

TRUST ME!

Creating Credibility on the Information Superhighway

Expertise and trustworthiness establish Web credibility. And today, a website needs a high degree of credibility, as users are expected to furnish personal information, submit online payments, open bank accounts, manage assets and more, without hesitation. Websites, however, run amuck without much regulation or editorial review, and nearly anyone can author content. So if you want to be perceived as a trustworthy company that operates with integrity, a credible Web presence is essential.

Expertise

To influence a visitor's opinion, showcase a company's proven results along with the staff's knowledge, skills and experience.

"Recognize the staff's expertise through published works, awards, certifications and professional associations," said Greg Weir, director of online marketing for Brand Extract.

Data

Need to prove a point, support a claim or enhance an argument? Try adding a compelling statistic, an interesting fact or a case study to back up a product, cause or firm. These items can provide the proof needed for one to take action, leading to more conversions and greater profitability. Keep in mind that informative content should be current, relevant and come from credible sources, such as government offices, trade/professional associations and educational institutions.

WebsiteMagazine.com

Learn the ABCs of winning Web awards at wsm.co/wini13

Testimonials

Bite-sized, authoritative snippets from reputable, trustworthy people are powerful credibility tools. Remember to accompany these with the person's name, photo and title. Better yet, use a combination of video and text-only testimonials that position the company as a solutions provider. The effectiveness of the testimonial will also depend on whether the reader can relate to another person's experience, according to the President of the Web Marketing Association, William Rice. He adds, "The more technical the audience, the less likely one will identify with the quote unless it is highly targeted."

This is because people in the tech field tend to engage better with facts and numbers, rather than marketing speak.

Customer Reviews

Be transparent. Using digital word-of-mouth, such as in-depth product reviews or rating scales, can provide the right amount of credibility to help sway site visitors. Allowing customers to candidly rate your service or discuss their experience with your firm helps other shoppers find answers, compare products and expedite the decision-making process. Be sure to include positive and negative remarks. Some online shoppers perceive negative reviews to be more helpful than positive ones. Essentially, a piece of information is perceived as useful if it helps the user reduce uncertainty in making choices.

Endorsements

With show-stopping power, celebrities cut through the clutter and gain attention. To be effective, the celebrity should be believable, trustworthy and connected to the product in some way to add support but not replace it. Meanwhile, be sure the audience knows the person, likes the person and shares some similarities with the person. Above all, the celebrity's image must align with the product and be appropriate for the audience.

10 Terrific Ways to Generate User Reviews

Enhance credibility at wsm.co/10reviewtips

Awards

The words "award-winning" alone can place the company in the front of the pack.

"Established award programs that use experts to judge and choose winners offer the highest level of credibility," said Rice. "These award programs carry the credibility of not only the sponsoring organization, but also all of the companies that compete and win the awards over time. Recently won awards can be listed in the footer of the website so they appear on every page and indirectly become part of the sales pitch."

Seals of Approval

Provide online visitors with a sense of security. Web-based quality seals, such as VeriSign, Better Business Bureau (BBB) and PayPal verified, communicate trustworthiness and boost Web credibility.

Privacy Policy

Finally, visitors perceive a website with an up-to-date privacy policy to be more credible over sites without one.

It's up to users to determine the quality of the content they are consuming and products they are researching, but for businesses to achieve a sufficient amount of credibility on a Web page, Aaron Kahlow, CEO of the Online Marketing Institute recommends using, in general, three testimonials, five reviews and seven ratings. He adds always include as much statistical data as necessary to support assertions, because combining several elements together strategically creates synergy on a Web page and should improve performance. ■

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