

## E-Commerce Essentials

Creating, designing and managing an ecommerce website requires a wide range of skills, research and hard work. The main reason a company or individual launches an ecommerce site is to make more money.

But how do you stand out from the vast amount of ecommerce sites in every saturated market?

Developing a plan on designing your website, to getting feedback from customers will allow your company to thrive in the ecommerce world. In this eBook we will take a look at the most crucial elements for building a successful ecommerce website for your products or services.

An ecommerce website is a delicate organism, designed to provide easy purchasing options to your customers. However without the proper guidance it can diminish your customer base as opposed to nourishing it.

Let's take a look at the best techniques for maximizing your website's effectiveness and the components guaranteed to increase your sales online.

### **Have a professional looking website.**

Many business owners tend to think about the functionality of their website more often than the actual look and feel of the website. Making sure things like speed, optimization and transactional ease are essential parts of making sure people will want to buy your product. However, it can be difficult to sell something with a high functioning site when the site looks like it might be from a decade ago.

Your ecommerce website is the first thing that any customer will see. Not how well your products work or how extraordinary your services are. Not how quickly your site moves or the quick, easy transaction process. They will search for what they are looking for on a search engine, click on your site and notice the colors, the header, your logo, the sleekness of the design and how your company is represented through that design.

So why is it good to have a beautiful ecommerce website? Here are a few reasons to help you decide that a redesign might be justified for your site.

#### **First impressions**

Your ecommerce site should be reflective of how you run your company. If your website looks cheap or lazily thrown together, it immediately shoots up a red flag to your customers. After all, if your company couldn't invest enough time and money into a website, why would it work hard towards pleasing its customers? Take as much pride in your website as you do in your company.

Your website is like a storefront for the world. Maintaining a quality impression is the first wave of offense for your business. The age of brick-and-mortar stores is diminishing and with that comes a new

age of internet businesses, with their primary marketing efforts going towards the internet. So make sure you keep up with changing trends and maintain a website that is appealing to the public.

### **Your company culture**

Many clients and customers purchase from companies based on the company's culture and beliefs. Most consumers have thousands of options when choosing to buy their sneakers, but if one company has a website that represents a fun, even silly atmosphere, they may be more likely to buy from that company, as opposed to a company with a dull website.

However, the culture you want to communicate depends on the type of company. If instead of selling sneakers your company sells dress shoes, you would probably want to present a sleek, professional look to those business people out there, seeking a company that takes professionalism serious.

### **Outdated sites may mean an outdated company**

If a company can't take the time to update their ecommerce website, this shows customers that you might be outdated when it comes to other aspects of your business. Show customers that you can keep up with the times on all levels of your company and you will receive more conversions. Think about when you see an old, crummy, outdated site. It's similar to walking into a rundown retail store, where most people leave as soon as possible.

### **Different colors invoke different moods**

Blue creates a calming effect when people look at it, while red induces hunger and anxiety. Thinking about your colors is more crucial than you think, so increase your company's sales by simply performing a quick Google search for what colors invoke particular moods in people. Mark Zuckerberg used blue for Facebook because it makes people feel relaxed, and that's exactly what Facebook does! What type of mood are you trying to provoke out of your consumer? Use a color that represents that.

### **Make your website functional**

The aesthetics of your ecommerce website are important for the first impression, but when it comes to selling your customers on your products or services, functionality is king. Make it easy for your customers to navigate through your website and find products or services.

Ensure the checkout process is quick and painless, while offering detailed tracking or status updates. Not only that, but make sure your ecommerce website is constantly offering your customer additional purchase options while they are buying. This can be seen as a luxury for many shoppers and allows for increased sales on your end.

There are numerous options for making the functionality of your site more user-friendly, so here are some things to check with your site:

#### **Search Box**

A search box provides a quick, easy way for customers to find all the information they are looking for. Typically customers do not go to a site simply to browse products or brands, rather they have a general idea of what they would like to purchase. Giving them an option to punch in a keyword provides an easy way for them to search your entire site. Especially since many ecommerce websites can be intimidating (with hundreds or thousands of products), this allows customers the ability to sift through this mess of products and find the one they are looking for.

