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Creating Value Online: If You Build It, They Will Buy

—By Donna Talarico

 Affiliate Marketing for the Holidays

How Happy are Your Customers?

Trust E-Commerce: The value of trust in your online business

Read this magazine and reap autumn's rich harvest. Or skip it. Do fall—as in leaves—and sales…



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- The Importance of an Employee Manual

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Remember When?



Editor in Chief

Recently someone asked me, "do you have any floppy disks I can borrow?" Caught off guard, I shook my head to make sure I heard the guestion correctly, then I fumbled with the answer. "Floppy disks, are you kidding?"

It reminded me just how much technology has changed in so few years.

My first computer was the Texas Instruments TI994A. You may have had a Commodore 64 or the "very fast" Commodore 128. My first "personal computer" purchase, a pretty expensive Tandy 1000 with an 8" floppy drive, a cassette player to save data and a dotmatrix printer. I remember saving up several hundred dollars to buy a hard drive for that computer, a 20 MB hard drive!

Back in the late 80's the closest thing we had to the "Internet" was a DOS version of America Online, which I remember well. Compuserve was around, but it was a little less intuitive than the AOL interface at the time. You'll also remember the Sierra Network and the original Prodigy if you were a child of this decade.

It wasn't until the 90's that the Internet became a household word. I took a job with one of the country's first Internet Service Providers (ISP's) back in 1994 after I became enthralled with this new technology. After only a few months I concluded "this thing is going to take off" and began experimenting with selling product online.



Back then the Internet

was very rudimentary. The browsers of the day were primitive. Java was still coffee, Flash was still something a camera did in low-light, and identity theft required a pickpocket. I was browsing the net with something called Netmanage Chamelion over a 14.4 connection. Netscape 3.0 arrived and changed the way we browsed, and Microsoft introduced Internet Explorer 3.0. I still long for the simplicity of the Netscape 3.0 browser, although trying to navigate the web with it today will result in extreme heartache.

When my first online company launched, TheFerretStore.com had a shopping cart that was so primitive, everything had to be hard-coded and maintenance was a bear. Secure shopping? Not back then!

Credit card numbers were passed in e-mail and unsecured forms. Today, credit card information is treated as securely as Dick Cheney in time of crisis.

Websites ten years ago had something called a "text-only" version for those not lucky enough to have a connection higher than 9600 baud. Today, "text-only" versions are written for PDA's and cell phones and optimized for mobile use.

Speaking of cell phones, boy have they changed over the years!

If you want to see how the Internet existed "back then" take a trip to the "Wayback Machine" at http://www.archive.org. Punch in your favorite website then go back in time to see how the site has changed over

the years. If you're lucky enough to find one from the early- to mid-90's like TheFerretStore.com, you will see how design and programming have evolved, but one thing you will notice, navigation pretty much remained the same.

Technology is rapidly changing and continually evolving. Twenty years ago the act of ordering groceries through a computer and having them delivered to your front door would have been as farfetched as putting a man on Mars. Today it's as common as mashed potatoes in a diner.

We are still in the very early stages of seeing the Internet's true potential. The way we shop online today may be completely different in a few years. Faster browsers, faster connections and the next generation of portable electronics will force us to embrace technology which today remains just a dream.

We're all challenged to keep up with the latest technology and trends. Our websites have to be multiple-browser compatible and we all want the latest and greatest features on our sites to enhance the customer experience. Each one of you is a pioneer in e-commerce, but if you sit on your laurels the latest advances will pass you by. You don't want to be the Smith-Corona of the 2000's. eBiz

Affiliate Marketing for the Holidays

Adalla Arrivares Lew Kernaza Luts To New Arrivare Newses Super Arrivares

Remembers & Speanner

The holiday season is the most important time of year and if you have an affiliate program, you have special conversion issues. Here are some hints to get you ready.

Be Prepared

Put a marketing plan in place early to get an edge on your competition.

Formulate an affiliate plan of attack that will integrate seamlessly with your overall marketing strategy. This can include promotions, sales and creative advertising. If you have been in business for a year, you should already know which types of promotions work best for you. This is not the time for testing. Create a single strategic plan that will run though the end of the holiday season.

Establish New Relationships

Make sure you partner with the right affiliates for the holidays. Loyalty-based programs, e-mail marketers and search engine affiliates can each promote your brand in different ways.

Identify the types of affiliates that perform well for your program and build

new relationships. The holiday season is dead ahead and you're not the only smart person out there, so start early to build a good mix of affiliate publishers.

Keep in mind that as the holiday season gets closer, Super Affiliates will become increasingly swamped with partnership requests. If you want to partner with specific affiliates for the first time, contact them as soon as possible. Most important, be prepared with a strategic plan in place and a great offer. It's the best way to stand apart from the crowd.

Enhance Existing Relationships

Current partners are vital to your bottom line, so be sure to use them to your advantage. Talk with your affiliates. Listen. It will allow those already performing to flourish and encourage those without a great amount of activity to surprise you.

Ask your affiliates what they want from your program. Many are experts in their fields; be sure they have everything they need to sell your brand. Communicate via newsletters and personalized e-mails to your top performers, but be sure to keep it concise and relevant.

