





The cover story

Creating compelling content for your website

How to pre-sell your customers before they walk through the door

By Ted Page

Mad Men-style advertising—based on interrupting the audience’s entertainment or news gathering experience—is still with us, but most marketers these days recognize that it’s increasingly unsteady on its feet (maybe because of all those martinis). The reality is that people are tired of being “targeted” with ads and are inclined to take evasive action.

Where do they go? The first place a mattress shopper goes is the web—especially the female shopper who’s usually the one driving the mattress shopping process. They log on to Google, enter their search term and click. If your shop appears on the first page of Google in your area, you’ve passed the first hurdle to success.

This article is all about how you can get your shop on that first page and—just as important—how you can create a website that really engages people and educates them about what you have to offer, so by the time they walk through the door they are already inclined to buy from you, not the other guy.

On the following pages, you’ll find a series of proven tips—not necessarily in order of importance.

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Having a really great website can help you eat your competitors' lunch.

Job one: Think about what makes your store different.

What do you have to offer your customers that's unique? To start, take a look at the websites of competitors in your area. What are they saying about themselves? How is your store different? Is your selection better? Do you offer better prices or values? Do you have an Imax movie theater (that's one of the attractions at Jordan's Furniture in Natick, MA)? Or perhaps you simply know more about mattresses than anyone else.

If you're fortunate enough to really be an expert with all your years of experience, then you're in luck, because my guess is that being knowledgeable and helpful ranks very high with customers. But here's the trick: Nobody is going to know you are the world's greatest expert on mattresses unless you convey that first on your website.

Your website is you. It's the first thing people see, and it's true that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. So, if you're the expert, your website needs to show people your knowledge and make it really easy for them to learn a lot.

Quality matters—and can help you beat much bigger companies.

As I said, your website is you. What do you wear when you're in the store selling to customers? Chances are you wear nice clothes, perhaps even a tie. The same level of quality and professionalism needs to be reflected in your website design. Because it's quite possible that a bigger competitor also has a website, and if you don't look as good or better online, you're at a disadvantage. In fact, having a really great website can help you eat your competitors' lunch.

Focus. Focus. Focus.

The biggest mistake most web designers make is that their sites have no focus. For example, here's a mattress company website to look at that has no focus: www.gomattress.com. When you look at the homepage, your eye wanders all over the place. You need to ask yourself, what's the number one thing I want people to click on? Make that the central focus of the site, with a larger photo and words that guide the visitor to take the action you want them to take.

Your website is a TV channel—make sure it's something people want to watch.

The fact is that YouTube is one of the top search engines, right after Google. And when people go on a website these days, they expect to find some decent video. NOT having video makes you look bad. Now, I'm not suggesting you put a commercial on your website. What you need is video that educates customers about your products. People who go on the web to pre-shop want to learn. They are going to mattress school.



And you need to be Harvard—or at least a great state school like UMass (not so subtle plug for my alma mater). If your site has useful information that's not an overt sales plug, you'll be ahead of the game.

Remember, your website is on 24/7. And the best part is, since you're not paying a network to air your spot or a newspaper to insert your ad, your media costs are zero. This is a golden opportunity to

share what you know about mattresses.



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Tell a story and educate.

If video isn't in your budget, start with writing some good content that helps educate your customers. Here's a website that I wouldn't call great, www.mattressmanstores.com, but if you explore their Buyer's Guide section, they have a helpful and well-written page that's all about different types of mattresses. Whether you agree with everything they say or not, the point is that they're not shouting at you to hurry up and buy something. They're just explaining options—just as any good mattress sales associate would do.

Written content for your website needs to be honest, accurate, engaging—and mistake-free. Typos on your website aren't just embarrassing, they might actually hurt your bottom line. They make a bad impression. Worse than that, they can make people question your business' legitimacy. Every word needs to be spell-checked and third-party proofread.



Use social media. There are many companies that specialize in social media marketing. In my opinion, a lot of them make it seem much more complicated than it really is—maybe because they want you to hire them!

Think of social media as a big party where all your friends are. They have Facebook pages, some of them use Twitter and some use LinkedIn—some use all three and more.



I suggest starting with a Facebook page. It's easy to set up and it's free. But don't treat your Facebook page like it's just another website. Use it as a place to share the personality of your helpful staff and let people know about upcoming events at your store.

