

The Personal Touch

By Bob Osgoodby

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Sure, the e-tools available for an online merchant are great. We have up to the minute product selection on our web pages, and auto-responders that can follow up requests. We have our own online mall, immediate payment methods to prevent that "cooling off" period, secure sites for financial transactions, and all sorts of e-tools at our disposal. But what is wrong? You're not being overwhelmed with sales, and barely making expenses.

Stop for a moment. Why are potential customers leaving your e-store without placing an order. Assuming that you have a decent product and prices, why are they not buying.

Possibly they have questions that are not being answered, and would like to talk with a live human being. The brick and mortar store has the edge over the e-store, when faced with a customer that needs personal contact to feel comfortable.

If someone has reached this point, usually all they need is a little assurance before placing their order. And here is the funny part - they may not even want to talk with someone, but may just want to be sure there is someone they can contact if there is a problem.

If you don't list proper contact information at your virtual business, you may be losing customers. Your name and e-mail address will go a long way. Even better, give them a physical address and a telephone number they can call. You may wish to have an "800" number, but you will get a lot of "tire kickers". Even if you don't give a free number, just the fact that there is a number listed goes a long way in allaying their fears.

Let your potential customers know, that if they have questions, they can email you their phone number, and you will call them. Many times they won't, as all they really wanted, was to know they are dealing with a real person.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words - consider putting your picture on your web site. This gives instant identification to your name and goes a long way in building customer confidence.

If someone requests information from you, do you respond in a timely manner? Letting days pass, without even acknowledging their request, is a major "turn off".

Why not send an automatic reply that let's them know their request was received, and you will get back to them shortly. If it will take a day or so to get back, let them know. Don't forget that humans have egos, and egos need to be stroked.

An auto-responder is really a great thing, and should be in everyone's marketing bag of tricks. They serve a vital role in your advertising efforts by providing someone with information in which they have an interest.

But some people have confused things here a bit. They don't understand the meaning of "NO". If I have made up my mind I am not interested in your offer, I really don't want you to give me the same, or similar information again, and again, and again. These are just as aggravating as web sites that won't let you escape, and they keep opening up additional windows that you have to close.

Some people have set up their auto-responders to send 5-7 follow-up notes. I refer to these as "nag notices". They must feel that if they "nag" you enough, you will give in and buy their product or service. I don't know about you, but with each one I get, my resistance stiffens. I may have been a prospect before, but the timing just wasn't right. These tactics have caused the loss of a prospect.

When you get an order, do you remember to say "Thank You" to your customer? Those two little words can be the key to getting repeat business from them.

E-commerce is here to stay, but the mortality rate of "wannabes" will be high. Those that remember the "Personal Touch" will be among the survivors.

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