



---

## **eCommerce Platform + SEO = Maximum Discoverability**

What role does your eCommerce platform play  
in your SEO strategy?

July 2017





The war for customer attention and mindshare has moved to the digital front. Brands address this move through digital strategies that always include search engine optimisation (SEO) investments. This paper looks into why the eCommerce platform, the foundation of the Digital Flagship Store, should work hand-in-hand with your SEO strategies, and how it should support these initiatives.

This paper focuses on SEO through organic, “free search” improvements. Search engine marketing (SEM) through paid advertising and Google Shopping feeds are not discussed in this paper, as they merit a separate in-depth discussion. By the end of the paper, you should be able to identify critical eCommerce platform requirements that will support your SEO needs, and evaluate your existing platform – or alternative platforms – against those requirements.



---

# The Digital Flagship Store

In this day and age, the ability to meet customer expectations has changed. The Flagship Store is not in Sydney or Melbourne or London or New York anymore; it has moved to the World Wide Web. The digital store has become the Flagship Store, and is now the most important in influencing brand perceptions and overall sales.<sup>1</sup>



**85%**

**SHOPPERS RESEARCH ONLINE**  
before making a  
**MAJOR PURCHASE**

<sup>2</sup>

And as customers turn online to conduct research and find inspiration for their next purchase, it has become imperative for retailers and Brands to have a strong presence online, and for their Digital Flagship Stores – the eCommerce site – to be the digital representation of their brand and customer experience. As bricks-and-mortar flagship stores are discovered as customers walk along High Street, so to are Digital Flagship stores discovered in the customers' journey online.

But how do you make sure you get noticed? How do you make sure you turn up on the equivalent of High St online, and provide the solution to the customer's immediate need? The best-looking eCommerce site with the greatest customer experience waiting to happen will be just that – waiting to happen – if no one knows it is there.



1 How Successful Kiwi Brands Are Entering Foreign Markets Via the Internet, Andrew Buxton for NZ Retail, December 2015

2 Fifth Annual Major Purchase Consumer Study, Synchrony Financial, December 2016

## Why SEO?

Retailers and Brands need to be able to put up all the arrows they can possibly display, as cost-efficiently as possible, to point to their Digital Flagship. Trying to ensure maximum discoverability in the borderless market that is the World Wide Web, many organisations have made significant investments in search engine optimisation (SEO). And studies show how these efforts are rewarded and can potentially pay off.



**34.36%**

**CLICK THROUGH RATE**  
when in the  
**FIRST POSITION ON GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS**



**31.35%**

**CLICK THROUGH RATE ON MOBILE**  
when in the  
**FIRST POSITION ON GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS**



**14.6%**

**ORGANIC SEARCH LEADS**  
have a  
**14.6% CLOSE RATE**



**1.7%**

**OUTBOUND MARKETING LEADS**  
(eg. from cold calling, direct mail etc)  
have a **1.7% CLOSE RATE**

But how hard and complicated can SEO really be? Focussing on improving visibility through organic, “free” search results, a multitude of literature is available around search ranking factors, and the ever-shifting emphasis on one ranking factor over another. However, which advice or opinions do you follow? And once you – or your SEO specialist partner – have decided on which strategy to put into place, how do you make sure that the eCommerce platform on which your Digital Flagship has been built will be able to support this strategy now and into the (very near) future?



---

# Search Ranking Factors and Google

While SEO may seem like a daunting task at first, there is actually a science to it.

Respected SEO publication Search Engine Land provides a “Periodic Table of SEO Success Factors”<sup>3</sup> that aims to provide guidance about important ranking factors and best practices for optimal success with both search engines, and in reaching your target market. These factors are classified under two groups: on-the-page factors, or factors that you can have direct control over such as content and use of keywords; and off-the-page factors, or factors that are influenced by your readers, visitors, and other publishers such as links back to your site, trust rating of your website, and engagement.

