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**Privacy: Reduce your Customers' Concerns by Building Trust First**

**By Anti Spam League**

**Privacy: Reduce your Customers' Concerns by Building Trust First by Anti Spam League**

Before making a purchase from you, buyers need to trust your company and think that your products and services will do what they are supposed to. Do your marketing and online practices help establish the trust necessary to convince prospects to buy from you? What is the connection between privacy and trust? Evidence shows that the two are closely correlated.

Since the beginning of interpersonal communication, trust has been perhaps the most important influence on information disclosure. Then, when commerce started, people would trade with those individuals whom they trusted and would avoid those who were perceived as non-trust-worthy. Intrinsically subjective and hard to define, trust is a function of the amount and type of control one has in a relationship. Social exchange theory advocates that individuals weigh both the costs and rewards in deciding whether to engage in social transactions. Aided by a little common sense we can conclude that if the rewards outweigh the costs, then the individual is likely to enter into an exchange relationship whereas if the cost outweighs the rewards there will be no exchange. This trade-off occurring inside people's minds should not be overlooked since it ultimately determines whether they will buy from you or not.

The same process takes place in cyberspace. That is, the risks of disclosing personal information are weighed against the benefits when deciding to provide information to a website. Hence, trust is critical to disclosure in both interpersonal and online relationships. This is where privacy concerns come in.

In a previous article; "How to write a privacy policy", we said that privacy involves protecting our integrity as individuals and our right to disclose or not to disclose our personal information to third parties. Since technology has become such a powerful enabler of data collection and utilization, one of the biggest IT responsibilities is making sure that the personal information their systems collect is protected from misuse and abuse. Who draws the line that separates them both? This seems to be quite an intricate issue.

As a consequence of the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, increased security is a reality in today's world. As the US government collects more personal information about its citizens, are

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Americans really confident that their personal information is being safeguarded without their privacy being compromised? A survey conducted by the Ponemon Institute, a leading privacy think tank, in September 2003 uncovers some interesting findings. The more than 6,000 Americans who participated in this first annual Privacy Trust Survey were asked to indicate their confidence, as it relates to protecting privacy, regarding 60 different government agencies. The overall results indicated that the majority of Americans surveyed (83%) consider privacy a matter that is important or very important to them. Nonetheless, many respondents indicated they have a high level of uncertainty about the government agencies that collect and use that information, thus creating a negative impression of those organizations. The survey also showed that protecting personal information is important to people of all ages, education and income levels. Among the organizations scoring the highest were hospitals, doctors, banks and the U.S. Postal Service. Those ranking lowest included retailers, grocery stores, telephone companies and the newly created Department of Homeland Security. Although at a

first glance it might seem somewhat strange that two federal government agencies could score so differently on the survey, a closer look would explain the apparent discrepancy. When you compare the two, it is easy to see why consumers trust the mailman more than the people fighting terrorism. The Postal Service has more than a century of proof it can be trusted, while the Department of Homeland Security does not yet have such proof.

A number of studies of interpersonal exchange situations have confirmed that trust reduces the perceived risks or cost involved in revealing private information. As a case in point, Jarvenpaa and Tractinsky in their 'Internet Consumer Trust Model' (1999) found that trust increases confidence in a company, which lowers the perceived risk of electronic exchange with that company and, therefore, increases the likelihood of consumers engaging in electronic transactions. Similarly, Swaminathan et al. in the 'Exchange Model' (1999) established that consumers prefer to do business with web sites that they perceive to be reliable, honest, consistent, competent, fair, responsible, helpful, and altruistic, all of which are main components of trust.

All of the above indicates that the role of trust in facilitating disclosure is especially critical in online exchanges, where computer-mediated communication replaces physical contact. Other potential issues on the Internet include; technical difficulties for people who are new to the online world, lack of ability for consumers to physically inspect goods prior to purchase, and new companies that have not been in the market long enough to establish good reputations. Trust is important because it contributes to building a good or bad image of the company before the customers' eyes. Negative images are very hard to change. This is why this is such a delicate and critical issue.

So what can you do to get your customers to trust you? The following tips can help you build trust, increase sales, reduce your customers' privacy concerns and keep them coming back.

- Reduce Perceived Risk: Consumers' overall regard for a company strongly influences perceptions of trust and perceived risk. Personal evaluations are made on the basis of many things, for example, firm reputation or personal experience with a company. Nonetheless, in the case of new companies where reputation and personal experience are lacking, personal evaluations are made on the basis of a company's observable attributes or signals, such as, self presentation through advertising, customer service interactions, or stated policies. Also, one of customers' biggest concerns is how well your

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product or service will perform. It is important that you clarify the value you provide and state your commitment to ensuring that your customers are extremely satisfied about your product and services. You must use all communication means at your disposal to enhance the customers' experience on your web site, which in turn will reduce their perceived risk.

·Use Clear Language and Give Examples: It is also important that you post a clear privacy policy on your web site and that you use Plain English in every piece of information you write. Many web sites like to use sophisticated language to look professional but they fail to see that they might be losing customers as a consequence. Giving examples is a good tool to increase credibility. Tell a story instead of making impersonal and exaggerated claims of what your company or your products do. Use case studies to tell what you did for whom and the difference it made in their lives or their business.

