Turning visitors into customers

A guide to streamlining and selling more

blackbell

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Foreword

Customers are used to shopping online. In fact, in the last 12 months 78% of adults in the UK bought goods or services in this way.

They have high expectations when it comes to convenience, choice and speed, and they expect to experience all of these things on your website. Yet while product providers have been successfully perfecting the art of ecommerce for years, many service-based businesses are still lagging behind. Failing to sell and market your service effectively online could prove highly detrimental to your business; according to the Office for National Statistics, one of the top three reasons for small businesses failing in 2016 was that they did not have a strong online offering.

At Blackbell we've had the privilege over the past eight years to work with many businesses across a wide range of sectors. We've seen first-hand how selling services online can dramatically accelerate growth. But – we have also witnessed the many hurdles that can stand in the way.

Foreword

Given that most ecommerce technology was developed with a physical product retailer in mind, service businesses have had plenty of obstacles to overcome. Some have struggled to know where to begin, buying separate software tools to tackle individual challenges.

You too may have found yourself using a mix of products to manage the various aspects of your online business - which can be costly in terms of both time and money. Or are you managing with a contact form, an email address or simply a phone number to encourage web visitors to book? If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

We have taken a closer look at some of the challenges faced by three service businesses who desperately needed to take more of their sales and marketing online. No matter what type of service you provide, we hope that this guide will help you to navigate your options and start converting your online visitors into customers.

David-Benjamin Brakha
Founder and CEO, Blackbell

Introducing our contributors

Stephen Brady is the Founder and CEO of PingLocker Group, which he established in 2012 in the UK to provide 24/7 laundry and dry cleaning services in residential buildings. PingLocker is now a one stop concierge service for international students and young professionals, offering everything from laundry and housekeeping to dog walking and relocation services for residents.

Wayne Reynolds is General Manager at Pullman Reef Hotel Casino in Cairns, Australia. The Pullman Reef is a prestigious five-star hotel, offering customers a range of services from beauty and spa treatments to business and secretarial resources.

Mary Dardenne is the Founder and President of Decanter Tours, which has offices in France and the U.S. Customers around the world can enquire, book and pay on the company's website for wine tasting tours in Bordeaux, Burgundy, The Loire Valley, Champagne and the Rhone Valley.

Scared of missing out? You should be

We've seen many companies commit a huge amount of time and resources to create amazing websites to promote their services. But if your website isn't helping to convert visitors into actual customers, then it's not serving its purpose.

Conventional sales wisdom preaches the importance of locking in the initial interest of a lead to convert them into an actual customer. The same is true for selling services online. In a recent report: The State of the Connected Customer, Salesforce reported that 76% of customers think that it's easier than ever to take their business elsewhere — switching from brand to brand to find an experience that matches their expectations. This makes it increasingly important for service businesses to ensure they are front of mind with their customers and are making it as easy as possible for them to browse, book and pay for their service directly. If a customer has to leave your site in order to book, they may well abandon the purchase.

Three key challenges

Too many different software packages

Too few people with too much to do

Too much time spent on unprofitable administrative tasks

In your shoes part 1: Too many different software packages

As a small or medium sized business, you are likely to have invested in technology in stages as you've grown, leaving you reliant on multiple unintegrated software packages. This can cause inefficiencies. A survey tool may be a helpful purchase, for example, but if it doesn't link to your CRM system, its value is reduced. The same applies to your reservation and payment systems, which are very important independently, but far more powerful if linked together. All three business owners that we spoke to highlighted the inefficiencies involved with using numerous software packages to manage different aspects of their business.

Stephen Brady, Founder and CEO, Pinglocker Group:

"Using multiple software tools that didn't integrate with each other was quite a cumbersome, time-consuming and costly way of doing things. Getting customer feedback for example, was something we really struggled with. We'd use a survey software and email our customer base for responses. This could happen months after they'd used our service, so we found engagement was inconsistent at best and low at worst."

"If there had been an issue, the likelihood was that we weren't hearing about it in time to do anything meaningful in response. Using so many different software packages was a problem for us because the time it took to carry out the various aspects of business operations, so there wasn't enough focus on providing great customer experience."

In your shoes part 2: Too few people with too much to do

Many businesses in the service sector will come under the umbrella of micro or SME – which represent 99 per cent of all businesses in the EU. These businesses will often be made up of fifty or fewer employees – which frequently means that the workforce is stretched very thinly.

When customers want to book a service, many different parts of a business may be involved in the process. One of the most common headaches new clients approach us with is being unable to react to customer demand and queries quickly and efficiently enough.

