

## Build Customer Relationships When Building Your Website

E-commerce, or doing business through the Internet is certainly picking up. This may primarily be because of the ease and convenience of shopping online, not to mention the savings from a significantly lower overhead compared to brick-and-mortar stores.

However, regardless of the benefits of e-commerce, why is it that traditional brick-and-mortar stores are still around and seem to grow instead of decline?

One major reason could be because these kinds of stores still represent and hold a significantly higher degree of security to the consumer as compared to a website. The sense of permanence, familiarity and reliability that a physical location holds is what brings customers back to the store.

While online businesses cannot compete with the physical assurance brick-and-mortars have, web-based enterprises can still develop a degree of familiarity with their customers that fosters a relationship of trust and reliability. And majority of this is built around the design of a website.

### The One Unchanging Principle: Think Like Your Customer

Whether your business has a physical or virtual location, one principle in building relationships with your customers remains - and this is to think like them.

The more successful businesses have prospered because they have made their customers' mindset their own. For traditional businesses, it meant everything from conveniently locating goods to offering ready and credible assistance.

Successful websites should follow suit. With the lack of tangible contact, a potential customer could have little basis for forming a relationship with an online store. And if building customer loyalty is your goal, then suitable substitutes must be found.

### Looks and feels familiar

First impressions last. As soon as a visitor clicks on a link to your site, he expects to see something that he will like, and therefore trust.

Take an online garden supply store for an example. A cut and dry layout of columns and rows, with little to no pictures won't give the visitor the impression he has accessed a gardening store. Not a lot of hits would result, much less in sales.

However, if that same site was built to look like a garden shed, for example,

the customer might feel more at home with shopping there because the look of the site used a familiar concept with the customer and incorporated it into the over-all look and feel of the website.

Being able to capture and retain your visitor's attention is the first step in converting a visit into a sale and eventually working towards a strong business relationship.

#### Ready Assistance and Assurance

A customer appreciates a ready source of help and information when he or she is shopping. So again, thinking like a customer, find ways where a visitor can access answers to common questions about your products. This could be in the form of a prominent FAQ page or a concise product description alongside a picture.

It helps to strategically locate short but strong testimonials from satisfied customers among your products so visitors can see right away the reliability of the service and goods you provide.

#### Safe and Secure

While familiarity and assurances of reliable service is great in building customer relationship and loyalty, the bedrock of any relationship is trust. So place a good deal of emphasis on this.

Almost all business and financial transactions over the Internet are now performed over a 128-bit encryption system. So settle for nothing less than this. It will also help to prominently display this information on your payment and sales confirmation page to assure your customers this measure of security.

#### Build on the Relationship

The beginnings of a lasting relationship start from a good first impression. Hopefully, the look of the website has drawn your visitor in comfortably enough to make them want to purchase something from you for the first time. Once they have done so, it is still well within your control to assure that that first transaction will lead to many more.

You can do this through a number of ways, the most common of which is to thank the customer for purchasing from you and to assure them of your products' warranties (if any apply).

Offer your customers useful tips and information on a resource page so they can visit you again, even if to purchase is not the primary intention. Most online transactions require an email address to be submitted so invite the customer to

subscribe to your e-newsletter (if you have one). You may offer perks and / or discounts if they do subscribe. However, to avoid being labeled as spam, make sure the material is clearly solicited for and is sent in timely manner.

About the best indicator of loyalty is when your customer sees you as an expert in your line of business. Aim to be this through your website and your customers will begin to see you as more than just a supplier, but a trusted consultant.

By taking the necessary steps with your website in cultivating familiarity and trust with your customers, results will be reflected not only in your sales but with your customer relationships as well.