

Engage Your Customers with Live Chat

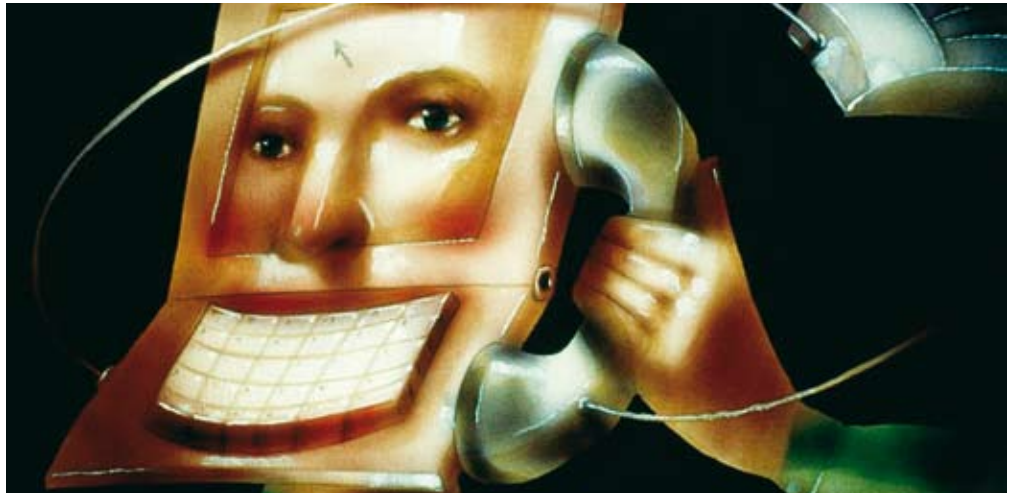
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While most businesses recognize the value of having a website to promote and sell their products, few actually monitor how their site is used by their customers or realize how easy it is to contact their website visitors as they browse the site to review their products. Imagine being able to offer the virtual equivalent of a friendly “May I help you?” to your website visitors. By adding live chat capabilities to your website and initiating outbound chat sessions, you can increase your sales and generate business from otherwise lost opportunities.

Here’s How it Works

Let’s say you own a business selling widgets. Many of your products are fairly complex or expensive, resulting in a longer sales process. As you see people browse your website from the live chat console, you notice one visitor in particular who has been on your site for 5 or 10 minutes and has been reviewing a specific category of products. You can observe this by seeing what pages he/she is viewing on your website while following along from the live chat interface. Due to the length of time spent on your site and the number of pages he/she has visited, you can safely assume that this visitor is interested in your product. With the click of a button, you initiate a chat session. This launches a small pop-up window on the visitor’s screen with the following invitation: “Hello, my name is Laura. May I help you find anything?” With a few small words, you have just humanized the online sales experience and have proactively engaged your customer.

While some online users may decline your invitation to chat, many will welcome the opportunity to learn more about your product and receive help finding the information for which they are searching. Customers are easily frustrated by complex websites or hard to find content that is buried deep within your site and



often welcome assistance shopping and researching online.

Anecdotal evidence suggests live chat technology works, increasing conversions and generating sales. The Internet service provider Earthlink estimates that 15% of its initiated chats result in a customer signing up. E-Trade Mortgage, based in Arlington, Va., added an “invite to chat” program in 2004. In the first 6 months, the program improved customer satisfaction ratings and the company found chatters were more likely than non-chatters to become customers. Rackspace, a Web services provider in San Antonio, generates about 80% of new sales via an initiated chat session, according to founder Patrick Condon. In other words, if you do not engage your customers online, you could be leaving money on the table.

Live Chat Can Easily be Added to Any Website

There are two basic ways to add live chat capabilities to your website. Live chat applications can be purchased for a one-time fee, installed and run from your website, or you can pay a monthly fee to a live chat service provider who will provide you with a few lines of code to be added to your website to enable live chat. While leasing service from a provider is easier to set up initially, it is cheaper and better in the long run to

purchase a live chat application that can be installed on your web server. Most services run anywhere from \$50-\$100 a month plus setup fees, while a live chat application script can be purchased and installed for less than \$200.00. You pay once and it’s done. As live chat requires little to no ongoing maintenance, buying is definitely the better option as a few changes will need to be made to your website in either case.

Be Proactive

All too often, little thought is given to how customers actually use your website or find out about you online. Do you know that your customers and prospects are able to find what they are looking for? What opportunities are you missing? Live chat can allow you to see how your website is used and can also help you connect with your customers directly from your website. Since live chat is inexpensive and easy for existing sales and support staff to manage, it is a great idea for almost any business and can radically improve sales and customer support.

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