Use holiday commission terms, contests and bonuses to create limited-time tiers or bonus levels which reward publisher performance. Offer bonuses beyond your normal terms to reward your top-seller, top-converter, etc. These incentives could take you from the section page to a front page feature and increase your holiday revenue!

Design Time

Give consumers a reason to click. Be sure your ads offer value, relevance and urgency.

Use effective, enticing ad copy to bring traffic to your site and be sure visitors land on the relevant pages. Don't be consumed by branding. Remember what's important to the consumer.

Start now! Design is one of the most time-consuming elements of a campaign. Gather ideas early and have your creatives ready to launch. This can all increase clickthroughs and conversions for the coming holiday season.

Post-Holiday Stress

Promotions don't end with the New Year. Consumers have finished their holiday shopping and are looking for great deals on the items they did not receive as gifts, many of them with gift cards or holiday cash in hand.



Example of a 6 month trend graph shows how affiliate marketing increases sales during the holiday season.

The weeks following the holidays are a great time for your affiliates to bring in additional sales. Have a plan in place through the end of January to capitalize on the tail-end of the holiday shopping season.

What if I Don't Have an Affiliate Program?

Start one now! Begin forming important affiliate alliances immediately.

Just as friendships take time to build and mature, affiliate relationships also require nurturing. If you're just starting you may not see the full effect of a mature program this year, but you should see a measurable return and you will be better prepared for 2008.

Remember...

Many affiliates publish as a full-time job. They earn a living by making sales for you and they want your links to convert. Help them help you by offering fresh content, fresh creative, great deals and competitive commissions to increase your affiliate revenue this holiday season and beyond. **eBiz**



By Michelle Pushefski

Michelle Pushefski has nearly a decade of marketing, sales, communications and web development experience and currently is an Affiliate Marketing Manager with Solid Cactus, Inc. Michelle can be reached via email at michellep@ebizinsider.com.



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Add Your Site

<h1>HTML Heading Tags Demystified</h1>



<h2>Why should you use heading tags and what exactly are they for?</h2>

Heading Tags have been around since the very beginning of HTML. Their semantic value has always been present, but only recently did it become an important device for driving website traffic and assisting website navigation.

<h2>What Are Heading Tags</h2>

Heading Tags are valid HTML code that help structurally organize your website content into meaningful sections. There are currently only six levels of Headings: H1 through H6. H1 is used for the primary headline of the article within a section or page. H6 is merely a sub-section about 5 levels beneath the main headline of the article. It is important to note that Heading Tags should never be used as design devices. Often Website Browser makers will make the H1 tag gargantuan and bold to assert the headline's importance. The true value of the H1 tag is in its default meaning. The presentation of the H1 tag is only beneficial during the design phase and in relation to the overall design layout.

Recently, Heading Tags have become a navigational device that facilitates website browsing. Modern Website Browsers, accessibility-focused Website Browsers and Online Screen Readers are built to recognize Heading Tags as meaningful headlines and allow the site visitor to quickly skim over each heading on a long page in order to find the article they seek.

Perhaps most important, Heading Tags have guickly become a crucial Search Engine Optimization device. Search Engines have always been focused on delivering the most relevant content to their users. A search engine has no way of determining the most relevant article or content when comparing similar text from one article to the next. When the Search Engine is able to compare a succinct "overview" of that article, that is the headline, the relevance becomes clear. By stating the headline of an article, Search Engines are able to narrow down search results and offer your site's contents to the appropriate visitor.

<h2>How to Use Heading Tags</h2>

There are many opinions on the proper use of headings on a website. You can review books, websites, and blogs and still not be 100% sure of the correct use of Heading Tags. That is primarily because their proper use is quickly summarized by the World Wide Web Consortium (www. w3c.org) as such:

"A heading element briefly describes the topic of the section it introduces. Heading information may be used by user agents, for example, to construct a table of contents for a document automatically."

Reference: http://www.w3.org/TR/

html401/struct/global.html#h-7.5.5

This explanation of a Heading Tag is purposefully simple so that developers and content managers have flexibility when organizing their content.

One way of using Heading Tags is to think of them in the context of newspaper design.

Newspapers usually draw attention to a story with an easily understandable headline. This headline would be your H1 tag. The page of the newspaper may have sub-sections under the main story to help support the main story. These would be your H2-H6 tags. Here's where it gets a bit more complicated. Newspapers will very rarely feature only one article on the front page. There will often be auxiliary articles of lesser importance (but still attentionworthy) on the front page. This is done in order to use as much available page space as possible. The main headline for these lesser articles would still technically be H1 tags. Remember that the Heading Tags are about meaning and not presentation. The presentation is an added layer that occurs later in the content delivery process.

<h2>One Heading Per Page or Multiple?</h2>

Obviously, the web is not bound by the same limitations as a printed newspaper. Why would anyone cram so many articles onto a homepage when additional pages are readily available and better yet, free? If you have 3 separate articles and one of them has sub-sections. it would seem obvious that using 3 H1 tags and one H2 beneath it would be acceptable. Ask 3 "experts" and you might hear 3 different opinions on the "proper" use of Heading Tags for this scenario. The "best practice" and "standard" of Heading Tags use is in the eye of the user. We'll leave it at this: your content should dictate your use of Heading Tags. Until a standard

is in place that strictly defines the proper method of organizing your content, your website's success will have the final say in what is the best practice.

