# eBiz Insider

## the ___ eCommerce professionals.

The Power of a Fresh Set of Eyes

# Site Deconstruction Session

## a Hit at Solid Cactus Boot Camp

*—By Donna Talarico*

◆ **Unwrapping Results with Holiday E-mail Marketing**

◆ **How to Write eCommerce Press Releases:**
**Tips to be timely & SEO-friendly**

◆ **Don't Publish Yet!**
**6 Common Oversights: Filling in the blanks....**

Give this magazine your set of eyes and improve your holiday selling season, or don't. Then, you'll just get tears in your eyes.

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## the magazine for eCommerce professionals.

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# Letter from the Editor

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

This issue of *eBiz Insider* comes on the heels of two exciting events in the history of Solid Cactus: The introduction of Solid Cactus eCommerce (SCeC) and our seventh Boot Camp.

Having our own eCommerce platform has always been a dream of mine. Taking on such a project would be a massive undertaking with dozens of programmers working on the backend, designers working on styles and layouts, and security experts examining every line of code ensuring compliance with tough Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards.

When our parent company, Web.com, acquired us in April, my dream looked like it would become more of a reality. One of the key goals of the new Solid Cactus was to introduce a shopping cart that combined shopping and marketing.

With input from me and other eCommerce experts on staff, we worked closely with a team of Web.com programmers to build a platform to our specifications. After all, nobody knows eCommerce better than Solid Cactus. With a history in online shopping that dates back to 1994, when I opened my first store, to the Solid Cactus you know today that services more top 500 Internet retailers than any other developer, our experience is vast.

SCeC has already been embraced by scores of merchants who have opened second, third and fourth stores to try out our new platform. Our soft-launch of the product has already been a success and we're excited about a long list of feature upgrades and enhancements that will be released early next year.

I encourage you to visit *http://ecommerce. solidcactus.com* to learn more about SCeC and view instructional videos and product demos.

While the excitement is still in the air over SCeC, our commitment to the platforms we've always built on remains. Whether you run your business on Yahoo! Store, eBay Prostores, or Amazon Webstore, Solid Cactus is here, standing ready to fully support you and your business.

At Solid Cactus Boot Camp @ HQ that was held October 14-16, our commitment to our platforms was evidenced by the release of nearly a dozen new store features for Yahoo! Store. The most impressive was our new Advanced Search which brings state-of-the-art search technology to your website. Additional features released are spotlighted throughout this issue.

Since January of this year, nearly two-dozen unique and game-changing features were released specifically for Yahoo! Store. In 2010, we will release two new features per quarter and plan on releasing version updates to our entire line of existing Yahoo! Store features throughout the year. This is an investment we're making in the success of your business and a strong indication of our continued support and dedication to the platform you currently run your business on.

Now is an exciting time to be a Solid Cactus customer because we truly are committed to be your partner in eCommerce success! **eBiz**

## Letters to the Editor…

**Dear Editor**: I don't really have a question, but I just wanted to say that I've been getting eBiz for a few years now and look forward to every issue. Last issue's story by Marc Manfre, "Cut the Clutter" really hit home because I didn't realize how much was wrong with my homepage. It was a wake-up call. I appreciate how much research your team at Solid Cactus does.

—*Stephanie H., Bar Harbor, ME*

**Hi, Stephanie!** Thanks so much. I will definitely let Marc know. Sometimes it's easy to overlook things on your site because they are familiar. Often, it takes something like a professional site evaluation or just a new, unbiased set of eyes to make you see your site in a new light. You can post your site for review in our eBiz forums, too.

**Dear Editor**: I always read about your call center but I don't have an eCommerce site. (I just get your magazine for marketing tips for my website advertising my construction business.) But I was doing some thinking. I'm always on the job site and miss a lot of calls. Can't answer my cell if I'm on the roof and it's loud! Does your call center only do work for stores?

—*Chuck M.*

**Dear Chuck,** Glad you asked. Sure, Solid Cactus is best known for being an eCommerce company; but, we actually build a good amount of informational sites for service-oriented businesses like yours. The same is said for our call center. We can customize a plan to fit your needs. For instance, if you need us to take messages, answer e-mails from your website, or other administrative needs we can help.

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

# Reaching for the Stars Matters in eCommerce

Holiday browsing is upon us and in some ways, purchasing is already picking up. Consumers are starting to compare prices and shipping costs, but these types of comparisons do not begin until consumers first choose which product to purchase. When trying to find that item, customers often rely on reviews.

Product reviews have become one of the key ingredients to converting a "maybe" into a sale. A recent Marketing Sherpa case study reported that sites with customer reviews saw a 17% conversion lift from websites without reviews. Small businesses to large retailers, such as Walmart understand the importance of providing product reviews as a way to increase conversions.

Because you're a savvy eCommerce merchant, I'm going to presume you already have a version of product reviews on your store. Now, what? How are you going to use product reviews to drive traffic to your site and help you convert sales? If your site has pages of empty reviews, I doubt that is helping much. Furthermore, if your site has nothing but praise, you may not be helping yourself as much as you think. Consider that product reviews are a tactic to increase customer confidence, which ultimately leads to brand loyalty and sales. I'm going to point out some strategies in which you can use product reviews this year to increase sales.

First, let's address all of those empty review pages.

One of the first concerns I hear when a merchant is considering adding product reviews to their website is, "Won't empty reviews make me look bad?" This is a valid concern; but, there there are very easy and proactive ways to get your product reviews moving. One savvy Solid Cactus client, Crescent Harbor (www. crescentharbor.com) installed Solid Cactus' Star Product Reviews in July of 2009. In

order to generate reviews more quickly, they sent an e-mail promotion to their customer list inviting customers to come review products they've purchased in the past. And, as a strong call to action, they entered each customer that posted a review into a product giveaway. As you can imagine, Crescent Harbor was flooded with reviews within days. This was a very creative approach to providing better customer service, which in turn led to increasing customer loyalty and building customer confidence. Not to mention, the return visits to the site likely led to additional sales, too.



What if your store is new and you don't yet have a large customer list?  How do you get off to the right start?

In this example, your attempts to fill your reviews may be a bit slower than the previous example but don't count yourself out. You could offer the same promotion to your customers as you make sales. With a product such as Star Product Reviews, after the purchase an e-mail is sent to your customer requesting they provide a review of the product they've recently purchased. It's important to note that you have control over the amount of days that pass before this e-mail is sent. Of course, some products may take longer than others to be tested by the customer.

You may not want to send a request for reviews on a first aid kit or grill in five or 10 days because it may not have been used yet; maybe you set it for 30 days. However, an electronics device will probably see a more immediate use, so you may want to consider sending the review request within 10 days of the purchase.

One of the last components of how customer reviews can drive traffic is to have SEO-friendly reviews. Not all product review solutions are SEO-friendly, so let me take a moment to explain a bit about Star Product Reviews and how it easily supports the strategy I'm presenting.

With Star Product Reviews, three components exist for improving your SEO.  First, your product's item page will be indexed organically, as always, based on your keyword strategy.  However, with Star Product Reviews, your review can also show up in organic rankings.  For example, for Crescent Harbor, I did a search for Norwell Legacy Wall Sconce.  In one of the listings that came up in my search, I found the product page (example 1) that would show up in a typical search.  Additionally, I found another listing of the product from the URL "reviews.crescentharbor. com" (example 2).  So, two different opportunities of organic searches for the same product were created simply because

The examples above depicts two different search results using product reviews, but does not show actual rankings.

of Star Product Reviews.  A third way to be considered is that the header of your reviews can be indexed as well; so, if you have "Product Reviews for Norwall Legacy Wall Sconce", listed on your item page, you've just gained a third way for your website to be ranked organically.

