# The Ultimate E–Commerce Web Design Guide

Everything the **Business Owner** Needs to Know

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## Congratulations on your decision to build a new website!

As e-commerce becomes an increasingly popular way to do business, more and more companies are looking to create their own e-commerce websites. However, with so many different platforms and options available, it can be extremely difficult to know where to start. So, the team of web development and design experts at CodingIT created this easy to read guide to help you on your web development journey.

This guide to e-commerce web design is meant to arm you with the knowledge and tools to build a website that will beat the competition in 2023! Feel free to refer to it as often as you need to as this guide was carefully crafted to answer the most common questions we get as professional web developers and
designers. Should you have a question or need some additional guidance, feel free to reach out to our team of experts here or on our social media channels.

For the ultra newbies in the audience, we should start with explaining what e-commerce website design is and why it is important. E-commerce web design is the term used to refer to the practice of creating a website used to sell
products or services online. Having a well-developed e-commerce website can bring lots of benefits to your business.

- First, it will create a professional look and feel for your business.
- Secondly, a well designed e-commerce website will ensure your business stands out from the crowd.
- Lastly, it can help ensure that your site is set up properly to grow with your business instead of being a challenge to overcome.

**Now that we have our bases covered, let's dive in!**

# Starting Out

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## Domain:

First things first, you need to procure a domain (also known as your web address) to make your website visible to the world wide web. You have most likely associated this term with the combination of letters and numbers followed by an extension to visit a website. For example, to pull up the shopping platform Amazon, you type Amazon.com into the address bar of your browser of choice. By doing so, the web browser will guide you to Amazon's website by displaying the Amazon webpage, allowing you to make your purchase(s).

Already have one? Great, skip to Hosting.

Don't have a domain name? Well, the world is ready to learn what you can come up with. So, no pressure!

When selecting a domain name, there are no rules of the web that we can share as just about any combination of letters and numbers will work, but there are some general pieces of advice we can pass on.

You want to select a domain name that can meet the following criteria:

- Shorter length is, generally, better
- Domains ending in .com is easier to remember than .net, .io, .shop, .web, .co, or other domain name extensions
- Include your brand or what you do in the name (example: dewdropcbd.com or dewdrop.com)
- If you are lucky enough to include a high value keyword, do so
- Easy to spell and remember
- Avoid hyphens and double letters
- Unique to your business

Once you have a domain name, you can progress to a Hosting provider of your choosing.

## Hosting:

The hosting provider is going to be your file repository for your new web platform. Meaning your host is going to be the master file that stores all the relevant information for your new e-commerce website.

A good web hosting plan must be efficient and scalable to accommodate future growth as your e-commerce business develops. Choosing the wrong plan can impact your online store very negatively, resulting in lost sales opportunities via poor loading speed times as an example.

As appealing as lower-cost solutions may seem, remember that such service providers may severely limit an e-commerce site's overall capabilities. Thus, it is essential to select a reliable hosting plan.

Consider the following aspects when selecting a web hosting provider:

- **Bandwidth** - Bandwidth refers to the amount of data a website can transfer to its visitors over a specified time. If possible, choose a hosting provider that offers unlimited bandwidth.
- **Storage** - An eCommerce website needs to have enough storage to accommodate site content such as text, product pictures, and databases.
- **Speed and optimization** - Speed is a critical element when running an online store. Choose a hosting provider that ensures fast page load times so that your site won't suffer from high bounce rates and slow website traffic.
- **Security** - High levels of protection will ensure the safety of your e-commerce site and, more importantly, your customers' data. Check if a web hosting provider offers access management, an SSL certificate, multiple layers of firewalls, automated backups, and system updates. Make sure that you keep up with the best e-commerce security practices.
- **Ease of installation and use** - Look for web hosting with an intuitive interface, as it will simplify the management of your files, domains, and applications.
- **Customer support** - Providing multiple communication channels such as live chat, email, or phone calls 24/7 can be a good sign of a hosting provider's reliability and trustworthiness. Good hosting providers offer vast information and resources to assist you with getting started.

Once you have selected the right vendor and plan to meet your needs, you are one step closer to welcoming those digital visitors to your new online store. But, we need to consider what kind of e-commerce business we want to be.

## E-Commerce Business Models:

There are many different types of e-commerce businesses models, but you will need to choose the one that best suits your products and goals. The three most common e-commerce website models are B2C, C2B, and B2B. Let's take a closer look at each one.

- B2C e-commerce stores - sell products or services to individual consumers. This is the most common e-commerce model and is perfect for businesses who want to reach a wider audience..

- C2B e-commerce stores are those that allow customers to sell products or services to businesses on their platform. The most common version of this type of site is the 'marketplace' style of website. This type of store is great for businesses who want to source products from other businesses and run the transactions through their business.

- B2B e-commerce platforms are those that allow businesses to sell products or services to other businesses. This type of store is perfect for businesses who want to reach a wider audience via wholesaling or Software as a Service.

Once you have established who you are looking to target, do some homework and explore who is currently operating in the space. Take notes on how they present information, what you love or hate about their e-commerce websites, how they organize the website menu and products, and most importantly, if they exude trust and credibility with their design choices.

Press on by selecting the platform that we will utilize to build your new e-commerce website.

## CHAPTER 2

# Taking your 1st Steps

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# Website Builder or Custom E-Commerce Platform:

**IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE:** Every decision has a compromise attached. Whether you choose to build your e-commerce site with a template-based Website Builder (GoDaddy, Squarespace, Wix, Shopify, BigCommerce, and more) or you are looking for more of a custom solution (WooCommerce, Python/Django, Magento, Ruby/Ruby on Rails, and many more), you will have to be confronted with the realization that NO SOLUTION IS PERFECT. Every method available to build a website comes with compromises. So, focus on the benefits, not the features offered when making this decision.

