

Create a Sticky Website with Customer Education

I have already mentioned this in a number of white papers, but it is worth saying again. The more valuable and relevant the information you provide to your target visitor on a website (or with any communication tool) the more satisfied that visitor will be and the more traffic you will receive. What could be more relevant than “educating” your visitors? No, not the kind of education that gets your knuckles rapped with a ruler when you can’t remember Lincoln’s birthday, but solid information that allows people to be more productive at work, to whip up a great meal, to dress better, or to get more self-esteem.

With so many websites vying for attention, you really need to have something special. It can’t be all about you or your company; it has to be all about your customers and prospects. That something, of course, should involve your company’s products and services.

Below are some ways to add customer education to your website. It doesn’t matter if you sell to consumers or to other businesses; these tools work for both.

Blogs

The great thing about blogs —short for “weblogs”— is that they are easy to set up and maintain. Blog entries can be short or long and can include images. If your blog gets popular, readers can add it to an RSS (really simple syndication) reader, sometimes called an aggregator, and have the blog entries arrive by email, on a desktop application or in a web browser.

Blogs are an efficient way to allow your internal experts to share information that is beneficial to your prospects and customers while building the intellectual capital of your organization. In addition, your readers can comment and provide you with information.

White Papers, Reports, Studies and Ebooks

A white paper, report or study is a more formal presentation of information than a blog. These papers might be take the form of a concept, a case study on the use of technology, a recipe book, even a coloring book for children or the results of an in-depth research study.

Whatever the subject of the paper, it should be produced as a PDF (portable document file) and distributed via your website. There are no printing costs and it is easy for your visitor to download and distribute to friends and family.

Customer Training

If you sell a complicated product or service you could conduct live “webinars,” but you may benefit more from posting written, video and/or audio seminars on your website. That way, prospects and

customers can access the materials at their leisure. The seminar subject depends on your expertise and can be just as valuable to a business-to-business or a consumer application.

Forums

A forum allows you to interact with your visitors and your visitors to interact with each other. It can be an extremely valuable and rich source of research for a company. An active forum will reveal strengths and weaknesses in your products and services and can generate new product ideas.

Surveys and Voting

People are always interested in the opinions of other people. A real-time online survey allows you to gather information and shows the results to the participants. A survey can be single or multiple questions or it can be a vote. Images can be posted online and visitors can vote on which ones they like the most. This method is highly desirable for visually-oriented businesses such as fashion, consumer products or food.

Tools and Resources

I am not talking about a link list that is indiscriminately created to make a site look better to search engines. I mean real tools and resources that provide value to your target prospect and customer. If you provide links, they should be for products and services you truly like and that have a benefit for your visitor.

Better yet, if you have the resources, you can provide actual online tools. These tools can be anything that you think will assist your visitors. You have seen, if not used, the online mortgage and loan calculator. Think about creating something that can bring that kind of value to your visitors. An associate of mine, who is a top consultant in the tradeshow industry, has an online return-on-investment tool. It is very effective and generates a lot of interest for him. If you sell video projection equipment, you might have a calculator to determine the best viewing distance, and if you sell food items you might have a calorie counter. You get the idea.

Sponsored Social Networks

Social networks are all the rage. They bring people with shared interests together and provide a forum for interaction and idea development. The most famous social network is MySpace, but whatever your company sells, a social network of your own may be your ultimate customer education tool.

I wrote a white paper on sponsored social networks; you can get a copy on my website (www.hallman.com) or by sending me an email at harry@hallman.com.



VISION

GOALS

ACTION



404.664.5664 info@hallman.com

White Paper

A sponsored social network can bring together all the tools I have mentioned in this paper and much more on a single website. If you have an interest in this concept, download my white paper. You may also want to contact my associate Brandon Sutton. Sutton has developed a number of small social networks and is now offering services and a technology platform to help companies build their own social network sites. His email is Brandon@brandsutton.com. He also helps organizations to create and maintain a MySpace.com presence.

Customer education works. Over the years I have been involved in many customer education projects. Among the largest were a technology company's seminar series that generated \$250 million in sales, and a proposal response that included customer education and won a testing company a \$110 million contract.

If you would like to explore adding online customer education programs to your marketing effort, please contact me and we can discuss the possibilities.

Harry Hallman

Hallman & Assoc.

6099 Millstone

Stone Mountain, GA 30087

Direct Line: 404-664-5664

www.hallman.com

Blog www.hallman.com/blog.htm