mc+co

MAKING YOUR E-COMMERCE WEBSITE WORK.

AN MD's GUIDE.

There are plenty of web store platforms and vendors out there that suggest building an e-commerce website is easy and something that anyone can do.

To a certain extent this may be true, but while they allow you to get a functional web store up and running using off-the-shelf template designs, they may lack finesse, be a poor fit with your brand identity, and, most likely, poorly support your specific customer journey - all things that make a real difference to store conversion rates.

With any web store large or small the key difference is in building the site your customers want and not the one you think is right. The majority of e-commerce platforms allow for considerable expert development and customisation when your e-commerce needs become more demanding.

> " Global e-commerce sales rose to $26.7 trillion in 2020, making up 19% of all retail sales "
>
> [UNCTAD]

Technology choice however, should be an outcome of defining the way in which you want to sell and most importantly what experience you want your visitors to have - not the other way around! To create a high-performing website, you need to understand who your target audiences are and what they want in terms of a buying experience and then execute that buying experience as slickly as possible online.

" 70% of Britons surveyed prefer online shopping to in-store, up from less than half pre-pandemic **"**

[Reuters]

EXPERIENCE IS EVERYTHING

The only metric that matters for any web store is the success it has in converting visitors into purchasers, and the customer experience is paramount to achieving this successfully. While B2C businesses have recognised the importance of the user experience for some time, the expectations of B2B buyers are changing. Businesses need to improve their web stores to offer the same seamless experience their customers get when buying from a B2C store.
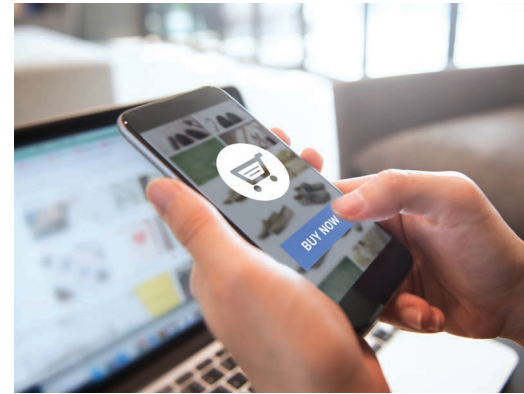
" At least 80% of B2B buyers are not only looking for, but expect a buying experience like that of a B2C customer **"**

[statista.com]

The idea that if you give customers a great experience, they'll buy more, and share their experience with friends and colleagues needs to be the central tenet running through your e-commerce design, development, management and marketing processes.

Don't forget that building a great web store is just the first step - you need to drive your existing customer base to adopt the web store and drive new traffic by marketing your business, brands or products effectively. "If you build it, they will come", quite simply doesn't work online.

PEOPLE PAY MORE WHEN THE EXPERIENCE IS GREAT

According to a Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) report, 86% of people who purchase online are willing to pay more for a great customer experience and in Adobe's 2020 Digital Trends Survey they concluded that customer experience topped the list as the most important element that drove customer purchase for e-commerce stores. So, in order for businesses to succeed and thrive in today's hyper competitive digital marketplace, it's essential to put the customer experience at the forefront of your planning.

TOO MANY WEB STORES STILL DON'T DELIVER

Given that customer experience is widely accepted as pivotal in the purchasing process, the big question is, why are so many stores still failing to deliver that experience?

" 77% of B2B buyers feel that making a purchase is very complicated and time consuming "

[Gartner]

Companies often adopt a feature, function or trending design approach, without really asking the question "Does that improve the buying experience for our customers?"

Web store development projects, both large and small, are often approached as either purely 'technology problems' or from a business's outlook, with pre-conceived preferences for particular features and functions.

The successful presentation of a companies offer and products online is only created by understanding and meeting the needs of the site's users first and foremost. You need to understand the real business and human needs of your customers, defining their user journeys.

Only once this has been fully understood can you define the sort of technology required to deliver a superior online experience for customers and prospects alike.

Customer experience doesn't end with your web store processes - you need to ensure your web store and business processes are aligned and work smoothly together. All the value gained from your efforts to deliver a great user experience in your web store can easily be lost by poor fulfilment and delivery processes.

