# E-Commerce SEO Strategies:

## Mastering the Art of Online Retail

# Contributing Authors

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Angela Davis is the Digital Analyst for the new business division at Catalyst. In this role, she analyzes the online presence of potential new clients and their competitors and develops custom integrated digital strategies to improve their online performance.

Angela previously held the role of Organic Search Manager at Catalyst, and was responsible for creating SEO strategies for Procter & Gamble's beauty brands.

She has worked with a variety of clients ranging from startups and small local businesses to global brands owned by Fortune 500 companies, creating online marketing campaigns including SEO, PPC, email, content, and social initiatives.

## Jennifer Kenyon, Organic Search Director

Jennifer Kenyon is an Organic Search Director at Catalyst. Jennifer joined Catalyst as an Organic Search Manager five years ago and has over eight years of experience in the Search Marketing industry. During her time at Catalyst, Jennifer has developed the organic search strategies for top P&G brands such as Gillette, Tide, and Gillette Venus.

As an Organic Search Director, she is responsible for the creation of category level search strategies and overall management of P&G's Fabric Care and Pet Care brands.

In her spare time she likes to travel and is a lover of all things fashion, beauty, and music related. She is also a serious roller coaster junkie!
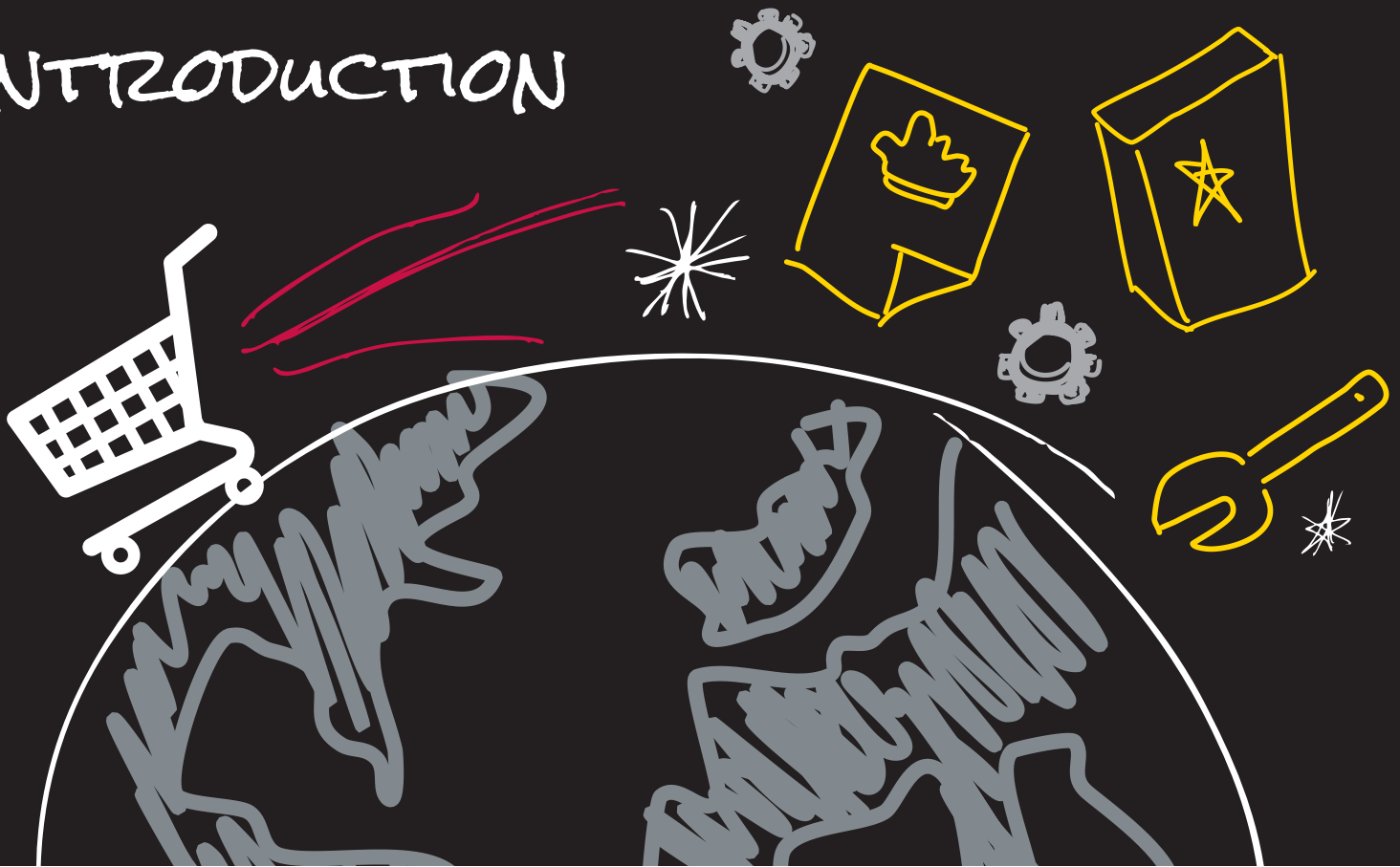
## James Cooley, Account Director

James Cooley is an Account Director in the New York City office. In this role, he is the account lead for multiple clients, managing the SEO strategy, ensuring the team's goals and objectives and overall success of the campaign.

James is a seasoned search marketing professional working in the industry since 2005. James has a website creative and development background, a proven track record for managing and directing search (paid/organic) campaigns specifically with Fortune 1000 corporations. He has worked within GroupM managing SEO campaigns for over three years.

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# Introduction

E-Commerce can be defined as the buying and selling of physical goods, digital goods, and/or services online. It involves commercial transactions digitally enabled between organizations and individuals. The mechanics of an online storefront provide many opportunities for optimized content to drive engaged, potential customers to your website. Like a seasoned sales rep, an optimized e-Commerce site will hand you the hottest leads (and closed sales) possible, time and time again.

This eBook provides you with intelligent SEO strategies, tactics and guidance to improve your online retail results. Exploring the world of e-Commerce, including m-Commerce (Mobile e-Commerce), Local e-Commerce, Global e-Commerce, s-Commerce (Social e-Commerce), and even the related subject of e-Retail, this eBook empowers you to understand the issues, identify the required technologies, and to map a course for greater SEO results that will lead to increased sales and revenue.

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## How Does e-Commerce Differ from e-Retail?

E-Commerce can be conducted on a brick-and-mortar retail store's website, such as Barnes and Noble (BN.com); e-Retail is transacted solely online through an e-Retailer, such as Amazon.com. E-Retailers do not have physical storefronts, selling exclusively on the Web. E-Retailers' focus and innovations in online sales offer valuable lessons to any retailer seeking to reap greater value from their digital resources.

## How Does e-Commerce Impact Search Engine Results?

Today, more prime real estate in search engine results is occupied by e-Commerce results than by purely informational pages. Because of this, your brand has a better opportunity than ever before to turn website visitors into paying customers through proper optimization.

In this eBook, we will show you how best to take advantage of this vast and lucrative marketplace, and how to measure the success of your newly energized campaigns. Read on to learn how mastering the nuances of e-Commerce SEO can accelerate your growth and improve your bottom line.
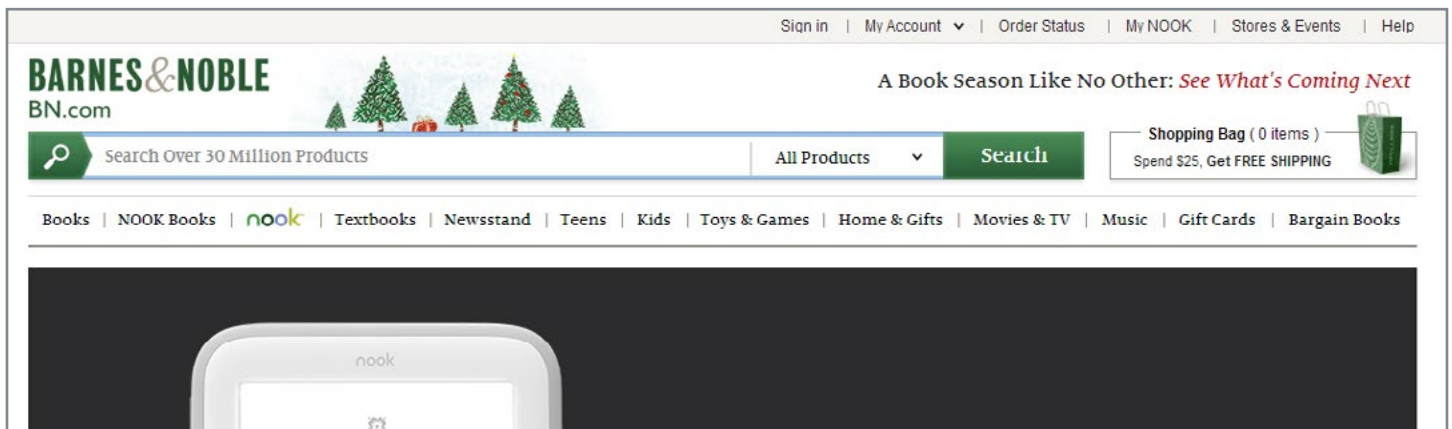
*Example of an e-Commerce website: Barnes & Noble (BN.com)*
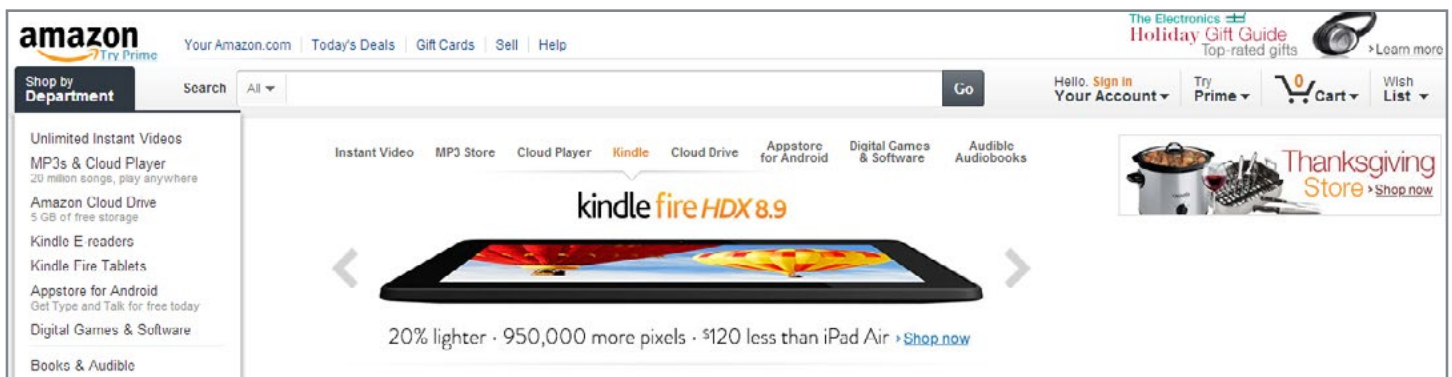
*Example of an e-Retail website: Amazon.com*

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# Optimal Buying Environment
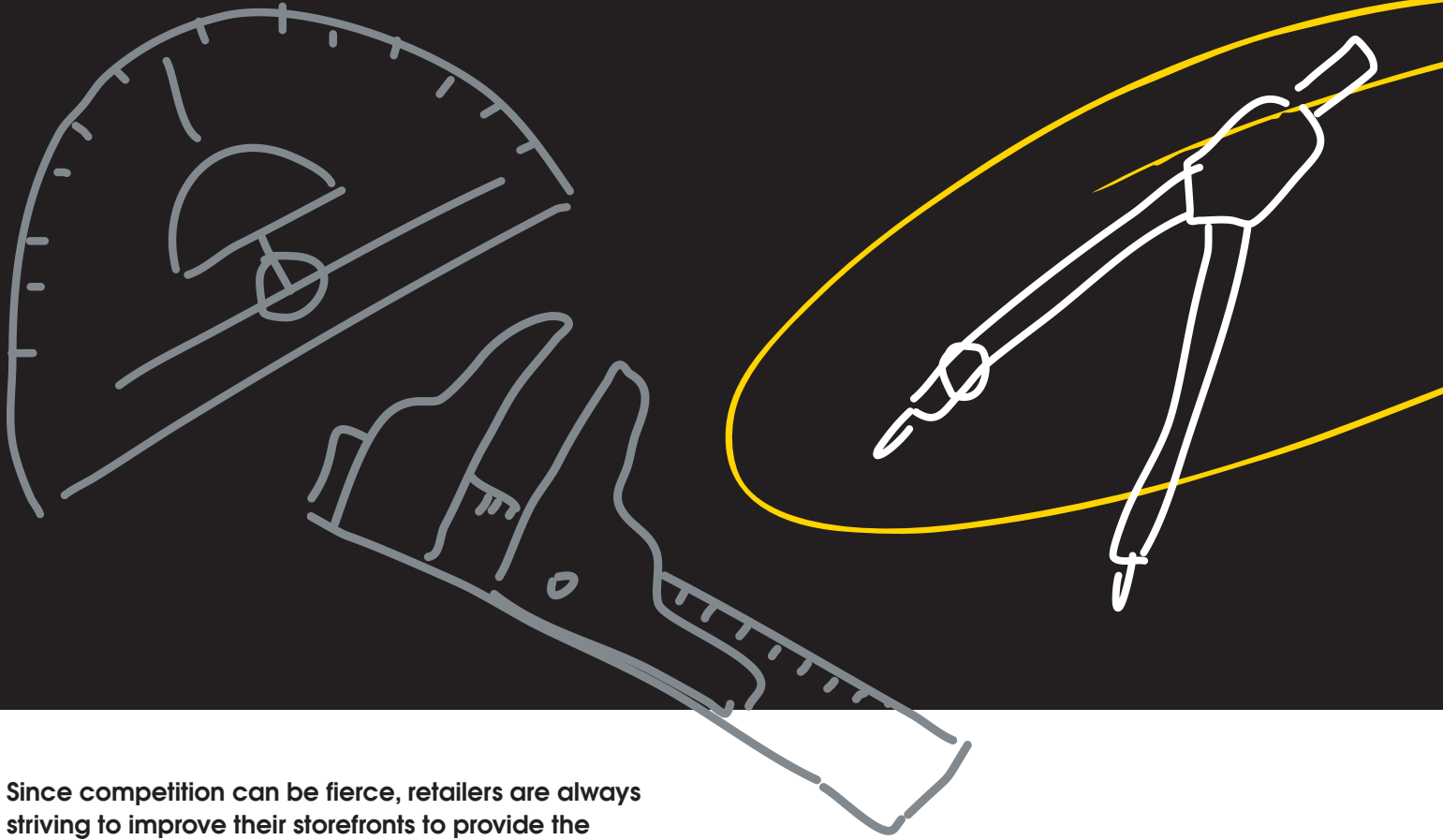
Since competition can be fierce, retailers are always striving to improve their storefronts to provide the best shopping experience possible. A retailer can hire an interior designer to entice customers to come into their stores, stay longer, and spend more. The same is true for e-Retailers and e-Commerce websites. Any store, whether online or brick-and-mortar, has to attract customers to come in, spend more time, and ultimately to make a purchase.

