

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

2009 HOLIDAY TACTICAL GUIDE

Be all you can be to capture sales
this holiday season

- ◆ Holiday Prep Checklist
- ◆ 5 Must-Have Features to Woo Holiday Shoppers
Forget sleigh bells — Get those cash registers ringing!
- ◆ Customer Service Corner:
Holiday Help - No Time for Newbies
- ◆ 10 Ways to Increase Your
E-mail Marketing Open Rate
- ◆ Making Sense of E-mail Stats
- ◆ Testing... as Easy as A, B, C?

Read this magazine and tackle the holidays. Or don't... you won't be the first team to lose in the fourth quarter, right?

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2009 HOLIDAY TACTICAL GUIDE

Be all you can be to capture sales this holiday season

By Scott Sanfilippo,
Editor in Chief, Co-founder, Solid Cactus



In one forum I frequent, a new store owner asked, "What do we need to do to get ready for the fourth quarter, holiday time?"

I was shocked by the reply from a fellow e-commerce store owner: "Stop spending money. Fourth quarter will be worse than last year."

While unemployment is high and consumer spending remains low, there isn't anyone out there who can definitively tell us if the 2009 holiday season is going to be good or bad. And that's the truth. To tell a business owner to "stop spending money" is just plain foolish. This is the type of advice your competitor wants you to take!

When the economy started failing, I saw businesses immediately pull their pay-per-click advertising and I started shaking my head. You can cut back on campaigns that aren't providing a good return, but to simply shut off your advertising is like turning off the lights, going home, and retreating under the bed. Making hasty judgments out of fear or despair is no way to run a business — in a good economy or bad. Making informed decisions that are backed by analytics and best practices is.

Here are my recommendations for making the best out of an uncertain upcoming holiday season:

Don't Sacrifice Service - provide clear policies and contact info and provide phone support (Need help? See page 18)

Be Descriptive - use unique, detailed product descriptions

Keep it Simple - avoid clutter. Marc Manfre has more about that on page 10

Invest in Features that Convert - Donna Talarico gives ideas on page 14

Embrace Social Media - spread messages and build a following. It's hot and free.

Use Comparison Shopping Engines - these are major (sometimes overlooked) sources of revenue

Negotiate! - get better rates with suppliers and other vendors

Spend Wisely - make smart advertising choices, don't overbuy inventory, and watch your ROI

This rest of this issue is jam-packed with more tactics on how to boost your business this holiday season and beyond. Here's to a good season! **eBiz**



catchmenow.ebizinsider.com



Dear Editor: In the last issue of eBiz [May/June 2009] you printed those survey results and it looks like I am in the majority of people that still haven't caught on to blogging. I know how important it is, but just don't know how to get started or even what to blog about. (And, how I will find the time?) What do you suggest? I signed up for a free Wordpress blog, but that's it.

—Brett P., Billings, MT

Hey Brett: Glad you took the first step. Wordpress is a great blogging platform. Now, just start posting! Keep up to date with at least one post per week, but more is better. Keep content fresh, interesting, and entertaining. Don't focus on selling and instead tell stories, provide information, be personal, stay interesting, and keep your visitors engaged. This will not only help drive traffic to your store from the blog, but also encourage people to share your posts with others via social networks or better yet, link to your blog. You do need to devote time to have a successful blog. Keep in mind, not all posts have to be lengthy. You can post 'quick hits' with a photo/caption or post a small blurb with a link to other sites/stories pertaining to your industry. Another idea is to have guest bloggers, either customers, vendors, or people in your field. Collect a few posts in advance, even stockpile your own, and post them as needed. You can have multiple authors with Wordpress, so encourage your staff to participate. Most importantly, have fun and keep at it.

Dear Editor: Is Twitter really working for e-commerce?

—Eddy H., Mounds, OK

Eddy, YES! But only if you participate in the conversation and not just announce. Use your name. Show your personality. Follow people back. Mix up your tweets. Reply to others. Share interesting links and facts. Get creative, too. Many e-commerce stores run Twitter-exclusive promotions. Use Twitter to promote blog posts (Hey Brett from above, we're talking to you!) or any other fun story that may interest your followers. Oh, and follow us: @solidcactus.

Good questions!

Let us hear from you!

Write to: scotts@ebizinsider.com **eBiz**

Making Sense of E-mail Stats

Metrics can be confusing, and subsequently, it can be a daunting task to determine if your e-mail marketing campaigns are effective.

I recently read an article from *eMarketer* that referenced a free report from *MailerMailer* called "E-mail Marketing Metrics." This report, published in June 2009, gives some good benchmarks against which you can compare your e-mail campaign. I'll share some of those highlights with you in just a bit.

But first, we need to establish what we should be tracking so we can then make sense of our e-mail stats. Like most digital forms of marketing, you not only have an opportunity to track the effectiveness of your e-mail campaigns, but you can also understand the behaviors of the people who are on your list. Let's first look at the variables that might impact your e-mail success:

- How was the person added to your list?
- What e-mail client is that person using to read your messages?
- What day did the prospect open the e-mail and at what time?
- How long was the subject line?
- Was your content plain text or images?
- What was the call to action?

Other factors do exist, but we'll focus in on these for the time being, as these are some of the basic variables that might impact the effectiveness of your e-mail campaigns. If you're not already using an e-mail service provider (ESP) such as Campaigner, ConstantContact, MailChimp (or any one of the many that are available), then you are missing out on some very valuable data. ESPs like those mentioned above allow you to track:

- Delivery rates
- Open rates
- Click-through rates
- Unsubscribe rates
- Conversion rates

Metrics like these allow you to establish a baseline and understand the effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness) of your e-mail campaigns over time. The first step to tracking your e-mail campaigns is to look at the following metrics: open rate, click-through rate, conversion rate and unsubscribe rate. These four measurements allow you to get a good understanding of the effectiveness of your e-mail campaigns, and allow you to understand customers a little bit better. I purposely left out Deliverability Rate because most of you should have a very high deliverability rate. To help ensure that your delivery rate remains high, examine your means of collecting e-mail addresses. If you rent or buy lists, then expect this number to be low. But if you acquired these addresses from

a sign-up form on your website or from customers who ordered from you in the past, then you can expect this number to be close to 100%. Here is what these four measurements can tell you:

- **Open Rate** - This metric will tell you whether or not people found your subject line compelling enough to open the e-mail and see what you have to offer. Pretend someone is walking through the mall and they walk past your store and see what is on display in the window. Was that window display attractive enough to get them in the door?
- **Click-through Rates** - This metric will tell you whether or not the body of the e-mail was persuasive enough. Did you have a desirable offer, significant savings, universal product that would appeal to a large group, or a strong call to action? This is like getting people in the door of your store. Did they find the offer convincing enough to enter your store, could they find the door easily, and was it easy to open?



- **Conversion Rates** - This metric will tell you whether or not someone actually purchased after they made it to your store. This is probably the most important metric, so you'll want to ensure that it is set up properly. This is the metric that you will use to calculate your return-on-investment (ROI). E-mail has been one of the top marketing methods with a high ROI consistently over the years.
- **Unsubscribe Rates** - This metric tells you how many people signed a petition to get your store out of the mall in the first place. Okay, maybe not that harsh. But, these are the people on your list who do not associate with the e-mails you are sending them. You will experience some people unsubscribing every time you send an e-mail, and you will learn how to be okay with that.

