

The DIY Doctor Story

Trying desperately to finish a job for a valued customer late one evening, I popped into a well-known DIY store for a length of timber.

When I asked a young assistant where they kept the 4 x 2 he looked at me in bewilderment. I explained I was looking for timber which was 4 inches wide and 2 inches thick or 100mm x 50mm. He told me where the timber was kept but said he had no idea if they had that size.

It occurred to me that, if the store did not train its staff in the purpose or details of the products it stocked (and I knew exactly what I wanted, and what I wanted it for), then members of the general public must be wandering about in the store for hours and still not be sure, even after purchase, if they had the right tools and materials for the job they had planned.

It certainly explained the many bemused faces scanning the backs of the cards the tools were stuck to.

I wrote to the DIY store and offered to put a building professional in each one of their stores, in the SW of England, for one day per week.

The builder could answer any questions the public had, and would be able to point them in the right direction for the tools they needed and the materials required. Customers could then be sure they had the right tools and materials. Sales would increase while returns would go down.

The store showed an interest but before negotiations started I heard an advert on the radio for these new fangled web sites and how a local company could build one for me (and explain it to me!) for only £99.

It occurred to me that if I could offer a physical service, such as the one described above, to one store; I could do it for all stores on "the web".

Knowing nothing about the Internet whatever (I didn't even own a computer) I engaged with the IT company, explained my idea and www.diydoctor.org.uk was born in a skeletal format in 1999.

The learning curve was almost vertical. I read everything there was to be read and talked to anybody and everybody who sounded like

they knew anything about IT ! We told everyone we knew about the website and answered DIY questions, by email, from anyone who sent a question in.

Having started talks with the original store I was now in a position to offer them a wider (albeit virtual) service. By placing a monitor in each store, we would be able to "talk" to their customers about their intended DIY Project or DIY problems they had and, using a product catalogue on CD, point them in the right direction for suitable tools and materials.

The store thought it was a good idea and I gave the store a 3 month, free trial. During that trial we answered over 2000 questions successfully, selling; I am sure, thousands of pounds worth of product for the store.

After the trial I met with the store to negotiate the cost of supplying them with this service.

They stated that (as they were a huge National chain, and we were tiny Internet minnows) we really should be paying them for bringing DIY Doctor to the public attention.

Apparently, I'm not allowed to print what I said but certainly no deal was struck !

DIY Doctor made the decision that day to remain independent and has gone from strength to strength. We collected all the questions we were asked every day turning the most popular problems into project pages on the website.

11 years on, we now have 22,000 pages and rising with over 120,000 users visiting us every week. Our advertising is amongst the most targeted on the web and we have provided huge returns on investment to most of the companies who have advertised with us.

DIY Doctor keeps the face of building real. We are more and more using our profile and integrity to make the building industry more transparent by driving out rogue tradesmen and familiarising home owners with the details of how their houses work while providing them with information on what should be done, **at what cost**, to keep them working.