When determining the optimal design and technical specs for your website, your first call should be to your SEO agency. As anyone in the SEO field will tell you, a prevalent issue in e-Commerce is that SEO teams are not included early enough in the website design / architecture process to provide the full value of properly optimized content. Let's review five key components of creating an ideal buying experience and why SEO is needed to help create an optimal e-Commerce environment from the standpoints of design, marketing, and purchasing.
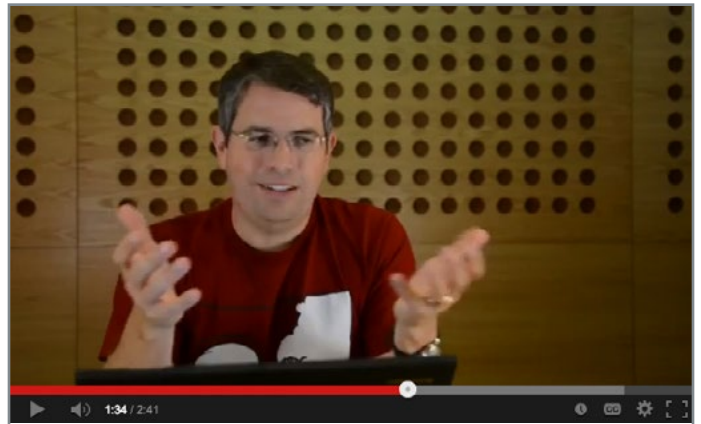


*Matt Cutts of Google says "search engine optimization" should be renamed "search experience optimization."*

# Technology

An e-Commerce system can be built on many different platforms using a variety of technologies. The selection of these technologies is typically made by an IT team or development agency, who can sometimes have a particular bias not shared with their client. To alleviate any bias in your technology selection process, pull in your website / CMS designer, information architect, and SEO agency. It is very helpful to have these key players working together to select this technology, as the natural give and take between all will lead to a smart and effective choice.

Your e-Commerce platform / technology is one of the most important elements of your website. There are many options, ranging from Microsoft's enterprise-priced .NET Framework to more cost-effective open-source platforms such as Magento. Any solution will typically need some level of customization to meet the needs of your brand and your customers. When defining the customization of your platform, your SEO team needs to add their input to ensure the foundation of your website is built in a manner that will maximize SEO traffic. Your development team then needs to break down the phases of implementation in determining the effort and process involved in executing your desired customizations.

# Site Architecture

The architecture of your website is critical to enabling customers to find your content. It's also crucial to your development team, who is tasked with creating an optimal system that can communicate with all needed business intelligence tools.

**Five of the most important elements of proper architecture for optimized search are:**

* **Navigation, Internal Links, & Breadcrumbs** – Search engines place quite a bit of weight on how your website is structured and how intuitively it can be navigated. For instance, they factor in the number of clicks it takes to get to the details page of a given product.

* **URLs and Directory Structure** – Think of URLs as folders and files, like the ones in *My Documents* on your computer. The naming convention of these folders and files is critical, as it helps define the page to search engines.

* **Categorized Products** – Category-level pages are typically the most likely to rank for high-search-volume, generic product keywords (e.g., womens shoes, dresses, or mens clothing). Product pages typically are most suitable for ranking for long-tail product-specific keyphrases (including those with more descriptors and qualifiers like color, size, designer, features, etc.).

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**Duplicate Content / Pagination Issue Management** E-Commerce websites are notorious for duplicate content and pagination issues. You need to appropriately manage duplicate content and ensure each crawlable page on your website is unique and provides value.

**Page Load Speeds** – Search engines place weight in their algorithms on the load time of a page, favoring pages that load quickly. It is not only important to optimize load speeds for search engines, but also to make sure that visitors are not waiting for pages to load, especially if they are ready to make a purchase. Kissmetrics produced an infographic showing that 47% of consumers expect a page to load in two seconds or less and that 40% abandon a web page that takes more than three seconds to load.

An example of a website that highlights many important site architecture elements is Nordstrom.com. In the screenshot on the previous page, you can see that Nordstrom is utilizing category pages as SEO-specific landing pages, driving unbranded search traffic to these pages without the need to create separate, stand-alone landing pages. Other indications that this page is part of an effective site architecture include:

**Navigation / Internal Linking** – This category page provides full access to global navigation and segmentation further within this category, encouraging visitors to dive deeper into the store and thus further down the purchase funnel.

**URL** – The URL is clean and clearly refers to the content of the page. The /c/ indicates that this is a category page: shop.nordstrom.com/c/mens-vneck-tshirts.

**Unique Content** – This page is a category page within the top level navigation, which allows this page to be more authoritative (yielding the ability to rank better). There is no need to repurpose or duplicate any of this content to drive more traffic, since this page already has the highest potential for the associated set of target keyphrases.

Determining site architecture when building an e-Commerce site is probably more important than for any other type of website. Many times companies set up their architecture and their product category pages based on their physical inventory lists, or even based on the product categorization of competitors. This isn't ideal, because your target market may not be searching for a specific product category. For instance, on the e-Commerce website of a hobby shop, one category is labeled as "abrasives," yet "sanding" or "sandpaper" have higher search volumes according to Google. Your category structure, and the architecture these category pages fit into, need to reflect your customers' search intent.

# On-Page Optimization

There are three factors that can impact your website's ability to rank well and be found in (and selected from) search engine results pages. This is also referred to as **"The 3Cs of SEO"**:

**Crawlability / Code** – Can search engines access, understand, and index your site content so that they know what your website and individual web pages are about? Is the information organized? You need to be on the list to get into the party!

**Content** – This is the "meat and potatoes" of your website. This refers to all of your product images, videos, product descriptions, blog posts, article text, etc. This is the reason people are coming to your site. Unique, compelling content is most valuable for SEO (and users).

**Credibility** – Your brand's name recognition and reputation online and offline will impact your credibility. The same goes for the amount of social shares / social buzz around your brand, products, or content, as well as the number, quality and relevancy of your inbound links.

That said, since the number one goal of an e-Commerce site is to make money, there really needs to be a 4th "C" for e-Commerce SEO success: Conversions. Converting visitors into buyers ("Cash" if you want to stick with the "C" theme) or into "Connections" by getting them to subscribe to social media, RSS feeds, newsletters, etc.

A common SEO term you've probably heard is "optimization," which relates specifically to the "Code" and the "Content." We'll cover "Credibility" later in this eBook, but the Code and Content are the main drivers in building Credibility online. When we say "optimization", we refer to making a specific page / website element as perfect as possible from a search engine ranking perspective. What makes that difficult to achieve is that good recommendations are not always implemented, due to limitations of timing, technical issues, or knowledge.

*Another resource for on-page optimization is this infographic by Catalyst that highlights all the recommendations on the next page.*

DOWNLOAD: http://www.catalystsearchmarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/ProductPageOptimizationInfographic_Catalyst.png

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Below is a list of recommendations for the basic on-page fundamentals that should be completed for any website:

* Title Tags should be optimized with a target keyphrase, call to action, or special offers
* Meta Descriptions should be optimized with a target keyphrase, call to action, or special offers as well
* Image Optimization should include the image file name, image alt text, file size and resolution, etc.
* Heading Tags (H1, H2, etc.) should indicate page titles, subheadings, and section breaks
* Body Copy needs to be relevant, unique content that provides value to the reader and is optimized with target keyphrases and halo terms
* Internal Links should be optimized with target key-phrases, and should provide logical information organization and navigation for both users and search engines

The search engine landscape has drastically changed for searchers with purchase intent over the past few years. Below are elements that all e-Commerce websites should have:

## Microdata (Schema.org)

Microdata is a coding specification designed to provide search engines and third parties with uniform information and semantic context about a website's content. One of the best examples of the benefits of microdata is rich snippets, which add more granular information to your page's listings on search engine results pages. Case studies have shown that retailers can see up to a 30% increase in organic traffic from implementing microdata.

The most widely recognized form of structured markup is provided at Schema.org, recognized and used by major search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Google currently supports rich snippets for people, events, reviews, products, recipes, and breadcrumb navigation.

There are a large variety of schema.org types and properties with which to mark up your content, and we are only at the beginning of this evolution in information organization.

Below are some examples of e-Commerce sites utilizing microdata to create compelling search engine listings to attract more clicks from shoppers:

**Womens Jeans | Womens Clearance | Abercrombie.com**
www.abercrombie.com/shop/us/womens-jeans-clearance ▾
40+ items - Sexy, casual clothing designed for the modern collegiate ...
A&F Super Skinny Jeans.          Vintage Rinse.                      $27.30.
A&F Mid Rise Super Skinny Jeans.  Dark Wash Flagship Exclusive.     $35.20.

**Men's Designer Clothing and Men's Designer Accessories ... - Bluefly**
www.bluefly.com/a/men-clothing-shoes-accessories ▾
20+ items - Men's Designer Clothing and Men's Designer Accessories at ...
Tommy Hilfiger.        $400.00.    $255.00.    sale: $204.00.
Salvatore Ferragamo.   $680.00.    $544.00.    sale: $462.40.

## Microdata for Social Media

Another important form of microdata / tags that should be added to the pages of your website are tags for popular social sites like Facebook and Twitter. By adding these platform-specific tags, your brand is able to better control messaging and content presentation when shared across top social networking sites. The tags allow you to customize how your content appears for each social audience; for example, you can choose the most compelling image or heading per platform to make your content stand out in busy news feeds.

### Facebook Open Graph Tags

Facebook Open Graph tags give your brand more control over messaging when your content is shared on Facebook. By adding Open Graph tags to the head section of your web page, you are able to specify the title, description, thumbnail image, URL, and more will appear when your page is shared on Facebook. You can also specify the "type" or category of your website for inclusion within Facebook Graph Search.

### Twitter Cards

Twitter Cards are similar to Facebook Open Graph tags in that by adding a few lines of code to your page, you are able to control how your content appears when shared on Twitter. By default, links shared on Twitter do not include the eye-catching title, description, and thumbnail image that appear on social sites like Facebook or G+. By adding Twitter Cards, you are able to substantially improve the appearance and "wow" factor of your content being shared on Twitter.

There are seven types currently available for Twitter Cards, including cards specifically designed for product pages, apps, video or audio players, single images, or image galleries.



*A "summary" Twitter Card on Twitter.com with content attribution.*

## Customer Reviews

Some brands are reluctant to include customer reviews on their websites. However, if customers can't find reviews on your website, they will probably read them somewhere else, like Amazon.com. What's great about customer reviews from a search perspective is that they are a constant source of new, user-generated content on normally stagnant topics such as products that have been available for a long period of time.

Many "review" features on e-Commerce websites tend to be embedded into iframes in order to integrate with third-party solution providers. However, this defeats the purpose of this content from an SEO perspective, because such embedding blocks the reviews from search engine crawlers. Customer reviews need to be incorporated into product pages as crawlable HTML content. As mentioned above, it is a best practice to mark up your customer review section with microdata. As you can see in the example below, Google shows the consumer rating of the product to increase click-through rate.



