

Sales Success in 2016

**Effective Ways to Increase E-Commerce
Conversion Rates Immediately**

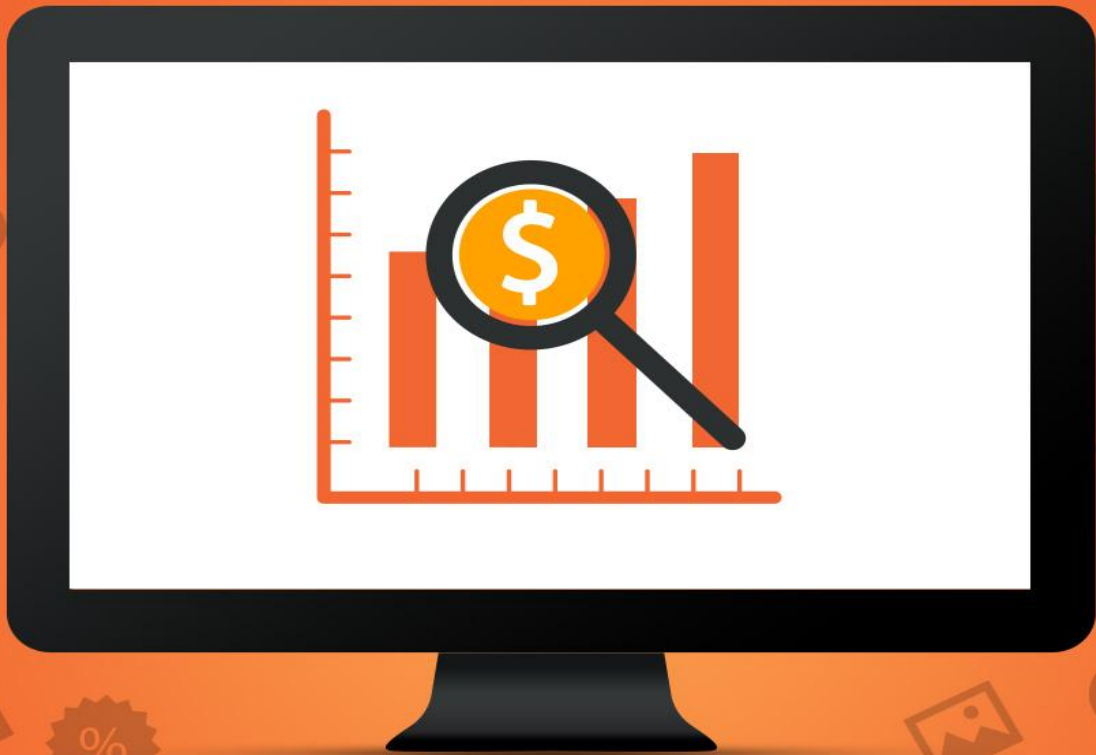


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Introduction

Buzzwords abound in the world of ecommerce and marketing. Each year seems to come with a new method for boosting traffic, sales, conversions, and revenue, but it is important to remember that in all of that excitement around the latest and greatest tools and tactics, there are also some "tried and true" solutions too.

In this guide, we are going to look at a few lesser known methods for boosting conversions and also some of those proven steps that too many online retailers might overlook or ignore. The good news is that none of the tips are extremely difficult, but some of them do call for a bit of financial investment or the commitment of more time to your website.

Before we look at those methods, though, let's consider the whole issue of conversions.

Conversions: A Quick Review

In the simplest terms, a conversion is the "point at which a recipient of a marketing message performs a desired action". We tend to call that desired action the CTA or call to action, and it is *not* always a sale.

CTAs can be:

- ❖ Opening an email and clicking on a link inside the message
- ❖ Visiting a landing page and submitting contact information
- ❖ Watching a video or viewing images in a gallery
- ❖ Reading a blog or post
- ❖ Liking or joining a social media page

- ❖ Buying a product
- ❖ Scanning a QR code to get a special offer or coupon

In this guide, however, we are going to look at ways of improving your ecommerce site conversions, meaning getting visitors to not only submit contact information, but also commit to a purchase of some kind.

