

1 Keys to success: use a practical approach

There are many aspects to achieving Internet success. But how do you know if your website is successful? Is it true that a successful sales website must be able to process online orders automatically, without any human intervention? Can real success be measured by the number of page impressions, visits or other traffic-related statistics?

Actual sales transactions are clearly one of the most important measurements of Internet success. However, not every company offers products that are easy to sell on the Internet, and not every statistical visitor is a potential customer.

In what follows, we would like to highlight a few important factors that will enable you to objectively evaluate the success of your website. Use these as a yardstick to measure your accomplishments.

Success factor: sales support

One of the keys to a good sales presentation is to highlight the product's benefits in a succinct and easy-to-understand manner. A website is especially suited to this task. Nowhere else can product information be so efficiently presented and continually updated. Moreover, effective presentation of data means customers can be encouraged to contact sales support departments if they wish to engage in further contact.

Success factor: support for telephone conversations

A website should be used as a support tool when talking to customers in person or on the telephone. Technical data bulletins with product details are ideally suited to website publication. This allows sales staff to quickly and easily refer to detailed information published on the Internet while the customer accesses it at the same time thereby giving the telephone call a high-quality, professional touch.

Success factor: professional business card

Not every company can have a reception area decorated in turn-of-the-century style, with stucco ceilings or post-modern meeting rooms. However, a website can be used to present a professional image of your company at very little expense and without much effort. Not only your products, but also your company image can be designed to compete with the major players.

Success factor: presenting references

Glossy reference binders can be very expensive, and it's rarely cost effective to provide every prospective customer with a comprehensive promotional package. A website is an excellent place to list the company's reference projects. For example, you can create a list of your five most important projects, with detailed photos and links to the appropriate pages.

Success factor: learning more about your target market and potential customers

Having detailed information about your potential customers and target market is vital for successful marketing. The Internet offers a variety of ways to communicate with your target groups and to survey customers or prospective customers easily and inexpensively. Conducting and analysing surveys on a regular basis will enable you to continually check whether your products or services are in tune with your customers' needs. As a result, you will be able to steadily improve what you have to offer and even uncover entirely new markets.

Success factor: reducing the burden on customer telephone support and cutting associated costs

Telephone support is a key tool for many companies, but it is also very costly in terms of personnel. Depending on the hours of service, the cost for this support can quickly run out of control. The Internet is an ideal way to relieve the burden on telephone support. Support questions that arrive by e-mail can be sent and processed around the clock and an immediate response is not necessarily required. FAQ (frequently asked questions) lists that grow dynamically for repetitive questions and answers can also be generated cost-effectively and contribute to reducing support questions, while still maintaining a high level of service. Including a link to your Internet support pages in all e-mail messages is a good way of ensuring recipients become more and more familiar with your website content, thereby substantially reducing your support department's burden.

Success factor: optimising internal communications and breaking through regional boundaries

The geographical limits to a regional operation are expanding further and further. Companies are focusing increasingly on their core competencies and only employ specialists in these same business areas. Strategic alliances and cross-company project teams are established in ever-changing configurations. Geographic borders play only a small role in these initiatives. Only those companies that recognise the benefits of the Internet and use it correctly can effectively grow beyond their local borders.

Summary

Keys to success: use a practical approach

- A website is a support tool that can be used when talking to customers in person or on the telephone. It highlights the unique selling position of a product or service in a few words and an easy-to-understand manner.
- A website represents a business card. It can make small companies appear large. It is also a good place to list reference projects.
- Regular customer surveys help you to continually improve your products and services and to adapt them to customer needs.

- The Internet can help you to work efficiently with business partners and to successfully break through local boundaries.