

# eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.



## 8 Tips to Get Your E-Mail in Shape before the Holidays

—By Michelle Johnson

- ◆ Expand your E-Commerce with eBay Listings
- ◆ Shipping Perishable Items
- ◆ Making The Grade: Google Adwords Quality Score
- ◆ The REAL Value of Links



Read this issue and stay cool during the dog days of August. Or skip it. You'll enjoy the heat! And the scratching...

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August 2008 Volume 2 • Number 8

## 8 Tips to Get Your E-Mail in Shape Before the Holidays.....6

Explore e-mail's limitless options, including segmentation, optimization and tracking features so you can have a successful campaign this holiday.

## Shoppers will be Shopping .....3

Ready or not, now is the time to start putting your holiday plans in motion. We've got some great articles in this issue to help you along the way.

## Can the Canned Product Descriptions .....4

Show the search engines you're different than all the other sites out there. Set yourself apart with unique product descriptions.

## Shipping Perishable Items .....8

Features and policies to combat the challenge of shipping perishable items and help customers understand these processes and requirements.

## Customer Service: What is the Best Medium of Communication? ....10

Methods to help you choose the best method of communication accordingly to be a complete success in business.

## Preparing Your Warehouse for the Holiday Rush .....12

Be ready for the increase in holiday business with an easy to navigate warehouse system.

## Toolbox: Keyword Research .....15

Ten tools and a progression of activity to simplify your keyword research process.

## Expand your E-Commerce with eBay Listings .....16

Learn the rules and learn the territory before you jump in, determine if selling on eBay is likely to be successful for you.

## Making The Grade: Google Adwords Quality Score.....17

The invaluable factors that Google shares for improving Quality Score and your overall account performance.

## The "net effect" has been very positive for Kaleidoscopes To You ....18

Karl Schilling has advice for making your own site attractive without spending lots of money.

## What's the Word on Widgets? .....19

Widgets done right can boost sales, maintain existing relationships, and even foster new clientele.

## The REAL Value of Links .....20

Web links can provide a boost to your appearance in search results and also increase relevancy in your shoppers by providing trust and approval to your store..

## Tech Corner: Saying Goodbye... When an Employee Leaves .....22

This month's Tech Corner provides a checklist for the IT-related issues involved in separation.

### Photo & Illustration Credits

COVER: illusime, PAGE 3: Andrey Smagin, netris, PAGE 4: kjpargeter, PAGE 6: illusime, PAGE 8: Niderlander, PAGE 10: Mdilsiz, PAGE 12: Scott Sanfilippo, PAGE 13: Randy Llewellyn, PAGE 14: Randy Llewellyn, PAGE 15: Randy Llewellyn, Koun PAGE 16: RocketPlace.com, PAGE 17, Pinobarile, PAGE 18: Lisa Kramer, Kaleidoscopes To You, PAGE 20: Peter Jobst, PAGE 22: Mikeexpert

**Editor in Chief:** Scott Sanfilippo  
scotts@ebizinsider.com

**Managing Editor:** John Dawe  
johnd@ebizinsider.com

**Wordsmith:** Kevin Lynn  
kevinl@ebizinsider.com

**Publisher:** Solid Cactus, Inc.  
www.solidcactus.com

**Production Director:** Randy Llewellyn  
randyl@ebizinsider.com

**Advertising Director:** Lisa Kramer  
lisak@ebizinsider.com

**Marketing Director:** Gregory Davis  
gregory.davis@ebizinsider.com

**Vice President, Sales:** Lou Pagnotti  
loup@ebizinsider.com

**Vice President, Operations:** Miguel Younger  
miguel@ebizinsider.com

**Exhibition Coordinator:** Lisa Kramer  
lisak@ebizinsider.com

**Conference Coordinator:** Scott Sanfilippo  
scotts@ebizinsider.com

**Online Producer:** Kim Good  
kimg@ebizinsider.com

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By Scott Sanfilippo,  
Editor in Chief

# Shoppers will be Shopping

everything from e-mail marketing, shipping perishable items, and the article that gets the most request for reprints every year - Preparing Your Warehouse for the Holiday Rush.

Forget what you've heard about the uncertain economy. For those of us in e-commerce it doesn't matter. Shoppers will be shopping and hopefully your store is ready to turn them into buyers. For many of these buyers, this is their first experience with your store and your one chance to get it right so they'll be back. Follow the tips and advice in this issue to make them long-term customers.

## Many Happy Returns

I order lots of things online and one of my favorite places to shop is Zappos.com. I've been a longtime fan because of their customer service policies. For example, buy a pair of shoes and if they don't fit, send them back - at their expense.

As the cost of fuel continues to rise and UPS and FedEx continue to charge Fuel Surcharges, I find it amazing that a company can offer such a customer-friendly return policy! Granted, the margin on a pair of shoes is greater than a bag of dog biscuits, it's still an expensive service. It's also the Zappos.com driving force for new customer acquisition and most importantly, customer retention.

Costs are increasing for everyone, but you should never let those increases take a toll on customer service. I'm sure you may be looking for ways to shave a couple of bucks here and there, but don't do a cut at the expense of your customers. Remember, they're all we've got.

Now I have to go and try on my new pair of, um, Crocs. Guess where I got 'em...? **eBiz**

I guess it's safe to call this our "Holiday Issue." Hey—it's August and the kids will soon be going back to school and then Halloween, then Thanksgiving and in no time it's the jolly fat man in the big red suit... well, you know what I mean. So I have to ask, are you ready?

Ready or not, now is the time to start putting your holiday plans in motion. We've got some great articles in this issue to help you along the way with



**Dear Editor:** I'm currently looking at launching a new e-commerce venture with a product I created. I am not a programmer and need to hire someone to do that. What I'm worried about is someone stealing my idea and selling this product. How can I prevent this?

—George S., Indianapolis, IN

**Dear George:** For us, the answer is simple. We have a very comprehensive NDA and all our employees and visitors to our location must sign it. We have a general counsel in house and enforce these types of things tooth and nail. Because we are a large company and deal with many big brands, we have many contracts in place that require us to maintain certain levels of security. This is why we brought an attorney onboard. People from the outside can't even get into our building without agreeing to the NDA signed along with a copy of their state-issued ID. Finally, if you are worried about someone stealing your idea, you should register it with the Patent and Trademark office immediately – that way you have legal recourse if someone does steal it.

**Dear Editor:** I recently put a toll-free number on my website and our phone calls have gone way up. My staff now spends all day on the phone, which is FINE if they are getting orders. I have told them if it's not an order to get the customer off the phone, but they still talk and talk. What's the solution?

—Victor M., Dallas, TX

**Dear Victor:** This is an issue I deal with every day and I don't know what the correct answer is. Well, I do – but it's not going to be easy. Getting the customer off the phone is one thing, but forcing it will only hurt your customer service. I remember when we had the pet company, our reps would be on the phone for 45 minutes with a customer and I used to get upset – but then I'd look and see that they're on with a long-time, faithful, high-spending customer. Would I rather they not spend ten percent of their day on one phone call? Probably. But what would be worse is losing that faithful customer because we were abrupt in ending a call. You need to make sure your reps know what is nurturing a customer and what isn't. Getting the customer off the phone to save a buck may hurt you in the long run. This is a very delicate decision.

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

# Can The Canned Product Descriptions



how effective chicken soup is in making you feel better.

