

THE ADVANCED
GUIDE TO

GROWING Your Online Store



At Merchant Maverick, our goal is to present small and medium businesses (SMBs) with the complete, impartial information they need to build their businesses. In part, we do this by providing unbiased reviews of business software and services. However, choosing the right software system is only the first step in growing an online store; there's a lot more you must do to maintain a successful eCommerce business. The purpose of this eBook is to guide merchants through the process of developing and scaling their online stores.

We've divided the book into two sections. In the first section, we'll discuss techniques sellers can use to grow their eCommerce businesses, focusing especially on marketing strategies, web optimization, and search engine optimization (SEO).

The second section focuses on how to handle new growth. We'll address the ways merchants can add to or upgrade their software to deal with increased traffic and sales. We'll cover how to scale your eCommerce platform, how to handle heightened shipping demands, and how to automate your processes.

Merchants who have just begun an online store (or who have just finished reading *The Beginner's Guide to Starting an Online Store*) should read this guide in its entirety. However, merchants who already have plenty of business development under their belts should jump straight into the second section, Handling Your Growth.

Our hope is that this guide will contain exactly the information you need to create a solid foundation on which your business can grow and thrive.

Let's get started!



SECTION I

How to Grow Your eCommerce Business

When you boil it down, business development is simple. Businesses succeed when they draw in new customers and keep the customers they already have. However, what is easily said is not so easily done. In order to collect and retain customers, you'll need to make your site--and your brand--attractive to online shoppers.

Here are a few practical ways to do that.

Build a User-Friendly Website

Web designers love to talk about “conversion-optimized websites.” These websites prioritize visitor experience over everything else. A conversion-optimized website is visually appealing, highly organized, and (most importantly) bug-free.

If you’ve done even the smallest amount of research on site optimization, you know there are thousands of small ways you can change your site to generate more sales. With so many different tips and tricks out there, it can be difficult to know where to begin.

The following list includes the most popular, and arguably, most crucial ways you can optimize your site.



Mobile Responsive Design

It’s no secret that society is going mobile in general, and eCommerce is at the forefront of this trend. Studies show that **58% of all traffic to online stores is now coming from mobile devices**, and that number is still increasing.

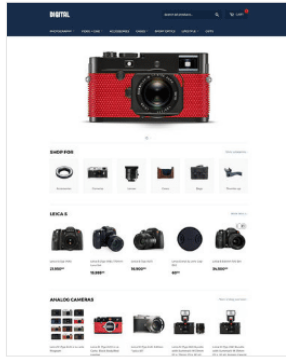
Mobile responsive websites are those that adapt to fit any screen. Mobile responsive sites look great on tablets, desktops, and mobile phones alike. And with the ever increasing impact of mobile phones on eCommerce, it’s absolutely crucial that your site uses mobile responsive design.

Fortunately, these days most SaaS eCommerce solutions offer a variety of attractive, mobile responsive themes for their users. To take advantage of those themes, all you need to do is click “Install” and hand over \$30 to \$200.

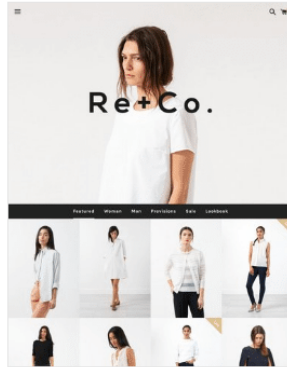
If your store is hosted by [Shopify](#), [Zoey](#), [3dcart](#), [LemonStand](#), or the like, you have a whole marketplace of mobile responsive themes available to you.

Trending this week

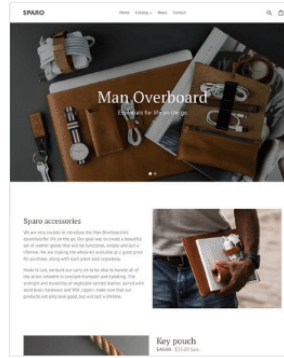
[See more](#)



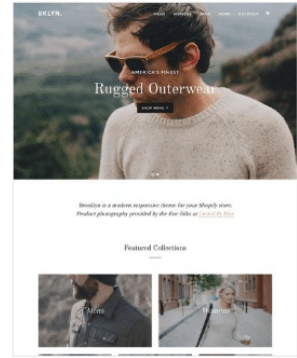
Supply · Free
2 styles



Boundless · Free
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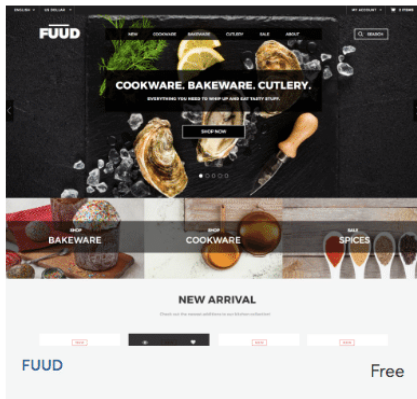


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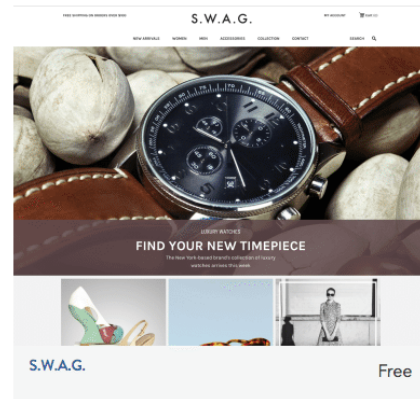


Brooklyn · Free
1 style

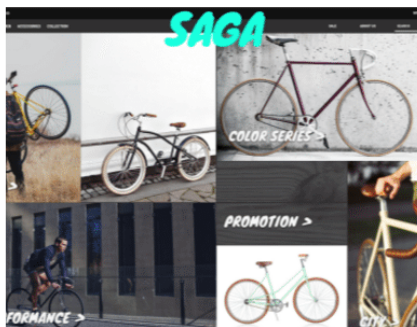
Shopify Themes



FUUD Free



S.W.A.G. Free



SAGA



curio

Zoey Themes

On the other hand, if you operate your store on an open-source shopping cart, you'll have to build your own responsive site or purchase a template from a third-party developer.

Whatever you do, make sure that your theme is fully mobile responsive. Test your theme on a variety of devices to guarantee there are no hiccups or glitches. In your testing, pay special attention to your site's checkout page. A mobile responsive site is worthless if customers cannot also make purchases from their mobile devices.

Mobile responsive design is the quickest and most important way to make your site user friendly.



Quick Loading Times

Online customers are incredibly impatient. In fact, [one study by Kissmetrics](#) shows that 40% of people abandon a website if it takes longer than 3 seconds to load.

So, how do you build a website that loads fast enough to retain site visitors? There's plenty you can do to ensure a quick-loading site, most of which occurs on the developer side of the software. However, you should first consider these two main ways to reduce load times:

- Take advantage of caching
- Find a Content Delivery Network (CDN) for your website

Web Caching

Web caching refers to a practice that allows visitors' browsers to store static files of your site for future use. These files can be HTML documents or images. By storing these files, site visitors are able to more quickly load your web page on every repeat visit to your site. Because their browsers have to retrieve fewer files, things load faster.

Many eCommerce websites allow merchants to set web caching specifications. If your eCommerce platform does not, take a look at [this tutorial from Digital Ocean](#) to learn how to enable caching on your site.

Content Delivery Network

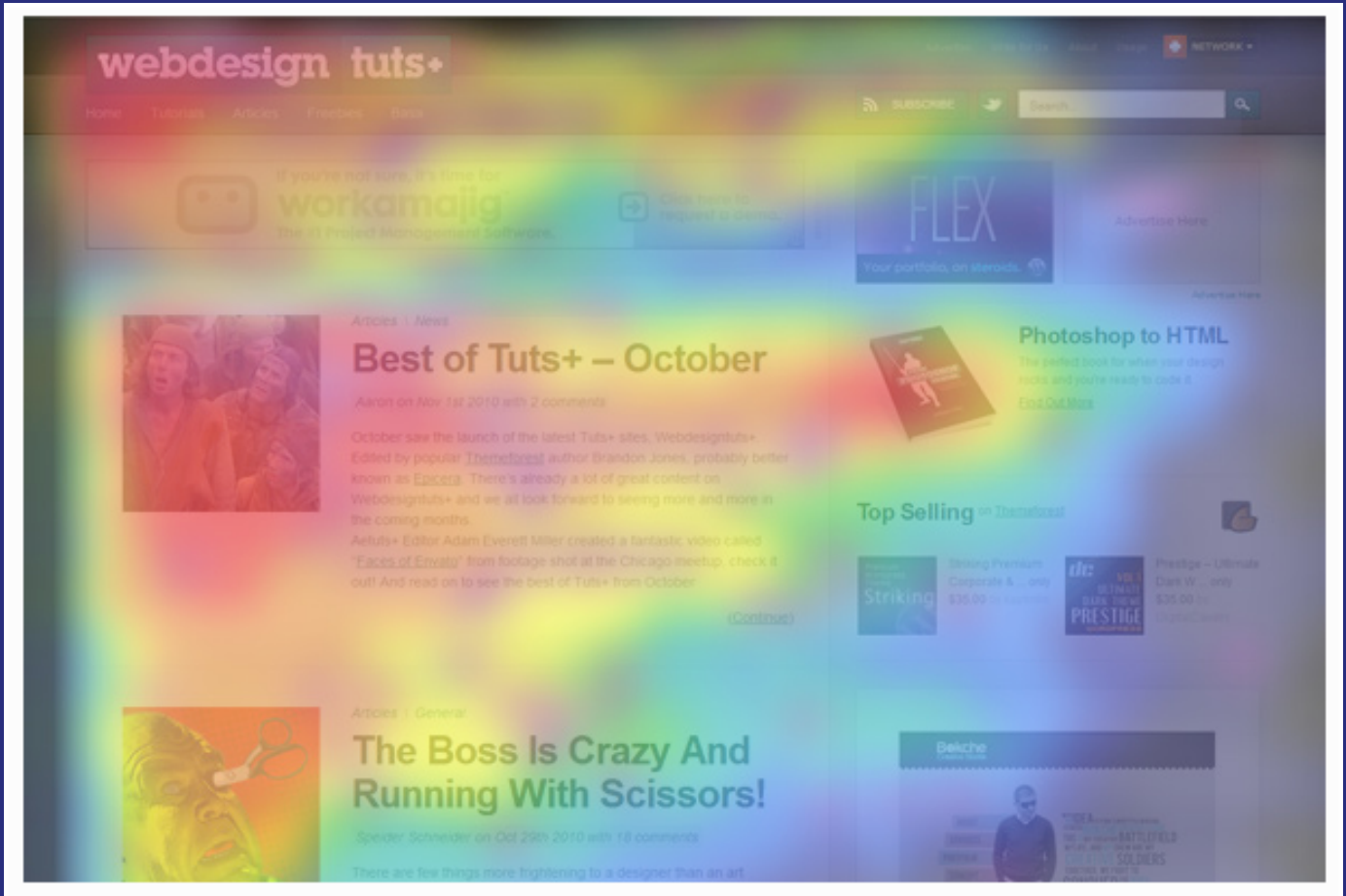
Another method is to use a CDN to bring your files closer to your site visitors. A CDN is a global network of servers that contain your site's information. By storing your site's information closer to your visitors, you shorten the amount of time it takes for those files to hit your customers' browsers.

Some eCommerce platforms offer a CDN with their hosting plans (though you'll likely have to pay extra to use them). If you're on a self-hosted platform, look for a hosting partner, like [Cloudflare](#) or [Amazon CloudFront](#), that offers a CDN in their services.



Present Your Information in an F-Format

Studies show that online browsers typically read information in an F-pattern. Just take a look at these eye-maps.



Heatmap from *Envatotuts+* and *Webdesigntuts+*



Heatmaps from *Nielsen Norman Group*

As you can see, browsers pay most attention to the top line of an article and the left side of a web page. Site visitors pay less and less attention as they move down a web page.

