

eBiz Insider

for e-commerce professionals.



“DO”ing the Continental: Customer Service Done Right

—By Scott Sanfilippo

- ◆ Order Size Optimization – Can You get a Little More Cha-ching?
- ◆ Automated Bid Management
- ◆ Killing Your SEO Softly: How to Ruin Your Rankings
- ◆ Brand Management

Read this magazine and Spring into Sales or don't ...
“Good Enough” will get you through the recession, right?

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

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Put On Your Creative Thinking Cap



By Scott Sanfilippo,
Editor in Chief

Someone once told me the three most expensive things in life are your wedding, your house and your divorce. In today's economy houses aren't selling, divorces are advertised in the classifieds for \$99 and now there is the \$150 wedding package.

I had some business to take care of in the Palm Beach County courthouse and when I stopped by Clerk & Comptroller Sharon R. Bock's office, I found an advertising card for what is billed as the "Sensible Start Wedding Package". With a price point "less than \$150," what a bargain! That is of course, if you're willing to say "I do" in a non-religious ceremony.

For \$150 you get your marriage license, the ceremony, a photography package and the all-important commemorative certificate. While a courthouse wedding may not be the extravagant event every little girl dreams of someday having, in this economy it may be all that some can afford.

When I saw this offer, I immediately began thinking of ways businesses can market themselves in a down economy:

- **Bundle Popular Products** - Everyone likes a deal, so give them a bonus for spending just a little more. Take three or four of your most popular items, bundle them and take off a couple percent.
- **Take Advantage of Local Search** - Do people in your neighborhood know you're right around the corner? Create listings in local search engines such as Yahoo! Local or Best of the Web to drive local traffic to your door. Local sales + no shipping charge = more profit.
- **Speaking Opportunities** - Is your local Lions or Rotary club looking for someone to speak to their group on e-commerce? This is a perfect opportunity for you to spread the word about your business and hopefully make friends who become customers.
- **The Morning Zoo** - If you have a unique product that deserves a few minutes of fame on your local radio morning show, send it to the jocks along with a note and some samples of other products you sell. If you catch their eye, they'll talk up your product or invite you into the studio for an interview. DJs love free stuff; trust me, I was one in a previous life and always plugged the company who gave up the goods.

There are lots of creative ways to get free or low-cost PR for your business; you just have to put on your creative thinking cap.

Now, I've got something free for you! If you're a Yahoo! Store owner and you're hooked on that amazing Internet browser called Firefox, you need the Solid Cactus Toolbar. Click over to <http://toolbar.solidcactus.com> and download this spyware and adware free time saver that is packed with features that I don't have enough space to explain. But trust me, it's useful! **eBiz**



Dear Editor: I hear a lot about Solid Cactus using "clean code and web standards" in your programming and that it is supposed to help my site's performance and search engine optimization (SEO). What does this mean?

—George, Galveston, TX

Dear George: Anyone who has worked in a small business environment, especially in today's economy, knows that "Do More with Less" is a frequently held mantra. That's what clean code is... using the most efficient, well-structured code to achieve the most functionality.

The cleaner the code, the faster a site will load and functions and features will work. Cross-browser functionality issues will be reduced. Search engines will have an easier time crawling the site.

Often, unclean code is a result of a programmer's lack of training, lack of time, or lack of motivation. Solid Cactus has invested a lot in ensuring that our programmers receive the best training and time for them to increase their abilities through both instructed and self-directed learning. As one of Pennsylvania's best places to work for the last three years, we ensure that our programmers are motivated. Finally, we have standardized all of our features so programming is done and tested the same way every time a feature is installed. This greatly decreases programming time. We also use the cleanest versions of CSS and HTML standards resulting in better SEO and user experience!

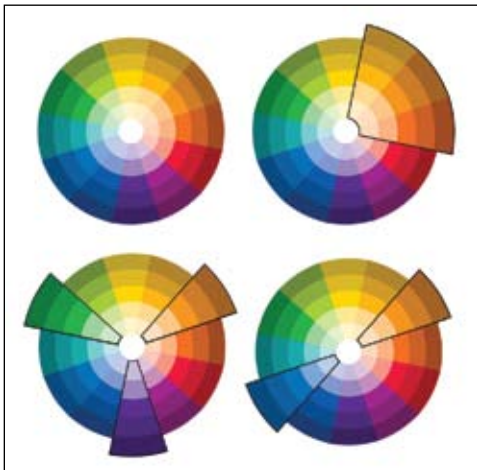
Good question!
Let us hear from you!
Write to: scotts@ebizinsider.com **eBiz**



Choosing a Color Palette for your Site

Whether you are launching a new website or redesigning a classic one, choosing a good color palette should be an essential part of the process. More often than not, poor color choices can disguise a strong brand or even steer customers away because of hues that have emotional effects (more on this later in the article). Since color is a subjective experience, it can be tough to determine the proper combinations that best suit your brand or industry.

To really learn about color you would need to first understand the structure of color. Of course, I am referring to the color wheel and the three primary hues: yellow, red, and blue. We then have secondary hues (orange, violet, and green) and third level hues which are combinations: yellow-orange, red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, and yellow-green. The colors opposite each other on the wheel are called "complements". Of course, you can choose colors without having a deep knowledge of how it works by relying upon your emotional responses.



The first place to start is with your business plan. The reason for this is you want to use a color palette that best represents your industry as well as your definition of your business. Referring to your business plan allows you to choose colors later that are a visual summary of your goals.

For instance, your plan states that you are offering electronic products but you want to be known as an ecofriendly company that is loyal to customer satisfaction. What does any of this have to do with color choices? Well since you are selling electronic gadgets and such, typically you would choose from a palette that appears mechanical, futuristic, modern, etc. Generically, this would be some sort of grey-blue and black combination. By referring to your business plan first, you identified that you want to be known as a more earthy electronics company. In this case you might instead go with a palette that has a softer tone, with more pastel and natural colors. Color reflects personality, so you want to be sure to choose a combination that defines the purpose of your offering more than the industry.

Another place you can begin is by creating a "mood board". A mood board is a collage of images, text, colors, etc. that represent your business mission and branding. For example, if you were a company that sold car accessories and you were from New York, you might make a mood board that was a combination of vehicles, roads, local scenery, etc. If you step back and look at the images you decided to use in this mood board you will start to identify repetitive combinations of color. From here it is a bit more obvious from what palette your primary and complementary colors should derive.

