

User involvement competitive benchmarking method

Analysis for technical document

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Introduction

The competitive benchmarking method compares company user documents to competitor user documents. Competitive benchmarking prioritizes the user's experience with technical documents from competing companies. Since cellphone use is ubiquitous across all demographics, competitive benchmarking directly addresses the needs of the customer base and increases user loyalty. The proposed document is a "Getting Started Manual" to reassure novice users who might be intimidated by a lengthy "User's Guide".

Analysis

Applying benchmarking to the document

Download the most easily accessible user's guides and manuals from company sites with the assumption that most end users lose their original print manual and look online for support. Pay close attention to the headings, subheadings, and section titles to assess how easy these documents are to scan and skim through. Check to see if company sites have a support page with an online manual/guide, and if these support pages can be easily accessed on cellphones. Compare the online manual/guide with the print manual/guide and note the differences between the mediums used by competitors and our own. Note how competitors layer their navigation pages and if they use a "product portal" that can be easily accessed and navigated by end users. Check how competitors organize product information and procedures online; is the information presented as disorganized articles spread across multiple pages or is there a cohesive organizational structure? Liaise with colleagues who work in distribution/production departments and draw an estimate of production costs and distribution logistics of print and online documents.

Observations and analysis

After gathering information from competitive benchmarking, write a formal report summarizing the observations and a sketch/outline of potential documents and their respective mediums. In the formal report, note the most common mediums and online organizational structures used by competitors, and how often they maintain their documentation. Write a note on each medium and their respective benefits, and calculate the maintenance cost of printed mediums.

Incorporating user feedback: user interviews

Look at the company site and make note of how many end users visit the technical documentation and support pages in a month. Note the most popular page and make plans to update and properly maintain the documentation (i.e., if over 60% of site visitors pull up the 'security & data privacy set-up' page, make sure to regularly update and maintain its documentation). Liaise with the marketing/market analytics department to find potential user groups to interview. Include colleagues from the marketing department in the user interviews (with the assumption that marketers already approach the product with the end user's experience in mind and knowledge of competitor's products). Conduct contextual interviews and if possible, interview end users with long commute hours.

Sharing information with coworkers and management

During the competitive benchmarking stage, write a short report on production costs and distribution logistics. Share this report with production/distribution departments. Liaise with the engineering department to ensure that all information in the document is accurate. Draw a mind map of all the information gathered from user interviews and present it to the team of technical writers, marketers, and the production department. Share the competitive benchmarking report, summary of production/distribution costs and logistics, and the mind map of the user interviews with my direct supervisor or manager.

Conclusion

The use of the competitive benchmarking method is divided into four phases. All four phases involve collaboration with different departments in the company. The purpose of collaborating throughout the process is to ensure that the document is both feasible for the company to produce, distribute, and maintain, and that end users will be able to access the document even after they lose their original printed manual/guide. The user interviews include colleagues from the marketing department and end users with long commute hours. The purpose of the commute group is to accommodate the 'busyness' of end users and their use of cellphones as entertainment (texting, watching media, reading, etc.). The purpose of the marketing group is to gather information about the cellphone's design and accessibility in comparison to competitor phones.