So now, let's look at some highlights from *MailerMailer's* report:

- How soon do people open their e-mail?
 - 74.5% of opens occur within the first 24 hours and 84.3% occur within the first 48 hours.
- Open rates – The overall unique open rates stand at 12.52%, which is a marginal decline from the 13.20% open rate experienced in the first half of 2008.
- Click rates – Click rates held steady. Subscriber clicks in the second half of 2008 were comparable to those in the previous six months, rising a mere 0.08%, around 2.80%.
- Best days to send – Though weekends and the beginning of the week outperform the other days, Monday is the clear winner having both the highest open rate and click rate.
- Subject lines – Yet again, e-mails with subject lines shorter than 35 characters were opened more than e-mails with subject lines longer than 35 characters.

You, too, can make some sense of your e-mail campaigns when you examine the four core metrics and consider the impact variables which will help you answer the burning question, "Is my e-mail marketing effective or not?" **eBiz**



By Kurt Illian

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TOOLBOX:

Brand...No? Logo...Yes!

We see them on just about everything we buy. The logo tells consumers “this is who we are, check us out,” in the nanoseconds our attention-deprived populace craves. Today’s consumer doesn’t have the patience to guess at the value or identity of an item or service and that trend is increasing as our attention spans decrease.

How much of an impact does a logo have? Ask yourself which resonates more strongly: the image of a person running track wearing a pair of Nikes or a visual of the swoosh? For that matter, does seeing someone eat a burger have the same brand identification as a three-second shot of the golden arches? Nothing carries the branding weight of a well-crafted logo.

So, which comes first, the logo or the brand? It’s been said, and rightly so, that a company should define a logo. A logo should not define a company. Still, while a good logo adds credibility to your company, even a well-designed logo will not make up for any of your businesses’ shortcomings.

If you feel you have the artistic ability and branding knowledge to create your company’s logo, more power to you; but, keep in mind that the visual you create will be featured on all of your business cards, marketing materials, packaging, and your website. Your logo is the first impression your prospective customers will have of your company. If they like what they see, you’re that much more likely to earn their business. By the same token, if your logo is off the mark, you can just as easily alienate your target audience.

How do you determine the right visual

representation for your brand? Keep the following in mind before you unchain your inner artist:

Brand Identity: Why did you get into the industry you chose? Familiarity, opportunity, passion, or all of the above? Was there a unique or interesting reason why your company came into being? Your logo should capture this.



Ask yourself: does seeing someone eat a burger have the same brand identification as a three-second shot of the golden arches?

Objective: Identify your brand’s features and benefits, target market, and competitive advantages. Make a list of all words or phrases that best describe the core value of your brand. This list should emphasize how your brand will resonate with the needs of your prospective customers.

Customer Perception: How do you want your customers to view your company? Is dependability most important? Accessibility? Or, do you want to emphasize attention to customer service?

Target Audience: To whom are you selling? People who feel money is no object or those who clip coupons? Your customers want something new or unique (i.e., the latest fashion or technology), or are they more

comfortable following the pack? Different personality types are attracted by different visuals.

Value Proposition: How do you plan to market your products or services in comparison to your competitors? Are you charging more or less than they are, or are you mirroring their pricing, but offering added value in some way? How is your brand better? What is your competitive advantage? How does it create value for your customers?

Tagline: A tagline is the slogan or phrase that best captures a company’s vision in a condensed fashion. Come up with a short, catchy (when possible) phrase that will effectively conjure a positive image of your company for your prospective customer.

Keep it Simple: A logo should capture your company’s identity neatly and uniquely. Avoid too much detail. Simple designs attract more

attention, period. Also, strong lines and characters reduce and enlarge easily. Try to picture how it will reproduce on an acrylic award, for example. Still, don’t sacrifice originality for simplicity. You need to include something compelling. Think along the lines of the aforementioned golden arches or the Nike swoosh.

Having a well-designed logo is a great way to establish or improve your company’s credibility. Remember, your logo is the first impression your customers will have of your brand. Make sure it’s a great one! **eBiz**



By Olga Gikas
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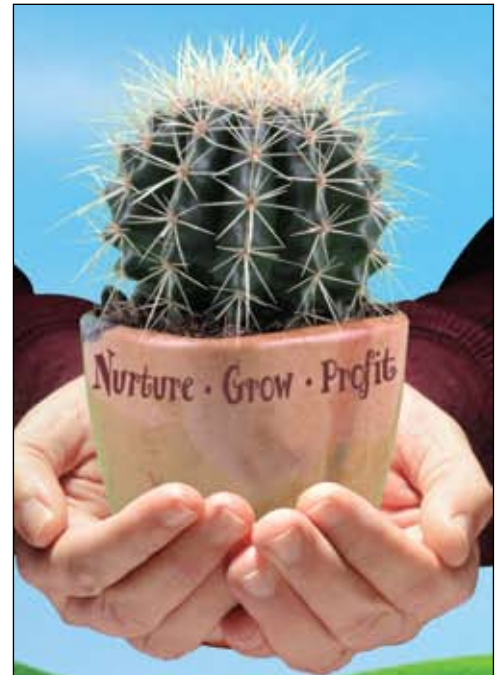
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Testing...as easy as A, B, C?

Headline = maximum 25 characters

Body Line #1 = maximum 35 characters

Body Line #2 = maximum 35 characters

Display URL = maximum 35 characters

Now, let's say I sell fuzzy-handled rakes, shovels, hoes, and other garden equipment. Women are my target market and I offer free shipping for orders of \$50 or more. Following is a sample ad:

Need A Soft, Fuzzy Hoe?

All It Takes Is A Comfortable Hoe To Make Your Garden Work Fun & Easy!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

Okay. Now that I have your attention, let's look at some REAL examples of some sample ads. (And take that as a lesson...be CAREFUL of word placement, and read your ad aloud to ensure it doesn't sound too...um...suggestive for your type of product!)

Tend The Yard In Comfort

Shop Our Garden Tool Line. Unique Soft Handles Make Gardening Easy.
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

There is a call-to-action with "Shop our Garden Tool Line," and we offer a teaser description of our product "Unique Soft Handles" to help entice the reader to click for more information. We are also utilizing our display URL as additional real estate for our marketing message by adding a qualified phrase, "GardenTool" at the end.

Buy Comfort Garden Tools

Unique Soft Handles Make Gardening Easy & Fun. Spend \$50+, Ship Free!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

In this example, we include our call-to-action "Buy Comfort Garden Tools" within the headline rather than the body of the ad. We also include a value incentive "Spend \$50+, Ship Free!" within the body in the hopes it will persuade the user to consider spending more than \$50.

Step Aside Martha Stewart

Your Flowers Will Flourish When You Garden With Our Comfortable Tools.
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

In this example, we use a bit of humor to attract attention. Of course, you need to consider the product or service you sell and your target market to determine whether or not humor is appropriate, but in this case, it can work.

Step Aside Martha Stewart

Flowers Flourish When You Use Our Comfort Yard Tools. \$50+ Ship Free!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

In this example, you can see how I maintained the humorous headline, but I changed the body text slightly, and inserted value incentive text to leverage both a humorous and promotional message.

Another easy way to instantly create an ad variation is by using Dynamic Keyword Insertion ads. These ads allow you to tell the system to automatically place the search term into your ad. This feature is often used in the headline, but can be used within the body of the ad as well. Here is an example that uses one of our existing ads:

{Keyword: Buy Comfort Garden Tools}

Unique Soft Handles Make Gardening Easy & Fun. Spend \$50+, Ship Free!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

You may have heard the term A/B testing. Do you know what it means, or are you having feverish flashbacks to calculus class?!

Simply put, A/B testing is the comparison of two or more variations of a particular strategy. For PPC, at the very least, you should employ A/B testing with ads. In other words, you should be utilizing at least two ads in every ad group. This may sound like a daunting task, but there are easy ways to create different ad variations.