E-commerce store owners like you know the value of a successful

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) campaign. If you're not listed for keywords related to your store on the search engines results pages (SERPs), how will potential customers find your store and purchase your products? They won't. But there is another component to successful SEO management. Search engine spiders frown on duplicate content, or content on your site that is taken from another site. Take the time to generate original copy. Don't run the risk of letting duplicate content adversely affect your keyword rankings.

Writing original, creative product descriptions can attract the eye of search engines and even propel them to rank your site higher for the keywords you'd like to target. Here are some tips for writing effective product descriptions:

- **Keep it short.** A paragraph of text is sufficient. However, make it original. Remember why you added this product to your offering in the first place. Use the enthusiasm that you felt for this product when you feature it on your site.
- **Highlight the product's features.** Think about the product. If you're writing about chicken soup, talk about how soothing it is and why the noodles in your chicken soup are so tasty.
- **Provide the customer with "free information".** Effective product

descriptions not only describe the product, they also have take-away value. Tell me how long I should cook the chicken soup for and any great recipes I could use it in.

- **Include your keywords.** Use keyword research tools like KeywordDiscovery and Wordtracker to find keywords that people actually search for that reflect the nature of your business. For the chicken soup product description, I might target a keyword like "chicken noodle soup", and use that phrase in the title of the page and about twice in the paragraph describing the soup.

If you have hundreds of products on your site and limited employees, we know it can be extremely time-consuming to write your own product descriptions. Have a good writer in the family, or know an English major who lives down the block? Have him or her read this article, give them a little extra cash, and give them something to do by hiring them to write your product descriptions for you. It's a good secondary solution. But in fact, if you have the time, no one else knows their products quite like you.

Show the search engines you're different than all the other sites out there and set yourself apart with unique product descriptions. **eBiz**

We all know by now that running an online business isn't easy - it takes careful planning, industry research, Internet marketing know-how and tons of skills which you'll only learn through hands-on experience. With all the time you spend managing your store, who has time to write unique product descriptions? After all, you can just rip them from the manufacturer's site, and who's going to notice that tiny paragraph of text you took from their site?

## Search engines will notice!

Search engines have been known to reward sites with original, quality content - and penalize those who copy it. Think of it this way:

You've got a cold and you walk into a supermarket ready to buy chicken soup. You stare at the shelves only to find there are 50 cans of that same boring condensed chicken soup - and one unique can which has creative packaging and highlights how great chicken soup is for your sniffles. Which are you going to grab?

If you're a shopper, chances are you'll notice the distinctive packaging. Likewise, if you're a search engine spider, you're going to pick the unique chicken soup can. After all, not only does it set itself apart from all the other cans, but it gives you great information right on the can about



By Alicia Magda  
aliciam@ebizinsider.com

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# 8 Tips to Get Your E-Mail in Shape before the Holidays

Black Friday, **Cyber Monday**, Christmas and Hanukkah are right around the corner. So *now* is the time to get your pre-existing e-mail marketing strategies in shape, or to start new campaigns.

Just imagine, an e-mail solution where you could ensure your customers are receiving personal, relevant, timely, branded and professionally designed and written e-mail that they want to receive. It's real, it's happening and it's here for the taking.

E-mail marketing is much more than simply sending an e-mail with a generic layout and no ability to segment, track or feature event-triggered sends. Forget what you think you know about e-mail marketing. Let's explore e-mail's limitless options, including segmentation, optimization and tracking features so you can have a successful campaign this holiday.

**Fact:** E-mail **IS** the holy grail of marketing. In no other area of the marketing exchange can you so directly target the people whom already patronize your services than through your current customer base.

**Fact:** It costs anywhere from five to eight times more to gain a new customer than to retain a customer. When you consider the price of your time, advertising and Internet marketing costs, the answer becomes obvious – e-mail is the perfect solution. E-mail marketing is the most sought after present and future of direct-to-client marketing available. E-mail marketing's Return on Advertising Spend, (ROAS), is triple PPC at 7% - currently making it the most sought after marketing tool.

Follow these tried and true tips tested to ensure you're ready for the rush this holiday season!

**1. Qualified List Building** – Without a good, qualified list, your e-mail campaign is going nowhere. Strike a balance of asking enough questions to get a great list without asking too many questions of your potential client. Pertinent information to ask for segmenting purposes (we'll get to that

in a bit) are gender, city, state or birth date. Wait until a later time to ask what types of products they're interested in and how often they'd like to receive communications.

**2. Professional Appearance** – Sending a generic e-mail simply by slapping your logo into a pre-designed template will not brand your companies identity and will show your customers you've put little effort into your campaign. With a professionally customized design, your clients will expect your e-mail to have a clear, concise and consistent message, blast after blast. This is where a managed solution stands above the rest.

**3. Segmentation** – Segmentation is the pinnacle of optimizing your campaign. If your current solution isn't offering advanced segmentation opportunities, you're missing the chance to properly communicate with your customers. I know what you're thinking—sorry! No more is segmenting only about splitting your domestic from your international customers; it's about communicating directly to your clientele based on their preferences, previous buying history and more.

If there's a group you want to more adequately target while receiving the greatest return on investment for your send, segmentation is the answer. You can target only men, ages 25-49, who live in the eastern half of the United States and have ordered sports gear in the previous 18 months. Why waste the money and resources to send a generic advertisement to customers that don't apply? With segmentation you know your clients are interested in the products and will increase your conversion rates, all with the proper split of a list.

**4. Personalization** – Segmentation is an example of personalization. If you're not personalizing your e-mail, you're not getting the most out of your campaign. Most e-mail programs will allow you

to personalize the subject line and insert a first name. More advanced solutions allow you to dynamically insert personalization based upon your client's interests.

Everyone is accustomed to "Hello (insert name)."

But advanced solutions allow you to speak directly to your client. Make them feel you have more of a one-on-one relationship and that your e-mail is targeted directly to them, such as:

Hello (*insert name*),

Thank you for your recent order of (*dynamically insert product*). We really value your business and your continued commitment to our company since (*dynamically insert first purchase date*). Because of this we'd like to offer you (*dynamically insert saving offer based on pre-set variables*) off your next purchase. Thanks again for your loyalty and happy shopping!

With such a personalized message your client's will know they are important, valued and respected for their individuality. Wouldn't you rather receive promotions that benefit you then clogging your inbox with useless offers? This way you optimize and increase your conversation rates at the same time.

**5. Event-Triggered** – If you're communicating with your clients based on their preferences, you're getting the message. E-mail is a commitment with a motive. It helps you stay in touch with your clients, lets them know you care about them and offers them a service, be it by a promotion, a newsletter, a whitepaper, etc.

E-mail solutions with event-triggered capabilities are a great way to get the most bang for your buck this holiday. Utilizing database information, you can automatically send customers birthday wishes, anniversary wishes and automated reminders for product refills or special promotions to counter

shopping cart abandonment.

Whatever you do, don't let that customer slip away. If they've made it to the cart you know they are at least partially interested. Use e-mail to entice them to complete the transaction with a "Where Did You Go" e-mail and offer them additional savings like 5% off their order if they submit today, or free shipping if placed by a predetermined time.

- 6. Testing** – If you're starting your first e-mail campaign this year it's best to do so as soon as possible in order to test, test and test. Test your subject lines, test your content writing style, test your coupon offers, test your images, test your design, and test your landing page design.

