TIPS FOR IMPROVING CUSTOMER TRUST & BUILDING LOYALTY WHEN SELLING ONLINE

Tips for improving customer trust and building loyalty when selling online

For many small businesses, building trust is crucial to ensuring repeat customers and standing out from competitors. This is not any different, and is perhaps even more important, when you are selling online.

In addition to providing quality products that are "value for money", below are some other areas to consider when working to build trust with your online customer-base.

1. Share your story

Giving your customers a brief summary of your business' history, including expertise and awards, conveys your approach and values, and helps your target audience to engage with the brand. This can be done through an "About Us" section on your online sales platform and enhanced through complementary social media. Sharing your story can help to provide a unique selling point and differentiate your business in the market.

2. Social Media

Use social media to connect and engage with new and existing followers. You should aim to regularly update and manage your content (such as posts, images, videos) to build awareness and visibility of your brand and business. Be authentic and creative to attract more followers and give them a better feel for your brand.

3. Use customer testimonials

When you use customer testimonials, you are using real people to showcase success in your product or service. As customer testimonials represent an unbiased view, they can help establish and enhance trust. When using a third-party sales platform, you can also encourage satisfied customers to leave positive reviews to achieve the same outcome. Encouraging customers to leave reviews, be it good or bad, gives you the opportunity to increase trust in your brand/business by how you respond to their reviews. It allows you to convey that you care about your customers and value their experience with your product or service. As such, it is important that you respond to all customer reviews.

4. Accurate and up-to-date product information

When shoppers visit a site with the intention to buy, the most important factor is price. So, it is important to ensure that the product price is aligned to the product value and to similar products in the market. A study by Episerver in 2017 found that consumers really care about content when shopping online, including quality, accuracy and how the content is delivered to them. Nearly all respondents to the study indicated that they were dissuaded from completing the purchase due to incomplete content or

information. It is important that you review your site regularly to ensure it is current and easy to access/navigate. Additionally, you should ensure that the product descriptions, stock availability, delivery timeframes and prices are clear and accurate. This aspect of your e-commerce operations is a key part of the customer experience which ultimately impacts trust and loyalty.

5. Reliable, convenient and timely order fulfillment

In online shopping, reliable, safe and timely delivery is the basic and essential goal for online consumers. A good product delivery service entails:

- the customer receiving what they ordered – the quality and specification are in accordance with the description online
- the item is well packed and protected from damage through the delivery process
- the order is received within the timeframe and at the place indicated.

Trust can be further enhanced if your customers had visibility over the tracking of the product movement from the point of order to final delivery. A delayed delivery may adversely impact your customer's confidence in shopping online with you, even where the responsibility for the delay rests with a third party. As such, you may want to "under promise and over deliver" when it comes to the timeline. For those times when delivery is delayed, ensure that there is prompt communication to the customer and keep them informed of your efforts to minimise the delay.

6. Ensure security and privacy of customer data

Issues of security and privacy play a very important role in creating trust during online transactions. Security typically refers to the ability of the website to protect consumers' personal data from any unauthorised disclosure of information during electronic transactions. You want to make sure your customers feel safe when they shop with you. A customer is unlikely to follow through with a purchase if they feel their personal information, including credit or debit card data is not safe. So, ensure you either use trusted payment options, or improve your encryption-based internet security protocols and display your trust badges.

7. Simple return and refund policy

You must think of your e-commerce returns as a service you provide your customers and as an aspect of your customer retention program. As such, your policy should be simple and easy to find before the transaction is completed. If you make your returns simple, customers may be more likely to buy from you again. If you recover well from a mistake such as damaged or mispacked item through a "simple and hassle-free-for-the-customer" returns policy, customers may become more loyal to your business. Ensure that your returns policy is easy to find, is illustrated in simple form (not too wordy) and includes clear deadlines and details on what kind of refunds are offered (e.g. cash, exchange, credit). Your strategy for this could also include accepting returns via shipment or in store (if you have a physical store), providing pre-printed return labels and forms for the refund claim in your initial delivery and paying for the return shipping. The returns process is another opportunity to show your customers that you care. Re-engage with your customer when you receive a return with a simple thank you and listen to them when they express their frustration. Consider also allowing some flexibility, e.g. with deadlines especially in the current economic and social climate.

8. Go all out for customer service

When customers experience a problem and receive prompt, helpful and memorable customer service, they will associate that with reliability. Make sure your customers feel heard and appreciated. Always be available; include phone numbers on landing pages and add in a chatbox if possible. Generally, people

feel comforted when they are able to talk to someone whenever they choose. Coach your employees into going out of their way to make the customer happy.