

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

“2009
is a Glass
Half Full”

—By Gregory Davis

- ◆ Yahoo Web Analytics – The Evolution of Site Analytics
- ◆ Marketing to the Hispanic Market
- ◆ Bad Tweets: How NOT to use Twitter
- ◆ \$6.00 Bottle of Water

Read this issue and gain ‘nice’ points with Santa, or don’t...coal is the in thing this year, right?

eBiz Insider

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Confessions of a Social Media Addict

So I'm not really the "social" guy you may think I am. I'm eccentric (some say loud and obnoxious but I usually ignore them), my views are liberal conservative (if there is such a thing) and I'm not so quick to embrace new technology as I was when I was younger. Although I just got an iPhone and if I could marry it, I would.

Recently, I have become what one may consider an addict to the social networking site, Facebook.com. According to its website, Facebook allows people "to keep up with friends, upload photos, share links and videos and learn more about the people they meet." It is just one of many that have become very popular over the last few years.

In addition to the Facebook website, I have the app for the iPhone that lets me log in and see what's going on no matter where I am. I find myself laying in bed at night with the remote in one hand and the phone in another seeing what my fellow Facebook friends are up to. Sometimes I feel like a stalker as some tend to share too much information about their lives!

Since being addicted to Facebook, I thought I filled my quota for social networking until someone asked me if I "twittered." I really didn't know how to answer the question so I laughed it off and pretended my phone rang and I had to take the call. I found by asking some of the younger, more 'connected' people around here what "twittering" was and I quickly felt like I was the ugly kid at the dance that nobody would do the Mambo with.

"Dude, you never heard of Twitter?"

Ah, Twitter. Another social networking site where you post what you're currently doing in 140 characters or less. People, presumably your friends but it can be anyone, then "follow" you and you can "follow" others. Honestly, the most challenging thing about Twitter is getting what you want to say down to 140 characters! It's meant for short updates like "gone to the gym" or "new blog entry at myblog.com - check it out".

After twittering for only a few days, I have doubled my social media addiction.

Sites like Facebook and Twitter aren't just fun and games. You have the opportunity to network with customers and peers and spread your message across channels your regular marketing wouldn't reach. It's new media, it's important and it's something to consider. Once you're setup, link to me on Facebook by searching my name and follow me on Twitter with username "scottsanfilippo".

Finally, this issue of eBiz Insider ushers in our new bi-monthly publication schedule. It's part of our "going green" initiative where we're doing our part to cut down on the use of paper while still delivering you a product that's timely and informative. As always, ebizinsider.com is chock full of information and articles and is updated on a continual basis, so I encourage you to visit often.

One of the most popular features of the site is our interactive forums where you can talk with other e-commerce store owners and share tips and tricks. **eBiz**

*By Scott Sanfilippo,
Editor in Chief*



Dear Editor: I'm using Gmail for my business mail, but I've heard that it's not professional to do so. What's your take?

—Samuel B., Gloucester, VA.

Samuel: You heard right. You're the proud owner of a bright shiny domain - and that domain name is part of your overall brand strategy. You should be using samuel@yourdomain.com. The good news is that you're not going to have to relearn a new system. In last February's eBiz Insider the Tech Corner talked about integrating Google Apps and its related Gmail with Domain Name. Learn more at <http://link.solidcactus.com/googlea>.

Dear Editor: I'm using FeedPerfect to get my products in the Comparison Shopping Engines, but there are 20+ of them! Which CSEs do I use? I can't afford all of them.

—Barbara N., Hanover, PA.

Barbara: That's a great question, and I don't have enough space to talk about 20 different CSEs here. But, since it's a great question worth further exploration, you can expect to see an article in a future issue about this topic. Meanwhile, head over to our forums at <http://forum.ebizinsider.com> and start a discussion.

*Good comments and questions!
Let us hear from you!*

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

Marketing to the Hispanic Market



Corporate America has paid a lot of attention to Hispanic-targeted online marketing lately. Most of the articles I've read are about the Hispanic market being an overlooked niche market with tremendous growth potential. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic community in the U.S. will reach 47.8 million by 2010, accounting for 15% of the total United States population. And this growth is happening fast, at a rate nearly three times that of the rest of the population. More important than population growth, though, is growth in earning - and therefore spending power. Estimated at \$860 billion in 2007, Hispanic spending power is expected to reach \$1 trillion by 2010.

Some online merchants may feel that they are not prepared to develop marketing efforts directed at the Hispanic community because they lack cultural understanding, don't know enough about Hispanic consumer behavior or simply because they do not speak the language. Keep in mind that marketing to Hispanics in the United States is different than marketing to Hispanics abroad. Around 60% of Hispanic citizens are born in the U.S. and, while they may indeed speak Spanish at home and enjoy a different cuisine or music than your typical Anglo-American (or, Gringo, some might say), it is likely that they speak English, went to American schools and grew up around American pop culture. Like all other Americans, Hispanic Americans shop...many of them online. Hispanics are known to be heavy users of digital media and are very accepting of new technology.

So what should you do if you believe the Hispanic population might be part of your target market? There are several strategies you can implement into your existing online advertising campaigns. For example, detailed geographic information on Hispanics in the U.S. is made available to the public by the Census Bureau. This information

could be used to develop a geo-targeted pay-per-click (PPC) campaign. Since your target market probably speaks English, you don't have to rewrite your ads in Spanish. Instead, translate some of your current keywords into Spanish so your ads will appear when someone searches for your product in Spanish.

Let's say that you have a store that sells dresses for formal occasions. Your primary market might consist of bridesmaids and high school girls shopping for the prom. Another segment of your potential market might be fifteen-year-old girls of Mexican origin. In Mexican culture, a girl's fifteenth birthday represents her transition into womanhood and this rite of passage is usually celebrated with an elaborate party for which the birthday girl (or, quinceanera, as she is called in Spanish) needs - you guessed it - a fancy dress. To test this theory, add keywords to your PPC campaigns such as "vestidos para quinceaneras" (quinceanera dresses). If you see that these keywords are generating a lot of clicks, then you may want to consider writing ads in Spanish and possibly developing new Spanish-language landing pages. The market will be more likely to develop a loyalty to your store if they feel that they can trust you. Part of establishing that trust can include sharing a common language in the form of a bilingual site. It's even possible that your success at home could open up doors to international expansion. The possibilities are endless. So, come on and give it a shot! Or, as you would say in Spanish: *Venga, inténtalo!* **eBiz**



By Joanne Hart

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Bad Tweets: How NOT to use Twitter



Twitter, the popular microblogging Web 2.0 application is one of the fastest-growing (eclipsed only by Facebook) and one of the best tools for brand monitoring and customer communication.

Twitter isn't a revenue stream in and of itself as there isn't a direct channel for earnings from Twitter. However, if it's used correctly, there is no better tool for reaching out to customers on an as-it-happens basis.

Now, just like everything else in the social media sphere, every cool new site isn't for every business. Whether or not a platform is right for your store depends on the amount of time you can spend with it, the level of engagement you're willing to accept and the depth of conversation you're willing to have. Each community has its own standards, and if the standards aren't compatible with your input, it's better to focus elsewhere.

