7 KEYS

TO **SUCCESSFUL**

WEB DEVELOPMENT

1221 COMMERCE

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01 WEBSITE STRUCTURE

a. How to plan the site architecture

Creating an effective ecommerce site doesn't just happen when an idea meets the sheer force of will. It's essential that your ecommerce development agency has a road map available to you to help navigate your way from conception to implementation. Thus, the importance of having a well-planned website architecture cannot be overlooked. Most of the individual steps required in developing such a structure are likely already known to you. Yet the exact execution sequence required to deliver optimal results is usually the one key area where education may be lacking.

With this in mind, here is a step-by-step guide to follow that will help in developing a strong website architecture:

- **Know What You Want:** This may seem to go without saying, yet you'd be surprised how many companies come into the website development process not really knowing what it is that they want. They simply know that they need to either revamp their current site or create an entirely new one. You need to know exactly what sort of audience your website is intended for, and what sort of functionality that audience is looking for when accessing the site. Finally, it's also important to establish what your goals and expectations are to create a benchmark for success.

● **Define the Content Areas:** You have an abundance of information about your website. Segment that information into different pages within the site by identifying general topics. Review the segments with your webmaster or development agency to make sure it matches your expectations for the site's structure and navigation.

● **Organize Content and Create a Site Map:** Once you've defined the different content covers, you then move on to group relevant information together under different topics and subheadings. Once this is done, then the next step is to build a site map as a high-level structure to reference the structured content.

● **Develop a Navigational Scheme:** With the site map in place, you now have an idea how to best structure the site's navigation. The navigational scheme will depend upon the amount of content available. If there are fewer than 20 pages on the site, a simple vertical side column should be enough to show users where they can go within your site. Larger websites may require the development of overview, or category and subcategory pages that groups related content together.

● **Create Your Wireframe:** Now that all of the elements are in place that define the site's content groupings and navigational structure, you're ready to create the wireframe sketch that will serve as the site's blueprint.

Knowing how, when, and where to apply all of this information is the key to building the types of sites that will exceed your expectations and build your ecommerce business.

b. Building for large websites

Technology has become a leading means of communication between businesses and consumers. Therefore, it is critical that companies properly represent themselves online and throughout various social mediums. Though technological concepts change virtually every day and certain concepts that worked for a company in the past may require redesign, there are four key things to know in order to successfully build large websites.

1- Know the Company Value

For a website to be effective at capturing prospective consumers it cannot just detail what a company does. The website must appeal to and add value to the consumer. To do this you must identify your unique service propositions by asking the following questions:

● What does the company have to offer?
● What makes the products/services different?
● How can these aspects be displayed?

Understanding these factors will help you to develop an exceptional website.

2- Know the Market

Part of understanding what your company needs is understanding what motivates your target market and knowing your customer can help you to customize their experience. Having the little things in place can go a long way towards helping you to stand out in the eye of the consumer. For instance, many companies overlook the importance of a customizable search option. Utilizing a search application such as Swiftype allows consumers to quickly find what they are looking for on your site, and customers appreciate targeted, immediate results.
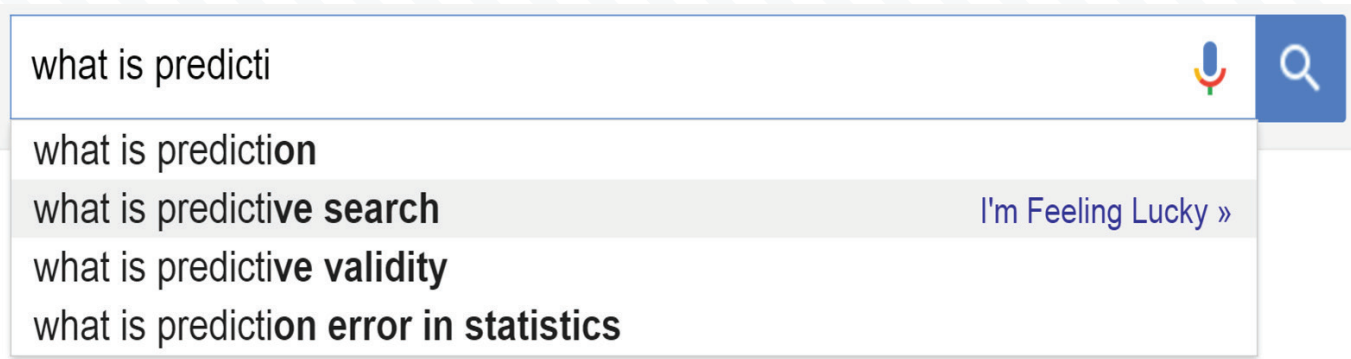
3- Know Your Competitors

Understanding your competitive landscape can greatly help you develop a successful website. Take time to notice what is and what is not effective about their website. Look at their value proposition, and analyze the changes that could be made to enhance the site and apply those elements to your design.

4- Define Your Plan

It is important to have a plan in place. The plan should highlight any wire-frames or designs and establish the methods that will be used to achieve the goal. It also creates a point of reference that different individuals may go to, ensuring that everyone is on the same page.

Under each of the aforementioned categories there are a few other things to focus in on, but having a grasp of these main concepts can point you in the right direction towards developing sound and effective websites.

02 SCALABILITY WITH YOUR ONLINE STORE

a. Optimizing for Growth

I. Platform Considerations

Choosing the right platform for your website is crucial. Once you have outlined what your needs are for your website, you can begin to research which ecommerce platform best fits your needs. Remember to consider, costs, scalability, and integration needs. Here are some options tho consider.

1 . BigCommerce: This company has an uptime record of 99.99 percent, which is impressive compared to the industry norm of 99.5. Every second your online store is up and running is time for you to be moving toward success. BigCommerce is fast, has higher conversion rates, and multiple layers of security, such as firewalls, intrusion-detection software, and human oversight on top of it all. Bigcommerce focuses heavily on feature that help you to grow your business.

a. Wide variety of response ecommerce template designs
b. In-class marketing and conversion tools to increase sales and drive more traffic
c. Industry-leading performance and stability, with uptime more than 99.99% and fast loading time
d. Cloud-based platform ¼ the cost of on-premise solutions.
e. Robust faceted search options

BigCommerce offers four main plans for their platform:
- "Standard" - A full featured online store
- "Plus" - Optimized conversion and customer group management
- "Pro" - High-volume security and analytics
- "Enterprise" - Full feature cloud ecommerce selling solution

2 . OroCommerce: OroCommerce is an open-source Business to Business eCommerce application built with flexibility in mind. OroCommerce can be customized and extended to fit any B2B commerce needs. OroCommerce is built from the ground up as a B2B application. The application includes such features as advanced search capabilities, a built in CMS system with support for multiple price lists, quote-to-order process, quick order forms, support for

multibusiness and corporate customer accounts, eliminating the need to compromise by extensively customizing existing eCommerce applications.

a. Corporate Accounts

b. Multiple Websites

c. Personalized Catalogs

d. Multiple Price Lists

e. Quick Order Form

f. Configure to Quote and Quote to Order Workflow

g. Store Frontend Optimized for B2B Buying Experience

h. B2C-Style Branded Frontend and Experience

i. Mobile Optimized Buyer and Sales Representative Experience

j. Built-in flexible content management

k. Multiple price lists

3 . Magento: Magenta's CMS platform for ecommerce is one that offers business owners out-of-the-box functionality. Oversight is provided for items such as vouchers, store credits, gift cards, and packing slips. It can also handle payments through alternative sources to credit and debit cards. Magento is rich with off-the-shelf extensions and a global ecosystem of expert partners.

a. Largest eCommerce developer Community on the Market

    i. Thousands of extensions

    ii. 100's of responsive ecommerce template designs

    iii. Largest number of third party integrations

b. Get support for multiple languages and currencies

c. Control multiple websites and stores from one administration panel

d. In-class marketing and conversion tools to increase sales and drive more traffic

e. Extensive Catalog Management Tools with the ability sell everything from Simple

products to complex KITs and Bundles.

      i. Related products, up-sells, and cross-sells

f. Extensive Suite of Features for B2B Functionality

g. Robust Promotional Feature Set allowing for everything from $ off to BOGO's and more.

      i. Set promotional pricing for specific stores, categories, customer groups, or products

      ii. Create flexible coupons for specific stores, customer groups, time periods, products, and categories

      iii. Export coupon codes for offline distribution, email, newsletters, and more

      iv. Track and report coupon usage

h. Create customizable category landing pages

i. Search Engine Optimization tools for Google sitemap, friendly URLS, and metadata

j. Use the content management system to create and easily edit pages and content blocks

k. Use a Web Services API for easy integration between Magento and third-party applications

II. Third Party Integrations and Extensions

Top Signs That Your Business Needs an ERP System

Some eCommerce business owners are wary of implementing an ERP system because traditional software can be expensive or time consuming to implement. However, recent software advances in this niche have streamlined these applications for maximum effectiveness. The following issues are warning signs that it may be time to improve your business with an ERP solution.

