

PalmerWebMarketing's

# eCommerce Roadmap



192

Best Practices of Today's  
Successful eCommerce Sites



# Table of Contents

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<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Landing Page Optimization .....</b>	<b>5</b>
So you have a visitor to your site....now how do you keep them there? Here's 10 tips to reduce your landing page bounce rate.	
<b>Site Navigation Optimization .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Don't let your visitors get lost in your online store. Keep them on the right track with the X tips.	
<b>Site Search Optimization .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Your site search feature is the closest thing you have to a live, 24 hour customer service rep. When you visitors ask it a question, will it answer correctly?	
<b>Category Page Optimization.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Now your visitor is showing interest in your products. What are the best ways to allow them to browse, filter, and sort your product line?	
<b>Product Page Optimization .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Now the selling really begins. Learn how to transform your product pages into lucrative selling machines.	
<b>Shopping Cart Optimization .....</b>	<b>47</b>
Now that the product is in the cart, the sale is in the bag, right? Not exactly. Learn the most effective ways to prevent shopping cart abandonment.	
<b>Checkout Process Optimization .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Learn the tactics that the most effective ecommerce stores use to simplify and streamline their checkout process.	
<b>Customer Service .....</b>	<b>64</b>
In reality, customer service begins the moment the visitor lands on your site. But what can you do after the sale to win the customer for life?	

## Bonus

<b>eCommerce SEO Tactics .....</b>	<b>72</b>
25 Principles of search engine optimization specifically for eCommerce sites.	



# Introduction

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On average, 3 out of every 100 visitors to an eCommerce store actually make a purchase. In comparison, about 3 out of every 10 visitors to a physical store make a purchase. Does that sound a bit odd to you?

## Why do eCommerce stores fail to convert 97% of visitors?

I believe there's a two part answer to this dilemma. The first reason is one that eCommerce retailers can do little about: competition. Rather than your competitors being across town or down the street, in the online marketplace they are simply a click away. A website visitor makes very little commitment when they enter your site, and will abandon the effort in a moment's notice for any reason. The second reason, however, is one that e-tailers can do much about: lack of customer feedback loop.

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**“3 out of every 100 visitors to an eCommerce store actually make a purchase.”**

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## The Absence of a Feedback Loop

Suppose you walk into a department store and are immediately greeted by a sales clerk. After a few minutes, you notice the poor condition of the store. Products are strewn about on the floor, and the displays are covered in dust. Disappointed, you make a comment to the clerk regarding store's condition and leave.

Now, suppose you visit this same department store's website. This time, you are disappointed by the online storefront. Products are incorrectly categorized, the site search doesn't work, and the pages are loading slowly. Frustrated, you leave the site.

In both examples, you encountered problems that made you abandon your efforts. However, in the example of the website, how will the department store ever know why you left? In most cases, they won't. In an online environment, the lack of face to face feedback from customers causes companies to overlook egregious problems with their websites.

## eCommerce Gives the Illusion of Automation

As you already know, eCommerce websites don't run themselves. They require every bit as much work as a brick-and-mortar storefront, if not more. Unfortunately, many well-known companies don't realize this fact, and invest very little into properly optimizing their online store.

## **The Purpose of the eCommerce Roadmap eBook**

The purpose of this book is to share practical, relevant, and effective eCommerce optimization tips for your online store. We'll review 192 best practices e-tailers are using that help convert visitors to buyers. Many of these ideas are simple and easy to implement. Others require more effort on the technical side, but are every bit as effective.

Many of these ideas I have used myself, and found very effective. Obviously, every website has different needs, and not every recommendation in this book will be appropriate for your site. However, I am confident that these ideas can revolutionize your sales, if implemented and tested properly.

If you have any questions about the material in the book, please feel free to contact me.

### **Justin Palmer**

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**“The purpose of this book is to share practical, relevant, and effective eCommerce optimization tips.”**

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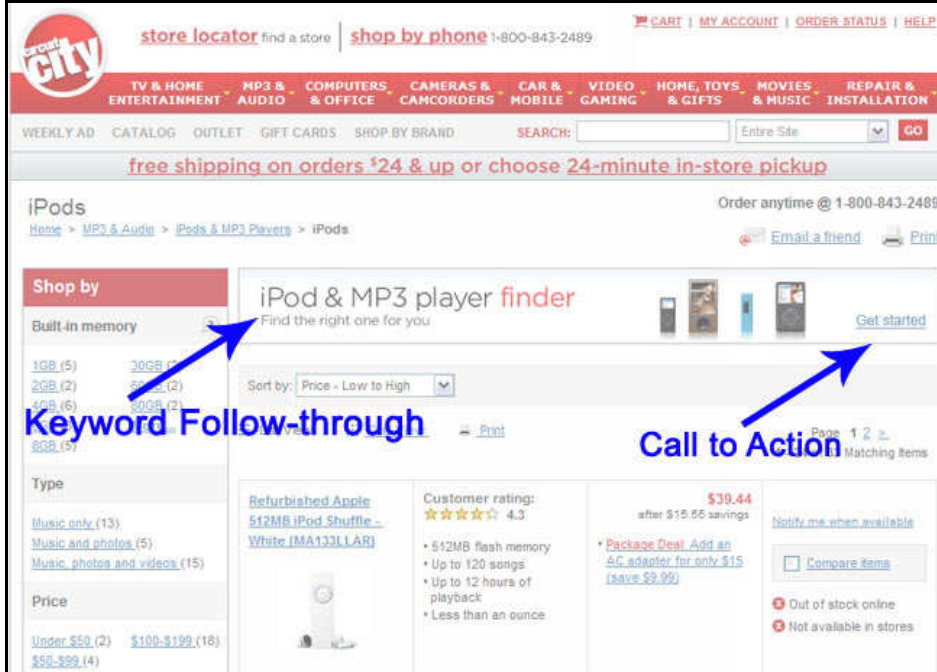
# Landing Pages

Landing pages are the crucial first step for every eCommerce transaction. On average, you have less than 10 seconds to capture the visitor's interest and engage them with your products. In this section, we'll review some ways of increasing the effectiveness of your landing pages.

## 1. Keyword Follow-Through

If you rely heavily on Pay per click or organic search traffic, it's essential the keywords the user entered in the search engine follow through to your site. In summary, here's how the process should work:

1. User performs keyword phrase query in search engine
2. PPC Ad or Title Tag Contains same keyword phrase
3. Landing Page contains same keyword phrase
4. Site content corresponds with keyword phrase



The screenshot shows the Circuit City website's landing page for iPod & MP3 players. The page includes a navigation menu with categories like TV & Home Entertainment, MP3 & Audio, Computers & Office, Cameras & Camcorders, Car & Mobile, Video Gaming, Home, Toys & Gifts, Movies & Music, and Repair & Installation. A search bar is located at the top right. The main content area features a section titled "iPod & MP3 player finder" with a "Get started" button. A blue arrow points to this button, labeled "Call to Action". Another blue arrow points to the "iPod & MP3 player finder" section, labeled "Keyword Follow-through". The page also displays a list of iPod models with their memory capacities and prices.

Landing Page for keyword search "ipod" on [www.circuitcity.com](http://www.circuitcity.com).

## 2. Clear Calls to Action

Once you have established that your landing page is relevant to the visitor, you must provide a clear, unmistakable call to action. What is the next step you wish for the user to take? For eCommerce sites, this may be navigating to the product department page, or if they were already on the product page, it may be adding the item to the shopping cart. CTA's should be recognizable as a clickable page element.

Typically, the most obvious way to make something look clickable is to create a 3-dimensional button or to underline the text. Whatever the desired action is, make sure the CTA is the most prominent element on the page.

## 3. Multiple Browser Testing

Effective website usability testing begins by stepping into the shoes of your customer. Testing your pages in multiple web browsers is a crucial step in optimizing your landing pages.







Begin by analyzing your web analytics to determine which browsers your audience most frequently use, and ensure your pages display properly with them. Differences in browser rendering can cause pages to display improperly, leaving an unprofessional appearance at best or creating a completely unusable page at worst. Browsershots.org offers a free service that shows a snapshot of your website in popular web browsers.

### Website overview

for <http://www.palmerwebmarketing.com/>

### Screenshot request group 1

Submitted 31 minutes ago

request new screenshots?

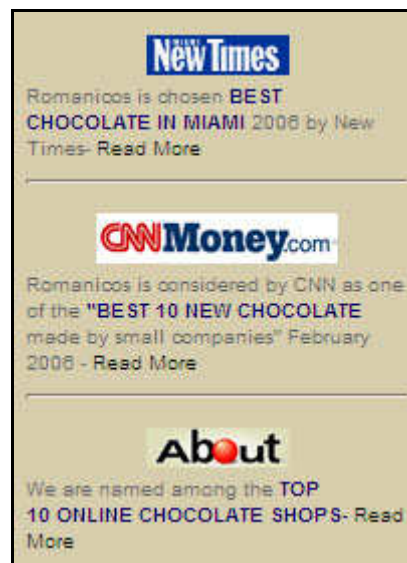
Free multiple browser testing from [www.browsershots.org](http://www.browsershots.org)

## 4. Screen Resolution Testing

First, determine what size screen resolutions are commonly used by your visitors by looking at your web analytics. Then, change the screen resolution on your computer and move step by step through the buying process. Be careful to notice whether important site features such as the Buy or Checkout buttons are below the screen fold or require horizontal scrolling.

## 5. Press Recognition

If your company has received recognition from the media, proudly let your first time visitors know by displaying the recognizable icons on your landing page. Romanicos Chocolate displays recognition from the New York Times, CnnMoney.com, and About on their home page.



Media Recognition Column on [www.romanicoschocolate.com](http://www.romanicoschocolate.com)

## 6. Reduce Download Times

Unfortunately, not everyone has access to high speed internet. In addition, even users of DSL and Cable internet can be quite impatient at times. Odds are, if your site doesn't load in around 6 seconds, your would-be customer

will simply leave. Below I've listed several simple methods of reducing your landing page's download time.

1. Compress .jpg and .gif images
2. Compress or eliminate unnecessary Flash elements
3. Don't Resize Images within HTML – Use Thumbnails
4. Slice Your Images
5. Avoid Too Many Image Slices
6. Use Gzip Compression to Reduce HTML Size
7. Cleanup Messy, Unnecessary HTML Elements
8. Convert from Table to CSS based layout
9. Upgrade your Web Server

## 7. Increase Trust

Keep in mind that your visitors may be landing on your site for the first time. Therefore, they do not trust you yet. By including elements that they do recognize, you can increase the chances that they'll stick around. For example, you consider showing the popular HackerSafe or Better Business Bureau logo. If you accept PayPal payments, show the PayPal logo. Most importantly, ensure that your overall site design is professional, usable, and easy to understand. If it appears that you spent 10 minutes designing your website, you'll be lucky to get 10 seconds from your visitors.

## 8. Make the Next Step Impossible to Miss

Put yourself in the place of a first time visitor. By taking a cold, hard look at your landing page, is it clear what action you want the visitor to perform? If you want a visitor to contact you, is the contact us link the most prominent feature on the page? If you want a potential customer to add a product to the shopping cart, does the Add to Cart button stand out above the rest?

## 9. Test, Test, and Test Again

Testing is not something you do when you have time, it must be done *every* time. Begin by analyzing your landing pages with your website analytics software, you'll be able to

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**“Testing is not  
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monitor bounces rates. Below are a few free or low cost analytic solutions to help monitor the effectiveness of your landing pages.

1. [Google Website Optimizer](#) – Allows you to test multiple variables at once and determine the best combination of them. This service is free as long as you have a Google Adwords account.
2. [CrazyEgg](#) – Confetti based analytics allows you to see exactly where users click, even if the element is not a hyperlink. The service is free for up to 1000 visitors per month.
3. [CamStudio](#) – Free screen recording software. Great for recording actions of a test panel as they complete actions on your website.
4. [Clicktale](#) – Clicktale is an alternative web analytics solution that allows you to record the the on-screen experience of your visitors, from the first page they visit to the last.

# Site Navigation

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Have you ever gotten lost while driving through an area you're not familiar with? We've all shared that frustrating experience. Your site's navigation structure is essentially the highway of your website. If the paths are confusing, inconsistent, or broken, your users will abandon the effort, regardless of the quality of your products. In this section, I'll suggest some tips for improving the all important navigation of your eCommerce site.