Just like any party you go to, you'd never hand someone a business card right away. Take time to get to know people and for them to know you. Once you've known each other for a while, and they've shown interest in what you do, let them know about stuff happening at your store, whether that's an informational seminar on mattresses and sleep, or an upcoming sale. Once you have a Facebook page, add a Facebook icon and link to your new website so people can easily find it.

Guide viewers into your online sales funnel.

Imagine people at their computers, watching your videos or reading your articles. Now they're ready to take the next step. The layout of your web page that's displaying the content should clearly show your offers, engage viewers and encourage them to click.

Think of your videos or other content as cups of delicious Starbucks coffee at Barnes & Noble. The longer people hang around, the more likely they are to buy or choose to visit your store. Just make it easy for them to take action when they're done sipping or you'll lose them.

Optimize your content for search. Do some research to see what search terms your target audience is using to find stores like yours. If your store is in Miami, for example, enter "Mattress stores Miami." See what comes up. Those stores are your main competitors, and the name of the game is not only to be on that first page, but as



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search for text, so simply having those words as text will help you. The other thing you should do on a regular basis is add more content, such as news articles and videos. The search engine algorithms like this, since it's a sign your website is active and robust. Another trick is to encourage other websites to link to yours. This is called "back linking." If another site, such as a chamber of commerce website, links to yours, Google assumes your site has more relevance with the audience, so they put you higher in their their rankings.

each video "snackable"—less than four minutes (1-2 minutes is ideal). People on the hunt for information prefer to nibble short videos.

As for the customers you've put on video, this becomes a source of pride for them and they tell their friends about it. They become, in effect, ambassadors for your store.

Use good photography.

Many companies make the mistake of grabbing any low-quality camera or smartphone and shooting some photos of their own store. When you're up against bigger competitors, you run the risk of making your store look small and low quality. Hiring a professional photographer for a one-day or half-day photo shoot can deliver excellent return on your investment.

Good visuals are critical. People process information visually as well as through the written word. If your website is too word-heavy, it makes it difficult for visitors to quickly get a sense of what you have to offer. Good photos are fast and effective.

Include interactive elements.

In the early days of website development, sites were basically online brochures—static pages that were really no different than print. That is changing very rapidly.

Videos of satisfied customers are must-see TV for today's websites.

high up on that page as possible. A web design firm that offers search engine optimization (SEO) can place tags and key words onto your website that make it easier for Google and other search engines to find you. There are also simple things you can do when you create and maintain the site that will make it easier for you to be seen. If you know, for example, that "Mattress stores Miami" is a term that people are searching for, make those words part of the headline on your website, i.e., "Miami's Number One Mattress Store." Google and other search engines primarily

Use video testimonials.

Video testimonials from satisfied customers are must-see TV for today's websites. Your customers can be your very best salespeople. They're ultra-credible, and it's easy to get them on camera talking about what a great experience they had shopping at your store. People trust other people. It's that simple.

You don't need people who look like supermodels. In fact, that can backfire. Site visitors want to get a feeling that they're seeing people just like them, so keep it real. And keep

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Today, the best sites offer you fun ways to actively engage your visitors and invite them to participate in learning new things. For example, the website for Michigan's Art Van Furniture, www.artvan.com, includes an interactive quiz designed to help you determine which mattress is right for you. It's simple, but effective.

The right site content adds up to trust. Done right, the first thing a shopper feels when they come to your website is a sense that they can trust you. There's no one thing that makes that feeling come about. It's a combination of things—from good design to an intuitive interface to photos that convey your quality to content that educates instead of sells. And when customers

come through your door after spending time online, chances are they are much more likely to know what they want and be ready to make a purchase. With a shorter in-store sales cycle, your business can sell more and become more profitable. That's the beauty of a website that pre-sells your customer. And as an added benefit, you'll sleep better knowing your website is always working for you. ●



Ted Page is co-founder and creative director of Captains of Industry, a web design, video production and marketing agency with experience working with leading brands. Ted oversees the creative development of websites, logos, videos and interactive web marketing campaigns. He is a frequent contributor to MarketingPros.com and other publications. Ted is also an avid sleeper. To learn more, visit www.captainsofindustry.com. To contact Ted, email

tpage@captainsofindustry.com.

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For more information call
E. Michael Allen
425-954-4004
mike.allen@brandsource.com