

How To Sell From Your Webstore Part 1

**A VIEWPOINT article
by Peter Parrish**

It is time to get serious about selling effectively in and from your webstore. It is no longer enough just to have a web presence, a demonstration that your business is "progressive." There are now multi-billions of dollars of online sales being done with many millions of online consumers from many thousands of Internet-integrated retail webstores. If your webstore performance is going to meet or exceed your expectations, you need to ensure that your online sales effort meets or exceeds your online customer's expectations.

Product information: When surveyed, every online consumer reports that her first purpose in shopping online is product research. Which brand? Which model? What size? What color? What warranty? How well will it satisfy my need? Is it in stock? How much to deliver? Can I pick up? And, finally – but often not foremost - what's the price?

Does your webstore product information answer these common questions? Does your webstore information answer the less common product-specific questions that your sales team answers for your real-world customers every day? Respond to customer feedback from your real-world sales floor as well as from your webstore. Plan for and invest more time and effort preparing and updating your webstore's product information than on the rest of your webstore's development and maintenance combined.

When assembling online product information, use bullet points for factual information. As applicable, use the same sequence of bullet point facts for every item, e.g. if size is the first bullet point, then make it the first bullet point for every item having size as a characteristic. This aids in delivering critical information to hurried customers, and in providing product comparison information to research-oriented customers. Save the creative writing for judicious use in painting word pictures of featured or signature products as these products might be enjoyed by satisfied customers.

Customer service information: Present customer service policies in readily accessible webpages. Include navigational links to your policy pages on every page of your webstore. If your business gives rise to complex customer service requirements, e.g. multiple shipping locations, oversize item delivery, product category-specific return policies, consider presenting your service policies in a second browser window. In this way your customer can keep track of the necessary service requirements while making her purchase.

Include all your customer service policies. Some examples:

- Payment procedures – payment methods, required customer information, payment processing procedures
- Shipping policies – how soon, how much, partial shipments, back orders
- Return policies – timeframe, procedures, return freight responsibility
- Product warranties – qualifications, limitations
- Integrated shopping – order online, by phone, by fax; delivery or pick-up; exchanges and returns
- Privacy statement – unqualified, unambiguous

Entertaining or selling? As a new and creative medium, the Internet has encouraged important and exciting artistic expression, particularly visual expression. This has resulted in the widespread use of animation and simulated animation in website design. Unless your webstore is principally in the business of entertaining, and unless you are prepared to replace your animated content on a continual basis, do not add animated content to your webstore.

Animated web design can only be effectively delivered to consumers having broadband Internet connections. Broadband service has been installed in less than half of North America's online homes. For the vast majority of online homes, using dial-up service, loading animated content is a slow, and frustrating, process. Even in the best of broadband circumstances, animated content requires your customer to stop shopping to watch your animation. Do you force customers to stop in the aisles of our real-world store to watch your home movies, or your current TV ad? Of course not!

Remember as well that your webstore success, just like your real-world store success, is predicated on repeat customers. Even if your animated interruptions are clever or cute, will your best customer, your repeat customer, enjoy being stopped every time she enters your webstore or navigates through its "aisles," to watch your home movie yet again? If your products or your business are best displayed in an animated presentation, place your animated content in separate browser windows thus allowing your customer the choice of taking time to view or not.

In the coming months, I will discuss other elements of a winning Internet-integration strategy for your integrated retail business. If you have any questions, comments, criticisms or recommendations concerning integrated retailing, please write to me. I would enjoy hearing from you.

Happy retailing,

Peter

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