For the purpose of this article, we'll use the Google ad structure guidelines:

In this example, if the search term was "Sale Garden Tools", the ad would show as:

Sale Garden Tools

Unique Soft Handles Make Gardening Easy & Fun. Spend \$50+, Ship Free!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

But, let's say our search term was "Clearance Tools For Gardening". That term is 29 characters, and exceeds our headline maximum of 25 characters; in that case, our ad would revert to inserting our designated default text of "Buy Comfort Garden Tools" and would appear as:

Buy Comfort Garden Tools

Unique Soft Handles Make Gardening Easy & Fun. Spend \$50+, Ship Free!
www.RobynsLawnTools.com/GardenTool

Sometimes, A/B testing is simple to do by flipping the first and second lines of the body text. Or, write a few ad samples and use a line from ad A and put it into ad B, and vice versa. In all cases, though, be sure the ad reads well and makes sense from a grammatical standpoint. Other things to be aware of include, but aren't limited to:

Punctuation: No exclamation points can be used in the headline and only one exclamation point can be used within the body of the ad.

Display URL: The root of your display url must match the root of your destination URL. For example, if my domain is www.RobynsLawnTools.com, I couldn't use a display url that read www.RobynsSaleLawnTools.com/GardenTool because the root URLs do not match.

Capitalization: You cannot use capitalization for emphasis within an ad. For example, "SHIP FREE" would not be acceptable.

Spelling/Grammar: Always, always, always check spelling and grammar before you activate your ads. Your ad can be disapproved for spelling and/or grammar mistakes, but regardless, you don't want an ad running with errors, as your store can appear to be untrustworthy and unprofessional in the eyes of the consumer.

Competition: Study your competition. What types of ads are they showing? What types of value incentives are they offering? If you are bidding on competitors' domain name terms, do not use dynamic keyword insertion ads with those terms as you do not want to appear as if you are portraying yourself to be the competitor.

There are many ways to write and A/B test ads. Start with a few simple techniques and work up from there. Before you know

it, the virtual seeds you are planting may grow into "money trees" over time. But like with any growing things, you will need to nurture and tend to your "garden" regularly; if you ignore it, your seedlings will either die or be chewed up by the competition. **eBiz**



By Robyn Snyder
robyn.snyder@ebizinsider.com

Introducing
Star ★★★★★
Product REVIEWS
by Solid Cactus

It's mid-year and the holidays are coming. Marketing Sherpa reports that **58%** of online shoppers prefer websites with product reviews. Star Product Reviews one of the most affordable and effective sales tools for 2009.

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ring, ring, ring!
RING, RING, RING!
ring, ring, ring!

Cut the Clutter

The economy may be on the ropes, but research shows e-commerce popularity is growing and many consumers are choosing to spend their money online. With online shopping becoming universal, wi-fi access available virtually everywhere, and the recent boom of social networking sites being utilized for mass marketing, more than ever, business owners are expanding their brick-and-mortar stores into web-based businesses. The average Joe is finding out that he, too, has the opportunity to create an additional revenue source with a website and a merchant account.

Now before you go out and venture into the virtual world of online retailing, let me start by saying that every field has its share of widespread, but mistaken beliefs, and e-commerce is undoubtedly one of them. Personally, I'm finding that one of the biggest (and common) misconceptions among webmasters today is that the more complex the site design, the better. Wrong, wrong, wrong! Take a look at the world (wide web) around you and you'll notice that the top retailers such as Apple, OfficeMax, and Best Buy maintain clean and organized sites that have a lot of breathing room. My favorite example is Google. Here is a website to be exact, the most visited website in the world, which contains nothing more than a logo, search box, and a few text links on their homepage. Although it is not an e-commerce site, it is still a major example showing how simplistic websites prove to be the most successful. What's their trick? They cut the clutter!



To start, let me say that cleanliness in design is not limited to one certain characteristic on a homepage. In fact, to create a crisp looking design, several aspects must be taken into consideration: typography, color, photography, and which I personally believe to be the two most important factors, the layout and the use of white space. Let's discuss the KISS principal for a

moment. No, I'm not talking about makeup application techniques pertaining to four musicians from Detroit Rock City. KISS is a commonly-used, modern acronym for "Keep it Simple, Stupid" (though, if you want to be more polite, "Keep it Sweet and Simple" works just as well). KISS states that simplicity should be a key design goal and one should avoid dabbling into a mess of unnecessary complexities. It's been stated that the origins of KISS have been traced back to similar concepts practiced by Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci. With that known, if the great minds that helped shape the 15th and 20th centuries are on board with this theory, it may prove to be a wise decision to hop on this design bandwagon.

Layout

The first step towards cutting the clutter is to make sure you start with an orderly layout that is not only properly aligned, but also makes good use of white space. Let me be clear: white space refers to the blank areas, or negative space, between the graphics, columns, and margins on your page. It's the unmarked portions of your page, not the actual color, so don't feel like every page you design has to look like it's lost in a snowstorm. Let your website breathe. Utilize space appropriately and determine how you will align the elements on your page. Page navigation is usually found at the top and/or left of the site, while headlines, photographs, products, and textual content are found in the body. Though screen sizes can vary between users, attempt to keep your important information above the fold; that is, make sure anything appealing is placed on the top half of the page. Alignment creates connections between your visuals, and helps develop a balanced relationship between objects. A page that is overcrowded with graphics or text, has little to no white space, and is poorly aligned will run the risk of appearing muddled, difficult to navigate, and difficult to read.

Typeface

Use simple and traditional typefaces whenever possible. When it comes to the Internet, to increase the chance that your content will be properly displayed on multiple platforms and systems, a web-safe font should always be used. If you have failed to use a web-safe font, more than likely your customer's browser will select a substitute font that you may not have intended to appear on your page. This can often result in text that is not easy to read and your homepage turning into an ugly mess. Fonts such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, Georgia, and Times New Roman are safe choices, have great letter spacing, and won't appear awkward or unbalanced on your site.

You want your type to be pleasing to the eye. Present everything in a fluid manner to the reader and let him or her easily obtain the information you are providing. This is the exact reason they are visiting your site in the first place. Don't be distracting! Make sure your important elements get top billing. You only have a few seconds to grab a customer's attention, so make sure your welcome/sale messages are minimal and to the point. Littering your page with paragraphs of text is a complete turn-off. Your goal is to sell a product, not to bore your readers with an overabundance of incoherent drivel.

Color

Also avoid littering the page with multiple colors. Color is extremely critical to the overall design, and a poor palette could possibly drive visitors away, ultimately resulting in less business. It's best to always start with one major color in mind and then vary the lightness and saturation of that color to see the optional tones it can provide. If you are incorporating a pre-existing logo into your design that must be adhered to, separate the colors used, and explore all the possible tones that can be created. Try to design your page using that one main color. Then introduce one or two complementary colors to enhance the rest of the page. This will help draw attention to places of importance, such as the navigation bar, section headings, or a sales headline. Choosing a sensible color scheme depends upon what mood you want to portray and what will fit your customers' needs. Keep in mind who your target audience is. Research what colors appeal to women and men. Make sure everything is easy to see and that your text is not placed upon a conflicting, hard-to-read background. Your page doesn't have to have a beautiful color scheme; it has to have a successful color scheme.

Images

Along with color choices, it is also important to choose the right images and to use them carefully. In some situations, not only can images increase load times (think of your target audience), but they can clutter up a

page in no time. Display your product images in a uniform manner and stick to using one or two prominent images to advertise what you are selling, help balance the page, and fill in the empty spots with some weight. Stay away from distracting backgrounds and don't go overboard with flash animations. You want customers to immediately understand what your site is about, and in the process, refrain from going blind. Make sure all your visuals are being placed in the right spot and aren't solely being used to add decoration to the page or its background. Just don't give your visitors "stuff" to view. Utilize images to properly clarify content, features, and navigation. A good, clean website is one that will not get in the way of the visitor's shopping agenda. Your customers should be able to reach the checkout with only a few clicks, so avoid building roadblocks by overwhelming users with distracting banners and animations.

