

Online Transportation Services Guideline for Service Quality

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Abstract: Over the past years, at an increasing pace, customer satisfaction has been an emphasis in most organization especially those in the service industry. Service quality becomes the major focus on achieving customer satisfy action and, over the long run, customer retention. Responding to the notion, many retailers begin to appreciate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) concept and constantly improve the quality of services that they offered to fulfill the customers expectations and satisfactions. Currently, the practice has also extended to the online retailers, both ‘brick and mortar’ and ‘click and mortar’ companies. The CRM concept has broaden to include online customers and services. This study is undertaken to explore the internet service quality in online service industry, particularly in e-ticketing of transportation service. Web observations were performed to identify the major and significant determinants of quality of internet services. By using electronic CRM (e-CRM) model as reference in observation, it is found that *appearance* and *linkages* are two important determinants that should be used when measuring the quality of internet services. Through the findings, a guideline of the transportation websites incorporating important features of e-CRM is developed.

Keywords: - Internet Retailing; Electronic Customer Relationship Management; Service Quality; Customer Satisfaction; E-ticketing

1 Introduction

Internet retailing (also known as B2C, or Business-to-Consumer e-commerce) is a Web-enabled interface between a company and their target consumer for selling products and services on the Web, with the facility of online payment. The Internet has been provided with a platform to deliver CRM function on web, which is known as electronic customer relationship management (E-CRM). One of the primary activities of e-CRM is the customer service on the web. Since customer service quality is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of Internet retailing, many practitioners and academicians focused on how to improve online services to attract potential customers and on how to retain current customers. Many organizations have encountered problems and challenges in furnishing Internet service quality.

Customers are still hesitant to make online purchasing due to problems associated with security, reliability, threat of fraud, and etc. Information search and purchasing on the Internet also require a level of computer literacy not required in a traditional retail space. Without this level of technical literacy, consumers can become frustrated and purchases maybe aborted [9].

For transportation, the industry has moved a step further in providing services to its customers when they are able to replicate some of their business processes into online. Becoming an internet retailer is a huge transformation and it has affected the organizations’ processes from marketing to customer services. The internet retailer needs to convince its customers that they would neither experience much difficulty conducting online transactions nor that there will be differences conducting transaction offline. This is a huge liability. Not only that they have to invest in the technology and infrastructure, the mindset of the employees and the management need also to be shifted. Other than that, organizations that involve with providing online services also need to be able to recognize the needs of their customers and the hurdles that thwart them. Ability to incorporate e-CRM features into their websites is among the important things that every online business must address. These features are included on the website to communicate and deliver services to the customers. Better than that, the features also become the subject of quality, measuring the excellence of internet services offered online. It is, therefore, important for organizations to identify prominent

features of website that are able to translate into quality services offered to the customers.

The objective of this paper is to identify the e-CRM website features of e-retailing in e-ticketing transportation services, namely train and bus, which meet customer satisfaction. The purpose of this evaluation is to see on how transportation industry values the importance of e-CRM to its business, hence proposing a guideline. The guideline would provide an input for those researchers on e-service quality area and as a framework for the ticketing websites to implement important features in order to increase their customers' satisfaction in doing online transactions.

2 E-CRM and Internet Service Quality

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a comprehensive business and marketing strategy that integrates technology, process and all business activities around the customers [1, 2]. At its most basic level, there clearly is nothing more important than customer as a satisfied customers buy more, more loyal and more profitable over their lifetime [1].

Responding to the benefits provided by CRM and E-CRM, many businesses are implementing the internet service quality as the service will increase customers' satisfaction. According to [11], CRM is a strategy that provides seamless integration of every area of business that relates to customers namely marketing, sales, customers service and field support through integration of people, process and technology. On the other hand, with the invention of internet-based technology, E-CRM systems will expand the traditional CRM techniques by integrating technologies of new electronic channels with electronic business applications into the overall enterprise CRM strategy. Both CRM and E-CRM systems have unique characteristics that support customer business interaction.

The concept of E-CRM involves the integration of web channels into the overall enterprise CRM strategy [10]. The objective of E-CRM is to drive consistency within all channels related to sales, customer sales and support, and marketing initiatives to achieve a seamless customer experience and maximize customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and revenue.