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**“Your site’s navigation structure is essentially the highway of your website.”**

## 10. Alternative Navigation Themes

While most sites opt for a navigation structure based on product categories, you might want to consider offering additional ways of browsing your products. For example, Seabear.com offers navigation based on 4 different themes: the usual product category based, Gift giving, entertaining, and healthy dining.



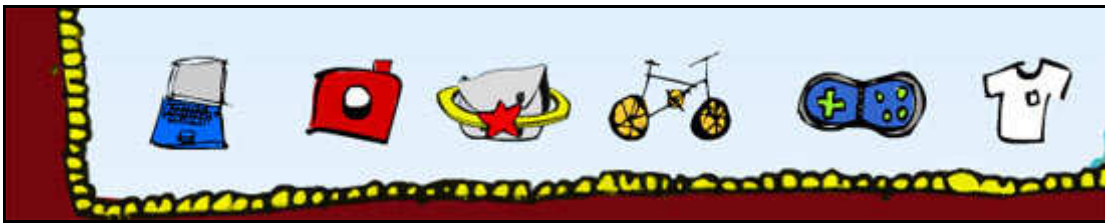
Site Navigation on [www.seabear.com](http://www.seabear.com).



Shop by Category or Makeup Color on [www.lancome.com](http://www.lancome.com).

## 11. Use Vertical or Horizontal Navigation

Don't get fancy and put your navigation structure on the right hand side or the bottom of the site. Since visitors are accustomed to vertical or left navs, this is the equivalent to telling them to drive on the wrong side of the road. CrumplerBags.com uses an entirely image based navigation at the bottom left hand side of the website. Artsy navigation schemes such as this might look pretty, but won't land you many sales.



Confusing, icon based navigation on [www.crumplerbags.com](http://www.crumplerbags.com).

## 12. Use Breadcrumb Trails

There is no greater navigation tool than Breadcrumb (aka Cookie crumb) trails. It easily allows visitors to go up or down a level and re-orient themselves when they get lost. In addition, when a first time visitor lands directly on a product or category page, they can immediately know how to backtrack.



Breadcrumb Navigation Trail on [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com).

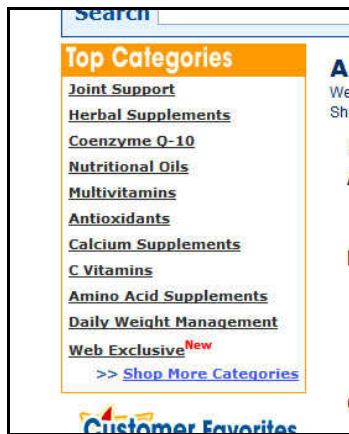
### 13. Limit Number of Menu Options

Typically, you shouldn't include more than 8-12 options on your primary navigation. More than this and you users may feel overwhelmed. Puritan's Pride, which sells vitamins and supplements in dozens of different categories, neatly groups their products into top categories, then allows visitors to dig deeper by clicking on a "Shop More Categories" option.

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**“Customers are trained to expect things to be in the same place every time. Don't frustrate them by moving links around.”**

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Example of effective site navigation at [www.puritan.com](http://www.puritan.com).

### 14. Keep Navigation Consistent

Never change anything on your navigation from page to page. This is extremely confusing and unprofessional. Customers are trained to expect things to be in the same place every time. Don't frustrate them by moving

links around. From a technical point of view, the easiest way to accomplish consistent navigation is by using server side includes.

## 15. Don't Link to the Page Visitors are Already On

Any time a visitor is given the option to click a link, it is assumed that it will take them to a different page. There's nothing more disorienting than landing on the page you are already viewing. Many users will simply assume the link didn't work.

Some usability experts, most notably Jakob Nielsen, also discourage using links that navigate to different areas within the same page. This tactic is frequently used on long pages such as an FAQ page. Clicking a link at the top will bring you to the relevant area below.

## 16. Prioritize the Your Navigation Links

Make sure your menu items are listed in priority from left to right or from top to bottom. Ask yourself "what action do I want the visitor to take?" Then lead your visitors along this path. You may want to order your product categories based on the importance of profitability of the individual product department.

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**“Ask yourself “What action do I want the visitor to take?”  
Then lead your visitors along this path.”**

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## 17. Show Visitors Where They Are

I strongly recommend using some sort of indicator in your primary navigation to show users where they are. For example, if your site uses tabs in the navigation, change the color of the category that is currently being viewed.



Example of differentiated tabbed browsing on [www.jcp.com](http://www.jcp.com).

## 18. Show Visitors Where They've Been




In addition, be sure to change color of visited text links so the user doesn't accidentally visit a page he or she has already been to. While some web designers dislike giving up this design preference, it will greatly help orient your site visitors. In addition, show a history of product pages that have recently viewed. This will allow browsers to easily return to a product they were interested in.



Example of changing "visited" link color on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

**Your Recent History** ([What's this?](#))

**Recently Viewed Products**

-  [Beginning PHP and PostgreSQL E-Commerce: F...](#) by Emilian Balanescu
-  [Beginning ASP .NET 2.0 E-Commerce in C# 2005:...](#) by Cristian Darie
-  [Streetwise ECommerce: Establish Your Online Bu...](#) by Aliza Rishahl
-  [Ultimate Guide to Google AdWords \(Ultimate Gu...](#) by Perry Marshall

**Recent Searches**

[ecommerce](#) (Books)

[View & edit Your Browsing History](#)

Example of page view history on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 19. Test Your Dynamic Rollover Menus

Dynamic rollover navigation can be a great tool to prevent users from making extra clicks in order to navigate to a page. However, depending on browser settings, this type of navigation can be finicky. Make sure you test your JavaScript, DHMTL, or CSS menus in multiple browser platforms.

## 20. Don't Stuff SEO Keywords into Nav

Inserting repetitive keywords into the site navigation requires the user to mentally remove the keyword in order to understand the menu item. In addition, keyword stuffing is both

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**“Inserting repetitive keywords into the site navigation requires the user to mentally remove the keyword in order to understand the link.”**

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unprofessional and useless from an SEO point of view. Keywords within the universal navigation of a website are rarely considered as a ranking factor.

## 21. Use Readable Fonts

Resist the temptation to make your navigation look like a piece of art. While attractive graphics have a very important place in a website, they certainly do not belong in the navigation.

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**“Resist the temptation to make your navigation look like a piece of art.”**

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## 22. Company Logo Linking to Home Page

Your company logo (usually located in the upper left corner), should always take visitors back to your home page. This is so basic, yet I run across sites on a daily basis that don't make their company logo clickable.



# Site Search

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No matter how effective your navigation is, impatient users will frequently default to using site search. After all, we've been trained to do so. This fact is illustrated perfectly by considering the dominance of search engines such as Google over web directories. Unfortunately for the user, internal site search features rarely perform as well as major search engines.

Why optimize your internal site search? For one, some studies suggest internal site search users convert 3 times better than users who don't use search, assuming their query returns relevant results. This chapter will cover some of the major problems of eCommerce site search and suggest solutions.

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**“Some studies suggest internal site search users convert 3 times better than users who don't.”**

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## 23. Know What Visitors are Searching For

Optimizing internal site search begins with understanding what visitors are search for, how often, and why. Do users resort to site search because of poor site navigation? Are certain queries performed over and over? Your website analytics must answer these questions. In addition, track what percentage of search queries return no results. As you improve this feature, you'll have a metrics to benchmark your progress. Google Analytics offers a site search tracking feature.



## 24. Intelligent Search Suggestions

An intelligent site search feature that suggests common searches as you type is an excellent usability feature that can prevent website visitors from making queries that return no results or irrelevant items.



Example of AJAX powered Intelligent Site Search at [www.foodnetwork.com](http://www.foodnetwork.com).

## 25. Focus on Short-Tail Searches

While long tail searches have been the focus of organic SEO for quite some time, you may find it more effective to optimize for more frequently searched keywords.

Do an 80/20 analysis by taking a look at your web analytics and determining what are you most frequently searched for keywords? When visitors search for these keywords, how relevant and optimized is the search results page? Focused on these high volume keywords first, in order to get the most bang for your buck.

## 26. Show Non-Product Results

If you analyze your log files, you'll likely find many search queries are not related to products. For example, visitors will commonly search for terms such as "return policy" or "order tracking." In addition, many site users will ask questions the same way they would to a real person. For example, you may find customer search for "what is your return policy?" or "how do I track my order?" Make sure your site search can display results from your site content as well as your product database.

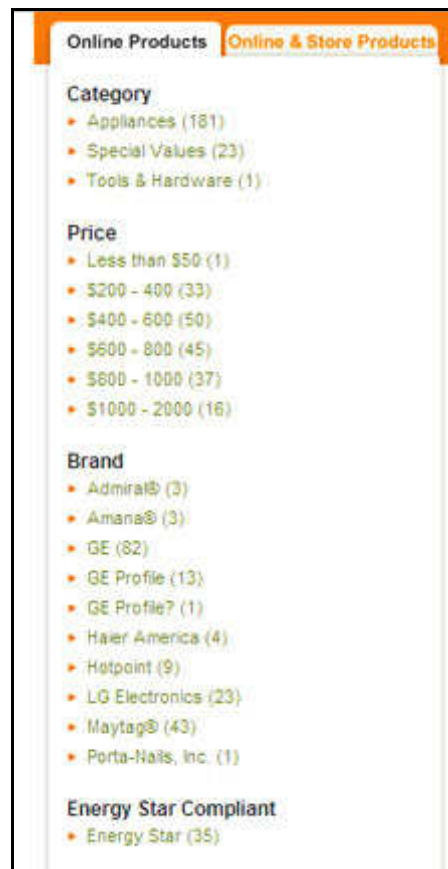
Ironically, a search for "Return Policy" on Amazon.com yields only products with those keywords contained in them. Nowhere will you find a result linking to their Returns page.

## 27. Optimize for SEO Keyword Searches

If you rely on SEO or PPC to drive site traffic, make sure that your internal site search can return results for the keyword phrases you rank for or bid on. For example, if your site ranks for "ipod accessories", you may find that visitors immediately perform that same query on your internal site search. If the search returns no results, you'll probably lose your would-be customer.

## 28. Filters and Sorts

It can be frustrating when a site search query returns too many results. Allow your visitors to filter down the results to increase the relevancy. Common filter criteria are age (newness), price, department, color, and popularity.



Robust Search filtering on [www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com).

## 29. Handle Misspelled Search Terms

By analyzing searches that return no results, you should be able to identify commonly misspelled search terms. Because search engines such as Google have become sophisticated enough to suggest corrected spellings of words, your customer may expect the same from your site.

## 30. Eliminate Expired Page Errors

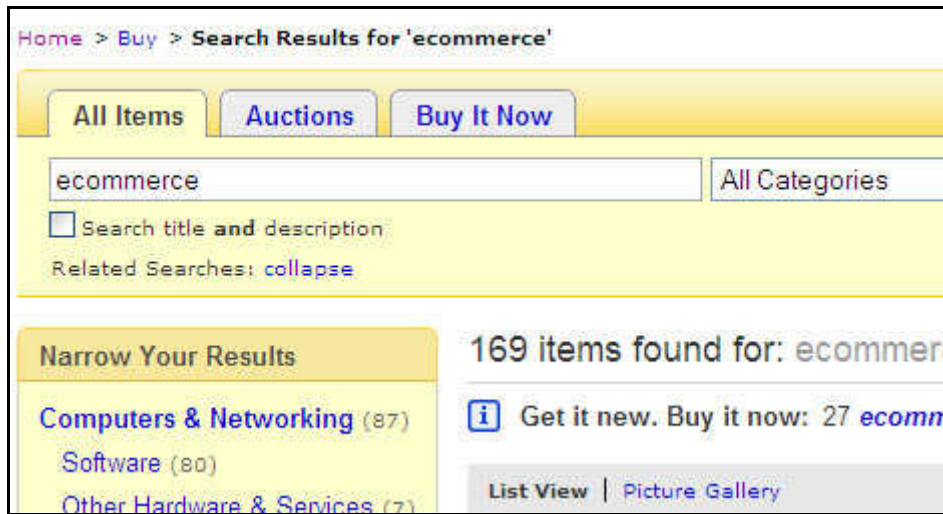
There's nothing worse than hitting the back button on a browser, and getting "This page has expired" error. This preventable error occurs frequently on search pages that submit queries via the "post" method.

