"Seven Fatal Errors" Doom Many Online Marketing Demos

When portraying a new or upgraded product line, too many companies get caught up in "meaningless impressive-looking images that fail to tell their story;" or, they hide the product story among over-long corporate "web infomercials." These are just two of the mistakes that can doom an online marketing demo to the annals of ineffective marketing artifacts, according to web marketing and design expert Stephanie Diamond.

"The most important online marketing question is 'Have I made my products easy to buy'," says Diamond in a forthcoming book on online marketing. Among the things to consider when answering this question is "whether the product's features and benefits are easy to understand."

One great way to ensure this communicability is to create an online marketing demo using Flash or Video, notes Diamond, whose company has worked on web marketing approaches for the likes of Raxco, ActionTec, and others. Marketing demos are attention-getting, cost effective and if done right, powerful sales tools. "But, it can be so tempting to concentrate on the sizzle that many companies forget the steak," she observes.

Diamond sees these "seven fatal errors" in many companies' online Flash or Video marketing demos.

1. Silent Movies

They are hard to follow and there is no evidence to suggest that silent movies are making a comeback. Software product demos with complex interface screens, complete with cursors that point in several directions and screens that change without explanation, are confusing, and may suggest to your user that the product is harder to use than it really is. Spend the money to add audio.

2. Over-long demo

Approximately 3 minutes is about right: anything more runs the risk of losing the visitor's interest…regardless of how engaging the demo may be. This will give time for a 1.5-minute "marketing pitch" and an equal amount of time for screen shots. Remember, the purpose of this demo is simply to capture the customer's attention. This is not a tutorial, which can run up to 5 minutes in length and demonstrate an important function in some depth. The goal is to help the customer focus his/her attention on what you have to offer. The website can be loaded with additional information and white papers. This demo will set the stage for a purchase. Then you can guide the viewer to more information.

3. Hide the Product Pricing

Don't make customer search for pricing; make sure it is shown right after the demo ends. And, end the demo next to a "buy now" or "more information" button. If you don't have confidence in your pricing, then you have a bigger problem than website design. After investing the time to watch the demo the viewer wants to know, "Ok, what will this cost?" If you hide your pricing, it becomes a focus of attention—and a negative one at that.

4. One-way communique' (forgetting to collect sales leads).

One of the reasons for creating a demo is to capture the attention of viewers browsing a site. If they are interested in viewing product demo, you will know something important about them.

Once you have their email address, you can request permission to send them a targeted newsletter, specific information or a special discount. If they give you permission, you have taken the first step in opening a valuable dialogue with them.

5. Ostentatious graphics
Website visitors have passed the stage of being impressed with animation for its own sake. When website design was in its infancy, everyone was thrilled with the notion that they could have animations that flashed and icons that spun around. That quickly went away when people realized that they wasted precious download time. Use the same rule for demos. A splash screen that booms out the name of the product to great fanfare is a waste of time and money. Animated splash screens can be used effectively, but many times they are gratuitous and/or meaningless.

6. Full frontal corporate bio
Customers need to know that the company is reliable, and has a quality product. This should be done on the website in the main, and not in a 3 minute presentation. Don't spend valuable demo time on lots of corporate information. If viewers are interested, they can find it on your website. Honestly evaluate whether the information you include will make your product more saleable.

7. Reinvent content (Repurpose demos in a hundred different ways to make it a more worthwhile investment).
A demo can be repurposed in a hundred different ways to make it a more worthwhile investment, yet so many companies ignore this benefit. When writing demo scripts, think about the different audiences you can target with small changes. You can take the same script and add a section that targets resellers. With a change to some of the graphics, you have a demo that will be useful for the next annual business meeting. A few different changes and it's useful for the company's international market. When you create several versions at once, the cost of the changes is minimal.

Diamond is collecting the lessons of her 25 years in marketing and sales into an e-book that is expected later this year.

About Digital Media Works
Digital Media Works (www.DigMediaWorks.com) is an Internet marketing and design firm that specializes in solutions for software, hardware and consumer electronics vendors. A seasoned 25+ year management/marketing professional, founder Stephanie Diamond is experienced in building profits in a broad range of product and services businesses. She created a highly successful line of multimedia software products that sold millions of copies for America Online, and has developed unique business strategies and products for a variety of companies, including AOL Time Warner, Redgate New Media and Newsweek, Inc.