## On-the-Page Factors

### Content

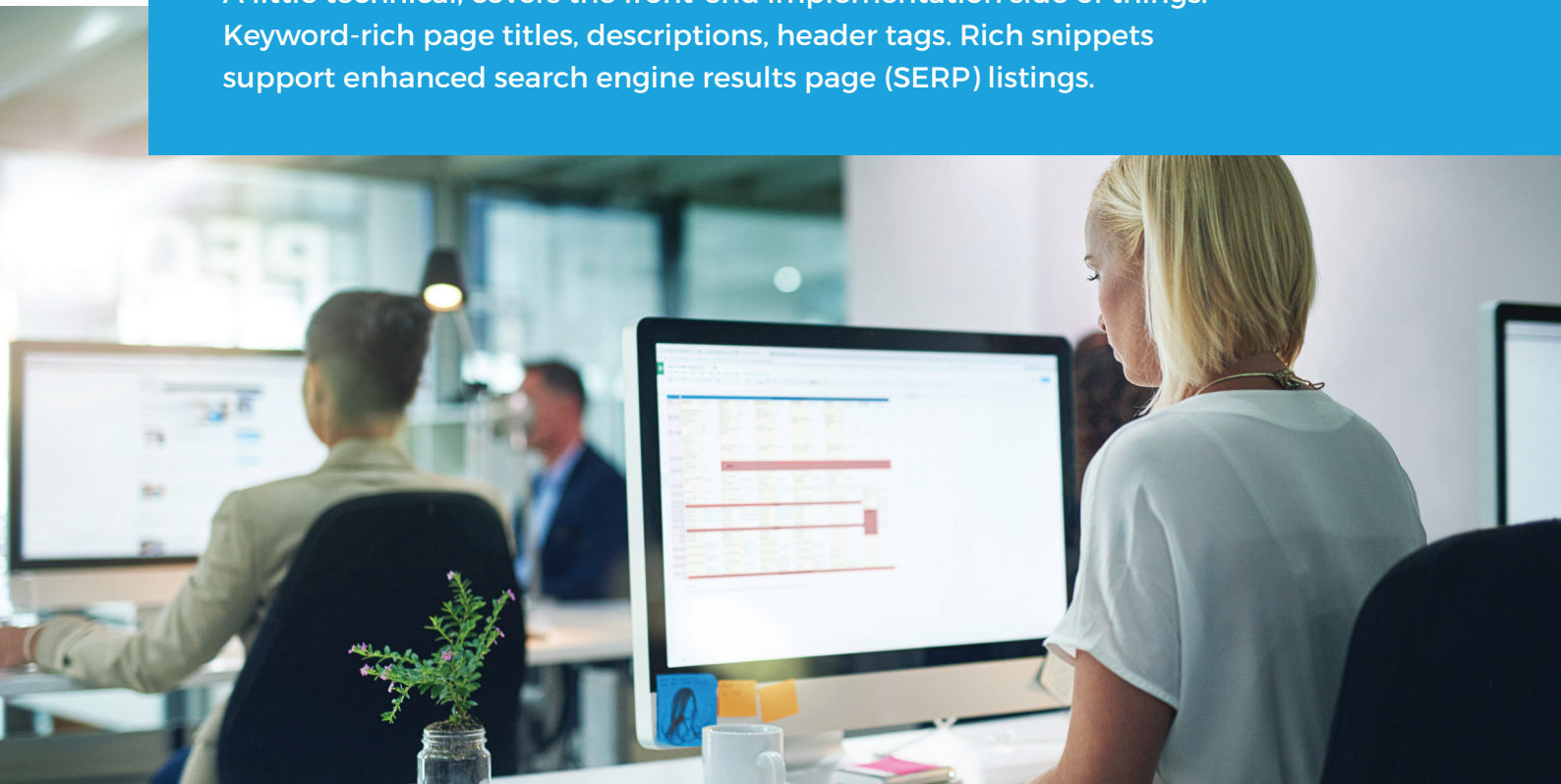
Content is king! Right messaging. Relevant content. Up-to-date.

### Site Architecture

This covers the technical implementation side of things. Index-friendly sitemap and custom robots.txt. Descriptive URLs. Canonical Links. Redirects. Mobile-friendliness. Security. Speed and performance.

### HTML Code

A little technical, covers the front-end implementation side of things. Keyword-rich page titles, descriptions, header tags. Rich snippets support enhanced search engine results page (SERP) listings.