<h2>Should Headings Be Used for Navigation?</h2>

It's a new source of debate: should you use Heading Tags for your Navigation bar? Logically, A Table of Contents or Navigation area could be seen as sections but how exactly would the navigation section relate to the overall article? Technically it wouldn't. A larger concern is that if you structure your pages with the navigation area as a section, with a heading, you would most likely want to hide the heading from view on your website. This tactic of "cloaking" text onscreen could be seen as a black-hat SEO technique and you could be penalized for it. There is currently no right or wrong answer, but I would lean away from assigning Navigation as a section with a heading.

<h2>What Not to Do!</h2>

Jumping back and forth with what you can do but might not want to do can be maddening. It is significantly easier to tell you how not to use an H1 tag.

- You may be tempted to us the H1 tags throughout your website in order to fool a search engine into associating keywords from your body copy. This means that you are dumping in every keyword you know in an attempt to get a better page rank for your product. Never, I repeat never do this. You will eventually be caught and your page rank or possibly site rank will suffer. Remember, headings should be tied to stories or sections beneath them. If you need to emphasize a keyword, use the "" tag for emphasis or ""
- Don't skip around. This isn't an

<h1> HTML Heading Tags Demystified </h1> continued on page 8

W3C Recol

unbreakable rule but there is no point in moving from an H1 tag to an H3 tag. The point of Heading Tags is their meaning. If you only have one headline and one subheading on your page, your second tag really should be H2.

- Don't use Heading Tags to make your page text large/small/bold. Heading tags are all about structure and meaning, not aesthetics.
- Don't embed HTML Headings within other HTML Headings. The proper use of an H1-H6 tag, per the W3C specification is to have text or "inline" elements within the tag. This means no paragraphs , block quotes <block quote>, block containers <div> or other block level elements.
- Don't place your company name and/or logo in the H1 tag. This is a common mistake when using Heading Tags. If your homepage is focused mainly on your company name and tagline, using an H1 could be acceptable. It all comes down to what you are trying to say to your visitors. Imagine a newspaper with a headline that only reads "NEW YORK TIMES September 5th, 2007." You see the point.

See the W3C spec for more information on this:

concerns a disc "	thingt, tinhing."s	
	Destatent Bedy	************************************
CONTRACT NOT	· (haisshijathipu) ·	(228(322) document hody
Million .	thread states	the document has been loaded - the document has been loaded - the document has been resord
CIRLINGET ADDRESS		information on mother
Laitrai		honorellan, hilfer bermins
VIRLAMENT BILL	etilizes 14	pasaria inipinje/style restation -
ACCURA.		honorartes, hills, honoris

Part of the HTML 4.01 DTD which lists guidelines for heading tags. These are the guidlines that browser manufacturers typically follow.

<h2>Where Do We Go From Here?</h2>

The Web is ever-growing and the Standards that code purists and Search



A heading element briefly describes the topic of the section it introduces. Heading information may be used by user agents, for example, to construct a table of contents for a document automatically.

There are six levels of headings in HTML with <u>ut</u> as the most important and <u>us</u> as the least. Visual browsers usually render more important headings in larger fonts than less important ones.

The following example shows how to use the pry element to associate a heading with the document section that follows it. Doing so allows you to define a style for the section (color the background, set the font, etc.) with style sheets.

```
<DIV class="section" id="forest-elephants" >
<ID>Porest elephants</NI>
<P>In this section, we discuss the lesser known forest elephants.
...this section continues...
<OIV class="subsection" id="forest-habitat" >
<ID=Values_subsection" id="forest-habitat" >
<ID=Values_subsection" id="forest-habitat" >
<ID=Values_subsection" id="forest-habitat" >
<ID=Values_subsection" id="forest-habitat" >

</DIV>
```

This structure may be decorated with style information such as:

```
</PEAD>
... document title ...</TITLE>
<TITLE>... document title ...</TITLE>
<TITLE>
DIV.section { text-align: justify; font-size: l2pt}
DIV.section { text-align: justify; font-size: l2pt}
II { font-style: italic; color: green }
H2 { color: green }
</STYLE>
</HEAD>

               mbered sections and references
```

Numbered sections and references HTML does not itself cause section numbers to be generated from headings. This facility may be offered by user agents, however, Soon, style sheet languages such as CSS will allow authors to control the generation of section numbers (handy for forward references in printed documents, as in "See section 7.2").

Some people consider skipping heading levels to be bad practice. They accept #1 #2 #1 while they do not accept #1 IIJ III since the heading level III is skipped.

This is the W3C Specification for HTML 4.01 Heading Tags. The explanations are a bit technical and confusing but with a bit of effort, a few late nights, a handful of online searches, and a few pots of coffee, you'll glean useful information about the web. <u>http://www.w3.org/TR/html401/struct/global.html#h-7.5.5.</u>

Engines cling to are changing. It's no exaggeration to say that by the time you read this, a "better" method for organizing and using Heading Tags will be in hot debate. The one constant is the purpose behind the Heading Tags. By using Heading Tags you are guaranteeing that your articles and content will be organized and readily understood by web technologies today and probably tomorrow as well.