To illustrate this point, website builders are not just tying you into an ecosystem (ie. Shopify or Wix) but you are also committing to their processes, work flows, limitations, order fulfillment, data management protocols, and more! So, choose wisely.

Some of the major questions that you should ask yourself prior to jumping head-first into the web development pool are:

- What are the business's goals?
- What are the website's goals?
- Do I want my website found from organic search?
- Do I plan to keep adding new content (blog, changes to products or services, seasonal imagery, etc)?
- Do I plan to add pages to my site (short and/or long term)?
- Do I intend to sell products online?
- If I am a retailer, how many products and variations of those products do I need to support/display?
- What do I want my customers to experience?
- Do I have any business processes that I should integrate into the site's design or development?
- How important is security for my site's visitors and me?
- What are the commonly accepted, industry-specific conventions in your space?
- What can you do differently to help your website stand out?
- How does your ideal customer prefer to be presented with information?
- How can you make your site more enjoyable to your desired audience?

After you have established your goals, desired outcomes, and customers, we need to ask ourselves this question: "Which is better for my business, template-based website builders or custom web design/development?"

Here are the pros and cons of website builders:

| PROs | CONs |
|---|---|
| Lower Cost (can design for free with some options) | Ownership (you are leasing the site, design, plugins, theme, etc) |
| Ease of Use (CMS is usually easy to interact with to maintain and build out the site) | Hidden Fees and Costs (higher costs apply for domain names, premium plugins, better theme selections, customizations, automations, hosting, etc) |
| Easy to Add Features (find, click install, and done) | SEO will be a challenge (you are not in control of what you can alter or optimize) |
| No Code Options | Rarely well designed or professional appearing |
| Faster than traditional web development | Design options are limited to approved themes |
| Integrated tools and apps for reporting, data management, shipping, email marketing | Limited Size and Structure |
| Faster than traditional web development | Design options are limited to approved themes |
| Security is partly handled by the ecosystem | Poor Customer Service |
| | Scalability and Bandwidth could be a problem |
| | Mobile Phones may not display the pages properly |

Here are the pros and cons of custom web development:

| PROs | CONs |
|---|---|
| Ownership (you own the site, domain, and all the data with it) | Longer development timeline |
| SEO | Security is a concern |
| Better performance (page load speeds) | Choices can be overwhelming |
| Implement automations, integrations, personalization for users, custom functionality, and much more | Only as good as you or your developer's abilities |
| Bespoke Design and Structure | More costly than templated based optionss |
| Mobile Phone Optimization | Lots of decisions to make |
| Bespoke Design and Structure | More costly than templated based optionss |
| Customer Service | Need to have the ability to alter/work with code or hire someone who can |
| Better User Experience and User Interface | Must have an idea of the final product before starting |
| Scalability is endless | |
| Higher credibility | |

The team at CodingIT tends to recommend template-based website builders for those who are very new to websites or ecommerce, the computer-phobic, people who want to change designs yearly or very often, or A/B testing landing pages for marketing campaigns.

Custom Web Design & Development is best suited for those companies who want a bespoke experience for their users, have a cohesive brand style or look, consistently evolving products or services, need Search Engine Optimization, and want to own the website.

We could not include a section on Website Builders or Custom Web Development without mentioning the most important element of any website, the Content Management System.

## Content Management System (CMS):

Something to consider if you are going to build a new e-commerce website is the Content Management System (CMS) you want to utilize. Your choice in CMS will define your experience with your new website.

What is a CMS? Simply put, the CMS serves as the back-end of the e-commerce website. You will interact with the CMS whenever you want to alter anything on the front-end (meaning what the user sees on their screen). It will be the thing that you interact with most often.

We could write an entire guide about CMSs alone. By no means are we the only ones with opinions, so feel free to explore the pros and cons of certain CMSs on your own, but we defer to industry experts about selection of the right CMS for the product(s). Experts tend to agree on the following 4 pillars of CMS Selection:

• Support: How much help are you going to need? This may be limited to product patches and may include services like hosting, user mentoring, strategic guidance, or even web development assistance or guidance.
• Vision: Is this CMS going to help you and your customers do more business together? Are you able to add features your clients and your business need?
• Community: What is your industry doing and why? Look at your existing customer base and competitors. Mimicry is perfectly acceptable, copying is not.
• Stability and Focus: Is it tested and verified as a solution in your industry? Meaning, has this CMS been applied to a high ranking, well trafficked platform or not? If so, chances are it should also work for your website.

What are some key things to keep in mind when reviewing options for your CMS?

- Put together a shortlist of candidates and do your research. Forums and other resources exist to help you make this decision.
- Customers are demanding more personalized experiences (account with order history, 1 click re-ordering, suggestions of new products based upon purchase history, and more) and your CMS should allow you to add these features.
- Involve others in the decision making process if possible. The CMS will only be as good as your ability to use it, so ensure everyone who will be interacting with the back-end understands how to add content or pages, add or remove features, respond to customer queries, etc.
- Have defined needs and goals that your CMS will accommodate. This includes future growth potential.

If choosing to move forward with a Website Builder, the CMS will be built into their platform, so you will have little option to customize or add features.

Research these platforms prior to starting to design your new website (examples include Shopify, Wix, BigCommerce, Squarespace, GoDaddy, and others) by reading about issues others have had and what they love or hate about their experience will help you determine if they will be able to perform the tasks that you need for your website.

After deciding on what methodology we want to utilize to design and develop our new e-commerce website, we can explore how we want that website to represent your business.

