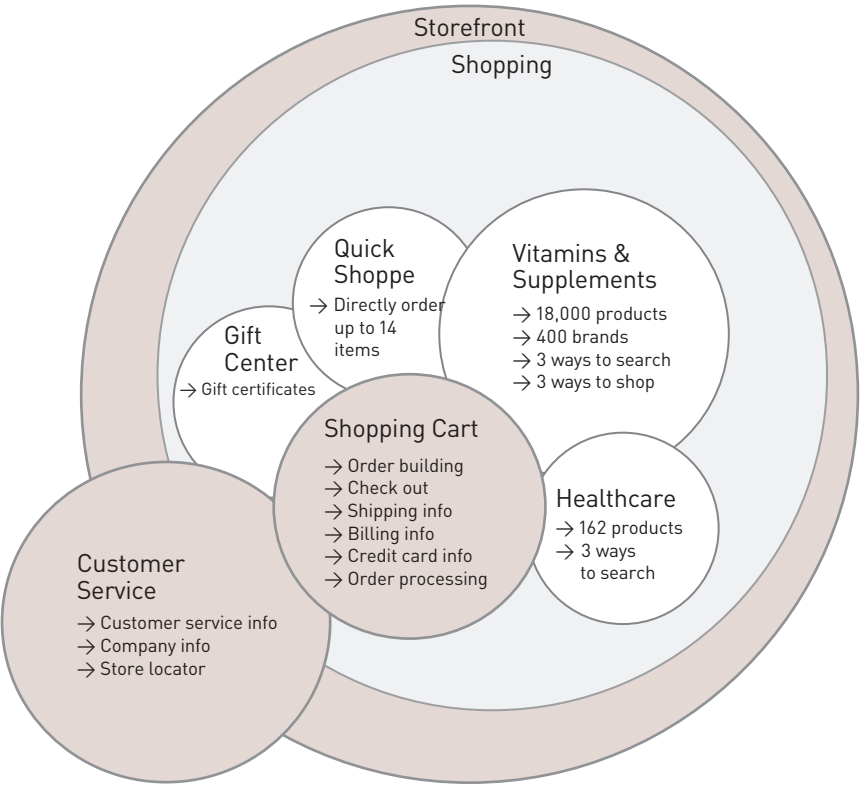
The Interaction Model describes the user's interaction with the site and its structure to accommodate the user's needs and goals. The Interaction Model is the basis for the site's Functional Domains and User Task Flows, as well as the

Information Architecture and Navigation Design. The Interaction Model provides insight into the most basic needs and demands of the user, as well as the mechanisms that the site design uses to support them.



Functional domains are a mechanism for describing the functionality of a user's experience, as well as a tool for showing the relationships among pieces of functionality.

VitaminShoppe.com
E-commerce/CRM



E-commerce/CRM

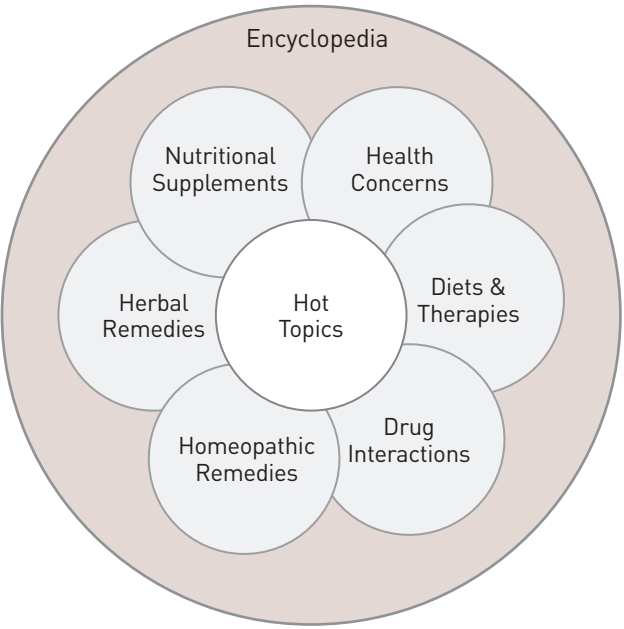
This domain is composed of the e-commerce functionality, as well as the related Customer Relationship Management (CRM) capabilities of the site.

The e-commerce functionality is made up of a **Storefront**, a **Shopping** interaction, and the **Shopping Cart**, which acts as the bridge from e-commerce to CRM.

The Shopping interaction is made up of interactions for the various channels of products and services, including Vitamins & Minerals, Healthcare, QuickShoppe, and the Gift Center.

The CRM functionality includes the **Customer Service** interaction and also shares the Shopping Cart.

Vitaminbuzz.com
Content Provider



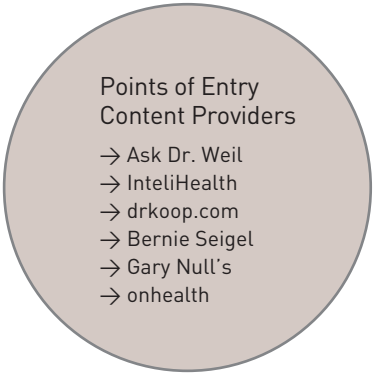
Content Provider

This domain provides detailed supplement information with the exception of product descriptions.

This domain is physically separated from the e-commerce/CRM domains and is presented to the user in the form of a partner site that acts as the **Encyclopedia** for VitaminShoppe.com.

The only access between this domain and the e-commerce/CRM domain is from point-to-homepage.

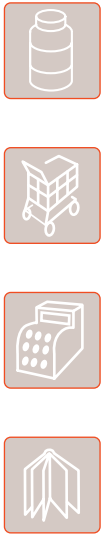
Partner Sites
Network Alliances



Network Alliances

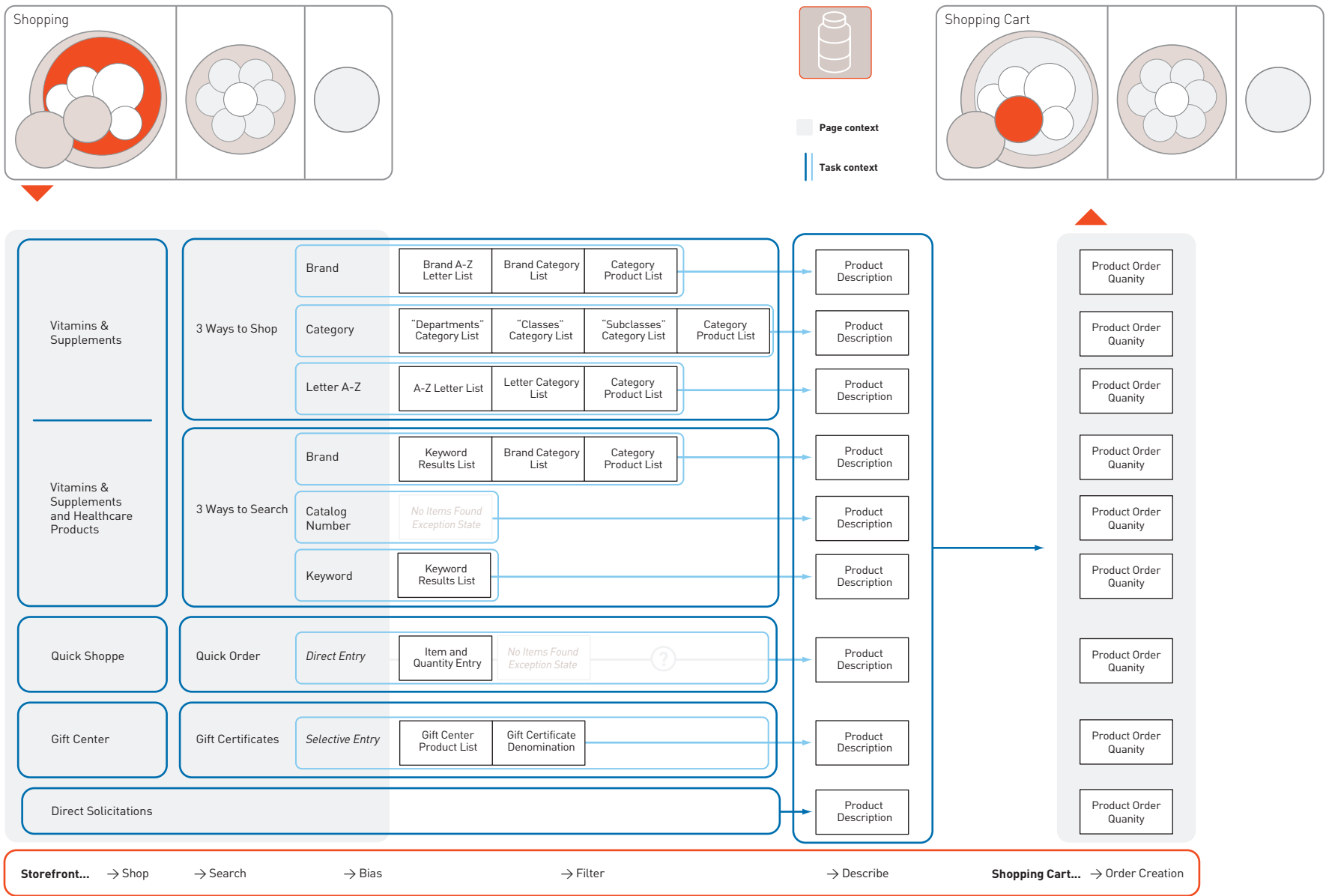
This domain provides associative links to other external vendors of information.

These affiliate sites provide **Points of Entry** for the VitaminShoppe experiences and, indirectly, provide sources of information and content for VitaminShoppe.com users.



Shopping to Shopping Cart

The Task Flow Analysis shows the processes and procedures a user undertakes during an interaction within the functional domains of the site.



Shopping to Shopping Cart Task Flow

The user's task flow, from the arrival at the Storefront to the addition of the desired items into the Shopping Cart, is the bulk of the functionality of VitaminShoppe.com. As an e-commerce site, the primary user tasks that need to be satisfied are: finding a desired product, getting information about that product, and opting to purchase that product and others.

The Interaction Model is implemented as a series of Search, Bias, and Filter steps used to guide the user to the desired product.

The primary tasks of Search are facilitated through an up-front decision between Vitamins & Supplements, Healthcare products, QuickShoppe, and the Gift Center. Or, the user can select products directly from solicitations on the homepage. Secondary tasks are biased through up to six different mechanisms. Tertiary filtering is conducted linearly to facilitate the user's selection of the desired product.

Once the selected product is found, the user can view its description. If the found item meets the user's search criteria, the product can then be added to the Shopping Cart to end the flow.

What Works

- Multiple bias lets users choose what search mechanism meets their needs
- QuickShoppe feature allows experienced users to quickly reorder products
- Allows for easy catalog-to-Web purchasing
- Direct product solicitations are fast and easy

What Doesn't Work

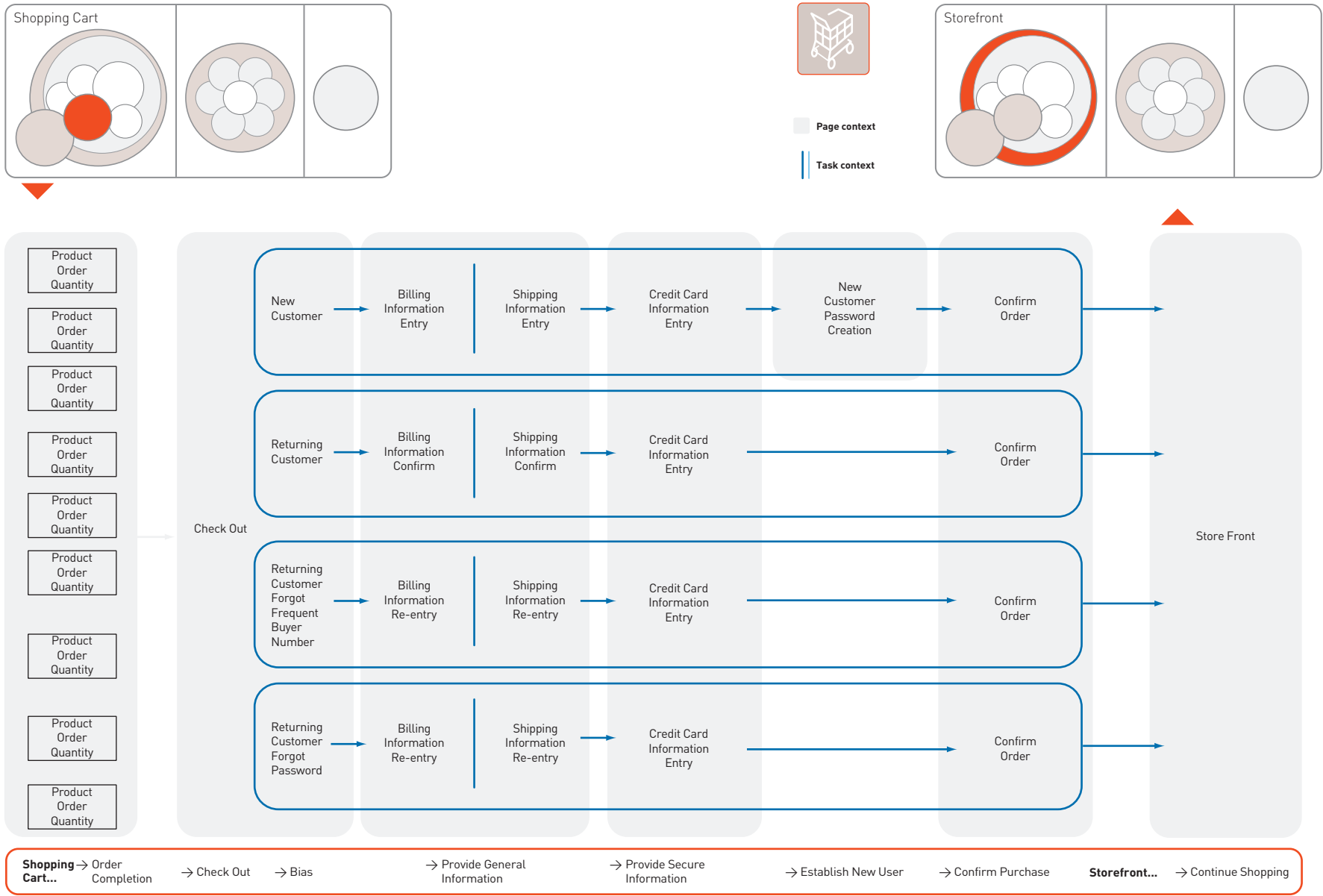
- Too many pathways to product
- Most pathways to product are inefficient
- Taxonomy of brands, product line, and products not clear
- Confusing nomenclature – "categories" used too often with different meanings
- Hierarchy of interaction not clear or balanced

Key Findings

- Combine search mechanisms to reduce too many choices
- Base search mechanisms on user goals and needs and not store or organization structure
- Develop a clear taxonomy of brand, product line, and products
- Develop a clear hierarchy interaction, naming system



Shopping Cart to Storefront



Shopping Cart to Storefront Task Flow

The user's task flow starts from the decision to store a product in the Shopping Cart, through the purchasing process, to the final confirmation of the sale, finally returning the user to the Storefront to restart the Shopping cycle.

The primary bias of this task flow is discrimination about the type of user checking out. When the user has self-selected a type, the secondary data entry process is accomplished over a series of pages that encapsulate the Interaction Model's tasks for this domain. The tertiary tasks of confirmation complete the feedback loop, indicating to the user that the Shopping cycle has been successfully completed. The user is returned to the Storefront to begin the process again.

The basis of the biasing and filtering mechanisms are directly related to the current site's technological implementation, which prevents user profiling and recognition to eliminate the self-selection and data entry steps of the task flow.

What Works

- Basic Shopping Cart behaviors and related tasks are consistent with other e-commerce solutions
- Integration of affinity programs
- Progression of steps for new users
- Ability to quit purchasing cycle

What Doesn't Work

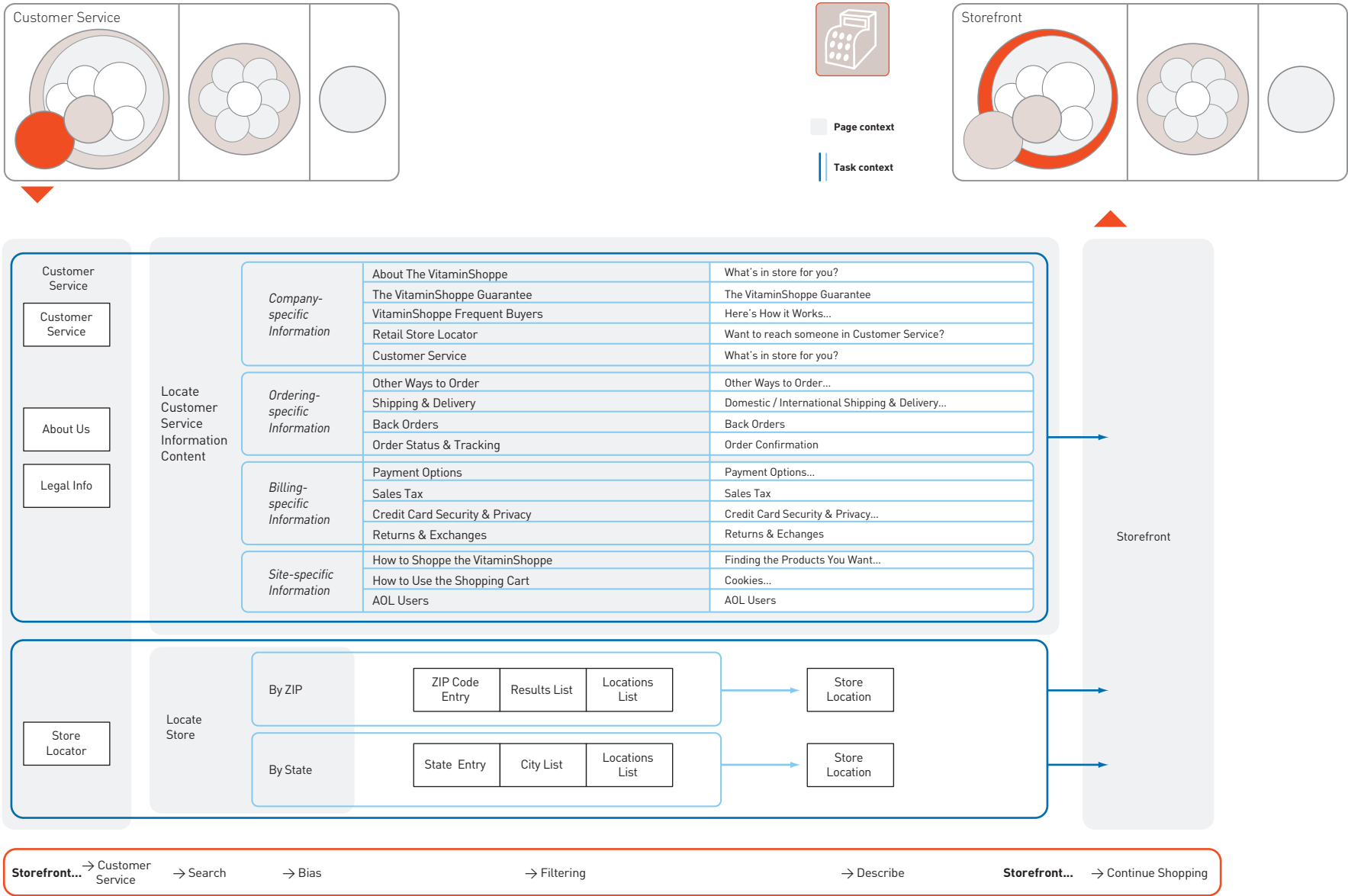
- Repeat customers are not recognized and information must be re-entered
- Feedback
- Indication of progress in task flow
- Self-selection bias
- No alternate mechanisms for different levels of experienced users

Key Findings

- New technological capabilities should provide user data collection capabilities to allow for user profiling, eliminating self-select bias and data re-entry
- Provide alternate purchasing flows for users of different levels of experience
- Better indications of progress
- Better feedback



Customer Service to Storefront



What Works

- Store Locator sub-flow appropriate
- Depth of Customer Service content
- Basic access to Customer Service

