

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.



New Year, New Look: Is it Time for a Redesign?

—By Donna Talarico

- ◆ Dynamic Keyword Insertion
- ◆ Setting Superior Customer Service Standards
- ◆ Choosing the Best CSE for My Products
- ◆ Doing A Holiday End Review

Read this issue and realize your New Year's Resolution to make it big in 2009... or don't, having another 2008 is good enough.

eBiz Insider

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By Scott Sanfilippo,
Editor in Chief

Good Riddance 2008

It's gone. Done. Finished. 2008 is behind us and a new year has begun and like many other business owners, I'm glad.

2008 will go down as one of the most challenging years we have faced in quite some time. While small businesses struggled to meet payroll and keep inventory on the shelves, the elite in Washington doled out nearly a trillion dollars of taxpayer money to their wealthy friends disguised as a "bailout."

While banks foreclosed on homes and families were left on the street, the banking industry was given taxpayer money which was supposed to help reduce this travesty. Instead, executives took bonuses, smaller banks were bought up to create bigger ones, and the government made no provisions for accounting for where the money went.

George W. Bush left the White House and President Barack Obama moved in with a vision to change the way government works. Good luck with that one, Mr. President.

As I write this today, I still see headlines of layoffs, closings, jobless rates at

an all-time high and promises of an economic stimulus plan. But will it help the small guys like us? I doubt it. Until the politicians realize that the foundation of business in this country IS the small businesses, we won't see any "bailouts." We don't lobby enough and we don't donate enough to attract their attention, simply put, we're not AIG, we're not GM and we're not on their radar.

So what is a small business owner to do?

The answer is simple. Work harder than you've ever worked before in your life. Working harder doesn't mean 20 hour days. It means watching your balance sheet very carefully making sure the money you're spending on inventory, equipment and supplies is really necessary. It means keeping one step ahead of your competition and making sure that every customer who visits your website becomes a customer. And most important it means you need to kiss your customer's ass. Yes, I said it and I mean it.

Now more than ever, you need to treat your customers as if they were gold. Give them what they want. If they ask for a hassle-free return policy, give it to them. If they ask for deals because they spend a lot of money with you, send them coupons. If they request a specific color of something you sell and you sell it as "assorted," give them what they want. The businesses that survive this "economic downturn" are going to be the ones that take care of their customers and really, truly value their business.

Treat your customer's well and they will return the favor with another order.

This is our bailout; don't expect one from the suits in Washington. **eBiz**



Dear Editor: I read the article, "What's in a Name?" (Oct. 2008). An associate told me I should buy multiple domains with popular keywords that potential customers would use and redirect the traffic to my site. Will I have problem with Google & the other search engines if I do this?

—Jorge G., Manhasset, N.Y.

Dear Jorge: As long as the other domains are redirecting to the site and not simply set up as mirror sites, there won't be a problem with the search engines. I'd also advise using analytics to monitor the traffic coming in through those alternate domains. This will allow you to see what's performing and what isn't. There's no sense paying for a domain that's bringing you zero traffic. If you have a domain that's not performing, you can always sell it or let your registration lapse.

More information on "301 Redirects" can be found at <http://link.solidcactus.com/301>.

Dear Editor: I read the article in last month's issue about the "\$6.00 Bottle of Water" – and I just happened to be traveling. The hotel I stayed at had a deal in the room with bottles for only \$4.00. I walked across the hall and got a \$1.25 bottle from the vending machine! This inspired me to go through our site with the customer in mind and eliminate a number of barriers to sale. Some has created a little more work for us administratively but hopefully those removed barriers mean more revenue! Thanks!

—Deborah M., Vero Beach, Fla.

Dear Deborah: Good for you! Now, remember the barriers you removed won't really cause any extra work unless you are seeing increased traffic and hopefully increased sales! If you find that you're getting more traffic but sales remain the same, it's time to tweak some more.

Good comments and questions!
Let us hear from you!
Write to: scotts@ebizinsider.com **eBiz**



Ensure Your SEO Campaign Is *Just Right* For Your Site

We've all heard the tale of Goldilocks and The Three Bears - Goldilocks snuck inside the bears' home, tested out three bowls of tasty porridge, sat on three comfortable chairs, and fell asleep in three cozy beds, but only one of each was right for her. Goldilocks wasn't about to settle for any bowl of porridge or any bed - she wanted the one perfectly suited to her tastes. The same goes for your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) campaign - by tailoring your SEO efforts to your industry and taking advantage of the great opportunities niche marketing has to offer, your SEO will be "just right".

Most Websites fit into a specific niche, which Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as "a place, employment, status, or activity for which a person or thing is best fitted". Goldilocks has an online store that sells delicious porridge. She wants to start working on SEO to increase her keyword rankings for competitive phrases in non-paid, "organic" search engine results. She wants to attract as many people as possible to her store, so she thinks it makes sense to concentrate her SEO efforts on ranking for the keyword "food".

Not quite, Goldilocks. Sure, ranking for the term "food" will certainly increase your online visibility, but it'll take years of round-the-clock SEO work for Miss Golden Locks

to rank high for the keyword "food". Plus, how does she know someone searching for "food" actually wants porridge? What if they want Swiss chocolates or recipe ideas? That searcher definitely won't click on her listing, and her SEO efforts will be all in vain.

Don't worry, there's a better solution. Rather than striving to rank for general terms, look to your own industry. Since Goldilock's online store sells porridge and has a great deal of relevant information about the porridge on her site, search engines are much more inclined to rank her site for targeted terms related to "porridge". So, she's higher up on the non-paid search engine results for porridge-related terms, and people searching for that term are actually looking for that in which her store specializes.

We all know that SEO is a long-term strategy. Instead of trying to go after those highly competitive, general terms from the start, research keywords directly related to what you're selling, try to think like consumers - if they were looking for your products, what keyword phrases would they type into the search box? Sure, these terms may not be as competitive, but you have a much better chance of ranking high for them in a shorter amount of time, and actually reaching the audience you want to reach.

There are several ways to take advantage of niche marketing. First, make sure your site's

informational content is optimized to target the industry-specific keywords for which you want to rank. Create a resources section and include informative content about different topics related to your niche. Next, start a blog, brand it to your site, and start posting about topics related to your industry. Reach out to non-competitive sites in your industry and ask them to add your site's link to their own Website. Point out that your site is specific to the industry, and thus will be extremely useful to visitors to their site. Research social media sites tailored to your industry, and create lively, interesting profiles and pages on those social media sites. You're putting yourself right in front of the exact audience you want to target.

