



TECHNOLOGIES

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES

Doing Business Online: Going Beyond Selling Parts

by Greg Gardner, Karmak, Inc.

Selling parts online is a great place to start to build your online presence. It gives your customers an idea of what you have available without having to come into your location or make a phone call, it puts you ahead of your competition that may not have an online presence, and it puts you in a position to be a part of a growing trend in the heavy-duty parts industry.

Here at Karmak, many of our customers have understood the benefits of taking this step for quite some time.

“It’s easier for our customers that do not like to call to see if a part is in stock. Our customers simply log into the website and check for themselves if we have the part. If we do, they order it online and the order is printed directly to our warehouse printer. The customer can also leave us messages or special instructions, all without having to take the time to call,” says Jeff Weaver, Director of Parts & Service, Truckworx.

But selling parts online is just that- a start.

To get an even bigger ROI from your place in the online space, consider adding new dimensions to what you offer online. What could you do online that would make the lives of your customers easier? What process could you move online so that your employees are freed up to focus on tasks that bring you more revenue?

Order Details

If you’re already selling parts online, you don’t have to go far for another opportunity to provide value to your customer. Once an order is placed, provide the customer with order details.

When someone is anxiously awaiting a part’s arrival, a status on their order can go a long way toward building trust with that customer and relieving the stress that they feel. The steps each order takes will be different based on your processes, but things like “order received,” “in process,” and “fulfilled” will be a few of the basics. And if the part is out of stock or unavailable, “backordered” should certainly be another status.

If the order in question is going to be shipped, providing a tracking number would be a good idea. Many customers these days simply expect one, and if they don’t get one, may call you to get that piece of information. That would defeat the entire purpose of providing information online, so it would serve you well to be proactive.

It’s a small detail, but this simple addition reduces a lot of friction for a customer when they are looking for order details. Before, they may have had to give you a call or shoot off an email. With this added functionality, all of this information would be available with a couple of clicks. This makes the life of your customer easier and it frees up your employees from having to take another phone call.

Account Information

If you are selling parts online, chances are that you're tracking at least basic information on each customer. Their name, company, address, email, and phone number are pretty standard. Those should be on just about every order that comes in.

But what about an order history? That would help your customers, particularly those that place large orders, keep from forgetting which parts are part of their regular orders. Plus, it reduces friction to placing a new order for those items, as they are already browsing your website. That could easily translate into increased sales for you.

If you allow purchases to be made on credit, there is also an opportunity for you to provide that information in this space. Giving your customers a chance to view their account balance, account limit, and billing dates will help them keep their account up-to-date. If they are looking into making a purchase, it also will give them an idea of whether or not they can afford to make that purchase on credit.

FAQs

A frequently asked questions page gives you the opportunity really free up your employees from taking extra phone calls, keeping them focused on more productive and profitable tasks. What questions come up time and again when one of your people answers the phone? Find out what those questions are and get out ahead of them by including them in the FAQs.

Be careful, though, as you want to make sure you only include questions that can be adequately explained in a sentence or two online. If a question requires a lengthy explanation or if the answer is different for every customer, it's best to handle those in a different format, even if they are questions you get often. The last thing you want to do is give an inadequate answer because then your customer is frustrated and you're going to get a phone call for further information about their question.

Track Mileage

Preventive maintenance can be a huge profit producer for your service operation and there is a lot of value for your customers in having a set preventive maintenance schedule set for every unit that comes into your bays.

If you allow for mileage tracking within your online portal, you're providing a next-level service on top of your preventive maintenance program. Customers can see when they have preventive maintenance coming up, so they won't be blindsided by it when they stop in your business. Likewise, you know when it's coming up, so you can be proactive about calling that customer and scheduling a time for them to come in. Being able to lock in that service appointment equals increased service profit.

Conclusion

One of the biggest benefits of being active in the online space is that success only breeds more success. As you make more information available online, your customers will get accustomed to going online to find information. Soon, they may begin to look there first.

Not only does this provide a quicker, more streamlined customer service experience for your customers, but it also frees up your staff from having to take as many phone calls. With more traffic coming into your website, it can also help drive internet parts sales.

Most importantly, though, it gives your business an additional competitive advantage over those that don't put an emphasis on being online and on more equal footing with other businesses that do. That's not lost on people like Steve McEnany, Vice President of Marketing and Technology, Midwest Wheel Companies.

In a recent [story](#) for Truck Parts & Service, he said, "It's an advantage for us that [a customer] can get online and see if we have what he needs...It is better he do that with us than look somewhere else."

Ultimately, that is what it is all about. Giving your customers what they need is the bottom line no matter how you are doing business. Maintaining an online presence is a way to do that more efficiently than ever.

About Greg Gardner

Raised in Carlinville, Illinois, Greg Gardner has held a number of roles within Karmak, including Parts and Service Trainer, Quality Assurance, and Product Manager before taking on his current position as a Product Owner. Greg most enjoys being able to coordinate across multiple departments during the software development lifecycle and seeing customers using the finished product successfully. He holds a B.A. in Secondary Education and is also a graduate of ATD Dealer Academy. In his spare time, Greg enjoys golfing, running, traveling, attending sporting events, and spending time with his family.



About Karmak

Karmak, Inc. is a leading provider of business management solutions for the commercial transportation industry. With more than 30 years of heavy-duty experience, we offer a unique approach combining innovative technology, strategic advice, and best practices. Our success programs produce measurable results by improving ROI, mitigating risks, and achieving operational excellence.

Serving more than 1,800 locations across North America, Karmak is an employee-owned company with headquarters in Carlinville, Illinois.