When you are working on choosing your color palette make sure to choose shades that offer contrast. Additionally, you want to have at least one complementary color. Using contrast will help deliver a

well-balanced design. The addition of a complementary color will deter from the palette, thus avoiding the risk of appearing too aggressive. It also allows a resting place for the viewer's eyes. Complementary colors should be applied in a subtle way to avoid complicating the design. The goal is to create a harmonious effect. Optimal results can be subjective but if your palette is harmonious, then you still achieved the goal.

There are a variety of online resources to help you pick your palette. Some that designers use all the time are:

<http://kuler.adobe.com/> is my personal professional favorite. Adobe has done a terrific job offering users the ability to submit their favorite combinations. The program allows you to search by industry, emotional responses, etc. It also allows you to download the swatches to be used with their software.

<http://www.colourlovers.com/> A great resource of commonly used color trends.

<http://www.colorjack.com/sphere/> An interactive color wheel that helps you define color combinations and offers up the hex codes.

<http://www.colorhunter.com/> Allows you to upload images and picks out the color combination. This is great way to assure your site theme complements your product images and vice versa.

As a designer I will always recommend that you allow a professional to choose your palette; but if you decide to do it yourself, follow these simple guidelines and use the recommended tools and you'll be off to a colorful start. **eBiz**








By Chris Pawloski
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Increasing the Average Order Value



Each potential customer has a price range in mind when purchasing from your website. In a call center, it is the Customer Service Representative's (CSR) job to listen to your customers' needs and to increase the order value. The most successful techniques a CSR uses are active listening and probing questions. A good CSR will make the call a personalized shopping experience.

To increase each order value to the max, the CSR needs to understand WHY the customer is purchasing and what the intended use is. By understanding the need for the purchase, CSRs are able to offer additional features and products to complement the main purchase. Website features such as related or recommended products, gift wrapping, quantity discounts and free shipping promotions also help reps increase average order value.

Consumers turn to e-commerce shopping for unique and hard-to-find items. CSRs know this – and use it towards the website's advantage. When a customer reaches a representative to make a purchase, the CSR explains we can offer several related products to make the purchase unique.

Here is a true story about a woman who called a scrapbooking site's CSR to purchase a starter kit for her daughter. Since the website does not offer scrapbooking kits already made, the CSR asked the customer her daughter's favorite colors, to which she advised pink and purple. The CSR asked the caller to be patient with her for a moment while she customized a scrapbook starter kit unique to her daughter. About three minutes

later, the CSR added several ala carte items to the shopping cart to create the perfect starter kit – everything a 14-year-old girl would need. The customer was so pleased with the one-on-one attention the CSR provided, she practically doubled her order! This testimonial just goes to show that listening to a customer and being creative will increase order value.

Oftentimes, by asking probing questions, reps can create a flowchart of the customer's wants and desires. The customer wants to purchase a charm to give as a gift; the rep's first question is, "What type of metal (yellow gold, white gold, sterling silver)?" Once the desired look is achieved, the up and cross-selling starts. The customer has selected to purchase a yellow gold charm priced at \$49.99; the rep will then attempt to increase order value. Offer the customer a similar, upgraded charm made by a different manufacturer. When reps offer the product, we also explain the benefit of the upgrade: "Mr. Customer - by upgrading your purchase to charm-X you will also receive a lifetime warranty." Explaining the benefit of the purchase will put callers at ease and urge them to spend the extra money.

Once the upgrade suggestions have been provided and the base product decided upon, our reps will offer related items. A customer is purchasing a brand new charm, so that's an instant red flag to our reps to offer something to hold the charm. "How about a bracelet or rope chain?" If the customer has selected the rope chain. "How about a few decorative beads to

complement the charm, or upgrade to a deluxe gift box?"

Another widely used tactic for increasing orders is free shipping or free gift promotions. If your site offers a free gift over \$75 – we will encourage the customers to increase the order until they hit the \$75 level. It could be as simple as a reminder to the customer, or more persuasive tactics: "Mr. Customer, the free gift we offer on orders over \$75 is valued at \$19.95. It's a beautiful gift to keep for yourself, or you can give this to your special someone."

More often than not, customers are so driven to the perfect item on your website, they may miss the promotional offers or not bother to look for complementary items. Suggestive selling is key. Simply make an offer. Our CSRs make the offer in a first person perspective; an example would be, "Mr. Customer, that is a beautiful jewelry selection. I would just love if my husband bought this bracelet and the matching necklace. You have very nice taste." A simple compliment that has a built-in suggestion will make the customer feel special and often boost the ego with the hopes the person they are purchasing for raves about it as much as the CSR did. Don't believe me? Try it, it works! **eBiz**



By Katrina Domkowski

katrina.domkowski@ebizinsider.com

Don't Leave Money On the Table. Don't Let Your Customers Hit Voicemail.

Find out how we can
MAKE MONEY for you and
keep your customers happy!

Call Center Services makes owning an online
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“

LivePerson.com was able to categorize our e-mail and our chats. We feel as if we can provide substantially better service to our customers and reduce our operating costs. Plus we have a treasure of information about our customers that we can use in real time to help them decide on products, think about new products and overcome their reluctance at the checkout. For us it was worth the investment.

”

Derek Kleinow - TigerGPS.com

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LIVEperson

Getting Creative with Employee Benefits



Employee benefits can be more than annual raises, paid days off, 401k's and tuition reimbursement. If you want to retain current employees and attract new employees, you need to try various alternative benefits. Following are examples of alternative benefits. You should look at your business and find examples of what would work for you and your company.

Examples that will help you become creative and offer some neat benefits for your business:

Lottery for a prize - Raffle off an mp3 player or other popular gadgets for a few months. Have employees earn raffle tickets through various means- weekly perfect attendance, 100% quiz scores (sent via e-mail), positive customer feedback, etc.

Event ticket giveaways - These are awarded to the agent with the highest sales for a set time period, most calls taken within a set time period, etc.

Free Break Certificates - These are the easiest and cheapest awards for agents. Break Certificates are awarded in 10 or 15-minute increments. Employees earn these by closing high dollar sales, going above and beyond for customers, etc. Employees like these not only because it gives them more down time during the day, but also because they have an actual certificate to hang at their desk and be proud of as a sense of accomplishment.

Paid Time Off (PTO) - Offering PTO instead of

fixed pools of sick or personal time gives employees extra flexibility in when or how they can request time off.

Offer flexible scheduling - Such as "Work from Home". This benefit is becoming more and more popular for businesses that can accommodate such a schedule.