Naturally, conversions in an ecommerce site are the key to success. To get them means driving traffic to your site or landing page. This can be done through a paid search strategy, marketing, SEO, and advertising. And the rate at which conversions should occur is a huge issue in the world of ecommerce and marketing in general.

Though you may hear that a good rate is between two and five percent, the experts now agree that this is average at best. The real performers and success stories are averaging at the 11% mark, or even a bit higher. Of course, you may not yet even know your precise conversion rate, and this could be a huge reason you need to focus more on the information in these pages!

In the sections to follow, we will begin with the common wisdom approaches to improved traffic and conversion, and then we'll consider some of the newer or more modern advances. One thing to keep in mind, is that conversions happen on your home or landing pages. You won't need to make enormous changes to the entire website at once, but we recommend that you do. As one expert says, "Most landing page optimizations are like moving around the deck chairs on the Titanic. Small changes = small gains", so rather than risk fruitless efforts, be ready to make

focused by comprehensive updates or improvements.

Are you ready to learn all about these changes and tactics? If so, let's jump right in.

Section One

The Common Wisdom Fixes

Your online sales are not what you would like them to be, and you are not seeing the numbers of conversions you require to remain in business or grow the company. There are a lot of reasons this may be occurring, and the good news is that we will help you uncover a few of the biggest issues in the pages that follow.

Before we can do that, though, we need to ask a relatively simple question: Are you obsessive about your website's traffic data? If not, that is the first step on the road to success in the coming year.

Scrutinize the Data

Your website traffic data is the key to the whole issue, and it is readily available to you through a range of website analytics tools that include Google's Analytics.

What the data is going to tell you is quite plain:

Who are the people who are coming to your website or landing page?

How do they get there?

What do they do upon arrival?

Why do they leave?

Expert marketers will tell you that analytics steers you in the right direction where

segmentation is concerned. This is one of those buzzwords that has connected itself to marketing and ecommerce, but it is an important and relevant one. Segmenting is when you accurately divide your customers into functional groups. As an example, a company that sells baking products might segment its clients into wholesale buyers, gluten free buyers, and standard baking ingredients buyers instead of clumping them into a less defined group.

When you clearly and accurately segment your audience, using authentic data, you discover how most of your viewers find and use (or click away from) the site. And with this information, you can begin to optimize for conversions much more effectively than ever before.

As a prime example, your data shows that more than 70% of your traffic is via a mobile device, and that the page these device users visit is failing to convert them. Could it be that your page is not optimized for mobile devices? Could it be something as simple as switching your template to one that is responsive and mobile-friendly? This could be the simple solution to a huge problem and it would come straight from data analysis.

Deeper Insight

Naturally, not all fixes will be so obvious or simple, but analysis allows you to take a deeper look. For instance, you will often hear about your "conversion funnel". This is where all of the traffic from your various sources will arrive as a "prospect". They enter your funnel as they choose to click on various options from the landing page.

Using the data from your website traffic, you can easily find the "leaky" pages in

your sales funnel; these are the points at which visitors exit or click out of your site. For example, you may find that your leads and prospects get all of the way to the last page, such as the checkout, and then exit. Why? There is a flaw in their experience at that point, and it is a sign that you must address this specific point of their user experience on the site.

When pages have a high rate of traffic, but then they lose the traffic, it is called the "bounce rate". Generally, you lose visitors at such a point because the information is not relevant, is poorly written, or the design is not appealing.

Traffic data also helps you to look at such things as the average amount of time that visitors spend on a page or the number of times a specific page is viewed. All of these indicators can show you where to optimize or even eliminate low performing, non-converting pages.

Customer Patterns

Obsessing over traffic data also allows you to begin to understand your customers and potential customers more clearly. You can enhance your analysis by using one or more of the "visitor behavior analysis" tools available.

There are many options, and most are part of an analytics package or software. Some are free and some are paid services, and the most familiar include Google Analytics, Yahoo Web Analytics, Crazy Egg, Compete.com, Google's Website Optimizer, Optimizely.com, 4q by iPerceptions, and Kissinsights, among others.

Most will help you to better understand what visitors are paying attention to, ignoring, and bouncing away from. Then you just go in and optimize or adjust.