Not too long ago, a company started following me on Twitter that really stood out as an example of using the application incorrectly. Here's what they did wrong:

1. Bad Design.

Twitter's feed of updates (or 'tweets') is organized in a vertical list. This company's page had a busy, tiled background of its logo. This didn't make me want to keep my eyes on the page. In fact, my eyes were being pulled in many directions at once. Isolate a nice, eye-friendly color in your branding, and make a calm, monotone background with your branding in the upper left – where anybody looking at your page will see it and where it won't interfere with other page design elements.

2. Being Spammy

The business posts links to blog posts every few hours. That's spammy, and will lead to people unfollowing. Remember, quality trumps quantity in all social media and in Twitter especially (because space is at a premium of 140 characters).

Looking at Summize.com (the Twitter Search Engine) to see what people are saying about this company, several people have responded favorably to one article. That's probably the one thing the person managing the account should have used and cut the others: I'll say it again: *quality trumps quantity* in all social media and in Twitter especially.

3. No Conversation.

Going back to the Summize results, there have been a number of direct replies (@ messages, for the Twitter-savvy), but the account hasn't been responding to any of them. You're missing the point of social media if you aren't going to be social.

In the space of a few days, the account was suspended by Twitter due to excessive complaints about its spamminess, so plenty of other people must have agreed with me.

Just like every other marketing strategy, abusing Twitter or using it poorly is not going to reap positive effects, and it's very easy to abuse Twitter or use it ineptly. Make sure your post is going to be of value to your followers.

There are three main types of Twitter offenders out there, and these are their calling cards:

The Spammer:

The Spammer befriends users totally at random and never interacts with the rest of the community. When the Spammer posts, it is only ever to link to his or her store website, usually with a blurb like, "This is amazing," "I love it," or "I'm making so much money." In most cases, these accounts are literally robots – programs built to make posts to Twitter on a fixed schedule. Because the Spammer is likely to get suspended, it's difficult to gauge their return on investment.

The Loathsome Linker:

The Linker is a real person, but like the Spammer, they don't interact with anyone else. Instead, they do nothing but link blog posts and news stories about their industry, intermingled with the occasional link into their own stores. It's incredibly likely that a few of these links will have real value, but the signal to noise ratio is incredibly off-putting.

The Pitchman:

The Pitchman uses Twitter to aggressively sell customers on their products, looking for people who ask for product advice and then assaulting them with a cold call and a link. Like the Loathsome Linker, the Pitchman can provide some value to other users, but one of the big benefits of Twitter is the chance to have real conversations and not to simply deliver hard sells. **eBiz**

<http://twitter.com/ebizinsider>



By Jeff Stolarczyk
jeff.stolarczyk@ebizinsider.com

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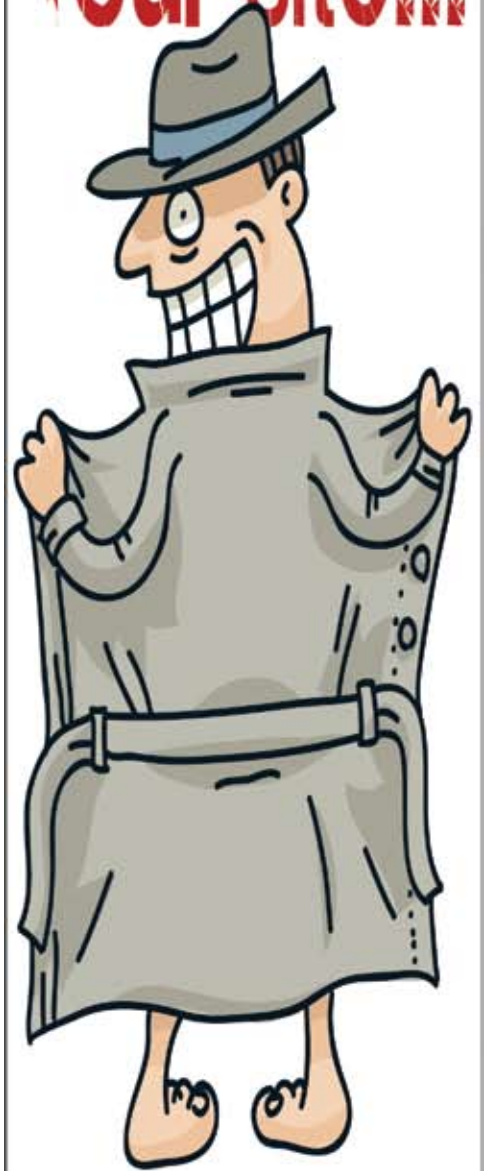
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CAN-SPAM Act of 2003

A Primer for E-Merchants



If you're currently doing e-mail marketing (and you should be), you should be well-versed in the Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act, better known as the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003.

If you've found yourself asking the question, "CAN-SPAM what?!" immediately step away from the SEND button. Before you send another e-mail blast, you should be well-informed on the topic, and be practicing according to guidelines, because the alternative can be costly.

The Act establishes requirements for sending commercial e-mail, spells out penalties for spammers and companies whose products are advertised in spam and gives consumers the right to opt out of receiving commercial e-mail.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, is authorized to enforce the CAN-SPAM Act. CAN-SPAM also gives the Department of Justice (DOJ) the authority to enforce criminal sanctions. Other federal and state agencies can enforce the law against organizations under their jurisdiction, and companies that provide Internet access

may sue violators as well.

The law covers e-mail whose primary purpose is advertising or promoting a commercial product or service, including content on a website. A "transactional or relationship message" that facilitates an agreed-upon transaction or updates a customer in an existing business relationship is typically exempt from most provisions of the CAN-SPAM Act.

What CAN-SPAM Does

- It bans false or misleading header information – Your e-mails "To" and "From" address, domain name and e-mail address must be accurate and identify whoever sent the e-mail.
- It prohibits deceptive subject lines – Your subject line can not mislead about the content or subject matter. So, yes, "FREE VACATION" as a subject line of an e-mail marketing pet products is SPAM.
- It requires that e-mail recipients have a chance to opt-out of mailings. If you send marketing e-mails, you must offer an easy opt-out method in every e-mail. Once a recipient opts out, the Act gives you 10 days to remove those who have opted out and to stop mailing to them.

- It requires that commercial e-mail be identified as an advertisement and include the sender's valid physical postal address.

