

It's Not About E-Commerce It's About R-Commerce

by TERRY L. BROCK

Focus on the Relationships of Business, Not the Electronics of it.



We live in an E-crazed world. Everywhere you turn you hear about E-Commerce, E-this and E-that. Seems that some are thinking you only have to put an E in front of a word and you are in the digital age. How ridiculous!

No matter how sophisticated our technology gets, we still are working with human beings. This is something the wise and successful businessperson knows. The technology of 100 years ago was amazing at its time, but it still required the human connection. One hundred years from today we'll use technology that will make our latest MP3 files and miniature chips in cellular phones look like 12th century crossbows.

Yet, in spite of all the E-Commerce, real success comes from R-Commerce — Relationship Commerce. It is the relationship that you have with the customer that matters most. Yes, this is more important than the price. Price can bring in a transaction. It can work for a short time, but it is the long-term relationships that you

establish that will keep customers coming back again and again. If you base your business on price alone, you'll be blown out of the water when the next new business comes along that can undercut you (and they will, eventually).

Case in point: Amazon.com is viewed as the poster child of E-Commerce. Jeff Bezos, Amazon's president and CEO, was *Time* magazine's Man of the Year because of the changes that he brought to our way of life. The company has focused on helping customers to feel comfortable to purchase not only books, but CDs, videos, gifts and now even furniture. Who knows what they will add in the future?

Is Amazon's success due to the fact that they have the lowest prices? Anyone who can click to

one of Amazon's competitors knows that you can often buy the same product for less elsewhere. In the age of clicking to competitors, why doesn't everyone just leave Amazon in a mouse click and go to the competition? In the age of sophisticated price shopping robots (like www.mysimon.com and www.priceworld.com) how can Amazon stay in business if they don't have the lowest prices? And yes, profit is in the picture for Amazon, but they are building infrastructure and top-of-mind presence now. The profits are in the picture and will come in the future.

How can Dell Computer (www.dell.com) stay in business if they've built their business around the web? In the spirit of full disclosure, Dell Computer is

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If there are any subjects that you feel should be explored in Tech for Reps, or if you have any comments about this subject, please contact the Tech for Reps editor at: alaplante@MANAonline.org.



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a client of mine, and I'm seeing up close what they do right to get and retain customers. Dell computers are not always the least expensive computers. You can even get some reliable computers from their competition at good prices. How is it that they keep their customers in light of lower-priced competitors?

Well, the answer is that price alone will not do it. Amazon and Dell Computer both provide several things that are critical for success in R-Commerce:

- **Reliability** — Make sure your customers can rely on you. This means having technology that works and the good ol' fashioned customer service that works. Dell computers are good and consistently hold up well in reviews and in real-world experience.

- **Passion** — A passion to satisfy customers can build loyalty. My friend Jeffrey Gitomer says that customer satisfaction is worthless, but customer loyalty is priceless. When you talk with the people at Amazon or Dell Computer you hear it in their voices and see it in their eyes. They love their customers and want to do what they can to make customers want to come back again and again. They focus on the fourth or fifth sale, not just the first.

- **Consistency** — Both Amazon and Dell make it a point to be consistent in their approach to technology and customers. Note their web sites and how simple they are, yet rich in content. No-

tice they provide this familiarity over and over.

- **Adaptability** — Amazon started with books and expanded to other areas that customers like. Are they in the book business? No way. They are in the "making customers giddy with glee" business. What kind of business are you in? If you answer that with a given product or service, reframe your perspective. Think of areas where your customers need help and aren't getting what they want now. Adapt to the new opportunities that await you.

- **"Sam Drucker" Approach** — I grew up watching programs like *Petticoat Junction* and *Green Acres* on television. Both of these shows featured a character named Sam Drucker who was the General Store manager. He was kind, fun, funny and a bit goofy at times. However, he knew his customers and their needs by name. He was part of the family. Your customers want someone who can help them in their specific requests and make technology personable. Use data mining, CRM (customer relationship management) software and data collection technology to get to know your customer. Then use that information for their good. Think like Sam Drucker.

E-Commerce is the buzzword today. Yes, having the right technology is not only a good idea but imperative for success in today's business world. But don't lose sight of the fact that it is always about R-Commerce, Relationship Commerce. Building and enhancing relationships through technology, personal contact and meeting customers' needs is what it is all about. It was before, it is now and it will be that way for the next 100 years. □