Can Online Business Advice from 2001 Still Apply Today?

Do you remember 2001? When Tweeting was something only birds did and most businesses didn't even had a web site. Is it possible that what was true about online business then is still true today?

Recently, I looked through one of my wife's old business books from college. In the section about entrepreneurship, it had a half page about online business. A half page out of 400+ pages. That was the extent of their lesson on the internet.

This little section packed a lot of punch though...and all of the tips it offered for businesses in 2001 still apply today. That's amazing considering that it stated that web-based business were "still in their infancy." Smartphones, Facebook, streaming video, and most of the tools we think have revolutionized the business world didn't even exist yet.

The simplicity of the advice in the book is what makes it still relevant today. Despite all of our innovations online, the basics of success in online business have not changed.

Here's what the book said about running a successful online business. I've added my own commentary after each suggestion.

1. Keep it simple.

Don't require people to download plug-ins or software to interact with your site. Don't use graphics that are too large. Make sure your site is easy to use on mobile.

In 2001, we had dial-up and large sites could take minutes to load. Now, it's all about ease of use on a tiny screen and making a good impression in five seconds or less.

2. Provide value.

This is what content marketing is all about. [shareable]Provide value to your audience first, then ask for a sale later.[/shareable]

My first site, which I built in 2002, went directly for the sale. It worked in 2002, but even this business textbook knew back then that wasn't enough.

3. Make buying easy.

When people want to give you money, don't make them jump through hoops. Make the buying process as easy as possible.

This means making the order form as short as you possibly can, limiting the options (2 or 3 at most), and taking away their fears with good sales copy.

4. Display security certification. Be secure and show it.

This almost goes without saying (but I'll say it). If people are going to buy from you, make sure that they know it's secure.

5. Post a privacy policy.

I just checked and my privacy policy was viewed by more than 100 people last month. That is less than 0.4% of my total traffic but these people are clearly hot prospects.

If someone cares enough to view your privacy policy, they are likely interested in subscribing or buying. Don't think that this page is outdated or irrelevant. Make sure yours addresses any concerns they might have and make it clear and easy to read.

6. Be accessible.

The worst thing you can do online is be unreachable.

Make sure that contacting you (or your team) is easy. Give them multiple ways to contact you. This means:

- A contact form or email address on your site.
- Social media contacts.
- An audio messaging tool like Speakpipe. You can click the floating "Leave me a message" tag on the right to contact me via voicemail.

7. Respond quickly.

When people DO contact you, make sure to respond quickly (48 business hours MAX).

Timely responses make customers feel important. They feel served...and they spread the word.

8. Get it right the first time.

Make sure you have the systems in place to get orders right and serve customers with excellence.

When you get the first buying experience right, people are more like to buy from you again.

9. Keep track of what's selling (and why it's selling).

If you have inventory, this is critically important. You can't just run out of something. That is bad on so many levels.

But even if you don't, it's important to know what is selling and why. What is working in your marketing? Make sure you are on top of the data.

10. Build a support network.

The book says "build relationships with other Web-based entrepreneurs."

One of the biggest temptations of new online entrepreneurs is to try to go solo. It can be attractive in many ways to escape the distractions of the office and have time to focus. But you need a support network.

In an online business, like life, you can't go it alone. Meet with other marketers in your area. Meet with them virtually. Meet up with them at events.

[shareable]In an online business, like life, you can't go it alone. You need a support network.[/shareable]

Being a part of a support network will not only help grow your business, but will also help reduce some of the loneliness that often comes with working online.

This support network is a big reason why I've started four different mastermind groups. These groups of like-minded, fellow online entrepreneurs have allowed me to grow at a much faster pace than I ever could have alone. And, they have constantly reminded me that I am not alone in this journey.

I'm considering starting an additional, paid mastermind for online marketers looking to increase their affiliate income, connect with other entrepreneurs, and significantly grow their businesses in the next year. If you are interested in learning more, **click here** to be put on the early bird notification list.
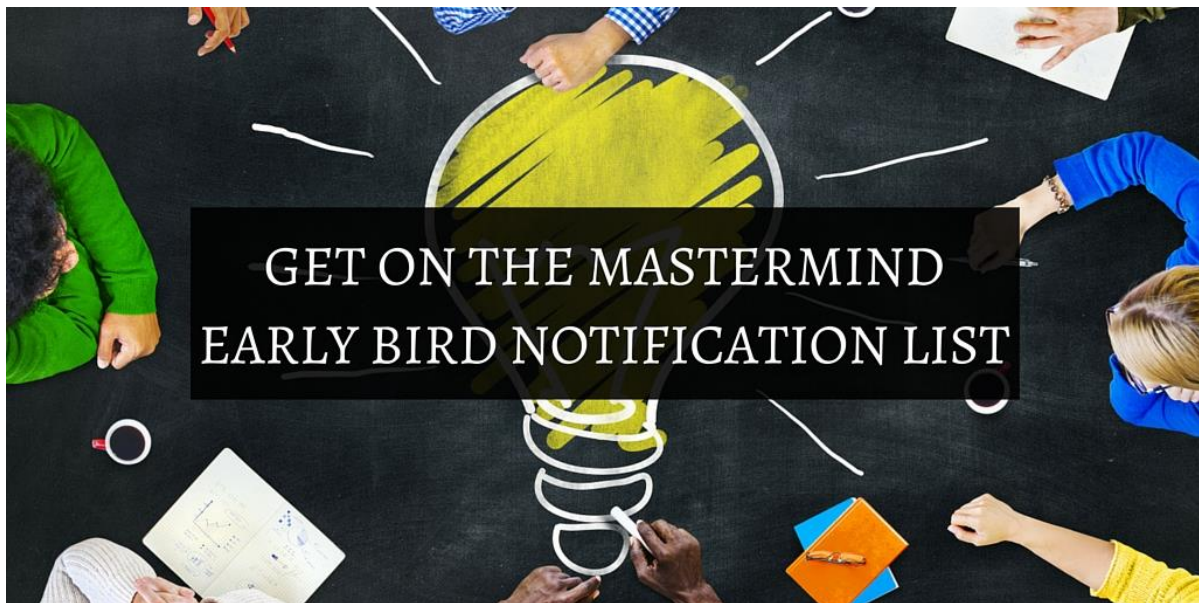
I started my first online business in 2002, only a year after the book was published, and not much as changed since then. The fundamentals never do.

Isn't funny...the more things change, the more they stay the same.