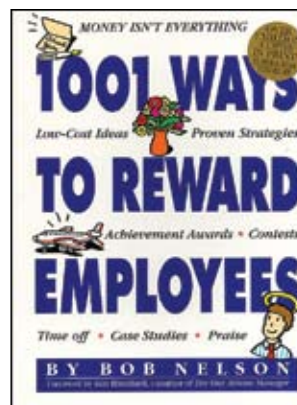
Offer a relaxed dress code - The days of the suits and ties are gone! Many companies are discontinuing the dress codes and just allowing employees to use common sense on what apparel to wear to work. Try it--it is a great benefit, and costs the company nothing.

"Lunch and Learn" - Take your team to lunch and have a topic of discussion to review during that lunch period. This gives the employees a chance to learn, bond and enjoy a free lunch at the same time.

Discounts on cell phone bills can be negotiated with wireless providers for all employees if the business utilizes the carrier. Yes, you can obtain group discounts on cell phone providers. Everyone is willing to bargain in this economy.

There is a great book out there I recommend called "1001 Ways to reward employees" by Bob Nelson, Ph.D. There are endless amounts of benefits out there, and not all are expensive, either.

eBiz



By Ed Stanchak
eds@ebizinsider.com

TOOLBOX:

How Social Media Monitoring Can Save Your Online Reputation

Existing in the social media space has limited benefit if you're doing it in a vacuum. It is social media, after all. With that in mind, the focus in social media is on listening going into 2009 – listening to your customers, listening to your detractors, listening to anybody talking about your brand. The main reason to listen is customer service, pure and simple, but monitoring is also useful for reputation management.

The good news about social media monitoring is that you'll be able to find out what people are saying about you and your brand. The bad news... may be the same thing, especially if you aren't prepared for the lack of filter that the anonymity of the Internet provides. Either way, monitoring doesn't have to be laborious or time-consuming. There are a few free tools that can do the work for you.

Four Tools For Social Media Monitoring

Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) – Google Alerts lets you designate a search query (such as your name or the name of your brand, for instance). Google will notify you when there are new search results for those terms. Users can designate what type of results they want to receive alerts for – news, web pages, blogs, video, Google Groups or a comprehensive option that encompasses all the other options.

You can also adjust the frequency of Google Alerts. It's best to receive alerts on an "as it happens" basis if you're worried about rep management – the immediate notification will allow you to stay on top of any tempests that threaten to erupt in your online teapot – or you can choose to receive a daily digest of mentions. I recommend a comprehensive alert set to "as it happens", though the digest is probably the better option for the excessively popular. You can also set up a separate alert for each type and have, for instance, video results sent daily and blog results sent immediately.

Summize/Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com>) – Even if you aren't using Twitter, lots of other people are – the site

just passed Digg.com in terms of daily traffic. Although it might occasionally be redundant with your Google Alerts results, Summize lets you create an RSS (Really Simple Syndication – the format of choice for blog and news feeds) feed of the search results that you can watch from your browser, desktop, or mobile phone without clogging up your e-mail inbox.

Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics>) – If you aren't already using Google Analytics, you should be. While there are myriad benefits of using GA, the most important one for monitoring purposes is the ability to view referring traffic.

Referring traffic, the traffic that comes to your site from another, non-search engine website, is a great way to see who's talking about you online and where the conversation is taking place. Because Analytics lets you track data over time, you can also see the shape of the conversation instead of isolated mentions. This data lets you analyze the traffic these mentions are sending to your store – are they leaving immediately, leaving product reviews, or maybe even buying?

There are other free analytics offerings out there, including BLVD Status (<http://www.blvdstatus.com>), whose claim to fame is real-time conversion stats.

SM2 (<http://sm2.techrigy.com/>) – Like a lot of web startups, SM2 is free but has a more robust version that users can obtain with a monthly subscription fee (the buzzword for this business model is "freemium"). Unlike Alerts, SM2 is focused only on social media – blogs, microblogging sites, wikis, video sharing sites and social networks. Like Google Alerts, the service is easy to manage, and like Analytics, Techrigy has a dashboard interface that lets you look at reports on the accumulated data.

Now What?

Once you've set up these monitoring tools, start thinking about a strategy for reacting to the mentions of which you're notified. While it's probably not essential to respond to everyone, especially if the volume is

high, the real value in monitoring isn't the monitoring itself, but its ability to direct you to a conversation about your brand. No matter what, be aware that people are going to be watching what you say and that the Google index has a long memory. A really great customer contact will be seen by a lot of eyes, just like an equally bad one will be.

The Wikipedia Question

Wikipedia may have a high PageRank and, literally, tons of traffic, but, as some brands and people have the misfortune of discovering, some of the information in the crowdsourced encyclopedia isn't exactly factual or accurate. Wikipedia's editorial community doesn't look favorably upon parties changing their own entries, so do not try to change the entry yourself. Instead, submit a ticket to the site's volunteer editors using the OTRS system, leave a note on the offending article's "talk page" or leave a comment with the "help desk" (http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Help_desk&action=edit§ion=new).

Do I Need To Worry About Monitoring?

Whether or not you need to use all or even some of these tools depends upon your goals for social media. If you want to establish channels for traffic and pad the Search Engine Results Pages to push down a high-ranking negative mention, then maybe not. However, using the Internet socially to maximum effect demands interacting with others. If you're using social media without monitoring, now is the best time to start. In order to stay part of the conversation, it's imperative that you know what your audience is saying about you. **eBiz**



By Jeff Stolarczyk
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Distinguish yourself in a down market, increase conversion and save on advertising with



It's an unfortunate reality that competition among e-merchants is fiercer than ever. With fewer dollars to spend, consumers are extremely selective about what they buy and where they shop. Competition for big ticket purchases is probably as fierce as it has been in years. Solid Cactus is pleased to introduce you to buySAFE, a partner that can help save you money on comparison shopping and help with site conversions without startup costs.

buySAFE Bonding

buySAFE offers a great opportunity to brand your site as a safe and reliable place to shop. buySAFE Bonding is a free, two-part trust solution for your website comprised of the buySAFE Seal™ and Bonding Option. By applying to become a buySAFE Bonded Merchant you can add the buySAFE Seal and Bonding Option to your site.

Consumer confidence at the point of sale matters. Used by thousands of e-merchants including many of the IR Top 500, buySAFE is a clear signal of trust to potential customers. The presence of the buySAFE Seal™, and offering shoppers the option to bond their purchase at checkout, have been proven to cause a much higher percentage of shoppers to buy. Any merchant who decides NOT to use buySAFE is foregoing customers and revenue.

