HOW TO BUILD A MAIL LIST THROUGH YOUR WEBSITE

BACKGROUND

When most people start thinking about their website and what they want it to do for them they usually say "Generate sales enquiries". That is a perfectly reasonable goal but you would need to have an extremely good website, or be exceptionally lucky to generate an enquiry from everyone who is interested in what you have to offer. What we mean is, perhaps we should have a secondary goal; to build a prospect list of people who are interested in your products and services.

When a person conducts a search for a product or service through a search engine they are often in 'collecting information mode'. Perhaps as little as 5% are actually in 'buying mode' and that 5% are far more likely to shop from a company whose business they already know about and have trust in, rather than from an unknown company that just happens to be presented to them by the search engine.

If a user comes to your website and is information collecting mode you have a great opportunity to get them to register themselves on your mail list. But people no longer give out email addresses for nothing. You have to buy it with an exchange of value and a promise of care and attention to their privacy and their right not to be spammed.

THE USER WANTS INFORMATION

Most websites offer little information beyond the sales spiel; perhaps they believe that this shortfall in information is what will motivate the user to make a phone call or fill in an enquiry form. But it turns out that unless people feel that they are close to making a purchase they will just go on to other websites in search of the information they need.

If you provide your users with greater depth of information you are more likely to keep them on your site. The longer a user is on your site the more comfortable they will be with your website and your company. You are on the way to building trust.

Well positioned registration forms (with privacy statement attached) for newsletters, tips of the week, or a monthly case study will be better received when seen in conjunction with high value content. If possible you should give users access to past newsletters, tips and case studies; this will greatly enhance your odds of winning the user over.

THE MECHANICS

What you want in this mail list are people with a genuine interest in your products and services. So there is no point in accepting just any old email address, but it would be a mistake to try to qualify the user too early in the piece.

Make your registration form as simple as possible. You can simply ask for an email address, but I think it is worthwhile also asking for a name.

Use auto-responders to make your registration process as professional as possible. Here is an example of how this can be managed using the email software that many hosting companies use to manage email sent under your domain name.

Registration Process Through Web Form

1. The submitted registration email is sent to regsub@yourcompany.com.au

2. The auto-responder sends a confirmation email to the user. The reply address of this email is regconfirm@yourcompany.com.au

3. The auto-responder on this email address sends a success message to the user. The reply address of this email is success@yourcompany.com.au - this is the only email address that you need to see. The others can be deleted automatically if you want.

The above process ensures that only valid email addresses are entered in your mailing list. It is amazing how many people will deliberately provide invalid email addresses, but you really don't want bogus email addresses on your mail list, their presence only inflates your subscription figures, not your sales figures.

An example of the auto-responder message described in point two could be as simple as:

Thank you for subscribing to YourCompany's Tip of the Week.

As part of our quality assurance process we require you to confirm your subscription to this service. If you would like to continue with your subscription please respond to this email. (You don't need to write anything)

If you do not wish to continue with your subscription simply ignore this email.

We hope that you will enjoy our service.

Regards,

Evelyn Wright

Marketing Manager

www.yourcompany.com.au

Ph: 1800 999 999

An example in the auto-responder message described in point three follows:

Thank you for confirming your subscription to YourCompany's Tip of the Week.

Should you wish to unsubscribe to the service at any time you can simply respond to an email and edit the subject heading to read "Please Remove"

We assure you of our best service and attention at all times and trust you will enjoy our service.

Regards,

Evelyn Wright

Marketing Manager

www.yourcompany.com.au

Ph: 1800 999 999

You can now marry up your user's name to their email address in your data base; ensure that you also note the date of the subscription as it will prove valuable down the track. Excel is probably the cheapest way to go if you are planning on personalising your emails. Refer to the resource Personalising Bulk Email for more information on how to do this efficiently.

So now you have your subscriber but you know almost nothing about them except that they visited your site and the date that they subscribed to your service. After perhaps four or five emails you may have earned the right to learn more about your subscriber and it could be time to email them with a request to participate in a short survey.

Your survey should:

- Be short – ensure it takes no more than 3 minutes to complete

- Provide you with truly useful information

- Provide the user with the option of being anonymous

- Thank the subscriber for their participation

Conducting subscriber surveys every six months or so will help you to gather more information about your subscribers. Not only will you build a better profile of your subscribers, you will also learn what they value most and what influences their purchasing decisions. A ripe audience for special offers.

web | assets
© Copyright Web Assets 2004