# Making Decisions

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# Website Structure:

Now that you have the platform and CMS figured out, deciding on the ideal customer journey is where the fun begins! Determining the structure that your new e-commerce website will present to its' users is going to allow you to determine the quality of their experience.

What is site structure? Site structure is a term used to refer to how you organize your website's content. In other words: the pages and posts that are visible on your website. These often have a variety of related topics, and site structure deals with how this content is grouped, linked and presented to the visitor. You can use taxonomies, like categories and tags, but also internal links, your navigation, and breadcrumbs as tools to improve your site structure. If you do this well, your users will find their way around your website with ease!

Plus, Google and other search engines will be able to easily index your URLs! What are the types of website structures and how are they utilized?

What are the types of website structures and how are they utilized?

- **Hierarchical Model** - This is the most common and preferred type of website structure. The hierarchical model in website structures is the most commonly used one since it is very easy to understand. Also called the tree model, this website structure is used by websites containing a large pool of information distributed amongst many pages. The hierarchical model uses a home page, main category pages, subpages, and child pages within subpages to distribute the website structure. This model also uses internal links to connect child pages, subpages, and category pages in order to convey the hierarchy of the pages to the search engine algorithms. The simple to-down approach helps websites in clearly conveying the importance of the pages within a website, as well as the relevance of the content within.
- **Sequential Model** - As the name says, this allows the user to browse in a more linear manner. Here, the user can only travel in a forward or backward direction. Also, called the linear model, this one is the most suited for websites with a basic structure with not too many pages. Not all websites require multiple pages to convey information. The sequential model is most commonly used by small businesses. If a website does not require subcategories or child pages, this model is the best fit. This model usually has a main page, a home page, or a landing page. This is followed by a small number of basic parent pages that lead to the relevant call to action for the users. Usually, this model takes the users on a predefined sequential journey on a website in a straight line

- **Matrix Model** - The matrix model is more commonly known as the webbed model for website structures. It is named after the visual it creates for a website structure, which is a web of landing pages. This model interconnects all the parent pages with the subpages and main page so everything can be accessed by the user in minimal clicks. Best suited for e-commerce websites, this model can seamlessly connect product pages with retail pages and payment gateways. The goal of this model is to create an environment for the user to access whatever pages they want to with a minimum amount of clicks via internal links. While it may look like a lack of structure to many, that is almost the point. It makes it a user experience the website however they want to based on their needs, even if they change their mind midway through.
- **Database Model** - The database model takes almost the opposite approach to the hierarchical model, and shapes the website from the bottom-up. The model uses taxonomies and metadata to define the structure of the website. This helps in allowing the users to create their own unique website experience as they go along the internal pages. The information that appears on the website is specific to the user, and from there onwards, data is pulled from a database that guides your journey on the website. This model is usually used by search engines like Google and even bank websites.

Since you are reading this guide, we should share what is best for your business. CodingIT almost exclusively, with very few exceptions, will recommend the Matrix Model of website structure for all e-commerce websites. People are creatures of habit and deviating from that wisdom is not rewarded. We want to allow users to explore our new website with ease, finding the necessary information or products, and making a purchasing decision quickly. Don't worry, there is still a ton of room to add your own style and flair.

What are some tips to help you create an ideal website structure?

- **DO NOT** have competing content on your own site. Order your content by level importance with the most important subjects to least important subjects. Sub-categories should fall under the general theme or category they are referencing. For example, if you want your users to be able to find CBD products by the category 'CBD' or the consumption method sub-category (edibles, flower, tinctures, topicals, and vape carts) your user should find those categories in your shop menu under the CBD category with a drop down menu appearing with the consumption methods.
- **DO** use commonly accepted nomenclature and vernacular. We know we didn't just then, but you know what we mean. Simplified language is friendly to users and search engines.
- **DO** use internal links to support main categories and provide more information about subjects, products, or services. For example, you want to have a blog article about the quality of your CBD topicals, link to those products in the article.

- **DO** incorporate breadcrumbs into your design. Users should always know what page they are on and what leads them there.
- **DO** pay attention to what you think your users would want to see and experience. Every decision needs to pass the "will this make the user's experience easier?" test.
- **PRO TIP**: Layout your site structure in a spreadsheet to allow you to examine your content and map out your customer journey. You can use this spreadsheet to plan future content ideas and how it will integrate to your site with time.

A properly structured website should have clear pathways for users to follow, clearly indicate the goals of the website, and be the cornerstone that your new website is built upon. Finally, we get to move onto our favorite part, the design!

## Design Principles:

Here is your chance to present your brand or online store in the best light possible! Your e-commerce website should be your best employee, representing your business 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, and needs to shine in a crowded space.

To help establish the right frame of mind for website design, we need to recall the questions we answered at the beginning of this journey. For those that frantically skipped to this section, here they are again to ensure you are on the right path:

- What are the business's goals?
- What are the website's goals?
- Do I want my website found from organic search?
  Do I plan to keep adding new content (blog, changes to products or services, seasonal imagery, etc)?
- Do I plan to add pages to my site (short and/or long term)?
- Do I intend to sell products online?
- If I am a retailer, how many products and variations of those products do I need to support/display?
- What do I want my customers to experience?
- Do I have any business processes that I should integrate into the site's design or development?
- How important is security for my site's visitors and me?
- What are the commonly accepted, industry-specific conventions in your space?
- What can you do differently to help your website stand out?
- How does your ideal customer prefer to be presented with information?
- How can you make your site more enjoyable to your desired audience?

