eHouse Studio

STAGE

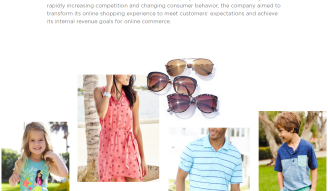
Developing an omni-channel strategy to transform the customer experience for a national department store chain

SERVICES

User Experience Strategy / User Experience Design / Usability Testing

Stage Stores Inc. is a retail company that operates nationally known department store brands, including Bealls, Goody's, Palais Royal, Peebles and Stage. Often located in small or mid-sized communities across the country, Stage's stores offer recognized brands in apparel, footwear, accessories, cosmetics and housewares at moderate prices. The company has more than 850 stores in 40 states and also offers an eCommerce website that serves its five retail brands.

Driving online sales was Stage Stores' primary goal when the company approached eHouse Studio about a transformation of the company's eCommerce site. Facing rapidly increasing competition and changing consumer behavior, the company aimed to transform its online shopping experience to meet customers' expectations and achieve its internal revenue goals for online commerce.



Benchmarking the customer experience

Our first step was to conduct a user experience audit of Stage Stores' website. This helped the team understand consumers' existing experiences with the company's desktop and mobile websites and assess areas of opportunity. Leveraging the team's extensive work on large eCommerce sites, the UX team conducted a deep competitive analysis to evaluate the online presences of 12 key competitors along with Stage's own site, against eCommerce best practices.

We provided Stage with a 120-page audit, which identified and prioritized 20 critical areas for improving consumers' online shopping experience. Each area of the audit detailed the issue's negative impact on the customer and laid out short-term and long-term solutions for the issue.

USER EXPERIENCE AUDIT

120+

120+ page user experience audit, identifying and prioritizing critical area for improving the site's customer experience.

HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

20

20 high-level findings detailing the negative impact on the customer with short-term and long-term solutions for each identified issue.

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

75

75-point evaluation of the websites of 12 key competitors along with Stage's own site, against eCommerce best practices.

From audit to action

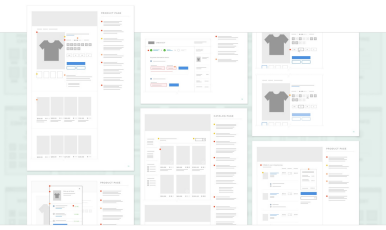
Equipped with a clear and actionable assessment of its eCommerce site's current state, Stage could develop a pragmatic plan for addressing specific issues without investing in a complete website redesign. The company was able to easily prioritize and tackle issues with the biggest impact on driving conversions and enhancing revenue opportunities.

> **"eHouse is a very creative team, dedicated, organized, and efficient group of individuals that knows how to communicate with my team and articulate well as they work with multiple players. Their deliverables show the use of latest trends in the industry while still establishing a solid base for our online business."**

Kristen Brown,
Director of eCommerce, Stage Stores

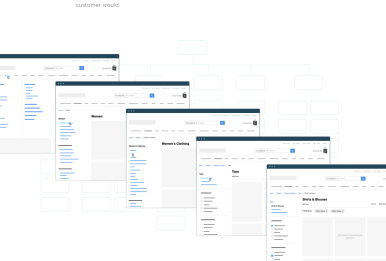
Optimizing for a transformational change

Our team focused on five core areas of the site to redesign high impact experiences. We researched best practices specific to those key sections and reviewed top eCommerce websites to identify common patterns being widely and successfully used across the industry. We then developed 48 high-fidelity wireframes, exhibiting recommendations for design and functionality changes with detailed annotations denoting the impact of each interaction improvement. Finally, our team led a workshop with Stage Stores' technical team to discuss design and technical recommendations and ideas for implementing them.



Addressing issues below the surface

Transforming the website's user experience didn't stop at the interface. We developed a new organization schema for products to reflect the mental model of Stage customers, basing our recommendations on the way customers shop and the language they use. The new taxonomy also supported relevant marketing opportunities in key areas across the site. For easier review and understanding of our proposed site structure, we developed the site map, including product categories, as a clickable, HTML prototype. This allowed the Stage teams to navigate the full site structure the same way that a customer would.



Research to make the right decisions

In order to advocate for the Stage customer, we conducted extensive research and user testing to understand customer needs and patterns. We dissected website analytics to study the engagement and sales patterns of different customer segments and evaluated 12 months of sales performance across product categories. We then used that information to test customers' ability to navigate the existing site structure against our recommended site structures, using the results to develop a taxonomy that reflects how customers shop.

TESTING PARTICIPANTS

391

Customer research and user testing involving 391 participants, three tree tests and four card sorting exercises provided a better understanding of Stage Stores customers' needs and patterns, aligning our recommendations with customer expectations.