Too many web stores also try to automate every aspect of the user journey, trying to remove the human element from the client facing processes altogether.

Forgetting that, and this pertains especially to B2B e-commerce, the human factor is essential in creating the experience that drives conversion. People connect with people and the availability of, and access to, a real person when needed is often an essential part in the sales process.

People are increasingly loyal to the brands that consistently provide exceptional value with minimum friction or stress during their purchase or enquiry process

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER INTENT

B2C purchases are driven by a need, either the need of a business or the need of a product - but the fundamental motivation that drives that need is different in each instance.

B2C shoppers will act on an immediate need for a product, so search specifically for that product. Though they may compare several products or several web sites selling the same product, the decision timeline is short - minutes, hours or a few days at most.

B2C buyers are often swayed by promotions into a purchase, but the fundamental buying experience will also influence the purchase design substantively.

A B2B purchase is also driven by a need, however a purchasing decision is rarely taken by one individual in a business, a wider group of business stakeholders are often involved. The purchasing timeline therefore is longer and may require a wider range of information to support the buying process. Due to this, B2B buyers will often repeat stages of the customer journey several times before completing a purchase.

MAKE THE PURCHASE PROCESS RELEVANT AND EASY

An e-commerce website has to inform, support, and demonstrate how your products can meet all of the customer's or organisation's needs through content, on-site tools, and supporting marketing assets.

Remember in the B2C space, purchase decisions are often emotional and need-driven, where as B2B purchases are long term and your main goal is to generate leads that can be nurtured in to a sale over the longer term.

The goal of B2C e-commerce is to drive the immediate sales, so websites should provide just enough detail to drive a sense of urgency into the purchase process - offers, promotions, social proof are all things that aid the purchase process.

> " **77% of B2B buyers are conducting more detailed ROI analysis before making a purchase decision** "
>
> [Demand Gen]

B2B customers on the other hand need more detail and substantiation to support the purchasing decision, which may require, case studies, reviews, technical documentation and video demonstrations.

Before undertaking any e-commerce site development, large or small, B2B or B2C, you should always scope your requirement.

You need to identify your customer journey and the features, functions, services and promotions you will need to enable and support that journey online.
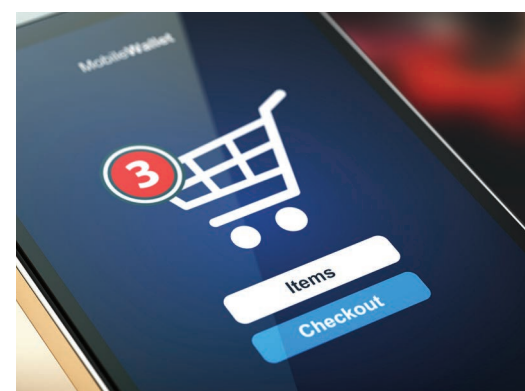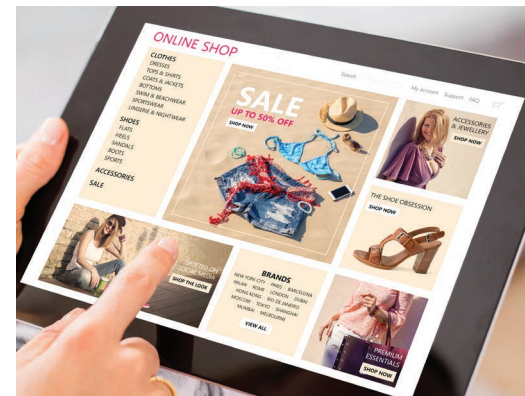
15 ESSENTIAL THINGS TO ENSURE WHEN BUILDING A WEB STORE

So what does that mean in terms of practical items that you need to consider when designing and developing your e-commerce store.

The below is a top 15 list of the things that you should consider:

1 Ensure that your website is strongly and consistently branded.

2 Make sure that every page is as simple and clean as possible - minimise and reduce page clutter and content bloat - present only the essential information as and when it's needed by the user in the customer journey.