Simplicity can be a very complex issue, but it's not impossible to achieve. Your website makes a big impression on your viewers, so take the time to educate yourself about the latest trends in design, presentation, and functionality. How you portray your website is how visitors will think you portray your business in general. You want to show them you are structured, professional, and here to help. It might take some time before you manage to find the perfect mix between details and appearance, but that's okay; Rome wasn't built in a day (actually it took about 850 years to build, but you don't have that much time and that's not really the point). Again, stay up-to-date on web development and constantly pay attention to how you are laying out the elements on your page. Remember, your website is not for you, it's for your visitors – so cut the clutter and keep it sweet and simple! **eBiz**



By Marc Manfre

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Holiday Prep Checklist



Serious e-commerce owners begin planning for the holiday shopping season early. Like, now. Online holiday sales have been increasing steadily every year. In 2008, Nielsen reported Cyber Monday sales had increased 10% from 2007. And, Forrester Research predicted a 12% growth in online holiday sales from 2007, with sales over \$44-billion. But, with the tightest economy in decades, it's natural to expect 2009's numbers to be higher as more people than ever turn to the Internet. Is your store ready for the onslaught of bargain hunters?

Competition is strong. Following these tactics will help maximize your sales this holiday season:

Get Inside Your Shopper's Head

Millions of people are just like me. We know the internet is fast, so we procrastinate and shop late.

How can we market to this type of consumer?

- Hit the pain.** Remind them why they're online. Display a graphic on your homepage that says:

Avoid the lines and shop with us online! Check out our money-saving holiday specials..."

- List your offers.** Make sure your deals connect with your customers.
- Sell their wallets.** Consumers don't want to pay for gas or shipping costs. Whenever possible, offer free shipping.
- Reassure them.** Guarantee delivery if orders are made before a certain date. Guarantee delivery with express delivery options.
- Offer services.** Free gift wrapping and cards with a personalized message save last minute shoppers time.
- Match prices.** If there's a better bargain, match it.
- Use flash.** Flash increases consumer confidence and draws attention through movement. Flash allows you to fit more into a small area without crowding.

Merchandise

Start tracking products and trends now. Find out what the big guys in your industry are doing. Feature the hot items prominently on the homepage. Showcase deals in a holiday-themed section.

- Sell suggestively.** Feature gifts for mom, dad, him, her, etc.

Market!

All roads involve search engines.

- Pay-Per-Click** remains the best way to get people from the search engines to your store. You can control when your ads are displayed, what is displayed and where the visitor lands when clicking the ad.

- ❑ **Comparison shopping engines (CSEs)** such as Google Products (formerly Froogle), Nextag, Shopping.com, etc. are increasingly popular. Feed management tools get your products in the CSEs and provide ROI analytics at a product level. One example is FeedPerfect by Solid Cactus.
- ❑ **Affiliate programs** are typically pay-for-performance; you only pay if they deliver. Arm these programs with holiday graphics and banners showcasing your specials.
- ❑ **The best customer is a regular customer.** Personalize a special coupon code for “preferred customers.” Giving your regulars an exclusive deal goes a long way.

When mass e-mailing, make sure you have the following:

- ❑ **E-mail programs maximize delivery.** Because ISPs trust e-mails sent through programs like Exact Target and Campaigner, using them increases your deliverability rate.
- ❑ **Use a well-designed HTML e-mail,** but don’t make it a mirror image of your homepage.
- ❑ **Personalize.** Start the e-mail with “Dear <first name>, as a valued customer of <your store name>...” then go into your offers, showcased items, gift suggestions, etc.
- ❑ **Call to action.** A sign saying “start shopping” or “don’t wait another minute—click here” often work.
- ❑ **Be consistent.** Touch the pain of shopping offline, tell people why they should shop with you, create urgency and have a call to action. Put this message on every page (remember, more people land on the inner pages than the homepage.)

Be Creative on a Shoestring

- ❑ **Hold a contest.** Have visitors submit names, e-mail and mailing addresses for a chance to win a product (make it valuable!) delivered to them, gift-wrapped, before the holidays.

- ❑ **Use the list you just created for holiday shoppers.** Send an offer like “Shop now for the holidays—Guaranteed delivery if the order is received by 12/xx Midnight.” Showcase your offers and don’t forget the call to action.

Inspire Customer Confidence

Offers and pricing won’t matter if people don’t trust you. Dispel their fears up front.

- ❑ **Identity theft.** Install a “click here” link to explain your site’s security. Yahoo! Store owners should explain why its encryption is important to consumers. Carry your site design and branding through the shopping cart and carry your security messages through checkout.
- ❑ **Fly-by-night operations.** Your “about us” page should eliminate these concerns by including your mission statement, how long you’ve been in business, your location, your customer service goals, a picture of your building and the people who work there. Let customers see who you are.
- ❑ **State your policies.** Shopping cart abandonment often results from the charges at checkout. Explain shipping and tax charges. Explain your exchange and return policies.
- ❑ **Bad customer service.** Make toll-free numbers and contact information prominent on every page of the site and have enough people on those phones. Some online shoppers still need to place orders by phone. Make sure they can.

- ❑ **Testimonials.** A customer’s words speak loudly. Showcase glowing reviews on every page.
- ❑ **Product reviews.** Big guys like Amazon are using product reviews for a reason. A merchant praising a product they’re selling won’t be nearly as convincing as a customer saying the same thing.

Prepare the Team

Higher volumes require more people. Most merchants increase customer service and fulfillment staff 25% during the holidays.

- ❑ **Get your people now** so you won’t have to scramble when you need them. A \$50 employee bonus for hooking up a friend with a job is a good incentive.
- ❑ **Train them well.** They should know your shipping and tax policies, your values for customer service, and be able to answer product questions. Make sure they have cheat sheets for gift ideas, can handle price matching and know your promotions. Sales through in-bound calls will mirror the knowledge of your customer service staff.

Get Started Now!

Prepare your website, offers, marketing strategy and customer service now for fewer headaches, unexpected problems and potential disappointments. **eBiz**



By Sean Gove
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Must-Have Features to Woo Holiday Shoppers

Forget Sleigh Bells — Get Those Cash Registers Ringing!

There is something special about the sights and sounds of holiday shopping. Garland and lights are hung, seasonal music is pumping, maybe the smell of pine is in the air; but most importantly, careful merchandising by retailers is a call-to-action to entice customers to buy. Online retailers can also make seasonal changes to put more emphasis on what's hot for the season, beef up holiday sales numbers, and even get a little festive.

Here are five must-have features for Yahoo! Stores to woo holiday shoppers:

1. Give Holiday Shoppers a Peek Inside with Flash Sequence Banner



Learn more about the Flash Sequence Banner at Banner.SolidCactus.com

There's something nostalgic about walking down the sidewalks of a festive, decorated, snowy Main Street during the holidays, with all the store fronts giving shoppers a glimpse at what's featured and on sale inside. Flash sequence banners can be your virtual window display case. While useful year-round, the holiday season is a prime time to consider adding flash sequence banners to your homepage. Boost sales by rotating through promotional messages for sales, special shipping and gift wrap offers, featured products/sections and then,

after-holiday clearance sales! Aside from increasing conversions, flash sequence banners keep your homepage fresh.

