

In Web with Nicky Jurd Successful Online Retail



The most successful online retail websites are infused with a strong sense of community.

You won't see the best online retail operators relying solely on loyalty cards or discount vouchers. They have a long list of loyal customers and keep them coming back by encouraging genuine interaction with the shop, the product range and the website.

Smart, Personal Marketing

Encouraging a community to form around a website isn't as easy as just having the tools like a forum or a blog. It requires input from all people involved in the business; suppliers, owners and customers. The easiest ways to grease the wheels on a new community is to encourage people back to the website through regular and thoughtful communication with your customers.

Discussion Forum

All great online communities feature an active discussion forum with a host of regular contributors. Forums on retail websites are energetic centres of customers enthusiastically chatting about upcoming product releases, how to use various items sold in the shop, and what essential accessories are

needed. These discussions provide invaluable feedback to store owners on how to improve their product range and ultimately make more sales.

Many manufacturers include a discussion forum on their website and the answers to all sorts of small and niggling questions from their customers. These are useful ongoing resources and new customers appreciate the time the companies have taken to invest in this style of knowledgebase.

Blog

Whereas a discussion forum is a medium for conversation with many visitors, a blog is a great avenue for experts to share their news and opinions with the wider community able to leave comment. Blogs are stellar performers on retail websites especially when they're used by a diligent shopkeeper to keep their customers up to date with new products coming into the store, and to talk in detail about how items can be used. They're a wonderful avenue for raising credibility and building ongoing loyalty to your shop.

Email Marketing

Promotions delivered by email generate immediate response through purchases, enquiries, registrations and bookings. Informative email newsletters strengthen relationships with customers by building brand awareness and encouraging return visits to your website.

Look for assistance from professional email marketing companies to avoid raising the ire of your customers who already receive bucketloads of emails.

Web 2.0 Fandangled Bits

The new age of doing business online has brought with it a host of new tools inspired by giving your customers more points of interaction with you. Be brave and look into the new ways of attracting business online.

Twitter

Twitter is a free service which allows you to send short updates to people on your subscription list. The service has a mammoth following worldwide and is known to help keep customers and product users informed and loyal. The messages, called tweets, are very similar to sending a text message on your phone as they are restricted to 140 characters.

Have a peek at how the service works at <http://twitter.com/>.

Facebook Business Pages

Facebook is a household name to the Generation Y crowd, but most businesses have still not tapped into using it as an effective marketing tool. A business page on Facebook is free, and is another way of disseminating information to a focused target demographic which is otherwise tricky to tap into. The pages allow the posting of media such as photos and video and provide an area for your fans to discuss your business.

We've seen progressive local FNQ companies using Facebook Business Pages such as The Cairns Post, Skytrans Cairns Taipans and Cairns Tropical Zoo.

Customer Reviews

The benefits are substantial but allowing customer reviews on your website is only for the bravest of ecommerce vendors. The internet has made it easy for customers to be product savvy, and in researching a purchase they will look to the comments of previous customers to assist in their purchasing decisions. By allowing previous customers to post comments on your website about particular products you will greatly increase the likelihood of purchases from your online shop.

TripAdvisor has built an entire travel business around customer reviews, but have a look at online retail giant Amazon.com for an upstanding example of how customer reviews work.

It’s important to realise that a happy customer wants to shout about you to all their family, friends and colleagues and is just itching to interact with you through your website.

These enthused customers have been used by clever marketers offline for decades and now is a great time to interact with them online.

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