

# 5 Improving customer interaction via the Internet

It is not absolutely necessary to sell via a website, but, at the very least, it should encourage prospective customers to contact the company directly. Here are a few simple and user-friendly examples of how to actively encourage customer communication using a website and improving the rate at which visitors become customers.

## Selecting the right e-mail address

The same rules apply to an e-mail as to a printed letter: it should always project professionalism and clearly identify the sender. Since e-mail users are often swamped by spam, unwanted e-mails from fly-by-night businesses, it is important to clearly differentiate professional business correspondence from spam. This requires an e-mail address that is traceable and with complete information identifying the sender at the end of the e-mail (e-mail signature).

E-mail addresses comprised of names should always include the proper first and last names, whereby the first name may be abbreviated to one letter. For example:

**anna.jones@company.net**  
**a.jones@company.net**

Although e-mail addresses that are comprised exclusively of short forms can be read quickly, they only make sense if the receiver already knows the e-mail address. When establishing contact for the

first time - for example, if you were trying to get an appointment to make a presentation to a potential customer, an e-mail address consisting only of short forms would not be helpful since it could not be clearly identified in its unopened state. There is a risk that the request for a presentation will remain unread and end up in the deleted folder.

The following e-mail address is an example of what not to do. It establishes little trust and, more than likely, would be quickly eliminated as spam.

**aj@abbr.com** (Do not use)

E-mail addresses such as:

**info@company.com**  
**marketing@company.net**  
**service@company.biz**

are suitable for use by departments where customers do not generally interact with a specific individual.

## **An e-mail signature is a sign of courtesy**

Reputable companies consider it a common courtesy to include complete information regarding the sender at the end of every e-mail. E-mail applications such as Microsoft Outlook Express include an "e-mail signature" function that enables you to automatically include your contact information in every new e-mail.

**Here is an example of an e-mail signature:**

*Herbert Sample*  
*Sample Travel Agency Ltd*  
*12 Any Street*  
*Any City / Postcode*  
*Phone: 0123 456 7890*

*Fax: 0123 456 7891*

*E-mail: [info@sample-travelagency.com](mailto:info@sample-travelagency.com)*

*Internet: [www.sample-travelagency.com](http://www.sample-travelagency.com)*

## **Improving customer interaction by offering a wide range of services**

Some businesses are quite extensive and very difficult to outline precisely in a scope-of-services description. In such cases, use the same rule that applies for products and services that are not self-explanatory: don't even attempt to outline everything in detail. Focus on one differentiating competitive aspect, complete with its benefits or advantages. Offer prospective customers a simple and informal opportunity to establish contact with your company.

An e-mail response form is particularly suited to this task. prospective customers can use it around the clock to send questions, or to order a catalogue by regular mail. This gives you a chance to process the request at your own pace and to call back the now identified prospect. You may have acquired a new customer!

A form generator enables you to easily generate user-friendly forms as required and for every conceivable purpose. An e-mail response form is only one of many useful templates.

## **Improving customer interaction for products and services that are not self-explanatory**

Products or services that are not self-explanatory lend themselves to an easy Internet order process based on few words. Prior consultation is the decisive factor leading to sales success in this situation. You should therefore not even try to answer every question on your website. Instead, place the emphasis on the benefits of your product or services and whatever differentiates them from comparable products or services offered by other vendors.

At the end of your user-benefit message, you can include a simple request for a telephone call instead of a link to additional details. The prospect is thereby under no obligation and it gives you an opportunity to provide additional details in smaller doses.

Be sure to prompt your visitor with logically structured web pages that lead him step-by-step through the required sales process (see section "Proper architecture for a website" in Chapter 2). If there is no clear direction on what to do, there is considerable risk that the visitor will give up and simply leave the website. The next page gives an example of clear and concise step-by-step instructions.

A form generator enables you to generate user-friendly forms for every conceivable purpose. A callback response form is only one of many useful applications.

