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E-Commerce Tutorial: E-commerce Design

Like any venture, there are many steps to launching a successful online business. When planning your business, one of the most important considerations is the development of your website. How will you e-commerce enable your site? Will you have a programmer develop the online shopping cart from the ground up or will you implement turnkey online store (shopping cart software) equipped with pre-programmed e-commerce functionality?

Along with the development of your shopping cart, there are several other factors that contribute to the development and success of your store including; e-commerce design, hosting, payment processing, security, maintenance cost and web promotion. Perfecting each one of these areas will ensure a targeted, organized and profitable web site..

E-commerce Design

The design of your web pages including link structure and content organization will make or break your e-business. Why? Because professional design accomplishes two goals. First, it builds credibility and instills confidence amongst your target audience. Few consumers feel comfortable purchasing goods from a site that looks insecure. Secondly, proper design follows specific guidelines regarding content organization and link structure. Following the rules will help you rank higher in the major engines.

Design also includes a professional management of your brand- create a logo that will withstand the test of time and work to develop an overall harmonious theme. The development of your company's logo should not be taken lightly. In fact, most graphic design experts agree - your company's logo is directly related to your firm's bottom line. A carefully crafted corporate identity starts with a professional logo designer with a well-planned strategy. There are many low-end logo design alternatives, which may save you a few hundred dollars in the short-term, but how much are you damaging your company's potential for long-term success?

Creating a website design theme can be achieved in a number of ways. Custom web development provides more flexibility and incorporates specific requirements to the shopping cart but it costs more. Template based design is standardized providing less flexibility but will serve nearly any design budget.

E-commerce Shopping Cart Hosting

Web hosting is mission critical to your e-business. It is important that the web hosting company is capable of providing you with guaranteed uptime: a few specifications to look for are:

- Guaranteed uptime
- Available tech support
- Fast connection
- Knowledgeable staff
- High compatibility
- Sufficient backup

Find a suitable company that is accessible and focuses on support. If your site goes down and you can't reach a representative by phone it is like locking the doors to your online shop during business hours. MonsterCommerce provides guaranteed e-commerce hosting uptime and secure hosting services.

Payment Processing

About 95% of on-line consumer transactions are purchased with a credit card. To accept CC's as an online payment type you first need a secure means of collecting credit card information from your customer. Most storefront shopping cart providers offer this service. You then have the choice of processing these transactions manually, or using an online authorization system to process the payments. Finally, a merchant account with a bank is required in which your payments can be deposited. Not all merchant accounts are suitable for Internet payments and some may not be compatible with certain cart features.

Other than accepting credit cards, there are other options like on-line checks, or reverse SMS using mobile phones, but the traditional method seem to be the norm for most online shopping cart sites.

SSL Certificate

A digital certificate, also known as SSL Server Certificate, enables secure encryption on the web server. It protects order communications so you can process credit card payments securely and ensure that computer hackers cannot steal sensitive data. MonsterCommerce provides free 128 bit SSL security.

Maintenance

ASP's (application services providers) enable you to build, edit and maintain your e-commerce storefront using your web browser in the store's back end administration panel. There you can add products, hide out of stock products from view, upload images, change prices, edit the look of your storefront, set shipping and edit many other management options with ease. Also crucial to developing a lasting and profitable business is maintenance and constant updates. Consumers like to see new changes to the site. It is essential that it be done easily and quickly. For simple sites a form-based interface for entering product information is preferable to having to edit the pages directly. More sophisticated sites may have automated links to stock databases.

Cost

As well as cost of running and hosting an ecommerce site, there are additional fees for processing payments. You then will pay transaction and statement fees on top of shopping cart services.

Marketing

You have to work to get customers to you site. One way is through sales and promotions. Using your backend browser you can easily place items on sale, offer quantity discounts, create specials pages, or setup repeat customer discounts. Don't expect customers to come flocking to your web site once you set it up. Marketing is the hardest, but most important part of selling successfully online. You can use search engines, banner ads, mass emailing, offline advertising, reciprocal links and many more marketing techniques. The effectiveness of your marketing campaign will make the difference between success and failure.