

# Credibility Counts

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If prospective customers don't believe you, you might as well start your "Going Out of Business Sale" right now.

This is especially true on the Internet, where anyone can (and evidently does!) put up a website. Sources of information in a site may be unclear. You may find it difficult to identify the author or publisher and wonder about their motives. The qualifications of the source to speak on the particular topic or sell a particular product may be questionable.

Because of this, credibility is an important concern when you're using the Internet, whether you're the visitor or the webmaster. As a shopper or 'Net surfer, you don't want to quote an "expert" who proves not to be, or send credit card information to some sleazy con artist whose site disappears before the order arrives. As a web designer or webmaster, you cannot afford to be seen by site visitors as anything less than honest, ethical and aboveboard.

Yet few sites use more than half of the strategies that build trust in the site visitor's mind, according to usability expert Jakob Nielsen and the Nielsen Norman Group. In October 2000, they tested 20 big e-commerce sites and found that the average site complied with only 55% of guidelines for trustworthy design. Smaller sites tend to use even fewer of the recommendations.

So what can you do to make sure your website is believable and builds trust in the mind of your visitors?

Plenty. Here are some pointers.

- Make sure that information about your company is complete and easy to find. Include full contact information. Photos of the principal employees help your visitor trust you because they come to feel they know you.
- If you're selling something, don't be coy and make visitors hunt all over for the price. Price it fair and put it there.
- Give enough information about your product or service to allow the visitor to make a decision. YOU know why your "Wonder Widget" is worth \$29.95, but your visitor doesn't. This also means including important information such as shipping costs and return policies.
- Make sure your site looks professional, loads quickly, is up to date, and is free of spelling and punctuation mistakes.
- If you collect personal information (names, email addresses, credit card information), use it appropriately and securely. Explain why you're collecting the information and what you will do with it.
- Make sure your site visitors can reach someone quickly if they need help.
- Give your visitors what they came for. If they're looking for information on "how to build an igloo", don't make them wait through a Flash presentation of a snowstorm before they get to the instructions.

According to an old saying, "Honesty is the best policy." If you want to be successful on the Internet, it's an essential policy as well.

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Diana Ratliff believes your website should work as hard as you do. Visit <http://www.dratliff.com> to learn how a website "makeover" can increase your sales and improve your image.

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