


High Tech, High Touch - It's a Winning Combination

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No one I know would dispute the benefits technology—specifically the computer—has had on every aspect of our lives. It has put information at our fingertips and allowed us to communicate with others whenever and wherever we happen to be. Technology also has allowed businesses—no matter their size, location, products, or services—to compete on a global basis.

For many businesses, however, that technology has a downside. They have used technology to provide their customers with the speed and convenience of online shopping but, in the process, they have downgraded the importance of human interaction to the stage of near extinction. Many of those businesses don't even include an e-mail address or a telephone number on their web sites so that customers can contact them. The message that sends to customers is this: "Please place your order and select your payment option, but do not, under any circumstances, attempt to contact us. We are not interested in—nor do we allow—human interaction."

What these businesses fail to realize is that most consumers turn to the Internet to compare products and prices before they make their purchase decisions. If, during that process, they have a question or two, but they are unable to contact that company, they will move on to the next. What is almost worse are companies that do provide e-mail options and telephone numbers, but don't respond in a timely manner to customer inquiries.

During 2010, e-commerce in the United States reached \$165.4 billion, up from \$144.1 billion in 2009. How much of that revenue did your organization take in? How much more could you have had if you had provided potential customers with the opportunity to communicate with your employees?

If you are to be successful and grow your business, it is critical that you combine high tech with high touch. Amazon, Redbox, and Go Daddy are three companies that have mastered this concept. Each relies heavily on technology to attract customers, but their employees are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to serve those



customers. Amazon was one of the first—and most successful—companies to market entirely online. In 1985, it had sales of about \$600,000; last year it had sales of \$30 billion.

Today's consumers want speed and convenience, but they also want a great customer experience. If you don't provide those three elements—along with quality products and services at competitive prices—you will be doomed. You must include a phone number on your web site and man your phones seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Train your employees to respond quickly to customer inquiries—to answer phones within three rings and to respond to e-mails within an hour. The more available you are to your customers, the more money they will spend with you, and the more successful your business will become.

Remember: When it comes to online sales, you are just one click away from extinction.

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