## Off-the-page Factors

### Trust

Subject matter authority. Quality of customer engagement measured by clickthroughs and bounce rates. Quality of social media engagement measured by Likes and Shares. Historical performance. Identity verification.

### Link Building and Ranking

Third-party links back to your site. Quality over quantity.

### Personalisation

If your content or your site is not deemed relevant to a particular country or locale, then you have less chance of showing up in country-personalised or local searches<sup>4</sup>. Proximity, we know, is the primary ranking factor in local searches but personal preferences based on browsing histories will determine the presentation of the search results.

### Social Media

Social media engagement and social sharing of your content. Quality over quantity.

## Beware Violations

You do get penalised for trying to game the system. Penalties range from ranking degradation to outright removal from search results. A lot of it has to do with content. Activities that will be penalised include:

- Keyword stuffing
- Piracy
- Hiding text
- Advertising bombardment
- Backlinks gaming
- Link spamming
- Paid links

<sup>4</sup> The Newest Addition to the Marketing Mix's Ps: Proximity, Brian Smith for Search Engine Land, 31 March 2017



Over the years, the weights attributed to these factors have varied; and while no single factor will guarantee SEO success, it is important to note that knowing and understanding what is important to Google is key.

Why Google? More than two-thirds of all eCommerce website traffic comes from Google, with 43% coming from Google organic results and 26% coming from Google CPC (Cost Per Click or Adwords).<sup>5</sup> However, Google's ever-changing emphasis on search ranking factors (their algorithms are changing every day, often multiple times) keeps marketers on their feet to ensure their brands and sites get the exposure they deserve.



**40%**

**40% OF MARKETERS SAY THAT THE MOST CHALLENGING OBSTACLE TO SEO SUCCESS IS THE EVER CHANGING SEARCH ALGORITHMS**

6

For now, we know that the top three factors that affect search rankings are: Content, Links, and RankBrain.<sup>7</sup>

- Content is something you have control over. By supporting your foundation SEO keyword strategies with quality content you influence other ranking factors such as links, bounce rate, and click through rate (CTR) to your site. This makes your site more visible in the artificial intelligence run algorithms of RankBrain.
- Links are something you can influence and are tied to the content you have on your site. Providing content your target audience will consume and share makes it appear more relevant to Google's algorithms and as a result will boost rankings.
- RankBrain is Google's machine-learning artificial intelligence system to help process the 15% of queries that Google's systems have never seen before.<sup>8</sup>

*RankBrain "helps better interpret those queries and effectively translate them, behind the scenes..., to find the best pages for the searcher" and "can see patterns between seemingly unconnected complex searches to understand how they're actually similar to each other...allow[ing] it to better understand future complex searches and whether they're related to particular topics...[associating] these group of searches with results that it thinks searchers will like the most."<sup>9</sup>*

While it seems that this ranking factor is something beyond your control, the quality of your content, as well as your foundational SEO strategies, all come into play here.

5 eCommerce KPI Benchmarks 2016, Alan Coleman for Wolfgang Digital, September 2016

6 Ascend2 and Research Partners, June 2015

7 Now We Know: Here Are Google's Top 3 Search Ranking Factors, Barry Schwartz for Search Engine Land, 24 March 2016

8 Google Turning Its Lucrative Web Search Over to AI Machines, Jack Clark for Bloomberg, 26 October 2015

9 FAQ: All About the Google RankBrain Algorithm, Danny Sullivan for Search Engine Land, 23 June 2016

# Addressing Micro-moments with Mobile and Local Search SEO



**56%**

56% OF ON-THE-GO SEARCH  
HAVE LOCAL INTENT



**51%**

51% OF IN-STORE SEARCHES  
HAVE LOCAL INTENT

10

What about Mobile and Local SEO? With the rise of mobile use, and with over half of Google searches conducted on mobile devices, the mobile-friendliness of a site has become a key ranking factor for Google's search algorithms. This is to ensure that searchers find the most relevant results optimised for their devices.

In relation to mobile, Google has been talking about micro-moments that demand immediate action, relevance and loyalty to needs. These are the I-need-to-do moments, where-or-what-do-I-do moments, show-me-how moments that are perfect for conducting search using mobile devices and best supported by local information. Many companies do not often think about their local strategy as they have national or multinational operations, and therefore, target a wider set of audiences. However, a local strategy can become a differentiator, giving you more visibility over competitors in those micro-moments.