**Acer Aspire 5742** (6814)
www.laptopmag.com/review/laptops/**acer-aspire-5742**.aspx ▾
★★★☆☆ Rating: 3.5 - Review by Michael A. Prospero ...
Jan 17, 2011 - This 15-inch notebook offers fairly strong computing power in an affordab
package.
More by Mike Prospero

## Product Q&A

Another example of user-generated content that can improve the optimization and engagement of your product pages is a Customer Q&A section, allowing users to pose questions about the product and to answer questions from other users. Your staff can also use this channel to communicate directly with customers to encourage them as they move through your sales funnel. Allowing users to comment on blog posts or to participate in discussion forums are other useful ways of encouraging your customers to generate unique content for your site.
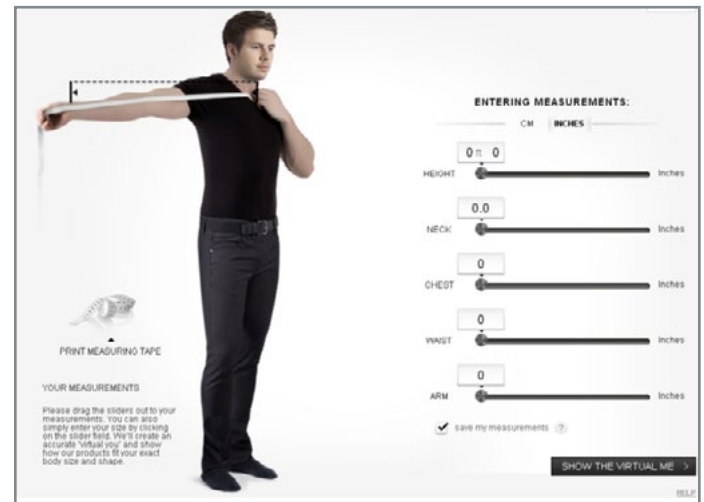
## Images

Images are especially important to e-Commerce websites, as they are one of the main ways for consumers to get a sense of what they are buying. Using images with a variety of angles, action shots, and close-ups on an e-Commerce website gives your customers a way to view your products as if they were right in front of them.
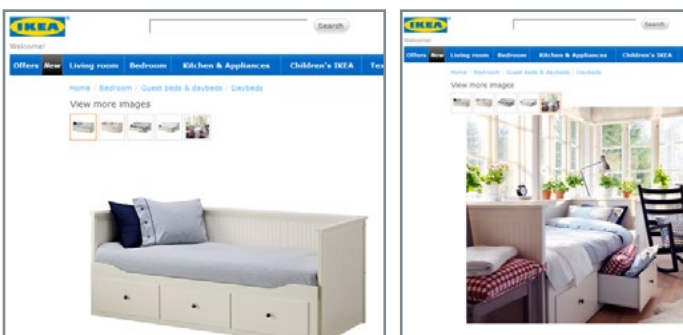


The IKEA website does a great job of creating a virtual showroom through the use of product images. IKEA product details pages typically show a variety of images, and often include an image of a product in a staged home environment to make the product more appealing and to help shoppers visualize what the product might look like in their own home.

E-Commerce websites that sell clothing sometimes have a high shopping cart abandonment rate (which we will discuss later in this eBook). This typically occurs at the point where customers are determining their clothing size. Hugo Boss has attempted to solve this problem with a virtual sizing room that features images indicating how to take measurements to ensure the clothes will fit.



## Video

Images are great, but video can be even more effective for e-Commerce website promotions and product demos, because they bring your products to life and provide more context. Purchasing a product online that you would otherwise purchase in-store requires even more information than a sales representative would typically provide at a store. e-Commerce retailers have recognized this and the need to provide substantial detail about their products through video.

TheArtofShaving.com specializes in high-end shaving products for men. They leverage their YouTube video assets on their product pages, adding a "video" thumbnail to their product images. These videos provide more background on the products and demonstrate them in use.
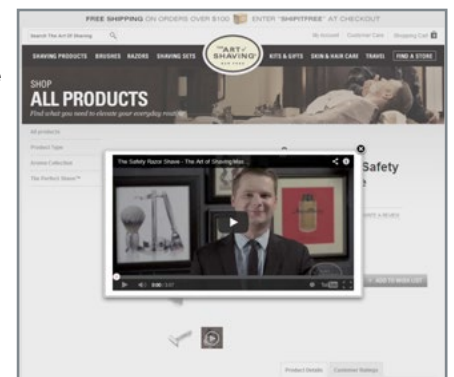
There are benefits to utilizing embedded YouTube videos, such as giving your product videos more exposure via the YouTube user base. Also, your YouTube video content can rank well in search engine results (if you optimize your YouTube videos and playlists). It can be less expensive to implement than integrating videos directly onto product pages or producing additional product videos solely for use on your website. However, that increased traffic will primarily be visiting your YouTube channel, so make sure your video descriptions provide links directly to the product pages on your website.

Another option is to embed your videos directly on your website. You can do this by using paid hosting solutions like Wistia or Vimeo Pro, or by self-hosting your videos using players like JW Player or HTML5 Video Player. The SEO benefits to these options include the ability to better customize your video player and the ability to have video rich snippets appear in search results for your website. You can learn additional ways to optimize videos hosted on your own site for better search rankings in this ClickZ article, as well.

ShopBop.com sells designer women's clothing. To make their product pages more compelling, they seamlessly integrate videos of the model shown in the product images turning and moving around, so shoppers can see how the fabric fits and flows as the model moves. This is incredibly helpful and compelling for online shoppers, giving them a virtual fashion show on every product page. (It's really impressive. Go try it out!) In contrast to videos on TheArtof-Shaving's site, these videos would not perform well on YouTube because they simply demo the product in motion without any narrative or added context.
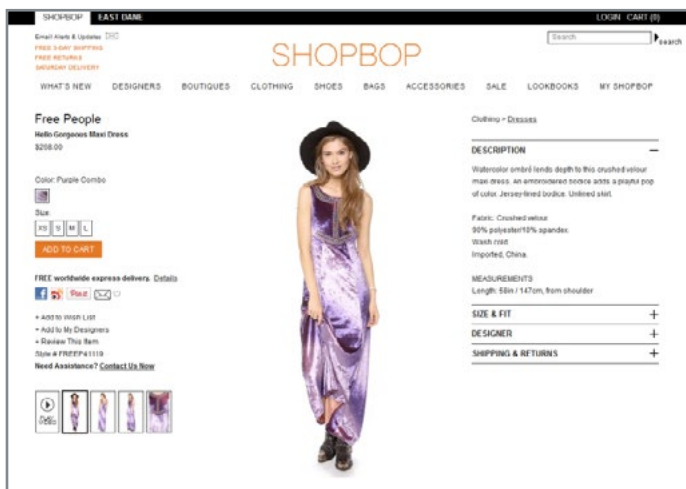


The right video solution for your business will depend on your budget and resources, the types of video content you are producing (and your business goals for that content), the price point of your products, and the frequency with which your product offerings change. No matter which video solution you choose, adding video content to product pages can have a huge impact on conversion and revenue.

## Related Items / Suggested Products

What do your customers do when they find a product that they like but want to find something similar or just slightly different? They may return to your product category page or even leave your website altogether. You can avoid this by having a Related Items and a Suggested Products section on your product details pages. Your brand should consider including both of these sections. The Related Items section should display products purchased / viewed by other customers who have viewed or purchased the initial item. The Suggested Products section allows your brand to showcase products related to the initial product and / or category, which is a great way to promote new, discounted, or otherwise meaningful products to your sales strategy.

Zappos.com specializes in shoe and clothing e-Retail and is known for their superior customer service. On Zappos' product details pages, products which other customers have purchased are shown, as well as products that a customer "may also like," as seen in the below image. These product selections are extremely effective in further engaging your customers and providing bonus SEO value to your website.
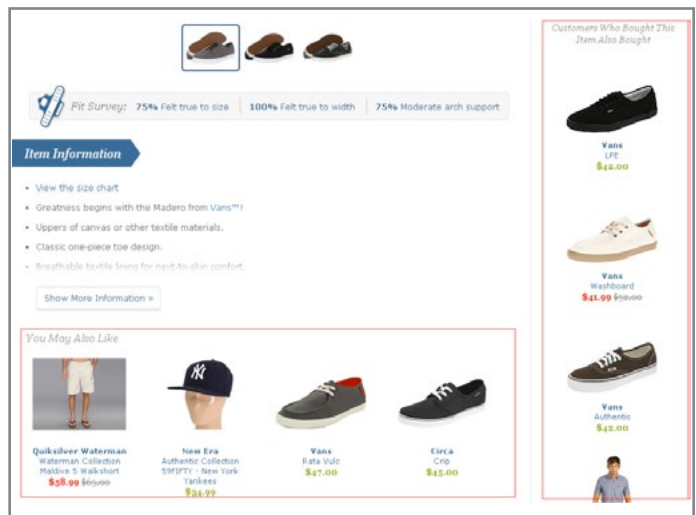


## Calls to Action

Buy, buy, buy! Purchases have always been the core objective of e-Commerce websites, but today there are many calls to action that are valuable for your brand. Wish lists, subscriptions, the ability to email a product to a friend, and social sharing tools are all appearing on modern product details pages, all offering unique value.

In a search campaign, as in other marketing channels, there needs to be a defined objective for each call to action. Not all calls to action have the same weight. The values of a wish list and an "email a friend" feature are very different, and your search campaigns need to be optimized for each call to action respectively.

E-Commerce SEO Strategies © 2013, Catalyst Online LLC.

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# User Engagement Optimization

Determining the value of each call to action is very important, especially when it comes to user engagement. Two thirds of online adults have at least one social media profile. Sixty-eight percent of consumers go to social media sites to read product reviews (Pew Internet). Social calls to action are obviously something that cannot be overlooked. You need a specific strategy to increase online sales by engaging your customers on social networks in order to build search engine authority.

## Social Sharing Buttons

Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and many other social sites can help your search engine rankings both directly and indirectly. When considering which social buttons to include on your pages, e-Commerce sites should always include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google+. Other social sites should be considered based on usage by your target audience. You don't need to feature every social network, just the ones that your prospective customers frequent.

For an additional chance to gain brand exposure, create a "thank you" page, pop-up window, or "thank you" email that prompts users who leave reviews or make purchases on your site to social share their reviews or purchases upon completion.

## Social Logins

Nearly 75% of online purchases are halted by shopping cart abandonment, and often this is due to issues with the checkout process. Several social networking sites offer the ability to obtain information from your customers' social profiles (such as their names and email addresses) with a simple login, facilitating easier checkout. Facebook simple sign-on (SSO) has the highest adoption rate at approximately 60%. Twitter and Google+ offer similar processes that are gaining traction with users.

Connecting with social logins not only saves time for the customer but also decreases abandonment. It grants your brand access to extremely valuable information about each user that can then be added to your company's CRM tools and utilized later for targeted emails and offers.

# Conversion Optimization

Conversion optimization is another essential area on which to focus for the success of your SEO campaigns. An e-Commerce website is the perfect environment to test, test, and test some more with the goal of increasing revenue. Conversion optimization is about creating the best user path for conversions / sales.

A/B testing is an effective way to determine whether one version of a page outperforms another. For example, a useful test could involve a featured image on a product details page, or experimenting with changes to the checkout process to reduce the shopping cart abandonment rate (Hint: provide shipping cost and delivery information as early in the process as possible). Be sure to test only one variable at a time so you get a clear picture of the specific changes that are delivering improved results. Tests can be run via a paid search campaign in order to get the statistically significant traffic numbers needed to evaluate results.

## Shopping Cart Abandonment

Abandonment rate is a key metric for any e-Commerce vendor to monitor. Below, eMarketer calls out the top reasons for abandonment:

Note that consumers use shopping carts in many different ways. They can treat their carts as wish lists, ongoing shopping lists, or price shopping tools (calculating the cost of shipping plus tax). When optimizing for search, it is useful to determine the products / categories with the lowest abandonment rates, as you may want to develop a dedicated SEO strategy to target priority, better-performing products and categories.

**Reasons for Abandoning Online Shopping Carts According to US Online Buyers, Feb 2012**
% of respondents

| Reason | % |
|---|---|
| I was not ready to purchase, but wanted to get an idea of the total cost with shipping | 57% |
| I was not ready to purchase, but wanted to save the cart for later | 56% |
| Shipping costs made the total purchase cost more than expected | 55% |
| My order value wasn't large enough to qualify for free shipping | 51% |
| Shipping and handling costs listed too late | 40% |

Note: n=2,625 who have abandoned their shopping cart
Source: comScore Inc., "Online Shopping Customer Experience Study" comissioned by UPS, June 4, 2012
141284
www.eMarketer.com

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## Capturing Leads

Of course, the number one goal of your e-Commerce website is to generate revenue. However, an important secondary goal is to build your contact database (CRM) so that you can nurture those leads and convert your visitors into customers—if not today, then whenever they are ready to make a purchase.

A great example of creative lead capture for e-Commerce can be found on BlueFly.com's home page (example above). It features a quick and easy way for visitors to subscribe to their email list by incentivizing them with 25% off their first purchase. Their signup form also features two different "submit" buttons: one if you are female, another if you are male. This helps Bluefly gather more important demographic information about their visitors to include in their CRM, and will help Bluefly send their users more targeted emails and special offers in the future.

## Discontinued / Sold Out Items

You will need to develop a strategy for handling discontinued and out of stock items on your e-Commerce site. The best strategy for your company will depend on the quantity and variety of products you sell, whether you have control over manufacturing of the products you sell, your resources for managing your website and inventory, etc.

The worst strategy is to have no strategy at all, and instead to simply remove pages from your website navigation without proper 301 redirects in place. This will cause website errors, a loss of link equity, and user frustration. In addition, this can hurt the performance of your website in search engines, or worse, result in the loss of a sale or customer.

Another excellent lead capture feature of the Bluefly website is their handling of out-of-stock items. Rather than simply removing these pages from their website, Bluefly allows shoppers to sign up to be notified when an out-of-stock item becomes available again.

**Tom Ford**
black leather zip pocket tote
retail value: $ 3,550.00
SALE: $ 1,967.19
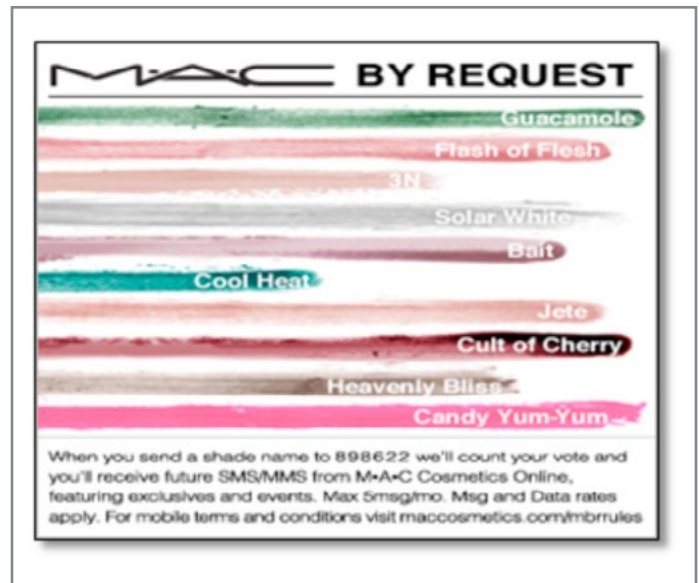
MAC cosmetics sells limited-edition makeup inspired by the latest fashion trends, and they have found a creative way to leverage discontinued items. MAC does a great job of creating social buzz and demand for its products both when they are available and when they are gone. MAC runs contests allowing customers to vote for their favorite discontinued cosmetics shades. The winning products are brought back to market. This is a great way to gain consumer insight and also to market your brand across social media at the same time.