Penalties

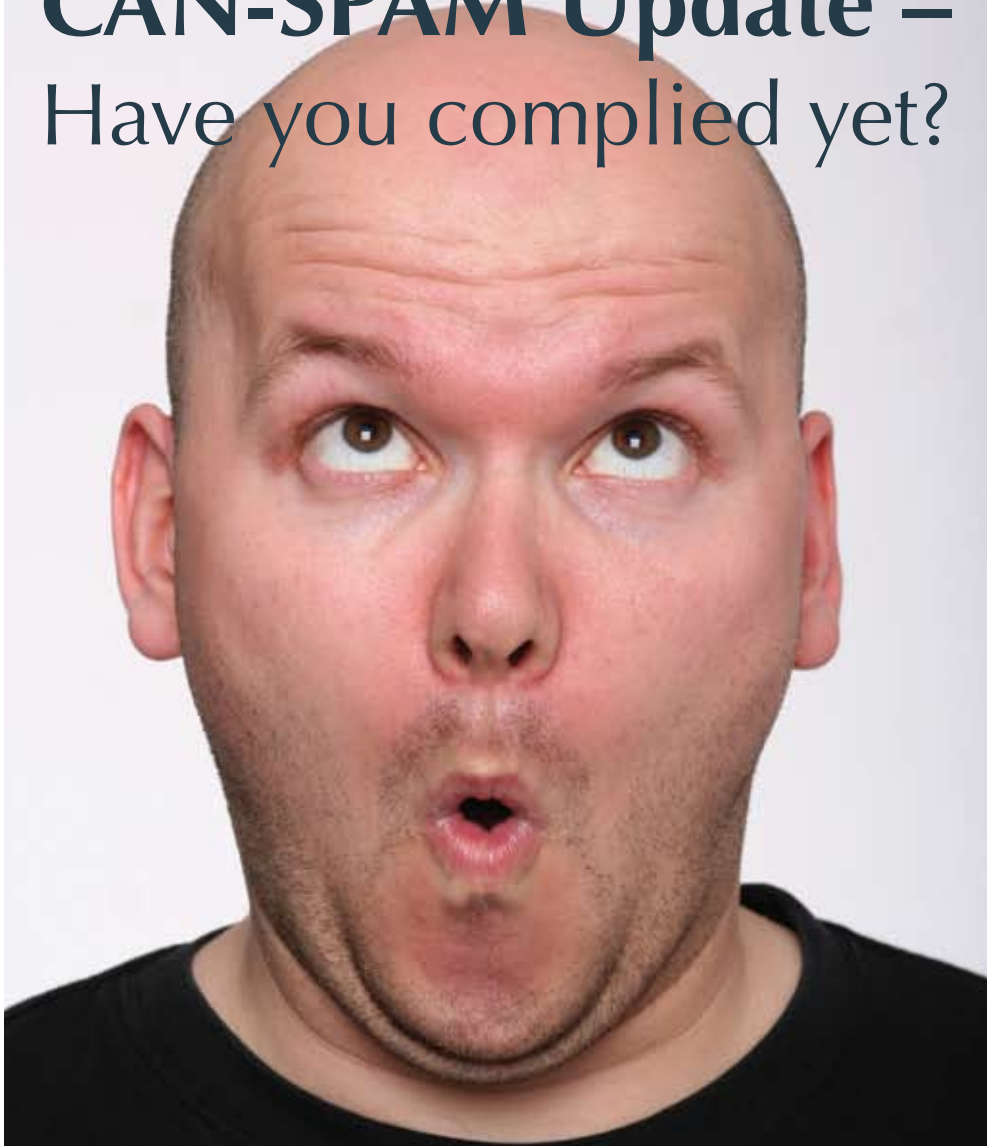
Each violation of CAN-SPAM is subject to fines of up to \$11,000. Deceptive commercial e-mails are also subject to laws banning false or misleading advertising. If you fail to include an opt-out link, forget to add a physical address, or don't get around to removing a person's e-mail address from your list within 10 days, you can be fined severely.

Don't take a chance on sending spam e-mails, thinking that all those spammers in your junk folder are safe from prosecution. Not only are you risking a steep fine by sending non-compliant e-mails, but you are tarnishing your reputation and ruining the relationship you have with your customer. **eBiz**



By Michelle Johnson
michellej@ebizinsider.com

CAN-SPAM Update – Have you complied yet?



The Federal Trade Commission's latest updates took effect on July 7, 2008. Have you updated your practices to meet its new requirements?

Change 1 – Unsubscribe requirements

E-mails must not require an e-mail recipient to pay a fee, provide information other than their e-mail address, or take more than the subsequent steps to opt out from an e-mail: Send a reply message or visit a single Web page.

Change 2 – Definition of 'sender'

A 'sender' is now defined as the entity whose goods, services, business, organization, etc., are advertised in a commercial e-mail message.

Change 3 – P.O. Box address OK

A 'sender' can use an "accurately-registered" post office box or private mailbox. This will meet the rule that a commercial e-mail present a "valid physical postal address". Prior CAN-SPAM rules did not make that clear.

Change 4 - Definition of 'person'

A 'person' now is not limited to a human being. In

short, if an e-mail is perceived as promotional, CAN-SPAM applies to that sender – nonprofits included.

Change 5 - Forward to a Friend

Brands doing 'forward-to-a-friend' e-mails – where participants are rewarded, offered incentives or induced – must adhere to CAN-SPAM rules. They must honor opt-out requests and provide a physical address to people who receive the forwards.

Be sure to incorporate these new rules in order to abide by the law. Remember, the costly consequences are not worth it!



By Michelle Johnson
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Reuniting with Your Customer: The Power of Listening

The great and powerful customer has spoken. Have you listened?

Everyone knows listening is an extremely effective tool, but why is it so we're often caught not paying attention? In order to deliver the best service possible, listening to customer praises and gripes is essential. Without feedback, messages fall into the abyss of misinformation. How many times have you been frustrated by incorrect data surrounding your site or services? Does it bother you when you have a disgruntled customer that hasn't spoken up and abandons your site instead?

Here are some ways that you can get back to basics and start improving service for your customers by lending an open ear to increase your e-commerce success:

Listening 101

Defined by Wikipedia as “the act of hearing something with thoughtful attention and the giving of consideration.” Listening is the foundation upon which both public relations and customer satisfaction are built. Listening isn’t just hearing; it’s an active mental and physical process, one that takes practice to master.

Open your ears, clear your mind, and start developing e-commerce strategies that will work. Utilize a strategy known as R-O-P-E (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation) to get the best outcome when it comes down to the sending and receiving of messages. Our approach will be slightly different, but still keep with the same theme – the idea of planning out a strategy utilizing your listening skills. Merchants, time to learn R-M-E-E (Research, Message, Execution, Evaluation).

Research

The first step in creating a powerful message that will reach your customers is research. Research provides the building blocks you need to construct a clear, concise, and creative message that customers can relate to and appreciate. Start out by researching your customers. Find out what they need and what you can offer them. Research their likes and dislikes. Talk to them. Watch the movies they like. Read the books, blogs, or magazines they enjoy. Maybe even try the food they like to eat. Find out what they value and what they prioritize when it comes to doing business. The best way to get a feel for your target audience is to assimilate. Start examining your audience under a microscope and you can then begin to evaluate how your messages will be received. After all, listening is a two-way street.

Message

Next, make your message memorable. With the research that you’ve gathered, make educated decisions about building your message, but also be mindful of the mass of data that is already out there.

Study your competitors and see what information they are already presenting. Can you convey it better? Do you have something more to offer? By taking a closer look at what is already out there, you can sort through the grit and grime and produce a sparkling message that will draw customers to your site.

Execution

It’s all about the medium. Whether your message gets sent out through a press release, a social network, a blog post, a forum comment, SEO content, a PPC ad, or even your site design - listening plays a vital role. Recognize which forms of communication will best suit your target market. If you’ve done your research, you’ll already have a good idea of what method could work best, but it is always a good idea to test different mediums. Integrate different avenues of communication into your strategic marketing plan in order to see what will work best for your business. Trial and error can be a valuable tool, so remember to listen to the feedback you receive from both business professionals and customers. Don’t ignore a form of communication with which you’re unfamiliar. It could be your key to success.

