



eCommerce Made Simple

A FREE Guide from

Design-First

Introduction

ECommerce websites offer everything from tangible products such as books, electronics and other manufactured goods to digital products such as software, ebooks, music, or access to information.

But what do you need to know in order to create your own eCommerce website?

This detailed article is designed as a guideline to show what is involved in setting up an eCommerce website.

This guide does not cover every single detail of a typical eCommerce project. However, this guide will provide a clear understanding of the fundamentals of eCommerce and what is involved, *before* you hire an eCommerce consultant or website development company, or try to create your own eCommerce website.

If you would like to know more about eCommerce topics not covered in this guide, please contact us at **678-969-0448**.

If you have website you need a quote for, please use our **Website Requirements Form** to tell us more about your eCommerce project.

Quick eBook Links:

- What is a "Shopping Cart?" > [Go](#)
- How do you get started? > [Go](#)
- Contact Design-First > [Go](#)

“Selling your products and services online can be ‘as easy as 1,2,3,’ provided you have the right shopping cart or catalog system for your website, and provided you have it properly configured.”

Vann Baker
President
Design-First

“We turn product lists into Internet Stores.”

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Duluth, GA 30096

What is a “Shopping Cart?”

A **Shopping Cart** can be as simple as a tiny programming “script” for making credit card or PayPal transactions within your website. Usually, shopping cart scripts are found within websites where one or two items need to be paid for online, but not where eCommerce is the primary business of the website.

If you have made a donation through a website or if you have been on a website selling a few items using PayPal to make the transaction, you have seen a shopping cart script in action.

With a PayPal or similar shopping cart script, you are placing a small piece of programming code within your website, which takes your customer to PayPal. The rest of the transaction is completed within the PayPal website, then the script brings the customer back to your website after the transaction is completed.

With a shopping cart script, your customers are really using the shopping cart system that is managed and maintained by PayPal or another external system, but the code placed in your website makes it work.

Quick Tip:

If you only need to sell one or two items in your website, or you need to add a “**donate now**” button in your website, PayPal is one of the least expensive and easiest solutions for you to implement.

If you have many different products for sale, with product variations and you need to include packing lists or to suggest other items to shoppers, then a **shopping cart system** will be needed.

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What is a “Shopping Cart System?”

Shopping Cart Systems are far more complex than a shopping cart script. A shopping cart system is a robust application that will allow you to create and manage multiple categories and sub-categories, add new products to the website, and will provide you with an intuitive administration system to process online orders, manage your inventory, automatically charge appropriate tax rates and handle shipping fees.

Well designed shopping cart systems will give you full control over your website design and allow you to control all aspects of your website content, allowing you to:

- Create featured products
- Send auto-notification emails to customers as an order is processed, packaged and shipped
- Automatically suggest other products based on items a customer has added to their shopping cart
- Create customer accounts for reorders, and ***much more***

Think of a shopping cart system as a catalog, content management system, and a shopping cart **combined into one application**, which can be customized with your branding.

Quick Tip:

Shopping cart systems make it easy to set up a self-contained, free-standing catalog website and simplifies the process of importing of hundreds or thousands of products into your store. It also allows you to manage all aspects of your online store with ease.

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How do you get started?

Assuming you will be selling dozens, hundreds or thousands of items within your website, product categories make it easier to organize your products and helps your customers find products when they do not have a product name or number.

A good place to start is to create a comprehensive list of all your website's product categories.

Next, estimate the number of products you will have in each category. If you are using an inventory system you can probably export a list of your products in order to know exactly the number of products your website store will offer to customers.

If you are planning to offer several thousand products and if you want to get your website launched as soon as possible, consider limiting the number of categories you are going to offer initially, or limit the number of products in each of your categories.

Keep in mind that you can easily add more products and categories to the website after you launch the website.

Quick Tip:

If you have an inventory system and you can export a database file containing SKU numbers, product descriptions, prices and other information, this will make creating your product pages much faster and easier.

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What about product photographs?

You will need high quality product photographs (or images) on your website. Ideally, the product manufacturer will provide you images that are about 3 to 4 inches tall, which are high quality and can be used within your website.

Having high quality website images is crucial to the success of your website. Making a great first impression by presenting clear, professional photographs of your products is the first step to winning over new customers.

Quick Tip:

Using a photographer's "light tent" to reduce shadows and a seamless background will make your photographs better by eliminating distractions behind the product, or consider hiring a professional photographer to create your product images.

Customers must be able to see the details of the item they are interested in, especially if they are ordering a replacement part or an item that is expensive. When a customer is shown poor quality product images, they may decide to go elsewhere to buy.

ECommerce websites will typically have a small, "thumbnail" image, which initially shows the product along with a brief description to your customer. This small image can be enlarged when clicked on, giving the customer a much better view of the product. Cutting corners by using low-quality, fuzzy images will cost you sales.

If you are using images that are "web ready" from several different manufacturers, make sure there's not a lot of variation between the images in terms of quality and photography style.

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How are products imported into the system?

If your online store will have hundreds or thousands of products, using a spreadsheet to create a product file is one way to gather product information, pricing, descriptions, SKU numbers and other information to initially populate the system.

If you are using an internal inventory system, it may be possible to export a data file with most of the information for your products into a spreadsheet.

Product descriptions should be written so they are not overly technical and you may want to make your descriptions more “user friendly,” based on who your customers are. While a fun description may help sway a customer to consider buying your product, be sure not to go overboard, and keep your product descriptions accurate and professional.

