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INCREASING ONLINE SALES

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OVERVIEW

Selling online requires a simple approach. One based on an understanding of three factors that govern the sales you currently have, and the sales you could have.

This article is targeted to merchants that are selling an item or service online through a web site. It is intended to help you increase sales of that product or service. The concepts discussed apply to most any situation of selling online and is intended to illustrate simple principles that all merchants should keep in mind when developing their online business.

There are only three ways to increase sales online:

- 1. Get more visitors to your web site**
- 2. Get more of your site visitors to buy your products**
- 3. Get your existing customers to buy more of your products**

That is all there is to succeeding online. There are no other ways to increase sales. The three simple statements above are all you need to know. Keep these three facts in mind during your decision making process. Base the decision on whether it will affect one of the three statements above. Next, we'll take a detailed look into what each of these principles mean.

Note: The resources listed may not have been tested or evaluated by us and should serve only as examples or starting points for particular technologies.

GET MORE VISITORS TO YOUR WEB SITE

First, let's make it perfectly clear that it does not matter what you are selling. Given enough traffic to your web site, someone will buy your product. It may take only 1 in 100 visitors before someone buys, or it may be 1 in 1,00,000 visitors. Someone is looking to buy your item somewhere on the Internet. You simply have to get them to your web site.

Any web site will have traffic no matter how small a site is. Our job in this section will be to increase the number of people coming into your site. This is done through simple web marketing, most of which, can be done for little or no money. It just requires time and effort.

The options we will explore are:

- Search engine optimization
- Affiliate system
- Send to friend
- Newsgroups

- Free content
- Getting Linked to
- Performance based advertising

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine effectiveness can vary by industry and product in terms of how much traffic will be driven to your site by the search engines. Some products will rely heavily on search engine traffic, possibly being the largest source for site visitors, but others may only have a small percentage of site visitors from search engines. In either case, your site should be setup properly for search engine spiders. A search engine spider is a program that scours the Internet indexing every page based on content. It is this index that search engines use to present results back to people making a search. It is very simple to do and should be one of the first things you do when launching your online marketing effort.

Resources:

Spider Food <http://www.spider-food.net>

Affiliate Systems

An affiliate program is when you give others the ability to help you sell your product, in turn, they are rewarded with incentives. There are several ways of setting up affiliate programs. You can have affiliates sell your product directly from their web site, or have them redirect their visitors to your site. There are many programs out there that can easily be plugged into your site without any programming knowledge.

The key point to affiliate systems is why have your one web site selling all alone on the Internet when you can have an army of web sites selling the item for you. If your site gets a thousand user sessions a day, that is good, but you can quickly increase the size by having an affiliate's site that gets a thousand sessions a day sending traffic your way. You will need to provide good incentives for your program to work.

Resources:

Dr. eBiz Finding Affiliates - <http://www.doctorebiz.com/07/030226a.htm>

Send to Friend/Suggest This Page

A very simple and effective way to increase visitors is by giving a site visitor the ability to send a friend a link to the web page they are on. Essentially you have a link or button on your web site linked to a web form that enables your visitor to send the URL of your web site to their friend along with any comments in an email. The friend then receives the email with the comments and a link to your web site. It is often not only to send new visitors to your site, but some visitors

will send links to themselves as reminders. There are several free programs available.

Resources:

Tell a Friend Wizard: <http://www.tell-a-friend-wizard.com>

Newsgroups

Message boards or newsgroups are online communities of people that share a common interest where members can “post” comments or questions and have responses supplied by other members of the community. There are thousands of newsgroups and there is sure to be one that is closely related to your product or service. Posting in these places help you become a visible member of the community and can help your site grow.

Once you have established yourself as a member of the community by offering your help and advice to other users, you can begin to market your product or service by including a “signature” in your responses. A signature is synonymous to what you would put in a letter, though in this case, we will add a link to our web site. Your post may look like this:

*Dear NewsgroupMember,
I had that problem too, here is how you fix it.....
Hope that helps,*

*John
Visit Joe's Widgets – <http://www.joeswidgets.com>*

You need to be very careful about marketing in newsgroups. It is highly frowned upon and could hurt your reputation. Another key point to posting in newsgroups is that search engines like Google index the newsgroups in its results and anyone performing a search online could return your answer. It effectively gives you as many web page entrances as you have made posts. That is, for every answer you give in a newsgroup, there is a link to your web page.

Resources:

Google Groups: <http://www.google.com/grphp>

Free Content

If you provide free, useful content that is relative to the product or service you are selling on your web site then your traffic will increase. This can take the form of articles, links, or other resources that your target customer may also be looking for. For instance, this guide could be placed on a site offering eCommerce services. Someone looking for ways to increase their sales online could find our web site to read this article. While they are on the site, they will be presented with

the opportunity to purchase our eCommerce services.

This technique can be especially powerful if you are providing a large amount, or very good quality content as other sites will link to you as a resource of information.

Getting Linked

Just remember that your site that has a certain level of traffic coming to it. This traffic will grow naturally as time goes on. However, a way to see big jumps in traffic is to leverage traffic from other sites on the web. Our goal here is to get as many web sites on the Internet to have a link to our site on it. The more sites that link to our site, the more potential traffic we have. If one other site links to yours and that site receives 1,000 visitors per day, you have effectively increased your potential visitors by as much.

Anytime you have the opportunity to place a link on another site and it is in good form, then you should take advantage of the opportunity. Again, net etiquette applies.

