

/r/ecommerce Checklist

Original Thread:

https://www.reddit.com/r/ecommerce/comments/4c6uiu/lets_make_a_community_created_ecommerce_checklist/

Request to edit! Commenting on for all.

Gzip all possible files (server side)

Not valid for every platform/site but when possible you should make sure your files are compressed properly. Check out who you're getting your servers from too and make sure they support this.

Have a lead capture system in place

It doesn't have to be fancy, or expensive, but establish some way to capture people who don't buy.

Have analytics enabled

Google is great addition to platform analytics. When it comes to google(or any analytics), establish goals and ecommerce tracking. Always have at least some kind of analytics running at some level even if you don't understand all of it it... the historical data will help consultants/marketing firms or buyers.

Choose proper image files & optimize them accordingly

Make sure that images are png and jpg accordingly. png is for images meant to have transparency instead of white(or color) backgrounds & images that are illustrations (lines/patterns/digitally manufactured images). jpegs (or jpgs) are for photographs and these especially have optimization standards. When finalizing these photographs in photoshop (or you can use a image optimizer online) set these images to being optimized. In photoshop you do this by hitting "save for web". I typically suggest you save them at a quality level of 80% since I've never noticeably been able to spot the difference but this is completely up to you.

Image titles (SEO tip)

When you save an image - put a relevant title on it. Especially if your CRM/platform doesn't magically change the image name to something insane. As a result you'll increase the ranking potential for that image and also add additional context/relevance to the page the image is on. I used to mass edit original images' file names as well and put the brand name at the end so that anyone that saved the image would have a reminder on their computer of the brand... or the brand would be mentioned if they uploaded it somewhere else... it also increased the easiness of tracking some people using the image improperly.

Always establish a good title tag for your home page.

In 6-7 words tell someone exactly what the site is about, what you sell, etc. Having your main page's title be "home" or "brand name Y" doesn't help apply context towards what your site is about. You can do the rest of the site's titles

later as this will take some time and keyword research... just at a minimum, even if you don't understand SEO, maintain a good title tag on your homepage from day 0.

7.) Don't choose a theme with a carousel. If you do... remove that terrible thing ASAP. Create static category blocks instead. You'll be able to fit 2-8x as many pieces of information in the same space + it's stronger for SEO. You can choose some of these blocks and rotate them out to promote seasonalities, new products, etc... but your core items will always be there unlike a slideshow/carousel which just says "F you" to users and rotates all of the info.

More on this in my comments on [this thread](#)

8.) Claim your social media pages for your brand so that you have them.... But don't attach every social media site on your website and don't try to 'maintain' all of them.

Work with the one/two you know you can do well, or the ones that fit your target demographic... build those up organically (**8.5: never fake it**) and create strategies and systems based on the content that's working.

9.) Make sure that you A. have a search system enabled and B. it's 'flexible'. I know there's a term for this but I can't think of it right now for some reason (please chime in if you know it)...

I'll start with why you should have search. **Unless you only sell a few products**, people browsing your site will use the search box if they get lost. I've seen this only increase over time as mobile becomes more prevalent, mobile navigation sucks and users opt into just searching for the item instantly so if you're having low mobile add to cart/conversion rates... this might be part of it.

Here's why you should have flexible search and what it is (please... someone chime in with the actual term)... What I'm referring to is when someone makes a search and the EXACT words they type in aren't there. With a search system that's looking for exact wording, they'll get "no results, please try another search". A lot of store owners don't test their search enough or monitor what people are putting in their search box to notice this happening and it's bad for obvious reasons. A.) You should always be presenting an option to a customer... who knows, they might like it more than what they originally thought they wanted but also B.) people suck at spelling "monkey towel" turns into "monkie towel" or a brand name is messed up... now they don't get any results unless your search system is set up to give alternates/close to matches (or at least a few results no matter what. SRY for the ramble... if this is confusing leave a note and I'll try to clean it up.

10.) Enable google webmasters and bing webmasters. Once again, if you don't know what to do with these don't worry just don't mess with them too much then... but at least have them pre-established so you have historical data, can get notifications of something wrong, and don't create headaches for consultants/firms.