Attention to mobile and local SEO has a huge payoff potential:



**28%**

28% OF SEARCHES  
FOR SOMETHING NEARBY  
RESULTS IN A PURCHASE  
(Google, 2016)



**72%**

72% OF CONSUMERS WHO DID A  
LOCAL SEARCH VISITED A STORE  
WITHIN 8 KILOMETRES

11



**50%**

LOCAL SEARCHES LEAD 50% OF  
MOBILE VISITORS TO VISIT  
STORES WITHIN ONE DAY  
(Google, 2014)



**78%**

78% OF LOCAL-MOBILE  
SEARCHES RESULT  
IN OFFLINE PURCHASES  
(Search Engine Land, 2014)

10 Understanding Consumers' Local Search Behaviour, Google, May 2014

11 Amy Bishop of Clix Marketing, from Wordstream Blog of the SMX East October 2015 event



There are three main factors to consider when optimising for local search:

- **Content**, again, is still king, no matter the device or the target. Adding a “local” flavour to your content – using local language, focusing on content and keywords that resonate with the local audience – allows your site to reach out and address your local targets’ needs directly. Just make sure that your mobile site content is optimised for on-the-go consumption as mobile searchers are looking for quick and relevant information.<sup>12</sup>
- **NAP (Name, Address, and Phone)**. Google uses your business address and phone number to determine the relevance of sites to local searches, so be sure to surface this information in an element of your site that shows up on every page, e.g. your Store Finder in the header or footer of your website.
- Claim your business in **Google My Business**, making sure that you provide your complete business information, verify your location(s), ensure that your hours are accurate, and manage and respond to Google reviews. Don’t forget to post photos relevant to your business, too.

It has been mentioned earlier that proximity is the primary ranking factor considered by Google to determine local ranking. Relevance and prominence round out the top three.

With relevant and localised content, good quality links, and great engagement (this is where not only social media exposure and your social circles’ engagement would matter the most, but also those reviews and ratings that your customers provide) working together, you are on your way to the top of the local search result rankings.

---

# SEO and Customer Experience

The key to Google's success is for consumers to have a great experience on a site after coming from a Google results page. Assisting consumers in finding the most relevant content drives Google's revenues and is why Google is placing greater emphasis on user experiences.

Google's search ranking algorithm updates puts emphasis on many aspects contributing to great experiences:

- mobile friendly sites
- site wide security
- penalising interstitials and pop-up windows

And a host of others are in place to support this.

**SEO is not about coming up in all search results; it is ensuring that your Brand comes out on the searches that matter, and that are relevant, to you.**

From your business point of view, your Digital Flagship store is the digital embodiment of your Brand and customer experience. And your SEO efforts all point toward one thing: discoverability – so that searchers who matter to you will find you. To discover your Brand for the first time, to drive them to visit your stores, to convert them to customers, and to, ultimately, become your most loyal advocates.

But when customers do find their way to your digital storefront, you only have a couple of seconds to capture their interest and initiate a meaningful journey with your Brand. Thus, beyond mastering the keywords game and getting listed on the first page of the Google search results and climbing up to the coveted top three listing, you must also consider the next steps to the journey and serve the content and the experience most relevant to their stage of the journey. And everything that you need to consider – and have considered – in getting your SEO right are the exact same things you have already considered for delivering great online customer experiences.



---

# Your eCommerce Platform: Stand Out. Delight.

So how should your eCommerce platform support your SEO requirements and make you stand out amongst the crowd?

You may be looking to move to a new eCommerce platform, or you may just be looking at how your current platform can better support your SEO strategies. No matter which stage you are at with your research, you do not want to leave evaluation of the platform capabilities that will support your SEO strategies until it's too late.

eStar is a provider of an end-to-end eCommerce solution, iSAMS, that has helped some of the most prominent Australasian brands maximise their online sales opportunities and optimise their digital customer experience for the past 16 years. With iSAMS, on-the-page SEO factors have never been easier to manage, and off-the-page factors to influence.