What Doesn't Work

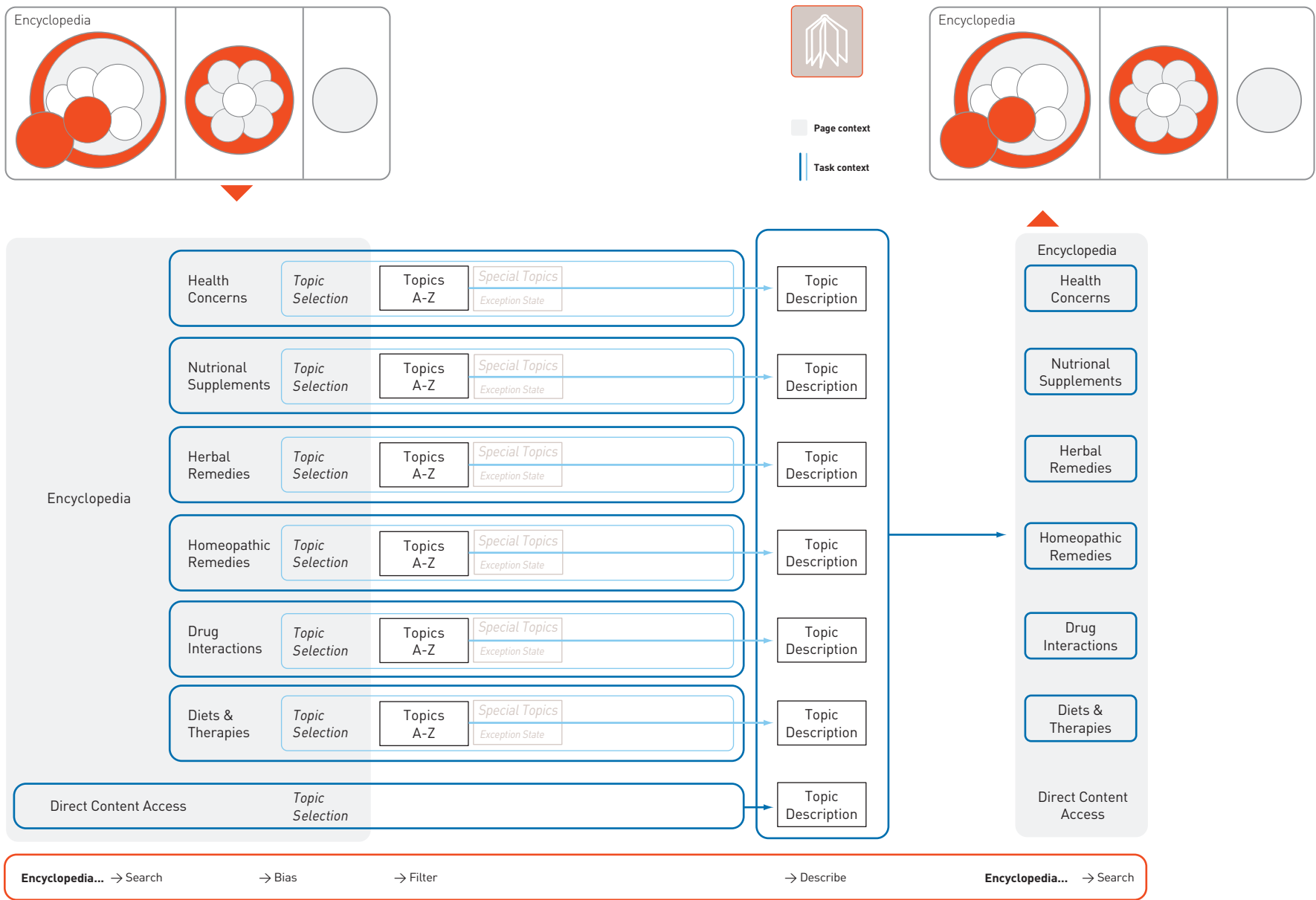
- Too much content in the page context
- Interactive or real-time service missing
- Taxonomy of content not clear
- Confusing nomenclature

Key Findings

- Leverage new technological capabilities to offer more robust and interactive customer relationship management
- Develop a more robust taxonomy and hierarchy of customer service needs that are based on the user needs and not the organization needs
- Make the capabilities of Customer Service more accessible within the information architecture



Encyclopedia



Encyclopedia Task Flow

The user's task flow for the Encyclopedia functional domain begins with the user entering the context through <http://www.vitaminbuzz.com>. This task flow describes the user's flow from choosing a topical area to the discovery of the topic description that was being sought.

The primary bias requires the user to select from six primary domains of content. Once this preliminary choice is made, the user must select from a list of topics in an A-Z letter sort list. Once the appropriate topic is found in this list, the user arrives at the content.

Once the user has found the topic description, they may either use the cross links within the content to read about other relevant topics or return to the Encyclopedia's starting context, the homepage for vitaminbuzz.com.

What Works

- Single, easy to comprehend filtering mechanism
- Cross-linked content links within topic description

What Doesn't Work

- No integration with VitaminShoppe.com user experience
- Monolithic A-Z sort list too long
- No other search, bias, or filter mechanisms
- Topic content is static and without visual content
- Content hierarchy and taxonomy unbalanced and unclear

Key Findings

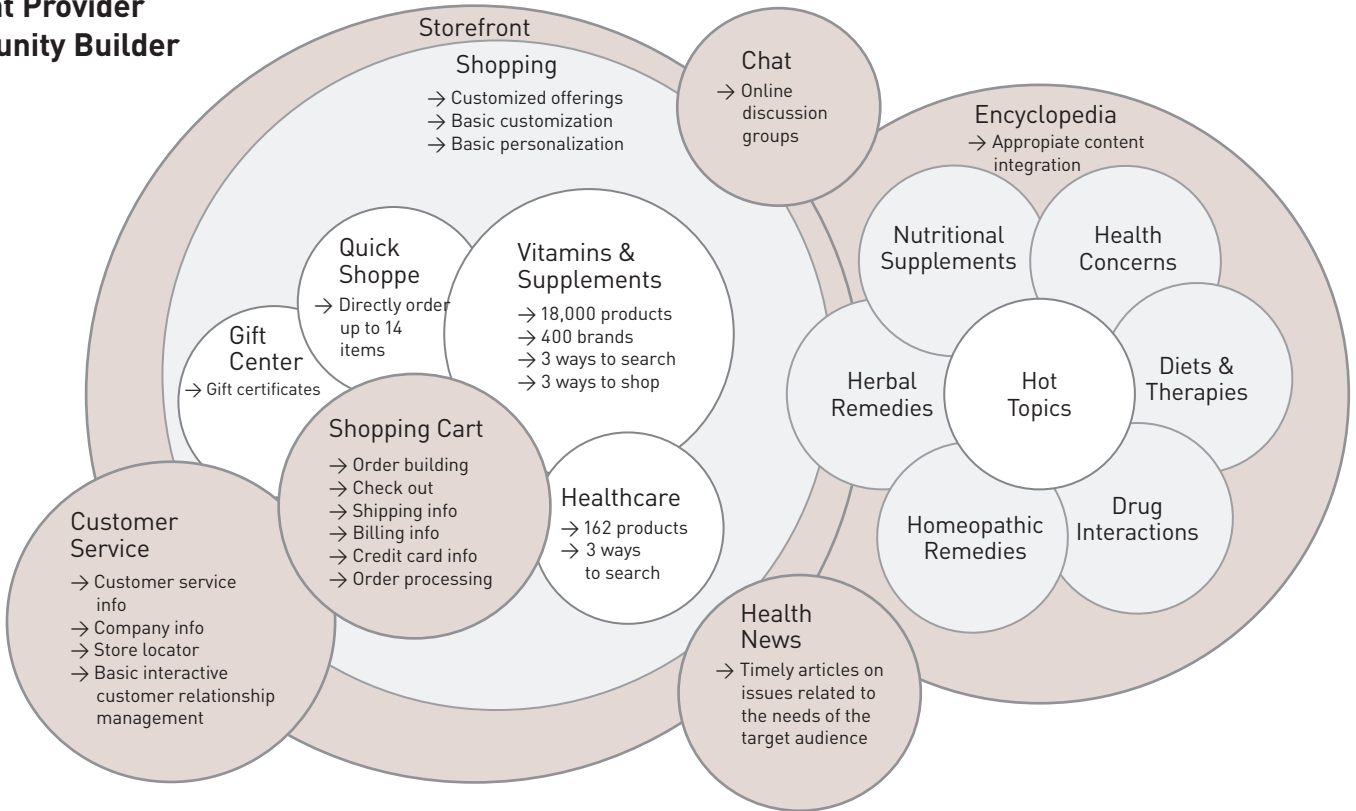
- Integration of topic content with VitaminShoppe.com is vital to assist user needs and goals
- Content should be accessible through alternate search mechanism defined by user research
- Content should be dynamic via technological solutions like a Content Management System
- Content hierarchy and taxonomy of topics should be assessed for usability



The functional domains for Phase One show the evolution, integration, and augmentation of the site's functionality.

VitaminShoppe.com and vitaminbuzz.com

E-commerce/CRM
Content Provider
Community Builder



E-commerce/CRM, Content Provider, Community Builder

This proposed new domain for Phase I integrates the Content Provider functional domain and adds the new Community Builder functional domains. The e-commerce/CRM domain is augmented with new functionality or improved capabilities.

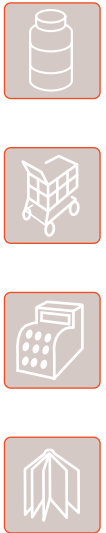
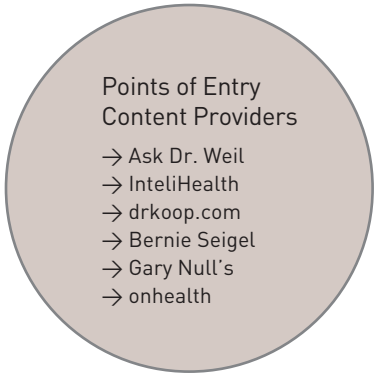
The e-commerce/CRM domain and the Content Provider domains are now conjoined to provide easier access between the **Shopping** experience and the **Encyclopedia** experience, allowing users to leverage newfound information or validate a purchasing decision. The **Shopping Cart** and **Customer Service** functions expedite and improve the customer relationship.

The new functional domain for Community Building provides functionality through the addition of **Chat** and **Health News** functionality.

This new integration and augmentation provides increased customer focus to the VitaminShoppe experience. The current capabilities are streamlined and empowered to provide a holistic retail experience.

Partner Sites

Network Alliances



Networked Alliances

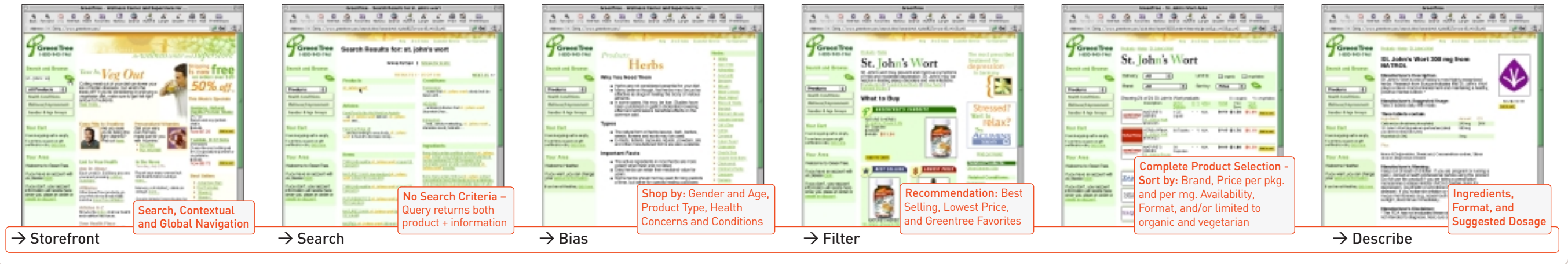
This domain still provides associative links to other external vendors of information. These affiliate sites will still provide **Points of Entry** for the VitaminShoppe experience.



Number of Steps (PER TASK)

→ Sell...4 → Inform... 3 → Purchase... 5

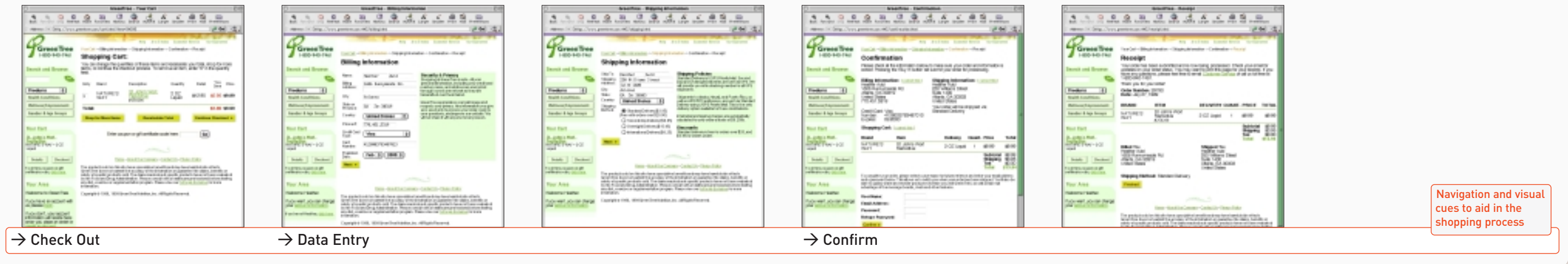
Sell



Inform



Purchase



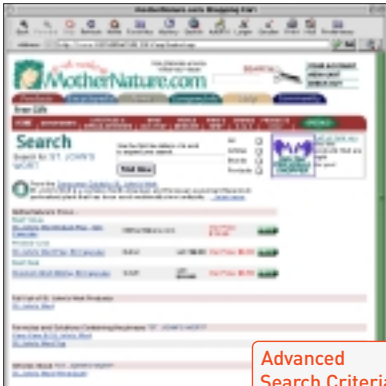
Number of Steps (PER TASK)
→ Sell...5 → Inform... 5 → Purchase... 6

Sell



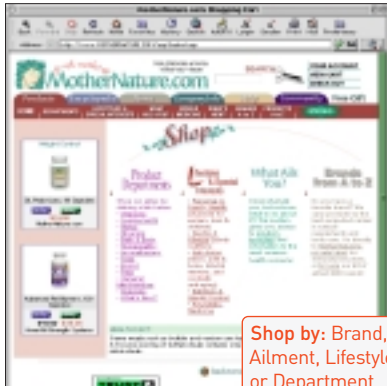
→ Storefront

Global Navigation and Search



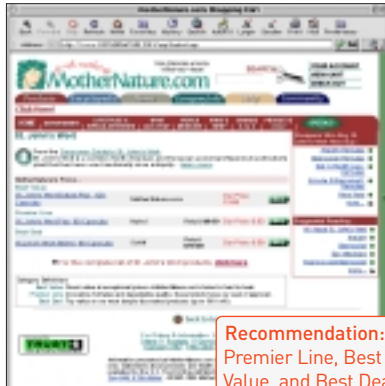
→ Search

Advanced Search Criteria



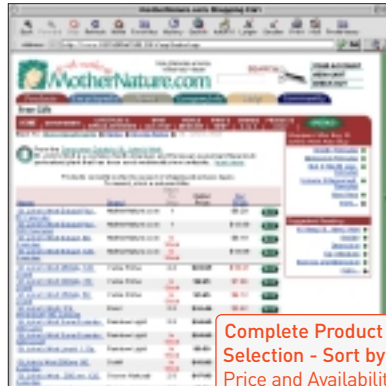
→ Bias

Shop by: Brand, Ailment, Lifestyle, or Department

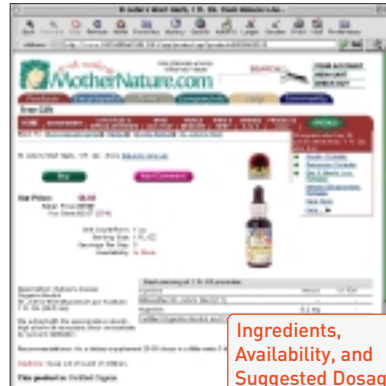


→ Filter

Recommendation: Premier Line, Best Value, and Best Deal



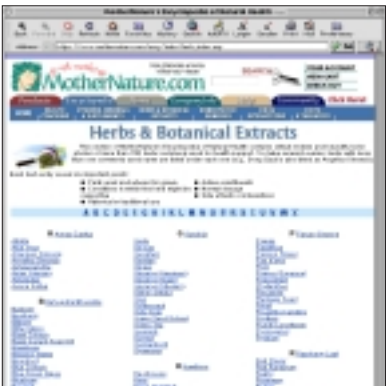
Complete Product Selection - Sort by: Price and Availability



→ Describe

Ingredients, Availability, and Suggested Dosage

Inform



Non-Integrated Third-Party Content - Fact Sheets, Consumer Guides, and Articles

Purchase



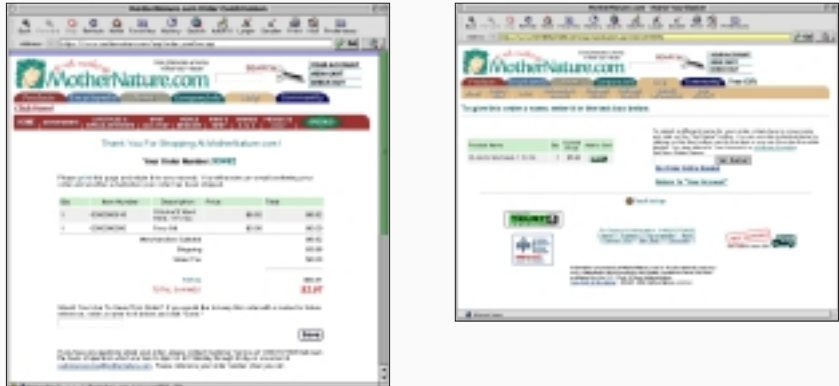
→ Check Out



→ Data Entry



→ Confirm



→ Re-order

"1-click" Re-order and account status



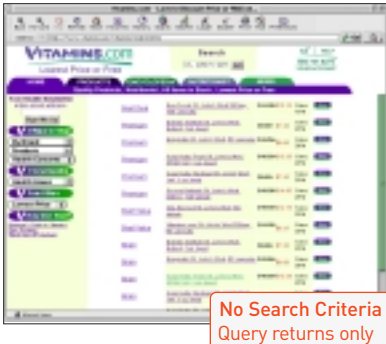
Number of Steps (PER TASK)
→ Sell...5 → Inform... 3 → Purchase... 6

Sell



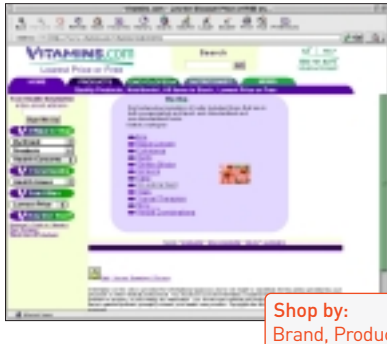
→ Storefront

Global Navigation and Search



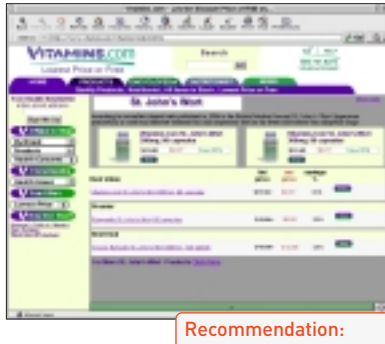
→ Search

No Search Criteria - Query returns only product. Information is browse only.



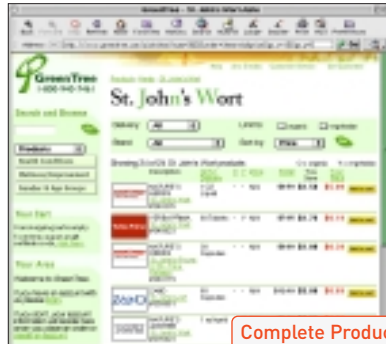
→ Bias

Shop by: Brand, Product Type, or Health Concern

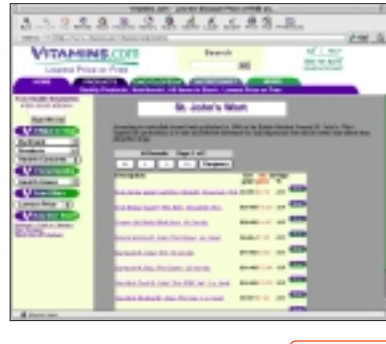


→ Filter

Recommendation: Premier Line, Best Value, and Best Deal



Complete Product Selection - No sort capability.