Developed from Internet marketing and the traditional service-quality literature, the concept of internet service quality in e-commerce ("e-service quality") can be defined as the consumers' overall

evaluation and judgment of the excellence and quality of e-service offerings in the virtual marketplace [13]. Service quality is viewed as a unique construct from customer satisfaction. Service quality is by nature a subjective concept, which means that understanding how the customer thinks about service quality is essential to effective management. [12] stated, service quality is the amount of congruence between customers' expectations and perception of the actual service. The expectation that the customer bring the service could affect their evaluation of its quality. Service quality means understanding the customers' needs and identifying ways to meet or exceed them. It is sometimes equated with customer satisfaction, or the difference between customer's perception and expectations of a service transaction. In contrast to their evaluation of traditional service offerings, customers are less likely to evaluate each sub-process in detail during a single visit to a Web site; rather they are likely to perceive the service as an overall process and outcome [14].

Research on consumer evaluations of online services is still in its early stages [14] and insights into the differences between evaluations of service offerings on the Internet versus the physical marketplace are still needed [8]. Zeithaml et al. [15] uncovered 11 dimensions of e-service quality which are reliability, responsiveness, access, assurance/trust, security/privacy, customization/personalization, ease of navigation, flexibility, efficiency, site aesthetics, and price knowledge. However, personal service was not considered critical in e-service quality except when problems occurred or consumers were making complex decisions [9].

Customers often divide service-quality dimensions into various sub-dimensions [5], and according to Brady and Cronin [4] a hierarchical conceptualisation of service quality is often appropriate. Therefore, Jessica Santos [13] proposed that e-service quality consists of an active dimension and an incubative dimension. The active dimension and the incubative dimension each consist of five or six related overlapping determinants. The active dimension can be defined as the good support, fast speed, and attentive maintenance that a Web site can provide to its customers [13]. While, the incubative dimension is defined as the proper design of a Web site, how technology is used to provide consumers with easy access, understanding and attractions of a Web site [13]. The majority of elements in the incubative dimension can be developed before a Web site is launched.

While many industries have harnessing the power of the Internet, it is also the time for the transportation industry to jump on the bandwagon too. Many transport companies have been able to deliver efficient services to their customers through online. Beginning with scheduling and other informational material being posted online, these days have seen tremendous improvement on online services provided by transportation websites. Currently, most of the transportation companies have enabled online ticket purchase for the convenience of the customers. Customers are able to plan their journey using scheduling system, book their tickets online, and even pay online. It gives lots of convenience especially for overseas travellers to plan ahead their trips.

Along with providing comfort during journey, it is also a must that transport companies provide conveniences for their passengers making plan for their travels; which is likely achievable through online. Therefore, having a transportation website guideline with appropriate features would be a value added to the industry.

3 Research Methodology

Web observations comprise of observations of selected websites from all over the world that apply electronic services in conducting their business. The evaluation of the transportations' website was based on a predefined set of checklist [13, 3, 7]. This checklist containing 41 features of e-CRM was implemented by the organizations' website. All the features were then categorized under the 13 determinants of service quality proposed by [13]. Observations were made on 51 bus transportations and 50 train transportations websites. The major observation falls on Europe region, corresponding to the maturity of the consumers and businesses of this regions on E-Commerce area.

4 Research Model

Figure 1 represents the research model of this study. The model has been adapted to include both e-Services quality features [13] and e-CRM features [3, 7].

All of the 41 e-CRM features observed were fitted to the 11 determinants of internet service quality studied. *Appearance*, which is one of the determinants of internet service quality, however is found not to be much related to any part of e-CRM feature, but to be included in the observation as well. Figure 1 shows the summary of how the 41 e-CRM features were mapped into the 11

determinants. Of the 41 e-CRM features, speed of downloading feature is excluded from observation since the feature is subjected to different interpretation on different platform of evaluation.