Make sure the most important information (free shipping details, promotions, contact information, etc.) is listed at the top of the page. Place your navigational tools at the top and left hand side of the page.

Also, keep in mind that customers may never see information you place at the bottom of your webpage.

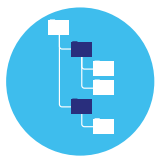


Strong Navigational Tools

In the same way that customers are quick to abandon a slow-loading website, they aren't likely to stay long on a site that is disorganized. Shoppers are more drawn to well-organized brick-and-mortar stores, so it's not surprising that online customers prefer clean, easy-to-navigate websites. They want to quickly find the products they're looking for, make their purchases, and move on.

When it comes to web navigation, don't try to be original.

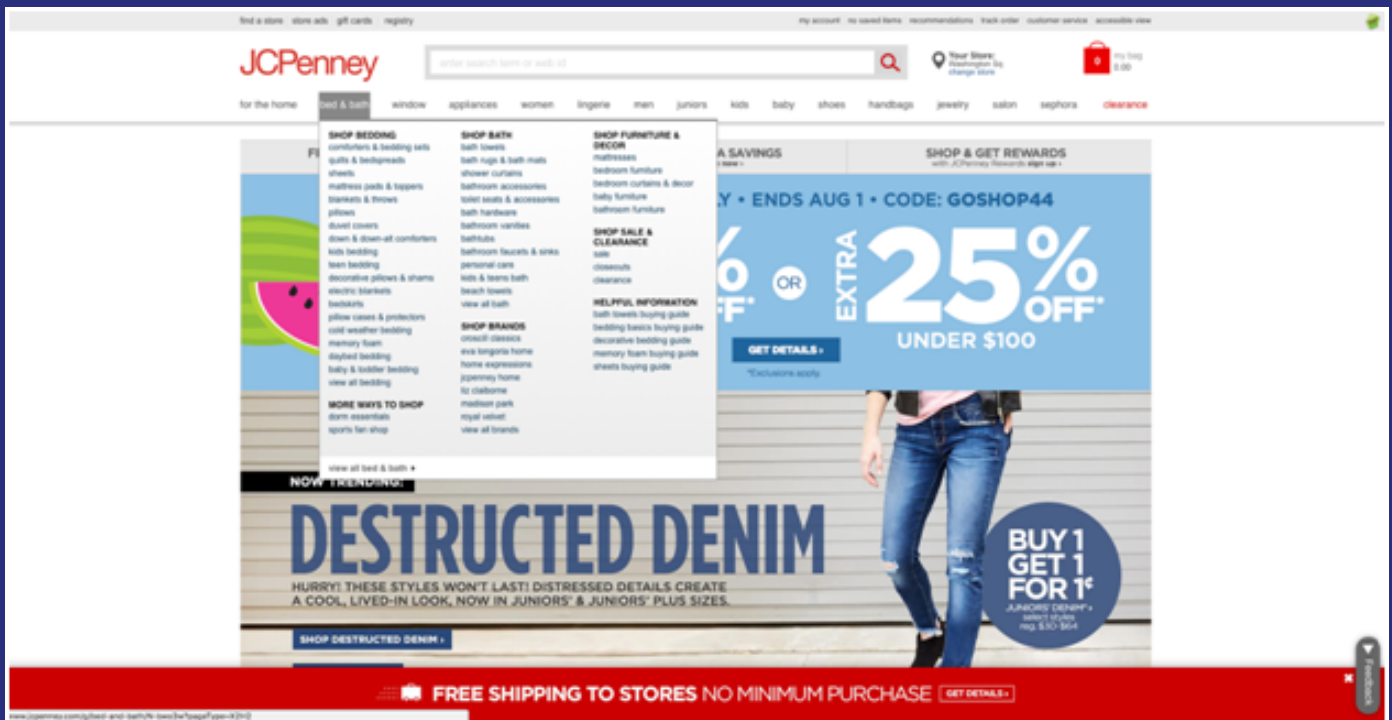
It's cute to name your categories with unexpected, quirky titles, but it isn't wise. Stick with the boring ol' navigational methods that everyone else uses. It will make things much easier on your customers, which will greatly aid your conversions.



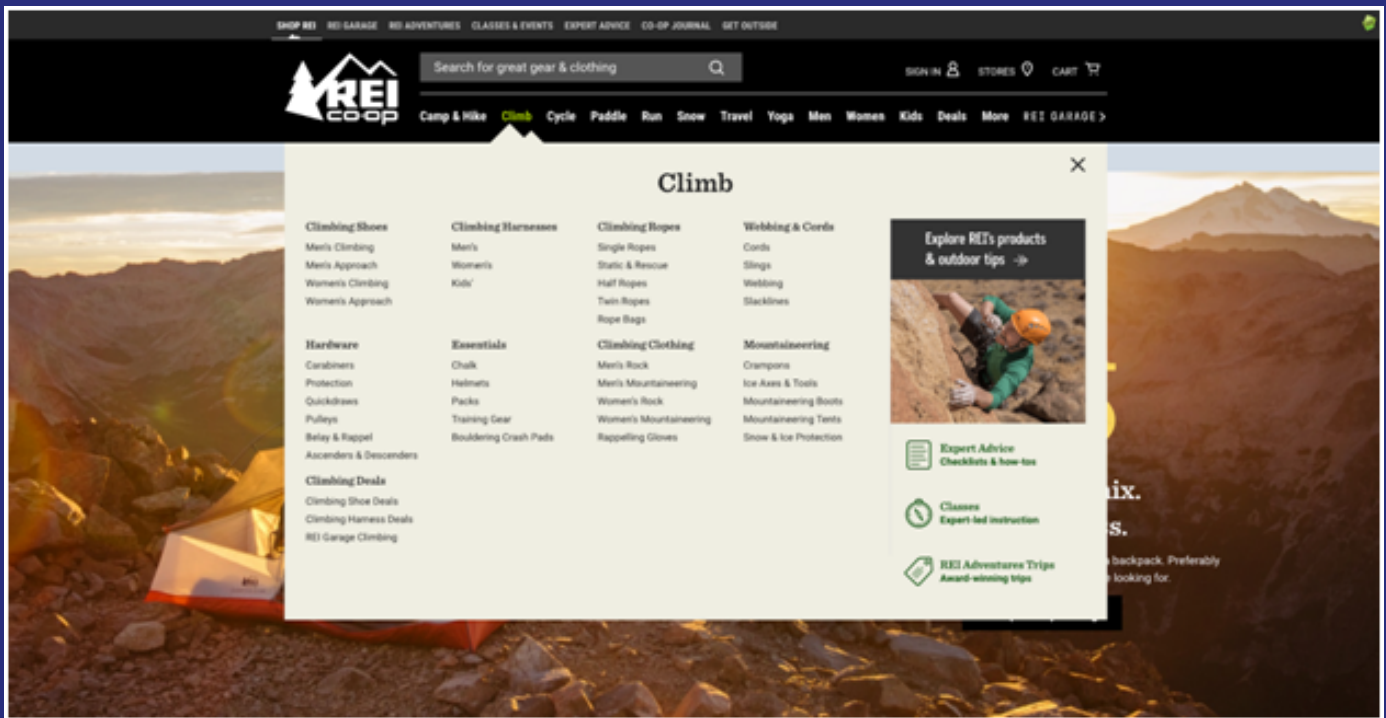
Use Categories and Subcategories

One of the best ways to organize your online store is to create categories and subcategories under which you can list your products. Customers should be able to easily find these categories either at the top or on the left-hand side of your web page.

Take a look at a couple of examples below:



JCPenney Main Navigation



REI Main Navigation

As you create these categories, keep a few things in mind:

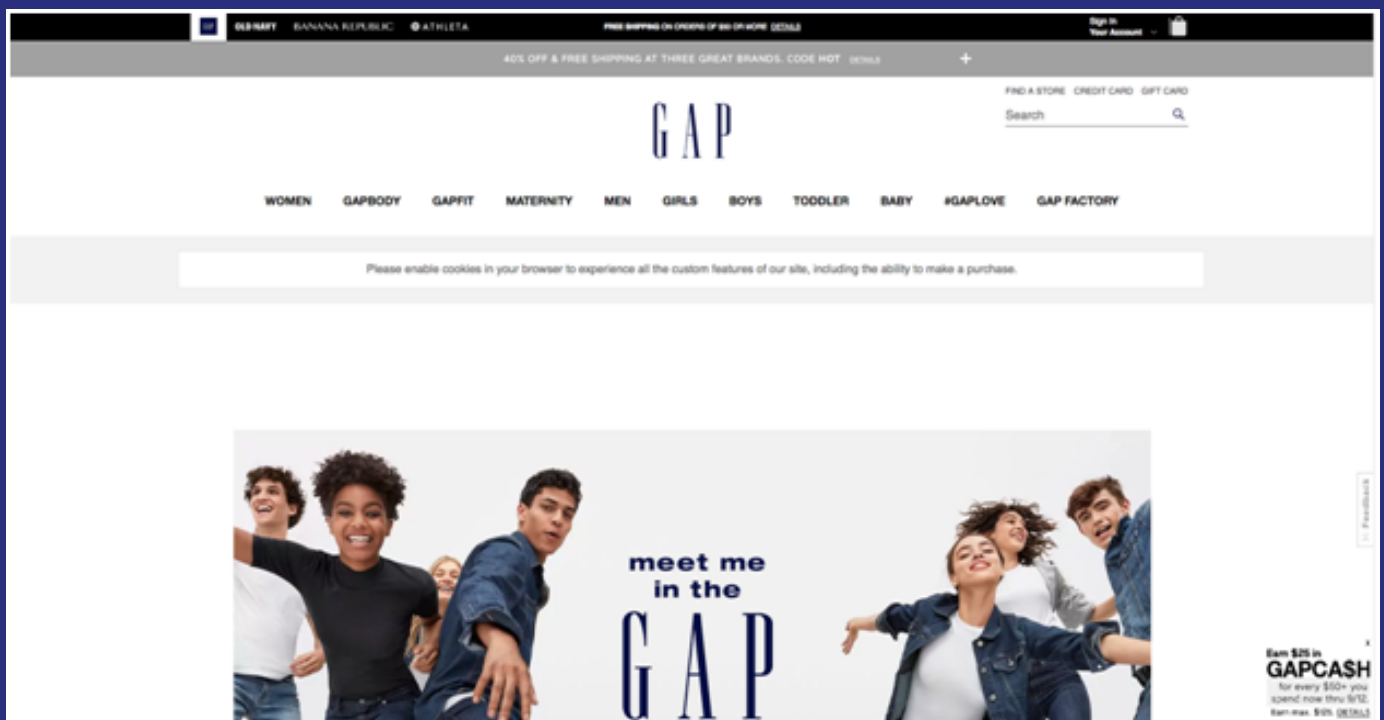
- The number of categories you list should be proportional to the number of items you have in your inventory. Three products is too few for a category and 500 is too many.
- Sort subcategories by the popularity of your products. Keep the F-format in mind. List your most popular products on the top left of your dropdowns.
- Make sure every option (in both your categories and subcategories) contains clickable links. Each item in your top navigation bar should lead to a landing page, and every item in your dropdown subcategories should do the same. According to [Practical Ecommerce](#), customers expect every component of your navigation to be clickable.
- Include categories for sale products and new arrivals. This will let frequent visitors quickly browse any changes to your store.

In short, your categories should help customers jump quickly to the product pages of their choice.