A properly structured website should have clear pathways for users to follow, Now that we have recalled what are the key elements to include in the new e-commerce website, we have to start the hard part, actually crafting the visual elements of the website. In an effort to make this section as information-packed and easy to understand as possible, we have put together this list of tips and tricks to help you create the best design for your new e-commerce website:
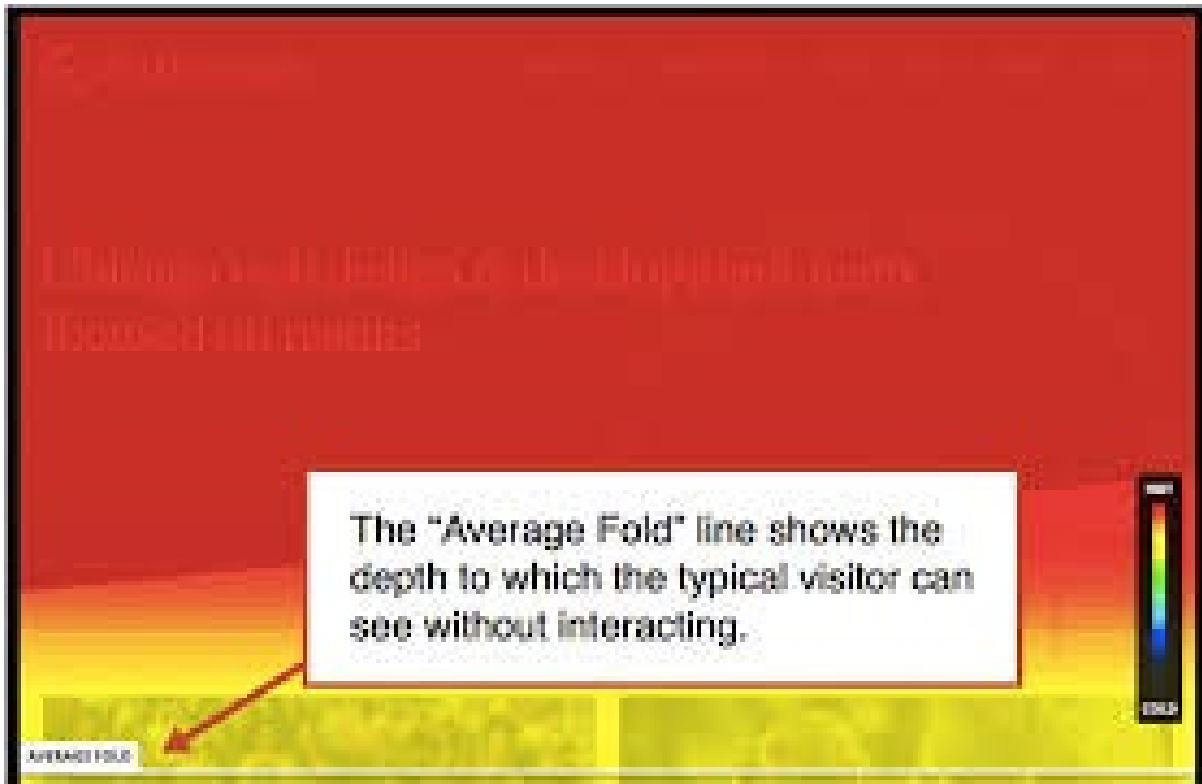
- Laws of Visual Hierarchy - professional web designers use visual hierarchy to guide visitors attention to important elements first. The website layout includes the position (high or low on the page), sizes (big or small), visuals (video, images, icons) and contrast (color and white space). Ideally, the largest, visually stimulating imagery is going to be featured at the top of your pages and have bolder colors. Smaller visual elements should be towards the body or bottom of the page and be surrounded by text.

## The Laws of Visual Hierarchy

low visual prominence ←————————————————→ high visual prominence

|  | low visual prominence |  | high visual prominence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Size | small |  | large |
| Position | bottom of the page |  | top of the page |
| Color | low contrast |  | strong contrast, unique color |
| Format | text | images, icons | movement, video |
| Position relative to other elements | crowded on the page |  | surrounded by whitespace |

- Page loading speed is critical to success. Don't clutter your site with too many pop-up windows, unskippable videos, or unused elements in the source code. You will frustrate users and they will find another vendor.
- Leverage the fold. Despite the world moving away from newspapers, a lot of our ability to interpret or understand information has been shaped by them. Most important information is up top and clearly visible. Use clear and keyword-focused descriptive headlines, include easy to understand calls to action, use media (images and video) to highlight a product or feature. By incorporating different font sizes and styles, you can enhance the user's ability to understand by breaking up the content into an easily digestible package.

The "Average Fold" line shows the depth to which the typical visitor can see without interacting.

- The '7' rule. In the United States, and most of the western world in general, we tend to '7' a page when reading it Meaning, we start reading in the top left, transition to the top right, and scroll down the right side of the page*.* Take advantage of this by having the content you want your users to engage with most on the right side of the page. **



Baby look at the camera... visitors look at the baby

Baby look at the headline... visitors look at the headline

- Utilize Hick's Law. Hick's Law ****states that the more choices an individual has, the longer they will take to make a decision. Keep menus and choices simple, limit form fields to vital information only (ie. contact or order forms), have one focused call-to-action (a call-to-action is expressing to users what you want them to do, for example 'BUY NOW' or 'Add to Cart") on the page, only display social media buttons for the channels that you are active on, and be intentional with your language.

- Stick to standard layouts. Visitors love familiarity as it gives them the feeling of comfort and tend to find websites with conventional structures or pre-sentations as more trustworthy.

- Avoid the excessive use of carousels, sliders, tabs, and accordions. The more work you make a user do, the less likely they are to want to explore or shop on your site.

