

Ecommerce web design principles

If you are a store based retailer then you have many, many generations of knowledge and experience to draw on and certain principle are well known.



1. Target group

Understanding your market and why they shop with you – brand, price, convenience, location etc. – is crucial.

2. Create an experience not just a building

The whole store from the entrance to the fixtures used for display has to come across as one entity. You have to create an experience,

with a bold statement, making the centrepiece of the store an atrium or some other visual cue that fits the brand and draws you in and around.

3. Ease of shopping

The store is created for the customer, it has to be easy to access, navigate and simple to understand. Space needs to be efficiently and effectively used so that display, services, storage and customer movement are integrated. A retail store is organized by the context in which people use the products with for example cameras, photo printers and image software together so that customers can dream about possibilities.

4. Prioritize messages

Any packages, signs and promotional material are important but customers can only take in so many so focusing on the messages that count is crucial.

5. Focus on display

The primary focus within the store has to be the product or the merchandise. Visibility of products plays a crucial role in encouraging the purchase decision.

6. Flexibility

Stores have to be adaptable as retailers must think how to cope with ever changing consumer needs.

7. Making a purchase

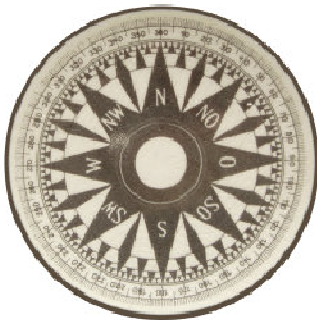
In one sense this is the whole point! Well trained staff who act as if the purchase is not the end of the relationship but the beginning are crucial as is product knowledge and any out of store marketing.



Well, it's not so different on the web as browsers' habits online aren't that different from customers' habits in a store. In both cases people glance, scan and go to what catches their interest or vaguely resembles the thing they're looking for.

However, web visitors are even more impatient than store visitors and really, really want instant gratification. This means they aren't 'rational' they choose the first that seems right – they follow their intuition.

So, as well as following the classic retail principles above, what else should you do online?



1. Make navigation and use easy

Get rid of the question marks, navigation and site architecture must be intuitive and browsers should not have to search for the answer. People won't use your web site if they can't find their way around it. Things such as breadcrumbs make navigation easier.

2. Simple and consistent communication

Browsers are not there to enjoy the design they are looking for information. Let the browser see clearly what functions are available so they feel comfortable with the way they interact with the system.

Help your visitors to get from point A to point B without thinking how it is supposed to be done - the less thinking required the better is the user experience. Consistency, screen layout, relationships and navigability with the least amount of cues and visual elements are important and the same conventions and rules should apply to all elements so that they are not ambiguous and simple to understand. Convention is a friend and does not mean a boring web site but a reduced learning curve, so use the conventions.

3. Put your products centre stage

Your site is there to convince browsers to buy products from you and not go elsewhere. It is essential to have good product images in all sizes. Poor images will mean fewer sales. Provide a clear, accurate and easy-to-read description and don't just take it from the manufacturer's website or from another site making sure you have managed to get across all the features and benefits. Identify the key products that sell best and order them on the page to promote them.

4. Create confidence and trust

Check out our visual as to what you have to cover then make sure your guarantees, your returns policy, price promise, multi-buy offers and delivery as well as privacy policy are easy to find and understand. Display your delivery charges and options clearly and concisely on your website before you get to the checkout. Give your customers a range of delivery options and the option to pay a little extra for a quicker delivery – it's all part of 'instant' gratification.



Let browsers explore the site and discover your services without requiring subscriptions or registrations and forcing them into sharing private data. It's not reasonable.

5. Security and checkout

Assure browsers that their private details will not be shared with any third party. Security is a real issue so secure your online payment processing reassurance is essential. Failure to do this will result in lost customers and sales.

Make sure your basket is easy to see at all times and the checkout has a few steps as possible that are clearly marked. Make sure all data is not lost with an error and make it easy to change and correct things.



6. Start a relationship

Aim to build a long term relationship with your customers and bring them back on your website.

Make it as easy to contact you and ask for help. Good customer service is appreciated so provide customer service online that actually resolves customer queries and helps people to buy. Ask your customers when they check out if it's ok to put them on your mailing list.

7. SEO

Make sure you are found in the search engines with good page titles, headings and descriptions. Text is important for SEO but the Web is different from print, so it's necessary to adjust the writing style to browsers' preferences and browsing habits whilst keeping the search engines in mind.

8. Test

This is direct marketing so test and find out what works best. Test in a continuous cycle so that you get better.

None of this is rocket science, but it's not always acted on either by online retailers. If you have or are planning an online store, make sure you test it against these principles.