

INTEL MEASURES TRUST TO GROW ITS BUSINESS

By Don Peppers and Martha Rogers, Ph.D.

We've always said that garnering customers' trust is critical to maintaining their loyalty and long-term value. Now there's proof. The [MIT Center for eBusiness](#) at the Sloan School of Management and chip-maker [Intel](#) recently concluded in a joint study that trust levels affected the number of successfully completed software downloads from Intel's customer support site.

"Trust has always been fundamental to relationships, whether between individuals or between a corporation and its customers," says Professor Glen Urban, who heads up the MIT Center for eBusiness, a research consortium funded by corporate members such as Intel, General Motors and Hewlett-Packard. (Intel contributed \$150,000 to fund the project and provided a support team.) "The traditional paradigm of how trust is developed, which was through real human interaction, has been sharply altered by new technology... If people don't trust you, they won't buy from you."

Six market experiments were conducted over a three-year period. After each phase, both Intel researchers and MIT Sloan students measured traditional online metrics such as clickthroughs and downloads, as well as attitudes on such things as visitors' confidence in Intel, their perception of Intel's benevolence and whether Intel was perceived as working for the customer's interest. The experiments were centered around eight "trust cues" -- specific elements that have positive or negative effects on user trust, such as navigation, friendliness, touch and feel, open space, graphics and personas, among others. Individual rating scores (on a 1-5 scale) were then averaged to create an overall trust measure.

About 3 million people visit Intel's customer-support Web site during an average month, but only about half download successfully, Urban says. Those who are unsuccessful call the support center at a cost to Intel of \$25 per call.

The research showed that Web site improvements drove trust values up, which in turn positively affected the number of downloads and saved Intel millions of dollars in customer-support costs. Conversely, when visitors couldn't find what they were looking for and got frustrated, trust was negatively affected, and the cost of service to Intel went up too.

Logic wizard generates greatest improvement

In the first experiment, trust seals such as TrustE and the Better Business Bureau were added to the site, but, "The Intel brand itself is so trusted that adding a seal didn't provide any incremental value," Urban says. In phase two, navigation aids and assistance tips were added to each screen. Here, successful downloads increased by 6 percent, trust by 3.5 percent and satisfaction by 4.5 percent, according to Bryan Rhoads, Intel

Web Strategist and leader of the Intel project team.

The remaining experiments focused on Intel's line of PC cameras. A logic wizard was added to help people identify which products they owned and to select matching downloads. Next, a persona -- a character named Rosa -- was added to help visitors find what they were looking for. "The biggest result came from adding the logic, which improved downloads from 63 percent to 83 percent," Urban says. Adding the persona, picture and voice moved the needle another 3 to 4 percent and also generated a "statistically significant" increase in trust levels.

Both Rhoads and Urban agree that trusted-advisor techniques can work for other companies and in other channels. Measuring across every channel to create one centralized trust measure would be ideal, but "correlating all that data is quite a task," Rhoads notes, and it's not a project Intel is currently working on.

Intel is, however, currently looking at using the methodology across other online businesses, such as its intranet, human-resources systems and employee remote-learning site, Intel University. "Anywhere you're interacting remotely...or working to reinforce the corporate culture, you can benefit by presenting a...trusted message across the entire organization," Rhoads says.