8 free ways to win customers via the Web

By Tasha Cunningham
tasha@bizbytes101.com

Are you effectively influencing the buying behavior of your potential customers online?

It’s an important question to which every small business owner must have an answer. It is imperative that you know who your potential customers are and how you can influence them. But how exactly can you influence consumers online to buy your product or services versus that of your competitor?

To find out, BizBytes enlisted the advice of James Gray, chairman of the Florida Atlantic University’s Marketing Department within the College of Business, and Arbab Hassan, chief technology officer for Blueliner, a New York-based Internet marketing firm. Here are eight recommendations from the experts.

• Decide who, why and how. “There are three important things that a small business owner must focus on whether they are marketing to customers online or off,” Gray said. “You’ve got to be able to decide who your customers are, why they buy from you and how they buy from you. Once you can answer these questions, you’ll be well on your way to employing techniques to influence their buying behavior online.”

• Analyze the online buying behavior of your current customers. “You can’t effectively influence your clients buying behavior if you don’t know what they’re doing when they get to your site to make a purchase,” Hassan said. “The quickest and easiest way to analyze that behavior from your current clients is to install Google Analytics. It’s free and will provide you with a wealth of information such as what pages people are visiting on your site, how long they spend on each page.”

• Optimize your website based on current customer behavior. “Start by analyzing your current customer behavior and creating a list of 25 keywords that relate to what you sell. Then make sure those words appear on the pages of your website. This will ensure that your product shows up in organic search results,” Hassan said.

• Go where your potential customers aren’t. “Make sure you have a presence on the Web in places where people may not necessarily know about you like niche social networks, blogs, product review websites, etc. Post special offers, e-coupons and other special promotions and always include a link back to your website’s purchase
Gray said.

- Make your online store user-friendly and easy to navigate. “If you guide a customer back to your site and they are ready to make a purchase, but once they get there, it’s too hard to navigate or is not very user-friendly, you will lose the sale,” Hassan said. “Don’t create a complicated e-store that takes a customer through too many steps to complete a purchase.”

- Market to your existing database of customers. “If someone has given you their e-mail address or signed up to receive information via your website, they are obviously interested in your products and services,” said Hassan. “Take that existing information that you have and market to those people with special offers, sales and discounts that could influence those people to buy your product. A person may not buy something from you at full price, but they would if they were given an exclusive 15 percent off discount.”

- Create a secure e-store. “Use Verisign, Paypal or other secure services to process your transactions online and post a statement about the fact that your company does not tolerate online fraud. This gives a customer a sense of security and assures them that their purchase is secure,” Hassan said.