

4 Ways to Encourage People to Return to Your Website

Like a bricks and mortar shop, your website or webstore (online business) needs to have a regular stream of passing traffic to entice people to buy what you sell.

Unfortunately, your online business is more vulnerable to the offers of your competitors than a bricks and mortar shop which can take advantage of other forms of buyer appeal such as physical location (a pharmacy next door to a doctors clinic) and convenience (buy it and take it home right now).

With your competitors being just a Google search and click away in the online world, it's vitally important to make the most out of every opportunity you get. That means making a good impression on the first visit (selling the visitor exactly what they are looking for) and encouraging them to return again and again (selling more wanted things each time).

Making a good first impression comes down to having well written copy for your online business, making it easy to find the things you sell, having an easy to understand buying process and ensuring that all your promotional efforts are well targeted so that you're generating top quality leads.

Getting people to return to your website is a bit trickier and involves a lot more work to set-up, than it did to build your online business.

This article discusses 4 different ways you can encourage people to come back and keep coming back to your website.

1. Create a Relationship

A person who clicks on links in your website is someone looking for something they think you sell or can tell them. Making them a good prospect or lead.

Whether they find what they're looking for or not, your intention needs to be to capture their details and if possible learn what ever you can about what they were looking for.

Pop-up survey systems help you capture the information you need and are increasingly easy to set-up and use on your web site.

Kampyle is a free service that can be hooked into your Google Analytics account to give you one view across your visitor's actions.

Depending on how and what you want to collect from your visitors you may need to investigate other providers of popup survey systems, such as -

4Q
QuestionPro
Ultimate Exit Popup

2. All the Information You Can

From your own experience, you know that there are times when you want to know as much as you can about all your options so that you can make the best buying decision you can.

If you're selling based on price (being the lowest priced seller in your market), then providing a photo and a price will work until someone else comes along and is able to undercut your price.

Getting better margins and bigger profits depends on making your visitors comfortable that you have all the answers to their questions. Beyond product specifications and the marketing information provided by manufacturers it's up to you to create more information. The approach you take will determine just how much it costs you to create the additional information that will turn your online business from a standard website into an in-demand online presence.

One of the least expensive ways to create information is to build a community; through groups, forums, wikis, repositories and consumer generated content.

Groups

A Group is a micro-membership website, that people join so that they can communicate and share with like-minded people on around a common topic or interest.

Google Groups
Yahoo Groups
Windows Live Groups
Ebay Groups

Forums

An Internet Forum is an online discussion website, that allows people with a common interest or a need for information, to ask and answer questions.

YouForum
Forumotion.com
AtFreeForum
Freeforum 101

Wikis

Wikis are community collaborated content websites that allow people to write the information that is displayed on the pages of the website. The most popularly used and contributed to wiki is currently Wikipedia.

Wiki.com
Wikispaces
Zoho Wiki
WikiMatrix

Repositories

Repositories are sometimes also called digital libraries and are websites where people can store collections of digital content that other people can access, view, share and comment on. Examples of popularly used repositories are Flickr, Slideshare and YouTube.

Adding a repository to your website is a substantial undertaking and will require you to seek professional assistance, in the form of a web developer.

Consumer Generated Content

Many of the new breed of social networking websites fall into the category of consumer generated content websites. Basically these websites rely on people adding their views, reviews and opinions about different things.

For online businesses, consumer generated content in the form of visitor added reviews substantially increases the return appeal of your website. A study conducted in the UK, USA & Europe in 2007, found that adding consumer generated ratings and reviews to online retail websites increased website traffic by 77%.

A tool like Power Review Express makes it easy to have customer reviewing incorporated into your online business with very little technical experience.

3. Give Them More of What They Want

Obviously the easiest way to find out what your customers want is to ask them. You can do this with a survey (online or as a questionnaire you mail to your customers) and then wait around for your customers to send you their comments. Alternatively, you could take a look at some website statistics and get an objective answer sooner.

You're already tracking what your visitors do on your website, now it's time to take advantage of all that information you're capturing.

Invest some time and look through your website statistics to find out what is getting the most attention on your website. Take a long hard look at your most popular pages (other than your homepage) and do a bit of research.

You need to work out why these pages in particular are doing so well.

The statistics you will want to look at in particular are Unique Pageviews, Bounce Rate and Average Time Spent on the Page.

Unique Pageviews is the total number of individual visitors who have viewed a particular page in a specific period of time. Bounce Rate is the percentage of times that the page is the first and only page that is viewed by a visitor. A high bounce rate means that visitors aren't finding what they expected on the page and leaving straight away. Average Time Spent on the Page is the total length of time every visitor spends with your web page open in their web browser, divided by the total number of visitors to the page during a specific period. The higher the average time spent, the more likely it is that your visitors are thoroughly reading or interacting with the page.

Basically, you're looking for pages that have a high Unique Pageviews value. Once you've worked out which these are, look at the Bounce Rate and Average Time Spent on the Page. Great performing pages will have a low Bounce Rate and a high Average Time Spent on the Page value.

It's these top performing web pages you really want to focus on. Look at each page to see how you can leverage it and create more pages like it.

Should you discover that you've got a high Bounce Rate on an important page, you will need to investigate further. Start by finding out where people are coming from to get to the page.

Sometimes pages getting indexed in interesting ways (mainly because search engines aren't as intuitive as humans) so visitors can end up on your web page expecting to find information totally different to what your page is about. They take one look and see that it's not what they want and away they go.

Other times it can be that you just don't have enough information or the type of information the visitor is looking for.

The answer to these problems is Search Engine Optimization. Search Engine Optimization is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic coming to your web page from search engines via organic search results.

Giving your visitors more of what they want gives them a real reason for returning to your website. Once you're recognized as an online business that has exactly what customer's want, you become their first point of inquiry each time they're looking for something in your industry.

4. Respond Promptly

When businesses decided to get online and build websites that allowed customers to independently access all the information they needed to make buying decisions, one of the surprise outcomes was an expectation that customer service be immediate once the visitor decided to take action.

Even now many businesses find themselves unprepared when queries, requests and comments start streaming in from their various activities (online advertising campaigns, website incentive offers and email).

Once a visitor has taken the step to contact you, you must be available and ready to give them what they want.

Dealing with people in real-time by phone is the ideal solution and can be supported through agencies providing 24x7 answering services such as Live Answering Service, 3Messaging and Alltel.

Responding quickly to email is easier for most businesses when they have a constant connection to the Internet, whether by computer or mobile device (such as Blackberry or iPhone).

If this isn't an option and you also have a problem providing 24x7 phone support, you may want to investigate virtual receptionist services, like those provided by Greymouse Nearshore.

For other channels of communication such as when visitors add information via your website, a timely comment to acknowledge their contribution will keep them involved and coming back to you.

A survey conducted in the UK by Fasthosts in 2007 revealed that 1 in 5 visitors abandoned their inquiry after 12 hours. Respondents also felt that there is a strong link between having inquiries promptly replied to and them being brand loyalty.

By addressing these four areas of your online presence you not only increase your website visitors desire to return, you also give them a great experience in dealing with your business which builds respect and trust. Something we all know is vital to long term customer relationships and business prosperity.

Related Reading

Best Website: Simple Steps to Successful Websites

ISBN: 978-1419690006

The Little Black Book of Online Business: 1001 Insider Resources Every Business Owner Needs

ISBN: 978-0470407769

Long Tail, The, Revised and Updated Edition: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More

ISBN: 978-1401302375