Those shoppers who are risk-averse have a higher propensity to purchase once their confidence threshold has been met ...in fact, they plainly weigh the value of a safety and reliability endorsement and bond more heavily than additional price discounts in making the purchase decision.

buySAFE Shopping

Cost Per Sale

If you are already advertising with the use of Comparison Shopping Engines you already know that the Costs-Per-Click are getting a bit well... insane. While the overwhelming majority of CSEs charge you every time a potential customer clicks, only a very few offer cost-per-sale. That CPC model is especially difficult in a down economy as shoppers are more discriminating than ever.

buySAFE's own shopping engine, buySAFE Shopping, has no traffic fees unless you make a sale. The sale fees are fixed for each referral and are not category- or order-total dependent.

buySAFE and FeedPerfect

To make things even easier, buySAFE is already integrated with FeedPerfect, our Comparison Shopping Engine feed manager. You can categorize products in FeedPerfect and automate the feed to buySAFE Shopping.

buySAFE offers the only service which helps consumers find the best merchants on the web, and then reassures them the purchase will be risk-free. The impact: more traffic, more shoppers become buyers, and more buyers become long term customers. Sound too good to be true? It isn't! You can increase conversions with buySAFE Bonding and advertise more cost-effectively using buySAFE Shopping. What do you have to lose? **eBiz**



By Jason Longo
jasonl@ebizinsider.com

For more information, or to become a buySAFE merchant please visit us online at:

<http://www.buysafe.com/offerfeedperfect>



Order Size Optimization – Can You Get a Little More Cha-ching?

Back when this eBiz writer slaved in retail at a big box electronics store, employees in the departments that sold music and video games were required to carry around accessories like CD cases to upsell shoppers. Why? Video games and CDs have low margins, but the accessories are marked up much higher. Getting the customer to buy the extras adds value to a purchase that is, in many cases, a low or no value sale. At restaurants, the wait staff always tries to entice a dessert order. At fancy boutiques, clerks suggest complementary items for

an outfit. At the eye doctor, the optician's assistant tries to upsell patients on various finishes for lenses. You get the point.

In e-commerce, there aren't clerks or physical check-outs stocked with quick grab items like magazines, hand sanitizer, candy, gum, batteries, gift cards and other impulse buys to add to the cart while waiting in line. So how does one increase the average order size in e-commerce?

There are various features and business practices that, when implemented

on an online retail store, will result in customers adding more items to the cart. Here are some ways to get your customers to buy more.

Item Page Multiple Add-to-Cart

It's common practice to offer cross-sell and up-sell items on an item page to promote products that either go along with the main item (cross-sell), or more expensive models that can be sold instead of the main item

Order Size Optimization - continued on page 13

OPTIMIZE YOUR

GET A LITTLE MORE CHA-CHING

ORDER SIZE

Is your current average order size where you want it to be? If not, Solid Cactus wants to help you succeed with a 15% discount on the features you can implement to your site to increase your order sizes.



Flash Sequence Banners - NEW!

The Solid Cactus "Flash Sequence Banners" feature captures your visitors' attention with attractive promotions — an important part of any e-commerce website. User navigation controls invite interaction and promote engagement.

List Price: \$649.00

Sale Price: \$551.65* You Save: \$97.35

Snap Shop

Snap Shop will allow consumers to get a sneak peak at that item's information directly from the section page. If they like what they see, they can add it to the cart right from the section page. If they need more info about the item, they can navigate to the item page right from the Snap Shop interface..



List Price: \$1,479.00 **Sale Price: \$1,257.15* You Save: \$221.85**

Quantity Discounts!

24 - 35 pieces	\$5.15ea.
36 - 71 pieces	\$3.43ea.
72 - 143 pieces	\$2.89ea.
144 + pieces	\$2.09ea.

Quantity Pricing Table

The default quantity pricing layout can be confusing for online shoppers. If you offer quantity discounts, we make it simple and easy for your customers to understand.

List Price: \$179.00

Sale Price: \$152.15* You Save: \$26.85

15% Off these features



Free Shipping Countdown

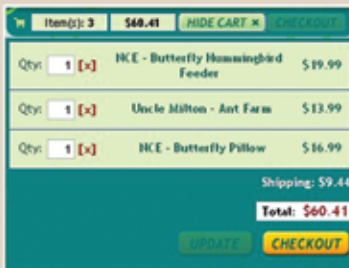
With the Free Shipping Countdown you're creating a pro-active approach to marketing your shipping savings to customers who are ready to purchase. Don't let your customers checkout without the opportunity to save money.

List Price: \$179.00

Sale Price: \$152.15* You Save: \$26.85

Mini Cart

Get your customers through the checkout faster! Mini Cart was built by Solid Cactus programmers to provide a visual display of the shopping cart, its contents, and shipping costs on every page of your Yahoo! Store.



List Price: \$999.00

Sale Price: \$849.15*

You Save: \$149.85

Banana Fish Carousel Bedding - Gold

Gold Carousel 4 pc Crib Bedding Set	\$325.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Gingham Crib Sheet	\$42.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Print with Stripe Ruffle Sham	\$56.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Print with Flannel Reverse Coverlet	\$36.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Print with Chenille Reverse Coverlet	\$72.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Stripe 72" x 14" Valance	\$42.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gold Print with Gingham Diaper Stackers	\$72.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

Multiple Add to Cart

Let customers order multiple items with only one click of the order button. Make shopping faster and easier for your customers by offering suggested items to purchase as an accessory to your main product.

List Price: \$479.00

Sale Price: \$407.15*

You Save: \$71.85

Call Today: 1.888.361.9814

SOLIDCACTUS
your partner in e-commerce success

Mention Cha-Ching

* To get 15% Off any of these features, mention coupon code: Cha-Ching. **Hurry!** this offer expires April 30, 2009. Offer may or may not be combined with other Solid Cactus offers.

(up-sell). The cross-sell is a great asset to an item page; however, you can take the idea a step further. Rather than have users navigate away from the item page to the item pages of the cross-sell items, a multiple add-to-cart feature allows customers to add the main item and all required/desired accessories to the cart with one click. A multiple add-to-cart feature makes it easy to purchase more at once.

For example, you sell paintball guns. But you don't want someone to walk away with just the paintball gun, right? You can merchandise your item page by giving customers the option to buy the CO₂ tank, paintballs, safety mask, gloves and camo pants all at once. Congrats. You just sold more!

Mini Cart

On a traditional Yahoo! store, when a customer adds an item to the cart, the customer is also taken directly to the checkout process. With a mini cart feature, also referred to as a floating or perpetual cart, the item is added to the cart and the customer stays right on the item page – in buying mode. The contents of the cart and order total are displayed in the header. Allowing users to always see their current purchase total eliminates any sticker shock at the end, and in the meantime, it keeps users out of the checkout lane, which means they continue to browse.