Next, let's talk about managing your reviews. You may be tempted to only publish positive product reviews, but I strongly urge you against that. Granted, I don't believe you should have extremely negative posts; however, if you want to earn your customers' trust, remember that everyone has a bad experience once in a while. Don't try to fool shoppers into believing all of your products are exactly what customers wanted. It's possible that a particular purchase wasn't a good fit and you'll earn more trust by admitting that.

Having some negative reviews can still boost the sale. Let's face it; a lot of negative reviews tend not to relate to the product's performance. For example, I've seen statements like "the blue was darker than I thought it would be" and in turn, has a lower rated review. I'm sure you've seen these sort of posts also. Sometimes they come across as so nitpicking that it actually may persuade the customer to trust the product more. As a customer, if I'm considering purchasing a vacuum cleaner and the worst thing I see someone complaining about in reviews is they didn't like the shade of blue, I'd still consider that particular brand; the color of the vacuum cleaner isn't as important to me as the quality. You can also use a bad review as a form of damage control. If someone is posting bad reviews based on one aspect of a product, address those

concerns. For example, in the case of "bad shade of blue", you could improve your product details by being more descriptive about the color or compare it with other colors and, you may also want to post a better product photo that captures the color better. Negative products reviews could also help you determine which products to offer or discontinue.

As far as how you can manage the actual posting process, I'll again use Star

Product Reviews as my example. In the administrative panel of Star Product Reviews you have the ability to review, edit, post, and delete reviews. If you want to edit for a glaring typo or remove a particularly sensitive subject in an otherwise positive review, you can. If you desire to have review be more hands-off, you can choose to have reviews post automatically. With this option, Star Product Reviews will protect your site from abuse with a built-in profanity filter, which allows you to target specific words you don't want to appear.

Don't overestimate the sales strength that is created when your customers can compare products via your other customers' experiences.  More importantly, don't lose a sale by letting your customers go somewhere else to find a review.   **eBiz**

*By Gregory Davis*
Greg Davis is the director of corporate marketing at Solid Cactus but if he were a product for sale, we think he'd get five stars.
*gregory.davis@ebizinsider.com*

# Unwrapping Results with
# Holiday E-mail Marketing

Just yesterday, I was enjoying the fall weather while hanging orange Halloween lights. But, in the back of my mind I was thinking (and maybe even a little singing), it's the most wonderful time of the year.

The holidays seem to be rushed more and more each year. In stores, Halloween items are on display in August, Thanksgiving (if at all) is wrapped up by Halloween, and the gift-giving season starts November 1. Heck, Santa Claus even arrives in Harold Square during the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade before I've even had the chance to savor my first bite of turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie.

The holiday shopping season is just weeks away from its (un)official launch on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. That means today (not tomorrow) is the time to begin planning. If you hope to have a successful holiday e-mail campaign, now is the time to start promoting because, you can bet, your competitors are doing the same.

I know what you're thinking: Times are tough, sales are down, and customers are tightening those purse strings, so how will e-mail marketing help? The good news is, since the holidays are here, recession or not, consumers will be shopping - albeit on a smaller budget. So, give them every reason to do their spending with you this holiday, no matter the dollar amount. Make up for this past year's struggles with a great holiday season e-mail campaign.

With some basic strategies, even the busiest store owner can make time for e-mail marketing, and you'll be sure to entice some purchases you may have lost:

1. Get started now – Have I said that already? Your competitors aren't wasting any time getting started with their holiday promotions, so why should you? Most businesses that benefit from the November/December season start sending their holiday e-mails November 1. Starting then gives you the chance to sell to the early shoppers and build awareness with the ones who will buy later.

2. Getting started now requires laying out a detailed plan of promotions/offers and incentives. A small percentage off orders isn't going to cut it with all the competition during the holidays. Try to appease the large and small budget shopper. For example, reward them; the more they spend, the more they save.

3. E-mail template – Be sure to update the look of your e-mail to reflect the holidays. No need to drastically change everything to green and red, but a splash of holiday cheer will put your customers in the holiday shopping spirit. (If you work with an e-mail marketing firm like Solid Cactus, you may want to discuss implementing a holiday-themed template design.)

4. Subject Line – As always, don't forget the subject line is the most important aspect of your campaign. If you aren't enticing the recipient to open your e-mail, you aren't getting the sale. Simply state the benefit they'll receive from opening your e-mail, for example, "New Holiday Arrivals + $15 Off Orders," as opposed to "Shop Today for Your Holidays Gifts." The more straightforward and to the point, the better the chance they'll open-- and make a purchase.

So you've got a plan in place, you know you want to market, and you know when, but what else? Here are some ideas to incorporate into your holiday promotions:

• Remind customers about gift cards - You can also offer a discount or an added

bonus to those who purchase gift cards from you.

- Give customers gift ideas - Everyone is trying to figure out what to buy for their friends and family. Help your customers by highlighting secret gems that would be great for everyone on their shopping list.

- Offer a range of promotions - Don't just offer one promotion for the holidays. Offer a range that speaks to different customers. For one person, free shipping might get them to buy from you, for another, incremental discounts might work better (spend $100, get 15% off, spend $200, get 20% off, etc).

- Sell to their wallets with free shipping offers – Shoppers can save time by avoiding the hustle and bustle of holiday traffic and lines by shopping online; however, many brave the crowds in order to save money on shipping. Offering free shipping can go a long way to capture more sales.

- Match prices – Price matching is an effective method to let customers know you value their business and subsequently, you as a merchant remain competitive.

- Openly advertise your shipping dates- Remind customers of the deadline orders must be placed by for guaranteed holiday delivery. This keeps expectations intact, and it's a great way to swoop those last minute customers who are in need of a gift -- and fast!

Finally, a comprehensive holiday marketing strategy will leverage all of the nearing holidays, right on through New Year's and will respond to the season as it unfolds. Offer value and incentive that will have your customers go from opening e-mail to their loved ones opening neatly-wrapped gifts.
**eBiz**

*By Michelle Johnson*
Michelle Johnson is an e-mail marketing specialist at Solid Cactus.
*michellej@ebizinsider.com*

# How to Write eCommerce Press Releases:

## Tips to be timely & SEO-friendly

This article, just like a press release, has about a 30-second time span (about 150) words to keep you reading, or you'll be turning the page and on to the next article. If you do stay with me, chances are you're finding this article interesting and useful, and the likelihood that you'll tell a friend or colleague about it is pretty high. If they find it similarly useful, they'll pass it on to their peers and so on, thus spreading this article to a much wider audience.

Captivating your readers right from the start is one of the core principles in writing a successful press release. Before you start writing always ask yourself, "What will my readers find interesting?" If you're a home décor website, visitors may be more interested in hearing about Spring 2010 home design trends than statistics on how the industry is weathering the economy. Conversely, if you're in a B2B industry, stats may be exactly what your audience wants.

Examples of common press release topics include:

- Grand opening of your website and features that make your brand unique
- Announcing a major sale, promotion, or contest
- Upcoming trend forecasts and how your products or services fit into those trends
- Your company's commentary on recent industry news or changes
- New product offering or brand on your site and how it can benefit your audience

Once you've got your topic down, research the facts. Consult industry experts and even your own customers for their unique opinions on the topic and get permission to use their quotes in the release.

A typical press release averages about 250 words. Include quotations to frame your release's topic and to give it a more personal feel for your readers. Avoid using industry jargon in the release or making it sound like a humdrum corporate memo. You want readers to find it creative and accessible enough to make them want to spread the word about it.

A good press release is SEO-friendly, too. Research relevant, competitive keyword phrases for which you would like the press release to rank. Narrow keyword phrases down to one attainable phrase. Then, add that keyword in the title of your release, about three times per every 250 words, and as the anchor text for a link in your release, increasing the chance your release will be ranked for that keyword phrase. Including images in the release is also recommended and can help the images and the associated release rank in Google Image search.

The headline and first paragraph of your release are crucial. The headline should clearly explain your release's topic in eight words or less, include your website's URL and a keyword phrase for which you'd like the press release to rank. Your release's first paragraph should be as concise as possible and answer "why should this matter to me?" in the first three sentences.