11.) Apply some level of retargeting tracking. Facebook pixel, 3rd party agency, google's retargeting..... historical data, you don't have to use it instantly.... but at least have it. DATA IS KING, having and not using it is always 100x better than not having it at all... historical data is kind of like the cryogenic freezing of business, if you don't know what to do now - one day someone will :P

12.) Plan your initial marketing channels. You must choose where initial traffic is going to come from... "if you build it, they don't magically come". SEO isn't magic, Social isn't magic, Websites as a whole just aren't magic... you have to market them outward. (I hate that I have to say this)

13.) Manage plugins accordingly. Make sure you don't have too many or have a bunch idle in the background. This is especially true for wordpress... plugins will cause your site to have a 10 second load time which not only kills your revenue but costs you more in potential server fees too. This applies as well in the sense that having too many things going on is just bad for users but typically the site slows to a halt before this happens anyways.

14.) Check to make sure you're not operating at an 'extreme'... by which I mean SEO, Site speed, etc. The differences between tiny changes early on doesn't matter - Don't stress about every little thing, prioritize then optimize later.

This includes this list as well as any 'analysis' software like google's or site speed / seo checkers. "Amazon reports that for every second of site speed blah blah blah conversion rate drops".... Guess what, you're not Amazon and your visitation & conversion rate data doesn't even have enough of a sample size to be statistically valid.... Just make sure you're not operating at an extreme, make small Minimum Viable efforts to get the motor running and then get moving. That why we have the term "optimization"... to make continual improves over time cause what you put up on launch won't be perfect.

15.) (SEO) Put unique text on each page! Product categories are #1 when it comes to the most important page that's forgotten. Some platforms don't make this exactly easy but when possible always put a little bit of info on these pages (build it out more later). It's a product category so talk about the products within that category as a collective whole. Additional pages that don't always get enough unique text: product pages, contact us page, homepage, blog main page (summarize what the blog is about).

16.) Check your forms! Contact us, email entry, etc. Scan around your site for all forms and put in test data to make sure they work. Nothing is worse than finding out a month later that a form doesn't send info properly to your email/database and you sit there wondering how many sales/opportunities you missed out on.

17.) HTTPS YOUR CHECKOUT/LOGINS!!! Your entire site doesn't have to be secured although you might as well but at minimum make sure that if you have user accounts, login pages are secured and always always always make sure your checkout is secure. Look in the top left of your URL bar and if there isn't a green lock, fix it or find someone who can. Anything can cause your site to become insecure, images that are coming from the http version of your site on the page is the #1 thing I've seen to cause https to not actually be fully secured. This opens up vulnerabilities but browsers are now starting to notify their users of unsafe checkouts and the like and for good reason!

18.) Make sure you have breadcrumbs enabled/established. (SEO benefit, navigation benefit, analytics benefit) On each product page there should be an obvious link that sends people back to the product category they came from. Not one that says "back" but one that acknowledges the category. I've seen sites with and without it and when it's non existant things go wrong on many levels, people leave, things don't work properly sometimes if your site has slightly broken features (search, filters, etc), much more. As well being able to link people back to a page makes it easy to follow their pathways in an analytics system.

19.) Establish a good FAQ, and shipping and other policies page(returns, taxes, etc). I've never actually tested if this effects conversions or not... because I believe it's just ALWAYS necessary... don't be a crummy sketchy business <3.

20.) Remove gift cards if you're a new site and don't have a physical location... just trust me <3 No one gives a crap about giving a friend a gift card to your no name site. Having this only opens you up to fraud. Around the holidays is a good time to set this up and run an email campaign sending people to the page with an offer that says something like buy X in cards, get X yourself.... then remove it again.

21.) Find a strategic partnership or platform early on. It's very hard to scale something from scratch and that's why most big companies start attached to something/someone else.

These partnerships can come from a unique opportunity for another business to be an affiliate where they recommend your site/business to a demographic that matches your ideal customer or it could just be something to gain traffic like a joint content creation concept where both parties get equal growth in terms of viewers/emails/etc. There's a lot of options here for partnerships, get creative.

Leveraging platforms is very common when it comes to ecommerce sites. Too many people say things like "I want to build my own site and maximize my profit" instead of "I'll sell it wherever people will buy it so I can grow my business". The word 'startup' to me means nothing more than early stage business with high growth potential. Which means your ecommerce site is a startup... and you should treat it as such. Startup growth is founded on rapid scaling until you can hit a certain point of sustainability... essentially you make \$0 and re-invest everything into the company one way or another. So when you look at the Etsy, Amazon or whatever platform you're

leveraging's fees/cost... that's just an advertising cost just like the rest and you must let go of your desire to maximize profits and seek out maximization of growth early on.

22.) Be willing to make \$0 on a sale. Yes, I just said this but I want to make that it's own point too. If a customer is unhappy... drop all profits till they are. If you're running an advertising campaign, spend until you make nothing. If you can't afford to live on your job or savings until this grows... then calculate your personal out of the business salary into your costs on each product but be willing to still live on as little as possible to make sure you're maximizing growth and not your current wallet.

