

## **The Essential Christmas Web-store Makeover**

*Ten great tips to turn online holiday shoppers into eager buyers – and satisfied customers*

When meeting potential clients, you wouldn't dream of showing up late in a mismatched outfit, hair disheveled, with food on your tie and no business card, would you? And if they asked for testimonials or explanations about your company policies you'd hardly say, "Sorry, I don't give out that information."

So why do it on your website?

Just like in person, Internet shoppers look for clues (consciously or not) that suggest you are credible and professional – and they make that judgment call inside of a minute or two. That means you have a small window of time to impress would-be buyers and gain their trust. Unlike in person, however (where you can apologize for tardiness or charm customers with funny tales about how that mustard landed on your lapel) you have zero opportunity to redeem yourself online. One click and they're gone for good.

But fear not. As Web-goers gear up for their Christmas shopping sprees, there *are* things you can do quickly and easily to inspire confidence. Here are some surefire ways to turn browsers into buyers and buyers into regular customers:

1. **Put on your best Web-suit.** You don't need to hire Armani to redesign your site, but make sure it's clean, organized and error-free. Check for typos, broken links,

inconsistencies in graphics, repetition, cluttered appearance and the like (think of it as good grooming habits). Such lack of attention to detail sends a message, however untrue, that you will be equally careless in your business dealings.

2. **Put your best logo forward.** Provide familiar visual clues on your site, such as well-known brand names and logos. Also, list any other trusted brands, including suppliers, business partners and customers — and always display their logos to make a stronger impression. When shoppers see recognizable names, it increases their confidence level in your store. They'll be more inclined to buy your goods knowing *FedEx* was shipping their Christmas gifts instead of *Joe X*.
3. **Proudly wear your credentials.** If you have attained a standard of excellence or have met minimum certification requirements, such as for service or security, let customers know about it. Credible *trust marks*\* displayed on your home page will instill confidence in shoppers so they'll stay on your site and discover all you have to offer. (*\*TrustGauge.com has a nifty utility for measuring the trustworthiness of your website. Simply type in your URL and get instant results. By filling out their form, you can improve your score – and build credibility with customers. Subscribing to certain trust marks is also an easy way to increase your TrustGauge score.*)
4. **Pass out your virtual business card.** Make sure your contact information is visible and indicate all the ways that you may be reached – including your physical business address. Besides being convenient for the customer, it helps

assuage fears that you will take their money and run into cyberspace, never to be found again.

5. **Don't be a Grinch.** Offer freebies (such as trial software, free advice, money-back guarantees, etc...). This allows customers to experience doing business with you before they actually buy anything. Similarly, if your website is easy to navigate (again, see tip #1), it tells customers they can expect their buying experience to be just as pleasant.
6. **Insure – and assure – customers.** The single most effective thing you can do to build customer confidence in the short-term and transform reluctant shoppers into spenders is to provide a third-party insurance policy. Payment services such as PayPal provide Buyer Protection programs that assure your customers they are protected from loss or damage caused by shopping on your site.
7. **Deal with privacy matters.** Shoppers now know that inappropriate use of their personal information can be devastating. Address privacy issues explicitly whenever you are asking for any information. Tell customers why you are collecting the information, how you will use it and how you protect it. Use clear, concise statements. Legal wording and fine print make people think you're trying to hide something.

For those customers expecting compliance with specific privacy laws and regulations, explain why you are in compliance and back it up with relevant third-party assurance. A well-recognized privacy seal, such as from TRUSTe.org, assures them you are taking care to protect and respect their privacy.

8. **Be transparent.** Online fraud is growing at an alarming rate and people are becoming increasingly sensitive to the threat. Unlike when shopping in a store, online shoppers have no way of witnessing what's really going on and often feel vulnerable. Your website should include easily accessible information on why your store is a safe place to shop. Tell customers how you protect them with safe shopper policies. Consider joining the ePublicEye.com Safe Shopping program.
  
9. **Hold the customer's hand.** Once the customer is ready to buy, walk them through each step of the online purchasing process. Assure them at each prompt that you are sensitive to their concerns and deal with each concern or issue as it comes up. Provide a clear link to your mission statement, customer service policies and other aspects of your business that may need explaining. Even better, follow tip #10. The objective is to eliminate those moments of hesitation – especially in the final stages of the sale.
  
10. **Offer a personal touch.** One way to instantly endear your customers is by having a real person assist them prior to and during their purchase. Use today's Internet technologies that provide a variety of communication channels ranging

from IP telephone to instant chat. For higher value transactions, provide a 24-hour toll-free telephone number — with prompt, friendly service. It's often the last touch that sways hesitant holiday shoppers to buy.

At the end of the day, it's all about building trust. Following these tips will definitely improve your online credibility and create more satisfied shoppers at your site (check out the sidebar below for "*Five easy ways to please your online holiday shoppers*"). It will also prepare you for the next critical step in the trust process of winning clients over the long-term, which will yield even higher returns for many seasons to come.

Let me know about your experiences implementing each of these recommendations. I'm confident you'll see a difference.

Happy e-tailing this holiday season!

*Alex Todd is founder and president of Trust Enabling Strategies, a Toronto-based management-consulting firm that helps online businesses to improve sales by developing confidence-building processes. He can be reached at [www.trustenablement.com/Web-store\\_Makeover.html](http://www.trustenablement.com/Web-store_Makeover.html).*

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Sidebar:

### A Christmas bonus

*Five easy ways to please your online holiday shoppers*

1. **Add a touch of holiday spirit** to your site. Don't be excessive. Just add a few colorful graphics to let shoppers know you have Christmas gifts to offer.
2. **Categorize products** to make shopping for gifts easier: Use catchy phrases like "For Her", "For Him", "Gifts under \$50" and "Holiday Specials."
3. **Alleviate clients' worries** by communicating well with them – online, by phone and/or e-mail – and assuring them their gifts will arrive on time.
4. **Be clear about shipping fees and return policies.** The last thing you want is to surprise clients with unexpected fees and conditions regarding your return policy.
5. **Flash a Smile. Tell a joke.** Last but not least, have fun with your customers whenever you get a chance, especially at Christmas. Clients may not see you smiling but they can certainly feel it. And they'll remember you for it too.