

Turning visitors into customers

The world has changed. Today 70% of all companies and services are originally found by way of the Internet. Tomorrow it will be closer to 95%. Will yours be found?

And when yours is found it had better be good. As mother said, you only get one chance to make a first impression - and that's the one that sticks. What she didn't say was that when it comes to web sites, not only must it create a good impression, it must be effective.

Your web site has two choices. It can choose to sit quietly in the corner like a wimp, or it can engage with visitors, make contact, and do business. Not much different to a real world encounter when you think about it. If you have something to offer, you either go out and tell people about or sit home and get ignored. And guess which web site does more business - the inactive wimp or the pro-active web?

But there's a problem. To interact online, you have to have some way of establishing contact with your visitor. Most importantly, finding out who they are, what they need and when they need it.

Let's get one very common misconception out of the way. However good it is, don't expect your web site to sell your organization, your product or your service immediately; it won't.

Using the Web is called browsing for a reason. Visitors are browsing, not shopping. But be it on the Net or in the local shopping mall, people do see things that catch their eye while browsing [aka window shopping]. They do 'come in' and 'look around'. They may not need what you have at the moment. They may not even be able to afford it right now. But they are interested or they would not have 'come in' and browsed around. Your web site's critical task is to ensure that when they can afford it or when they do need it; they know exactly where to find your web site - easily and quickly. How do we achieve that?

A long time ago bookmarking came along to help visitors who needed to remember interesting sites. Although now modernised as online bookmarking sites, apart from a few more bells and whistles, things are much the same. Not a lot has changed. But let's pause a moment and ask ourselves a question.

Of all the sites *you* bookmark, how many do *you* remember to go back to? Not too many, no doubt. And when was the last time you spent a few minutes clearing out the clutter that has inevitably occurred in that particular cupboard under your computer stairs? Quite a while, is my guess. Don't worry, you're healthy. That makes you much the same as the rest of the human race.

So apart from a few bookmarks that you *do* use regularly, the rest have gotten a little 'untidy'. Meaning you're not liable to do anything with them except one day throw them out and start again. You cannot remember what most of them were about anyway, can you?

If you are relying on other folks to bookmark your site [a minor-miracle in itself] and then come back and visit you later, then Alice may well have found yet another companion in Wonderland. Good luck to you and give our regards to the Red Queen.

Okay, if that doesn't work, what does?

We used the term pro-active. To us web sites that just sit there and wait for visitor requests or signs of interest are re-active [aka: wimps]. They do nothing until poked by the visitor. Pro-active web sites poke the visitor - in the nicest possible way, of course! It is vital your web site finds a way to engage your visitors again in the future. The simplest way to do this is by getting their email address. Then you can contact them. How you do get in touch later, to good effect and without being a nuisance, is a major science all in itself. But if you cannot do it because you do not have their address, all the science and subtlety in the world is worthless. First you must open the contact channel. How?

You must always give in order to receive. The better quality you give, the more you receive. It is a law of nature established long before the Internet or probably even the dinosaurs. Provide a *quality* 'something' to your visitors in exchange for the ability to contact them. Then treat this exchange with the care and respect it deserves and, sooner or later, that visitor will become your client. It may take days, maybe months, but sooner or later, when they have a real need of what you provide, they will come to you and ask for it - guaranteed. You won't have to sell it. They will want to buy it.

Complete the transaction with politeness and efficiency and they will come back again when they need something else you provide. Not only that, they'll tell others about you and your web site. When was the last time you bought something or joined a club and couldn't wait to tell your friends or show your folks what a great buy you just made

We're all pretty much the same in this respect. We love to show off a good deal or a great move. These happy satisfied customers are your most powerful advertising. They came to you and they cost you nothing - except a squeeze of effort, a pinch of thought and a twist good manners; an easy recipe.

Thousands of people may visit your site every day. This is totally futile unless you help them to help themselves. Help them remember you by offering emailed articles, newsletters, RSS feeds, Blogs or whatever does it for you. There are many avenues you can choose from. Whichever you choose, don't just have your web site sit there in the corner looking pretty - and doing nothing. Make it work for its living.

You invested time, effort and probably money in putting it there. Make it earn its keep – it owes you that. Ensure it greets the visitor [simple uncluttered home page - saying what you do], makes them feel comfortable by helping them find their way around [good navigation], has plenty of attractive and useful stock [content], but above all else, ensure you make all efforts to get your visitor's calling card [email address] before they leave your store [web site].

Without it, your web site wimped out. It failed.

Need some guidance in putting this into practice? Need a little help with the exact ways to do it on site? We will review your web and assess its pro-active score. We will make suggestions how it can be improved and show you how to do it. This is an entirely free service - there are no strings attached, no advertising and nothing to pay. If you haven't got your web published yet, we can help build in proactivity right from the start. Just contact us at: proactive [at] tcwwd [dot] com

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