## On-Site Search

Another important, yet often overlooked website feature that can assist in site conversion and user engagement is an easy-to-find on-site search bar. Most modern e-Commerce websites tend to include a site search feature, but many still have not mastered optimizing the site search function.

An additional SEO benefit of having an on-site search feature is the ability to track what users are entering into your site search within your site analytics. Reviewing the queries entered can identify content your customers can't find quickly enough through the current site navigation. This is valuable input when considering site updates, conversion funnel optimization, featured products, etc.

# Outreach & Finding Your Audience
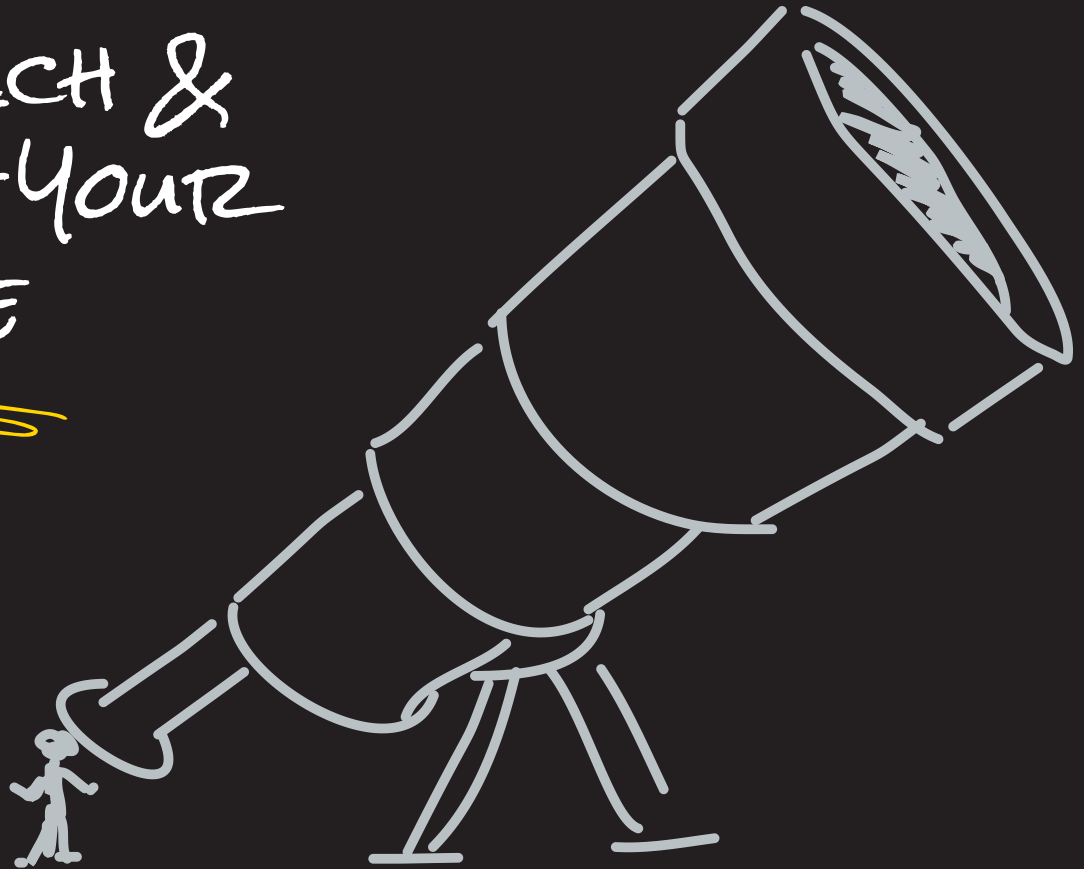
We've already covered some of the most important aspects of e-Commerce website crawlability and conversions when discussing creation of optimal buying environments and technology best practices. However, there are other important "findability" considerations for e-Commerce retailers, including Local SEO for those with brick-and-mortar locations, Global SEO for retailers wishing to sell internationally, and Mobile SEO for online retailers that want to stay competitive beyond the next few years.

Proper e-Commerce SEO takes the entire purchase funnel into consideration. To that end, omni-channel experiences should provide consistent messaging that has been optimized for each medium, platform, and target audience. A 2012 survey showed that 71% of consumers who saw a compelling TV, press, or mobile advertisement would immediately perform a search from their mobile device. What will they find in search results when they Google you from their mobile device upon seeing your ad?
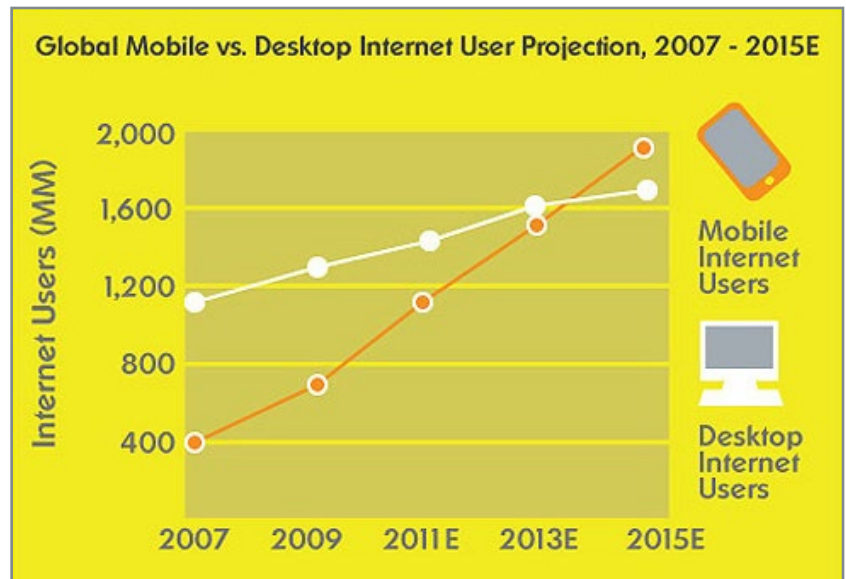
Share This >

# Mobile SEO & m-Commerce

Numerous studies project that worldwide mobile Internet usage will surpass desktop use as early as 2014. There are over 6 billion mobile subscribers worldwide, or 87% of the world's population. In the US, 25% of people accessing the web do so via mobile devices exclusively. In developing countries such as Egypt, approximately 70% of users are mobile-only.

Regardless of whether you have physical retail locations or global aspirations, upgrading your mobile shopping experience should be your first step in providing a more omni-channel shopping environment for users. Trends show that retailers are making investment in mobile SEO more of a priority this year than ever before. In "2013 Holiday Strategy and Planning Guide" from Shop.org, a mobile-optimized website was the No. 1 holiday investment among retailers, with 57.4% taking the plunge.

If you haven't started optimizing the mobile buying experience on your site, you risk being ignored or abandoned for a competitor that has!

## Mobile SEO Best Practices

There is still a lot of debate in the industry over the best way to optimize your users' mobile e-Commerce experience (aka "m-Commerce"). There are a few options to choose from, and each has its own benefits and drawbacks. However, as explained in the table on the next page, the best option is to upgrade your e-Commerce website to a responsive design, which has many benefits for SEO, usability, and long-term cost-savings.

*(Source: http://www.smartinsights.com/mobile-marketing/mobile-marketing-analytics/mobile-marketing-statistics/)*

## Responsive Design

Google officially recommends responsive design, noting these benefits:

* Using a single URL makes it easier for your users to interact with, share, and link to your content, and it helps Google index the content.
* Users get to their device-optimized view faster, with far less chance for error.
* It saves resources for both your site and Google's crawlers, keeping your site appropriately fresh in search results.

*THE WEB IS FLUID*
*THE WEB IS EVERYWHERE*

# M-Commerce Options & SEO Pros & Cons:

| OPTION | PROS | CONS |
|---|---|---|
| **Do Nothing.** Leave Your Desktop Website As-Is. | It's the easiest option; you only pay to maintain and market one website; consistent appearance | Bad mobile experience; can hurt search engine rankings; Flash content not viewable on many mobile devices; page load speed issues |
| **Build a Separate Mobile Website** (i.e., m.mybrand.com). *Some brands create separate smartphone and tablet sites, such as tablet.mydomain.com and mobile.mydomain.com.* | No need to redesign your desktop site to create a mobile-friendly experience; improved mobile load speed; prioritized and customized content for mobile users; mobile-friendly navigation | Tablet users have no clear choice; cost of multiple sites; inconsistent experiences; canonical / duplicate content issues; diluted authority, link equity, & social shares; harder to gain insight via analytics |
| **Build a Native App for Mobile Devices** *Developers must create a separate app version for each operating system/mobile device.* | Great for content that requires login (social apps, online banking, etc.); ideal for functionality that requires a camera, GPS, etc.; more targeted for users on mobile devices; encourages ongoing incremental purchases; ability to send "push" notifications; can work offline with local data | Cost of apps in addition to website, versions for various operating systems and devices, & updating for new phone / OS releases; updates must go through approval process; App Store approval restrictive and lengthy; hard to convince users to download & use app; native content not crawled, indexed, or measured by search engines |
| **Build One Website Using Responsive Design (RWD)** *RWD uses standard web technologies that most web developers are familiar with (HTML & CSS).* | Google officially recommends this option; device-agnostic user experience; requires no redirects; only pay for one site; Best for SEO - consolidates domain/page authority, link equity & social shares; easier to measure via analytics | Requires redesign to upgrade; requires more planning for content strategy, design, usability, etc. than separate desktop / mobile sites; requires strategy for optimal image appearance; potential to load slowly on mobile devices if code is not optimized |

Upgrading your site to a responsive design allows you:

* The chance to revisit your design and information architecture with a "mobile first" mindset.
* To create navigation that is more user-friendly on touch screens.
* To ensure that the "mobile" versions of your site include all important content that the desktop version of your site has.
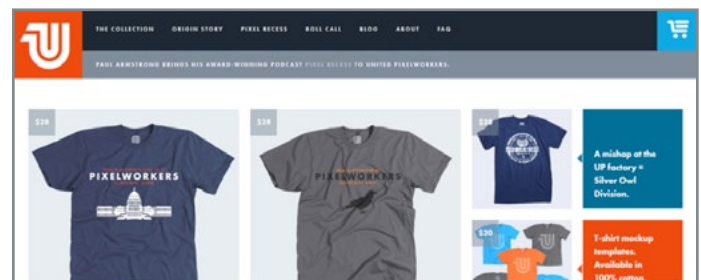* To make sure that the code your site is loading is optimized to be as efficient as possible.

This will help you create the ideal shopping environment for tablet users, a segment of online shoppers that is increasing rapidly. In 2012, tablets accounted for 56.2% of m-Commerce retail sales, and the percentage of tablet users and the dollar value of their purchases are only expected to rise.

If you're not sure what your website looks like on different mobile devices and have no way of testing on real devices, you can use a simulator. Official developers' simulators, such as Android SDK Simulator and iOS Simulator, can be downloaded by your developers to their desktops when designing responsive websites. More user-friendly web-based simulators, such as ScreenFly by Quirk Tools, Responsivepx, and Demonstrating Responsive Design by Jamus Reynolds, offer simple interfaces and easy one-click presets to demonstrate the layout of content for a variety of screen sizes and common devices.

Here are a few examples of e-Commerce websites currently utilizing responsive design:

### www.unitedpixelworkers.com

This company specializes in selling creative limited-run t-shirts designed by web developers and designers.



## US Retail Mcommerce Sales, by Device, 2011-2017
### billions and % change

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tablet** | $5.43 | $13.93 | $26.05 | $37.32 | $51.00 | $68.06 | $81.20 |
| —% change | 352.8% | 156.5% | 87.0% | 43.3% | 36.7% | 33.5% | 19.3% |
| **Smartphone** | $7.47 | $9.91 | $14.59 | $18.15 | $22.50 | $27.11 | $30.66 |
| —% change | 119.8% | 32.8% | 47.1% | 24.4% | 24.0% | 20.5% | 13.1% |
| **Other mobile devices** | $0.68 | $0.94 | $1.04 | $1.25 | $1.50 | $1.65 | $1.70 |
| —% change | 69.8% | 38.8% | 10.6% | 19.8% | 20.2% | 9.7% | 3.5% |
| **Total** | $13.57 | $24.78 | $41.68 | $56.72 | $75.00 | $96.81 | $113.57 |
| —% change | 171.7% | 82.6% | 68.2% | 36.1% | 32.2% | 29.1% | 17.3% |

*Note: includes products or services ordered using the internet via mobile devices, regardless of the method of payment or fulfillment; excludes travel and event ticket sales*
*Source: eMarketer, Sep 2013*

162465                                    www.**eMarketer**.com

A unique feature of their product pages is the availability meter for the various t-shirt sizes, illustrating the in-stock inventory levels of specific sizes and providing the shopper with the ability to register to be notified for out-of-stock

**My Website Shrinks**
**by Meagan Fisher**
In-stock. Ships in a day or two.

**$28** +shipping

They say don't feed the trolls. We say turn their criticism into t-shirt slogans. "My Website Totally Shrinks On Phones," Meagan Fisher's favorite blog comment, is now a t-shirt. Brown and white ink printed on a Grass American Apparel 100% cotton tee.