## 31. Search by Item Number

Make sure your site search can handle item number queries. When a user enters an item number that matches a product in your inventory, take them directly to the product page rather than the search results.

## 32. Show Last Search Query in Search Box

After a user performs a search, populate the search form field with the exact query the customer entered. This will allow them to realize if they made a typo when searching.



Example of search field populated with last query on [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com).

# Product Category Pages

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An extremely crucial step in the buying process occurs on the product category page. Typically, product category pages show listings for all products within a certain category, and provide a link to get more detail on the product page. Every product based e-commerce store has them, but not all of them are equally optimized. While the suggestions below vary greatly in their complexity and may not suite all businesses, I hope you'll find something you can implement on your site.

## 33. Auto Return after Add to Cart

Don't automatically assume your customers are done shopping. After adding an item to their shopping cart, automatically return them to the last product category page they were viewing. Just be sure to make it clear the item was successfully added to the cart.

## 34. More Items Per Page

In the days of dial-up internet, it was advantageous to show only a few products per page in order to speed up page loading time. With most web users on DSL now, it makes sense to show more products per page, so users don't have to constantly click to the next page.

In nearly every a/b test I've performed, product category pages that display a larger number of products per page result in better conversion. Also, be sure to allow them to view more than the preset amount of items.

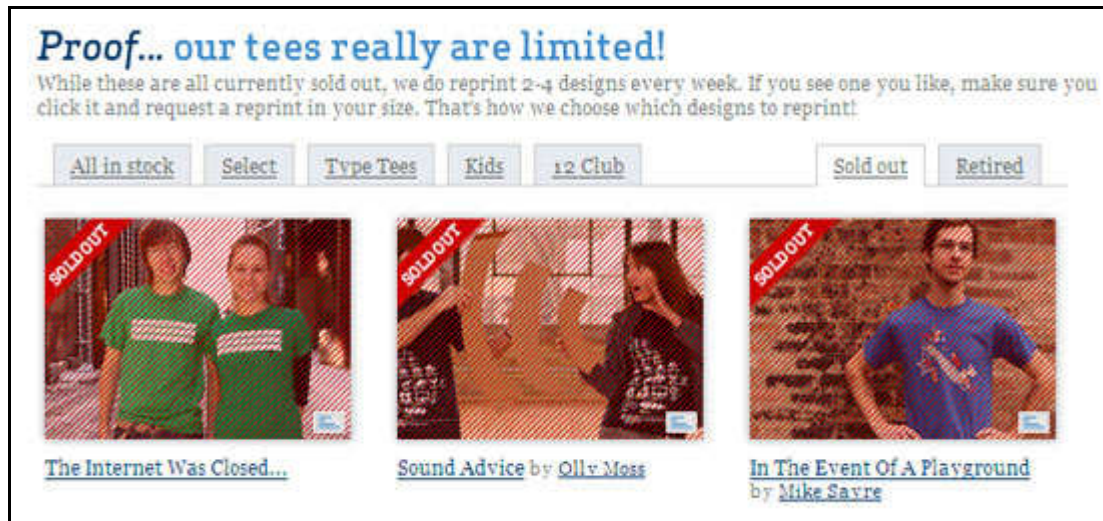
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**“In nearly every a/b test I’ve performed, product category pages that display a larger number of products per page result in better conversion.”**

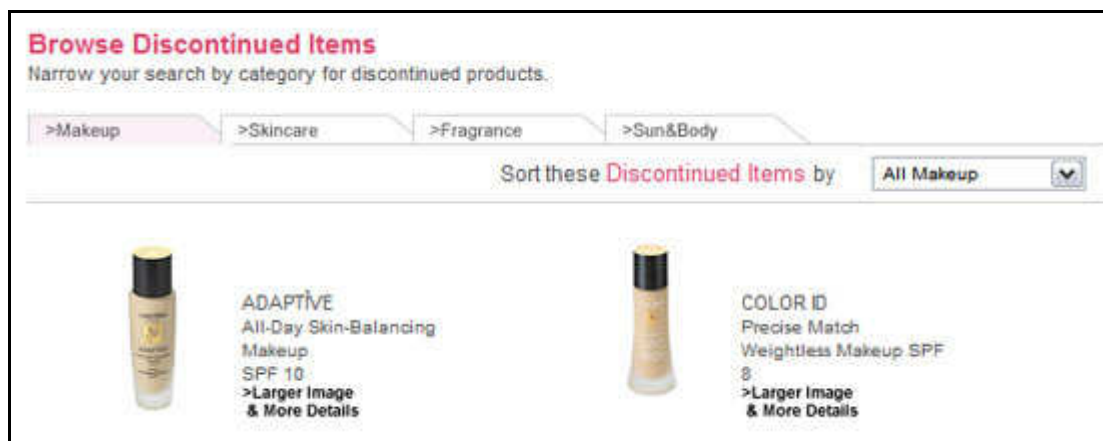
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## 35. Display Out-of-Stock Items Separately

While mixing your in-stock product listings with out-of-stock items can create a disappointing user experience, there are several advantages of continuing to show out-of-stock items on your site in a separate area. Threadless.com allows customers to view t-shirts that are no longer in print. On the product page, customers can request old designs to be re-printed. Another benefit of showing older items would be as a reference tool. Comparing new products to old one's can be a convenient feature that helps the buying decision process.



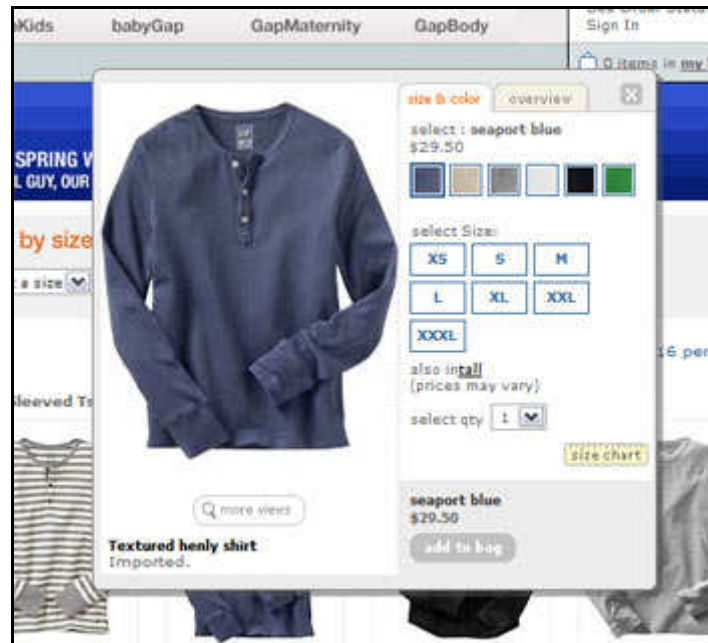
Separate "Sold-Out" Product Listing page on [www.threadless.com](http://www.threadless.com).



Discontinued Items Listing Page at [www.lancome.com](http://www.lancome.com).

## 36. AJAX Quick-View Feature

Many sites are now allowing you to view more product details such as more photos or the description directly on the product listing page. This is a great time saver when used with AJAX, because it doesn't require the customer to leave the product category page.



QuickLook feature on [www.gap.com](http://www.gap.com).

### 37. Add to Cart Button on Listing Page

Don't underestimate the eagerness of your customers to buy. If they know what they are looking for, many won't need to go all the way to the product page in order to click add to cart. If possible, put the "Buy Now" or "Add to Cart" button directly on the product listings page.

### 38. Sort by Price

Let's face it. Price is one of the most important factors for most consumers. Give them a way to answer the ubiquitous question, "which one's the cheapest?" by letting them sort by price.

### 39. Sort by Sale / Clearance

Every customer base has its bargain hunters. Highlight sale or clearance price merchandise by letting them view those items first.

#### 40. Sort by Age

Repeat visitors will greatly appreciate being able to quickly see which items are new since their last visit. In fact, it's probably advantageous to sort by product age (newest first) by default on all product category pages.

#### 41. Sort by User Ratings

Product peer reviews are becoming increasingly important to online shoppers. Many have begun to expect them. Let people easily see which products are rated the best by other buyers.

#### 42. Sort by Best Seller

No one likes to feel they are the first one buying something. Ever heard of this psychological merchandising trick? Make a perfectly stacked pile of widgets and place them in a prime location in a store, and they won't sell. However, take a few widgets out of the pile, and people think they are selling like hot-cakes and grab one for themselves. All that to say... let your visitors view the top selling products first.

#### 43. Filter by Brand

For the brand conscience, let people filter down and eliminate items they don't want to see. Remember, once they are on your product listing pages, your goal should not be to show them as many products as possible, but rather to filter down to the ones they are interested in.

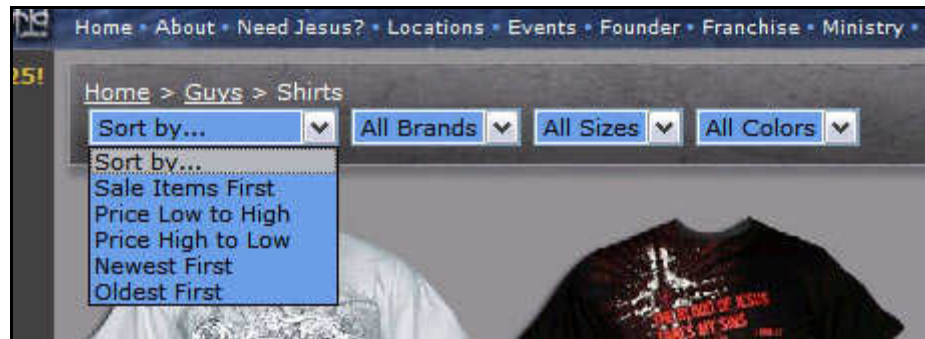
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**“Price is one of the most important factors for most consumers. Give them a way to answer the ubiquitous question, “which one’s the cheapest?””**

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#### 44. Filter by Color/Size/etc

Have you ever shopped the clearance rack at a clothing store? Usually, items are merchandised by size. Or take shopping for paint at a hardware store. Most people walk right to the color family they desire, then decide from there. What your e-business sells will determine what type of filters you should create. View a good example of filtering here.



Example of Category, price, and department filters on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

#### 45. “Save These Settings” Feature

Suppose you’re browsing a certain product category on a site. After telling the website you want to see the items sorted by lowest price first with 50 products per page, you’re irritated to find that your settings have been lost when you move to a different product category. To prevent situations like this, save a user’s settings to the most recently selected ones, or allow them to click an option to save them across the whole site.

#### 46. Click to Any Page Navigation

I can’t stand it when a website only gives you a “previous” and “next” button to click through the product category. Allow visitors to go exactly to the page number they desire by creating hyperlinks to each page number.

#### 47. Sorting/Filtering Options at Top & Bottom

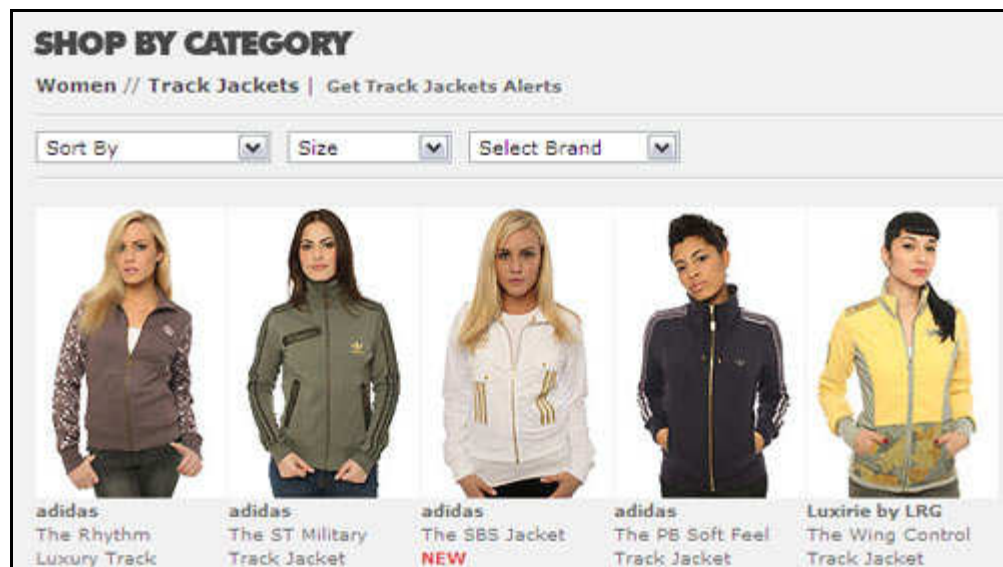
It's important to show your filtering options on both the top and bottom of your category pages. While most sites show them on top, many neglect to feature them for easy access at the bottom of the page as well.

