

The Dirty Dozen

“12 Of The Dumbest Things Companies Do To Screw Up Online Sales”

1) Requiring your prospective customer to “sign up” or “create an account” before they can buy.

Hey! Wake up and smell the greenbacks. You have someone interested enough to whip out that credit card and purchase. Now maybe they don't want to create an account just yet. They just want to buy the damn widget.

They're not interested that it's only gonna take 'em 5 minutes to sign up. They want to enter their billing info, place the order and that's that. Putting in an additional hurdle may very well shift the balance away from them being sold to bailing out.

2) Just as bad... telling some one they can't buy because they already have an account – and they now entered something differently.

This is one I just can't grasp. You got someone who's a repeat customer. They want to buy again. They enter the billing information and get.... REJECTED!

Not because their Credit Card was no good. It's because they may have forgotten their original password and don't want to waste time having you retrieve it for them. So they just type out everything on the order page – and get slapped down for their efforts.

DUMB!

3) Not tying in mail promos with internet forms.

This one just happened to my wife. She got a printed catalog from a well known (and VERY REPUTABLE) online vitamin shop. The catalog had a promo code. She went online to order. The promo code was rejected. She tried again. Same result. She called the customer service number.

“AH!” Said the friendly representative. “That code is only good for PHONE orders.”

Huh? It saves the company time and money by using their online ordering form. So why in whatever they hold holy would they not honor their promo discount on the web form?

It can't be because of gathering special marketing information. They would still know the code was coming from a particular catalogue. In fact – they would get even more marketing insight by seeing how many people actually preferred to use the internet store over call-in orders. How many people would just give up entering the code and go elsewhere?

Too many!

(BTW: After she placed her order by phone – she got a confirmation... by email!)

4) S&H Gottchas

A short time ago I placed an order with an online electronic outlet. They advertised FREE Shipping and Handling if I used PayPal. Why sure! Sounded good. PayPal it was. Placed my order 1, 2, 3. Saw my invoice - \$9.95 S&H.

What the Sam Heck? I called the company.

“AH!” Said the friendly representative. “When you chose PayPal, the expedited S&H was the default. You should have chosen the free shipping option.”

“Bullfeathers” said I! “I clicked on the free S&H promo link from your site. The store should have been set up to recognize that and give me the free shipping as promised.” After a small haggle, the charge for S&H was taken off.

Heads up! You offer free shipping and handling? Give the customer what you promised up front – and don't make them double check to see if you added any GOTTCHAS instead.

5) The links to nowhere.

This happens more often than I can count. I see an offer, whether online, on TV, or in print. The offer is tied to a web address. I go to the site – wanting to find what I was interested in buying.

SURPRISE! I now have to hunt for the particular item – since the web address just took me to the main page – with no reference to the item I was looking for.

Sorry Charlie. I just lost interest – and you just lost a sale.

Would it really be so difficult to have a direct link taking me to the item itself – or if that was too much to ask – at least have the promotion somewhere noticeable on the main page?

6) Broken links.

I shouldn't have to say this, but I will: Do your "order here" links work? Does your online order form work? Check it out for yourself to make sure!

7) No immediate feedback.

When I buy something online – I want reassurances the order went through – and went through correctly. Don't keep your customer guessing. Immediately after ordering, show them what happened. Then follow it up with a confirmation email.

8) It's my way or the highway!

This is one of my pet peeves. When entering my billing and shipping information, I want to do it my way. Maybe I like putting dashes or spaces in my telephone number: (877) 788-1989. Maybe I like putting a "#" symbol for my office address, as in Suite # 207.

What I don't like is getting kicked back to the fill in the blanks page and being essentially told:

"Now, now little boy. We don't allow telephone numbers with spaces, dashes or brackets. And you can't have symbols in your address. Go back and do it over."

Do you really give a flying fig how someone enters their telephone number? Is having it done your way so important that you're willing to give up sales for it?

As long as the payment goes through, don't sweat the small stuff!

9) What did I do wrong?

There's only one thing worse than being sent back to Square 1 because some information you entered was wrong. And that's being sent back to Square 1 – AND FIND ALL THE INFORMATION YOU PREVIOUSLY ENTERED HAS BEEN ERASED!

You want to kill a sale? That's a sure fire way of doing it.

10) SUBMIT – DON'T CLEAR

You know... many people are a tad fumbled fingered when it comes to computer keyboards and moving mice. If you have a "CLEAR" option that will erase all the form's information – here's a tip: LOSE IT FAST!

If I have to go through the whole dog and pony show from scratch, I just might say... "Aw... forget it!" (And why give some one such an easy opportunity to change their minds anyway?)

11) Keep 'em guessing 'til the end.

Here's another ditty I run into way to often. In fact – here's a personal example:

I was ordering sweatshirts and stuff online. When I saw something I liked, I added it to my shopping cart. But there was no running total of how much I was spending.

So off I go to "Checkout" to see. OK – no problem. But... getting back to where I had been was a problem. I hit "Continue Shopping" and instead of the page I had previously been on, I was back at ground zero. Grrrr....

I got chapped and logged off. No sale from me that day.

Either have a running total visible on all screens the customer visits, or gently return them to where they were after they check their cart.

12) Returns? We don't want no stinkin' returns.

You want to make sure someone will never, ever purchase from you again?

Then here's how:

- Guarantee your product.
- When a refund is requested, make it as difficult as you possibly can for them to get their money back.

This happened to me with an online service. I was doing research for a client, and needed some specialized information. The service in question promised me up to date and accurate information. OK – I plunked down my \$39.97 and ordered. I went online, logged in, entered some test queries about myself and waited for the results.

Which were totally inaccurate and false. So much for that. I requested a refund.

Now – since I paid online, you would think I could get a refund the same way.

Nope. I had to print out and fill in a downloadable form. Then I had to call customer service and listen to their chin music spiel trying to retain me as a valued customer. (Yeah – right.) Then I had to mail in the form (per post – NOT by email) and wait “up to six weeks” for my request to be processed.

What are the chances those rat-finks will ever get a dime from me again? About zero to zilch.

There you have it – 12 wonderful ways to lose sales and aggravate customers.

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