Wayne Reynolds, General Manager, Pullman Reef Hotels Casino: *"As a medium sized hotel offering many services to our clients, it used to require a huge amount of manpower to be in contact with customers at every stage – from booking, to arrival, the duration of their stay and to checkout. With so many departments in the hotel and without the resources to respond to guests quickly, our staff were under pressure and requests were getting missed. As a result, our customer service was suffering."*

In your shoes part 3:
Too much time spent on unprofitable administrative tasks

As well as the manpower issues, administrative tasks can detract from work that drives the business forward. And it's not just manual systems that can create time-consuming admin. If you are having to transfer information from emails into your booking system, for example, and then enter the pricing details from here into a separate payment system, your technology is not doing its job. Time wasted on administration acts as a barrier to growth when this time could be better allocated to proactive activities such as following up on leads, refining your offering, improving the customer experience and ultimately securing more sales.

Mary Dardenne, Founder and president of Decanter Tours: *"We found that too much time was being spent to-ing and fro-ing with prospective customers – providing them with information about the tours, proposals and pricing. Because of the amount of time this whole process took, the percentage of people who actually went through to the end and bought the tour was minimal."*

What can you do?

Technology applied in the right way can go a long way to solving these problems.

- Firstly, using a fully integrated platform is a no-brainer. Having a single system to manage your online interface with customers enables you to be more reactive and responsive to customer needs and takes the pressure off staff by streamlining the operational aspects of the business.

Stephen Brady, Founder and CEO, Pinglocker Group: *"Adopting a single system that allows us to see everything in real-time is brilliant. We now have better insight into what's hot and what's not in terms of customer engagement."*

- If possible, add a chat function to your website so you can handle customer queries immediately before they lose interest. This needn't be manned 24/7 but it means the website remains at the centre of your communication.
- Ensure that you can change your pricing easily. Too many companies leave prices the same simply because it's too time consuming to change them. By being able to display discounts or special offers quickly you'll be able to be more responsive to market changes and to your competitors.
- If you are offering your service on a recurring basis, adapt your website to give customers the option to sign up to a subscription.

Stephen Brady, Founder and CEO, Pinglocker Group: *"Instead of placing ten orders a year, customers can place just one and schedule a recurring visit – more like a mobile phone contract."*

- Make sure your customers have everything they need in one place to book and pay for the service you are providing. Avoid driving them through additional channels such as email or the telephone which creates extra work for you and is an inconvenience for them.

Mary Dardenne, Founder and CEO, Decanter Tours: *"For us, automation has meant that we no longer have to go through the back and forth process with customers on email. With just a few clicks of the mouse customers can see what we're offering, choose a package and a date and pay. This has helped phenomenally with securing bookings, particularly with our more affordable packages which tend to get booked last minute."*

Questions to ask yourself

- Can your customers book and pay for your services online?
- Do they have to leave your site to contact you?
- When a previous customer returns, do you recognise them?
- How easy is it to change your pricing or the details of an offer?
- How long are you spending on each customer transaction?
- Are you able to promote your services effectively online?

And remember:

- Customers have an expectation of convenience, choice and speed.
- Muddling through using multiple independent software packages that don't integrate with each other will cost you time and money.
- Embracing technology can help elevate your service business, become more agile and respond faster to customers' needs.
- Implementing a fully integrated solution makes good business sense.

About Blackbell

Blackbell is a SaaS platform that integrates all processes to sell services. It offers an end-end solution which allows businesses to sell, organise, deliver and market their services online. Blackbell provides quick and simple website building capabilities and includes features such as calendar bookings and online payments. Blackbell helps users to streamline operational processes, provide higher standards of customer service and manage customer relationships.

Founded in 2011 and headquartered in the US with offices across Europe, Blackbell has a growing customer base which now spans across 20 countries.

With thanks to everyone who contributed:

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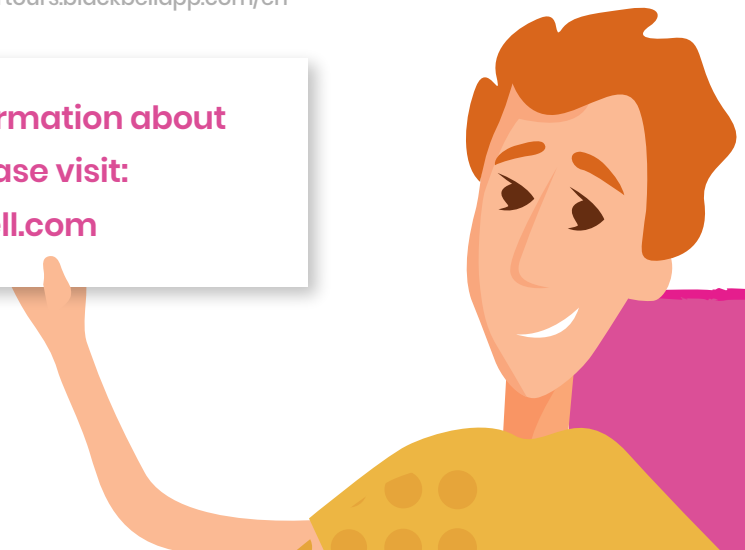

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