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"For us that's really exciting because we thought we would get it to a point (where) without spending a lot more time and a lot more money, it would plateau, but it keeps going up and up," she said.

Website appearance and function

"We looked at what it is that people want, and this isn't a strategy that stopped back then, this changed as late as two weeks ago," Gillett said.

A digital camera and special lighting box were purchased to improve the quality of the pictures on the site.

The site navigation was improved, through the implementation of a one-to-two-click policy, meaning people should only need to click once or twice to get anywhere in the website.

Navigation bars were placed at both the top and the bottom of each page, giving people easy access to a range of information.

"It's really important to build trust and credibility through a website, particularly because most of these people that we deal with, mainly in the US now, don't know us — they don't know that we've been in the business for 30 years and won awards and so on," she said.

"They need to understand what to expect from the whole process, so we have shipping information, policies and prices, a satisfaction guarantee, general information about jewellery-related topics, contact information, FAQs, services and policies, customer comments, all those sorts of things that people need to know."

Gillett said a barrier for e-commerce sites could be uncertainty.

"If they're not sure about something, then they may not bother to email you and then you've lost a sale and they probably won't come back again," she said.

"So all of those basic things are important — for example, the navigation in terms of products, most websites have a button that says 'products', but that's what usually they're there for, so we have all the categories (listed at the top)."

Gillett's Jewellers also offers a live chat

section, which shows when Gillett is online and available for real-time question and answer sessions.

When she is not online, the box changes to "Click to leave a message".

Target market

"In any business that you have, in any retail store, you don't just open up your shop and have all these people flood in, and that's not different on the Internet," Gillett said.

She said while it was true millions of people could access the site 24 hours a day, they have to be able to find it first.

"That's obviously a huge issue, but before you try to market, you need to be able to know who you're marketing to," she said.

Gillett's Jewellers has developed a number of niche markets to complement its range of fine jewellery.

Specialties include men's wedding rings, titanium rings and nomination bracelets (charm bracelets popular in America).

Geographically, the target market for the online store is America, by chance not by design.

"Most of the traffic that we were originally attracting was from the US — who use e-commerce more, have a mail order mentality, it's not as much of an issue for them to buy something over the Internet," Gillett said.

"It's still our strongest market, (but) we don't specifically target the US itself."

Customer service and order fulfilment

Customer service encompassed more than live chats and quick responses, Gillett said. "Keeping people informed, whether it's email inquiries or where they're at with the ordering process, is important," she said.

The company uses email templates for generic contact, to alleviate some of the burden on staff.

Gillett said regular contact was essential in overcoming the barrier created by the lack of face-to-face contact.

"In a retail store you'd ring up to say 'your ring's now ready', there's no reason why that shouldn't happen on the Internet, but a lot of businesses don't," she said.

"That's really helped us in terms of customer satisfaction — people expect high quality when they buy and we give them that, but what excites them is we're in contact with them.

"It makes a big difference and helps with generating the repeat business."

She said there were two sides considered when developing the customer service model — the needs of the customer and the burden placed on staff.

As an example, she said the titanium rings could originally be adjusted by emailed requests, but the result of that strategy was a doubling of email.

The site now has a step-by-step process to

bricks-and-mortar business in terms of sales.

The six staff in the retail store had varying levels of knowledge and ability with computers and the Internet, but with assistance from Gillett and Wild, have adapted well.

"A part of our strategy is getting all of the staff involved — it makes a big difference — besides getting different input, it shares the burden across a lot of different staff and it makes them more excited," she said.

Repeat business

Regular contact with previous customers is a key element of Gillett's strategy to get repeat business.



Sharon Gillett

custom-design a titanium ring, engagement ring, or nomination bracelet.

"We're all about eliminating barriers, and that's what it does," Gillett said.

"It's made a huge difference in the way people use the site, they like to be involved, it's more personalised, and has greatly increased the chances of getting the sale."

On the ordering side of the business, staff responsibilities have had to be adjusted as the online store developed to match the

She sends out newsletters quarterly, focusing each on a special event such as Valentine's Day or Mothers' Day.

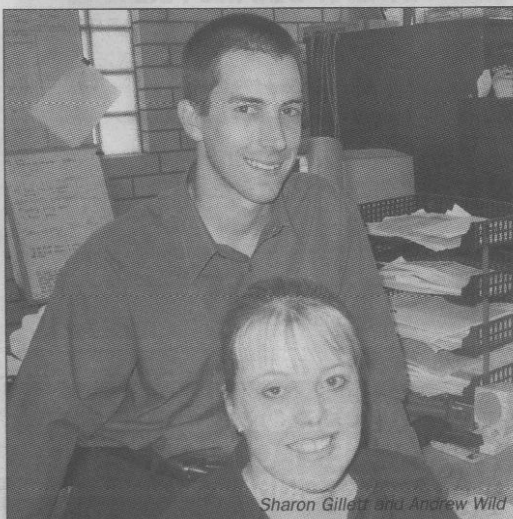
"It's a really good way to keep the cash-flow moving," she said.

"You have to satisfy them in the first place, but once you've done that, just by keeping in touch with them... we can guarantee we'll get repeat business out of it."

And getting the top four strategies right ensures the fifth will work like a charm. ■



JAZ CONVERT SOLVES THE CURRENCY CONVERSION DILEMMA



Sharon Gillett and Andrew Wild

The JAZConvert currency conversion service was created as a solution to a significant problem faced by Gillett's Jewellers.

Sharon Gillett said a huge barrier the site faced was selling effectively to Americans, who wanted the products displayed in their own currency.

"What it does is it automatically detects where someone's viewing a website from, and then it displays all of the product prices in that person's currency," Gillett said.

She said Australians visiting e-commerce sites are more likely to willingly calculate currency changes, but Americans, the world leaders in e-commerce use, are not so willing.

"It's not good for browsing purposes — Americans, if you're not talking in US dollars, they're not interested," she said.

"Either they'll close the site and go to the next jewellery store they see on the search engine, or they'll try and use the pop up (currency converter) and get confused or irritated, then leave.

"We got a lot of emails saying 'we don't know how to use this currency converter'."

After spending too much time and too many staff

resources on responding to such emails, Gillett and partner Andrew Wild developed JAZConvert.

"It was never intended for us to sell it as a product in its own right, it was simply a solution to a problem we had, and it was a real problem, it was a huge barrier preventing us from selling products," she said.

"We see this as something we developed ourselves and it's not available anywhere else in the world, but it's a need that most businesses that are looking to sell internationally through e-commerce, have.

"We already have some clients internationally, we have clients in the US, New Zealand and the UK.

"We haven't specifically been targeting that market yet, because we're looking to work with the Australian market first. We're looking to develop our export plans further into next year."

Potential adaptations of the conversion service include language translations and measurements — not just ring sizes, but footwear, clothing and anything metric to imperial and back. ■



www.jazconvert.com