

How Well Do You Score For Presentation?

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The Internet has become our customers' most powerful shopping tool, and how you present your product or service may be the determining factor as to whether you'll get their business.



The Internet has become our customers' most powerful shopping tool. It's vital that you present yourself, your service, and your products on the Internet in a way that not only enables your customers to find you/it/them and perceive that what you offer is well developed, but also answer your customers' questions.

The Rest of the Story

The next time you eat out, take a moment to reflect on how presentation of product is such an important element of the what-to-eat-for-dinner process. We've all become numb to the phenomenon of seeing a nice, juicy, delectable fast food product pictured on the menu board, only to discover what arrives in the paper wrapper does not resemble what's pictured on the board.

But, if the picture on the menu board truly looked like what arrives in the wrapper, would you have ordered it? Would you have even gone to that restaurant? If you enjoy fine dining, you probably expect the food on your plate to look as much like a work of art as you expect it to taste like one.

Presentation is an important element of the food industry, and we can make the same obvious correlation to the clothing and fashion industry. Naturally, it's also

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important for your industry, whatever that is. But, how well do you really present your offering in the venue where people shop the most – the Internet?

I was talking with a friend last week, and her story for trying to repair and upgrade her sprinkler system is the genesis for this article. Her sprinkler system is more than 30 years old. The timing controller finally gave up the ghost and she needed to replace it.

Of course she turned to the Internet to shop for an alternative (point #1). There were three controller products that floated to the top of her search (point #2). As she researched each one, she found a plethora of information, not just from the manufacturers or distributors, but also from repair services and blogs (point #3).

The information she found helped her eliminate one of the choices based on feedback posted in a couple of blogs, but she kept digging because she had a specific concern she wanted addressed before she would make a purchase decision (point #4).

She wanted to know which of these new controllers would link through the home wireless network and allow her to monitor or control her sprinkler system from her smartphone, and which would be compatible with her thirty-something-year-old system.

Now, it may be obvious to the makers of these sprinkler-system controllers, and even to the service technicians that install and repair them, that the fundamental technology that opens and closes the valves hasn't changed in three or four decades, but to her it wasn't. To her, it wasn't a dumb question, but an important one.

On a manufacturer's site for the multi-purpose control circuit, which is used inside the sprinkler controller she researched, she found the information she needed to know. That product won her purchase.

Now, there is one more detail to this story, which may or may not be an "aha" to a reader. This friend of mine isn't a technology-addicted youth who lives on the Internet. She is a baby boomer who gets discount meal prices at her favorite buffet. If you think that only the youthful techno-addicts are shopping on the Internet, you are mistaken. Everyone is. (point #5)

So let's look quickly at the five points I found in my story and learn from them how we can better present our products on the Internet:

1. The Internet has become the first stop in the shopping experience. We have a choice to go to a variety of stores and talk with a bunch of people to do our research, or we can sit at home, in front of our favorite show, and multi-task. Also, between blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and every other social media solution, the Internet is the new medium for word-of-mouth sales – still everyone's favorite method for purchase advice.

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2. We must study and understand how search engines work and how to use that knowledge to get our offering to float to the top of our customers' searches. I'm sure that there are more than three sprinkler-system controllers on the market, but my friend only researched three.
3. Your website will not be the only one with information about your offering, and you probably want it that way. But, do you use your business's social network to help get the information you want or to ensure positive feedback on the other sites? Do your references tell the same story you do? How do blogs and services portray your offering? Do you know? Recall the fast food paradox of presentation here: If your offering arrives differently that you presented it, word will get out and your potential customers will know.
4. It's not enough to present a well-constructed sandwich on the menu board anymore. If you want a customer to decide that your product is the one they must have, anticipate and answer their questions. Here is another example from the food industry. My family and I frequent restaurants more often that post the calorie and fat values for their meals on the menu because that information is valuable to our decision about what to eat.
5. Don't think that because you're offering caters to a particular demographic, or a specific region, that the Internet is not important to your sales.

I know that it seems like five simple and even obvious points, but take a look at your offering and your sales methods against those five points and see how well you really address each one. In particular, I believe that point #4 is the most important, and the least addressed, when I'm shopping, Furthermore, I know that it was so for my friend.

The next time you sit down to review or develop your marketing and sales strategy, break out this story and the above five points. Build a strategy that addresses them all, and you may very well get the edge on your competition. Ignore one, and your competition may get the best of you.

Stay wise, friends.

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