Don't settle for any old SEO campaign. Just like Goldilocks, be sure your SEO efforts are just right for your industry. Follow the tried-and-true SEO tactics such as search engine optimized content, link building, and social media optimization, but tailor them to your industry. You'll be reaching the customers who are actually seeking your products, and in time, you can step ahead as a leader in your industry. Seems like Goldilocks knew a thing or two, after all. **eBiz**








By Alicia Magda
aliciam@ebizinsider.com

Looking for ways to grow and improve your e-business

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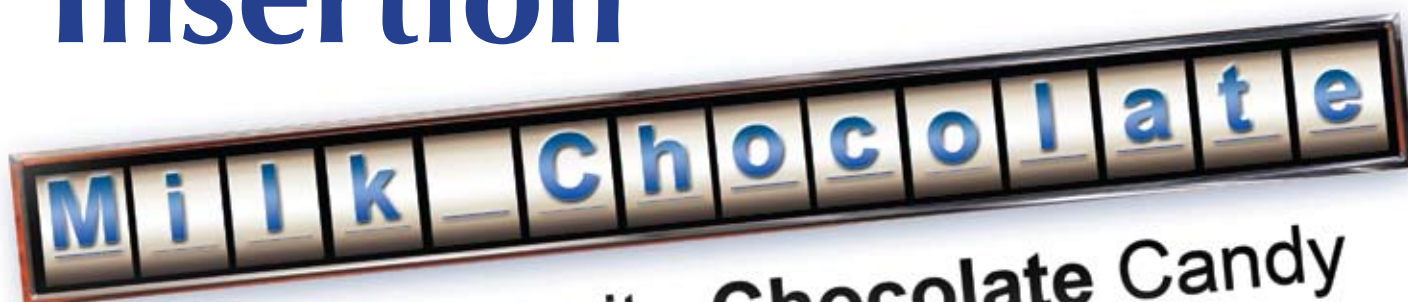
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Dynamic Keyword Insertion



Buy Your Favorite **Chocolate** Candy
Bars & Other Treats On Sale!

Imagine for a moment that you had the ability to make your Pay-per-click ads as targeted as possible, so that every time a user saw your ad, that user thought, "Hey! That's exactly what I was looking for!" If you've taken the time to develop a detailed structure to your PPC campaigns, you're halfway there already. Assuming your keywords are broken up into tightly woven groups of relevant phrases and ads, you are primed to take advantage of another great tool that the search engines offer.

Take a moment to search some of your top keywords on Google's Ad Preview Tool (<http://www.google.com/adpreview>). Now look at your ads and your competitor's ads. Some of the ads will probably have bolded words in the ad text. This happens whenever the keyword searched matches the words in the ad text. All the major search engines reward advertisers for taking the time to create relevant ads that include keywords in the text with this bolding feature. The bolding makes your text stand out from the crowd and will help pull a searcher's eyes to your ad.

But what happens when you have one hundred different keywords that all belong in one ad group? After a certain point, it doesn't make sense to continue to break up your list if all the keywords in a group are related. Most small business owners don't have the time to write a targeted ad for every single keyword on which

they want to bid. Rather, you've probably grouped similar keywords in one ad group, such as "chocolate bars, milk chocolate bar and chocolate candy bar". It makes perfect sense, but you can't fit all three of these keywords in the ads for this group. This is where Dynamic Keyword Insertion comes into the picture. Rather than spend the rest of your days writing ad text, you can write one ad that will automatically insert the correct keyword for you!

When you are writing your ad text, use this tag to dynamically insert keywords in your ads: `{Keyword:Default Text Here}`. Now the engines know they should replace this section of text with whatever keyword triggered the ad. It's important to take the time to replace the default text with text that makes sense and that will still be relevant to your ads. Regular character limitations still apply, so if the keyword that's triggered makes your ad too long, the search engines will fall back on the default text you've supplied them. For example, if we were to use a dynamic ad for our chocolate example above, it would look like this inside our Pay-per-click accounts:

`{Keyword:Yummy Chocolate Bars}`
Buy Your Favorite Chocolate Candy
Bars & Other Treats On Sale!
SolidCactus.com/Chocolate

However, when a user searches for "milk chocolate bars" they will see:

Milk Chocolate Bars

Buy Your Favorite **Chocolate** Candy
Bars & Other Treats On Sale!
SolidCactus.com/Chocolate

Please keep in mind, Dynamic Keyword Insertion is not a one-stop solution for PPC campaigns. Some advertisers will attempt to throw all their keywords in one ad group with a dynamic ad. While on the surface your ads will look relevant and targeted, the search engines may penalize you for not taking the time to properly structure your account. That being said, it's still a good idea to test some Dynamic Keyword Insertion ads in your accounts. It's a fantastic tool for increasing the relevancy of your ads and just may be what you need to help take your Pay-per-click marketing to the next level! **eBiz**



By Jean Lloyd
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ElementzNutrition.com Co-founder Makes Social Media History; Increases Followers 20x

In days of old, it took the Pony Express days or weeks to deliver a message, but today news travels fast. Sometimes so fast, the big news bypasses traditional media. Thanks to the immediacy of Internet-enabled camera phones, Solid Cactus client Janis Krums garnered national attention at exactly 3:36 p.m. ET on Thursday, January 15, 2009.

Krums, co-founder of ElementzNutrition.com was on a commuter ferry in the Hudson river when it was diverted to rescue passengers of U.S. Airways Flight 1549 after it made an emergency landing in the New York river.

Being the connected man he is, Krums took a picture and uploaded it to Twitter using TwitPic.com, where he also updated his status, letting his then 180 followers know that he was en route to pick up the survivors.



Janis Krums at Solid Cactus Boot Camp, May 2008

"Basically, it was an incredible sight. I definitely thought I should take a picture, and I happened to be on Twitter when I saw it, so that was quickest place to post," said Krums.

When the ferry reached the plane Krums let a few of the passengers borrow his phone to call loved ones. When he was handed back his phone, he was amazed at the number of messages and Twitter followers he had gained. His photo became the first to circulate as part of an international news frenzy branded "Miracle on the Hudson." His phone then started to ring.

Interviewed on many major news outlets for his citizen journalism experience, Janis Krums discovered the huge power of social media.

Regarding the calls from MSNBC, the BBC, and ABC News, he said, "I was very surprised and overwhelmed. When I got the phone back I had messages and calls... right away. [The media] had my number. My phone didn't stop making noises for five hours."

Krums had a Twitter account for 8 months, but really became active during the last 3.



"I was slowly building a following. It was mainly an experiment to see how you could use Twitter to promote a business or a brand," he said. "I would post links to health-related articles since that's our industry, or links to technology or social media articles. Basically anything that was cool to read."

After his now historic Tweet, Krums jumped from 180 followers to 3500. He had planned to utilize social networking for his new website, however the plane incident reinforced that decision.

"I was going to use [social media marketing] tactics anyway. This reinforces the point, especially now that my network is so big – the reach now is incredible. No questions asked, I'll definitely use it now," he said.

"Nowadays you need to have any medium you can for business. You never know what is going to catch fire. Some people may look at Facebook and not Twitter...you need to have all angles covered. Everything is evolving so quickly. If you can be on the front of new technology, it'll help business," he said.

While this example is more on the citizen journalism side, it paints a huge example of how a fad, a product, or new site can spread fast. For that reason, social media has become a booming way to promote e-commerce. Krums says that he's a member of several social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and a blog, but admits he doesn't update them all the time.