## **Navigation**

Navigational menus are crucial for a successful ecommerce website as well. As opposed to our customer mentioned above, who knew exactly what they wanted, some customers have a general idea or no clue as to what they want. Providing them easy filter options and navigation on the top and sides of your website is helpful when searching on an ecommerce site.

For example, your customer might be interested in purchasing a particular brand of pants, but they don't know the color, design or size they want. Offering filters for all the brands you provide helps those with less knowledge on what they plan on purchasing. Navigation is also great for easy reference to important pages like the shopping cart, FAQs and your return policy.

## **You Are Here**

Since most people who search for products and services online typically go through search engines, there is a good chance that they don't initially start at your home page. They will probably end up on a product page they searched for, so it is wise to let them know where they ended up on your website. Breadcrumbs come in handy here, allowing customers to see how deep they are located on your website. This also helps customers backtrack from the page they ended up on.

## **Understandable Navigation**

This seems like a "no-brainer" at first, but with many ecommerce sites you will find the text for the navigation buttons ambiguous and hard to understand. People want to understand where they are going before they click on a link. When they click on that link they want relevant information. So if you create a navigation button for "Women's Shirts", simply call it "Women's Shirts". Getting too creative with navigation text creates confusion for your customer and will send them away from your ecommerce website.

## **Communicating your product to users**

When a customer finds a product they are thinking about buying, is there anything on your website that convinces them to do so?

Are you connecting with your customers on a different level than simply providing a picture of your product and assuming this will be enough?

When creating your product pages for your ecommerce site it is important to communicate the specifications, quality, brand and even your own company spin in order to convince people to buy the product.

Here are a few things that are essential for communicating why people should buy your product over a competitor's:

### **Duplicate content kills**

Why is it not ok to simply take the manufacturer's product descriptions and put them on your site? Why is it not ok to simply copy product details from a competitor? Because search engines are designed to notice duplicate content on the internet. When they find this duplicate content it flags your site and minimizes chances of moving up in the rankings.

The website with the original content does not typically get penalized for this duplicate content since it was originally on that site, however if you copied content from another website you are simply just hurting your visibility online.

### **Unique attributes and specifications of the product**

Most customers won't simply buy a product based on a picture. They want to see sizes, functionality, specifications and details on what the product can do for them. Is it a right fit? Is another product on your site more suitable? Customers like to compare these details with competitors, and not providing the relevant information takes you out of the race before it even starts.

### **A Header**

This seems like a given, but you will want to make sure that your product titles are accurate and short. Give enough information to entice customers to click on the product, but don't fill in the product headers with details that can be saved for later.

A creative header is often enticing, however you should refrain from using anything besides the actual product name for the things you are trying to sell.

Why?

Because people don't search for "Incredible red tennis shoes" in search engines. Rather they search for Adidas tennis shoes. You will always want to be thinking about search engines when creating headers and titles for your products, because these titles will be what comes up first in the search engine results and what the search engines actually crawl for first.

Just remember to keep your titles short and to the point. Think about what your customers will actually be searching for on the internet and create titles to accommodate these searches.

### **Inspiration**

This is where you differentiate yourself from your competitors. Most ecommerce website competitors will have the same boring specs as the next company, making it difficult for customers to choose between companies.

This is your time to shine. It may not show customers that your product is better, but it could show that your company exhibits a professional or fun, youthful tone. Represent the culture of your company in the product descriptions and separate yourself from the competition.

### **Simplicity**

Consumers crave simplicity. Regardless of the complexity of your product, make sure your product details and descriptions are clear and concise. Make it so easy that anyone outside of your industry would have no problem understanding it. Assure that your formatting is professional, your text is legible, your sentences are short and technical jargon is kept to a minimum. You must remember that seasoned customers are not the only ones looking at your site.

If you plan on getting new customers, you have to make it easy to read. For example if you are selling rock climbing equipment it might come naturally to use equipment jargon or words that newcomers wouldn't understand. Help these people out by explaining the technical aspects of your products.

This also applies to lists that you might have for product specifications. No one is going to read a giant list of features. However, if you put a small list of the most important features, people will not have to sift through the less important information. After that small list you can put a link so customers can view a detailed list of features if they desire.