2. Attract Bargain Shoppers with Dynamic Sales Page



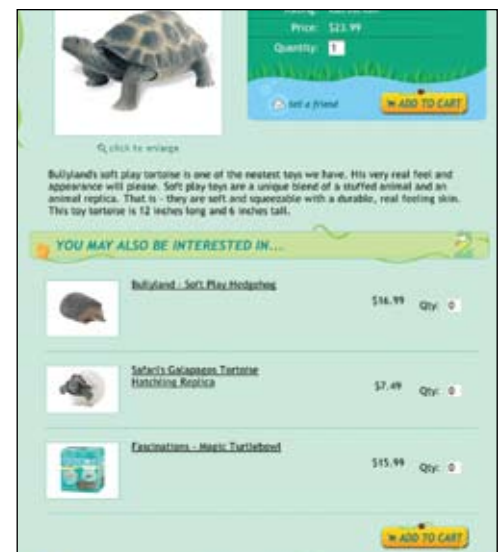
See the details about the Dynamic Sales Page at DSP.SolidCactus.com

Ever walk right toward the clearance rack or value bins at your local department store? Bargain shoppers sure do, especially around the holidays. Dynamic Sales Page, one of Solid Cactus' newest features, makes deals and steals easier to find. Working in tandem with Dynamic Paging, the new Dynamic Sales Page feature automatically populates with all items listed 'on sale' in your store. Not only will customers easily find your best deals of the season, but this feature also saves valuable time for store owners like you because no longer will you have to manually create and reorganize pages each time items go on or off sale.

3. Increase Order Size with Multiple-Add-to-Cart

It's all about the accessories and coordinating items when it comes to

gift-giving. Video game systems need controllers and games. Necklaces need matching earrings. Baseball bats need balls and balls need gloves. You get the idea. No matter what products you offer, chances are other items in your store are a perfect complement. Item Page Multiple Add-to-Cart puts coordinating items smack dab in the forefront, thus suggesting add-ons the user may not have initially thought of purchasing. Plus, customers can effortlessly add those multiple items to the cart with just one click. Multiple-Add-to-Cart can eliminate the need for users to search for accessories, and more importantly, increase order size by prompting customers to buy more with that one click.



The Multi-Add-to-Cart feature can be seen at Multi.SolidCactus.com

4. Build Exciting Promos with Scratch and Save

Holiday shopping can be exciting; you never know what bargain you may find or when

Santa's Holiday Success List

Must Have features

1. Promote Sales with Flash Sequence Banner...
2. Attract shoppers with Dynamic Sales Page....
3. Raise order sizes with Multiple Add-to-Cart...
4. Build exciting promos with Scratch and Save....
5. Promote urgency with Holiday Countdown.....
6. **CALL SOLID CACTUS**

SOLIDCACTUS
your partner in e-commerce success

Make your holiday success happen now. **888.361.9814**

Scratch & Save

Click and drag the dime over the scratch surface to reveal your coupon code.



Use this code when you checkout to **SAVE**.

See how the Scratch and Save feature works at Save.SolidCactus.com

you will come across an unexpected slashed price on the shelf. Entice your e-commerce shoppers with a secret savings with Solid Cactus' newest feature, Scratch and Save. This fun, interactive feature gives your customers the chance to scratch off a virtual coupon, revealing a mystery discount code that can be used upon checkout. There are endless promotion ideas for this feature, but to get you started for the holidays, why not call it a "Secret Santa Sale" and couple it with an e-mail marketing blast and featured graphic on your homepage?

5. Build Urgency with *Holiday Countdown*

How many shopping days are left? Solid Cactus' Holiday Countdown is a perfect way to build urgency with your online

shoppers. Think of it as an Advent calendar for your store-- without the chocolate, of course (although we'd offer that if we could). The feature provides a countdown in hours, days, minutes, and seconds to the end of the holiday shopping season, a special sale, a free shipping offer, or other time-sensitive



Learn more about the Holiday Countdown feature at Countdown.SolidCactus.com

promotion. This feature isn't just for Christmas, either. Change the graphic and promotional message throughout the year for other seasons or holidays like back to school, Halloween or a general annual sale.

The trees may be green now, but summer is the time to get in holiday mode and make preparations for the busiest shopping season of the year. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
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Please leave a message after the tone.





Puzzle Me This

Internet marketing specialists can promote your store and nurture your success through various tactics and strategies:

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) is the billboard of the Internet. Using strategic keywords, landing pages, and ad combinations, PPC can drive immediate traffic to your store. However, like any marketing plan, you must be sure the people managing your accounts are knowledgeable about PPC metrics. Solid Cactus is a Google Analytics Authorized Consultant and our PPC specialists include certified Google Advertising Professionals and Yahoo! Search Marketing Ambassadors.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is more than just trying to achieve high rankings; it's about creating more traffic for your site through organic (or FREE) listings on search engines. SEO must be continually nurtured with strong keywords, fresh creative content, link building, and utilizing social media, such as blogging.

Social Media Optimization (SMO) is a valuable part of your SEO strategy. The Internet is evolving from merchants hiding behind their websites, to putting their faces and personalities back in front of their businesses. Facebook, blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and other social platforms are quickly becoming the favored tool for reaching out to customers. Some merchants are SMO-shy and that's where Solid Cactus comes into play. We recognize the need for businesses to participate in social media, but understand that many store owners lack the time or clear understanding of best practices. Solid Cactus' managed social media services allow you to lead, and let your customers follow you...all the way to your store.

E-mail Marketing is a smart and affordable way to market to your existing customers. If you're collecting contact information from your clients, you are building an incredible sales tool and should be reaching out to them on a consistent basis. Solid Cactus' managed e-mail solution provides you

Running a business is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. There are no instructions and no guarantees; it can be a game of trial and error. Obviously, the goal is to make as few errors as possible and to do that, you need to find the right pieces to make your business stronger. Every vendor, consultant, or employee you hire should fit the solution for running your business better.

Solid Cactus is *Your Partner in E-commerce Success*. That message is a mantra we've been proud of for as long as Solid Cactus has been doing business. It's a promise we take seriously because truly, our success is only made possible by our clients' continued success.

When Solid Cactus co-founders Scott Sanfilippo and Joe Palko decided to take their experience from successfully launching over 39 different e-commerce stores to creating a consulting firm for other could-be entrepreneurs, I don't think even they could have envisioned just how far the company would go. What started as a web developer for Yahoo! Stores has grown into a dominant and trusted name in e-commerce, offering solutions for every aspect of your e-commerce business.

When you put all of Solid Cactus' puzzle pieces together, you will see how we've become the big picture in e-commerce:

The Comparison Shopping Engine Piece

Merchants utilizing Comparison Shopping Engines (CSEs) understand what a powerful sales channel these can be. With CSEs, you're directly targeting online shoppers (not browsers!) looking to purchase based on the best deal they can find. However, making sure your CSE strategy remains profitable can be challenging because of the difficulty involved in delivering products into multiples CSEs. Solid Cactus recognized that need and released FeedPerfect in 2007 with that optimal profit in mind.

Since its launch, FeedPerfect has made millions of dollars for our clients because it has allowed them to market their products smarter than the competition. With FeedPerfect, you can analyze your sales data down to a precise product's performance on a particular CSE. This means you know just what your 'heroes vs. zeros' are; therefore, you can make more sound marketing decisions. Find this piece at www.FeedPerfect.com.

The Marketing Piece

If you build a brick and mortar in the middle of the forest, how would shoppers find you? An e-commerce store can be as lost as a store in the forest if you don't advertise and promote it properly. Solid Cactus' team of

with the ability to brand your e-mails with a professional design. Our e-mail marketing specialists will develop creative copy to optimize your efforts, manage your sends, and monitor and analyze the results of each e-mail campaign. It's not SPAMMING: it's good customer service to reach out to your customers with promotions or announcements.

