

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

TALES FROM THE TRENCHES: A Boot Camp Recap

—By Donna Talarico

- ◆ The Positive Effects of Negative Keywords
- ◆ Free Shipping in a Bad Economy
- ◆ Conversion Optimization Through Personalization

"Read this issue and watch your business blossom in that special month called June. Or skip it. Hey, June is a—four-letter word."

eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

June 2008 Volume 2 • Number 6

Tales From the Trenches: A Boot Camp Recap..... 12

From e-commerce basics to what's hot and new in the industry, the staff and recruits summarize their experiences at the May 2008 Boot Camp @ HQ.

Boot Camp Improves with Age (While I Age Despite the Improvements...) 3

The fourth successful Solid Cactus Boot Camp, an experience that just keeps getting better.

The Positive Effects of Negative Keywords 4

Learn about the positive benefits that negative keywords can have on your pay-per-click marketing.

Content: The lifeblood of Every Good Website 6

Using the power of the written word to capture attention, educate, invoke a call to action and dramatically affect how search engines rank your site.

Free Shipping in a Bad Economy 8

Should you continue to, or offer free shipping when times get tough?

Conversion Optimization through Personalization 10

Introducing a new way to deliver targeted messages to under-performing segments of your traffic that will increase your conversion rate.

Going Green: How Your Business can make Earth Day, Everyday 16

Steps you can take to make your company environmentally friendly and cost effective.

It's so Easy for Vacuums27X7.com 18

TR Mutlu recalls the early days of his vacuum parts business, shares his ups and downs and how Solid Cactus made e-commerce work for him.

What Can You Do Better?—

The Basics Behind the Solid Cactus Site Review 19

Guidelines to evaluate and improve your site to prevent customers from jumping ship.

How Live Chat Can Increase Average Order Value 20

Understanding how real time personalized assistance to visitors helps your bottom line.

Tech Corner: Plan B: Backup your Data! 22

Easing the pain of devastating computer failures with a few of the most popular methods of backup to save your vital data.

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Boot Camp Improves with Age

(While I Age Despite the Improvements...)

This issue of *eBiz Insider* comes on the heels of our fourth successful Solid Cactus Boot Camp. We have now had three here at headquarters and one “at sea” on a cruise last summer. As with a fine wine, these Boot Camps have definitely improved with age. I don’t want to sound like I’m tooting my own horn, but these events are tremendous sources of information. E-commerce store owners can leave Boot Camp and immediately implement what they have learned into their own businesses to boost their bottom line. In other words, we don’t dwell on hypothetical notions at Boot Camp. We deal in real world advice for e-commerce operators.

Donna Talarico does an excellent job “reviewing” Boot Camp in this issue, but words on paper don’t do the event justice. You have to be here to really experience Boot Camp. We combine high-tech teaching with “high touch” interaction with Solid Cactus e-commerce experts. “Campers” are essentially outnumbered by Solid Cactus staff; there is no better way to get the attention you want and need. Beyond that, you have to feel the passion the attendees have for their businesses. You have to feel the excitement as they learn new ways to increase conversions. You have to feel the motivation they have to be successful entrepreneurs.

That “feel” is what Boot Camp is all about, but there are some educational sessions thrown in there as well! I’m always sitting in on them to increase my own knowledge of e-commerce. After all, technology and the way the web works are always



By Scott Sanfilippo, Editor in Chief

changing and as a good e-commerce citizen, I need to stay on top of things! I still may not be 100% sold on having my own blog (after all who wants to read MY opinions on things..?), but I know that blogs are an important part of your overall search marketing strategy. I may think all commercial e-mail is spam, but I know there are consumers who buy from these mass offerings and they buy a LOT. These are the types of things you learn about at Boot Camp and that can ultimately help you earn more money. So when we send you that e-mail (ugh) announcing our next Boot Camp, don’t hesitate to sign up!

Join Us Online

Have you taken a moment to visit the new *eBiz Insider* website? No? Well, come on in, the water is fine! Our new site launched a few weeks ago and is quickly becoming a hot-spot for e-commerce store owners around the world. Not only can you read all the current and past *eBiz Insider* articles, you can also take part in lively conversations in our forums. It’s not Boot Camp, but it’s as close as you’ll get until we host our next one. Don’t wait any longer. It’s fun, it’s free and it’s only online at ebizinsider.com. See you there soon!

eBiz



Letters to the Editor...

Q. I’ve just noticed that a competitor of mine has stolen several images and even some descriptions off my website. I’ve emailed and sent letters to them but nothing has been done, what can I do?

—Angela, Elk Grove Village, IL

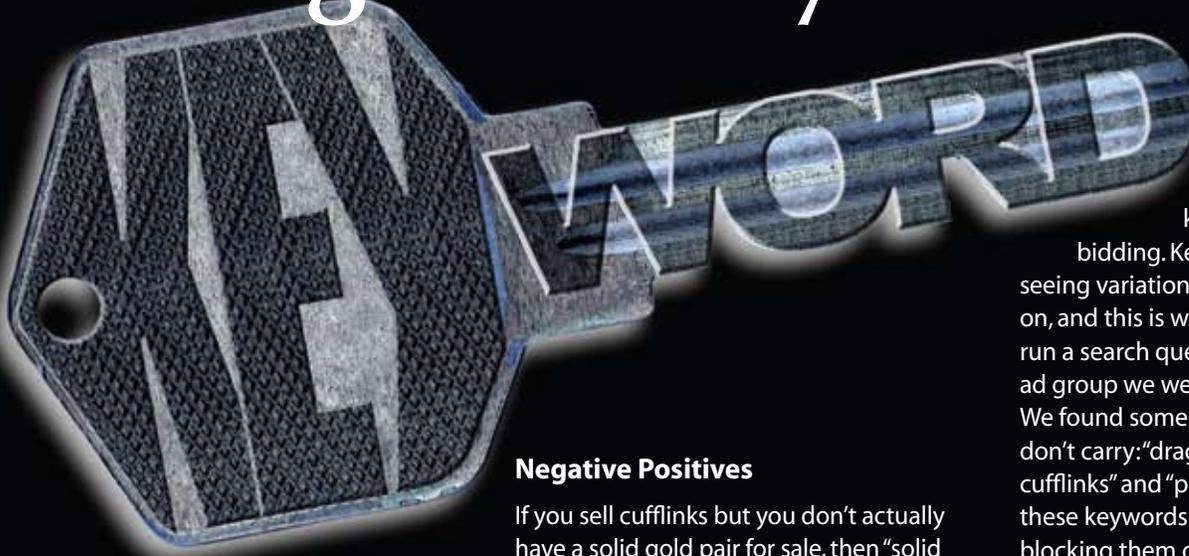
A. Angela, unfortunately you’re not alone in this. Believe it or not, this is more common than you may think and there are probably readers shaking their heads right now saying “This happened to me!” If the photographs were taken by you, not provided to you by a manufacturer, you own the rights to those photos. Same thing with copy, if you wrote it and it appears word for word on another website, you can act. Solid Cactus offers a suite of intellectual property protection services that will stop this from happening and also file DMCA actions to get the photos and copy removed. Don’t sit idly by while your competitor is cashing in on your work, call 1.888.361.9814 and ask about Protected By Cactus.



Good comments and questions!

Let us hear from you! Write to: scotts@ebizinsider.com **eBiz**

The Positive Effects of Negative Keywords



Anyone who has set up a pay-per-click (PPC) advertising campaign knows the work and care required to target the right set of keywords for your site. However, the irrelevant traffic you worked so hard to avoid is still sneaking in to your account. It's time to learn about the positive benefits that negative keywords can have on your PPC.

A Keyword Primer

First, let's have a short lesson on regular keywords. When you bid on a keyword, you have to choose a match type. Match types determine the variety of traffic that your keywords can trigger. Three common varieties of Google Adwords include broad, phrase and exact match types. Broad match keywords bring in the greatest variety of traffic, while phrase and exact are more restrictive. The broad match of "cufflinks" can bring in traffic from users who search all of these phrases: "cufflinks", "solid gold cuff link", "kuff link", and "win free cufflinks". Broad match is the fastest way to capture a wide selection of relevant traffic, which makes it an important part of your PPC campaigns. However, broad match can also attract a lot of keywords in which you aren't interested. This is where negative keywords work their magic.