> **77% of B2B buyers currently feel that making a purchase online is very complicated and time consuming**

3 Ensure that photography and video content is of the highest quality possible. Image quality is a key factor in delivering sales conversion, it should be clear, descriptive and emotionally appealing. Use imagery to support and make your calls to action visible.

4 Ensure that your messaging is prominent, on brand, communicates value or benefit and is focused on driving action.

> **46% of site visitors will leave a website because of a lack of message**

5 Ensure your website is responsive in design and optimised to deliver ease of use for mobile devices. Google now only indexes websites that are responsive. With 91% of initial B2B buyer searches carried out on a mobile device first, you can't afford not to optimise your web store for mobile use - even if that means leaving out some desktop features.

6 Make any process buttons, such as the shopping cart icon and checkout buttons, clearly visible on every page. Also make sure that the 'Buy' or 'Add to Basket' buttons are prominent - many potential sales are lost purely because web stores aren't clear about what a user needs to do next.

7 Make sure that site navigation is clear and simple to use - ensure through search and filtering that the user is able to find the product that they are interested in quickly.

37% of site visitors will leave a site because of poor design or navigation

8 Make contact information clearly visible on every page. Don't hide and if a user needs to talk with a person, make that as simple and easy to do as possible.

9 Don't require sign up before people can browse the site. Make the registration process a seamless part of the checkout process. Also avoid using pop-up information or sign up boxes as they disrupt and interfere with the customer experience.

10 Keep product descriptions short and informative. For B2B sales the initial product description should be backed up by additional product information. Use tabs or blinds for technical details and/or downloads if you have a lot of product information to share.

11 Include customer review scores - using third party review providers can display an addition level of credibility to your reviews.

12 Ensure your e-commerce store will support omni-channel sales - so you easily support in person, in store and social selling as well as selling through Amazon if needed.

13 Make the checkout process as simple as possible and clearly show the user where they are in the process.

14 Ensure that all customer service and support options are optimised to keep the user/purchaser informed of where they are in the purchase and delivery process.

15 Don't forget about your post purchase support, doing this well can help create the valued feeling that will support driving a second purchase and/or recommendation.

By creating the best experience possible for your web store visitors you will capture and retain more of them as customers. Companies that successfully master this have an 8% higher shareholder return and five times more revenue growth.

" British consumers spent £113 billion online in 2020 "

[Ofcom]

CONCLUSION

Building the right e-commerce website is a critical part of selling for both B2B and B2C focused businesses and as such, it is essential that your web store is carefully tailored to your audience.

The technology involved with creating even a simple store can be bewildering, and complex. If you don't ask the right questions from the outset, you can easily end up with projects that fail to deliver for your business.

If you don't have the time or expertise in-house, engage with a digital agency who has the website and e-commerce development expertise you need to help you plan and execute your store effectively - it doesn't have to break the bank.

Our digital specialists have the knowledge and expertise to build device independent, fully SEO'd e-commerce websites and provide everything you need to plan and execute your business's online store presence.

If you're still not exactly sure how to go about creating an e-commerce store for your business or don't know how to improve the store you have, why not give us a call. We will happily help you understand how you can maximise a web store's performance.
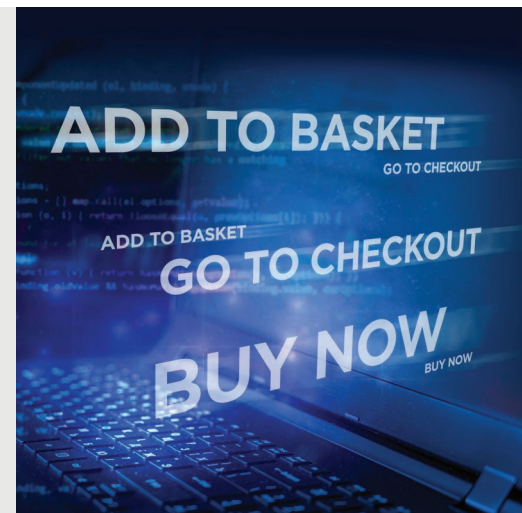
WANT TO TALK ABOUT AN E-COMMERCE WEBSITE FOR YOUR BUSINESS?
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CREATIVE COMMUNICATIONS THAT SELL