

# SBM

*The Source for Business Owners*

ST. LOUIS  
**Small  
Business  
Monthly**

VOL. 18, ISSUE XI

DECEMBER 2005

## Does Your Website Create A Great Customer Experience Learn What Your Site Can Do For Customers?

by Wendy Gauntt

We all know the basic structure of a website by now...a home page, info "about us," product or service details and a contact page. Maybe you've even got an online store. But is your website truly customer-centric? Think about your favorite websites. Chances are, you visit these websites because they make your life easier, not because they have an "about us" page. Find ways that your website can make your customers' lives easier, and you will gain loyal advocates who will spread the word about your business.

### **Create A Memorable Shopping Experience**

Why did Amazon.com make it when so many online stores crashed and burned? The answer is simple: It created a great shopping experience. Customers can access detailed information on an unbelievable range of products, read uncensored commentary from people who have used the product, and easily find similar products that might be an even better fit for their needs. Amazon.com also recommends new items based on past purchases, and particularly appreciated are the emails that alert me to new books by my favorite authors. You can even view your complete order history.

### **Deliver All The Product Info Anyone Could Ever Want**

You probably have a drawer, a shelf, maybe a binder, where you keep all those product manuals. But can you actually find the one you need, when you need it? Well, empty that useless drawer of manuals. Now you can go online to the manufacturer's website, search by model number for whatever you need, and pull up the product manual online. You'll often find extras such

as special how-to articles and troubleshooting tips.

You can take a similar approach when shopping for a new fridge. You want a big one, but have limited space in the kitchen. After using Consumer Reports to find the best choices, visit the manufacturers' websites for detailed specs including the exact measurements. One choice might be too tall, but another choice might fit with a half-inch to spare. Think of all the time saved running around to different stores with a measuring tape!

### **Let The Website Do Your Work**

None of us have spare time these days, but computers have plenty of processing power that can be put to good use. For example, we've just launched a new online support system to handle our clients' tech support needs. Clients can submit a problem on our website, send us an email, or—if their Internet connection is down—they can call us with a problem and the voicemail will be automatically submitted to the system. We've set up special emergency procedures so that we can handle the most urgent issues promptly—the system notifies us by office phone, cell phone, home phone, email, or text message depending on the urgency and the time of day. Like Amazon, we're keeping detailed information available so our clients can review past issues and their resolutions. Basically, our website is actively working for us 24/7, alerting us to emergencies, logging the work we do, and reminding us of the follow-ups we need to handle. At the same time, it allows our clients greater access to us—they can see complete information on what's been scheduled and what's been done, and they can reach us when they need us.

Another way our website works for us is with a technology from Microsoft, called SharePoint, which allows us to collaborate on our projects online. We set up a special restricted-access area on our website for each client project. Everything we do on the project, from task lists to work products, are stored on this easy-to-use website. Our clients like it because they can pull up their project information at any time, without searching through old emails or calling us to resend an attachment. We like it because we know we're always pulling up the latest version of our work, and we can access it from any location with an Internet connection.

What work can your website do? It all depends on your business...but consider some of these possibilities: online surveys, a detailed knowledge base that answers common questions, training online or by email, live or prerecorded web seminars, interactive calculators, planning tools, articles, sample work products or a portfolio, video demonstrations, and live chat.

### **Build An Architecture Of Participation**

One of the latest catch phrases in the online community is "building an architecture of participation." What does this mean? Get your customers involved—let them participate in your business and on your website. EBay.com has done a brilliant job of this by allowing buyers to rate sellers. This simple feedback system gives us a way to trust and buy from strangers halfway around the world.

Other examples? Many sites have been inspired by Amazon.com to allow customer feedback on their products. Netflix.com, where you can rent DVDs, tells you not only

what movies people rate the best, but also the movies you're most likely to enjoy based on the ratings of others like yourself. Online fantasy football is supposed to be pretty awesome. Many sites encourage interaction with public forums where people can share common interests. And when you see the "four forks" rating on Epicurious.com, you'll know the recipe must be delicious!

### **Follow Google's Lead**

Google has a highly innovative company culture. They encourage this by allowing employees to pursue pet projects. Many terrific Google services, like the toolbar and desktop search, were created in this way; up and coming innovations can be viewed at <http://labs.google.com>. The reason I bring this up? Don't be afraid to try new ideas.

Some will work, some will fail—but your willingness to innovate will set you apart from your competitors. All you need to remember is one thing: create a great customer experience, and the business will follow.

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