

Quality Images Boost Sales

CUSTOMERS WANT A MORE ROBUST VISUAL EXPERIENCE

BY DAVE YOUNG



Online retailers use the Internet to reach a broader audience in order to promote and sell products. However, as online technology has evolved, so have the expectations of the growing number of shoppers.

Customers now expect a quality online shopping experience. A website that is poorly conceived and poorly designed will yield poor results. Merchants who plan to attract and keep consumers must create visually inviting sites that satisfy the demands of their customer base.

Quality images matter

Product presentation is key to increasing customer loyalty and generating sales. Merchants need to understand two concepts before they post images online: Consistency and quality.

Betsy Emery, CEO of TELLUS, an award-winning web design firm, says “consistency and quality of product images directly impact conversion rate.” Consumers who browse products on websites want to see the products they’re considering for purchase represented by the highest quality image possible.

The best way to get high-quality images is to hire a professional photographer. In addition, the ideal set-up is for products to be photographed in a professional studio where proper lighting can be ensured.

It’s worth the expense to do so, because “pictures sell,” said Sheila Dahlgren, senior vice president of marketing at Scene7,

provider of on-demand rich media, a tool allowing websites and ads to contain multi-media components such as audio, video or special effects. “People do not buy what

they cannot see, so the higher the quality and resolution of your imagery, the better your results will be.”

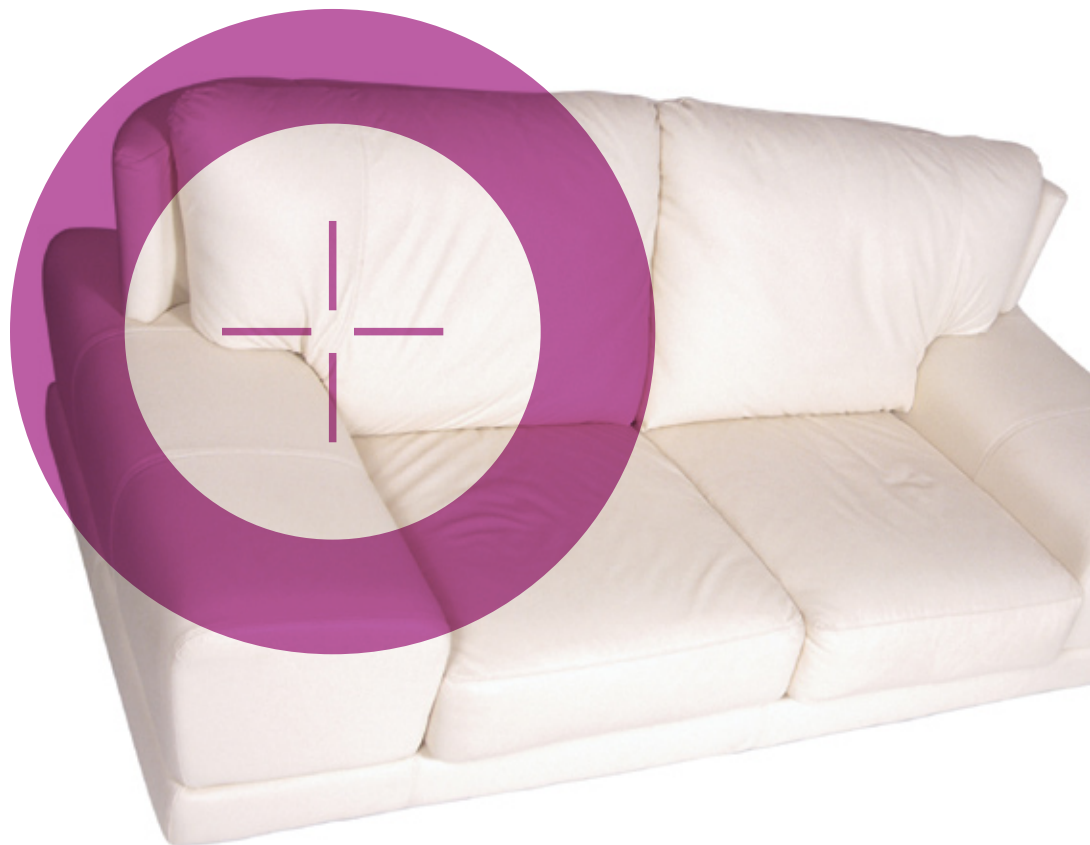
To qualify as a high-resolution image, a picture must be taken with a camera that supports 15 megapixels or more. Most digital cameras used by nonprofessional photographers operate with three to seven megapixels. A camera needs a minimum of eight megapixels to produce images that will enlarge well.