"I'm getting better at updating and might use a service that does all the sites from one interface. I didn't have as much of a use for it a week ago and hadn't explored it, but it's time now," he said.

His site, ElementzNutrition.com features performance nutrition for elite athletes and is scheduled to launch this spring. You can bet he'll post that throughout the Social Media universe! **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
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Setting Superior Customer Service Standards



In a call center one thing is certain; each call is unique and requires agents to be at the top of their game to provide superior customer service. The problem is, how do we as a company define and encourage superior customer service? Can we set standards that fit all situations?

Let's define superior customer service. Customer service, in its basic definition, is an organization's ability to supply its customers' wants and needs. But, superior service means going the extra mile to ensure that our customers' wants and needs are anticipated.

We all know when we have been subjected to poor customer service: our food is cold, a package is not delivered when promised, a product doesn't work as advertised. But how do we know when we have received "superior" service.

Superior service is going above and beyond what the customer expects. We expect a package to be delivered on time, but if that package is delayed at one point in the chain, the employee that goes above and beyond and makes a second run to ensure a timely delivery provides superior customer service.

In order to set superior standards, we have to understand what it means to go above and beyond what your customer expects. Answering the phone quickly, being polite and courteous, having answers at your fingertips, completing the customer's transaction(s) efficiently, and saying "Thank You" are all part of good customer service. We have quality checks set up to ensure agents are meeting these standards. Agents are continuously trained on the proper way to assist our customers.

- Did the agent greet the customer appropriately?
- Did the agent answer questions correctly?
- Was the agent pleasant on the phone?

However, call monitoring and quality checks are usually associated with negative reinforcement. For example, if you fail your quality checks you will be written up for it. You are given additional training and one-on-one coaching. The agent is now focused on meeting the standards set forth in the monitoring form, not producing to the level of superior customer service.

Reaching the superior level is best achieved through positive reinforcement. Create a program of incentives that rewards agents for attaining a superior level. As the incentives start to become commonplace, re-evaluate the

program and find ways to raise the bar on what actions are rewarded. Come up with new incentives that challenge the agents to perform at the highest levels. And remember, presenting an agent with an incentive reward is a motivator for one agent, but announcing the award and giving recognition throughout the department makes the incentive a motivator for the whole team.

To set the standards to the level of providing superior customer service takes more than just classroom training and call monitoring. A culture of customer service must exist in an organization from the top down. Senior management needs to set the stage for how customers are treated. Your organization needs to learn what your customers' needs and wants are; from this information, develop action plans, budgets and strategy. Each decision, no matter how small, must be made with the idea of providing this level of customer service.

In your call center, service does not stop when an agent hangs up the phone or disconnects from LiveChat. Agents should routinely follow-up to ensure that a customer's order has been fulfilled. When a customer calls into your call center, you are acting as the agent for your clients. Call center management members need to remember that everything they do reflects on their clients.

We have defined superior customer service as going above and beyond – anticipating customers' wants and needs, and following through after the initial contact. Remember that standards need to be set from the top down to show your teams the level of commitment expected from everyone in the organization. As managers, it is your responsibility to provide direction to your employees that ensures success for everyone. **eBiz**



By Gregory Kosicki
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New Browsers on the Block

Browsers, Why Bother?

In the world of e-commerce, the most optimized, up-to-date coding and rendering is vital for site interaction. With new browsers, though, come new responsibilities - at least from a programming standpoint.

Eventually, older browsers are weeded out, newer browsers take over, and upgrades are made; however, it is a necessity to make sure that any website or online store is picture perfect in all rendering browsers. Not doing so will alienate potential buyers from your site, plain and simple - both the early-adopters with the newest, hottest browser and the tech-averse with archaic, versions of obsolete browsers. In order to help you future-proof your online store, here's what is new and up-and-coming as the new browsers on the block.



Internet Explorer 8 (IE8)

From a normal viewer's perspective, Internet Explorer is just as good as the next browser. However, from a programming and usability perspective, there are many differences that could wreak proverbial havoc to the design and development of a Website.

Standards, Compatibility, Usability

With the release of Internet Explorer 8 approaching rapidly (projected for June 2009) and several Beta versions already in place, Microsoft decided it would be best to address the issues of web standards and better functionality in their newest installment.

The browser originally was set to work off of the default behaviors developed in IE8 and currently used in previous versions, but after several discussions Microsoft has decided to default to "super standards mode" while allowing the user to toggle back to normal behavior if desired. This change will prevent programmers from needing additional Meta tags in the code header, as well as incorporate new rendering and scripting engines developed for IE8.

IE8 is set to be Microsoft's most standards-compliant browser to date. At the end of 2007, the browser passed the ACID 2 test. ACID is a series of tests to identify rendering flaws within web browsers. This test checks to see just how compliant the browser is at ensuring support for web standards. A modification such as this to the standards of IE8 could prove extremely beneficial to websites programmed using highly efficient and search-engine-friendly cascading style sheets (CSS).

As far as compatibility, there are many websites that have been developed to work well with the default standards of IE6 and 7. With the numerous changes implemented into the new release of IE8, these websites may have problems with the visual compatibility and rendering within the new browser. However, IE8 has a new feature to help with this! In the IE8 toolbar, users will find a Compatibility button. When clicked, the browser will render the website with the IE7 standards, while saving this change for future visits.

Unlike previous versions, Internet Explorer 8 will be completely CSS 2.1

compliant. Also, the new browser allows for additional CSS 3.0 attributes. CSS allows for more effective visual and interactive customization of a website. More attributes available for a particular browser means that a wider variety of user experience and site functionality improvements can be implemented.

Finally, from an end-user perspective, not only is the new IE browser beneficial to programmers, but with a rapid startup and faster page loads, IE8 may just turn heads and change the opinion of web surfers around the world. New enhanced tab features help with user-friendly functionality.

Google Chrome

For a company that spends all their time working on the Internet and using web browsers, creating one of their own was just another notch on the belt for Google. The basic look of Chrome is similar to that of the Google search page -- a clean and fast loading environment for users. Chrome is open-source, meaning any programmer may access the code for the browser, and Google is looking for innovative modifications to mold their browser to the needs of their users.

Standards, Compatibility, Usability

The Google Chrome rendering engine and web standards are the same as that of Apple's Safari browser. Pages displayed on Chrome will appear as they do in Safari. However, Apple's newest project, Safari 4 has passed the ACID 3 Test with a score of 100, whereas Google Chrome has only scored a 78. Both of these web browsers are running off of the WebKit framework created by Apple, which is, in my opinion, the most efficient on the web.

Along with an amazing rendering engine, Chrome brings with it the V8 JavaScript engine. Results from V8 are clear as day. JavaScript is widely used on the web and is growing more and more popular for site interaction. With a need for a faster, more efficient engine, Chrome has answered the call.