## Manage rich content within the platform

This paper has emphasised how critical content is: not only to ensuring your site's relevance to your target audience but also their actual experience of your Brand. With great content you improve engagement with your audience (improving dwell times and click-throughs), and you improve your authority and trustworthiness on what you know you are great at – all contributing to boosting your search result rankings.

iSAMS supports not only the management of contextual product information (i.e. different information aspects may be presented for different product types) but also rich content management, including videos and other files, for the entire site: category pages, non-product content pages, and a native SEO-friendly blog module.



DETAILS    SIZING & FIT    DELIVERY    RETURNS

**COMPOSITION**  
73% Cotton, 2% Elastane, 20% Lyocell, 5% Polyester

**STYLE CODE**

Select your size  [VIEW SIZE GUIDE](#)

 HAVE QUESTIONS? [CONTACT US / HELP](#)

RECENT LIVING STYLE CULTURE TRAVEL POPULAR TAGS ARCHIVE

**PREVIOUS:** Snowed In

## STYLE

## 20 JUL 2017 By Country Road



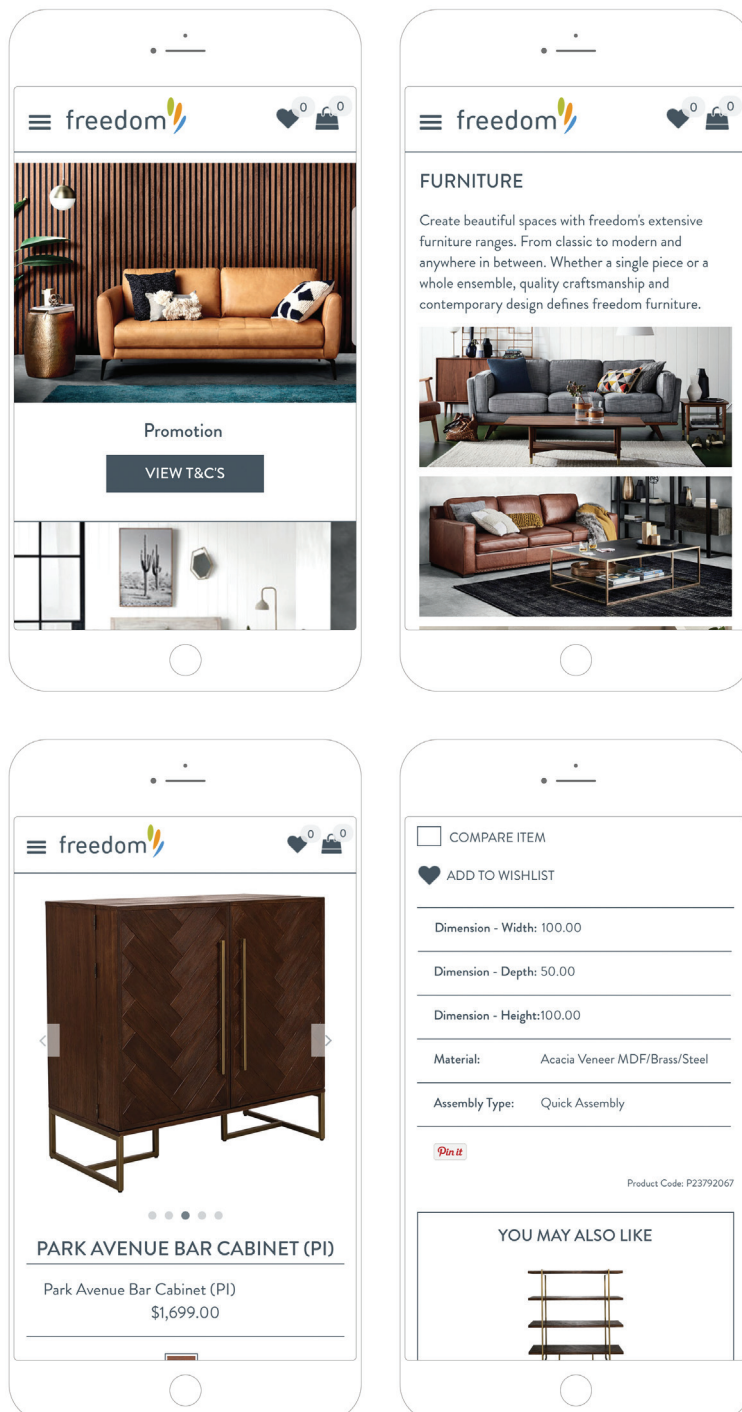
12



# Optimise your sites for different devices

eStar's support for mobile devices is a fundamental feature of the eCommerce platform. Support for responsive sites is the minimum eStar deliverable. These responsive sites are the "fluid" versions of the traditional (desktop) sites, with design and user experience adjusting automatically to the size of the browser used. For more advanced and specific requirements, the platform is able to support device-adaptive sites, which will enable you to optimise the design and user experience, as well as target content, based on the device used.