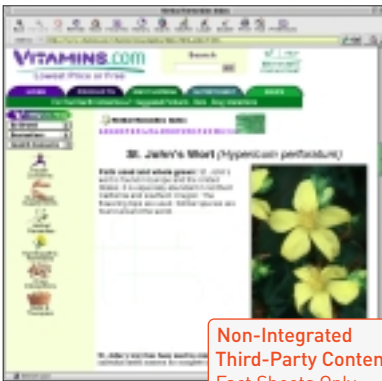
→ Describe

Limited description

Inform



Non-Integrated Third-Party Content Fact Sheets Only



Purchase



→ Check Out



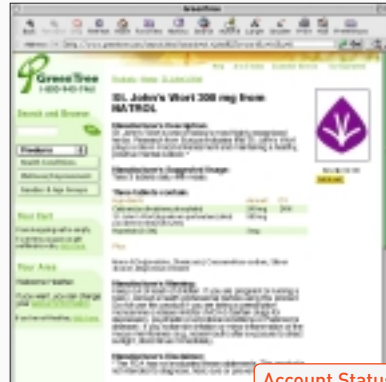
→ Data Entry







→ Confirm

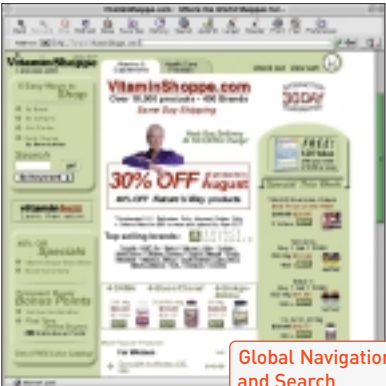


Account Status

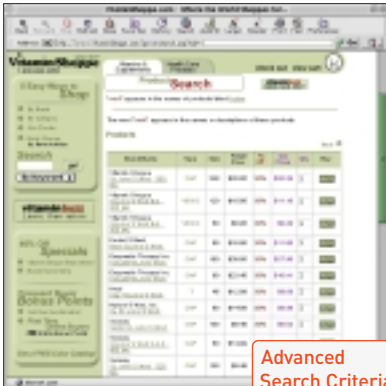


Number of Steps (PER TASK)
→ Sell...5+ → Inform... 4 → Purchase... 6

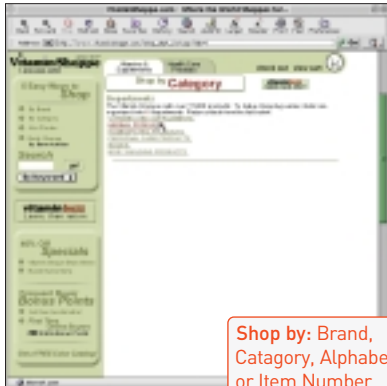
Sell



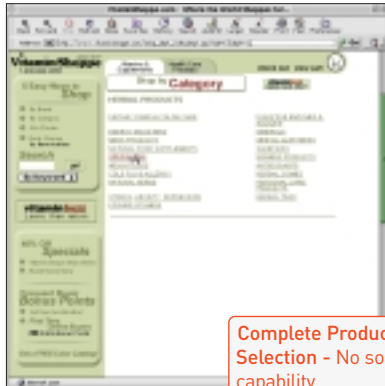
Global Navigation and Search



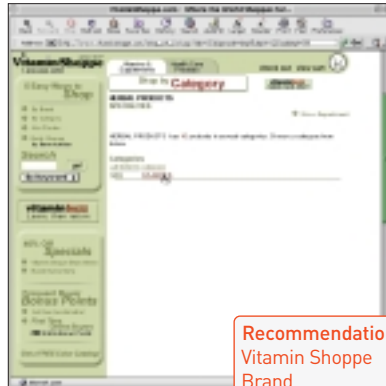
Advanced Search Criteria



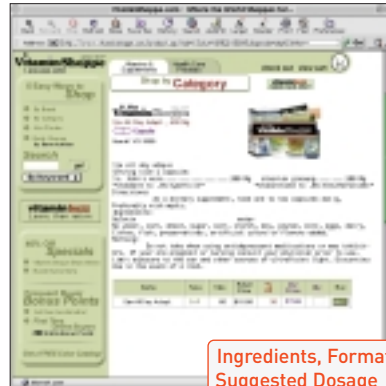
Shop by: Brand, Catagory, Alphabet, or Item Number



Complete Product Selection - No sort capability



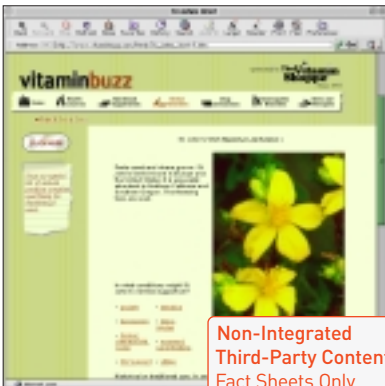
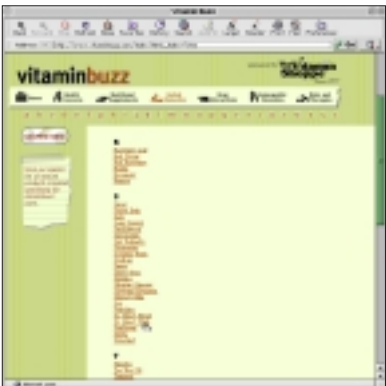
Recommendation: Vitamin Shoppe Brand



Ingredients, Format, Suggested Dosage

→ Storefront → Search → Bias → Filter → Describe

Inform



Non-Integrated Third-Party Content Fact Sheets Only

Purchase



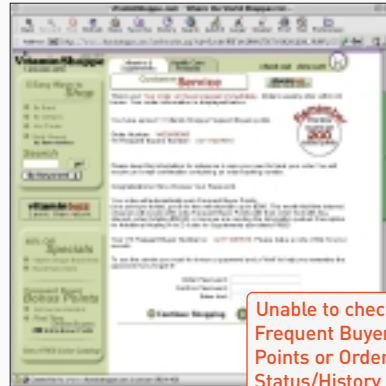
→ Check Out



→ Login



→ Data Entry



Unable to check Frequent Buyer Points or Order Status/History

→ Confirm

PREPARED BY SAPIENT FOR VITAMINSHOPPE | 08.13.99

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Storefront and Shopping Domains

Navigation systems are the mechanisms that link and relate information together within the information architecture.

Navigation Overview

The Storefront and Shopping domains incorporate a variety of navigational approaches.

Navigation between the functional domains is the job of the global navigation system.

Navigation between pages within a functional domain is the responsibility of the local navigation system.

Movement within a page is provided by the internal navigation system.

For all of these systems, the current Web site lacks a consistent presentation and structure for users to easily navigate the site.

Global Navigation

The global navigation for VitaminShope.com is located in the footer of the page as a table of links, and piecemeal around the rest of the page.

The Shopping domains' navigation model is basically a search engine. While some options are accessible from all pages, there is not a formal mode of global navigation.

Local Navigation

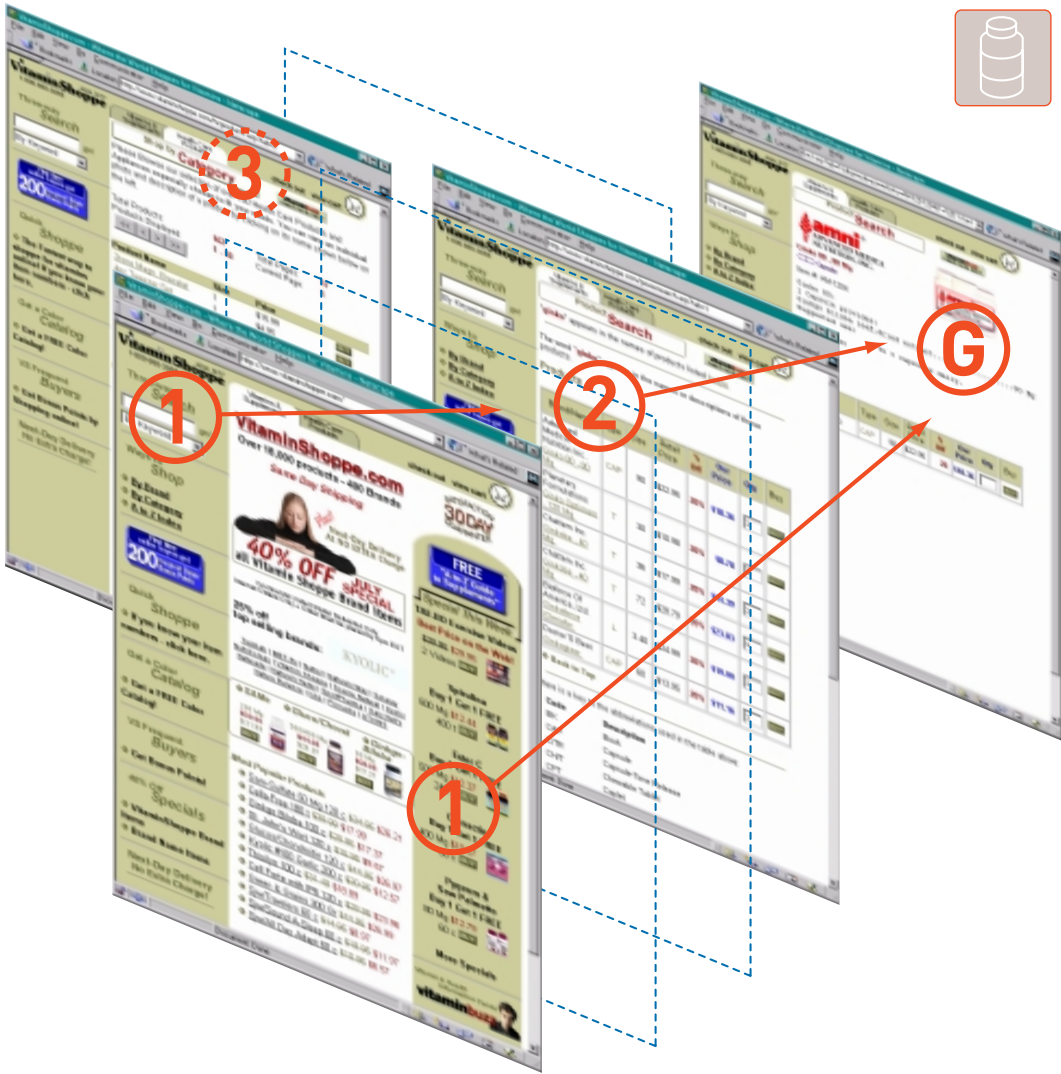
The local navigation system is composed of submit buttons and page-to-page HTML text links that provide access to the next context within the task flow.

Given the essentially linear flow, there is no system to the local navigation.

Other Navigation Types

Internal navigation is provide by anchor links as required.

The Health Care Products list pages incorporate a unique Next/Previous navigation construct.



- ① Navigation to products can be either as a Search or a Direct Selection.
- ② There are several intermediate pages to Filter the Search for users to navigate to a product.
- ③ There are other forms of Search navigation within the Health Care section.
- ⑥ The Goal for the user's navigation is the page where the product is described.

What Works

- Multiple ways to navigate to a product
- Some form of global navigation in footer

What Doesn't Work

- Too many pathways to product
- Most pathways to product are inefficient
- No form of local navigation
- Linear flow makes browsing difficult
- Too many forms of navigation that vary in look and behavior

Key Findings

- Combine search mechanisms to reduce the number of choices and makes accessing products appropriately efficient
- Develop a robust form of global navigation
- Structure site to accommodate browsing and other non-linear activities
- Develop a form of local navigation
- Develop a uniform and systematic presentment and behavior for navigation



Shopping Cart Domains

Navigation systems are the mechanisms that link and relate information together within the information architecture.

Navigation Overview

The Shopping Cart navigation is a linear flow from screen to screen of the information architecture that is facilitated by a series of submit buttons.

No other formal navigation systems exist to support the interaction model, other than the globally accessible constructs, such as the global navigation in the footer of each page.

Global Navigation

The global navigation for VitaminShoppe.com is located in the footer of the page as a table of links, and piecemeal around the rest of the page.

No formal mode of global navigation exists for the Shopping Cart domain other than the link to the domain, which is accessible on all pages.

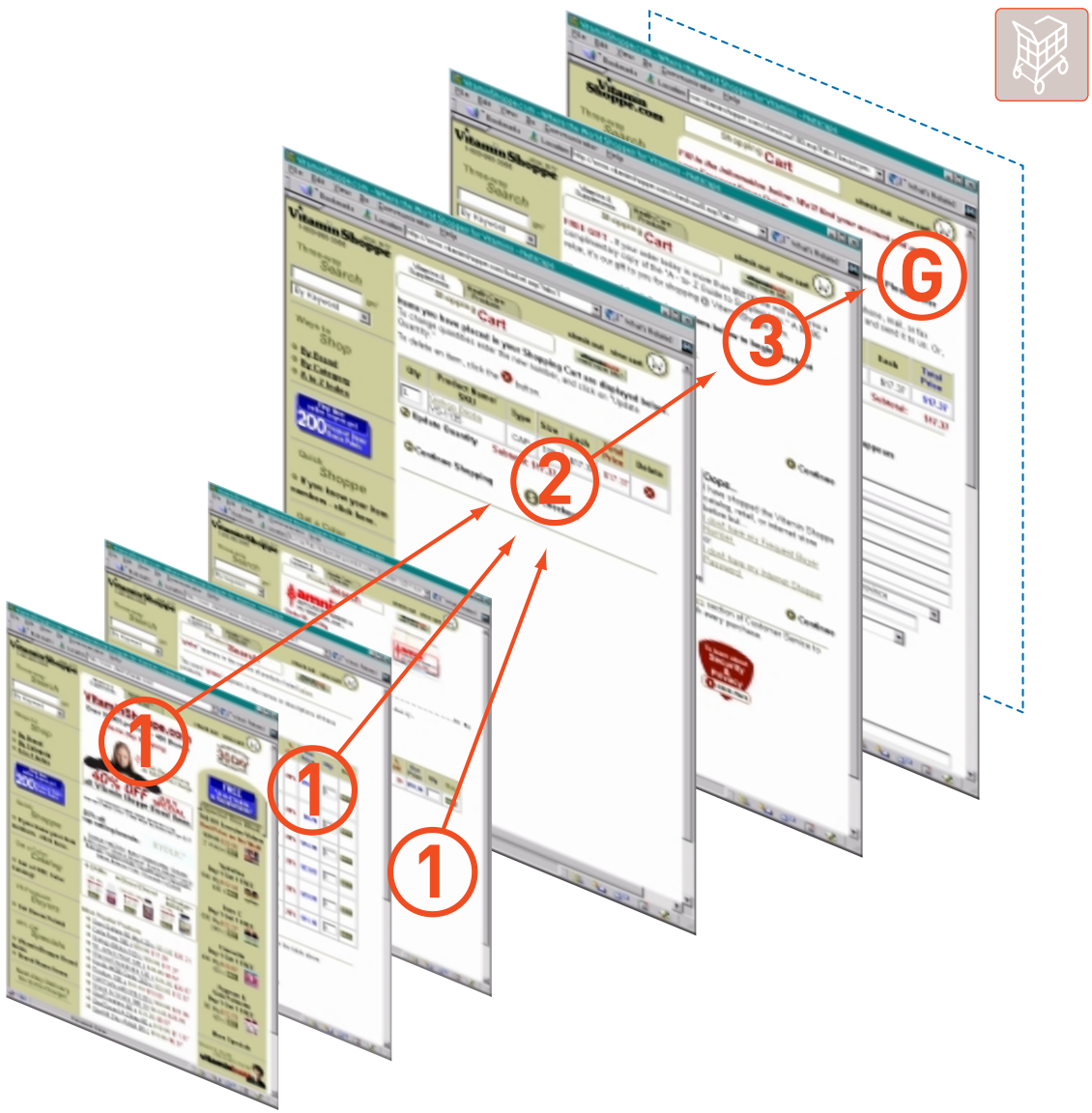
Local Navigation

The local navigation system is composed of submit buttons and page-to-page HTML links that provide access to the next context within the task flow. Most links have a formal visual language as graphical buttons.

Given the essentially linear flow, there is no formalized system to the local navigation except in the visual design of these buttons.

Other Navigation Types

Internal navigation is provided by anchor links as required.



What Works

- Direct access to the Shopping Cart
- Some form of global navigation in footer
- Systematic, linear check out flow

What Doesn't Work

- No local navigation to reverse purchasing flow
- Too many forms of navigation that vary in look and behavior

Key Findings

- Develop a robust form of global navigation
- Develop a form of local navigation that allows the user to reverse the interaction with greater control
- Develop a uniform and systematic presentment and behavior for navigation

- ① Navigation links to the Shopping Cart are available from all pages of the site.
- ② All links to the Shopping Cart feed into a view of the Shopping Cart contents.
- ③ At check out, the user is linked into a linear flow of pages to collect needed purchasing info.
- ⑥ The Goal for the user's navigation is a completed submission of the order and its confirmation.



Customer Service Domains

Navigation systems are the mechanisms that link and relate information together within the information architecture.

Navigation Overview

The Customer Service domain has a simple navigation system due to the relatively small numbers of pages within the domain.

A few content pages for customer service information are linked to from several points in the global navigation footer.

The store locator application can be accessed from the footer or from within the customer service information pages. These pages are linked with a linear navigation flow.

Global Navigation

The global navigation for VitaminShopee.com is located in the footer of the page as a table of links, and piecemeal around the rest of the page. Several of the footer links link to a single page with anchors.

No formal global navigation exists within this domain.

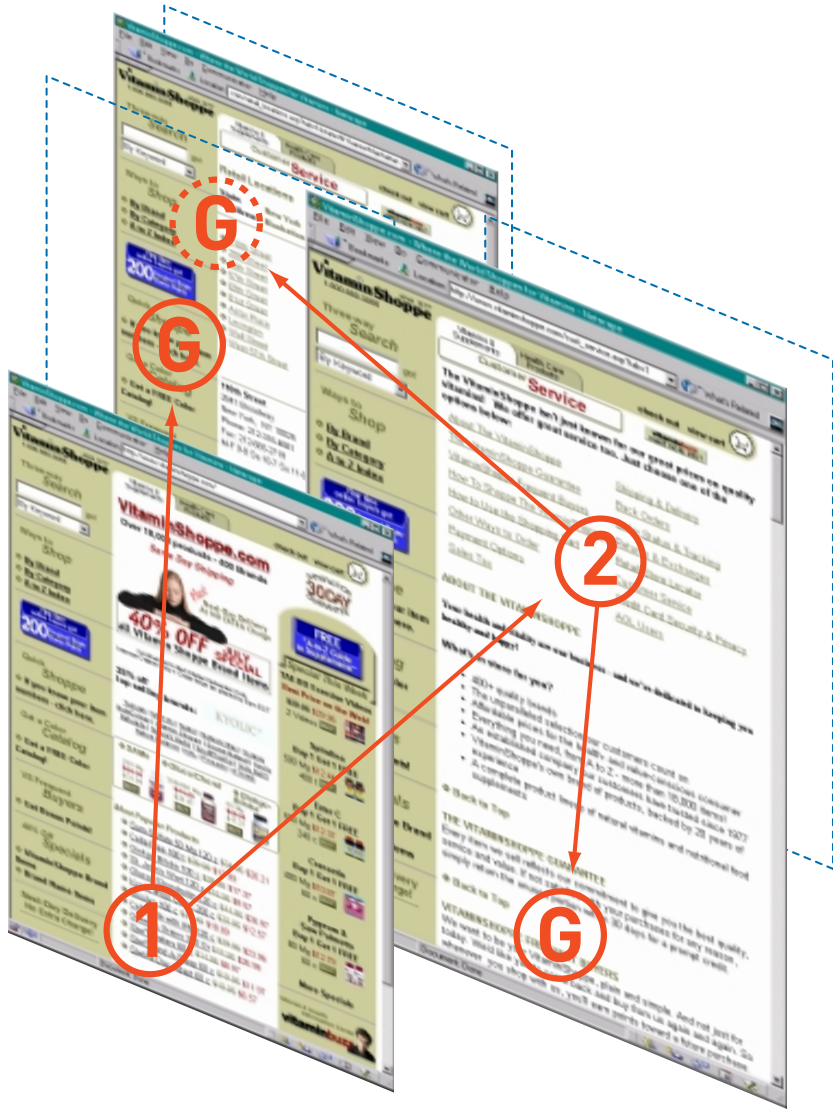
Local Navigation

For the content pages, no form of local navigation is present to connect all of the pages together.

The local navigation system for the store locator applications is composed of submit buttons and page-to-page HTML links that provide access to the next context within the task flow.

Other Navigation Types

Internal navigation is provided by anchor links as required. For the large Customer Service page, this is the primary method of arriving at a desired piece of content.



- ① Users can navigate to the Customer Service domain from several links in the footer table.
- ② Once inside the domain, internal page navigation is the primary navigation system.
- Ⓒ The Goal for the user's navigation is the paragraph of content that describes the customer service information they are looking for, or the location of a store.

What Works

→ Some form of global navigation in footer

What Doesn't Work

- Too much content for one page, requiring too many choices to seek out customer service content
- No form of local navigation
- Some pages within Customer Service domain are not accessible other than through the footer
- Too many forms of navigation that vary in look and behavior

Key Findings

- Break out customer service content into smaller contexts (pages) linked by local navigation
- Connect all the pieces of the Customer Service domain
- Develop a robust form of global navigation
- Develop a uniform and systematic presentment and behavior for navigation



Encyclopedia Domain of vitaminbuzz.com

Navigation systems are the mechanisms that link and relate information together within the information architecture.

Navigation Overview

The Encyclopedia domain of vitaminbuzz.com is a wholly separate context with its own forms of navigation systems. Linked to VitaminShoppe.com only through in-page banner ads, the Encyclopedia is a self-contained module for delivering content.

vitaminbuzz.com has its own global navigation, its own local navigation, and its own forms of internal navigation distinct from the other systems in the other functional domains.

