

6 Ways to Provide Customers with a Safe Online Shopping Experience

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There's no getting around it. To do almost anything online these days requires consumers to give some form of personal information. Most adults have hundreds of online accounts requiring usernames, passwords, and various other details. We've all heard the horror stories of major information security breaches, identity theft, and fraud – maybe even from someone you know. Consumers are ever more reluctant to do business with companies they don't know well. They are quick to desert organizations that misuse their information, and rightly so. How do businesses build trust with their customers?

1. Be Transparent

Consumers today expect a smooth, high-quality shopping experience from beginning to end. The amount of required information can be the difference between a happy customer and an abandoned shopping cart. In addition, a company that is not transparent regarding its customers' data security is likely to garner a poor reputation and low sales figures. Be clear and forthcoming about security policies and make this information easy to find. If there is a breach, be candid about the problem and how you will address it.

2. Make a Plan

Just like an evacuation route prepares you for a physical emergency, a data threat contingency plan prepares you for a breach. It may not be a matter of if, but when an issue occurs. Create a plan to handle both minor and major disruptions in security. Determine the chain of command and delegate employees to carry out each step. Being caught unprepared will only compound the problem, and you don't want to deal with a public relations fiasco amid everything else. Having a plan in place will give you better peace of mind and protect the interests of your customers, employees and company.

3. Use Advanced Technology

Electronic security has come a long way from the days of the early internet. What has worked in the past may no longer suffice, so update IT systems accordingly. You should reassess these annually and make changes where necessary. The less information users have to remember, the more secure your business will be. Consider [alternatives like a multi factor authentication solution](#), ID proofing, or password-free authentication. These are easier to use and are quickly becoming the new standard in data security.

4. Ask Only for Necessary Information

The less sensitive information you gather, the better. It's tempting to create extensive files on each customer for marketing purposes, but doing so puts them at risk. The best practice is to keep only the minimum amount of information necessary to do business. It's easier to collect less information up front than to have to destroy excess data later. Minimal data requirement creates a smoother customer experience and encourages return visits.

5. Train Employees

Keeping data secure is a team effort. Your employees are vital to protecting against security threats, but untrained workers become a vulnerability. Make security training mandatory. Keep up on the [latest cyber security risks](#) and hold regular information sessions as you learn about each one. Grant access only on a "need-to-know" basis and maintain the appropriate network privileges for each level of seniority. Recognize employees who alert you to threats and encourage everyone to do the same.

6. Know the Laws

The Federal Trade Commission enforces laws regarding how businesses interact with the public. One that most people are familiar with is the [Fair Credit Reporting Act](#), but many others exist. Protections are in place for international business dealings, data security and consumer privacy (including the privacy of children). An example of international consumer protection is the General Data Protection Regulation framework, which is now in effect. Familiarize yourself with these laws to better understand the legalities of your particular situation.

These are just some of the ways that you can protect your clients' precious data. Don't become a news headline for the wrong reason. As your business grows, ensure that your security policies evolve along with it, and you'll build customer trust – and your reputation.

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