### **Formatting**

Creating clean product descriptions, with proper headings, descriptions and outlines, makes a quality experience for your customers. Similar to the cleanliness and modernism of your home page, your product descriptions need to look professional. Poor formatting and lengthy paragraphs will turn away customers quickly, since it looks like you didn't put any work into your site.

Bold your headers and keep all your paragraphs to a maximum of three sentences. Most people scan text on the internet, so cater to these people and don't intimidate them with large chunks of text. Ensure that your text doesn't float around when viewed on different devices such as tablets or cell phones. Your text should be maintained in clean columns, similar to the format of a newspaper. This allows for easy reading and the ability to scan through to find the important parts.

### **Affiliations and awards**

Your ecommerce website is no place to be modest. If you have any affiliation with accredited business organizations, provide emblems and links to these organizations in your sidebar so people can see that you have more credibility than your competitors.

Also, if you have received any awards in the past, get a picture of the award and create an awards section in your sidebar. You can also create a whole new page depending on the amount of awards you have and the amount of clutter those pictures create on your page. Customers have very limited resources when it comes to distinguishing between which companies they should purchase from.

Therefore, showing your customers the awards you have received in the past will create credibility for your company and increase the amount of people willing to purchase goods or services from your ecommerce website.

In fact, your affiliations and awards should be included on all of your pages, so in the footer or header of your website put graphics to your most distinguished awards and affiliations, so people can see them regardless of the page they are on. This way you won't have to worry about your customers having to navigate to another page to see how credible your company is.

### **A call to action**

Communicating why your products are superior to your competitor's products is a difficult task, but often a simple change in your call-to-action can push people to purchase something, as opposed to analyzing the product and then leaving. Providing the proper text in your call-to-action button can push more conversions through your site. For example if you mentioned a timely promotion of an additional product they might be able to receive with the purchase of the product they are currently looking at, they may feel pressured to click the "buy" button now, instead of saving a product in their shopping cart and coming to purchase it later.

### **Recommended products**

When a customer is on one of your ecommerce product pages, they may be interested in purchasing complimentary products to go along with their main purpose. Suggesting other options is another way to communicate the wide array of products that you offer, while providing a valuable service, so they don't have to go digging even deeper into your site to find relatable products.

### **Your company vibe**

If you take a look at the Zappos or Groupon websites, you will notice that they provide creative product descriptions to differentiate themselves from the boring, monotonous product descriptions on many other ecommerce websites.

This is a chance to represent the culture of your company through your products. The greatest advantage here is that you probably have hundreds of product pages to explore your creativity and share your company's uniqueness. People love to see something other than the typical stock product descriptions, and this can actually keep people on your site for longer than usual if they get encapsulated with the writing on your site.

This can help increase your search engine rankings and can even increase the chances of people clicking on ads (if you do provide ads on your website).

## **Use Trust Signals**

Separating yourself from the competition with your ecommerce site can be done in many forms, however one of the most powerful methods is by building trust signals. With a saturated market comes few ways to distinguish between companies. So you must think about why you purchase something. Most people purchase a DVD, a pair of shoes, kitchenware or cars based on a recommendation from someone else.

This is human nature. Why? Because a third party recommendation is always more trustworthy than a recommendation from the company that is trying to sell to you. That's why most people make purchasing decisions based on critic or user reviews, or they might spend some money on a product because a friend said they would love it.

However, these offline trust signals must be converted into money-making functions for your own ecommerce site. In order to do this, implement these options on your website:

### **As Seen On TV**

If someone has seen your product on TV this immediately gives them a recollection of what that product looked like, what it did and the overall message from the company. This builds trust and credibility as they have already had a chance to preview a visual demonstration of the product.

Overall, this creates a small sense of nostalgia, where they can think back and remember a funny or witty commercial they saw. People also enjoy the idea of "Seen On TV" products because the company has already invested a certain amount of money to endorse their product, representing the money, time and commitment that the company has already put into the product. Many people suspect this dedication can only mean a quality product.

