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Inside Edge

Make Customer Engagement Your No. 1 Priority

In this month's edition of Inside Edge, we highlight the fundamental customer engagement techniques of Internet marketing. As you plan your business strategies, stay on track and reap the rewards of implementing processes that will enhance customer engagement on the web.

Nothing can drive profits and get your cash register ringing better than an engaged, involved and active customer base. You can effectively "own the customer" if you follow these basic, easy-to-adopt and highly effective Internet marketing steps:

Analyze and revive your email marketing campaigns: Over the last year, your email marketing campaigns must have delivered results in varying degrees of success. Review and analyze these past campaigns to nail down the success factors of the most effective ones. Fine-tuning these and adding current relevance will ensure that you are better equipped to roll out new email campaigns this year. In addition, review your email lists and databases in order to purge "dead" addresses. Study the trends, click-through rates of old campaigns and plan ways to "awaken" or re-engage the folks who have stopped clicking on or opening your emails. Simple ways to do this is through making special offers (with a time validity), requesting addressees to update their profiles and preferences or even sending out text-based messages, which will overcome any blocks due to images or html. If your website has an e-commerce engine, another way to use email is 'triggered messaging' which comes into play, for example, when a potential customer abandons the shopping cart on your site. It is absolutely possible to try to regain lost sales in this manner – not easy, but possible and certainly worth the effort!

Edit your 'Search Words' to become 'Customer Carewords': Gerry McGovern, author of "Killer Web Content" propounds the concept of 'customer carewords' over search words. No longer is it sufficient to have the right search words that help your website to be found on the web. Getting targeted traffic that travels through your site and performs the desired buying actions is achievable through the use of carewords. For example, if your website sells Orthotics and related foot-care products, an effective search word would certainly be "orthotics". However, the customer carewords would be "foot pain relief", "foot comfort", "foot support" and so on.

Create or enhance your rewards and loyalty program: If you haven't yet rewarded your loyal customers, periodically or through an ongoing loyalty program, start right away! What better way can there be to win over, encourage and enhance customer engagement than by saying "Thank you for your business"? Offering a reward or incentive for continued business is like investing in insurance; stocking up on loyalty to be prepared for bleak seasons, sudden and fierce competition or any other unforeseen business circumstances. You can't go wrong. In order to own the customer, you have to be in their mind space through high positive recall.

Get actively involved in social networking online: Select the most useful online social media for your business. Consumer Generated Media (CGM) is the intersection between real and virtual worlds. In the travel industry, for example, where consumer opinions and forums play a major role, various companies offer networking opportunities. From choosing your cab-sharing partner to Instant Messaging another passenger on the same plane to invitation-only 'meet spaces'

designed to bring like-minded travelers together, all of these are effective networking mechanisms.

The credibility of information on a website is no longer automatically accepted. There is an "ideological clash" between "official" content (your own website, brochures, descriptions, industry rating, awards, etc.) and CGM-related content (blogs, customer review sites, etc.). What do your customers believe? Establish a corporate policy regarding CGM and it is critical that you monitor and react quickly to postings on blogs, forums, web-boards, or other influential social media.

Audit your performance through customer feedback and ROI metrics: Website visitor analysis using real-time web analytics, digital advertising campaign tracking, online surveys, customer feedback forms, web forums, customer brainstorming sessions; all of these and more methods of internal and external audits can and should be employed to monitor your business' e-performance. Embracing trends and best practices with regard to e-CRM is the first step towards owning the customer.

Having outlined some top Internet marketing resolutions above, it goes without saying that you cannot ignore or undermine other equally important aspects of your website. WSI can help you ensure that your website is always up to date, informative, optimized, and user friendly – bringing in qualified, profit-bearing and ENGAGED customers.