



How Online Web Forms Boost Offline Conversions

A “form submit” is generally an email that is automatically created and sent to a website owner when a user completes – and “submits” – information using a website form. When the website owner receives a “form submit” from a user this action begins the start of a “conversation” that businesses can ultimately use to build profitable relationships with their customers.

If handled properly, customer relationships that originate with a website form have the potential for drawing a customer closer to the ultimate conversion – **a sales transaction**. The secret, however, is understanding how to invite online website visitors to complete a form on the website in the first place.

Use Web Forms to Start a “Conversation” With Customers

Contrary to what most people may think, visitors to a website will gladly allow the website owner to capture personal information from them and initiate a conversation if two conditions are met. First, **the website owner must present a compelling “offer”** to the website visitor in exchange for capturing the requested information on the web form. Without a compelling offer the chances for capturing the information on the web form are reduced.

The second condition that must be met for a web form to be successful is that **the website owner must be perceived as being totally honest and trustworthy**. If the website visitor gets the slightest whiff that the website owner might be untrustworthy (such as misuse personal information about website visitors) then the opportunity to complete the web form may be lost. **Trust is everything.**

The Offer

The “offer” is critical to a website owner's success in capturing customer information on a web form and initiating a conversation. **The offer must meet four criteria:**

- 1) It must be perceived as genuinely compelling and valuable to customers;
- 2) It must be cost-effective for the website owner to make;
- 3) It must be easy for the customer to redeem; and
- 4) It should cost very little or nothing to deliver to the customer.

If these four criteria are met then the website owner can reasonably expect to be successful in

collecting customer information using a web form.

Examples of successful offers might include:

“Pet Stains on Your Carpeting? Download our FREE Guide on How to Make Them Vanish!”

“Download a FREE \$25 Discount Coupon on Your Next Purchase”

“Get Access to Our FREE Video and Learn How to Polish Your Car Like the Pros!”

Each of these offers are cost-effective, easy for the customer to redeem, and can cost virtually nothing for the website owner to deliver. All the customer has to do is give the website owner three basic pieces of information in exchange which I will discuss later.

The Perception of Trust

The online customer **MUST trust the website owner** – or at least lack any suspicion about the business. Otherwise, the website owner's offer becomes effectively nullified. Unfortunately, the general public has become increasingly suspicious of businesses that engage in shady or flat-out dishonest practices on their websites. This fact has presented a challenge for honest website owners that want to build their businesses – especially with first-time customers. We discuss a number of online practices in another article that explains in more detail how legitimate website owners can protect their good reputation on the Internet.

How Web Forms Should Be Presented on the Website

Web forms work best when they appear on the home page or on a landing page. The form should also be positioned “above the fold” whenever possible on the web page so that the website visitor does NOT have to scroll down to see the form.

The website owner should only ask for **three pieces of information** from a new online visitor. The three pieces of information are:

1. Name
2. Email Address
3. Permission to email

This basic information is really everything a website owner needs to initiate a conversation with the customer or prospect. Asking for anything more (especially with new visitors) only casts unwanted suspicion on the website owner's intentions.

A website owner wants a customer's name because it's easier to converse with someone when you know their name. The web form may not always elicit the customer's real name, but any name is a start. A website owner should keep in mind that the customer will offer plenty of

information later once a successful relationship is built. **Never get greedy** when asking website visitors for personal information about themselves.

The customer's email address gets a little more personal and there is a natural tendency for a customer to offer a false address. No one wants to have their email address show up on a spammers email list. However, there are a few simple and effective methods (that we also use) for insuring that most of the email addresses you receive from web forms are valid.

The "Permission" piece of information is usually represented on a web form by a simple checkbox. The box is preceded with a label that makes yet another "offer" to the customer. "May we add you to our 'Preferred Customer List?'" or even better "May we send you free discount coupons in the future?" Generally, we don't recommend using "Can we add you to our e-mail list?" because customer's have a hard time visualizing a specific benefit by getting on another email list.

Once the customer submits these three pieces of information the conversation starts and now it's up to the website owner to start cultivating that new relationship as soon as possible.

How Web Form Submits Should Be Handled

What a website owner does NOT want are thousands, hundreds, or even dozens of form submits coming into the Inbox from the store website everyday without some way of managing all of that customer information. Obviously, the website owner should respond to a form submit promptly, so a system should be in place that automatically receives the emailed form submits, collects the customer data into a database, and then sends the website owner's offer back to the customer to complete his end of the deal.

Our company uses an affordable, subscription-based software tool from *Zoho* that enables us to easily design a form and embed it into our own website. Plus, each time a website visitor completes and submits a form the information is automatically added to our online *Zoho* database that is associated with the form. *Zoho* can even send an "auto-reply" email back to the customer if necessary. We highly recommend this application to many of our clients.

From the Web Form to the Conversion

Periodically, the website owner should be able to access his or her database, export all the customer information that has been collected from the web form, and take the customer "conversation" to the next level.

The website owner now has at least **implied permission** from each customer or prospect in the database to send them an email about a new product, an in-store event, a big seasonal sale, or a close-out on a particular line of products. The opportunities to leverage such information is

endless and will enable the website owner to drive traffic into the store or place of business almost on demand.



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