1. You Have Multiple Applications for Different Tasks

If you have one program each for warehouse inventory, ordering and pricing, you're introducing many potential issues into your processes. When your employees have to wait for multiple programs to communicate, they can't make quick decisions based on accurate data, which can decrease overall efficiency.

2. You Rely on Heavily Customized Software

Your business needs are unique, so a bit of customization is expected. However, if your system uses many plugins or support applications to operate effectively, updates (which happen frequently) become time consuming and expensive. Your software system should be flexible enough to support business growth.

3. You Have Difficulty Accessing Important Business Data

If you are asked about your enterprise's key performance metrics, how long will it take you to track down precise and updated data? Ideally you should have immediate access to this type of data without needing a round of data input or manual analytics.

4. Your IT Department Is Overwhelmed

When you're a business owner, you'll find in many cases the simplest solution is the best. With ERP software, this is especially true because customization, integration, maintenance and troubleshooting of complex, multi-application systems can overburden even your finely cultivated IT team.

5. Accounting Is Increasingly Time Consuming

Pay special attention to your accounting department because this backend operations stomping ground will probably show the first noticeable signs of needing new ERP software. Because they deal with so much data, input and reporting tasks can halt other important department functions. However, ERP solutions can handle these tasks easily.

6. Customer Service Is Suffering

Managing your inventory and shipping is crucial, but it is increasingly difficult as your business grows. If you are having trouble keeping popular items in stock or giving customers accurate updates on their order, you should consider a system upgrade.

7. You're Missing Deadlines

Are you having trouble filling orders on time? Can you consistently meet your shipping deadlines? When you start having trouble keeping up with these tasks, it may be an indication that your order management system is no longer sufficient for your needs.

8. You Have Limited to No Remote Access

Frankly, you should be able to access your important business metrics and other data from anywhere at anytime. You never know when an unforeseen obstacle or opportunity will come your way, so be sure you'll always have the data you need to make good business decisions.

9. Your Departments Aren't Collaborating

When your team doesn't work cohesively, it's hard to maintain smooth daily operations. You need your departments to focus on their tasks, but it's incredibly important to share information. For instance, can your inventory manager easily gain access to projected budgets so he or she can effectively plan for next quarter?

10. Your Innovation Has Halted

If you aren't exactly sure of your businesses current state of health, how can you target areas of your enterprise that require improvement? One of the keys to effective business growth is knowing when to innovate and upgrade. If your business is showing the above signs, implement a practical ERP solution and reap the benefit of an improved bottom line. You'll be more responsive to the market's frequent changes and your enterprise's individual growth might just skyrocket.

Why Utilizing SkuVault Will Increase Performance, Efficiency, and Revenue

Mis-picks, overstocking, and understocking result in an estimated $252.9 billion in costs per year for major retailers across the US (that's $1.5 million, $123.4 billion, and $129.5 billion, respectively). Some of this cost is associated with extra labor hours to rectify human error, returns handling, shipment fees, and marketplace penalties – and some of it is opportunity cost. SkuVault helps you to take advantage of your existing inventory, and helps you make smart forecasting and replenishment decisions to take advantage of your future opportunities as well.

Plan for the Future With Innovative Tools

Business owners want their enterprises to succeed for years to come, but how do you build a business with staying power? First, you need tools designed to suit your business model – ideally, tools designed by individuals who understand the unique pain points that hinder your growth daily. SkuVault was designed by eCommerce merchants, for eCommerce merchants – by sellers like you who knew there was a better way to manage their online business. Legacy WMS and inventory software were around before the eCommerce days, and weren't exactly designed for this new generation's business needs. If you want to plan for the future, you'll need tools that will prepare you for the obstacles and successes to come.

Replace Fragmented Applications With a Cohesive System

Even the big names of ERP software, such as Magento and NetSuite, need supporting applications to cover the fundamental needs of eCommerce businesses. Applications like nChannel and FarApp allow each system to run more cohesively across various data platforms, but, frankly, that is inefficient. SkuVault goes beyond the scope of the traditional ERP system, and helps you manage:

- **Inventory management & quantity syncs**
- **Product kitting**
- **Purchasing & receiving**
- **Location-based wave picking**
- **Quality control**
- **Forecasting analytics**

That means you can lighten your IT department's workload, since it won't have to work out as many cross-platform bugs.

Saves You Time While Increasing Profits

SkuVault gives you two incredible improvements on traditional ERP systems: automated data input and the most powerful analytics suite you'll find on the market. When you're trying to run a smooth and efficient business, you have to consider the little things like inputting data into your systems. Instead of having your employees spend hours inputting data, moving orders and updating inventory across many platforms, put that time into analyzing and improving your backend tasks.

Get Access to Real Time Data From Anywhere

For business owners, cloud storage has been a revelation – now, when you leave for that important networking trip, you can stay updated on the daily operations of your warehouse without having to ask your managers to add briefing you via phone to their hectic schedules. SkuVault gives you real-time updates too, so you don't have to wait for your regular quarterly progress reports. Instead, you can use updated and accurate data to help guide you through important business decisions.

Running a business means conquering many headaches, so why not use a backend management that won't give you the hassle? Spend more time on improving your efficiency and profitability and less time getting your management software to work as it should. Use SkuVault to streamline your ERP-related applications into one cloud-based system that was designed specifically for eCommerce sellers in need of better ERP and backend solutions.

RetailOps

E-commerce and omnichannel retailers each have their own unique set of operating pains that need to be solved in order to grow. There is a common theme amongst all growing retail businesses, however, that must be addressed. Specifically, any growing retailer must solve the right balance of Procurement, Warehouse and Supply Chain Operations to meet Customer Expectations. All too often the solution to this core issue of growth entails several different software solutions each of which must be negotiated, integrated, implemented, and each employee trained on to conjure a cohesive business operating system. The pains RetailOps solves show up in a myriad of ways such as:

- Low inventory accuracy
- Incorrect Cost of Goods On Hand
- Oversold orders (stuff you thought you had, but don't)
- Undersold inventory (stuff you have in your warehouse but not for sale on your site)
- High incidence of mis-shipped orders (shipped the customer the wrong thing)
- Difficulty expanding warehouse teams (high training cost, low output per employee)
- Low returning customer rates
- Poor product data on site leading to low conversion rates (missing images, not enough product information collected and entered into the site)
- Inability to leverage inventory in more than one channel (your site only and not amazon or ebay, etc..)
- Lack of a multi-channel strategy to leverage inventory you have (takes too long to list entire catalog for sale in all places available to you, in-store inventory available for sale on website? On amazon? On sears? etc..)
- Small catalog of product (can't automate drop shipping capable vendors)

RetailOps is a Saas product uniquely designed for retailers, online, brick-and-mortar, and everything in between. Providing a full set of tools to run back-office operations from the C-suite to the warehouse floor; purchasing, receiving, inventory, product management, shipping, reporting and beyond in a single cohesive system.

With over a decade of experience in retail execution and operational efficiency, RetailOps has built their reputation and stronghold in the market due to their capacity to configure their all-in-one software suite on the processes of how retail business operates. RetailOps is engaged because you shouldn't expect to operate two businesses, a Technology business and

a Retail business to scale your organization and work around rigid software tools that don't work well together. RetailOps will immerse themselves into your business and configure the software and your corresponding businesses processes with tried and true solutions for retail.

III. Hosting

Best Practices for Choosing a Hosting Partner

When it comes to site hosting, things like suitable equipment and hardware can be extremely important to ensure your business maintains a viable online presence. Additionally, selecting a suitable hosting provider can be just as crucial.

A great hosting company is MageMojo, which is rated highly among similar hosting providers. To further improve your chances of finding the right hosting service for your specific needs, the following information can prove beneficial.

Leadership Ability Is Crucial

Leadership is an integral concern in the business world, particularly when it comes to web hosting. The right company will assume a leadership role to ensure your business's web site has what it needs to function at peak capacity. This includes the initial setup process, as well as implementing the proper protections where security is concerned.