·Personalize Your Marketing: Personalizing your communications is definitely a trust booster. People like to do business with people - not with faceless companies – and they feel a lot better when you refer to them as `Bob' or `Mary' than when you simply call them `Dear Customer'.

·Give Something Away: Evidence suggests that when you give something to people, regardless of the cost, they are more likely to trust you and return the favor by buying something from you or providing you with more of their personal information. For example, you can use an ebook, an article, a workshop or a free demonstration to build trust.

·Adhere to Recognized Seal Programs: Enhancing perceptions of web site privacy protection via features such as privacy statements and seals helps increase regard for the company and trust. TRUSTe and BBB Online are two well regarded seal programs that can contribute to your efforts of building trust. In addition, you can take a step further by telling your visitors that your web site adheres to anti-spam practices by displaying The Anti SPAM League seal. This organization, formed specifically to combat the spam problem, has a seal program for web sites that are concerned about email communication. You can become a member for free by visiting [www.AntiSpamLeague.org](http://www.AntiSpamLeague.org).

·Make Contact Easy: If you want clients to get in touch with you, make it easy for them to contact you. Put your phone number and your other contact information on all your marketing materials - including your web site -. When you call them, give them your phone number again at the end of the conversation and tell them to call. This is another powerful way to build trust.

·Stay in Touch: The people you see and talk to on a regular basis are usually the ones you trust the most. If you sell services or high end products, a personal phone call is one of the best ways to answer prospects questions, and to establish trust. If you have a web site, it is a good idea to periodically contact your customers through newsletters containing information you think might be of interest to them. One key point here: make sure customers have manifested an interest in receiving such information and have given their permission via an opt-in option or another similar mechanism. Remember that permission always builds trust, rapport and respect.

As stated before, the degree to which Internet users think a commercial web site protects their privacy will positively influence their overall regard for the company and trust of the company's web site. Once

achieved, trust becomes one of the company's most valuable assets. Not only does trust eliminate skepticism, but it also has the power to transform visitors into customers for life. Following these guidelines can help you avoid missteps that can negatively impact your brand, public goodwill, and customer satisfaction/loyalty (e.g., 'trust').

If you want to learn more about this and other related topics, check out [www.Anti-Spam-League.org](http://www.Anti-Spam-League.org). This organization offers free membership and the chance to access a wide amount of relevant information on privacy, spam, email abuse, Internet fraud, responsible marketing and several other topics.

The purpose of the Anti SPAM League is to help consumers and business owners reduce the amount of SPAM they receive. In addition, our Anti SPAM organization believes that educating site owners in the area of SPAM prevention and ways to successfully and responsibly market their sites, is key in making a difference.

## **Build Trust Online By Focusing on Web Consumers**

**By Pete Prestipino**

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Somewhere between project ideation and results analysis, those responsible for the success of internet endeavors will wonder if their visitors actually trust their website enough to buy product or share personal information. ValidatedSite.com believes Web sites will exude Web credibility if they adopt some very basic trust-building policies and so shares some vital tips about building trust online by focusing on Web consumers needs:

Tell consumers who you are by helping them focus on your identity: To have consumers believe in you and take the action you want, web sites should clearly disclose their physical location and offer easy one-click access to postal address, telephone number and e-mail addresses or support forms. Building an heir of credibility can also come from clearly disclosing ownership information and making corporate and mission statements readily available.

Tell consumers the truth by focusing on transparency: With millions of websites online it is easy to understand why many consumers simply do not trust some websites. By being "transparent" when it comes to your existing relationships, web businesses foster an atmosphere of open communication. Successful sites do this by clearly distinguishing advertising from news and information through labels or other visual means. Websites should also clearly disclose relevant business relationships, including sponsored links to other sites – the site's sponsorship policies should be clearly noted in accompanying text or on an "About Us" or "Site Center" page.

Tell consumers why they can trust you with formal privacy policies. While every website does not have a privacy policy, every website that wants to establish credibility with their website visitors should have one. Privacy policies help consumers understand what you as a business can do with their information. More than just legal documents, easy to read privacy policies give consumers peace of mind about

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who they are sharing their personal information with. Many consumers read these documents in detail before submitting or sharing any information. Usually the most important part of these policies is about what you as a company can do with their information once you have it.

Tell consumers that others can vouch for you and your online business with a seal of approval. Nothing speaks more highly than when an independent entity vouches for the credibility and trustworthiness of your company. Utilizing seals of approval on your website help consumers know that you have taken steps to earn their trust. Popular research indicates that sites that display such seals have better conversion rates, lower abandonment rates and higher customer retention than those that do not.

### Building "Trust Equity"

Understanding your customers, providing excellent customer service and proving that you are worthy of consumers' business, builds the trust you need to be successful. It's not rocket science, but it does

take commitment. The Internet is like a fitness club – you get out of it what you put into it. Having an effectively designed website with up to date content that is relevant to your target audience whose requests you follow up on in a timely fashion takes work. Happy visitors become happy customers who provide lots of word of mouth referrals and more business over time. Having a "trust fund" is one of the best investments you can make in your business.

Interested in learning more about building trust with web consumers? Visit [www.BusinessVerificationSeals.info](http://www.BusinessVerificationSeals.info) for more information!



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