Affiliate Marketing gives you a pay-for-performance model; you don't pay a commission unless you receive a sale. You, in essence, nurture your brand reach via affiliate partner sites. Solid Cactus helps recruit new affiliates with our established relationships with a network of top-performing affiliates; we can also assist in building a stronger relationship with your current affiliate partners. With Solid Cactus managing your affiliate program, we will keep your campaign current and on-track simply by analyzing your data and suggesting marketing strategies on a regular basis.

As you can see, Solid Cactus has all the pieces of your marketing strategy available under one roof, but it doesn't stop there. Find out more at IM.SolidCactus.com.

The Order Management Piece

Fulfilling orders can be a time-consuming and very frustrating part of running your business. If you're using multiple warehouses or multiple drop-shippers, processing your orders can sometimes leave you feeling like less of a business owner, and more of a slave to your business. Cactus Complete Commerce Order Management (CCCOM) could be the best employee you'll ever hire. CCCOM is a web-based order management system that automates the processing of orders from your Yahoo! Store.

CCCOM allows merchants to:

- Take phone orders
- Process payments
- Manage returns and refunds
- Provide flexible fulfillment
- Communicate with customers
- Automate purchase and inventory management

The time you'll save with CCCOM will allow you the freedom to run your business instead of letting it run you. Find

more about this puzzle piece at: www.CactusCompleteCommerce.com.

The Customer Service & Administrative Support Piece

Think about your experiences as a customer. A bad customer experience can break your business. Have you ever been frustrated by calling a number and reaching a busy signal or voice-mail? Even worse, is that voice-mail box full? If your online store is guilty of any of these practices, you're in trouble! Solid Cactus Call Center is a customizable solution for your customer service needs:

Phone Support: I caution merchants against dismissing Solid Cactus customer service reps (CSRs) as order takers; our CSRs are an extension of your business. They are the friendly voices that support the promise of your brand. Whether your customer needs a question answered before making a purchase or needs to resolve a concern, a CSR will be there. With hours 8am-Midnight Monday through Friday and 9a.m.-9p.m. on the weekends, your customer service needs will be met, allowing you to turn off the computer at night and spend more time doing what you love.

Live Chat: A simple measure that goes a long way in customer service is our managed live chat service. If a client wants to ask a question in writing, sending an e-mail may not be the quickest way to receive a response. Having a live chat icon on your site shows your customers there is someone available to answer your question right now. Our CSR will be there to instantly answer the question and capture the sale.

Virtual Office: When you think virtual office, what do you think of? Are you thinking of a service that could answer

your e-mails, track packages, verify credit cards, resolve disputes, pretty much be your administrative assistant? If you don't have the administrative help you need, you should learn more about our Virtual Office (VO) service. We take the day-to-day tasks out of your hands, letting you focus on managing other needs.

Learn more about our customer support puzzle pieces at CallCenter.SolidCactus.com.

The Store Development Piece

Store development is the root of our business. Prior to launching our other services, Solid Cactus made its splash by providing award-winning designs and creating a world class programming team that can not only program your store, but create new features for you to use. Whether you are in e-commerce or need an informational site to promote your brand, Solid Cactus can do it. We remain passionate about creating great design and functionality for your website that will allow you to compete successfully. Find out more at www.SolidCactus.com.

Oftentimes when new clients call Solid Cactus for the first time, they may be looking for a single piece of the puzzle. But, they become pleasantly surprised when they discover how many solutions we offer under one roof. Partnering with Solid Cactus eliminates your need to call on multiple vendors because all the pieces to your successful e-commerce puzzle can be fit together right here. **eBiz**



By Gregory Davis

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Hello, hello, hello, anyone there?



Holiday Help – No Time for Newbies

With the fun and festivities of the summer season, it's hard to imagine the holidays are right around the corner. Ask yourself this: As an e-commerce merchant, are you ready?

July through September is crunch time for merchants preparing for the holiday rush.

It's vital to begin hiring holiday help early so your new team can learn the ways of your store, understand the benefit of each product, and be able to convey that message to potential customers. The all-important fourth quarter is no time for newbies or amateurs. As any HR representative knows, finding the right employee is not an overnight process. Think about all that's involved: placing help wanted ads, reviewing applications, interviewing applicants. Then it's on to start the training process.

There are alternatives to the headache of hunting for seasonal help. Why not consider Solid Cactus Call Center to provide top-notch, professional assistance to your shoppers? Whether you are looking for basic sales support or complete customer care, Solid Cactus has customizable solution for you.

In the past few years, Solid Cactus Call Center has grown in leaps and bounds. We are currently fully-staffed for four shifts and our team services hundreds of e-commerce merchants across the United States and abroad. We have a razor-sharp focus on capturing sales and order entry, and we also know the importance of complete customer care, such as tracking shipments, authorizing returns, and handling credit card declines. You decide how much or how little we perform and what tasks we do. Many of our clients capture calls during their traditional business hours and utilize our group for evening, after hours, and weekends. If you

prefer, we are ready and able to handle the whole enchilada.

For less than the cost of a good help wanted ad, Solid Cactus Call Center can set up, prepare, and train our savvy team for your specific needs. We post open positions, review applications and hire only the best of the best. We carefully train our staff on your products and procedures, and learn from the best – YOU! All customer service reps (CSRs) are skilled in up-selling and cross-selling, so we're capturing more sales and increasing the size of your orders. Many clients initially thought of using our call center as an affordable luxury, which it is. However, clients are soon delighted to discover the large increase in sales in the matter of a month or two. Convenience and profitability – what a great combination!

Despite doing your homework and hiring your very best prospect, there's no guarantee your new employee will be a good fit. With Solid Cactus, that's no longer your problem. Our team provides you with the ultimate employee. We never call off sick and we don't complain about working late or on weekends. You never have to worry about bad driving conditions or family emergencies; our crew will man the phones, capture your sales, and delight your shoppers.

One mistake we see is that many merchants believe that e-mail and voice mail are a substitute for customer care. Nothing could be further from the truth. Step into our call center at any time, day or night, and you will hear the phones ring and our CSRs busy taking calls. Why? Consumers have the "I want it when I want it – and I want it NOW" mantra. They will not wait on a voice mail or

e-mail to be returned.

We live in the information age; your customer does not have to be inconvenienced by driving and shopping around. Your competitor is simply a mouse click away. A pleasant, professional voice promptly answering your phone is priceless. Not only does it give a personality to your company, but it also shows the customer you truly care and are dedicated to complete customer satisfaction.

Just how easy is it to get started with Solid Cactus Call Center Services? It's as simple as one, two, three:

1. Contact Solid Cactus Call Center for a free cost analysis.
2. Complete a brief questionnaire and review what tasks and duties you would like our team to perform.
3. Schedule a few brief call or two with your account manager and our team trainer. The rest is up to us.

It really is that simple. In most instances we can have you up and running in under a week. Maybe it's time you considered giving yourself an early gift: one of a profitable and stress-free holiday season, courtesy of Solid Cactus Call Center Services. **eBiz**



By *Cindy Cruikshank*
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and *Katrina Domkowski*
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10 Ways to Increase Your E-mail Marketing Open Rate

E-mail marketing is a much sought-after form of communication with your current customer base. In no other area of marketing can you so directly communicate with the people who already patronize your services, know and respect your brand, and trust you to give them the best customer service. While whipping up an e-mail and pressing the send button seems like an easy day at the office, there is actually much more that goes into producing a successful e-mail campaign.

There is a diverse group of bells, whistles, and hoops you must skip, jump, leap, and hurdle just to get your e-mail into the customer's in-box. If you're lucky to make it that far, your circus act is still far from over. Now comes the hardest part: getting the client to open your e-mail.

We all know that despite the best efforts of filters, lots of junk still ends up in our in-box. So, even though the client wants to hear from you, you've got to cannonball your e-mail above the rest. Let's be honest. When you open your in-box and there are 200 e-mails from random, non-personal addresses, more often than not, we are quick to select all and press delete.