Snap Shop

The “quick shopping” feature is becoming a trend for all the big retailers. In 2007, Solid Cactus innovated the feature for Yahoo! stores. This feature allows users to shop right from a store's section pages, without having to click to an item page, then back to a section page and back to another item page. Because shopping this way is both easy and fun, customers buy more. Snap Shop can work in sync with the Mini Cart feature, and this really maximizes the user experience, totally keeping them shopping by reducing the number of clicks between the customer and the checkout.

Quantity Discounts & Quantity Pricing Table

If you sell a product where people may need multiple quantities, or products they may need replaced or refilled down the

line, an effective way to increase average order size is to get people to buy more of that item. This type of practice is common for party favors, promotional items and other merchandise that is usually bought in larger quantities, but other industries could do the same. Rather than buy one item for \$10, perhaps you can offer three at \$7 each. If people can save a little more now, offer a better price point for buying more. The result is a higher sale-- and you move more product. For this to be a successful way to increase order size, the discounts need to be clear and easy to understand. Yahoo! comes standard with a quantity pricing feature, however by default its display leaves a lot to be desired. Solid Cactus offers a visually appealing Quantity Pricing Table which clearly displays discounts.

Free Shipping on Certain Dollar Amount

Another popular way to entice customers to add more to their shopping carts is a free shipping offer at a set dollar amount. Setting a threshold just slightly over your current average order size will help push people over that limit, thus increasing the size of orders. For example, if you see that most orders are coming in at around \$40-ish, set the free shipping at \$50.

Zvi Dubin, Co-Owner and CTO in charge of marketing, development and JewelBasket.com's web presence, said that when he implemented free shipping along with Yahoo!'s Cross Sell, average order size soared.

“Average order value varies by season and economic conditions, and we are also interested in revenue growth. At the time we implemented the free shipping countdown and Yahoo! cross sells in 2007, the combination increased sales approximately 10 to 15-percent,” said Dubin.

Free Shipping Countdown

This feature goes with the previous suggestion. Setting a free shipping threshold is a no-brainer, however, some customers may need to be reminded of this. Incorporate a free shipping countdown feature into the shopping cart (or within the Mini Cart if you are using that) to do the math for customers and to tell them exactly how much

more they need to add to the cart to qualify for free shipping. This is an extra (psychological) reminder at the end of the shopping experience to maybe buy just one more item.

Free Gift with Purchase

Everyone likes free stuff! Department store make-up counters are well-known for this tactic. Customers who buy over a certain dollar amount get something free-- like more make-up, a bag, a purse or perfume. Advertise that any customer who buys a certain product or a certain dollar amount gets a free gift along with his/her purchase. This builds value and entices shoppers to make a higher value purchase to get the free gift.

Discount on Certain Dollar Amount

Coupon codes are another way to entice people to buy more. Offer a coupon code to take a percentage off orders of a certain dollar amount.

Display of Promos with Flash Sequence Banner

Promotions such as free shipping on a certain dollar amount, free gift with purchase, or percentage off a certain dollar amount with use of coupon code, can all increase average order size, but how can you make these promos evident without cluttering your header or homepage? Promotional messages can be tastefully displayed within a site's header, and it's common practice to use that area for a feature such as free shipping. If you have multiple promotions, using a flash sequence banner can relay multiple messages without taking up lots of real estate.

By increasing average order size, you grow your business. People are buying, but you can persuade them to buy more. Take a step back and analyze your current average order size. Is it where you want it to be? If not, where would you like it to be? Read over this list again and determine what strategies you can implement to your own e-commerce business to earn a little more cha-ching. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
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Automated

BID

MANAGEMENT

Imagine a magical world where you wouldn't have to sift through line after line of keyword performance data to determine whether or not you want to raise or lower a bid. Take a vacation to a perfect place where you could go days or weeks without having to worry about burning through your allocated budget on high spending terms. Immerse yourself in a utopian keyword society where your account is kept in a perfect state of working harmony while you sit back and reap the rewards.

Sounds impossible right? Well, surprisingly, it's not as unrealistic as you

may think. In this ever-changing world of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, there are new innovations coming out each and every day in an attempt to make managing online campaigns as painless as possible. These days, there are tools for everything from keyword generation to ad writing; however, one of the latest crazes to generate buzz in the realm of PPC is automated bid-management systems.

So, what exactly is automated bid management, you ask? Think about all of the keywords in your Google

AdWords, Yahoo! Search Marketing & MSN adCenter PPC accounts. Each term, if managed properly, should hold a certain priority based upon performance metrics such as conversion rate, cost, and clickthrough rates. Because no keyword is created equally, you should naturally raise bids on profitable terms while cutting bids on those that yield no return. Anybody who has managed a PPC account, including those of us in the industry, understand what a time-consuming task this can be. This is where the beauty of automated bid management systems comes into play.

Bid management software attempts to provide advertisers with peace of mind by automatically adjusting keyword bids several times per day based upon performance metrics. These applications have the ability to collect keyword data, analyze it, and make an adjustment based in real time. Users ultimately determine the criteria that trigger bid management software to adjust a maximum CPC bid with benchmarks commonly known as "bid rules". These rules can be based upon cost-per-acquisition (CPA), position, cost, return on ad spend (ROAS), or any other performance-related statistic that can be broken down to the keyword level.

This kind of technology can definitely help combat the erratic landscape of the paid search market. Just as stock prices have the ability to rise and fall several times each day, so do the prices and performance of your keywords. If a term is spending too much money and not performing, bid management software has the ability to decrease the maximum CPC in order to help reduce spend while maintaining exposure at a lower position.

Just as you are guarded against spending too much money, this software can also help to capitalize upon daily trends of which you may not be aware. Once a keyword becomes profitable or brings in a conversion, bid rules can be created to automatically increase the maximum bid by a set amount or percentage. The increased bid will cause an ad to show in a higher position with the intention of bringing in more conversions while that keyword is still performing. If the new placement fails to perform in the higher position, bids will gradually be lowered until the costs

and return fall in line with your goals.

Although it sounds easy enough, there are a lot of things to take into consideration before moving

your account into an automated bid management solution.

Many people think that bid management is an autopilot for their search marketing efforts. However, they couldn't be more wrong. Know that even with bid management, a lot of TLC is required on your end. After all, no program can ever replace human insight - tweaking formulas, checking keywords, and updating the account through an unfamiliar interface can create a somewhat overwhelming experience for even the most seasoned PPC managers.



In a world where time is money, you may be losing more than you know if you don't at least weigh your options.