In the SunSpider test, similar to the ACID tests, but for JavaScript rendering engines, Google Chrome posted a load time of

3,471ms. Using the same test, Internet Explorer 7 posted a 12,866ms load, and Firefox 3 came in with a time of 6,701ms. JavaScript-based web applications will run faster, giving web pages themselves faster load times.

In the same manner as a computer operating system, Google Chrome was created to run different processes per tab. This way, each tab can be working to load a page at once without the need to wait on any other tabs to finish. Separating the processes increases loading speeds making the web browser much more efficient.

The basic design of the browser gives a clean, user-friendly experience and also decreases startup time. Google is known for simplicity, first with their homepage, and now their web browser. Based on efficiency and functionality, Google Chrome will be a browser of choice in the near future.

Summing up

Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser will be much better with their new Version 8 release. The increased web standards give this browser better rendering more comparable to that of Firefox and Safari. If your choice is currently Internet Explorer, then you will need this upgrade!

Google Chrome has a different spin on development, but a more efficient look on browsing. Between easy JavaScript rendering for web applications, faster page loads, and separate tab processing, Google has released a web browser that everyone should test out. **eBiz**

Where can I take these browsers for a test drive?

IE8 (Beta 2):

<http://www.microsoft.com/ie8>

Google Chrome:

<http://www.google.com/chrome>



By Joel D. Nye

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New Year, New Look: Is it Time for a Redesign?

People seem to get a little more dressed up for New Year's Eve bashes, more so than they would for an ordinary night out. The idea is to shine and dazzle a little more. That mentality continues as the new year starts. People want to improve upon their own appearance with a new hairdo, a new wardrobe, a new waistline, whiter teeth. Sure, we think about these things year-round, but there's something about a glowing, dropping ball that brings a personal makeover to the top of the to-do list.

It's the same experience in e-commerce. E-tailers start to think, "Hmmm. What can I do to make my site dazzle more this year? How can it really shine?" For that reason, every year around this time, those in the e-commerce industry begin to be hit with newsletters, articles and seminars about how to prepare for the new year, namely about getting a redesign. The holiday push is over, a new sales year is beginning and in general, the focus is on a new beginning.

Remember that a redesign isn't only about aesthetics. Sometimes putting a band-aid here and adding a feature there can actually clutter your site's programming. A complete redesign may be needed to give your e-commerce site a facelift inside and out. A professional site evaluation that looks at everything from code to usability to search engine optimization and overall design is a sure-fire way to let an expert explain in detail what you are doing well, and most importantly, what you could be doing better. Often giving your own site a once over can identify if you need to redesign. If you recently had a redesign or your site is relatively new and current, keep reading — you may find something you want to implement.

1. How long as it been since your last redesign?

Industry experts recommend a redesign every 2-3 years. A refreshed look and feel is a huge part of that. Imagine if Madonna still looked the way she did in the 80s? She'd never be the success she is today; she livened up her image over time. Fast food restaurants and major soft drink brands like Burger King and Pepsi have jazzed up their logos. Bottom line is, they are still the names we know and love and are still recognizable, but these giant companies invested in changes to keep things current. So, if your e-commerce site looks like it did in 2002, 2005 or worse, 1999, you are going to definitely want to consider a brand new look and feel. You'd be amazed at how far some highly successful merchants have come since they first launched. Use the Way Back

Machine (archive.org) for any store you frequent to get an idea of how a redesign every few years can progress their success.

As stated above, it's not just about aesthetics, it's about what's behind the scenes, too. What is your code like? Is it gobbledegook? Is it table-based? Table-based programming is fast and easy for programmers, but it's very old school and clunky; therefore the search engines don't favor it. For serious programmers and e-commerce business owners, Cascading Style Sheets CSS is the recommended way to go. If you've been on the e-commerce block for some time now, but are starting to see your organic rankings dip, your code could be the culprit. Newer sites or redesigned sites with less-complicated code are now getting spidered better and faster.

Think of it this way-- table-based programming is like being seated at the kids "table" on Thanksgiving; it is often ignored and gets slim pickings. CSS-based programming gets to sit with adults where it will be noticed, be part of the conversation and be surrounded by plentiful options. Aside from the type of code, there could also be lots of heavy stuff on your back-end bogging down load times and SEO.

2. Is Your Site Busy? Is it Hard to Navigate? Does it Instill Trust?

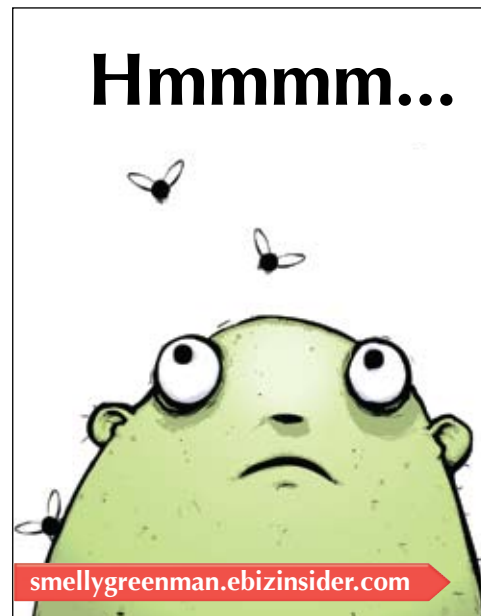
We all know what K-I-S-S stands for, right? While every e-commerce site needs to have its own unique branding, there are fundamentals in e-commerce we call best practices that must be followed. Landing on a cluttered homepage with mixed messages, no flow, no call to action, too much text, etc. can all cause people to click away. There's lots of competition out there. There are pages upon pages of

results for any keyword a user searches. Why should they stay at YOUR site? You have less than ten seconds to capture their attention, and if someone gets to your site and doesn't know where to go, what to do or-- worse yet- even WHAT you do, you can "kiss" that sale goodbye. Some glaring errors could be lack of a search box, a hard-to-find search box, an endless menu where shoppers have to scroll to see the navigation menu, no featured items or pricing on the homepage, too many clicks to get to item pages. Bottom line: if it looks amateur, you risk losing a customer. If your site is professional and consistent through the shell, homepage, section page, item page and checkout, you are in good shape.

Trust is the number one reason someone will leave your store. Does your site have customer service information in the header? (We hope you are not hiding from your bread and butter!) Is your checkout branded like the rest of your site? Do you have secure shopping graphics? Anyone can add something to the cart, but will they proceed by putting their credit card information into a form if they don't trust your site, if they can't see your return policies, etc.? Probably not.

3. Do you require people to register to check out?

If you answered "yes" to this question, WHY? It's easy to add items to the cart, for sure. But hitting that registration screen is a roadblock standing between you and a conversion-- between you and profit. Of course there are benefits of offering account registration, however most online customers simply want to easily and swiftly check-out and make their own determination if they want to register. This



issue is listed in a redesign article because this required checkout comes standard with many e-commerce platforms. If you find yourself in this situation, changing platforms may be worth considering, which inherently means a redesign.