<h2>Goodies</h2>

Read more about the standards

driving the web today at http://www. w3.org/TR/html401/struct/global. html#h-7.5.5]] W3C Spec

This handy tool will show you if your site is well structured and offers a formatted outline view of the content! http://validator.w3.org/. eBiz



By Miguel Younger

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Creating Value Value Online: If You Build It, They Will Buy



Value.

That's the key to selling nearly anything, no matter the price tag. The question is; how do you build value online, on a virtual store where there is no person-to-person selling? How do you create that value when the customer is in control of when they shop, where they click, what they see and in what order? How do you get them to stay at your site once you've gotten them to visit?

When it comes to e-commerce, there are many simple things business owners can do to create value before, during and after a sale. And when visitors see the value, visitors become customers.

Building Value Before the Sale

Branding

One key way to build value as a merchant is to be well-branded. People have to like

your site long enough to click around. The biggest retailers in the country have recognizable logos or contagious jingles or both. You may associate value with those big names just because you recognize them. That's the key. Be recognizable. Be familiar. There is value in buying from someone you know.

Are you well-branded? Your website's branding will consist of a name, logo, design scheme, color scheme, fonts and other design elements which are all associated, ultimately creating your image. This branding can instill values, ideas and even a personality—all associated with your company.

Be Consistent

If you have a brick and mortar store or catalog, do those images jive with your website? Is your web site branding consistent? What about your check-out page or e-mail newsletter? When customers click an add-to-cart button, does that look like your homepage? Does your online and print advertising, invoices, packing slips, etc. match the online image, too? Keep the image consistent across the board in every way you do business. It will make your web presence stronger. It will build value.

Keep It Fresh

Give your website a periodic redesign while still keeping your brand recognizable. It is an inexpensive way to build value and tells your customers you are up to par with current e-commerce trends. A fresh look makes you look professional and makes your visitors comfortable. Big e-tailers reinvent themselves regularly. If you can't afford an entire redesign, adding new graphics, fresh content or additional features can also liven up a 'worn' site.

Building Value During the Sale

Products

Do not rely on manufacturers' descriptions to sell your products. Your competition is probably using those boilerplate statements as well. Be different. To be frank, if canned descriptions worked, we wouldn't need salespeople. If you can't be there in person to sell your products, you need to do more than cut and paste things from a catalog. You must show your customers the value in buying from you. Get creative and beef up those product descriptions, but don't just sell the product. Sell the benefits. Sell as if you are talking to your customer. To quote the famous (or infamous) sales guru Zig Ziegler, "Paint the Picture."

Example: A student desk could be "made of oak and be x-amount high by x-amount wide with two drawers and a pull-out keyboard tray. Some assembly required." Yawn. Boring. No value. Click.

Or, a student desk could be "...the place where 4.0 term papers are written. This sturdy oak desk offers a rock solid writing surface for homework and plenty of room for a mound of textbooks during a late-night cramming session. This dorm-room must-have can store your link to the world—whether it be desktop or laptop. The deep, roomy drawers will allow you to keep your notes and assignments organized, or serve as a place to stash your clutter on Parent's Weekend. Since some quick assembly is required, this will allow extra quality time with mom and dad before they leave you at college. First build this awesome desk—then build your future."

The second statement builds value in something as simple as a small, wooden desk. Now, improve the offer. "If you purchase this student desk, we will throw in your choice of an ergonomically-correct desk chair for 50% off. And a free desk lamp." Special offers are an excellent way to build value to nab the sale.

Special Offers & Sales

People like free stuff. They see value in it and they feel valued by getting something extra. Offering a free gift with purchase is a wildly successful way to increase conversions and average order size. Department store cosmetic counters are known for this tactic. Spend \$50 with X-Make-up and get a free purse. Ladies will line up for these pretty looking offers. If people can get something extra, they will usually buy more.

Another retail clothing store tactic is the "Buy one shirt for \$9.99 each or get two for \$18.00." Perhaps they only needed one shirt, but they saw the value in purchasing two and actually spent more. Even small discounts build value.

Pricing

Building value through the way your pricing is displayed will also increase conversions.



You can see from the example above that the regular price of the circulator is \$198.00. But, it is struck out to show, "Hey! That's not what we're charging you for it!" The sale price is written below in red: \$175.00. Then beneath that in a strategic green it says, You Saved: 23.00. This idea can also be translated into the "Retail Price vs. Our Price" format.

Everyone sees value in saving money.

Shipping & Other Services

Free Shipping Countdown calculators are one of the best methods of increasing order size. I cannot tell you how many times I bought just one more item while shopping online to get free shipping on an order, say over \$25.00. Graphics and banners should say:"Free Shipping on All Orders Over \$X.00." However, a countdown calculator does the math. If someone sees that they are only \$8.00 away from free shipping, they're very likely to keep shopping until they find something for \$8.00... or more. Letting people buy more to avoid shipping costs leads to higher conversions and order sizes.