Even bid management tools have limitations. The most advanced software solutions are still not able to help you optimize bids on emerging content networks. This means that you will still have to make changes for content and site-targeted campaigns within Google AdWords, Yahoo! and MSN. Along with this, bid management software is not able to measure the success of social marketing campaigns that are becoming more and more essential to success in the world of search.

Aside from the limitations of software itself, several of the available bid management solutions can prove to be quite expensive for smaller businesses. Some companies charge inflated installation fees, monthly service rates, as well as a percentage of your monthly ad spend that can really tax your returns. Pursuing a venture such as this is ideal for accounts that already have staggering returns, and critical to nearly unmanageable keyword lists.

But alas, there are several aspects to automated bid management that can really pay off. Many solutions now have built-in analytics programs that can provide deeper insight into your site. With a code snippet installed on every landing page, you can accurately track correlations between bounce rates, chart conversion funnels, and gain a comprehensive understanding on how your keywords perform at a given position. This information can then be used to improve the overall performance of your search marketing accounts.

Proper utilization of this software can also allow for a more hands-on approach to your PPC efforts. Rather than adjusting bids every couple of hours to cater to the ever-changing needs of the market, you can set aside more time to focus on creating compelling ad copy, research additional negative keywords, and AB test landing pages. Along with this, bid management systems never sleep - even when you do. You can ensure that your account doesn't go haywire during the hours that you aren't actively managing.

There are clearly many aspects to consider when choosing to move forward with an automated bid management solution - and in a world where time is money, you may be losing more than you know if you don't at least weigh your options. **eBiz**



By Aaron Hagenbuch

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Catch an e-Tailer

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Killing Your SEO Softly: How to Ruin Your Rankings

The two-plus years I've come to know and love the world of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) are also the same two years I've become a website perfectionist. I can't surf my favorite online stores nowadays without noticing whether the title tags are all the same, or if the site is just a bit too image heavy. I went from looking at the cute tees and dresses to either admiring a site's SEO tactics or grimacing and bouncing off the site. I even once e-mailed the web designer for a popular women's clothing site and complimented them on their on-page SEO techniques. It's been an eye-opening two years where I've come to have a very close relationship with the SEO industry (eat, breathe, sleep SEO), and it's given me time to pause from thinking about how to improve client rankings to, well, pondering how a site owner can ruin SEO rankings. Take a few minutes to learn what not to do in SEO.

Stagnant SEO

Here's a great way to ruin your SEO: Do nothing about it! Many site owners feel that they can sit back and relax, and search engines will eventually just notice that they have a great site. Not so. Although I wish search engines would show love to every site out there, it's just not going to happen. You, as a site owner, need to stand up and take charge of your site's SEO. Read expert SEO articles at established SEO blogs such as the Solid Cactus SEO Blog at <http://SEOBlog.SolidCactus.com>, SEOmooz.org, and SearchEngineWatch.com. Learn the tips and techniques to get your site on the path to SEO success in the ever changing world of SEO.

Keywords, Keywords Everywhere

Just like the What-Not-To-Wear crew says about your wardrobe, moderation is also key in SEO. Adding a paragraph of 20 keyword phrases to your homepage isn't going to help your SEO – It will send a red flag to search engines that you may not be employing the most ethical SEO practices. Keep your site and search engine optimized copy sounding as natural as possible.

News Flash! My Site Isn't Ranking

Flash websites often look beautiful, but they're not the best for increasing your keyword rankings. Balance out a Flash or image heavy site by creating informative text on the site describing the business' products and services, and writing useful articles from which the average user can benefit.

Who Has Time to Write?

You want to add more content to your site, but don't have time to write it, so instead, you simply pull some great copy off a competitor's site. Congratulations, you just ruined your rankings. Your website should have unique copy that will engage your visitors. Set aside a few hours or hire a professional SEO copywriter to write unique content for your site. Investing your time or a few dollars will only help your rankings, and online business, see success.

If I Can Pay Someone to Write, Can't I Buy, Links, too?!

Sigh, if I had a dime for every time a site owner asked that question I'd have... ruined SEO rankings! Link building, the practice of adding your link on another website to propel your own rankings to increase, is not an easy task, but must be done by hand. Whether you consult an SEO professional or contact websites or blogs in your industry and personally ask them to link to you, buying links from paid link services or cheap, low quality directories with thousands of unrelated links is an absolute N-O. I've personally seen a site jump from page ten in Google to page four just by having the site owner remove one paid link from a low quality site.

In addition to avoiding paid link services and spammy directories, be sure your links associate only with a good neighborhood of sites. Look for established sites that have a solid amount of incoming traffic or a Page Rank of three and above with which to link. You wouldn't want the search engines to catch you on the wrong side of the tracks by linking to completely unrelated sites or sites that employ the same techniques we're warning you to avoid!

Title Tag - Same As Every Other Page



The title tag is the short phrase located at the very top of your Internet browser. It gives both human visitors and search engine spiders a quick glimpse of what can be found on that page, and can be extremely helpful for your search engine rankings. I've seen many sites with the same title tag on each and every page of the site - usually just the website address. Create unique title tags, just as we did for our Solid Cactus site, including our SEO page - "Solid Cactus - Search Engine Optimization Provides Online Store Visibility & Profitability". We know it can be quite daunting to create a unique title tag for every page on your site, so our good friends in the Store Development side of Solid Cactus created our popular

"Dynamically Generated Title Tags" feature to help you.

Who Cares About Anchor Text?

Search engines do, that's who. Anchor text, the words used to describe a link, can give search engines a clue on what keyword phrases best describe your site's products and services, and in turn rank your site higher for those keyword phrases. When creating copy on your site and including links to other pages within your site, use a natural sounding, two to three word anchor text that includes a keyword phrase for which you would like to rank.

Choosing the Lowest Price SEO Consultant

Marketing your re-design is easy with the Internet. Solid Cactus professionals at Solid Cactus, specializing in Web Site Design, Advertisements, Affiliate Marketing, Search Engine Optimization and Email Marketing Campaigns, our Internet Marketing team can help refresh your business while you refresh your site.

As with all things in life, you often get what you pay for in SEO. It's usually best to leave your SEO in the hands of an SEO professional, but be sure to look at more than just the price of the services. What do they offer? Are they up to date on the latest SEO techniques? What kind of SEO reporting do they offer? Here's one way to tell how legit they are: If they guarantee page one rankings right from the start, they probably don't know what they're talking about, and will have you ranked for an overly long keyword phrase that no one ever actually searches.