**Choose your size.** [Not sure? Check your measurements: girls, guys.]

MEN S / SOLD OUT          WOMEN S / SOLD OUT
MEN M / SOLD OUT          WOMEN M / SOLD OUT
MEN L / SOLD OUT          WOMEN L
MEN XL                    WOMEN XL
MEN 2X / SOLD OUT

**ADD TO CART**

(Is this shirt sold out? Are we missing your size? Sign up below and we'll let you know when it's back in stock.)

Men S

**NOTIFY ME!**

**About the designer.**
Name: Meagan Fisher
Twitter: @owltastic
Web: owltastic.com
Meagan Fisher is a web designer living in Brooklyn, NY. She's worked with Simplebits, Happy Cog, Hoefler Frere-Jones, and Metalab. Man, does she love owls.

---

items when more shirts become available. These features create a sense of urgency and make the user want to buy the shirt in their size before it sells out. This retailer sells unique items in sufficiently small volumes that they've made the decision to keep their sold-out items accessible as lead-generation content rather than remove the pages from the site.

### www.cocosa.com

Cocosa is a members-only e-Retailer that sells luxury goods at a discounted price. However, unlike other private shopping clubs like Ruelala where most of the content and products for sale are kept hidden and locked behind a login page, Cocosa takes a completely different approach by inviting would-be shoppers to endlessly browse products.

Cocosa's website was designed with a mobile-first responsive approach. Site navigation takes up the majority of page space, using large, gorgeous images that have users browsing latest offerings as they click through the navigation menu. This approach is much more appealing than simply a list of text menu buttons that many older mobile-only sites currently offer.

If you're struggling to visualize how your store can be converted to a responsive design, visit MediaQueri.es. Although this site features responsive design sites across all verticals (not just e-Commerce sites), it should be helpful to you to browse the gallery and see how different brands and industries organize their information in a responsive fashion.

# Local Retail & e-Commerce SEO

The terms *Local SEO* and *Mobile SEO* have a tendency to be used almost interchangeably, because they both tend to target "on-the-go consumers" using their mobile devices.

However, implementing Local SEO is more complicated than simply optimizing your website for mobile devices. Local SEO is about making sure your brick-and-mortar locations can be found by shoppers (no matter what device they are using or where they are), ensuring that your shoppers can find the products they want, and ensuring that your website shows in search results for relevant, location-based queries.

## Local SEO & Real-World Retail Collide

Consumers continue to expect more from retailers and increasingly demand consistency across all shopping channels. To that end, it is becoming more important to cater to shoppers who engage in "Showrooming" (browsing in the store, but buying online) and "Webrooming" (researching online, but buying in-store).

A recent Accenture Seamless Retail Study found that 49% of consumers believe that the best thing retailers can do to improve their shopping experience is to better integrate online / mobile and in-store shopping channels. 82% percent of consumers surveyed said that access to current product availability information at local physical stores would be the most useful information retailers could provide online to users before they head into a store. An Accenture benchmark analysis discovered that only 21% of top global retailers currently offer this capability on their sites.

Pricing consistency was also an important factor to consumers surveyed, with 73% of consumers expecting online and in-store pricing to be the same, and 61% expecting the same promotions both online and in-store. However, while research showed that 73% of retailers surveyed offer the same promotions online and in-store, only 16% offer the same pricing. Pricing discrepancies do not provide the omni-channel shopping experience consumers are growing to expect.
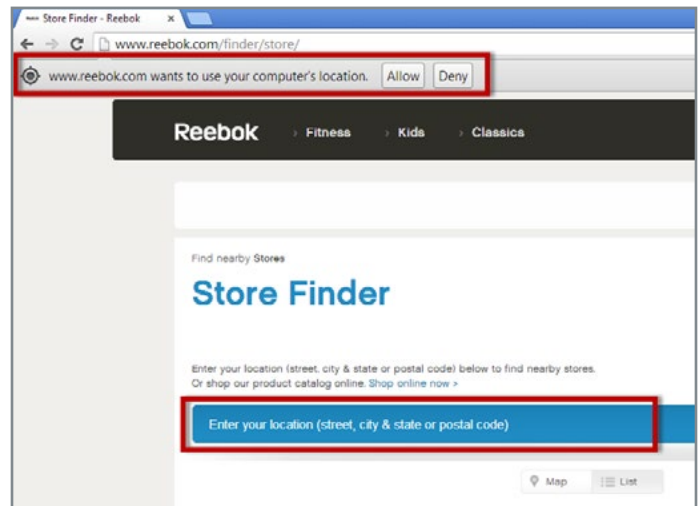
## On-Site Local SEO with Geotargeting

Leveraging a user's location to deliver a more customized search / shopping experience is an important part of the evolution of Mobile SEO and Local SEO. Geotargeting, in terms of online marketing, is the process of determining the current geographic location of a website visitor and delivering unique content to that visitor based on their location, such as country, region, state, city, metro code / zip code, organization, IP address, ISP, or other criteria.

This is typically an automated process (leveraging IP geolocation), in which users are presented with a pop-up notice in their browsers asking for permission to use their location information to provide customized content.

When your online shoppers are located near a retail location they want to visit in person, this technology is a great time-saver, especially for mobile device users. However, it is still best practice for e-Commerce websites to always include the ability for users to manually input or select a location to find a store (or select a different language or country, etc.). Users may be planning a trip to someplace other than their current location or they may simply deny your site permission to use their device's location and settings information.

### Sample of Geotargeting on Store Finder/Location Pages



**49%** OF CONSUMERS WANT BETTER MOBILE/IN-STORE INTEGRATION

**82%** OF CONSUMERS WANT LOCAL PRODUCT AVAILABILITY ACCESSIBLE ONLINE

**21%** OF RETAILERS ARE GIVING CONSUMERS WHAT THEY WANT

SHARE THIS >

## Sample of Geotargeting on Product Pages
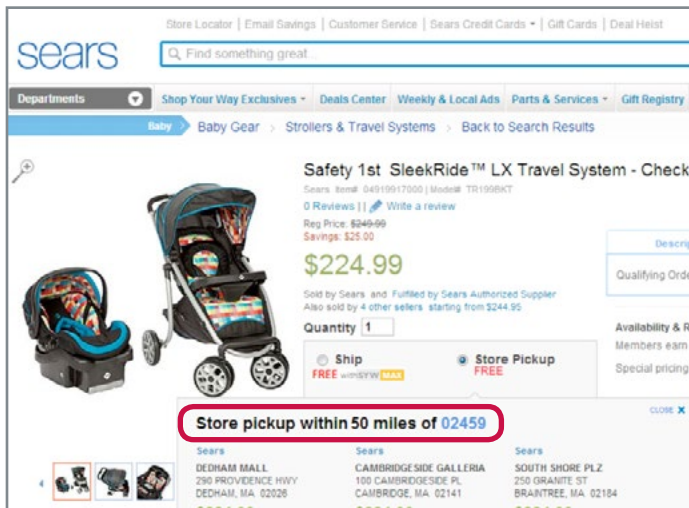


Retailers like Target and Sears let shoppers browse and purchase online, but also provide the option of picking up merchandise at a local store. This allows users to enter their location to find local stores that currently carry the item in stock. Location information can auto-populate with store listings close to the user, but should also provide the ability to manually select a store from product pages.

Multinational retailers can use geolocation data to direct people visiting their global website to the correct version of their online store for those visitors (with localized product inventory, pricing and currency, etc.). Again, an easily accessible country / language selector should always be provided as well.

Language / country selectors that utilize universally-recognized flag symbols are easier for users to understand than text alone.

Apple uses a flag icon in the footer of their website to indicate a country selector.



Maybelline uses a button labeled "location" in the footer of their website to indicate and initiate the country/language selector. However, if you are on a version of the site that is written in a language you can't read, this button is difficult to locate and understand. Notice, however, that you have no trouble immediately recognizing the social media icons to the left of the country selector. Iconic images transcend language barriers.
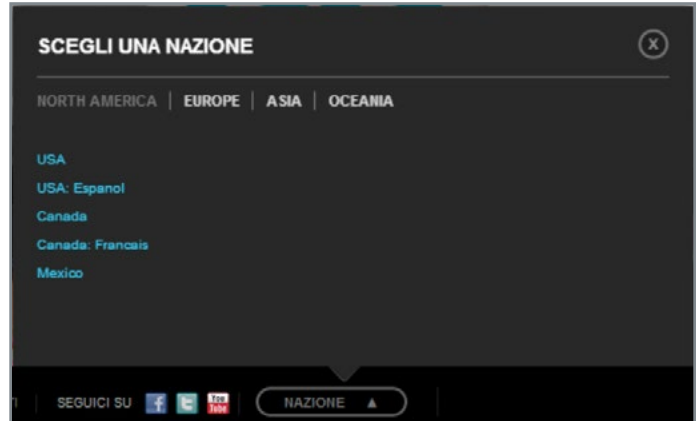


## On-Site Local SEO

While a store location finder is a feature often used online by retailers with physical store locations, many online retailers still do not have a dedicated website page for each location. This is a missed area of SEO opportunity.

In the real world, you want each of your store locations to be a destination and the same is true in the virtual world. You want to have a landing page or "home" for each of your locations on your website. These pages should serve as the authority regarding things like address, phone number, hours of operation, images of the store, etc.

Although each store location is part of your overall brand, each location is also unique. You may have special services at one location but not others. Some retail locations may carry only certain product lines. Some locations may have been recently renovated, and others may be hosting a local event they want to promote. By giving each store location a unique landing page on your website, you are giving each the opportunity to shine in search results. Location pages can be optimized using structured data (e.g., Schema.org) to promote in-store events, hours of operation, and more.

In September 2013, Bing announced a partnership with Local Corporation to begin incorporating local product availability information into their search results. Only certain retailers are participating thus far, but the list includes (as of this writing) Best Buy, Costco, Express, Fry's, Home Depot, Kmart, Lowe's, Nordstrom, Orchard Supply, Office Depot, Radio Shack, Rite Aid, Sears, Staples, Target, True Value, and Walmart. Bing is ahead of Google on this development, as Google has merely an "in stock nearby" inventory filter in its Shopping Search.

You can also feature links to store location listings on third-party review services such as G+ Local Listings, Facebook Local Listings, Foursquare, Yelp, Yahoo, etc. on your website's location pages. Furthermore, you should include a call to action for customers to review your store locations on these sites to further enhance your locations' presence in search results.

## Off-Site Local SEO

If you're familiar with search marketing, you know that multiple Google algorithm updates have changed the status of old-hat SEO practices, such as submitting your site to link farm directories, to black-hat SEO. These practices must be avoided.

However, not all directories are bad. In fact, there are a large number of directories, especially for local businesses, that your retail brand should be taking advantage of. As stated above, popular directory sites that have high user engagement, such as Google+ Local Listings, Yelp, Yahoo Local Listings, etc., are still considered "high quality" sites in the eyes of search engine webspam teams, so links to each of your locations from these sites will not harm your site. Rather, they will actually improve your SEO by creating more digital assets to dominate search results and more inbound links to drive referral traffic.

If you're concerned about having the manpower to create, claim, and monitor all of your local listings, don't worry! There are several online service providers that specialize in helping you manage your online listings and online reputation—a key part of your brand credibility. There are more affordable do-it-yourself options with basic features, such as BrightLocal, and more comprehensive enterprise solutions such as Yext or AllLocal, that submit your local listings to top GPS information providers. Your SEO consultant can help you choose the most appropriate solution for your business needs and budget.

# Global e-Commerce SEO

Global Search Marketing is about bringing an international audience to your brand. Global brands can no longer be US-centric with their online presence, organic and paid search, or social marketing campaigns. Marketers, retailers, and brands need to "think globally, act locally".

Global SEO is essentially Local SEO on an international scale, with many additional complications due to differences in countries' languages and colloquialisms, cultures, economic state, currency, shipping and tax laws, search engine provider preferences, privacy laws, etc.

There are additional technical SEO considerations for international retailers and brands looking to improve their Global SEO strategy, as well. Inventory / website management issues come into play, for example.

In addition, server location can impact page load speed, and therefore search engine performance, of your international sites. Note, though, that Google recently clarified that server location should not be relied on for geotargeting; instead, webmasters and SEOs should create geotargeting through ccTLDs or the geotargeting tool in Google Webmaster Tools to identify country-specific subdirectories or subdomains.

## Multilanguage e-Commerce Websites

Another layer of complexity for retailers looking to expand their reach and potential customer base is ensuring your content is available in multiple languages. Even if your site sells to only US consumers, you may want to consider creating an alternate language version of your site that targets the large Hispanic population of the country (estimated at 53 million consumers).

You can help search engines serve the correct language / regional URL to users by adding rel="alternate" hreflang="x" tags to pages, identifying the various language versions of the same page. You can also submit language version information using a sitemap as well. The language optimization option that is right for your e-Commerce website will depend on your specific resources and needs.