Negative Positives

If you sell cufflinks but you don't actually have a solid gold pair for sale, then "solid gold" would be a great negative keyword. Additionally, if you aren't planning on giving them out for free, then "free" is another negative you should add to your account. You can add your negatives directly into individual ad groups, or they can be placed at the campaign level if the negatives are applicable to multiple categories.

Identifying Negatives

Now you can block unwanted traffic, but how do you actually find that traffic in the first place? If you're not using negative keywords, you can almost guarantee that some of the PPC traffic currently coming to your site is unwanted. There are three great places you can go to start your negative keyword hunt. The first is in your initial keyword research. When you plug your core keywords into a keyword research tool, there are terms you choose not to use. Go back to that tool and take a look at the keywords you didn't add to your campaigns. Was it because the volume or the cost per click was too high? Or did you pass those keywords by because they had nothing to do with your business? Add those irrelevant keywords to your negative keyword list!

Do Your Homework

The Search Query Report from Google Adwords allows you to see the actual

search queries that are triggering your ads. Many of the search queries are the actual keywords on which you are

bidding. Keep digging and you'll start seeing variations that you aren't bidding on, and this is where it gets interesting. Let's run a search query report for the cufflinks ad group we were working with earlier. We found some individual styles that you don't carry: "dragon cufflinks", "copper cufflinks" and "plastic cufflinks". None of these keywords had a large volume. In fact, blocking them only saved you around \$1. But running Search Query Reports and blocking lower traffic keywords can turn into big savings in the long run.

The final tool for researching negative keywords is your own analytics program. Google Analytics allows you to view the keywords driving traffic to your site. You can parse them out by paid (PPC) and non-paid (organic) keywords. Then you can analyze stats that include pages per visit and bounce rate. Not only is analytics a great tool for finding negative keywords, it provides additional insight into how all your keywords are performing.

Update, Update, Update

Like the rest of your keywords, negatives should be periodically reviewed. If you add new inventory to your store, be sure negatives aren't blocking newly relevant traffic. As your business grows, you may find that you don't need to be as restrictive with some categories as you once were. Negatives are a critical part in the success of your paid campaigns. Isn't it time you started feeling the positive effects of negatives on your PPC? **eBiz**



By Jean Lloyd

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Content: The Lifeblood of Every Good Website



The power of a well written phrase captures attention, draws the reader in, attempts to educate, enlighten or inform and invokes a call to action. In addition, unique copy can also dramatically affect how search engines rank your website. With that power, good content is indeed the lifeblood of every website.

Content is King

Unlike brick-and-mortar stores where you've got sales staff ready to greet, engage and sell your product, with an e-commerce store your written content becomes your virtual team of salesmen. The power of those words can be compelling.

With users browsing, clicking and jumping around, websites need content to stand out above the crowd to grab shoppers' attention immediately. Once you have their attention, you need to spark their interest.

To get the reader involved, you need to build desire. Good copywriters do this by painting a picture, explaining value and letting the readers know what the benefits are, all in a language customers understand. Visual stimulation is a benefit, of course, but words help make the experience more personal, which keeps shoppers on your site.

Once the desire is there, the last step is provoking the customer to act. Any good salesman will tell you the call to action is the most important part of a sales pitch.

A key to e-commerce success is writing persuasive copy – copy that provokes a

desired response. On the web, that could be anything from getting people to read the next page, follow a link, sign up for a newsletter or whitepaper, or buy a product. The bottom line is--good copy sells!

Speak To Your Audience

Speaking to your audience is arguably the most important aspect of content writing. Look at the vocabulary your target audience uses. By speaking the same language, you make your readers feel comfortable and show them you know your business, your products and them.

For instance, if you're marketing designer purses targeted toward young women (ages 16-29), using a light-hearted, fun-loving vernacular - as opposed to rigged sales talk - will give you credibility with both your audience and search engines.

Search Engines Love Good Copy

Adding fresh, new content to your website is helpful for search engine optimization and increasing linking efforts, as well as building and marketing your brand.

Search engines crawl websites searching

for text. Therefore, the best way for website crawlers to decide what your site is about is to provide rich, invoking text on every page.

Try to make your website 'sticky' – to keep customers on your site browsing, reading, and interested as long as possible. When you feature content that is related to what people are looking for, they're not only more likely to stay on your website, but they will also potentially remember and recommend it to others. Should they find you to be a reputable, expert source of information, interesting, entertaining or thought provoking, they'll also be more likely to remember your site for future purchases.

Power of the Word

"The words you use, either written or spoken, can have a powerful effect on your audience - if you use them carefully and skillfully. Whether your goal is to inform, to persuade, to call for action or to entertain, your words and your stories can be powerful. They can be powerful, because language is software for the mind. Learning how to write that software well is well worth the effort."

— David McNally, speaker and author of the best-selling book *Even Eagles Need A Push*.

Copy is Selling in Print

Lackluster copy that fails to invoke emotions, tell compelling stories, create vivid mental imagery or excite your potential customers about your product or service is a common reason why websites fail.

Copy is selling in print. Therefore, its job is no different. Since e-commerce lacks the human interaction you would normally get in a face-to-face sales encounter, your copy plays an even more important role. It must communicate that same enthusiasm your salesman would, energize your potential customers, excite them about your offer and entice them to buy. **eBiz**



By Michelle Johnson
michellej@ebizinsider.com



Solid Cactus has partnered with Avalara to integrate AvaTax™, a complete sales tax compliance solution -



from the point of sale to electronic filing and payment, streamlining a cumbersome process for millions of e-commerce companies and reducing the risk of loss or penalty in case of an audit.

AvaTax™ for Solid Cactus Shipping Manager automates tax rate calculation directly into your Yahoo! Store, streamlining a complicated and complex manual process.

Interested in learning more about AvaTax™ and how it can benefit your e-commerce business?

