



Do you own an e-commerce web site?

Do you sell products, services, and other goodies to complement your products and services? If so, you're most likely monitoring your web site's performance through traffic analyzing software? Or, maybe your e-commerce web site has built-in reporting functionality that tells you how well your site is performing? Is it a situation where traffic is up, but sales are below what you were expecting? Even though you have a great web site, that's designed well, with user-friendly navigation, graphics that are not too intensive, and content that is just right? In other words, you have done everything you can to make it a great virtual store – so what's missing? Could it be your communication?

No, I'm not talking about just your product descriptions or details on your services. I'm not talking about your "About Us" page or your money-back guarantee. I'm not even talking about your sale prices, or your top-selling products and services. Before I reveal the big secret, first think about the last time you went to a retail store and were shopping for a particular item. Let's say you walk into an electronics store searching for a new television, maybe that new High Definition television

INCREASE WEB SITE SALES:

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

By Dave Young

(HDTV) you've been wanting to buy. You walk into the store, and immediately head to the television section where the wall is filled with new HDTVs, just like you've seen in the ads. Before you can even make it to the first wall of new HDTVs, you look up and notice there are literally dozens upon dozens of televisions. So, which one do you choose? How do you know which HDTV is the right one for you? What size television is ideal for your room? And, most importantly, which brand is ideal for your exact needs? How do you know?

My first guess is that you will ask a salesperson. Or, even better, a sales person approaches you first, and says, "Hi, my name is Jim. Can I answer any questions you may have regarding our line-up of HDTVs?" You are immediately taken back by Jim's eagerness to help you. What's Jim doing? He's communicating with you. Jim wants to answer your questions. He wants to help you find the right TV. Jim wants you to leave his store knowing that you made the right purchase. And, he wants you to tell everyone you know just how great your experience was at the electronics store, so they too can stop by and let Jim communicate with them about his wall filled with dozens of televisions. Okay, so how does the retail store, televisions, and Jim relate to increasing sales on your web site?

Well, it was easy for you to talk to Jim, because he was in the store and approached you first – there was a human element involved. You did not have to pick up brochures or read sales copy on every television before learning which one was best for you. Although it's possible Jim gave you literature on the television you purchased, or were considering purchasing, you did not have to rely heavily on just the text – instead, Jim communicated with you directly, and it was easy because he saw you walk in the store and noticed you were interested in his televisions. The same goes for your web site. But, how do you communicate with your visitors since you cannot see them or directly know what interests them?

First, you need to understand the different tools you can utilize on your web site to communicate with your customers. Let's start with the easiest one first – e-mail. Yes, that's right, put your email address on every page of your web site. Typically you would want to use something similar to sales@yourdomain.com or questions@yourdomain.com. In some cases, you can include a person's name, especially if the web site is based around one person such as a consultant, lawyer, accountant or web designer. For example, if you are a consultant, you can use your-name@yourdomain.com, because it is more personal. It gives the impression that you are available to communicate with current and potential clients directly.

Another way to communicate with your customers is to create a contact form on your web site. Do not create dozens of text boxes on your form, as that will deter your customers from filling it out and pressing the send button. The only text boxes needed are name, phone number, e-mail address, and comments. And, sometimes you can use a text box specifically for the "best time to call you," if you are asking for a phone number. Make sure you provide options for either the phone number or e-mail. Some customers feel more comfortable using e-mail versus picking up the phone. However, in my experience, placing a phone number on your web site is one of the best things you can do for your company.

Why is advertising your phone number one of the best things you can do for your company? Just the fact that you have, or should have, someone on the other end of the web site waiting to answer questions is a huge advantage. Remember the human element Jim provided you at the retail shop? Most customers feel comfortable using the phone because they can hear your voice. And, if you are enthusiastic about your products and

services, it is heard in your tone of voice; the way you feel about what you do and what you sell reflects over the phone. The impression your customers receive can be so strong that it can either persuade them to buy, or dissuade them from purchasing anything from you. Don't make that mistake – talk to your customers – and be sure you are the subject matter expert (or hire someone to be the subject matter expert on your products and services if it can't be you).

In addition to e-mail, contact forms, and phone numbers, you can also utilize the flexibility of online chat programs. There are free versions such as Skype, Yahoo, MSN, and AIM. These free chat clients do not allow you to initiate chats with your visitors, but it's okay to place your instant messenger usernames on

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sales will increase!

your website, understanding that it is up to your visitors and customers to make the "first move." However, you can purchase software such as LivePerson and have full control on which visitors you contact. The advantage of using LivePerson or a similar product is that you can initiate chats with visitors, track where they go on your web site, keep a history of chats with visitors, transfer chats to other team members, and push specific web pages to customers based on their particular areas of interest.

Taking all of the above into consideration, you should make it easy for your customers to know how they can communicate with you. Your current and potential customers will contact you if they need to purchase more products and services, get support, or ask general questions related to your business. The more options you provide them, and the easier you make it for them to find those options, the more chances you have to communicate with your customers. And, the more you communicate with your customers, the better they feel and the more televisions (or hosting packages!) you can sell, just like Jim does in his retail store. Don't let these concepts and channels of communications seem difficult to implement – rather, approach these ideas as a way to send your subject matter experts out into the virtual world to help your customers. It's an easy way to make them feel like they are in a retail store, without actually having to be there. If you can make them feel good about what they are purchasing, sales will increase – all because you are communicating with your customers. 📞

Writer's Bio: Dave Young plays a vital role in the web hosting industry as Marketing and Public Relations Specialist for FastServers.Net, Lead Technical Writer for cPanel, Professional Writer and founder of Young Copy (www.youngcopy.com), and a Staff Writer for Ping! Zine Magazine.

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