Global Navigation

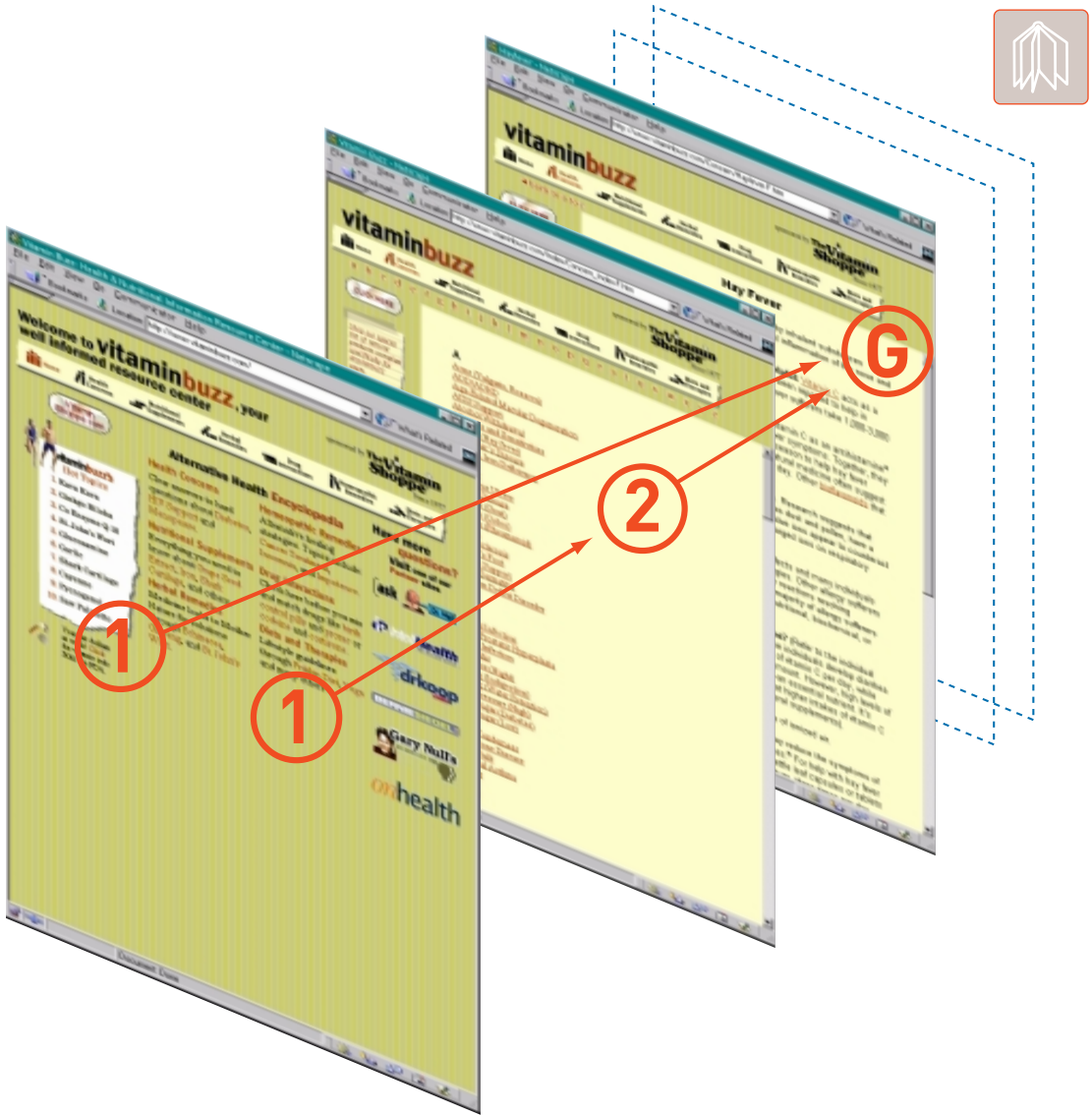
The global navigation for vitaminbuzz.com is a persistent navigation bar across the top of every page. The navigation reflects the top level content chunking for vitaminbuzz's information architecture.

Local Navigation

No strong form of local navigation is present, but the letter sort list and letter navigation bar found on the second tier of the site's information architecture provide some form of page-to-page navigation.

Other Navigation Types

Internal navigation is provided by anchor links, as required.



What Works

- Persistent and consistent global navigation
- Consistent letter sort for intermediate navigation

What Doesn't Work

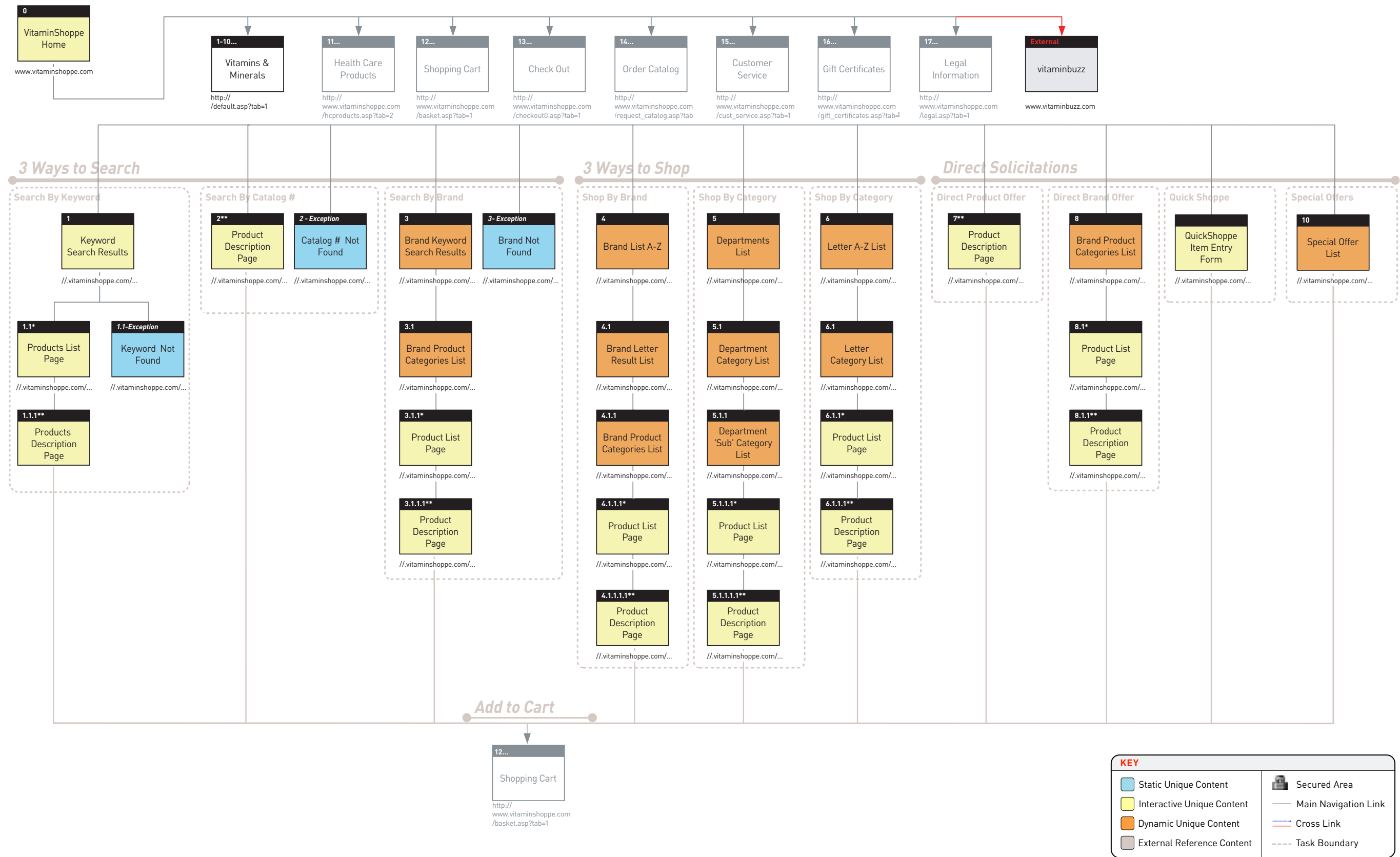
- Not enough pathways to reach content
- No search capabilities
- Letter lists of intermediate navigation too large

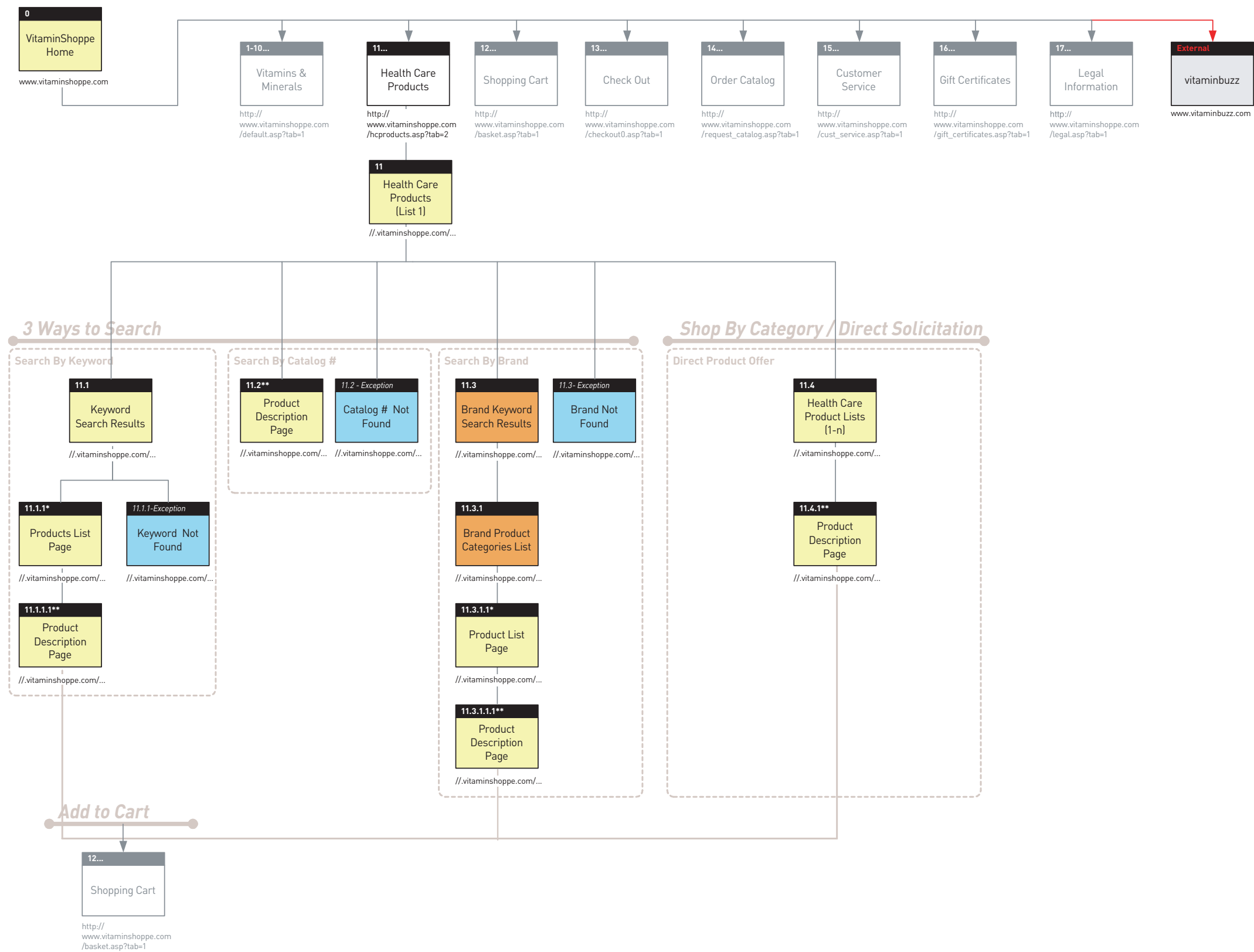
Key Findings

- Not enough pathways to reach content
- No search capabilities
- Letter lists of intermediate navigation too large

- ① Navigation to main content chunks is accessible from the navigation bar or the front page menu.
- ② Intermediate navigation is made possible by the letter bar or the topic link list.
- ③ The Goal for the user's navigation is the page where the topic is described.

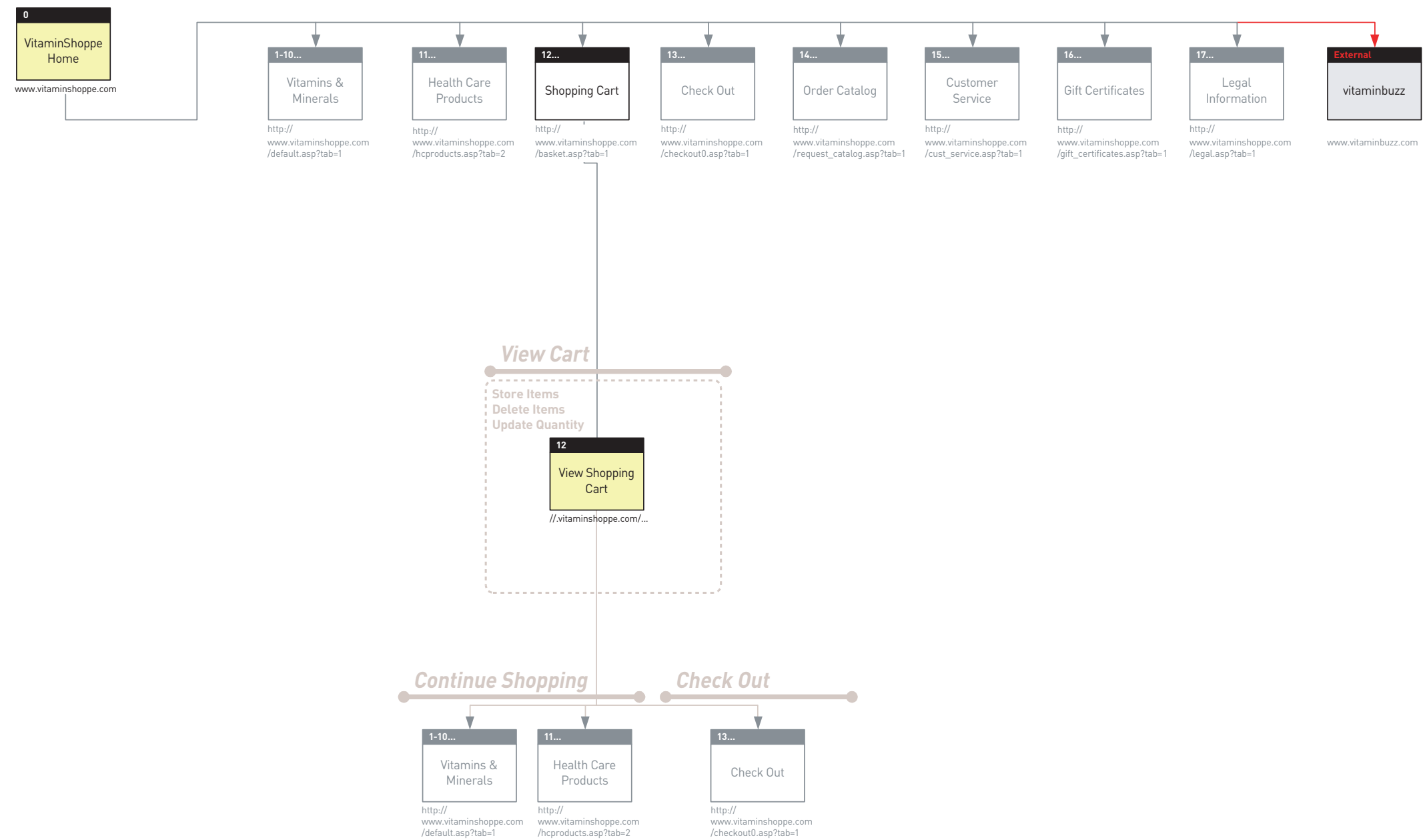






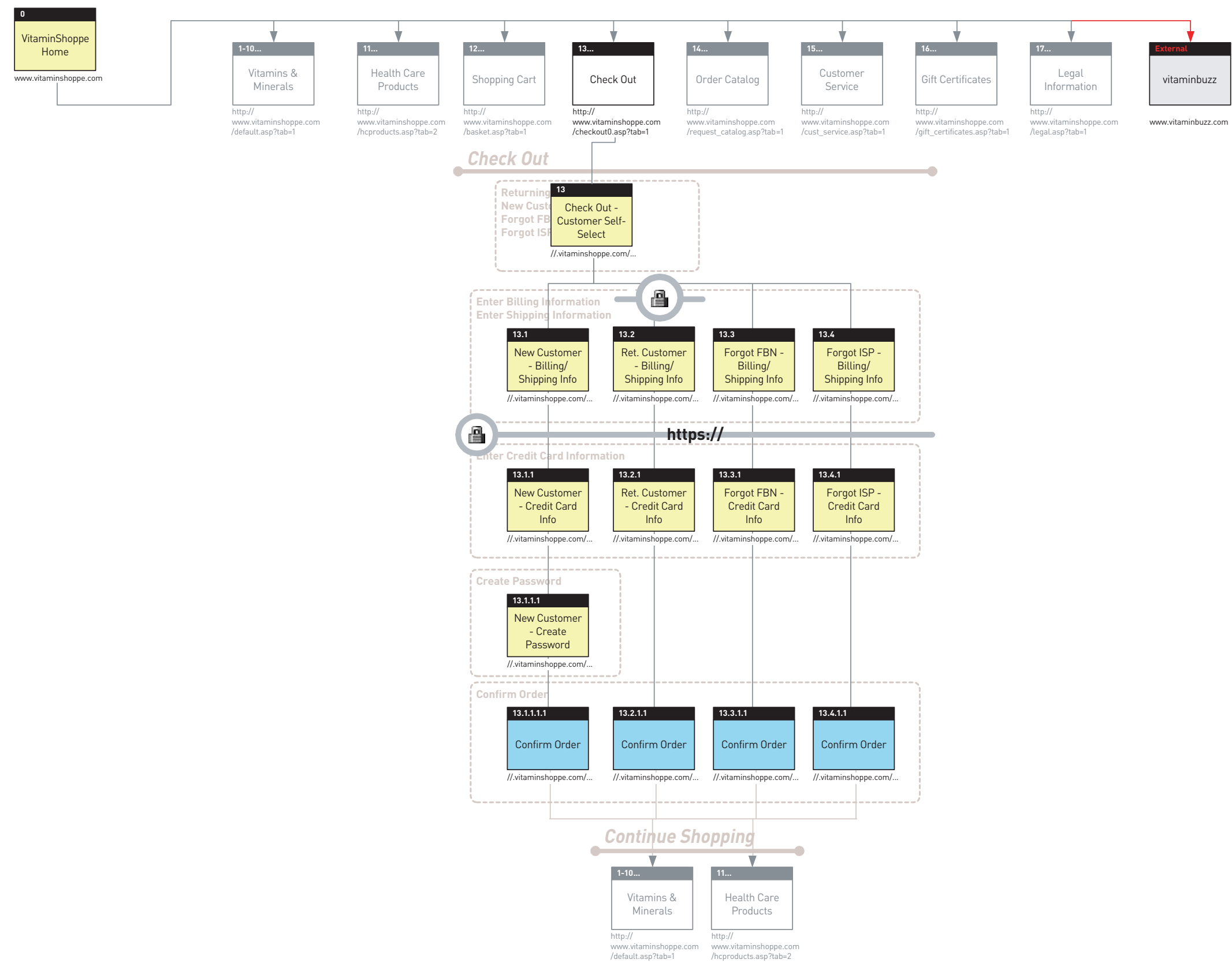
KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary