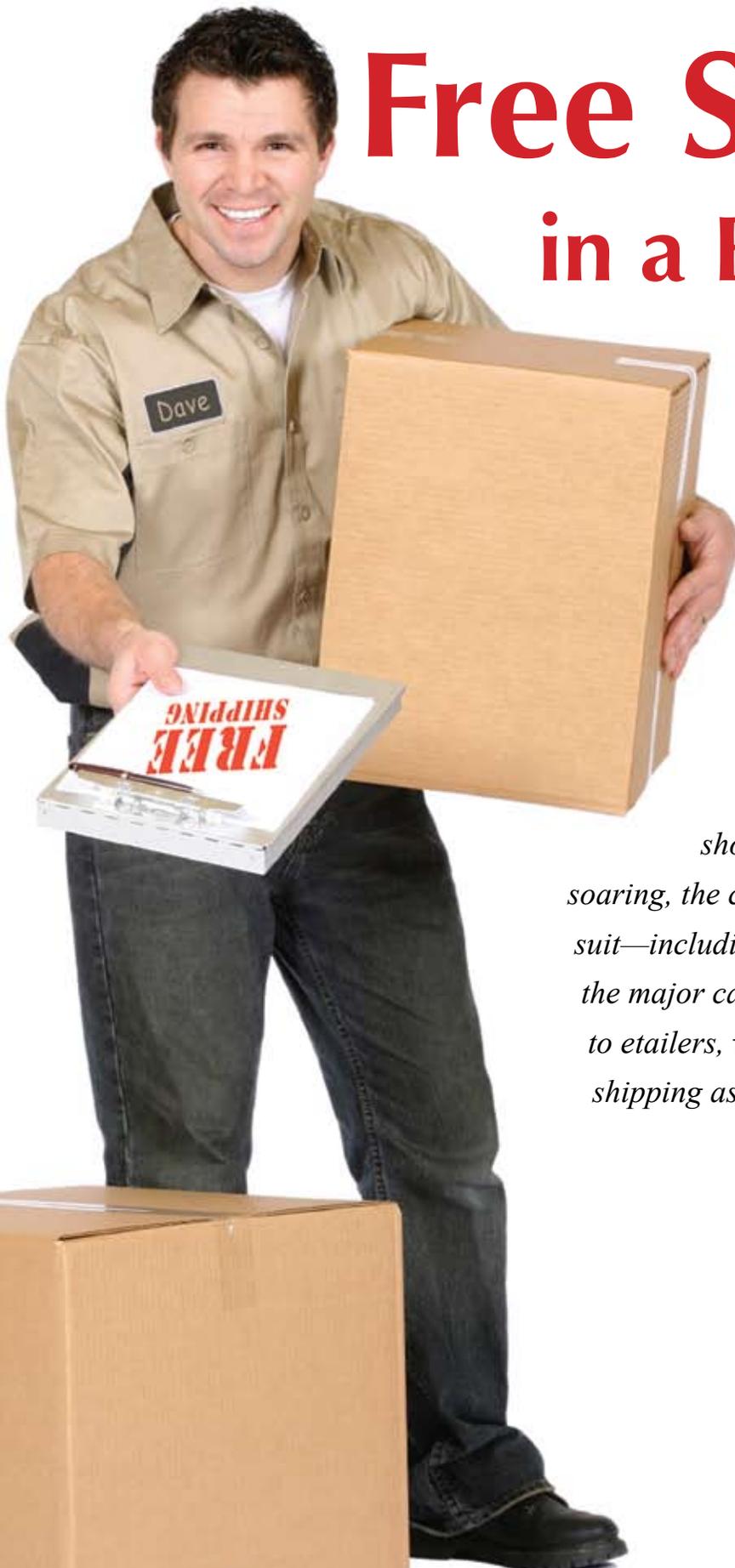
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Free Shipping in a Bad Economy



Shipping prices have gone up—but many retailers still offer free shipping at the same threshold. What does this mean to your bottom line? Can you continue to offer free shipping when times are tough? What can you do to still gain the sale?

Free shipping adds value to the online shopping experience. But with gas prices soaring, the cost of other services are following suit—including shipping and delivery fees from the major carriers. This presents a challenge to retailers, who have traditionally offered free shipping as a booster for sales.

At the advice of his developer, Reagan Klohn of Brandsport.com recently increased his site's free shipping threshold to \$100, from \$50. He made this increase in April, and reports that this increase had little impact on his steady stream of orders and in fact, helped increase his bottom line. "While I still feel there is some intrinsic value in being able to market our site using the 'free shipping' terminology, (I'm) convinced the we can raise the free shipping threshold without hurting our business," Klohn reported in an e-mail to Solid Cactus.



On BrandSport.com's homepage, a banner in his header touts the free shipping offer. While higher than his previous threshold, this "Free Shipping Over \$100" message still communicates extra value. And, with a higher threshold, average order sizes are encouraged to increase as well.

Online retailers could take a cue from BrandSport.com by looking at their own free shipping promotions. Perhaps it's time to look at an old issue in a fresh way. If the threshold is at \$25, perhaps raise it to \$50 or \$75. Take a look at average order size and make a decision based on that. Your "free shipping" ad is still accurate and simply sets the bar at a new, higher level. You may decide to cancel free shipping altogether. It is true that some online retailers have successfully removed free shipping altogether and have seen little impact on their sales.

In a previous *eBiz Insider* article we focused on the value of negotiating better rates with the major carriers. If an e-commerce site has the volume, this could also be an option to look into saving on shipping costs. Think about revisiting your busiest shippers and see what they can do for you in exchange for your continued high volume with them. Finally, with products like Solid

Cactus' Shipping Manager, retailers can set shipping rules down to the item level to ensure that they are not losing on shipping, but are instead saving every penny they can possibly save.

Rising fuel prices is not a new problem plaguing e-commerce. Research for this article uncovered articles in the *New York Times*, *C|Net* and other online and print publications covering the jump. On August 19, 2005, *CNet.com* reported that online retailers were beginning to worry about the rising cost of gas. Back then, it had risen to \$67 a barrel. Clearly we are looking at newer, vastly higher numbers.

The good news is that inflated fuel costs will only fuel e-commerce as more would-be shoppers look our way. Clearly, there is much to protect. A survey by Harris Interactive in April found that 57% of surveyed shoppers said it is free shipping that urges them to make an online purchase. This same survey also revealed that 33% of those surveyed are shopping online to save money on gas. Clearly, breaks on shipping will continue to impact consumers' decisions about where they buy.



There is no doubt that online sales will continue to soar as people opt for the information super highway rather than the asphalt highway. Online retailers can still be smart and increase sales and revenues by building value in other areas, while not losing on shipping costs. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
donnat@ebizinsider.com



“LivePerson.com was able to categorize our e-mail and our chats. We feel as if we can provide substantially better service to our customers and reduce our operating costs. Plus we have a treasure of information about our customers that we can use in real time to help them decide on products, think about new products and overcome their reluctance at the checkout. For us it was worth the investment.”

Derek Kleinow - TigerGPS.com

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Conversion Optimization through Personalization

Conversion optimization takes traffic and conversions to the next level. Great web design is irreplaceable, but it is a bird shot approach. Conversion optimization speaks directly to each segment of visitors differently based on demographics.

Examples of Optimization...

Most merchants I know have spent the majority of their marketing dollars driving traffic to their websites. They usually target first time visitors where improving conversion rates will make a huge impact on returns.

Let's look at two geographic segments: Canadian shoppers and New York shoppers. A Canadian searching the web for a particular product finds a site, looks at the about us page, sees it is an American site and then looks for a site that has a .ca URL. Shipping rates, duties and customs can be tricky with international orders; therefore they would rather stay within the country even when shopping online.

Their conversion rate is dramatically lower than that of domestic shoppers. A strong conversion optimization campaign can fix this.

A maple leaf banner on your site saying "Canadian shoppers get flat rate shipping... click here" will catch their attention. On the landing page, explain that they will have to pay duties. Informed shoppers won't call your customer service department complaining about surprise duties.

New York shoppers pay sales tax if the website's warehouse is located in New York, but if it is not, they don't. Announce: "New York shoppers pay NO sales tax."

Other Areas to Apply Optimization Strategy

- Lost Shoppers – A shopper comes from a Google ad, lands on an item page and uses the search box. After viewing another product, they return to the search. Now is a great time to say "Can't find what you are looking for, have us help you – 1-800-555-5555"
- Average time per visit – Analytics say that when customers are on the website for more than X minutes, conversion rates plummet. Have a banner that directs them to a clearance page or a product finder.

The impact on your bottom line can be dramatic.

Canadian Visitors/mo	Canadian Conv. Rate	Canadian Revenue (\$100 Avg Order)	Improved Conv Rate	Improved Revenue from Canadian Shoppers
10,000	0.5%	\$5,000.00	1.50%	\$15,000.00
50,000	0.5%	\$25,000.00	1.50%	\$75,000.00
100,000	0.5%	\$50,000.00	1.50%	\$150,000.00

- Keyword searches – If someone comes in searching for a product line with a specific keyword and then moves to a completely different line of products, they are probably not finding what they want. Ask them “Still looking for _____, click here to view our entire _____ selection.” On the page you drive them to, use the same strategy mentioned in the lost shopper campaign.

Imagine customers in a brick-and-mortar store. What would you say to someone endlessly walking up and down each aisle of your store? What if they stopped 5 feet short of checkout?

You must interact. It’s why brick-and-mortar stores convert visitors at vastly higher rates than online stores.

The Clutter Problem

Filling every page on your website with banners leads to clutter, loss of consumer

focus and lower conversion rates. The solution is to show the consumer only relevant messages. Show the Canadian shopper the Canadian banner; show the New York shopper the New York banner.

You need technology to do this, the knowledge to dig through the analytics, the resources to design the creative and the time to implement and optimize.