Summing Up

The new year is a prime time to evaluate your website to determine what you are doing well and where you can improve. If there are a number of improvements to be made to make your site more trustworthy, easier to navigate, faster to load and an updated look, a redesign for 2009 may be what you need to ring in the new year... and ring up more sales. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
donnat@ebizinsider.com

Your website is your best employee and it's time for its annual review.

Let us do a comprehensive evaluation of your site and provide recommendations on how you can increase traffic, instill customer confidence and most importantly improve conversions.

For a limited time | Get a complete Site Review for only \$249.50 That's 50%off!

For more information:
sitereview.solidcatus.com

Choosing the Best CSE for My Products

In the past few years, comparison shopping engines (CSEs) have gained traction with online shoppers. The big three search giants, Google, MSN, and Yahoo!, all offer comparison shopping, oftentimes bundling regular search results with relevant products from their respective CSE. Engines such as Shopping.com, Pricegrabber, and Shopzilla have become household names. There are also niche CSEs that spring up almost daily in hopes of capturing a portion of the comparison shopping market. Sites like Pronto.com and Healthpricer.com each have unique comparison shopping themes that customers can utilize to find the lowest prices for products they're searching for. For merchants who have no idea which CSE to start advertising with, the choice can be a tough one to make.

"Which CSE is going to make me the most money?" is a question that I've been asked countless times, and unfortunately there's no easy answer. For

starters, the answer is dependent upon a host of factors, not limited to but including:

- 1) Marketing Budget
- 2) Time dedicated to managing data feeds
- 3) Quality of your feeds
- 4) Product pricing
- 5) Merchant website look and feel
- 6) Shipping costs and options offered and so on....

The real question to ask is "Which CSE is best for my type of product(s)?" The answer requires some research, but luckily our team of account managers has come up with a list of CSEs and "compatible" product types for you. Please keep in mind that this list is based on our team's experience managing accounts with a hodgepodge of different product types.

Google Product Search

Product Type: Everything!

URL: <http://www.google.com/products>

Google Product Search offers one of the best comparison shopping engines for two main reasons. **1)** it's Google. **2)** it's absolutely free. Google is, obviously, the search king and, as such, no CSE marketing campaign would be complete without having this engine active in their list of CSEs. Most merchants I've serviced only include the bare minimum for content in their data feeds which is a huge mistake. Google Product Search doesn't use categories or cost-per-click (CPC) to determine search rank so the more content you have in your feed the better. Electronics, for example, should have information related to Battery Life, Aspect Ratio, Capacity, Operating System, etc. included in the data feed so that your listings will be featured more prominently when people search for items you sell. Populating your data feed with this extra information may be a chore but you'll be glad you did once other CSEs start asking for some of the same information. Google Product Search is THE starting point for anyone launching a comparison shopping campaign.

Shopzilla

Product Type: Clothing & Accessories, Jewelry, Home & Garden, Toys & Games

URL: <http://www.shopzilla.com>

Shopzilla is recommended to any merchant who isn't sure where to start for several reasons. One, the setup is



quick and easy. Two, their support team is extremely quick in responding to account issues. Third, they have a high volume of traffic that covers a wide variety of search queries and product types. Lastly, Shopzilla lets users check CPC bids against a list that show their rank relative to the competition's for a given category. The important thing for merchants to remember when considering Shopzilla as a startup CSE is that, overall, they've produced positive results for most, if not all, of the accounts our team has managed. We attribute this to a comprehensive list of categories, listing syndication across a broad network of affiliates, and an easy-to-use merchant account interface coupled with a reliable support staff.

Shopping.com

Product Type: Electronics, Appliances, Clothing, Jewelry, Brand Name Items

URL: <http://www.shopping.com>

Shopping.com, an eBay company, is one of the best-performing engines our team works with. It's one of those shopping portals that you just can't ignore. With more than 1.5 million shoppers visiting the site daily, Shopping.com is a must have for any merchant interested in reaching qualified customers who are ready to make a purchase. One of the biggest concerns merchants have when considering this CSE is the initial funding cost of \$700. The money is refundable if you decide to opt out of using Shopping.com at any point, so there's no need to fear. Another concern merchants have is whether or not their funds are going to be exhausted in a short period of time because of the volume of shoppers Shopping.com produces. A well-planned strategy will pay off in getting the most out of your investment. Make a point of including products in your data feed that have high profit margins instead of others that may only break even after factoring in the conversion costs.

Pricegrabber

Product Type: Electronics, Clothing, Brand Name Products

URL: <http://www.pricegrabber.com>

Pricegrabber.com describes itself as "the industry innovator in online comparison shopping." Founded in 1999, Pricegrabber offers one of the most competitive shopping engines for merchants both big and small. Product popularity is used to determine listing position, so even newcomers to this CSE can perform very well if they offer actively sought-after products. Manufacturer Part Numbers (MPN) ought to be included for all items you submit to Pricegrabber to optimize your current feed.

The staff at Pricegrabber are some of the most helpful in the industry. We all know how difficult completing your account setup can be without the assistance of an experienced account representative, and the Pricegrabber staff points users in the right direction and even gives periodic updates on product performance and optimization tips specific to your store's industry so that you're getting the best advice you can get.

Live Search Cashback

Product Type: Electronics, Computers, Jewelry, Clothing

URL: <http://search.live.com/cashback>

Live Search Cashback, known as Jellyfish prior to Microsoft's acquisition of the company in late 2007, is Microsoft's answer to "the CPC problem." One of the most difficult things about CSE advertising on CPC engines is making sure your advertising dollars are being spent on products that perform well, as opposed to spending on products that customers are just window-shopping for. Wouldn't it be nice if you were allowed to pay referral fees only if a customer made a purchase instead of every time you received a click? Jellyfish uses a cost-per-action (CPA) model: Cashback charges merchants a commission only on purchases made through referrals from the engine. The amount of the commission is determined by the merchant and can be set both on the category and product level, either in the account interface or within the data feed itself.

When Cashback launched, it raised skepticism about how well it would

actually perform using this new revenue model. All fears seem to have been dispelled by the 2008 holiday shopping season, though. Not only did Cashback outperform some engines that our team considers to be "Tier 1," but the ad spend for most merchants, even the ones that didn't do extremely well, was nominal. What's more, fraudulent orders were able to be reported to Cashback within 60 days of the occurrence so that the commission that was paid out could be credited back to the merchants account.

So, now you should have a decent idea of where you may want to begin your venture into comparison shopping campaigns, right? If you still have more questions about other CSEs and how they stack up to the ones mentioned in this article, our best advice to all of you who fall into this category is to research, research, and research some more. Reach out to the CSEs you're interested in and ask as many questions as possible before deciding which one is the right fit for you. Don't be ashamed to ask your friends and relatives if and where they comparison shop. Sometimes the best field research is conducted right in your living room with your family or at a friend's house.

