

COLUMNS

Using good manners and e-signatures to grow business

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In an environment in which businesses should be able to reach targets anywhere at any time, many brands still struggle to connect to prospects in a way that makes it easy for customers to do business.

Whether the immediate need is lead generation, increased sales or better customer service, the overall ambition of for brand businesses is easier to fulfill in the cloud.

E-signature services are a primary example of how luxury brands can employ cloud-based solutions to scale quickly and enhance the customer experience.

Sign off

Companies in a wide range of industries have found that e-signatures help speed sales cycles by 200 percent to 400 percent, freeing staff to pursue new leads and grow businesses.

More luxury brands are moving their contract processes to the Web to gain secure, fast sales cycles and give consumers a collaborative negotiation process.

But are customers ready to close contracts in the cloud? They are, as long as the brands with which they work approach them with proper e-etiquette.

The masters of good manners spent generations expounding upon what have become widely accepted rules for communication in almost every social and business circumstance.

However, the swift rise of the Internet has created many unanswered questions about electronic etiquette, particularly when it comes to e-sales practices.

For example, brands might question their responsibility to prospects, and customers might worry about legality and security.

Retailers who want to reap the business benefits of e-signing should remember the golden rule of etiquette: communicate clearly and be thoughtful of your audience.

Getting prospects accustomed to e-signing

Consumers, particularly those who frequent luxury brands, have likely signed at least a few documents via the Internet.

Digital signatures have gone mainstream, and shoppers are asked to provide them for everything from Internet auctions to collective buying.

However, that does not mean brands can forego e-signature education.

As electronic signatures have moved from the early-adopter phase to widespread use, the concerns about it have shifted, as well.

At first, new users asked about legality. Customers wanted assurance that online signatures were legally binding.

Today, there's enough awareness about the E-SIGN Act and related laws that almost every consumer and potential user of e-signature technology knows that signing something in the cloud creates the same level of obligation as taking the same action on paper.

Now, more difficult questions have arisen, and many of them have to do with etiquette.

Take, for example, the experience of a traditional consumer asked to complete a valuable contract in the cloud.

The customer might be familiar with e-signatures and the laws supporting them, but she has never before used the service hosting the contract, and she is hesitant about the security risks.

Additionally, the customer is displeased that the retailer she is patronizing never asked her consent to use an e-signature solution.

What would the etiquette mavens of the past say about this situation? Most likely, they would fault the brand for bad communication and maybe even poor manners.

More retailers complete deals via cloud based contracts than ever, but this process is still young enough that brands should assume responsibility for educating their customers about it.

Easing customer resistance to closing cloud contracts

When brands decide that their path to growth will move through the cloud, they should inform their customers.

Retailers can easily let prospects know beforehand that expected sales documents will arrive electronically and can be signed electronically, as well.

By starting these conversations, businesses educate one group of consumers who then pass their knowledge along to others, organically creating modern etiquette rules for e-sales.

For new or reluctant e-signers, the most important point to reiterate is that electronic signatures are enforceable. This has been long proven and further underscored by legislation.

The second concern often involves fraud and here too, the retailer can educate customers about common safety checks and the ability to track each step in the signing process when the contract was sent, when it was viewed and signed, and when it was sent back.

This detailed tracking offers superior security and compliance over traditional signing methods.

Once legality and safety concerns are answered, beginners might want to know the benefits e-signatures offer over paper-and-ink ones. Brands can list the benefits of this technology.

By using an electronic contract management solution, one can ensure that the customer completes every signature, date and other field, drastically reducing the opportunities for delays in the sales process.

E-signatures have turnaround times as high as 10 times less than those on paper, meaning customers receive their goods more quickly and with less hassle when they sign electronically.

Cloud delivers benefits to customers and brands

For discerning, busy shoppers of luxury goods, e-signatures should be a welcome change. They facilitate faster, easier buying experiences, meeting the needs of a target market generally pressed for time.

By closing sales in the cloud, retailers not only make it easier for customers to do business with them, but they also lower their own expenses and free staff to generate new leads.

With some minimal effort to educate customers, businesses can easily use cloud-based processes such as e-signing to expand their market share.

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