Conversion Optimization from Solid Cactus

We created our own optimization program because we know the value and because many merchants don’t have the time or resources to implement a strategy.

It works like this:

1. We research your traffic, segments, and conversion rates to identify groups with poor conversions

2. We pick a few pieces of real estate on your site to deliver relevant messages to these segments
3. We use technology to identify visitors within those segments the second they land on the website and deliver a message we’ve tailored specifically for them through an attractive banner
4. We review the results, optimize the campaigns and then target new segments

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By Sean Gove
seang@ebizinsider.com.

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Through Conversion Optimization Services by Solid Cactus



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- Lead Source
- Keywords Used to Find Your Site
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TALES FROM THE TRENCHES: A Boot Camp Recap

A few dozen recruits. A daily schedule. Hot meals. Yep. All the makings of a Boot Camp. But this was not a traditional "Give me 50! Now!" style boot camp. Instead, it was a three-day long E-commerce extravaganza.

A few times each year, Solid Cactus hosts its E-commerce Boot Camp, an event that displays the company's vested interest in continuing to educate and inform its clients on the latest and greatest in e-commerce.

The Spring E-commerce Boot Camp drew a varied troop of e-commerce folks. Some were total e-commerce newbies, who were looking to launch their first online

store. Others were veterans who have had online stores for a decade or more. Still others own brick-and-mortar stores, too. The clients came from across the US and Canada and the industries were also varied-- food, vitamins, health and beauty products, clothing, candy, custom gifts, pet supplies, awards and more.

Despite our different locales and perspectives, everyone was at Boot Camp to learn. The clients learn from the Solid Cactus staff. Clients learn from each other. Solid Cactus learns from its clients. Every day is a school day in e-commerce, and Boot Camp is an extension of that.

The Latest and Greatest in E-commerce

Between 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, there were 17 sessions, from e-commerce basics to what's hot and new in the industry.

The sessions included:

- Trust-commerce/Creative Value
- Advanced Features that Make the Sale
- Social Media & Viral Marketing
- Personalizing the Web Experience
- How to Plan for a Redesign
- Alternative Marketing Methods to Help You Grow Online
- New Features for Your Store from Solid Cactus
- Strategic Marketing
- Protecting Your Website
- Is it E-mail Marketing or is it SPAM?

- Blogging for Business
- SEO vs. PPC.

Additionally, there were sessions that unveiled the newest Solid Cactus offering, Cactus on Demand and the ever-popular site deconstruction session.

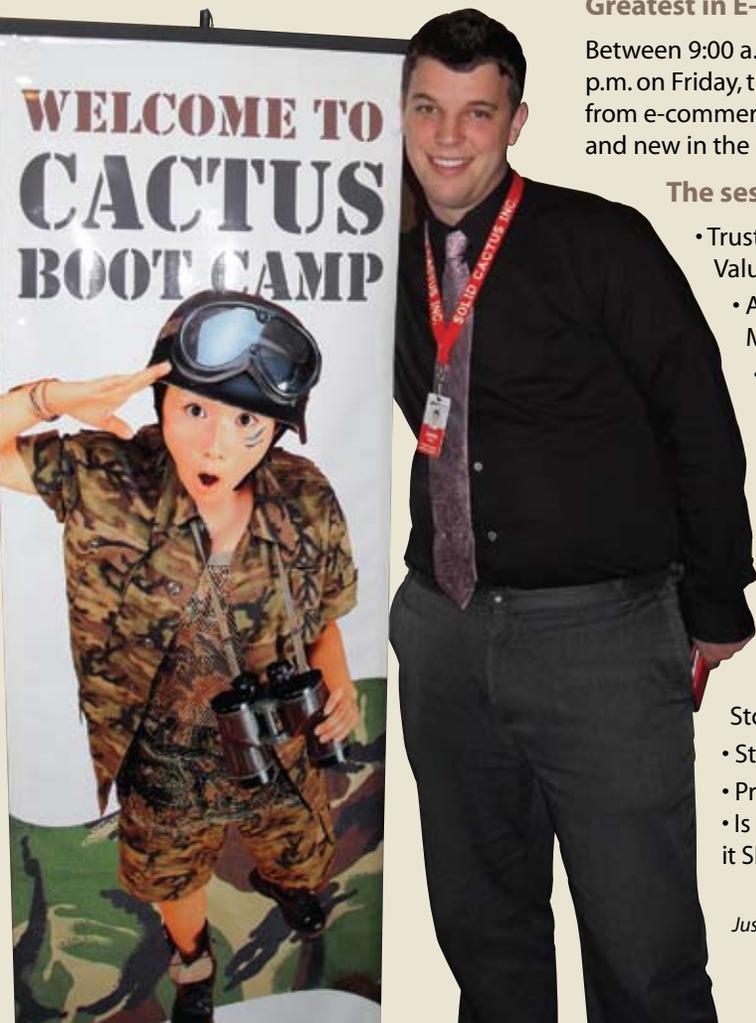
"This year's Boot Camp was ideal for both experienced e-commerce store owners, as well as new up and comers," said Michael Jozaitis, Search Engine Marketing Manager at Solid Cactus. "The mix of sessions ranged from deep focused analytical and technical sessions to introductory and educational ones."



Karl Schilling from Kaleidoscopes to You (left) says "Cheers to a killer PPC campaign!" to SC Search Engine Marketing Manager Michael Jozaitis.

"It was exciting to talk about social media with everyone there," said Jean Lloyd, also a SEM manager. "They didn't have a good hold on why it was important or even how they could leverage Facebook or Twitter for their business. Maybe some of them were still skeptical when we were done, but I could tell they were more receptive and had a clearer idea of how businesses are using these tools effectively. If even one participant gets the courage to sign up for Twitter and start promoting their business, then I'll feel good."

Joan Marchand of MMWIEmbroidery.com said she wished she had attended



Justin Verry, Solutions Advisor, Solid Cactus.

an event like this before she started her e-commerce site. "(Boot Camp) was very informative," said Joan. "I think if I came to Boot Camp first, I would have learned from square one, what the best things are to have on my website, what makes people buy from my website."



Social Networking happens off-line too. Just ask Candy Pam Marchola (right) of BlairCandy.com and Search Engine Marketing Managers, left to right, Jean Lloyd and Robyn Craig.

Andrew DiMino of CarbSmart.com and a Solid Cactus customer since 2003, is currently getting ready to publish his fifth site, BabyontheBrain.com. His four other sites focus on food products for those on lo-carb, sugar-free or gluten-free diets. His new site is completely different. "This is my first non-food venture, so I am looking forward to taking advantage of all these new features that I didn't use before," he said.



Boot Camp is worth the trek, whether its three time zones away, like Andrew Dimino of CarbSmart.com or three miles away like Ron Miller of Wilkes-Barre's Pro Beauty Supply.

DiMino paid particular attention to the sessions focusing on new features and redesigns. It took three planes and three layovers to get from Reno to Wilkes-Barre, but he says it was worth it. "First, you get the chance to meet the staff in person and actually sit down and point to the screen. As a planning

Tales from the Trenches continued on page 14

Finale Dinner @ Boot Camp Peps Up Attendees: Advantage? You!

Wined and Dined. Those three words sum up the evening events at Solid Cactus Boot Camp. And the finale dinner at the Woodlands Inn & Resort was no different.

Before clients and staff bid farewell from another successful E-commerce Boot Camp, the crowd was entertained and motivated with speeches from Co-Founder and President (and Commanding Boot Camp Officer), Scott Sanfilippo and keynoter, Solid Cactus Public Information Officer, Kevin Lynn.

Lynn's speech, filled with both humor and sincerity, offered sound advice to attendees and applauded the efforts of these small business owners, who are indeed the heart of e-commerce.

"Everyone has one page, one chance. You have you," Lynn said of how small businesses really have the advantage when it comes to reaching customers online. "Can they possibly be as sensitive to a client as you? Can they possibly be as accommodating to a client as you? No. They can't. Advantage? You!"

