



Dec 01, 2010

Case Study #CS31769:

[Detroit Industrial Company Grows Sales by 37%: 5 steps to using your website to go from a local to an international company](#)

SUMMARY: While many cities are showing initial signs of recovery from the recession, others continue to struggle to stay afloat, much less generate new sales opportunities.

In this case study, see how a Detroit-based distributor of industrial containers created a web strategy based on a redesigned website and online catalog that not only boosted sales and site visits, but also expanded business far beyond city limits.

by Brad Bortone, Reporter

CHALLENGE

When Richard Rubin, President, Maxi Container, Inc. noticed that the Detroit economy had all but eliminated his local competition in the industrial container distribution field, he knew that the company would be forced to evolve in order to survive in the economically-starved region.

In assuming the company's helm a few years earlier, Rubin took on challenges of lost automotive industry sales, an economically-depressed city, and the subsequent negative impact on Maxi's bottom line. Maxi Container once had more than a dozen local competitors. Now, it's the last company of its kind in the Detroit area.

"We knew we had to explore new markets, both geographically and in terms of product," Rubin says. "To do that, we had to transform from a small regional distribution company to one with a larger footprint. We had to reach more people. We knew we had to do this on the Web."

CAMPAIGN

In 2009, Rubin determined the best course for long-term business survival would be to expand his customer base geographically and develop new product lines. The most successful vehicle for attracting new customers to Maxi Container had been advertising online in industry directories, which then drove customers to their company.

Though Maxi Container's customer base was loyal and consistent in purchasing the same or similar products,

many customers did not know the full scope of products the company offered. By developing a new web strategy which included an online catalog and user-friendly website experience, Maxi Container would be able to cross- and up-sell to existing customers, and allow customers to see the distributor's entire enterprise.

"I can't tell you how many customers said they didn't appreciate all that we could offer until we created the [revised] online catalog," said Rubin.

"Just like people make snap judgments about you when they shake your hand, I feel they make snap judgments about your company when they come to your website," Rubin said. "You have a few seconds to grab their attention. In a catalog, you need them to drill down and see all you have to offer. You need a web catalog that will grab their attention while facilitating them to explore your product line even further."

The first step was to find an industry partner with demonstrable experience in developing web strategies for industrial businesses. Rubin partnered with ThomasNet to help Maxi Container implement a strategy to replicate their offline sales process. Here are the steps they took:

Step 1. Map an appropriate and efficient website search experience

Utilizing the vendor's research, Rubin determined that industrial buyers were turning to the Internet first and foremost for information, and that they needed to service these buyers with quick and efficient access to this information. Together, they decided that the ideal Maxi Container website experience should mirror an actual conversation a buyer would have with a phone representative. This would allow buyers to follow ThomasNet's VSET process, which developed and implemented Maxi's internet strategy:

1. Verify they have the right product for their needs
2. Search among the products to find specifics
3. Evaluate whether the right tools are available on the website (e.g., "How do I narrow down my selections by specific product data/specs?")
4. Take action

The catalog was redesigned to reflect this experience.

Step 2. Prioritize content creation and production

Once the updated framework was in place, the team decided which products needed to be pushed first. At launch, the team posted a broad range of products that allowed users to get a sense of scope for the company's product line, and then "filled it in" as the process continued.

Each item listing in the online catalog was highly detailed, using descriptions that closely match how a prospect would search online. Catalog items are accompanied by a photo, alongside notes on whether it is new or reconditioned as well as the container's capacity.

"We used internal resources to develop the catalog photos," said Rubin. "We prepared photos of inventory to marketingsherpa.com/article_print.html?...

maintain control of product look and feel. Most industrial websites have a hodge-podge of photos that do not appear consistent to the viewer. We wanted to make sure we maintained a consistent look across the catalog."

It took the team six to nine months to implement and launch the revised Web catalog. The front-end user interface was completed quickly, and Maxi needed extra time to provide the detailed content that would make the catalog effective.

Step 3. Increase and optimize content for improved SEO

By allowing the team to post more detailed, intricate information in its catalog, this new approach considerably improved search rankings. Content is optimized to appear at or near the top of results in major search engines.

The platform the team chose utilizes a tool similar to a standard word processing program, which allows Maxi Container to make real-time changes to the website and online product content. The team can change info, pricing, etc., on their own, assuring that they don't remain "handcuffed" to the content, unable to make changes as needed.

Step 4. Create a seamless, integrated Web experience

The new catalog accurately matched the Maxi Container website look and feel. The goal was to make sure that users were not aware that they were leaving the main Maxi Container site when clicking through to the catalog.

"Our landing page has a specific look and feel that represents our brand and values," Rubin said. "Since we control the photos and written content, we present a completely unified image."

