

## THE BASICS OF SELLING THROUGH YOUR WEBSITE

### INTRODUCTION

If you go to a web developer and tell them that you want an E-Commerce site you will want to hold on to your hat when you hear the price. It is not uncommon for E-Commerce sites to start at around AUD \$6000; some developers may be more inclined to indicate a price closer to AUD \$10,000.

On the other hand you can build a web site using Word and provide an order form that people can download, complete and fax to you. Total cost – zip!

Somewhere in between is probably where you will want to start.

### PREREQUISITES FOR SELLING

#### VISITORS

First, you need to have people visiting your site. They may be existing customers or they may be prospects, but unless you have people coming to your site there is no point in adding any selling functionality. If you need to get visitors to your website reference the Web Asset Resources' under the heading Check List One – Are People Visiting My Site.

#### CREDIBILITY - HAVE YOU GOT IT?

There are a number of things that can build credibility on a web site. They are:

- Having full contact details on your site. Nothing looks more shifty than a website with no phone number, fax and in some cases, no email address. Some people just have a contact form on their site. This is the Internet equivalent of operating from your car boot.
- Adding your ABN to your contact details, it can only be of help.
- Giving a street address as well as a postal address.
- Having and using your own domain name. e.g. [www.yourcompany.com.au](http://www.yourcompany.com.au) and [info@yourcompany.com.au](mailto:info@yourcompany.com.au)

#### MAKE IT OBVIOUS THAT YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR PRODUCTS

Believe it or not, on some sites, it just isn't clear that they want you to buy their products online. They keep their order forms hidden from their visitors, or often they don't make the price or the terms of the purchase obvious to the user.

Keep in mind that you should be making it easy for people to take their interest in your products further. If they want to buy, make sure they have everything they need to place their order including the price and delivery details.

#### **HELPING THE BUYER TO MAKE THE DECISION**

Not everyone is comfortable with buying online, especially for cottage type products that may well have a more mature market in mind. Make forms an option for those people.

Provide peace of mind; ensure that your terms and conditions, your privacy policy and your return or money-back guarantee are all accessible and easy to understand.

If you want people to supply their credit card details you need to provide security, either via an SSL connection or through a merchant clearing house.

A 1800 number or online chat facilities will often help a user make a buying decision.

An FAQ is a good helper, but only if it answers questions that really are frequently asked.

Testimonials from other customers will assist some potential buyers to make their decision.

#### **WHAT'S IMPORTANT**

Selling from your web site is just like selling through other mediums. You need to follow good business practices and make sure that you keep good records.

#### **TELL THE BANK**

If you are taking credit card details through your web site (and not using a merchant clearing house) you will need to contact the bank that handles your credit card merchant account and tell them of your intentions. This is not usually a problem; most banks will treat orders taken through your website just like orders received via fax as long as you use SSL with a trusted professional digital certificate.

#### **TERMS & CONDITIONS**

Ensure that people are aware of your terms and conditions when they place their order, you can do this by having a checkbox on the order form. The order form should not be able to be processed without the box being checked by the customer. The fact that it is checked should be recorded on the order form. Of course you will need to make sure that your terms and conditions are handy for the customer to read. If customers are placing their order via fax, then have a place for them to sign that they accept your terms and conditions.

#### **CONTACT THE CUSTOMER**

When a customer places an order with you make immediate effort to contact them. Thank them for their order and let them know if there is any variance to the conditions set out

on the web site, such as delivery method or time. If there is a variation, ensure that you keep a record that the customer has agreed to it.

#### **SUBSCRIPTIONS & RECURRING FEES**

If you are taking credit card details for subscription sales or other recurring fees it is a good idea to bring this up with your customer when fulfilling the first order. This can be done by faxing your customer a form that they should sign and return to you. The form should give the customer the option to agree to the automatic deduction of the fee from the credit card, or to ask to be contacted before the next payment is due. This practice is worth its weight in gold and will eliminate problems down the track.

#### **TECHNOLOGY**

You will note that we haven't been talking about a particular technology or service. Nor have we been promoting shopping carts; these are not essential, or even central to selling from your site. It is true that shopping carts make it easy for people to purchase multiple products in one shopping session and they are a great assistance to website owners that have a large inventory. But they are not essential.

Depending on your business you may not find it worthwhile adding merchant clearing facilities to your site until you are processing more than 10 or so orders per day. Most businesses are happy to process 20 or more credit card sales per day through their shop or factory.

#### **PRICE GUIDES**

**Merchant Clearing Services** – Service usually starts at around \$2,000 to set up, and often there is a commission on each sale. Don't settle for the first option you see, this area is becoming more and more competitive.

**Shopping Carts** – These can vary widely, I am very happy to refer Web Assets customers to MetroStore from Metro Software Development. [www.msd.com.au](http://www.msd.com.au) The prices are reasonable, the service and programming exceptional.

**SSL** – The current price for a 1 year 40 bit Certificate from Verisign is US\$349. The current price through Thawte is US\$199.

#### **MORE THINGS TO CONSIDER**

Not all products or services are suited to being sold through the Internet. If you have a product that you are in doubt about, why not do some research and find out if similar products are being sold successfully overseas. When you find a site doing what you are thinking of doing, drop them an email and ask a few questions. It's a huge market, people are often happy to answer questions about their site and their business. You never know, you may even form an alliance with them.

Adding a selling capability to a small website is often an easy and inexpensive thing to do. Adding it to a larger site is often expensive and complicated. If your site consists of more than a few pages and you have more than one or two products and services to sell then you should re-write your website marketing plan. Failure to plan this properly can end up costing you a lot of money and return very poor results. Use the Web Assets Resource [Website Marketing Plan](#) if introducing e-commerce capabilities means more than a couple of small changes.

## **FRAUD & RISKS – YOUR EXPOSURE**

Every now and then there is some media hype about credit card fraud. It stirs up the imagination and fears of users and website owners alike. Of course they don't say that the liability of the credit card holder is limited; as it is in any case of theft.

The real loser in credit card fraud across the Internet is the supplier. Any e-commerce site will probably attract dishonest shoppers that will fake credit card numbers, or just fake their way through the entire purchase, never, ever having the intention to pay for the goods and services they order.

Be ready for this from the very start and make sure that your systems protect your business. You might for example:

- Process all credit card payments before delivering your service or product.
- Accept credit cards only for sales up-to a certain value.
- Run credit checks on any company that wants to purchase goods above a certain value, regardless of how they are paying.

The extra time you take in verifying these sales will prove invaluable. There is far more money, time and energy wasted in arguing your case with customers and the credit card provider when you cut these corners. We've been there and done that.