"Advantage? You!" set the theme for the remainder of Lynn's address—about smaller companies harnessing the power of the Internet. He gave a list of eight reasons why small businesses have an advantage, and offered four solutions for taking advantage of, well, those advantages.

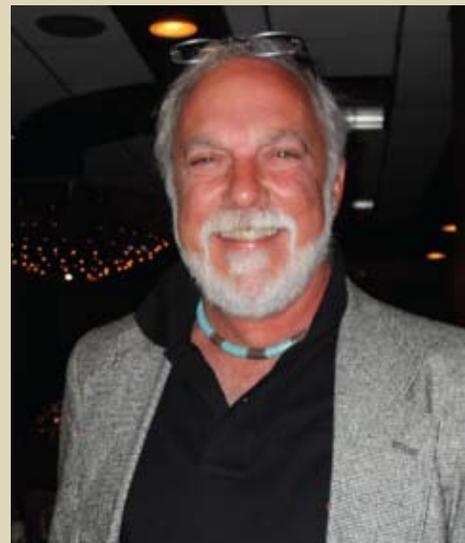
As part of those solutions, Lynn stressed the importance of blogging and a great About Us page.

"Every story is fascinating. Every story is unique. That's the thing about your website. It's more than your store; it's your sales assistant on the floor," said Lynn, likening a great About Us page to striking a conversation with the owner while in a brick-and-mortar store.

"Why are people going to buy from you? Because they like you. Why are they going to like you?" he said. People will like small business, he continued, because of the stories, because of the content.

"It's about unique content. It's something that shows you care," he said.

Lynn also said that small business owners have an advantage because they make their own decisions and usually have interaction with their clients.



No stranger to the microphone, Kevin Lynn, Solid Cactus Public Information Officer, praised small businesses for being the heart of e-commerce during his keynote address at the finale dinner.

"You're listening. You're paying attention because it's your business. You are going to listen to your people because you are smaller," he said. "These are the reasons you know the internet better than the big guys."

Following Lynn's speech, Sanfilippo gave his closing remarks.

"Boot Camp is an invaluable opportunity for you to tell us what we are doing wrong and what we are doing right," he said. "We're your partner in e-commerce success and that's not just a bunch of words that are taking up space below our logo. It's our mantra. It's our way of doing business. We truly want to be your partner in success."

"We thank you for your business. Your success is Solid Cactus' success. This year we were named to the Inc. 500 list and recently the Entrepreneur Hot 100 list, all of which would not be possible if it weren't for companies like you," he said.

His conclusion again addressed the driving force which inspired the creation of the Solid Cactus Boot Camps. "I hope that you all walk away with something that helps you run your business better." **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
donnat@ebizinsider.com



It's not just knowledge you gain at Boot Camp.... it's relationships, too! Clarice (Corky) Fairchild of Horse & Wildlife Gifts and Joan Marchand of MMWI Embroidery became fast friends at Boot Camp.

exercise, it's fantastic. Second, I get to see what is new and coming up. Third, I get to suggest new ideas. Fourth, I get to learn best practices from other businesses," he said.

Clarice "Corky" Fairchild from HorseandWildlifeGifts.com/All Things Equine is currently under redesign with Solid Cactus. She is not new to retail, but is somewhat new to e-commerce. "At first I thought coming would be way over my head, but felt if I was able to pick up a few things, it'd be worth it," she said. "(Boot Camp) helped me understand the back side of things. My head has grown by leaps and bounds."

Sharon Robson came along with her brother Fred Robson, of Woodstock Enterprises. Sharon is considering following her brother into e-commerce. "It was amazing," she reported. "I didn't know anything coming into this. I've come a long way since Wednesday. Learning the difference between SEO and PPC was very interesting to me. It would have taken me months on my own to learn what I learned in three days."

Face Time with Your E-commerce Team

"It's always good meeting people you work with," said Fred Robson of his main reason for attending his third Solid Cactus Boot Camp. Robson utilizes several Solid Cactus services and met one-on-one with his account manager, his solutions advisor, marketing team, call center rep and the designers and the programmers working on his site.



E-commerce runs in the Robson blood! Fred Robson, of Woodstock Enterprises had so much fun at his first two Boot Camps, that his sister Sharon wanted to see what the Cactus was all about.

"The individual attention you get when sitting face to face is great," said Joan Marchand. "Solutions Advisor Justin Verry could go over things with me while

I was right there. He gave me a good idea on where to channel my money, where to focus my efforts."

While Boot Camp was in session, the magic was still happening at Solid Cactus world headquarters, where attendees were treated to a tour of the new Solid Cactus Technology Center in Shavertown, as well as Solid Cactus Call Center Services, Inc., located in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

E-commerce Camaraderie

Perhaps one of the best aspects of Solid Cactus Boot Camp is meeting other people in e-commerce—where else can you get one-on-one access to some of the most brilliant e-commerce experts in the country? While the daily sessions are an excellent learning experience, the learning continues after the sessions end and the evening activities begin.

Solid Cactus Boot Camp features activities each evening—from Italian dinner and karaoke to a night at the local casino and then a finale dinner where attendees are "graduated" from Boot Camp. During these events, clients and staff can interact over homemade Italian cooking and other catered affairs, sharing war stories, tactics and tales from the trenches.

Fred Robson likes the fact that he can meet other e-commerce business owners who have similar features on their site so they can compare notes. "It is always good to share ideas and make contacts," he said, explaining that if he knows another Solid Cactus client has a certain feature, he can contact them to see how it is working. "Boot Camp is great to increase your contact network. It's joining fun with the learning."

Fairchild agrees with Robson about discussing current e-commerce issues with others.

"I think being able to network with other business owners is great. I can say, 'I had that issue and this is what I did.' You can discuss the issues," she said, using how she asked Solid Cactus Boot Camp three-timer, Pam Marchola from BlairCandy.com about her Live Chat feature as an example.

The Solid Cactus staff also loves meeting clients in person. Lloyd enjoyed talking about SEM with clients over lunch and dinner. What she learned from Boot Camp attendees will help her with her day-to-day duties as an SEM account manager.

"It was awesome to interact directly with clients. I got a better feel for everyone's level of knowledge on PPC & Internet Marketing in general. It's going to help me when I send info out to my own clients," she said.

Vice President of Sales Lou Pagnotti adds that clients learn from each other at Solid Cactus Boot Camps. "It's more about learning how to maximize your business through interacting with other store owners and learning best practices and seeing innovative solutions from Solid Cactus," he said.

Ron Miller attended Boot Camp to learn about e-commerce. He's looking to take his beauty supply business online. "It was great to see people being so passionate about their websites. I am definitely glad I came," he said.

Miller, who is new to e-commerce, talked quite a bit to DiMino, an e-commerce veteran of sorts. Folks like DiMino certainly can be looked upon as mentors for those new to e-commerce.

"The beauty of (Boot Camp) is that everybody talks to each other and shares

best practices. That's beautiful," said DiMino of sharing the knowledge with each other.

Marchand says she had a wonderful time at Boot Camp interacting with her peers.

"We did a lot of laughing," she said. "It was just interesting to talk with other website owners. It was a great experience. The food was great. The entertainment was great. The people were great. Everything was great!"

Solid Cactus Boot Camp is a must-attend event. As Marchand said, she wished there was an event like this before she got her e-commerce feet wet. DiMino has been in e-commerce nine years, but says he is still learning each day.

