**Pinterest: No Longer Just a Southern-bell’s Website to Plan Her Wedding**

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Pinterest is emerging as a global threat to competitors. Ben Silberman introduced Pinterest as an invitation-only site in March 2010. Best described as a visual web space where users can upload, like and share images by ‘pinning’ them to customized ‘pinboards’, Pinterest’s success has only grown since its launch in the United States. ComScore, an internet marketing research company, released in February 2012 that Pinterest has more than 10 million unique visitors monthly and is now the third most popular social networking site. Investors in Pinterest included Andreessen Horowitz, but recently, Pinterest shifted to global investment   
 Rakuten invested $100 million into Pinterest’s global expansion in May 2012. Rakuten is a Japanese e-commerce giant, compared as Japan’s Amazon. Rakuten CEO Hiroshi Mikitani said the funding would help expand Pinterest into Japan and Rakuten 's 17 other global markets. Shift towards internationalization Pinterest will face many obstacles. These challenges include: language and cultural barriers, clones and legal protection, and business model development.

Pinterest was introduced in English, but earlier this year announced they were looking for translators in French, German, Japanese, Portuguese and Spanish. Silberman said “We’ve always wanted to make it easy for people all over the world to organize and share all the beautiful things...We want to take another step towards making this vision a reality by translating Pinterest into other languages”. The language barrier results from the links to websites included with pinterest images. Beyond this, Pinterest will need to find a sweet spot of users culturally. For example, in America, users consume themselves with home improvement pinboards. By contrast, a home improvement focus would not be successful in Japan, where users occupy smaller, temporary spaces. Pinterest could try to explore a different type of position--possibly promoting rentals via pinboards. In emerging Brazil, users often want to keep tabs on their friend’s lives. Pinterest could enter the Brazil by adding a ‘chat’ feature, combining the visual experience with a social aspect.

As learned in class, a challenge to internationalization is that speed of expanding globally. Pinterest failed to expand fast enough and is facing hundreds of copycats internationally. Pinterest legally can’t easily challenge sites because not all countries have fair use copyright provisions as the U.S. I recommend Pinterest rely heavily on Rakuten to help ward off copycats. Rakuten has three main e-commerce sites: Rakuten Ichiba, Rakuten Travel, and Rakuten Recipe. Rakuten Ichiba is the largest e-commerce site in Japan and amongst the world's largest by sales. Rakuten incorporated a ‘pin it’ button and ‘how to’ guide as of July 2012 on all three sites. This limits copycats by directly linking users to the true Pinterest site, positioning Pinterest as an exclusive leader.

Lastly, a threat to Pinterest’s success globally rests in its business model. Silberman gave a speech at Stanford University last weekend attributing success to grass roots marketing. He continued to tell students, “Instead of changing the product, I thought maybe I could just find people like me.” As learned, grass roots marketing targets a small group and hopes the group will spread the message. The success of grass roots marketing in the U.S. largely came from the fact that Pinterest was an invitation-only site. The elimination of the invitation feature limits the spread via friends, hindering the marketing strategies success. Silberman should revaluate his marketing strategies and develop specific markets. For example, the Japanese are obsessed with smart phones. Pinterest could increase success in Japan by improving visual experience of the application and offering it on many types of smart phones.

In conclusion, Pinterest is an attractive, intangible product. With the high growth rates of users and continued investments, it is logical for Pinterest to expand globally. While Pinterest has partnered with Rakuten to expand to Japan and 17 other global markets, it has also reached out to users, recruiting translators to help break the language barrier. Furthermore, because Pinterest began solely in the United States, competitors could see the product and copy the service. Pinterest must continue to partner with Rakuten and other global supersites adding exclusivity features like the ‘pin it’ button. Lastly, Silbermann must revaluate his ‘just-like-us’ mindset and develop business plans to either change the product for different markets or truly globally brand Pinterest in such a way that copycats are obsolete.

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