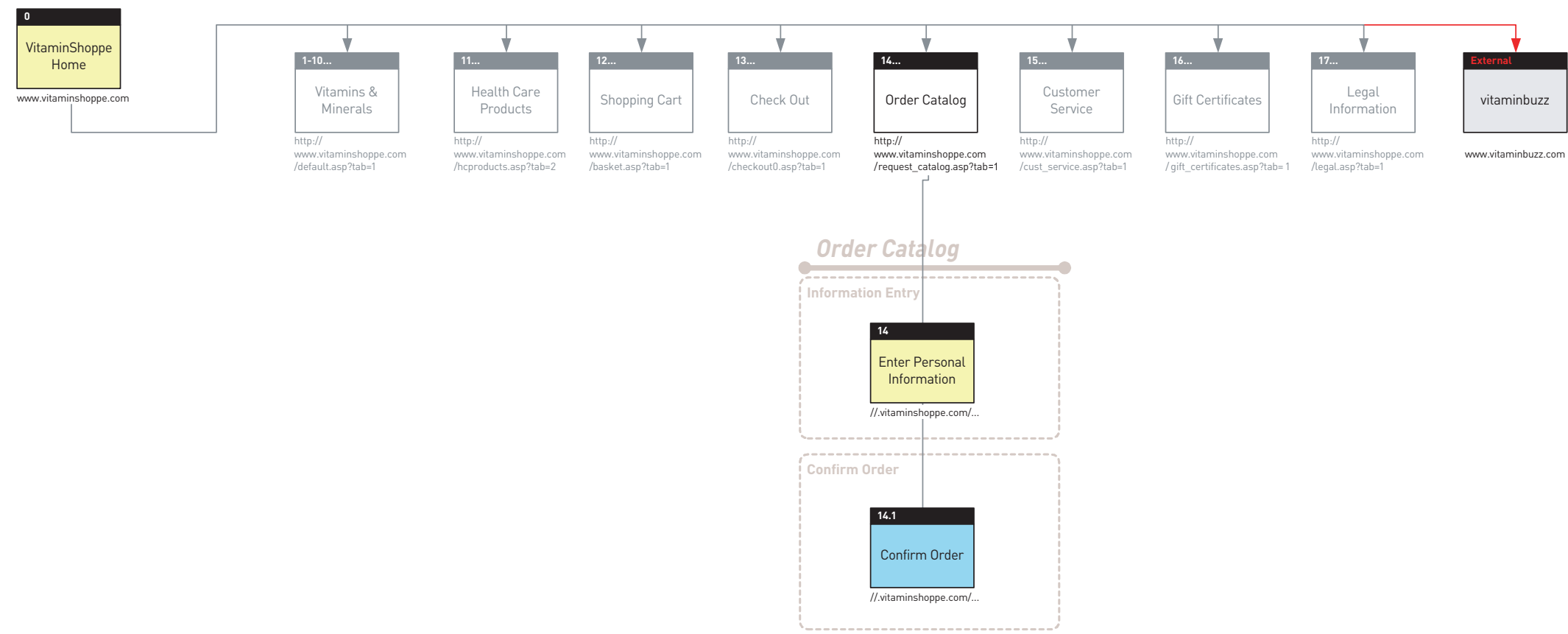




KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary

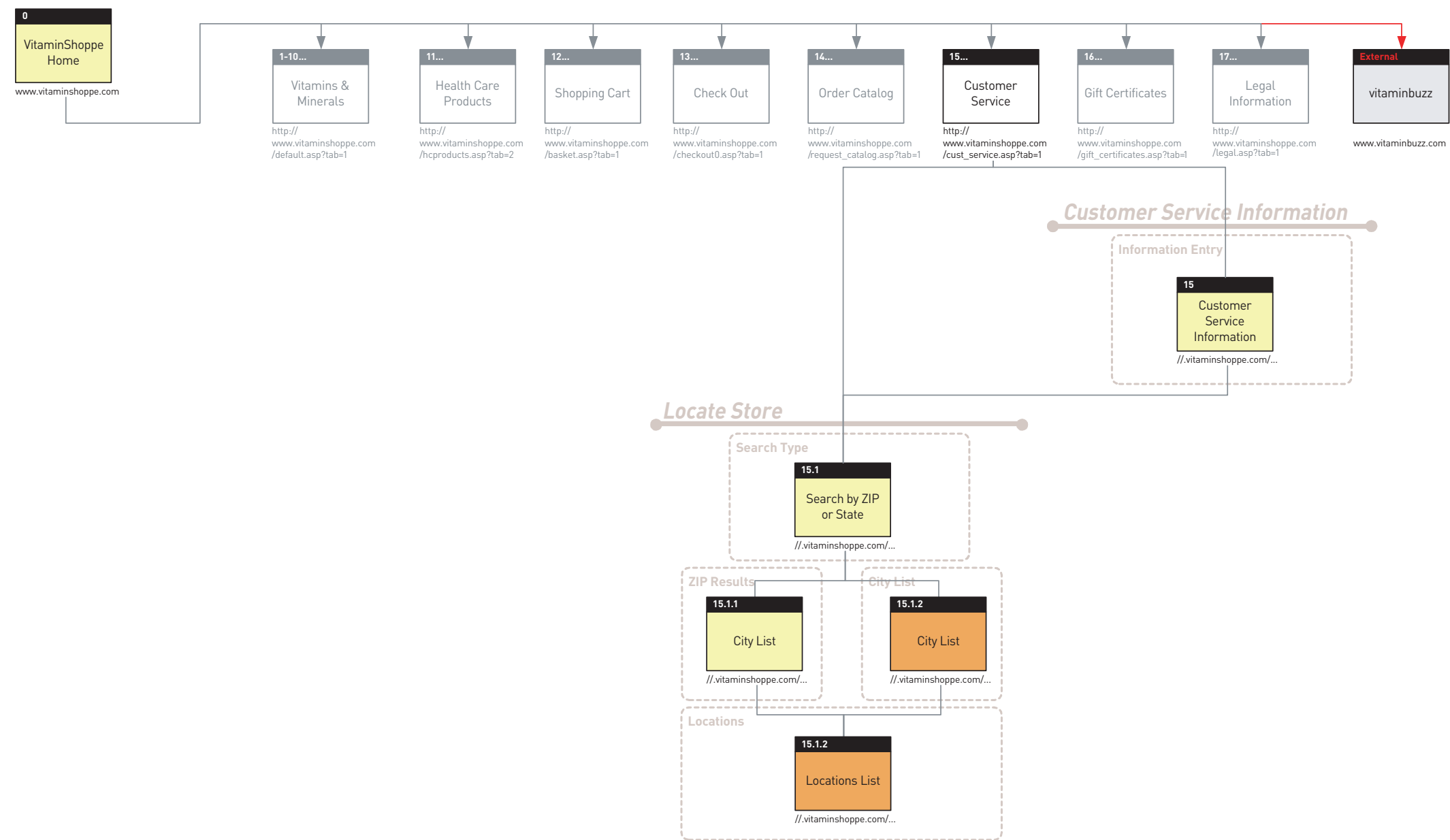






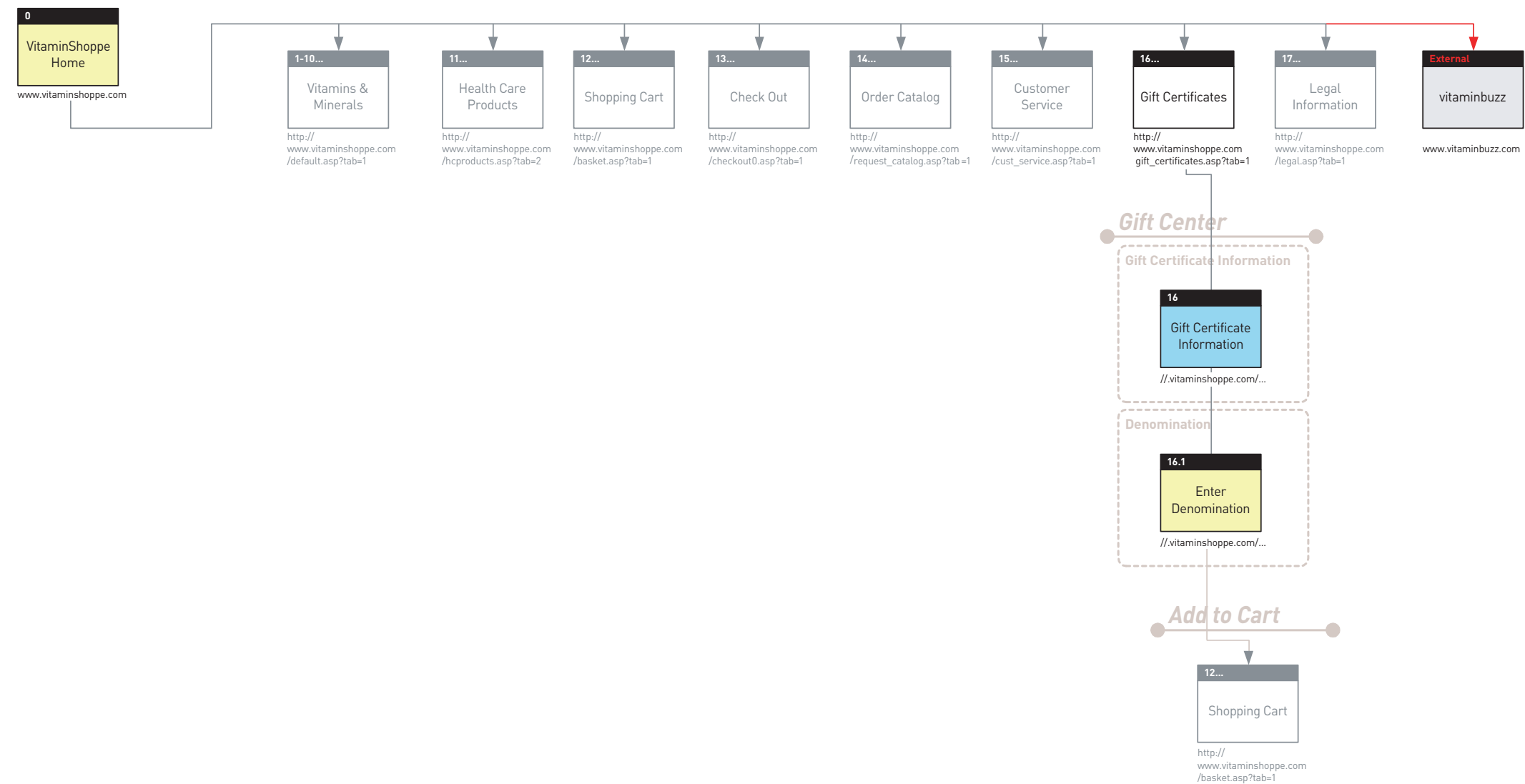
KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary





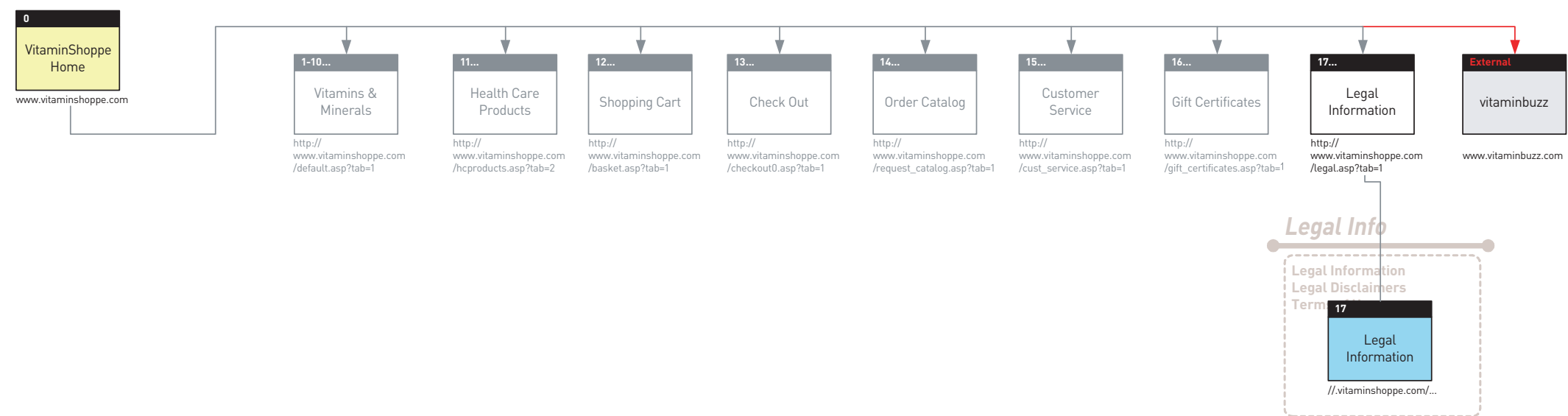
KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary





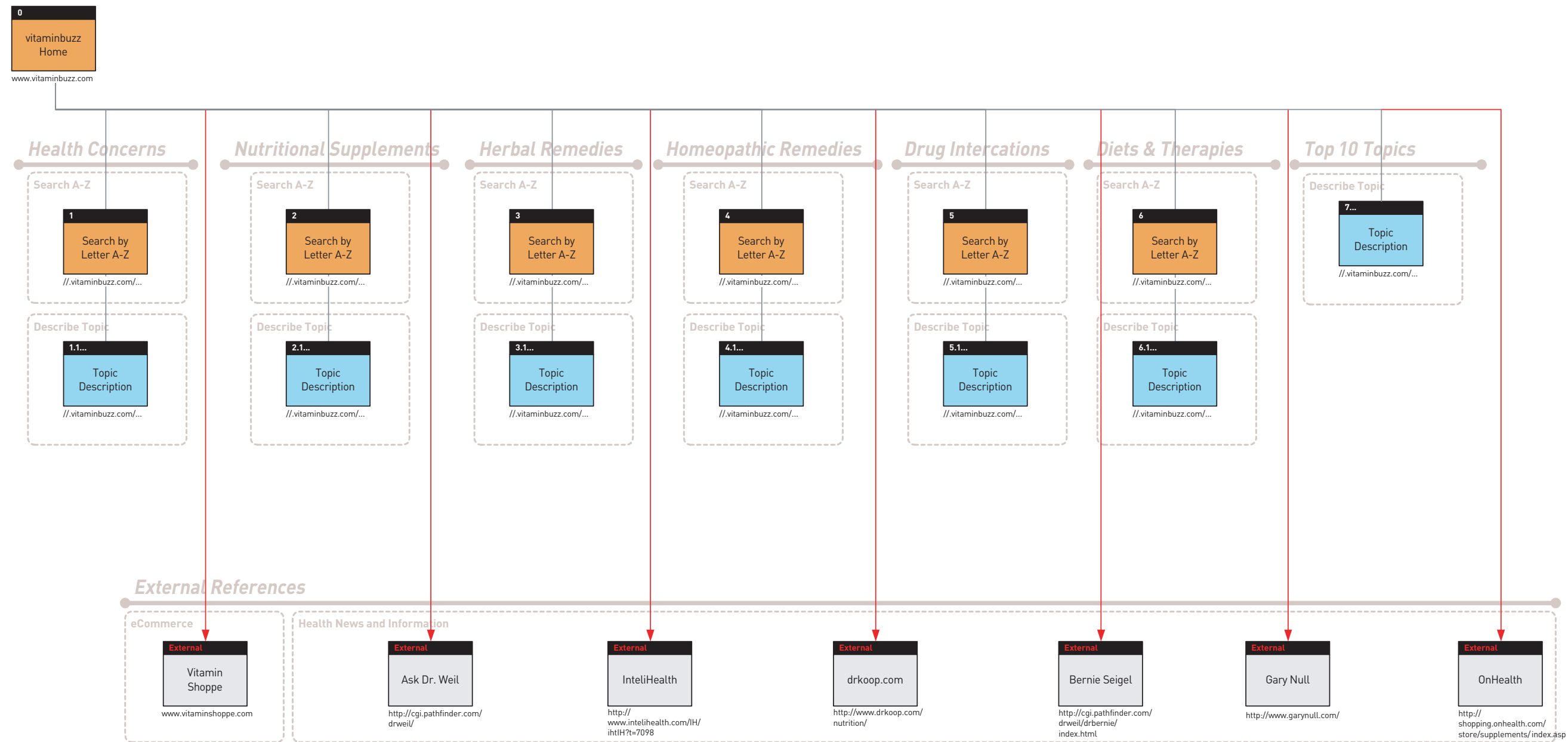
KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary





KEY	
Static Unique Content	Secured Area
Interactive Unique Content	Main Navigation Link
Dynamic Unique Content	Cross Link
External Reference Content	Task Boundary





In this section, Sapient assesses the existing content on VitaminShoppe.com, identify key competitor offerings, and discuss issues surrounding content development and management.

What is VitaminShoppe.com?

Currently, it is an e-commerce site dedicated to the purchase and sale of VMS and other health care products, particularly for customers who are familiar with VMS products and know exactly what they want to purchase. It is a straightforward, trustworthy site that enables customer transactions.

A focus on customers

Online, no transaction is tangible. There is no employee to greet the customer at the front door. The customer is in a self-service environment. To recreate this personal experience, sites must be customer-centric and not product-centric. Thus, the focus of VitaminShoppe.com needs to shift somewhat away from the products and more toward the customer. VitaminShoppe.com must provide customers with meaningful content directed at them, for them, and focused on their needs. The content must educate customers and help develop personal relationships with them through unprecedented customer service.

Customer-centric site: Case in point

Currently, VitaminShoppe.com gives customers three “Ways to Shop” – By Brand, By Category, and an A-Z Index. Only the A-Z Index provides customers with a few instances to find products relative to a health condition (i.e., arthritis, headache). VitaminShoppe’s competitors, however, provide customers with ways to search for products relative not only to health conditions, but also lifestyle or some other need or characteristic.

COMPETITOR	SEARCH PATH
Mother Nature	Life Styles & Special Interests, Health Conditions
GreenTree	Health Conditions, Gender & Age Groups
Vitamins	Health Concerns
VitaminLife	Health Conditions
Enutrition	Your Health, Condition/Ailments



In Phase I, search mechanisms that better reflect customer needs could be developed. The nomenclature used should similarly reflect the customer experience and not be product-centric.



Who is incorporating content to facilitate sales?

VitaminShoppe's competitors are taking progressive steps to incorporate content that informs product selection and purchase. Examples include:

COMPETITOR	SEARCH PATH
Mother Nature	"What Ails You," "Encyclopedia," and "Health Journal" provide direct product recommendation
GreenTree	"Herbal Recommendation" provides direct product recommendations
Vitamins	"Health Concerns" provides direct product recommendations
VitaminLife	"Health Conditions" provides direct product recommendations
Enutrition	"Your Health" provides direct product recommendations

MotherNature and GreenTree place links to recommended products either within the related content or in a sidebar. Customers are “two-clicks” away from putting those items in their shopping cart. Vitamins, VitaminLife, and eNutrition, however, provide product recommendations once a health condition is selected. They do not provide supporting content or context for the products.

Seemingly, the general rule is if a site provides content about a health condition, this content will link to related products. The ability to begin the transaction is not offered from the content page. If a customer selects a health condition and no content is provided, the products are displayed immediately.

Ranking	Nutritional Supplements	Herbs
Primary		Garlic
Secondary	Coenzyme Q10 (for deficiency) Calcium Fiber Fish oil (EPA/DHA) Magnesium (for people taking depleting diuretics) Potassium	
Other	Taurine Vitamin C	Green tea Kudzu Reishi

The incorporation of vitaminbuzz.com

VitaminShopper recognizes the need to incorporate the vitaminbuzz content with VitaminShopper.com. Incorporation of this information will help inform customers' purchasing decisions. In fact, vitaminbuzz users currently purchase more items online than non-vitaminbuzz users.

The incorporation of vitaminbuzz could be achieved in the following four ways, or by incorporating these steps in a phased approach:

- Migrate the vitaminbuzz content to VitaminShoppe.com and replicate the content categories – Health Concerns, Nutritional Supplements, Herbal Remedies, etc.
- Provide the content categories and a search engine to better locate the content.
- Match appropriate content with The Vitamin Shoppe products.
- Send customers targeted content based on their purchasing history or customer profile.

For Phase I, VitaminShopee could incorporate the vitaminbuzz content by replicating the content categories on the site and provide customers with a search mechanism to locate specific content. Depending on legal constraints, content could also be incorporated to inform or recommend products. Similarly, if content is provided regarding a health condition, customers should be able to link to the product and begin the purchasing process.



Competitive landscape

A comprehensive list of features or content types offered by ViaminsShoppe and some of its key competitors are listed below. The list distinguishes between features incorporated into the current ViaminsShoppe site and features proposed in Phase I and subsequent phases, as well as competitors' features.

[illegible]

Owning the customer experience

Personalized services are one step to owning the customer experience. They provide a means to develop relationships with customers by giving them control over their information, providing custom-tailored information, and encouraging customers to “leave something of themselves behind.” Once customers have become accustomed to getting targeted information or purchasing products from a particular site, they may be less inclined to shop on another site, even for a lower price, thereby promoting brand loyalty. VitaminShoppe’s competitors are already offering some personalized services on their sites.

Personal accounts

At their simplest, personal accounts allow customers to access transaction histories and to track purchases. This basic functionality can be enhanced to provide several ways for customers to control and monitor their purchasing decisions. Two of VitaminShoppe’s competitors currently offer this functionality.

GreenTree

GreenTree customers can create personal accounts without making a purchase. This way, customers are able to place items in their shopping carts and access them at a later date. Once customers have made a purchase, however, they can reorder items purchased in the past by clicking on the reorder option on the left-hand sidebar of the page. An order history is maintained for four months. GreenTree also provides email reminders to let customers know when they might be running out of the products purchased. These reminders are timed based on the supply purchased and the daily recommended intake.

MotherNature

MotherNature proposes even more benefits for its members, including Personal Shopper assistance, access to bulletin boards, subscription news, and sales and product promotions. The Personal Shopper feature recommends products based on a customer profile and places products into a shopping cart for the customer to review.

Personal products

GreenTree provides personalized vitamins – through Acumin – based on a customer profile. eNutrition provides eSystems, which are product packages designed to address particular health concerns. VitaminShoppe is also considering offering pre-packaged items.

Personal advice

GreenTree provides personalized weight loss programs (eDiets) but charges a fee for this service. GreenTree and Vitamins provide “experts” to answer their customers’ individual questions.

User research will help validate what type of personalized features or services would most benefit VitaminShoppe customers.

Community

Content features that are aimed at educating or informing customers and providing one-to-one customer service should take priority over other features. In fact, it is often recommended that community features not be employed until solid one-to-one relationships have been developed. For this reason, VitaminShoppe might start with a bulletin board feature before implementing chat. Noticeably, its competitors’ efforts at community have not been particularly successful. Although market research has shown that vitamin users enjoy a sense of community, a successful community stems from consistent traffic and sense of connection with a particular site. A phased approach to introducing community features might be the best way to develop popular followings.