Evaluation

Finally, take a look at your results. Measure the success of your message by reading product reviews, offering a place for customers to leave their feedback, or by simply asking. Conducting a survey could be a great way to get a feel for how your customers are receiving your messages. Also, measure your listening and sending abilities by looking at your growth in sales, your site traffic, or even that one e-mail from a satisfied customer. Everything matters when it comes to evaluation. If you’ve helped at least one person understand your message, you’ve met your goal.

Avoiding Pitfalls

While listening may seem like common sense, many people put up barriers that will prevent them from getting the most out of their communication experience. Remember that your customer is not you.

He or she may not have the same values or point of view on a given situation. Use your listening abilities to gain a different perspective. Don’t get hung up by distractions like the manner of delivery, uninteresting information, or your own personal values. Take listening as an opportunity to take a walk in your customer’s shoes. With this insight, you’ll be better equipped to understand the customer’s needs, wants, and expectations for your business.

So Why Be a Good Listener?

Because your customer wants to be recognized and remembered. He or she wants to feel valued and appreciated. He or she wants to feel respected, understood, and has a desire to feel comfortable about conveying a want or a need. Listening is the most powerful form of acknowledgement. It helps you build stronger relationships, both personal and professional. In addition, it also promotes acceptance, learning, and resolution of important issues. Listening is that secret key to providing the best service possible to your customers.

In our chaotic economy, the best way to keep your site afloat is to deliver unparalleled customer service. A satisfied customer is a valuable resource. After all, word-of-mouth can be the most effective way to promote your business. Make yourself an asset to your customers and start sending the right messages out about your website. Remember, listening is a two-way street. If you open your mind to the perspective of your customers, they will be more receptive to the messages you send – a surefire way to get them paying attention to what you have to offer. As poet Percy Bysshe Shelley said in his poem *To A Skylark*, “the world should listen then/ as I am listening now.” **eBiz**



By Mandy Boyle

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Direct Traffic is Better Than Google Traffic



Not all web traffic is equal and understanding the value of direct traffic can help online retailers hone their marketing.

“Direct traffic” is web traffic you get from people who already know about your website or store. They either click a bookmark to come to your site or type your site’s URL directly into their browser’s address bar. By comparison, “search engine traffic” comes from people that probably don’t know about your site. They were looking for a keyword or phrase and your site just showed up in the results on Google, Yahoo!, or MSN’s Live Search. Finally, “referrer traffic” describes web visitors that follow a web link or online ad to your website.

Direct Traffic Potency

Of these three traffic sources direct traffic is the most powerful. Visitors that arrive at your site directly were looking for you or what you sell. If you sell candles, table cloths, or placemats and someone types your site’s URL directly into their browser, it’s a pretty safe bet that they’re shopping for candles, table cloths, or placemats. Likewise, no one is going to take the trouble to type www.SuperWidgetStoreOnline.com into their browser unless they want to shop for Super Widgets.

Brand and Brand Value

Direct traffic is a measure or indication of your store’s brand value. To understand brand value, you need to remember

that brand is that intangible concept that influences a customer’s buying decisions. It’s that thing that motivates some buyers to choose your store over a competitor’s store.

Brand value then is your brand’s monetary worth in terms of premium pricing, preference, or recognition. And direct traffic is a demonstration of your brand’s ability to attract web traffic without the help of a search engine or a pay-per-click ad.

Apple’s Brand Turns Preference and Recognition into Premium Pricing



Here is an example of how brand value works in the world of online retailing. Let’s pretend for a moment that I have an Apple MacBook and I want to add 4 gigabytes (GB) of memory so I can run some high-end video editing software. Instead of going to Google to search, I recognize the Apple brand on my MacBook or from an “Apple versus PC” television ad and go to the Apple website (direct traffic) where I navigate to the store. Apple has what I’m looking for—4GB of DDR3 SDRAM in the

form of two 2GB SODIMMs. I can buy my new memory from Apple for \$300.

Now let’s pretend that instead of going to the Apple website I run a search for “Apple Memory Upgrade” on Google. I see Crucial.com’s organic results and click to their site. I use Crucial’s search tools to find 4GB of DDR3 SDRAM in the form of two 2GB SODIMMs that will run with my MacBook. At Crucial my new computer memory sells for \$131.99—some \$168.01 less than on the Apple website.

Now I need to stop you. You’re thinking something like, “that’s not a fair comparison” or “you’re comparing a real Apple product to a generic product.” But that is not the case; Apple does not make DDR3 SDRAM. The module it sells is every bit the same as the module from Crucial’s website.

So in this particular case Apple’s brand value is worth \$168.01. If Apple did not have its brand and the direct traffic associated with it, it might not be able to compete seriously with Crucial or dozens of other memory retailers in search engines or shopping comparison sites since it charges so much more for an identical product.

Value Direct Traffic More Highly than Search Engine Traffic

With the Apple example in mind, smart retailers would take pains to track just how much direct traffic they get and measure direct traffic conversions against search engine traffic and referrer traffic

conversions. It is also helpful to follow up with customers that do know your URL. Try to learn how they heard about your site, so that you can replicate that sort of marketing and create more direct traffic visitors.



Summing Up With Five Direct Traffic Tips

Too often retailers overlook brand and direct traffic when they plan their marketing campaigns, instead focusing on search engine traffic. But, you should do more to build direct traffic, and here are five things you can do.

1. Follow up after a sale. Great follow up and exceptional customer service can convert a one-time customer, who may have surfed to your site from a search engine, into a "direct traffic," "brand aware" customer that will go to your site first next time.
2. Establish a newsletter. Develop a content rich newsletter that doesn't just promote your products but also includes interesting content. As an example, if you sell hiking equipment try including short stories about hiking, say a first person article about a recent trip.
3. Develop a product update RSS feed. Allow site visitors to subscribe to a product update RSS feed that provide them with price and availability information when a product they're interested in is updated.
4. Offer services or downloads. Keep customers coming back by offering them something other than a sales transaction. For example, an online store featuring school and art supplies

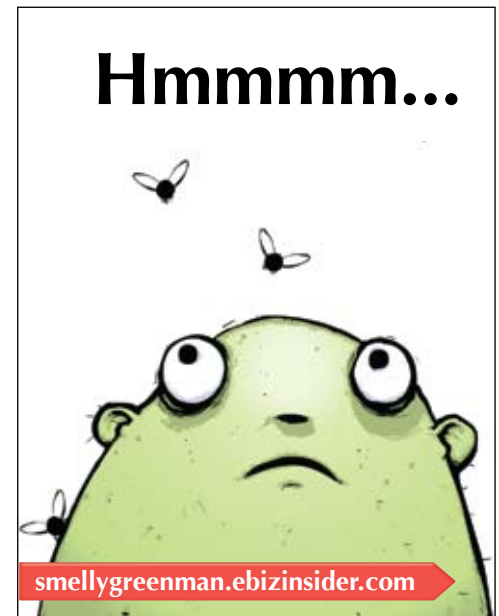
might offer free downloadable coloring pages that are branded with the stores logo. Parents and teachers can download the coloring pages for their students or children.

