

E-Commerce Trends™ Newsletter

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One of the latest things in eCommerce is web site certification by independent third party certification services. Some of the early ones were the BBB Online® and Truste® (launched in 1997).

This is not to be confused with SSL certification such as Verisign®. SSL protects data as it travels from a user's computer to a commerce web site's shopping cart. SSL doesn't provide data privacy or protection once it is on the merchant's server.

In past issues of this newsletter, we reviewed ControlScan (gave it 3½ stars), HackerSafe, from Scan Alert, (3 stars) and the BBB Online Seal (3 stars).

We liked that **ControlScan**®, with 19,000 members, does everything that HackerSafe promises, but additionally checks privacy protection (as does Truste) and does a business background review similar to the BBB. They give you the full three point service and certification. We found their hacker scan results not totally reliable with some false-positives.

HackerSafe® has become the clear leader in online certificates with their catchy name and aggressive marketing. In just 4 years, they've gone from 0 to 70,000 members, each paying at least \$1,790 per year. Our tests show that they do deliver a sense of security, but because they charge so much more than ControlScan for 1/3 the service, we award it just 3 stars.

The **BBB**® certificate is probably the best well-known, as the Better Business Bureau has been around for what seems like forever. The long standing and highly regarded consumer advocacy organization - offers certification of your online privacy policy as well as website seals designed to convey your reputation to your visitors. However, a website displaying the BBB Cert can be a nightmare to deal with and dishonest, and the BBB is very slow to take away their certification. The BBB guarantees nothing. We gave it 3 stars.

This week we take a look at Truste's new email certificate and a relative newcomer, Online Trusted.

TRUSTe®

Why Pay TRUSTe Big Bucks for a Privacy Seal?

According to their price chart, they have an *application fee* that ranges from \$450 to \$1,875 and an annual license fee of \$1,000 to \$15,200 depending on your annualized revenues and assuming you have a single brand. If you have multiple brands, it could cost you up to \$88,000!

TRUSTe launched a new program this week that is designed to be an email privacy seal that says confidently, "**WE DON'T SPAM.**"

As you can tell from my sarcasm, I am not overly amused by TRUSTe's newest invention, but let's shake off that silly face and explore what lessons we can pull out of their announcement this week.

Fran Maier, the executive director and president of TRUSTe said in their press release that:

"A survey last month found that two-thirds of Internet shoppers decided not to register with a website because the privacy policy was too complicated or unclear. This marks a difficult and worsening situation for businesses that rely on trusted digital communication...Companies need a way to declare simply, clearly and believably 'we don't spam.' Our seal lets them say that with confidence and consumers now can trust they won't be receiving unwanted email from these companies."

Ahh ha! I knew there was a nugget in here to give you. Quick, go check out your posted privacy policy. Is it 5 pages long? If it is, you may have a problem. Don't have a privacy policy? Are you serious? Get one up today... but use simply, clean and short language to get to the point and sell confidence that you won't abuse your new potential list member's privacy.

According to TRUSTE's website, participants in their email seal program must meet the following requirements:

Prior consent standard for commercial email, At a minimum, pre-selected option for house files,

Opt-in for 3rd party mailings

No 3rd party sharing without explicit permission

Clear and conspicuous notice describing use

Privacy statement fully disclosing email practices

This is all very good and there are obviously many web site owners that can afford to participate and receive this seal, but it is hard for us to justify the price. Because of the high price and questionable value for the cost, we feel TRUSTE is over-rated and can only give it 1 ½ stars.

Online Trusted™

Online Trusted™ has been providing server vulnerability assessment and protection services since 1997. Just recently they have opened their services to web sites everywhere, not just big companies who could afford the best.

Although a bit more expensive than HackerSafe, they provide the ultimate hacker detection vulnerability solution and additionally add the same services that the BBB and TRUSTE provide.

We were quite impressed with the knowledgeable service that this company provided. We purposely opened some vulnerabilities on our server, including one that Hacker Safe didn't catch in our tests.

Not only did Online Trusted flag the problem (they **test for more than 20,000 vulnerabilities** versus HackerSafe's and Control Scan's 11,000) but also their solution and patch was accurate.

We quote form the OnlineTrusted.com web site:

"The way for online companies to distinguish themselves from the thousands of others in a way that is recognizable by consumers, instilling trust and confidence in your website. The Online Trusted™ seal is among the most recognized seals on the internet and its name and reputation are well known throughout the world.

Credibility is crucial if you want to make money with your web site. Your web site visitors must trust you. It's pointless to spend a lot of work on getting visitors from search engines or money for pay per click if these visits don't convert to sales.

The Online Trusted™ Seal of Approval

- Certifies Site is Hacker-proof
- Lets consumers know your business is reliable
- Demonstrates that you treat customers fairly
- Certifies that confidential information is secure
- Reduces shopping cart dropout
- **The bottom line:** increases sales / conversions"

We agree. And they are allowing use of 1 to all 4 seals for the same price!

With the most comprehensive hacker vulnerability testing, true business practices verification, and privacy policy verification - all at a most reasonable price, we have awarded Online Trusted the rare 5 star rating.

That wraps it up for this week. Watch for next week's newsletter with our discussion of Shopping Cart Dropout

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