By using a solution that offers heat maps you can track which aspects of a design received the most attention in each e-mail. If one area wasn't a success, change it, while keeping the positively received areas the same. After several campaigns you'll have a layout that is ideal to your clients' likes. This process takes time. To have the best layout ready for the holiday rush, you'll need to start with an optimized managed solution today!

- 7. Tracking/Reporting** – If your solution isn't offering you the best reporting then all your efforts are for naught. My best advice is to utilize a solution that offers advanced reporting and tracking features. You can send, send and send, but if you're not getting the numbers to justify, improve and optimize your campaign you're not able to maximize your conversion success.

While some solutions may offer limited reporting resources, Solid Cactus' high-end solution is the crème de la crème. If you want it we can track it; opens, clicks, forwards, subscribes, unsubscribes, web pages visited, conversions, heat maps, click-through performance and more. Utilize this information to retarget your customers with unique campaigns.

Reporting allows you to improve relevancy for greater long-term success. Did a client click but not open? Send them a follow-up offer. Did they click-through, roam around and not buy? Based upon their pages visited, track items where they have shown interest and remarket featuring those products. The options are endless and the results are staggering. I can't say it enough; sending personalized, qualified e-mail

# E-Mail Marketing Works

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**Solid Cactus offers professional solutions to maximize your permission based e-mail marketing campaigns, including:**

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- **Dynamic Mailing Content**  
Tailor messages to individual recipients based on preferences, profiles and history. Use the option to utilize dynamic content, which makes a mailing more relevant to the recipients needs.

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will make you profitable this holiday and throughout the year.

- 8. Create a Marketing Schedule** – E-mail marketing is not simply about sending a blast when sales are low. E-mail is a way to keep your brand in the forefront. Customers will think of your company—your brand—first, because your e-mail consistently shows up in the inbox offering them services that benefit their lives.

As an e-commerce store you have a goldmine sitting at your finger tips. Retarget to those customers who have shopped with your company, know and respect your brand and trust you to bring

them the best services possible.

By sending personalized more relevant communications customers want to open, read and act on – you'll drive your sales, grow your opt-in subscription list and improve your ROI. E-mail marketing allows you to easily follow the most important rules in marketing: keep in touch with your clients, understand their needs and reward their loyalty. **eBiz**



By Michelle Johnson  
michelle.johnson@ebizinsider.com

# Shipping Perishable Items



*Fish. Chocolate. Cheese. Cookies. Steak.*

These are all delicious, edible items that can be purchased online. However, shipping perishables can pose a real challenge to retailers.

There are several features and policies to combat the challenge of shipping perishable items. Other features help customers understand these processes and requirements.

## **SHIPPING AND HANDLING**

The way items are packaged and the time they spend en route determine their condition when they arrive.

### **Packaging**

Pam Macharola of BlairCandy.com sells and ships many treats with melt-potential — chocolate, gummies, taffy, mints, gum and more.

“We’ve tried everything! Right now we use a gel ice pack that was designed so it doesn’t sweat next to the item. These only last 48 hours max,” she said. “We are about to offer dry ice, so now we are going to have two options.”

CountryCupboardCookies.com’s Judy Wittig packages baked goods direct from the oven to ensure freshness.

“Our cookies and brownies are baked from scratch without preservatives. We spend a lot of effort so that the packages arrive as fresh and delicious as possible,” she said. “Cookies are baked, packaged in heat sealed bags within an hour or two, gift-boxed and shipped that same day.”

Andrew Dimino runs five websites based out of Nevada, four of them food related. The most affected by the elements is LowCarbChocolates.com.

“We go out of our way to say in big, bold letters in multiple places, that chocolate will melt in certain areas (of the country),” said Dimino. “We tell our customers that we have been in business nine years and we know that chocolate melts in the summer.”

The warehouse at LowCarbChocolates.com dons a big map of the United States, where Dimino’s staff displays where the weather is hot.

“We look at routes the different products will take. As the temperatures change, we determine what states need ice packs. In the December Holiday Rush for example, we know that we still need ice packs to Florida and Arizona, but



nowhere else in the country. As the year goes on, we change the maps," he said.

### Shipping Limitations

Timing also determines how items will arrive. Most retailers avoid shipping perishable goods for Saturday deliveries.

"We avoid shipping over the weekend unless the gift will arrive on Monday, also within 2-3 business days," said Wittig.

BlairCandy.com uses a similar method.

"We ship on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for most areas. We spend a lot of time in the hot months looking at the area it's going to and what they ordered," said Macharola.

Many retailers require next day air during hot months for certain items. Management tools like Shipping Manager by Solid Cactus (<http://www.solidcactus.com/shipping-manager.html>) creates item level rules for cases like this, which would restrict shipping methods. This prevents the customer from selecting an unsafe method in case the retailer does not catch it.

Dimino also requires overnight or second day air delivery on perishable items going to hot climates.

"We would love our product to arrive in perfect condition, but it is impossible unless its expedited," he said.

### Restricting Items in Warm Weather

Sometimes it just boils down to making certain items unavailable at certain times of the year.

"During the summer months we have a few items that we do not ship, like our Belgian chocolate fudge and butter cream frosted brownies," said Judy Wittig of CountryCupboardCookies.com.

BlairCandy.com makes certain products temporarily unavailable for ordering, but on the item page notes that the item is in stock, but they will not ship.

Dimino's flagship site, CarbSmart.com has another weather limitation, this time in the cold weather. His popular DaVinci sugar-free syrups come in glass bottles that burst when they get too cold.

"The first few years, every winter we knew that we would lose 24-36 bottles. For the first six years of business it was an acceptable loss. Two years ago, we had 120 bottles break; that's why we changed our policy to not ship in winter," he said, adding that each fall he has a sale prompting customers to stock up.

### INFORMING THE CONSUMER

Informing customers of potential shipping issues is a must. Wittig explains that retailers who stand by their policies shouldn't have a problem.

"We are honest with our customers. Once they understand the reason for the sometime restrictive shipping policies, they are appreciative of our attention to the freshness of their gift," she said.

### Shipping Policy Page

All e-commerce sites should have a shipping policy page prominently linked from the header and/or footer. Moving seasonal restrictions to the top of the page will ensure they are not overlooked.

FoilWrappedChocolates.com has an entire section on "hot weather shipping." It includes a link to the Weather Channel's website to tell customers the temperature along the delivery route.

### Shipping Policy Pop-up

The item page can also feature a Shipping Policy Pop-up, for shipping policies on a particular item.

"Our newly designed website by Solid Cactus offers a shipping policy pop-up page with rates, policies and options. This is a great feature as it keeps the customer from leaving the page, utilizing the pop-up," said Wittig.

BlairCandy.com goes a step further with a pop-in.

"The customer cannot get past the pop-in and check-out without acknowledging they read the message and clicking through. We can say 'We warned you ahead of time,'" Macharola explained.



BlairCandy.com also has a shipping graphic on their homepage linking them to a page with the seasonal and weather-related shipping issues.

LowCarbChocolates.com also has a required acknowledgement.

"During check-out, customers have to check a box that says they understand the shipping policy. We have to do that,"

Dimino explains. "We had the policy four years, only had the check-box this year."

### Use of Customer Service Department

FoilWrappedChocolates.com invites customers to call their customer service line when choosing shipping based on geography and temperature. Having a customer service line in the header is especially important when there could be an influx of incoming calls.

