

Imaging Equipment Manufacturers' Websites

Information at Your Fingertips?

C. Ozdoba

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Whether you want to spend € 1500 on a new laptop, get a new high-end digital camera body for € 3000, or buy a new car for € 40000, thanks to the World Wide Web, it was never easier for consumers than today to obtain detailed information about any product that they are interested in.

So, if you are willing to spend a seven-figure-sum on a new CT or MR scanner, it seems logical to assume that the manufacturers of these machines will provide at least as much information as a computer company:

Multi-page PDF documents with detailed technical data, a side-by-side comparison of two different models directly on the website, perhaps even an online configurator where you can check whether your dream system can be built in your specific configuration.

I ran a simple test: On the websites of four major manufacturers¹, I looked for one specific information: The length along the z-axis (in cm) that is covered by a perfusion CT study in the respective company's top-of-the-line CT scanner.

I thought that it would be easy to obtain this information. Reality, however, looked different. Here is what I found.

Find the Website—In Your Language

All companies cover a wide field of technology, from airplane engines to nuclear power plants. Medical imaging

equipment is only one branch, and the first task is to find the relevant website.

I started by simply entering the address `www.[company-name].ch` in my browser. Ideally, such a request should be redirected to the homepage of the country-specific Swiss site. This worked fine.

Switzerland is a challenge when you check for consumer-friendly websites: We have three official languages (French, German, and Italian), so we may expect that a company's website is available in these languages or at least in French and German (which, together, constitute the vast majority). One company gives you the choice of all three; the others offer French and German. So far, this was still satisfactory.

Find the Top-of-the-Line CT

Locating the page about computed tomography in the product portfolio was rather easy; it was never more than three or four clicks away from the homepage. Then, however, things became confusing:

When you look at automobile manufacturers' websites, you will find that they are almost always organized by models/classes. This is not a real problem for a visitor to such a site: Mercedes-Benz may fairly assume that the prospective customer knows the basic difference between C-, E- and S-class, and anyone interested in the brand will most probably be able to differentiate between the Lexus IS, GS, and LS model (Fig. 1)

But: What do you do when a CT manufacturer presents a drop-down menu where you can select between cryptic-model-name-1, cryptic-model-name-2, and cryptic-model-name-3? (Fig. 2).

Computer companies usually have another approach: First, they present a selection where you state what you

¹ In alphabetical order: General Electric, Philips, Siemens, Toshiba.

All screenshots were made on June 23, 2012.

C. Ozdoba (✉)
Bern, Switzerland
e-mail: christoph.ozdoba@insel.ch

Fig. 1 Screenshot of the Lexus Switzerland website (Copyright Lexus; <http://de.lexus.ch/range/index.aspx#>)

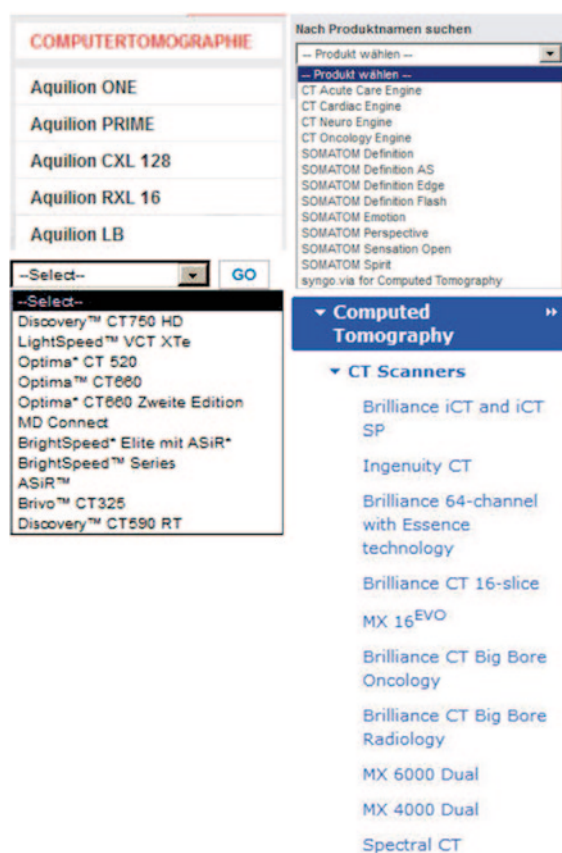
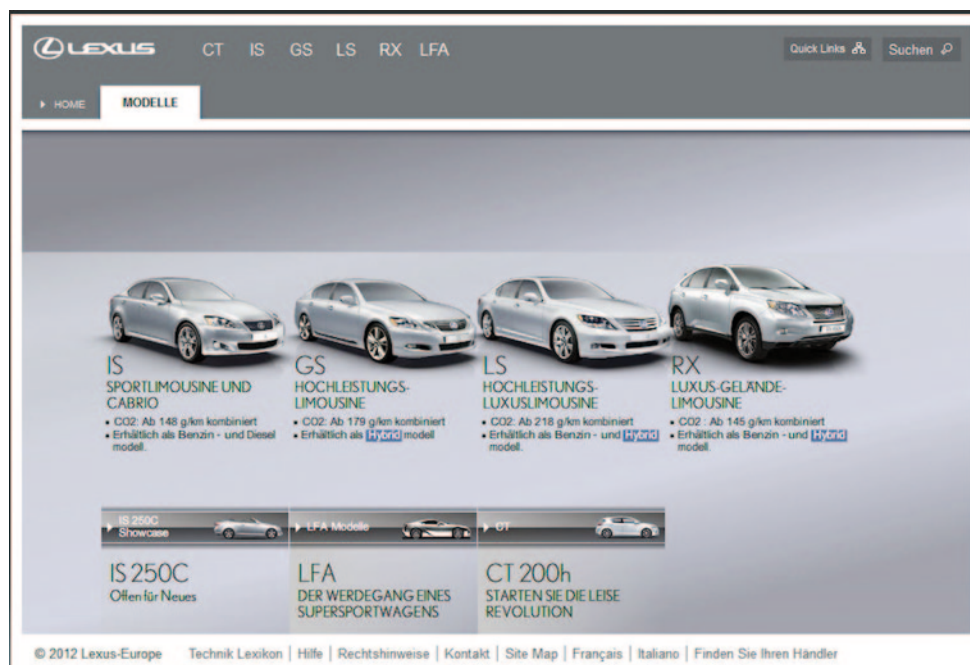