So, the first tip to improving conversions is to obsessively pour over your website's traffic data and find all of the flaws, weaknesses, leaks and exit points. Then, take the time to find out just why a certain trend occurs at that point in your funnel. Making those repairs could be the easiest answer!

The Look of Things

Of course, you may discover that it is a case of poor website design or layout that is the heart of the problem.

As one blogger explained, "Having a bad site is like having a run-down brick and mortar storefront that gives potential customers a reason to keep driving to the next store. You wouldn't expect to have great sales if your windows were broken and your shelves were so old, they had 5 years' worth of dust caking your inventory. Same thing with an outdated site – how do you expect to sell anything if your site looks like something out of a 1990s website archive collection back when it was called electronic commerce instead of ecommerce?"

Your website is the key to success, and if you are wondering where you should invest the most in terms of time and money (after heavily analyzing the traffic data), it is likely that your website or landing page is a hot spot. You have seconds, or even milliseconds to make an impression and/or lose the conversion, so start with a look of your website!

Many spots offer affordable ecommerce templates at affordable prices and you can select one that has customizable elements to ensure you can stand out from the crowd. This is important because it is one of the few ways of instantly "branding" your site.

Branding

Branding is what makes your website unique. It allows you to distinguish yourself from the competition. It is done with consistent use of logos and colors that are a good fit to your audience and your company's personality. If you haven't identified your specific "brand", now is the moment.

Not only will a distinct and recognizable logo that uses a style appealing to your intended audience win them over, but consistency brings with it a sense of trust and reliability. Take a look at the site and see if you can improve on branding.

It should also include the product images as part of the branding. As an example, a website selling specialized candy can just slap up a photo of a bag or box of the candy, but it may sell more favorably if the candies are photographed in a stylish and appealing way, such as in a small bowl that contrasts sharply with the color of the candies. Visually appealing images that match the style of the brand are important, but they must also be "optimized".

This means they should be the best quality images, and they should be tagged and named in a way that helps with your SEO (we'll get to that shortly). They should load quickly and appear on the site map to get you the most mileage.

Of course, optimized sites must be mobile-friendly, and that means your website must, and you should read that as **MUST**, be responsive. This is a site that is built on a template that automatically adjusts to the screen on which it appears. Sites that can be easily viewed and used on a cell phone, tablet and computer are the ones that succeed at much higher rates. Just consider the latest "Cyber Monday" data...InternetRetailer.com reported that more than \$835 million in goods was sold

through mobile devices on that one day! Clearly, people have no objection to making costly purchases via a cell phone!

That means that the second common sense step you should use to boost conversions, after data analysis is to scrutinize your website and be sure that customer experience is optimized on all devices. Good looks and functionality are the biggest keywords here.

And while we're on the subject of keywords...

A Little Thing Called SEO

For years now, retailers know that they need to have a good looking site, but many have learned the hard way that you can spend a fortune building a gorgeous site only to see it languish, unvisited and unfound. This is often due to a site that is not SEO friendly.

You can use good SEO methods in your website content, and still not rate well in the results. Often it has to do with the way the page is designed. As you scrutinize page design, make sure that you have the elements that ensure your pages are as friendly to SEO as possible:

- ❖ Make sure your URLs are keyword optimized
- ❖ Use keyword optimization in the page titles, headers, sub-headers, copy, descriptions, image file names, alt tags, meta titles, and meta descriptions
- ❖ Be sure you have a sitemap
- ❖ Make sure that the loading time is fast (less than three seconds)
- ❖ Make certain that layout and navigation are simple and quick

SEO is a huge issue, and we are barely skimming the surface by mentioning it here, but you must commit time and research into identifying the best keywords for your industry. Not only will this help with SEO, but also with any PPC ads or marketing that you do. Knowing what your audience is seeking and then creating a clear and easy path to it is how keywords and SEO work, so be sure you really understand it. Then, be sure your site is not just SEO friendly, but truly optimized.

Once you have analyzed data, assessed your website design, and tested it for SEO friendliness, you should have created a better site for converting visitors to customers. However, there are few more modern and trendy steps to take. Let's look at those now.