This time of year, Macharola reports that about 50% of the customer service calls at Blair Candy are for one question: "Will this melt?"

### SALES AND PROMOTIONS

As an internal way to manage the melting issue, LowCarbChocolates.com has a few annual promotions aimed at pushing to sell the chocolates before the weather gets too hot.

"We have a big sale in the spring, before summer comes. We say, 'Load up now, here's a big discount, order everything you need for summer now,'" said Dimino. "After summer we have another sale as a welcome back, that summer's over."

When it's all said and done, mistakes still can happen when shipping chocolate. Perhaps Dimino says it best:

"It'll still taste great, just won't be in the same shape," he joked.

### REMEMBER CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

Even though the holidays happen in traditionally cold weather throughout most of the United States, shipping gift baskets to places that are warm and sunny year-round can still pose a problem. Dimino says paying attention to the weather on the holiday gift delivery route is still important.

"Even though chocolate will be less likely to melt in the winter in some cases we still have to require second day or overnight; winter in Miami is still warm," said Dimino.

eBiz



By Donna Talarico

donnat@ebizinsider.com

# Customer Service: What is the Best Medium of Communication?



E-mail might not be enough and a phone call might be too much. So, what exactly is the best way to communicate in different situations? Day to day, we all need to communicate with the world and workforce around us. We all need to keep our schedules synched and we need to keep the world informed and there are so many means to accomplishing this. In other words, the right way to “reach out and touch someone” will change with the specifics of the situation. It is up to you to adjust your method of communication accordingly to be a complete success in business.

Say you’re a successful online retailer that sells clothes for professional women. You’re at the computer when a Live Chat Message pops up. It is your best customer wondering what sizes you have in the black blouse on your homepage. In pops an instant message from a co-worker asking, “Where the heck did you put the packing tape?” As you are typing your answer, you see the window pop up for a new e-mail message. It is your drop shipper changing his pricing, ‘What now?’ You ask yourself. You open the e-mail only to see the charges went up drastically with a side note that they are sorry but shipping costs are unbelievable!! Go figure.

Your customer initiated the inquiry by Live Chat so you respond using that. Simple. You answer your co-worker's question. That was easy – and fast. Now you sit and ponder how to best voice your frustrations to this company you have been dealing with for the past 11 years. With increasing communication tools, comes increasing demand for response. You need to evaluate what the best medium for communication will be?

- Picking up the phone?
- E-Mailing?
- Instant Messaging?

Depending on the situation, using some or all of your communication tools will work. Just think about what point you are trying to express. E-mails and IMs are a great communication tool, especially if you are including specific instructions or directions. The written word can sum up a situation or a list of tasks precisely. However, written words can be taken the

wrong way, especially if you are trying to convey nuance or emotion. A phone call may be the better way to go when you need to express your feelings rather than leave your feelings up for interpretation. As they say, "Others can see you smiling or frowning on the other end of the telephone; they can hear your concerns or just feel your emotion." Inserting smilies might work – but don't count on it. They can also be interpreted as too informal or just plain silly.

So – in this situation where you need to discuss a lousy situation, pick up the phone and call your distributor so you can calmly discuss your concerns and hear their immediate response. A live conversation gives you the opportunity to massage a situation where a written message may be taken as cold or misinterpreted altogether. It also gives the person with whom you are speaking a chance to fully explain their side of the issue and "reach out and touch" you, too.

After the phone call, send a follow up e-mail thanking them for listening and summarize the call.

We're fortunate to have so many tools at our fingertips but remember; with increasing communication tools, comes increasing demand for a proper response – and choosing the method of reply is paramount. When it needs to be specific and clear, write it out. When it needs to reach out and be flexible, to connect at a more emotional level, act accordingly and pick up the telephone. When in doubt about how to utilize them and which direction to take, remember to treat your customers as you like to be treated when you're a customer. **eBiz**



By Amber Subjin  
ambers@ebizinsider.com.

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# Preparing Your Warehouse for the Holiday Rush



Example of bin labels

E-businesses expand at the holidays because of increased business, and it is critical to have a product location plan to teach to your holiday temps. An easy-to-navigate system is crucial, and is one of many things we learned along our very long road of very hard knocks as we developed our own company.

If you're selling product and stocking it in your warehouse, you probably have some type of bin location system in place to make picking easy for your employees. You don't? Well then, read on!

If you're just starting out and have a few employees who know where product is located by memory, it may seem like a good system to have. Don't be fooled. For instance, what happens when those employees take jobs elsewhere or you need to quickly hire new people to take care of the influx of holiday orders that suddenly crept up on you? Chances are you'll be wasting a lot of valuable pick/pack time having those employees walk around aimlessly searching for product. The solution to your warehousing evolution is bin locations.

Bin locations are simply the places where products are housed in your warehouse. This is a crucial system for every e-business to develop, and you

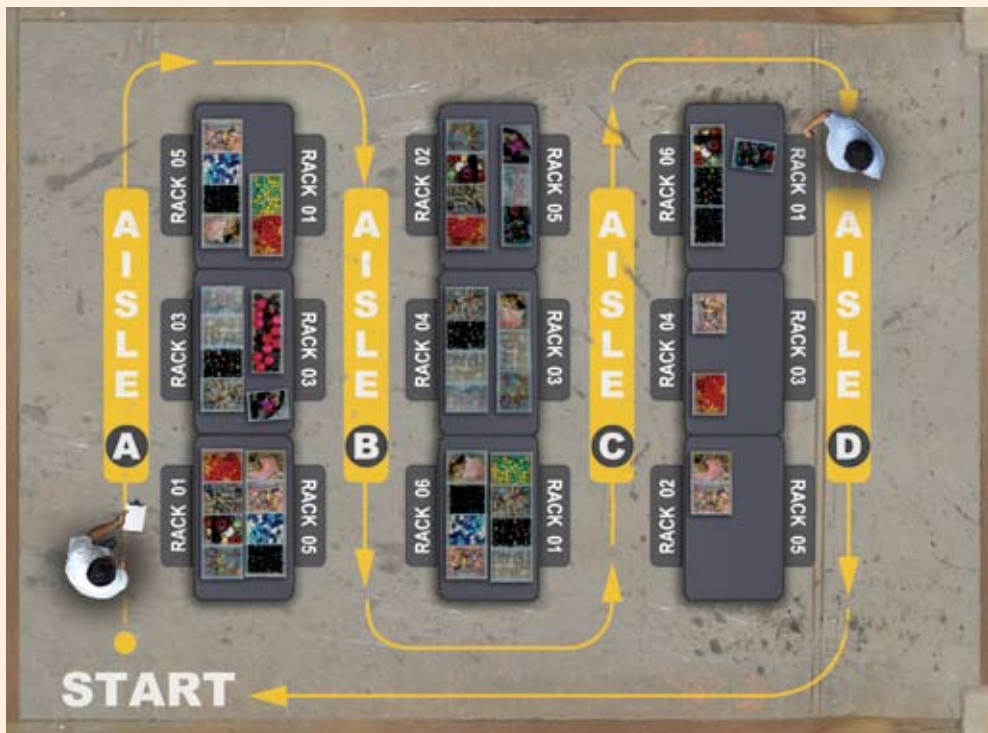
should organize your warehouse right down to the exact location on every single shelf. Taking the time to setup bin locations now, before the holidays, will save you time, money, improve your order turn-around time and eventually lead to greater customer satisfaction down the road. Here's how you start.