Heed these tips on how not to ruin your SEO rankings, and hopefully, you won't take a step backward on the path to your site's SEO success. Our friendly team of SEO Specialists at Solid Cactus is always here to help, and we've made many a client happy with increased traffic, revenue, and rankings. Check out our SEO Blog at <http://seoblog.solidcactus.com> for SEO tips and techniques, and feel free to drop me an e-mail at alicia.magda@solidcactus.com if you'd like to really see what we can do for your site's SEO. **eBiz**



By Alicia Magda
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“DO”ing the Continental: Customer Service Done Right

“Customer appreciation events such as the recent Continental event go a long way to distinguish Continental from its competition while at the same time providing a direct conduit for communication between customers and management, and providing instant feedback on new ideas and innovations being considered by the airline. Continental consistently reaches out to their customers for input, and most importantly, they truly listen to the customers. Such an event not only provides face to face contact with their customers to get this information, but shows customers that Continental values their opinions as well as their continued business.”

—Art Pushkin, Chairman and Co-Founder of Frequent Flyers Organized and Concerned about Unacceptable Service (FFOCUS).

In the January/February issue of eBiz Insider, my column was called “Good Riddance 2008” and in it I discussed the new mantra on how we all have to do business moving forward in this “new economy”. I talked about how as small business owners we’re not going to get any government bailout, how we all need to keep a close eye on our balance sheet and expenses, and how we must keep one step ahead of our competition.

I ended the column by talking about the importance of good customer service, giving customers what they want and kissing your customers’ backside in order to earn the business. It is the absolute truth that the businesses that take care of their customers today will be around to service them tomorrow, so pucker up.

After that column ran, I was shocked to receive so many e-mails from business owners who chastised me for even suggesting that

they should make things easier for their customers or make an attempt to bend over backwards to make them happy. I wish I could have taken these people to an event I attended in Houston, TX, so they can see how much one company values their customers and works hard to earn their business in an industry notorious for poor customer service.

The customer appreciation event was put on by Continental Airlines and was attended by well over 500 of their most frequent flyers. About 99% of them were also participants in various aviation forums such as FlyerTalk.com, FFOCUS.org and USAviation.com. As someone who frequents many forums, I can tell you, these are the people you want on your side, and Continental Airlines knows it.



Scott Sanfilippo inside the engine of a Continental Airlines Boeing 737-900.

With social media so prevalent in today's world, good news spreads quickly and bad news spreads at MACH 2. The frequent flyers who participate in these social media outlets asked Continental four years ago to put on an event where they can come together, express their opinions and get feedback from management. Continental obliged and for the past four years they

have taken a very active interest in hearing from their customers and developing products and services around them.

This year's event kicked off with a cocktail reception Friday evening where company executives, including Chairman and CEO Larry Kellner, were on hand to meet and mingle with the attendees. The theme of the event was "Fun & Games" and Friday featured a couple rounds of "Deal or No Deal" where lucky contestants could earn up to one million frequent flyer miles. Throughout the evening, Mr. Kellner and company executives stood for photos, listened to attendees, answered questions and made themselves available for anyone who wanted to chat.

Saturday was a fun-filled day which included tours of the airline's maintenance facility,

baggage handling area, catering facility where 9,000 turkey sandwiches are made a day, and some lucky attendees got to test their skills in a flight simulator. From all accounts, the best tour was the one billed as the "Mystery Tour" which actually turned out to be a flight. About 150 people were welcomed aboard a Continental Boeing 757 complete with champagne and were given a scenic tour over Galveston Bay at

only a few thousand feet.

Later in the day, the group broke-up for several break-out sessions which covered a variety of topics. The most anticipated session was the final presentation hosted by Mr. Kellner and Continental Airlines President and Chief Operating Officer Jeff Smisek. The two top guys fielded questions from the audience for well over an hour and answered questions ranging from "Do you ever fly in coach?" to questions on the new Boeing 787 and Continental's frequent flyer program, OnePass. They talked about new products and services the airline will be offering including LiveTV on their Next Generation Boeing 737's and their new lie-flat seating being installed through BusinessFirst class on international routes. They also acknowledged their weaknesses and mistakes, which is what any customer would want to hear.

The event kicked off with a party at the airline's newest hangar at the Houston

airport where the theme of "Fun & Games" continued, along with plenty to eat and drink, and a new Boeing 737-900 on display to tour and photograph. Again, Mr. Kellner and Mr. Smisek were on hand to mingle with the guests and again lend an ear.



Joe Palko, Solid Cactus CEO & Co-Founder in the cockpit of a Continental Airlines Boeing 737-900.

Continental Airlines did not have to put an event like this together, but they did. They know that their most important assets aren't made of aluminum and carbon fiber; they're made of flesh and bone. They know that the people who paid to fly to Houston and take part in this event are going to blog, Tweet, e-mail and Facebook about the fun they had. They know they are going to tell others who are going to say, "Wow, it's amazing that a company would do that for their customers; I'm going to try them out next time I fly." Most importantly, they know these are the customers who deserve to have their behinds kissed.



Scott Sanfilippo and Continental Airlines Chairman & CEO Larry Kellner.

I came back from this event with a renewed sense of what customer service really means. I'm already looking inside our own organization to see how we can put an event like this together to reward our customers for their loyalty and business. The wheels inside my head are turning! After reading this, yours should be too. **eBiz**



Continental Airlines Chairman & CEO Larry Kellner with President & COO Jeff Smisek.



By Scott Sanfilippo
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BRAND[®] Management

Branding Impacts Future Growth

Notice that I'm now using the word branding, which is the integration of your brand promise into every aspect of your organization. A

solid, consistent branding program effectively communicates your company's brand promise. This can grow the size of all of your audiences, help you make marketing decisions, and shorten response time to your marketing messages.

Your brand is reflected in everything from the quality of your products and services, to your marketing strategies, to your choice of communication media, to your working environment and organizational culture.

Your brand enables you to build recognition and loyalty among your audiences in a memorable way and give staff a sense of belonging to a team.

Brand loyalty – one of the keys to an organization's sustainability – is earned by the consistent presentation of your brand and everything that your brand implies.

The benefits of an effective brand strategy, though not always immediately apparent, are substantial, and, in the final analysis, worth the time and resources required to implement.

Brand Management – It's every day and it's proactive.

Your brand is an asset; manage it as you would any other on your balance sheet. You already evaluate your company annually in an effort to determine the

best way to effectively deliver products and services and maximize your resources. The same principle applies to your brand. Are you investing in your brand? Are those dollars being spent effectively?

Do you have a brand steward? This person is responsible for assuring your brand promise is true, consistently communicated and understood by all audiences. Everything that comes out of your organization is examined to see if it meets the test of brand effectiveness. Everything.