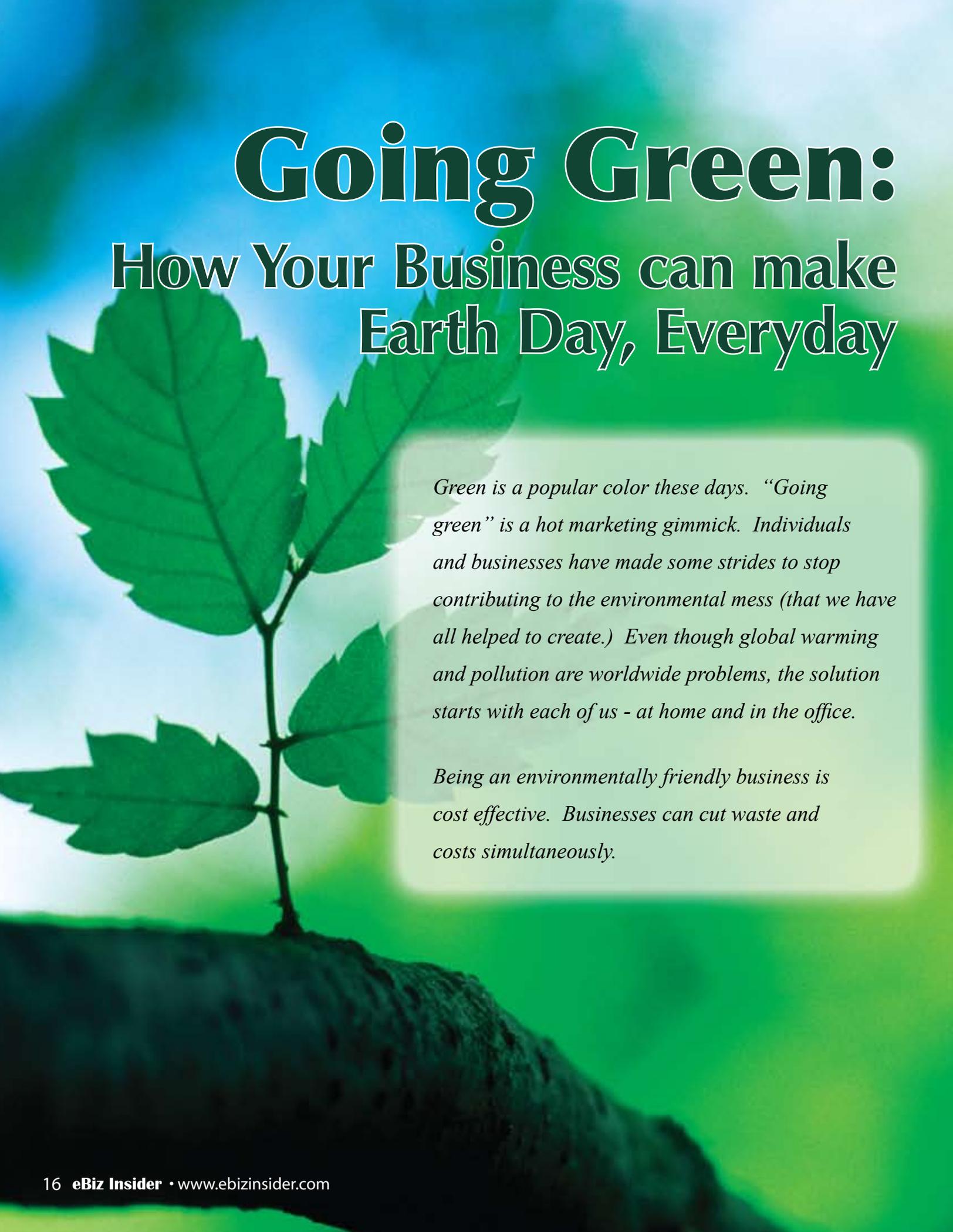
Besides, where else can you sing a duet with your programmer? **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico
donnat@ebizinsider.com



Meredith Zeigler of CriticalTool.com gets a lesson in some excellent e-commerce tools from Vice President of Sales Lou Pagnotti.



Going Green: How Your Business can make Earth Day, Everyday

Green is a popular color these days. “Going green” is a hot marketing gimmick. Individuals and businesses have made some strides to stop contributing to the environmental mess (that we have all helped to create.) Even though global warming and pollution are worldwide problems, the solution starts with each of us - at home and in the office.

Being an environmentally friendly business is cost effective. Businesses can cut waste and costs simultaneously.

Saving money and the Earth:

- Go paperless. Trade paper documents for digital documents. Stop paying for paper, toner and printer servicing. Trading paper mailings for e-mail reduces postage costs. Consider replacing paper catalogs with PDF files. If you send catalogs or print mailings, providing an easy way to opt-out will prevent unwanted waste for your customers and unnecessary costs for you.
- Turn off the power at the end of the work day. Have employees turn off monitors and computers when they leave.
- Strive for a smaller carbon footprint for travel to and from work. Encouraging employees to carpool or ride bikes into work can blunt rising gas prices.
- Reduce breakroom/kitchen waste. Remove disposable products and ask employees to bring their own coffee mugs to work.
- Buy bulk supplies to reduce numbers of individually wrapped products.

The Earth loves efficiency:

- Switching to Energy Star certified appliances allow you to use less energy; additional settings may also help draw minimal power during off hours.
- Motion and/or time sensitive lighting and temperature controls can cut energy use during off hours. Sadly, buying advanced fixtures costs more than having employees simply flip some switches when they leave, but it reduces human error.
- Tankless water heaters reduce the energy required to keep water hot.
- Radiant floor heating reduces extra energy used to heat outside air which may leak into ducts. Water and electric cables are also able to hold more heat than air, making them more efficient heat producers.
- Recycling wasted heat from data centers, waste water, etc., can save real money. Data centers often require energy to cool, while offices in cooler climates (or winter months) are expensive to heat. Filtering cold outside air to cool the data center can reduce your total energy use. Displacing and circulating wasted heat (energy) given

off by servers can offset energy use. Routing waste water pipes to preheat water before it reaches the water heater offers additional savings.

Switching to sustainable sources:

- Find a renewable energy supplier that can directly feed your organization or purchase renewable energy certificates (RECs) to reduce your carbon footprint. To find renewable energy sources and RECs see http://www.green-e.org/base/re_products?cust=b
 - Buying recycled office supplies means less total landfill waste. Although biodegradable hardware (computer parts, phones, printers, etc) are not really available at this point, you can at least use a buying preference that tends toward companies that use less toxic chemicals in the production of their equipment.
 - Check options for supplying your own solar/wind/geothermal energy on-site. For many organizations, on-site power options are not realistic. You'll save money and external energy consumption and you may even be able to sell excess energy back to the grid.
- Running a web-based company obviously requires electricity, not to mention any waste or CO2 produced

during packaging and shipping. Here are ways to help offset usage:

- Reuse. Print on both sides of office paper, write on both sides of scratch paper, use refillable pens and pencils.
- RECYCLE. If you are not producing much waste, you may reduce costs by taking bags to your local recycling center. If you are lucky (or convincing), you may even be able to negotiate for cheaper residential pick-up.
- Buy carbon offsets. Carbon offsets exchange your inability to solve the problem locally with a global solution. One versatile non-profit offset provider is <http://www.carbonfund.org>. I found a comparison of several providers here: http://www.ecobusinesslinks.com/carbon_offset_wind_credits_carbon_reduction.htm

Every positive change helps. Please remember this when you stock your supply shelves, pay your energy bill, remodel a building or finish a bottle of water. Remember each time you leave a room, flipping that switch helps us all. **eBiz**



By Jacob Swartwood
jacobs@ebizinsider.com



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Add Your Site

It's so easy for Vacuums24X7.com

"I'm no computer expert. Solid Cactus made it easy for me to manage my pages, change numbers, add prices, you name it. It's so easy I've added two more websites."

—TR Mutlu, Vacuums24X7.com

Vacuums24X7.com grew from some brick-and-mortar stores in the northern Virginia area. TR Mutlu opened his first store in 1990, then he came online in 2003 selling vacuum parts only. His company has 4 employees and sells more than 3,000 different parts for many different vacuum cleaners.

"We started with a Yahoo! Store," TR recalls. "We started out simply, but after awhile it was clear we needed a better online store. We needed something that looked professional and was easy to use. I did the research and we decided on Solid Cactus. Right from that first redesign we looked like a big-time business and not something someone operated from a garage. It was perfect."

