3/12/08

Trish:

It is time for yet another round of questions for our school project! 😊

We have begun creating our strategy for the marketing techniques through the implementation of a newsletter, forum, and RSS feed. After looking through your list for future marketing plans several questions came up when we began a more detailed look into what was actually required to implement a newsletter, forum and RSS feed.

Any information you could provide for the following question would greatly appreciate and help us further understand what marketing direction is appropriate for your business.

Questions about possibilities for a forum.

Should certain areas of the forums be accessible only to cardholders?
Who would be in charge of maintenance and new topic posts?
Would a forum be considered more of a necessity or an afterthought?

Questions about possibilities for a newsletter

Does the company have someone dealing solely with e-mail subscribers?
Are you satisfied with the mass/auto mailer for e-mail promotions you use now and do you consider the price, if any, reasonable?
Do you provide separate e-mail promotions for subscribers who subscribe on the website and cardholders? If so what is the difference between the promotions?
Are e-mail promotions in html format only?

Thank you for your previous responses they have been a great help.

Sarah Sandusky
Rachel Rodriguez
Michael Decker
Sarah:

Yep, I missed answering this one. Remember reading it but didn’t get it answered. So here goes:

Should certain areas of the forums be accessible only to cardholders? We currently don’t have any “cardholders” at Kitchen Collection. We shut down our loyalty card program about 7 years ago because the ROI didn’t justify the program. That being said, every forum that I’m aware of requires registration. Look at the customer reviews on Macys.com and you will see that they have used this as a tool for collecting demographic info.

Who would be in charge of maintenance and new topic posts? This is a TBA in our organization right now. However, I have been watching a group that just started a forum. Take a look at www.ebizinsider.com. A small biz platform provider called Solid Cactus started a magazine about a year ago and now have added, this week, a forum on their website. They are using internal expert staff to get the forum off the ground, moderate, etc.

Would a forum be considered more of a necessity or an afterthought? At this point, we are building some capability into the platform that could be expanded later for functionality. It will sit there until we solve more pressing issues first, so will probably be about Phase 3 or 4.

Does the company have someone dealing solely with e-mail subscribers? No, I do this too. Although, with a company our size and the complexity of managing database marketing properly, we should have someone dedicated to this.

Are you satisfied with the mass/auto mailer for e-mail promotions you use now and do you consider the price, if any, reasonable? About a year ago I shopped for an email ASP. After looking at a lot of different companies, I got probably the best deal in the marketplace for the functionality that I can manage at this time. That being said, at some point if we can step up to more help, we will need a more sophisticated system. My choice would be ExactTarget because of the dynamic generation features and the analytical dashboard. These services are priced on a cost/thousand of sent emails.

Do you provide separate e-mail promotions for subscribers who subscribe on the website and cardholders? If so what is the difference between the promotions? Unfortunately, right now, everybody gets the same thing. I would like to be able to marry customer profiles and purchase history with dynamic content to personalize some of the emails but our database management system does not provide me with that kind of info yet.

Are e-mail promotions in html format only? Emails are html only. That being said, I am working on some ideas...
that would fix some of those issues. Vermont County Store sends emails with a call to action text headline in the upper right above the html hero. I think there is a lot of merit to this both because of the placement (above the fold) and because this adds a text component in a prominent place for email users who have images turned off.

Newsletter—there is a difference between a selling email and a newsletter. Newsletter is all about content. In our case, this would be recipes, menu ideas, cookbook reviews, etc. The amount of time to put together this kind of content can be really daunting. As much as I would love to implement a newsletter, I think this would require a dedicated person just for this project and I don’t see that happening any time soon. However, one of the great things about newsletters is that you can post an archive on your website and all that content becomes a magnet for the search bots. Magazines and organizations tend to do the best job with newsletters. One of the best that I receive in our vertical is from Cook’s Illustrated which sends out a weekly newsletter, themed to season/current trend, with a recipe, equipment review, technique, etc. and sprinkled liberally with links to online content.

Selling Emails—most retailers do selling emails which are basically an electronic sales flyer to promote new/current product and have a strong call to action.

You mentioned about RSS. Currently our target audience doesn’t use their phones/blackberries for shopping info. Our demographic is 45-62 female. They are growing by leaps and bounds on-line but not personal devices. Interesting study on the different usage/comfort levels of technology by demographic. GenX and Millenials use technology as an extension of themselves and their desire to “have community” and be in constant contact. Late-Boomers are tech-savvy as a business tool. Male Late-Boomers and Busters in upper socio-economic groups might be interested in RSS for high tech/electronics type merchandise info. However, there has been a lot of comment recently about the invasion of advertising into phones and other personal devices as an invasion of personal space.

