



Top Ten Tips

Each Webmaster's business plan, financial model, and level of technical know-how is different of course, but Web-based retailers/service providers and their affiliates say there are tried-and-true tricks of the trade that will help almost anyone profit from a symbiotic relationship with an online store.

Make it personal: Product reviews, best-seller lists, usage tips and other content created by a Website's staff are great ways to spark consumer interest in shopping according to All Spin Zone's Richard Cranium. His blog site reviews movies in the context of larger social issues, and he says his click-through-to-purchase ratio is nearly 1:1.

Keep it real: Take a tip from Amazon.com: Nothing speaks to the consumers like the recommendation of other consumers like themselves. ToysRUs encourages all of its affiliates to have their users rate and comment on products they've purchased.

Make it fun: A sense of humor never hurt anyone, says Shopping.com's Arthur Levine. "The funny or bizarre always generates a buzz," he says, "whether it's a product itself or the way it's presented."

Be creative: Is a specific item featured in video clips, a photo set, or in fiction on your site? Link to its page on your online store right at the point it appears. Many times you will be looking for a product review, for instance a DVD. Offering customers the opportunity to buy the video or DVD of the movie under discussion right from the page that lists its review is a great sales tool.

Be direct: Highlighting specific products from a retailer's mix can boost sales dramatically. Many online retailers are happy for their affiliates to "borrow" product images for use on their own sites. Some, even put together pre-formatted image packages for affiliates. One caveat: If images aren't specifically mentioned in the affiliate agreement, be sure to ask before you help yourself.

Educate: Embarrassment about lack of experience with anything purchased online is one of the things that keeps consumers from shopping for them online. Another is confusion about exactly how the product will make their lives better. It's easy to get over those hurdles by providing users with educational articles that explain how to incorporate your product/service.

Integrate: Never miss an opportunity to tie retail products to content on your Website. Impulse buying is as big a phenomenon on the Web as it is in brick-and mortar stores, and surfers who've just seen or read about a product in "non-sales" context are likely to buy it. Every time you talk about a product, you should link to it and make sure you have 'buy' buttons everywhere.

Create urgency: Just like in the brick-and-mortar world, limited-time offers and sales encourage shoppers to buy now before the special opportunity disappears. The best way to get someone to buy something is to tell them they want it. Marketing an online store is not actually that different from [doing the same for] brick-and-mortar."

Trade on trust: Unilaterally, affiliates say the untrustworthiness and reputation of the stores they promote has a profound effect on their sales. Make sure you have a respectable company on your side. Surfers need to know they're not going to get burned by 'cheap' products or bad customer service.

Promote, promote, promote: Most online retailers offer a plethora of ways to encourage consumers to shop at their stores. Use them, and use them liberally. Text links, banners and other ads, e-mail marketing help, top lists, customized code snippets, contests, and other sales tools all can help increase purchases, but only if they're employed by the affiliates for whom they were designed. Some stores even offer bounties to their affiliates who suggest new promotional ideas that can be used network-wide – so speak up!