It also shows that other people have purchased your product already, so they have the opportunity to browse the internet in order to checkout reviews from other people who have used the product. Obviously, if the product doesn't have good reviews online then this might not be to your advantage, but if you are certain the reviews online are favorable, this is a great opportunity to let customers know that it was on a TV commercial or infomercial. Therefore, the product will most likely have been used and reviewed by others online.

### **Testimonials and Reviews**

This is one of the most powerful trust building areas when it comes to selling online. Like we stated before, it is nearly impossible for customers to choose which company to buy from when they offer similar or the same products.

However, if they see a positive testimonial from a credible source or a previous buyer, it gives them a sense of ease, knowing that someone else has already been satisfied by your product. Not only that, but

it gives them a third party review of what the product does well. They are much more likely to trust someone who has no affiliation with your company.

### **About Page**

This is your chance to communicate your brand's theme and company culture. You can communicate certain morals or beliefs of your company in order to connect with niche groups of people. This page is extremely important as it allows you the opportunity to stop the sales pitch and become human for a while.

Connect with your customers and don't simply try to sell them on your about page. Tell them how the company got started or provide pictures of your staff. When customers see they are buying from actual people and not just a computer, it can sway their decision drastically.

### **Support**

Customers often have questions that can't be answered on your website or maybe they can't find the answer they are looking for. In this case you must provide a means of communication, so they can contact you and receive answers to their questions.

The best ecommerce stores always offer 24/7 support. This support usually comes in multiple options for communication, whether it be instant chat, email or the phone. Once again, this helps people realize that your company is not run by a machine and can convince them to make a purchase.

### **Give the users enough options to pay.**

Nothing is more frustrating than sifting through products on an online store, comparing options, deciding on what you would like to purchase and then realizing that the store does not take your payment option.

Every option that is given to you should be used when setting up your payment system. Make sure you are accepting all major credit cards, as well as PayPal, for fast, easy checkout options. Some companies might even allow customers to link to their checking account, do a wire transfer or a digital check. The more options the better.

Not only that, but you should allow your customers to save their payment information on your website. This way they can come back whenever they want and prevent looking around for their credit card and punching in all the numbers every time.

Many merchants feel that offering something like PayPal or Google Merchant is good enough for their customers. Unfortunately, many people don't even know how these payment options work. If they do know how it works, or they figure it out, it requires them to create a brand new profile on a third party site in order to make a simple transaction. Nothing will turn away more customers than only offering

PayPal as a payment option. Chances are they will have to create a profile on your website, and then they will also have to create a separate profile for PayPal.

This turns people off, because no one likes giving out their information. By asking them to do it twice, you turn away those uncomfortable with spreading their information all over the internet. Also, it adds one more step to the payment process. Now, if someone already has a PayPal account, this actually speeds up the process. That's why it is recommended to include as many payment options as possible, because everyone has their own preferences when paying for items online.

## **Make changes and test!**

After your site is fully functional you must rigorously test it to make sure everything works properly. There are two methods of testing that must be completed in order to make sure your ecommerce website is ready for the world.

The first testing procedure involves going through the website yourself and making sure everything is working properly. You should test the different elements of your website to assure the site is optimized for your customers, to find exactly what they are looking for.

The second test is when you ask other people to navigate through your site. A third party view is always going to provide better feedback than your own. This can be done in various different ways, but some of the most effective methods include having the customers fill out surveys after their experience or even videotaping them as they navigate through the site.

Here are a few areas to test on your website in order to assure the best user-experience for your customers, while maintaining a quality sales website for your company.

### **Search Results and Product Display**

Are your featured products showing up on your homepage? When you search for a certain product, do all the related options show up? When you click on an item to view the product page does it redirect properly and display as desired?

These are all questions you must ask yourself in order for your ecommerce site to run flawlessly. Don't assume that you can skip over a handful of them, because there is a high chance that something is wrong with a few of your products or search results. Walk through a purchase simulation with every single one of your products and make sure they all run smoothly.

Tying into search results, it can also be helpful to try searching for your products through a search engine. This will give you an idea of how visible your products are to people on the internet. After you see how high your products rank in search engines, you can develop measures to increase your search engine optimization, such as putting more keywords in your product descriptions, creating better title and meta tags and maybe installing a search engine optimization plugin to further the exposure your products see on the internet.