Finally, be realistic about the current state of our struggling economy when considering including CSE marketing as part of your store's advertising campaign. Online shoppers are going to continue to search for bargains on items they are ready to purchase. CSEs continue to gain more market share as a result of this trend and as such should be paid more attention to. If you're still not sure about whether your business is ready to take the CSE plunge, give us a call. We'd be more than happy to consult with you and your team about why comparison shopping advertising is a good fit for your business. **eBiz**



By Carlos Sanes

To get your attention, we didn't make a fancy ad.

Yahoo! Store Forums

<http://www.ebizinsider.com>

TOOLBOX:

Build Professional Connections on LinkedIn

LinkedIn tends to be touted as “Facebook for adults”, despite launching a year before Mark Zuckerberg’s uber-popular website. Still, LinkedIn is considered a social networking site that lets users make a virtual resume and create a network of friends and colleagues called connections. A user’s network consists of his connections plus the connections’ connections – to whom a user can get introduced through the mutual contact.

In the early days of LinkedIn, that was it. Like Facebook without applications or photos, there wasn’t much to do except acquire new connections and hunt for jobs. Instead of being “Facebook for adults”, LinkedIn only got updated when a user needed work, a problem further compounded by Facebook opening its doors to the public in 2006.

But recently, LinkedIn has expanded what its users can do in three important ways. While critics deride the site’s new functionality as a copy of features on other sites, the unique business-oriented focus of the site makes that functionality more useful.

1. LinkedIn Answers

LinkedIn Answers is the most useful of the new features. That is, the one that you are likely to use the most. Like Yahoo! Answers or the newly launched Mahalo Answers, this feature allows users to pose questions that can be answered by other users in the community.

The benefit of using LinkedIn Answers as opposed to those others I mentioned above is twofold. First, the trust level is increased because you can see the real names of the respondents along with their profiles. This allows you to determine the “expert” status of the person behind the response. On other answer sites, you are often reliant on the username (often an amusing Internet

sobriquet like “TwilightFan999”) rather than a name, title, and company. Second, the focus of the community means that the snarky comments and joke answers are a rarity, if they appear at all.

You can also recommend an expert on the subject within the LinkedIn Network for the questioner to contact.

2. LinkedIn Groups

Yahoo!, Google, and Facebook, have group functionality, but once again, LinkedIn’s version benefits from being more user-friendly than the first two, and with a better, higher signal-to-noise ratio than the latter (where groups can be as off-the-wall as “I love beer!”)

Participating in LinkedIn Groups is a good way to network with other professionals who have similar interests or work in the same industry. Groups encourage discussion and debate more fully than Answers do, so they can be an even better platform for getting to know other users.

3. LinkedIn Applications

Just a few months ago, LinkedIn introduced applications that users can add to their profiles. Again, you’re thinking “Just like Facebook,” and this isn’t untrue. There are still very few apps available, but every one of them is useful in some way. If you have a blog, you can now connect it to your profile and show people browsing your most recent posts. Other apps allow the sharing of Word and PowerPoint documents, as well as other files – a great way to display work samples. The app “Triplt” shows where your network is traveling and when you and a Connection will be in the same city – an extremely useful tool for those of you who live from trade show to convention to conference. A market research app was recently rolled out that allows users to poll the community.

The Cost?

Although LinkedIn runs on a “freemium” model, where a paid membership garners extra features, all of the features above are available to anybody at no charge.

Your Reputation

At the very least, you should be using LinkedIn as a reputation management tool. Take a few minutes and create a profile; it will show up in the first couple of pages when your name is Googled. Linking your profile to your blog or personal website can bring in traffic. Unlike other outposts you might use to promote your business, LinkedIn is about promoting yourself. If you run a B2C e-commerce store, being active on LinkedIn might not lead directly to an increased conversion rate, but you’ll be seen as more of an expert in your product than others without profiles. Also, a savvy B2B store owner could leverage additional business.

Summing up

What’s the best way to use LinkedIn? Like any social network, it depends on what you want out of it. It can be a good tool for lead generation or finding freelance work, or just to establish your expertise among your peers. Being an active participant will raise your visibility and get you noticed, as well as increase your authority. **eBiz**



By Jeff Stolarczyk
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**Join the Solid Cactus
LinkedIn Group:**

<http://link.solidcactus.com/linkedin>

To Your Health – VitaminPro.com

Reaches Health Conscious in Crowded Market

“Solid Cactus... they watch our site and, as we grow, help us by making recommendations to our online marketing strategy”

—Dr. Dan Schlenger, OVitaminPro.com



Dan and Mary Schlenger at home with their Border Collie Oscar enjoying the Holidays with family and friends.

The vitamin market segment on the web is a very crowded place that includes everything from wholesalers to Mom and Pop shops selling home remedies for “what ails you.”

When the owners of OVitaminPro.com launched their site in January 2008, their goal was to reach out to specific consumers – those who have a higher than average interest in their health as shown by their willingness to research conditions and use lab results to determine their product choices. Thus, using internet marketing search terms such as “vitamin E” or “fish oil” was not going to be particularly useful. Enter Solid Cactus’ pay-per-click (PPC) strategy using a combination of broad, phrase and exact match terms for maximum return.

To target those health-conscious consumers, Solid Cactus created an Internet marketing strategy that used specific ads written for each product on the site with small, targeted Ad Groups. The combination of high-quality products, compelling copy and the promotion of value propositions such as \$1 shipping produced strong conversion rates.

During the first month on Google, the Return on Ad Spend (ROAS = Sales Value/ Ad Cost) was a remarkable 3,506%. This trend continued during 2008 (see chart)

with an average Google and Yahoo! ROAS through three quarters of 3,405%. This is a strong result for their specific market segment and target audience.

OVitaminPro.com Investment in Ad Spending Pays Dividends!

Month	Google ROAS	Yahoo! ROAS	Average ROAS
January	3560.8%	N/A	3560.8%
February	4752.1%	4267.7%	4509.9%
March	2491.9%	4081.1%	3286.5%
April	2838.2%	5963.8%	4401.0%
May	3087.9%	4753.6%	3920.7%
June	1985.2%	5782.7%	3883.9%
July	1784.9%	2028.3%	1906.6%
August	2212.8%	3004.9%	2608.8%
September	2234.9%	2900.0%	2567.5%
Overall Average	2772%	4098%	3405%

OVitaminPro's commitment to customer service and insistence on quality products has built strong repeat business as proven by high traffic through the site's Login feature, which allows customers to save items, create a wish list, create a registry, and keep track of past orders. This is a logical outcome of the marketing efforts, as most people purchase vitamins and supplements on a monthly basis. The combination of word-of-mouth and Internet marketing bodes well for OvitaminPro.com's future. In order to grow the customer base even more, PPC campaigns continue to drive approximately 20% of the site's sales.

"One of the things we really like about Solid Cactus is the way they watch our site and, as we grow, help us by making recommendations to our online marketing strategy," said Dr. Dan Schlenger, co-owner of OvitaminPro.com. "It's a constant puzzle and they sort through the pieces to find the ones that fit."