Section Two

More Recent Innovations

- ❖ Take a moment to consider these recent additions to many websites:
- ❖ Real-time surveys that popup while you are on the site, about to navigate away or even in your inbox after you left the site without converting...
- ❖ Strong CTAs (Calls to Action) that include a popup box asking you to supply your name and email address to get important news, offers, and information from the site you are visiting. You might also see very clearly defined buttons that make it incredibly easy to add an item to the cart or "Buy Now"...
- ❖ A landing page or Home page that asks you to select from a variety of "users" to personalize your visit. For example, a site might ask you to choose "Sales", "Marketing" or "Agency" in order to direct you towards the most relevant information...
- ❖ Upselling or cross selling "suggestions" that show you similar items, other

items related to what you are buying or looking at, and even items that others who were looking at the same page purchased...

- ❖ Videos that are used in place of text to market or introduce you to the product, service or site, or a gallery of videos that offer demonstrations, how to instructions, and even testimonials...
- ❖ Customer reviews that allow people to rate via stars, written feedback and even to post images to demonstrate their point...

Are these familiar to you? It is likely that you have seen, and even used some or all of these tools or items when visiting other sites. Each of them is seen as some of the latest ways of boosting conversions too.

Let's start with real-time surveys. These are some of the strongest tools for improving the flow, content and basics about your site. Asking a visitor to provide feedback while they are on the site is one of the most reliable ways of receiving valid information. You can use them to ask why they are leaving, what is stopping them from purchasing, and just what they intend to do while on the site.

You can request details about abandoned carts, page bouncing, lengthy stays on a page, and much more.

With CTAs you enhance the user experience by creating easier navigation, but you also help to keep visitors on track and on target. Integrating these features into pages prevents distraction and keeps the options clear and limited.

Personalization is a very hot topic, and one to consider. It lets you take any segments you have discovered and use them to direct the audience to the most

relevant material. This has resulted in many sites seeing a 14% improvement in sales due entirely to this one small step! Naturally, it means you have to use your data to understand the groups and to create functional segments, but it is a potent tactic.

For years, Amazon.com has used the upsell and cross sell effectively, as soon as a customer puts something in the cart, a series of additional items is presented. You can use the same method in many ways. Present a basic product alongside the higher end version, put the same product but with more features alongside another, and always put complementary products in the same screen as the main products. McDonald's does this in their retail stores by putting the hot pie dispensers behind the cash registers, visually cuing guests to purchase the desserts at the time they buy a meal!

Videos can help with SEO and web search results, but they are also more appealing to most customers than blocks of text. Say what you need to say in a well made video, and place the text or narration below. Give them the option of viewing or reading, and see how quickly conversions climb.

Finally, there is little that compares with client feedback. If your customers are looking for deeper information or a way to justify making the purchase, honest and genuine feedback and reviews are far more likely to influence a conversion than nearly anything else. It is good policy to use third party systems to ensure your readers feel confident that feedback is accurate and authentic.

In Conclusion

You now have several tried and true along with some newer steps to use to begin

increasing conversions. There is no fast and easy method to success. Be sure that the customer experience is pleasant and easy, use new and proven methods, and keep abreast of the latest developments.

For instance, responsive design is a phrase that did not exist even a few years ago, but today is a hallmark of good design and essential to conversion. Responsiveness alone is not enough. Be sure that the site is fast to load and easy to navigate, make the home page clear and easy to use - including incorporating personalization or segmentation options.

Be sure you show that your site is secure and trustworthy as well! You will be amazed at the difference it will make when you put security badges in sight!

Invest in the best content, images and videos, always including keywords in your descriptions and text. Point out your customer feedback and make it easy to use and read. And be sure that the checkout process is not a long and overly complex one.

One last tip is to consider user experience after the sale. Be sure to have very meaty thank you pages with additional products and even a thank you gift. Send out responsive and triggered emails, and even consider a "welcome" message with special offers or discounts. Develop email marketing that remarkets to those you may have lost along the funnel, and always have some sort of promotions underway and in the works!

Conversions can only happen when you have traffic, and it is important to never forget to keep working on building traffic just as much as you are converting them and retaining them as ongoing clients!

There is much you can do, but starting simple is often very empowering. We encourage you to look at all of the points we have covered, assess your pages to identify any flaws or weaknesses and then try the newer remedies to gauge results. We're sure you'll have success and wish you the best of luck!

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