Sadly, times change in e-business and so do the demands on the operators. "We were going to get out of the Yahoo! Platform entirely," TR says. "It wasn't Solid Cactus, but we had issues with the Yahoo! Platform itself. Google Checkout doesn't integrate and the order processing was from the Stone Age." Be careful what you wish for, as the saying goes. Vacuums24X7.com did indeed switch to a new company who promised

they would take care of everything. It didn't happen. "Suddenly we had a very bare-bones website again," says TR. "Our orders started falling until they were only a fraction of what they had been. Everything took months to fix and they cost us much more than Solid Cactus. We were happy to come back and especially happy when our orders picked back up to normal."

Vacuums24X7.com did more than come back to the Yahoo! Platform fold, they've taken their partnership with Solid Cactus to a new level by adding two entirely new websites. TR calls them clones of the first store. "We have opened Vacuumpartsstore.com and Kirbypartsstore.com," says TR. "We've been able to reach out to other markets and work everything through our staff working the online side of our business."

Since then, Vacuums24X7.com has decided on yet another redesign. "There are many new features that make it easier for our customers and easier for us," says TR. "We want a new face. I told the Solid Cactus design team I had three stores in mind and we wanted to look better than they did. The three are Walmart.com, Sears.com and Target.com. The first mock-up the design team did for us looks better than those sites look now. Solid Cactus really uses color and visuals better than anyone else in the business. By the time they're done with us we'll look much better than those big name sites."

Vacuums24X7.com also wanted new functionality. They've decided to add Snap Shop and they'll be putting the Shopping Cart on the item page. Naturally, as the internet has become more focused on search engines, TR wanted the latest in search engine optimization. "That'll be emphasized throughout the redesign," he says. "It's



TR Mutlu, Vacuums24X7.com

strange, because back a couple of years ago we weren't thinking much about SEO. There are so many more stores out there and so much more competition, you can be sure we're thinking about SEO now!"

Vacuums24X7.com will have a brand new look and new functionality in a few weeks. "We expect the same results as the last time we went through this process," says TR Mutlu. "When Solid Cactus did our last redesign not only were there no missing parts, we got more than we counted on. We already know we'll get great tech support; we always have. You know, when they say 'Solid Cactus is your partner in e-commerce success,' it's more than just a slogan. It's the truth." **eBiz**



By Kevin Lynn
kevinl@ebizinsider.com

What Can You Do Better? – The Basics Behind the Solid Cactus Site Review...

What happens when you spend every waking moment tweaking your site, adding content, categorizing products, etc? You become intimately connected to your site but you can simultaneously lose sight of how first time shoppers are experiencing it. This perspective is vital to creating a shopping experience that leads customers from the home page through the checkout page.

Use the Customers' Eyes

How do you obtain the beginners mind necessary to view your site from a fresh perspective? Follow the guidelines below to evaluate your site as a brand new customer might.

What Causes Customers to leave your site?

The first step to evaluating your site from a customer perspective begins with understanding the disease of Site Abandonment. As with any disease, there are usually multiple factors at work. MarketingExperiments.com has found that most visitors jump ship for the following 3 reasons:

1. Lack of Relevance
2. Points of Friction
3. Creation of Anxiety

Lack of Relevance:

If a customer comes to your site from the keyword "green cleaning products" and they land on a page for "Comet" you can be sure that they will leave without buying a thing. It is your job to provide a logical connection between the keywords used to navigate to your site and the landing page you are presenting to visitors. If the keyword "scent" does not follow through from the advertisement (or search result) to the landing page on the site and then

onto the product page, you will lose that valuable customer to a competitor.

Points of Friction:

In addition, if a customer is unable to navigate your site to find the product they are looking for, they will leave. This friction caused by poor navigation is the number one reason why shoppers leave a site without buying. A prime example of friction is if a customer searches for the product they came to buy and irrelevant search results come up. This disparity is enough of a roadblock to send the visitor packing. Your goal as the experience creator is to remove all roadblocks between the landing page where a visitor arrives and the checkout page.

Creation of Anxiety

The final trigger for increased bounce rates are the elements of your site that cause anxiety in the mind of the visitor. When a customer comes to the shopping cart and is presented paragraphs of warnings about shipping, he or she will abandon the cart. The reason is that there are twenty other competitors who probably offer the same product and who don't scare customers while they are in the checkout process. Avoid creating points of anxiety at all costs. However, if you do have to explain a negative element of your site, do so in a positive way. Utilize fonts that are positive and write in a tone that is friendly and explanatory. The last thing that you want to do is have a paragraph of bold red text listing all the places where you don't ship.

Summing Up

Take a step back, examine your site and ask yourself these questions: Is my site relevant to my target market? Are there any roadblocks preventing my visitors from finding the products they desire?

Are there any warnings, broken links, or confusing policies that will cause anxiety in the visitors minds? If you are able to find any issues with your site, take the time and effort necessary to fix each one.

In today's e-commerce world there are too many competitors waiting just a click away. Once you have a customer on your site, try to do everything possible to keep them. This doesn't mean trapping them in Kafkaesque navigation scheme, it means providing a simple, intuitive, positive shopping experience that will convert a majority of fist time visitors into sales.

Take the time now to examine the issues customers are facing on your site. It may be hard, it may create more work for you in the present, but in the long term it will lead to a successful, profitable e-commerce website. **eBiz**

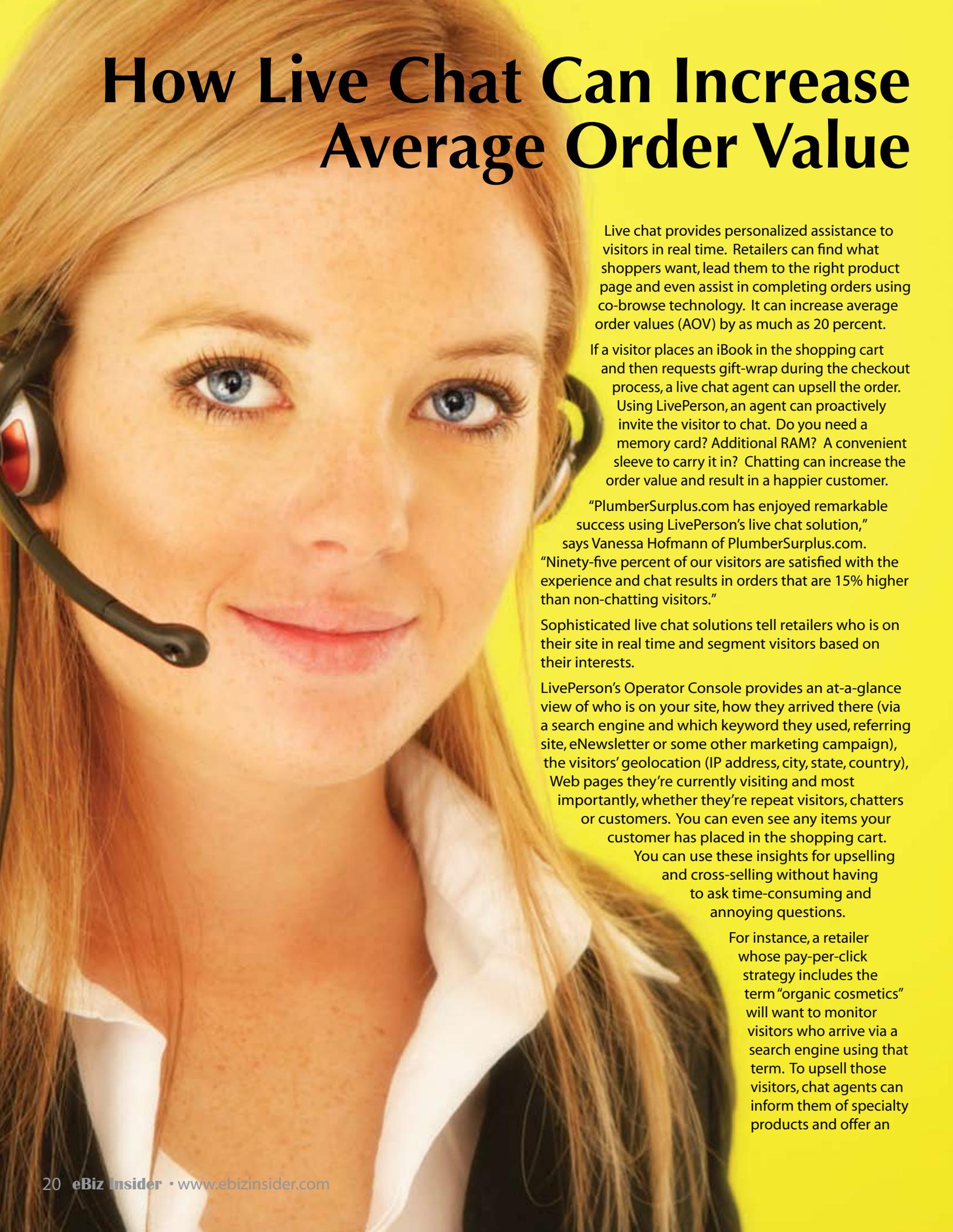


By Jeff Petrosillo
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How Live Chat Can Increase Average Order Value