However, there is more to Global Search Marketing than just translating your existing web pages into other languages. To get Global SEO right, you really need to have a "local" understanding of your target areas. The person responsible for your Global SEO must know the importance of localization, as your company's keywords, link building, and technical requirements must factor in the cultures, customs, and laws of each respective nation served.

| GLOBAL DOMAIN / URL STRUCTURE OPTIONS | PROS | CONS |
|---|---|---|
| **One Domain with Multiple Country/Language Directories** *All countries are technically part of the same website.* | Recommended for SEO; one domain = one SEO campaign; building authority for one country / directory builds authority for all | One server location (/fr/folder can't be hosted in France); may impact load speed; management and analysis more difficult |
| **Separate ccTLDs (Country Code Top-Level Domains)** *Each country has its own separate website.* | Clear geotargeting; can use fast local servers; recognized in SERPs; may increase user trust; easy separation of sites | Authority not shared among sites; SEO efforts for each ccTLD; some desired TLDs may not be available |
| **Subdomains with gTLDs (Global Top-Level Domains)** *Your brand has one primary domain, with each country having a subdomain.* | Easy to set up; can use Google Webmaster Tools geotargeting; allows different server locations; easy separation of sites | No SEO benefit; authority not shared among sites; SEO efforts for every subdomain; users may not recognize geotargeting from URL alone |
| **URL Parameters** *Parameters are used to track user paths to purchase and to provide customized content.* | Default setup for some e-Commerce platforms, so it may offer a more affordable start-up cost for launch | URL-based segmentation / linking difficult; geotargeting is not possible in Google Webmaster Tools |

# Linking & Social Signals

Although search engine algorithms are somewhat secret and always evolving, there is no denying that links are still an important trust signal that search engines rely on when ranking websites.

The way search engines categorize and vet links has evolved; we've all heard high-profile cases of retailers like JCPenney and Interflora face the consequences of poorly executed, spammy linking strategies of the past. The way marketers and retailers think about linking needs to evolve, too. Linking is no longer about getting links from as many domains as possible with exact match anchor text or submitting your site for inclusion in as many directories as you can find.

Even if you're a retailer without local listings to optimize as part of your linking strategy, your e-Commerce site still has a variety of opportunities to create a strong and diverse linking profile, primarily through content and social linking. This should include social shares and influencer outreach—creating and maximizing relationships with third-party industry leaders or social influencers that already have authority and rank for keyphrases or content themes you wish to target, or that offer products or services related to yours. You should also have a strong "link bait" focused content strategy, and don't forget traditional press releases and press coverage!
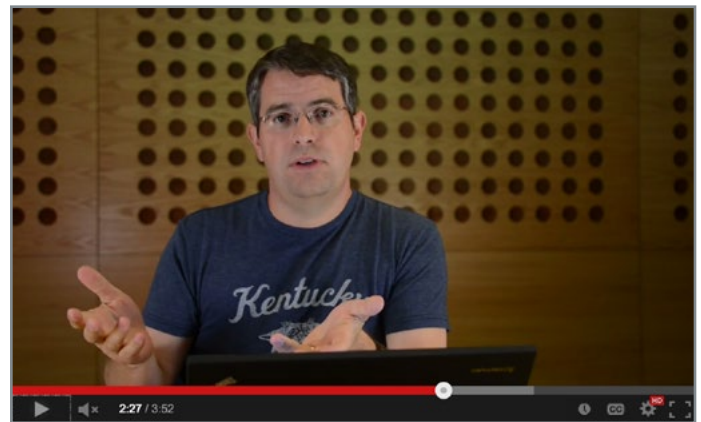


*Matt Cutts of Google addressed the question "How can a legitimate business compete online."*

## Social Signals: Build Your Credibility with Search Engines & Consumers

The value of a link should be determined by the traffic it drives to your site, as well as by the authority level of the source linking to you.

Social Link Building is taking blogger outreach to a new level by combining SEO know-how with social reach. Building relationships with online influencers empowers them to become 'brand ambassadors,' sharing their experiences and product reviews with their readers. This amplifies social signals, which can have an exponential effect on a brand's authority, trust, and ROI.

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For example, Catalyst utilized influencer outreach during a product giveaway campaign for a CPG retailer in the beauty industry with an e-Commerce website. Catalyst identified and connected with some of the top influencers in the social and blogging space for the target consumer demographic and asked these respected beauty bloggers and gurus to host and promote product giveaways for the new cosmetic.

The contests resulted in great success, with over:

* 4,550 Entries
* 345 Retweets
* 355 Facebook Shares

The website received an impressive 2,931% increase in organic search traffic as a result of the campaign. The client also went from not ranking in the top 30 results for the highly competitive keyphrase "lipstick" before the engagement, to ranking first for the term within a few months of the campaign launch.

Links from social sites such as Facebook are technically rel="nofollow" links and therefore don't pass any "link equity," but "no follow" doesn't mean "no SEO value" or "no sales value". As search engine algorithms increasingly rely on social signals to help determine the value of a webpage, social influencer outreach has become an even more effective way to help your brand expand its audience and the reach of your message. If a link drives relevant referral traffic to your site, it's a good link.

In contrast to Facebook, links shared from G+ status updates DO pass link equity, and each status update has a unique URL, is crawlable, and is indexed by search engines like Google.
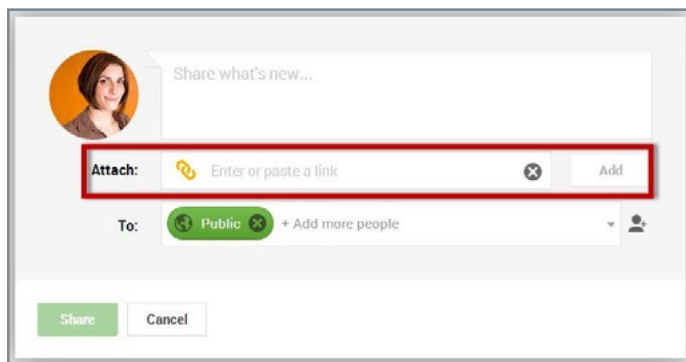
So, you should ask your influencers to share a link to your site on G+ as well as their other social profiles, since different social networks cater to different age and gender demographics and therefore have slightly different audiences. This also increases the chances of your content being noticed and reshared across a variety of social channels.

A great tool for identifying and comparing social influencers in your niche using Twitter data is Followerwonk. Of course, this is not a perfect solution. Some people may, for example, have a large Pinterest following, but no presence on Twitter. However, it is a helpful starting point.

For more tips on linking through blogger outreach, read the Catalyst blog post entitled "*6 Tips to Supercharge Links with Blogger Outreach*."

SHARE THIS >
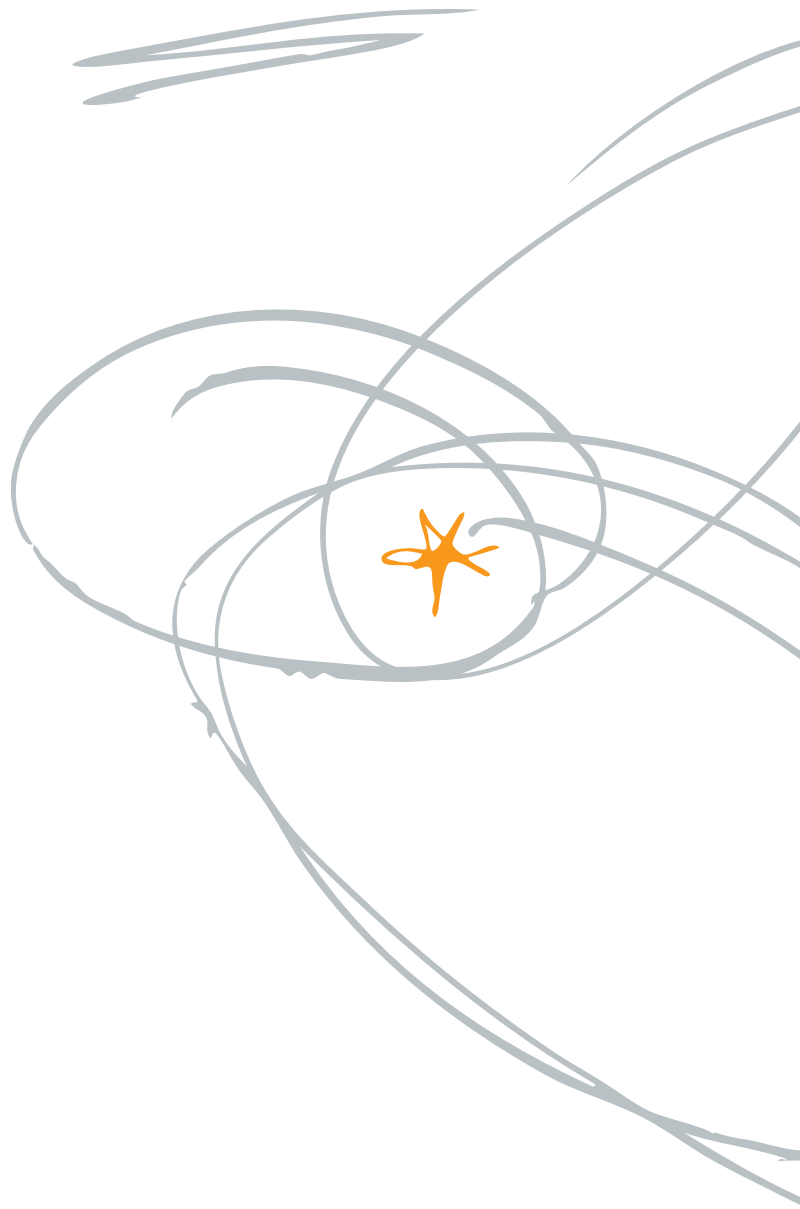
# S-Commerce (Social Commerce) Linking

Another trend in online retail and social media that brands should be aware of is social e-Commerce, also referred to as social commerce or s-Commerce. This is defined as the trend of social platforms adding e-Commerce features in order to capitalize on their already engaged user base to better serve their corporate clients (and ideally generate revenue for the social sites, too).
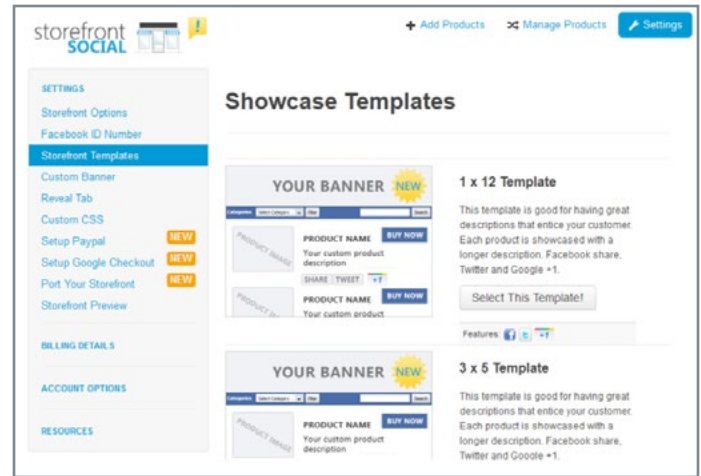
For several years Facebook has been offering brands the ability to add a storefront to their business pages using third-party apps, such as Storefront Social. This allows users to browse products on Facebook and to then be directed to your site to finalize their purchase or to purchase products directly within Facebook using payment gateways like Paypal or Google Merchant Services.

Some e-Commerce platforms, such as BigCommerce, even include social storefronts as part of their package offering.

In a more recent social e-Commerce evolution, Pinterest introduced Rich Pins in May 2013. Why is this so significant? With a user base of more than 70 million, Pinterest has proven to be one of the most popular revenue-generating social platforms for retail. Studies show that a high percentage of referral traffic from Pinterest converts directly into e-Commerce sales. A study by Shopify showed that users referred from Pinterest had an average sale value of $80, whereas Facebook user referrals averaged only a $40 spend in comparison.

Rich Pins, which are essentially pins with rich snippets of data added to them to provide more context to viewers, are only going to improve the Pinterest browsing and shopping experience. Product Rich Pins give retailers the ability to include price and availability information for the products they share images / pins of. Pinterest followers can then "repin" the products to their own boards and will be automatically notified if a product they are following has a price drop.

Rich Pins do require that your Pinterest profile be verified with your website, and that your product pages contain the proper semantic markup using Open Graph or Schema to identify the data needed for Rich Pins to work. But you were already planning on adding Schema markup to your website after reading the chapters about optimizing your product pages, right?

### More Social SEO Opportunities

You can download the Catalyst eBook, *Social SEO Strategies: Mastering the Art of Social SEO*, to learn more about improving your social media ROI with Social SEO.

http://www.catalystsearchmarketing.com/pubs/social-seo-strategies/

# Content Strategy for e-Commerce SEO

Implementing an effective content strategy that produces "link bait" is another important way of generating links for your e-Commerce sites. Link bait is content that is so helpful, entertaining, or unique that the people who read it feel compelled to share it across their social channels. Your content strategy is something that should be unique to your website and aligned to your brand messaging, target audience, business goals and needs, budget and timelines, etc.

Learn more about creating a Content Strategy at http://www.catalystsearchmarketing.com/search-strategy/content-strategy/.

Ideally, your link bait lives on your domain, so that your website receives the increase in website traffic and inbound links that come with great content and broadened exposure, thus improving the SEO performance of the site. That way, your website (where people buy things you are trying to sell) gains longer-term SEO and business benefits, long after social buzz around your content inevitably begins to fade.

Some retailers and brands choose to utilize third-party blogging services such as Tumblr instead of hosting their blog (and all of that content and engagement) on their e-Commerce website. Although this does provide an initial cost savings, Tumblr should really be considered as another social media opportunity and not as your sole blogging platform, because it doesn't provide an SEO benefit to your e-Commerce site other than links. Retailers that host their own blogs not only get all the page and domain authority SEO benefits of robust content, links, and engagement, but they can also feature "ads" for their own products and promotions in the sidebar of the blog at no additional cost.

