

14 Steps To A Trustworthy Website

By Maria Marsala

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Have you ever visited a web site and been attacked by screaming pop-up ads, gotten lost in a clutter of banner ads, had things flash and go boom? And have you ever visited a site that was informative, easy to navigate and generally pleasant to peruse?

Which site gained your trust? Which site would you revisit? The more user-friendly building tools you use on your site, the more trust will be developed with your viewers. With this in mind, here are expert tips for making your online store trustworthy...

Purchase an appropriate domain name

Paying for your own domain name builds trust and is professional looking. Your own domain name will be - free of all advertisements (except products you sell or recommend). You want to sell your visitors on the content of your site - not the products of other advertisers.

Use domain name email addresses

When searching for a host for your site, look for packages that include POP3 accounts (preferred) and alias accounts (second in line). This will enable you to send email from your site (you@yourbusiness.com) which looks much more professional than you@freeemailaccount.com It is easier to trust someone who has evidently made an investment in their business.

Include contact information

Provide phone numbers, hours of operation (including time zone), a business mailing address and an email address. PO Boxes are not considered addresses. Many companies won't deliver to PO Boxes, and many visitors won't purchase from you if you use one. Work from home? Add a suite or building number to your home/apartment. Or use a mail forwarding service for a real address.

Add contact links

Place at least one way for your visitors to contact you on each page and place your Webmaster's contact information on at least the bottom of the front page. This way your visitors can request information from you, and if there is a problem with your site, they can write to the Webmaster. Even if you and the Webmaster are the same person, place the Webmaster's email address on the site.

Keep your content updated

To be current, the content of your site must be no more than 6 months old. The pages must include an up-to-date "Last Updated _____". Even if you don't change the site information (because it is completely correct and updated) do keep the date updated.

Include a personal touch

Provide an "About Me/Us" page. Provide the names of the owner, president, executives, and staff on the contact page. Include individual and group pictures, small biographies if relevant, and email addresses where they can be quickly contacted. Don't make it look as though your site's owners want to be anonymous, which obviously generates suspicions.

Avoid enter pages and splash screens

Do you have an "Enter page" or splash screen on the front of your site? If so, delete it now! You will lose visitors who want information quickly because they'll go to a rival site instead. Worse than an enter page is an enter page that forces someone to download a program such as Flash. If you want to use the option of Flash pages, fancy pointers etc., give visitors the option of viewing them. Don't force them to download any programs.

Cater to everyone

Include tags with your images to assist those with sight disabilities and the hundreds of thousands of people all over the world who use library-based text-only computer software and Web browsers.

Make it quick

Ensure that a majority of your pages load in less than 20 seconds with a 56K modem. Most visitors will not have the patience to stick around much longer than that and will simply move on. A site that loads quickly and is neatly designed, will show that you are a professional company. It will also boost confidence in your potential buyers.

Request recommendations

Ask your clients for testimonials and permission to use their whole name on your Web site. If they don't feel comfortable doing so, find others who will.

Link it

Make sure that links within your site work. Ask your Web designer to design an interesting "error" page that will allow your visitors to get back on track if a page they bookmarked no longer exists. Make sure that links to sites outside your website work. Download a links checker and use it monthly. Sometimes you'll find that you've linked within your site to a page you've moved or removed. Other times you'll find that pages outside your site have disappeared or are changed.

Spell it right

If you want your site to be as professional as it could be, put each page through a spell checker or hire an excellent proofreader. Don't underestimate the value of a properly spelled site.

Provide guarantees

If you have a money back guarantee on your service or product, say so. If you don't, say so. Do guarantees include or exclude returning the shipping or handling fees? How about a privacy policy for your newsletter emailing list or code of ethics? Clearly place any type of guarantee on your site.

Secure purchases

When you purchase from the best sites, the site owner will provide you with the most secure purchase program available. This includes a secure server, secure gateway, and information that informs you that your purchase is as secure as is currently possible. When you are taken to another website to make your purchase, notice if the new site mentions that it's been secured. If it doesn't say so, go find the product on a site that does.

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