Additionally, the teams designed the pages with an eye toward multiple platforms. Aware that people use different operating systems, browsers and devices to view the site, they worked to ensure that the site and catalog translate across both traditional and mobile platforms.

Step 5. Maximize site efficiency to quickly drive prospects to sales department

Once visitors arrive at Maxi Container's website, either from an online directory of industrial product information such as ThomasNet.com or a search engine, they have nine different product categories in which to browse. Those who know exactly what they want can search by keyword or part number. And users can compare up to five different choices side by side.

The catalog also "anticipates" a prospect's questions by providing answers to typical questions, such as the materials used to make the container, as well as more intricate questions, such as whether the container requires a special permit from the Department of Transportation, or if the container has a UN Mark for international transportation of hazardous materials.

At any point in the process visitors can submit a request for quote by phone or email.

"The whole concept [of implementing the new catalog] was to drive traffic to our site, in hopes of then getting customers on the phone, asking for information, forms, etc. We didn't want to conduct ecommerce -- we wanted live interaction. We don't even use voicemail until we leave for the day."

RESULTS

Over the course of implementing these changes, Rubin discovered that improving the catalog also helped him learn more about the company's products and customers, and ultimately the sales process.

"For every dollar [the company] saved in costs, we invested more into our catalog, which gave us a lot of info about our products," Rubin said. "We had customers we had worked with for 20-30 years, who bought the same things over and over. They didn't have any idea about the other products we offered. By having a new catalog where they could see these products, drill down into product specifics, and then send us info requests, the process was streamlined and improved."

Since launching the catalog in March 2009, results have been very encouraging. Overall, Maxi Container sales are up 37 percent over the same period last year and the company set four successive months of sales records, which Rubin attributes to the new Web strategy.

Most impressive is the dramatic increase in site visits as a result of the new Web catalog. In February 2009, there were 65 total sessions on the Maxi Container website. In February 2010, the site logged a staggering 1,652 sessions -- a 2,441% growth. This dramatic jump has been sustainable, and site visits now range from 1,700 to 2,000 per month.

"We credit the catalog and Web strategy with boosting this growth, because it's allowed for a wealth of new inquiries from all over," said Rubin. "Our new customers are learning about Maxi Container through the website and catalog. We've landed countless new customers since implementing this."

In terms of sales growth related to the new catalog, the team saw:

- o 29.8% sales growth from FY 2009 to FY 2010
- o 4.6 % sales growth over 12 months after site relaunch (3/2009-2/2010)
- o 102 new customers in FY 2010, accounting for \$277,000 in sales versus FY 2009. This accounted for 26% of the total increase for FY 2010.

Once limited to Detroit and surrounding areas, Rubin now sees new customers coming in from all over the world.

"We have customers in Pennsylvania, California, Georgia, Texas, Massachusetts and even Canada and Puerto Rico. We've had to expand -- 20 years ago, we didn't leave the Tri-County (Detroit) area. Now, our own fleet of trucks delivers to multiple states, and we've partnered with trucking companies to deliver products throughout the country. "

Additionally, the traffic to Maxi Container's website through general online search engines has grown exponentially. The increased detail in content descriptions, alongside the more specific language used in the catalog, has allowed the site to improve search engine rankings for more industry-specific terms, such as "fiber drums approved for shipment of hazardous materials."

Rubin sees considerable future growth for the company as a result of implementing the new catalog.

"We keep adding new products to the catalog, so there's no reason this can't continue to evolve along with our product line. I expect more growth. We keep adding new product lines. We now have a consumer division, focused on environmentally sustainable products. We expect to expand even further nationally. The sky's the limit."

Useful links related to this article

Members Library -- [Use Research to Guide an Ecommerce Site Redesign: 5 Tactics to Pinpoint Needed Improvements](#)

Members Library -- [New Chart: New Ecommerce Research -- Website Tactics that Boost Conversion](#)

Members Library -- [Efficient Website Redesigns: 6 Tactics to Guide Your Process](#)

[ThomasNet](#) -- Designed and implemented site and catalog redesign

[Maxi Container](#)

- [Home](#)
- [SherpaStore](#)
- [Your Email Account](#)
- [Q&A](#)
- [Search Library](#)
- [Store Affiliates](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [About Us](#)

Questions? Contact Customer Service at (877) 895-1717 (outside the US and Canada please call (401) 247-7655), service@sherpastore.com

For Membership-related questions contact (877) 512-2765 (outside the US and Canada please call (401) 289-2602), MemberService@MarketingSherpa.com

[Email Marketing Delivered by ExactTarget](#)

[Web Analytics powered by Omniture](#)

© 2000-2010 MarketingSherpa, LLC., ISSN 1559-5137

Editorial HQ: MarketingSherpa LLC 499 Main St., Warren, RI 02885