“Unless your digital camera meets these requirements, you should skip the idea of using your own digital camera and take your products to the nearest studio-grade photographer,” Dahlgren said.

“In some cases, you can use product images that have been provided directly by the vendor, but make sure you hire a good web designer who can maintain the consistency of the images used throughout your website,” Emery added.

Professionally-taken images of your products will instill trust and confidence in your customers. Conversely, if the product images are difficult to see or do not show details, they will actually have a negative impact on what and how much your customers purchase.

“The importance of quality photography is twofold: Merchandising of the product and



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brand identity of the website,” Emery said. “Successful merchandising provides enough visual imagery to support the purchase. Brand identity plays a large role in user confidence; [customers feel] they are purchasing from a reputable and reliable source.”

Since customers cannot touch or feel the merchandise when they browse a website, the quality of the image plays an even greater role in helping consumers decide if the product is right for them.

“Customers convert at a much higher rate and buy more when the product imagery on a site is better,” said Dahlgren. “Customers are three times more likely to buy online when retailers offer rich imagery with the ability to zoom, pan, and see color options and alternative views of the merchandise, along with the products presented in context or on a model.”

If you have the means and resources to have your products photographed by a professional, or you can supply large, high quality images yourself, do so. It will certainly increase product awareness and help your customers make better purchasing decisions.

Eoin Townsend, vice president of product and marketing for RichFX, a provider of online visual merchandising solutions, said, “As with all rich media and image solutions, the quality of the initial image dictates the quality of the end product.” Users instinctively recognize value and quality in professionally-taken photos, he said, especially ones that depict luxury brands and specialty products.

“As long as the image quality is high, say 1,500 to 3,000 pixels per inch for an image scanned from film, users will be able to see the necessary details to make an informed decision on their purchases,” Townsend said.

Overcoming the touch-and-feel barrier

When customers browse in a traditional brick-and-mortar store, they tend to pick up or feel items for a closer look. Let’s say a customer is shopping for a new sofa. He/she will walk in the store and touch and sit on the sofas that look interesting. This aspect of shopping is impossible online, but there are successful retail websites that bridge the touch-and-feel barrier between consumer and website.

“Displaying fabric and color choices and a cross-section image that shows the construction of a fine sofa may provide more information than the consumer sees in a retail store,” said Emery. “The online channel provides an excellent opportunity to supplement information that may not be readily available in a store. Therefore, displaying these same views online will contribute to an optimal user experience that results in more online purchases.”

A robust image presentation can also replicate the touch-and-feel experience.

“The use of rich media and online visualization is the key to creating the comfort level that users traditionally feel in a store environment,” Townsend said. “This is accomplished by giving the control back to the online users and allowing them to interact in a way that is driven by their needs and requirements. In some situations the online channel offers an even more detailed and engaging environment than what users find in stores or via catalogs,” he said.

Providers like Equilibrium, Scene7, RichFX and others offer tools to help website owners maximize the potential good image use offers. Such products that provide a way for online shoppers to visualize how their product selection will appear when they receive it.

“Instead of selecting a sofa fabric from a swatch in the store and imagining how it will look on the finished piece of furniture, online consumers can see the final product in the fabric selection of their choice, thanks to rich media software. That option isn’t available when shopping in a retail store,” said Dahlgren.

Townsend agrees. “Improved customer experience through the use of rich media visuals helps merchants sell all kinds of products,” he said, noting that implementation will vary based on the products themselves. For example, a website might choose a shirt configuration for clothing, a zoom function for jewelry and 360-degree rotation for toys.

When you combine high quality, professionally-taken images of your products with software that can present your online consumers with the product for which they are shopping, it can significantly increase the number of visitors from “just browsing” to real purchases. ■

Name Yaro Starak, web entrepreneur
Company Entrepreneur’s Journey
Blog Entrepreneurs-journey.com

In Bloglist, we ask ecommerce professionals to identify their favorite blogs. For this installment, we’ve asked Yaro Starak, with Entrepreneur’s Journey.

Johnchow.com

This is a relatively new and prolific blogger. John is from Vancouver and talks a lot about how he monetizes his blog — an area that always interests me.

Probblogger.net

Darren Rowse is a friend from Melbourne and the most famous professional blogger. His blog is *THE* blog for news about blogging.

Stepavlina.com/blog/

Whenever I get too caught up with making money on the Internet and need a reality check, I read Steve Pavlina, who teaches self development. It’s a dose of “calm” when you are overstimulated.

Seomoz.com

I study search engine optimization and this blog is the number one resource for updated info on the SEO world.

Entrepreneurs-journey.com and Smallbusinessbranding.com

Since I manage these two blogs I have to read them every day. However, I’m not the only writer who contributes to these blogs, hence there is new content even for me.