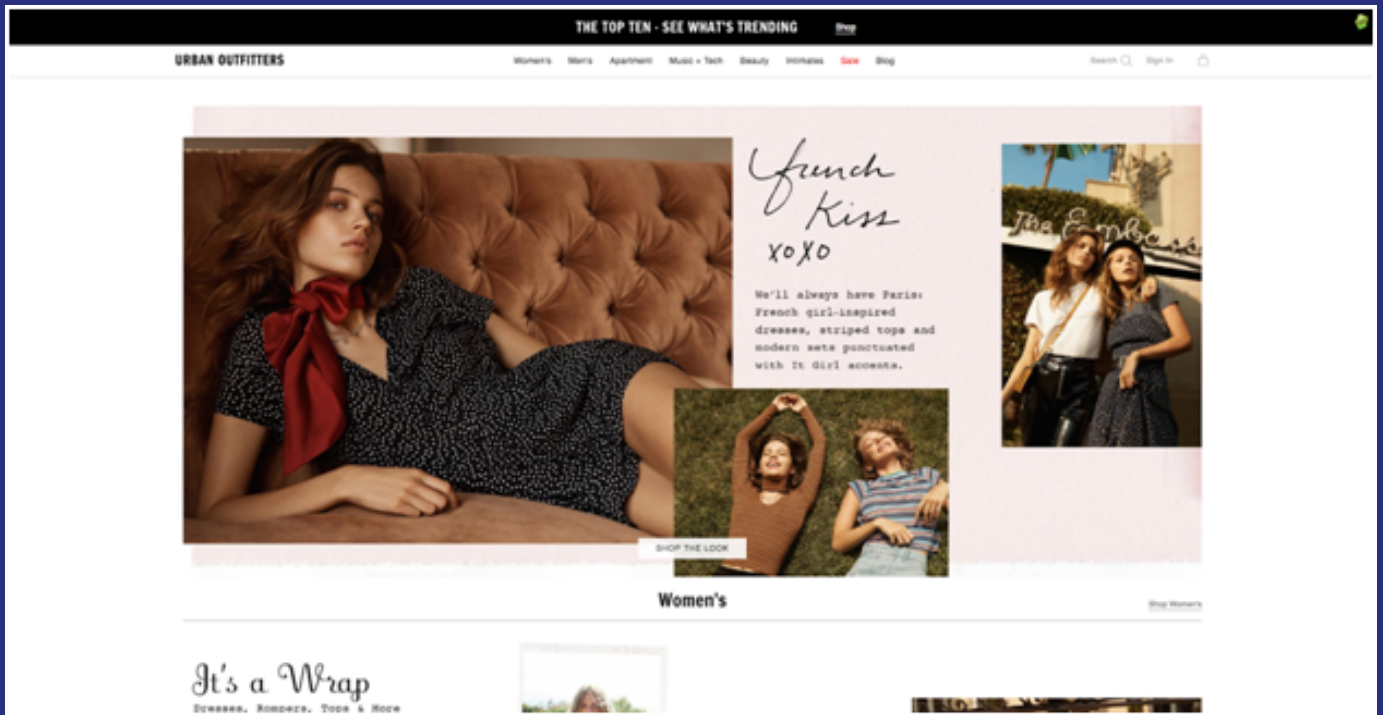
Provide a Search Field

You should also make an internal search function available for customers who are looking for one specific product. Display that search bar in the upper right hand corner of your site.



The Gap Landing Page

Some optimization experts recommend that you minimize the search tool to just a magnifying glass (which expands when a customer clicks on it) to conserve valuable toolbar space.



Urban Outfitters Landing Page

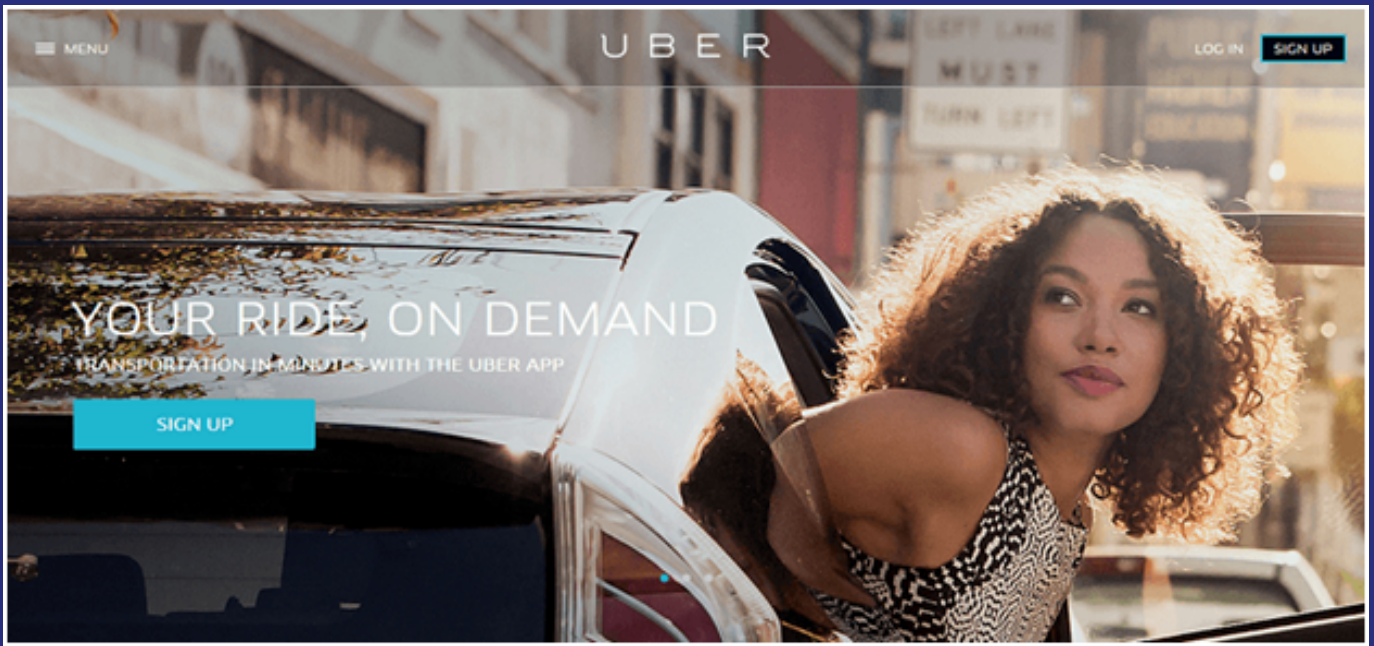
An internal search feature lets customers jump straight to the products they're interested in. You'll do even better if your search engine allows for misspellings and typos.



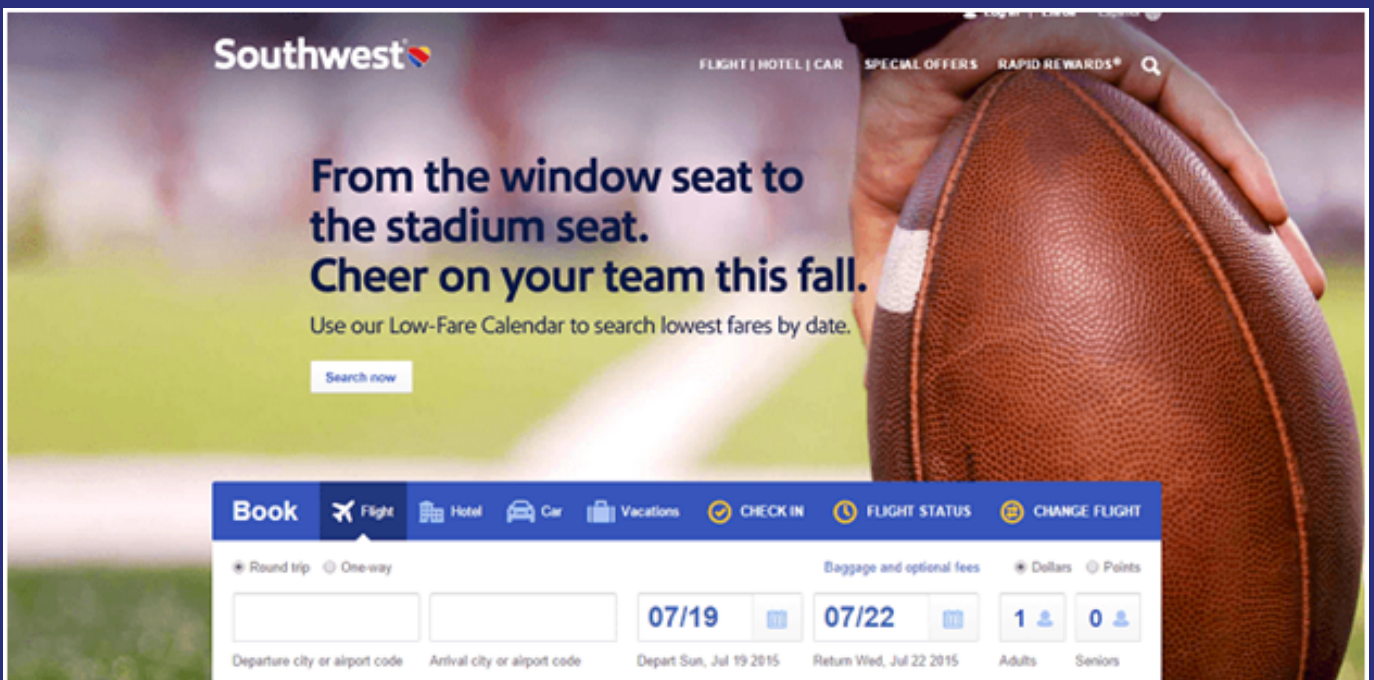
Focus on Images

While you should always prioritize function over form when it comes to web design, you should never abandon form completely. An attractive website makes visitors feel comfortable and confident in the legitimacy of your site. What's more, good web design can add perceived value to your products.

One excellent way to quickly improve your site's aesthetics is to add high-quality images to your main pages. Featuring bold images on your landing pages makes your website more engaging and interesting. Just take a look at [1st Web Designer's examples](#) of good, image-focused landing pages to see what I mean.



Uber Landing Page (taken from <https://1stwebdesigner.com>)



Southwest Landing Page (taken from <https://1stwebdesigner.com>)

Browsers are much more likely to interact with your website if you feature large, high-quality images. Just consider engagement on social media sites. [Studies show](#) Facebook posts featuring images get 2.3 times more engagement than posts without images. In the same way, your potential customers will be more likely to engage with your online store if your design is image-focused.

A word of warning: Be sure your image-focused design does not detract from your site's functionality. If an image gets in the way of navigational tools, creates a barrier to entry, or slows down your website, lose it. It's more important that your site works well than looks great.



Follow Strong Examples

Web design best practices are continually changing. As you design your website to be user-friendly and conversion-optimized, make sure to keep up with industry standards.

To get a good idea of quality navigation practices, take a look at these 50 case studies by [Baymard Institute](#). They analyze and rank top eCommerce sites' overall usability. As you peruse, take note of which features get a good score and which do not. Then, do your best to follow suit!

Create a Smooth Checkout Funnel

Abandoned carts are one of the biggest challenges of online selling.

Customers abandon their orders for a variety of reasons. They may find a better offer on another site, decide they don't need the product, or leave because they feel skeptical of site security.