Fig. 2 Screenshots with CT scanner selection menus on the manufacturers' websites. Top left: Toshiba (Copyright Toshiba; <http://www.toshiba-medical.ch/#url>); Top right: Siemens (Copyright Siemens; <http://w1.siemens.ch/ch/de/healthcare/produkte/Pages/ProdukteLoesungenServices.aspx>); Bottom left: General Electric (Copyright General Electric; <http://www.gehealthcare.com/euen/ct/index.html>); Bottom right: Philips (Copyright Philips; http://www.healthcare.philips.com/ch_de/products/ct/products/scanners/index.wpd)

want. When you enter the desired screen size, CPU type, memory and disk space requirements, you see the models that fulfill these requirements (Fig. 3).

It can't be impossible to implement a similar function when it comes to selecting a CT scanner....

Find the Data for Perfusion CT

This was a real challenge: No, I don't want to download Shock Wave Flash® animations to see an overview of the CT product palette. I want either a downloadable PDF document with technical data or, even better, I would like to find the information directly on the website.

What I did find was one site which contained the information, one which showed pictures of whole-brain perfusion studies (which at least allows to see what you can do, even if you don't have an exact value), and two sites where I searched in vain.

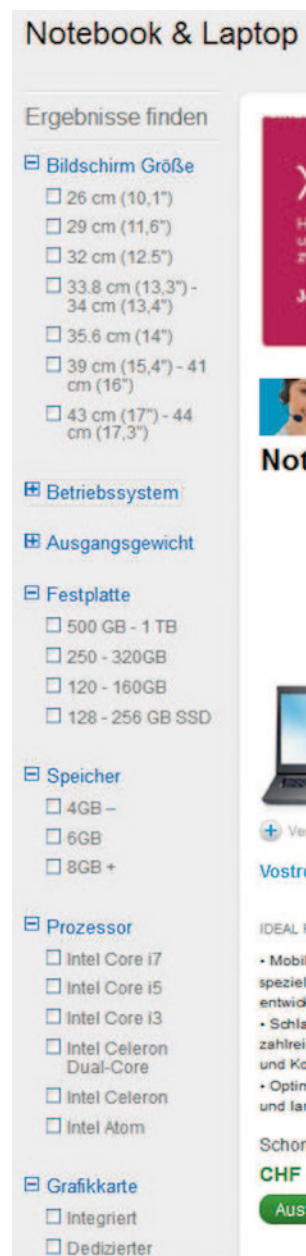
Tabular overviews of all models' relevant (!) data or even a comparison between different scanners weren't available on any of the sites visited.

Summary

This—admittedly limited—test showed some deficits in the visited web sites. The texts should focus on information; instead, you could often play a nice round of “buzzword bingo”² on some sites: Scalable, sustainable, powerful, innovative—it's all there.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buzzword_bingo.

Fig. 3 Screenshot Dell Computer Switzerland (Copyright Dell; (<http://www.dell.com/ch/p/laptops?~ck=mn>))



When I look at the data that we collected during the last open competitive bidding for new CT scanners, I find parameters such as “delay until first image in fluoroscopy mode,” “reconstruction speed,” “tube heat capacity,” or $CTDI_{vol}$ values for common studies. This is what a professional is interested in; we neither need nor want Facebook links....