# Mini Akiba Proposal

As someone who specializes in the design and implementation of Information Systems, I feel that it is incomplete to suggest changes to existing systems without having a holistic picture of what the aforementioned systems are supposed to achieve. Therefore, I have put together a complete conceptual design proposal for your perusal. This proposal encompasses three major areas of consideration pertaining to the design, operations and outlook for Mini Akiba. The proposal is hence structured into the three major sections: *Design Aesthetics*, *Relationship Building*, and *Future Growth*.

Design Aesthetics
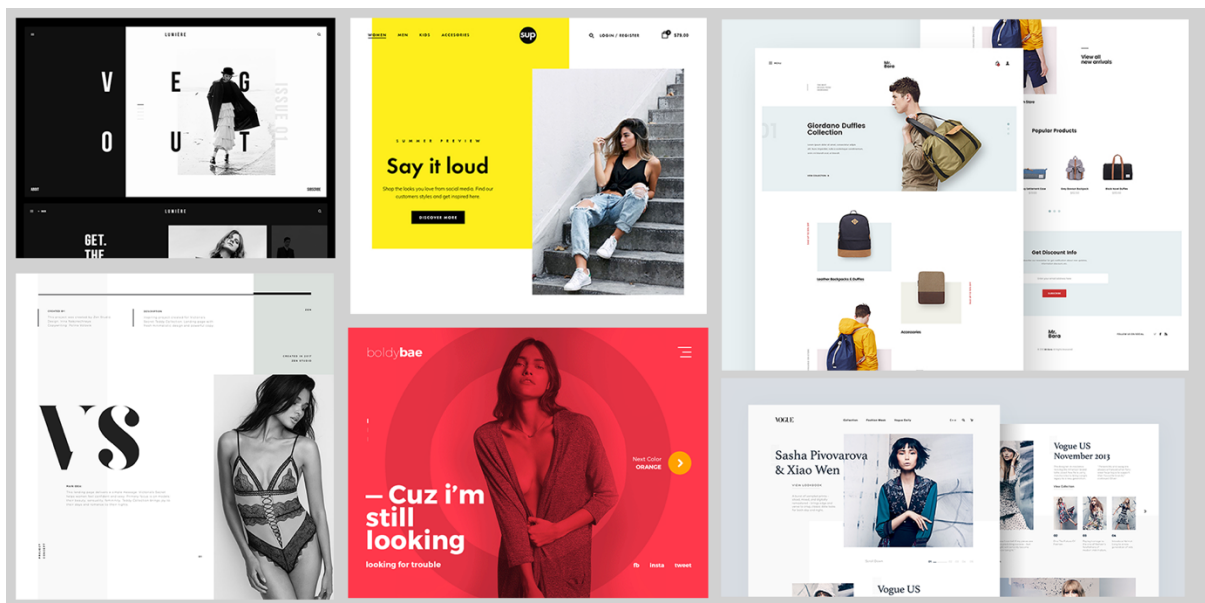
The aesthetic design of a webpage, and in particular an online store, plays an important role in the overall user experience for potential customers. It not only impacts the visual appearance of the store, but also its usability, information architecture, and how it connects to people on a subconscious and visceral level. While the existing design is functional, it is rudimentary at best. There are numerous small opinionated design changes I have in mind that I won't be able to cover here. However, I can begin by highlighting three prominent areas of concern that I think need to be addressed.

- Categorization and structure
- Visual attention through images
- Designing with a clear vision

First, products need to be organized into categories that make sense. This could be done based on series, theme, season, etc. An effective way to do this would be to use some form of *Tagging* system that would allow visitors to find related products more easily. It is understandable that this is not implemented yet as there are far too few existing products on the page. However, having effective categorization, hierarchy and structure will go a long way in helping users to navigate the site and get to what they need to find.

Second, images and pictures should be used strategically to stimulate attention. One of the issues with the existing site is the lack of high quality pictures. Without visually appealing images on the page, it would be difficult to stimulate the interests of potential customers. To be clear, I am not suggesting to add excessive amounts of images to the home page. That would cause information overload, and is generally poor design. What I do recommend is to improve the placement and quality of the images shown. Further, custom images and '*hero banners*' can be designed separately to make certain products stand out more.

Third, is to design with a clear vision in mind. What is the ultimate goal and purpose for this website? How do we bring value for our customers? How are we different from existing players and competitors? All of this should be clearly communicated through design and through our actions. For starters, it is important to have an *About Us* and a *FAQ* page to inform visitors what this site is about, and to clearly articulate our *Mission* and *Vision*. This will form the core driving principles that drive the company, and should also be manifested through our future actions such as on any social media campaigns or marketing materials.