The more interesting and useful your press release is, the more likely your release and your website will be linked to from blogs and other websites. And, we all know quality links can work to increase your website's rankings. Help your readers spread the word about your release by including popular social media buttons right in the release, and of course link to your website's own social media presence.

We recommend syndicating your release through a reputable press release syndication site, such as PRWeb.com, that will automatically syndicate your release to thousands of media sites. Syndication fees vary, but are worth it if your release will be distributed right into the media outlets' hands.

Once the release is syndicated, wait about a week before viewing its statistics. A good press release
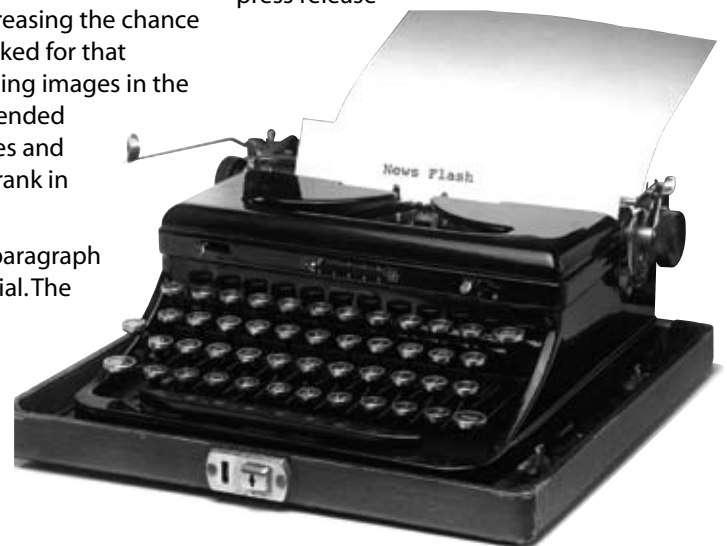
syndication company will allow you to view the number of impressions and opens for the release, as well as break down the numbers for each syndication source. Segment your web analytics data to view the time frame the release was syndicated in, and check for spikes in traffic, usually seen in both direct traffic to your website and referring traffic from other websites. Monitor your incoming links through Yahoo! Site Explorer a few weeks after syndication.

Press releases are a great way to expose your website to a wider audience. Keep in mind that syndicating too many releases can be like seeing the same company's billboard every mile; it just loses its power to influence us. Keep the juicy factor intact by syndicating only when you have a newsworthy, interesting tidbit to announce or comment on.  **eBiz**

*By Alicia Magda*
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# The Power of a Fresh Set of Eyes

# Site Deconstruction Session

## a Hit at Solid Cactus Boot Camp

Most eCommerce store owners look at their websites all day, every day. When something is so familiar, it's very easy to overlook potential problems. That's the power of a fresh set of eyes.

As of press time, Solid Cactus had just wrapped up its seventh eCommerce Boot Camp. Day two of the semi-annual event kicked off with the ever-popular, interactive site deconstruction session, moderated by John Tomkoski, manager of sales engineering. Rounding out the panel was designer Marc Manfre, marketing analyst Kurt Illian, and senior director of account management, Lou Pagnotti.

Several clients had ahead of time volunteered their sites for a live deconstruction. One of these good sports was Terry Fluke, owner of NaturePavilion.com, an online store focusing on nature-themed educational toys and games.

"I knew it wouldn't be just Solid Cactus employees evaluating it; it would be website owners like me, who have tried different things with their websites and have learned through trial and error what works," she said on why she volunteered.

Tomkoski, who has been a driving force in this particular session at each Boot Camp, says the high level of interaction makes the session a hit.

"I like to keep the session like a town hall meeting, where everyone can chime in with their thoughts and suggestions. I have always felt when people are involved, they take more away from it," he said. "We will usually work with three volunteer sites, but while we are reviewing one site, a member

of our audience will be sitting there going, 'Wow, I never thought about that. How could I implement something like that?' It helps everyone spark some thoughts about their own sites."

Fluke's and two other eCommerce stores were reveiwed during the 90-minute session. Here, we'll share some key findings.


The site deconstruction session provided lots of useful feedback.

### Design and Branding

Capturing a potential customer's attention right away is crucial. All three sites did a nice job matching branding and design with their respective target audience. The audio book site was slick, clean, and simple. The site with gifts for horse lovers had a rustic, classy feel with a parchment paper background. NaturePavilion.com, which is geared toward kids (but also the grown-ups doing the buying), had a fitting design with fun images and inviting colors.

"You have awesome branding. That boy with the magnifying glass is great; this can be used in business cards and all your marketing. The vines, and the flowers..." said

Manfre to Fluke during the session. "To this day when we have a client who wants a site with an illustrated feel, we always go back to yours for inspiration."

That said, if a store has a fun logo or header design, think how you can take that further, incorporating those elements in add-to-cart buttons, section headers, and other on-site graphics. (See Page 22 for a related article on the design process.)

### Homepage: Specials of the Day

One site used a larger area on the homepage to feature a daily special. Pagnotti asked the store owners if they actually changed the specials daily. With a chuckle, they responded, "no". In the rush of eCommerce, it's not always easy to change things daily; so, he suggested they use that same area, but split it into two halves.

"That's prime real estate there. Use some of that area for text, as well as to promote specials. Better yet, a sequence banner would be perfect. Keep your site fresh all year round," said Pagnotti.

### Navigation: Getting there in less clicks

Several volunteer sites had lengthy navigation or section pages. NaturePavilion.com had this issue on one section page in particular: Toy Snakes & Lizards. Tomkoski clicked through to that section page and began to scroll, joking that he ran out of room on the podium to scroll further. While this prompted a chuckle from the crowd, it illustrated how scroll becomes an issue when there are hundreds of items on one section page. The solution? Adding dynamic paging. This hit home for Fluke. She explained to panelists and attendees that over the years her product line grew from 12 items to over 2,000,

"[Toy snakes] are our number one seller. We sell the most toy snakes on the Internet," said Fluke during the session. "We're at a point now where we do need paging."

Tomkoski pointed out that items on the very bottom of the lengthy section page may not be seen unless searched for. Illian suggested splitting up the toy snakes into subcategories, such as length, color, or type.

Lengthy left-hand navigation was also an issue. Getting users to the right section page with less clicks often means restructuring the navigation to include subcategory headings or utilizing cascading or expanding navigation. For example, the site selling wildlife gifts uses a simple segmented navigation with just a few main categories, such as "Shop by Animal" or "Shop by Product." Then, that works in tandem with the new Solid Cactus Mega Drop Down, which displays the deeper levels.

## On-Site SEO

Illian spent some time showing store owners how some product names were using pretty broad search terms, for example, "bears." A more specific product title, such as "grizzly bear gifts," would help customers find items both on the internal site search and in search engines. Otherwise, bears could mean Chicago Bears or information on bears for a school science project. He encouraged store owners to keep SEO in mind when naming items and writing descriptions.

## Beefing Up Product Reviews

Illian pointed out that one of the sites offered product reviews, but had many products without reviews. He suggested offering a contest or promotion to solicit reviews via e-mail marketing. An example would be everyone who submits a review gets a coupon or entered to win a shopping spree.

## Professional E-mail Address & Phone Number and Offering Live Chat

It was suggested the displayed contact e-mail address matches the domain name of the eCommerce site instead of using an e-mail from a local ISP or web-based provider. Also, panelists encouraged store owners to use a toll-free rather than local number. (Related article by Greg Kosicki on page 18) Finally, when utilizing a live chat service this should not just be featured in the shell, but should also appear upon check out.

## Highlighting Best Sellers or Top Categories

Going back to Fluke's toy snakes, it was suggested if any particular item or product is something a store is known for, it should be promoted. This could also be temporary; for instance, if something you sell is being advertised, whether by you or the manufacturer. Make these stand out on your homepage and easier to find rather than being buried within navigation. Use graphics, banners, or a sequence banner.