---

*“... because of increased business... it is critical to have a product location plan to teach to your holiday temps.”*

---

For the purposes of these examples, I will assume that your warehouse is set up with racks making up aisles, which we call pick lanes. The first thing you need to do is find a starting point for your pick route. A good origination point is the spot where you keep your pick tickets and baskets or carts for picking product. The second step is to label your pick lanes. Pick lanes should be labeled alphabetically. The aisle closest to the start of the pick route can be labeled “A”, second closest is labeled “B” and so forth.



Example warehouse floor plan

Once you have a map of your pick lanes, it's time to label the racks that are located in each of those aisles. In order to maintain a flow, racks are labeled in such a way that your picker will start at the beginning of the pick route, walk up the first aisle, down the second, up the third and so on, eventually ending up back at the start of the route ready to pick another order. For obvious reasons, we call this a serpentine layout.

Labeling your racks along the pick aisle is simple. Let's assume there are three racks in each aisle. Starting at the beginning, assign the first rack on the right the number 01 (put a zero in front of single digit numbers to maintain consistency and allow for future growth), the second 03, the third 05. On the left side of the aisle, assign the first rack 02, second 04, third 06 (see the example warehouse diagram). Once your racks are labeled, it's time to drill down to the details of each rack.

The first rack in aisle A is called A01 (aisle A, rack 01). Let's assume that rack 01 has three shelves. Starting at the floor, label the bottom shelf as A, the middle shelf as B and the top shelf as C. On those

shelves your product is contained in boxes or "bins". Starting left to right, each "bin" will be labeled 01, 02, 03, etc. You will do this for each shelf, so that in this example, product in the 4th bin on shelf B of rack 02 in aisle A would have a bin location of A02B04 (see the example rack diagram). The key thing to remember: the bin location is not tied to an item, it's tied to the rack.

At first, organizing your warehouse may sound confusing and look like a lot of work but believe me, it will pay big dividends over time! The time spent training new employees on how to pick product takes no more than 5 or 10 minutes because the system is easy to learn. With a system in place like this, when you need to bring in temporary help to pick and pack during the holidays, your training is minimal.

Once your bin location system is up and running, you can tweak it even more to improve warehouse efficiency. For example, you may want to put your most picked products right at the beginning of your pick route so your pickers don't have

*Preparing Your Warehouse for the Holiday Rush  
continued on page 14*

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to go three aisles back to get the most popular items they pick on a constant basis. Or, if you have items that only sell in the winter, move them to the end of the pick route and put your summer merchandise at the beginning during the spring and summer months. **eBiz**

Discuss order management on the eBiz forums at <http://forum.ebizinsider.com>



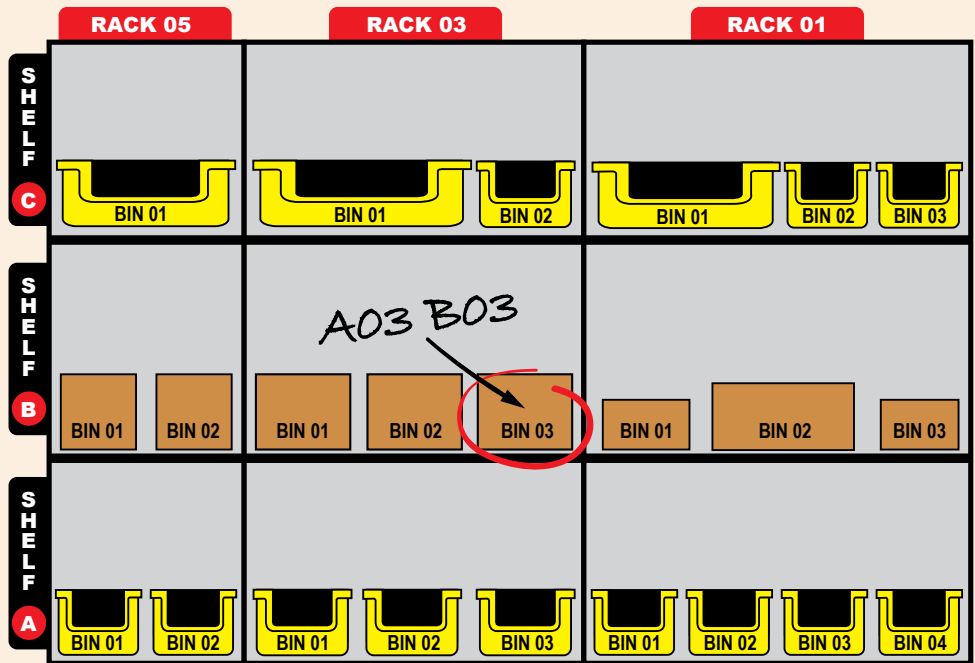
By Scott Sanfilippo  
scotts@ebizinsider.com.



## Getting ready for the holiday checklist

- Stock up on packing supplies... you don't want to hold up orders because you ran out of boxes.
- Be sure to include catalogs or sell sheets with outgoing orders. Turn one time holiday shoppers into repeat buyers by keeping your name in front of them. Think coupon code too!
- Give your website a holiday flair with a holiday logo to put shoppers in the spirit. (Don't wait till it's too late... call Solid Cactus now!)
- Offer gift certificates or gift cards. Great for the undecided shopper and they often go unredeemed.
- Be prepared for an increase in orders... don't get caught with a lack of staff to pack and take customer calls. Bad customer service this time of year, often results in no repeat sales.

### Aisle A Right



Example set of racks, see page 12 for examples of bin labels.



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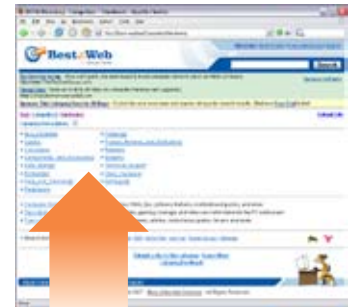
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# TOOLBOX:

## Keyword Research

To build up the right campaign for your client, you need to have the right keywords. The ten tools below are a progression of activity to simplify your keyword research process.

### In the Beginning, There Was General Research

Preliminary keyword research will give you the foundation for your campaign. These are the four tools you'll need to get started:

- ➔ **Keyword Discovery** – This tool acts as a guide in your keyword generation development, as it provides the number of searches for keywords relating to your main keyword research query. This gives you real numbers around which to base your strategies.
- ➔ **Google Tool/Traffic Estimator** – Located within Google Adwords, this tool gives you additional options for generating new keyword ideas. Compare advertiser competition, current search volume, last month search volume, and past year search volume trends.
- ➔ **Yahoo!/MSN tool** – Yahoo! & MSN employ their own keyword research tools. Find related keywords and monthly search volumes for each engine and then compare your results to those you've found in Google. This data can help you decide which keywords will be the most effective.
- ➔ **Wordtracker** – Similar to Keyword Discovery, Wordtracker gives the search volume for keywords with the added feature that suggests related keywords to use. This tool can also give you the KEI analysis for keywords, which compares search volume to advertiser competition. With a high KEI, your keywords will have a better chance of ranking well.

### The Middle of the Road: Analyze Your Data

Once you've selected your keywords, evaluate their performance using tools that will analyze specific keyword data.

