

Is Your Website Winning You Business?

**Be Sure Your Website Has What It
Takes to Sell to Industrial Buyers**





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Your website is where potential customers look first before buying from you. More than 93.4% of industrial buyers use the Internet to research purchase decisions. If your website doesn't provide the information they need, 91% of them will seek a new supplier.¹

This explains why your website should be more than an electronic brochure. Instead, think of your website as an indispensable member of your sales team. Like your star salesperson, your website must anticipate customers' questions and answer them clearly. It should provide details, product information – everything customers need before calling you to make a purchase.

Essentially, your website must persuade customers to buy from you. Besides offering nuts-and-bolts information, it must clearly show potential customers that you sell what they need, while answering their questions and earning their trust. If your website does all of these things, it will serve as a powerful sales channel.

Already, many manufacturers recognize the role their websites play in driving sales. In fact, 37% of those surveyed by SVM E-Business Solutions attribute up to 40% of total sales to their websites. And industrial business owners are taking notice. 88% of B2B manufacturing companies feel the need to have an online presence to compete effectively.² Of these businesses, 44% have budget allocated for website development.

Are you keeping up with your competitors who are successfully using their websites as a sales channel? A better question is, can you afford to lose business because your website isn't built with potential customers in mind? Probably not.

Consumer Websites Are Raising the Bar for Industrial Websites

Industrial buyers are like any consumer who may shop online for anything from entertainment to travel. Their high expectations for business-to-business sites come from their familiarity with the conveniences popular consumer websites offer.

Think about the sites you visit on a regular basis to buy music, book trips or purchase clothing. You expect to find what you need easily, and this is possible with today's consumer sites. Their "website construction" familiarizes us with advanced search options, organized navigation and product information, product images – the works. Consumer websites set the bar.

¹ Thomas Publishing Company, 2003

² SVM E-Business Solutions, January 2005

Nowadays, we're so accustomed to the ease of use of consumer websites that we expect the same when we make business-related purchases. But there is a key difference between your potential customers and the average consumer, who searches the Internet for this and that. Industrial buyers expect even more detailed product information. And they want to evaluate different product options and make a buying or specifying decision without having to talk to a salesperson, if possible. Also, industrial buyers aren't just browsing online. They turn to the Internet when they have a specific, immediate need for certain products.

So, what type of detail and how much information should you include on your website? That depends on what your customer needs to know to decide to buy from you. And if your website is going to be effective, you're always thinking about the customer.

Industrial buyers expect these conveniences on your website:

- **Detail** – Information and specifications on products and services
- **Search tools** – Ability to quickly find the products and services they need
- **Ease of use** – Simply marked buttons, navigable links and product descriptions
- **Follow-up** – Buyers expect an immediate response to requests for more information

The easier your website is for potential customers to search and find information on, the more likely they are to have a positive user experience and return to your site again. Consumers can be 80% more likely to be influenced by a website for buying decisions than other traditional forms of advertising.³ If you deliver information in a clear, simple-to-navigate manner, your online message will work to your selling advantage.

Put Your Website to the VSET Test

We know that your prospective customers turn to the Internet first to research purchase decisions, but what will they find if they land on your website? Remember, information is critical – and you must give your customers the information they expect to find. Research shows that 84% of customers look for product pricing, and 90% look for product descriptions and specifications.⁴

³ *Is Your Web Site a Sales-Winning Machine?*, Chris Winfield, DMNews.com, July 18, 2005

⁴ *ThomasNet / Google Survey*, October 2005

So, if a hot prospect clicks on your site today, will they find information to decide if you have what they need? Will they know how to contact you so they can buy from you? In other words, can buyers **Verify**, **Search**, **Evaluate** and **Take Action** on your website? That is, can they:

- **Verify** that you offer the products they need – Does your website make it easy for potential customers to immediately determine whether you have what they are looking for?
- **Search** for specific products – Can buyers search your website in multiple ways (part number, keyword, or by product specifications)?
- **Evaluate** your product offerings – Do you provide buyers with enough detailed information so they can make a buying decision? Can they compare products side-by-side? Or do you offer CAD drawings for them to download, if applicable?
- **Take Action** – Do you offer multiple ways for buyers to request more information from you or buy from you, including: contact information, RFQ links, your phone number on every page, or even e-commerce?

Think about how you go through the buying process on any website. You want to find out immediately whether the website has what you need, and then you want to be able to easily search for specific products. Next, you may want to compare several products side-by-side so you can make a decision. Finally, you may look for the company's phone number or e-mail so you can request more information or make a purchase. Without realizing it, you went through the VSET process. And that's how industrial buyers approach your website.

When potential customers find what they need on your site quickly and easily, they are more likely to take the next step and contact you. If built properly, your website can be an effective sales channel – helping you attract new customers and increase sales from existing ones.

Building a Website that Works for Industrial Buyers

An effective website will anticipate your potential customers' questions and cater to their needs. Will your website target new customers, current customers or distributors? And what kind of information will they need to find there?

What is the business objective of your website? Do you want to educate visitors about your products or services, offer a complete catalog of your products, or allow buyers to make purchases online with an e-commerce tool?