Not only will your mobile-friendly site improve customer experience, it will also fulfil Google's requirement that a site be mobile-friendly to get a boost up the rankings.



Mobile-optimised site. Content rich: Category landing page content, Product detail page imagery and specifications.

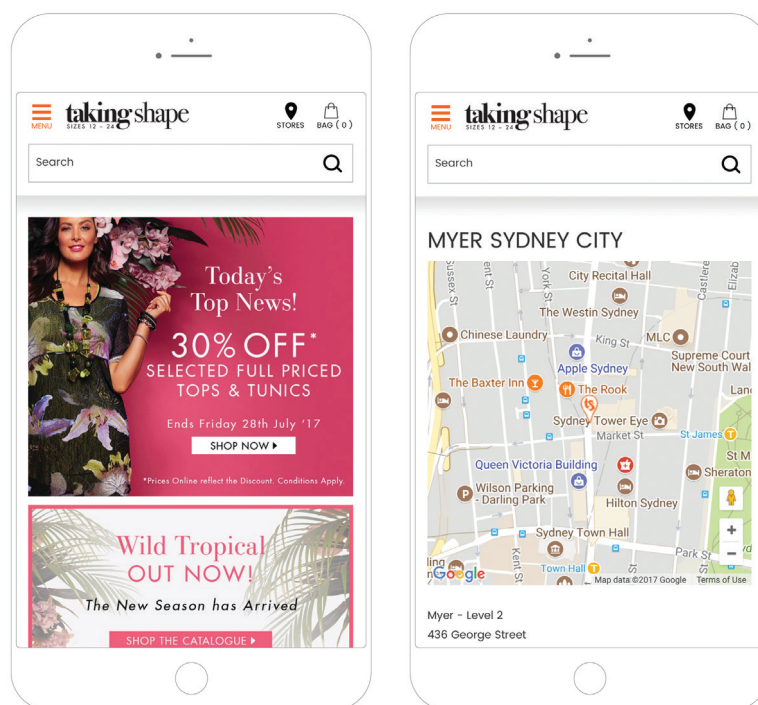
## Manage your on-page SEO without needing to code or call IT

Auto-generated SEO components are all well and good, but the granular ability to control these components ensures that you have the flexibility to adapt to any SEO strategy changes quickly, and without needing to code or call IT to implement the changes.

The ability to manage the keywords associated with any of your content – including product, category, and other content pages; to manage canonical links and redirects to optimise your authority and influence in specific subject matters or topics; to add rich snippets to all of your content to enhance your SERP presentation – these are all native to the iSAMS platform, and can be performed by your SEO specialist or partner without any coding requirements.