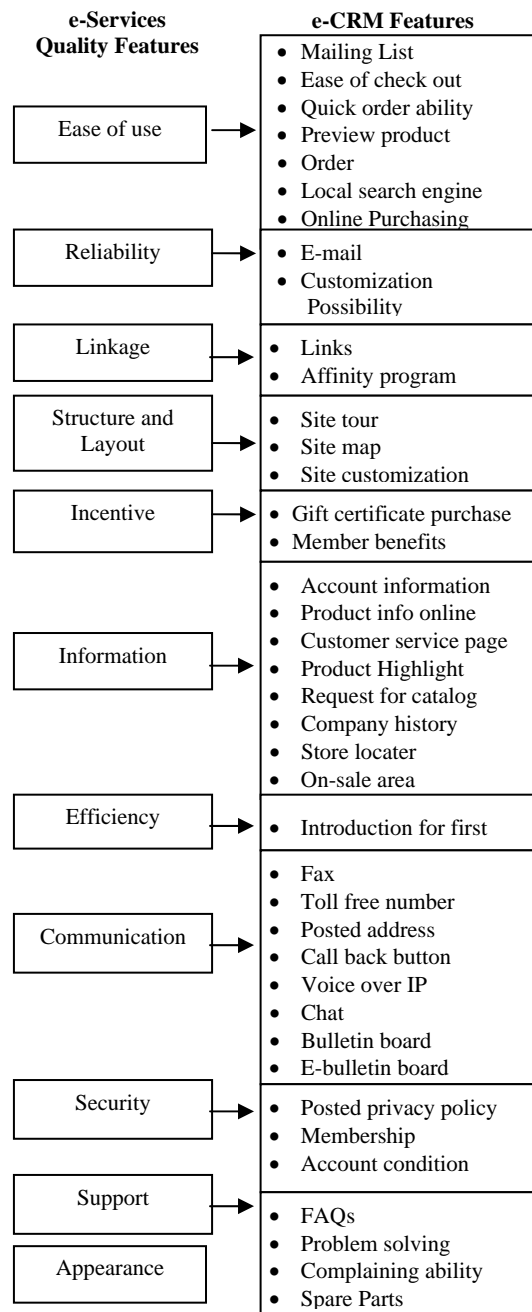


Fig. 1 Features of e-Services and e-CRM

5 Findings and Results of Web Observations

This section depicted the result of the web observations.

5.1 Demographic profile

52 bus and 49 train transportations websites observed as tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1 Web Observations by Region

	Bus		Train		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Asia	8	15.4	10	20.4	18	17.8
Euro	18	34.6	27	55.1	45	44.6
America	17	32.7	8	16.3	25	24.8
Africa	4	7.7	2	4.1	6	5.9
Australia	5	9.6	2	4.1	7	6.9
Total	52		49		101	

5.2 Web Comparisons between Regions

Referring to Table 2, collectively it is found that for all regions; the most applied e-CRM feature is *Product Info Online* with collective score of 95%; meaning that mostly all observed websites have applied this feature. This is followed by *Order* (90%), *E-mail Us* (85%), and *Online Purchasing* (82%). Each region basically share similar pattern where these four features fall within the frequency of 80% and above except for Africa and Asia region. For both regions (Africa and Asia), *Online Purchasing* is not ranked among the top features; the scores are 67% and 56% respectively. On the other hand, the least e-CRM features applied in all the websites are *Call Back Button* with collective score of 0%, *Voice Over IP* (1%), *Bulletin Board* (2%), *chat* (2%), and *site tour* (2%).

The remaining features have collective scores ranged from 4% to 79%. Similar to the most applied features, each region basically share similar pattern where the five least applied features fall within the frequency of less than 5% except for Asia and Australia. For Asia websites, there are about 6% and 11% of the websites having bulletin board and chat features. Whereas for Australia 14% of its transportation companies provide site tours, contrary to other counterparts.

Further comparison was made to see the trend of each region. Analysis of differences between each score of the region and the collective total was used as shown in Table 3. From the table, it is found that Europe region is the highest likely to have similar pattern with the collective figures derived from the average of all regions. This does correspond to the fact that Europe's maturity in term of its consumers and businesses in the area of E-commerce.

