How To Earn And Build Trust In Your Business

Can your business be trusted? Establishing your business as trustworthy might be more important than you think, particularly given that consumers commonly seek out reliable brands in response to economic instability.

Sean Adams, managing director of Sydney research and strategy development firm The Seed says there are various factors causing consumers to feel insecure, which places greater emphasis on buying from businesses that they trust.

"If consumers trust you, then you are more likely to appeal to their risk-averse nature and in these times, that gives you a major advantage over competitors."

Adams says brands and businesses that understand people's current insecurities and provide ways to merit their trust are more likely to succeed in the uncertain times ahead.

"The implications for brands and businesses are that they should be acknowledging that these are uncertain times and find ways to reassure consumers."

Currently topping the trust stakes in Australia is Colgate, Dettol, Cadbury and Panadol, according to the 2011 Australian Reader’s Digest Most Trusted Brands survey.

It reveals that 87% of respondents say trust was an important factor when choosing which brands to buy.

The survey, undertaken by McCrindle Research, asked 1,200 Australians which products are important to their day-to-day lives and why they believed in them.

Reader’s Digest says the take home message is that consumers are looking for brands that are true to their word, don't take them for granted, respect their needs and deliver on their promise.

And while it might sound simple enough, even big corporations get it wrong when it comes to trust. A national poll by the Essential Report found that Australians don’t feel the same about Qantas brand after the recent grounding of the entire fleet amid a pay dispute. The research found the grounding did more to damage to the brand than anything done by workers.

Just like large corporations, SMEs need to work hard to build trust, with a poorly designed website enough to see customers lose faith.

Deliver on your promise

Don't talk about being trustworthy – trust is something you demonstrate, says Ash Aryal, head of Sydney consulting of online marketing firm QuantumLinx.

"Associating your business with industries so customers know you are held to a minimum standard and perhaps even offering a money-back guarantee may also be worth considering," Aryal says.

Also, consider sourcing authentic testimonials that include the person’s full name and suburb, respond to email or voicemails quickly and be transparent about your offering, which will also help endear people.

Businesses should also remember that standing by your promise can mean thinking outside the square, says the director of Perth communication firm Image Seven, Brad Entwistle. If a courier hasn't arrived at the office in time to deliver a proof to a client, he acts fast.

"I'll jump in the car and personally drive the proof to the other side of town if I have to. It's not an efficient use of my time, but it means I'm keeping the faith with the client, which all feeds into building trust."

Be consistent

Inconsistencies between a businesses' physical store presence and its website will deplete trust, says Lisa Wade, director of customer experience consultancy Stamford Interactive, which works with large companies like Qantas and ANZ Bank.

Customers will also doubt your authenticity if your website is confusing, there is a broken link or even a spelling mistake, Wade says.
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"We’ve spent countless hours watching people and how they interact with websites, and they make a decision on whether to do business with you in a few seconds. It can take a quick scan of your home page to decide if they trust you or not."

Trickery is also an instant breach of trust, adds Wade. "Some websites automatically tick the box asking if you want to receive their newsletter, and the customer has to untick the box if they’re not interested. This is the sort of behaviour that will definitely break trust with customers."

Also, don’t bury your conditions on your website, she adds. "Be very clear about your delivery times if you’re selling online and make sure you deliver on your promise. Not meeting customer expectations will break trust quicker than anything."

Establish online credibility

There are tonnes of dubious websites out there, so you need to establish credibility within seconds of a person arriving at your site, says Denise Mooney, copywriter at Clickable Copy. Making sure your website includes your physical address is one of the quickest ways to build trust and credibility, she says.

"Whether you’re buying shoes online or checking out service providers, trust is critical to the decision-making process," Mooney says.

A well written bio or "About' page, testimonials, case studies or customer success stories, media clippings your business has appeared in and a blog are great additions to a website, she says.

"Don’t be afraid to get personal. You don’t want your ‘About’ page to sound like a personals ad, but equally, you don’t want to hide too much behind a professional persona. Let your buyers get to know you and include a photo. Remember, we like to buy stuff from people we know," Mooney says.

And make sure it’s easy to buy from you online and that you use secure transactions to protect your customer’s data, which will also help build trust.

Meanwhile, don’t ignore negative comments made about your business online, says Simon Carson, general manager of review site TrueLocal. "By ignoring negative comments, you're essentially showing customers that you don't care about your own customer service and the customer experience," he says.

Write a book

Glenn Twiddle is a Brisbane real estate sales trainer. He says writing a book helped him build credibility with both potential customers and the media. "If you write a book, you're catapulted to a position of trust," Twiddle says.

Valerie Khoo, managing director of the Sydney Writers' Centre recently wrote on a blog explaining that books are fast becoming the new business card. "When you go to conferences these days, people are handing out their books. Business people aren't seeing their books as a revenue centre, but definitely a very important marketing tool."

Khoo says barriers to entry to publishing your own book or eBook have plummeted in recent years and that getting published is far cheaper.

Approach marketing with caution

Small businesses are notoriously "binge" marketers, hitting the phones when business slows down in an attempt to drum up business, which is not a good approach. It is far better idea to establish a marketing calendar that fits with your business objectives and offers incentives ahead of an expected lull in sales.

And while social media might be an extremely popular marketing tool, a new report suggests businesses should approach with caution.

Australian firm Experian Marketing Services found that consumers are least trusting of newer marketing channels such as social media, SMS and LinkedIn, with almost three in 10 (29%) of consumers ranking social media as among the three marketing channels they least trusted when receiving information about a brand.
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Experian general manager Matt Glasner says the lack of trust is to be expected given social media is a relatively new form of marketing.

"Social media is a new and immature market within Australia and there is much that all organisations are still learning about the effective use of this channel and how to deliver value to both customers and the brand."

Information overload is a challenge, he says. "As we move deeper into an era of multichannel marketing, marketers need to be more selective in their communications and deliver them in a way that is personally relevant to the audiences they are targeting," Glasner says.

But before you even embark on marketing, be sure that your offering is spot on, Entwistle says.

"For example, perhaps banks should spend their marketing budgets on shortening the queues rather than a campaign talking about how good they are."

**Earning trust:**

While trust generally has to be earned, there are several ways in which it can be developed, according to Sean Adams of The Seed. These include:

- **Brand awareness and familiarity** – People are more likely to trust a brand they know.
- **Clarity of message** – People are more likely to trust a brand that has a clear, simple message.
- **Track record** – People are drawn to brands that have been around awhile and have a demonstrated their track record.
- **Service delivery** – Consumers want to deal with businesses that keep its promises and stick to deadlines.

**Building trust:**

- Perfect your offering.
- Make sure your online and offline branding is consistent.
- Be transparent about your offering.
- Deliver on your promises.
- Respond to messages and emails in an efficient manger.
- Deal with complaints.