Performance based advertising

Advertising online has gone through many changes over the years. It used to be (and still often is) that you would create a small image in the form of a banner or button that you would pay a flat fee another site to have it appear on their web pages with a link back to your site for either a number of days, or for a number of people who simply viewed your banner. This technique ultimately proved to be ineffective as site visitors began to ignore them. Though, they can still be effective if placed at special interest sites that are closely related to the product or service you are selling.

A better method evolved. That is pay-per-click advertising. In this scenario, you place an ad at a web site, but only pay when someone actually clicks on the link. Some systems still use images, banners, and buttons, but many are evolving into simple, non-invasive, text based ads. The best system in this market is found on search engines where your ads are displayed when a visitor searches for a related topic to yours. This is search engine relevant advertising and can have the highest effectiveness for getting visitors to your site.

Most of these systems charge anywhere from \$0.05-\$1.00 per click-through. You often can set daily or monthly spending limits to keep it with budget as well.

Resources:

Google Ad Words: <https://adwords.google.com/select>

Overture: <http://www.content.overture.com/d/home>

MarketBanker: <http://marketbanker.com/mb>

GET MORE OF YOUR SITE VISITORS TO BUY YOUR PRODUCTS

This is a straightforward idea. You have people coming to your web site from all over the world, now you have to get them to purchase your item from you. This section addresses whether you have a site that is an *effective* web site at selling. Does your site compel your visitors to purchase your item. There are several steps to making your site effective.

- Clear, concise text
- Low-barriers to product acquisition
- Multiple opportunities to purchase
- Ease of communication
- Point of Sale Offers
- Support

Clear Concise Text

This is straightforward and we will not go into great depth. Your web pages should be laid out in a consistent manner with similar navigation, and simple, clear, text.

Resources:

Wilson Web: <http://www.wilsonweb.com>

Low-barriers to product acquisition

If a person is interested in buying your product, you should make it as simple as possible for them to buy and receive your item. If they have to wait months for delivery of a readily available item, they will look elsewhere. If the payment process is confusing or requires many steps, that is raising a barrier to product acquisition. Lower the barriers as low as they will go and your sales will increase.

Multiple opportunities to purchase

You never know when the impulse to purchase will strike your visitor while they are on your web site. Therefore you should give them as many chance to purchase your item as possible. This can be as simple as having a “Buy Now” link on every page of your web site. This can also be viewed as lowering the barriers to product acquisition.

Ease of Communication

Your potential customers should be able to easily contact you if they have any questions or concerns. They should also be made to feel that they will be able to communicate with you after purchasing your item. It is also not just them asking questions, but rather how will you communicate with them during the transaction. Will you provide confirmation emails, or shipping and tracking numbers? A page that lists Frequently Asked Questions really helps here. This page displays a list of commonly asked questions and their answers. It will save your customers and you time by providing answers directly on your web site.

Point of Sale Offers

Giving your customer an added incentive to purchase your item can add to sales. This can take the form of discounted pricing, bonus items, or limited time offers. A sample may look like, "Click here to buy Widget and get a free bonus item".

Support

Your site should provide a support area. This can save you time in answering emails, but also gives your potential customers the feeling that they will be able to get help with their purchase if need be.

GET YOUR EXISTING CUSTOMERS TO BUY MORE OF YOUR PRODUCTS

This is often a largely untapped resource for merchants. These people have already been to your web site, were sold on its effectiveness, and completed a purchase. Therefore, they are the most likely to buy something from you again. For this approach to work, you will need to either sell more than one item, have complimentary items for use with their original purchase, or are selling a new version of the item the purchased previously (an upgrade).

- Email newsletter
- Follow up emails
- Product feedback
- Price breaks on additional purchases

Email Newsletter

Whenever a person purchases an item from you, their email should be included into a list that gets regular notifications of your products and services. You may want to make the inclusion as optional, but many customers will be interested in receiving offers from you if they have bought from you already and are pleased with the item. They should be able to "opt-out" of your list at any time. Giving list members special offers only available to them is a great way to increase sales.

Resources:

List Builder - <http://www.bcentral.com/products/lb/default.asp>

FanBlast - <http://www.fanblast.com>

Follow up emails

A few days after the customer has received your item, you should send them an email asking them if they are pleased and if there is anything else you can do for them. This builds customer satisfaction and therefore loyalty. They will be more inclined to purchase from you again.

Resources:

Autoresponder - <http://www.getresponse.com>

Product Feedback

Your customers should be able to contact you at any time after their purchase. This does several things for the customer, but most importantly, gives you an opportunity to present them with another buying opportunity.

Price Breaks on Additional Purchases

A great way to generate additional revenue from your existing customers is to provide them with special deals for purchasing more items from you. The best way to offer these impulse buying incentives is to include them in a follow-up email described above.

CONCLUSION

We have outlined concrete details to help you increase your online sales. We suggest implementing as many, if not all, as quickly as possible. This will allow you to see the effect from each of the tools and will give you insight on where you need to focus your attention. If a certain system or tool is proving to be particularly effective, then you will want to refine that method first and foremost. Then continue to work your way through the rest of the systems above until each one has been refined thoroughly. Repeating the process will let you squeeze the most out of each item.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shannon Sofield has been selling online before the bubble and after the bust. He founded [Superfreaker, LLC](#) as a consultancy practice that evolved into an application solutions provider. That business went on to spin-off several online

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