Holiday Help

10 Tips To Optimize Your Web Site For The Holidays ℗

by Lisa Schneegans

(NAPSA)—Over this holiday season, Forrester Research predicts a roughly $13.2 billion increase in online sales, 20 percent above last year's figures. So how can small and midsize businesses take advantage of this valuable sales channel and ensure online success?

These tips, from Praxis Software Solutions—integrated commerce provider and solution partner for SAP business management software—can help small and midsize retailers leverage widely available online sales technology and reinforce their business operations for the chaos of the holiday season:

1. Test your site early and often. Plan ahead to make sure your site can handle the holiday shopping frenzy.

2. Test the integrity of your content. Check for misspelled words, broken links, busted pictures, etc. A nonprofessional appearance may lead to a bad customer experience.

3. Make sure images load quickly. A slow-loading page may simply drive customers to click on to the next site. You want to minimize page download time.

4. Make sure you're up to snuff on patches. Install, verify, test and lock down all patches and upgrades now, before the season gets too busy.

5. "Load test" your site. You're expecting (or at least hoping for) a rush of customers. So it's a good idea to determine how much traffic your Web site can support.

6. Create sample transactions. These can simulate expected customer traffic and Web transactions. By running "synthetic" transactions periodically—say, every five to 15 minutes—you know, before your customers do, if there is a problem.

7. Check the performance of your network provider. You can do this by looking at a site that is similar to yours in your area but connected to another network. In a fiercely competitive business, every second matters.

8. Add cross-sell and up-sell opportunities throughout your site. This means, for example, suggesting table linens on the dinnerware, silverware and glassware pages. Offer "Top Gift Suggestions" or "Bestsellers" to improve sales and drive "impulse" purchase opportunities.

9. Make it easy to find and contact customer service in the form of a real person. Providing an easy-to-find phone number on the site helps online shoppers feel more secure. Clearly state your company's return policy. Remind customers of the last day it's possible to order and receive a product in time for Christmas.

10. Make your search function more effective. Your search function should accommodate common misspellings by returning similarly spelled items or your site's most popular search terms.

• *Lisa Schneegans is president of Praxis Software Solutions.*