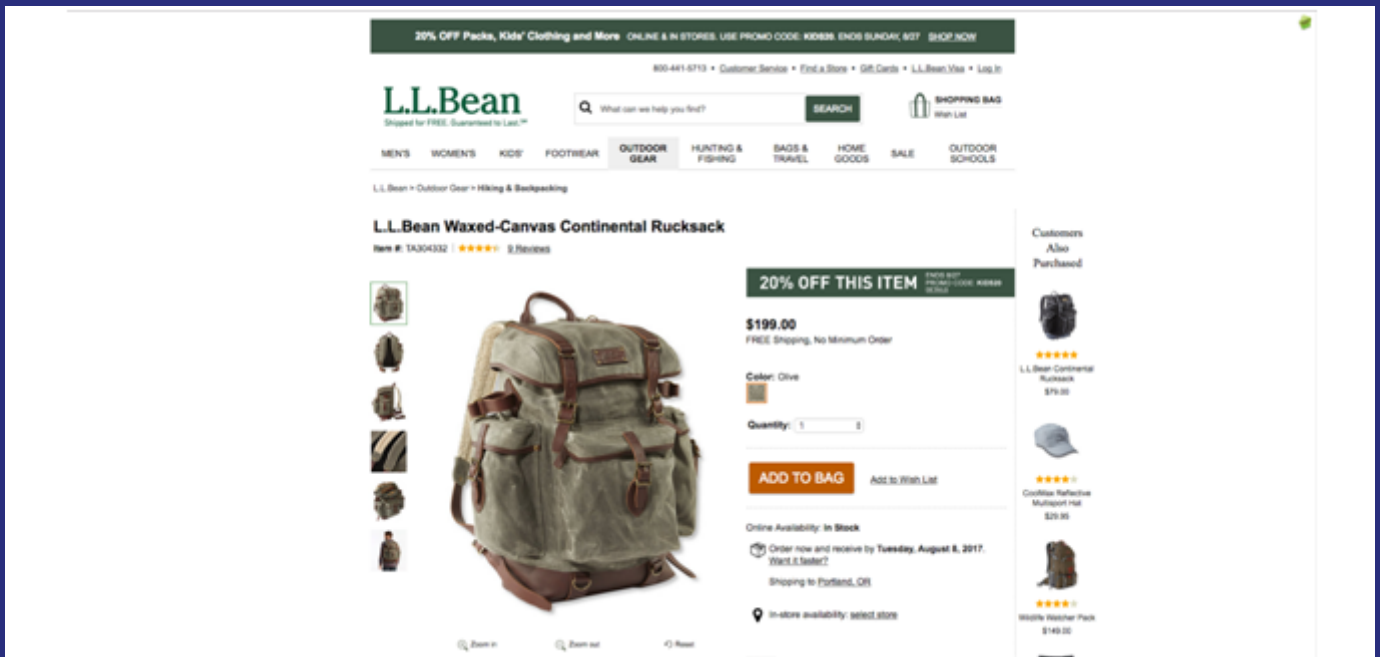
Fortunately, you don't have to accept such high abandonment rates. There are plenty of practical steps you can take to smooth out the path to checkout. Here are a few ways you can shuttle more customers from "Add to Cart" to "Complete Order."



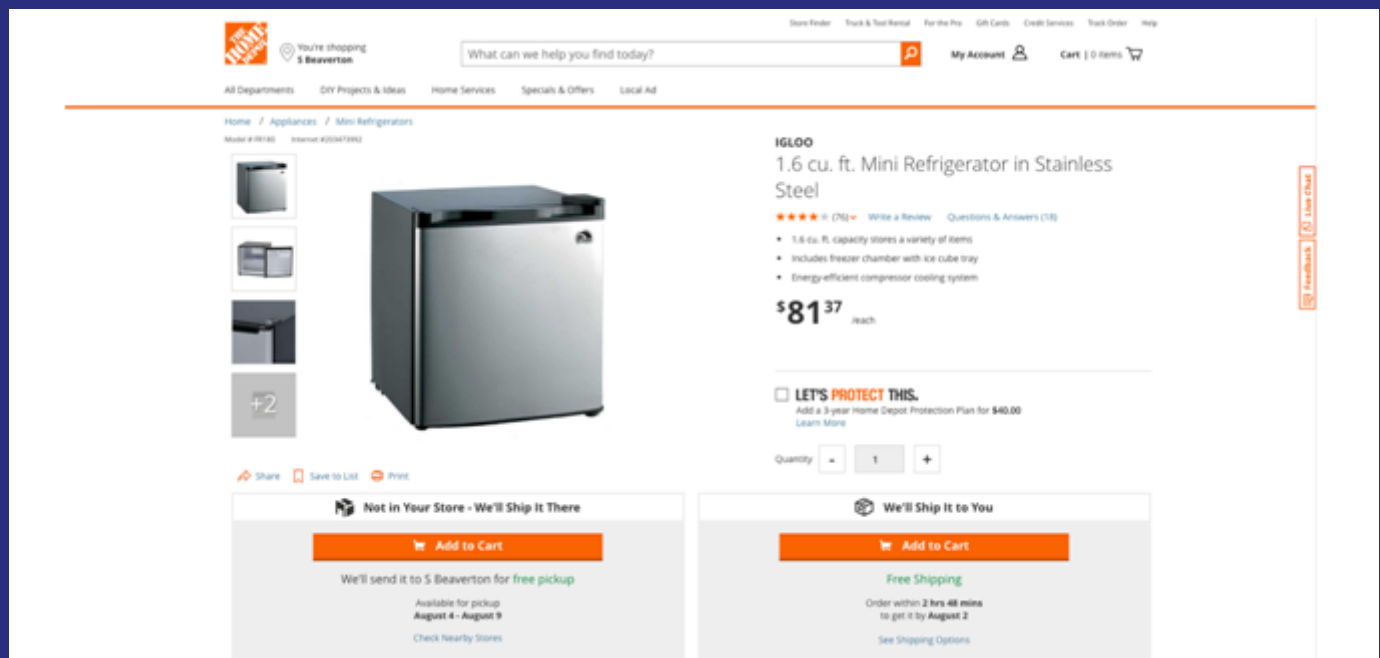
Make Your "Add to Cart" Buttons Obvious

The purpose of your site is to sell. Achieve that goal by making your "Add to Cart" buttons impossible to miss. Make sure your action buttons are listed above the fold (i.e., on the top half of your web page) and don't be afraid to use a bold color.





L.L. Bean Product Page



Home Depot Product Page

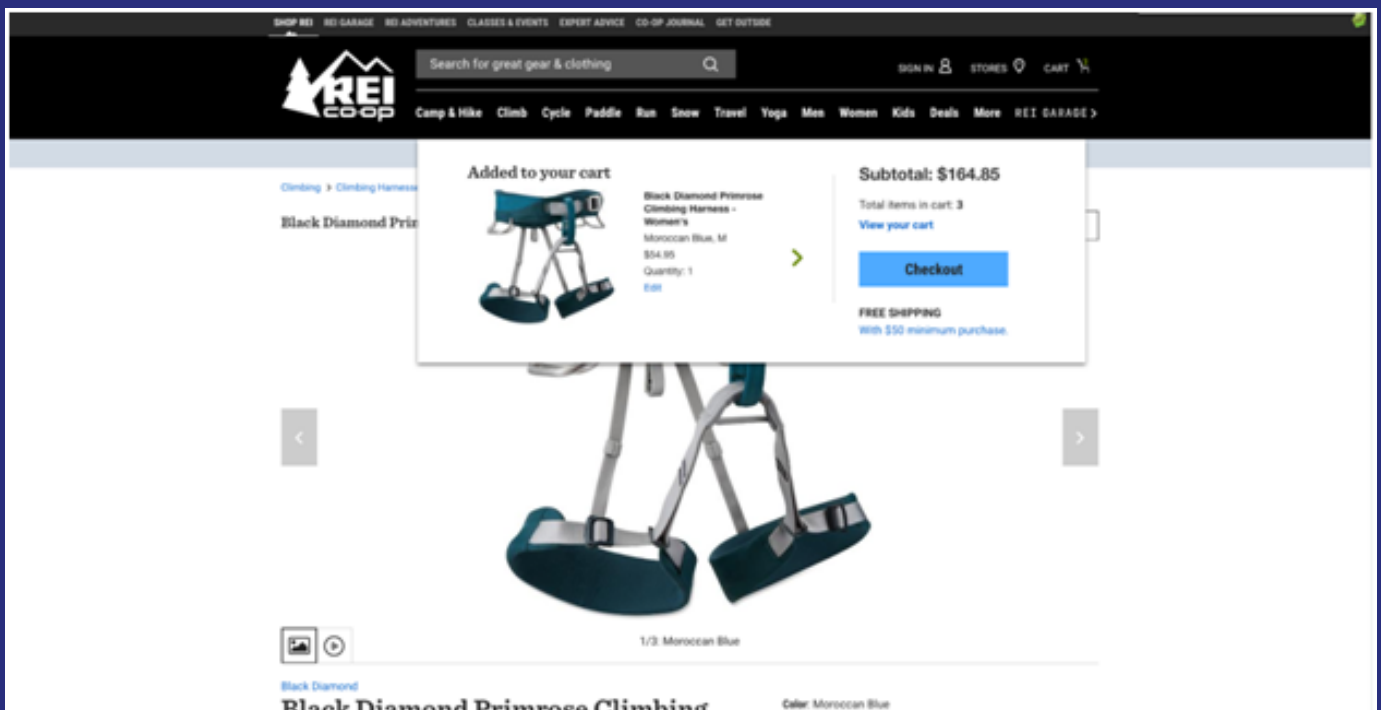
When a customer does click that “Add to Cart” button, you’ll want to make sure they know it worked. Some sites do this by adding a simple notification bubble above the shopping cart icon in the toolbar.

Sign In
Your Account



The Gap Shopping Cart Notification

Other sites go so far as to briefly open up a customer's shopping cart to show the new item. Then, they automatically close the shopping cart in a matter of seconds.



REI Soft Add to Cart

Whichever method you choose, ensure that 1) customers can easily spot your "Add to Cart" button and 2) they are clearly notified when an item has been successfully added.



Don't Ask for Too Much

You should aim to make checkout as simple as possible, which means only asking for the information you absolutely need to fulfill an order. This includes:

- Name
- Shipping Address
- Billing Address
- Email Address
- Payment Information

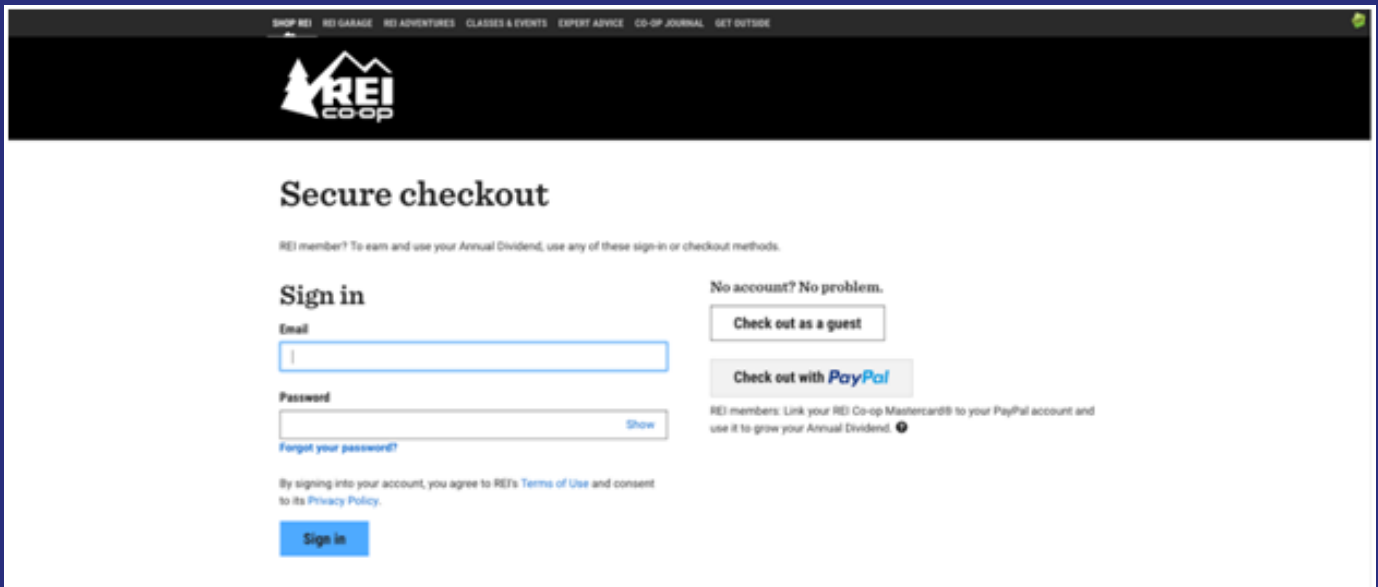
Checkout is not the time to ask customers to sign up for your newsletter, nor is it the time to get information about visitor demographics. Instead, you should wait until after customers have completed a purchase before asking if they'd like to receive future emails. A "Thank You" page is a perfectly acceptable place to market your brand—a checkout page is not.

Most importantly, you should never force your customers to create an account in order to complete a purchase.

According to [Econsultancy](#), 26% of customers abandon a purchase if they are required to create an account. This is one of the biggest reasons customers leave a site. Always give your customers the option to checkout as a guest.