So now I think we’re caught up. Don’t hesitate to ask anything.

Trish Tickle
Ecommerce Marketing Manager
KitchenCollection.com/LeGourmetChef.com
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740.774.0592 fax

From: Sarah [mailto:SLSandusky@cox.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 18, 2008 5:15 PM
To: Tickle, Trish
Subject: re: class project

Trish – Here is the most recent (before today) e-mail I sent; I don’t remember if you answered them either!! Haha

Your help is so appreciated!!!
3/12/08

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Thank you for your previous responses they have been a great help.

Sarah Sandusky
Rachel Rodriguez
Michael Decker
Dear Trish,

This week our group will be working on a SEO proposal for your website. From one of your previous letters we gained a general idea of what the direction you are heading in regard SEO methods, i.e. page structures, meta tags and keyword copy-writing. For the project it would also be helpful to how many visitors you currently receive and your current method of tracking those visitors. Though there is always room for improvement, what are your traffic goals for the future?

We are still wrapping up our marketing plan for your website and will e-mail it to you by this Sunday along with the SEO plan.

Thank you for all the time you have spent with us discussing website plans,

Sarah Sandusky
Rachel Rodriguez
Michael Decker
Dear Sarah, Michael and Rachel:

First, I need to ask if I answered your last set of questions. Things have been so crazy around here recently that if I missed a set, send them again and I will be sure to answer. We are in the midst of a management change. Retail is a volatile business—change happens quickly without notice and you have to be prepared to change course on a dime.

To your question:

We are currently running Google Analytics on the site. Here are some stats from February:

- 95,000 visitors
- 79,000 unique visitors
- 6.13 page views per session
- 3:18 average time on the site
- 2% conversion rate

Traffic:
- 35% is organic from search engines—about 40% uses my brand name in the search
- 18% is direct
- 47% is referred by paid or unpaid links

It is true that this is a numbers game and the more visitors you have, the higher your sales. However, this is an overly simplistic view of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). As a multi-channel merchant I have a different view of certain KPIs. Some examples:

1. Some of my most hit links are Store Locator links. These links have much higher bounce rates but honestly that’s fine because I know these folks are headed for one of my physical locations. One of the site redesign ideas is to add a pop-over on the store locator page that will offer a coupon good in-store. We already know from email coupons that we have a good in-store redemption rate. Question: will we really drive traffic to the stores with this coupon or just give away $$$ to customers who had already decided to go? Don’t know the answer.

2. My 3rd most popular page is the clearance page. Have a very high bounce rate, low conversion rate and low average sale. Why? These folks are just looking for a bargain and moving on. This group is not loyal but is very expensive to maintain. While this KPI did influence my decision for placement of a clearance tab on the main nav bar, I’m not going to work very hard for them because they don’t have a very good annual value.

3. I know that my customers spend 3:18 average on a site session. Published stats on my competitors tell me that their average session times are 6-8 minutes. Obviously my site is not engaging customers enough. So we have decided to add customer product reviews. Saw a case study from BazaarVoice.com that showed the relationship of customer reviews to conversion rate and what impressed me was that merchants had double digit increase in conversions by engaging the customer longer with product reviews. That’s huge!

So while I would love to think that we could see a 30% increase in traffic with the new site roll-out, I am much more interested in .5% conversion increase. That kind of conversion increase would translate into double digit annual sales increases.

Along with reviews, we are going to start adding PDF files of owner’s manual for many of the products (especially electrics). Search bots can read PDFs so this adds lots of meaningful content. Plus, we know from our call center that lots of customers lose their owner’s manual and then call us looking for one.

I am currently redesigning the website as well so I’m anxious to see what you come up with and will be happy to share some screen shots with you after you complete your project. Here are a couple of sites that I have looked closely at for usability design:
Look at their category structure. Also their “blue” branding is excellent. You never forget whose site you're on.

This is a competitor. They just rolled out this new site in January. I find their category structure with the glam pix for each sub-category to be very clunky. They have gone to a very horizontal layout which I like. Because they also have an awesome catalog, their website really pops because of outstanding photography.

Do a search for stand mixers and then click through on a product. Look at the page layout for the secondary info tabs (customer reviews, product specs, etc.)

Has a really cool zoom feature on the product pages. We won't be getting this as is a special plug-in technology but is still very interesting to see.

Don't forget to send me any questions I may have missed. Talk to all of you soon.

Trish Tickle
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From: Sarah [mailto:SLSandusky@aol.com]
Sent: Tuesday, March 18, 2008 3:41 PM
To: Tickle, Trish
Cc: 'Rachel Rodriguez'; 'Michael Decker'; SLSandusky@aol.com
Subject: Class Project: SEO Proposal

Date: March 18, 2008

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