- ➔ **Google Analytics** – View detailed reports and data regarding your keyword selections. Check your paid keyword performance while seeing what keywords are ranking organically. For each section, you can view keywords, number of pages per visit, average time on site, percentage of new visits and the bounce rate for each keyword. From this, you can choose the keywords that give you the right advantage.
- ➔ **Yahoo! Store Backend** – Keyword Finder lies within the backend of the Yahoo! store. It ranks keywords for your site based on the number of conversion and referrals to products. It is a great tool to use in developing your PPC campaigns.
- ➔ **Search Query Reports in Google** – Google Adwords allows you to run search query reports that gives you data on search queries that triggered your ads and received clicks. You can tell how your keywords are performing from these results, in addition to gaining insight on additional keywords you're not using, including potential negative keywords.

### Finish Like A Pro with Advanced Strategies

By now you've developed a list of solid keywords and have become skilled at using the other tools, but there are still several more resources at your fingertips. Stay on top of the trends with keyword research tools. These advanced techniques in keyword research will keep your campaign going strong:

- ➔ **KeyCompete & SpyFu** – These tools provide data on competitor keywords. Search by keyword or domain to get information on both paid and organic keywords. Using these tools, you can find out who your competitors are, then find out the items they're bidding on. Flesh out campaigns and find the keywords you may have missed. Either way, you've got the right advantage.
- ➔ **Compete.com** – Although Compete features much of the same keyword data found on KeyCompete and SpyFu, it also contains several other features that set it apart. Compete allows you to find a particular competitor's keywords, what websites get the most clicks from a particular keyword, and then comparisons on how two sites perform for competing keywords. Use the variety of site analysis tools found on Compete to help you further review and evaluate the traffic coming to your site.
- ➔ **Google Trends** – Get insight into broad search patterns and learn what regions of the world are searching for your keywords. An invaluable tool for geo-targeting, Google Trends can help you pinpoint campaign objectives. Google also provides Hot Trends, the 100 most searched keywords for any day.

Effective keywords are crucial to e-commerce success. There are tools available to help you choose and monitor wisely. Be wise. Use them! **eBiz**

For these and more keyword toolbox essentials visit [www.ebizinsider.com](http://www.ebizinsider.com)



By Mandy Boyle  
[mandy.boyle@ebizinsider.com](mailto:mandy.boyle@ebizinsider.com)

# Expand your E-Commerce with eBay Listings

Many online e-commerce operators can supplement their current store with listings on eBay, a marketplace transacting over \$50B (that's billion) per year. eBay has huge potential for sellers who have items people want and prices that make them want to bid or buy online. Before you jump in, determine if selling on eBay is likely to be successful for you.

## Research!

eBay is a marketplace operating under the laws of supply and demand. To determine if there is demand, room for you in the supply and sale prices that will lead to profits, use one of the many available research tools. The main ones are [Terapeak.com](http://Terapeak.com), [HammerTap.com](http://HammerTap.com), and [Vendio.com](http://Vendio.com). By running reports on keywords that describe an item you have, you can see how it is performing on eBay.

## Rules

eBay has many rules and no single place where you can learn them all. As a result, many sellers with good intentions get warnings or suspensions for breaking rules they didn't know existed. For example, did you know that it's against the rules to link to your off-eBay website or even your e-mail address from your eBay listing? Did you know that you can't sell certain medical devices unless you are properly licensed? Did you know you can't sell unboxed cosmetics to Germany? It's important to know the rules and play by them.

## Formats

Additionally, you must learn how shoppers find items. Sellers choose among listing formats such as auctions (people bid, time counts down), fixed price (no bidding, fixed

price, but time counts down), and Store items (no bidding, rarely shows up in search results, time doesn't really count down). In addition there are eBay's new Best Match search results, which are based on an algorithm nobody knows. Search results are now ordered by when an item ends (items ending sooner show up higher) and by things like seller reputation so that sellers with good reputations will be highlighted (and sellers with bad reputations somewhat buried). Confusing? It can be a bit of a learning curve. Educate yourself so that you are armed with strategies like what to list, when, and how.

Part of the "how" is the understanding that most sales on eBay come from search results, and that most searches are for words in the eBay title. For example, if you use a title like, "NEW NWT black leather handbag," and your shopper types in, "new black leather purse," you won't be found unless you also had "purse" in there.

If you sold on eBay more than a year ago, it's a whole new playing field now. Good sellers rise to the top. Sellers who have DSRs (Detailed Seller Ratings, a new way buyers can score their sellers) that are below eBay's standards might find their items no higher than page 8 of search results. It's all about managing shopper and buyer expectations, and giving them a better experience than eBay sellers previously provided.

## Design Counts

The design and layout of your listings are more important than ever. For example, if you are seeing low scores for what you charge for shipping, this doesn't mean that you should lower your shipping charges. It may mean improving

communication of your shipping policies, which relates directly to design and layout. Think about your brochure or website. You put certain information and certain design elements in certain places to create a certain experience. eBay sellers can now really see the benefits of upgrading to that type of approach.

## Educate Yourself!

Once you've decided on eBay, learn about the site from a reliable source. We recommend starting at <http://pages.ebay.com/education> or attending a conference like RocketPlace <http://RocketPlace.com>. RocketPlace has a track for those who are new to eBay even if you are not new to retail, online selling, or other areas of e-commerce. Readers can get \$25 off registration with code EBIZ.

eBay will also help. The company has a Certified Provider Program <http://certifiedprovider.ebay.com>, nearly 30 companies who can assist with software, services, design, strategy help, product sourcing and more. These can be your partners in eBay success.

eBay is a fertile field for e-commerce success. But first, learn the rules and learn the territory. **eBiz**

*Debbie Levitt is the Founder and CEO of As Was (<http://www.aswas.com>), a full-service consulting firm for eBay sellers, specializing in design, branding, marketing, strategy, and operational issues. As eBay's first Certified Service Provider, As Was produces the RocketPlace conference <http://RocketPlace.com>. RocketPlace is a twice-yearly conference for eBay sellers at all levels.*



By Debbie Levitt  
[deb@aswas.com](mailto:deb@aswas.com)



# Making The Grade:

## Google AdWords Quality Score

How would you grade your Google Adwords account? Targeted campaigns with well written ads, specific landing pages and keyword level bids will have you well on your way to a passing grade. Poorly designed campaigns with generic ads pointing at your homepage will have you sliding toward failure.

Ultimately, the grade that counts is the one that Google gives to your Adwords account, known as Quality Score. Google calculates Quality Score on a variety of factors and then applies it to each of your keywords. In general, as your Quality Score increases, Google will reward you with lower minimum bids and better positioning for your ads. Google developed Quality Score as a way to ensure advertisers are creating the best accounts possible so that users are getting the best search experience possible.

### How Google Determines Quality Score

There are several components that make up your Quality Score. Naturally, Google doesn't share everything that makes up Quality Score with advertisers. The factors that Google does share are invaluable for improving Quality Score and your overall account performance.

- **Clickthrough Rate (CTR)** – Your account's CTR is one of the most important factors in establishing Quality Score. Clickthrough Rate is the number of clicks your ads receive divided by the number of impressions it gets. New ads need time to establish their CTR, so it's important to set your bids high enough

to give Google solid data for determining your Quality Score. An ad on the second or third page of search results is going to have less CTR than an ad appearing on page one. This can have a negative impact on Quality Score.