Building Value After the Sale

The e-commerce world depends on repeat customers and referrals. You want to reward your good customers and entice them to come back. Continue to build value even after the sale is over and the item is shipped.

After the sale, many sites generate a thankyou e-mail. Be sure that e-mail really shows that you appreciate the business. When possible, take the e-mail a step further by adding a coupon code or another offer exclusively to repeat customers. Make them feel valued.

Creating value in the e-commerce environment is different than in personto-person selling, but just as important. People like to shop around and compare prices, and the Internet makes it easier to explore options before opening the virtual checkbook. Therefore, you must create value on your website, or they will buy from the 'other guys'. Just like brick-and-mortar stores, people are likely to buy at either the first place that treats them right, and/or the first place they see a really good value.

Now that you have some necessary tools in your box, start building that value. If you build it right, they will buy. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico

Donna Talarico is the author of the book "Kids, Have You Seen My Backpack?" and currently is employed with Solid Cactus, Inc. as a client advisor. Donna can be reached via email at donnat@ebizinsider.com.

Not affiliate marketing, but smart marketing!

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Get started today at: http://mycoupons.solidcactus.com

Mining the Gold in Global Sales While Minding the Devils in the Details...

E-commerce is uniquely positioned to take advantage of rapidly emerging international markets. However, all countries and products come with their own rules. Pay attention!

accept plant-based products. Check the import auides.

Duties, Taxes, and Postal Systems Vary Widely

All countries charge import duties and taxes, and if the receiving client does not pay them, you will. Make sure international customers understand your terms.

It is cheap to ship UPS Ground to Canada, but UPS charges a \$45 - \$75 brokerage fee in addition to duty and tax. The Postal Service does not. So, go postal or consider UPS Expedited Service

which bundles brokerage fees into the shipping price. Negotiate these issues with your shipping carrier.

Avoid shipping regular air mail or surface mail to countries with poor postal systems. For example, air mail delivery in Italy often takes 6 months. Mexican and Brazilian postal systems have very high theft rates of packages. When in doubt, use UPS, DHL or FedEx. The Postal Service also subcontracts reliable "International Priority" to third party carriers.

Exports are profit centers for FedEx, DHL and UPS. They will create favorable export rates and offer deep discounts.

NEVER pay book rate!

Verify, Verify, Verify!!

Address verification does not work on most foreign-issued credit cards. You will generally lose charge backs. Many merchants require wire transfers for initial orders before accepting credit cards. For large dollar value orders, you may want to consider setting up a separate checking account with your bank for wire transfers. Your customers can wire funds into this account and you can transfer the money into your regular operating account. Never leave a balance in a bank account used for wire transfers.

Avoid the Costly Mistakes...

Make sure all packages are documented properly, and the contents and values are clearly and correctly stated on the bill of lading. If customs in your destination country refuses the package, you will usually be responsible to pay for shipping in both directions. International sales can be a gold mine if you can avoid the land mines! eBiz



By Joe Palko

Joe Palko is co-founder and CEO of Internet design and marketing company, Solid Cactus, Inc. Joe can be reached via email at joep@ebizinsider.com.

Know the Territory

Some underdeveloped countries are breeding grounds for fraud. Nigeria and Indonesia rarely offer legitimate sales. Remember: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Fed Ex and UPS will provide you with "free" international guides to help you understand import rules. Meat based products from the USA are not allowed into European Union countries without proper documentation. Mexico has restrictions on Chinese made fabrics. Island countries like New Zealand and Australia fear invasive species and rarely

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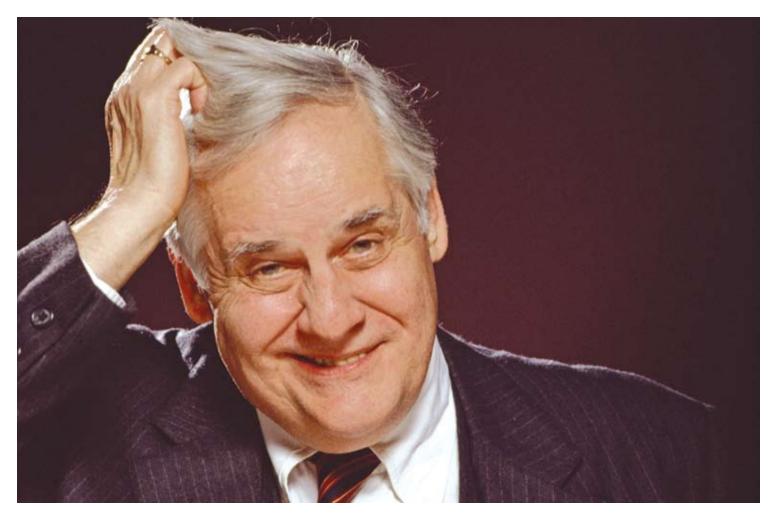
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We're Firing on all Cylinders and it's Time to Hire...

You hear it in the office, in staff meetings or between executives, "I think we need more people." The life cycle of your business is constantly changing. And whether your company, department, or team is growing in customer volume or sustaining the current volume before the next growth phase, at some point manpower justification is priority one. The magic is finding the number that will yield exceptional customer service while ensuring the maximum profits. Friends, there is no magic!!!