If your customers aren't opening your e-mails, you aren't getting the content of your message across. So how do you suspend yourself above the crowd, stand up and shout "Open me! Open me!?" Try a few of these tried and trusted techniques on your next campaign.

Tip #1 Qualified Contact List - Be sure your e-mail list contains people who want to receive your offers; for example, those who have purchased from you in the past. These contacts will be most qualified and most open to receiving new product and special offers. Never purchase a mailing list. These are unqualified contacts that are going to drive down your reporting metrics and leave you wondering what is going wrong with your e-mail campaigns.

Tip #2 Customize the "From" Field - Be sure to personalize the "from" address as your company name or an individual within the

company. This will help your e-mail stand out among the rest. If recipients recognize your business as one where they have previously shopped, they'll be more willing to open it. And, once you've settled on a "from" name, keep it consistent.

Tip #3 Segment Your E-mail - Sending highly qualified e-mails helps increase open

rates. If you are a variety shop that sells make-up as well as sporting goods, sending athletic promotions to women who only shop your store for make-up shows your customers you are out of touch with their shopping habits. Segment your list in a variety of ways:

10 Ways to Increase Your E-mail Marketing Open Rate - continued on page 21

Wow! There Went Five Customers

Hope that's not your idea of customer service!



Can you really afford to lose a customer this holiday season?

Prepare to give your customers *superior service, immediate response to their questions* and *confidence in your brand*.

With Solid Cactus Call Center your business will be prepared to *answer phone calls, respond to e-mails, verify credit cards, take orders, track packages* and *upsell your products*.

**Just Over 100
Holiday Shopping
Days Left!**

We have solutions to fit any budget!

A Simple Call Can Get You Started Today:
888.361.9814 • customers.solidcactus.com



**SOLIDCACTUS®
CALL CENTER**

Made in AMERICA

Solid Cactus Call Center is owned and operated in the United States. All employees require English as a first language.

Commentary: Will Bing make us sing, or will it just be the same old song and dance?

Bing is being touted by its creators as a “decision engine” that is a new “search experience.” Search results offer expanded details, fun facts, and related items. Top sponsored search listings now show at both the top and bottom of the page. Basically, Bing is Microsoft’s “new and improved,” re-branded search engine. We know it is new, but is it really improved?

It is no secret that Google reigns king when it comes to search. In terms of U.S. search volume for 2009, according to Hitwise.com, Google has 74% of the market share. Yahoo! gasps for breath at a distant second with 16%, and MSN has been on life support with third place at 5%. The remaining 5% is spread across less popular second-tier engines such as Ask.com. As we know, statistics are relative; so, how does this compare to prior years? Google’s stranglehold has steadily strengthened over the years, (according to Hitwise.com, 2006 = 61%, 2007 = 66% and 2008 = 72%), which is exactly why Yahoo! and MSN are scrambling to gain some ground.

Traditionally, from a demographics point of view, MSN is typically used by an older population—think baby boomers and seniors. Will the flashy changes be enough to attract a broader audience, including the coveted younger generations X, Y, and Z? Time will tell.

I have to laugh when I think of a joke I heard some time ago regarding locating one of the search engines other than Google. The instructions begin:

Step One: Go to Google.com

Now, obviously, this is a satirical and sarcastic way to look at other search engines and how they compare to Google, but there is some merit in that line of thinking. While 5% of the U.S. online population may be using MSN/Bing as a search engine, do we know if that is the first choice of search engine? Or,

is that simply overall usage? I truly believe that, while there are people out there using MSN/Bing as a search engine, it may often be a second or third choice, selected only after the use of Google and/or Yahoo!.



So, how is Bing doing? I’ve heard some positive feedback regarding Pay-Per-Click (PPC) traffic and Bing. I know a lot of people also like the Comparison Shopping Engine (CSE) feature which offers a special cashback option; to be fair, I must say that I am not familiar with the feature, but so far, it is getting a lot of props. But, are these true successes, or simply the logical results of the novelty? Personally, I haven’t seen anything in terms of search engine functionality or PPC results that is enough to convince me MSN is much improved now versus a year ago. I should note that in terms of the innovation adoption curve of Rogers, I tend to be one of the “late majority,” or, those skeptics who use new ideas and products only after seeing results or a majority adoption. I want to see proof of success

before I even begin to test. Now, those may be some unfair or overly critical expectations, but I have high standards; when I consistently see positive results from Google, it takes a lot to persuade me to look elsewhere.

If Bing is going to be successful, I do believe MSN needs to step up its sophistication of the current PPC system, MSN adCenter. In terms of functionality, flexibility and ease of use, well, let’s just say it is no surprise that MSN holds only 5% of the U.S. search engine market share. The adCenter system can be cumbersome and limited. For example, if you are utilizing multiple match types within adCenter (which, in many cases, you should be using) and you want to pause a high-spending/low-converting keyword, you have no choice but to pause all match types for that term. Huh? What is the point of having multiple match types if you can’t pick and choose which are to be kept and which are to be purged due to poor performance?

However, there have been some improvements over time, which gives me hope that MSN is not entirely out of touch with what advertisers need. For example, a new desktop was unveiled to help make bulk changes easier. Additional targeting options are now available, allowing the advertiser to more precisely segment marketing efforts. The content network has been improved, with filtering capabilities to help weed out unqualified traffic.

What’s the bottom line? Clearly, I’m not convinced that Bing can hold a candle to Google or even Yahoo! But, that doesn’t mean we should rule out the potential of Bing. After all, the fat lady hasn’t sung just yet... **eBiz**



By Robyn Snyder

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men, women, sporting goods, shoes. Sending direct messages that interest the viewers will increase the potential for them to open, become engaged, click, and convert.

Tip #4 Test, Test, Test - Before investing in sending to your 10,000 contacts, randomly select 1,000 of those names. Test a variety of subject lines, images, promotions, text, links, etc. If something seems to be problematic, you can make changes to improve the e-mail before sending to the entire list. Testing like this increases your chances the masses will be more engaged.

Subject lines! - As a critical factor for achieving good open rates, "subject lines" is a subject that deserves five slots in our top ten. While the other four tips we've covered are important, the subject line is the deal breaker. If you don't engage the reader in 50 characters or less, there are no opens and your campaign has flopped.

Tip #5 Short and Sweet - A recent industry report showed subject lines of 35 characters or less had a 24% open rate, while longer ones averaged only a 17% open rate.

Tip #6 Make it Enticing - With a compelling subject line, your customers will want to open the message because what's inside can't be missed!

Tip #7 Urgency - People don't want to feel like they're missing out on something. Use subject lines that are time sensitive. Add urgency with words such as "last day," "now," and "ends Friday."

Tip #8 Never use FREE - This is a sure-fire way to get caught in the jaws of SPAM filters.

Tip #9 Testing - Test subject line version A with version B to measure greater success.

Tip #10 CAN-SPAM Compliant - Learn what the restrictions are and follow them, otherwise you won't make it into the in-box at all.

Remember, with the popularity of preview panes, open rates aren't the end all in metrics. Also, when viewers' images aren't enabled, this viewing is not registered as opened. So remember, the importance is in clicks and conversions. But to entice customers to open the e-mail, whether they enable those images or not, is the only way to get them clicking through and buying. **eBiz**



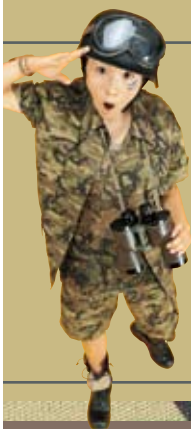
By Michelle Johnson
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BOOT CAMP @ HQ 2009 e-commerce conference

Solid Cactus Boot Camps are multi-day events designed to give the e-commerce store owner the opportunity to attend multiple training sessions that are focused on building business and making the most of your e-commerce site. Seminars throughout the event are focused on ways to grow and improve your business, plus you'll have the opportunity to share ideas and thoughts with your peers and the experts on hand.



