

# Use

# Tech

# to Build

# Trust

Enhance customer relations and sales with tools that improve service and make you look good.

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**T**OO OFTEN, TECHNOLOGY and people skills seem like they work against each other in a business environment.

**They actually should reinforce each other and help optimize customer service. The problem typically stems from how software is being used, and the solution lies in successfully integrating it into your shop.**

**THE POINT OF** using technology to interface with customers is to enhance communications and streamline interactions with your clients. Getting the most out of technology means understanding what it can do from a relational standpoint, as well as its technical capabilities. This calls for exploring ways to use it more effectively.

Trust is one of the key factors in sales and the overall customer-business relationship. Developing trust should be an implicit goal at every point of contact, including the electronic ones. Online selling automatically provides several advantages when it comes to this.

For starters, having a website or web store makes your company look more professional; this inspires confidence and trust. An online presence has become an expectation, and not selling — or at least having a place for people to visit your company — on the Internet creates the perception that your business is antiquated.

Being online also puts your showroom in the customer's comfort zone. What setting is more conducive to a feeling of trust on customers' part than their homes or offices?



Also, gearing your site to facilitate their needs and then following through lets you take customers' trust to a higher level. It's not enough to easily collect data or offer an online designer; use these and other tools to be more responsive.

### **AUTO-RESPONDING**

**START WITH CUSTOMERS'** inquiries — even if it's just letting them know you got their message and they will hear from you soon. Ideally, the goal is to acknowledge receipt of the information and respond with a full-fledged follow-up within 24 hours. This makes customers feel like their business is important to you and it's a positive indicator of how jobs will be handled. This provides a great example of how properly using of technology can enhance customer relations.

We're talking about an automated response to various types of contacts. There are software plug-ins for websites, some of which are free, that send a response within five minutes of an inquiry. With most email services, you can build in canned responses or premade emails saying that you got the message and will follow up soon.

In every automated-response scenario — even voice mail — don't conclude your message at "Thank you for contacting us." Instead, also include a call to action. Invite the customer to check out your FAQ page, look at a video or check out your online designer. This can help speed up the sales process and answer questions.

If the customer provides you with upfront information, such as his company address, type



### **The Personal Touch**

Don't expect technology to do it all with respect to responding to customers, especially first-timers. Following are some ways you can still use technology, but add a personal feel:

Give 'em a voice. With new leads, spending five minutes to touch base with a quick phone call or email — preferably within 24 hours — can establish a personal connection and perhaps expedite the sales process. The phone number even can be set up to go to an automatic voice mail, but it still provides

a method of getting in touch with you personally.

Develop a plan aligned with technology. Gather the necessary information to plug into your online quoting tool or designer to standardize and speed the process while facilitating customers' transition to online ordering.

Maximize your online tools. After generating a quote online during your phone conversation, you can offer to send it with a proof. You also can include a link to the online store in your email and set up an account for the customer so he can check the job status or order online next time.

of business or area of interest, take advantage by actually responding to it rather than simply adding it to your marketing list.

If the initial inquiry is through an online form or email, the automated response will be generalized. The most typical question customers ask is, "How much will this cost?" For an email inquiry, the all-purpose — and necessary — response is something along the lines of: "I would be pleased to give you a quote, but I need more information. If you could take a few minutes to answer the following questions or give me a call, I can let you know the price."

Your response should include a list of questions concerning the type, color and garment sizes to be printed; the type of artwork and number of colors; quantity; etc. Ask all the necessary questions so you can tell the customer how much the job will cost and how long it will take.

These questions should elicit the same information as an online designer, form or quoting tool, and you can include a link to an online alternative as an option. Also, remember these questions when discussing job particulars with the customer by phone.

### DON'T WAIT...EDUCATE

A QUICK ONLINE tutorial that shows how to use your company's technology can lessen the reservations of customers who are hesitant to try it. It has to be easy and you must be available to answer questions, but it's a good way to get them to take the first step.

Education can play a major role in building trust and adding value to your customer relationships. It can differentiate your company and give it an edge. With a growing number of companies in our industry that are more production-oriented than software-savvy, showing customers how to leverage the best of both worlds can yield big dividends.

For example, set up a web store that showcases examples of your work. Include descriptions of services you provide, such as inventory management and fulfillment. Let customers know you offer 24-hour ordering and faster online turnaround.

Today's technology also enables you to promote trust by accentuating your company's strengths and capabilities, like using premium products, providing super-soft prints, being green and supporting the community. Customers won't know about these things unless you tell them.

Videos and photos are great ways to market your company, what it does and how it does it. If you have an online designer, or a way of doing e-commerce or addressing a problem, post a video about it on your website. Boost your company's credibility and create trust by quickly and efficiently delivering the message



#### TALKING ON THE PHONE

You will capture more sales if you take five minutes to call a new lead to establish a personal connection.



#### AUTOMATED EMAIL RESPONSE

An automated email response to queries assures prospects that they will hear back from your company within 24 hours.



#### ART APPROVAL

Even during a phone conversation, you can create a design and have a proof ready to send after hanging up.



#### ORDER STATUS

Setting up a way for customers to check on a job's status is another confidence booster.



#### WEBSITE EXAMPLE

A professional website inspires consumer confidence and trust.



#### INFOGRAPHIC

An infographic can be a photo, graph, diagram or similar illustration that tells a story quickly, concisely and in an entertaining fashion.

that you're offering a solution, not just a product.

An infographic is another great way to educate customers. It shows them what your company does and why it's the best place to go — all in a single image that can be viewed on any platform. Unlike a video, it allows customers to take as long as they want to process the information.

### CONFIRM & NOTIFY

AFTER THE ORDER is received, it should be confirmed. Typically, the online design program will generate a confirmation email that acknowledges receipt, summarizes its details, and provide an opportunity for the customer to review and approve it. This also is a way to reach out to the customer and clarify any issues. Also, provide an estimated shipping date.

The order confirmation is important because it makes people feel comfortable. Our industry is different compared to, say, Amazon, because it involves more than putting the order in a box and shipping it. Assuring the customer that his job is on track gives him confidence that he is being taken care of.

It's always smart to update your customers on the status of their orders, another area that can be automated using online design or e-commerce systems. At the minimum, you should have an order confirmation and a notification that an order has been shipped that includes a tracking number.

Although it marks the completion of a job, the shipping confirmation you send also is yet another opportunity to pave the way for future sales. Invite customers to go online and share their experiences. You can encourage this by offering to send a voucher good on the next order.

If you don't hear from a customer but know he has good things to say, follow up with a phone call. It's important to have a way to gather positive feedback, especially online where other customers can see it.

Making it easy for customers to communicate with you is critical for marketing, and for establishing and supporting trust. Letting customers know what to expect is key to avoiding misunderstandings when integrating technology into your business.

In an online context, this means providing information about the process, prices, turnaround time, and terms and conditions. Standardizing your process and business practices, and educating your customers, will earn their trust and add the value that will make your business stand out from others marketing apparel with online technology. ☐

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