

WHITE PAPER

INTERNET TRUST MARKS: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND PROFIT ONLINE



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INTERNET TRUST MARKS: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND PROFIT ONLINE

INTRODUCTION

The fear of fraud, spoofing, phishing, identity theft, and lax website security have made a sizeable percentage of consumers wary of using credit cards online. In a TNS survey conducted for VeriSign in March 2010, four out of 10 people surveyed would never conduct online bill payments or online banking because of security concerns and roughly one-third would never manage investments or purchase online because of security issues. However, trust levels increase by more than 60 per cent when users check for security seals, the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) padlock, a green address bar, or 'https' when making online purchases or sharing personal information.¹

Having the right level of website security in place is not enough by itself to turn the tide. Online merchants need to advertise their investments in site security and their commitment to shopper safety. As proven time and again, trust marks are one of the best ways to convey the notion of site security and establish peace of mind with would-be consumers.

This paper examines how recent trends in Internet trust marks can help restore confidence in online shopping, and as concluded by at least one recent study, even induce those who do shop online to spend more.



Displaying a Trust Mark

A trust mark is a form of advertising that communicates to online shoppers that a website meets the requirements of a trusted third-party, which helps them shop with confidence. For example, the VeriSign seal communicates, amongst other things, that the website and its owner or operator have been authenticated by VeriSign, and that the website uses SSL and/or another service to enhance security. A trust mark needs to be highly visible on every page where a shopper even thinks of initiating a transaction in order to be effective. The home page is a given, but the trust mark should also be placed on every page where there is a Buy button or a required customer login, to strengthen shopper confidence. It should also figure prominently on the Checkout page, to combat shopper anxiety and help protect shopping carts from last-minute abandonment. Search results are another important place to display a trust mark to convey trust to existing and potential customers early in their shopping process.

WHY TRUST MARKS?

Trust marks have a long history in the online world, but their use has really taken off in the last few years. The VeriSign seal was amongst the first. Like a Health and Safety Certificate in a restaurant window, a trust mark on a website or in search results immediately conveys important information about the business and its practices, enabling shoppers to decide whether it's safe to transact or not.

In the 'bricks and mortar' world, shoppers can easily look for clues regarding the trustworthiness of a store or restaurant, from employee demeanour to dirt in the corner. In the online world, it is much harder to know for sure whether a site is trustworthy. It is all too easy for fraudsters to fake an online storefront – it is done all the time, and very convincingly, with the intent of capturing unwary individuals' credit card numbers and other important personal information.

1. VeriSign Trust Index Report, March 2010. Available at: https://www.trustthecheck.com/assets/VeriSign_Internet_Trust_Index_March_2010.pdf





On the other hand, a trust mark posted on the website or displayed in search results, tells would-be shoppers that a credible third party such as VeriSign has validated certain aspects of the business and has found the site to be trustworthy in regard to those aspects.

WHAT TRUST MARKS PROVE

Unless made visible, considerable investments in world-class site security and consumer privacy measures can be wasted. The use of trust marks can make these measures pay off with customers by providing visible proof that a trusted third-party has authenticated the ownership of a website (if applicable), and stated security measures are actually in place.

The process to obtain the VeriSign SSL Certificate involves thorough investigation of the business to confirm its identity and to validate that the website, where customers share personal information, is legitimate. This authentication process is based on time-tested methods that have been used by VeriSign to authenticate more than three million businesses.

The most widely recognised trust mark today, the VeriSign seal indicates that a website has been authenticated as legitimate and also indicates the use of data encryption for website security. Other marks can indicate a variety of additional properties of websites. For example, another popular trust mark is the RatePoint Site Seal. RatePoint's platform helps businesses harness online reviews to improve customer confidence and trust. The presence of the RatePoint Site Seal gives website visitors instant visual feedback and provides access to customer ratings and feedback.

These two leading signs say different things about a business. The VeriSign seal vouches that the website is real, uses SSL encryption, and that the business has taken steps to ensure that personal data submitted through the website is protected from interception. As a complementary measure, the RatePoint Site Seal indicates that the website has been positively received by its customer base. Together, the VeriSign seal and the RatePoint Site Seal are a comprehensive statement about the trustworthiness of a site.

Other flavours of trust marks speak to different aspects of a website's performance. For example, the Better Business Bureau has an online trust mark that indicates certain facts

about an established nature of the business, its willingness to resolve disputes, and its relatively clean record from customers. Likewise, the eTRUST seal indicates that an online business has a published privacy policy that prohibits sharing critical customer information with unauthorised parties. Each of these popular seals vouches for a different component of the online business's overall trustworthiness.

