



TECHNOLOGY

ManyLists: Product Comparison Tool Using Spacial Layouts With Animated Transitions

OVERVIEW

Background

The modern economy offers an unprecedented amount of variety in consumer goods from personal electronics and automobiles to clothing, food, and pharmaceutical drugs. Given the wide variety of features and specifications, many online retailers add a “compare” button to their web pages to assist the consumer in discerning which product is the best choice for them. However, these “compare” buttons do nothing more than juxtapose similar items and specifications while making the consumer do the actual comparing (a tedious and confusing task). Furthermore, many consumer product review websites and blogs make excellent comparisons but present them in a narrative and only compare limited product selections.

Innovative technology

University of Maryland researchers in the Human Computer Interaction Laboratory have developed software called ManyLists that juxtaposes multiple product choices, but it sorts the similar and unique attributes of each item and makes it crystal clear to the user what features of each are different. The key to the clarity is the animation that occurs when the comparison is performed. The software quickly and clearly collates similar, dissimilar, and unique attributes of multiple products and assists the user in identifying the most appropriate product based on user input specifications. User studies have demonstrated that users enjoy the animation and pay greater attention. This software has a variety of applications in the consumer market, such as vitamin or dietary supplement comparison (with long lists of ingredients of varying quantity), food labels (to quickly identify the most healthful item), and consumer electronics (to narrow the search to the attributes most needed by the consumer), among many other products.

The University of Maryland is seeking a commercialization partner to license and implement the software. The software is written in Javascript/HTML5 for easy integration into browser applications.

See this video for a software demonstration:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25Wp0I9wv9s&feature=player_detailpage

Advantages:

- Animates similarities and differences
- Compares multiple products
- User can select most desirable attribute

Applications:

- Pharmaceutical records comparison
- Consumer products websites

- Mobile shopping applications

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