Businesses may have millions tied up in facilities, inventory, marketing and the

like, but arguably the most challenging asset to manage is our human capital.

Listen to Your People

Consider the variables before hiring: current performance, market conditions, employee attitude, finances, vendors, etc.... They can be dizzying. Get help from the inside. Pull your managers and key employees from the department you are considering enlarging. Please don't think, "This is a management decision." These are your folks in your trenches and they know your business best. They make or break your organization. They know when they need to increase production and when they're at maximum capacity. Ask their opinions; you'll be wiser for their answers. Begin the process. Collect, Analyze, Solve, Implement.

COLLECT information regarding the state of the department (e.g. Current numbers vs. goal, quality assurance data, morale, employee perception, etc...). Next, identify whether the position has an established benchmark for capacity performance.

ANALYZE the information to determine if current employees are operating at

capacity. Conduct a second analysis based on the needs of the organization. Question your team: Does the current volume of performance achieve our forecast? Does current performance meet or exceed our benchmarks for customer satisfaction and profitability? (Additional questions are listed below.)

SOLVE by comparing the current team's performance against the benchmarks. If you don't have performance benchmarks, establish them. If people fall short, find ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness. If they are performing at the highest levels of the benchmark, it may be time to hire. The hiring decisions would include number of additional people, capital investment requirements, new departmental benchmarks, etc... Finally, it should include how you will measure the return on investment of your newest organizational asset(s).

IMPLEMENTATION is the toughest step for most businesses. Analysis is easy; acting on your conclusions is tough. It will not happen by itself, and you can't afford to procrastinate.

GET STARTED. Ask the Right Questions

Discussion-starters when collecting information:

- 1. Are we hiring for a new position, or a current position?
- **2.** Have we established a benchmark for exemplary performance in this position?
- 3. Have we provided expectations, coached, mentored, and trained our current employees to successfully achieve these benchmarks?
- **4.** Are our employees performing to that benchmark?
- 5. Have we removed all organizational obstacles?
- **6.** Have we removed all resources obstacles?
- Have we decided who will absorb the financial risk of bringing someone new aboard? (Our organization, the employee, or both?)
- 8. Do we have the cash flow to support the position? If not, do we know where it will come from?

- **9.** What is it costing us by not having someone in the position?
- 10. Have we developed a written, behavior-based process for hiring?
- **11.** Do we have the Human Resources support to aid in hiring?
- **12.** What challenges, if any, have we had in the past when hiring new employees?
- **13.** Have we had retention issues in the past based on our hiring, training, and employee development processes?
- **14.** Have we identified and/or considered the legal implications?

Before we hire, we should be asking, "Have we achieved the benchmark for exemplary performance with the people, processes and product we have? Have we maximized customer satisfaction and profitability?" If you can answer "yes" to those questions, it is probably time to hire.

There is no crystal ball for making human capital decisions. Start by talking and listening with your people. After all, they are the ones who will carry you to success, or ensure that you fail. **eBiz**



By Todd Barnhardt

Todd A. Barnhardt is president and CEO of Peak Performance Solutions, LLC and provides consulting services to small and large organizations.

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How Happy are Your Customers?

If you want to know how your customers feel, ask them. Much of the feedback you receive will be anecdotal and can help you feel your way through customer relations. But the fact is, we all like numbers. We can't empirically conclude whether our customers like us, but we can get a strong clue. It's called Net Promoter.

Net Promoter is widely accepted as the single most reliable indicator about a company's ability to grow. It was first introduced by Fred Reichheld in his book,

The Ultimate Question: Driving Good Profits and True Growth. Net Promoter asks your customers to answer a very simple question on a scale from 0 to 10: Would you recommend us to a friend or colleague?

The answers are tabulated and responses fall into 3 categories:

Promoters

Promoters are customers who are very enthusiastic about your company. They will not only continue to purchase from you, but they will recommend your company to their friends and neighbors.

Passives

Passives are satisfied customers, but aren't enthusiastic about your company. They can be lured to competitors offering special deals or lower prices.

Detractors

Detractors are unhappy customers who are looking for someone other than you to do business with. To find out your Net Promoter Score, simply subtract the total percentage of detractors from the total percentage of promoters.

Obviously, having a customer list full of promoters will help grow your company naturally. If the majority of your customers love you, they will tell their friends, and their friends will tell their friends, etc. This will reduce your marketing spend in the long term and your customers will keep returning.

Having too many detractors will harm your business. You'll spend the money spreading awareness about your products, only to lose your customers (and their friends) to competitors.

The highest growth companies (Amazon, eBay, Dell) have Net Promoter Scores ranging from 50-80%. The "average" company has a score of about 5-10%.

Companies that have negative scores mean that they are creating more detractors than promoters each day.

Here's how to measure your Net Promoter Score:

Step 1:

Ask your customers one simple question: Would you recommend us to a friend or colleague?

Have them rate their likelihood on a scale from 1-10

Step 2:

Total the responses and determine the percentages for each response. To do this, divide the number of responses for a certain answer by the total number of submissions for the survey, and multiply that by 100.