## Putting it Together

Tomkoksi and the other panelists agree the site deconstruction session is very rewarding.

"I come away from this session feeling accomplished because I was able to help our visitors find areas to improve their websites on all fronts," said Tomkoski.

Clients also leave inspired. The Monday morning following Boot Camp, we contacted Fluke for this article. When asked what she had learned and what she was planning to implement, she laughed and said, "Oh. You mean the stuff I am working on this morning?"

Fluke immediately jumped on making changes to her site by purchasing several features from Solid Cactus while at Boot Camp. Dynamic Paging was a no-brainer. She's also updating Mini-Cart to add Free
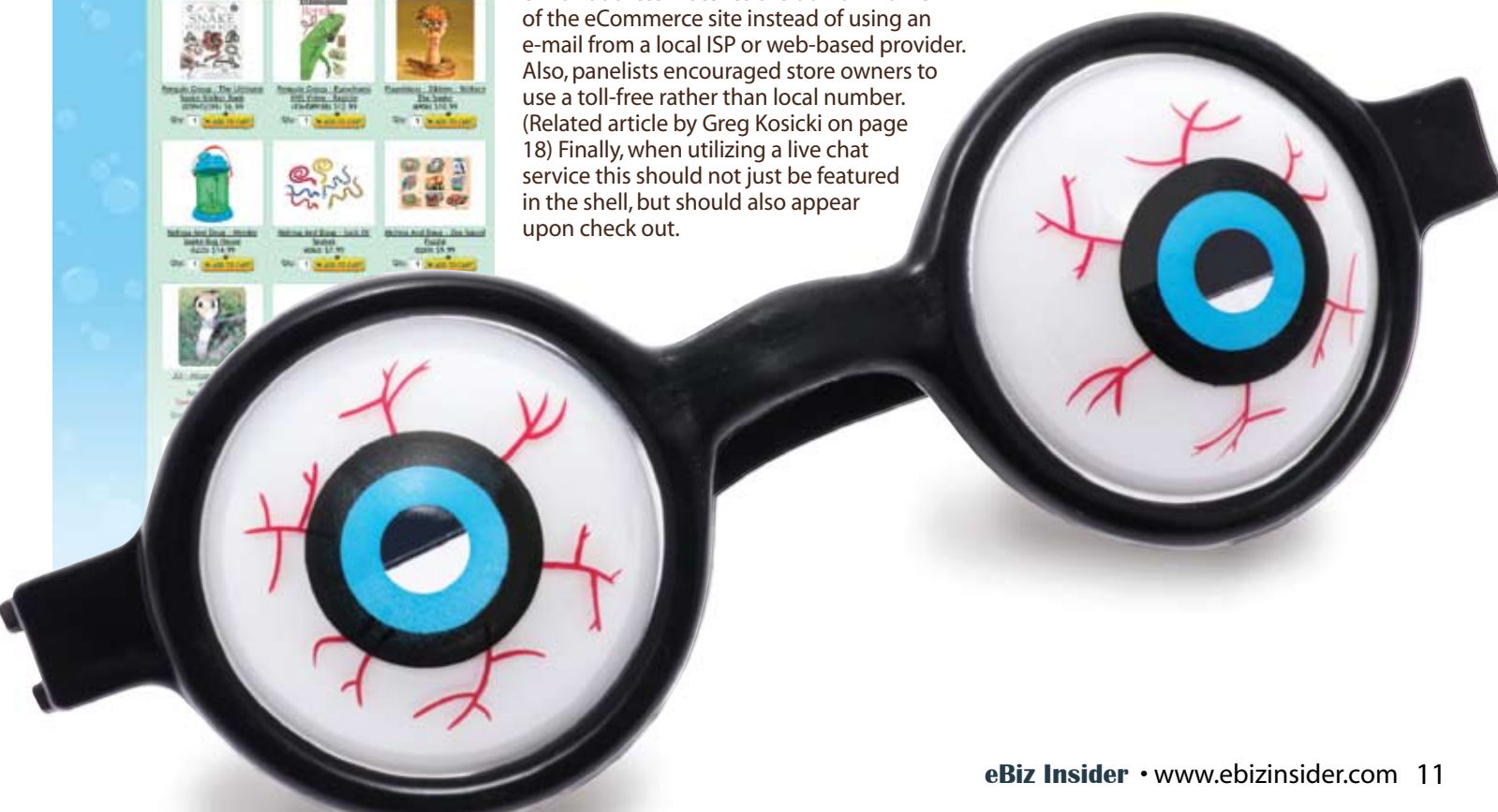
# Capture More Sales and Create Buzz with Scratch & Save

Instant lottery tickets. Publisher's Clearing House mailings. Direct mail pieces from a car dealership. What is under that surface? Where's that dime so I can find out?

## Scratch & Save

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

Copy and paste this code into the coupon code area in the checkout to apply discount.

There's just something exciting about the unknown. Scratch & Save from Solid Cactus, allows you to capitalize on that consumer curiosity. Scratch & Save is an online version of a scratch-card and can be installed on Yahoo! Store item pages. Customers click and drag a dime across a virtual surface to reveal a coupon code that can be applied upon check-out.

Heather Dominello of Doggie-Depot.com purchased Scratch & Save because she wanted to add something unique to her site that "would catch the eye of visitors and not cost a fortune."

"My ultimate desire was to increase my conversion rate. It certainly did just what I had hoped. In the first week and the weeks that have followed my conversion rate has nearly doubled. The Scratch & Save paid for itself in no time at all," she said.

Some store owners, like Dominello and Vance Selin from HomeandOutdoorDecor.

com, leave Scratch & Save active at all times, while others activate it for special promotions. Either way, there are some clever ways to use Scratch & Save to capture more sales. Here's a few:

- **Seasonal Numbers for Percentage Saved** Numbers in themselves may be boring, but here's a way to get creative and have fun with holiday sales numbers. Think about what numbers are associated with a particular season or holiday and use those for what percentage savings are available.

  For example, you may want to have a St. Patrick's Day sale. Use 3% (for March) and 17% (for the date) as some ideas. For Halloween, the number 13 rings a bell. For Christmas, there are 12 days of Christmas. There are eight reindeer. There are three kings. For the new year this year, it's '10. Have some fun with it! You get the idea. Of course, you will still want to have several numerical values available because that's the fun in Scratch & Save.

- **Cyber Monday Sale** (*or any other one-day sale*) Use e-mail marketing and other promotional efforts to promote a one-day sale ahead of time, such as Cyber Monday. Build excitement for a special sale leading up to the sale date when the Scratch & Save is activated. You can use this in conjunction with other Yahoo! Store features like Solid Cactus' Holiday Countdown to show how many days are left before the big sale.

- **Treasure Hunt** - Find the Sale Items While Scratch & Save ultimately takes a

percentage off the entire order and not a single item, you can still have some fun with the feature by hiding it on certain items. This way, your customers will visit more pages. By browsing more they may find something they may not have otherwise seen.

## Promoting the Savings - How to Promote Scratch & Save

Scratch & Save is an item page feature so many clients using this feature have started to get clever with promoting the savings through various marketing and on-site efforts.

### Here is a look at how Scratch & Save can be promoted:

- **Call-Out On Site**
  Create a banner to promote the feature and place it in your shell or homepage. The example shown here is from HomeandOutdoorDecor.com.

This banner appears below the header within all of the interior sections with the message, "Scratch & Save! Visit any item page to reveal additional savings when you order today!"

- **E-Mail Marketing**
  If you regularly send e-mail marketing broadcasts to your customer base, be sure to tell them about Scratch & Save. Include a screen shot of an item page

highlighting the feature to familiarize customers with it. If you only use Scratch & Save at certain times, be sure to let people know when it's back, too. On the flip side, if you are doing an e-mail marketing campaign for store savings and do not wish to use the Scratch & Save feature along with that sale, you can do like Pam Macharola from BlairCandy.com and temporarily disable Scratch & Save during other store promotions. That's the great thing about this feature. It can work in tandem with other store promotions or it can be turned off if you want to do another sale or promotion.

