



CASE STUDY:

American Telecast

THE CHALLENGE

- Improve online conversions for a business transitioning from a call-center model
- Provide extensively trained, live online-assistance agents

American Telecast, one of the leading consumer product and direct-marketing companies in the world, is best known for its Total Gym product. The Total Gym, an in-home fitness machine endorsed by actor Chuck Norris, model Christie Brinkley, and numerous professional and Olympic athletes, first captured the public imagination in 1996, when American Telecast began marketing it in highly successful television infomercials.

The infomercial is still running, making it one of the longest, continuously running fitness infomercials in history. However, in recent years the call-in volume has steadily declined as more and more people turn to the Internet for information and purchasing.

“It used to be that for every one website visitor, we had 10 phone calls; now for every one phone call, we have 10 website visitors,” says Joseph Crowley, vice president of marketing for American Telecast.

This posed several challenges. First, the online contacts didn’t convert at nearly the same rate as telephone prospects. Web conversions were under a meager 1%, while phone conversions were at a robust 28%. With phone sales dropping precipitously, it was essential to improve online conversions.

Second, American Telecast had long relied on highly trained telephone agents to convey the benefits of the Total Gym, address customer concerns, and help them understand the value of purchasing this high-ticket item. The website couldn’t offer the personal, knowledgeable interaction that phone agents provided to turn skeptics into buyers.

“We quickly realized this wasn’t going to be a successful, long-term business model, so we started getting serious about the Internet and our website,” says Crowley.

THE SOLUTION

American Telecast adopted several strategies to help boost online conversions, including venturing into paid search and online display advertising, establishing affiliate programs, conducting search-engine optimization, presenting video pop-ups for special offers, and instituting an automated exit chat. The latter implementation created some modest improvement, but its limitations concerned American Telecast.

“It was picking up additional orders for us, but because it was automated, sometimes you’d ask a question and get a response that didn’t accurately answer the question. It felt as though we were leaving orders on the table,” says Crowley.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Name: American Telecast

Industry: Direct sales and marketing

HQ: West Chester, PA

Employees: 50 (2010)

Website:
www.americantelecast.com

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— Joseph Crowley



CASE STUDY, CON'T:

American Telecast thought live-agent interaction might be the answer. If American Telecast could successfully translate its telephone model to an online, live interaction, using highly trained agents who understood both the product and the psychology of selling, it could provide a significant boost to conversion.

American Telecast engaged with TouchCommerce in September 2009. Live-interaction opportunities were built prominently into every page on the website; in addition, a variety of business rules were put into place to trigger a live-agent interaction under certain conditions, such as if a prospect showed signs of abandonment.



THE RESULT

- Website conversion improved 32% after the addition of TouchCommerce services
- Conversion rates are now 4 to 5 times higher for prospects who interact with customer-engagement services from TouchCommerce
- TouchCommerce-assisted sales currently comprise 30% of total website sales

“We definitely feel that TouchCommerce is bringing in incremental orders,” says Crowley. “Many of those orders probably wouldn’t have been placed without the agents being there. Sometimes it’s answering one or two questions at a critical point in the order funnel that gets that person over the proverbial hump.”

THE BENEFITS

Customized Agent Training Creates Conversions

TouchCommerce worked with American Telecast to implement a strategy of using local agents that American Telecast could train directly in the art and science of selling Total Gym.

“We wanted Dave Scudder, our vice president of telemarketing, to work with agents face to face, do role playing, and explain the psychology of the sale,” says Crowley, noting that this strategy worked extremely well for their phone agents. “TouchCommerce took a leap of faith with us.”

That faith paid off; Crowley says the conversion rates of the trained agents were quickly double that of untrained agents. Now all live-interaction agents work regularly with Mr. Scudder.

A Personalized Partnership Reaps Results

Crowley says the partnership with TouchCommerce has sparked new ideas and insights.

“So many things we’ve done have been very collaborative — putting our two groups together collectively has really generated a lot of good ideas,” he says. “TouchCommerce is very proactive in making suggestions that can be validated with testing and has been extremely helpful in sharing its expertise in online, live-agent engagement.”



CASE STUDY, CON'T:

In addition, the companies connect weekly to discuss strategy, review optimization efforts, and keep tabs on trends and results. The result? An ever-shifting approach that's agile and able to react quickly to business needs.

"The onsite live-agent solution that TouchCommerce has developed for us is like a customized program; we definitely feel it has been tailored to our needs," says Crowley. "If we had done a cookie-cutter approach, it wouldn't have worked because of all the nuances within this particular product line."



Customer Insights Improve the Web Experience

"One of the biggest and unanticipated benefits of working with TouchCommerce," says Crowley, "was the extensive influx of information from customers. TouchCommerce agents engage deeply with prospects, and as a result are able to pass along feedback – both positive and negative – to American Telecast.

"We have been able to apply those learnings across our entire site, even to the customers who aren't interacting with agents," says Crowley. "Any time you can gain insight directly from customers about what they think of your site, your product, and your offers, that's very critical."

Crowley notes that live-interaction agents help him keep abreast of any repeat kudos or complaints so American Telecast can then leverage the positive and improve the negative. "Once you see those trends, it's actionable," he says. "We can move forward, make changes, and improve that customer experience – and hopefully, make the sale."

A Lasting Partnership that Continues to Grow

Now, four years later, as call volumes continue to fall, TouchCommerce still drives incremental interactions and online conversion rates for American Telecast. Their partnership continues to be collaborative as they work closely together to identify opportunities and implement tests. The teams collectively evaluate test results to determine what works and what doesn't, what was learned from each test and whether further testing is necessary.

"TouchCommerce continues to come up with new and innovative ways to drive interactions and online conversions, as well as expand beyond the desktop platform into tablet and mobile," says Crowley. "It is a comprehensive online solution ... that is in line with our goals and objectives."

About TouchCommerce

TouchCommerce is the leading provider of pay-for-performance conversion marketing solutions. Combining best-in-class technology leveraging real-time customer analytics with optimization services and extensive expertise, TouchCommerce proactively targets the right customer with the right message at the right time to significantly increase online conversion.