Table 2 Scores of Observed Features by Regions

	Diff. bet. Score of Each Region with Total (%) (Score - Total)					
	Tot	Af	Am	As	Au	Eu
Productinfoonline	95	83	100	89	100	96
Order	89	100	92	89	86	87
Emailus	84	100	84	78	86	87
Onlinepurchasing	83	67	92	56	86	89
Appearance	79	83	80	61	71	84
Postedaddress	79	83	80	61	100	82
Co.history/profile	76	83	88	61	71	76
Links	68	67	72	67	71	64
FAQs	69	67	80	56	86	67
Storelocator	66	100	68	67	86	60
Problemsolving	64	67	72	44	43	71
Complainingability	57	50	64	56	43	58
Membership	48	50	52	39	29	51
Ebulletinboard	46	0	40	33	29	62
Fax	47	67	56	44	57	38
Quickorderability	41	100	52	17	29	38
On-salearea	42	33	44	44	57	40
Localsearchengine	40	33	36	22	57	47
Sitemap	40	0	40	17	71	47
Affinityprograms	38	0	28	56	0	44
Trackorderstatus	35	33	44	39	29	29
Postedprivacypolicy	33	33	32	33	14	36
Custservicepage	32	67	48	17	43	22
Easeofcheckout	31	33	44	17	14	31
Accountcondition	28	33	44	22	0	24
Introto1sttimeuser	28	83	24	22	57	20
Accountinfo	25	33	32	22	14	22
Memberbenefits	23	17	20	17	14	29
Producthighlight	19	33	36	6	43	9
Customization	17	33	20	6	14	16
Toll-free-number	16	0	40	0	43	4
Previewproduct	17	17	16	17	43	11
Mailinglist	9	0	8	11	0	11
Requestforcatalogs	9	0	8	17	14	7
Replacement	9	0	12	0	29	9
Sitecustomization	4	17	4	6	0	2
Giftcertpurchase	4	0	0	0	0	4
Site-tour	2	0	4	0	14	0
Chat	2	0	0	11	0	0
Bulletinboard	2	0	4	6	0	0
VoiceoverIP	1	0	4	0	0	0
Callbackbutton	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Af-Africa, Am-America, As-Asia, Au-Australia, Eu-Europe

The differences between the Europe features' score and the collective total score are small compare with other regions. It ranges between -11% to +17%. The negative sign indicates that the frequency score in the compare region is smaller than the frequency score in the collective total, and positive sign indicates that the score in the compare region is higher than the collective total's. On the other hand, Africa region seems to deviate a lot from the collective total. This is shown in the differences range from -46% (Electronic Bulletin Board) to +59% (Quick Order Ability). Data in Table 3 is further summarized in Table 4.

Table 3 Differences between score of each region with total

	Diff. bet. Score of Each Region with Total (%) (Score – Total)					
	Tot	Af	Am	As	Au	Eu
Product info online	95	-12	5	-6	5	0
Order	89	11	3	0	-4	-3
Email us	84	16	0	-7	1	2
Online purchasing	83	-16	9	-27	3	6
Appearance	79	5	1	-18	-7	6
Posted address	79	5	1	-18	21	4
Co.history/profile	76	8	12	-15	-4	0
Links	68	-1	4	-1	3	-4
FAQs	69	-2	11	-13	17	-2
Store locator	66	34	2	1	20	-6
Problem solving	64	3	8	-20	-21	7
Complaining ability	57	-7	7	-2	-14	0
Membership	48	2	4	-9	-19	4
E-bulletin board	46	-46	-6	-12	-17	17
Fax	47	20	9	-2	11	-9
Quick orderability	41	59	11	-24	-12	-3
On-sale area	42	-8	2	3	15	-2
Local search engine	40	-6	-4	-18	17	7
Site map	40	-40	0	-23	32	7
Affinity programs	38	-38	-10	18	-38	7
Ability to track	35	-2	9	4	-6	-6
Posted privacy policy	33	0	-1	0	-19	3
Cust. service page	32	35	16	-15	11	-10
Ease of checkout	31	2	13	-14	-17	0
Account condition	28	5	16	-6	-28	-4
Intro to 1st time user	28	55	-4	-6	29	-8
Account info	25	8	7	-3	-11	-3
Member benefits	23	-7	-3	-7	-9	6
Product highlight	19	14	17	-14	23	-11
Cust. possibility	17	17	3	-11	-2	-1
Toll-free number	16	-16	24	-16	27	-11
Preview product	17	0	-1	0	26	-5
Mailing list	9	-9	-1	2	-9	2
Request for catalogs	9	-9	-1	8	6	-2
Replacement	9	-9	3	-9	20	0
Site customization	4	13	0	2	-4	-2
Gift cert purchase	4	-4	-4	-4	-4	1
Site tour	2	-2	2	-2	12	-2
Chat	2	-2	-2	9	-2	-2
Bulletin board	2	-1	3	-1	-1	-1
Voice over IP	1	-2	2	4	-2	-2
Call back button	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Af-Africa, Am-America, As-Asia, Au-Australia, Eu-Europe