- Prioritize scrolling over clicking. We cannot stress this enough, when information isn't easily findable, it will remain hidden.

- Use people in photos. Users want to imagine themselves experiencing the product or service and having people in your images helps complete that mental picture. Be careful though, as stock images should be altered to make them your own.

- The power of lists. Using lists, both ordered and unordered, is a great way to make information more accessible to visitors. However, we tend to remember the beginning and ending items on lists, meaning the middle tends to be forgotten quickly. The lesson here: When listing attributes of your product or service, make sure to put the most important benefits where they are likely to make an impact.
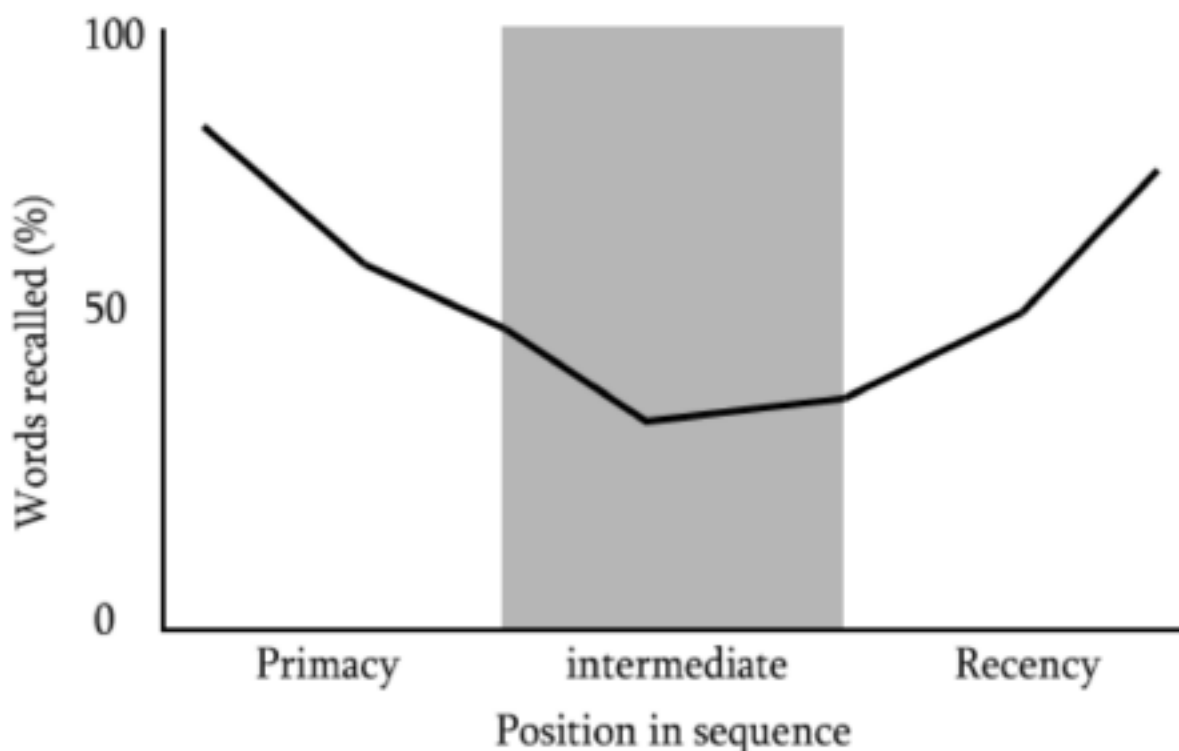
- Leverage Social Proof. Take advantage of conformity bias (term used to describe the tendency of people to do what they see or think others are doing). If you can show that others have a positive opinion of your site, content, product or service, new visitors are more likely to do the same.

- Consistency is key. Having a standardized presentation style will help users find relevant information faster and allow them to focus on imagining how your product or service will benefit them.

- Content is King. Your content (other terms used are 'copywriting' or 'copy') should speak to what your users care about, nothing more. Answer their most common questions succinctly and make that information easily available. We have all had the experience of a salesperson mindlessly sharing details about a product that aren't important to us, don't allow this to happen to your new e-commerce site.

- Tag everything. Meta titles, descriptions, and alternative tags are just some of the tools you will have available to explain to crawlers and users what is found on your pages. So, take this opportunity to instill some best practices and tell the world what it should find on your website.

- Color is important. One of the easiest ways to differentiate yourself is by having a different color palette than your competitors. Your choice of colors will impact how users interpret your brand and e-commerce website. Take the time to choose colors that help convey what your brand represents, are associated with emotions you are looking to drive, and help your visitors associate your website with a positive experience.

Complementary color combinations

Analogous color combinations

We cannot speak about design without spending a moment on your new home page and product pages. Well designed home and product p.ages make the user far more likely to complete their transaction after all.

**CHAPTER 4**

# Putting It Together

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## Homepage:

This will be the most visited page of your website. It is going to be a lot of visitor's first impression of your business and serves as the tone-setter for the rest of their experience. The gravity of this task is not lost on CodingIT, so we tend to look for home pages to answer the following questions before having to scroll more than once:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- Why should visitors care?

Like other web pages, your home page is going to be broken out into 3 main areas: The header, the body or blocks that make up the body, and your footer. The Header is what will be visible first and includes all the elements you want the visitor to notice first. The body of an e-commerce home page is meant to further the mission, enforcing that this online store has the products the visitors need. Finally, the footer, this section usually contains an abbreviated sitemap, links to social media channels, and other helpful information about the business (ie. phone numbers, contact details, business address, etc).

Good Homepage design is not easy and there are tons of different ideas on how to make the most impactful home screen in your industry. So what are some guidelines to ensure that your homepage serves as a welcoming influence on your site's visitors?