For example:

Answer	# of responses	%
0	25	6.25
1	20	5
2	15	3.7
3	30	7.5
4	10	2.5
5	5	1.25
6	20	5
7	30	7.5
8	35	8.75
9	85	21.25
10	125	31.25

Step 3:

Add the percent of promoters (people who selected 9 or 10) together e.g. 21.25 + 31.25 = 52.5

Step 4:

Add the number of detractors (people who selected 0-6) together

e.g. 6.25 + 5 + 3.7 + 7.5 + 2.5 + 1.25 + 5 = 31.2

Step 5:

Subtract the total detractors from the total promoters

e.g. 52.5 - 31.2 = 21.3%

The answer is your Net Promoter Score

If you need software to help you track your NPS responses, I like an application called Survey Monkey. It's cost-effective and easy to use. Visit www.surveymonkey.com for more info.

For more information on Net Promoter, visit www.netpromoter.com



Pay Attention to Your People

Your most important customers are your promoters and your detractors. Do not rest on your laurels with either group. Find out why your promoters like you and why they recommend you to others. Make sure you do to others what works so well with these folks. Your detractors are also very important. Not as customers, but as a mirror to your business. Why don't they like you? How have you failed them? You have even more to learn from your detractors than from your promoters. Use anecdotes, use numbers, but whatever you do, pay attention to your customers. **eBiz**

By Justin Rattigan

Justin Rattigan is COO for Internet design and marketing company, Solid Cactus, Inc. Justin can be reached via email at justinr@ebizinsider.com.

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Handling Objections -3 Simple Steps to Yes!



If you want a successful sales career, handling objections must be one of your strongest attributes. I've heard every story

in the book. No money, no time, wrong quantity, send me information, leave a sample... it's endless. And that's the point. Sales managers should teach that the objection should be expected and "no money" will come up 90% of the time. Most

people just keep pushing the features, benefits and value. Big mistake. By doing that, you never really address the smoke screen and it will resurface. That's right, most of the time the objection is a smoke screen.

The 95% Rule

Scenario: You walk up to a clothing rack in a store. The sales associate approaches and says, "Can I help you?" Usually, the response is "No thank you, I'm just looking," Inherently, people generally don't want to be sold. Instead, they want to feel good about buying. It's a smoke screen.

95% of sales associates will say "If you need any help, I'll be right over here." That 95% of sales associates have become order-takers. The other 5% will do it right. First, they will ask a critical question when they get resistance and second, repeat that skill over and over becoming successful as a result. This 5% become the sales hunters that every business needs.

The 95% Rule applies to nearly every type of sales call. You get with a potential buyer, build rapport, establish trust, discuss wants and needs to find the correct fit, build additional value, discuss price and here it comes, BAM! OBJECTION! The key to successful selling is overcoming objections and moving the sale forward. By Acknowledging, Answering and Asking for the commitment, you'll increase your success "batting average."

3 Steps to Handling Objections and Getting the Order.

- 1. Acknowledge the Objection. This lets the buyer know that you listened and are aware that there is an issue on the table. It allows you to eliminate possible new objections like size or features. Since price is the objection 90% of the time, let's use it for this demonstration. "If I understand, you are satisfied with the size and features of this product but are concerned with the price is that correct?" This is not an open-ended question and requires a definitive response. It also takes the "fall back" size and feature objection off the table.
- 2. Answer the Objection. This gives you a second chance to rebuild value,

establish possible savings, increase in production etc... Example: "I understand why you think this product seems expensive, but perhaps I failed to properly explain the... (value, savings or increase in production) that you'll receive...let me show you... "This gives you that opportunity to really drive the "pain" and the "medicine" home and sets you up for the final step.

3. Ask Again for the Order. Here's where the 5% distinguish themselves. Reasking tells you if the objection is real or a smokescreen for something deeper. Example: "So as you can see, the value of using this product will greatly benefit the way you're currently growing your business, does that make sense?" If you've explained it properly... It will, and a yes is a yes. Objections are normal. You should expect them and focus on building the skills to overcome them. Deal with objections directly and 3 things will happen. First, your sales will increase. Second, you will become the 5% instead of the 95%. Finally, you will become a hunter instead of an order-taker. A baseball player doesn't learn to hit a slider or a curve ball his first time at bat; he spends time in the batting cage learning to recognize it. He practices endlessly until he develops the skill to knock it out of the park. So, grab your bag of objections and head to the batting cage. Batter-up!!! **eBiz**



By Chris Williams

Chris Williams has over a decade of sales and management experience and currently serves as outbound sales manager for Solid Cactus, Inc. Chris can be reached via email at chrisw@ebizinsider.com.

Trust E-Commerce The value of trust in your online business

If you could put a price tag on trust, what would you be willing to pay? Trust plays a leading role in any business, but this is particularly true for e-commerce. People are connected to your business by the thin filament of the Internet. Trust is the core of its strength. Every interaction that you have with your customer, directly or indirectly, affects their perception of you and your company. Customer expectations and experiences have changed what we all knew as e-commerce into TRUST-commerce.

