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**Developing a Winning e-Commerce Strategy**

**By Lee Traupel**

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One bright spot on the economic horizons around the world seems to be continued consumer spending and e-commerce is clearly a part of this, with sales estimated to be in excess of \$9.9 billion in the next three months according to ACNielsen. But there is a dark cloud hovering over this sunny e-commerce landscape called poor web site design. Let's explore some of the reasons why consumers are not reaching for their credit cards after perusing an e-commerce web site.

There is a huge knowledge gap about how the web is really driving online and offline commerce. A recent eCommercePulse survey of more than 33,000 surfers conducted by Nielsen/Net ratings and Harris Interactive indicates e-commerce sites are driving more purchases offline (phone, catalogue, retail store sales) than online. Many consumers are using the web to effortlessly compare features and pricing, then calling the company or visiting their local retail store to make a purchase. Clearly many companies need to factor this information in when analyzing their online and offline marketing expenditures and related ROI.

According to a recent Zona Research and Keynote Systems Report released earlier this summer, over \$25 Billion (USD) was lost in e-commerce due to users abandoning the web site prior to a purchase being made or during the process. The users just gave up because the load times (the amount of time it takes a page to be displayed in a browser) were painfully slow. Today's online shoppers aren't a real patient group; they want information presented in 12-18 seconds or they are off to another site that works.

Unfortunately, many firms have allocated a disproportionate amount of resources for advertising and not enough on good web site design and back-end infrastructure. It's critical to make the market aware of a site, but if the potential customers are not presented with the right navigation and menus (read information architecture), they will not buy. Case in point: according to recent Dataquest surveys (and others), between 20-40% of most users don't purchase because they can't figure out how to easily move around the web site.

## Developing a Winning e-Commerce Strategy

Many firms fail to properly integrate their e-commerce components with the overall site design. The in-house developers or the outside design firm concentrate on the sexy parts of the web site design process (the graphics, branding, look and feel) and only focus on the e-commerce process after the primary web site design is completed, making e-commerce an afterthought.

A large number of e-commerce web sites don't even list a phone number, arbitrarily forcing people to contact the company electronically. This is a real problem, as many people don't want to use e-mail or forms as their primary means of communicating. They want the immediacy of the telephone.

It's very surprising, but approximately 30% of e-commerce sites don't have a search capability that actually works. In many cases it just returns gobbledygook. This is a real irritant for many online shoppers who want to find goods and services quickly and efficiently. The need for speed should be the e-commerce merchant's marketing mantra and a good search capability gives users a way to quickly

find products.

One of the most important parts of any web site is the home or index page, as it aggregates the design elements and information architecture. So many index pages are cluttered and poorly designed, loaded with poor graphics, bad menu structures, oddball words, or my absolute least favorite ... 30-60 second Flash animation sequences which force the user to sit and stare at a blank screen while the animation loads.

Privacy statements are about as exciting as filing taxes (unless you know you're getting a refund). They are out of necessity filled with legal terminology that needs to be addressed succinctly and in a way that makes a consumer feel comfortable about doing business with an e-commerce web site. Unfortunately, many e-commerce web site privacy statements look like an afterthought, or are so "attorney driven" (three pages – who has time to read this?) that people are turned off by them. It's very important that a privacy statement be a compromise document brokered between legal and marketing.

We are a full service ad agency so I don't mind shooting arrows in the direction of my peers. Too much attention is being placed on web site advertising metrics (clickthrough rates, certified traffic to substantiate ad rates, etc.) and not enough on how people find and use an e-commerce web site. The industry standard web site analysis tool is Web Trends, but one of the least understood aspects of this product is tracking how people find and move around a web site via reports which can be pulled from the server log files; i.e., where did the visitors come from, what pages do they visit, how long do they stay, what are their traffic patterns, etc.? e-Commerce companies should be analyzing these "digital customer tracks" to better understand how to improve their front-end marketing processes and back-end web site design.

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience – he is the founder of Intellective Communications, Inc.,

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## **Winning Texas Holdem Poker Strategy**

**By Adel Awwad**

In any type of game, strategy is an important part of winning. Adapting to the differences in each game, understanding the importance of position and realizing that knowledge is essential are three main parts of Texas Holdem strategy. There are many different approaches to strategy, but if a player uses these three key parts, then they should discover they have a winning strategic approach.

Adapting to the differences in the game is an important part of strategy. Not every approach works in every situation. A player that finds, during the course of the game, that another player is picking up on their strategy may need to change their style a little to throw the other player off. Being able to make quick decisions and being flexible with game play is also part of adapting. Adapting is relevant in every game, every time Texas Holdem is played. A player who does not adapt will find keeping up a winning strategy is difficult.

Understanding the importance of position is most relevant to the game of Texas Holdem than any other poker game. Texas Holdem is based on the fact that the position a player is in has great influence over that player's game. Position is based on literally where a player sets during the game. The ideal position is to have a player on the right side that bets often and high. On the left side a player wants someone who does not win often. This ideal position sets the player up to win big more often. It is also a good position to be the last player to act. This allows the player an advantage of seeing the other players' actions and the ability to get basic information about their hands. Position can often times mean the difference between a bad game and a good game.

The biggest advantage to a winning strategy is information. A player who keeps themselves informed throughout the game will have the best odds of winning. A strategy that includes observation and the gathering of information sets a player up to be able to determine other players' actions and bet accordingly. Texas Holdem is all about information and how a player uses it. A player should aim to get as much information as possible while giving little information to other players. Strategies differ from player to player and from game to game. The idea behind a winning strategy is to be able to make it work in any game. This means being able to adapt it to the situation of the game, having a good position and gathering information. A strategy may change or be altered throughout a game of Texas Holdem. The basic structure of a winning strategy, though, is made up of the three key parts regardless of its implementation.

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