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TRINITY INSIGHT'S E-COMMERCE PLAYBOOK

8 STRATEGIES TO TAKE ONLINE SALES TO THE NEXT LEVEL

By Craig Smith
Founder of Trinity Insight

Introduction

Its about keeping pace...or maybe even setting it
No industry is as dynamic as eCommerce. Due to changing consumers, technologies and algorithms, the only way to maximize your online and eCommerce opportunity is to stay ahead of the curve.

Winners online are not always the biggest brands with the deepest pockets, but rather the companies that are most willing to embrace new traffic and conversion tactics. Trinity Insight helps companies execute these efforts to increase online performance.

If you are reading this, you are probably responsible for the success of an online or eCommerce operation. We have created this eCommerce playbook exactly for you. Think of it as some new ideas to kickstart your business, or read it to reaffirm that you are on pace with the industry.

To learn more about Trinity Insight and how we help eCommerce businesses, read the last page of this playbook and visit us online at TrinityInsight.com.

Thank you for reading and enjoy.

Craig Smith
Founder & Managing Director
Trinity Insight LLC

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1. "Sweep" your high bounce rate pages

Every website needs to be cleaned from time to time. By cleaning, we mean locating underperforming spots on your site and executing new approaches to improve them.

So what's the best metric to determine which pages should be worked on? A great place to start is the bounce rate data.

Bounce rate is described as the percentage of visitors who land at your site and immediately leave without viewing another page. This metric clearly represents visitors who are not having their expectations met.

What to do:

Identify your top 30 landing pages within your analytics software. Within these pages, segment results by bounce rate. Locate the top 5 pages within your site that have the highest bounce rates. Spend some time assessing these page types, and see what type of message is being conveyed.

Is there a call to action or central promotion? If a customer is new to your site, do you provide adequate information about your company?

Focus on the pages in your site with the highest bounce rate, and be proactive to eliminate elements that do not meet user's expectations. Making these pages more effective by testing new presentation tactics will move the needle with both visitor engagement and conversion.

2. Re-engineer your transactional process

Too often, cart and checkout processes lead consumers down a long and winding road. Retailers lose would-be customers, because visitors lose patience or simply become distracted.

Testing new approaches to your cart can quickly increase sales 10-30%, depending on current page progression levels. By evaluating alternative creatives, or by re-engineering the transactional process entirely, your eCommerce business can achieve tremendous gains.

What to do:

Conduct path analysis
Customers all behave differently, and different factors cause them to take different paths. If you understand where they drop off within the checkout process, you can properly reengineer the checkout process. Within your analytics software package, make sure that you have created "checkpoints" for each cart/checkout step. Each step within your process needs to be tagged with tracking codes, so that abandonment rates are associated with exact pages.

Implement "visible" security
Don't underestimate online shoppers' hesitation to buy from a merchant whose website does not seem secure. Use partnership logos from companies such as Versign, Hacker Safe, TrustE, and the Better Business Bureau to reduce the hesitation of your shoppers.

Clarify your return policy
Make sure that you explain your return policy clearly in the cart, potentially with a link that triggers a javascript or pop-up message explaining details. By defining how returns are processed, your business will be answering a question that is undoubtedly on your customers' minds and potentially inhibiting sale progress.

You may want to utilize a persistent cart that consistently shows customers what products are in the cart and at what dollar total. Another tactic is to remove navigation after a customer progresses to the first step of the checkout process. Many retailers find that this limits potential distractions.

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3. Syndicate fresh topical content for SEO benefits

Search engine optimization, otherwise known as SEO, is the process of improving organic (ie. unpaid) placement in search engines. SEO is a highly changing tactic that is primarily driven by two components within your site: Content and Linking.

The process of content syndication leverages these two areas to help your SEO efforts. In short, content syndication is the ongoing process of making newly written content available to webmasters in an effort to improve "authority" status within search engines. The publishing of this material, both at content portals and individual websites, generates one-way links for your business and helps your "score" within search algorithms.

What to do:

Start writing content, or re-purpose old content with new research. Create content that maps to the phrases you are targeting.

For instance, if you are targeting the keywords "discount cruises", write content entitled "5 Ways to Find the Best Cruise Bargain". The content should be well-written and at least 800 words in length in order to have value. Within the body of the content, and within the author section of the content, embed html tags that provide links back to your website.

For example, in the author bio: "Charles Johnson is a writer for Trinity Insight. Trinity Insight specializes in eCommerce Consulting".

These links point to pages deep within your taxonomy and help search engines properly identify and classify your pages to specific keywords. Make sure to change the phrases and destinations
of the links as you syndicate your content.

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4. Embrace Social Media

At Trinity, we think that web 2.0 is best defined as web experiences driven by user-generated content. Google and other search engines favor user-generated content because it is comprehensive, fresh, and objective. It provides search engines with additional information to their indexes, it's provided by people who are knowledgeable on a topic area, and it ultimately delivers what search engines want -- relevance.

Embracing social media & social bookmarking will help your business increase search engine rankings as well as drive positive customer interactions.

What to do:

Establish campaigns for social bookmarking and social content-sharing sites to help grow your online presence. Create numerous accounts at social bookmarking sites such as Del.icio.us. Use varied pages within the "merchandising" sections of your website (ex. category/sub-category pages) and bookmark them at these websites. Make sure that the description and title of all of the submitted bookmarks encapsulate targeted search phrases. This is essentially adding the page to the search index of the bookmarking site and creating a one way link back to your website.

After conducting social bookmarking, a great next step is to establish "topical hubs" at sites like Squidoo, Hub Pages, and WetPaint. These sites allow visitors to create pages on topics they are passionate about, and these pages are typically embedded with video, RSS feeds, blog feeds, bookmarks and guestbooks.