- **Social Media**
  There are many ways to use social media to promote your Scratch & Save promotions. Place a note on your Facebook page about the feature and explain how to use it. Also, use Facebook to post a link to an item page with the feature being used. On Twitter, you can post links to the item pages as well or just a general tweet to show that you are having a sale. You can use YouTube to show a demo of the feature being used on your site.

- **Pay-Per-Click (PPC)**
  Use your PPC ads to promote the Scratch & Save feature. Capitalize on that mystery savings within your ad copy, maybe highlighting the highest amount customers can save such as, "Save up to 17%..."

- **Press Release and Informational Page**
  When Solid Cactus released SnapShop in 2007, one of our clients sent out a press release about the new feature. Several clients also created how-to pages about the new feature. The same can be done for Scratch & Save. Send a press release about the new store feature and how it's saving customers money. Then, use that press release or a version of it as an informational page on your site to talk about the feature and how it works.

- **Blog About It**
  If you have a blog that goes along with your eCommerce store, be sure to write a blog post about Scratch & Save. Include screen shots and even a demo video. Then, continue to blog about Scratch & Save in the future when you do something else fun with it.

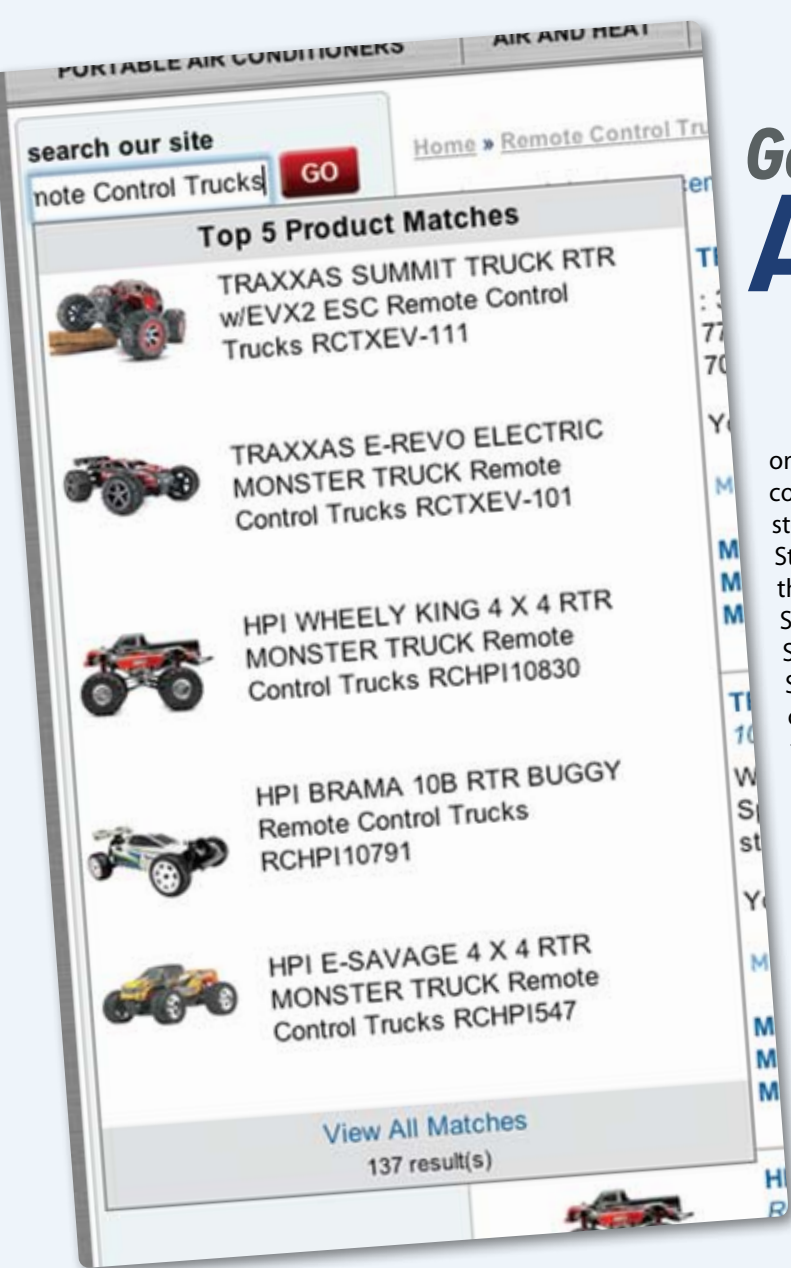Scratch & Save is an interactive feature that gives store owners a lot of control and customization opportunities. Use that control to your advantage with some of our suggestions mixed with your own creativity to capture more sales. **eBiz**

*By Donna Talarico*
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# Get Better Results with the New
# *Advanced Search*
## *from Solid Cactus*

Now, more than ever, website visitors are looking to find exactly what they want in a short amount of time. Merchants and developers have responded by placing emphasis on site search with a larger and more prominently displayed search box. But, effective site search goes beyond that; the functionality and display of the results have to deliver. If your eCommerce website doesn't have the tools necessary to make that happen, then your customers may search elsewhere.

At its infancy, site search generally matched keywords or phrases and delivered product results based on a simple algorithm or weight system. Fast forward to 2009 and site search is all grown up. It has advanced beyond basic keyword search into a strategic merchandising tool powerful enough to handle a multitude of products on even the most complex eCommerce stores. To help Yahoo! Store owners meet these search needs, Solid Cactus launched Solid Cactus' Advanced Search. The new release of this advanced search tool provides shoppers more ways to find products faster than ever before.

## Solid Cactus Advanced Search Highlights

As site search has evolved, so have the features that are included with many popular third party search products. The product development team at Solid Cactus wanted to make sure Solid Cactus Advanced Search included a host of features to help you convert more visitors into customers. Here are a few highlights:

- **Guided Navigation**
  The guided navigation menu allows users to narrow search results by selecting specific criteria such as brand, department, price range, color, etc. These drilled-down results will also display the number of products matching the selected criteria. The navigation can be customized or built automatically based on your product categorization and the available product attributes.

- **Advanced User Breadcrumbs**
  When a visitor drills down by using the guided navigation, those selections are recorded in the breadcrumbs to help users track their movements. Any search filter can be removed, thereby expanding the search results by clicking the close link. Alternatively, a visitor can select any one of the breadcrumb links to show only items in that particular category.

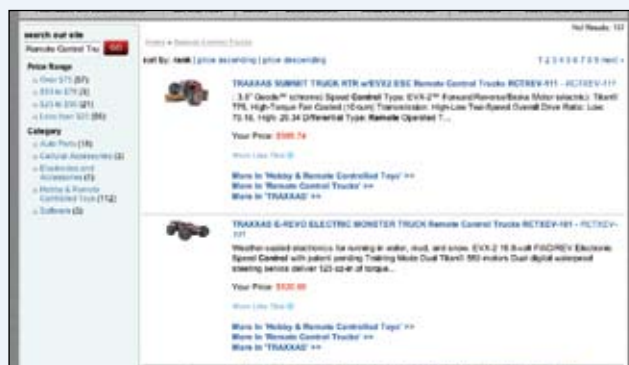- **"Did you mean" Suggestion (built-in spell check)**
  The latest release of Solid Cactus Advanced Search includes a spell checker to offer suggestions for misspellings as well as try to match both words or either word. If a customer were to search for "traets," the built-in spell checker would reply to the visitor with the message "Were you looking for treats?" Users can then click on treats for results.