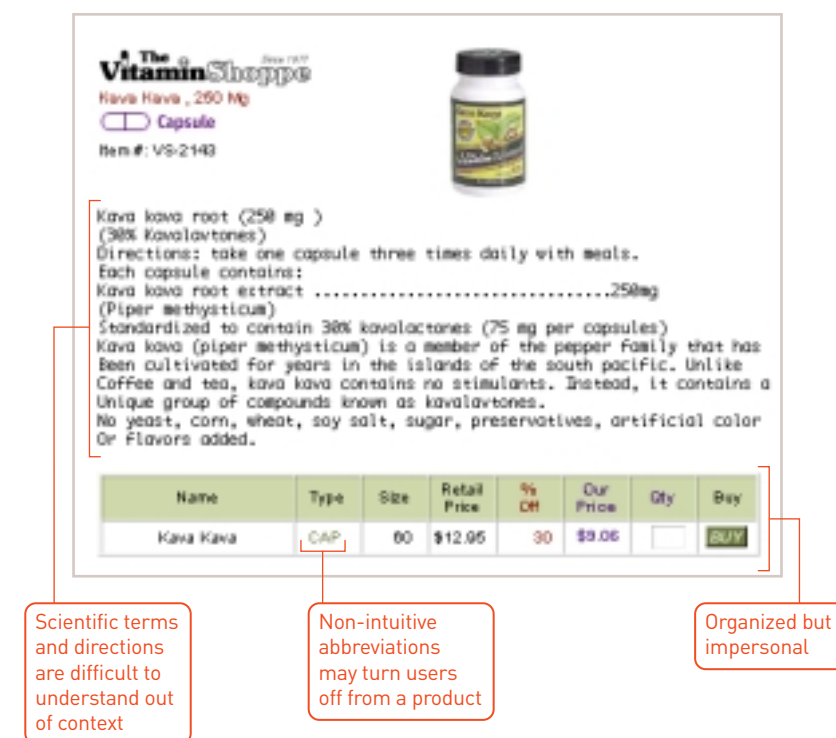
Partner sites

Vitaminbuzz.com partner sites include Ask Dr. Weil, InteliHealth, drkoop, Bernie Siegel, MD, Gary Null’s, and onhealth. These are all credible information sources. However, users may be confronted with too many site choices from the homepage. If vitaminbuzz.com content is migrated to VitaminShoppe.com, perhaps only one or two partners should be featured on the homepage, if any. This presents the possibility that users will click-off the VitaminShoppe.com site and not return. The best scenario might be to incorporate partner content within the site with appropriate content served up based on a keyword search or other search mechanism. If incorporation is possible, consideration has to be given, however, to whether the partners’ content is consistent in tone and style with VitaminShoppe.com’s.



Product descriptions

All product descriptions are initially displayed in a table. This table provides information about the product such as its name, the form, (tablet, liquid, etc.), the amount of product included in a unit, the retail price, the percentage saved by using The Vitamin Shoppe, and The Vitamin Shoppe price. Additionally, users may click on the name of a product for a detailed description, including active ingredients and directions for use.



While all of this information is essential to differentiate products, the way the information is presented may be difficult to understand and read. For example, the product type or form is indicated by a symbol such as T for tablet or CRM for cream. Customers must scroll to the bottom of the search results page to view the key for these symbols, perhaps hampering usability. Additionally, the detailed product information introduces already complicated information in a hard-to-read format. A revised product description layout could be included in Phase I with an emphasis on providing appropriate headers, scannable descriptive information, and providing one or a maximum of two clicks to purchase.

How VitaminShoppe “sounds” online

The current site takes a straightforward, objective, and credible approach to content. The site “sounds” informative, invokes convenience, yet it is an impersonal experience. It sounds like someone is reading straight from the catalog. With the Internet, VitaminShoppe can do more to reach its customers. The interactive nature of the medium enables VitaminShoppe to take a more personal, even conversational, approach to content. Again, the customer doesn’t have the benefit of a friendly employee to greet them or help them. That experience has to be created online. The customer needs to feel like someone is speaking to them, not at them, or trying to “sell” them. Currently, there are too many messages on the homepage with the same or a similar overall message – sales, specials, free, % off, no extra charge, best price. These messages need to be toned down or complemented with more personal messages.



The substance and voice of VitaminShoppe.com's content is important to both reach its customers and differentiate it from its competitors. The following are key attributes of the voice and/or expression of the VitaminShoppe.com brand:

- Straightforward
- Trustworthy
- Credible
- Impersonal
- "Salesy"

Going forward, the impersonal and “salesy” attributes should be eliminated and a revised set of voice attributes should be followed when creating content for the site. The actual attributes will be developed along with the complete brand identity. However, they should be consistent or reflect the brand personality and might include:

- Straightforward
- Reliable
- Credible
- Personal
- Concerned
- Friendly

Straightforward

Content should be written in a natural and straightforward voice. The subject of VMS can be confusing for customers. Changes in medical opinions and federal regulations can happen overnight. VitaminShoppe must be straightforward with its customers about its products, speaking clearly and offering the latest updates in a timely manner.

Reliable

The Vitamin Shoppe has a more than 20-year legacy in the VMS business. The name alone evokes a level of trust to those who know it. By integrating quality content sources in a professional and informative way, VitaminShoppe can educate its customers about its products and other health-related issues. As a trusted information source, it can provide a deeper customer experience than is available in stores or through the catalog.





Credible

At all times, VitaminShoppe must maintain its credibility. The vitamin and supplement industry is a serious business involving people’s health. VitaminShoppe’s reputation could be damaged by introducing content, including experts or professionals, which its customers might view as not reputable or of questionable authority.

Personal and Concerned

This is VitaminShoppe’s opportunity to truly connect with its customers. The current site has a lot of “sales talk.” VitaminShoppe needs to complement the sales emphasis with language that guides the customer experience.

Friendly

VitaminShoppe expressed an interest in providing an experience that is more fun for its customers. From a content perspective, this can be achieved through a shift in tone and style, using language that is natural and familiar.

Content standards for the Web

As VitaminShoppe prepares content for its Web site, certain standards must be taken into account. VitaminShoppe should use a conversational and straightforward voice, using short sentences and active voice. This voice must complement VitaminShoppe’s voice in other media and be consistent throughout the site. Additionally, content should be organized into short groupings with clear, useful headings, so that customers can easily scan or read on screen. These principles will reinforce VitaminShoppe.com’s credibility and reliability, making it the trusted online source for VMS information and products.

Content types

At this point, Sapient anticipates that several types of content will be included on VitaminShoppe.com. VitaminShoppe can use the list of content types below to begin sourcing (creating, buying, creating partner-ships for) this content. Securing appropriate content will take time to collect and convert to the appropriate format.

Potential needs may include:

- Taglines
- Site nomenclature
- Navigational text
- About The Vitamin Shoppe messaging (about us, press releases, job listings, privacy and security assurances, legal disclaimers)
- Welcome messages
- Contextual help
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Product descriptions
- Product listings
- Promotional content
- Health or product news/articles
- Expert advice
- Newsletter
- Bridge content between VitaminShoppe.com and third-party content/services/products
- Email push content (messaging, promotions, calls to action, reminders)
- Coupons/discounts

Sapient will need to coordinate with an editor/writer from VitaminShoppe to determine a plan for creating and/or obtaining this content.

Looking ahead

The RFP proposes a wide-assortment of content features, ranging from news articles to online chat. The actual features implemented during Phase I must be technically feasible, based on user needs, and in line with VitaminShoppe’s overall vision. To make VitaminShoppe a leader in digital customer service, it needs to exploit ways to educate customers and to provide functionality that will help VitaminShoppe own the customer relationship.



Content management

Content Management Systems (CMS) are powerful tools that organizations use to centralize and categorize different kinds of content they deliver to the Web. Rather than manually maintain the content and HTML links for hundreds or thousands of pages across a Web site, CMS allows for content to be placed in a single, central content repository that feeds the site and delivers the content to the site’s users. Attributes and information about the content (meta-tags), which are stored in a database, replace manually maintained links with dynamic links that reflect content types appropriate to different pages and users across the site. A CMS often provides features such as:

- Internal permissions control to restrict who on the content management team can view and edit certain types of content
- Workflow components to manage content/document authoring, publication, and expiration
- Personalization/customization features that allow for the discreet targeting of content based on user needs, preferences, or purchasing history

Sapient will work with the VitaminShoppe content management team to establish a well-defined content publishing model. This model will incorporate a workflow model designed to ensure the integrity of all content published to the site. The workflow model will adhere to strict protocols and will be comprised of the following roles:

Content Creator

Create, source, or aggregate content to be displayed on the site.

Content Tagger

Catalog new content based on established content meta-tagging protocols and place new content into the content repository.

Content Editor

Ensure that all content is grammatically correct, meets the aesthetic standards of the site, and is on-brand.

Content Validator

Manage the workflow process, ensure all content has been properly channeled through the workflow, check all content against a universal validation model, send any content that does not match up with the validation model back through the workflow, and publish all final content to the site.

Decision support

The publishing model will also address content personalization/customization issues through a process know as decision support. Decision support is the analysis of user needs and preferences based on data gathered through the personalization/customization processes. Through this analysis, VitaminShoppe’s content management team will be able to better tailor the user experience as individual users or groups of users mature in their relationship with the site. Comprehensive decision support is vital for a successful personalization/customization initiative.

Content Management Systems are powerful tools that require intensive planning, preparation and vision, but when properly implemented a CMS increases an organization’s control, at the minutest level, over all content published to their site, and greatly enhances the ability to own the user experience. It is Sapient’s recommendation that VitaminShoppe put considerable effort into forming a competent content management team as soon as possible, so that they can begin the process of learning and implementing the publishing model that Sapient plans to produce at the conclusion of the Concept phase.

To help inform our visual design process, Sapient sought an overall understanding of The Vitamin Shoppe's existing communication channels – retail stores, print catalogs, and the current Web site – and the visual systems that each employs. We examined key elements of how these channels look, act, and sound, as well as the visual consistency of each.

Visual strategy for digital media

The VitaminShoppe.com brand should communicate the following attributes: personal, knowledgeable, reliable, credible, responsive, and leadership. This emphasis will further develop the visual vocabulary of the brand and complement The Vitamin Shoppe's visual identity as much as possible.

VitaminShoppe can build a graphical user interface that clearly and consistently establishes and reflects the brand personality by:

- Prominently and consistently staging the VitaminShoppe.com identity.
- Establishing a visual vocabulary for the VitaminShoppe.com brand across imaging, navigation, and interface systems.

By adhering to this strategy, VitaminShoppe's visual design in digital media will:

- Provide users with a consistent, engaging, and valuable experience.
- Support their understanding of the site's editorial content, features, and functionality.
- Create and express a strong personality for the VitaminShoppe.com brand.



The Vitamin Shoppe store

In the retail environment, The Vitamin Shoppe is an established company that customers have trusted since 1977. The stores have an inviting ambience and knowledgeable staff. The Vitamin Shoppe brand identity and color palette build awareness and are consistent across store locations. In defining the way the store functions, we looked at how customers interact within the environment and with the products and informational resources. A knowledgeable staff provides personal customer service and can point customers to helpful books and a kiosk, in addition to helping customers choose from a wide product selection. The primary messages that are communicated in the stores are “quality organic products” and “discount savings.”



The Vitamin Shoppe catalog

The catalog uses The Vitamin Shoppe's brand identity and color palette as a consistent tie-in to the retail stores. It extends The Vitamin Shoppe's presence nationwide with periodic home delivery. The catalog repeats the primary messages of quality organic products and discount savings.

The Vitamin Shoppe Since 1977®



20-40% off
Entire Catalogue!*



1-800-223-1216

To Order or for Customer Service Call 1-800-223-1216. Outside the U.S. call (201) 866-7711
 Order Hours: M-F 7am-11pm, Sat-Sun 9am-5pm EST. New Extended Customer Service Hours: M-F 9am-8pm EST
 Shop online: www.vitaminshoppe.com Get health information: www.vitaminbuzz.com
 Fax 24 hours-a-day 1-800-852-7153



The objective of visual design is to create a visual design system that captures the essence of the VitaminShopper.com brand personality and ensure that the most important aspects of the VitaminShopper.com identity are communicated accurately. Visual design is one way that VitaminShopper can differentiate itself from its competitors in the digital space.



Visual vocabulary

To successfully develop a graphical refresh of VitaminShopper.com, we must understand the elements of the existing site. The components that make up the visual vocabulary and build on the site’s overall strategy include the the VitaminShopper.com brand identity, color palette, typography, imagery, and grid.

The visual language of VitaminShopper.com is not currently integrated with a branding system. Visual elements such as color palette, typography, imagery, and use of The Vitamin Shoppe identity are not consistently executed across all channels of communication.

The VitaminShopper.com identity

The Vitamin Shoppe.com logo placement is consistent on all levels of the site. However, the logotype is used inconsistently in highly visible areas such as banner ads and the homepage. The look and feel of the GUI is underdeveloped and does not clearly enforce the identity or reflect the personality and brand attributes of VitaminShopper.com.



VitaminShopper.com

Color palette

Web colors are specified as RGB values, which is the color model utilized by full-color digital display. Colors that fall outside of the RGB gamut are not considered “Web-friendly.” The site employs a limited palette of Web-friendly colors. Shades of green are used predominantly throughout accompanied by dark red typography. Blue is used as an accent color for secondary messaging. The minimal use of color is visually bland. The color palette should be consistent with the corporate brand and portray VitaminShopper as the definitive source for vitamins, minerals, and supplements. The current palette does not relate to The Vitamin Shoppe brand, causing disconnect with the other channels of communication.

R	0	204	102	153	51	0
G	0	204	102	0	51	0
B	0	153	51	0	255	153

Typography

Consistent use of typography throughout the site and across all channels of communication is an integral part of the brand’s visual vocabulary. To ensure consistency with the existing brand, the use of typefaces should be limited. The typeface Arial appears to be the standard typeface used in the site for headings. Actual content and navigation are formatted in Arial hypertext.

Arial
ABCDEFGHIJK
abcdefghijklmnop
1234567



Imagery

The site makes minimal use of imagery. Buttons and information graphics serve as navigational aids to illustrate topics or highlight important information. Iconography and product photography also help differentiate content, but these elements are not applied consistently.

Navigation

Vitamins & Supplements

Health Care Products

Vitamins & Supplements

Health Care Products

Ways to Shop

By Brand

By Category

A to Z Index

Three-way Search

By Keyword

go!

Shop by Brand

Select a Brand

We carry products from over 400 brands! Click on any of the letters in the alphabet below to find the brand names you are looking for.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Shop by Category

Departments

The Vitamin Shoppe sells over 17,000 products. To make shopping easier, items are organized into 6 departments. Please select from the list below.

VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS

HERBAL PRODUCTS

HOMEOPATHIC PRODUCTS

PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

BOOKS

BODY BUILDING PRODUCTS

Shop by A to Z

We carry more than 17,000 products! Click on any of the letters in the alphabet below to find the product category you are looking for.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Information Graphics

Plus!

Next-Day Delivery At NO EXTRA Charge

40% OFF JULY SPECIAL all Vitamin Shoppe Brand items

Next-Day Delivery At NO EXTRA Charge*

30% OFF all products in August 40% OFF Nature's Way products

Next-Day Delivery At NO EXTRA Charge*

30% OFF all products in August 40% OFF Nature's Way products

Quick Shoppe

If you know your item numbers - click here.

Next-Day Delivery No Extra Charge!

Get a Color Catalog

Get a FREE Color Catalog!

VS Frequent Buyers

Get Bonus Points!

SATISFACTION 30 DAY GUARANTEED

SATISFACTION 30 DAY GUARANTEE

Information Graphics

First time online buyers get 200 Frequent Buyer Bonus Points

FREE With \$50 purchase or more

BUY

check out

view cart

vitaminbuzz need more info?

Iconography

Gel

Kit

Lozenge

Pack

Capsule

Liquid

Powder

Tablet

Vegetarian Capsule

Chewable Tablet

Product Brands

ALVITA

PANDA

CamoCare

Zia Cosmetics

Product Imagery

JASON NATURAL COSMETICS

NATURE'S HERBS

Opti-Free

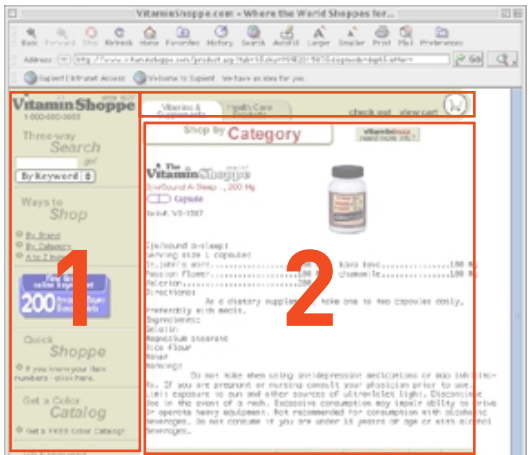
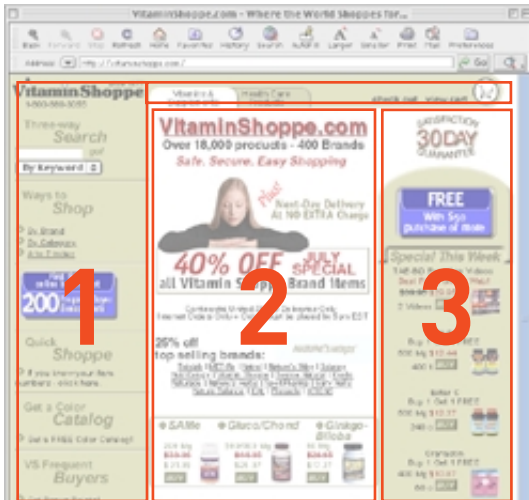
DAVEY'S HOUSTON ENTERPRISES

The Vitamin Shoppe



Grid

A tight grid structure dominates most of the layout. Generally speaking, a three-column grid is applied, with Column 1 reserved exclusively for global navigation. Columns 2 and 3 are used for content. Most pages are laid out consistently, and only one or two design templates are used throughout the site. This simple grid system helps ensure the visual consistency and supports ease-of-use. Refining this type of flexible page layout system would allow for consistent organization of all types of content across the site.



Vitaminbuzz.com

The look and feel of vitaminbuzz.com is loosely connected to VitaminShopper.com. Vitaminbuzz is branded in the upper right with a “sponsored by The Vitamin Shoppe” identity. However, the vitaminbuzz brand bears little resemblance to The Vitamin Shoppe brand identity. Although they are two separate entities, their identities should imply association and leverage each other’s existing brand equity.

The vitaminbuzz color palette is also limited and loosely based on the current VitaminShopper site. The palette is neither an exact match nor Web-friendly. It uses lighter shades of green than VitaminShopper, with the addition of a dark orange for messaging and hypertext. The typeface Meta is the standard font for vitaminbuzz branding, headers, and navigation. Imagery styles seem to differ greatly between the two as well. The book icons and the “torn edge” treatment in the side bar are a departure from the tab approach and tapered horizontal rules used in the sidebar of VitaminShopper.

Vitaminbuzz has a wealth of information, but without a search engine the user is forced to drill down manually. The disparity between VitaminShopper and vitaminbuzz is partially due to the different overall structures and lack of cross-referencing between product and information. Creating this consistency between the two sites will allow the user to develop a comfort level within one environment that translates to the other, building a consistent online experience.



The competitive landscape is comprised of primary (VMS), secondary (drugstores), and tertiary competitors, all evaluated on the same visual criteria: identity, typography, color palette, imagery, grid, navigation, and visual consistency. Amazon.com and Encarta.com were chosen for tertiary comparison because they are the industry benchmarks for shopping components and content development, respectively.

Greentree.com — Primary

Greentree has created a strong digital identity through a consistent execution of color, typography, and the tree logo. These treatments are applied to product and information alike. Positive benchmarks from this site include tasteful product and lifestyle photography and fairly consistent use of a three-column grid, coupled with global and contextual navigation. This lightly customized site is “friendly” and easy to use.



