

Is Your Web Contact Form Hurting Your Sales?

Many websites contain a contact form on the Contact Us page. A contact form gathers information from the customer, assembles it into a message, then emails the message to the company.

Potential customers like contact forms because they can complete them 24/7 and avoid playing phone tag. That's a great benefit in today's busy world, as people juggle commuting, work, and a family.

Companies like contact forms because the form can:

- require the potential customer to provide certain information
- ask questions to qualify a sales prospect
- route the message to a specific staff member based on that information

If the contact form benefits both sides, how can it hurt sales?

Upset Potential Customers = Lost Sales

When a potential customer completes the form, they expect the company to respond. If the company never responds, the potential customer becomes frustrated.

"If the company really wanted my business they'd respond. Why should I waste any more time on them when they won't answer a simple request?"

The former potential customer gives up on the company and calls another vendor.

That's one potential sale lost. They may even tell their friends, family, and business contacts about their negative experience – in person and over social media. Result: even more lost sales, and damage the company's reputation.

So what steps can you take to prevent this potential problem from upsetting your customers and costing you sales?

1. Begin testing the form on a monthly basis. A simple test can help ensure the form is in working order.
2. Discuss the form with your management team.
Have a discussion with your management team about the form:
 - a. Nail down the procedures involved in testing the form and processing the data sent through the form.
 - b. Brainstorm ways to leverage the valuable data you collect with the form.

How to Test a Contact Form

1. Contact the person who designed or maintains your website. Ask them to look at the form's programming code and tell you the form's "send to" email addresses.
2. Match the email addresses to your staff members.
3. Fill out the contact form and click Submit.

4. Contact the staff members who should have received the messages.

Did the messages go through? If the staff members can't find the messages, have them check their junk mail folders. If they still can't locate the messages, contact the person from Step 1 and ask them to troubleshoot the form.

Discuss the Form with Your Management Team

Talk with your management team about the customer's expectations of messages sent with the contact form. Next, discuss how you can most effectively meet those expectations.

These questions will help you start the discussion:

- Which staff members should receive the messages?
- How often will designated staff members check for new messages?
- How long will staff members have to respond to messages?
- When the designated staff members are absent, who will monitor and respond to the messages? Technically, how will this happen? Can the supervisor login to the staff member's computer and email accounts?*
- Will staff members use an email template or a script to respond to the messages?
- How will staff members prioritize the messages?
- Should you create special procedure(s) for routing emergency or sensitive messages?
- How will you ensure all incoming messages get answered?
- Will you monitor the responses for quality assurance? If so, how?
- Who will test the form each month?
- Who will troubleshoot the form if the test fails?
- When an employee listed in the "send to" of the contact form leaves the company, who will update the form with the new email address?
- Can you mine the message data to improve customer service? Message volume statistics could be used to manage workload or justify new staff.

Repeat questions could signal the need for new policies or additional topics for your website's Frequently Asked Questions page.

After the meeting, make sure to update your training and policy and procedures manuals based on your decisions.

- * Role-based email lets multiple employees share a single account. The email address represents a role (e.g. sales@companyname or customersupport@companyname) rather than an individual employee's name. A supervisor shares the login information with designated employees, and can monitor responses for quality assurance.