Perhaps the most important measurement for OvitaminPro is the low CPC (Cost Per Click). The industry norm is \$0.52. However using several targeted campaign strategies, Solid Cactus has built "Quality Score" which directly influences CPC and as a result, the average CPC for OvitaminPro is a mere \$0.25. (see chart)

Quality Score is a dynamic variable calculated for each of your keywords. It combines a variety of factors and measures how relevant your keyword is to your ad text and to a user's search query.

Since the marketing focus is brand-centric, the campaigns take advantage of relatively low search volume and fewer competitors. This is confirmed by the high proportion of exact match conversions versus broad or phrase conversions. Additionally, click through rates (CTR) of 4.28% have consistently stayed above the industry average of 2.47%

Click, Click

Q3 '08	Industry	OVitaminPro
CPC	\$0.52	\$0.25
CTR	2.47%	4.28%

CPC (Cost Per Click) - This is the average cost the advertiser is charged when someone clicks on your PPC ad.

CTR (Click Through Rate) - The percentage of people who clicked on a PPC advertisement to go to your site. This measures how persuasive your PPC ads are. Literally, CTR is # clicks/# impressions where impressions are the number of times your ad was displayed.



OvitaminPro.com provides the highest-quality professional nutritional supplements with efficacy proven in their clinic.

Recently, OvitaminPro.com added international AdWords campaigns targeting Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands which have already borne fruit.

"This is still new for us and we ran into shipping issues that stumped us," noted Mary Schlenger, OvitaminPro.com co-owner, "but our relationship with Solid Cactus helped us there too. We had attended one of the e-commerce Boot Camps and were able to call some of the other companies we met there who gave us great advice and suggestions from their experience."

OvitaminPro.com will probably hire its first employee soon, giving the Schlenkers a respite from their 24/7 involvement with the company. "It might also give me time to update our blog more often," laughed Mary. "We know people read it and Solid Cactus keeps reminding us how important it is for Search Engine Optimization."

OvitaminPro.com, using a combination of PPC keywords, content campaigns and geotargeting is trending towards record sales months. Add in their commitment to superior customer service, and you have an unbeatable marketing plan. OvitaminPro intends to provide the highest quality professional nutritional supplements with the efficacy proven in their clinic. The website is the result of 25 years of passion about improving the wellness of the health-conscious community.

About OvitaminPro.com

OvitaminPro.com, headquartered in Minden, Nevada, provides vitamins and health supplements at competitive costs. Owned and operated by the husband-wife team of chiropractor Dr. Dan and nutritionist Mary Schlenger, the couple has been providing patients at their clinic with experience-proven advice for more than 25 years. Wanting to provide the highest-quality professional nutritional supplements with the efficacy proven in their clinic, they launched OvitaminPro.com in January 2008. For information, visit <http://www.ovitaminpro.com> or call 877.465.0844. **eBiz**



By Leigh McGlynn

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and



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Doing A Holiday End Review



Another holiday season is over. You made moves to drive traffic to various places on your site. Well, did they work? No time like the present to review the past!

Website Activity

If you provided visitors with navigation to your gift sections did it work? Check your store stats to see how often customers clicked into your gift sections; then look at sales of the products in those sections. The numbers will indicate how well you funneled visitors into your gift areas. Make notes on ways you can improve this area next year.

Customer Activity

Once the visitor reached your gift section, did they purchase or did they bail? Ask the important questions, "Was my gift section product relevant and appealing to my target audience?" "Were my descriptions

compelling and detailed?" "Did I organize the items as well as possible?"

Promotional Activity

During the holiday, promotions are more important than ever. Did you use any "hooks" to lure customers in? Many companies e-mail previous customers to bring them back. Another method is to offer some type of "deal" on the homepage (e.g. free shipping, a free gift with purchase or a dollar-off deal). What worked and what didn't? How did your promotions convert?

Inventory Management

Shopping online this year I was surprised at the number of "out of stock" warnings. If you had multiple items that you couldn't fill, fix the problem! At Neeps.com, we start increasing holiday inventory levels in September. We base inventory on seasonal items by looking at sales from the previous year. We also closely monitor items we

believe will be big sellers, and increase or decrease stock levels as needed.

Customer Service is Key!

Customer service should not be a lost art. If your customer service department is a full voice mail box, shame on you! Would you shop at a department store where the help flees as you approach? An e-commerce business can connect potential customers with real human beings. Consider adding part-time help to answer the phones during peak periods or (shameless plug) ask us about Call Center Services.

They say the past is prologue. Make it so. Examine what you did this holiday season so that you can learn from your mistakes and improve on your successes. **eBiz**



By Scott Sanfilippo
scotts@ebizinsider.com

Numbers, Graphs and Stats, Oh My!



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A Brand is a Promise Wrapped in an Experience

Mention the word brand or branding and you'll probably see some eyes rolling. After all, everyone knows what a brand is right? It's the type of shoe you buy and the peanut butter you eat. It's the logos and colors that, without a word, represent a company. It's the "Just Do It" and "Do No Evil" slogans that describe exactly how an organization operates. Right?

Well yes, and no.

A brand is a living thing. It has a heartbeat. It does not exist in a vacuum. It is the core of an organization. The logos, slogans, mission statements and management strategies are tangible iterations of the brand, manifestations of the core values of the company. So, what is a brand?

A brand is a promise wrapped in an experience.

It is a promise made to your employees, your customers, your investors, your vendors and suppliers. A promise implies that a trust between two entities has been established. Expectations and a sense of security or reliability grow from that trust. Break a promise and you destroy a relationship.

Thus the experience anyone has with your organization must reflect your promise. Every experience, every time. This is at the heart of marketing your organization, company, even yourself. So stop rolling your eyes and read on.

Why Brand Matters

Your brand is an intangible asset that occupies some of the most expensive real estate in the world – a very small niche in your customer's brain. As human beings we respond to brands because we need to distinguish one thing from another in order to process information. One study after another tells us what we already know – we are bombarded by information in an

endless, noisy stream every day. A strong brand promise allows the brain to selectively recognize and absorb a message.

The most consistently delivered brands are the ones people respond to.

The most consistently delivered brands communicate clearly.

The most consistently delivered brands are the ones people understand, know and trust.

How Do People Absorb a Brand?

Values

A brand is a promise and an expression of the core values of your company that creates expectations. When those values are in concert with the audience's, a connection is made and attention is paid.

Emotional Connections

Your brand creates relationships based on shared beliefs. When emotions are triggered (joy, anger, indignation, exhilaration) by your brand promise the resulting action (purchase, donation, activism) is strong and determined.

Loyalty

This is often seen in the nonprofit world. People who become involved with a nonprofit brand see the world in a certain way and look for organizations that agree with that position. They want to join others who value and want the same things they do. For them, the brand promise must be absolutely clear and true.

Reputation

Branding occurs outside of your company – in the marketplace – so be careful what you promise. Remember, your brand is not a role. It is the core values of your organization delivered in every experience. Audiences who know you by reputation may never actually interact with your company, but they have an opinion

nonetheless. You are not in control of how you are perceived which means your brand must never waver – this will only create competing messages in the marketplace.