5. Consider buying print advertising. Nothing says brand like print advertising that shows something about your company's values and products. **eBiz**



By Armando Roggio for Practical eCommerce

Article provided by Practical eCommerce
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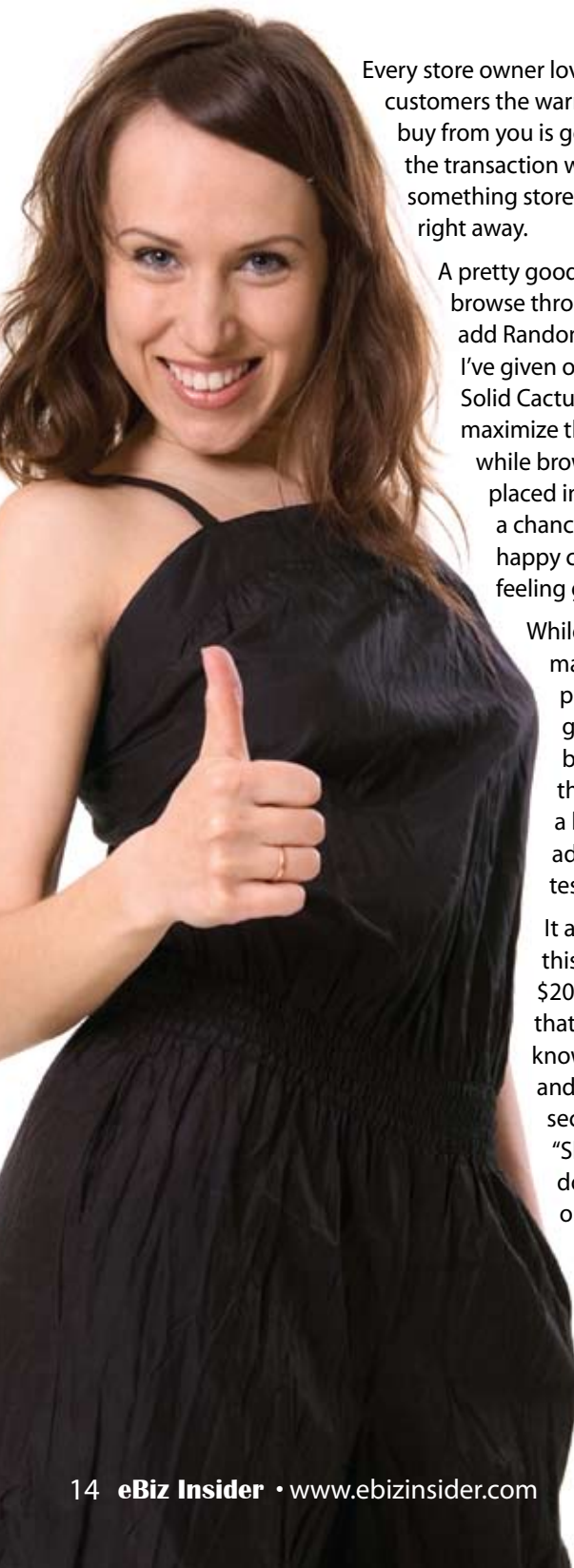
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Creating & Cultivating Customer Confidence:

The Power of Testimonials



Every store owner loves testimonials, right? It gives your new customers the warm and fuzzy feeling that anything they buy from you is going to be shipped to them quickly and the transaction will go smoothly. So, in most cases, this is something store owners want to show their customers right away.

A pretty good technique, that allows a customer to browse through your available items without fear is to add Randomly Displayed Testimonials. A lot of advice I've given out over the years as a project manager at Solid Cactus was to put these in an area that would maximize the amount of testimonials a customer saw while browsing. For example, if the testimonials are placed in the navigation, it gives your customers a chance to see more testimonials from other happy customers and keeps that warm and fuzzy feeling going throughout the whole process.

While this was good advice as far as maximizing the use of the feature, it's probably not the best advice I could have given as far as effectively using the idea behind the feature. After digging into the psychology of the buying process a little deeper, I have some even better advice about using randomly displayed testimonials.

It all starts with buying anxiety. Think of it this way: You're in a retail store and you have \$20 in your pocket. You see an item for \$30 that you REALLY like, and want to buy. You know you have a credit card in your pocket, and you could just buy it, but for that one second, you automatically stop and think: "Should I actually do this now, or put it down and get it another time?" Shopping online is no different... In fact, it's the same thing, just in a much quicker fashion.

Everything about being online is about grabbing someone's attention quickly and at just the right time. Every time buyers hover over your add-to-cart button, they have that same reaction, whether it's conscious or not. In many

cases, the best place to show a testimonial is right in that product information table, directly below that add-to-cart button (although we wouldn't want a long testimonial pushing that button below the fold). This helps alleviate any anxiety a customer may feel about clicking it.

Using that same psychology, another great place to display testimonials is right inside the shopping cart. (Are you starting to think the best place would be right next to the continue button like I am?) The anxiety a customer feels increases as the steps to completing the order get closer and closer. We take measures to make sure a checkout is a dead simple process to complete—three steps and your product is on the way to being delivered. However, placing testimonials near the buttons that a customer is going to feel the most anxiety about clicking is something about which to think. It might just stop a few customers from clicking the "close window" button instead of the "place order" button.

The other thing to think about regarding testimonials is that most new customers that are going to feel any kind of buying anxiety from you are probably using Google or a Comparison Shopping Engine to search for a product, not necessarily your store. So, your item page is really their first impression of your store. Having a great testimonial close to that add-to-cart button could be the difference between a new customer clicking add-to-cart, or instead, hitting the back button to go back to Google and on to the next merchant in the list selling the same product. **eBiz**



By Brian Emershaw

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\$6.00 Bottle of Water

Let's imagine you are traveling, probably on business, and you've just arrived at the hotel. You are a "valued member" of the chain's affinity program, earning many points during the year. The desk clerk welcomes you back by name and asks how your trip was. He then lets you know you've been upgraded to a suite and hands you coupons for drinks during happy hour and breakfast in the morning. "Wonderful!" you think, "this is why I stay here."

Arriving at the room you notice the view, the fluffy, comfy bed linens and the free wi-fi. "It can't get any better than this." You unpack your laptop, plug in, get online and start firing out e-mails. As you work you reach for one of the bottles of water conveniently located on the desk. You're about to open it when you notice the tag hanging from the plastic cap - \$6.00. \$6.00!?!

Everything the hotel has done right is for naught. When someone asks how your trip was, there is a strong likelihood that you will tell them about the \$6 bottle of water before you mention the free eggs and bacon. You may even become indignant. "How dare they charge me \$6 for a bottle of water? I'm a 'diamond, honors, gold member!'" Will you think twice before booking your next business trip at that hotel? Probably. Will you tell the hotel why? Probably not. This is the danger of the \$6 bottle of water and every organization has them - yours included.

\$6 bottles of water come in many forms. It could be the extra step you force a customer to take before accepting their order; the 800 number that isn't manned 24/7 or is answered unprofessionally; the lack of an easy way to contact someone by e-mail; or the return policy that calls for

hoop jumping. Why do they exist at all? In most cases it happens when procedures are set up based on the company's needs rather than the customer's.