Security Is a Top Priority

A reliable hosting service will make certain that security remains a top priority for your business. This includes making use of the latest in security measures, such as managed firewalls and intrusion detection systems.

Task Management Must Be Determined

When considering a particular hosting provider, you should make every attempt to determine which tasks will be managed by the company. Many companies leave this intentionally vague,

which can lead to quite a bit of confusion should you be ill-prepared to deal with certain responsibilities. Inquiring about the following tasks can be helpful in this respect:

- Who will be responsible for incremental backups of your site?
- Who's in charge of security measures, such as patches and upgrades?
- Are things like redundancy and clusters included in the total package? If so, who will be in charge of the management processes?
- How will migration from the current hosting provider occur?
- Who will be tasked with managing platforms and applications?

Also, be wary of providers who claim to cover all of the above tasks without question. Because many of these tasks must be customized on a site-by-site basis, hosting companies are reluctant to include them along with other more general duties.

Hosting Services Should Be Familiar With Your Technology

A hosting company should also be familiar with the technology you're using. For instance, Magento servers entail specialized requirements that not all hosting companies are capable of meeting. This includes components such as a specially tuned LAMP stack necessary to meet the high performance capabilities of Magento servers.

Quality Support Is Equally Important

Of course quality support is an exceedingly important aspect of a hosting provider. Because problems can arise at virtually any time, you need a company that offers around the clock assistance. In addition, speed of service is also important. Reliable hosting companies will respond to support tickets no later than two hours after receipt, and pressing matters should be dealt with in about an hour.

A Hosting Partner You Can Trust

When seeking the above qualities in a prospective hosting company, Managed Magento Hosting can offer just what your business needs to ensure success. Let 121eCommerce help you choose the perfect hosting partner to match your needs.

IV. Newsletters & Affiliates

Email Marketing Remains Effective – If You Do It Right

Of all the different ways e-commerce merchants can reach their current or potential customers, none may be as consistent in getting results as email marketing. Despite the fact that today's consumers pay less attention to promotional emails in the sea of messages in their inboxes, it is not yet time to give up on this communication strategy for boosting your online sales. However, it is important that you keep your messaging fresh and valuable for customers, otherwise, your emails might just sink.

Newsletters of Old

Email newsletters have been around for decades, and in many cases they have not evolved much. The approach generally is one of "editorial" content that may be of interest to someone who ordered products or services from your company. In the past, everyone on the email marketing spreadsheet received the same messages, regardless of their interests or any specific preferences. Sometimes, the email used a form function that filled in the name of recipient in order to look more personal. Many customers found these newsletters a bit on the boring side and only opened them to see if a percentage-off coupon was included.

Fresher Approaches

Today's newsletters are all electronic, and they take full advantage of the customization technology with dynamic e-commerce marketing firms such as BlueCherry Group. Each email marketing message can be tailored to the preferences, browsing history and frequently purchased lists attached to each recipient. Newsletters can offer cross-selling items or suggest styling options for the felt fedora your customer bought last week. Email newsletters with helpful information, pertinent reviews and valuable offers not only entice readers to open them, they can lead to increased customer satisfaction and repeat business.

Utilize Technology

At this point it is clear that customization in email marketing is much more lucrative than generic messaging. However, you may be wondering how you will have the time to handpick all the topics covered in each subscriber's email newsletter. Fortunately, that all can be left to technology. These services are automated ones that you can learn to utilize yourself, or you can hire a personalization and marketing service that will handle all these details for you. They might also be able to offer other helpful services. BlueCherry Group also can oversee affiliate marketing efforts, search engine ad campaigns and customer data mining programs.

If you have been working on email marketing for a while and have a newsletter approach in place, maybe it is time to consider tweaking it to add more personalization. Use the tools you have at your disposal to harness the power of effective email marketing.

03 CONVERSION RATE OPTIMIZATION

a. Shopping Cart Optimization

I. Top 5 Checkout Process Mistakes Companies Should Avoid

For many e-commerce companies, simply getting customers to put products in their online shopping carts is a feat to be celebrated. However, the purchase is far from being "in the bag" (pardon our pun). Your customers might run into prompts or checkout process problems that discourage them from completing their orders. You have a lot of control over these types of situations, depending on whether or not you employ best practice techniques in your store checkout process.

Your customers may also temporarily abandon their online carts before checking out so they can quickly run an errand or compare prices. You can't control situations like these, but you can control how your online store is programmed to handle them. Here are the top five checkout process mistakes online companies make, and advice for how to avoid them.

1. Checkout Distractions

When a customer commits to making a purchase, they typically want to do it quickly. If you bombard them with multiple distractions during the checkout process, their determination may wane. In order to encourage a quick, undeterred purchase, try eliminating any unnecessary distractions during the checkout process, including:

- Featured boxes
- Sidebars
- Main navigation
- All other unnecessary site elements

The best practice for e-commerce sites is to make the checkout process simple and quick with minimal distractions.

2. Awkward Mobile Checkouts

You might be surprised to find out just how many online companies make it difficult for users to complete purchases from their mobile devices. If your checkout process is currently not mobile-friendly, it's time to make some changes! Users who attempt to make mobile purchases from your site should not be subjected to a complex, slow or confusing process.

In order to make sure your checkout process is mobile-friendly, give it a test-run (or ten!) on various mobile devices to ensure that the copy is easy to read, the design is attractive, and the checkout process is quick and simple. Welcoming customer feedback is a great way to keep yourself aware of any challenges or frustrations your mobile shoppers may face. An excellent service for customer feedback is with ShopperApproved.   As you make necessary changes to ensure the mobile-friendliness of your site, pay attention to how your conversion rates are affected.

3. Clearing Abandoned Carts too Quickly

Many customers temporarily abandon their carts, but then come back hours later to complete their purchases. If you clear abandoned carts too quickly, you could frustrate your customers and discourage the completion of purchases. According to research conducted by Baymard Institute (an independent web research company), 67.44% of shopping carts on average are abandoned. According to Forrester Research, 27% of those shopping cart abandoners want to compare prices, which means they could come back to purchase if your prices prove to be competitive.

Forrester Research also shows that 24% of shopping cart abandoners want to save the items in their carts so they can come back and purchase them later. If you clear carts too quickly, then you will discourage customers and miss out on sales. Many exasperated website visitors have left sites in frustration when their shopping carts were unexpectedly cleared after mere minutes of inactivity. Don't drive customers away by clearing their carts too quickly.

4. Surprise Checkout Charges

Most people like surprises right? Maybe so, but not when it comes to extra charges during the checkout process! When customers place items in their shopping cart, they expect to know how much they will pay for those items before they get to the very end of the checkout process. If customers are unfairly surprised by high shipping costs or unexpected delivery charges while checking out, they are highly likely to abandon their purchases and never return.

In order to prevent unpleasant checkout surprises like this, make sure your shipping and delivery charges are clearly displayed on the product pages. You can also simply incorporate the extra cost directly into your product pricing. This will keep your customers from feeling blindsided by extra charges while checking out.

Your exchange policies, shipping and return policies, and customer care contact information should also be shown in a prominent area, such as the bottom of each page. The FAQs section is another area where this information is commonly found. Just make sure it is easy for your customers to find all of your policies so that you keep them happy while covering all of your bases.

5. Forcing Registration on Buyers

Some customers hate registering on various websites, so you should never make registration a prerequisite to purchasing goods or services on your site. Many customers shop in haste, and being slowed down by constant prompts to register may frustrate them and cause them to leave without making a purchase. While it is important to give customers the option to register, you should also give them the option of making their purchase as a guest.

We Can Help!

Wondering how to improve your checkout process and keep your customers happy? 121eCommerce can help! Fill out our contact form online or call us at (216) 586-6656 for more information about improving your conversion rate by asking us to assess your checkout process.

b. Site Abandonment

I. Avoid Site Abandonment to Increase Conversion Rates

It's easy for customers to abandon a shopping cart on an ecommerce site. There are many things you can do to avoid site abandonment and increase your conversion rate. Your site should be optimized to give the shopper an easy experience and tell them what they need to know when they are ready to checkout. Layout and design is crucial in conversion rate optimization. Then, during the checkout process, you need to look at the customer's experience and ensure you're doing everything you can to get them to complete the sale.