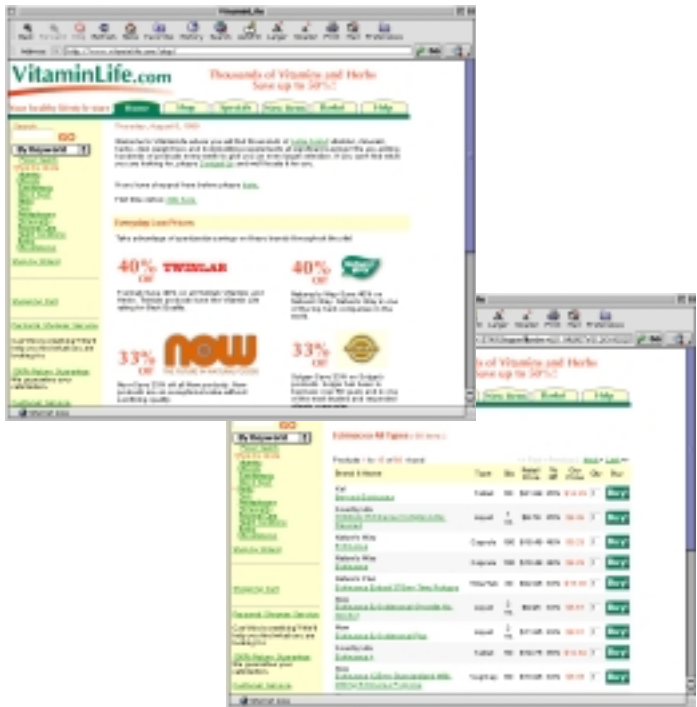
Vitamins.com — Primary

Pull-down menus that refresh the main frame help minimize filtering. The layout, typography, and imagery are disconnected and inconsistent. Poor quality graphic production makes it less than exemplary. The color scheme includes light green, dark blue, and several hues in between, giving it a fresh and clean look. The presence of the Vitamins.com logo on every page and the “V” accent on buttons reinforce the brand. The strength of this site lies more in how it acts rather than how it looks.



VitaminLife .com — Primary

VitaminLife looks and acts so much like Greentree, Mothernature, and Vitamins.com, it becomes hard to differentiate. The bright, “healthy” palette, paired with clear global and contextual navigation, creates a feeling of trust and security. There is little in the way of unique imagery, layouts, or typographic treatments. The few unique treatments are consistently executed, but are so much in parity with other competitors that it breeds indifference. VitaminLife offers only products, with no supporting information.



eNutrition — Primary

This site’s “sporty” look derives from the blue and gold color scheme, the three-column grid, and the simple typographic hierarchy created from variation in cut and weight within the same font family. “Active lifestyle” photography and the starburst in the logo are used consistently throughout the site to create a sense of fitness and health that goes beyond selling vitamins. Global and contextual navigation make finding the special features easy.



Mothernature.com — Primary

Mothernature carries their maternal theme throughout, with section titles like “Ask For Motherly Advice.” The color-coded tabs at first glance define the palette, but are not used with any level of consistency, causing the site to lack a dominant palette. The typography and imagery are all treated differently within every major section and especially in subsections, making it visually “busy.” There is little to no structure in layout or navigation, affecting some basic visual navigation cues that would tell the user where to find information corresponding to a product.



GNC.com — Primary

GNC is one of the most widely recognized brands in the VMS retail landscape. Their logo is used widely, but not consistently throughout the site. Typography, layout, and color schemes are not well-defined or consistently executed. Lifestyle photography is used on the home page, and product images on secondary pages. Limited navigation on these secondary pages forces the user to return to the homepage to choose another section. There is no obvious customization or personalization. GNC's digital presence is one of the weakest of all the competitors, despite its brand equity.

GNC Live Well.



PlanetRX.com — Secondary

The consistent execution of this site is clean, simple, and concise, which creates the feeling that you will have consistent shopping experiences, in turn building trust. Tasteful lifestyle and product photography executed across a three-column grid create a slightly upscale feeling. The simple, understated typographic hierarchy is created from variation in cut and weight within the same font family, not only giving visual navigation cues, but effectively lending itself to contextual navigation.

planetRx™



Drugstore.com — Secondary

This site makes effective use of a spectrum of hues to color code section tabs and carries the assigned section colors throughout the site. Both global and contextual navigation guide users to the exact product within three clicks. The product descriptions are easy to read and consistently formatted. The use of multiple weights and cuts within the same font family add interest while creating a typographic hierarchy. Icons and elegantly silhouetted product photography are consistently executed across a three- or four-column grid, instilling a sense of ease and clarity that work to cultivate a level of comfort, thereby creating trust.

drugstore.com.



Amazon.com — Tertiary

Amazon.com is one of the most trusted retail sites on the Web. The personalized recommendations and new “1-Click Shopping” has taken Amazon to yet another level. Their site is comprised almost exclusively of consistently formatted hypertext, with a few inconsistent, graphical text treatments sprinkled throughout. They have used a three-column grid within each of the color-coded sections. Amazon is beginning to threaten their vast brand equity and overall visual look with the “patch-work syndrome.” The more products and services they offer, the less consistent their execution becomes.

amazon.com



Encarta.com — Tertiary

Encarta is one of the most robust informational sites on the Web. Simplified navigation and search criteria help the user sort through the wealth of information that is there. Black and blue lend a somewhat “academic” feel, and the site follows book design principles more than Web principles, giving it a traditional encyclopedia feel. Although Microsoft’s name is only added to the footer, the use of the standard MSN style guide makes its owner fairly obvious. The consistent use of a range of information (photography, audio clips, maps, and other multimedia) lends credibility to the content.

ENCARTA®



In this section, Sapient summarizes the assessment of VitaminShope’s technical architecture and introduces the package selection process, which will continue into the Concept phase. The complete assessment is provided as a separate document.

The technical assessment workshop

From Tuesday, July 20, to Thursday, July 21, 1999, the Sapient technical sub-team met with VitaminShope to begin transferring knowledge about VitaminShope’s back office and Web site system architecture to the Sapient team. This knowledge is critical for Sapient to make informed decisions during the package selection process. The information that was gathered is not comprehensive, and will need to be further developed to create a technical design and complete implementation in later phases.

System architecture

The VitaminShope’s three retail channels—stores, catalogs, and the Web site—currently share a single back office system. At the heart of this back office is ACT, a catalog system package that has been modified to fulfill back office requirements for all three channels. ACT is responsible for managing all functionality related to inventory management, such as:

- Determining when inventory has fallen below the required levels
- Executing and tracking a purchase order
- Receiving the shipment from the vendor against the purchase-order
- Tracking inventory levels, including the amount of current inventory available for sell or committed to orders, and back orders
- Tracking inventory locations within the warehouse
- Entering orders
- Checking the real-time status of orders
- Fulfilling an order, including selecting and shipping an order
- Updating inventory prices (i.e., catalog management)

ACT also has the ability to perform loyalty program management, marketing, sales analysis, mail order management, and financial management. ACT’s widespread functionality makes it useful throughout the company—by customer service representatives, warehouse personnel, the merchandising department, the marketing department, and many others.

ACT is not, however, used in the retail stores. Most registers in the retail stores run a point-of-sale (POS) software, InfoCorp, which processes sales; validates credit cards, gift certificates and other types of payments; signs up new customers; and exchanges information with the back office systems. Every night the registers send off the day’s sales and new customer information, and receive the latest price changes, new product information, and customer information from the back office.

Due to some inherent problems with the existing system, including the lack of robustness in this nightly polling process, VitaminShope decided to replace InfoCorp with the STS OpenWorks package. This move solved many of the problems VitaminShope had with InfoCorp. OpenWorks has a robust nightly polling feature, as well as a sales audit module and two modules for handling loyalty programs, neither of which InfoCorp had.

Additionally, OpenWorks is Y2K and ODBC compliant, which enables outside systems to easily access OpenWorks data.

OpenWorks is a full retailing package that includes functionality beyond POS. OpenWorks has the following modules and functionality:

- MarketWorks is the data warehouse that contains customer and sales information and uses that information for marketing analysis.
- RewardManager is a sub-module of MarketWorks that keeps track of customer’s loyalty bonus points balance.
- StoreWorks is the POS software used in the registers.
- AuditWorks is the sales auditing module that detects and prevents fraud.
- LiabilityTracker is a sub-module of AuditWorks that tracks liabilities such as gift certificates and frequent buyer certificates.
- CreditSwitching is used to route non-cash payments from the registers to the correct system for approval and settlement.

VitaminShope has the following smaller systems, which perform discrete functions:

- The Call ‘X’ program is a constantly running process that synchronizes disparate systems.
- Dialog is a customer service email management package.
- X-Bulk is manufacturing software that manages the production process for VitaminShope brand products.
- Package Shipping System (PSS) manages the shipping process from weighing orders to determining the most cost effective way to ship packages.
- MAS90 is VitaminShope’s accounting system.





Web site functionality

From a technical viewpoint, the main functionality of the VitaminShoppe and vitaminbuzz sites is to allow customers to search for, view information on, and purchase items from the VitaminShoppe’s inventory of VMS products.

Customers can use three different types of searches to find a specific product or a group of products: catalog number, which allows the user to search by entering the product’s item number; keyword, which allows the user to enter any word that might be associated with a product; and brand, which allows the user to enter a brand name to find all products in that line. These searches are supported by the information captured in the site’s data warehouse.

Two types of product information can be viewed: detailed or general. Detailed information comes from ACT, is displayed on the VitaminShoppe site, and consists of information such as the contents of the government-regulated label, the number and type of items, the brand name, etc. General information comes from HealthNotes, is displayed on vitaminbuzz.com, and consists of medical information about the particular product. For example, detailed product information would state that a product is a 100 capsule bottle of VitaminShoppe-brand kava kava. General product information would list the health benefits, normal usage, and side effects of kava kava.

The buying functionality uses a shopping cart metaphor for collecting and persisting selected items. Customers can then purchase items using a credit card, gift certificate, or frequent buyer certificate. Microsoft Site Server provides the shopping cart functionality and persistence.

Web site architecture

Snickelways, a contractor to VitaminShoppe, created the current VitaminShoppe and vitaminbuzz sites. Snickelways still maintains and updates the sites, but will stop once their contract runs out, which should occur before the end of 1999.

Exodus hosts the VitaminShoppe and vitaminbuzz sites. The machines that serve the content for the Web sites are physically located at Exodus’ offices.

More specifically, these machines are responsible for:

- Serving pages for the vitaminbuzz and VitaminShoppe sites
- Serving ads using NetGravity
- Maintaining a local data warehouse
- Connecting to the VitaminShoppe back office to exchange information

Most machines are mirrored in order to provide the highest possible degree of fault tolerance.

Requirements

The 2.0 version of the Web site architecture should be more than just a fix for the problems of the current site. It needs to be a scaleable, upgradeable, robust, and flexible system that can grow and change with the “dot.com” company.

Requirements were identified during the workshop that supplement or clarify the ones listed in the RFP. Several of these requirements are listed below. The full list can be found in the technical assessment.

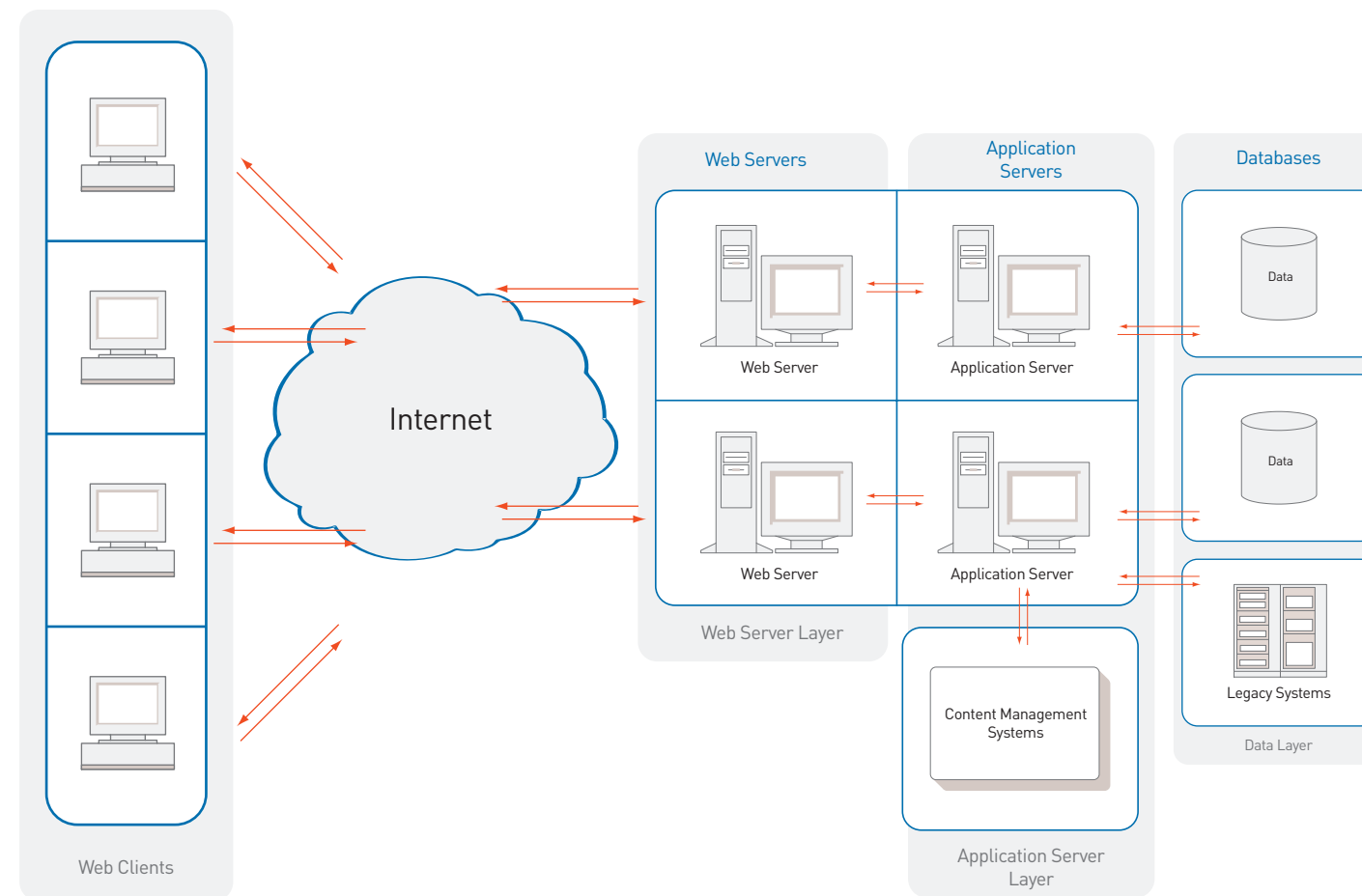
- The site should interface with the current back office system. The site should also be flexible so that it could interface with a new back office system when the “dot.com” separates from the parent company. To this end, standard interfaces, such as ODBC, should be used whenever possible, rather than software specific interfaces.
- The site should be able to display customer-specific prices based on the catalog that directed the customer to the site.
- The site should have real-time access to the back office system so that, for example, real time authorization of gift certificate-type items and credits can be performed, and customers can have access to the real-time status of their order and to their ordering history.
- Capturing information about visitors should become more robust so that it can be used for marketing, merchandising, and upgrading the site.
- The site should have rich transactional and data warehousing capabilities.

Package selection

The key components that are part of any e-commerce architecture include:

- Web servers
- Application servers
- Content management systems
- E-commerce packages

These components have been depicted in the diagram below. This diagram suggests one design for how these components can interact, but does not represent a final decision on how these components will interact in the 2.0 version of the Web site.



High-Level Overview of a Typical E-commerce Architecture



Web servers

A Web server is a program that, using the HTTP protocol, serves the files that form Web pages for presentation to the users. Every computer that contains a Web site must be connected to a Web server. The main function of a Web server is to receive URL requests from client browsers, process the requests, and return the results. Web servers can cache or store static HTML pages, while dynamic content can be created using a scripting solution or passed on to an application server.

Some of the considerations in choosing a Web server are:

- Ease of use and customization
- Interface capabilities to other application components
- The ability to execute instructions (scripting) embedded in HTML pages
- The ability to handle the expected request loads

Web servers often come as part of a larger package of Internet- and intranet-related programs for serving email, downloading requests for FTP files, and building and publishing Web pages. Other considerations in choosing a Web server include how well it works with the operating system and other servers like application servers, its ability to handle server-side programming, and publishing, search engine, and site building tools that may come with it.

The leading application servers being considered for VitaminShoppe include:

- Netscape Enterprise Server
- Microsoft IIS
- Application servers

All of the business logic for a Web application usually resides in an application server. Whereas the Web server serves up the pages to the browser, the application server typically builds the content for the page itself. Some of the other typical functions include interfacing to legacy systems and coordinating transactions between these systems.

The major considerations in choosing an application server are:

- Development support (IDE, sample code, code reuse, customer support)
- Scalability/application partitioning
- Performance
- Extensibility
- Robustness (minimal downtime)
- Security
- Analysis tools and maintenance
- Load balancing

Application servers, such as WebLogic (BEA Systems) and Netscape Application Server, have evolved to handle management and operational issues associated with Web development. Application servers offer a number of inherent advantages, particularly for applications that, over time, will grow in complexity, business logic, or in the number of users. The following list describes the major functions, features, and capabilities in some of today’s application servers:

- Communicating between the Web server and database or other back-end systems
- Generating dynamic HTML pages using templates
- Implementing business logic or other services
- Tracking and logging user state and session information
- Scalable application deployment to accommodate increasing user demands

E-commerce packages

E-commerce packages are a new breed of complete solutions for the Web commerce environment. They include everything from the Web server, application server, and content management, all the way to the analysis of the site’s performance. They normally provide an end-to-end e-commerce solution and do not require third party add-ons.

The leading e-commerce packages being considered for VitaminShoppe include:

- BroadVision
- ATG Dynamo Retail Station
- InterWorld Commerce Exchange
- Open Market (Live-Commerce & Transact)

Content management systems

The role that content management plays within Web sites is changing. Besides providing content as a main feature of Web sites, content management systems can now manage elements such as interface graphics, product descriptions, and help text within highly transactional and personalized sites. To facilitate this level of site design, content management systems need to easily integrate with application servers. Choosing the correct content management system is highly dependent on the type of Web site being built and the intended audience.

The leading content management systems that are considered for VitaminShoppe include:

- Vignette
- Future Tense
- BroadVision

The technology benchmark is based on the analysis of reports from the Statistics Server 4.22 and other resources and aims to establish lowest common denominator indices for future design and development tasks. It outlines the user’s target delivery platform, including the user workstation configuration and associated client-side functionality.

The current user environment and reporting data suggests two optional paths for VitaminShoppe to follow. Where appropriate, Sapient presents both aggressive and conservative options for review and consideration.

Upon approval, Sapient will optimize all design and development within the parameters of the technology benchmark.

Key Findings Summary

The Web browser and HTML version benchmarks are the only items dependent on one another. Aside from this dependency, the approved technology benchmark could be a combination of aggressive and conservative options. VitaminShoppe will need to weigh the business objectives against the user needs and technical strategy to determine the appropriate benchmark strategy.

Aggressive

- Web Browsers: Netscape 4.x and MSIE 4.x
- AOL Support: AOL 4.0
- HTML Version: HTML 4.0
- Operating System: Microsoft Windows
- Screen Resolution: 800 x 600
- Screen Colors: 256 (8-bit) adaptive palette
- Connectivity: 33.6 Kbps
- Target Download Time: 40K to 120K per page

What does this mean?

- Positions VitaminShoppe as a leader in next generation Web sites
- Provides an enhanced user experience with more robust functionality
- Forces 30% of current users to upgrade their Web browser
- Slight performance degradation with enhanced functionality

Conservative

- Web Browsers: Netscape 3.x and MSIE 3.x
- AOL Support: AOL 3.0
- HTML Version: HTML 3.2
- Operating System: Microsoft Windows and Macintosh
- Screen Resolution: 640 x 480
- Screen Colors: 256 (8-bit) adaptive palette
- Connectivity: 28.8 Kbps
- Target Download Time: 20K to 85K per page

What does this mean?

- Supports over 90% of the current users without any browser modifications
- Supports a consistent user interface design for all resolution settings
- Maintains parity for VitaminShoppe
- Mitigates risk, but may not meet increased user expectations



Web Browsers

Identification of the Web browsers that the site will support is essential to ensure that key design and development decisions reflect the user population’s technical capabilities.

Sapient generated reports based on historical data from Statistics Server 4.22 and an analysis of browsers as reported by StatMarket (<http://www.statmarket.com>).