23.) (CRO) Make sure that whenever you're comparing conversion rates (or any data) to come to a decision that you're doing it in an appropriate manner. 1.) Do you actually have enough data to go off of? If your sample size is too small then your data set isn't valid 2.) You're comparing thing that can be compared like an A/B test where webpage 1 is run at the same time as webpage 2 and the only difference is webpage itself. Or something like comparing traffic sources... looking at organic vs paid should be done as a comparison against the same timeline and depending on the question you're trying to answer potentially even just looking at the same page only and isolating it. 3.) Is there actually a question worth asking? "Will I get a higher conversion rate if my add to cart button is a different color" is not meaningful. Something like "Are people not finalizing their order because it's too difficult" may contribute a stronger analysis. By finding out the answer by A/B testing your checkout, surveying customers, etc you may end up modifying other areas of the site and even business to improve speed or other things that actually add value on the customer's end. This could also be focused around the way you pitch the product/business... altering this approach in a test dedicated to higher conversions can lead you down an entire shift in your marketing strategies.

24.) (speed) SSL (https) can slow down your site drastically if it's not set up correctly. I wish I had a universal solution for this but not always... sometimes it's actually the SSL provider entirely (so don't go super cheap-o).

25.) (More speed) I'll cover these as one because someone asked me privately about google's page speed tool along with the others and why I hadn't mentioned some of the stuff on there yet. Well this is why I didn't mention everything: The time put into fixing some of these issues is not worth it early on. The money spent on experts to do them since some are technically is DEFINITELY not worth it. Even for million dollar businesses there are just some things that still just don't really make that big of a difference. If you reference back to #14 you'll note that when you are at least 'doing well'... that's all you need. The difference in a second or half a second on your site at this stage is meaningless... just don't be at something crazy like 10seconds.

So here's are tools to check stuff related to site speed: Yslow, [Google Page Speed](#), Pingdom.

And here's the list that every blog in the world and these tools will tell you:

Eliminate render blocking CSS and Javascript.... Ok so this one actually may warrant a look at by a dev but only if it's extremely bad and your site is blank for a very very long time before showing graphics/visuals... this is likely why. Like I said, early on you're going to add plugins and change stuff around and the cost to fix this isn't always small... so only take this on if it's an extreme issue or if you're getting to a larger state.

Caching - make sure your files get cached onto the user's computer. Basically this means that your site gets saved onto their hard drive so that when they come back the site is loaded from their computer instead of your server. This is really technical sometimes and you can do more harm than good if you have no idea what files you're messing with. Making them last forever (the intuitive concept) can result in your site being broken/outdated if you make any changes.

Minify JS, HTML and CSS files. Basically the files on your site aren't always using everything in them... especially something known as comments. They're exactly what they sound like. They're notes that surround and give context to code for future and past devs to work off of. A lot of themes have stuff in them.... just leave it... unless you're a dev. The 10-20kb that this adds to your site is a minor issue.

Use a CDN. This isn't always a good thing, especially if it's not set up correctly and often... they aren't. CDNs can break your encryption, slow down your site, lower your search rankings, and much more. Lets not forget that they're pretty expensive. Cloudflare is good and I'd suggest it at a certain point but not early on. When you're at a stage where an hour or two of downtime because of who knows what equals out to the cost of the service... then it becomes a reasonable choice.

Make fewer http requests. This one is all about the # of files you're trying to load and where they're coming from. Don't stress about this... just do your thing. This is going to require a good amount of dev work to fix and won't pay off.

26.) (speed & SEO) Manage your site wide redirects correctly and double check it after major changes. This is a part of those checkers from 25 but it typically doesn't show up as flagged because it's not looking for it. What it's looking for is to make sure that you're not creating a loop on a page but what it doesn't look for is making sure that your site is set up correctly as a whole.

This is what you need to look out for: Lets say your site is <http://www.BobsShoeSupply.com> and this is the way you've structured your site and how you want it to be (http and www). You should check <http://BobsShoeSupply.com>, <https://BobsShoeSupply.com>, and <https://www.BobsShoeSupply.com> and make sure they 301 to <http://www.BobsShoeSupply.com>. You can change this around at any time but whatever you want it to be, the other 3 options should 301 to the main one.

ps. I suggest always having "[www](http://www.BobsShoeSupply.com)." in your url. Did a lot of research that I don't remember now... but the focus on my several weeks of research was SEO & architecture. Check some of your favorite fortune 500s... yes they're enterprise... but they all have it.