II. Integrate an Abandoned Cart Saver Into Your Process

There are many reasons customers don't finish the sale. You may not even know all the reasons that they don't click the checkout button, but you can encourage the conversion. One of the key tools that BigCommerce uses is the abandoned cart saver. Once a customer puts an item into the cart, but doesn't complete the sale, the cart saver tool picks up on it. A cart is not considered abandoned until there has been no activity for an hour. The cart saver tool waits another hour before it sends an email to the customer reminding them about the item in the cart
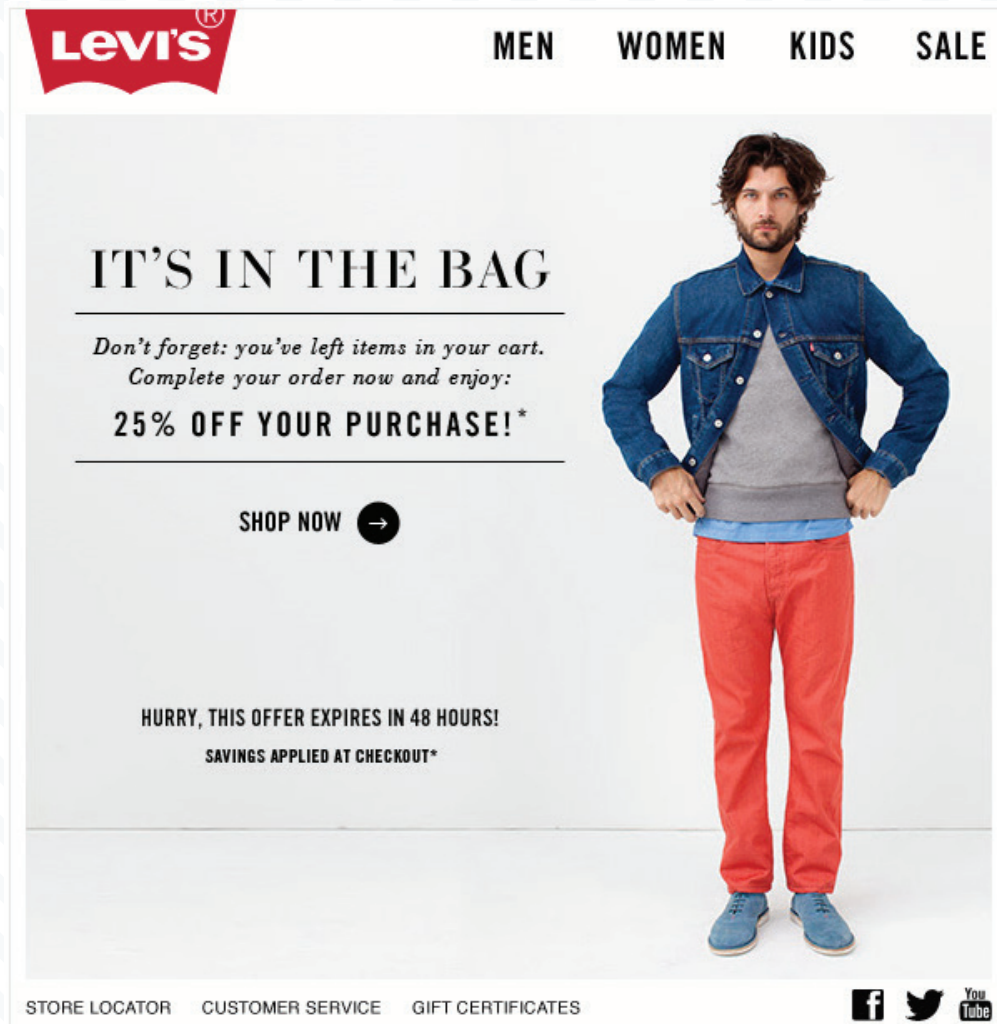
In order to use this tool, your business must have the customer's email. This can be accomplished by asking the customer for an email when they add something to the cart or having them log into an account that was previously established. You may have to offer a special reward or discount to encourage sign-ups. A 15 percent discount on the first order may provide more conversions, which leads to more sales. It's a small trade-off, especially when you consider that once you have that customer, it's often easier to re-convert them to more sales.

III. Utilize Tools That Help You Manage Site Abandonment

Software such as Magento's Magento Abandoned Cart Campaign that integrates into your website offers more options to reach out to shoppers who left their carts. This allows you to generate a list of those potential customers and then reach out to them with incentives to return. BigCommerce has multiple options in which your business can contact those shoppers

who left their cart. Use these tools to change site abandonment losses. There are multiple options within the tools to give you plenty of control over when the emails are sent to abandoned carts. You can change the frequency based on customer feedback. You can also create a list of potential customers who may be interested in your newsletter and other sales.

c. Web Analytics

When a consumer performs an action that you want them to, the process is known as conversion. Conversion can involve a myriad of actions, such as filling out a contact form or purchasing an item. One aspect of Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) involves exploring user feedback and web analytics in order to uncover issues that are preventing conversion. This unique and helpful process allows you to examine your website and repair user-related issues that pose a problem. For example, if one of your actions can only be performed in Mozilla or Chrome, you will alienate users who use Safari. CRO can easily bring such issues to your attention.

How CRO Can Benefit Your Site

Conversion rate optimization requires an in-depth analysis of your website. Everything from your content to the structure of your site should be examined in detail in order to discover what aspects of your website are conducive to your goals, and which ones are detrimental. Conversion is not a uniform process, and different types of websites will require different conversion approaches. Despite this fact, there are still some universal ways to make CRO work for your site.

Ways to Increase Traffic

The ultimate goal of CRO is to increase the amount of traffic your site gains on a weekly basis. If your web analytics are properly in place, you should be able to easily do this. By seeking out pages that exhibit higher than average bounce and exit rates, you will be able to find out where the majority of your efforts should be focused. You should also seek to answer the following questions during the CRO process.

- Is your Call to Action visible and easy to understand?
- Are your images adding to or taking away from the user experience?
- Is your site easy to navigate?

- Are your value propositions communicated clearly?
- Do your users feel as if they are browsing a safe website?
- Is your site loading at a sufficent speed?
- Are your users required to take extra steps in order to perform basic actions?

All of these questions will help you better understand your website, and identify areas that need improvement.

Additional CRO Resources

Conversion rate optimization requires a wide variety of tests, web analytics, heat maps, and surveys. Each of these techniques has its own benefits, but they can all help you find ways to generate more traffic. If you lack the expertise to properly perform the CRO process, there are many online tools and companies that can help you effectively do so.
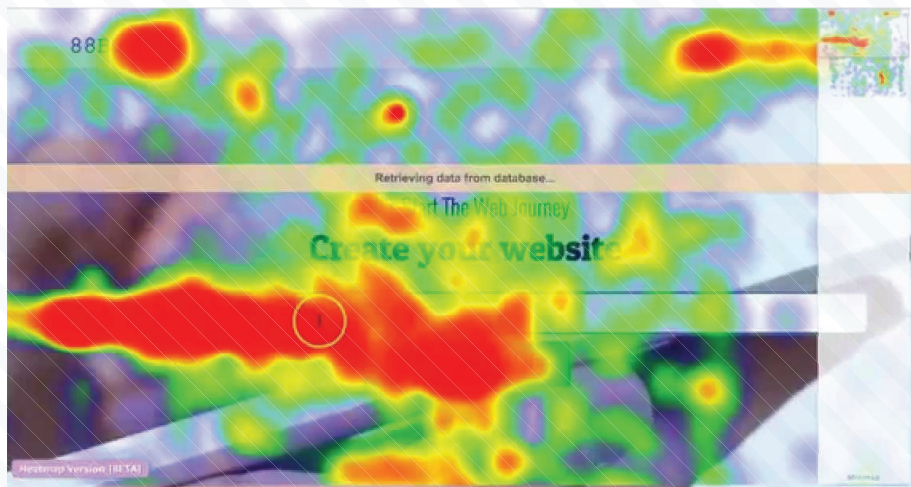
04 WEB DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

a. Structured With SEO Best Practices

I. *4 SEO Best Practices To Keep In Mind*

Search engine optimization, or SEO as it is commonly called, is a marketing tactic that increases search engine results. There are many different elements of this practice, but they all aim to help a website generate traffic and improve search engine rankings. Simply put, your website will be

better understood by search engines if it is created using an SEO web design process. If you are new to the world of search engine optimization, the following list of do's and don'ts will help you formulate your own SEO best practice tactics.

✓ Keep Your Users in Mind

When it comes to web design, your site should always cater to the needs and preferences of your users. Do your pages look professional? Are they helpful? Is your message clearly articulated? If you answered no to any of these questions, you may have some work to do. When building your site, try to only include enough static pages to make your website functional. If you add an excessive amount of pages, you could end up watering down the content on your site or confusing users.