The company may want to gather more information about its customers, so just before check-out they ask the customer to complete a survey or provide some demographic information. A logical thing for the company, but an intrusion for the customer. The company may want all transactions to be funneled through one e-mail address and then redirected to the appropriate person on staff, because someone decided that having too many people answering e-mails might lead to the wrong information or too much information being given out. Customers, on the other hand, just want an answer and quickly.

In the case of the hotel's water bottles, it was probably someone in accounting who decided this amenity was costing the company too much money and it would be too hard to figure out which rooms the affinity program travelers might be staying in, so just charge everyone. They should have asked their customers what they think. The easiest way to discover your \$6 bottle of water is to talk to your customers - and listen carefully. Do it anonymously with an online survey. Put a forum on your website and when negative items are posted look at them as an opportunity to re-gain a customer. After all, they've taken the time to write to you, most who have had a bad experience don't and you never know it happened.

You might even consider calling some of your customers. Yes, pick up the phone and actually call them. E-mail is great, but you cannot hear inflection, pauses or sarcasm. (Emoticons don't do it either.)

Your customers will be impressed that you took the time to hear their opinion and you will probably learn a thing or two. Don't forget to call the customers who only ordered from you once and find out why. You might even thank them with a coupon towards their next purchase.

Now, go out there. Find your \$6 bottles of water. Rip off the price tag and invite your customers to share a toast. **eBiz**



By Catherine D. Shafer
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HAPPYgreenBABY

Puts the "Eco" in E-Commerce

"...I just think it's so great when customers choose to shop with us ... I guess I'm still shocked that we're running our own business!"

—Annie Angelo, HappyGreenBaby.com

"Happy" isn't just part of their business name, it's how Annie Angelo and her husband Marc feel about HappyGreenBaby.com – their eco-friendly baby boutique. The store features organic, "green" products for little ones.

HappyGreenBaby.com offers products and a lot of content – all with a commitment to lessening the impact on the environment.

"Oftentimes, new parents start to think more seriously about the planet they are leaving behind for their children – which means they start to question the plastic toys, chemicals in food and clothing, etc. We start to become more aware of everything with which we're putting our new baby in contact. Of course, we all know new babies need a lot of stuff – so to help parents lessen their environmental impact and make healthy choices for baby – we started Happy Green Baby (HGB)," said Angelo.

"With HGB we wanted to create a place where everything is truly eco-friendly and sustainable, so that people could shop with confidence and not worry about

reading every little detail on each product. What's more – new parents are inundated with so much information these days, we wanted to compile a 'starter guide' of sorts for helping parents make informed decisions about those products to which they want to expose their babies. That being said, we believe that every small change makes a difference. We know that not every parent is going to use cloth diapers. We know that every onesie in baby's wardrobe is not going to be organic cotton. But even choosing to use non-toxic bath lotion or BPA-free plastic bottles makes a huge difference in the health of baby and the planet," she continued.

Getting Online

HappyGreenBaby.com was born at the same time that many of the Angelos' friends were having babies. Annie found herself wanting to purchase eco-friendly products for her friends, but could not find one spot with a wide selection. This need combined with e-commerce experience resulted in the conception of Happy Green Baby!

"We both have e-commerce and online marketing experience. Marc was a worked for several years for SierraTradingPost.com and now at EvoGear.com. I have managed the online marketing and e-mail marketing programs for a number of retailers. We both felt like we knew all the best practices when it comes to running an online store – so we figured we'd give it a go," she said.

The first step was finding the platform for HappyGreenBaby.com. When the Angelos were exploring how to enter e-commerce, they recognized the benefits of Yahoo! and Solid Cactus.

"Being a home-grown business, we were looking for economical ways to get online



HappyGreenBaby.com offers products and a lot of content – all with a commitment to lessening the impact on the environment.

and we knew we couldn't build a platform from scratch so we went with the Yahoo! store platform. One area we refused to skimp on was the design of the website. We wanted our site to look professional and give customers a sense of security when they shopped with us – so they didn't feel like we were being run out of a basement (which we were)," said Annie.

Yahoo! provided the e-commerce engine that HappyGreenBaby.com needed, and coupled it with the design and custom programming Solid Cactus provided. Once Angelo and her partner and husband Marc learned the Yahoo! platform, they found the site easy to maintain.

"I would never have been able to create a site as compelling as what Solid Cactus did on the Yahoo! platform on my own – and I have quite a bit of web design experience. Yahoo! is easy to use once you get in there, but there is a rather steep learning curve when it comes to building pages, etc. With the training and support of Solid Cactus, it has been really easy for me to go in, make edits and keep the site updated," she said.

She added that Solid Cactus was able to provide other services they required such as implementing custom features like

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e-mail marketing and gift registry.

"We are incredibly happy with the look and feel of the website. We wanted our site to take a fun, fresh approach to green living. So many 'eco' sites out there are bland, beige and boring. Our product mix is funky and we wanted the site to reflect that," she said. "People are really excited about the site. We've been getting a great reception from people about not just the idea behind the site, but about the design and functionality as well."

Growing Green

HappyGreenBaby.com has relied heavily upon grassroots marketing, a perfect fit for such an organic site. Still, they couple the natural SEO efforts such as link-building and blogging with e-mail marketing and paid search advertising.

"Because of the limited amount of marketing we do, we are really happy with the traffic we have to the site," explained Angelo. "Business has been steady and just about right for what we can handle right now. We're excited about all the repeat customers we have and the great feedback we get when it comes to our

shipping times, customer service and site performance. We're really looking forward to the holiday season and seeing how things go. The gift registries have been great – we have hundreds of families registered. I don't think there are many 'green baby registries' out there!"

Although she's been processing orders since the summer, Angelo still feels excitement every time an order notification hits her inbox.

"Every time we get an order, I still get really excited. I want to know what each person ordered every day just because I'm interested in the types of gifts people are giving. I just think it's so great when customers choose to shop with us ... I guess I'm still shocked that we're running our own business!"

Thinking of their present site, there are a few things that Angelo could not live without. For starters, she loves the navigation and how people can browse for products by category, gifts and brand.

"I think the way Solid Cactus put together the left navigation is incredibly usable and helps people to dig deeper into the site," she said. "The gift registry is

something I wouldn't want to do without right now. I can't believe we actually questioned whether or not to launch with it ... it has been so successful, I couldn't imagine running without it!"

HappyGreenBaby.com, as of press time, was packing up the office to relocate to a brand new warehouse.

"We're really excited about the move because we'll be moving into a bigger warehouse space and are looking at the potential to open a retail outlet. In the coming year, we're also going to start looking at expanding our product mix to include maternity gear and more 'big' items like strollers and furniture."

"We really wanted a company that understood all the capabilities of Yahoo! and how to maximize them for a high performing, splashy looking site," she said. "Yahoo! is a great starting place for small businesses. You can get up and running very quickly and without a huge initial investment." **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
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“2009 is a Glass Half Full”

Have you ever noticed that reports on the economy are always “better than expected” or “worse than expected” but rarely “on target” or “as expected”? With the media telling me every day that I should hold onto my money and not spend it, it’s no wonder we all fear a bad holiday season.

