



## **e-Marketing: Don't Forget Your Back-End (Ohhh Matron)... with apologies to Kenneth Williams**

The focus of e-Marketing is usually on the attraction of clients. There is a tendency to look at activities optimizing websites, developing inbound links, setting up directory entries, email campaigns and Pay-Per-Click (PPC). But if you only look at that side of your business there is a good chance that you will “come a cropper”.

Gareth Edwards, National B2B Centre Associate e-Business Consultant, takes a look at your back-end.

### **Problems**

Consider this Christmas. It has broken all records for online spending with the IMRG (Interactive Media in Retail Group) estimating online Xmas sales soared to £7.5bn, a 50% increase on 2005. In addition to this Amazon experienced their record sales for a single day on Dec 11th selling 4m items worldwide (source: [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), January 3 2007)! But it seems that it has also broken all records for customer dissatisfaction. My personal experience is one of great irritation. I have suffered;

- Very late delivery of gifts destined to send overseas (but ordered back in November)
- Poor facilities to communicate with suppliers (standard email address or no phone number)
- No response from customer service departments
- Delivery companies that believe “delivery between 9am and 5pm” is acceptable in 2006

My response is likely to be the same as everybody else. Those suppliers will be put on my black list and next time I will go elsewhere. There is, after all, plenty of choice.

So the onus is on those of you selling goods and services on the internet to sort yourselves out and look at your e-Marketing effort.

### **e-Marketing?**

Some people will be asking what this has got to do with e-Marketing – isn't all to do with those people in operations? Actually no.

Firstly e-Marketing (and marketing in general) is very much about managing the relationship with customers: attraction and retention are two sides of the same coin. There isn't much spending money on getting customers to find you and make a purchase if you do things that scare them off.

Secondly consumers rarely buy the nuts and bolts core product on offer. They usually look at the overall value proposition that consists of the product plus a variety of other components and features. Finance, easy-to-access shops, free delivery, attractive packaging, on-going support, a trusted brand...it could be anything. If you don't offer the right set of extras (which could include good service, fulfillment and delivery) that your target market wants, then prospects will simply go elsewhere at the click of a mouse. Sounds like a job for your eMarketers to me!

Thirdly if customers who have bought from you have problems post sale then there is a good chance you will lose them. Unless you sell something unique then they will find it easy to switch to your rivals. Don't forget that dissatisfied customer have a nasty habit of telling other people when they have had a bad experience – viral marketing in its nastiest sense.



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### **Retrieving The Situation**

With Christmas 2006 disappearing into history you have got some time for a bit of structured analysis of your approach to dealing with the back-end of your business.

### **Complaints Are Gold Dust**

Most people don't bother to tell you if they are dissatisfied: they just go elsewhere. This means you need to treat complaints as vital clues as to what problems clients are facing and why. Use them to generate your short term action plan.

### **Data data everywhere**

Use webstats, analytics and phone records (if you have a switchboard) to understand how people have tried to contact you for service and post-sale enquiries. Is there anything to suggest that visitors to your site gave up trying to get contact details or use enquiry forms? If you provided a phone number then check your phone records to ensure there aren't any problems with the number of lines or operator staffing. If your business is set up right then there will not be a shortage of data to look at.

### **Put yourself in your customer's shoes**

Try going through the ordering and fulfilment process yourself (or get someone to act as a mystery shopper) and see what happens. Are you happy with the speed of delivery or the delivery arrangements? Do you get a good response from emails or phone calls? If the answer to either of these questions is no then imagine how your customers feel? It still surprises me that some people don't go through this process as a matter of course.

### **Supplier Audit**

Now might be a good time to check the small print in the contracts you have with some of your suppliers and contractors. Are they sticking to service level agreements (SLAs)? Are the SLAs adequate in light of your commitment to improve service to your clients?

### **Shout About It**

If you are actually as good at fulfilling customer orders as you are at making sales then review your website copy, your email campaigns and your PPC ads to ensure that your customers know about it. If you can turn an order around overnight, if you use delivery services offering specific delivery times, or if your customers regularly tell you how great you are then put it on your website, in your newsletter and in a press release. It could be an opportunity to gain some competitive advantage over your rivals.

### **Summary**

What happens after customers make a purchase could make or break your on-line business. Taking an e-Marketing approach to putting problems right is the only way to make sure the solution is geared towards your customers' (and ultimately your) best interests. Take time to look at your back-end now!



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