## 48. Highlight New & Sale Merchandise

When repeat visitors land on your product category pages, many will wonder "what's new?" or "what's on sale?" Include an icon or other indicator to show that an item is on sale or is brand new.

## 49. Show "Real Life" Photos

Showing pics of your products in real life situations brings your pages to life and is much more appealing than a dull list of names and prices. Rather than displaying their clothing on boring manequin's Urban Clothing retailer Karmaloop show model pictures on their product category pages.



Real Life Pictures at [www.karmaloop.com](http://www.karmaloop.com).

## 50. Prominent Search Function

People tend to use search as the first resort or the last resort. If they are unable to find what they want from browsing your category pages, they will look for a search option. Make this feature available on every page of your site.

## 51. Make Product Images Clickable

I'm still surprised when I see sites that force you to click on the text of the product name to get to the product page. Make sure the product image is clickable as well.

## 52. Auto Following Nav

Most sites have a left or top navigation structure. However, unless the site uses frames, when the user scrolls down, this navigation will not be accessible. Create a dynamic navigation that follows them down the page. This will ensure they are able easily move to a different category.

## 53. Need Help Deciding Feature

It's a well-known fact that having too many products to choose from can be just as bad as not having enough. Help your customers make a decision by linking to a "Help Me Decide" page that compares the benefits of each product type. CompUSA uses Guidester's search technology to simulate a real life question and answer experience with a knowledgeable sales associate.

To view Guidester's customized product recommendations, answer the questions below then click the Show Results button.

[Frequently Asked Questions >](#)

**Select from the Criteria Below**

**You & Your Needs** ?

Which statement best describes you? ?

I prefer to buy the best technology

My primary consideration is cost / value

Neither of these statements apply to me

Select any statement that describes your needs: ?

*I primarily need a monitor...*

...for gaming and multimedia applications

...that I can mount on a wall

...that is flexible and adjustable

...with built-in speakers

...with a wide screen


**Screen Size, Resolution** ?

**Price** ?


**Type (CRT, LCD...)** ?

**Available Products**


« Prev | 1 2 3 4 5+ | Next »

- 

**1. Acer AL1516AB**  
**Price: \$171.99**  
 15" LCD Monitor  
 250 cd/m<sup>2</sup> Brightness  
 600:1 Contrast Ratio  
 1024 x 768 Max. Resolution

Compare
- 

**2. Acer AL1916WAb**  
**Price: \$194.99**  
 19" LCD Monitor  
 300 cd/m<sup>2</sup> Brightness  
 700:1 Contrast Ratio  
 1440 x 900 Max. Resolution  
 .294mm Pixel Dot Pitch

Compare
- 

**3. Acer AL1917WAbd**  
**Price: \$169.99**  
 19" LCD Monitor  
 300 cd/m<sup>2</sup> Brightness  
 700:1 Contrast Ratio  
 1440 x 900 Max. Resolution  
 .294mm Pixel Dot Pitch

Compare

**guidester**

**51**  
PRODUCTS FOUND

**SHOW RESULTS >>**

Help Me Decide feature at [www.compusa.com](http://www.compusa.com).

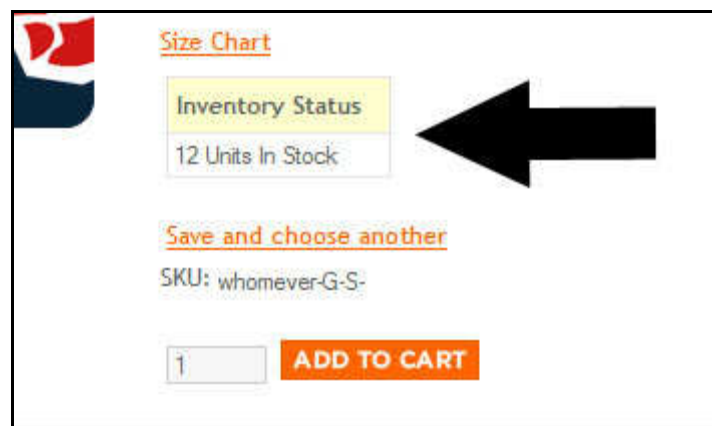
# Product Pages

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I'm constantly astonished at how many large e-commerce sites have seriously deficient product pages. Many large companies, especially click-and-mortar retailers, seem to forget that products cannot be touched, tasted, or tested over the internet. While the internet will never perfectly mimic the in-store experience, there are dozens of tactics that can be implemented on the product page to increase customer engagement and convert visitors into buyers. Below I'll describe 25 methods I've either used or seen used by other online retailers.

## 54. Low-Stock Indicator

In order to create a sense of urgency, show some type of indicator when a product is close to being sold out. This will likely increase the chances of the customer taking action now, rather than waiting until later and finding the product is no longer available. Below are a few examples of this on e-commerce sites.



Low-Stock Indicator on [www.glarkware.com](http://www.glarkware.com)



Low-Stock Indicator on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 55. More / Better Product Photos

It's important to remember that unlike you, your customers may have never seen nor handled your products before. Therefore, take pictures of every possible angle a customer would want to see. Also, make sure the quality is acceptable.

## 56. Suggest Replacements for Discontinued Items

Pop-ups



Suggested Replacement for Discontinued Item on [www.lancome.com](http://www.lancome.com).

## Enlarge Images without Pop-up

Pop-ups suffer from several usability problems. First, pop-up blockers prevent them from opening at times, confusing users. Second, different browsers handle them different, some not sizing them properly, others loading them slowly. Prevent these problems by displaying enlarged product images in

## 57. Flash Zoom with Different Angles

Many advanced e-commerce customers have implemented flash technology to allow zooming and changing angles. If you have the expertise and the resources, this is a killer add on feature for any product page.

[Zoomify](#) offers a great free tool that creates a flash zoom file from an existing high resolution photograph.



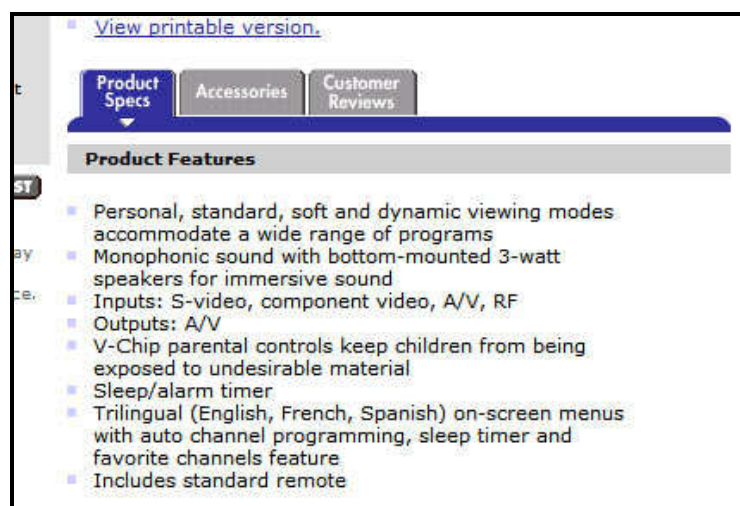
Product zoom feature on [www.rampage.com](http://www.rampage.com).



Product zoom feature on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 58. Tabbed Product Details

In order to prevent page clutter and improve organization, hide certain product details such as specs, reviews, or add-on items behind individual tabs.



Tabbed product information on [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com).

## 59. Show Where the Product was made

People care immensely about this. Whether they are concerned about ethical working conditions, or just for quality reasons, be sure to tell them where your products are made. If they are made somewhere besides the US, be sure to put a link to your fair labor policy, so your customers don't think you're using sweatshops.

## 60. List benefits, not just features

Don't rattle of an endless bullet list of technical specifications. Tell customers specifically how this product will improve their life.

## 61. Show Product Return History

One question at the back of your customers mind may be returns. Shoeline.com created an innovative "Return-o-Meter" function that shows customers how frequently other customers returned a product.



*Return-o-Meter at [www.shoeline.com](http://www.shoeline.com).*

## 62. Show product measurements or weight

Remember, they can't actually touch and hold your product over the internet. Give them the next best thing with the measurements and weight.

MEASUREMENTS / FIT / MATERIAL FOR: One Nation			
Size	Chest	Length	Sleeve
SM	36	25.5	14
MD	41	27.5	15
LG	44	29.5	16
XL	49	31	16
XX	50	32.5	16

\* all measurements are shown in inches  
[How to measure](#) - [Convert to Centimeters](#)

FABRIC THICKNESS

STANDARD



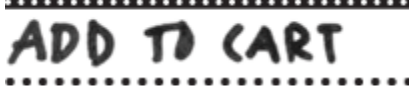


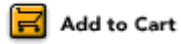





Detailed Product Measurements at [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

### 63. Make “Add to Cart” Impossible to miss

The “Add to Cart” or “Buy Now” button should reach out and grab your attention. Avoid tiny, vague “Add to Bag” buttons such as the one on Gap’s product page.

Below is a sample of several good and bad examples of Add to Cart buttons.

		
<p>Amazon's add to cart button is salient, and stands apart from the rest of the product page.</p>	<p>What's a bag?</p>	<p>Good size, but doesn't look like a button at all.</p>
		
<p>What's a bag? Is this an ad or a button?</p>	<p>Very clickable, but small and “Buy” may convey too much of a commitment</p>	<p>You'll need a magnifying glass to find this one.</p>
		
<p>Well branded, but branding shouldn't trump usability</p>	<p>Order Now is a great call to action, but may discourage using the cart for comparison</p>	<p>Quite possibly the worst add to cart button I've ever seen</p>
<p>Source:  <a href="http://www.getelastic.com">http://www.getelastic.com</a>.</p>		

### 64. Allow customer generated product reviews

This will both increase the amount of trust your website receives and add valuable content for the search engines. Worried about negative product reviews? Don't, the experts say it can be one of the greatest tools to show your customers you are transparent and trustworthy.



Detail Product Review summary at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 65. Ask a Question Link

Don't leave your customers hanging with nagging questions about a products. Add a link that emails your customer service department so customers can ask a specific question about the product. This also serves as a great feedback tool so you know what information needs to be put on the product page to prevent questions.

**RAMPAGE** [CLOSE]

Ask a question about this item:

\* signifies a required field

Your name: \*

Your email address: \*

Your phone number:

Your question or message: \*

Please respond via:  email  phone  none required

SEND

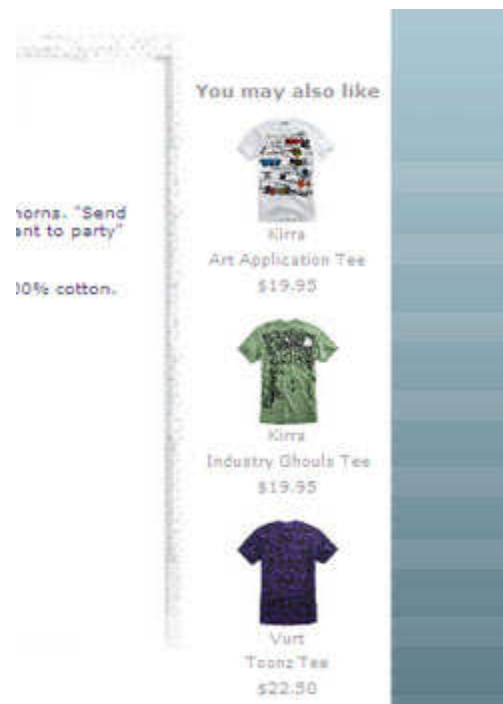
Black Cotton Vest

[CLOSE]

Ask a Question feature on [www.rampage.com](http://www.rampage.com).