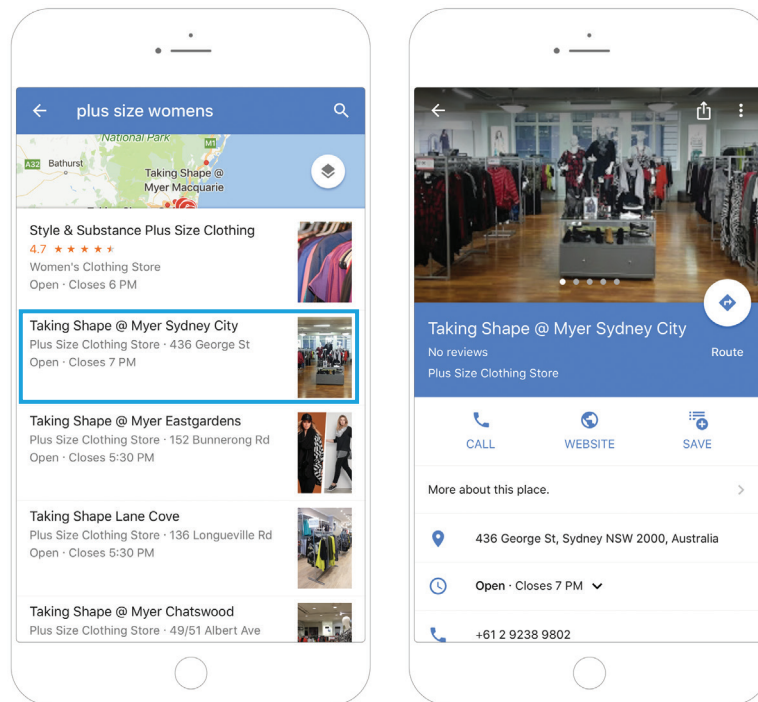
## Drive foot traffic to your stores

Almost every site has a Store Locator feature. It is now standard. But having this feature on your website guarantees that your store locations will easily be accessible to searchers.



Prominent Store Locator icon. Location page shows both Google Map location and store information.

Depending on implementation, your store locations and information may not be visible to search engine crawlers. To work around any possible limitations, iSAMS makes sure that links to your stores are included in the auto-generated sitemap to improve discoverability in search engines.



Complete Google Business Profile

## Increase social engagement and make buying decisions easy

Social media platforms act as search engines that your potential customers use to research brands. They also perform the role of forums for like-minded customers and can influence purchasing decisions. Whilst Google is yet to provide detail on whether or not social media is used as a ranking factor, you should not disregard social media in your SEO strategy. Remember, just like your website is an extension of your business and a representation of your brand, so too is your social media presence.

So how will your eCommerce platform support your social media strategies? Support for social media linking or sharing in product and content pages should be easy – and a standard feature of the platform. Support for Open Graph is also critical, to ensure that you have control over how shared content is displayed on Facebook.

Curated, user-generated content on your site would not only enhance discoverability (through hashtags that such content usually comes with), but also add a personal dimension to the content presented, improving engagement with customers. The ability to quickly integrate with social media feed solutions is definitely an advantage.

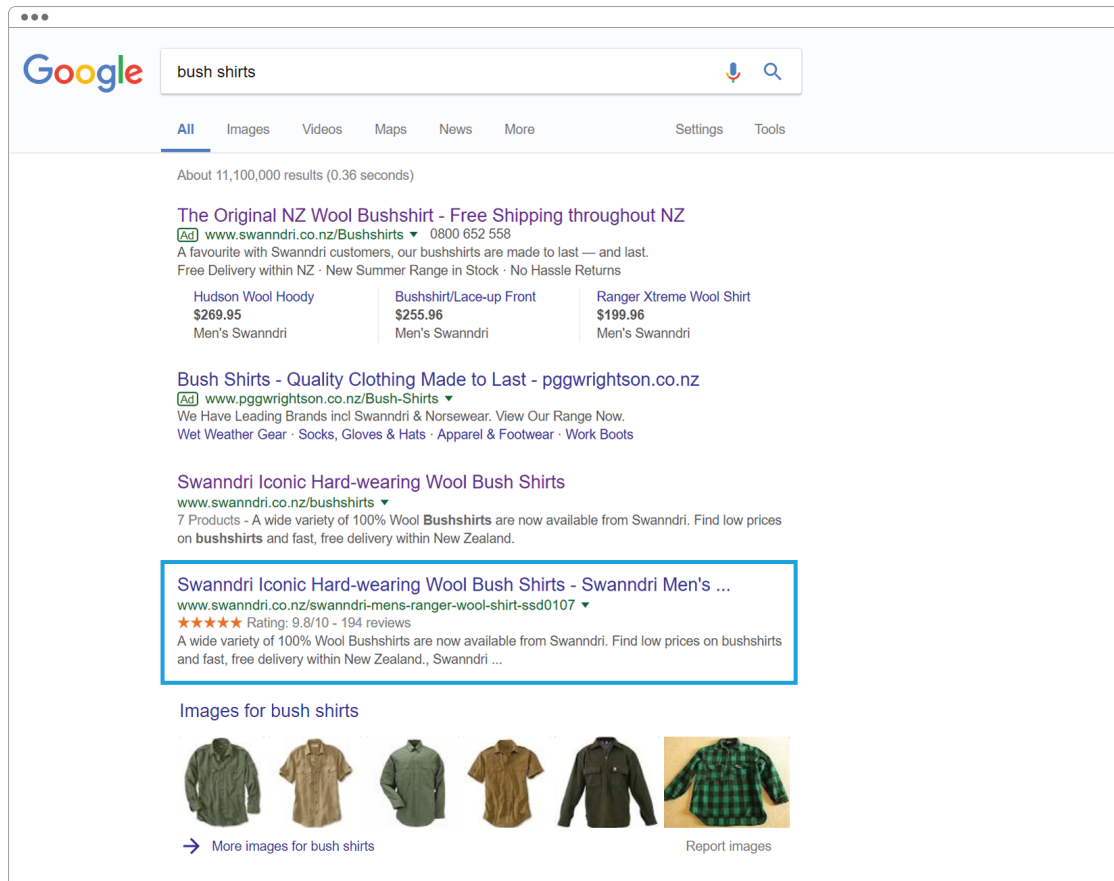
90% of customers say that their buying decisions are influenced by online reviews.<sup>13</sup> So not only do they ease the customers' path to purchase, they also are a critical part of your strategy to boost local search rankings, and improve click-through rates and your conversion rates – all of which contribute towards your site's authority and engagement. iSAMS provides a Reviews and Ratings module as part of the platform, and can integrate with your preferred third-party Reviews and Ratings system.

