

CS 591/791 – Fall 2012, Assignment 1

Slides due at NOON on Thursday September 6

Your first assignment is to investigate a basic problem in Electronic Commerce by doing some research online. By all means, keep it simple for now. It is certainly possible to produce a reasonable solution just from Wikipedia entries.

Problem Statement: You are a researcher at an online merchant (think Zappos), and the site developers are considering a new page layout for the presentation of a set of commonly purchased goods, which they believe is superior to the existing design. Your management team is hyper-focused on short-term revenue, so all they care about is determining which layout maximizes sales of the goods.

In at most three slides, make the case to management for a well-designed experiment to test whether the developers' new design is actually better than the old design. You may direct actual users to the new site as part of the experimental design. Consideration of the statistical significance of your experiment should be a central component of your presentation. In one additional slide, consider the limitations of your methods, including key assumptions that you are making, as well as a critique of why management's focus could be oversimplified.

Submission: E-mail your slide deck to byers@cs.bu.edu no later than NOON on Thursday. I will pick around three of the slide decks and ask those students to give a 3 minute presentation on their slides to start class on Thursday. (All semester long, students who are picked to present will be given "immunity" from having to do the next assignment.)