If a merchant has room for multiple trust marks, using the VeriSign Trust Seal in tandem sends a powerful message. If there is room for only one, the best approach is to display the most recognised trust mark.

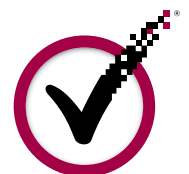
RECOGNITION: THE TRUE POWER OF A TRUST MARK

Ultimately, it is consumer recognition that gives a trust mark its teeth. If consumers are not familiar with a particular trust mark, and do not understand what it is saying about the website, they will likely not gain any confidence from it.

Online businesses look to three critical metrics to determine the value of an individual trust mark on a website:

- Level of display: How many sites use the mark? What presence does the trust mark have among leaders of specific segments such as online retail, banking, insurance, securities trading, or healthcare?
- Exposure breeds familiarity: How many site visitors view this online trust mark and become familiar with its brand and associated value?
- Recognition: What level of awareness of the trust mark does the public have, and what is the public's perception of what this mark indicates.

The VeriSign seal is displayed on more than 90,000 sites, far more sites than any other trust mark in history. It is viewed up to 250 million times a day, a figure that no other trust mark approaches. It is the most recognised trust mark worldwide, with 86 per cent online consumer recognition in the U.S., according to a VeriSign Brand Tracking Research study conducted in 2009.





LEVERAGING TRUST MARKS TO DRIVE COMPETITIVENESS, REVENUE, AND PROFITS

Addressing consumer fears about website security through the use of trust marks can help drive not only increased transactions but also larger Average Sales Prices (ASPs) and higher profits.

A recent study investigated security concerns of online shoppers and the value of trust marks in the minds of consumers. The following statistics are from a 2008 VeriSign Brand Tracking Research study.²

Consumers are very aware of trust marks and understand what they represent. The overwhelming majority of consumers feel it is important for sites to include a trust mark. For instance:

- 87 per cent of online shoppers are familiar with website security.
- 86 per cent of online shoppers feel more confident about entering personal information on websites using security.

Determined to establish consumer confidence in its online portal, pan-European travel service Opendo posted the VeriSign seal on select payment pages and experienced a 10 per cent increase in completed sales compared to pages that did not display the VeriSign seal. A 10 per cent increase in sales can have enormous impact on revenues and profits, and Opendo wasted no time in placing the VeriSign seal on all payment pages across its sites.

Just as significantly, studies have revealed a willingness on the part of consumers to pay more for items if their online safety is ensured. A study conducted by Carnegie Mellon Usable Privacy and Security Lab that was presented at the 2007 Workshop on the Economics of Information Security³ revealed that shoppers would spend up to 60 cents extra for a \$15 item when they thought privacy protections were in place. That represents a four per cent boost in margin, which online merchants can use to either increase profitability or to invest in marketing to grow their businesses.

Ten times as many consumers feel trust is more important than cost when doing business online. (VeriSign Brand Tracking Research, 2008)⁴

TRUST MARKS: GREEN ADDRESS BAR MEANS 'GO'

Almost all online crime involves a fraudster pretending to be someone they are not. Trust marks are continuing to evolve to be more proactive in fighting online impersonation and fraud, and in doing so help to encourage the growth of online commerce. One particularly promising innovation has been to build visible fraud detection capabilities into the Internet browser itself.

To this end, the Extended Validation, or EV, SSL Certificate, was introduced at the end of 2006. EV SSL Certificates leverage security functionality embedded in the browser. Online businesses applying for EV SSL Certificates undergo extensive evaluation, with rigorous investigation beyond that used in a standard SSL Certificate evaluation. Functionality embedded in a high-security enabled browser, such as the most recent versions of Microsoft® Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, Safari, and Chrome, proactively recognises when an EV SSL Certificate is in place on a website and graphically indicates that the site's identity is known to be authenticated. Specific visuals include the address bar turning green and a special field appearing with the name of the legitimate website owner along with the name of the security provider that issued the EV SSL Certificate.

The use of SSL Extended Validation has been very successful, to date, with high levels of consumer recognition regarding the value of EV SSL. As of April 2010, dozens of tests conducted by companies around the world have demonstrated that the use of VeriSign® EV SSL increases transactions, on average, by 17.8% (in over 30 tests).⁵

2. Javelin Strategy and Research, March 2008. Available at: www.javelinstrategy.com/2009/03/17/survey-finds-retailers-missed-out-on-21-billion-in-sales-in-2008-due-to-online-shopping-fears

3. www.ascribe.org/cgi-bin/ behold.pl?ascribeid=20070606.093408&time=11%2032%20PDT&year=2007&public=1

4. VeriSign 2008 Brand Research This study was sponsored by VeriSign and was comprised of online shoppers at least 18 years old. U.S. respondents were recruited from VeriSign Brand Tracking Research's online consumer panel.