✓ Build a Site That Performs its Intended Functions

If your site does not perform its intended functions, users will simply leave. Users tend to visit websites for the following reasons.

- To gather information
- To purchase products or services
- To communicate with others
- To get help or read professional opinions

Your site should perform all of these functions in a manner that is efficient and intuitive. Try to put yourself in the shoes of your users, and think about what you would want your site to do if you were on the other side of the fence. Your site should also be an extension of your company's personal brand, so be sure that it showcases your company's identity.

✗ Don't Overuse Keywords or Backlinks

It can be tempting to stuff your content with keywords, but that out dated method will only hurt your site now. Your site's ranking will be based more on the quality of its content and how well you manage to satisfy users. It is great using target keywords, just remember that your content should be unique and relevant. It is also recommended that you build links naturally over time instead of setting overly-ambitious targets. Too many too quickly, and links from spammy sites like most directories will only harm your rankings.

**✖ Don't Anticipate the Needs of Your Users**

Understanding the needs of your users is not only good practice overall for an ecommerce website, it also plays a positive role with SEO. For example, by designing a navigation that allows users to easily find the content or items they need, you are creating a great user experience. When users have an easier time finding what they are looking for, they are less likely to bounce on arrival, and more likely to stick around on your site. Search engines factor in time on site as a positive reflection of the user experience, and rewards your site in the rankings.

II. Responsive Website Design

One important aspect of SEO is responsive design. Having a mobile-friendly website is essential.

Google's Mobile-Friendly Update Rewards Websites That Look Good on Smartphones

Predictions that Google's April 21, 2015 search engine update would hurt websites not optimized for mobile devices have proven true. Since the launch, Google's latest algorithm has promoted mobile friendly websites, placing them higher in mobile search results than sites that haven't been designed to look good on smartphones.
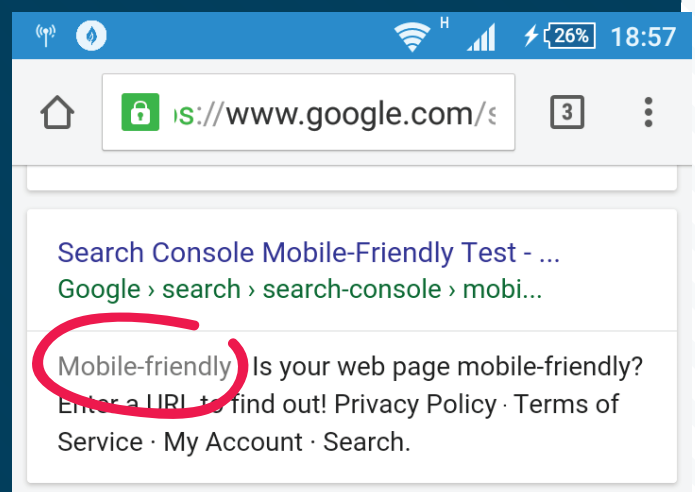
The search company gives a boost in rankings to websites that load quickly on smartphones, have text large enough to read and can be accessed by scrolling rather than swiping back and forth. Google reduces the ranking for websites that are hard to navigate on the small screens of mobile devices.

The demotion for sites that aren't mobile friendly appears to have led to a decrease in their visitors from smartphones. According to a recent study by Adobe Systems, traffic from mobile searches fell 12 percent for non mobile friendly websites in the months since Google's update. The study analyzed data from 5,000 websites. It found the biggest drop in visits to non mobile

friendly websites occurred during the Memorial Day weekend. The study hypothesized that many people were traveling and used smartphones to search online.

Google Gives Fair Warning of the Mobile Algorithm Update

Google took the unusual step in February 2015 of announcing its planned adjustment and urging developers to optimize their websites. In its announcement, Google said the update in the ranking system would have a "significant impact" in mobile search results.
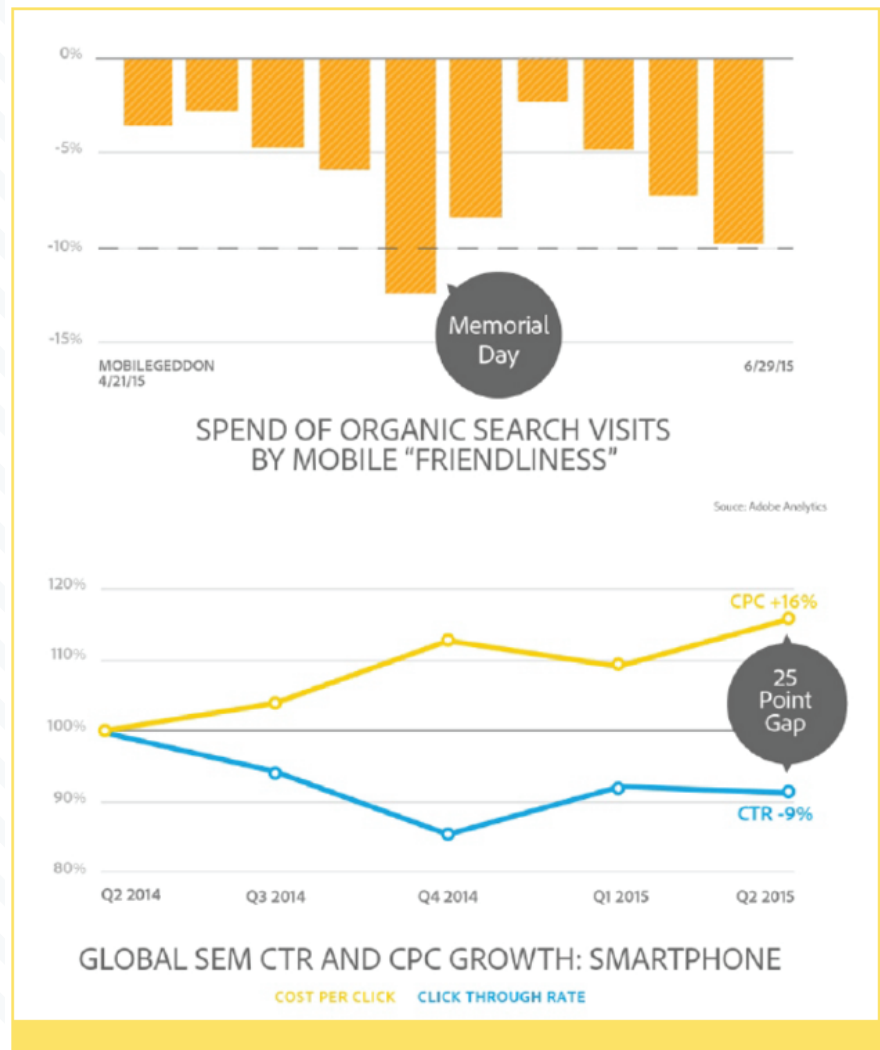
Some website operators and owners worried they wouldn't be able to optimize their sites in time for the change. The algorithm tweak was given the hyperbolic moniker of "Mobilegeddon." While fears spurred by the speculations seemed overblown to many, Google's algorithm has had a measurable effect in search rankings, traffic and ad prices.

Mobilegeddon Aftermath

Some websites saw a drop in traffic by 35 percent in the month immediately after the update was rolled out, according to an analysis by the online publication Marketingland.com. Other studies and websites found little change in traffic after Google's update.

As a result of falling visits, many website operators tried to bolster rankings by buying more mobile ads from Google. The increase in sales drove up the price of mobile advertising by about 16 percent during the second quarter compared to the same period in 2014, Adobe Systems found in its study.

Google ads are awarded by keyword auctions based partly on bids and partly on a website's quality score. Since mobile friendliness is now more important in Google's ranking standards, advertisers with optimized sites have a better chance of winning keyword ads and reducing the ad-spend.

Make Sure Your Website Meets Mobile Standards

Google's updates are giving mobile users a better experience. These changes can benefit any business as long as their websites are compliant with the search engine's standards. If you need help getting your pages ready for the mobile revolution, contact 121eCommerce for a consultation. We have the expertise to put your website in the hands of smartphone users.

III. 5 Elements to Analyze When You Do an SEO Audit – and the Tools to Use

Whether you run a small business or control a huge corporation's website, one of your top priorities should be boosting your website's search ranking on Google or other Search Engines.. A higher search ranking means more attention, and ideally, more customers. In all cases, you need to enhance the SEO friendliness of your website to give it the best opportunities to rank high. If you are not sure what SEO friendliness is and how to measure it, don't worry. Read on as we explain the most important elements to check in an SEO audit and the tools you can use to measure these elements.

