

Web Design that Sells

...Tips and tricks for selling more online

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INTRODUCTION

Well done! Your online marketing strategy has worked and someone has decided to check out your website. They've heard about what you do and they think it sounds interesting. It's great news and you should pat yourself on the back because 99% of websites don't get this far¹. The bad news is that 99% of those 99% don't end up taking that next step and actually selling something.

This e-book is designed to help you identify and overcome some common failings in website design and sales strategy that prevent sites from making money from the products and services they promote.

There are seven main reasons why sales websites don't do their job properly:

1. People don't trust the site enough
2. It's too hard for customers or potential clients to find what they want
3. The products or services aren't promoted effectively within the site
4. The products or services aren't displayed effectively
5. The sales pitch isn't strong enough
6. The purchasing or enquiry process is too complicated
7. The products or services aren't competitively priced

The information below will help you overcome these problems and make sure your website sells.

HOW TO CONVINCING PEOPLE TO TRUST YOU

Unlike setting up a shop in your local mall, starting a website or online store requires very little long-term commitment. It's also a global medium, so people can run sites from parts of the world that have limited, or non-existent trading regulations. Online stores can come and go in the blink of an eye and there are plenty of dodgy websites out there selling plenty of dodgy products. If you want people to buy something from you, or make an enquiry about your services, you have to convince them that you're a reputable organization who, at best, will provide outstanding service, or at the very least, not rip them off.

There are five main things you can work on to help win people's trust:

- Your company history and experience
- Your reputation
- Your website's appearance
- Your customer support
- Your data security procedures and privacy policies

SHOW YOU HAVE A COMPANY HISTORY, EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

You need to show people that you have a track record and a reputation. Tell people how long you've been in business and what experience you have. Use around 25% of the space on the homepage (or more if it's important) to do this (unless your company is so big and well-known that everyone knows). If you're a new company, use testimonials or endorsements instead. If you haven't got any, get some fast!

STAND BY YOUR REPUTATION, HAPPY CUSTOMERS AND ENDORSEMENTS

The best possible endorsement for your business is the one they heard from a trusted friend before they even got to your website. This is one of the basic tenets of online marketing. The second best thing you can do is show them what other happy clients or customers have said. 'Testimonials' work well and the more credible

they are the better. Anonymous testimonials are a waste of time, as are words of praise from 'John, Sydney'. You need real, credible people to back you up. If you're a large company testimonials can look tacky so have a series of client logos, or showcases instead. The bigger the clients, the better, and don't lie. People should be able to access this information from your homepage without having to scroll.

If you are recommended or endorsed by, or a member, or a sponsor of a professional organisation or industry body make sure you mention it and include logos where possible. If others trust their brand with you, people will be more likely to trust you with their business.

MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION WITH YOUR WEBSITE'S APPEARANCE

First impressions count. If your website doesn't look professionally designed people will think it's run by amateurs. If your site looks better than your competition you're naturally going to make a better first impression than them. If you're on a tight budget, at least make sure your website is of the same visual standard as everything else out there or no-one will take you seriously. Use a [templated design](#) if you absolutely have to, but understand it won't be tailored to meet your exact needs or target market and understand your website may end up looking like everyone else's.

PROVIDE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SUPPORT AND SHOW CONTACT DETAILS

People want to know what happens if they have a question, or if something goes wrong. If you show that you are there for them they'll appreciate it. Give them a freecall number to phone you on (and display it at the top right of every page), provide an email address that people answer, not just an anonymous form (there are [ways to obscure it so you don't get spam](#)), have an online chat feature they can use. At the very least, they want to know that if worst comes to worst, there is a physical door they can come and knock on to demand answers. If you don't prominently show your street address (or if your street address is in Nigeria) people will be suspicious.

Make sure you also let people know what your returns and refund policy is. Make this information obvious and easily accessible.

MAKE SURE YOUR SECURITY AND PRIVACY POLICIES ARE ROBUST

Any credit card processing must be done on secure pages and you have to have a privacy policy prominently displayed. No bank will let you process transactions without these measures in place. If the bank wouldn't trust you, why should your customers or clients?