Before you design a plan to improve your website, ask yourself the following:

- Who is your target audience?
- What products do potential customers look for? Can they Verify that you offer these products immediately? Remember the VSET test.
- What questions will customers ask about your offerings?
- How do your customers shop – what keywords, or products, are they likely to search to find what they need?
- Does the information you provide on your website persuade people to contact you, or buy from you?

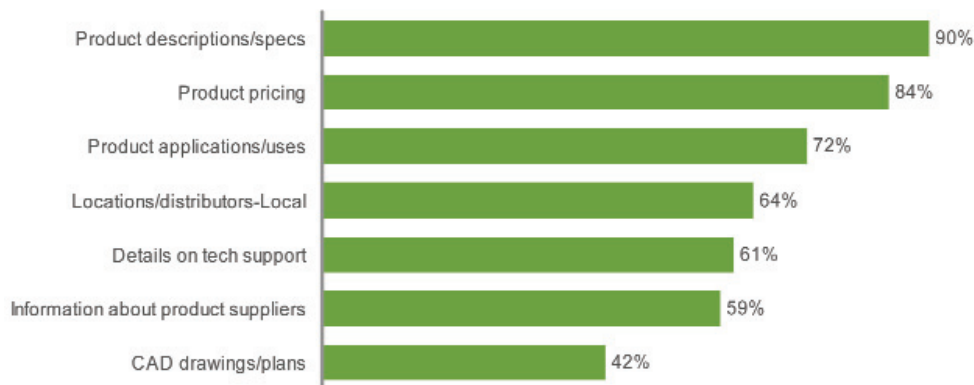
Be sure to revisit this last point as you consider ways to improve your website: *Does your website persuade visitors to become customers?* You can make a positive first impression by answering potential customers questions and modeling your website to match their search expectations. By doing so, your website reflects that you understand their needs. And in doing so, they'll probably be more inclined to pursue you as a vendor, which could lead to a phone call and a new customer.

Industrial Buyers Want a Direct Route to Information

You know how much information potential customers for your products or services need to make buying or specifying decisions. Don't leave them guessing about product specifications or confused about how to search for information.

For example, if you sell bolts, buyers should be able to come to your website and click on a "bolts" button to browse bolt options, or easily perform a search for bolts. Then, they can click on their choice to dig deeper and find information that allows them to confirm that what you offer is what they need.

Here are some of the types of information industrial buyers expect to find on your website today:⁵



If this information is organized in a format that customers can understand and search easily, they will generally have a positive experience on your website. Your goal is to pull in your best prospects with an effective website – persuade them with detailed information – so they won’t click away from your website before they take action and contact you.

A Site With “Killer Content” Will Help You:⁶

- Allow potential customers to easily search your website
- Increase the number of visitors who return to your site
- Boost page views
- Drive sales

Create and Maintain a Website That Wins You Business

Chances are, your primary business is not building websites. Still, your customers will expect your site to be on par with other consumer and industrial sites they search each day. This includes your competitors’ websites.

You’ll want to build characteristics into your site that enhance the user experience by avoiding “pet peeves” that drive away potential customers. After all, 76.7% of online visitors refuse to return to a site with annoying characteristics.⁷

⁵ThomasNet / Google Survey, October 2005

⁶McGovern Case Study, MarketingProfs.com, 2005

⁷Taylor Nelson Sofres Study, 2005

These “do’s” will create a positive, productive online experience for potential customers:

- Research your customers’ expectations – ask them what they want and need.
- Track activity on your current site – make improvements based on what visitors do on your site, where they come from, what pages they view, and from what pages they leave your site.
- Make ease of use and simple navigation a priority.
- Use terminology that your customers would naturally use to describe your products.
- Include your sales team on customer research – their in-field feedback is valuable.
- Explain the process to purchase – tell visitors how many steps they must take to buy so they don’t get “lost” on your site and decide to leave.
- Provide help a click away and include multiple ways to contact your company.

Avoid these “don’ts,” which interfere with online searches:

- Pop-up advertisements or promotions
- Required registration
- Prompts to install extra software to view images or PDFs
- Dead or broken links
- Confusing navigation
- Slow-loading pages
- Moving text

Need Help Getting Your Website Up to Speed for Industrial Buyers?

ThomasNet offers a range of website solutions to help you meet the needs of the industrial buyers your business targets.

- **Website Services** – Creation and hosting services include basic “first-time” websites to search engine optimized website upgrades.
- **Catalog Navigator®** – ThomasNet’s online catalog solution converts printed catalogs into a searchable format for your website. It allows buyers to search for products according to their specifications, compare them side-by-side, and get information necessary to make immediate purchase decisions. Online catalogs can include e-commerce capabilities and downloadable CAD drawings.
- **CAD Solutions** – ThomasNet can make your CAD drawings available for industrial buyers and engineers to download and insert into their designs – directly from your website.
- **Web Traxs®** – This client-side website tracking solution helps evaluate whether your website effectively converts visitors into customers. Collect tangible data on individual visitors to your website, including: which sites refer the most qualified customers; keywords visitors search to find the site; and visitors’ paths through the site.

Get more information on how ThomasNet can help your website gain more business from the Internet, today:

- Contact your local ThomasNet representative
- Go to ThomasNet.com/goodcustomers
- Call 1-800-879-6757