Besides that, from the analysis, it is also found that there are a few features of eCRM and other common features that have different/diverse appreciation among the regions. Among the features are *Quick Order Ability*, *Affinity Program*, *Customer Service Page*, *Toll-Free number*, *Privacy* (*Assure customers that their information will not be shared with others*), and *Practicality* (*Offer the option of internal search*). For example in *Quick Order Ability* (Table 2), collectively it is found that all African region websites implement this feature into their website as they perceive it important, whereas only 17% of Asia websites have this feature on their web. Other counterparts such as Australia, Europe and America have the frequencies range between 29% - 52%.

Table 4 Summaries of Range of Differences between Regions

	Range of differences (Score – Total)	
	Lowest than collective total	Highest than collective total
Africa	-46% (E- Bulletin Board)	59% (Quick Order Ability)
America	-10% (Affinity Program)	24% (Toll-Free Number)
Asia	-27% (Online Purchasing)	18% (Affinity Program)
Europe	-11% (Toll-Free Number)	17% (E-Bulletin Board)
Australia	-38% (Affinity Program)	32% (Site Map)

Comparing regions, it is found that Africa differs significantly with its counterparts. Many features that deemed important in many regions such as *Affinity program*, *Site map*, and *Electronic bulletin board* are not perceived important by transportation websites in this region. On the other hands, features that are perceived not much important by other regions such as *Introduction to first time user*, *Customer service page*, *Quick order ability*, *local search engine*, and *Store locator* are deemed necessary.

By looking from the eleven determinants of internet service quality perspective, overall, it is found that *Appearance* determinant was observed to be the most concerned attribute in most of the websites. *Appearance* was also found to be the highest scored attribute. It seems that, for organizations, looking good and attractive is the first crucial point of connecting to the customers.

Table 5 summaries the overall score of each internet service quality determinants, ranking from the highest to the lowest. As mentioned earlier, *Appearance* (77%) was scored highest followed by *Linkages* (54%), *Information* (45%), and *Ease of Use* (44%). The lowest scored were *Communication* (24%), *Structure and Layout* (15%), and *Incentive* (14%).

Table 5 Overall Score on 11 Determinants of e-Service Quality Website Attributes

E-Service Quality Determinants	Score (%)
Appearance	77
Linkages	54
Information	45
Ease of Use	44
Reliability	43
Efficiency	43
Security	43
Support	43
Communication	24
Structure and Layout	15
Incentive	14

6 Guidelines of Transportation Service Quality Website

From the findings that have been analyzed and observed, a guideline of the quality online transportation website is proposed. The proposed guideline is shown in Figure 2 (Appendix 1). The guideline is based on the e-CRM features analysis of all websites. From that, about 31 features are suggested as important and significant features to be included in organization websites; based upon the recognition of the features by most organizations. The recognition These 31 website features are summarized in Table 6.

Of these 31 features, it is further classified into 10 website segmentations such as Home, Product Info, Ordering, Membership, Contact Us, About Us, Online Help, Electronic Bulletin Board, Related Link, and FAQs. Each page suggested to have all features identified in Table 6 for quality services websites.

Table 6 Listing of 31 important features of e-CRM to be included as part of organizations' websites

No	Features	Page Classification
1	Introduction to first time user	Home
2	Easy checkout	
3	Local search engine	
4	Product highlight	
5	Customization possibility	
6	On sale area	Product Info
7	Product info online	
8	Preview products	Ordering
9	Order	
10	Online purchase	
11	Quick order ability	
12	Ability to track order status	Members Area
13	Membership	
14	Customer service page	
15	Account condition	
16	Account information	
17	Member benefit	
18	Affinity program	Contact Us
19	Email us	
20	Complaining ability	
21	Posted address	
22	Toll free number	
23	Fax number	About Us
24	Company history	
25	Store locator	
26	Site map	Online help
27	Problem solving	
28	FAQs	
29	Electronic Bulletin Board	
30	Posted Privacy Policy	
31	Related Links	

The other 10 eCRM features that have dropped are those features that have been deemed as not important and insignificant by majority of the organizations being observed. Based on collective scores, these features are scored less than 15%. Those features are *Request for catalogue*, *Replacement*, *Site customization*, *Gift certificate purchase*, *Site tour*, *Chatroom*, *Bulletin board*, *Voice over IP*, and *Call back button*.