1. Mobile Friendliness

As an August 2014 report from comScore shows, more people connect to the Internet through mobile devices (51 percent) versus desktop and laptop computers (42 percent). The conclusions are obvious; you must be able to reach people through mobile means, or you are not giving them a satisfactory experience or tapping into your potential. Plus, you are handing your competitors a great advantage on a platter.

To test the mobile friendliness of your website, head over to the Google Developers Mobile-Friendly Test. In fact, use the test to check on your competitors' websites as well. All you do is type a URL, and this tool analyzes the website, telling you how mobile friendly it is.
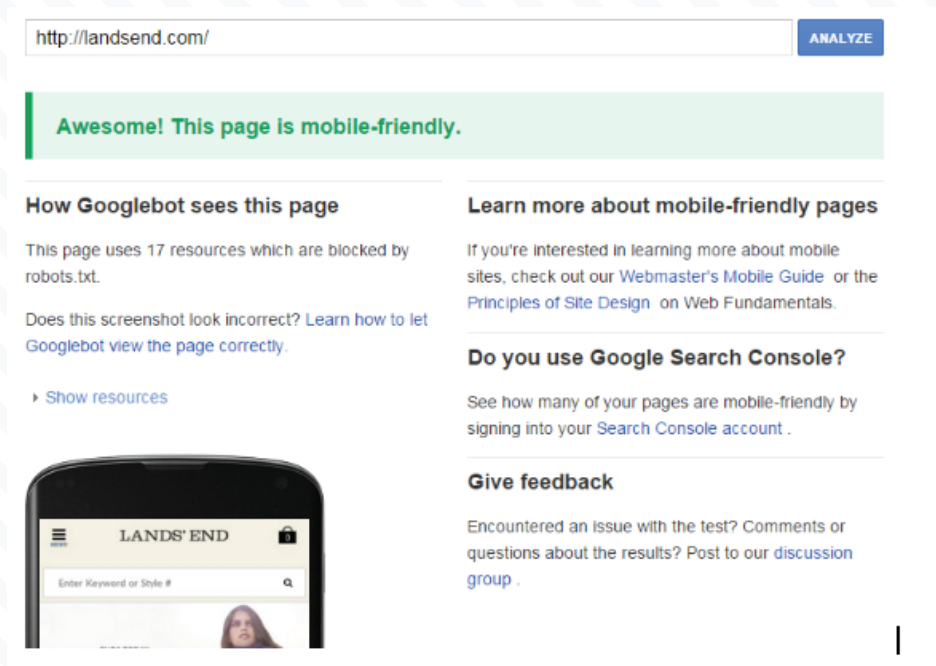

2. Page Speed

The better the experience for the end user, the higher the website ranking on Google. Page speed is one of these key elements you must test, especially since attention spans these days are shorter. GTMetrix gives you in-depth reports on your website's page speed and how you can make it even speedier, for example, by deferring JavaScript parsing.
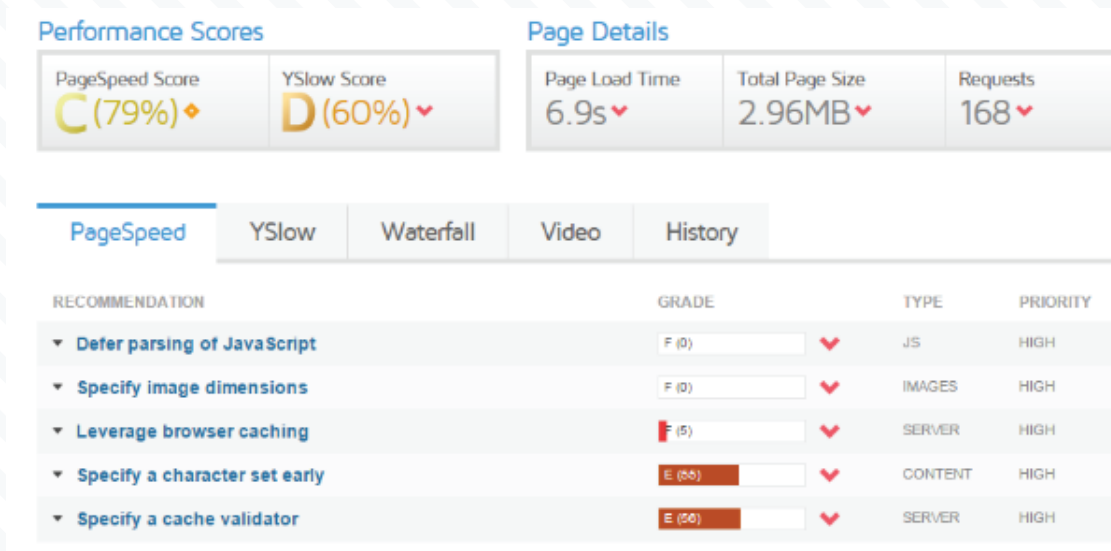
Another useful tool to measure page speed is Google Developers PageSpeed Insights. While it does not provide as in-depth a report as the GTMetrix testing tool, you do get distinct recommendations for mobile and desktop versions.

3. Overall Health

Google Search Console is your go-to when you need to explore the overall health of your website. Various tabs in the console lend insight into areas such as search appearance (title tags, for example), search traffic (the keywords that bring users to your website, on what device type and who likes to link to your website), crawl (potential URL errors) and Google Index (pinpoints index bloat problems along with other indexing problems).
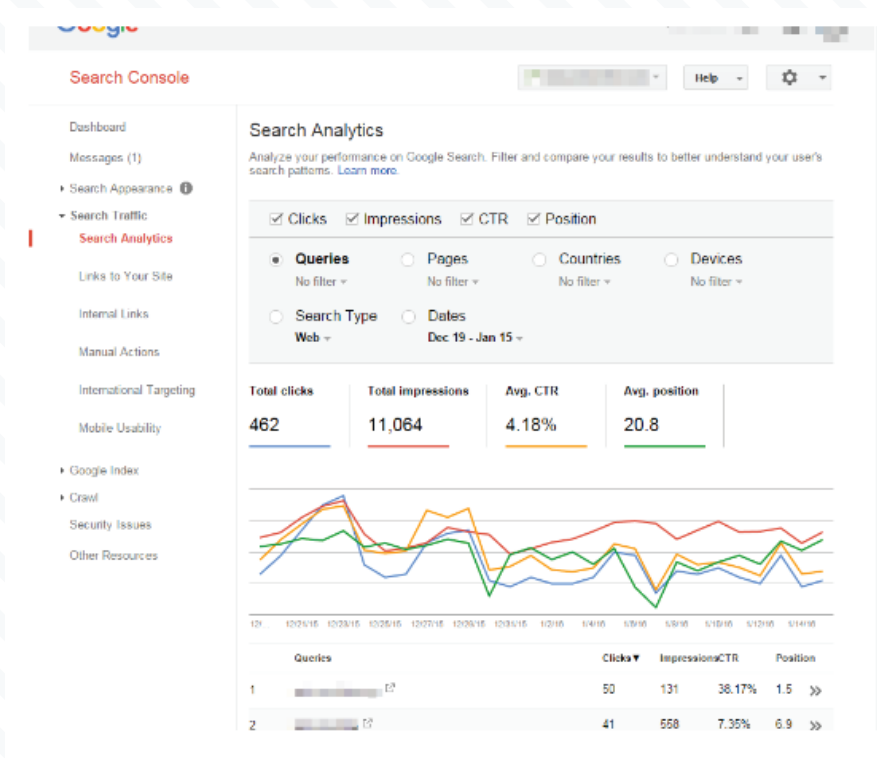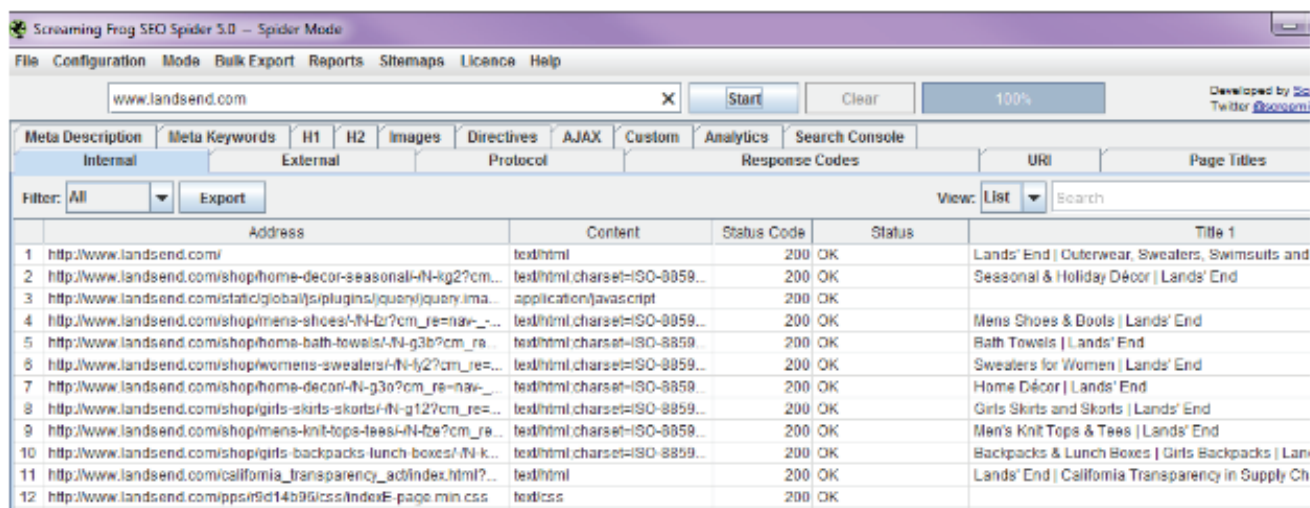
You should also use SEMRush, but keep in mind that the free version is not nearly as useful as the paid version. However, the free version does provide insight into elements such as backlinks and the keywords responsible for your website's search ranking. Perhaps the most advantageous reason to use SEMRush is the Domain vs. Domain tool; use it to identify your true online competitors.
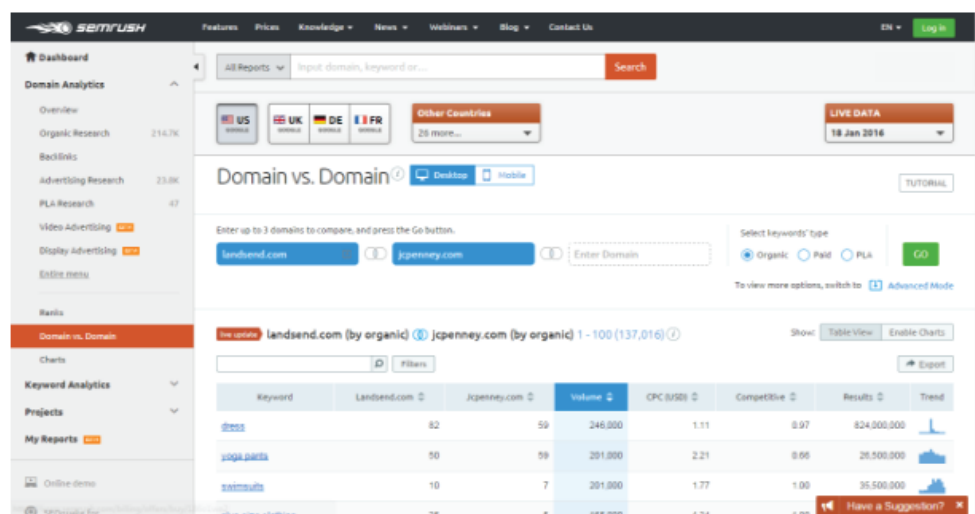
4. Page-by-Page Feedback