<sup>13</sup> Survey: 90% of Customers Say Buying Decisions Are Influenced by Online Reviews, Amy Gesenhues for Marketingland.com, 09 April 2013

# Optimise your site for performance

There are many reasons why your site needs to be optimised for speed and performance, search ranking factors notwithstanding. In this day and age of impatient potential customers, every second counts when displaying content on your site: bounce rates increase by 50% if your site takes two seconds or more to load, and conversions fall by 12% for every extra second.<sup>14</sup>

Site performance is determined by a good number of factors, including page complexity, application server efficiency, network capacity, and data centre locations. eStar's iSAMS itself is a highly-efficient platform, with an average application server response time of 280 milliseconds across all clients.



# And lastly, don't forget about security

In August 2016, Google started using HTTPS as a ranking signal to encourage webmasters to make their sites more secure, even going to the lengths of tagging non-HTTPS-compliant sites and those with HTTPS issues as non-safe for browsing. For your eCommerce site, make sure that your platform can be natively supported within the HTTPS protocol; and if possible, supports HSTS (HTTP Strict Transport Security), which tells the browser to automatically request the secure HTTPS pages even if the user enters http:// in the browser location bar. This way you minimise the risk of serving unsecured content to your customers and potential customers. There is nothing worse than getting your Brand site compromised and having your customers presented with a defaced site or having their personally-identifiable information leaked to the Internet.



---

## Summary

If you build it, they will come...but only for a reason. Your target audience must first know that you, your Brand, and your Digital Flagship store, exist. They must then know that you can provide what they are looking for, what they need. Then they must have a great experience to keep coming back and build loyalty to you and your Brand.

In this Digital Age, discoverability, accessibility, and experience go hand-in-hand with establishing your presence in your primary markets, and to introducing the rest of the world to your Brand. Your eCommerce platform, as the foundation of your Digital Flagship store, must be able support the foundations of your digital strategy – your SEO, your social media, and your mobile strategies – leading to improved traffic into your site, improved dwell time, increased conversion rates, and directing traffic to your local, physical stores.

Google, in their bid to provide their own customers ever-better experiences by providing the most relevant search results, does not make SEO easy for eCommerce websites. But if you build a strong foundation on a robust and flexible platform, and make sure that you get the critical search factors – mobile-friendliness and security, quality content and focus on relevant keywords, as well as optimisation for local search – you are on rock-solid footing to be discovered online by searching customers.

In the world of eCommerce, your digital strategy must be aligned to, and support, your overall business strategy for maximum success. The right strategies executed on the right platform by the right partners – partners who not only provide technology and digital services but also Retail and eCommerce expertise – are the key to your success.