Inspired Advocates

You can't develop brand loyalty through creative advertising, or by developing a brilliant logo or theme song. It comes from being true to your promise. It's that simple. Brands that don't deliver on their promise create catastrophic, negative word of mouth. Brands that consistently exceed their promise create Inspired Advocates who will sing your praises near and far. **eBiz**



By Catherine D. Shafer
catherines@ebizinsider.com

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Is Your E-Commerce Site Ready to Go Visual?



YouTube, Vimeo, and Hulu. Are they just buzz words that have become part of our daily vocabulary or are they related to a better marketing opportunity? We've all hopped on the web video train in the past few years, but there are doubts about whether or not e-commerce sites have been making the most of it. New studies and recent reports indicate that adding video to your site can boost conversions, increase customer trust levels, and differentiate your e-commerce site from the competition. If you haven't used video marketing tactics in the past, it may be time to start using them to boost the performance of your site.

According to Practical eCommerce, 8 percent of the 2.7 billion video ad impressions studied by Google-owned technology firm DoubleClick involved higher levels of user interaction – a vital element in the overall shopping experience. Another study conducted by Innovate Media, an online video production company, showed staggering increases in conversion rates ranging from 12 to 115 percent.

eMarketer also puts online video viewers at more than three-quarters of US Internet users, and estimates that percentage will rise to 88% by 2012 – in short, video is a wise choice for keeping up with the pace.

"Every page on our web site using video converts two or three times more than pages without," says Todd Holmberg, co-owner of AirgunDepot.com.

"Some products were gathering dust on our shelves, but we knew they were good products and people would buy them if they could see how they worked," Holmberg says. "Two of these items

are now among our bestsellers in their category. Video is 100% responsible for the change in sales."

Uploading just any content won't give you the results that online merchants like AirgunDepot.com are enjoying. Creating a creative, informative, and well produced video will often receive the best response. By making a clear outline of what exactly goes into producing a quality video it'll be easier to dictate your next move and give you guidelines around which you can design your video project. Let's take a look at some of the factors.

Content

The first and one of the most vital parts of the video creation process is deciding on the content. Product demonstrations, merchant information, and answering user questions are some of the most popular video formats for e-commerce sites, however, one form of video may work

better than others. Decide which type or format of video works best for the message you're trying to send to your visitors. Then, develop a well-written script that is easy to both perform and understand. Remember, writing for video is much different than other forms of traditional media. Develop a script that uses a conversational tone, short sentences, and gets your message across in as little time as possible. Also, brainstorm ways that you can set your video content apart from the competition. Personal or creative details may be the competitive edge you're seeking.

Length

Remember to keep it short, sweet, and to the point. Although you may want to expound on all of the great features of your product down to the manufacturing facility where it was made, working in time frames less than five minutes will be most effective. Site visitors tend to skim product descriptions or articles, rather than spending the time to

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— Todd Holmberg, www.airgundepot.com

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read carefully. The same principle applies to video. Visitors are looking for fast, easy to understand information presented in a short format that is visually appealing. After developing your content, practice your script to see if it needs to be trimmed to an appropriate length.

Talent

Adding a professional actor or voiceover can add value to your production, but sometimes site visitors would like a more personal approach. Starring in your own video gives your visitors a chance to get to know your site on a much more intimate level, which can increase their overall trust in your brand. This is up to you though. Professional actors are not for everyone, but the right actor can significantly enhance the quality of your footage, especially if you're someone who doesn't like to be in front of the camera.

Graphics

The images and text used in your video presentation can make or break the level of engagement in your visitors. Graphics can be created using special software by either yourself or a professional production company, however, be mindful of the way they are going to look on screen. Try to choose graphics, logos or colors that are easy to read and cleanly designed. Choosing opulent graphics can distort or cloud your video's overall message or goal. Remember, keep it simple.

Music

Choosing the right music may seem easy enough, but copyright laws may indicate otherwise. When choosing music for your video, be sure that you either have permission to use it or are paying the appropriate royalties, or if you're creative, compose your own.

Setting

Shooting video footage can be challenging depending on what facilities you have available. While the outdoors can seem like a great idea, wind and other elements can impact the comfort of your talent, the quality of your sound, and the safety of your equipment. Using a studio space would be ideal, but may not be within reach of your budget. Try to improvise by creating a well-lit, comfortable atmosphere, or be modern and go with a solid color backdrop. If

you're doing a product demonstration, put the product in a setting where it would normally be used.

Equipment

Quality footage can start or end behind the lens of a camera. If you have access to professional video and sound equipment, utilize it, or hire a production company to take the headache out of filming. If you're working on a small budget, using a personal video camera can suffice; however, you will be sacrificing image quality. Be sure to read up on best filming practices if you're shooting the footage yourself.

Editing

When it comes time to put it all together, you have two options. The first is to edit the video using editing software like Cyberlink PowerDirector, Adobe Premier, or Pinnacle Studio yourself. The second is to hire a professional editor. If you don't have experience in making and editing videos, hiring a professional is the better way to go, mostly out of necessity of time, convenience, and knowledge.

Quantity

After you've made a successful video, try not to overload your site with too many that could make loading times slower for visitors or can bog down your server space. Try selecting some of your best performing products and creating a few videos for various landing pages, or under the "About Us" section, upload a video tour of your operations. Moderation, as in most things, will be essential. The video is supposed to add to the appearance and integrity of your site, not detract from it.

The opportunities offered in e-commerce are endless, especially for the merchant who is willing to develop and adapt his or her site to the changing needs of visitors and the demands of our economy. Investing in video this year is just what you need to give your site a boost in sales, conversion rates, and customer satisfaction. You have the ideas. You have the tools. Now it's time to make it happen.

eBiz



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Tech Corner: Cut Your IT Spending Now!

In Scott's editorial (page 3) this month, he gives some very important advice: "Watch your balance sheet very carefully making sure the money you're spending on inventory, equipment and supplies is really necessary."

Here are three ways to cut your spending right away.

- 1. Replace Inkjet Printers with Laser.** Inkjet-based printers, even with refill kits on ink, are often the most costly of office equipment. They're great for printing your photos at home, but a high-yield, low-cost laser printer will cost you much less in paper and maintenance in the long run. If you need color, that option is available in laser printers.
- 2. Receive faxes with J2.com or eFax.** Using j2.com or efax.com to receive your faxes might be a cost saver for you if you rarely send a fax and only need to receive them. Senders fax to your J2/eFax number and they show up in your inbox as a PDF. The cost of \$15 a month is much less than the cost of a phone line, fax machine ink, and paper.
- 3. Renegotiate your phone rates.** This goes for wireless and wired phones. Negotiate with your providers and ask them to really look at your past few months' bills to see if you can save on another plan. For cell phones, see if you can get on a family or group plan to save money. If you have enough bandwidth, will Vonage or Skype work for you?

How else are you cutting costs thanks to technology? We want to know! Visit <http://link.solidcactus.com/tech> and let us know! **eBiz**



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