“*Good or bad, we’re a society obsessed with spending; we’d rather shop for a piggy bank than use one.*”

But I refuse to subscribe to all of the doomsday news. I'm not oblivious to the fact that there's real news out there that isn't positive. However, I believe one thing you can never underestimate is the need for people to spend money, and I mean "need". We are a society that loves to buy things; it's in our blood and yes, we may not spend as much as we did last year, but there's an eternal flame burning a hole in our pockets.

For months, I've advised our customers that working smarter this year is the key to a successful holiday season. If there are fewer dollars being spent this year, be sure you're grabbing as much share as possible. My hope is that you're head is spinning from a "better than expected" holiday season and you're looking for more ideas to maximize your post-holiday sales.

To help with this article I asked some of my fellow e-commerce experts about what they believe are the key things store owners need to do to start their 2009 off on the right foot. After reviewing their feedback, I realized that in large part these are things that you should already be doing and if you're not, you may be paying a heavy price.

Analyze Your Traffic:

The old adage rings true that "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got".

Now is the time to take a good look at your analytics to see how your site performed. Look at the bounce rates of your web pages and take a look at your cart abandonment rate. Most experts would say the 50-60% range is an average cart abandonment rate. If you're seeing a much higher rate, be concerned because this means your customers found something wrong once they decided to check out. Maybe your shipping rates are too expensive, maybe they were confused by a less-streamlined checkout process, maybe they lost confidence in the security of your store once you asked for a credit card. The cause may be

difficult to pinpoint, but the results could potentially be detrimental, so REVIEW YOUR ANALYTICS and start figuring out positive changes.

Evaluate Your Site Objectively:

Asking a friend, co-worker or relative what they think of your site is not effective if you're looking for productive changes that could increase your traffic or conversions. Have your website evaluated by a professional Conversion Analyst that understands best practices in e-commerce and can offer you valuable tips on what you're doing right or what you need to do to better optimize your sales. This includes evaluating the aesthetics of your site from header to footer, reviewing your checkout process and evaluating the friendliness of your search engine content.

Segment Your Heroes and Zeros:

Look at what products sold best and worst and create special sections on your site to highlight each in a way that will give them better selling potential. The Heroes that made your holidays a better year should be on your homepage or in a "Hot Items" section that is easy to find. Conversely, create a "Clearance" or "Specials" section for the Zero's on your site.

BLOG! BLOG! BLOG!

Really, it works. Blogging is such an easy way to build a community with your customers, and by the way, it doesn't hurt your Search Engine Optimization. Launch a free Wordpress blog and brand it to look like your store, then, just write, write and write.

Most "Blogiphobes" tell me "I don't know what I'd write about" and then proceed to tell me all about their business, how they got started or what products they love. Sometimes, I'll stop them to point out "you're blogging right now" and they begin to understand just how easy it can be. Blogging is not about determining if you're Mark Twain or Emily Dickinson

in your writing style, it's about talking about yourself, your family, your products, your store, or anything about which you're passionate. SELL ME and do it by engaging me in a dialogue that I'm interested in, which should be you or your products!!

Determine Your Marketing Efforts

What marketing efforts did you not participate in that you regret? Did you keep up your pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns? Are you still not convinced about e-mail marketing? Are you blogging? Are you maximizing your Search Engine Optimization?

1. Ramp up your PPC campaign to focus on your post-holiday deals and keep attracting new customers.
2. E-mail Marketing, if managed properly, is very effective for informing all those new customers about continued deals at your site. Remember those "Hot Item and Clearance" sections you created? Get the message out to your customers to come back for post-holiday deals.
3. Blog – okay, I'll shut up about it now.
4. You still need to attract new customers, so make improvements to your SEO by revising your content to be more keyword-rich.

You can take these as post-holiday tips but they're really tips you should continually make for your e-business to stay successful. Don't accept a struggling economy as a reason for less than desirable sales; be the exception in a struggling economy by working smarter than you did last year. 2009 will be a great year for you if you understand that a large part of the results are attributed to what you're doing to improve your business strategy. When the economy is truly great again, you'll be much further ahead in the game. **eBiz**



By Gregory Davis

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Yahoo Web Analytics – The Evolution of Site Analytics



Once upon a time, Web analytics was the realm of large websites that could afford enterprise-level solutions. They reaped the benefits of their investments with business and customer insights gained, giving them a significant competitive advantage over the rest of the e-commerce field. Then several years ago, Google launched a free web analytics platform, Google Analytics, thus sparking the widespread use of this data in marketing across the online sphere.

The arrival of Google Analytics leveled the playing field by offering previously unknown insights to small- and medium-sized businesses. This enabled small business owners to drive decisions & strategy based upon hard data instead of subjectivity. This solution was a good first step, however, it was still lacking the depth and advanced capabilities that the enterprise solutions brought to the table.

Fall 2008: enter Yahoo! Web Analytics (YWA), an enterprise level site analytics tool. YWA was beta-launched in mid-October and is evolving the field further with Yahoo!'s answer for web analytics. Previously known as Index Tools, YWA offers the advanced flexibility and capabilities of higher-priced analytics solutions for free to any of the small- and medium-sized businesses using the Yahoo! Small Business platform.

What separates YWA from Google Analytics is that it gathers the granular data of each visitor (every click they make and the story behind them) in real time and stores it in the data center indefinitely. This frees business owners to turn on the system, let it gather data in raw form and then pull insights

based upon historical data on the fly at any point in the future.

YWA gives the e-commerce operator the capability not only to just gather data, but also to unearth trends that affect the business. Some of these capabilities YWA offers above what is capable with GA are:

Custom Reports and Dashboards

Custom Reports

One of the biggest benefits of YWA is the flexibility it provides with custom reports. It allows business owners to choose the combination of metrics that provide insight to the problem at hand, and then save this report for use at any point in the future. In addition, these custom reports can be easily integrated into a custom dashboard with a click of the mouse.

Custom Dashboard

Each business operates under different goals and tracks various site areas and traffic channels closer than others. YWA provides custom dashboards that can be tailored to your business goals. When combined with custom reporting, business owners can truly begin to realize the power and flexibility of YWA.

Marketing Workflow Management

Timeline Feature (Events)

Google Analytics users have been trained to look at data and its trends over time. However, these are only 2 dimensions of the 3 dimensional analytics world. The 3rd is corresponding events that affect your website. This can include changes to your

site, holidays, system outages, pauses to marketing campaigns or any other event that could affect site or traffic performance. This timeline increases the value of the insights gained: not only are business owners able to see changes in performance, but they can now more accurately pinpoint the cause and make note for future changes to strategy.

Alerts

In addition to the Timeline feature, businesses can set Alert rules anywhere in their accounts, on any metric, to notify them if the data begins to stray from set parameters. This allows you to instantly tell if a recent change you made is positively or negatively affecting your business so you can react nimbly, like a cat. Anyone who has ever found a problem on one's site (or marketing channel) a day or two late will really appreciate this feature.

Traffic Flow Analysis

Goals and Funnels (Scenario Analysis)

With Google Analytics, site owners are required to set up goals and funnels before the system will begin tracking customers who come in and out of the funnel. One highlight of YWA is that businesses can now set up goals and funnels for any steps on the site, at any point in time, and reap the rich historical data that has been gathered since it was enabled on a site.