The free version of the ScreamingFrog SEO audit tool crawls your website up to 500 pages, delivering page-by-page input on issues such as title tags, meta descriptions, H1 tags and many other elements. It's a great way to ensure you cover as many bases as possible.

5. Backlink Analysis

While some of the tools above assess backlinks, you should also try out Majestic Tools. This SEO audit tool is top of the line for looking at inbound links and evaluating the linking pages. For an even more intricate look, use the paid version.

So, in a nutshell, here are the tools you should be using and what they do. After you scan the list,

keep reading for the scoop on two more invaluable tools.

- **Google Developers Mobile-Friendly Test:** Tests how mobile your website (and other websites are)
- **GTMetrix:** Assesses the page speed of your website
- **SEMRush:** Provides insight into elements such as backlinks and the keywords responsible for your website's search ranking
- **Google Developers PageSpeed Insights:** Gives separate reports on mobile and desktop page speed issues
- **Google Search Console:** Provides insight into your website's overall health with looks at elements such as searchers' keywords and search appearance
- **ScreamingFrog:** Provides page-by-page feedback up to 500 pages (paid version searches more pages)
- **Majestic Tools:** Analyzes backlink elements such as inbound links and the linking pages

Also worth mentioning is Moz Tools. It's an excellent resource for anyone who wants to learn more about SEO and SEO tools. The tools on this website are all great, and some are free.

Many reports on SEO audit tools skip over Google Analytics because many people assume you are already using it. We don't want to make that mistake, so here's a rundown on this tool. It tracks such elements as:

- organic traffic
- paid traffic
- email traffic
- referral traffic
- other types of website traffic

Combine Google Analytics with your other tools, and you are in an excellent position for insightful SEO audits. After you have executed SEO recommendations, Google Analytics helps track increases in organic traffic.

Contact Us to Learn More! We highly recommend Volume9 and Optimal targeting

If you want to learn more about SEO or need help with a SEO audit, get in touch with us today. Our aim is to help your business be all it can be.

IV. Are You Implementing Blogs and Social Media Into Your Marketing Strategy?

It might be difficult to add one more element into your business, but social media and blogs cannot be ignored in marketing. Facebook has more than one billion active users. It's estimated that over 90 percent of Americans have a Facebook or Twitter account. More users are getting their news and information through these two channels. As a business owner, you have to tap into these sources for new customers and to inform current ones to keep them coming back to your site. Here are some easy ways to use a blog and social media to build your brand:

- Use software which easily integrates posts on social media to your website or into a shopping opportunity. AddShoppers is a great choice to help with this.

- Always give your customers a call-to-action. Tell your audience what you want them to do, i.e. join an email list, buy your product, share the post, or get more information. By varying your CTA, your business doesn't sound like you're all about sales.

- Give your customers an insight into your business. A blog post written by an employee helps the shopper know that they are credible in the industry. It also demystifies your industry.

- Before implementing a strategy, get the analytics of your current rankings in order to watch what works and what doesn't.

- Set measurable goals which benefit your business. The number of followers you have might be the most noticeable number, but you have to convert those followers into sales to really make a difference into your bottom line. Look at gaining customers, not just followers.

- Once you start updating a blog, make sure you keep up with it. It demonstrates to customers that you are reliable, dependable, and motivated.

- Integrate social media and content on your blog. Give customers a reason to come to your website and shop.

- Facebook can certainly be shoppable, by posting pictures of what you offer. Most experts recommend using social media as brand engagement. For every two posts that are "sales-worthy" give another eight that are informational.

- Find the social media platform that works to reach your potential customers. Instagram users have different demographics than Facebook users. Target your potential customer even further within the platform.

Ask for Help in Your Marketing Strategy

With companies like Volume9 and AddShoppers, your business increases sales and conversions by using tools and getting that extra marketing help to get you more out of your ecommerce site with social media and blogs.

05 DESIGNING FOR ECOMMERCE

a. Designing for Promotions and Sales

The eCommerce industry has exploded over the years as consumers want to be able to conveniently shop online more than ever. This can be of great benefit to companies when utilized correctly. It can decrease operating costs and increase efficiency. In fact, many businesses have completely switched to eCommerce from brick-and-mortar businesses. In order for this opportunity to be most effective, it is critical that promotions and sales efforts be properly employed. Here are a few things to consider in designing eCommerce promotions and sales.

Target Audience Tendencies

There are a few key questions that a business can consider to help outline its target audience's tendencies.

- What do they value?
- What draws on their emotions?
- How do they interact?

Keeping these things in mind can help a company engage their intended audience on several different levels, which can greatly increase chances of them purchasing products or services from the business.

Current Market

What season is it? This question alone can help to determine how effective certain campaigns will be. Depending upon the products or services of a business, promoting certain aspects can be most effective during certain seasons. For example, a business that creates customized knitted apparel may fair best promoting their blankets in the fall and winter months. Being aware of the holiday seasons allows you to prepare promotions in advance to boost sales during that time.

