



Wowing 'em or waning on the www

by Georgia Suttie

Many Australian retailers will tell you that their websites have little impact on sales. But are Australians simply not shopping online or is the real issue that most Australians are not shopping at their websites?

Online shopping on the rise

According to Hillary Mendelsohn, author of *thepurplebook: The Definitive Guide to Exceptional Online Shopping*, and considered America's foremost authority on Internet shopping sites, online sales are poised to grow by 20 per cent every year until 2010, so it is a trend that cannot be ignored.

Shopping over the Internet currently appeals to the time poor and (usually) Internet savvy, a rapidly growing affluent group of shoppers. And previous mainstream reluctance to use the web because of uncertain credit card security is now declining, as online security is now better than ever.

Second-rate sites

One of the issues with Internet shopping sites and a reason that the take-up has been slow is poor development of the sites themselves.

Kate Forster of Digital Dogma, web design specialists, points out, "Many internet shopping sites have been developed with 'off-the-shelf' products that use templates. This means there is no design to speak of or thought behind how this may affect the marketing of the site."

Off-the-shelf products appeal to small business or home based business owners. Literally software out of a box, they allow anyone to set up his or her own shopping trolley. But these solutions do not allow great flexibility to create a brand "flavour" or to create a user experience that is streamlined to your particular target group.

Know your customer

Customer satisfaction is still *the* issue that needs to be addressed to encourage the user to come back again. Creating an infrastructure that encourages the user to browse, learn about the product they are interested in, and to checkout easily (and if needed return the product) is without a doubt the first step in the right direction.

Knowing your target group/customer is the key to creating the best site possible. The best designs are those that help their customers to understand the design so that using it is easy. If they have a great experience they will visit the site again.

Branding in cyberspace

Think of your site as "your shop": every step should be taken to ensure that it meets usability and accessibility guidelines, as well as showcasing the look and feel of your brand.

This can be done by putting special emphasis on the navigation of the site, with clear product display and product descriptions. Images are often more powerful than words, so straightforward images can become your major difference in online branding.

Online POS signage

The site navigation needs to be intuitive and the checkout process needs to be simple. Intuitive and consistent navigation gives the user a sense of orientation and a sense of place within the site.

Forster recommends using "breadcrumbs" to show where the user is and has been. A breadcrumb trail is a navigation tool that allows a user to see where the current page is in relation to the website's hierarchy, and derives from the old "Hansel and Gretel" fairytale.

Welcome both sexes

The site also needs to be developed for both the PC user and the Macintosh user. It is astounding how often this is not a consideration, especially with the rise of home MAC users over the last few years. Your company will not be doing itself any favours

with potential customers if you alienate this growing and passionate demographic.

Turn browsers into buyers

Mendelsohn says that *The New York Times* reported the astonishing fact that a consumer is six times more likely to be a loyal repeat customer to an e-tailer if they have a positive experience with an online site, as opposed to a bricks and mortar store.

So what is the magic formula to create a great shopping site? Easy: a well-designed site that is intuitive and thinks of the customer, features excellent customer service and, of course, sells a great product.

P3 is a consultancy company that helps advertisers achieve maximum value for their advertising and marketing budget.

For easy online shopping

- Know your target group/customer.
- Help your customer understand the design so using it is easy.
- Site navigation needs to be intuitive.
- Checkout process needs to be simple.
- Site needs to be developed for both PC and Macintosh users.



Kate Forster's top five shopping sites

www.wishlist.com.au - find a present quickly for a co-worker or friend.

www.quickclicks.com.au - DVDs delivered to your door, who could ask for more?

www.amazon.com - more books and CDs delivered to your door.

www.net-a-porter.com - great fashion, great design, good sizing charts, and fun to browse.

www.meccacosmetica.com.au - everything a girl needs to look and smell pretty. Well-designed site and easy to use.



Wishlist uses bright graphics and bold navigation to help the user navigate through the site.



Netaporter's design reflects the aesthetics of the fashion magazine in an online environment.



Quickclicks uses tab navigation and search facilities to get to the sale as quickly as possible.