You can share teaser elements of your link bait on social sites to get better exposure (i.e., micro blogs on Tumblr; images on Pinterest or Instagram; videos on YouTube, Pinterest, and Vine; mentions in status updates; etc.), but you should always try to drive traffic back to a page on your own website. Just as in paid search, these links need to lead visitors to the designated "landing page" for each campaign, such as a blog post, a product page, or a promotional page. These pages provide additional value or content of interest to the visitor to keep them engaged with your brand on your own website, and ideally convert these visitors into buyers.
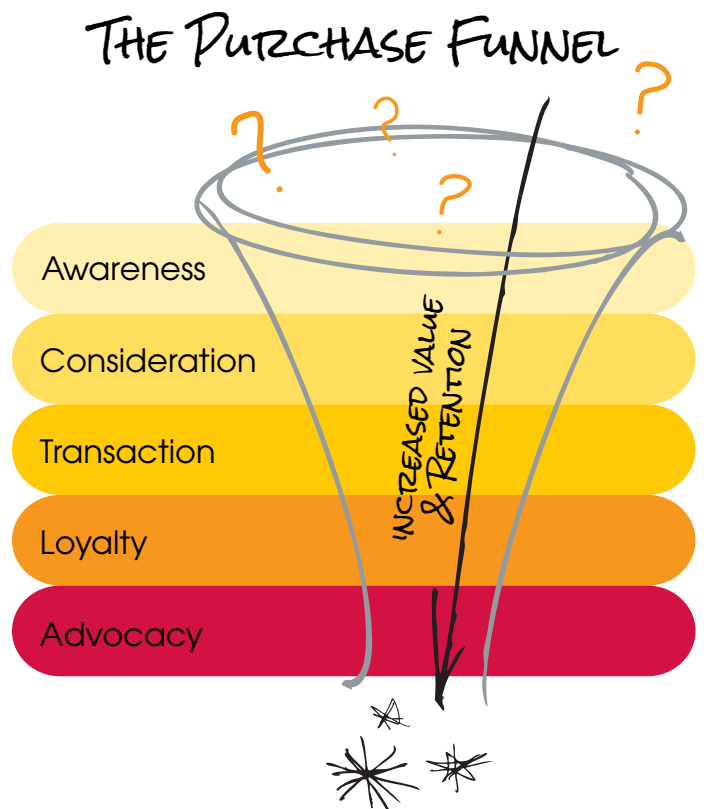
As can be seen in the images below, TOMS is using a variety of content (product videos, lifestyle images on Instagram, Rich Pins on Pinterest, etc.) across multiple social platforms to help promote the launch of a new product line called the "Nepal Boot". These digital assets successfully drive viewers to visit the TOMS website to purchase the product using engaging language and product stories, as well as using links (with campaign tracking) to the Nepal Boot landing page on the TOMS website.
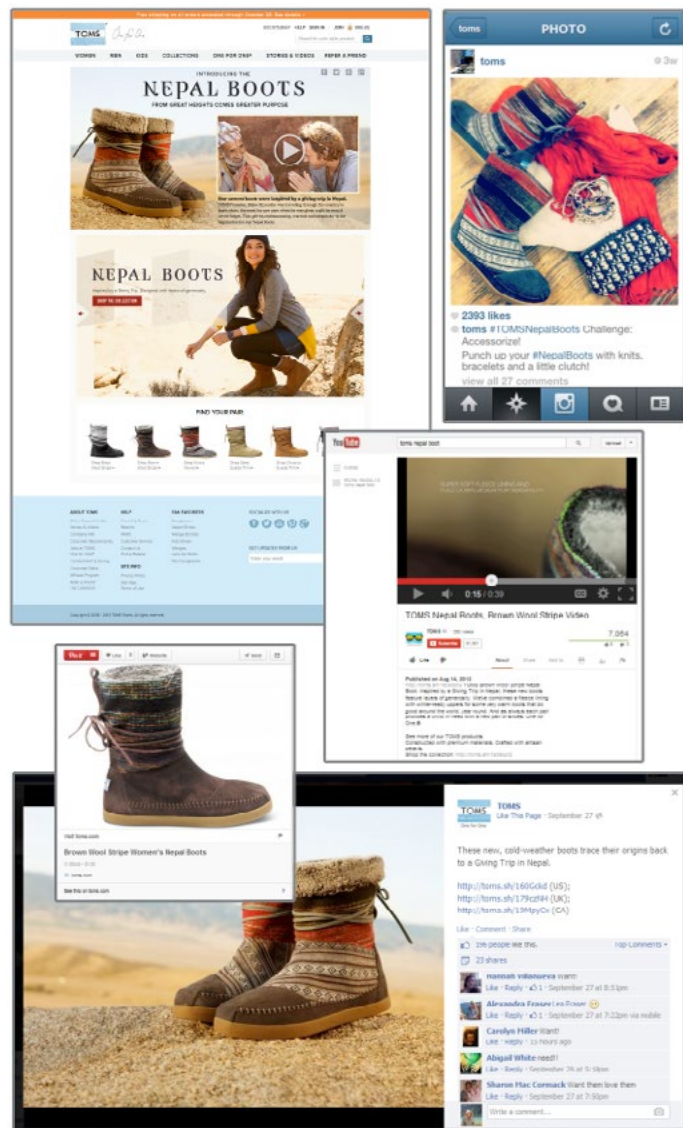
Some visitors won't be ready to make a purchase when they are exposed to your content, and that's OK. You can still impress and engage them enough that they subscribe to your profiles on social media sites like Facebook, G+, Twitter, and Pinterest; sign up for your newsletter; or create a user account to use a feature of your site, such as a wish list.

Viewers may simply share your social media posts or share a link to content they found on your site. This is still successful engagement - simply at an earlier stage of the purchase funnel - providing your brand with additional exposure through a social network. Having optimized content and a social sharing strategy can help e-Commerce vendors build an audience by continuing to provide compelling content to your subscribers' newsfeeds and inboxes. This helps you to stay top-of-mind with customers as well as potential customers. Then, when they are ready to make a purchase, they are more likely to come to your site since you have built familiarity and trust.

Do your research (or hire an experienced SEO agency) to determine the areas of interest of your target audience. This will help to ensure that you identify the keyphrases they are searching for, the social platforms or blogging sites they frequent the most, the types of content they engage with most, and the social influencers in the space. With this critical information, you will then be able to design, optimize, and execute an effective content strategy to help drive awareness, traffic, and sales to your e-Commerce website.



## The Purchase Funnel

- Awareness
- Consideration
- Transaction
- Loyalty
- Advocacy

Increased Value & Retention

E-Commerce SEO Strategies © 2013, Catalyst Online LLC.

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# Tracking, Measuring and Reporting for e-Commerce



The **#1 goal of an e-Commerce website is to drive revenue for a brand or business. That goal is often best achieved with a holistic approach to online marketing. This can include organic and paid search; an ongoing strategy for the creation, optimization, and distribution of a variety of valuable content; and a strategy for engaging audiences via channels such as social media and email.**



*Matt Cutts of Google answers "What are your thoughts on ranking reports?"*

## Traditional SEO KPIs vs. e-Commerce KPIs

Traditional SEO tracking metrics are still applicable when measuring and reporting e-Commerce results. However, with the addition of on-site sales and revenue data, e-Commerce reporting can become a lot more complicated (and interesting). Working towards appropriate goals and KPIs can help an e-Commerce website drive real business results like reducing costs and increasing online revenue.

Companies often struggle with how best to track and measure ROI of their online marketing efforts, because they don't set clear goals before launching marketing campaigns or making changes to their websites and other online assets. Your company's business goals should determine which KPIs to focus on so that you'll be able to monitor your progress and measure results and ROI.

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## Sample "Awareness / Engagement" Top of the Purchase Funnel KPIs:

* Total site traffic by source (organic, paid, display, referral, campaigns, etc.)
* Click-through rates for paid ads
* Unique visitors vs. returning visitors
* Page views per visit/time on site
* Top-visited landing pages, product pages, blog posts, etc.
* Keyphrases driving the most organic traffic
* Pages with the highest / lowest bounce rate
* Pages with the highest / lowest conversion rate
* Pages with the highest / lowest entrances and exits
* Social shares to each major social network
* Subscribers / followers on each network
* Newsletter subscribers
* User reviews (quality and quantity)
* Engagement in Q&A or forums
* Chat sessions initiated
* New accounts

## Sample "Sales/Success" Bottom of the Purchase Funnel KPIs:

* Total sales (annually, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily, hourly, etc.)
* Total number of online orders
* Revenue attributed to organic search
* Revenue attributed to paid search, display ads
* Revenue attributed to social, outreach, content, email, and linking campaigns
* Total cost of goods sold / profit margin
* Top-selling products; profit margins for each
* Conversion rate and revenue attributed to target keyphrases / categories
* Average order size
* Average profit margin
* Average conversion rate
* Average per visit value
* Shopping cart abandonment rate and associated recovery rate
* New customer order value vs. returning customer order value
* Related products (products viewed / purchased by the same customers)
* Inventory levels
* Click share (% of related search queries for which the brand showed in the search results and the share of clicks received vs. competitors)
* Competitive pricing

# E-Commerce Reporting

Some e-Commerce platforms and CRM tools have built-in reporting features to make locating and tracking these success metrics simple. Most social networks report data on user engagement with your content, your advertising spend, etc. You can also create custom reports in analytics programs such as Google Analytics or Coremetrics to easily track your e-Commerce KPIs.

Custom reporting dashboards like the ones offered by Catalyst can help you centralize all information from separate data sources into a single tool that allows you to easily track and monitor your own performance. Custom Catalyst reporting dashboards also allow you to track the performance of competitors and help you gain actionable insights that may otherwise go unnoticed if the data were kept siloed.

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# The Future of e-Commerce & e-Retail Tracking and Reporting

As e-Commerce technologies evolve, retailers are striving to provide a more omni-channel experience for consumers (i.e., providing a more seamless consumer experience through all available shopping channels such as desktop and mobile devices, physical locations, television, radio, direct mail, catalog, etc.).

A recent Google / Ipsos survey showed that 96% of consumers have used their smartphone to research a product or service, with 37% of shoppers preferring to make a final purchase via a traditional computer and 32% completing their purchase in-store.

The next evolution of e-Commerce and retail tracking and reporting is going to be the measurement of online marketing efforts in real time with cross-channel attribution and tracking that includes both online and offline channels.

Major digital platforms have begun to release beta versions of tools that enable marketers to match offline sales activity with online engagement. Although the technologies are not yet foolproof, tools being released by companies like Google, Twitter, Marketo, SugarCRM, and Salesforce are just the beginning of the ability to trace the true monetary impact online engagement (organic, paid, and social) has on offline purchases.

## Recent Google Updates: Impact on Reporting & Tracking

In September of 2013, Google announced that it had created a new search algorithm to better cope with long-tail, complex search queries and to keep up with the evolving habits of searchers. The new algorithm is called "Hummingbird", because it is considered "precise and fast" just like its namesake.

Google is also moving forward with 100% encrypted search, meaning they will no longer be revealing visit and user-level keyword data through Google Analytics. Neither will they be providing that data to third parties for organic searches, although you do still have access to keyphrase metrics for paid AdWords visitors.

You still can access aggregate organic keyphrases data from Google Webmaster Tools. GWT will show the number of times your website appeared in search results for a given keyphrase or query, your corresponding average position in the search results, and the number of times searchers clicked through to your website for each keyphrase. Be aware – these numbers are approximations, are not real-time (there's about a two-day delay), and the data is stored in GWT for only three months. However, this is still a sufficient amount of keyphrase data to monitor your campaign progress. As stated earlier, there are many other KPIs that are more important for e-Commerce websites to focus on.

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# THIRD-PARTY RETAILERS

For many brands, online retail doesn't end on-site. According to eMarketer, the B2C e-Commerce market is expected to reach $398.70 billion in sales in 2013, while B2B will see $58 billion this year. Internet Retailer estimates 2013 online retail sales at $262 billion, which would make e-Retail 57% of e-Commerce sales! And with both of these numbers seeing tremendous growth year over year, there is still significant opportunity for manufacturers and brand marketers in online sales through e-Retailers. So who are the key players?

## Key e-Retail Players in the Industry

For many online retailers, the key to success is putting their products in front of as many eyes as possible. For example, many large consumer packaged goods retailers see the majority of their overall revenue from offline sales. However, when making online retail decisions, they prioritize their efforts to focus on sites that receive the most visitors and in turn the most sales. A good assessment for this is The Top 500 Guide by Internet Retailer, an annual report of the largest e-Retail websites ranked by web sales.

**The Top 10 Internet Retailers by Online Sales**

| 2013 RANK | COMPANY NAME | 2012 WEB SALES | 2012 PERCENT GROWTH | 2012 VISITORS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Amazon.com | 61.1B | 27.06% | 89.9MM |
| 2 | Staples | 10.3B | -2.83% | 13.7M |
| 3 | Apple | 8.8B | 33.57% | 60M |
| 4 | Walmart.com | 7.7B | 20.31% | 61M |
| 5 | Liberty Interactive (QVC) | 4.3B | 14.36% | 15M |
| 6 | Sears | 4.2B | 16.53% | 20M |
| 7 | Office Depot | 4.1B | -0.98% | 7.5M |
| 8 | Dell | 3.9B | -15.40 | 10M |
| 9 | Netflix | 3.6B | 12.65% | 28.5M |
| 10 | Best Buy | 3.3B | 13.39% | 21.1M |

*It is worth noting that this list ranks only parent companies and that Amazon owns large sites like Zappos.com, Quidsi (diapers.com), and Woot among others, which helps boost its numbers above the rest of the list.*

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## Niche e-Retailers

While quantity of online sales and website visits is extremely important, those numbers don't always translate perfectly to qualified visitors or potential sales. When selecting an online retailer, it is extremely important to consider the predominant industry in which the retailer plays. For example, if you are a makeup brand you wouldn't want to be selling products through Staples or Best Buy. Moreover, if you are a high-end makeup brand, Sears and Walmart might not be the best fits either, because your target audience more likely shops at higher-end stores like Sephora. So even though Sephora has only $156 million in annual online sales (as opposed to the much larger $7.7 billion generated by Walmart), Sephora is the place for you to be since that is where your customers are.