Tailored Promotions and Sales

Discounts, sales and promotions have always been an excellent tool to pique the interest of prospective consumers. However, these methods do not always transition interested parties into actual consumers. To aid in this endeavor, different promotions and sales applications have been developed. Online marketing platforms such as SpringBot and Jirafe help you to monitor and analyze the activity of consumers that frequent your website and utilized your promotions. This helps you in considering a few different aspects:

- **the products consumers purchase most with what promotion**
- **which marketing strategy provides the greatest results**
- **the type of consumer utilizing the various promotional methods**

Employing such tactics can help you gain a greater understanding of your market and to develop campaigns that will garner the greatest revenue.

Applying these efforts can help you design your online marketing strategy and employ it

effectively. Be sure to do your research and develop a solid plan, but leave room for change as technologies advance.

b. Up-sells and Cross-sells & Product Reviews

3 Smart Ways to Maximize Your E-Commerce

Online shopping carts with intuitive and suggestive checkout tools are vital to the success of many virtual retailers. If you've got a smooth system that works well, can handle heavy traffic and generates useful customer analytics, you're already ahead of a lot of companies conducting online sales. But wait. You can take your e-commerce to the next level using a few tools you probably already are familiar with. Follow these tips for generating more revenue while creating more happy customers.

Cross-Selling

Cross-selling has a lot to do with customer behavior, which is a topic that data mining services such as Jirafe excel at. With the right kinds of information about your shoppers and their preferences, you will be able to offer them related products that match with either the current items they are browsing or things they've purchased during previous visits to your site. For example, perhaps they bought some baking supplies last time they shopped with you, and now they are looking for cookbooks. Technological applications allow you to offer dish towels, parchment paper or rolling pins to them while they browse.

Up-Selling

Up-selling is different from cross-selling in that e-commerce solutions offer customers a better or upgraded version of the thing they already were planning to buy. Let's say, for example that a customer is browsing cell phones. If they are looking at a certain model, the up-sell offer could offer a better camera, more memory or deluxe exterior colors. Even if the increased sales are incremental for each purchase, those dollars will add up over the course of a fiscal year. Services such as Springbot can help you optimize these additional sales efforts.

Product Reviews

Finally, customers love reviews, and use them to determine whether to engage with companies. So you should be gathering reviews of your specific products on your own site rather than relying on a third-party location. Shopper Approved is an excellent option as a Reviews company that sends email surveys to gather reviews on behalf of your company. These reviews can be used in your own product listings pages as well as on other review sites such as Google Shopping. A positive product review can go a long way toward educating your customers and helping them make the right purchasing decisions, which is to say, adding your products to their shopping cart.

These three methods for increasing sales can benefit you in two ways. Not only can they increase your revenue, but they also may lead to customers who are happier with their overall buying experience.

06 WEBSITE SECURITY

a. Hosting & Server Security

Why Your Website and Hosting Server Security Is Vital to Your Business

Most people remember the infamous Target data breach, but what they don't know is that the breach occurred through the attack of an even smaller business who had access to the Target servers. Hackers did not directly attack Target. This should be a warning to every business about their web and server security. The server that hosts your site needs to have safeguards for your business' web security.

Common Threats

As individuals, people are told to change their passwords to prevent cyber criminals from infiltrating accounts, but there are a variety of threats to information:

Brute force attack - this is the password attack to get valid credentials into a system. This is the front-door break-in.

SQL injection attack - in this type of attack, hackers exploit vulnerabilities in the web application of your database. It's more like a back-door attempt.

Distributed denial of service (DDos) attack - This is an attack on multiple computers and Internet connections. Botnets overwhelm the servers with junk data or multiple users so that the server cannot distinguish between a legitimate user and a hacker.

What Can Businesses Do to Prevent Threats to Their Site?

Business owners may not be IT specialists, but you can still ask the right questions to ensure your security is tight. It's important to discuss potential threats with your secure web hosting provider. Good security is not just a lock on the front door by encrypting passwords. It's a multi-layer strategy including:

- Real-time monitoring
- Firewalls
- 24/7/365 IT support
- Automated backup
- Disaster recovery services
- Intrusion detection systems
- N+1 redundancy (this means that there is always at least one independent backup component)

Discuss Your Concerns With Your Web Host

Your business should have a written web security strategy which gives your employees information about handling private and protected information. You should have a plan in place to know what to do if your site is being attacked. Work with your web hosting company, IT department, and business insurance company to be prepared.

Your web hosting company should have the answers you want about your site's web security. We know that MageMojo is the top web hosting solution for server security in multiple industries. Sometimes, it's not just about protecting customers' data, but about protecting your own data and your vendors. Know which information you have to protect in order to have those safeguards which keep hackers out. It's vital not just to your organization monetarily, but also to your image. Your customers want to know that you can be trusted to protect their data.

b. CMS Security

Content Management Systems are important parts of doing business online, and so is keeping everything secure. In addition to setting up a great website, it's crucial to plug all possible security holes to keep your site safe from cyber criminals. Luckily, there are protective measures to take that can keep your website safe.

Protective Tactics

In order to shore up your site so it's not vulnerable to hackers, you must take some protective steps. These tactics are simple enough to institute, if you take the time to do them. Don't let procrastination or busyness leave you vulnerable. Do the following:

- **Create strong passwords:** It's important to create ironclad passwords with at least eight characters, upper and lowercase letters, and numerals in order to protect your admin accounts against break-ins.
- **Take time for regular backups:** Operators should regularly backup their CMS software as well as its supportive database.
- **Adhere to an update schedule:** CMS plugins and themes should be regularly patched and updated to keep everything secure and up-to-date.

Website Hosting

Another critical part of keeping sites secure is website hosting. In order to keep your store up and running, choose a reputable host, such as:

- **MageMojo** - MageMojo is the only hosting provider that exclusively hosts Magento websites and has a highly knowledgeable support staff. MageMojo uses the latest technologies like solid-state hard drives and paravirtualization to correctly run Magento.

  - Managed 24/7 Magento expert support
  - Proactive performance monitoring and tuning
  - Technicians are Magento experts

- **Cynch** - Any website hosted on AWS needs to know about Cynch. This company is the best support to manage AWS hosting.

There's no doubt about it: CMS security and Hosting security matters. You want to focus on running your company, refining your products, and offering your customers the kind of service that makes them return to your site again and again, rather than fretting about cyber crime. When you take precautions, including hiring an ecommerce company you can trust, partner with, and communicate easily with, you can move ahead toward business success.

07 OUTSOURCING WEB DEVELOPMENT

Choose the Right Agency When Outsourcing Web Development

Website development for electronic commerce can be complicated because of all the variables. There are multiple programming languages, content management systems, and disciplines to consider. When you need to outsource your web development project, it may seem overwhelming and you might not know where to start. There are important qualities to look for in an agency so you can avoid common pitfalls and pain points.

Communication

It's important to choose an agency that can communicate clearly. It's crucial that developers present information in a timely, understandable manner. It's also vital that they listen carefully

to what your needs and expectations are. When selecting an agency, be sure to:

- Explain your expectations in terms of timeline and launch and make sure the agency concurs.
- Set up a plan for staying informed along the way; make sure everything is transparent and understood by both parties.
- Schedule a timetable of touch points throughout the course of your project.
- Make sure the agency representatives are proactive rather than responsive.

Project Management

You want to choose an agency that has a reputation for managing projects competently. The right team should be appropriately sized for the scope of your project. Some questions to ask include:

- Administering site: Will the agency administer the site or will they partner with another company?
- Strategic guidance: What sort of strategies does the agency have to guide the process?
- Custom programming: If your site needs customized components for its functionality, how will the agency manage this?

Fee Structure

Make sure the firm you partner with has a fee schedule that aligns with your needs, expectations, and budget. Discuss topics, such as:

Ballpark estimates: Based on the scope of your project, an agency should be able to give you a rough estimate to help you make decisions before getting started.

Firming up cost expectations: Once a project is ready to move forward, you should be given firmer cost projections. While these figures may vary slightly from the initial ballpark numbers, they should be fairly close.

Staying on budget: The unexpected can happen, and you want to find out how an agency deals with this to stay on track financially.

Pay-as-you-go model vs. retainers: Discuss the options up front.

Trust and Reliability

When an agency is reliable and does what it says it's going to do, it gains its customers' trust. You can learn about an agency's reliability and trustworthiness by interviewing them, checking their resume of past projects, and hearing what other clients have to say about them.

121eCommerce matches resources with strategies to accommodate clients' needs. Once agency professionals understand your company's plans and expectations, your project can be on its way to success.

7 KEYS
TO **SUCCESSFUL**
WEB DEVELOPMENT

We Can Help!

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and keep your customers happy? 121eCommerce can
help! Fill out our contact form online or call us at (216) 586-6656
for more information about improving your conversion rate by
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