E-COMMERCE: SELLING ONLINE

You may have great products on your website but that doesn't mean they will sell.

IT TAKES a great website to convince a visitor to part with money, much more than it takes for a bricks-and-mortar store. There's a lot to consider in getting the online shop right.

Credibility matters. Anonymity is a blessing for web shoppers and a curse for web merchants. In the absence of a friendly sales assistant and a good shop fit-out, a website needs to display all the right signs of a fully-functional web business and make potential customers comfortable doing business.

Start with the ways customers can get in touch if something goes wrong. Clearly display phone numbers, street and email addresses. Next, consider payment security. Using a secure payment gateway issued through a bank or third party such as eWay will assure customers their credit card details are secure. Credit card fraud is a great fear of online shoppers so at the very least, own a secure certificate. Credit card and bank logos feel trustworthy. Display the logos of the cards accepted in the footer of the website near the contact details.

Hordes of small business owners went into business because they were experts or specialists and had great track records of doing what they do best. Tell the story on your website through a company history or professional profile page.

There can never be too many photos. The budding digital photography industry has spawned a society of amateur photographers but professional photography is still the way to go for anyone serious about making money online.

Professional photography ensures products are displayed in their most attractive and sellable light. For emotional purchases such as fashion accessories, shoot a number of different angles of the product, particularly multi-purpose products such as handbags. Keep the photos simple because when displayed on a website, they appear quite small.

Don't forget to include photos of the business owners and team looking smart in their uniforms outside the office. Photos of the management give visitors the personal contact they miss in a face-to-face transaction. It also raises your credibility through recognition.

Information overload. Online shoppers are curious, inquisitive and get annoyed by having to search for extra information. Think carefully about the questions customers ask about each product and answer them. Don't be scared of having too much text because interested customers will read it thoroughly and the search engines love it!

Internet shoppers don't like to be sold to, so by all means mention the benefits of your products but don't forget the facts. Consider writing light-hearted and informal product descriptions as the online shopping demographic tends to be younger so you can afford to be a little less serious.

Prices need to be clear and easy to read. Remember, people from overseas may visit the site so ensure the currency is understood and include a currency converter if you're trying to appeal to the global market.

Clarity in delivery prices. It is frustrating to get to the end of an online shopping experience only to find the postage charges are astronomical or even worse, the company doesn't ship to Australia. Make your delivery prices easy to find and detail various shipping options with realistic timeframes for delivery.

For everyday products, often the delivery charges prevent websites from competing on a level playing field with shopping centres. Consider offering free postage for deliveries over a certain spending level or drop the postage charges altogether and build them into the pricing model instead.

Ask me to buy through calls-to-action. Use strong, affirmative language to ask customers for the sale. Don't just do it at the

bottom of a page either, ask customers to buy at regular intervals throughout the copy. If you don't, customers will wonder what to do next. Buying from your website must be easy and intuitive with limited thought required.

I love shopping online. I love not being harassed by badly-trained sales staff. Bliss is having an easygoing, retail therapy experience in the privacy of my own pyjamas. Concentrating on what the online customer wants in a shopping experience will inevitably bring legions of loyal and happy shoppers to your website.

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