Summary of data:

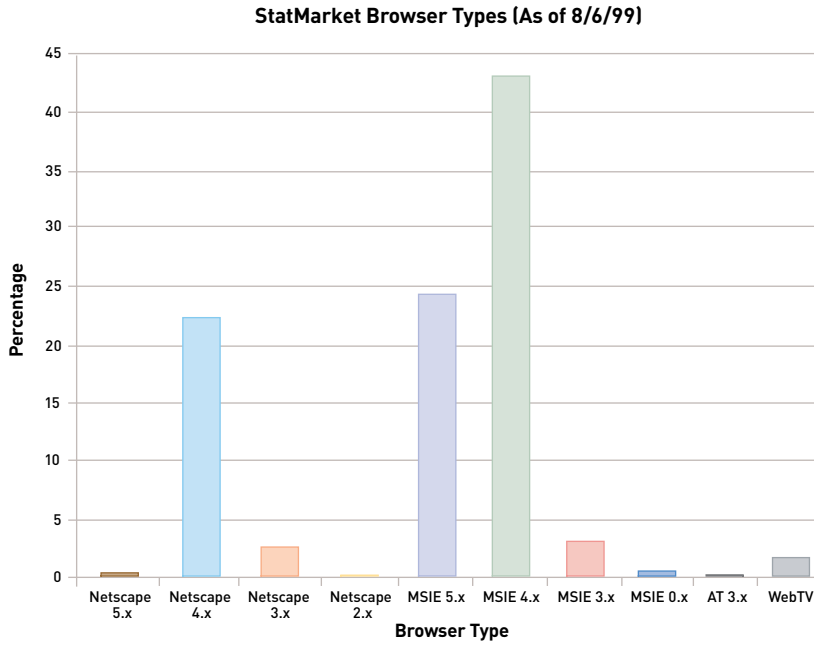
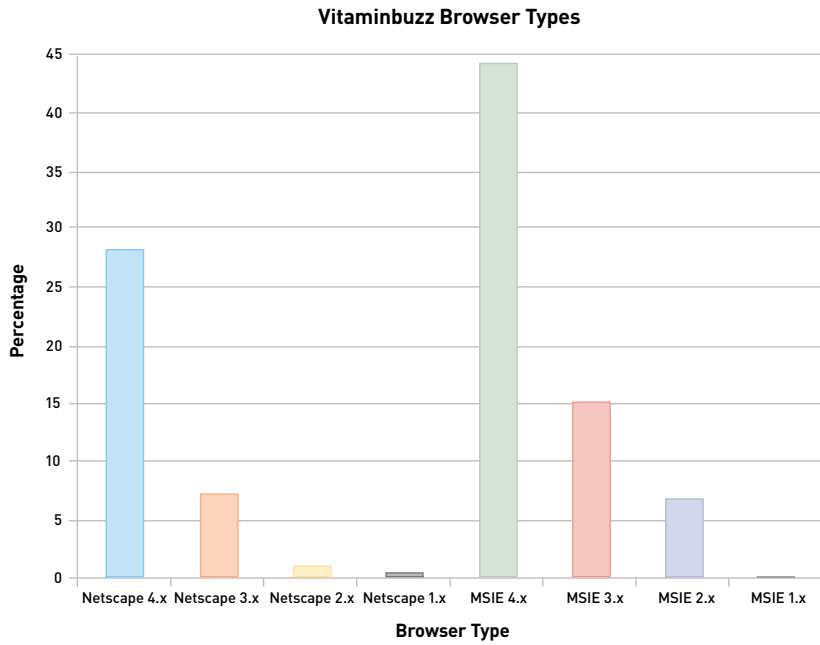
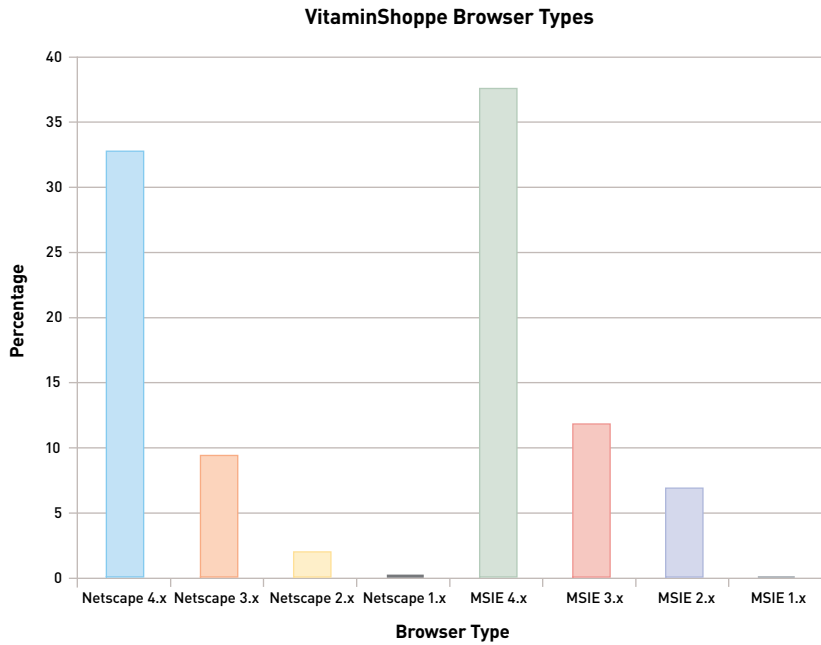
- 70% of VitaminShoppe users browse with Netscape 4.x (33%) or MSIE 4.x (37%).
- 72% of vitaminbuzz users browse with Netscape 4.x (28%) or MSIE 4.x (44%).
- 92% of the users in StatMarket’s report browse with Netscape 4.x (23%), MSIE 4.x (44%) or MSIE 5.x (25%).
- 21% of VitaminShoppe users browse with Netscape 3.x (9%) or MSIE 3.x (12%).
- 21% of vitaminbuzz users browse with Netscape 3.x (7%) or MSIE 3.x (14%).
- 6% of the users in StatMarket’s report browse with Netscape 3.x (3%) or MSIE 3.x (3%).

Aggressive

Design and functionality should be optimized for the 4.x generation of Netscape and Microsoft Internet Explorer browsers. This comprises just over 70% of the current user population. This aggressive approach seeks to optimize the user experience through enhanced functionality provided by the fourth generation Web browsers.

Conservative

This approach insures that all site functionality is available to over 90% of the current users by including support for Netscape 3.x and MSIE 3.x. This will reduce the client-side technology options available for development and result in a less interactive user interface design.



AOL Subscribers

An analysis of the RDNS machine identity data suggests a majority of the users access the site through an AOL proxy server. AOL browser’s have a history of unique compatibility issues and should be addressed specifically. Unfortunately, it was not possible to correlate this machine identity data with a specific AOL browser version.

Aggressive

Design and functionality should be optimized for AOL 4.0 with the MSIE 4.01 browser type. This aggressive approach provides a more robust user experience through the enhanced functionality provided by MSIE 4.01.

Conservative

This approach maintains the existing AOL policy establishing AOL version 3.0 as the benchmark. This will ensure all existing users will be able to access the site without having to upgrade their AOL browser.

HTML Version

The identification of the Web browsers the site will support has a direct relationship with the HTML version benchmark. Only 4.x browsers have limited to full support for HTML 4.0, while 3.x browsers support the HTML 3.2 standard.

Aggressive

The existing VitaminShoppe Web site already utilizes some HTML 4.0 features such as Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). This approach would extend this HTML 4.0 functionality to create a more robust user experience with the judicious use of JavaScript, Dynamic HTML (DHTML), and CSS. Please review the chart above for additional browser functionality.

Conservative

This approach would rely on the basic HTML 3.2 standard. Consult the chart above to review the limitations of 3.x browsers. The resulting user experience would provide limited interaction and may have package integration issues.

WINDOWS	Java	Frames	Tables	Plug-ins	Font Size	Font Color	JavaScript	Style Sheets	gif89	DHTML	I-Frames	Table Color	XML
AOL Browser 4.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	
AOL Browser 3.0		Supported	Supported		Supported	Supported							
AOL Browser 1.0													
Explorer 5.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported
Explorer 4.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	
Explorer 3.01	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported	Supported	
Explorer 2.0			Supported		Supported	Supported							
Navigator 4.06	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported	
Navigator 3.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported			Supported	
Navigator 2.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported				
Navigator 1.1			Supported		Supported								

Supported

Partially Supported

Not Supported

MACINTOSH	Java	Frames	Tables	Plug-ins	Font Size	Font Color	JavaScript	Style Sheets	gif89	DHTML	I-Frames	Table Color	XML
AOL Browser 4.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported	Supported	
AOL Browser 3.0		Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported			Supported			Supported	
AOL Browser 2.7													
AOL Browser 1.0													
Explorer 5.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported
Explorer 4.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	
Explorer 3.01	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported	Supported	
Navigator 4.06	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported	
Navigator 3.0	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported			Supported	
Navigator 2.0		Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported		Supported				

Supported

Partially Supported

Not Supported



Target Delivery Platform

The target delivery platform is the computer workstation configuration that will be used by the VitaminShoppe target audience to access the Web site. It includes the following specifications:

Operating Systems

Determining operating system compatibility is essential for establishing a testing environment in combination with other benchmark data.

Summary of data:

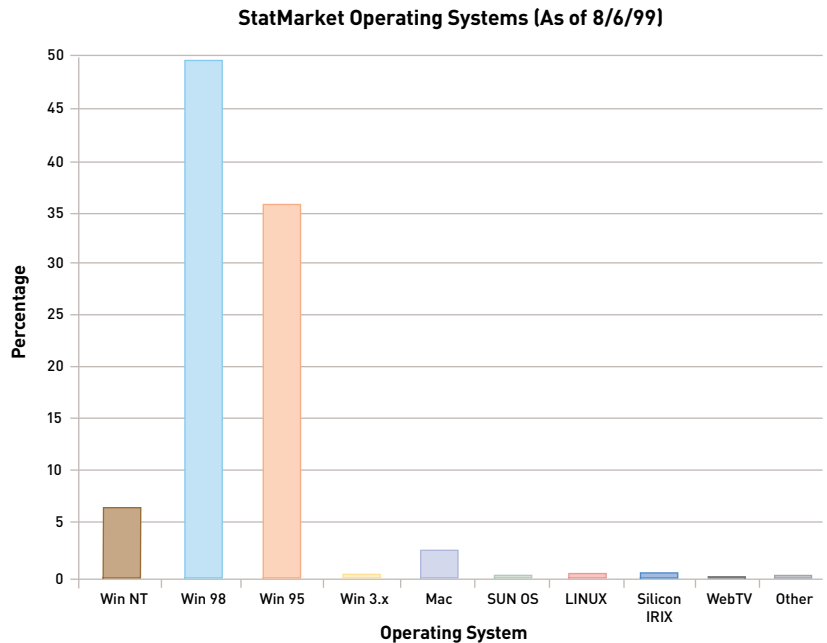
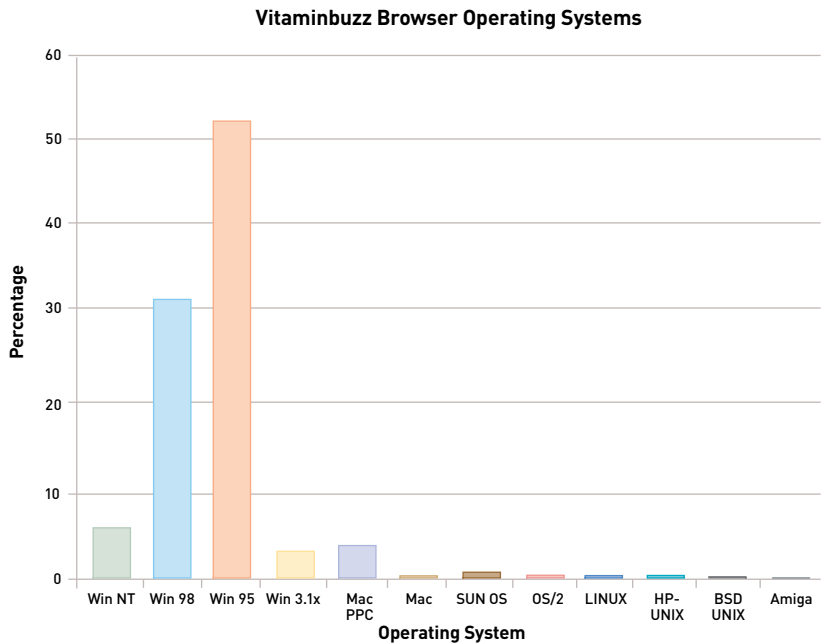
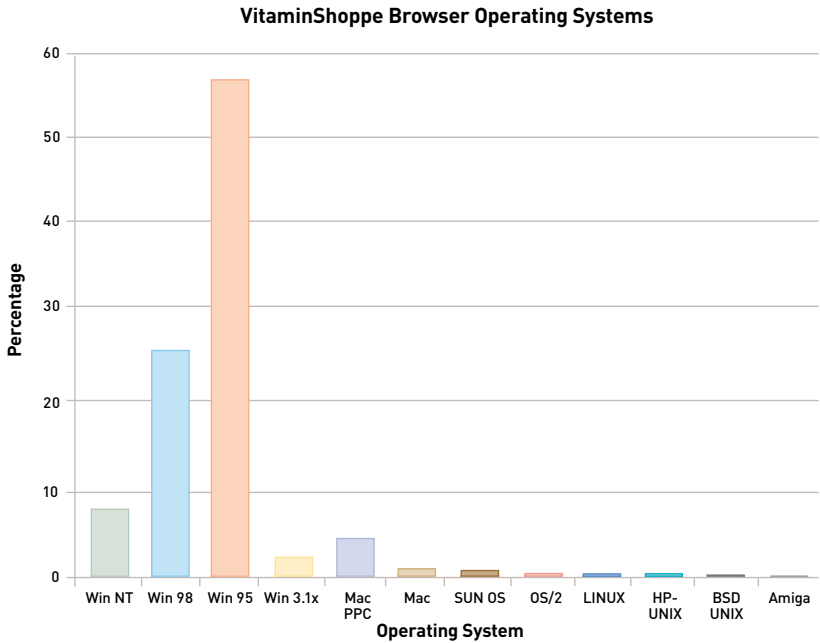
- 94% of VitaminShoppe users are running a Microsoft Windows-based operating system, while 5% are running a Macintosh operating system.
- 95% of vitaminbuzz users are running a Microsoft Windows-based operating system, while less than 5% are running a Macintosh operating system.
- 95% of the users in StatMarket's report are running a Microsoft Windows-based operating system, while less than 3% are running a Macintosh operating system.

Aggressive

This approach would focus design and functionality on only the Microsoft Windows-based operating systems. Microsoft Windows-based operating systems hold 95% of the user population's operating systems. The primary negative to this approach is that it excludes an entire user segment.

Conservative

This benchmark addresses design and functionality for both the Microsoft Windows-based and Macintosh operating systems. This option is a more time consuming approach due to the inconsistencies with display rendering across operating systems as seen with font size differences, etc.



Screen Resolution

The screen resolution refers to the user’s monitor screen dimension settings in pixels.

Summary of data:

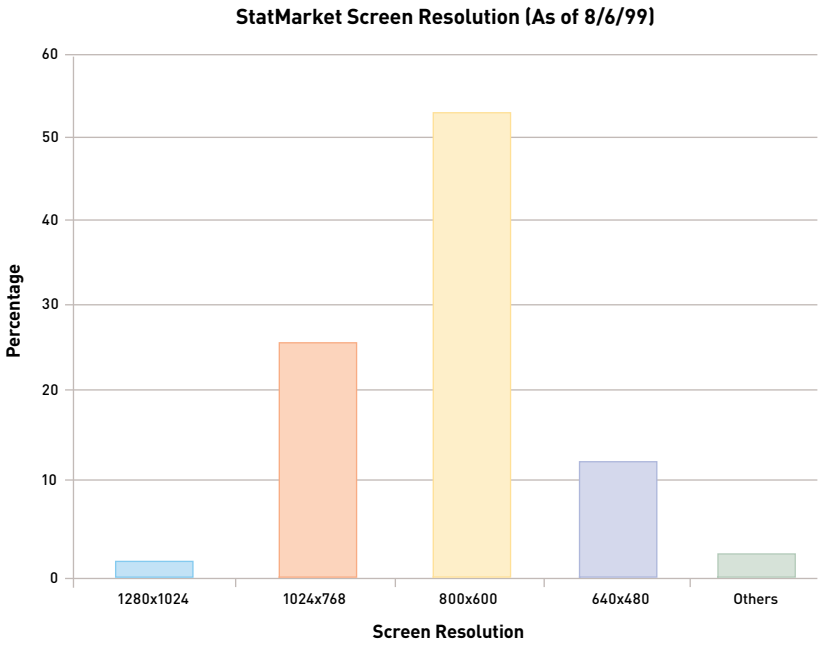
- 82% of users in StatMarket’s report have a screen resolution equal to or greater than 800 x 600.
- 13% of users in StatMarket’s report have a screen resolution of 640 x 480.

Aggressive

The user interface design should be optimized for an 800 x 600 screen resolution setting. This approach is gaining wider acceptance throughout the industry as data clearly indicates a strong population of users with higher resolution monitors.

Conservative

In an effort to facilitate the user experience for the additional 13% of the user population, the user interface design should focus on a screen resolution setting of 640 x 480. This approach ensures that there will be no horizontal scrolling for all users and has been the current baseline standard for user-centric designs.



Screen Colors

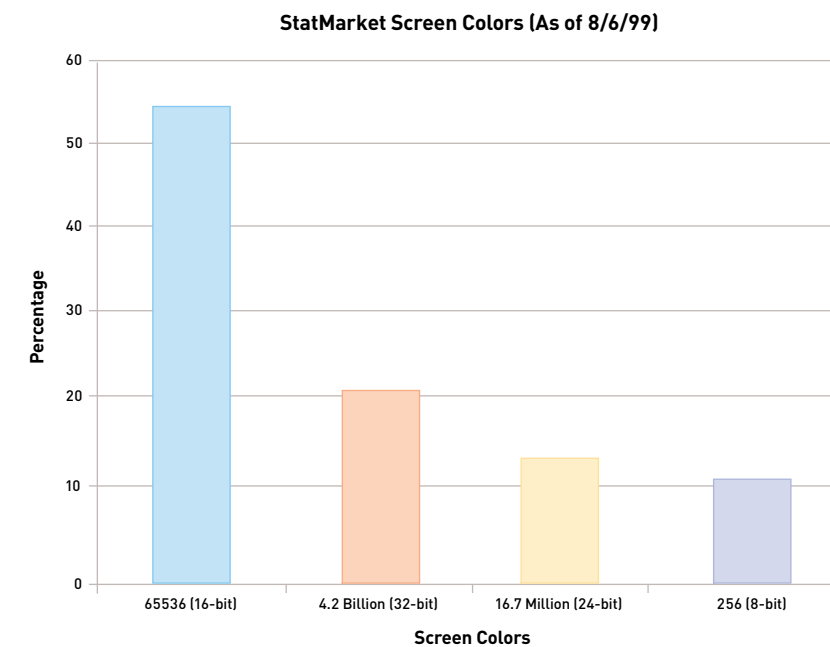
Screen colors refers to the number of colors the user's monitor is set to display.

Summary of data:

- 89% of users in StatMarket's report have screen color settings equal to or greater than 16-bit.
- 11% of users in StatMarket's report have a screen color setting of 256 colors (8-bit)

Aggressive/Conservative

It is essential that all graphical elements display well at 8-bit color settings. All GIF images are indexed to 256 colors, therefore an adaptive palette should be utilized throughout the site design.

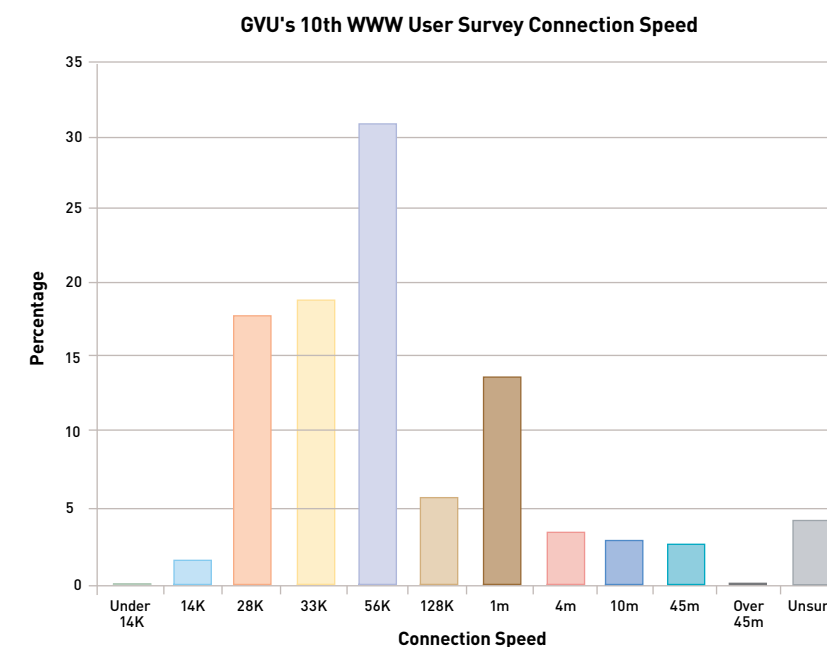


Connectivity

Connectivity refers to the connection speeds which users connect to the Internet. This data is also used to establish target download times for the site's pages.

Summary of data:

- 2% of users in GVU's 10th WWW User Survey had a connection speed of 14Kbps or less.
- 15 % of users in GVU's 10th WWW User Survey had a connection speed of 28 Kbps.
- 18% of users in GVU's 10th User Survey had a connection speed of 33 Kbps.
- 31% of users in GVU's 10th User Survey had a connection speed of 56 Kbps.
- 30% of users in GVU's 10th User Survey had a connection speed of 128 Kbps or greater.



Aggressive

Site content and functionality is optimized for 33.6 Kbps connection speeds.

The target download time should range from 40K to 120K per page. This aggressive approach may frustrate users with lower connection speeds who will experience longer download times.

Conservative

This approach accommodates users with slow connection speeds by optimizing for 28.8Kbps. A strict AOL standard for the file size of a Web page is 20K to 85K per page. This equates to approximately 15 to 30 seconds of download time over a 28.8 baud modem.