## **Improving customer interaction and reducing support costs using an FAQ list**

In many cases, service and support are very personnel intensive and, as a result, very expensive. However, good service is often more important than a good product. Customer loyalty is often not established until a particular issue has been resolved to the customer's satisfaction. Customers who have never used a company's services have neutral opinions about the organisation. On the other hand, a positive experience with services makes a good impression.

Offering a discussion forum gives customers access to a particularly useful service. Unlike a chat mechanism, a discussion forum is not tied to a fixed time slot. Discussions are visible to anyone and not conducted live. You can make your own decision about what is published at what time, and what is not.

In a discussion forum, customers can pose questions about your products or raise concerns. You can subsequently decide, as a moderator, whether or not you wish to publish the question and its answer. All that is required is a mouse click. This demonstrates confidence and provides effective help to other customers. This is the first step in creating a living FAQ (frequently asked questions) list, to which everyone has access. This will save time and money, since the most frequently asked questions will subsequently be answered automatically.

## **Surveying customers via the Internet: Knowing, not guessing, what customers want**

It is vital for every company to know as much as possible about its target group, their opinions and their buying habits. It is the only way

to establish a solid foundation for product and service improvements. Aside from indispensable personal customer contact, surveys are an ideal way to obtain detailed customer information. They are especially useful when it is important to use indisputable facts instead of merely subjective perceptions.

A website provides an inexpensive platform for conducting customer surveys. There are special tools that enable you to quickly and easily generate the necessary forms, without having any specialised programming knowledge. These tools allow you to generate whatever question and answer combinations you require. Response options include lists (pull-down menu selection), multiple-choice (selecting one or more answers) and input fields for written answers. Your customer responses are presented in the form of statistical analyses and graphic charts.

Be careful when creating your surveys, a poorly executed customer survey can annoy your target group. Avoid questionnaires that are too long, questions that are not absolutely relevant to the survey's purpose and inadequate selection categories for answers. Incentives, such as a raffle prize, can convince the customer that it is worthwhile to invest time in responding to the survey.

## **E-mail newsletters for repeat customers and for prospective customers**

Winning customers is difficult and sometimes requires a little luck. Retaining repeat customers for as long as possible and making them loyal to the company is a painstaking and time-consuming process. Moreover, there is a considerable difference between winning customers and keeping them. However, it is not necessary to be a top salesperson to ensure that repeat customers remain loyal to the organisation for a long time. Once customers have been won over, you no longer need to convince them of the fundamental benefits of your products and services. Repeat customers are especially interested in new products and innovations.

A regularly published e-mail newsletter satisfies your customers'

craving for information. At the same time, you continually provide new food for thought, while giving your customers the assurance that you are looking after them and that they made the right decision when they selected your company.

Instead of using so-called "mailing lists", where e-mail messages are not personalised or customised when they are sent to the e-mail distribution list, you can use a software application to generate high-quality e-mail newsletters, which can be personalised and fine-tuned to cater to the specific interests of individual customers.

**The benefits are obvious:**

- The e-mail newsletter includes exactly the information that interests the particular customer.
- Your customers can establish direct and simplistic contact and make reference to the content of your newsletter.
- An e-mail newsletter enables you to present news, as well as new products or services in a way that will generate additional sales.
- You will be able to measure the success of an e-mail newsletter a few days after sending it out.
- Producing an e-mail newsletter is easy and costs almost nothing, only time. Your customers should be worth this investment.

## Summary

- Make sure that your e-mail address is traceable to avoid having your e-mails tagged as spam and automatically deleted.
- Every reputable company enhances its positive image by including a signature and contact information in its e-mail communications.
- Avoid including detailed product and services descriptions on your website. Instead, limit the information to important customer advantages and benefits.
- Callback functions on your website make it easier for prospective customers to contact your company.
- Use discussion forums to jointly create FAQ lists with your customers over time.
- E-mail newsletters, easily personalised using modern software tools, enable you to quickly inform your customers about newsworthy events and innovations.