- Provide a clear value proposition - state your purpose and intention, it's only polite.
- Offer a diverse selection of product recommendations - feature or highlight special offers, sale items, new products, or popular products to encourage visitors to dive right in.
- Have an easily found search box with autocomplete - make navigation from the home page super easy by allowing visitors to take control.
- Place your main products towards the top - the products that you sell the most often or the ones that you are known for should be on the pedestal that is your home page, preferably in the header.
- Clearly display shipping and return policies - yes from the home page. Visitors need to know what to expect from your online store to feel comfortable. Have a defined call to action that takes users to another page with this information spelled out.
- High quality images - preferably ones that you own or took for this purpose.
- Display Social Proof - trustworthy or credibility building certifications, affiliations, badges, and reviews all reinforce the idea that your site and business are credible.
- Link Social Media Channels in Footer and encourage social sharing
- Offer personalized recommendations - if your CMS allows for users to create accounts with order history, you can use that information to display personalized blocks of products to suggest they try something new!

- Differentiate between new and returning visitors - again, if your CMS allows for it. This feature displays a pop-up window or special header images to encourage new shoppers to purchase with a custom offer.
- Keep it simple - We recognize the irony of us saying that after this long list. But it is true! Simple, easy to understand design choices are always rewarded.
- Fast to load and scroll - pay special attention to page loading speeds and responsiveness. We don't want a visitor's first impression to be "is it working?"

The same rules of design that are covered earlier apply here too. Be purposeful, keep your audience in mind, and don't be afraid to express your personality. Now, onto the reason you want a new e-commerce website, the product pages.

## Product Pages:

These pages enforce or derail all the work you have done up to this point. Building product pages that consistently convert visitors into customers is a science all its own, but we are going to share some of our secrets to success.

- Clear Images - feature your products in all their glory! There are a minimum of 4 sides to every product, show them off. The subject of the photo should be in-focus, well-lit, high quality, zoomable, and not taken away from by the background. For bonus points, you can take advantage of 3d modeling to give your visitors control of what they can see.
- Prominent, direct calls-to-action (CTA) - CTAs could be as simple as 'add to cart' but must be easily recognizable by the visitor and compel them to act. Differentiate your CTAs by implementing accent colors to denote different things. When deciding on color, keep in mind two things. Firstly, whether that color triggers the emotion in your target audience that you are hoping for. And secondly, how does it contrast with the color scheme of the rest of the page? Ideally, you want the CTA to stand out so that it grabs customer attention immediately. Don't forget to localize your language if you are selling across international borders.
- Easy to Navigate to and from - Use breadcrumb navigation to let users know where they are and where they have been. Breadcrumb navigation helps visitors understand the product hierarchy as well as navigate to other areas of interest. They are also known to reduce bounce rates.

- Create a sense of urgency - Products that are selling out fast can make users convert quicker, believe it or not. Remember those "expiring T.V. offers" that were all the rage in commercials? Well, they still exist, but are most commonly found on your favorite e-commerce websites. This can be accomplished via an accurate remaining stock figure displayed on the product page, could be the last day of an offer sticker, or a last 2 hours of free shipping pop up window. Create your own arsenal of phrases and ideas. Don't give your customers unnecessary time to mull over the purchase by creating a sense of urgency to encourage them to act instantly.
- Social Proof - We have said it multiple times, but it really does make a difference and bears repeating again. You can display consumer trust badges, customer reviews, accreditations, and certifications to help drive home the point that your product and e-commerce website are trustworthy.
- Optional: videos - Videos can be an awesome tool if done well. They explain the benefits to potential customers, add a human element to the user experience, allow the user to picture themselves engaging the product, and can put quite the professional coat of polish on your website. That being said, unless you have experience with shooting commercials or demo videos, we recommend that you enlist the help of a professional.

No e-commerce web design guide is complete without an exhaustive discussion of product descriptions. Strap in, grab a coffee, and maybe a warm blanket, because we have a lot to cover.

*The ultimate goal with your product description text is to offer informative, educational information that answers user questions.* The best e-commerce product descriptions create an impression, immediately. They communicate value, get people excited, and make them switch from visitors to customers. Keep product descriptions short and make sure to include important keywords so that the page ranks well in search engine rankings. A high converting description is not just appealing but also offers complete information and answers the following:

- Who is the product for?
- What is the product used for?
- How does the product work?
- What sets it apart?
- Why should visitors purchase the product?
- Why should visitors purchase the product?

Apart from answering visitor questions, your product descriptions should also be written keeping in mind the following tips for it to be conversion worthy:

- Speak to your target audience - Should your voice be serious and formal, or casual and funny? Should you emphasize the technical aspects of the products in your descriptions or concentrate more on its aesthetics? Understanding the main considerations of your customers is most crucial to make them relate to your descriptions, and buy your products.
- F.A.B. your gab - What does F.A.B stand for? FEATURES. ADVANTAGES. BENEFITS. A feature is a fact about your product or service. The advantage is what it does better or differently than competitor's solutions. The benefit mainly answers how a feature is ultimately more useful for your customer. Tell visitors exactly "how" a particular feature is useful for them, and "why" they should make this purchase. Product descriptions that bridge the gap between features and benefits can lessen buyer's remorse and make the buying decision easier. For example, mentioning that a certain 100% organic cotton shirt is sweat-free and anti-allergy justifies its high price.
- Rely more on verbs - Verbs are much more compelling than adjectives when trying to convince a person of something. Consider these: This cute, little sleeping bag is perfect for your one year old baby. Or, This bright sleeping bag gives your baby plenty of room to kick and wriggle without the worry of getting tangled in layers of bedding. He will never wake up cold having kicked his bedding off. Your baby will feel safe even in unfamiliar surroundings. Which one sounds more compelling? We have our opinion, what's yours?
- Use jargon only when talking to sophisticated or highly educated buyers: ****Excessive jargon that your customers do not completely understand will lead to confusion and not conversion. It is best that you avoid it at all because if the reader does not understand it, they won't buy it. But more likely than not, you will want to include the industry jargon because you think that it makes you come across as an expert. We will say it: you're probably right. Using industry-specific or technical jargon can add to your credibility. This is especially true when you want to cater to educated audiences. However, if you are dealing with the general public, they prefer to be educated in terms they understand.
- Borrow from your ideal customer's vocabulary: Joanna Wiebe, the Founder of Copy Hackers, mentions in one of her articles: "Don't write copy. Swipe copy from your testimonials." We think this is fantastic advice! In the article, she explains how she swiped the exact words from a customer testimonial for her headline, which increased conversions (click-through to the pricing page) by 103%. Here's the testimonial that she used:

Image Source: Copyhackers
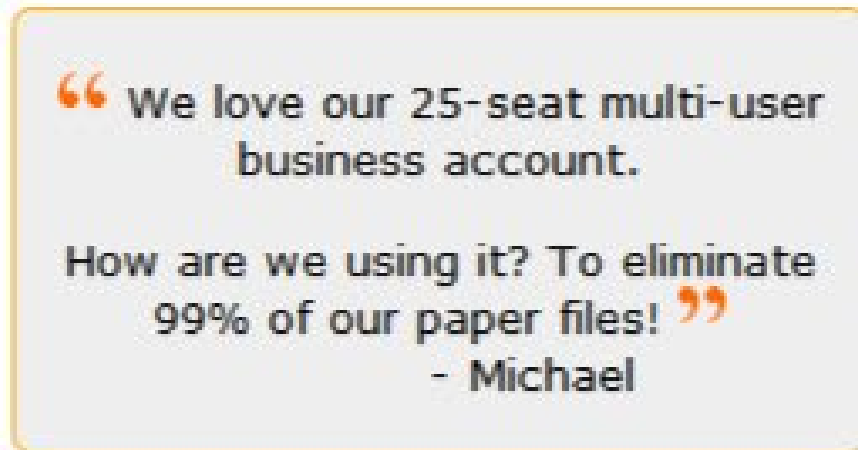


And, this is the winning headline that swiped words from the above testimonial:

Image Source: Keep&Share
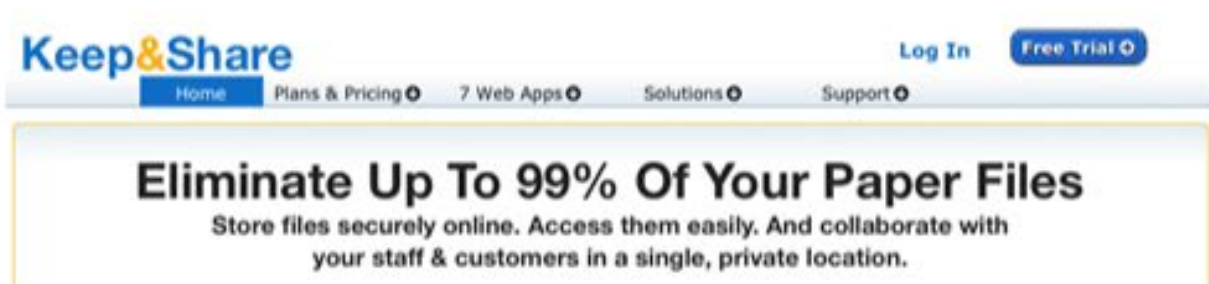


Conversion experts swear by this technique and you can easily use it to write high-converting descriptions. It's all about matching the conversation in the minds of your prospects.

Check for Readability before signing off on your new product descriptions:

- Use short or broken sentences: ****You should air on the side of brevity at all times. If reading feels like a task to your customers, they will ignore your descriptions, sinking your conversions.
- Use bullet points: ****Most users scan pages on the Internet. They do not read word-by-word. Get them to notice the important points by listing them in bullets.
- Use larger and well-contrasted font: Make sure that your font color easily stands out on the page, and that your font size and type is easily readable for your target audience.
- Don't make your visitors squint their eyes to read your text and they will.

Whew! That was a lot, no let's cover something that is the final barrier between you and a new customer, your shopping cart and completing the transaction.

## Shopping Cart:

Did you know that nearly 70% of online shoppers abandon items in their shopping carts? Really! This is such a big problem that some vertically integrated retailers have started displaying messages to users that the items in their cart will be removed if they don't complete a transaction within the allotted window.

We are not a fan of this technique as visitors tend to view this behavior as manipulative, but the point stands. Shoppers can be indecisive. Furthermore, 58% of online shoppers in the US ditched their e-commerce carts because they were browsing items without the intention of buying. However, when we look beyond this factor as a reason for cart abandonment, customers leave their carts full for many other reasons:

- 48% felt there was excessive additional expenditure (tax, shipping, etc.)
- 24% of websites urged visitors to create an account to complete the purchase
- 17% felt the checkout procedure was too long or complicated
- 16% felt costs weren't transparent enough
- 13% had experiences with the website crashing
- 9% felt there weren't diverse payment options

So what can you do to limit the amount of abandoned carts on your digital doorstep?