## 66. Show Related Products

Having a “customer who bought this also liked...” section is a great way to cross sell. A product page can be a dead end if the customer is not interested in what they are viewing. Always give them somewhere else to go.



Product cross-sells on [www.pacsun.com](http://www.pacsun.com).



Video Reviews on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 67. Include SEO terms in Title Tag

If you sell moisturizer cream, don't just put the product name in the title tag. Create an extra field in your product database that people will likely search for such as "Cure for Dry skin." Below is an example of a recommended title tag format.

<title>SEO Term > Product Name > Category or Brand Name > Site Name</title>

## 68. Foreign Currency converter

Have you ever been to a site that showed currency in something other than US dollars? I have, and I usually leave because I am too lazy to convert it. Including a currency converter link near the price will help encourage your international business. If you don't want to clutter up your product page, you can even program the link to only show if the user has a non-US IP address.



Currency Converter Feature on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 69. Add a Wish list

Wish list's are a great way to create stickiness and possibly even reduce shopping cart abandonment. People tend to use shopping carts as wish lists, so giving them to real thing will allow you to more accurately track your true shopping cart abandonment.

## 70. Email Me When It's Re-stocked Button

Many sites, especially apparel retailers, may sell out of a certain size or variety of a product. Rather than throwing up a "Out of Stock" notice on the product page, why not allow people to be emailed when the item is re-stocked? In my experience, this is one of those features that really surprises and delights customers who are otherwise already frustrated.



Request Reprint feature on [www.threadless.com](http://www.threadless.com).

## 71. Email Me Before It Sells Out Button

People tend to wait to the last minute. But what if you warned them before the item sells out? There's no greater way to create a sense of urgency than by sending an email saying "Hurry, it's about to sell out!"

Email Before Item Sells Out Feature on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 72. Email Me When Products Like this are Added

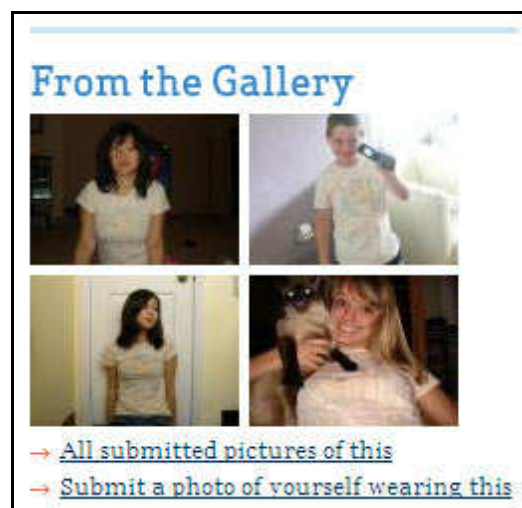
Customers are tired of generic, one size fits all email newsletters. Give them something they really care about by creating a system where they can request to be notified when product within certain categories are added to the site.

## 73. Social Bookmarking Links

Although its not typical to see a Digg or Delicious button on an e-commerce site, it may work well for certain buzzworthy products, such as t-shirts from Threadless.

## 74. Customer Generated Photos

Allow your customers to upload pictures of them using your products. This works great for apparel retailers, or anything where people take pride in using a product.



User Submitted photos on [www.threadless.com](http://www.threadless.com).

## 75. Audio Testimonials

This is becoming common as sales pages for eBooks or other informational products. A testimonial that can be listened to will probably hold more weight than simple text on a page.

## 76. Video Product Demonstrations

This is becoming common as sales pages for eBooks or other



Product demonstration video from [www.tigerdirect.com](http://www.tigerdirect.com).

## 77. Video Testimonials

Even better than just audio, allow for full video testimonials. If you have the videos hosted by You Tube, you can also spur a viral marketing campaign.

## 78. Video Product Demonstrations

Even better than just audio, allow for full video testimonials. If you have the videos hosted by You Tube, you can also spur a viral marketing campaign.



Product demonstration video for GPS Unit at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 79. Link to the Product Manual

By linking to a PDF of the owner's manual, you'll provide the answer to nearly every possible question about a product. In addition, you'll provide a useful tool for existing users of the product, as well as good search engine bait for those looking to find the manual online.

## 80. Provide Warranty Details

This allows customers to navigate more efficiently and return to where they just were.

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**“The golden rule for product pages is to answer questions before they are asked.”**

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## 81. Gift Reminders

Delightful Deliveries allows you to create emailed gift reminders. From the product page, customers can click a link to a form that allows them to enter the occasion, recipient name, and date of the occasion. The website will automatically email you a link back to the product page, reminding you to purchase the gift.

Tell us when to remind you about, **Red Velvet Bouquet- Red Roses**, as a special gift and we'll email you at that time.  
Just complete the form below and we'll make sure you don't forget.

What is the occasion:

For Whom:

When:  

Send Reminder # days in advance:

Memo:

Emailed Gift Reminder feature on [www.delightfuldeliveries.com](http://www.delightfuldeliveries.com).

## 82. Multiple Add to Cart Buttons

If your product pages are lengthy and require scrolling, place additional Add to Cart buttons through the page. As your customers read product descriptions, reviews, view pictures, they should always have quick access to the buy button. A good rule of thumb is to make sure your Add to Cart button is visible at all times.

## 83. Ask for Page Feedback

Tiger Direct displays a form at the bottom of their product pages, giving visitors the opportunity to comment on the clarity and accuracy of the product description and photographs. While this is certainly not a replacement for careful proofreading, it does show a company values correct product information.

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**“A good rule of thumb is to make sure your Add to Cart button is visible at all times.”**


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**Help us continuously improve by reporting any errors on this page:**

- The information above is incorrect or conflicting.
- This page has misspellings and/or bad grammar.
- This page did not load correctly on my browser or generated an error.
- The rebate information is incorrect.

Please provide an example of any missing or incorrect information.  
Again, if you need immediate Customer Service assistance, [click here](#).

Email Address:

 SUBMIT MY INFO

Page Feedback form on [www.tigerdirect.com](http://www.tigerdirect.com).



### SUGGESTION BOX

Every voice counts, so stand up and be heard! You encountered a technical issue on this page, we were unable to reply directly to suggestions.

 SUBMIT For additional information, [click here](#) to view

Suggestion Box on Product page at [www.buy.com](http://www.buy.com).

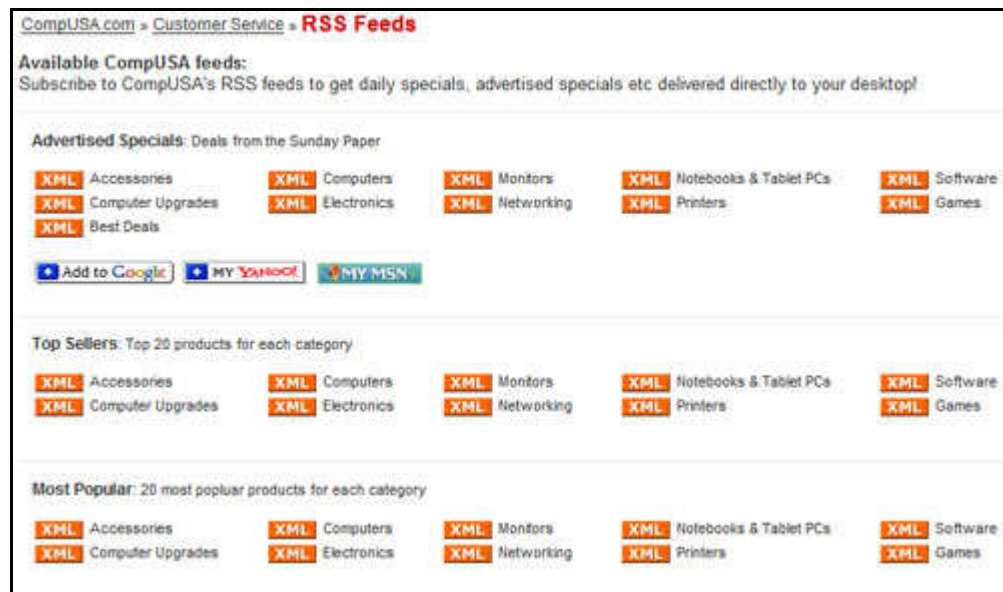
## 84. Browser Bookmark Button

Don't let them forget your site. With a simple JavaScript command, you can trigger their browser to bookmark your product.

## 85. RSS Product Feeds

With the integration of a feed reader into Microsoft's IE 7, Rss feeds will likely move out of the early adopter stage and become more mainstream. With the abundance of SPAM in the inbox, receiving product updates through

an RSS feed is a great alternative for keeping your customers informed. CompUSA boasts an incredible assortment of product related RSS feeds.



Product related RSS feeds on [www.compusa.com](http://www.compusa.com).

## 86. Social Bookmarking Shortcuts

While not all products are buzz worthy enough for social bookmarking sites, you might consider placing social bookmarking links for sites such as Delicious, Digg, Stumbleupon, or Furl on your product pages. If your customers are excited about sharing your products with others, this provides an easy tool for obtaining traffic from these hot sites.

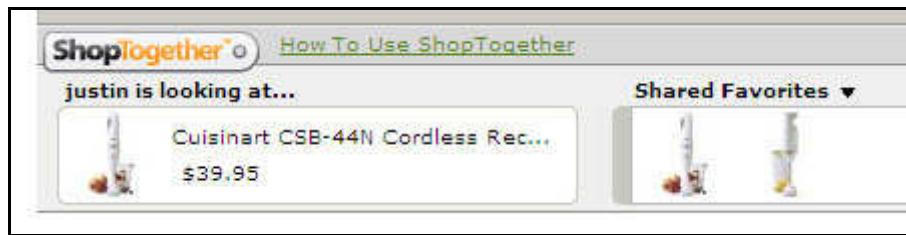


Social Bookmarking links on product pages at [www.tigerdirect.com](http://www.tigerdirect.com).

While many products are not buzz worthy enough for social bookmarking sites, you might consider placing social bookmarking links for sites such as Delicious, Digg, Stumbleupon, or Furl on your product pages. If your customers are excited about sharing your products with others, this provides an easy tool for obtaining traffic from these hot sites.

## 87. Social Shopping Feature

An obvious shortcoming of online shopping is the lack of social interaction. Sharing a shopping trip to the mall with friends is not an experience that can easily be duplicated online. Netshops has come close, however, with their ShopTogether feature. Two or more friends can login to the site from different locations, and see which items each other are viewing, and well as add items to a shared favorites list.



*ShopTogether feature on [www.netshops.com](http://www.netshops.com).*

# Shopping Cart

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Shopping cart abandonment is every online merchant's worst fear. After all, with all that you invest in marketing your website, it's painful to leave money on the table when would-be buyers don't convert to sales. In this post, I'll share some ways to improve your shopping cart that I've used or seen used by other savvy online retailers.

## 88. Email Me When Cart Inventory Is Low

Do your customers a favor and send them a reminder email when an item currently in their shopping cart is close to selling out.

## 89. Show Similar Items Feature

When customers are viewing the items in their cart, offer to show them similar items. Amazon does this well, as shown below.



Similar Items feature on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 90. Add Product Thumbnail Images

It's easy for visitors to forget what they added to their cart. Remind them by displaying a small product image next to the name. Remember, visitors don't know the product names as well as you do, so they need a visual reminder.

## 91. Your Just X Dollars away from Free shipping

Most e-commerce sites offer free shipping at a certain level. Remind your customers of this by displaying a prominent message letting them know how much more they need to spend to receive the promotion.




Free Shipping Ad on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 92. Buy X Get X Free

If you offer some sort of BOGO promotion, the shopping cart is a great place to display a message such as "Buy 1 more, get a 3rd FREE."

## 93. Show Shipping Prices Early

For me, the thing that frustrates me most is when websites require me to enter my shipping info in order to calculate the shipping price. Simplify this by showing the shipping prices as early as possible. If your website calculate shipping prices based on the destination zip code, allow visitors to calculate the cost without having to enter all their personal info.



Shipping Cost Calculator on [www.groovycandies.com](http://www.groovycandies.com).

## 94. Show Shipping Times Estimate

UPS, Fedex, and USPS offer different service time commitments to different parts of the country. Show a map of these estimated to shipping times to reassure your customers they will get their order on time. Delightful Deliveries shows an exact delivery date next to each shipping option.



