

The Chat Connection

Many of you have probably encountered some Chat software in one form or another, but have you ever considered using it as a way to communicate with new customers on your web site?

Why Chat?

Chat takes many forms. One of the most popular forms is IM or Instant Messaging which are commonly found through Yahoo, MSN and AOL. Many dating and social sites use Chat Forums where groups can chat together either publicly or privately.

With text based Chat you are conversing with someone in real time. With text Chat you will have to type on a keyboard to express yourself. Because of having to type messages, a sub-culture of brief short-hand has developed. Typing is a lot of work and perhaps some of the intonation gets lost. Chat is where we get emoticons from, those little faces that show emotion. They have even crept into our email with LOL (Laughing Out Loud) or 😊 the smiley face characters.



There are two types of online communication; text and voice. While some can type at the speed of thought others have trouble with keyboards and spelling. Chances are someone is visiting your web site and looking for a phone number.

The problem with voice communication is that both parties are detained momentarily or sometimes for an inordinate amount of time. That time costs money with the disadvantage of only one sales person to a customer on the phone. Where as with Chat, a support or sales person may be able to communicate with 3 customers at the same time.

Text chat sessions are usually shorter than phone or voice sessions because nobody wants to take the time to type in a joke or talk about the weather. Ok, well some do...

Text communication is easier to manage because you can block out time to research the answer. For that reason I probably sound smarter in my email than I do on the phone.

Chat is another way to bridge the highly personable phone call with the less personal email. For your web site, it is another way that a potential customer can touch your business. Have Chat software connected to your web site. However, it only works if you use it.

Chat Software

There are many types of chat software available. They can be installed on your web site or they can be linked to a 3rd party service via subscription much like any other service on the internet. One of the most popular Chat software used for support and sales is LivePerson.

3rd Party Subscription	Web Site Installation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Live Person• BoldChat• Provide Support• ParaChat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FlashComs• RealChat• ZaZaChat• PHP Free Chat

If you or someone in your office has the ability to be available on line for chat questions, all you do is login and the little banner on your site says to the visitors that someone is online waiting for a question. At the same time you are alerted that someone is at your site.

Some chat software can pop-up on visitors to promote chat vs a phone call with a little banner that reads “Can I help you?”.



Conversely you don't want to have a chat banner that always seems to be in “dormant mode”. It is like saying to everyone that no one is home or that they are never home. You might conclude that the site might be abandoned.

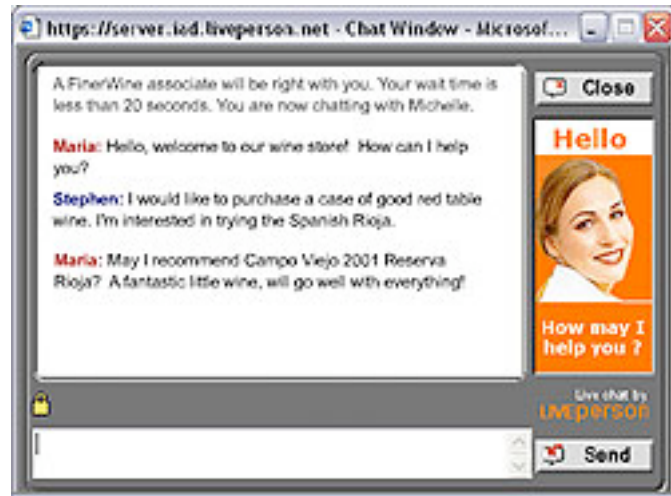
One of the features that I like about Chat is that sometime the software will allow you to email or cut and paste the conversation for your records. This feature may be disabled for legal reasons or to keep employees from offering something that was not true.

Chat is tons cheaper than having an 800 number and just about everyone has online access.

Chat brings your site to life and adds another type of customer interactivity. Think of Chat as the sales person on the floor, but with the added benefit of being able to track performance and to increase sales.

Some features to look for in Chat software would be integrated real time analytics and visitor monitoring, Chat Invitation (these are the pop-ups I was telling you about), conversion tracking, reporting, and unlimited customization.

I personally like to use Chat Support with web sites that I would like to purchase software from because most of the time it is quicker to get questions answered. Also, if I have to catch a phone call or answer the door, it is not like I had hung up on them. However, some chat messages say “..hello...are you still there”?



Attention Webcentrica Account Holders!

Ask about trying out **PHP Free Chat** on your Linux hosting account.

Conclusion

The world of Chat is still evolving and now includes video. Not only does this enhance one on one communication it also makes group communication possible. With the new advances in technology you can hold virtual meetings and presentations.

For the online store merchant, Chat represents a valuable tool to help sell and to head off shopping cart abandonment.

Posted on July 7th, 2008 by Karl Knelson