- Place the shopping cart in the top right corner, always - remember when we discussed users are going to '7' your website? Here is one of the reasons
- Use the shopping cart icon to display the number of items already present - Many online shoppers browse stores with no intention of making a purchase. Instead, they might bookmark items for later and forget about them. This is why reminding customers about products in their shopping carts is essential.
- Have an automated abandoned cart message - a simple pop-up window that mentions the visitor has items that caught their attention could help remind them to complete the transaction.
- Indicate they have added something to the cart - It's important to let customers know that chosen items have been added to their carts. Amazon does this well — they confirm with a clear "Added to Basket" in bright green lettering to make it obvious the product is now in your cart. A "Proceed to checkout" button also encourages shoppers to go ahead and make their purchases.
- Use a mini cart if you can - A mini cart is a pop-up containing essential details, such as the product name, price, and quantity. It gives customers a quick glance at their shopping cart without leaving the page they're currently on.
- Lead customers to the checkout page - The shopping cart page allows customers to see their orders, change quantities, remove items, and more.

The main goal of the shopping cart page is always to move customers to the next stage of the process: the checkout process.

## The Checkout Process:

According to the Baymard Institute, the 3 biggest reasons as why website visitors don't complete transactions online are:

1. hidden costs, artificial friction (meaning unnecessary steps or obstacles) and wasted time.

   Hidden Costs - When customers don't see the cost of shipping and taxes until checkout, they underestimate the total cost of their purchase and can exceed budgets quickly.
2. Artificial Friction - Many people are turned off by having to create an account — no one wants to jump through hoops to complete a purchase.
3. Wasted Time - People are wary of a lengthy checkout process.

So, the question becomes, how can you develop your checkout process to not fall into these traps? Well, it's as easy as:

- Letting visitors know the total purchase price as soon as possible. If you have free shipping beyond a certain barrier, mention it. If you have to charge a flat rate for shipping, mention it early and often.
- Allowing users to complete a transaction without setting up an account with your business
- Keep form fields limited to just the vital information. If it isn't required or normal operating procedure, drop it.
- Provide an outline of the checkout process complete with status updates.
- Use text and images to exude confidence in the purchasing decision.

See! Not hard to do at all! Speaking of contact forms and sharing information to complete a transaction; what happens when a visitor needs to reach your business?

## Contact Forms and Pages:

Easy to overlook, but oh so critical when things don't go to plan, visitors need to know how to reach your business as they do not have the luxury of walking in the front door.

Creating great contact forms and pages is not rocket science, but it does require some thought and consideration to execute well. How can you create a great Contact Page or Contact Form? Check out these guidelines to be on the path to success:

- **Layout is important** - make it easy to fill out, keep the size of the input fields matched to the expected length of the answer, encourage the form submitter to use brief statements to describe the issue, and no more than 2 columns in width unless absolutely necessary.
- **Position the form properly** - make it obvious and easy to spot, it should not blend in with the rest of the site as to appear obscured.
- **Limit the number of fields** - If you can help it, never include more than 3 fields on your form.
- **Choose the right color** - The key is to choose a color that fits your current design and layout, but also pops out and screams "click me." According to a number of studies, red is the highest performing color overall, but green and orange have been shown to work as well.
- **Skip the digits** - if you can go without actually speaking with the visitor, they would most likely prefer it! If there's one piece of information users hate giving away, it's their phone numbers.
- **Explain what happens next** - People don't want to be left in the dark. They want to know exactly what will happen after they click the button. By improving the copy of your call-to-action button or adding another field that tells them what to expect, you can greatly enhance your conversion rates.

Now that we have gotten your contact forms in order, we have to bring up something that every business tends to overlook, despite being an important factor in the visitor becoming a lifelong customer, your "About" section.

## About Page:

Who really cares? Everyone, that's who. No, really.

People prefer to do business with those they know, like, and trust. So, how can an online retailer utilize this principle with the creation of their new e-commerce website? We are glad you asked!

Firstly, as stated earlier, the Home page should give visitor's the opportunity to quickly learn:

- Who you are
- What you do
- Why they should care

However, unlike other pages on your website, the Home and About pages also have the unique duty of sharing the reasons your business exists with the digital world!

About pages can be an amazing place to feature and share the history of the business, the current company makeup, team members delighting customers, testimonials, deeper explanations of the design or creation process of products, and more!

When creating your About page, some helpful tips are:

- **Stay away from the hype** - Users can see straight through it, so save it for social media content.
- **Avoid a sales pitch** - If a reader is on your About page, there's a good chance they're considering using your service or buying your product. They're looking at why they should choose you. So don't sell your product or service. Sell you.
- **Be creative** - Don't fall into the trap of simply writing a brief summary of your business and calling it a day. The best About pages are creative, informative, and interesting.
- **Don't follow the crowd** - If someone's reading your About page, there's a good chance they've been considering your competitors. So, make sure your page stands out. It should make it almost impossible for a potential customer to forget you.
- **Feature faces** - Consumers often like to know who they're buying from or working with, so be sure to feature at least.

Simply put, the About page is your business's time to shine. So shine on you crazy diamond.

# Thank You!

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DEV-SHOP

Well that was a lot to cover in a short amount of time, wasn't it?

We want to take this moment to say 'Thank You' for giving us your time and consideration.  It is our hope that you were able to garner a new perspective, learn about the reasons for certain processes, or find a few ways to improve your e-commerce website.  The entire CodingIT team wants to see you succeed with your new platform, so much so that we published this guide for free.

Despite not being designed for absolute beginners, it does have a lot of great nuggets to take with you as you start to cultivate your own style and sense of what your customers want to see.  This is only the starting point, there is an entire world out there regarding web design and web development best practices and CodingIT is going to do our best to highlight the information we feel is most important.

It would mean the world to us if you were to share this information with others and maybe checkout our social media channels for other great tips and tricks. Good Luck!

**Sincerely,**
**The CodingIT Team**