By creating a "topical hub", you relay expertise about your marketplace while strategically embedding links with targeted anchor text. After leveraging these social media tactics, your website will likely gain ground quickly within key search engine placements.

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5. Test top paid search landing pages

How many times have you heard the saying, "You only get one chance to make a first impression"? Nowhere is this more true than with paid search marketing, as a web user decides within 3 seconds if they are going to stay and explore or if they are going to continue their search elsewhere.

More often than not, retailers choose to present paid search visitors with existing category/sub-category pages that are generated by their eCommerce platform. These pages are usually presented in grid-type format, and may miss key merchandising messages. It's no surprise that these pages frequently under-perform because they do not engage and persuade.

Re-launching a paid search campaign, in which critical ad group landing pages are tested for effectiveness, will yield an eCommerce business higher returns from their advertising dollars.

What to do:

Assess your keyword and adgroup spending. Where are the most dollars being spent? Isolate an initial 5 pages to test alternative layouts external to your eCommerce platform.

Next, think about a new customer that comes to your site in the aforementioned keyword scenarios. What are they looking to see, initially? Are you doing a good job of presenting it? Do you entice with an active promotion within the category? Do you present quality content to educate? Write down ideas to help drive alternative page designs.

Create new wireframe versions for these 5 keyword themes and review them internally. After the wireframes are finalized, construct new html designs that mirror the wireframes, and launch the control page versions in a split test within the ppc channel. When statistical validity is reached, the test is completed. At this time, your marketing team should observe any conversion changes and attempt to isolate the page variables that caused the increase for future efforts.

6. Dynamically serve content based on parameters

Turning browsers into buyers is best achieved by providing a user experience that is tailored to customer interests. Using new technologies that are available today, eCommerce and internet businesses can provide a presentation that speaks to the customer.

When constructing this type of optimization effort, consider the types of offers that will be presented, where and when they will be presented, and the unique visitor segment that will receive the offer.

The number of messaging opportunities are endless. With the right tools and strategy to dynamically serve content across high-frequency user scenarios, online metrics relating to engagement and conversion will rise.

What to do:

How do you speak to the customer? Use cookie data in conjunction with IP information to present tailored messaging for varied scenarios. Scenarios could include:

- First time visitor incentives
- Discounts or promotions presented to return customers on 2nd visit
- Sitewide creative triggered by clickstream targets
- Messaging that correlates to IP location promoting in-store events
- Discounts or promotions to users that have exited the cart/checkout process
- Promotions that are tailored to an incoming search phrase

These scenarios will likely convert customers at higher levels, and overall revenue per visitor within these scenarios will increase.

7. Integrate Cart Abandonment Solutions

The shopping cart and checkout process can be one of the most frustrating aspects of an eCommerce store.

Numerous customers enter your cart, but only a percentage of them complete a transaction. An online business needs to make every attempt to re-engage with cart abandoners and persuade them to complete their purchase.

Using strategies to gain mindshare and trigger user behavior, your eCommerce business can make great strides in reducing leakage. Doing so will increase your overall conversion rate and equal incremental sales for the business.

What to do:

Integrate these two cart abandonment solutions:

"Email me my cart" functionality

Many users use the shopping cart as a way to save products when doing price comparisons online. If you are selling merchandise that is offered at other online retailers, your customers are likely leaving your process to do a quick scan to see if they can find a better price.

Provide consumers with the tools to make it easy for them to remember you. Within your cart page, add the ability to "email me my cart". With this, a user gets their cart and any future promotions for items in their cart sent directly to their email inbox.

Abandon cart email system

For site visitors that are logged-in, or who have entered their email address within a step of your checkout process, an opportunity exists to market to them directly. Integrate an automated process that allows your marketing team to send direct emails to visitors who have abandoned their cart, and your business can drive an additional 3-6% in sales. Include the product(s) that was in the cart, and if possible, integrate a promotion that correlates. Promos could include free shipping, a percentage off the order, or a free gift with purchase.

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8. Explore rich interaction merchandising

Look around the web at top online retailers and you will see innovative approaches to homepage and category merchandising. Large multi-channel brands are creating flash and ajax "merchandisers" to help guide consumers to certain products and to market assortments in varied contexts.

These types of capabilities allow marketers to easily incorporate new products to site refreshes, while providing users the ability to browse top promos within the first 1-2 clicks after arrival.

What to do:

Test flash or ajax merchandising by creating a homepage merchandiser for your top overall 4 products/messages, as well as one category merchandiser outlining 3-4 products/promotions within your top category. Conduct a split test to accurately distribute traffic to a customer segment, such as direct traffic, to accurately measure against the control version.

Be sure to use high resolution photography and provide clear calls to action within the main reading pane. Gauge the impact by assessing overall conversion rates at the respective levels, and continue to expand if metric increases are realized.

If possible, create reading panes that allow consumers to find category top sellers, new arrivals, and items on sale. By presenting products in this fashion, the online business will reach brand loyalists and bargain shoppers alike.

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About Trinity Insight

Trinity Insight provides services to assist internet and e-commerce businesses in increasing traffic, optimizing conversion rates, and reducing operational costs.

Backed by over 10 years of eCommerce experience, Trinity has helped leading brands within the retail, travel, pharmaceutical, and financial markets drive higher sales through the online channel. Our services span the areas of search marketing (PPC & SEO), web analytics management, multivariate and usability testing, and website/interface design.

For more information and to learn more visit us at TrinityInsight.com or call us at 866.535.8807 to schedule an initial consultation.

Written by: Craig Smith, Founder
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