	Price:	Arrives:
<input type="radio"/>	\$09.99	Mon, Jan 21-Fri, Jan 25
<input type="radio"/>	\$13.99	Mon, Jan 21-Wed, Jan 23
<input type="radio"/>	\$17.99	Mon, Jan 21-Tue, Jan 22
<input type="radio"/>	\$25.99	Mon, Jan 21

Delivery date estimates on [www.delightfuldeliveries.com](http://www.delightfuldeliveries.com).

## 95. Show What Method(s) order will ship

For many, the shipping method is as important as the shipping price. Some customers may have reservations about certain shipping methods. In addition, customer with rural address may only be able to get service from UPS or Fedex. Customer with PO Boxes will only be able to get deliveries from US Mail.

## 96. Cross-sell Items

The shopping cart is a great place to suggest similar items to that which are already in the cart. Just make sure the suggestions does not get in the way of the checkout process.

## 97. Up-sell Items

The shopping cart is a great place to let customers know about another product that may better serve their needs. Again, remember to soft sell so as to not confuse the checkout process.

## 98. Link Back to the Product Page

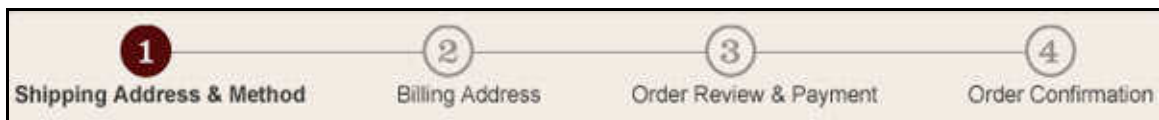
It's very easy to forget the features or other details about the products in your cart. Make it easy for your buyers to get back to the product page by providing a link from the shopping cart.

## 99. Feature Comparison

Show as much detail as possible on the cart page in order to let shoppers compare features. If you can't fit all the relevant information, include a "compare" link that allows them to compare all the features at a glance.

## 100. Checkout Progress Bar

People want to know that your checkout process is fast and easy. Display a progress indicator to let them know where they are, and how much further they need to go.



Checkout progress indicator at [www.seabear.com](http://www.seabear.com).



Checkout progress indicator bar on [www.buy.com](http://www.buy.com).

## 101. Make Your Cart Button Highly Visible

Above anything else, the “Checkout” button should be the most prominent feature on the shopping cart page. Make it large and bold enough to reach out and grab the user’s attention.

## 102. Add “Checkout” to Cart Button

Most site’s have a ubiquitous “View Cart” button on every page of the site, usually located in the upper right hand of the page. Consider also including the word “Checkout”, since not everyone knows that “View Cart” is the first step to checking out.

## 103. Email Customers with Abandoned Carts

An extremely effective way of capturing lost sales opportunities is to email those customers who abandon their shopping carts. Better yet, offer them a coupon or some other discount to come back and finish the purchase.

## 104. Show Stock on Hand

There’s no greater way to stress urgency than to let customers know how much product you have on hand. While you might not want to show the exact quantity in inventory, you should definitely warn them when a product is close to selling out.

## 105. 1 Click Ordering

A great way to increase your conversion is to skip as much of the shopping cart/checkout process as possible. Pioneered by Amazon, 1 click ordering is a great way to speed up the checkout process.

Quantity: 1 ▼

 Add to Shopping Cart

or

 Buy now with 1-Click®

Ship to:

Justin Palmer ▼

Add gift-wrap/note



## See More Items Like Those In Your Cart

Give them an incentive to spend more by suggesting other items similar to those already in the shopping cart.



## 106. Live Chat Link

Don't let customers abandon their order due to a nagging question. Provide an easy way to get an instant answer to their query.



## 107. Prominent Phone Support Number

Always provide an easy way to speak to a live person. A Prominent toll-free number is not only useful for customers wanting to call, but it also instills trust for those who won't need to call.



## 108. Show Payment Options Early

Customers will be curious as to what payment options you accept early on in the process. Let them know by displaying credit card logos, the Paypal logo, and an e-Check representation.



## 109. Auto-Submit Form Changes

It's common for customers to change the quantity of an item in the cart, and then click "checkout" instead of first clicking the "update" button. You can prevent later confusion by refreshing the quantities in their cart automatically if it is changed.

## 110. Save for Later Button

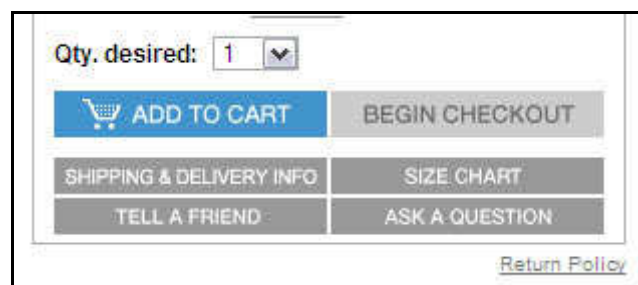
Let's face it, not everyone will complete the purchase the same day they add the item to their cart. Assure them that the items will remain in the cart by allowing them to save it for later. Better yet, email them after a certain amount of time to remind them.

## 111. Security and Privacy Reminder

Assure your visitors your website is secure and trustworthy. Display emblems such as the HackerSafe logo or the BBB Online logo. Also, let your visitors know their personal information will be kept private by linking to your privacy policy.

## 112. Link to Your Return / Exchange Policy

One of the greatest hesitations to buying is worrying about returning a product to an online retailer. Assuage the fears of your customers by linking to your "No Hassle Return Policy."



Link to Return Policy from Product page on [www.rampage.com](http://www.rampage.com).

## 113. Don't Require Registration

One of the greatest hesitations to buying is worrying about returning a product to an online retailer. Assuage the fears of your customers by linking to your "No Hassle

## Registration

### Returning Customers who have set up an account

Email:

Password:

**Login**

Forgot your login? Click [here](#) to reset your password.

### New SeaBear Customer

Don't already have an account with us yet? You can register today for quicker easier checkout, order history and more!

**Guest** This option allows you to checkout without registering.

**Register** Register now with SeaBear.com

Guest Checkout option at [www.seabear.com](http://www.seabear.com).

# Checkout Pages

---

Imagine walking into a busy, high traffic grocery store. Despite the large number of customers in the store, you notice abandoned shopping carts strewn about the aisles and checkout lanes. For many online businesses, this example illustrates perfectly the predicament many online retailers find themselves in. Why? For one, I believe many online retailers rarely actually test their own checkouts from the user's perspective. If they had, they would have identified stumbling blocks. Below I've compiled a fairly comprehensive list of ideas on improving the checkout process.

## 114. Emphasize Security

Every chance you get, remind your customers your site is secure. Possible ways to do this might include simply inserting the word "secure" into a page title, page file or directory name, or button during the checkout process. Below is great example of a checkout button with a security reminder.



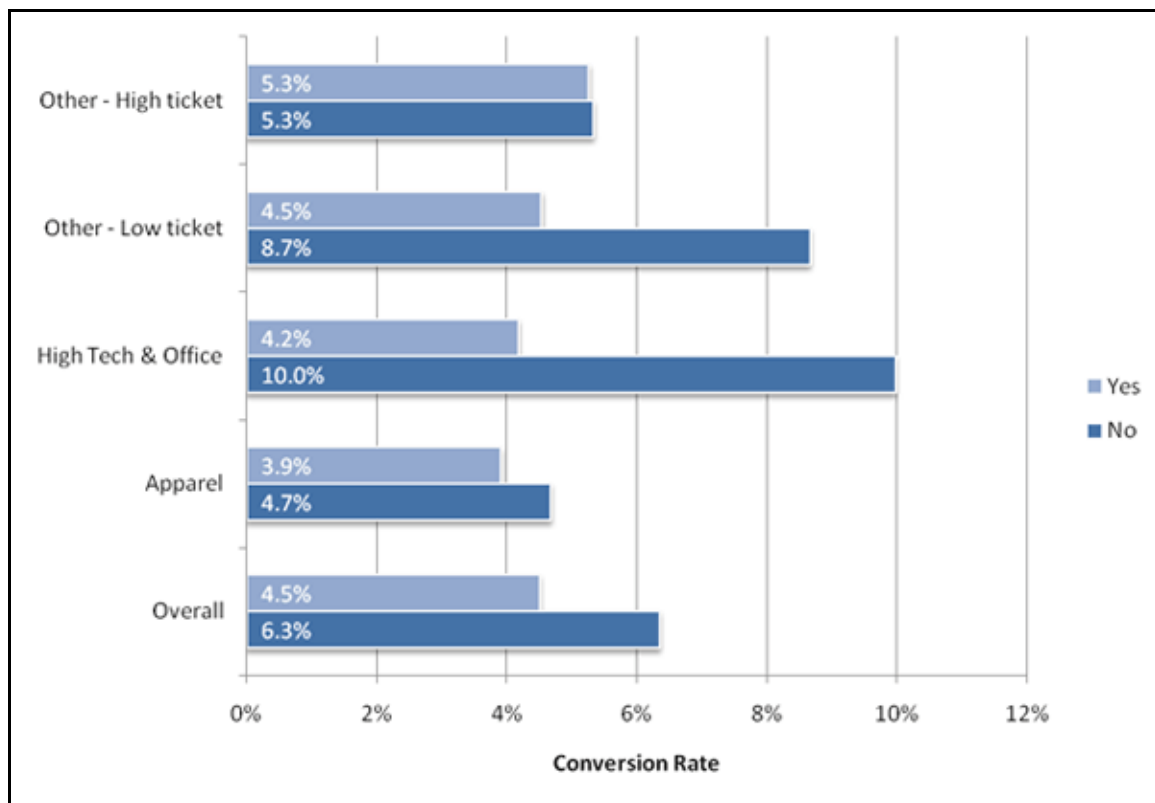
*Example of security reminder on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).*

## 115. Eliminate pages, eliminate scrolling

Many usability experts decry the benefits of shortening the checkout to as few pages as possible. While in theory this works, sometimes the real world provides other factors that must be considered. For example, suppose you combine your whole checkout into 1 page. Sounds great, unless the page is a mile tall and requires excessive vertical scrolling. In my opinion, the basic rule of thumb should be to condense the checkout into as few pages as possible requiring little to no vertical scrolling.

## 116. Don't Require the CVV Code

Yes, you read that right. While it's important to eliminate as much fraudulent activity as possible, an online retailer should never do so at the cost of blocking legitimate orders. There are many reasons requiring a CVV code can decrease your conversion rate. Some customers are very cautious about giving this information out for security reasons. In addition, after a card has been swiped over and over, these codes have a tendency to rub off. Because the bank does not keep this code on file, the customer will have to wait until they receive a new card in order to make an online purchase. Below are the results of a study performed by the [Get Elastic E-Commerce blog](#).



Does Requiring the CVV Code Affect Conversion Rates? Source [www.getelastic.com](http://www.getelastic.com).

## 117. Hide the Navigation

Hide both your top and side navigation once the customer has initiated the checkout in order to prevent distractions. At this point, your goal should be to finalize the order as soon as possible before the visitor loses interest.



Checkout page on Amazon shows only the progress indicator at top, no site navigation

## 118. Ditch the Confirm Page

Once you ask for the customer's credit card information, don't ask them to again confirm that they want to make the purchase. A final confirmation page only gives customers a way out, and another reason to change their mind. Do however, display the order total before they finalize the order.

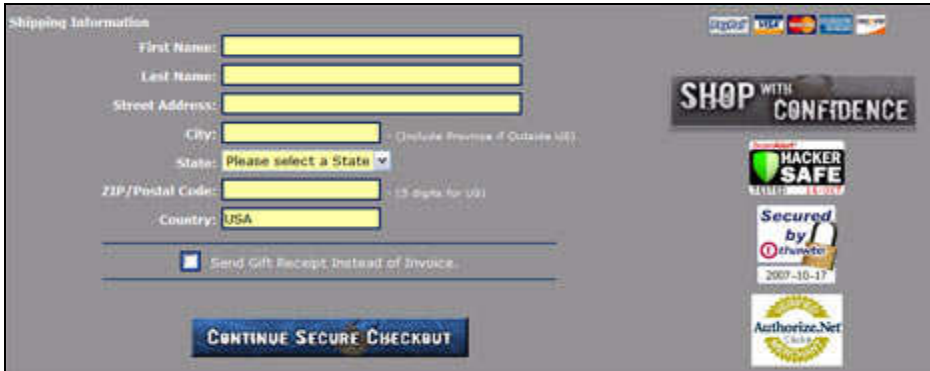
---

**“A final confirmation page only gives customers a way out.”**

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## 119. Secure Certificate and Security Seals

Most likely, your Payment Gateway and Secure Certificate provider offer a clickable security logo that you can install in your checkout pages. This provides an external way of validating the authenticity of your site. In addition, services from HackerSafe or Control Scan can be a great way to boost confidence during checkout.