However, that doesn't mean that you should never suggest that customers register with your site. There are a couple of ways you can go about advertising customer accounts.

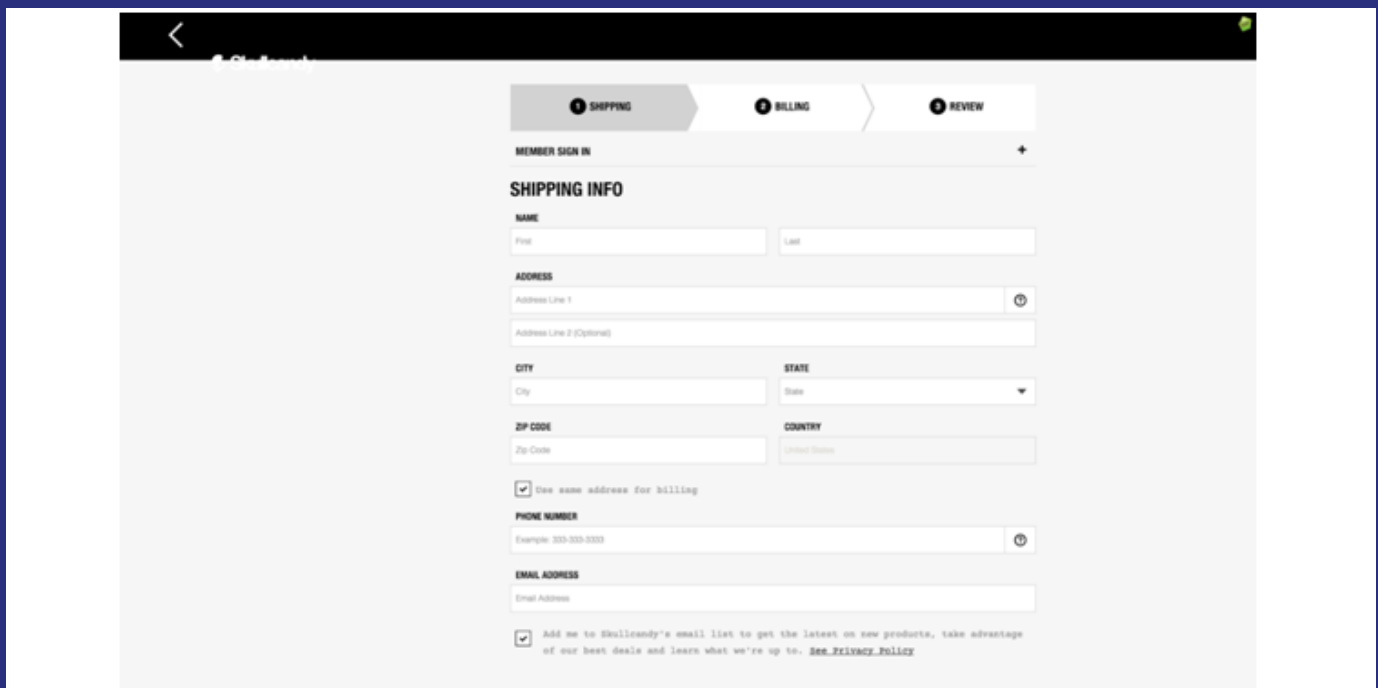
You can take the typical route of offering both "Checkout as Guest" and "Create an Account / Sign In" options on the first page of checkout.



REI Checkout Page

This is the method I see most often on eCommerce sites, and I think it's an acceptable option. However, some eCommerce experts argue that this method creates an extra step for your customers, and extra steps should always be avoided.

Your other option is to proceed as if all customers are going to checkout as guests while displaying a small "Already a customer? Login" link at the top of your checkout form.



Skullcandy tucks away their login fields under "Member Sign In."

Then, you should allow customers to register with your site after they complete a purchase. You can even incentivize that registration with the offer of a discount on their next purchase.

This method is a good alternative to the standard “Create an Account” option as it streamlines the checkout process for those who want to checkout as guests.



Make Your Shipping Policies Clear

Surprise expenses at checkout are one of the most common reasons for shopping cart abandonment. *One study* revealed that 60% of online shoppers who had abandoned an order in the past year had done so in part because extra costs (shipping, tax, fees) were too high. Fortunately, there are a couple of ways you can reduce unpleasant surprises at checkout, especially those related to shipping.

The first is to take advantage of your shopping cart’s estimated shipping features. Let your customers view projected shipping rates in their shopping carts before they proceed to checkout.

The second is to make your shipping policies clear as day at the top of your website. If you offer free shipping for orders over \$25, make that known! If shipping is \$5 on all orders, tell that to your customers!

In addition, you should create a return policy and include that policy at the top of your website, on product pages, on your checkout page, and on your FAQs page.

By informing your customers of shipping expenses beforehand, you greatly reduce the likelihood that your customers will balk at those prices at checkout.



Guarantee Site Security

Customers are very wary of handing over their payment information, and with good reason! There are plenty of scam sites out there. It’s your job to differentiate yourself from these sites and put your customers’ minds at ease.

Make Sure Your Site is PCI Compliant

For your customers' sake, and for the sake of your business, you'll need to make sure that your checkout process is Payment Card Industry (PCI) Compliant before you ever go live. If you use a hosted shopping cart platform (like Shopify or 3dcart) for your online store, PCI compliance is built in. If you host your own site, however, you'll have to handle security yourself. Take a look at the PCI Security Standards Council's website to learn more about what that entails.

Use HTTPS Data Encryption

Nothing says security like that little green padlock in your customers' URL bar. Add that little green padlock to your site by purchasing an SSL certificate, thereby enabling HTTPS encryption on your site. SSL certificates typically range in cost from \$100 to \$500 per year. These certificates guarantee that your customers' payment information is encrypted, and they also turn your site's address bar green, which tells customers that your site is secure.

Display Security Seals

Take advantage of any badges or seals you may be able to list on your checkout page. If you use Norton or McAfee Secure, if you're PayPal verified, or if your business is BBB accredited, display those badges on your checkout page! According to [Baymard Institute](#), proof of affiliation with reputable third-party establishments increases customers' trust in your business.



Consider Hiding Promotion Code Fields

While promotions and coupon codes are great for your marketing strategy, they aren't so great when it comes to checkout. When presented with a blank field for discount codes, customers often navigate away from your website in hunt of a code to use. In fact, according to a report by [Barilliance](#), 8% of online shoppers in 2015 abandoned their carts because they couldn't find a discount code.

To retain more customers, try to avoid using an obvious promo code field. Here's an example of what NOT to do:

The screenshot shows a 'Payment method' form with three sections. The first section, 'Have a coupon?', has a text input field for a 'Coupon code' and a black 'Apply' button. The second section, 'Redeem a gift card', has two text input fields for 'Number' and 'PIN' and a black 'Apply' button. The third section, 'Credit card or PayPal', has radio buttons for 'American Express', 'VISA', 'MasterCard', 'Discover', 'JCB', and 'PayPal'. A blue 'Continue' button is at the bottom with the text 'Don't worry, your card won't be charged yet.'

REI Checkout Page

Instead, you should make your discount field more subtle by tucking it away behind a link.

The screenshot shows an 'ORDER SUMMARY' table. The subtotal is \$59.99. A link for 'Kohl's Cash & Promos:' is followed by a white 'APPLY' button. The shipping is \$8.95, and the estimated tax is \$4.14. The total is \$73.08. Below the table, 'Your Savings \$5.00' is circled in red.

ORDER SUMMARY	
Subtotal:	\$59.99
Kohl's Cash & Promos:	-
Shipping:	\$8.95
\$15.01 away from Free Shipping	
Estimated Tax:	\$4.14
TOTAL:	\$73.08

Your Savings \$5.00

Kohl's Checkout Page

This will keep more customers on your checkout page, which is right where you want them to be.



Don't Forget About Cart Saver Emails

Unfortunately, no matter how well you optimize your checkout, you will always lose sales to abandoned shopping carts.

For this reason, it's crucial that you master the art of abandoned cart emails. Many eCommerce platforms offer built-in cart saver features. However, if you don't have access to built-in abandoned cart features, you can likely find an add-on for your platform that will work just as well.

You'll want to make sure your abandoned cart emails follow the industry's best practices in order to reclaim as many sales as possible. As you design your abandoned cart emails, you should keep a few things in mind:

Use Your Brand's Voice

We'll get more into developing your brand later in this eBook. But for now, you should just know that it's a good idea to infuse a little personality into your abandoned cart emails. Your emails should sound like a real person wrote them.

Be Clear in Your Subject Lines

A subject line is where you make your first impression. Use inviting, personal language in your email subject lines. Lines like "You forgot something!" or "We're holding this for you" are a good way to rekindle interest in your potential customers.

Include the Specific Products They've Forgotten

Remind customers of the items they left behind by including those products in your email. List the names and prices of those items, along with the main product images.

Don't Forget a Call to Action

Your abandoned cart emails will be worthless unless you immediately redirect customers to checkout. Every email must include a call to action. Create bold, colorful buttons with tags like “Buy Now” or “Claim My Deal” that link directly to a customer’s saved shopping cart.

While you’ll never be able to reclaim 100% of your customers’ abandoned carts, with abandoned cart emails you can hopefully snag a few more sales that you would have otherwise lost.



Conduct A/B Testing

As you build your website, you should test each aspect of your website (especially your checkout) to see how well customers respond. Use A/B testing, also known as split testing, to compare conversion rates of different strategies and methods on your site. Implement what works, and ditch what doesn't. With any luck, your website will be more and more successful with each development.

Build Your Brand



One of the best ways to increase customer loyalty and repeat sales is to build a brand that customers can identify with. Branding infuses your products with perceived personality, quality, and character.

There are entire books out there dedicated to building a brand that sticks. We won't go too deep into branding here, but I will present a few practical tips you can quickly implement on your site to boost your sense of brand.



Consider Your Audience

In order to connect with your customers, you need to know your customers. Consider your target demographic. Ask yourself these questions:

- How old are they?
- What are they interested in?
- What problems do they have?
- What other products do they like to buy?
- What is their communication style?

Perhaps your target demographic is new, young parents who are very tech savvy. Or perhaps you're mainly selling to middle-aged women. Your style of communication will vary widely depending upon your target demographic.



Develop Your Voice

When you have identified your target demographic, you can turn your attention to developing your company's voice, or personality. That personality should be one your target demographic can relate to. Your voice could be any combination of the following:

- Playful
- Familiar
- Friendly
- Professional
- Exclusive

Choose the adjectives that you think your audience will connect to, and write those down. Once you find that voice...



Be Consistent

Remember that your voice is your brand's personality. In order for your brand to have the greatest impact, you'll need to maintain that personality across all of your company's communication. Use the same voice on your website, in your product descriptions, and in your email marketing campaigns. It might help to pretend that your brand is a person, and write in the way that person would speak.

Now that you've identified your brand, here are a few ways you can apply your new brand identity.



Tell a Story on Your “About Us” Page

Everyone loves a good story. Engage your customers by using your “About Us” page to tell the story of your company. Let customers know how your company came about and what problems you're trying to solve. And don't forget to use your voice!



Add a Blog

Blogs work wonders for eCommerce sites. A blog can help you significantly strengthen your store's sense of brand. Even better, maintaining a blog is great for SEO (more on this later). Add a blog to your site and post new articles frequently.



Freshen Up Your Marketing

Make sure to take your personality into your marketing strategies. Use that finely-honed voice in your company's newsletters. Revamp your popups and engage with social media in a way that matches your brand and audience.

Remember: Keep your brand in mind with every customer interaction.

Utilize Email Marketing

Although many merchants fear that email marketing is a dying artform, those fears are unfounded. According to the [DMA](#), email marketing is still one of the most successful digital marketing strategies, with an ROI of 3800%. That means for every dollar you put into email marketing, you'll reap \$38 in sales! I think you'll agree email marketing is certainly a worthy investment!

