Top tips for converting online visitors

By Simon Bestbier , issued by Realm Digital   24 Feb 2012

Many goals of being online

An online presence can take several forms and have any one of multiple objectives.

The goal with an Digital.co.za/solution/e-commerce/ e-commerce website, for example, is to sell goods or services. As a run-up to a possible future sale it may wish to hook site visitors into a loyalty programme, or for other reasons get them to register for membership.

Another type of website may simply be looking to turn visitors into newsletter subscribers, whereas a Digital Facebook page may wish to drum up awareness of a brand or campaign, which may involve a product. The call to action in such a case may be to "like" a product or page to boost its membership, or recommend a friend.

Different complexities

Depending on the objective, different levels of persuasiveness may be required. Getting someone to subscribe to a newsletter is not quite the same achievement as getting them to buy a product.

In addition, some types of product are more complex to sell than others: An insurance policy may require the buyer to complete several fields of information over and above that of something standard, such as a computer game or music CD.

Widening the conversion funnel

According to Wikipedia, any stream of visitors to a website will get progressively narrower as visitors go through the series of steps required to fulfil the site owner's eventual objective for them, for instance clicking 'Buy'. To achieve a high percentage of conversions, the site must 'funnel' as many visitors as possible towards the end-goal.

A significant body of knowledge has developed around 'conversion funnels' or best practices of converting online visitors (which has a direct impact on increasing profitability).

In e-commerce, for example, visitors enter a landing page with banner ads confronting them. The goal is to firstly get the visitor to click through, for instance to a product page. Once this is achieved, visitors will be asked to add a product to their shopping cart, register and check out. But as each step is taken, more visitors leave the process. In the end, only a miniscule percentage of visitors are left.

Tricks of the trade

An effective conversion funnel relies on a combination of psychology, user interface (UI) design and good-old-fashioned logic.

- Psychology:

> " o Understand what potential customers want, and give it to them. A buyer of CDs may want to see different tracks of the desired album, as well as the album cover. Images must be of good quality, and there must be different ways of sharing it on the visitor's preferred social medium.o Don't spring surprises, like requiring lengthy registration or login upon clicking "Buy". If a high percentage of site visitors leave at this point, it points to a need to re-think the conversion path.o When

asking for registration, keep this minimal and confine it to the start of the process, filling in gaps later. Subtle badgering for extra details may be in order. 99

 - User interface design:

66 *o Click-through rates (CTR) rates are typically very low, but they can be increased with subtle variations in link positioning, text, size and even colour. This is known as ad optimisation.o Provide a good, solid call-to-action (unambiguous, visibly positioned and colourful without being off-putting.* 99

- Logic 66 *o Don't do silly things like over-price your products or sell sub-standard fare, or no-one will buy them.* 99

o Provide consistent messaging and look-and-feel in all marketing. Promising one thing on the side of a bus while not integrating the offer online can be fatal.

o You can't manage what you can't measure - Google [Digital.co.za/solution/web-analytics/ analytics](Digital.co.za/solution/web-analytics/) can give insight into successful or failed conversion. For example, 'exit pages' give an indication whether visitors leave the process prematurely. Over time, this will give a good indication of possible improvements.

o When requiring customer details, make sure the appropriate fields are pre-populated with information you already have.

Subtle science

Conversion is a subtle science that applies online as well as in the real world. It is also a shifting landscape, and website owners can never assume they've arrived, as new technologies continue to offer new possibilities and present new challenges.

Considering the difference it can make to profits, it is crucial to get the right consulting partner that will optimise the site experience and allow you to get the jump on the competition.

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