- **Relevance** – The keywords in your ad group should tie in directly with your ad, which should tie in directly to your landing page. Divide keywords into different categories and write your ad text to reflect the main theme of your keyword group. If you're selling iPods, clearly mention them in your ad text, then take the user directly to your iPod product page.
- **Account History** – If you are a current Adwords advertiser, take a moment to review your past Clickthrough Rates. If your account has performed poorly over a long period of time, a new, well designed ad group may still initially struggle with Quality Score because of the account history. In extreme cases, it might be worth creating a whole new account.
- **Landing Page Quality** – A well structured account won't perform if it's sending users to a poorly designed web site. Does your site have fresh, original content? Is it easy to navigate? Are you being transparent in defining your business to consumers? Does your site load quickly? The answers can impact your Quality Score.

### Making Quality Score Work For You

Advertisers can find information on their Quality Scores directly on the keyword

and ad pages in each ad group. However, it's not shown by default; click on the "customize columns" link and choose "show quality score" to add the column to your current view.

If your Quality Scores are poor, restructure your account to improve relevancy. Say you were an electronics retailer and you sold televisions, computers and cell phones. A bad set up would be to have keywords for all 3 categories in one ad group, with a very general ad (think: Buy all your electronic gadgets here!!) that linked to your home page. Users wouldn't be sure if you sold their product because you don't mention specifics, so you'd probably get less clicks. This is low Quality Score waiting to happen!

A better way is to make each category a campaign and each brand in that category an ad group. Placing keywords in the ad text targets the ads better and sends the user straight to that sub category landing page. It's a better Quality Score and a better user experience.

Google is trying to help advertisers improve their accounts. When your PPC is well organized, it provides better results for Google users. They'll find exactly what they were looking for and your campaigns will convert more often. Optimize your Quality Score and you'll be graduating with honors in no time! **eBiz**



By Jean Lloyd  
jeanl@ebizinsider.com

# The “net effect” has been very positive for Kaleidoscopes To You

“When we got married my wife’s family and I owned five stores in three states. Since we went online, we’ve closed four of the brick-and-mortars and sold to every continent except Antarctica.”

—Karl Schilling, *Kaleidoscopestoyou.com*



Karl Schilling,  
Kaleidoscopes To You  
at Solid Cactus Boot  
Camp; May 2008

Talk about the very definition of “niche market” and you’ve just described Kaleidoscopes To You. Founder Karl Schilling started making and selling kaleidoscopes when he was still in high school. “It helped pay for high school and college,” he says. After 10 years, in the early nineties, he started a series of brick-and-mortar stores in Illinois and Minnesota selling seasonally and ultimately opened a store in the Mall of America in Minnesota. But when *Kaleidoscopestoyou.com* went online, Karl realized it was the perfect match for his niche business. “We needed lots of traffic for this business,” says Karl. “We had people come from all over to buy our products at the Mall, but we were really made for the Internet.”

Kaleidoscopes To You is 8 people total with a product line of 781 items. Karl runs the business with his wife Jean, a native of Manly Iowa (Karl says with pride that he married a ‘Manly woman’). In 1996 they went online and Karl says he realized that ultimately their success would be tied to cyberspace. “I learned code and designed the first site myself,” he recalls. “It was slow in the early years but I always believed it would work.”

The Schillings found Solid Cactus and had their site redesigned in 2005. Since then he’s been a Solid Cactus client and has continued to ‘tweak’ his site. “As I recall I was a tough sell on the redesign,” says Karl. “Now I’m a junkie for changes.”

Among the additions he likes best are the Quantity Price Table (“it’s excellent, clean and concise”) and Snap Shop (“a good navigation tool; the new version is very advanced”). He’s also a big believer in branding through checkout. “As a retailer I’ve seen increases,” he says. “Seeing the shell throughout the checkout process is very comforting for customers.”

Perhaps the best praise for *Kaleidoscopestoyou.com* comes from his customers. “They tell me that they shop other sites,” Karl says. “But they say we have a more professional look, we have more products and they trust us.”

The net effect has been very positive. “We’ve seen 25-30% growth in each of the past four years,” says Karl. The Schillings are now expanding their horizons. “We had Solid Cactus clone a second site for us called *Marblesforyou.com*. That site just went live in April, but we have 350 products and we’re very hopeful.”

Karl says he’s more comfortable as an Internet retailer. “I like the marketing aspect,” he says. “I like developing different angles to attract customers and grow our base.” One area where he’s concentrating is on organic listings. “We were spending so much money on our pay-per-click advertising that I decided to get more serious about our natural rankings. That’s what I do now, ‘tweak’

for natural listings. In addition, I try to identify trouble areas and deal with them. We monitor our phone calls carefully for content and subject. I find when I get several questions about the same thing it’s usually a problem that is confusing people. That’s something I can fix.”

Karl is still tweaking *Kaleidoscopestoyou.com*, as well. Solid Cactus will be adding a blog section to the site this month. He believes the interactive possibilities, combined with general industry knowledge make e-commerce blogs important.

Karl Schilling has advice for making your own site attractive without spending lots of money. “A good ‘about us’ page is valuable if you do it right,” says Karl. “Make sure you include a picture of yourselves and the location of your business. Let people see who you are. It’s hard to make people feel at home online and I believe a good ‘about us’ page gives people a greater sense of comfort.” **eBiz**



By Kevin Lynn  
kevinl@ebizinsider.com



# What's the Word on Widgets?



Over the last five years, widgets have become wildly popular across the desktops of millions of Internet users. Not the widgets from Accounting class in high school, but web widgets: easy-to-install mini-applications that subtly inform users of information they might find important. For example, a widget might show how many unread messages a user has in his inbox, or tell them whether or not they should wear a jacket outside.

These widgets can be placed practically anywhere and work on almost every computer: every Windows Vista and Macintosh OS X computer already supports widgets (Vista calls them Gadgets), and programs such as Opera 9.26 (opera.com) and Stardock Object Desktop (stardock.com) add this same functionality on computers that don't otherwise support these applets by default. Some widgets can even be put on websites, Facebook profiles, MySpace pages, and blogs, such as those offered by Widgetbox (widgetbox.com).

Put simply, a web widget is a portable chunk of code that can be installed and executed within any separate HTML-based web page by an end user without requiring additional compilation. They are derived from the idea of code reuse. Other terms used to describe web widgets include: gadget, badge, module, capsule, snippet, mini and flake. Web widgets often but not always use DHTML, JavaScript, or Adobe Flash.

"A widget is anything that can be embedded within a page of HTML, i.e. a web page. A widget adds some content to that page that is not static. Generally widgets are third party originated, though they can be home made.

According to Wikipedia. "The first widely syndicated web widget, Trivia Blitz, was introduced in 1997. It was a java game applet offered by Uproar.com embedded on 15,200 websites as of December 31, 1998 and 36,100 websites as of December 31, 1999. It spread virally through an "add this game to your website" button. Sites that carried the game ranged from Geocities and Tripod personal pages to CNN and Tower Records. Uproar paid sites a referral fee for new users that registered through the widget. When Uproar.com was acquired by Vivendi Universal in 2001, the widget was discontinued.

Widgets are clearly not just novelties. Because of their size and ease of use, they are great tools for spreading a brand or company name directly to a user base's desktop or personal blog or website. For instance, Acme XYZ Corp. might build a widget that shows off the latest gizmo to come out of their labs. Every user with the Acme XYZ widget will then see that information (along with the Acme logo) on their desktop, Windows Sidebar, or Macintosh Dashboard. Pretty cool, huh?