- **"More Like This" Dynamic Up-sell**
  In addition to the robust guided navigation, Solid Cactus Advanced Search includes a built-in "more like this" feature that helps visitors find what they are looking for faster. When a visitor is browsing the search results they can click the "more like this" button and get a window that displays products that are the closest match and have the highest number of common words in the product description.



Customers are shown the number of matching results within specific criteria, presented with similar items, and can sort results by price and relevancy.

- **Advanced Tracking and Reports** - User-friendly administration interface allows you to track top search terms, the number of searches a day, searches with no results, depth of search, search terms that were misspelled, and more. You can use these reports to more effectively name and describe your products, too.

- **Daily Database Indexing**
  The search results database is automatically indexed on a daily basis, adding and removing products where necessary.

- **Search Term Highlighting**
  Solid Cactus Advanced Search 2.0 takes the best matching fragment from an indexed product/document and highlights matches.

- **Sorting Search Results**
  Visitors will have the ability to sort the results by price (ascending or descending) and by relevance.

- **Stemming**
  Stemming is the process of bringing words to their root form. This helps maximize search results by finding various forms of the search term, such as removing (or adding) suffixes like-ed, -es, -ing, or -ful. An example would be if a user searches for "cell phone battery," "cell phone batteries" would show up.

If you find your website growing each year with more products, more brands and more categories, then it may be time for you to invest in an advanced merchandising tool. **eBiz**

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# The Power in Relevancy Ranking

Marketing Sherpa in May released a survey, New eCommerce Research: Website Tactics that Boost Conversion. Optimizing internal search results was the second top strategy cited by store owners, topped only by a perpetual shopping cart. 60% of respondents said customizing their search was a priority.

One of the most sought after features within an advanced search tool is the ability to modify search results. There are many reasons you may want to do this. Marketing Sherpa suggests a "last-in-first-out" strategy to move older inventory out first. Another strategy to consider is setting any particular product or brand that has gotten some recent press coverage or is being discussed in social media. For example, the movie Toy Story is out in the theaters. You could make Mr. Potato Head rank higher for "toys for children three and up" or "kid gift ideas."

Here are some other reasons you may want to adjust your internal search results:

1. Top sellers within a specific category
2. Top rated items based on your product reviews
3. Products with higher margins



Source: MarketingSherpa   April 2009
Ecommerce Benchmark Survey, N = 1,481
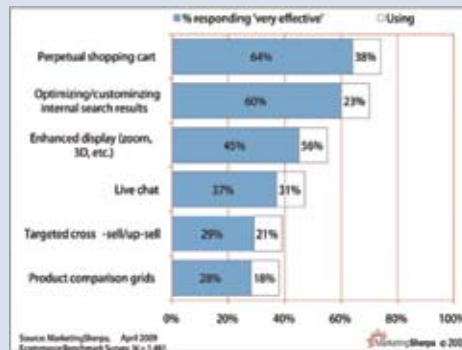
4. Products which have upsell opportunities
5. Items you want to clear out of inventory
6. Hot items based on current events and trends

These are just a few opportunities to consider when adjusting your relevancy results either by product or product attribute. When you have power over your search results, imagine what you can do.   **eBiz**

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# Search Engine Rankings Vary Among Searchers

**Rankings have long** been a valued metric in search marketing. After all, it's easy to monitor and seems like a really important measure. However, if you really want to measure the effectiveness of your SEO campaign, stop obsessing about rankings.

Proactively changing the focus of your company's expectations from rankings on a single trophy term to metrics that matter more will help. Search engine rankings remain a useful diagnostic tool and should be tracked as a metric, but rankings are not the most telling measure of SEO success.

## Rankings Can Be Different for Each Searcher

In fact, rankings for the same term on the same engine can be different for each searcher. In reality, the giant success or dismal failure that a particular eCommerce merchant perceives may be isolated to his or her search results. Understanding this phenomenon is one of the most effective ways of helping your team focus on the measures that really matter, and halting obsessive rank checking.

The following factors all influence the search results for individual users.

- **Personalization**
  Search engines use what they know about your online behaviors to tailor search results specifically for you. This factor alone means that the more products you use from an engine, the more customized your results are likely to be. Unless you have the same online habits as your colleague (unlikely), you will see different results than he or she does. Take, for example, Google: Gmail, iGoogle and Google Toolbar all collect information about your search behavior and online habits, not to mention all the other Google products (Chrome, AdSense, Google Analytics, YouTube, and Picasa). Google knows a lot about you, and it uses that information to present your search results. Google allows you to manually remove personalization from results by

appending &pws=0 to the query string. For example: http://www.google.com/search?q=seo+rankings&pws=0. Note that you have to add &pws=0 every time you change the search query, and opinion is divided as to whether it works if you're signed in to any of your Google accounts.

- **Number of Results Displayed**
  Search results will also be different based on the number of results you choose to display. The default is 10, of course, but you can manually increase that to any number up to 100. Engines will display the second result from the same domain as an indented result, artificially promoting the result for usability purposes. If your CEO is displaying 10 results and you're looking at 100, she may see her trophy term in position #3, but you may see it at position #3 and #4 as an indented result. The indented result actually ranked at #67, but because you're viewing 100 results that #67 was displayed indented as #4. Google allows you to manually change the number of results displayed by appending &num=100 to the query string. The value can be any number up to 100. For example: http://www.google.com/search?q=seo+rankings&num=100.

- **Data Centers**
  The major engines have systems of data centers strategically located around the world to serve results more quickly and allow them to release updates more gradually into the wild. Each data center can have different URLs indexed and different algorithms, some of which are new or experimental. Which data center you hit typically depends on where you're located, but traffic volumes at individual data centers and other factors may come into play as well. The Google

Data Center Research Tool http://www.seocritique.com/datacentertool provides a quick snapshot of the complexity that data centers introduce into search-engine-results tracking.

- **Geographic Location**
  Your location (and the location of your IP address) matters as well. Not only will your location affect the data center you hit when you search, but it can also affect the personalized content in the results. If your colleague is at a conference in London, his or her results will be different than yours in the Seattle office. He or she will see more local content, more content from .co.uk domains and from sites hosted in the U.K. Even different locations in the same country (Seattle versus Chicago) can have different search results. To see a side-by-side example of different results in different countries, check out the Google Dance Tool at http://www.google-dance-tool.com.   **eBiz**

# CUSTOMER SERVICE CORNER:

# Why a toll-free number is important to your business

Like most people today, I'm an online shopper. I buy everything from parts for the 1979 Ford Fairmont I am restoring to toys and books for my son -- and, of course, jewelry for my wife.

When shopping online I expect to be able to easily browse a retailer's site, but there are always questions, often things I need to know right now. That's why, before I get too involved in the shopping process, I always make sure a website has a toll-free number.

## Immediate Answers Mean Immediate Conversions

Online shoppers want immediate answers. According to a 2008 Forrester Research study, 42% of online shoppers contacted a store prior to making a purchase. That means if you have a toll-free number available, your potential customers are likely to call you for an answer instead of putting off the purchase or worse, finding the answer at another store. If your potential customer is on the fence and the buying decision depends upon getting a question answered, requiring your customer to pay for the phone call could lead to a lost sale. It's much easier and less expensive for a shopper to return to the search results to find another retailer, perhaps one that has a toll-free number.

Likewise, if a consumer has already decided to buy from your site and runs into a problem during the checkout process, having a toll-free number prominently displayed can keep that customer from leaving your store and instead, can encourage them to call for help. Once the customer is on the phone, your customer service representatives can strengthen the relationship and as a bonus, take advantage of upsell opportunities.

## Reduce Post Sale Issues, Like Returns

After publishing a toll-free number and manning the phones, retailers generally report a significant drop in returns. With a free, easy way to contact your store, consumers can call in to resolve issues instead of returning the item. For example, a customer may call in to report a broken or missing part and ask for a return voucher. A customer service representative can talk the customer through the issue, perhaps explaining that the part was purposely shipped that way and just needs to be assembled or that the part may be small and actually packed inside another part.