Advanced Path Analysis

Along the same vein as Goals and Funnels are Advanced Path Analysis. The raw data collection system that drives YWA allows



store owners to analyze the most popular paths through the site over time. When combined with customer segmentation, it allows you to gain insight into post-click behavior, therefore opening the opportunity to begin a legitimate post-click marketing push.

Additional Benefits

Integration with Yahoo! Stores (Merchandise Reporting)

Yahoo! Store owners gain a truly enterprise level feature in YWA with Merchandise Reporting. It enables the tracking of products and product combination that customers purchase, add to carts and preview on their own and in product combinations. It also allows store owners to upload product costs which can then be used in coordination with various marketing campaigns to determine true profitability. Granted, this takes some legwork to set up, but the insight gained is tremendous.

These are just some of the multitude of advantages in YWA. If you're a Yahoo! Store owner I highly recommend enabling the Analytics, which should be appearing in your account any day now. Worst case scenario—turn it on now, begin gathering the rich, granular data... and after the holiday rush is over, kick off the new year with insights garnered from the evolution of small business analytics. **eBiz**



By Jeff Petrosillo
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With the holiday rush and post-holiday sales in full swing, there are numerous areas to take into consideration with the expected rush of online traffic. If you haven't already begun preparing for this year's online holiday season, it's not too late to put these last-minute tips into effect.

Offer customers an incentive to shop within your site rather than your competitors. Promote a shipping incentive for the holiday season. To stop your potential customers from looking elsewhere, offer an incentive that is simply just too good to pass. Who isn't looking to save a penny these days? Promote an enticing shipping offer, such as \$25 off any order over \$150, or offer FREE shipping, whichever you are able to provide.

Another idea you may want to consider is a coupon code. Whether it be marketed across your website, included in your e-mail marketing efforts, or displayed in your paid search ads, a coupon code can entice potential customers to shop from your site. Those customers may even think about revisiting your website after the holiday season and make future purchases.

Another suggestion is gift certificates. Gift certificates can be awarded when customers spend over a specified amount, and can also be used as another potential product. This may attract customers to spend more than they initially intended, which, in turn, will allow them to reap the benefit of receiving a gift certificate. Extend your brand presence with an offer they can pass on to someone else. In the end it all comes down to stretching your company's visibility in as many ways as possible.

Make sure you have the adequate amount of inventory available. The last thing you want is to market products that you don't have on your shelves. Assure you have hot selling products available, whether during

the holiday season, or year-round, in order to effectively process your orders. Make sure you have your top products in stock. If you offer "hot" products that are in high demand, or are pushing a great deal on a particular product, make sure you have enough stock to meet your customers' needs. Check sales trend on your popular items over the last couple of months and note the inventory you have on-hand.

Don't leave your customers hanging. Be available to answer customer questions about your website, products, pricing, shipping, etc. If you expect an increase in calls during the holiday, make sure your staff is available and well-informed of questions that may arise. Friendly service and a positive attitude can lead to a repeat customer in the future. A popular question that last-minute online shoppers may be contacting you about is the arrival date of their purchases. Many may be hesitant to purchase items that will not reach them on

time. Either note the timeliness of shipping on your shipping confirmation page, or be ready to make any accommodations via a telephone call to assure that orders arrive at the customer's doorstep on time.

Keep your audience well-informed of upcoming holiday promotions. Begin to circulate a newsletter or e-mail which pitches your holiday incentives. State the urgency of ordering now to receive a percentage off your purchase or, like stated previously, provide a coupon code that can be used during the checkout process or to be passed on to another individual. If you don't have the opportunity to send multiple holiday e-mail blasts to your customer base, don't rule out sending one single e-mail. One is certainly better than none.

If you do not have the resources to circulate an e-mail blast or newsletter, word-of-mouth can be just as effective. The effects of viral marketing can have a



Fig 1. evaluate search volume trends, and news headlines for particular peak shopping times.

Tech Corner: Potpourri

A number of our eBiz Insider readers have sent in their tech-related questions in over the past year, and I have answered each of them individually. This month, let's take a look at some of the best questions received via e-mail and in the eBiz Insider Forums at <http://forum.ebizinsider.com>.



Fig 2. how popular the terms are within certain geographical locations

huge impact on company, website, and product recognition. When one individual tells another individual about a positive experience they've had while shopping on your site, this may give that individual a motive to check out your site. Continue to spread the word about your website and holiday promotions you are offering to friends, family, neighbors and others.

Take some of these tips into consideration in preparing for the yearly onrush of shoppers. According to the International Council of Shopping Centers, one-third of retailers' annual profits results from the holiday season. With a tough economy, you need to take the necessary steps to maintain a profitable business and remain optimistic about its future. It's always important to drive traffic to your site, but especially important during the holiday season. Grab shoppers' attention, provide excellent service and you're bound to keep them coming back for more. You may not know what to expect from this year's online holiday shoppers, but it never hurts to take advantage of last-minute holiday provisions so that you are prepared.

A great tool to take advantage of is Google Insights for Search. This tool allows you to compare search volumes for specific products across specific geographical areas, particular time frames, and can even be compared across categories. This tool is helpful in evaluating your current marketing strategy or message, examining the importance of seasonality across your product line, and exploring new markets. Allocating additional dollars, emphasizing

a new area of focus, and honing into what your competitors are offering are also useful features you can gather from utilizing this tool.

<http://www.google.com/insights/search/>

For example, if we search the terms "christmas gifts" and "children's toys," we see the (fig 1 & 2) results. We can evaluate search volume trends, and we can see news headlines for particular peak shopping times. You have the ability of filtering your results worldwide, evaluating specific time frames, as well as selecting the appropriate category related to your search. (See fig 1)

We can also see how popular the terms are within certain geographical locations; use filters to further narrow your search. We can also see related terms that are gaining popularity. (See fig 2)

Like many of the numerous Google resources, one of the best parts about this tool is that it is FREE! So get out there and research, test and prosper! **eBiz**



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Additional information can be found via:

<http://www.google.com/support/insights/>
<http://www.google.com/support/insights/bin/answer.py?answer=96693&topic=13973>

Q: Is there any reason to pay for the \$50 per user account per year Premier Edition of Google Apps?

A: The answer is yes if you're going to be using the full apps suite for calendaring, sites storage, Google Video Sharing, or advanced integration. If you're just using Apps for Google Mail or Docs, you don't need to upgrade.

Q: With the variety of platforms out there, what's the best software to use for blogging?

A: Wordpress is currently the most popular and most flexible blogging platform. Because Wordpress is built as an open-source, free platform, there are hundreds if not thousands of widgets, plugins, and templates available. It's also built into most hosting packages including Yahoo! Small Business. The branding advantage you have with Wordpress is that it is possible to create a design that matches your online store.

Q: Can you recommend a good anti-virus program?

A: I actually use Microsoft's OneCare Live personally. The cost of \$50 a year ensures updates and I can put it on three computers for that cost. It covers anti-virus, anti-spyware, wireless network security, and performance tune-ups (<http://onecare.live.com>). For free software use AVG Free Edition for Antivirus (<http://free.avg.com>) and Spybot S&D (<http://spybot.info>). **eBiz**



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