Whether someone has been to your website or not, they have a basic

perception of you. Once you understand how to mold that perception into something which attracts them, you will create a loyal customer. Recently, the owner of Zappos.com was interviewed and gave his top ten lessons learned in over 8 years of online business. 75% of Zappos.com orders come from repeat customers. Not surprisingly, 5 of his 10 lessons dealt directly with trust.

Because customers cannot walk into your store and talk to someone directly, or hold the product in their hands and examine it closely, you have to go to great lengths to make your online business transparent. It goes beyond a simple e-mail address listing or explaining your privacy policy. In order to gain their trust you will need to put your business out on a limb. Without the risk, you can't expect any reward.

Building Trust on Your Website.

Clear shipping methods and rates, tollfree phone number, e-mail address and mailing address should already be part of your website. Here are three things that may not be on your website, but will play an important role in building trust:

- 1. Product Reviews Amazon has had it for quite some time. Wal-Mart and Staples just added it to their online business. Do you have it? If you've spent a lot of time online you may be noticing that businesses are paying a premium for community-oriented websites such as YouTube.com and MySpace.com. The community is playing a larger role online than ever before and online consumers trust one another more than you, the "expert." Put the peer reviews up on your site. Make it easy to build that trust.
- 2. Highlight Secure Shopping One of the main reasons that customers abandon shopping is because they don't feel "secure" in placing the order through your website. If you're an experienced internet user you may see the little "lock" in the bottom of the browser, but not every shopper will notice. The best way to alleviate fears is to prominently display security information such as SSL encryption, cookie management, etc. Put a large graphic on your shopping cart that says "SECURE SHOPPING (read how)". Take out the guess work and you'll get that extra order.
- 3. Clear Return Policy If you do accept returns, tell the customer exactly what to expect. Do not try to wiggle around the issue with some fancy terminology or hidden fees. If you can't afford

to refund the return shipping cost, tell them. To minimize the number of returns, create a return window by only accepting returns with 30 days of the purchase, or some other reasonable time frame. Your customers will appreciate how easy it is to return an order and you will minimize any customer service issues that may arise.

Your website can play a vital role in building trust with consumers. In the 2007 E-commerce Benchmark Guide from MarketingSherpa, one study showed that 58% of online consumers preferred customers reviews when shopping online. Use the trust that consumers have for one another to your advantage by adding features such as Product Reviews to your online store and continue building that trust through secure shopping and a clear return policy. Build trust in your business one piece at a time, one secure customer at a time. **eBiz**



Make Your Best Pitch in...

he magazine for e-commerce professionals.

By Kurt Illian

Kurt Illian is Vice President of Marketing for Internet design and marketing company, Solid Cactus, Inc. Kurt can be reached via email at kurti@ebizinsider.com.

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Tech Corner: Saving on Software



If you've ever had to purchase software, you've probably debated it and then either bitten the bullet or gone without. Software is EXPENSIVE!

However, while companies like Microsoft and Adobe have the majority of market share on software, developers are constantly creating free or inexpensive alternatives that you can download for free and avoid dropping thousands of your hard-earned dollars.

Star Office (<u>http://sun.com/staroffice</u>) is a suite, similar to Microsoft Office that includes integrated word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and presentations. It can also open files from and save files as Word, Excel, Access, and Powerpoint.

Thunderbird (<u>http://mozilla.com/</u> <u>thunderbird</u>) is an integrated reader for e-mail and newsgroups which does almost all of the things Outlook will do, especially when partnered with Lightning Calendar Manager (<u>http://mozilla.org/projects/</u> <u>calendar/lightning/</u>).

Google Apps (http://google.com/a) is

a free web-based software suite. Apps includes document management for word processing and spreadsheets (including team-level collaboration), personal and shared calendars, RSS feed reader, and Google's Gmail e-mail web client. Also, the information is stored totally on the web – so you don't have to worry about viruses, computer failures, etc. You can always export everything to your personal computer as a backup. A premiere edition with multiple users' accounts and increased storage will cost \$50 per user, annually.

AVG Free (*http://grisoft.com/free*) is an antivirus client that does just that. It detects and cleans viruses on your personal PC. Use in a corporate or office environment will cost about \$30 per machine.

Gimp (<u>http://gimp.org</u>) is a free image editing and manipulation program, with many of the functions of Adobe Photoshop.

For editing HTML, CSS, and other textbased languages, **PSPad** (<u>http://pspad.</u> <u>com</u>) is a great free utility. For about 15% the price of Dreamweaver, you can also get **TopStyle Pro** (<u>http://newsgator.com/</u>

<u>Individuals/TopStyle/</u>) for all your mark-up programming needs.

All of these programs are similar to their pricey counterparts and take a little getting used to if you've learned the "Microsoft" or "Adobe" way. The benefit — you'll save a bundle of money so you can afford to take your favorite computer geek out for a nice dinner.

I want to know if you have favorite free (or inexpensive) software utilities you use. Email me suggestions to *johnd@ebizinsider. com.* I'll check out your suggestion. You might even see your name and suggestion appear at the resources area of eBizinsider. com. **eBiz**



By John Dawe

John Dawe is your typical computer geek. Ask him and he'll admit it! If you have a technical question and would like to see it

answered here in Tech Corner, drop John and e-mail at johnd@ebizinsider.com.



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