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Importantly, the experience of some Internet retailers may indicate that consumers are demonstrating this extra confidence with their wallets and actions.

Real World Results with VeriSign EV SSL

Papercheck.com: 87% increase in online registrations.

CRSHotels.com: 30% increase in conversions.

CarInsurance.com: 18% increase in online enrolment.

Flagstarbank.com: 10% increase in customer sign-ups.

CreditKarma.com: 26% higher in conversion rates.

See www.verisign.com/ssl/ssl-information-center/sslcase-studies/index.html for all of the details.

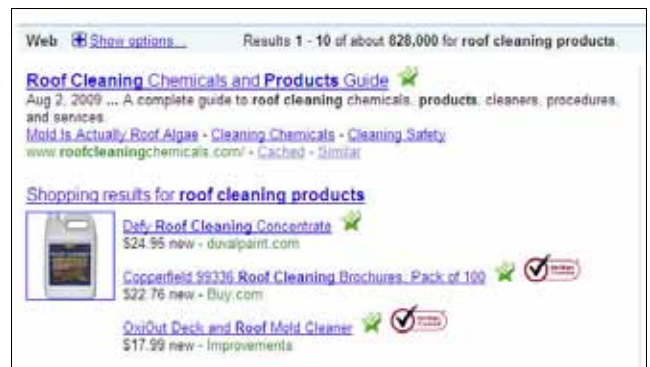
EV SSL was an innovation that took trust marks to an entirely new level in increasing user confidence while diminishing the risk of phishing. To date, over 23,000 websites have deployed Extended Validation (EV) SSL Certificates, and VeriSign is the provider of choice for over 16,000 of them (Netcraft Survey, March 2010).

TheFind

TheFind, a rapid growth online shopping centre, knew that the presence of the VeriSign seal mattered a lot to users and recently decided to measure how much of a difference it makes. The results: companies that display the VeriSign seal next to their link on TheFind's website received 18.5% more click-throughs than their peers who did not display the VeriSign seal.⁶ Whilst other factors may have helped contribute to the results as well, TheFind identified the presence of the VeriSign seal as a key element in the results.

TRUST MARKS EVOLVING TO NEW LEVELS: VERISIGN® SEAL-IN-SEARCH™

Given all of the noise experienced on the Internet, online marketers need to reach customers as early as possible in the purchase cycle. By displaying a trust mark next to a link in search results, the website is naturally differentiated as customers are directed to links that display a trust mark while they're in the process of doing searches and comparison shopping.



Display of trust marks can help businesses demonstrate their trustworthiness in search results and encourage traffic to their website.

The VeriSign® Seal-in-Search™ feature displays the VeriSign seal next to links from VeriSign trusted sites within search engine results (on enabled browsers) and VeriSign partnered sites. Seal-in-Search™ helps to increase link visibility and improve consumer confidence, which could lead to higher click rates and improved traffic to trusted websites.

5. See www.verisign.com/ssl/ssl-information-center/ssl-case-studies/index.html for all of the details.

6. VeriSign/TheFind Case Study. Available at: <http://www.verisign.com/ssl/ssl-information-center/ssl-case-studies/thefind.pdf>





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CONCLUSION

Given persistent concerns over Internet privacy and security, the lack of a recognisable trust mark associated with a merchant's website can materially impact revenue potential. Most consumers lack the tools to verify the presence of adequate security on an e-commerce site, and trust marks address this need. Merchants need to convey that their site is a safe place to conduct commerce. A trust mark is an active demonstration of that commitment.

In strengthening consumer confidence, trust marks are proven to help drive sales, boost margins, and enhance a website's competitiveness. However, a trust mark's effectiveness is proportionate to its recognisability. The VeriSign seal is far and away the world's most recognised Internet trust mark – it is seen in more places, by more people, with a higher recognition level of its value than any other trust mark.

To ensure continued brand prominence, VeriSign invests in building consumer awareness of the VeriSign seal. It is also a leader in promoting cutting-edge innovations such as Extended Validation SSL and Seal-in-Search that further extend the value of trust marks. Through the use of the VeriSign seal, consumers and merchants alike can more fully profit from the advantages of online commerce.

LEARN MORE

For more information about VeriSign SSL Certificates, please call 0800 032 2101 or email: sales@verisign.com.au

ABOUT VERISIGN

VeriSign is the trusted provider of Internet infrastructure services for the digital world. Billions of times each day, companies and consumers rely on our Internet infrastructure to communicate and conduct commerce with confidence.

Visit us at www.Verisign.com.au for more information.

