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Restoring The Personal Touch

By Kent E. Butler

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by: **Kent E. Butler**

There are now 126 Billion websites where you can buy anything from disposable diapers to nuclear weapons. More business is done on the Internet in one month than France has done in the last 10 years. You can email any human being on Planet Earth in less than 15 seconds.

Those are algore facts – meaning I just made them up. My point is, we're living on a planet that gets more wired every day. As the commercial says "We're changing everything". Maybe not. Some things never change, or maybe I should say they shouldn't change.

You can buy a pair of designer shoes on the web and have them delivered right to your door, or desk. Or, you can go to a shoe store and get personal attention from the sales associate, get the shoes properly fitted, chat about one thing or another and leave with your purchase. Which is the more satisfying experience? Unless you're a serious Type-A personality, it's got to be the latter – and maybe even then.

Why? You got personal service from someone who at least seemed to be interested in your wants and needs and took pains to satisfy you. With the former situation, if the shoes prove unacceptable you have to email the vendor for a return authorization and ship them back – about as personal as a parking ticket. At the store, you know before you leave how happy you're going to be and maybe how much your feet are going to hurt.

Am I a Luddite advocating the abandonment of the web as a commercial platform? Not hardly. I'm suggesting there are ways to combine technology with attention to the individual. Here are some possibilities:

How inviting is your homepage? Is it friendly, easy to read and reassuring? Reassuring? Yep. You doubtless know there are many more people wary of buying on the web than there are those who do so fearlessly. So you need to put them at ease from first contact, just as you would greet and welcome

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people entering your store. Empathize with them regarding their concerns (riptoffphobia, I believe), act accordingly and you will improve your return.

My completely unscientific poll of web surfers confirmed my suspicions: People are put off, even threatened, by an abundance of whirling doodads, flashing thingamajigs, and critters popping in and out all over a site. You won't have a chance to provide personal service if they won't stay a while. You have to set the scene in the first ten seconds. How about a text-only welcome message that pops up while the site loads?

Examine the text on your website through the eyes of a prospective customer. Bear in mind the prospect couldn't care less what you want to sell, only what will satisfy his/her needs and wants. Pages of variations on "BUY NOW!" will seldom be read, much less acted upon. The questions the prospect is usually asking are, "What's in it for me; what will it do for me?" and "How much is it?". Do you have some rewriting to do?

Don't disappear behind your autoresponder. It can be a good and valuable marketing tool, but that's all it is: a tool. People don't normally have any emotional involvement with a hammer or a clock radio – they're just tools.

Your autoresponder cannot replace you and your personal attention to your prospect. Your sales letters may be warm and fuzzy, while still pushing your product or service, and they are probably as personalized as you can make them. Terrific! But they're still "just" sales letters – very important, but no substitute for you.

A thought (I have them sometimes...): When a prospect opts-out of further autoresponder mailings, email her/him and ask if you can be of service or help find what she/he wants. It may just be the person recognized and objected to electronic bulk mail and will buy with some personal attention. Don't harass them, of course.

Seek feedback. Don't assume that just because you've provided a place to email you that a prospect will do so. Be proactive (sorry, corporate buzzword), not passive. Ask your prospect what he/she wants, thinks or has questions about. Ask the person to drop you a note (Doesn't that sound more personal than email me? It does, too!) and be certain to respond within twenty-four hours. At the very least, you might learn about something that needs your attention.

Publish an address and phone number where you can be reached. Are you crazy, Butler? Not necessarily. I think doing so is a strong personal statement. It says I'm available to help you, I have nothing to hide and I'll be happy to talk with you. It's a potent confidence-builder. You don't have to plaster it across every page in foot-high characters, just make it easy to find. I think it highly unlikely you'll get many calls or snail mails.

You'll think of other ways to humanize your online business. By all means, use the latest technology, if you wish. Just keep in mind you're asking people to part with their money and they want to know they're dealing with a real person in case there's a question or problem. And that person is you.

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Kent Butler has been in marketing and sales since just after the discovery of dirt. He has written a great variety of things, from sales letters to screenplays. If this piece was helpful to you, he's happy. You are cordially invited to explore his Internet Resource Center at

If you became a customer, of course, he'd be even happier (not more happy).

Muscle Car Restoration 101

By Jason Tarasi

Restoring muscle cars is a hobby for some and a profession for others. There's just something about the classic high-performance cars that collectors, racers and general car enthusiasts find fascinating. If you are a hobbyist who is interested in restoring a muscle car, you will probably benefit from a few restoration tips. The restoration of muscle cars begins with shopping for a muscle car that can be restored. Prior to buying a car for the purpose of restoring it you need to make sure that the parts needed for the restoration are available and you can get your hands on them, and that you can afford to complete the project once you start it.

Before going shopping for a muscle car to restore, decide what your purpose is for restoring a car. Do you just want a great muscle car to drive? Will you be racing? Are you restoring the car so you can participate and compete in classic car shows? Do you intend to sell the totally restored muscle car for a profit?

Once you've determined the purpose behind your muscle car restoration you'll have a better idea about what type of muscle car you want to get. Before you go shopping, read up on different muscle cars and learn all about their performance, their value and so forth to make sure that the car you choose is appropriate for your intentions. To make sure that you don't get ripped off in a muscle car transaction, find out what the muscle cars you are looking for are worth "as is" and what they are worth once they are restored. Having this information at your fingertips will help you to determine whether or not you are really getting a "great deal" when you begin to negotiate to buy a muscle car.

Before you buy one, make sure that the parts needed to restore your muscle car are available and affordable. Set your budget and your timeline for restoring the car so you know how much you can afford to spend for the muscle car itself and for the parts and other expenses that will be incurred in the process of the restoration. Following these simple suggestions at the beginning of your muscle car restoration project will prevent you from starting a project you can't finish and will ensure that your muscle car restoration project is enjoyable and that you meet your goals for muscle car restoration, whatever those goals may be.

Jason Tarasi is a muscle car enthusiast who runs the Muscle Car Monster Website, where members can buy and sell muscle cars for free through the site's online classifieds.

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