Make sure you have links in your website's footer that point people to your policies and cite them whenever you're asking for information. They won't give you their personal details if it's not clear what you'll do with them.

MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO FIND WHAT THEY WANT

The easier you make it for people to find what they want, they more likely you are to make a sale. The two ways to do this are with navigation and search functions.

NAVIGATION

Each page should be as few clicks as possible from the homepage. If you have a large number of products or services use drop-down menus to show sub-categories. If you have lots of categories use '[breadcrumbs](#)' at the

top of each page below the main navigation so if people end up deep into your site they can see where they are in relation to the sites hierarchy.

Make sure your logo links to your homepage and make sure you have a 'Home' link in your menu, because that's how most people will try and bail out if they get lost.

Don't open pages (internal or external) in new windows because people need to be able to use their back button if they get confused. The back button is their life-line and it's the second-most used navigation feature (after following hypertext links). Users know that they can go anywhere on the Web and always be saved by a click or two on Back to return them to familiar territory.ⁱⁱ

SEARCH BOXES

Have a site search, and make sure it works. It's no good if the results people get are obscure or irrelevant. Make sure your search can make suggestions in case people don't know how to spell something correctly. ([Google's Custom Search function](#) is brilliant for this).

Make sure you stick the search box in the top right hand corner where people expect to see it.

CREATE EFFECTIVE PROMOTIONS ON YOUR SITE

Effectively promoting your products on the site isn't about whacking ads everywhere. People are used to ads yelling at them so they do their best to ignore them. If there are particular products or services you want to promote above others here are some tips for making them stand out:

- Devote no more than 25-50% of the space 'above the fold' on your homepage to promoting the products or services you really want to sell. If you've only got one product or service stick to that rule. You need to allocate space above the fold on your homepage to convincing them to trust you and making it easy for them to find other information on your site, don't get over excited by promoting stuff or your site will look like the classifieds section of a newspaper.
- Make sure promotions don't look like banner ads – ads get in people's way and they hate them. They don't like clicking them. Promotions should be there to help them, read [Jakob Nielsen's research](#) on the topic.
- Offer a free trial or demonstration wherever possible.
- If something is on special, show the price difference.
- Use 'Best Seller' or 'Most Popular' lists (check out how [Amazon.com](#) does it).
- Utilise 'People who bought this also bought' promotions when people are viewing products or services (make it up if you have to!)
- Start a newsletter, but don't force people to sign up for it. Make your product so good they want to know when or how to get more. Read [Seth Godin on permission marketing](#) for more information.
- Offer discounts for repeat business.
- Offer a gift reminder service so people can get an email at the same time next year prompting them to make another purchase (but again, don't force it on them).

DISPLAY YOUR PRODUCTS OR SERVICES EFFECTIVELY

Lay your site out the right way and people will rejoice that they found you; hit them over the head with a lengthy sales pitch, or treat them badly and they'll never come back. The following guidelines are useful for formatting content so that people get the information they want and are then prompted to make a purchase or enquiry.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Make it obvious how the person can obtain your product or service (or just make an enquiry).
- Put a 'call to action' at the top of the page next to the product (and at the end of the description if it's long). This should be a button to buy now, add to cart, or a link to an enquiry form or some other way for the person to take that next step.
- Put the most important information 'above the fold' (so they don't have to scroll down).
- Use 'features' boxes to illustrate strongest selling points.
- Break up long copy with neatly formatted headlines that get attention but make sure they follow the same style conventions as the rest of the page layout. You don't have to make something bold and red for it to stand out (although it probably will stand out, it will look desperate and tacky). Employ a designer to create a set of heading styles for you that draw attention but also complement the overall design in a professional way.
- Break up long copy with images placed on alternate sides of the page as you scroll down. This will catch people's eyes if they're scanning down the page and draw them to that section.

DISPLAYING PRODUCTS WELL

- Use an image gallery where they can view thumbnails and larger versions. Make sure the image gallery is visible above the fold.
- Make the photography as professional as possible (but don't steal copyrighted images)
- Show availability. Consider showing how many items are left if inventory is low (scarcity creates demand).
- Show price and tell them how much they'll save by choosing you over someone else, or the recommended retail price.
- Show product reviews and allow people to make their own comments. People will appreciate honesty, but make sure you moderate comments to prevent spam and defamation lawsuits.