There are a few ways you can go about creating an email marketing campaign. Many eCommerce platforms offer built-in email marketing systems. These systems let you use HTML or WYSIWYG editors to draft emails. Often times, you can even set up automatically triggering email marketing campaigns. While these systems are just fine for eCommerce beginners, they may not be comprehensive enough for growing online stores.

Fortunately, most popular eCommerce solutions also integrate with separate email marketing software programs, including [MailChimp](#), [Mad Mimi](#), [Constant Contact](#), and others. Software of this kind does a better job of helping you create and send emails. These programs also tend to have better reports and customer segmentation functionalities. You can easily see who is opening your emails, who is engaging (and with what content), and who is unsubscribing. Reports go a long way in crafting successful email campaigns.

As you go about rethinking your email marketing strategy, you should consider the industry's proven best practices. Here are a few tried-and-true tips for improving the success rate of your company's emails.



Capture Email Addresses (Honestly)

There are plenty of ways to build a large email list. You can buy leads from a third party, collect email addresses using popups, and file away email addresses as customers enter them at checkout. However, not all of these techniques will result in sales for your online store.

Your goal should not be to have the largest email list, but rather to have the *highest quality* email list. You should only be emailing individuals who are open to your marketing.

In order to ensure a receptive audience, you may have to take a second look at your email collection methods. Instead of signing up *all* your customers for your newsletter, you should include a box at checkout with a tagline like “Sign me up for monthly newsletters” or “Send me weekly sales notifications.” Try to be specific about the frequency with which you plan on sending your email blasts. This will help reduce the number of customers who unsubscribe from your email list.

An on-site popup is another good way to collect email addresses. Offer customers an incentive (like a 15% discount) in exchange for their email address. Once again, you should be specific about what you’ll be sending those customers (newsletters, product updates, discounts) and how often you’ll be sending them.

Finally, you should make sure to send a welcome email as soon as customers hand over their email addresses. In that email, you should thank your customers and establish their expectations for your newsletter. If you’ve promised a discount code, make that code available in your email as well.

Using these methods will help grow a quality, high-engagement email list, instead of one that just contains a lot of names.



Make it Personal

Nothing says “I don’t care about you” like forgetting your customer’s name. And the same principle applies in email marketing. Use autofill features to address your emails to your customers. Instead of “Dear valued customer” write “Dear Daniel.” You’ll do much better.

In fact, according to a study from [Aberdeen](#), personalized emails have been shown to **improve click through rates (CTR) by 14% and can improve conversions by 10%**.

Using your customers’ names isn’t the only way to personalize email messages. You can also send out messages that include personalized product recommendations based on products your customers have purchased or viewed. This sort of email will help retarget potential customers and hopefully lead to more conversions.



Use Email Segmentation

Remember what I said about reports being important? Here's where reports really come into play. As you send out emails, you may notice that some customers respond better to your messages than others. You may also notice that some of your customers spend more money or make more frequent purchases than others. You should be targeting these customers differently.

In order to do that, you'll need to create customer groups. Split up your customer list by engagement, order totals, purchasing frequency, etc. Once you have those groups identified and divided, create emails that target each one of them.

You could, for example, send a discount code to your inactive customers to inspire them to return to your website. Or, you could send a daily newsletter to your most loyal customers.

When you consider that *segmented and targeted emails generate 58% of email marketing related revenue*, customer segmentation seems like an excellent path to take, even if it requires a lot of preliminary work.



Don't Forget to Be Mobile Friendly

According to *Campaign Monitor*, 53% of emails are opened on mobile devices. That means mobile responsive design isn't just important for your online store. Make sure emails look pretty across all devices before you hit send.



Use Clickable Subject Lines and Calls to Action

We've already covered this in the abandoned cart section of this eBook, but it's applicable here too. Make sure your subject lines are engaging and your calls to action are clear.



Take Advantage of Autoresponders

Autoresponder emails (or triggered emails) send automatically when customers perform specific actions on your site. Autoresponders make things easier on your marketing team, and they have been shown to perform better than general email blasts. According to the [DMA](#), over 75% of email revenue comes from alternative email campaigns, and trigger email campaigns account for 21% of revenue.

Fortunately, many email marketing software options come with built-in autoresponder features. These features allow you to create email campaigns, establish their triggers, and set the frequency with which you send the emails. For instance, you can create an autoresponder series of five emails for customers who sign up for your newsletter. Or you can create a short abandoned cart autoresponder series for customers who navigate away from your store, leaving items in their carts.

As you develop your marketing strategy, you should create and test multiple email series. Gear them to customers who engage with your site, purchase from your site, and sign up for your email marketing. Then, set those emails to fire off with a couple days between each one. Hopefully, you'll notice an uptick in email engagement and click through rates.



Utilize A/B Testing

Email marketing allows for perhaps the easiest application of A/B testing. In order to improve your engagement rates, all you need to do is draft two slightly different emails. Send each email to 50% of your email list, and see which email does better.

A/B testing will allow you to improve your subject lines, calls to action, and overall content. Test to your heart's delight.



Clean Up Your List

Every email you send costs your company something. And while the ROI of email marketing is very good, you want to make sure you aren't sending emails to an uninterested audience.

Always provide an "Unsubscribe" link in your emails. If customers want to opt out, you should let them, and you should make it easy to do so.

In addition, you should periodically take a look at your customer reports to see how many of your customers are no longer engaged with your marketing. My advice is to segment out these customers, and make a final attempt at inspiring engagement. Keep those who respond, and delete the rest from your email list. Remember: the goal is not to have the largest email list. The goal is to have a high-quality list.



Get on Board with Multichannel

Multichannel selling is an excellent way to rapidly grow your online presence, and if you don't already operate across marketplaces, brick and mortar stores, and social media sites, now is the time to start thinking about it.



What is Multichannel Selling?

Multichannel is one of those words that doesn't yet have a singular definition. Marketers have been throwing the term around for a while, which can lead to some confusion. For the sake of our discussion here, I will define the term as follows:

Multichannel selling is the act of selling across multiple platforms at once. It includes, but is not limited to, selling via an online store, online marketplaces, brick-and-mortar stores, and social media sites. Any merchant who sells on two or more of these platforms engages in multichannel selling.



What are the Benefits of Multichannel Selling?

Selling on multiple platforms is beneficial for online sellers in many ways. Not only does multichannel selling increase your credibility in the eyes of your customers, but it has also been proven to increase your store's revenue.

Here are a few reasons you should seriously consider multichannel selling:

Customers Engage in Multichannel Shopping

In recent years, customers have become increasingly price aware (especially those much-discussed *millennials*). In fact, **around 50%** of online shoppers compare prices online before they make a purchase. When you sell your products on multiple platforms, customers are more likely to find your brand during their research.

Create Loyal Customers

Customers who purchase your products on at least two different sales channels are reportedly more loyal than customers who only purchase your product on one sales channel. According to [an article from Practical Ecommerce](#), these customers spend an average of 32% more annually than customers who only shop in-store.

Increase Revenue on Marketplaces

Sellers who list their products on online marketplaces (in addition to their own online store) bring in significantly more revenue than merchants who only sell their products on their online stores.

According to a [2015 study from Stitch Labs](#), merchants who list their products on even just one marketplace experience a 38% increase in revenue compared to when they sold exclusively on their site. Merchants who listed their products on two marketplaces (in addition to that online store) experienced a 120% increase in revenue!



What are the Challenges of Multichannel Selling?

It's clear that multichannel selling is the best way to begin expanding your business. Unfortunately, adding sales channels to your current business model is far from simple. Here are a few of the complications you can expect:

Managing Inventory

When you're listing the same products on an online store, eBay, Amazon, and Facebook, inventory management can become complicated. Throw a brick-and-mortar store into the mix, and things get even more difficult!

If you aren't using fully-synced software, you may end up accidentally selling products you don't have on hand. You'll need to make sure all your sales channels "talk to each other" and work together smoothly.

Different Rules on Different Platforms

As you expand into more selling avenues, you'll have to comply with different sets of rules. For example, Amazon has [seller policies](#) that differ from [eBay's](#) and [Etsy's](#) seller policies. And if you begin selling on your Facebook page, you'll have to comply with [Facebook's guidelines](#) as well.

It can be difficult to track and follow all these different sets of rules. And a lack of adherence to these policies can cause you to lose your seller's account.

Begin Selling on Multiple Channels

If you haven't yet tried multichannel selling, your first step should be to integrate your platform with one or two additional sales channels. Most popular shopping carts come with Amazon and eBay integrations. (Some include integrations with popular POS systems as well.) All you'll have to do is purchase the extension and click a few buttons to install it.

Then you can set up a seller's account with your chosen marketplace, list your products, double check your integrations, and get moving.

If you've already been selling on multiple channels and are still having trouble managing your sales and inventory, keep reading. You may need a more intense scaling solution. We'll be talking about these solutions in the [Scaling Your Technology](#) section in part two of this book.

Take on Search Engine Optimization

Effective search engine optimization (SEO) is a constant struggle. Given the ever-shifting standards for optimized sites, it can be difficult to stay on top of things. However, ranking well on Google and other search engines is crucial to maintaining your site's traffic.

While it's impossible to follow every single one of Google's criteria (especially since some ranking factors remain unknown), you should make a strong effort to optimize your online store for search engine crawling.

A few of the major steps you can take to optimize your site for search engines are included below. You should note that all of these recommendations follow the same general guideline: Write your own content. Google gives preference to quality, original content. Taking the time to write copy yourself will go a long way towards proper SEO.

Without further ado, here are a few best practices for improving your online store's rankings:

Create Original Product Information

One of the best ways to promote your products (in terms of SEO) is to create original content. That means using your own images and product descriptions instead of simply copying and pasting the content provided by the manufacturer.

Keep a few things in mind as you create this content:

Include High-Quality Images

Because your customers don't have the option to see and touch your products in person, you should endeavor to provide the most accurate possible representation of your product via images.

Use good lighting and a neutral background when photographing products. Take multiple high resolution images from multiple angles and display three or four of them on your webpage.

Shopify's blog has great advice for shooting excellent product photos. But, if you don't have the proper equipment yourself (or don't trust your aesthetic sensibilities), you should hire a photographer to do the work for you. The investment will certainly be worth it.

When customers have a good understanding of a product, they're more likely to make a purchase, and they're also less likely to return those purchases. It pays to generate custom, high-quality product photos.

Write Detailed Product Descriptions

In the same way, your product descriptions should be specific and 100% original. Do your best to accurately represent the dimensions of a product, what it's made of, and what it does. Don't just write strings of keywords: Google will see right through that.

As you write product descriptions, keep your brand and your brand's unique voice in mind. Take the opportunity to tell a story about each item you're selling. Lines like, "perfect for a walk on the beach" or "a great gift for the newest addition to the family" will help customers imagine how the product could fit into their everyday lives. For some excellent examples of product descriptions done well, check out [ModCloth's website](#).

Dresses - Casual - A Whole New Whorl Jersey Dress in Ocean



A Whole New Whorl Jersey Dress in Ocean
\$59.99

★★★★★

Green

XXS XS S M L XL 1X 2X
3X 4X

Availability: *Select Styles for Availability*

[Add to Bag](#) [Save to Wishlist](#)

Description **Details** **Size Chart**

Item No. 153576

As you debut this teal dress at an early meeting, you win over your coworkers with your fantastic points of view! Twirling a knotted waist and soft jersey knit into a totally sophisticated look, this ModCloth-exclusive frock proves that a proper ensemble leaves you no where to go but up.

Free Ground Shipping on Orders \$50+ | Free Domestic Returns | Join and Get 20% Off >

Chat Now

ModCloth Product Description (taken from <https://www.modcloth.com>)

ModCloth’s descriptions provide shoppers with all the information they need about an item’s material and fit, while at the same time painting a compelling word picture about the product’s potential use in the real world.



Write Custom Meta Descriptions

Meta descriptions are the short lines of text that appear beneath a search result in Google. Here’s an example of a meta description:

Merchant Maverick

<https://www.merchantmaverick.com/> ▼

Read merchant services reviews to find the best merchant account providers and credit card processors. Payment processor ratings and information by ...

You’ve visited this page many times. Last visit: 5/25/17

Google often auto generates these snippets from bits of content featured on your pages; however, you can (and should) customize your own meta descriptions.