Relationship Building

Another important area of consideration is the building of deep and long-lasting relationships with our visitors and customers. As with any business, especially new businesses, the major concern has always been to spread the word and onboard new visitors, and to convert those visitors into actual paying customers. However, it would be unwise to only focus on new customers and leave out the vast potential of repeat customers. Studies show that repeat customers spend up to 300 percent more, and are immensely important to a business in the long run. To this end, there are a total of three key areas that we should look to focus on. They are: *Awareness*, *Engagement*, and *Sales*.

Awareness

Among the most difficult challenges for any online business is getting exposure and awareness. The fact that we are a new business only exacerbates this issue as nobody has ever heard of or used the site before. This poses a challenge not only to our revenue but also the trustworthiness of the service and could serve as major hurdles for new customers. The way I see it, there are several approaches we could take for the purposes of outreach and awareness. While traditional advertisements could work, they are costly and not sustainable in the long run. A more prudent way would be to hence take a more organic and community driven approach. There are three cost effective measures that I am proposing.

- Active promotion on social media
- Referral signup and affiliate bonus
- Engagement through YouTube

The first avenue is labor intensive, but completely free. This involves actively posting and sharing on all the major social networks. It's not as simple as just posting on our own Facebook or Instagram accounts. Firstly, the right hashtags must be used for greater effect, and the content and pictures should look professional and enticing. Secondly, it would be even more effective to seek out niche Facebook groups and marketplaces as well to share our links within these groups. This will be a more targeted effort. A step-up approach to this will be to conduct giveaway contests for people who sign up or connect with our social media pages. Naturally, we mustn't forget the importance of simply getting friends and family to spread the word for us.

The second method is to implement referral signup bonusses. This ties in somewhat with the Gamification features that I shall elaborate on in the latter sections. The basic premise is very simple. Every user will have their own referral links that they can share with others. And when a new user registers using that link, bonus points will be credited to both users' accounts. These points may be used to redeem certain benefits or discount coupons on the site. The next step in this approach would naturally be to implement an affiliate program. Users can share our products using an affiliate link, and they get a certain number of points when a person makes a purchase using their referral link.

The third component of our outreach program is really just a more focused extension of the second. We should reach out to the community through YouTube endorsements. To be honest, most YouTubers hardly earn any money and are hard-pressed to find sponsors for their videos. That's not to say that we have to upfront give them cash to promote us. First and foremost, we are NOT getting them to review any specific product on our page, but rather our service, the experience, and of course our pricing. All of which should have been addressed in the preceding sections. Second, we do not pay them anything until a sale is made. How it works is that we give them a specific coupon code for them to share, and when a purchase is made using that code, the customer gets (for example) a 5% discount off their purchase, and the YouTuber gets 5% in cash. So, it will only cost us 10% of our margins for every sale made this way. Some YouTubers that I am looking at include Chibi Reviews, AniNews, and Gigguk. It doesn't even have to be a full review video, it could be just a spot at the beginning of regular videos. I believe this to be one of the most efficient approaches.

Engagement

Successful brands are those that are able to form engaging relationships with consumers. Engagement is a two-way street. It requires conversations and interactions with customers to build long lasting relationships. Depending on the vision and the growth strategy of the company, there are numerous ways to facilitate engagement with technology. I shall touch on three fundamental avenues that can achieve this.

- User Profiling
- Surveys and Polls
- Customer Feedback

User profiling is one of the key aspects to forming a deeper understanding of how the customer thinks, and what they ultimately want. In Design Thinking, personas are built to profile the needs of users. In an online business, we are able to take this further by using modern data analytics tools. By tracking key information markers such as the types of products they purchase, price ranges, frequency and timing of purchases, etc., we are able to build a comprehensive profile of the individual customers. This facilitates more personalized product recommendations and promotions. Obviously, this requires that our users be registered and signed into their account, and this only goes to show the importance of getting users to sign up. Certainly, user accounts will be used heavily in gamification aspects as well. Therefore, the more users we are able to register, the better.

Surveys and polls are among the most common tools used to understand customers. When used correctly, it not only directly engages users, but also democratizes decision making and gives customers the impression that they have an influence in the direction of the company. Naturally, we have all been annoyed by those long-winded and boring surveys before. That is why it is key to design and position our surveys and polls carefully. Additionally, gamified features and rewards can be awarded for attempting them. Possible areas to apply surveys and polls include for example, to decide on which new products to bring in, price sensitivity sensing, and overall impressions of the current user experience. All of which, will form valuable data that can help improve the business.

As our product portfolio starts to increase in number, it will reach a point where we are unable to individual vet the quality of every single product on sale. Thus, with that in mind, we will want a scalable approach to ensuring quality product listings. The most common way used in ecommerce is to incorporate customer feedback. Some of the basic methods include user rating of products and reviews given by customers who have purchased the product. These features are somewhat already implemented in the existing site. However, a step up would be to gamify it by awarding points to incentivize customers to actively review their purchases or provide photos of their purchase. This goes a long way to showing other customers that we are a trustworthy and reputable brand that values user feedback.

