

Simplifying the Buying Process

by Scott Orth, Director Internet Marketing Services, GTS

I'd like to walk you through a story—an analogy, really. Think about your experiences as a customer while you read. Trust me; I'll bring it all together in the end.

You're on vacation in a town you've never been in before. It's lunch time and you're hungry. You decide to make a sandwich, but you forgot to bring bread. Oh well, there's sure to be a grocery store up the street. You jump in the car and head off to get your bread. There's only one main highway from the vacation house; we'll call it Google Avenue. On the way, you see the sign you're looking for: "Stores next right." You make the turn but suddenly hit the brakes. In this remote little vacation town there are more than 100 grocery stores lining the street. "Wow, so many choices," you think to yourself, "this is great." You decide to pull in to the first store and just grab your bread—you're hungry!

You walk into the store and stop in your tracks. What's this? No aisles? Just random stacks of products on tables, shelves, even the floor. You'd think they were hit by a storm, or some random act of violence, but for the somewhat manicured nature of the piles. Something's wrong. You don't trust the store. You slowly back out the door, jump in your car, and speed off to the next parking lot. Finding the same disarray at the next three stores you mention something to a store owner. He looks at you, perplexed. "This is the way we've always had our store and it seems to work just fine," he says.

About to give up, you drive a couple of blocks down and try another store just off the main strip. You are elated to find that it is a highly organized store. Not only that, but there are customer service workers standing at the door and at the end of each aisle. They immediately ask if you would like help finding something. You tell them you need bread to make a sandwich. One of them gleefully walks you to the bread aisle and asks if you'd like to know the differences between each type. "No, thanks, this is all I need." "Sounds great," she says, "the register is right this way." "What kind of sandwich are you making?" she asks on the walk. "Turkey and ham, and, man, am I hungry," you exclaim. She says, "Do you have cheese, mayonnaise, pickles, and mustard, as well?" "Darn, I'm glad you mentioned pickles. I completely forgot about those—and they're my favorite part." "Just do'n my job," she says smiling. "If you're really hungry, you might want to grab some chips and a soda too. They're right here," she says, pointing to the items.

You buy the things you wanted, drive back to the vacation home, and enjoy your favorite turkey sandwich—with pickles. What's It All Mean? So what does this mean? Why did I take you through this odd little story? Because it's exactly what happens on the Internet.

Every day, people go online to find a product or service they want to purchase—yet they search and search, trying to find a website that

makes it easy for them. Too many sites are unorganized or confusing, making it difficult for customers to buy what they really want.

Web consumers are a bit finicky. Information needs to be handed to them, and the purchase process needs to be easy. Whether you sell an item online, or you want customers to pick up the phone and call—you must make it easy for them.

In addition to ease, like the pickles, chips and soda in this story, you should offer customers additional, relative products or information. Up sell them. Remind them of other products or services that go well with the ones they're looking for. You would do this in person.

Your website should do it as well. Here are a couple of tips to simplify the buying process on your site:

- Organize your site. If you offer different services, like auto glass and flat glass—organize your site to each category and make it easy for your customer to find what they're looking for.
- Use left navigation, with downward indented expansion. Avoid pop-up or roll-over expanding navigation.
- Put a strong call-to-action on every page. Your phone number, contact us, get a quote—whatever it is, make it stand out, and put it on every single page.

- Optimize every page of your site so that customers land on internal pages relevant to their searches—not the home page. If they search for “windshield replacement” send them to that page. If they search for crack repair—send them to a page about crack repair. And don’t forget the call-to-action.
- Offer additional services and products. Offer windshield wipers, or Aquapel, as an up-sell to every windshield. Remind them of your custom mirror selection when they’re shopping for a new frameless shower enclosure.

Customers often don’t think about other items until long after the purchase. Offer them related items while they’re shopping and they’ll likely buy.

Make sure you install analytics before engaging in any of this activity. After all, tracking the results is the only way you’ll know what works best, and which changes result in the largest increase in profits.