## **The Checkout**

Many people abandon ship right before they are about to purchase their items. There are various reasons for this and most of the reasons have to do with fear or time.

Make sure your checkout page doesn't have too many fields or steps to actually purchase the item. Many customers don't like creating profiles on websites, so provide an option for people to check out as a guest. This creates a sense of ease, as people don't have to provide their personal information if they don't want to.

This can be a problem, because many customers have a fear of their information being scattered throughout the internet, due to identity fraud and other potential crimes. However, giving your customers the option to checkout as a guest can help ensure that you are not trying to take and sell any of their personal information.

You can also provide your customers any certificates that ensure the security of your checkout process. Most large ecommerce sites provide a badge along with a link to show their customers that none of their information is being shared with third parties and that it is held in a secure third-party location. You can also provide a link on your checkout page that leads to a different page, outlining your security procedures and regulations.

A page like this can also be a great opportunity to communicate any moral beliefs your company holds. This helps build trust and may help increase the amount of sales through your ecommerce site.

## **Promotions**

Test whether or not your promotions are effective. This test is most effective when having other people navigate through your site. Provide different specials, prices and shipping strategies for different groups of people, in order to see who purchases the most. This is called A/B testing, where you offer different pages or verbiage to different customers in order to find out which method people are most attracted to.

Testing these different strategies allows you to accumulate feedback on how your customers are reacting to your site design and functionality. It is impossible to figure out customer response to a button, text or banner without testing it first. This is a huge mistake that many ecommerce sites make, before settling on decisions about the design and functionality of their site.

They simply think that it doesn't matter where you post a promotional banner or shipping special, because customers will just notice it and gravitate towards it. Unfortunately, this could not be further from the truth. Placement, colors, size and text are all crucial in how people respond to your promotions and call-to-actions.

Think about studying up on A/B tests and using these tests in order to figure out how to optimize your ecommerce site. This will help you convert more customers into successful sales.

## **Call-to-action buttons**

This seems miniscule, but changing up the text, location, color or size of your call-to-action buttons can actually have a strong effect on your sales. With A/B testing you can figure out which locations are best for people to click on call-to-action buttons, as well as the size and color of the buttons.

Text is often the most important aspect of your call-to-action buttons. “Buy now!” vs. “Click Here” makes a huge difference in whether or not someone will purchase the product. Also, many companies include timely offers and promotions on their call-to-action buttons, making people want to buy immediately, in fear of losing out on a great deal. “15% off for the next two hours” is a sure fire way to increase click through and conversion rates.

Testing and modifying your call-to-action buttons is crucial when trying to figure out the optimal conversion-building options for your company.

## **Get user feedback**

After you have tested your website it is essential to compile feedback from users who have used your site. There is no better critic than your actual customers and with today’s technology it is an inexpensive and easy to get suggestions from your customers.

Receiving feedback allows you to analyze which portions of your website are user-friendly and which are not. You may receive suggestions from customers for future improvements and some people will even point out bad links or typos. Never take customer feedback personally, rather use it to ask yourself how your site or company processes could be improved.

There are two types of feedback we are going to review that are easy to implement and can provide a strong response from customers. First of all, surveys create an opportunity for you to design questions for customers. After that, they can submit what improvements they think should be made and what areas of the website are lacking in functionality.

With surveys you want to make sure not to annoy your customers. Asking them constantly for feedback can turn them off from your company and commit more damage than benefits. Therefore, it is beneficial to offer some sort of incentive for them to complete your survey. You might provide an entry into a drawing whenever someone fills out a survey or even provide a discount on their next purchase. Giveaways are a fun way to engage customers, while capturing valuable feedback for your company.

Another option for accumulating feedback is through instant chat. This allows the customer to come to you (as opposed to seeking out customers with a survey). This is a valuable feedback option because it provides immediate support to the customers when they are experiencing a problem.

With surveys or other feedback methods your customers might forget about problems they had with your site, but with instant chat they are experiencing the problem at that very moment. Therefore, you

are providing high quality customer service while resolving problems that might be occurring on your site.

Both of these feedback options allow you to run statistical analysis, enabling you to see what problems occur most frequently.