Sales

For any business, most would agree that of utmost importance, is closing a sale and making profits. However, how we get there is often not so straightforward. How do we entice customers to purchase from us? And once they have made their first purchase, how do we encourage repeated patronage? Building upon the previous *Engagement* section, we need to close the loop by periodically triggering customers to actually make purchases. Once the sales have successfully been made, then we can then focus on leveraging technology to stimulate continued purchases. I propose three possible approaches to do this.

- Seasonal Discounts
- Regular Notifications
- Gamification

Perhaps one of the oldest tricks in the book, is the use of seasonal discounts and promotions to allure customers to finally make their purchase. There are a variety of ways to approach seasonality, and a myriad of ways to do the discounts. We can begin by offering end of season sales, school holiday promotions, year end festive discounts, etc. If we were to build on the *User Profiling*, we can even take it a step further to personalize this by giving birthday offers, and well-timed personal discount coupons based on their purchasing patterns. The way we

actually implement the discounts may vary. Of course, there is your standard percentage discounts. However, we can be a bit more creative by doing 1 for 1 offers, bulk and grouping based discounts, theme-based promotions, etc. At the end of the day, the idea is to create the illusion to make the customer feel that they are getting a better deal by making the purchase now rather than later.

Naturally, having the occasional discounts would be meaningless if customers were to wane off and forget about our store altogether. Therefore, it is also very important to send out regular notifications and call-to-actions to create mindshare and bring customers back to browse our site and make purchases. The most common way to do this is to periodically send out Newsletters to users to inform them about upcoming promotions and updates. We could enclose special discount vouchers and should design the content in a way that would entice users to not immediately send our newsletters into junk mail. Additionally, if we were to develop an official mobile application in future, we could leverage on push notifications to keep our customers regularly informed about our latest product offerings and promotions. The general idea here, is to create and sustain mindshare to prevent customers from dwindling, and ultimately maintain sales growth.

One of the more powerful ways to stimulate motivation with technology, which I have already alluded to in previous sections, is to use Gamification. Most basic Gamification techniques revolve around the three fundamental elements: *Points*, *Badges*, and *Leaderboards*. In our case, *Points* can be used as the major reward for any desirable actions taken by users. For example, when they sign up, make purchases, subscribe to newsletters, refer new users, etc. Further breaking it down, we can offer rewards points – which can be redeemed like currency to exchange for discount vouchers and other rewards; and experience points – which serve to show status and allow users to level up based on their loyalty and seniority as customers, unlocking special privileges. These titles of achievements can be depicted in terms of levels or *Badges* given when certain tasks have been completed. A good way of representing such tasks is to use *Quests* as a way to guide users on what to do next. And of course, nothing really drives action as well as some healthy competition. *Leaderboards* as well as some ranking systems will give users context of their general standing and perhaps motivate them to actively seek to improve their ranking. A combination of these mechanics would greatly play towards boosting and sustaining our sales. Of course, designing the structure and implementing of our Gamification approach would be a lot more nuanced than the examples given above. I would have liked to cover it in more detail, but it would not fit in this document, are warrants a separate dedicated Gamification plan.

Future Growth

It seems a little too early to talk about long-term future plans, but I do enjoy brainstorming and coming up with ideas and directions on how to take a business further. There are five major areas I could see Mini Akiba delve into. The first one is technologically related. Obviously, the most natural progression after setting up the online store would be to work on developing the mobile application. There are arguably many benefits of having our own dedicated mobile app installed on users' phones. The second and third area is more to do with integration with the community. As brought up by yourself previously, I too can envision a peer to peer marketplace where creators can list and sell their works to our customer base. With a solid platform in place, it would be a definite upgrade from the "*carouhell*" that plagues our anime loving community today. Taking this community supporting approach a step further, I could also envision possible partnerships with influential community figures such as popular cosplayers and event organizers to create even more brand awareness for our company while sponsoring things that we personally appreciate. For long term engagement, I do see challenges in sustaining interest. Looking far ahead, one possible way to quell this issue will be to start our own content production. Something along the lines of written articles, anime reviews, interviews, YouTube videos, etc. It should be fun.

Lastly, if the Gamification proves successful, I am also considering the possibility of spinning off that particular aspect into a separate business. For example, the reward points could even be implemented as a form of cryptocurrency on the Ethereum blockchain. And partnerships with other businesses can provide significant utility for such a token, while driving up sales for the entire ecosystem of companies involved. Something like a decentralized loyalty card app with Gamification built in. I think Perx and Poket are some existing competitors I saw, but they don't seem all that successful just yet. Seems like an idea worth exploring. So yeah, that's about most of what I wanted to cover in this document. As you can see, it's not solely about the tech. It's a confluence of technology, design, and business that makes it all happen. I normally like to start things off with a high-level structured view of everything first. And then delve into greater detail for each of the sections subsequently. I think this approach will give us a clearer picture to plan the tasks ahead.