In addition to our educational seminars, we've arranged for exciting after-hours activities to make the most of your Boot Camp experience. Now drop and give us twenty. Just kidding.



*"I could write a book about the entire event!
Put it this way, it was awesome.. and you
spoiled us. I've been to many events
everywhere, and this is by far the best!"*

— Pam Macharola, BlairCandy.com

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candles & such

"Making a Business Flourish with the Right Touch of Service"

"No more answering phone calls while you're shopping at target". It was that statement, during a Solid Cactus webinar about call center services, that really hit home for Kara English, co-owner of Colorado-based CandlesAndSuch.com, an online source for wedding-related favors and gifts.

"I learned that I needed to get out of the way and let my business boom and flourish, like a child. By trying to control everything I was actually holding it back."

—Kara English, CandlesAndSuch.com

"I had been signing up for everything and anything I could to learn more about e-commerce," notes Kara. "The Solid Cactus Call Center webinar made me laugh out loud."

Kara works from her home and has young twins. She found herself hiding in the garage to be able to talk to customers without kid noises in the background. She also found it hard to leave the house (well, office), but if she did, the phone had to come along with her. She knew something had to change. Immediately. After the webinar, Kara became a Solid Cactus Call Center client.

She likens the trepidation of letting go of some of the control of the company to dropping the kids of at a baby sitter for the first time.

"You know they'll be fine, but you stay by the door and listen until you hear them stop crying," she comments.

Would the call center represent her company the right way? Will they answer questions correctly? At first she sat by her computer, watching and worrying. But when she noticed the e-mails from

customers telling her how wonderful her "employees" were (even though Kara and co-owner Leslie Schultz are the only two CandlesAndSuch.com employees), she realized the call center team was actually doing a better job than she could. They focused totally on the customer, helping them make decisions and even pointing out things like free shipping with a certain order size. Suddenly, sales were going up and Kara found time to concentrate on the business instead of being caught up in the business. She focused on acquiring new products, looking at SEO, and other areas for which she previously didn't have time. The store now carries over 5,000 items.



CandlesAndSuch.com offers a wide variety of unique, creative, and affordable favors for special occasions.

"People want to talk to a person," notes Kara. "They are planning an event and are usually a bit stressed. They want to know the order has been placed and will arrive on time. That's not something they get with an answering machine."

Kara does not need to hire additional employees – another added benefit.

Another webinar changed Kara's business model a second time.

"I saw that Solid Cactus was doing another call center webinar, but this time there was going to be a tour to introduce some of the people who work there. I decided to watch because I've never been there and wanted to put faces with names," said Kara.

The webinar focused on newly released virtual office services, which includes answering customer e-mails, calling customers, updating orders, and processing orders. A light bulb went off.

"We were scheduled for a vacation to Walt Disney World in May, the busiest time of year for our business. I wasn't sure how I could go, and if I did, would I spend the entire time in the hotel room working?" laughs Kara.

Kara signed up for virtual office services immediately, and over a number of months, shifted additional office activities over to Solid Cactus. She was pleased with the way the Solid Cactus team picked up on her needs right away. Her comfort level allowed her to take her first real vacation in years.

One of the virtual office tools that particularly appealed to Kara was the ability to use instant messenger to communicate with Solid Cactus. For example, customer service reps can message Kara with questions while they are on the phone with one of her customers and get the answer they need. Kara still feels involved with her customers while relying on the call center staff to handle their needs.

As Kara noted in a recent *Practical eCommerce* article, "I learned that I needed to get out of the way and let my business boom and flourish, like a child. By trying to control everything I was actually holding it back."

CandlesAndSuch.com offers a wide variety of unique, creative and affordable favors for special occasions such as weddings, a rehearsal dinners, an anniversary parties, bridal showers, baby showers or just a special gift. Based in Silt, Colorado, the company is owned by Kara English and Leslie Schultz. For more information call 1-800-516-1589 or visit www.CandlesAndSuch.com. eBiz



By Catherine D. Shafer
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Tech Corner:

Overcoming PC Failures - Slow Start?

I often overhear my peers scream, "My computer is slow!" or "I've got a memory leak!" But, exactly what does that mean? With most of today's PC systems equipped with at least 1GB of RAM, how much memory needs to be leaked to experience an impact on performance? Short of a certified technician examining your system, we cannot pinpoint just one source. However, we can investigate one of the most overlooked sources of PC failures: Start-up programs.

What You May Not Know About Start-up Programs

Almost all programs, when implemented using the default installation, automatically decide the application should start up when Windows starts. If you don't pay close attention to this option, you could end up with a situation where every other program will slow down so much that you can't even open your Internet browser. The reason behind this is these programs use a portion of the system memory resource, which then leaves a smaller portion for other programs. Case in point: I recently formatted my laptop (Athlon 64 / 2 GB RAM) and did a test on what happens to a brand new laptop that happens to be running Microsoft Vista. To my amazement, after I installed all the basic programs (printer, camera, phone tools, etc.) I had over 30 programs running at start-up-- and an available system resource of 49-percent! Take note that this applies to all the free trials you get with a new PC.

Solution

Start filtering out these programs. Let's face it. Google Toolbar and Yahoo! Messenger do not need to run when Windows starts. Here's how to correct this issue, based upon your operating system:

For Vista users, Microsoft strongly recommends Windows Defender for controlling which programs run at start-up. Since it is already part of the operating system, simply

1. *Click Start > All Programs > Windows Defender*
2. *Click Tools > Software Explorer*
3. Locate *Category* and select *Start-up Programs*. A window will pop up.
4. By clicking on each name, you'll see the details of each program running at start-up. Simply click *Disable* (bottom right corner) to prevent it from loading at start-up.

Windows 98se/ME/2k/XP users, you'll need to use the System Configuration Utility, more commonly known as MSConfig.

1. *Click Start > Run*
2. In the dialog box, type in: *msconfig* and then click *OK* or press *[ENTER]*
3. In the pop-up window, choose the *start-up tab*. You'll see a list of all programs running at start-up. A check next to the name indicates the program is running upon start-up while those without one aren't. Simply go through this list and disable the applications that you know are not necessary. While you may not be familiar with every program listed, the obvious ones should stand out and you should be able to determine whether it needs to run at start-up. Those unfamiliar entries should be checked by an experienced professional before removing from start-up.

Mac/Linux users are not likely to be affected by start-up programs because there should not be any programs that run at start-up. Why?

The developers made it that way. The geeks behind these operating systems understand the potential performance drop; each kernel is made so that start-ups consist of operating system alone. (Hence, my Asus EEE still boots up in 12 seconds!)

Poor system performance originates from different sources and can impact any computer user. We have discussed one of the most frequently overlooked issues; meanwhile, other issues may also be causing havoc on your system (browser cache, settings, adware, viruses, etc.). To maximize the life of your computer, always pay attention to what's happening, check monitor usage, and perform regular maintenance (virus scan, defrags, backups, etc.) **eBiz**



By Jeffrey Li

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Missed opportunities in
Social Media History

HEY THERE!
JULIUS IS USING TWITTER.

MARCH 15, 44 B.C.

JULIUS: HANGING WITH MY
FRIENDS @ ROMAN SENATE.

MARCH 15, 44 B.C. 17:25

POMPEIA: @JULIUS, THE SENATE
ARE NOT YOUR FRIENDS

MARCH 15, 44 B.C. 17:30

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