The screenshot shows a checkout page with the following elements:

- Shipping Information:**
  - First Name:
  - Last Name:
  - Street Address:
  - City:  (Optional Province if Outside US)
  - State:
  - ZIP/Postal Code:  (5 digits for US)
  - Country:
- Payment Options:**
  - Discover
  - Visa
  - MasterCard
  - Amex
- Security Logos:**
  - SHOP WITH CONFIDENCE
  - HACKER SAFE
  - Secured by eThrone (2007-10-17)
  - Authorize.Net
- Buttons:**
  - Send Gift Receipt Instead of Invoice
  - CONTINUE SECURE CHECKOUT

Example of click-through security logos on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 120. Prominent 1-800 Number

If you offer a live help line, make sure the number is highly visible everywhere in the checkout screens.

## 121. Live Chat

For those not wanting to call a 1-800 and wait on hold, Live chat is an excellent customer service feature. I've found it to be very effective for businesses with high value items such as jewelry.

## 122. No Default Credit Card Type

Typically, before or after you enter your credit card you are asked to select what type of card it is. DO NOT default this option to one of credit card types as many people will not notice it. I can't tell you how many times I've neglected to change the default option, and tried to use a MasterCard with the Visa option selected. Customers then become confused when they received an error telling them their credit card is invalid.

## 123. Field Lengths Proportional to Data

Typically, before or after you enter your credit card you are asked to

## 124. Auto-Detect Credit Card Type

Many card processors, including Authorize.net don't require you to have a credit card type drop down box since the first 4 numbers of the card determine what type of card it is. PayPal does a nice job of automatically detecting and showing the credit card type with AJAX.

Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
Credit or Debit Card Number:	<input type="text" value="4560"/>
Payment Type	<input checked="" type="radio"/> VISA <input type="radio"/> MasterCard <input type="radio"/> Discover <input type="radio"/> AMEX
Expiration Date:	<input type="text" value="mm"/> / <input type="text" value="yy"/> CSC: <input type="text"/> <a href="#">What's this?</a>

*Automatic credit card type detection using PayPal checkout.*

## 125. Don't Up sell or Cross Sell

Resist the temptation to up sell or cross sell during checkout. Remember, this is not like a supermarket checkout aisle. Users get distracted and are free to abandon their shopping carts at any time for any reason.

## 126. Gift Receipt / Gift Wrap Option

Customers have begun to expect this, especially during the holidays. No one wants to send a gift with an invoice showing what they paid. At the very least, offer a gift receipt with the prices not showing. Even better, include an option for a gift message.

## 127. User Friendly Credit Card Errors

I rarely have seen this done, yet it can make worlds of a difference. In the complex world of online credit card processing, it's crucial to simplify any potential problems for the end user. If their credit card is declined due to an address mismatch, give them a list of possible solutions. For example, maybe they have moved recently and the processor or bank still has the old address on file? Or maybe they don't know where to find the 3 digit security code on the back of the card.

Typically, there are 4 reasons why a credit card may be declined:

1. **Address Mismatch (AVS):** This occurs when the billing address provided does not match the address on file with the bank. If this error occurs, suggest that the customer try a previous address. In some cases, I've found the bank or credit card processor can be up to 6 months behind in updating their records.
2. **Card Code Mismatch:** This error occurs when the user enter an incorrect 3 digit security code (4 digit with American Express), or does not enter one at all. If this occurs, politely explain where the card code can be found, and why it is necessary for online ordering.
3. **General Decline:** In this case, the customer is likely over the limit on their credit line. However, DO NOT tell the customer it was declined

due to lack of funds. Politely explain the bank has declined the transaction, so they should contact them directly for a resolution.

4. **Security Reasons:** In certain cases, a transaction may appear suspicious to the credit card processor. Again, be careful how you convey this information to your customer. Display your 1-800 number if this occurs and suggest the customer call in to complete the order.

## 128. Don't Require Phone or Email

Though most e-tailers would like to have this information, you must ask yourself if it is important enough to risk losing the sale. Many privacy sensitive customers don't like to give out this information. Some experts argue that for every additional field in form, you lose a certain percentage of visitors.

## 129. Email List Opt-Out

Always allow people to opt-out. Though technically this is not required since they are making a purchase, it's a best practice required by most ISPs in order to be considered for white listing. Believe it or not, information sensitive customers will abandon their order if they feel like their information will be used for marketing purposes.

## 130. Copy Billing Info to Shipping Info

Most sites have this feature, but I thought it was worth mentioning. Nothing is worse than having to type the same information twice for the billing and shipping.

## 131. Prominent "First time signup" Link

If you're like most businesses, you probably get a significant amount of online business from first time shoppers. For this reason, there should always be a prominent "first time signup" link in the checkout when you ask

someone to sign in. Unfortunately, many sites bury this important feature with an tiny, insignificant text link below the fold of the page.

### **132. Offer PayPal**

While I have doubts about certain online payment methods such as Google Checkout and Bill Me Later, I strongly believe adding PayPal will help conversion, especially for international customers or those without credit cards.

### **133. Offer E-Check Payments**

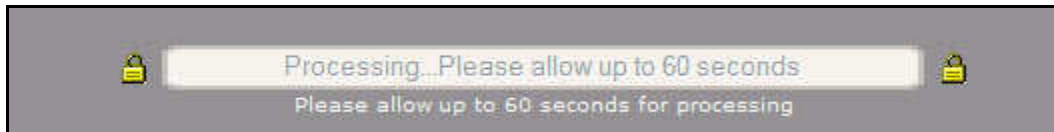
Another common payment method is by an e-check. Many customers who pay this way have checking accounts, but no credit or debit cards.

### **134. Security Code Explanation**

Always provide a clear explanation of what this credit card security code is and why you need it. While most sites provide an image of where to find it, rarely do they answer the question of why they need it. Many shoppers are wary about giving this out, so provide an explanation of why it's necessary for an online purchase.

### **135. Disable “Finalize Order” button On Click**

A lot is going on technically speaking when the user clicks the “Finalize Order” button. Many users are impatient, and will click this button again and again until something happens. Depending on how your checkout is programmed, this can cause serious problems such as double billing or duplicate orders. Prevent this confusion by disabling the button after it's clicked. In addition, show something to the nature of “please allow up to 60 seconds to process your order.” after the shopper clicks the finalize order button.



Example of disabled Finalize Order button on [www.c28.com](http://www.c28.com).

## 136. Bookmark-able Receipt Page

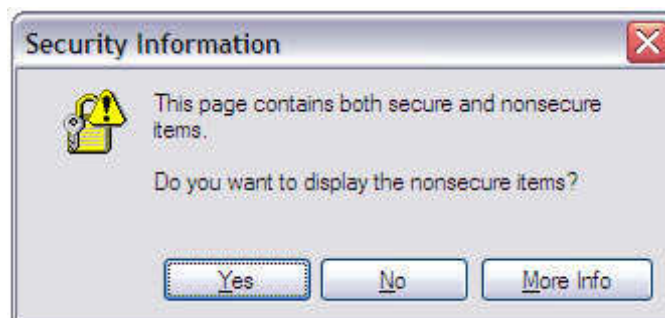
Make sure your receipt page is not the same page that processes the order via a form post. Shoppers tend to bookmark receipt pages, but if it's not available later they will be very confused.

## 137. Shipping Time Estimates

Usually, the first question on a customer's mind after submitting an order is "when will I get it?" Prevent needless customer service inquiries by providing an estimate of both when the order will ship and when it will arrive.

## 138. Eliminate Insecure Page Errors

A customer should never have to see a "this page contains insecure items" error right before they enter their credit card information. Usually, this is just a case of the webmaster not using relative links properly with images (<http://> vs. <https://>).



Insecure Items Error from Internet Explorer.

## 139. Don't Waste the Thank You Page

Surprisingly, many ecommerce sites waste the thank you or receipt page by making it a dead end. Instead of encouraging your visitors to close the window, continue to engage your customers with one of the following tactics:

1. Refer a friend form
2. How to Track your Order
3. Show products related to those ordered
4. Feedback Survey
5. Coupon for Next Purchase

A word of caution applies here. Before you encourage your customer to perform another action, make it **very clear** that the purchase process is complete, and there order has been submitted.



# Customer Service

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When you consider the competitive advantages of an online retailer, customer service isn't the first thing that comes to mind. Many e-commerce sites, even the large well-known ones, are known for impersonal, mediocre customer service practices. And yet, the few e-tailors that differentiate themselves on serving their customers, such as Zappos, become well-known case studies in client care. In this section, I'll share some of the unique best practices I've seen over the last few years that serve to differentiate companies in customer service.



## 140. Assign Personal Customer Service Reps

Along with the order confirmation receipt that you send to your customers, also automatically assign each customer a personal representative that will field their questions. Send the email from this representative's name, and include their contact info. Customers will be impressed that they have a "personal" representative assign specifically to them.



## 141. Add a Human Touch

Many online shoppers struggle with trusting an online merchant due to the lack of face to face interaction. Mitigate this weakness by showing pictures of your customer service staff. [Christian retailer C28](#) shows the picture of their customer service manager on the Help page as well as on every order confirmation email. In addition, below the picture is the manager's direct contact info. Something like this can go a long way to instill trust in your company.



## 142. Call Customers Who Abandon Their Order

When a customer starts an order but doesn't finish it, follow up with a phone call to find out if there were any problems. Customers appreciate the gesture, and you will likely save many sales in the process.

### 143. Free Upgraded Shipping

Surprise select customers by upgrading their shipping to 1 or 2 express. If you do this, be sure to send them an email letting them know they have been upgraded. This strategy was pioneered by [Zappos](#).

### 144. Same Day Shipping

Most websites have a policy of shipping orders 1 or 2 business days after they are placed. If possible, selectively ship some orders the same day. The speedy delivery will be appreciated, though not expected by your customers.

### 145. Increase Number of Customer Service Agents

It goes without saying that if you have a higher representative to customer ratio, you will have time to better serve your clients. While not every business can afford this, if you want to differentiate yourself with outstanding customer service, it's a must.

### 146. Hand-written Thank You on Packing Slip

Most packing slips are dull, impersonal, and useful only if you need to return the merchandise. On rare occasions, I've received orders where the packing list featured a hand-written, personalized thank you from a staff member. While this may not be practical for every order, it is a great way to impress select customers. Another idea might be to include the business card with contact info for a manager.

### 147. Hand-written thank you Cards

Imagine the surprise of your customer when he or she receives a hand written thank you note from your company. While you likely don't have the time to do this for every customer, your top clients deserve this small investment of time. Personalize these cards by adding a quick comment

about the product(s) they purchased. Give them your contact info if they have any questions.

## 148. Follow Up Surveys

Consider sending a survey email out with every order confirmation. While not every customer will complete it, your customers will know you care enough to ask their opinion.

## 149. Monitor Shipping Progress

Most shipping carriers, like UPS and FedEx, give shippers the ability to monitor the progress of their customer's shipments. Alerts can be setup to notify you when an exception occurs, such as a misrouted package or an undeliverable package. Customers appreciate the pro-active follow up when you notify them about these events before they find out themselves.

## 150. Extensive FAQ Knowledge Base

Surprisingly, one of the easiest ways to improve your customer satisfaction may be to prevent needless customer questions in the first place. No matter how friendly your call center representative, no customer will be pleased if they have to call you in order to answer a simple question like "how do I return a product?" Prevent situations like this by maintaining a searchable FAQ knowledge base that answers every reasonable question.

## 151. Live Chat

Many customers dislike the thought of sitting on hold for even a few minutes. Offering a live chat option can be an inexpensive way of answering questions for your visitors, and reducing the call volume for your call center.

