

# E-Commerce is Sticky Business!

by Bruce A. Love

Generally speaking, “stickiness” is not a term used to describe desirable attributes. When used in reference to kids or pets, “sticky” tends to give us that creepy/crawly feeling. When it comes to web sites, however, stickiness is a very positive quality.

In the virtual world of e-commerce, stickiness refers to the ability to encourage visitors to come often and stay longer. In theory, the longer a visitor stays, the more likely they are to be influenced by the business’s message. In the case of the e-store, the message is “buy our products.” There are many ways to make your site sticky. These methods require creativity, skill, and attentiveness.

Good web content promotes stickiness. When developing your web, begin by addressing user-friendliness, informational content, interactive properties, and multi-media components.

Nothing is more frustrating to web surfers than a page that runs slowly or goes nowhere. The last thing you want is a frustrated customer. Frustrated visitors quietly go away, never to be heard from (or sold to) again! You can improve the web browsing experience by using smaller picture files, removing dead links, using software compressing utilities, and choosing an appropriate hosting plan. Other user-friendly qualities include logical design flow, attractive layouts, and tools to help visitors find what they are looking for. Large web sites should also include search utilities and a site map.

Informational content builds upon our user-friendly focus. Product names, numbers, descriptions, and prices are all obvious informational attributes to include in an e-store. Make sure this information is current and accurate. Where appropriate, include pictures. As the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” The more information you can communicate using quick-loading graphics the better. However, informational content goes beyond pictures and basic facts. Many web sites have a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page to provide answers for questions most commonly asked. By having

this feature, business owners save time by not having to answer as many routine questions in phone conversations. News, tips, and external links are other examples of informational content.

Chat rooms and threaded conversations can also contribute to the overall mission of the web site by providing good content in the form of peer support. These tools are examples of interactive content since they give visitors something to do. Contests, prizes, and polls are other examples of interactive content.

The Internet is a great medium for presenting multimedia content. Slide Presentations, audio, and video, are examples of multimedia content that can be used to entertain visitors. Many companies play short introductions that resemble expensive TV commercials upon entering their site. These can help promote the notion that they are a reputable, well-established company! Use caution when adding multimedia elements, however, as they can slow the surfing experience.

I have recently begun to add stickiness to a web site that I originally developed 6 years ago ([www.lizziehigh.com](http://www.lizziehigh.com)). It currently has an unsophisticated look and an inefficient navigational structure that will be modified over the next several weeks to improve user-friendliness. Other content improvements have already been added to bring children to the site (see Fun with Lizzie) and encourage adults to visit more frequently (see Contests). These are examples of interactive content. Other improvements planned for the website include a virtual tour of the Lizzie High museum, a customer’s photo page, and a FAQ page.

The key to having good content is to keep things fresh and relative to the needs of your audience. A web site that has great content, but is not updated frequently, ceases to attract returning visitors and shoppers. If that happens, you may experience another type of sticky situation!

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