WHY YOU SHOULD AVOID LONG SECTIONS OF TEXT

Credible research has shown that people generally only have time to read about 20% of an average web pageⁱⁱⁱ. Read this [great article on how little people read](#) by Dr Jakob Nielsen if you'd like an insight. If you want people to read more, give them less.

If you need more than a couple of screen lengths to sell your product's features, chances are, your sales pitch is fatally flawed. Have you ever had a call from a telemarketer or door-to-door salesperson that just wouldn't shut up? Did that make you a) want to buy something, or b) punch them in the face?

There's a very good reason why advertising textbooks are very fond of quoting Cicero's famous line: "If I'd had more time, I would have written a shorter letter". If you need further convincing, read the [words of some of the world's great philosophers and writers](#) on the issue of brevity.

WRITE COPY THAT CONVINCES PEOPLE TO BUY

An Amazon Forest of textbooks has been written on how to sell stuff to people, but some basic principles of selling online are:

- Show how your products or services meet their need(s)
- Explain the benefits
- Explain why people should choose you over your competition

- Appeal to their hearts, minds and instincts
- Talk at their level
- Create a sense of urgency

If you want the best results, employ a copywriter to get the spiel correct and check out websites like <http://www.justsell.com/> for tips and advice.

MAKE IT EASY FOR USERS TO MAKE A PURCHASE (OR ENQUIRY)

If you've got the user to the checkout or the enquiry page you're almost home and hosed. Don't stuff it up now.

- Make it easy for the user to 'checkout' from any page.
- Make it easy for the user to view their cart from any page.
- Don't force them to sign up for anything, make an account or choose a password until they've given you their money. Get their money first, then worry about the other stuff.
- Make sure the payment process is secure.
- Show them your privacy policy (not the whole thing, just summarise it and link to the whole thing).
- Don't force them to sign up to your newsletter. People respond
- Don't force them to give you more details than you need – they don't want to tell you their birthday, their mobile phone number, their residential address or the colour of their underwear.
- Offer PayPal, heaps of people have it and it's easy, although if it's your only payment method you can look unprofessional (ie. it looks like you can't afford proper bank fees or a proper payment gateway).

BE COMPETITIVE

In the end, most people just want the best deal. Make sure you've done your research and you know that your costs are priced to meet the market. You can do everything else in this article better than everyone, but if you're way over-priced, there's no point. It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how many site owners don't look around to see what others are charging. If you do provide a service that costs more make sure you explain why.

EXAMPLES

The following examples illustrate some of the principles from this article. Visit them and learn.

TEN WEBSITES THAT SELL PRODUCTS WELL

- 37 Signals (<http://www.37signals.com/>)
- Interspire (<http://www.interspire.com/>)
- The Body Shop (<http://www.thebodyshop.com.au>)
- Flowers.com.au (<http://www.flowers.com.au>)
- Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>)
- CafePress (<http://www.cafepress.com>)
- Barnes and Noble (<http://www.barnesandnoble.com>)
- RealEstate.com.au (<http://www.realestate.com.au>)
- DealsDirect (<http://www.dealsdirect.com.au>)
- Zappos (<http://www.zappos.com>)

TEN WEBSITES THAT SELL SERVICES WELL

- e-CBD (<http://www.e-cbd.com>)
- Ilisys (<http://www.ilisys.com.au/>)
- Yellow Pages (<http://www.yellowadvertising.com.au/>)
- Beaurepairs (<http://www.beaurepairs.com.au/>)
- Etrade (<http://www.etrade.com.au>)
- Worldwide (<http://www.worldwide.com.au/>)
- Jenny Craig (<http://www.jennycraig.com.au>)
- James Home Services (<http://www.jameshomeservices.com.au/>)
- Net Registry (<http://www.netregistry.com.au/>)
- Elite Traders Group (<http://www.elitetradersgroup.com/>)

RESOURCES

- <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/>
- <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/designmistakes.html>
- <http://www.webdesignpractices.com>
- <http://www.justsell.com>

REFERENCES

ⁱ <http://www.pandia.com/sew/383-web-size.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/990530.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/percent-text-read.html>