## 152. Improve After Hour Call Center

If your business employs a 3rd party after hour call center that is off-site, make sure you frequently monitor the quality of care they are rendering. Make sure they are empowered to serve your customers as effectively as possible. If your primary call center is 3rd party, seriously consider bringing it in house. While this is not always the most affordable option, it's necessary if you desire to give your clients your absolute best.

### 153. Prominent Customer Testimonials

Place customer testimonials on more than just the "testimonial" page. Zappos features them right on their [main customer service page](#). A word of caution applies here though. If you're going to "brag" so to speak about your service, make sure you follow through!

### 154. Create a Customer Centric Slogan

Show your dedication to customer care by prominently featuring a customer centered slogan that summarizes your company's practices. A great example of this would be Zappos' famous slogan on their home page: *"We are a service company that happens to sell shoes."*



Customer centric slogan on [www.zappos.com](http://www.zappos.com).

### 155. Free Return Shipping

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to online ordering is the thought of having to return the product. Consider sending customers a pre-paid return shipping label in the case of a product needing to be returned. Because this is rarely done by e-commerce stores, you will certainly set yourself apart in the mind of your customer.



Free Return Shipping offer on [www.zappos.com](http://www.zappos.com).

## 156. Automatic Price Protection

Always honor sale prices of items that were previously purchased by customers. They need to be able to shop with this confidence. Better yet, automatically notify customers when items they have purchased in the past go on sale. Offer to apply the price difference toward a future purchase or just refund the amount. Sound crazy? Maybe, but it's small cost that can win a customer for life.

## 157. Lenient Return Policy

Make sure your return policy is not unnecessarily complicated or rigid. How many times have you shopped at a certain retailer because their lenient return policy gave you the confidence you needed to buy? (Think Costco vs. Walmart!)

## 158. Brag about your Easy Return Policy

It pays to boast about your hassle free return policy early and often. During checkout, I believe this is one of the most frequently asked questions and stumbling blocks. Linking to your return policy during checkout will assure customers you stand behind the product.

## 159. Keep Customers Updated about Returns

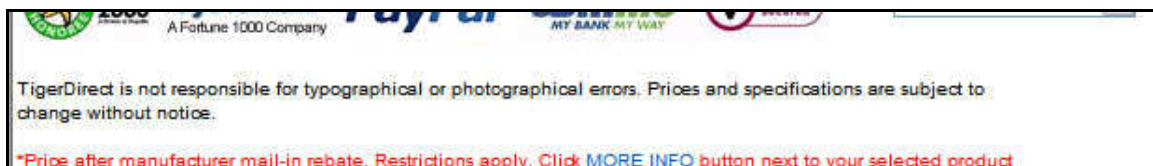
When you receive a return shipment, email the customer. When you begin processing a return, email the customer. When you refund their money or send out the exchange merchandise, email the customer. Constant progress updates will keep customers from contacting you about the status. In addition, they will appreciate the thoughtfulness.

## 160. Thank You Calls

Call select customers and thank them for ordering. This personalized gesture will blow them away.

## 161. Provide Accurate Product Information

Prevent problems in the first place by proof reading your product descriptions and double checking your photos for accuracy. Customers will hold you responsible for any errors, even if the pictures or descriptions were provided by the manufacturer. Rather than taking responsibility for errors on their site, Tiger Direct displays a disclaimer regarding the possibility of erroneous information.



*Product information disclaimer on [www.tigerdirect.com](http://www.tigerdirect.com).*

## 162. Thank You Emails

Email certain customers and thank them for their business. Be sure to include something personalized in the email that will convince them it's not just something generic sent to everyone.

## 163. Validate Email Addresses

When customers don't receive an email receipt for their order, they blame you, regardless of whether or not they typed their email correctly when placing the order. Do you customers a favor and validate the validity of the email address they entered. This can be done in two ways. First, ask them for their email address twice. Odds are, they won't make the same typo a second time. Second, you could validate to domain behind the scenes using email address validator software.

## 164. Do More than Fix Your Mistakes

When your business makes a mistake, be sure that you exceed your customer's expectations when fixing it. If an item was mistakenly left out of a shipment, don't just apologize, offer that item for free. Many businesses find their most loyal customers result from a highly satisfying resolution to a problem.

## 165. Fix Other's Mistakes

If a shipment is delayed or lost due to the fault of the shipping carrier, don't just blame UPS, offer a solution. Offer to promptly re-ship the item, or at the very least, offer to take care of the problem with the carrier so the customer doesn't have to.

## 166. Guaranteed Email Response Time

Most customers expect an email inquiry to be answered within at most 24 hours. If you can, guarantee a response time faster than this. Also, acknowledge the receipt of an email inquiry by employing an auto responder.

## 167. Secret Shop Your Website

Used extensively by brick-and-mortar retailers, secret shopping is a great way to identify problems and keep your customer service staff on their toes.

Here's a couple links to companies that offer online secret shopping:

[http://www.aboutfacecorp.com/sol\\_services.html](http://www.aboutfacecorp.com/sol_services.html)

<http://www.shopperscritique.com/services/internetMysteryShops.asp>

## 168. Upgrade Your CRM Tools

Proper technology can go a long way to improving customer care. At the very least, ensure that your staff has the ability to view the history of previous interactions with a customer. It's very frustrating when you have to repeatedly explain the situation to a representative.

## 169. Personalize Everything

Always greet customers by name on the home page, and offer them personalized product recommendations based on previous orders.

I once heard it said that *"the enemy of good is not bad, it's mediocre."* Too many online retailers struggle with mediocre customer service. Many businesses fail to realize their customer base is also powerful marketing machine. If treated right, they can become to most effective viral marketing campaign imaginable. Treated poorly, and they can become a PR disaster.

“  
the enemy of  
good is not bad,  
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# eCommerce SEO

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In some ways, it seems search engines have a grudge against eCommerce sites. Often times, I don't blame them. Many online stores offer little useful content, including dry manufacturer product descriptions, poor internal linking, and no unique, user generated content. Without a doubt eCommerce sites have unique challenges when it comes to SEO. Below I've gathered 25 tips that I've successfully used while optimizing eCommerce sites in the past.



## 170. Avoid Manufacturer Product Descriptions

It's tempting to just copy and paste from the manufacturer's website, but resist the urge. At the very least, re-write the description in some way to make it unique.



## 171. Create a SEO Keyword Field in Product Database

Just as every product record in your catalog has a name, price, and other attributes, you should also create a SEO keyword field that is displayed in the title tags, meta tags, and preferably the body as well. As you add products to the site, enter commonly search for keywords in this field. Not everyone will search by the brand name or item number, so this will greatly help your product pages rank for long tail searches.



## 172. Focus on Singular Keywords on Product Page

As a general rule, I try to optimize for plural keywords on the home page or other SEO landing pages. Focus on singular terms on the product pages by using the SEO keyword field mentioned in step 2.

### 173. Simple Product & Category URLs

Ideally, URLs should consist of keywords, not useless ID's or other parameters. If you don't have the option of using URL re-writing software, at least limit the number of variables passed in the URL.

### 174. All Products 2 or 3 Clicks from the Home Page

Keep your product pages as close as possible to your greatest source of PageRank. Many sites bury part of their product catalog deep within dozens of pages of categories and subcategories. This can be accomplished by using SEO friendly rollovers or increasing the number of products per page.

### 175. Unique Title Tags

While it's debatable whether the company name belongs in the beginning of the title tag, most agree you should not include extra keywords that are repeated in every tag. For example, if your company name was XYZ Travel, include only the company name in title tag, not "XYZ Travel Agency and Vacations." Use as little duplicate content as possible in order to prevent diluting the value of the rest of the text in the title tag.

### 176. Unique Keyword Meta Tags

Meta tags, including keywords and description, should be entirely unique on every product page. Though meta content likely doesn't directly affect your ranking, unique tags will prevent duplicate content penalties. In addition, don't stuff keywords into your meta tags that aren't relevant to the specific page they are on.

## 177. Unique Description Meta Tags

Personally, I like putting the same product description that appears on the product page in meta description tag. This will ensure unique content on each product page.

## 178. Product Reviews

A great strategy for guaranteeing unique content is displaying user generated content from your customers. Allow customers to review products they've purchased or comment on one's they haven't.

## 179. Pass PR Wisely

Obviously, not every page on your site deserves the same link juice. While your Return policy page is important, it likely won't bring in loads of revenue driving traffic from organic search. Make sure your primary SEO pages, (category and products pages) receive most of the PR flow by capping PR flow on less important links. You can accomplish this via Javascript links, form submit links, the no-follow tag, or the robots.txt file.

## 180. Internal Contextual Links

Site navigation links don't tell search engines very much information about the page. Within a paragraph of text, link to a relevant page using keyword rich anchor text.

## 181. Avoid Session IDs in URLs

Many ecommerce software platforms use cookie-less unique session IDs in the site URLs. Unfortunately, this creates an infinite amount of duplicate content for the SE's to crawl. There are ways to prevent this using an ethical type of cloaking which serves URLs to spiders without the session ID.

## 182. Create a Product RSS Feed

Create a product feed and submit it to relevant content aggregators. Google Base accepts an XML like product feed and displays your results for Google Base searches. Product feeds can be a great way of picking up free backlinks directly to your product pages.

## 183. Product Tagging

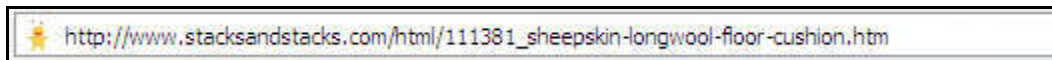
With the advent of social media, many customers have become accustomed with the concept of tagging. By allowing your customers to tag products with their own keywords, you'll reap SEO benefits as well as improved product searching. When you allow users to tag your products, you'll likely start ranking for slang keywords that you would have never thought of on your own. In addition, each tag creates a new ....



Example of product tagging on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 184. Page File Names

If possible, use keyword rich page file names. A page file name such as [www.yoursite.com/keyword-phrase-here.html](http://www.yoursite.com/keyword-phrase-here.html) tells the Googlebot a lot more than a URL such as [www.yoursite.com/?ID=1234](http://www.yoursite.com/?ID=1234).



Keyword rich URL at [www.stacksandstacks.com](http://www.stacksandstacks.com).

## 185. Use iframes for Duplicate Content

If you have repetitive content that must appear on every page, or your product descriptions are not unique, consider placing them inside an iframe with an invisible border. Users will not know that their data technically resides on another page search engines will not penalize you for duplicate content.

## 186. Links in Product Descriptions

Create keyword rich links from within the product descriptions of one product linking to another. I've found this is a very effective strategy for targeting long-tail keywords.

## 187. Crawlable Navigation

Avoid JavaScript or CSS based navigation structures that don't allow spiders through. If you're stuck with one, at least duplicate your navigation in the footer of every page with normal hyperlinks. In addition, don't rely on form based navigation such as drop down lists since the SEs can't follow them.

## 188. Don't Use "View" or "More"

On your product category pages, make sure you link to the individual product pages with anchor text that contains more than just words like "View" or "See more". Vague terms such as these tell spiders nothing about your products.

## 189. Optimize your Images

With images now popping up in Google's regular SERPs, every image on your site should be optimized. Make sure all your product images contain unique alt text attributes. By simply populating the alt text with the product and brand name, I've seen a huge increase in traffic from Google Image search. In addition, you're making your site more useable for the vision impaired.

## 190. Create Brand Landing Pages

If your site sells branded products that customers may be searching for, setup a optimized landing page for every brand.

## 191. Use Title Attributes in Links

For all anchor text on your site, be sure to use appropriate title attributes (e.g. `<a href="page.html" title="keywords here">`) in order to provide search engines more information about what the page contains. Although not nearly as important as the actual anchor text, title attributes are factored into the ranking algorithm in some way.

## 192. Track Page Yield

In order to determine the effectiveness of your site as a whole, take the number of unique keywords you are found for during a given time period. Then, divide that by the number pages indexed by Google. This will give you your page yield, a good metric for measuring the length of your "long tail."



# Conclusion

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I sincerely hope the ideas shared in this e-book will inspire a spirit of innovation in you, and you'll come up with some great ideas for your own website.

If you're interested in learning more, please visit the Palmer Web Marketing blog at <http://www.palmerwebmarketing.com/blog>.

If you are interested in a professional website review from Palmer Web Marketing, please visit us at <http://www.palmerwebmarketing.com/products.php>

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