Once your spreadsheet has been completed, it can be used to import your products into the eCommerce system using your website’s Administration system.

Product images can also be imported as a group with the better eCommerce systems, but care must be taken to make sure all product image file names use the correct product number or product name so they can be correctly imported.

Quick Tip:

If you are starting out with only a couple hundred products and you don’t want to create a spreadsheet, you can easily create each product page using your Administration page within the shopping cart system.

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Configuring your eCommerce system

ECommerce systems must be set up with very precise instructions so they can properly send out automatic emails to customers, provide multiple shipping options, connect with your payment gateway for payments to your merchant account, calculate the sales tax for your state, and more.

While most eCommerce systems use “generic” notification email messages, you may want to modify your messages to contain special instructions or you may want to change the verbiage to suit your customers.

Quick Tip:

Check with your accountant to see if you will be only be collecting sales tax in your state or if you are required to collect sales tax for out of state purchases. Many states have changed the rules for online sales.

Once all your shopping cart configurations has been completed, your settings should remain unchanged for some time. If your store

procedures change in any way, such as adding another method of shipping, you can easily make any needed changes to your eCommerce store’s configuration through your Administration page.

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Testing your eCommerce system

It is always a good idea to make a number of test purchases through the system so you will know exactly what email notifications are sent out to the customer and what each notification says. You will also want to utilize testing to familiarize you and your staff with the system and the many Administration features built into your system.

During the testing of your eCommerce system you can temporarily turn off your payment gateway so the system will accept orders, but not charge anyone's credit card.

You should go through the entire ordering process using several testers to confirm everything works correctly.

After your shopping cart system has been thoroughly tested and you are ready to go "live" with the website, be sure to make at least one or two actual purchases to make sure that your website payment gateway is in fact working as

expected and that charges are going through to your credit card merchant account.

	SUBTOTAL	\$579.99
SHIPPING OPTION	Standard	\$19.85
	TOTAL (pre-tax)	\$599.84
CHECKOUT		

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Keeping customers happy

Many internet users, including potential customers for your website, have been buying online for years and have been using very large, sophisticated eCommerce websites like Amazon.com, Ebay.com and others. When customers receive quick, professional service from these websites, they tend to expect the same from other websites as well.

It is vital that your eCommerce system is clear, attractive, professional and that your automatic emails go out to new customers as expected, so new customers will feel at ease with you and keep coming back.

Quick Tip:

Consider following up with new customers by inviting them to participate in a customer satisfaction survey. This is a great way to get feedback and show your customer that you care about their online experience.



Website “chat” can also turn a would-be customer into a happy, customer for life. Website chat allows your potential customers to ask questions before they buy, without your staff having to take a phone call.

Many internet customers today will “try” a new website by purchasing one or two small items, but will decide where to order the next time, based on how well their first order is—or is not—handled. Even a slight problem can lead to a customer to a competitor.

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Email Offers and Promotions

Sending your customers periodic email newsletters with promotions is a great way to give them a gentle “nudge” to buy from you, instead of your competitor. Many eCommerce websites will sign up new customers with an opt-in newsletter or agreement to receive offers and promotions when the customer sets up their account as part of the check out process.

Most internet products fall into two categories: **1)** products individuals or businesses such as ink jet cartridges, computer-related accessories and office equipment, and **2)** gifts, books and personal items that are nice to have, but not seen as necessary.

Using “autoresponders” or emails that are sent on a regular basis to remind the customer about a special offer will help to get them back to your website, and these days a discount coupon is appreciated by many customers.

Creating customer loyalty is more than offering the lowest price. Customer loyalty is created by your offering a friendly website, making it easy to reorder, keeping in touch with the customer and by providing great customer service.

ECommerce is truly about the customer experience.

Quick Tip:

By offering coupons, specials or promotions, your one-time customer can become a customer for life.

Be careful not to overdo offers or promotions. Customers can be turned off by getting too many offers. Monthly or bi-weekly offers tend to work best.

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Should I Create My Own eCommerce Website?

Should you change the oil in your car or make your own engine repairs? If you have the tools, experience and time—why not? The same is true for creating your own eCommerce website. If you have website experience, are comfortable working with HTML code, **and if you have the time**, you may be fully capable of creating your website. But be prepared for the process to take some time, and if problems arise, you can only blame yourself.

Keep in mind there are many small—and often highly critical—steps and issues that need to be dealt with before you complete and launch your new website.

“Our clients love the fact that we actually know what we are talking about when it comes to eCommerce and that we always do exactly what we say we will do—and more.”

Vann Baker
President
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Working with a seasoned eCommerce professional will make your website project go from an idea to reality quickly and efficiently, so you can go about the business of growing your business.

An eCommerce expert can provide you with:

- Website strategy
- Website design
- Product management
- Product page creation
- Hosting recommendations
- Configuration help
- Training and support

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There's No Time Like the Present . . .

Design-First can help you take your eCommerce idea and turn it into a reality. Let's start by talking about your company and your eCommerce goals.

Design-First will provide you a **free, no-obligation estimate or quote** for your eCommerce project.

Contact Us:

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In a hurry?

Just use our **Quick Quote Request Form** to give Design-First a basic idea about your eCommerce website needs: > Go

“First, we listen to our clients, then we ask a lot of questions, and then listen to what our clients say—our goal is to fully understand our clients’ market and their marketing goals . . . then we get started.”

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