

Is Your Online Business Making Best Use of its Consumer Information?

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By Lisa Schmeckpeper

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As of this writing, I've spent almost four years online, and in that time I've filled out hundreds of online forms at countless business and consumer websites. Maybe it was to register for access to the site, to make a purchase, or just to get some really cool "free stuff."

Each time the online form asked for a lot of personal information, and on more often than not, my birth date was requested.

Having a keen eye for a marketing opportunity when I see one, I'd also assume that websites asking for information from me and about me plan to *use* some of the information for their own purposes, whatever those may be.

So I was really surprised that, of all the online retailers I have told about myself, ONLY TWO sent me a birthday wish and only one of those two thought enough to include a special offer this past 24th of August. Yes, only ONE!

Sad isn't it?

It's not surprising to me that DOTCOM companies are disappearing faster than flies at a frog convention.

Most will spend many times the amount of dollars in advertising for each dollar they net in sales in 2000, and

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then they will sit there with red ink all over their hard copy accounting notes and wonder why they are struggling financially.

Here's some advice— a clue, for the clueless who are running their E-net businesses like garage sales. Instead of spending a cool million on that next banner ad campaign, hoping to squeeze a 1% or 2% click-thru ratio out of it, they should consider a simple friendly business strategy that nobody else on the net seems to be using.

First, we'll assume you have asked visitors to your site to fill out a order or some other personal data form. You can

then filter the customer database to find "matching birth dates" and send a personalized birthday greeting and "special" money-saving offer out to each person who is celebrating a birthday on that day.

Wow! What a concept! And just what would it involve? A few hours of database work to start the process, then a few more hours drafting an appropriate birthday card/greeting and offer and then —if your processes are automated —just a few minutes each day of the year to send a cordial, personal birthday greeting out to your astonished customers/site visitors.

Your offer is far more likely to be noticed and acted on than one in the mob of impersonal "sales letters" and other cookie-cutter marketing messages we all suffer through.

This is not new marketing in the brick and mortar world folks. For years each of my kids has been receiving an annual "Free Birthday Meal" coupons from both Burger King and McDonald's, a week or two before their birthdays. Do they know something E-tailers don 't, about building consumer appreciation at an early age?

Why do online retailers seem to ignore this simple but effective marketing practice? It is most likely one of two reasons.

1. They're too blinded by the online "mainstream" advertising methods that make no one but advertising agencies rich. They'd rather spend their advertising money

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on banners, ezines, and other costly ways of acquiring new customers instead of treating the customers the *do* have in a special way.

2. They just haven't figured out that they can use their existing database of customers to fuel their next marketing campaign and make those customers feel special at the same time.

No, we're not talking two-tier chocolate cakes with candles, followed by a magic show. Just a simple tactic that could reap untold benefits to the online sites that use existing customer/visitor information wisely.

Consumer Handbook Available

By News Canada

(NC) – Having quality consumer information is the best protection you can have in today's marketplace. The Canadian Consumer Handbook put together by Canada's federal, provincial and territorial consumer protection agencies offers a wealth of information. There's information on the differences between proper and improper business procedures, on how to approach banks, insurance companies, utility companies, landlords and many others. It also provides advice on consumer rights, making informed decisions, making a complaint effectively, and protecting yourself from unscrupulous dealers.

Complaining effectively is a skill that the Handbook looks at in full. Consumers should not be afraid to complain, as reputable businesses will be pleased to set matters right. There is information on how to keep track of what you have done to complain and what is the proper line of events that you should follow, from talking to the manager to going to small claims court.

This new Handbook is now available on line. Just visit Consumer Connection's Web site at

. This is an award-winning Web site developed by the Office of Consumer

Affairs of Industry Canada. It provides rapid access to consumer information, powerful tools to cut research time, and many useful links to consumer and other organizations. Canadians can access Consumer Connection from home, the public library, community access points or from Government of Canada, provincial and territorial service outlets. For a variety of information on everything from bank fees, to privacy rights, to the latest scams or frauds, this is the place to go.

provides a wide selection of current, ready-to-use copyright free news stories and ideas

for Television, Print, Radio, and the Web.

is a niche service in public relations, offering access to print, radio, television, and now

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the Internet media, with ready-to-use, editorial "fill" items. Monitoring and analysis are two more of our primary services. The service supplies access to the national media for marketers in the private, the public, and the not-for-profit sectors. Your corporate and product news, consumer tips and information are packaged in a variety of ready-to-use formats and are made available to every Canadian media organization including weekly and daily newspapers, cable and commercial television stations, radio stations, as well as the Web sites Canadians visit most often. Visit

and learn more about

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Consumer Handbook Available

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Secrets Revealed Of A Successful Online Marketer – Willie Crawford

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