Five Key Elements of a Successful Manufacturing Website

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Industrial purchases are moving to the web. A recent Thomas Industrial Network survey — which surveyed more than 3,000 industrial executives and managers — found that 90 percent [1] of industrial purchases are now researched, evaluated and selected online. As online activity continues to pick up in this market, manufacturers have an opportunity to supplement traditional lead generation efforts with their websites.

These days, just having a website isn't enough to generate online business. To truly capitalize on the online opportunity — and generate more leads — manufacturers need to create a website that meets buyer expectations.

I'd like to share five tips that manufacturers can use to improve their website and capture more leads.

1. Model Your Website After the Industrial Buying Cycle
The first thing to understand about an effective manufacturer website is that the eCommerce model popularized by retail isn't adequate for the manufacturing industry. Why? Because the industrial purchasing process is much more complex. Instead of involving only the consumer, an industrial purchase typically involves a CFO, engineers, a purchasing manager, etc.

For this reason, Jared Fabac, eSystems Architect of Idea Bright Marketing [2], believes that a website should mirror the four steps of industrial sales:

1. **Discovery** - Site visitors are just starting their research process and are trying to find companies that make what they need.
2. **Research** - Visitors are looking for information on product specs, operations procedures and materials used.
3. **Sourcing** - Individuals are ready to see detailed pricing and want schematics to ensure that your product works with what they're building.
4. **Procurement** - This will usually happen offline.

2. Immediately Communicate What You Do
When visitors first come to your website, they're going to make a split-second decision as to whether your company makes the product they're looking for. Linda Rigano of Thomas Industrial Network believes that manufacturers really only have 5 seconds to communicate their value. If it isn't immediately apparent what you make, visitors will leave your site for somewhere that makes it easier for them to

research products.

One company that I think does a good job of showing off what they do right up front is Alliance Express [3]. Their homepage shows exactly what they make and gives access to a detailed product catalog.

Request Information | Compare Items | Results Per Page : 25

Results 1 - 16 of 16 | 1

Item #	Clipnut Type	Panel Thickness (Min.) (in.)	Panel Thickness (Max.) (in.)	Nut Thread Size	Nut Material Type	Edge Margin (in.)	Clip Width (in.)
MM4001-08-1	Marketing Masters	.020	.160	8-32	STEEL C1050, CAD/DFL	0.745	0.635
MM4001-08C1	Marketing Masters	.020	.160	8-32	CRES A-286, CAD/DFL	0.745	0.635
MM4001-08CM1	Marketing Masters	.020	.160	8-32	CRES A-286, DRY LUBE	0.745	0.635
MM4001-08-2	Marketing Masters	.140	.300	8-32	STEEL C1050, CAD/DFL	0.745	0.635
MM4001-08C2	Marketing Masters	.140	.300	8-32	CRES A-286, CAD/DFL	0.745	0.635

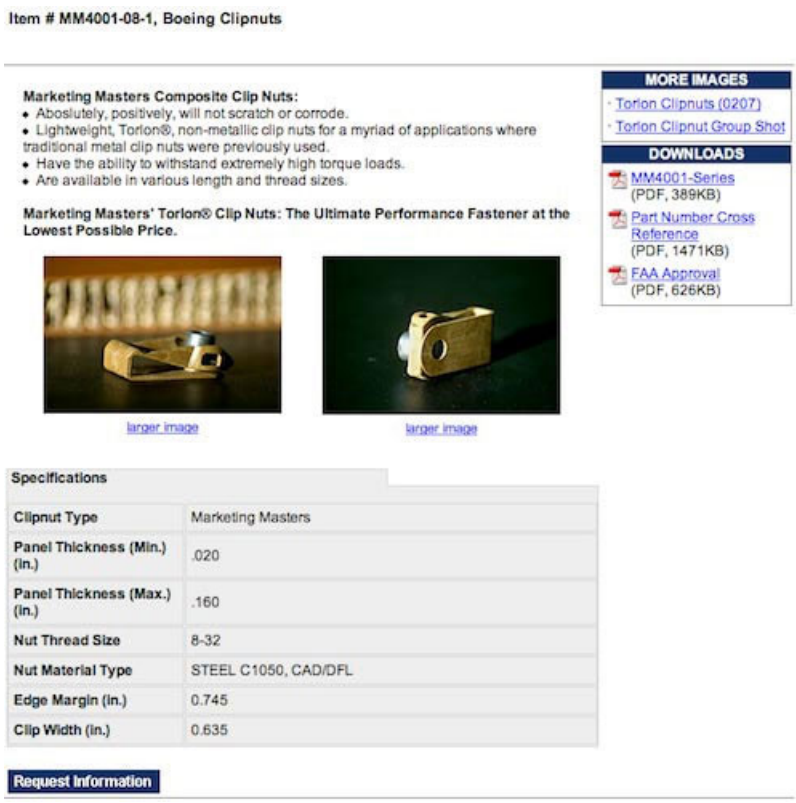
3. Create Side-by-Side Comparison Functionality

As visitors get deeper into your product catalog, they'll likely want to compare multiple products to help narrow options. At this point, buyers are moving into the research phase and now want basic product specifications, material type and other related information. Visitors should be able to use your website to compare 3 to 5 products side-by-side to help them understand their options. Marketing Masters [4], a manufacturer of aerospace parts, does a good job of making it easy to compare multiple products.

4. Provide Detailed Product-Level Information

In addition to wanting side-by-side comparisons in an online product catalog, buyers also want to be able to drill down into individual products and get access specific information. Taking the example of Marketing Masters again, a visitor that clicks on a particular product is now able to see an image, materials used, product tolerances and more. Visitors can also download more detailed drawings with measurements and product grip range.

Once your visitors are at this phase, you should also place a call to action (CTA) to allow visitors to to request more information. This gives the visitor an opportunity to tell you about how they're planning to use your product. It also provides you with their contact information so you can follow-up with them to communicate how you can meet their needs.



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Specifications

Clipnut Type	Marketing Masters
Panel Thickness (Min.) (in.)	.020
Panel Thickness (Max.) (in.)	.160
Nut Thread Size	8-32
Nut Material Type	STEEL C1050, CAD/DFL
Edge Margin (in.)	0.745
Clip Width (in.)	0.635

Request Information

5. Give Access to Downloadable CAD Files

It’s also a great idea to provide downloadable CAD files. Providing this information helps attract visitors that are even further along the sales cycle. Visitors that request a CAD file are generally trying to double-check whether your product will fit the model that they’re building out.

Making this information readily available speeds up the research process (and sales cycle) by saving the buyer from rebuilding a CAD drawing based on your product measurements. This information, however, should not be given away without capturing buyer information. The reason: the majority of the time, this person is ready to buy. They’re essentially at the last step before they’re ready to procure so it’s important to make sure that you can follow up with them and nurture the lead.

These are a few of the ways that manufacturers can go from just having a website to having one that can generate leads. For more information, please visit www.softwareadvice.com *[5].*

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