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**THE OFF SIDE OF ONLINE RETAIL**

**By John Ginsberg**

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Many online retailers are focused on the first time customer. And understandably so, considering that in an attempt to capture their fair share of an ever-growing online consumer market, many have put aside a large marketing budget.

However, in the process, they have forgotten that in many cases, sales are not made on the first attempt. The ability of e-tailers to offer impulse buys has been translated into the assumption that all customers are impulse buyers. And they decorate the front page of their web site with 1-click offers and promises of same-day delivery.

But in their haste to reach the masses, they have ignored the large number of careful shoppers taking to the net this year – many for the first time.

These individuals are careful about putting the credit cards where their mouth is. They evaluate every negative factor of online shopping before deciding to take the plunge. Will the gifts arrive on time? What if I need to return an item? Will QueueHere.com still be around after Christmas, or are they a fly by night web site?

These issues often plague the consumer until they experience the inevitable, "Oh hell, why not!" syndrome that all net shoppers have experienced at some point in time. And even then, they limit their testing to the gift for their 3rd cousin twice removed on their mother's side.

But even experienced net shoppers are hesitant, though perhaps for different reasons. The web is a price-shopper's haven with shopping bots constantly scouring the net for specials and bargains. The convenience of comparison shopping is merely a mouse click away. It is therefore not surprising that consumers are hesitant to put their money on the table, because there might always be a better deal somewhere across the globe.

Add that to the fact that a web surfer's loyalty to an online store is relative to the cost of their Internet connection – the more it costs, the less time they spend with each store.

And web shoppers are unlikely to be as forgiving in the online world as they would be in the real world. Slow download times and uncooperative web sites all help to convince them that the trip to the local mall, despite the inconvenience, might be less frustrating.

So how is an online retailer to compete in an offline-dominated world? It's actually not as difficult as it seems.

1. Build trust – clearly a forgotten aspect of commerce, whether online or off. Since online retailers operate in an untrusted environment, their number one priority is to build trust amongst customers.

2. Cater for the browser and the buyer – for those who know what they want, help them to find it with ease. Offer a search facility and a call center number in case they can't find an item. For those who just want to browse around, give them a convenient starting point and guide them through a tour of your various departments.

3. Save customer profiles – many customers will return twice or even three times before making a purchasing decision. Allow them to save a profile up front which they can recall when returning. Don't ask for personal details until they are ready to buy.

4. Follow up – comparison shopping has never been easier, so make sure your site stands out from the rest. Once a customer has saved a profile, send them an e-mail reminding them about their selection. And because shoppers tend to visit many web sites at a time, you'll need to constantly remind them of your web site address. Don't forget to include the URL of your site in all e-mail correspondence. Be careful not to overdo it though, because it could be considered spam.

John Ginsberg is a senior consultant for Net Brothers, a leading Internet strategy consulting firm based in South Africa. He is also the editor of EyeBiz Magazine, an Internet strategy and marketing publication. To subscribe, send an e-mail to [toeyebiz-subscribe@listbot.com](mailto:toeyebiz-subscribe@listbot.com).

### **What Is A Brochure Site?**

**By Richard D S Hill**

When you look around and research what people think the purpose of a brochure is you find suggestions such as:

"The first question you need to ask yourself is 'What does my company want this brochure to do?' or 'What purpose will the brochure serve?' and 'What target audience is it intended to reach?'"

When you then research what the answers to these questions are you get things like: 'to provide information'; 'to enhance our image'; 'as a PR tool'; 'to provide product information'.

## THE OFF SIDE OF ONLINE RETAIL

Then when you Google 'WHAT IS A BROCHURE SITE?' this is the answer you get: "A small web site consisting of the basic information about an organisation. This would be similar in content to a flyer or leaflet."

Made us think.

And what we thought was that all the definitions are pretty mealy mouthed and miss the point.

The point being that the purpose is surely to MARKET [i.e. engage in the commercial promotion, sale, or distribution of Z] or SELL [i.e. deal: do business].

If it isn't then why would any business add to costs by producing said brochure?

[Back to mealy mouthed answers there!]

Does it not follow then that a "brochure site" must also market or sell? Yet, when there are over 500,000 business websites in the UK, only about 26,000 of them are 'trading online'. What does that say about the other 474,000?

All this at a time when internet shopping has, according to IMRG, reached 10% of retail sales in the UK and £80 billion of consumer spending is on or influenced by the internet, of which:

1. £30 billion of RETAIL spending is online
2. £20 billion of OTHER CONSUMER spending is online
3. a further £30 billion of OFFLINE RETAIL sales is impacted by internet information, research or stimuli
4. 10% of retail sales now take place online
5. e-retail sales have grown at an average year-on-year rate of 45% for the past 6 months
6. e-retail sales have grown 2,000% in 6 years
7. 44% of shoppers polled expect their online shopping to increase in the next 12 months
8. 90% had researched goods online then bought them offline
9. 52% of consumers plan to reduce their high street spending in 2006

All this when a really good shopping cart costs less than £400 [yes, we sell them] and organizations such as Business West allow you to claim up to £500 worth of website development funding from IT @ Work Online. [Which we, of course, can help with!]

The world sometimes seems very strange!

Richard Hill is a Director of E-CRM Solutions, that specialises in CRM, direct and internet marketing [

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