

Industry Pro Interview: The Selling Power of Consumer Confidence

By Karon Thackston

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Butch Pujol came into his business through a unique series of events. Being taken advantage of himself didn't set well with Butch and he realized that many others had been through the same thing. His background lends itself to Butch's need to provide service and to care for others. The combination of these elements came together in a realization that when you take care of your customers - when you put forth a strong image of consumer confidence - your customers take care of you by granting you their loyal and repeat business.

Let's see what consumer advocate and consultant Butch Pujol has to say in response to questions about scams, business confidence and the power of trust.

KARON: You have a very interesting site, Butch. Tell me why you decided to devote your business to helping prevent scams and boosting consumer trust.

BUTCH: Karon, you hit the nail on the head. The key word is 'preventive'. I am also a Diver Medic, Hyperbaric Observer, EMT and Registered Nurse. I have spent a lot of time treating illness and injury but I also spent a lot of time teaching preventive medicine. I still do what I do best, I just apply my knowledge to a different area and medium. I can tell you, Karon, there are a lot of good businesses out there that mean well but don't know how to do it right and that's hurting their sales.

KARON: So what can we, as legitimate Internet business owners, do to provide a feeling of trust at our sites? How can we 'do it right'?

BUTCH: As a consumer, the first thing I look for is contact information: name, address, phone number and email contact (and by email I mean name@yourdomain.com not something like sales@hotmail.com.) Next I try to learn what you are about. A picture of the owner with some company history works very well. Lastly, I look for some things like: a mission statement, a privacy statement, hours of operation, and customer satisfaction guarantees. They should all be clear, concise and straightforward.

Another thing that adds credibility are testimonials with URL or email addresses so you know for a fact they are real. Testimonials without contact information are worthless.

KARON: Well, I can see there are lots of things to watch for when determining if a business is legit

or not. Butch, that covers the consumer side, but there are many people who would love to start an online business (or expand an online business). Unfortunately, they have heard so many horror stories that they are scared. What can they do to ensure they are not being taken advantage of?

BUTCH: Well, truly two things play the biggest role. Common sense and Internet safety education. Let me give you an example of a very effective tactic UNethical businesses use to get you to buy their product.

Let's say you are looking for a marketing package and you arrive at a Web site and in the sales pitch you read, "This is your last chance to get this marketing package for \$99.00. After midnight tonight the price will go up to \$149.00". This statement works on greed and impulse. If you don't buy it now it will cost you \$50.00 more later. But when I see that statement I leave the Web site because common sense tells me they only want my money. I will bet you a dollar to a doughnut if you go back one week later it says the same thing - if they are still there. It's not a scam if it REALLY is a limited time offer, but many people have the same thing up every single day.

Get educated about the tactics these scam artists use and you will be much better equipped to spot them before they have a chance to take your money and run.

KARON: Butch, what can we do if we have been taken advantage of?

If you have been taken advantage of, gather all receipts and communications with the offending business. If you have not contacted the offending business try to do so and work out a resolution. Go to their site and print out any information you can find on guarantees, statements of policy, support, terms or conditions made on the site that can help your case.

If you cannot resolve the issue with the company sit down and write a letter detailing what has happened. Then contact your credit card provider and begin proceedings to have the fraudulent charges removed. Next, contact the BBB and the Attorney General's office of your state and file a complaint. I also advise you to contact the International Council of Online Professionals at <http://www.i-cop.org> and file a report. Send the following information to <mailto:Report@i-Cop.org>

- * The name of the company
- * The URL of the company
- * The email address of your contact with the company
- * The name of your contact with the company (if available)
- * The date of your order
- * The order or transaction number of your order
- * Details of your complaint

KARON: Thanks Butch. That gives us a lot to use should we ever have the misfortune of dealing with an unscrupulous business. I see that you offer a large variety of products and services at your site. I guess all these have "cleared" your stringent security checks, right?

BUTCH: You bet! I've investigated each and every one of these companies myself. I use their products on a regular basis, I've had contact with the business owner, I've checked out their customer service practices and I know for a fact that the products and services they provide are 100% safe. I won't deal with anyone who doesn't pass the test, and I certainly wouldn't recommend them to my site visitors as viable resources if they were not.

KARON: Well, I don't mean to put you on the spot - but would you be willing to provide a "consultation" service for Business Essentials subscribers? Perhaps some would like to have you review their site to be sure they are doing everything they can to promote a feeling of security and trust. What would you charge for something like that?

BUTCH: I have been on the spot from the first question you asked laugh. But to answer your question, yes, I would be honored. My consultation fee is normally \$75.00 per hour but for Business Essentials subscribers I will provide a consultation for \$50.00 per hour.

KARON: Thanks, Butch. That's a very generous discount that I know will pay off in greater consumer confidence that - in turn - will increase sales, too.

And I appreciate your time! I've learned a lot and know that Business Essentials' subscribers are now better prepared to improve their own sites as well. For additional information about online professionalism and consumer confidence, visit Butch's site at <http://www.safeinternetbusiness.com>

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