## Broaden Your Reach

Today's consumer is not only Internet savvy, but is also more worldly than 20 years ago. When I shop online, I don't look for retailers that are located near me geographically; location becomes irrelevant. If your site has a local number listed you are not taking advantage of all the Internet has to offer. Remember: the Internet is global. The eCommerce site for your store in Pennsylvania can attract customers from all over the world. As an online merchant, your marketplace is no longer confined to a 10 to 20 mile radius. To me, a local number says the store owner is still only thinking about his local market and not counting on the power of the Internet to reach beyond those borders.

## Set Up Easier Than You Think

Some business owners are afraid of the costs involved with setting up a toll-free number. Others may worry they are not technical enough to setup and operate the toll-free number. There are many resources available to help you get started with a toll-free number such as your local phone company or web-based service providers. Another thing to keep in mind is that by offering an easy way for customers to reach you, your call volume may increase. With that in mind, if you are partnering with (or planning to partner with) a third party call center such as Solid Cactus, a toll-free number is likely included with your initial account set-up. And remember, the toll-free number issued to you is yours and can be used on any marketing material or within online advertising. How nice would it be for you to be able to tell your customers, "Call us toll-free at...?"

No matter how large or small your company, a toll-free number listed on your eCommerce site gives your store a sense of professionalism. For small businesses, a toll-free number also gives the sense they are dealing with an established company with rich resources to provide customer service and support.

## Be Prepared

There's no better time than now to consider adding a toll-free number to your store. The holidays are fast approaching and retailers are getting ready for Black Friday (November 27) and Cyber Monday (November 30). In today's economy, no business can afford to lose even a single customer. Make sure your customers aren't navigating away from your site because they can't find a toll-free number to contact you prior to purchase. Remember. Around the holidays people will have questions about availability, sizing, ship times, gift wrapping, and more. And more importantly, a toll-free number doesn't mean much if no one is there to answer calls. Solid Cactus Call Center Services can help. Visit callcenter.solidcactus.com or call 1-888-361-9814 to learn about obtaining a toll-free number and having it answered by our eCommerce experts. **eBiz**

*By Greg Kosicki*
*Greg Kosicki has decades of call center and customer service experience. He's the senior director of call center operations, and you can call him, toll-free.*
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Shipping Countdown, moving Holiday Countdown into her shell rather than her homepage, and is adding drop down menus to her left navigation so customers can shop by deeper categories, such as by price. And there's more.

"Solid Cactus is also designing us a blog with Nature Pavilion's branding and links to our soon-to-be Twitter and Facebook pages," she explained. "We also are adding Scratch & Save and having a shipping policy pop-up feature added so our customers don't have to leave the shopping cart to search for that info."

Fluke is also making improvements on her own including consolidating her left navigation and adding more text to her homepage.

Since not every website owner has the chance to get a live site evaluation from such a large panel of experts, including a room full of eCommerce store owners, it's always beneficial to have a professional site evaluation performed as well as ask for feedback from colleagues whether it be in an industry forum or just asking a peer for help. Fluke agrees wholeheartedly.

"Every website should have a professional evaluation. You need to know what is good and what is bad about the back end of your website," she said. "But, I also think asking other website owners to take a look at your website design, layout, and what features you are using is important too. You then have information from two different perspectives."

Solid Cactus offers professional site evaluations. Tomkoski, explains his evals are a comprehensive comparison of an eCommerce site against two to three competing websites. *(See ad on this page)*

"[The deliverable] is a summary of recommendations on what they are doing well and what they can improve upon," he said.

NaturePavilion.com has been online since 2001, but in 2007, Fluke moved onto the Yahoo! Store platform and hired Solid Cactus for the new store design.

"That truly was the best decision for my company that I have made. We became a more professional site that has much better ranking. This was my first Boot Camp. But, I will be back," she said.

With instant, professional feedback from eCommerce professionals - Solid Cactus staff and store owners- it's no doubt why the Site Deconstruction session is always a hit-- and a wonderful learning experience for everyone.

**eBiz**

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# Don't Publish Yet!

## 6 Common Oversights: Filling in the blanks

Is your site finished? Really? When your newly designed store is turned over from your designer or developer, there is no doubt that you are excited to go live with it. The design is hot. The navigation is great. Overall, the site is amazing. But not so fast. Don't hit publish yet. Why, you ask?

Not too long ago I was going through a bunch of newly-launched eCommerce stores and was astonished at the amount of incomplete pages and information. Before you go live with your new site, here are some areas which you should pay close attention:

### 1. Privacy Policy Page

I saw many sites that still had the default Yahoo! privacy policy being used. While the default Yahoo! privacy policy gives you a good guideline, every business is different. Be sure that your privacy policy page reflects your actual policies.

### 2. About Us Page

The amount of About Us pages that simply had 'coming soon' alarmed me. Don't publish your site without some content here. Sure, you can always come back later to add more content or images. However, you are somebody! Let the world know who you are, even if it's a few sentences. It doesn't take that much time to create a little tidbit about your store. Take some pride in what you do and tell your story. If you are already an established merchant, whether on or offline, there should be no excuse to leave this page

blank -- chances are you have something readily available such as a mission statement, copy from your previous online store (if this is a redesign), a business profile or something else. If you are a new business opening a store for the first time, it's almost even more important to show us who you are. So, before you publish your store for the first time, add something about your store or your company in there. A 'coming soon' blurb looks unprofessional and looks like you really don't care to tell your story.

Also, one of my pet peeves is an About Us page that is nothing more than customer service information. That's 'About Your Services and Policies' not about your business. Try to keep these separate by creating a customer service page that contains information about returns, shipping, and more while the About Us page focuses on your company bio.

### 3. Phone Number

You be surprised how many sites I saw that still have the 555-555-5555 as the contact number in the footer or contact us page. This fictional number is just a placeholder meant to be replaced by the store owner with a real phone number. Be sure you fill it in so customers can reach you. Chances are your correct phone number is in your header design and having a placeholder number in other spots on your site can confuse people.

### 4. Sections Not Populated

I've seen several instances where sites had a section in the left navigation for a category, but when clicked, there were no items in the category. This makes the site look incomplete. Be sure to populate all categories that have navigation pointing to them; otherwise, remove the main category navigation. When items become available to you or you get to the point of finishing uploading products to your store, add in the menu categories then.

### 5. Informational Pages & Other Content Areas

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit."

"Put your FAQ here."

"This is where you will put some information about your section page."

Like the About Us page and phone number, these are some additional examples of placeholder text a developer may place on an informational page as a guide to what you can add, before publishing, go through and replace this placeholder text with relevant content. Not only does this help with your SEO long-term, but it makes you look polished and professional from the start.

### 6. Image Coming Soon image

I noticed on a few sites many items had an "image coming soon" image on the section and item pages. The case here was that all the item information was available, but the merchant was probably waiting on the product images from a supplier. Everyone knows that having images is crucial to conversions. Be sure all item information is complete before listing them. If you are still awaiting images on certain items, save those items for later inclusion.

Remember that little details can make a huge difference. You've waited for your new store or redesigned store to be complete for weeks, maybe months. You've invested good money into the redesign. Don't let the excitement cause you to publish too soon. Use the checklist above to be sure all the little things are covered.   **eBiz**

*By Donna Talarico*
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# Tech Corner:
## Windows vs. Linux

As the holidays get closer, I figured I'd discuss something that may be on your holiday shopping list: a new computer.

Nowadays, computer selections are endless. There's the ongoing battle between PC and Mac and with the recent economic turmoil, retail giants such as Walmart have began investing in cheaper computers powered by Linux. But in the end, it comes down to spending wisely and getting your money's worth.

While I'd love to start a debate on Windows vs. Mac, I'd rather share my first-hand experience comparing Windows to Linux, perhaps making your next computer shopping experience a bit easier.

