

# Reliability: Back up your promises with action!

By Phil Hanson

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Summary: When you promote yourself and your business as being reliable, your Web site's visitors are more apt to become reliable customers.

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Reliability is an important part of your reputation, so be prepared to back up your promises with action. If you gain a reputation for unreliability, it can sink your business. If you promise to deliver the moon, deliver it — on time. Never mind that the guy who ordered it probably won't have a place to put it when it arrives. That's his problem. Your problem is to deliver it, because you said you would.

Promises are usually expressed, but they can also be implied. Regardless of its form, if a promise appears on your Web site for the purpose of soliciting business, it's a promise you should plan on keeping if you plan on staying in business.

Information is a staple of every on-line business. Whether you sell information as a commodity from your Web site or use it to sell products or services, you can't escape the necessity that it be accurate and up-to-date. Inaccurate or obsolete information plants the suggestion that you're unreliable.

If you promote and market services from your Web site, take care that those services are performed exactly as stipulated in your advertising copy. It's irrelevant whether you perform the services yourself, or whether they're performed by a third party whom you promote, any dissatisfaction with those services will reflect, badly, directly upon you.

Merchandise sold from your site needs to be shipped as soon as possible. Shipping information (product name, description, identification numbers, amount, size, color, etc.) should tally with the order information. Make shipping methods and costs known in advance. It's important to get it right the first time because any foul-ups result in unnecessary delays and additional shipping charges, the costs of which will come out of your pocket. Shipping errors not only wipe out your profit margin, but enough of them can also wipe out your customer base.

Depending on the kinds of products, services or information you sell from your Web site, you may find it essential to provide technical support and/or a means of addressing other customer service issues. If you promise your customers technical support, available 24/7, it had better be competent and available 24/7. 23/6 won't cut it. Make every effort to resolve customer complaints, as quickly as possible, to the customer's satisfaction.

Eventually, you'll encounter someone from that rare group of people who wouldn't be happy if they were bubbling over with joy. You can bend over forward, backward or sideways, you can do handsprings and somersaults and you can jump through hoops; nothing you do will satisfy them. No doubt some of these people use dissatisfaction as a ploy to get something for nothing, but others use it just to have something to complain about. Either way, doing business with them is a losing proposition for you. There's no way you can win.

Product warranties, satisfaction guarantees and monetary refunds are other ways you can enhance your reputation for reliability. Provide an easy cancellation process if you offer goods or services (an opt-in newsletter or e-zine, for example) on a continuing basis. Anything you can do to set a potential customer's mind at ease will work in your favor. They'll not only be more likely to buy from you a first time, they'll be more likely to come back and buy from you again. And, they'll be more likely to recommend you to their friends.

It takes a lot longer to build a good reputation than it takes to bring one down. If visitors to your site perceive you or your business to be less than reliable, they won't become your customers. Let them know that when they do business with you, they'll be doing business with a reliable professional. Provide quality products or services and reliability, because those are your strongest selling points.

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