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Blogs, Podcasting, and RSS

Emerging ways to reach your customers – is the impact there in online retail?

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Executive Summary

Three new communication tactics have emerged within the internet landscape. All three possess potential benefits to an online retailer, and none should be dismissed as a potential enhancement to your marketing efforts.

At this moment in time, Blogs, Podcasting, and RSS are not going to fundamentally change any aspect of your online business, but rather, offer your company new ways to speak to your customer segments. All of these technologies, in one shape or form, can help your company communicate your unique value proposition to your customers, while providing a new content vehicle for your business.

This brief gives an overview of the technologies, exactly what they do, and if you should start planning on incorporating them into your strategic marketing efforts.

Blogs, Podcasting, and RSS Overview

You probably have heard all these terms an awful lot lately. You wonder about what these technologies do? What value to they provide? If you aren't up to speed on these new applications and how they are impacting online interactions then read this brief further.

Will these technologies impact you? To be honest, it's too early to tell - but awareness will drive innovation and maybe your team will develop an idea/application that utilizes these technologies to enhance a portion of your eCommerce business.

Here's the rundown:

Blogs

What they are:

Probably the most well known of the three, blogs allow everyday people to quickly develop a website presence and distribute any type of content that they desire. Look at the metrics relating to blog penetration.

- 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults who use the internet say they have created a blog or web-based diary. That represents more than 8 million people.
- 27% of internet users say they read blogs.
- Only 38% of all internet users know what a blog is. The rest are not sure what the term "blog" means.

What a "blog" actually means is weblog. In basic terminology, it's the ability for someone to update web content directly through the Internet, using a web browser as the publishing mechanism. This makes the creation of content easy and many people are using blogs to establish authority sites within unique business and hobby/interest niches.

Where blogs impact online retail most is within these targeted online communities. Certain blog authors develop a large base of specific visitors, hence the site becomes a potential target market for viral marketing efforts. Many web entrepreneurs use this functionality to develop affiliate hubs within niche markets, and use search popularity to beat out larger retailers within corresponding natural search results.

By integrating your brand image within the site experience at that SPECIFIC blog, you as an online marketer are able to segment your marketing PRIOR to converting someone as a customer. It is a place to communicate with current and potential customers about current offerings/promos while boosting the credibility of the brand.

Should you care:

If you have a very unique value proposition, or sell to a very specific or high-value customer segment, blogs can be a great way to increase overall brand awareness. You can better connect with your customers and provide detail into the current happening within the business (ex. Current sales on XBOX 360). Potentially, one person within your organization should own the monitoring of blogs within your vertical and look to post new content to meet the needs within the unique blog community.

Podcasting

What it is:

Podcasting should be just called mobile video broadcasting. However, Apple's marketing/development team did a great job with branding their device to a type of emerging media – hence the term podcasting! Similar to traditional radio and television, mobile video broadcasting delivers branded content in either a paid/free environment, on someone's mobile media player (Apple only does video currently, but that will change shortly). Retailers can potentially use this communication channel to deliver targeted content to their customer base, while integrating advertising within the video content.

Should you care:

Not really. Until video podcasting penetration increases, it's still a limited channel for advertising. The best application available right now would be an online audio content segment that is digitally delivered to an opt-in list. As technology advances, you can potentially do this from your current opt-in page on your website and not from Apple's iTunes platform.

RSS

RSS stands for Real Simple Syndication and is a method for electronic content distribution. RSS is transmitted via the internet, but what makes it unique is that no downloading efforts are needed by the end receiver of the content. The content streams instantaneously within a webpage.

Advanced consumers have RSS news readers on their computers, either integrated into an email client, or utilize an aggregated web application such as News Gator. This essentially saves them time in aggregating all new and updated content that meets their interests.

Already gaining steam in the travel industry and within comparison shopping engines, RSS seems to be a valuable way to push news and time sensitive offers to customers. Travel companies are able to provide a streaming supply of last minute airfare offers to their customer segments, without that customer having to open an email or visit a webpage.



Should you care:

It completely depends on the nature of your business. Do you consistently offer new prices? Do you obtain new products to your assortment consistently? Do you have a customer base that is extremely loyal that you want to reach out to with messaging? If so, RSS may another channel to help build your brand.

Call us today to learn more about these technologies and the potential impact they can have in reaching your customers with targeted messaging and fresh content.

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