On a blog or website, widgets can be even more valuable towards building consumer relationships. Not only will the owner of the site see the widget, but so will all of the website's visitors! The webmasters of these sites are essentially providing free advertising in the form of a fun, useful tool in their navigation sidebar of the page body.

I personally use a number of widgets on my home computer. One of them is powered by a company called Woot (woot.com), which sells only one product per day until that product is sold out. The

widget shows a picture of the product on sale below the Woot logo. Hovering over the widget shows the name of the product on sale and a link to woot.com.



Not only are they encouraging my return by titillating my love for their products, but providing a logo and link to their site right on my desktop!

In conclusion, widgets done right can boost sales, maintain existing relationships, and even foster new clientele. **eBiz**

Discuss your favorite widgets on the eBiz forums at <http://forum.ebizinsider.com>



By Matt Basta

[mattb@ebizinsider.com](mailto:mattb@ebizinsider.com)

An advertisement for eBiz Insider. It features a close-up image of a brown leather baseball glove. The text reads: 'Make Your Best Pitch in... eBiz Insider the magazine for e-commerce professionals.' Below this, it says: 'Reaching your customers can sometimes be as tough as pitching a no hitter. With more than 5,000 e-merchant subscribers, advertising monthly in eBiz Insider you can throw perfect strikes.' At the bottom, it provides contact information: 'For a Rate Card &amp; Advertising Information, log onto www.ebizinsider.com or call: 1.888.361.9814'. A white mouse cursor arrow points to the contact information.

# The REAL Value of Links\$

[Buy your gourmet pretzels from Pretzelblogger >](#)



As the name implies, Search Engine Optimization is primarily about giving search engine spiders what they want with the goal of placing your site higher in the engines' organic results. While SEO can do wonders for a store's rankings, it doesn't promise actual customer retention. A strong core of returning customers is worth far more than a massive influx of carpetbaggers who might leave your site without ever dropping an item into their carts. In order to convert browsers into oh-so-lucrative repeat customers, a store needs to appear accessible and reputable. Of course, those customers need to find your site before than they can spend.

So what does this have to do with links? Plenty! Links can provide a boost to your appearance in search results and also increase recidivism in your shoppers by providing trust and approval to your store.

Although it may seem as if search engines are advanced enough to interpret the information on your site just like a person might, the fabled 'Semantic Web' is still years away. Search engine robots still rely on a mathematical algorithm to match indexed pages with a front-end user's search query. Search engines retrieve results based on, among other things, freshness (how recent the page is) and relevance (how closely a page is associated to a given search query).

Freshness is pretty easy to determine, but there's no way that a spider can read your pages for comprehension the way a real person would, so how in the world can a search engine determine if your site is relevant?

Spiders look at links — and their anchor text (the "blue words" that take you to the link target) — as a measure of relevance. Sites linking into yours will increase the bots' estimation of your own relevance — especially if the anchor text to that link is a meaningful keyword phrase and not simply 'click here'. For instance, your online pretzel store will benefit from a link from a long-standing and well-trafficked pretzel blog, but their endorsement of 'Buy your gourmet pretzels here,' will be much more valuable to Google, Yahoo! and the rest if the link to

your site from Pretzelblogger is anchored on 'gourmet pretzels' instead of 'here.'

Links are valuable to search engines and each of those links is a potential source of referring traffic. Traffic which may be more inclined to buy pretzels because they trust Pretzelblogger's opinion.

Thinking about links as a way to maximize rankings potential is sound, but don't ignore the real way that shoppers interact with the Web – socially. In today's online landscape, users are increasingly accessing content through RSS feeds and social networks. Yes, search engine traffic is way up, but social media traffic is way, way up.

Being part of the conversation is a good thing. Looking at analytics data from my own website, I might see that while I get roughly equivalent amounts of referred traffic (traffic that enters my site via a link from another site) and search engine

traffic, the bounce rate, time spent on site, and number of pageviews per visit are all metrics in which my referred visitors consistently perform better than the search visitors.

A link is a stamp of approval – which is one reason why engines penalize deceptive tactics like paid links, triangular linking and link farming.

There is a difference, however, between link sites and directories (like Best of The Web). These sites are coded as directories and are not usually frowned on by Google. The paid links that count against you are likely to appear on "link farm" sites or down in the footer of the seller's website (where it's least likely to be crawled anyway).

Remember during link building that while Google and the gang may be making strides toward giving searchers what they want, shoppers still trust their

peers, friends and industry luminaries to point the way to quality.

I often tell clients to think of their e-commerce stores like brick-and-mortar stores when cultivating community, user experience and visibility. That same advice holds true with links. A mention in your town's newspaper of record is more valuable to your business than a similar mention in a school paper or gossip column. Link building takes serious time because the Internet is full of school papers and gossip columns. While these sites aren't going to hurt your rankings, they won't do you as much good as a more authentic link from a trusted, relevant site. **eBiz**



By Jeff Stolarczyk  
jeff.stolarczyk@ebizinsider.com

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# Tech Corner:

## Saying Goodbye...

### When an employee leaves

When employees leave, it's always difficult. Whether voluntary or involuntary, the separation of legally-tied entities is like a divorce – lots of paperwork, follow-up and liability involved. This month's Tech Corner provides a checklist for the IT-related issues involved in separation.

*If you're planning on terminating an employee or if they've given notice:*

- ✓ Determine, based on the situation, if immediate separation is preferable to a notice-period.
- ✓ Immediately clone his/her login account and back up their current data – make sure no data is being deleted.
- ✓ Monitor their calls and e-mail –to prevent sending of confidential information off-site or conducting unapproved business on company time. If this happens, terminate immediately.

*At the exit interview/termination meeting:*

- ✓ Inform employee that non-public access to company information (anything the company has not formally published) has been revoked and if they discover they have company information it should be immediately reported to HR.
- ✓ Remind employee with a copy of their signed Intellectual Property and Confidentiality Agreements.
- ✓ Collect all company-owned possessions including:
  - ✓ Cell Phone
  - ✓ Corporate Credit Cards
  - ✓ Laptop or other computer equipment (PDA, etc.)
  - ✓ A list of passwords
  - ✓ Non-IT collateral (parking pass, books, keys)

*Immediately after the termination meeting:*

- ✓ Deactivate employee ID card.

- ✓ Cancel employee credit cards, expense accounts and checking account access.
- ✓ Have employee's past voice-mail and e-mail archived. Determine dates for call and e-mail forwarding to a manager and eventually account deletion.
- ✓ Create voice-mail and e-mail auto-responders informing people that the person is no longer with the company and if they require information, direct them to another contact.
- ✓ Disable remote and VPN access. If your company has Wi-Fi, change the access keys
- ✓ Change any passwords the employee formerly accessed. In the case of executives, IT Staff, and senior management, change passwords company-wide.
- ✓ Cancel cell phone, pager, and other subscription services.
- ✓ Backup entire computer using archive software and password protect.
- ✓ Remove employee from phone directory and internal e-mail lists.

*Two-weeks following termination (some of these apply only if termination was involuntary):*

- ✓ Review access logs. Has employee attempted to access your network?
- ✓ Check IM and E-mail logs. Has employee attempted to contact other employees? Have they discussed confidential information or solicited employees?

Losing an employee is never easy. When it happens, try to put sentiment aside. Take the steps necessary to protect your company. **eBiz**



By John Dawe  
johnd@ebizinsider.com

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