For starters, let's clear up the myth that: "Linux is a blank command line screen and you have to be some kind of geek to use it." That may have been the case a few years back, but Linux has evolved to become an alternative to the Microsoft regime for users of all skill levels. Its open source operating system (OS) has made it easy for former Windows developers to build a graphical user interface (GUI) for Linux making it appear Windows-like to the end user, and in my opinion, without the hassle of Windows OS.

While Microsoft is the core developer for Windows products, Linux is released by many groups: Linspire, Red Hat, SuSE, Ubuntu, Xandros, Knoppix, Slackware, and more. Windows has different versions like 98se, ME, XP, Vista, and 7. Linux also offers many distributions, commonly known as distros. All Linux distros released around the same time frame use the same kernel (the brain behind the operating system) but offer different interfaces, add-ons, support, and even price points. Two of the most popular Linux-based computers on the market today are the ASUS EEE PC and the Acer Netbook. Both were released at around the same time and likely use the same kernel. However, since ASUS uses a version of Linux that is built by Xandros, the GUI will be different than that found on the Acer Netbook. These computers, like a PC, come preloaded with the operating system.

### Why Linux over Windows?

• **Economy** - Cost is the number one reason why Linux-based computers are becoming popular. Linux is an open source project; anyone with any programming experience and dedication can simply create a better distro. Quite often, the development time is done during a programmer's personal hobby time, thus the release of a distro does not need to factor in executive salaries, benefits, and other overhead. (NOTE: Walmart has recently released a statement revealing its intent for a cheaper PC using its own version of Linux.)

• **Security** - Pre-Vista Windows applications use an encryption method called LanMan cipher (aka LM hash) and although its logic is DSE (Distribution Systems Environment) based, it still is a reversible process. This means that if someone were to find the encrypted string, they can reverse-engineer the hash to obtain your password. With the speed of today's processors it would only take a few hours to apply a brute-force attack before it would find the correct password. On the contrary, Linux uses a much more secure method for password encryption. The most common method utilizes a salt (randomly generated string) to create a unique hash 24 times; each hash is different for the same password. For example, if my password is password, after we apply the algorithm it could be abcdef for the first time and if we apply the same algorithm again, the result could be ghijkl. Several years ago the United States Department of Defense, particularly the National Security Association (NSA), set forth to building the most secure version of Linux, SE Linux (security-enhanced). In 2000, it was released under the GNU license to the open source community and since then, various portions of SE Linux have been implemented into today's distros. Whether it's SuSE, Xandros, or Fedora, you will be protected by the same security developed by the NSA.

• **Stability** - the NSA release of SE Linux not only provided security for Linux kernels; it also provoked standardization. Since all versions of Linux are built by the same kernel released at that time frame, developers have focused on developing applications that are modular, making it easy for users to download upgrades for their computer without the fear of compatibility issues (a common issue between Windows and Mac users).

• **Software** - there is open source software available that is compatible with Linux, such as Gimp (compared to PhotoShop) and Open Office (compared to Mircosoft Office) that is less expensive: usually free.

While there may be several versions of Linux available, we can see these different versions are all built from the same secure kernel. Whether you choose the version implemented by Asus or by Acer, you can expect the same quality from both. The added security should not incur additional charges for the system. Most importantly, any updates you need are readily available at your fingertips.   **eBiz**

*By Jeffrey Li*
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# A Design that Breeds Results:
## Best in Show
# Redesign Reinforces Branding

Best in Show's brand is built upon that one word – best!

Located in the heart of the historic San Fransisco Castro district, Best in Show is the premier pet boutique in the bay area and offers toys, treats, tags, clothing, and more for cats and dogs. Owner Richard Shui knows his customers are passionate about their pets and are willing to pay a little more for the best items. When it came to a redesign for his online store, he wanted BestinShowSF.com to share that same passion.

In 2003, Shui launched an eCommerce site using Yahoo! Stores to supplement the brick and mortar boutique. Shui explained that while his Yahoo! Store was doing well, after six years he knew it was time for an update in design and an upgrade in functionality.

> " *I wanted to take advantage of all of the innovation in design and website features that had occurred over the last six years, so I started researching design firms* "
>
> —*Richard Shui , BestinShowSF.com*

The website of one of Shui's vendors caught his eye. He contacted the firm that designed the vendor's website, but a conflict of interest prevented the two from working together. Instead, the design firm recommended Solid Cactus.

Shui had done his homework prior to the redesign. Knowing his customers were knowledgeable and educated about their pets (in the 25-65 age group evenly split between men and women) and had come to expect the superior service and products of Best In Show, he wanted a design for BestinShowSF.com that would appeal aesthetically and provide information in an easy-to-navigate format. His end goal was to have a design that was pleasing, functional, and would help the store rank higher in search engine results.

The design team at Solid Cactus was up to the task. First, designer Marc Manfre learned about Shui's goals for the site and the branding of the company from a client survey. Then, the two spoke one-on-one to discuss the project and concept further. Manfre and Shui looked at other Solid Cactus designed stores and noted some of the features Shui would like included in his new design. They also discussed which items on the existing site had been working well and should be migrated to the new site. For example, they decided the current Best in Show logo would serve as the basis for the look and feel of the new store.

Manfre enjoyed collaborating with Shui on the Best in Show site redesign.

"Richard, being the client, is a vital part of the design process. He had no doubts about the message and mood he wanted the redesign to express, but he also gave me the liberty to design and present it in my

Manfre suggested using the store's mascot Lucky (a lovable cartoon beagle) as the BestinShowSF.com spokesperson and included his image throughout.

own, original way," explained Manfre. "His ideas were inspiring to me and he let me have a voice in the process, which in turn helped me create a memorable site that Richard absolutely loved. I'm positive that any visitors to his new site will be motivated to buy his products and services."

As an example of the creativity of Solid Cactus designers, Manfre suggested using the store's mascot Lucky (a lovable cartoon beagle) as the BestinShowSF.org spokesperson and included his image throughout.

Also, since some of the features Shui wanted to add to his new store were social

media links and a blog, Manfre injected more of that fun branding by creating clever graphics that link to the blog and social media sites. The new blog link asks everyone to "Dish out Details". You can "Sniff us Out" on Facebook or "Follow our Trail" on Twitter. Lucky holds a newspaper in his mouth on the "Join the Best in Show Newsletter" sign-up box. Additionally, "Lucky's Favorites" and "Lucky's New Arrivals" are two more ways the mascot has been incorporated into the site as both a design element and brand "messenger".

To highlight Best in Show's physical location, Manfre incorporated a graphic of the neighborhood and the Golden Gate Bridge in the header. The subtle gray wallpaper background matches the cityscape in the header and features cartoon-type drawings of pet items such as paw prints and bones, which match the overall feel of the site. A fire hydrant in the footer adds a bit of whimsy.



The About Us page features shots of the interior of the brick and mortar store.

When Manfre presented the preliminary design, it was very close to Shui's expectations. With only one minor revision, it was ready to go live.

"It came out perfect!" said Shui.



The Checkout page is cute, incorporating a bouncing toy ball to show the customer's progress.

Customers and friends have already taken notice of the new look and features. Shui plans to monitor the impact on inquiries and sales, but he also knows there is much more to be done. Now that the redesign is live, Shui is focusing on search engine optimization (SEO).

"Right now I'm redoing all of the merchandise descriptions and keywords -- and that could take a month. But, I know that's also part of increasing the site's visibility on the search engines," he said, adding that down the road he plans on adding a customized blog to match his new store and perhaps a rotating banner on his homepage.

Premier pet supplies for passionate pet owners: The Best In Show brand emanates from every page of the website presented with a welcoming smile.

**About Best in Show**: Best in Show's motto is "Only the Best for Your Pets." Both the brick and mortar store in San Francisco and online boutique, BestinShowSF.com offer high quality items for dogs, cats, and pet owners. The San Francisco location offers in store events for pets and their owners. **eBiz**



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