Although meta descriptions *do not directly impact search engine rankings*, they do improve click-through rates, which in turn affect overall SEO.

Good meta descriptions help customers know if your page includes the content they are looking for. When those customers click through to your pages, your site gets a boost. So, make sure you create as many custom meta descriptions as you can.

Fortunately, many eCommerce platforms have built-in meta description customization tools, so it should be fairly simple to update that text. Start with your main content pages and popular product pages, and continue from there.



Use SEO-Friendly URLs

Another way to help search engines find you is to ensure your site uses SEO-friendly URLs. Essentially, these URLs use real English words instead of combinations of letters, numbers, and dashes.

This principle is applicable to both your main landing pages and individual product pages. Your URLs should use words that describe the content of each page. For example, your blog page might be “www.yoursite.com/blog.” Each product page should be listed under a URL that contains the product’s name: “www.yoursite.com/woodfired-ceramic-mug.”

If you have hundreds of products, you can take advantage of your store’s taxonomy as you create your URLs. Separate titles of categories and subcategories with slashes: “www.yoursite.com/womens/bottoms/jeans/skinny.”

Fortunately, if you haven’t already, it shouldn’t take too much time to set up SEO-friendly URLs. Hosted shopping carts usually offer customizable URL fields on their “Add New Product” pages. Many hosted shopping carts even generate these URLs for you! Take a look at the URL features your shopping cart provides before you dive in.



Maintain an Active Blog

You may have noticed a trend in this list of SEO recommendations: more content is better. Adding a blog to your online store is an excellent way to constantly create new content for search engines to find.

In addition, a blog is an excellent way to gather backlinks to your site. Because blogs are more engaging than other forms of content, your customers are likely to share your blog posts on social media platforms. Sharing creates backlinks; this tells search engines that your site has authority in the market, which in turn leads to a higher SEO ranking.

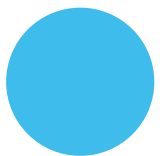
Finally, regularly updating your blog lets search engines know that your site is active, and an active site does better than an inactive one.



Monitor Page Speed

Since 2010, page speed has played a role in Google's rankings. Last year, [Google announced](#) that mobile site speed would be considered as a ranking factor as well.

Make sure your pages load faster with the strategies we've mentioned already (caching and CDNs), and don't forget to check the speed of your pages on mobile devices!



In Summary

There's a lot more you can do to improve your site's SEO, but these are a few good places to start. Above all, remember: Search engines prefer relevant, high-quality, high-authority content. Write your own stuff, and write like a real person. You won't be sorry you did.

How to Handle Growth

If you're reading this, chances are your sales have increased so much that you require additional resources, new hires, and a better work flow. Congratulations! Growth is a business's best challenge.

However, it's important to remember that "challenge" is the operative word here. And in the world of eCommerce especially, the challenges of expanding can take on gargantuan proportions. Not only do you have to scale your business model to meet your current sales, you have to scale your technology as well.

In this section of the guide, we'll attempt to make scaling your eCommerce software a little easier. We'll cover the basics of adapting to growth and provide practical tips for how to optimize your online store to better manage your business's size. And we'll explain it all in plain English, 100% free of technical jargon.

By the end of this section, you should feel comfortable scaling your business to meet any new challenges that may arise.

The Basics



What Does It Mean to Scale?

In essence, scaling is growing your business's financial, technological, and human resources to handle increased sales. In the context of eCommerce, this means ensuring that your site can handle sudden spikes in traffic. You will also need to invest in tools that optimize your marketing strategies and order management for larger numbers of customers.



When Should You Scale?

You can, of course, scale *at any time your business is financially ready*. This proactive approach is the wisest and most gradual approach to scaling. However, it can be difficult to accurately predict a company's future growth.

In this section, we will examine the primary signs that indicate scaling is necessary for your business's survival. If you're experiencing one or more of the following challenges, it's time to scale your platform.

Your Hosting Can't Handle Traffic

eCommerce sites that experience rapid growth often reference downtime as one of their most critical issues. This downtime is usually caused by an unreliable web host paired with sudden spikes in traffic.

When your site goes down at critical times, you miss out on potential sales and risk your company's reputation. Customers can be understandably miffed when they aren't able to access your site to purchase the products they came for.

You need to make sure your web host can handle anything the internet throws at it, including thousands of unique visitors within a day.

You Have Too Many Add-Ons

Growing eCommerce platforms can quickly become a hodgepodge of widgets, extensions, and plugins. If you're running on an open-source platform, juggling those different add-ons can be overwhelming.

As an eCommerce business grows, it's natural to continue adding extensions to resolve each technological issue as it arises. For example, you may have one add-on for abandoned cart retargeting, another for one-page checkout, and another for your Facebook store. You might also integrate with accounting software, tax software, email marketing software, and three different marketplaces. Syncing all of these tools effectively can be challenging.

If you spend hours managing your add-ons, it may be time to upgrade to a more feature-rich, all-inclusive solution.

You Spend Too Much Time Processing Orders

Despite your best efforts to simplify and streamline the process, you still spend hours each day fulfilling orders. You do all of your own label printing, picking, and packing, and you personally drop off your orders at the nearest post office or UPS store.

As the CEO, CMO, and CFO of your company, you have more important things to do than personally ship products.

If Any of the Above Apply to You...

It may be time to automate your system. Automation can take a variety of forms, including switching to a more robust eCommerce platform, hiring new recruits to pick and pack for you, or integrating with the best third-party solutions available to increase your functionality. You may even need to migrate to an omnichannel solution. It all depends on your current business's specific needs and capabilities.

The following sections discuss practical steps you can take to adapt your business to a larger model. We'll cover the importance of multichannel selling before moving on to different ways to automate your shipping processes. Lastly, we'll talk about how to upgrade eCommerce software depending on your current platform and your company's growing needs.

While most of the following will be relevant to your company's current situation, some sections may be old news. If you're simply looking for advice on upgrading your eCommerce platform, go ahead and skip to our Scaling Your Technology section.

Consider Growing Your Team

If you're having trouble fulfilling all of the tasks on your ever-expanding to-do list, it may be time to enlist some help. Hiring one or two additional employees (or bringing in an independent contractor) can free up valuable time for more pressing company issues.

Before you hang a "Help Wanted" sign on your door, you'll need to ask yourself a few questions:

- What do you spend most of your day doing?
- Which of those tasks add value to your business?
- Which tasks are routine housekeeping?
- What aspects of your business could be handled by someone else?
- Are there any tasks that an expert could handle better than you can?

Once you've given careful consideration to these questions, you should have a better idea of which positions you need to fill and how many hours per week you'll need help.

Here are a few positions you may consider filling, depending on your business's stage and needs.

Order Fulfillment

- If you spend hours each week doing your own order fulfillment, it's time for a change. Hire someone to pick, pack, and ship orders on your behalf. Find more information on shipping solutions in the following section.

Data Entry

- Let someone else take care of repetitive data entry tasks. Employees in this role can help by entering new product or customer information, adjusting current information, inputting sales data, and more.

Customer Service

- Providing quality customer service is key to maintaining a loyal customer base. When you can no longer take the calls yourself, train someone to answer customers' questions for you. These representatives should understand your brand and your products. They should also have a good understanding of your eCommerce platform so that they can create orders on a customer's behalf or guide confused shoppers through your website.

Copywriter

- Hire a professional copywriter to create original content for your site. Hand over the keys to your blog, and you'll hopefully end up with an SEO magnet.

Marketing

- It can help to hire someone to handle your marketing channels, including email marketing and social media campaigns. Choose someone with graphic design experience, and you'll have a design team and marketing team all in one.

Accounting

- A growing store can lead to complex taxes. Simplify your books (and your life) by hiring an accountant (or look into accounting software like [Quickbooks](#) and [Xero](#)).

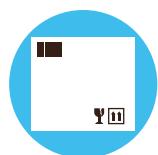
Web Design/Development

- This could be an especially relevant hire if you've built your online store using an open source eCommerce platform. You may not yet be able to afford a full-time developer, or even a team member devoted to resolving technical issues, but you should at least find a trusted third-party developer who you can call on when things inevitably break.

As you look to fill these positions, keep in mind any expectations you have of your future employees (and anticipate any expectations they may have of you). Management experts always recommend going through a formal hiring process, even if you're planning on hiring someone you already know. It's important to cultivate a formal employer-employee relationship, and an official interview process can help to establish your professional expectations. (You may also find a better candidate during the process.)

Write clear job descriptions for each position you're filling. If you expect your employees to complete a variety of different tasks, make sure they know what those tasks are ahead of time.

Free Up Time with a Better Shipping Process



Simplify Your Shipping Process (But Keep It In-House)

Never underestimate the power of good software and a few hired hands. If your business is still relatively small and you're doing all your own fulfillment, now might be the time to consider hiring an employee to help you pick and pack. Chances are good you know a teenaged relative or a college student who could use a few extra bucks a month. Call them up.

More importantly, if you aren't using shipping software yet, you should start. While most eCommerce platforms come with a few shipping features built-in, those features are far from extensive.

Good shipping software can simplify the process of printing order slips and shipping labels and ultimately save you money on shipping. Most shipping solutions offer direct integrations with carriers like FedEx, UPS, Canada Post, and USPS. In fact, they often negotiate deals with those carriers and pass the savings along to their users.

Below are a few key shipping solutions you should consider:

ShipStation

ShipStation is an überpopular shipping software that integrates easily with many shopping carts. For a monthly fee, ShipStation can help you generate and ship packing slips and shipping labels. Direct integrations with USPS, UPS, FedEx, and DHL help you calculate your shipping expenses. ShipStation makes picking, packing, and shipping a little easier. Read Merchant Maverick's [full review](#) for more information.

ShippingEasy

Subscribing to ShippingEasy doesn't just automate the shipping process. It can also help get you discounts on shipping. ShippingEasy partners with USPS to offer you the lowest rates on public shipping. ShippingEasy also allows you to email customers with shipment tracking information. Take a look at [our review](#) for additional details.



Outsourcing Your Fulfillment

On the other hand, if you've already integrated with a shipping solution and hired a team for picking and packing, you might be facing a different shipping dilemma—finding the space to store your products.

If your products can no longer fit into your garage or office space, it may be time to outsource your fulfillment.

When you outsource fulfillment, you pay a third-party service to house, pick, pack, and ship all of your products. They are responsible for ensuring that your products arrive at your customers' doorsteps in a timely manner and in top condition. This spares you the hassle of organizing shipping details yourself, and you may just save money on warehousing and shipping expenses.

You can partner with several different fulfillment providers. I'm listing a few of the most popular options below:

Fulfillment By Amazon's Multi-Channel Fulfillment

Amazon's fulfillment service is one of the best in the industry, and it's key to the company's overall success. Amazon's vast worldwide warehouse system allows merchants to provide customers with revolutionary 2-day shipping. If you so choose, you can harness the power of Amazon's warehouses and put them to work for your online store. You just have to sign up for [FBA's Multi-Channel Fulfillment](#).

FBA is particularly good for merchants who sell on Amazon in addition to their own online store. Using FBA for fulfillment increases the likelihood that your products will be featured in *the coveted buy box*.

Using FBA will give your business two distinct advantages:

- **Your products ship faster:** Because you're able to house merchandise in multiple warehouses across the country, your products will be stored in closer proximity to your customers and will arrive sooner. Using FBA for your Amazon seller account also qualifies you to offer 2-day Prime shipping and free standard shipping.
- **Amazon will provide customer service:** When you use FBA, you outsource every aspect of shipping and returns to Amazon. This includes customer service. If something goes wrong and a package disappears, Amazon will handle your customer's concerns for you.