Printed materials, your website, your office furniture, how staff responds to clients – everything is a reflection of your organization's brand.

Do you have a Director of First Impressions? Yes you do. It's the person who answers the phone or responds to an e-mail. It is one of the first experiences someone may have with your brand, and is critical – don't overlook it.

Brand Myths and Pitfalls

Myths:

- Branding and marketing are one and the same.
Marketing and advertising sell products and services.
A brand is a reflection of everything associated with the organization including the quality of the organization's work as well as its reputation, staff, leadership, culture, core values, and programs.
A brand is an organization's DNA.
- Once you have a logo and a tagline you have your brand.
Nope, they are just part of the brand integration.

- Branding is the responsibility of the marketing staff.
Nope, it is the responsibility of everyone in the organization, from board members to support staff.
- There isn't enough budget for branding.
*Branding creates affinity for your organization, ensures loyalty, minimizes competition, creates confidence, and "sells" the public on your company.
Strong branding creates returns and is worth every penny spent.*

Pitfalls:

- Stagnation.
*"We've been around 30 years, everyone knows who we are!"
Ask around, you might be surprised.*
- Misalignment.
Not delivering on your promise. It only takes one misstep to destroy a relationship.
- Not Asking for Help.
Is this your area of expertise? Probably not, so call in the experts.
- Never Evolving.
For example, have you embraced technology – how does it fit into your brand?
- Dismissing Branding.
*"It doesn't matter if the logo is green – it looks better that way."
"We've got a logo and a tagline – what more do we need?"*

What is your brand promise?

Ask Yourself (Better Yet, Ask Someone Else)

1. What is your brand promise?
2. How is your brand perceived by your audiences?
 - **Reputation** – how well is your brand known
 - **Values** – how highly does your audience rate your values
 - **Emotional Connections** – does your audience care about your brand
 - **Differentiation** – how is your brand different from others

3. How is your brand experienced?
 - **Internally** – employees and staff, your family and friends
 - **Interested Parties** – board, investors, vendors and suppliers
 - **Externally** – customers and community
 - **Media** – traditional, Internet, bloggers
4. How do you communicate your brand?
 - Marketing and Advertising
 - Public Relations
 - Internet Marketing/Website presence
 - Board orientation
 - Employee manuals
 - Vendor relations

This is a basic brand audit and it will provide invaluable information and, likely, some surprises. We live our brands every day and our perception may not be the same as the marketplace. If you are surprised by what you hear, you have work to do. **eBiz**



By Catherine D. Shafer
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<http://www.internetretailer.com/IRCE2009>



Freed Up to Run the Business... Instead of Handling Order Entries

Mark Richmond of the Wisconsin-based Chef Knives to Go (ChefKnivesToGo.com) signed up for Solid Cactus Call Center's Rapid Start program in October 2007. After several months of using the service, Richmond wonders why he "didn't do it sooner."

"It was easy and fast - 48 hours fast actually. It's quieted our constantly-ringing phones. I can't describe how nice it is to come into work and not have to deal with a bunch of calls from people who just want to place orders."

—Mark Richmond, ChefKnivesToGo.com

Richmond provided a quick training and a set of frequently asked questions for the customer service reps to follow.

"The nice thing about it is that we were able to give specific instructions on how much or how little we wanted the reps to handle the calls. It's really great and flexible -- we provide them with information about the products so they can be knowledgeable... but if they aren't sure on the answer to something they simply send an e-mail with the question and the contact information for the caller and I call the customer back," added Richmond. The process has also helped Richmond streamline the customer service operations at his location too.

"It's freed me up to be able to do what I do best - running the business and marketing ... instead of order entry for customers,"



Mark Richmond of ChefKnivesToGo.com wonders why he didn't sign up for Solid Cactus Call Center's Rapid Start program sooner.

Richmond said. "We aren't losing the human connection, though. People are more likely to place larger orders over the phone. The representatives clearly answer questions. In the time we've been on the program, the return has been huge. I'll be keeping it after the initial agreement period!"

The average order value that comes in from orders taken by the call center is typically two to three times that of standard web orders. Richmond attributes the increase to the fact that Solid Cactus' reps are very good at explaining features, upselling, cross-selling, and closing the sale.

Solid Cactus Call Center takes on average 48 incoming calls for ChefKnivesToGo.com on a weekly basis. Of those, less than 1% are service inquiries, 40% are orders or product inquiries that convert to orders, and 29% are policy inquiries. The remaining 30% of

calls consisting of product inquiries did not result in purchases.

Prior to using call center services, customers would call Richmond's office and, if the line was busy or he was unavailable, leave a message. By the time Richmond could call them back, many had purchased elsewhere.

Richmond is no longer on the phone all day. December 2008 was ChefKnivesToGo.com's seventh holiday season and call center services provided him the chance to really focus on his operations and keep holiday shoppers happy. After all, a happy customer is a repeat customer! **eBiz**



By John Dawe
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Tech Corner: A Well-oiled Machine

One of the most frequent questions I get about computers is that the once impressively fast computer is now running as slow as a snail. This week's tech corner tips can help get your productivity speedy again.

1. Uninstall Unused Programs: Did your computer come with programs that you've never used? Look on your start menu for programs that you can uninstall to free up resources. If you're using Windows, use the "Programs" or "Add/Remove Programs" feature to determine software you don't use. If you're not sure what a program is, do a Google search to find out if you really do need/use it.

2. Add Memory: Use the tools at Crucial.com to increase your RAM memory. Different from hard drive space, this memory is used in processing activity on your computer. Your computer will have a maximum memory limit. The closer you are to this limit, the faster your PC will operate. Also, if your hard drive space is depleting rapidly, consider a clean-up or upgrade. Drives fill up fragmentation and slow performance result. Speaking of which...

3. Defragment your Hard Drive: Think of a hard drive as a sheet of graph paper. As you add files to your hard drive you fill up a row of boxes. As you delete a file, certain boxes are cleaned out. Now, you save a larger file. Those boxes are filled up and then somewhere down the page there is another open box and that gets filled until the file is saved. Defragmenting your hard drive takes all the pieces of that file and puts them next to each other in the correct order. This increases performance and extends the life of your drive. A good utility (better than the one that comes built into Windows) for defragmenting can be found for free at Defraggler.com.

4. Get a Laptop Desk: If you've ever heard the term "Fried Circuits" then you know that heat is bad for computers. Overheating can be disastrous. If you're using a laptop with no cooling system, you're probably doing some amount of damage. A good laptop desk (<http://lapdesks.ebizinsider.com>) can keep your machine running well and also help with ergonomics. Cool, right? **eBiz**



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