Live chat provides personalized assistance to visitors in real time. Retailers can find what shoppers want, lead them to the right product page and even assist in completing orders using co-browse technology. It can increase average order values (AOV) by as much as 20 percent.

If a visitor places an iBook in the shopping cart and then requests gift-wrap during the checkout process, a live chat agent can upsell the order. Using LivePerson, an agent can proactively invite the visitor to chat. Do you need a memory card? Additional RAM? A convenient sleeve to carry it in? Chatting can increase the order value and result in a happier customer.

"PlumberSurplus.com has enjoyed remarkable success using LivePerson's live chat solution," says Vanessa Hofmann of PlumberSurplus.com. "Ninety-five percent of our visitors are satisfied with the experience and chat results in orders that are 15% higher than non-chatting visitors."

Sophisticated live chat solutions tell retailers who is on their site in real time and segment visitors based on their interests.

LivePerson's Operator Console provides an at-a-glance view of who is on your site, how they arrived there (via a search engine and which keyword they used, referring site, eNewsletter or some other marketing campaign), the visitors' geolocation (IP address, city, state, country), Web pages they're currently visiting and most importantly, whether they're repeat visitors, chatters or customers. You can even see any items your customer has placed in the shopping cart.

You can use these insights for upselling and cross-selling without having to ask time-consuming and annoying questions.

For instance, a retailer whose pay-per-click strategy includes the term "organic cosmetics" will want to monitor visitors who arrive via a search engine using that term. To upsell those visitors, chat agents can inform them of specialty products and offer an

incentive such as free shipping if the visitor purchases an additional item. Likewise, retailers who include promotional offers in e-mail campaigns can identify campaign recipients as soon as they arrive on site. The Operator Console flags these visitors so the chat agent may engage them.

LivePerson options to upsell orders:

- **Offer incentives to visitors to increase orders**

Entice visitors to increase their orders using premium promotions: free gift-wrapping, buy-three-get-one-free, free shipping on orders totaling \$200 or more. To implement, simply create a few promotional invitations and proactively invite visitors to chat to learn more.

- **Chat with visitors who select big ticket items**

Shopping cart abandonment is an online fact of life. Research shows that visitors use the shopping cart in their decision-making process. So if a visitor places a big-ticket item in his or her shopping cart,

alarms should be going off. Proactive rules can alert your chat agents whenever visitors place such items in their cart and can automatically send invitations that read: "Need help selecting the right components? Click to chat with a product specialist." Or you can offer other promotions that upsell the order.

- **Reward visitors who reach your site via a paid search term or SEM campaign**

Most retailers deploy costly pay-per-click campaigns to attract visitors to their sites. Retailers should couple them with a chat strategy to ensure conversion. Offer a promotional discount to visitors who arrive on your site via a paid search or free shipping if they purchase the item right then. Inform visitors that they'll be chatting with a product specialist, not a customer service representative.

- **Offer special incentives to chat**

Customer surveys indicate that visitors who chat are three times more likely

to convert. Offer a special incentive that entices a visitor to accept a chat invitation, such as "Chat now to get \$5.00 off your next order" or even free shipping on this item.

- **Offer discounts on next purchase**

If visitors linger on your iPod product page, encourage them to buy with a special offer. Buy the iPod now and you'll include an iTunes gift card on the next visit. It is easy to track such offers through the Operator Console reporting features.

For additional best practices to increase average order value, attend the joint LivePerson/Solid Cactus webinar this July 17, 2008 (see ad for details), or visit www.solutions.liveperson.com/events. **eBiz**



By Philippe Lang

Senior Vice President, SMB Solutions, LivePerson

How important is the 2008 holiday season to your online store?

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All webinar participants receive a copy of LivePerson's Best Practices for Increasing Average Order Value guide for free!





Tech Corner:

Plan B: Backup your Data!

If you've ever had a computer crash, you know it can be a devastating experience, both for you personally and for your business. Keeping your data backed up is vital. This month we'll examine a few of the most popular methods of data backup.

Tape Backup

Since the early days of computing, magnetic tape has been used as a medium for data storage. Tape drives have come a long way since the early days when cassettes were used in a tape recorder. Entry-level tape backup drives cost around \$1,000 and are often installed as internal devices.

The Good? Tape backups can hold 60 to 600 to 1,600 Gb depending on the drive and the media used. You should use a tape backup if you plan on running large-scale backups (servers or multiple computers) on a regular basis. Purchase several sets of data storage and store a copy off-site, too.

The Bad? Tape backups aren't the latest greatest technology, and require you to set aside a specific time each day/week to maintain them. There's also the cost of additional tapes (which need to be replaced on a regular basis).

Online Backups

Most online backup services require you to install a tiny application on your computer

that works in the background, looking for new and changed files. When a file is found, it is backed up on a remote server. These services are becoming more and more popular. Mozy.com and Carbonite.com are both popular online backup services. Mozy charges a monthly access fee plus a per-gigabyte surcharge. Carbonite charges an unlimited annual fee.

The Good? The benefit to these services is that data is stored online, therefore eliminating the need for additional equipment on your end. Mostly, these services run in the background and are activated and do their thing on a schedule, so you just need to make sure your computer is on with an Internet connection and your backup will run.

The Bad? If you have massive amounts of data that need backing up, you're going to spend bandwidth and time uploading. Also, if something does happen and your computer crashes, online backups aren't as convenient to restore as tape backups, simply because you'll need to re-download and sync your data from the Internet...which can take hours.

Backup Software

Backup software such as Novosoft's Handy Backup (handybackup.com) is a software

application that runs on your PC to backup specific files and directories to a variety of sources, including network storage, external hard drives, tape backups, CDs/DVDs, and remote FTP servers.

The Good? This is especially helpful if you have only a handful of documents and files to backup. You can use this software in conjunction with a tape or online backup. For example, if you have three computers and a server, use backup software to make sure your individual PCs are backed up to the server, then use the tape or online backup to archive the server.

The Bad? I've often found this type of software to be bad when it comes to scheduled backups and any sort of FTP/offsite backups. Because it's a full, bulky software application and not directly integrated into your operating system, it isn't as reliable.

Summing up

When choosing a backup service, ensure the provider has a good reputation. You don't want to back up your data with a provider who isn't around tomorrow. Think long-term. How frequently do you need a backup? Is the backup a total system backup or just what's changed since the last one (incremental)?

The bottom line is that if you're a one-person shop with one computer, online backup is often the way to go. On the other hand, if you've got multiple computers, you're looking at some combination of the above three methods.

Wrapping your head around the data backup process is truly an annoyance, but not nearly as annoying or as devastating as losing all your work and having to try and rebuild. **eBiz**



By John Dawe
johnd@ebizinsider.com

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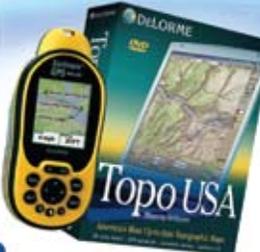
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