However, FBA has its downsides as well. Here are a few of the big ones:

- **Complicated receiving process:** Amazon has *very specific rules* about how you must package and label products for their warehouses. And once those products reach Amazon, it can take a week or two to process the shipment before Amazon can start fulfilling your orders.
- **Fees, fees, fees:** Every shipping fulfillment service comes with fees, but Amazon's are particularly complicated. Sellers who deal with large, heavy products may find that storage and handling fees are simply too high to generate much of a profit. Take a look at *Amazon's fee scale* to see how much you're likely to pay per product.
- **Brand limitations:** With FBA, you won't be able to include any marketing inserts in your boxes. In fact, unless you specify otherwise (and pay a pretty penny), all your products will be shipped in Amazon boxes, which may create a confusing brand experience.

In general, FBA is best for merchants who are already selling on Amazon. In particular, FBA benefits merchants who primarily sell small, lightweight products, as they incur the lowest fees.

Additional Third-Party Fulfillment Services

FBA, though popular, is far from the only fulfillment service available. There are many other third-party services out there. Many merchants have found success with local, independent warehouses, while others prefer more popular options like *Fulfillrite* and *Shipwire*.

Third-party solutions come with the following advantages:

- **Integration with your online store:** Popular options like Fulfillrite and Shipwire typically offer pre-built integrations with the most popular eCommerce platforms ([Shopify](#), [BigCommerce](#), [WooCommerce](#), etc.). When a customer places an order on your site, that order automatically gets passed along to your fulfillment provider.
- **Same-day shipping:** Third-party warehouses often promise to ship items the same day an order is placed.
- **Better for branding:** Third-party fulfillment providers are not nearly as picky about branding as Amazon. They'll send your products in unmarked boxes, and for a fee, they'll even include some of your branded inserts.

However, that doesn't mean third-party fulfillment providers are the perfect solution for everyone. Here are a few of the downsides:

- **Fewer warehouses:** Amazon ships from over 70 warehouses in the US, and that number is continually growing. Most other fulfillment providers have only a handful of warehouses, which means shipping will take a bit longer than it would with FBA.
- **Less rigid shipping standards:** Amazon's shipping policies are strict for a reason: FBA wants to be consistent. Other fulfillment providers do not necessarily hold such high standards, which can potentially lead to damaged products and customer complaints. Note: This is not very common--after all, these businesses specialize in shipping--but it is more of a risk.

These issues aside, if you're looking to outsource your fulfillment, a third-party provider may just be the way to go. As you make your decision, take a look at current customer reviews, read each provider's terms of service, and call them up for a quote.



Find What Works for You

If you're tired of tripping over boxes and sweeping up packing peanuts, take a closer look at one or both of the solutions I presented above. Do a little more research, sign up for free trials of the shipping software you're considering, and find something that works for you. Simplifying shipping will be a huge boon to your business. Give yourself the time and space that you need to grow.

Scaling Your Technology

In the eCommerce industry, your selling platform is almost as important as your products. If your platform is failing to stand up to your new traffic, you're going to have to make some changes. Scaling your eCommerce platform can take many forms, and the method you choose will depend on your current situation and projected growth. Depending on your business's situation, you may choose to grow your current platform, invest in an enterprise SaaS platform, or switch to an omnichannel solution.



Grow Your Current Platform

If you're currently operating your store on a customizable, open-source platform like [Magento](#) or [WooCommerce](#), you may not need to switch platforms in order to scale. Open-source solutions are excellent for growing merchants because they allow you to change every aspect of your site.

If you need an abandoned cart saver, you can easily find one in the app marketplace. Looking for an integration with Quickbooks? That will be there too.

And if your site is having trouble handling spikes in traffic, all you have to do is switch to a better, more reliable web host and pay a little extra for storage and bandwidth.

The downside to scaling an open-source platform is that it can get rather complicated. You'll need to make sure each add-on works well with your existing site, and that can take some coding skill.

If you aren't particularly skilled in web development and you'd like to continue to grow your open-source platform, I strongly recommend hiring a web developer to take care of matters for you.



Invest in an Enterprise SaaS Solution

If you've tried unsuccessfully to scale an open-source platform, or if you're already using an SaaS solution (like [Shopify](#), [3dcart](#), or [BigCommerce](#)) for your online store, you might consider switching to a more robust enterprise solution.

An enterprise-level SaaS solution simplifies online selling by providing you with the following:

- Reliable 99.9% uptime
- Web hosting with the ability to handle spikes in traffic
- Higher-level web security
- A more robust feature set
- An easy-to-use admin panel
- Beautiful, premade themes to use and customize
- An account manager for faster, personalized support

Enterprise SaaS platforms simplify the technological side of things in the hopes of freeing up your time and allowing you the energy to continue expanding. Each enterprise SaaS solution comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages, and what's right for one merchant may not be right for the next.

Below, I am presenting two enterprise SaaS solutions that score highly with us. Take a look at each of them to find the one that best fits your business.

Shopify Plus

At this point, you probably already have an opinion of Shopify. Most online merchants either love it or hate it. If you fall into the first category, you should consider Shopify Plus.

Shopify Plus is an extension of the Shopify platform. Shopify Plus merchants continue using Shopify's admin, features, and themes. The "Plus" part of Shopify Plus is the added support and more robust server capabilities.

Shopify's biggest perks include:

- **Easy to use:** Ease of use is one of Shopify's strongest selling points. That ease of use remains even as you scale up to an enterprise-level platform.
- **Lots of add-ons:** Because Shopify is such a popular option, it's easy to find connections between Shopify and other third-party services. Your email marketing and accounting software should integrate just fine.

- **Merchant Success Manager:** Each Shopify Plus merchant is paired with a Shopify representative who knows their case and can provide direct support.

If you're already using Shopify for your online store, Shopify Plus is the logical next step. If not, Shopify can help you migrate information over to their servers without too much trouble.

BigCommerce Enterprise

BigCommerce is similar to Shopify in many ways. BigCommerce also provides users with an easy-to-use admin and beautiful, editable design templates. Like Shopify Plus, BigCommerce Enterprise is a step up from BigCommerce's basic plans. Enterprise users will receive the following benefits:

- **Advanced features:** Clients who subscribe to BigCommerce Enterprise receive an advanced feature set with faceted (or filtered) search, abandoned cart features, and customer analysis features.
- **Built-in ShipperHQ integration:** *ShipperHQ* is a shipping rate calculation tool that gives customers real-time shipping quotes before checkout.
- **Top tier customer service:** Enterprise customers' concerns are answered first with "prioritized call routing." You may or may not be provided with an Account Manager, depending on the level of support you and BigCommerce agree upon in your pricing negotiations.

Shopify Plus and BigCommerce Enterprise are similar in many ways. Your decision between the two will likely be based on personal preference. Take each admin for a spin to see what makes the most sense for your business and call each company to find out about pricing.



Opt for an Omnichannel Solution

If you've already tried one or both of these options and you're still working to keep all the parts of your business working smoothly together, it might be time to switch to an omnichannel solution.

Omnichannel, like multichannel, is a relatively new term. As such, it doesn't yet have a very firmly established definition. One Google search will yield a handful of different answers.

For the sake of clarity, I will define what omnichannel means in our context:

An omnichannel solution is an all-inclusive selling system for online and brick-and-mortar stores. Everything you need comes bundled in one package.

Omnichannel solutions provide software for all aspects of selling and usually include modules for eCommerce shopping carts, point of sale systems (POS), order management systems (OMS), customer relation management systems (CRM), call center capabilities, inventory management systems, and warehouse/fulfillment center management systems.

Omnichannel solutions are typically priced per module and can cost anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars each month.

A word of caution: Many shopping carts will market their “omnichannel” or “multichannel” capabilities. Typically, this means that the shopping cart integrates with a few third-party services and marketplaces. While these integrations are great, they do not make a shopping cart into an omnichannel solution. Remember: Omnichannel solutions have everything you need *already* built in.

Why Should You Invest in Omnichannel?

Omnichannel solutions solve many of the difficulties that come with a business’s growth. Because everything from CRM to inventory management is included under the hood, you won’t need to do any syncing. Your systems will already work together perfectly.

This system compatibility won’t just save you time. It will also improve your reporting. With all the data from multiple channels compiled in one place, it will be easier to determine what is working for your business and what isn’t.

What are the Disadvantages of Omnichannel?

The biggest disadvantage of omnichannel is the cost. Depending on your business’s needs, omnichannel platforms can become very expensive—up to thousands of dollars per month.

In addition, opting for omnichannel limits your platform’s customizability. In order to take full advantage of omnichannel, you should stick with the modules your platform provides. Its email marketing tools might not do everything your [MailChimp](#) account can do, but at least you know it’s fully integrated.

What are a Few Examples of Omnichannel Solutions?

As you look for omnichannel solutions, make sure you research each option vigorously. Check feature lists, view demos, and read customer reviews before you buy.

I recommend you take a look at the following popular omnichannel solutions to begin: [Kibo](#), [NetSuite](#), [Infusionsoft](#), and [Lightspeed Omnichannel](#).



Choosing the Right Enterprise Solution

Now that you're aware of your options for scaling, it's time to start making a decision. Follow these steps as you move forward:

1. Draft a List of What You Need

At this point, you should have a good idea of what your business needs. Get out a piece of paper and spend a few minutes listing each and every feature you need to have for your next platform.

Do you need real-time shipping calculators with integrations to USPS and UPS? Write that down. Hoping for an abandoned cart notification feature? Write that down too.

When you think you've got everything written down, leave the list for a while and return to it later. You'll probably have a couple more features to add after a few hours away.

Once you've got your list finished, you can move on to the next step.

2. Analyze Your Skill Level

Consider how much technical assistance you've needed so far. Have you had to call up a developer every time you wanted to add a new integration? If so, you might consider moving forward with an all-inclusive option like an omnichannel platform or an enterprise SaaS solution.

On the other hand, if you've felt comfortable operating an open-source platform in the past, you can go ahead and continue in that vein. You'll just need to upgrade your web hosting and continue to add on new features as they become necessary.

3. Check Out Your Options

Fully vet each new platform you consider. Dig through its features to make sure it offers everything you need (break out that list you made to double check!) and call in to request a demo.

You should also check each vendor's reputation. Run a few Google searches using the vendor's name and terms like "scam," "ripoff," "complaint," and "stay away" to see what has upset former customers. You should also take a look at the company's score on the [Better Business Bureau](#).

Look for a history of price changes and examine the company's Terms of Service. Above all, *read the fine print*. Find out if you'll have to sign a contract (you probably will) and check for information about cancellation fees and refund policies.

4. Negotiate a Price

When you've chosen a platform, call up a representative and ask for a pricing quote. Pricing for an enterprise solution will vary depending on your business's needs, your store's size, and the level of support you require. While pricing is mostly dependent on these factors, you will have a bit of leeway. Go ahead and request a lower price than they present to you. See what you can do with some negotiating.

Other Points of Consideration

Since you're already changing so much about your store, now may be a good time to consider switching up other elements of your business as well. In particular, you might look into switching your payment processor.

There's a lot that goes into choosing a payment processor for your business. If you suspect you aren't getting the best deal from your current merchant account or PSP, you should look into some other options.

Merchant Maverick has published a full eBook on the matter, [The Beginner's Guide to Payment Processing](#), which explains in detail what you should look for in a payment processor. At this point, of course, you aren't a beginner, and you probably already have a good understanding of payment processing. However, with matters as complicated as processing fees and payment security, it can be good to return to the basics every now and then.

[Download the eBook](#) for free to take a closer look.

Conclusion

As you continue expanding your business, I encourage you to continue your research. The face of eCommerce changes every year, and in order to stay on top of those trends, you should continue reading up on marketing strategies, shipping methods, and SEO best practices. You've already proven yourself to be quite capable in this area (you read this entire eBook, didn't you?). You just need to keep doing what you're doing.

Hopefully you've found a few new techniques you'd like to try. Perhaps you're looking to take a small step by integrating with a shipping software. Or maybe you're planning on making a larger leap to a fully-capable omnichannel platform. Whatever change you have in mind, whether it's large or small, I wish you much success.

With any luck, in a few more years, you'll find yourself needing to scale your business once more.





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About the author

Liz is software review writer living in Oregon. As of late, she can offer haunting eCommerce forums and waiting on hold with customer service representatives. When she's free, Liz loves to rock climb, watch Spanish dramas, and read poorly-written young adult novels.