Online ticketing websites are suggested to have 8 main pages of Home, Ordering, Product Info, Contact Us, About Us, Members Area, Online Help, and Related Links.

Home page allows the company to, not only creating initial impressions on the customers, also *highlight* certain destinations or ticket that may be relevant in a particular festival or season. This feature will also increase traffic. Organizations should provide some space on the website for *on-sale area*. This is a highlighted place on home page highlighting sale items for example sale tickets or promotion on certain destinations during a period of time. *Internal search engine* feature posted under this page will allow customers to look for specific information quickly. Apart from that, *introduction to first time user* will help first time visitors and customers to get through the website easily and efficiently.

While for ordering page, features of *order* allows the users to place an order with *quick order ability*. Thus, customers do not need to click different buttons and go through different processes of ordering. Organizations should implement system or ordering within three-clicks. Visitors also should be able to *purchase online*. This feature is the most critical part of the web site since it will involve third parties for example payment provider companies and network security providers.

Product Information page is necessary for the organizations to provide tickets and services *information online*, where visitors can read the information on the website. Organizations need to make sure that adequate information are provided to customers, otherwise customers might choose other channels or organizations for better service. *Preview products* feature is suggested to be implemented to enhance customers' confident. The *product or service can be viewed* before purchasing. For example, customers can view the conditions and facilities provided in the bus or train before they decide to continue with the purchase.

About Us page is mean for the organizations to provide information on *store locater* for example head quarters and branch offices. It also important that this page highlights *company history and*

profile what will give the company's background for customers' information. This feature is also helpful for customers who gather product information through the web and subsequently buy the ticket from nearest ticket counter mentioned in the website. The information is critical to enhance customers' confidence on the company's credibility in providing the services.

Contact Us page should provide five e-CRM features which are *email us, postal address, toll free number, fax number and complaining ability*. Online organizations should provide alternative ways to contact the company whether through email, telephone, letter, or through fax machine.

Member Area offers *membership* facility to customers. Through this page, members get additional information on their *account, benefit, affinity program, and customer service page*. On the company's side, this page allows the company to build a database of e-mail address of potential users of the company's product and services. It helps organizations to track customers' behaviour at the site over time as well.

Online Help page should be designed to help customers with problems and enquiries. Features such as *problem solving, FAQs, electronic bulletin board, and privacy policies* provide ample related information that will help the customers to browse the website, purchase tickets, get services, and be satisfied.

Related Links is a page that will dedicate any related links to complement products and services offered by the company. For example, links to hotel reservations or public transportation to certain connecting destinations. This external links is also one way for the organizations to provide their customers with services they cannot offer, but still give options and solutions to their customers' needs.

7 Conclusion

As e-commerce spreads all over the world, many companies are attempting to establish a competitive edge by interacting with their customers over the web. The most experienced and successful companies using the web are beginning to realize that the key determinants of success or failure are not merely web presence or low price but instead centre on delivering electronic service quality [15]. They key element to business achievement is quality. Without the quality management approach that guarantees quality form its systems, staff and suppliers, a business will not be able to deliver the appropriate level of service quality to satisfy its consumers [14].

It is interesting to see that most online ticketing Web sites do not seem to have many of the very basic features that experts consider important in forming relationship with customers. With reference to the findings, less than 10% of the web sites offer call back button or voice over IP (VoIP). Furthermore, in online ticketing transportation, organizations feel that in order to attract customers they should emphasize more on the look of the web site. This could be due to the reason that good appearance can certainly attract Web surfers for initial and repeat visits, whether the actual product is appealing or not. Through this finding, organizations may use the necessary features as a guideline for developing e-ticketing website.

Furthermore, in online ticketing transportation, organizations feel that in order to attract customers they should emphasize more on the look of the web site. This could be due to the reason that good appearance can certainly attract Web surfers for initial and repeat visits, whether the actual product is appealing or not. Apart from that, organizations may also use the guideline as for developing e-ticketing website. The guideline serves as a tool to suggest important features that can be embedded into their websites as to offer conveniences and to strengthen quality of services to their current and potential customers.

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Appendix 1 Online Transportation Services Guideline

