

18 ways to prove credibility of your business online.

by Ivana Katz

Most first time entrepreneurs make a huge mistake by concentrating all their efforts on driving visitors to their website, but fail to prove credibility of their business. Think about your own online experience and what you look for in a business whose services/products you wish to order.

Unfortunately many people are still afraid to shop on the internet because they've heard horror stories from their

friends and colleagues who have lost money in various online scams. And we know how fast news of bad service travels!

In order to convert visitors into paying customers, you need to prove your credibility... you need to show your potential customers that you are trustworthy, reliable and that you will deliver what you promise.

These are some of the EXTREMELY important issues your website needs to cover:

1. PROFESSIONAL DESIGN.

Ensure your website is clean, easy to read and navigate. You need to make sure your visitors can find what they are looking for. Most websites either display their navigation bar on the left or at the top. And since most people are used to this type of navigation, it's best to stick with it. It also helps to include your navigation bar at the bottom of each page to save your visitors from having to scroll back to the top.

Stay away from:

- Flash intros, revolving globes, bevelled line separators, animated mail boxes.
- Loads of pop up or pop under boxes.
- Autoplay music. Allow your customer to play music only if they choose.
- Hit counters of the free variety, which say "you are 27th visitor".
- Date and time stamps, unless your website is updated daily or weekly.
- Busy backgrounds.

2. TESTIMONIALS.

Include testimonials from your current

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customers to show your potential clients that you are trustworthy, reliable and that you offer great service and/or products. Make sure the testimonials are real and if possible provide contact details of the person who supplied you with the testimonial. If you don't have any right now, get them! Simply email your customers and ask for their feedback on your business and service. Most happy customers will gladly provide this.

If you are starting out and don't have any customers yet, volunteer your services or give away some of your products. Then ask your customers to provide you with feedback - if you've done a good job or your product is useful, they will be more than happy to do so.

3. BEFORE & AFTER SHOTS.

If appropriate, show your customers problem pictures and beside them show the picture of resolution, with an explanation of your service/product's benefits.

4. PHOTO GALLERY / PORTFOLIO.

Even if you do not wish to sell your

products on-line, you may wish to showcase your goods or services in a special photo gallery. They say "pictures speak a thousand words" and on your website it is particularly important. Some examples of photo galleries and portfolios include:

- photographers - photos they have taken,
- marriage celebrants - ceremonies they've performed,
- entertainers - photos from their performances,
- dress designers - garments they've designed
- web designers - websites they've created
- cake decorators - special cakes they've made and decorated

and the list goes on.

5. MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

The longer the guarantee, the more effective it will be. It could be 30 days, 60 days, 1 year or lifetime. Remember you are trying to take the risk out of doing

business with you.

6. PRIVACY POLICY.

Privacy continues to be a major issue for customers shopping online. Concerns about how their information is going to be used is a major barrier when making a sale. Internet shopping experience is built on trust and privacy is the number one ingredient in trust. So let your customers know you will not sell or rent their details to third parties.

7. CONTACT DETAILS.

Place contact details in as many places as possible. Make it easy for your customers to contact you. Create a special "Contact Us" page, include your details in "About Us" page and also at the bottom of each page. Information to include: business name, physical address, mailing address, telephone, fax, email, emergency number, website address.

8. TRADE ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS.

If you belong to trade associations or professional business organisations, societies or clubs, ensure you include all the

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9. RESOURCES/ARTICLES.

You can easily source free information on the internet. This will ensure that customers will keep coming back to your website, even if it is just to get information. The more they visit, the more you will stick in their mind as an expert and the next time they are ready to order your products/services, you will be their first choice.

10. PROVIDE FRESH CONTENT.

Content is still the king. You should include as much information as possible about all your products and services, such as brands, pricing (even if you can't be specific with your prices, you should at least provide ranges - eg. carpet cleaning \$55 - \$66 per room), shipping costs, etc. Ensure your content gets updated regularly and that all your information is truthful. Don't exaggerate your products' benefits and features - your customers will quickly see through any dishonest claims.

11. MEDIA.

Include any information, photos of your products, staff etc that have appeared in the media - print, TV, radio or internet. If you have written articles that have been published, ensure you also include them.

12. PRODUCT REVIEWS.

If your products have been positively reviewed on other websites, ensure you place a link to them. What someone else says about your product carries far more weight than what you say.

13. RETURN/REFUND POLICY.

To make your customers feel more comfortable when making a transaction at your website, you should provide them with your return/refund policy. Ensure it is easy to understand and spelt out step by step. Let them know what the order process involves and how they can be refunded if problems arise.

14. ABOUT Us INFO.

This is a very important page as it tells your customer about who you are and why they should buy your products, services and/or trust your organisation. It can also feature your business hours (if you have a bricks and mortar store) or when they can speak to a real person. Many companies also include their mission or purpose on this page, details of their staff (photos, biographies, qualifications), recently completed projects. Other information to include: ACN or ABN, logo, directions to your store/office.

15. SECURITY INFORMATION.

If you sell products online or allow people to pay you via your website, ensure you include your website security details, such as the encryption that is used when they enter confidential information into your forms or shopping cart. Spell it out in simple terms to ensure your customers understand it.

16. AWARDS.

Ensure you include details of any awards that you or your business have won.

17. SPELL CHECK.

Spell Check your website to make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors. Check that all links are working and graphics display correctly. If your website has a lot of mistakes, people will wonder about the quality of your products and services.

18. BE ACTIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

This can be your local community or on-line community. You can sponsor events, teach classes or simply post useful information on message boards and in newsgroups.

Remember, if you lack credibility, customers will not buy from you, so it is extremely important that you do all you can to show them that you are trustworthy. Put yourself in their shoes and try to think like them - what obstacles might there be in their mind which prevent them ordering from you?

Ivana Katz is the owner of Websites 4 Small Business, a company specialising in the design and promotion of growing, small and home-based business websites. She believes that every business deserves to have a successful website, no matter what its budget is.
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