To find the best venues to sell your products online, an SEO agency should track your online consumers to the websites they frequent when searching for your target keywords. At Catalyst we utilize a proprietary technology called Asset Optimization Platform™ (AOP) that looks at the keywords on which our brands want to win and provides insights into the specific sites the brands should pursue. This provides recommendations for e-Retail as well as content opportunities and media purchases like display and PPC ads.

# E-Retail Optimization Best Practices

Regardless of the sites on which you choose to place your products, in order to increase sales you need to be visible within the e-Retailers as well as search engines. Gaining stronger visibility than your competitors can be challenging, but using some of the best practices outlined below can help you get ahead.

## Create an e-Retail Keyword List

What types of products are you selling? Group your products into categories, and then identify your "must win" keyword phrases within those categories. Remember, you won't be able to rank first for every keyword, so choose terms that offer a realistic chance at increasing your visibility.
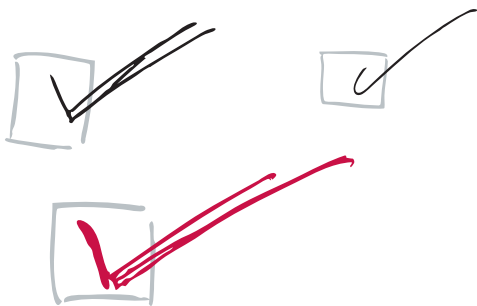
## Tips for choosing e-Retail Keywords:

* Brainstorm! Ask your colleagues and friends what keywords they would use to search for a specific type of product.

* Conduct research specific to the channel in which you want to be visible. For example, Amazon.com has a "related searches" feature which allows you to see other types of searches that people are performing. Just search for any item, and related searches will be shown above the results, with links to view the related products.

* Use the Google Keyword Planner tool. You can study search volume for the terms you are considering and can discover related suggestions. Additionally, you can prioritize your keywords based on search volume and competition levels.

* Use Google Trends to discover search trends for terms you are considering. Google Trends is a useful tool that can help you discover related (and growing) search terms, along with seasonal search spikes and regional search volume (by state and city).

## E-Retailer Product Page Optimization

Implement the following tactics in order to optimize your product pages on e-Retailer websites:

**Product Title:** Your products' titles are the most important elements to optimize, similar to title tags in traditional SEO. Ensure that product titles contain the product's category. Product titles should be brief, with important keywords appearing at the beginning of the titles.

**Product Description:** Your product description appears on a product's details page. It should be a short, text-only description of the product, similar to a meta description tag on a traditional web page. Ensure that product descriptions contain product categories and any other keywords you have identified as relevant to the customers you want to target. Also, include a call to action to increase conversions.

**Product Attributes:** Product attributes are a list of text-only descriptors and features of a given product. This list should outline the major selling points of the product and can sometimes be grouped with the product description. Ensure that product attributes contain the product category and any targeted keywords that could not be included in the product title due to character limits.

**Search Terms / Keywords:** Search terms, also called keywords by some e-Retailers, are a list of synonyms and descriptors that are highly relevant to the product. e-Retailers use these terms to improve their internal search results when users enter search queries. They are not displayed on product details pages, and are not user-facing. Search terms should not include misspellings or stemming variations (for example, "blade" and "blades" will both return the same search results, so choose one or the other).

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**Enhanced Content:** Enhanced content is only available on some e-Retail sites (typically for an additional fee). It is an expanded product description that offers the ability to embed images, videos, and other files related to the product in order to provide a richer experience for consumers. It is important to optimize this extra content for search purposes. Adding targeted keywords can improve visibility within e-Retail sites as well as search engine results. Ensure that your enhanced content contains product categories and any other related, targeted keywords that could not be included in the product title due to character limits.

**Storefront Optimization:** e-Retailers often give large brands the ability to place a "storefront" on their sites. These storefronts are typically spaces with limited possible customization where important products or promotions may be highlighted. Ensure that your storefront contains text-based content that includes your targeted keywords. Product images should have ALT text that incorporates targeted keywords where possible. Any links should point to the most relevant category landing page or product details page from the storefront.

# E-Retail Tools for Success

As with organic search, online commerce managers have a variety of tools to chose from when selling on their own site or a third-party e-Retailer. We have grouped vendors below by the services they provide:

## Competitive Intelligence Scraper Software

To stay up to date on the latest promotions and product launches, many brands choose to utilize a web scraper such as Channel IQ, Login Works, or Mozenda. Most of these tools allow you to track competitors' sites for prices, availability, quantities, and titles. This information is fed into a user-friendly dashboard or sent to you via email alerts for real-time updates.

## Syndication Software

A challenge for many large consumer packaged goods brands is managing their e-Retail feed and the corresponding syndication to all of their vendors. Most e-Retailers allow brands to upload product feeds directly to their servers. However, this process can be time-prohibitive when a brand has hundreds of SKUs to handle at any given time. Solutions such as Webcollage allow businesses to feed product information such as visual descriptions, videos, interactive tours, comparison tables, and any other engaging content to their platform, which is then syndicated to selected e-Retailers such as Amazon, CVS, and Walmart.

## Content Creation Providers

It is no secret that in-depth, engaging content is key to increasing sales on-site or off. However, many e-Retailers limit what brands can control on product pages. Fortunately, there are a variety of tools like Content26 and Easy2 that brands can utilize to create engaging and descriptive content that works for each specific e-Retailer. Content types that these tools can manipulate include product demos, image galleries, 360 degree views, FAQs, instructions, videos, specs/features, and comparison charts. Just be sure to optimize all of these to ensure that your brand messaging aligns with search behavior.
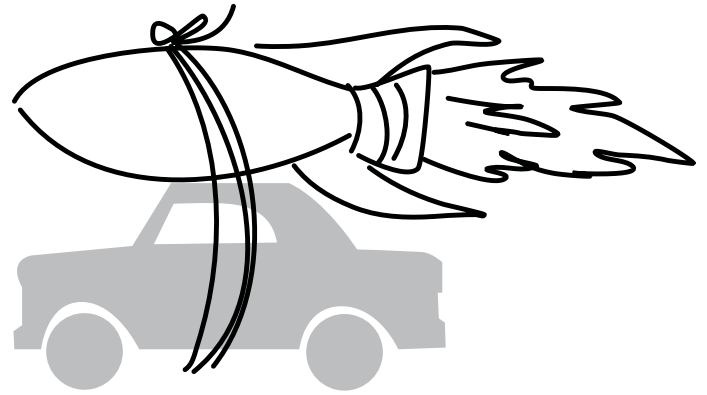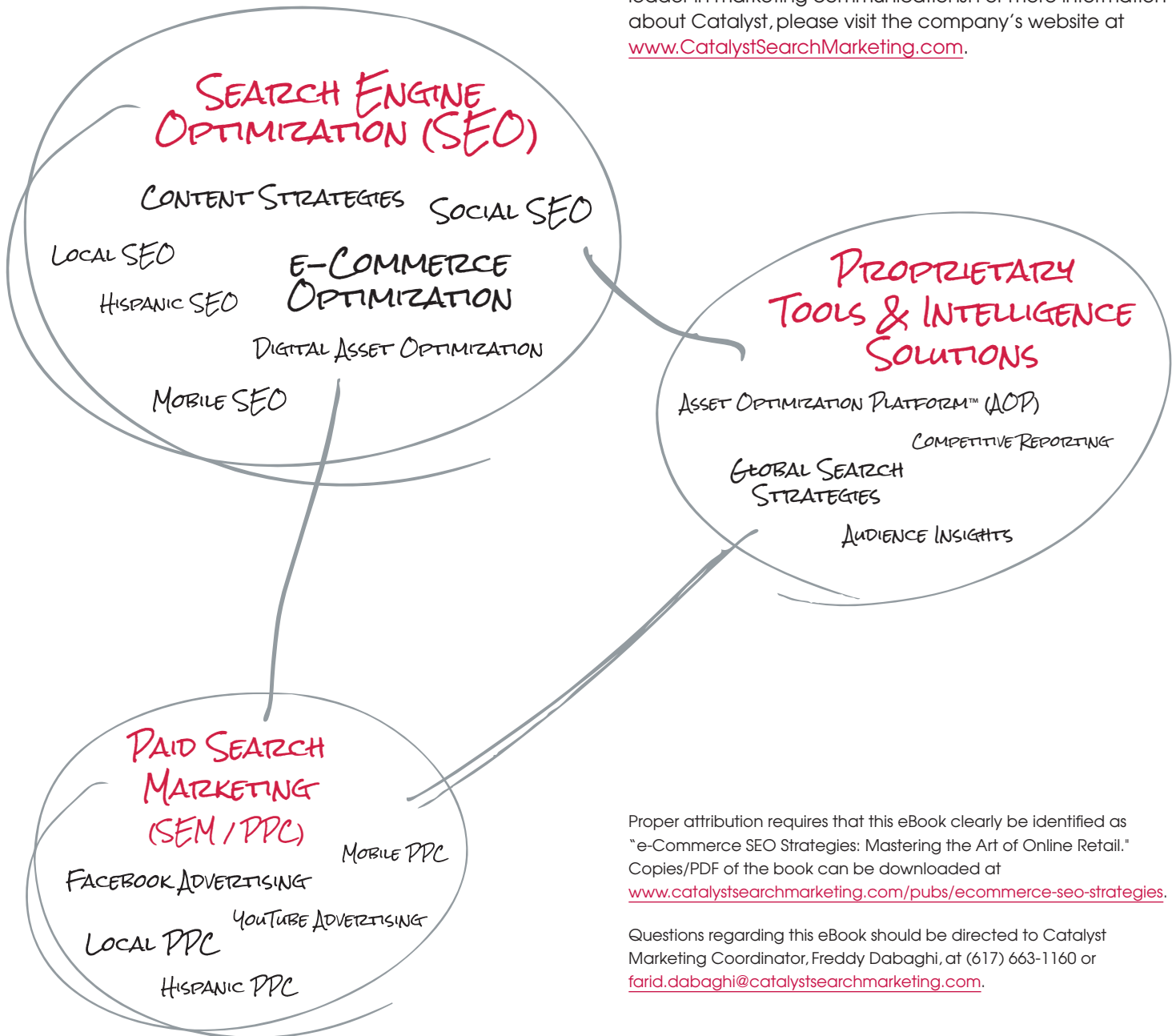
# Key Takeaways
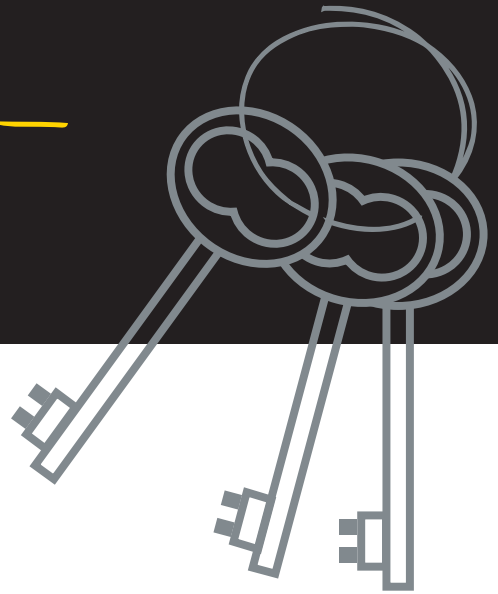
1. Just as in standard SEO, the foundation of e-Commerce SEO is the technical crawlability of your website. If search engines cannot accurately crawl and appropriately index your website's content, they will not rank your website well in search results, and you will have to get most of your traffic from paid advertising, which is more expensive than organically-driven site traffic. Structured data (such as Schema.org) is an important evolution in semantic search and indexability with search engines and social sites that cannot be ignored by online retailers.

2. "Search Engine Optimization" has evolved, and should be thought of more as "Search Experience Optimization." Brands need to optimize all of their digital assets across the web - with content that is appropriate for each of the various phases of the customer purchase funnel - in order to enhance their search experience.

3. Once you have attracted visitors to your site, it is important to present an optimal buying environment for your consumers, regardless of the device they are using to access your website or their location. This includes mobile, local, and global considerations, as well as thoughtful categorization of goods, intuitive navigation menus and internal linking, suggested related items, and providing tools to help shoppers find what they are looking for.

4. Best-in-class e-Commerce websites utilize features that help brands capture leads and build their audience. This includes calls to action to subscribe to newsletters or to create a user account, as well as integration with the latest social media platforms.

5. Content is still king, even with e-Commerce SEO. Your brand needs to create an integrated content / social strategy to help promote your products, build links to your website, increase brand awareness, and engage consumers across the web.

6. Understanding your business goals will help determine the KPIs and technologies you will need to track and measure your optimization and campaign results.

7. Before investing in website upgrades or an entirely new website, it is imperative that you consult with your SEO agency so that your business can avoid costly website revisions down the road. These revisions are often needed to help improve organic performance of the site if you haven't proactively designed with SEO in mind from the beginning.

8. Third-party e-Retailers enjoy an already established user base, high search engine rankings for competitive product-related terms, and the ability to offer deals to consumers (such as free shipping) due to the volume of products sold. For many brands, taking advantage of these online retailers makes sense. However, to get the best return on your investment, it is important to optimize your presence on each e-Retail site and monitor your performance relative to your competition, just as you would optimize and monitor your own e-Commerce website.

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## About Catalyst

Catalyst, a pioneer in developing strategic digital marketing services since 1998, is renowned for search marketing excellence in servicing Fortune 1000 brands. Headquartered in Boston with offices in New York, Chicago, Seattle, Toronto and Montreal, the search engine marketing firm serves numerous B2B and B2C clients in a variety of industries.

Catalyst is a wholly owned subsidiary of WPP, a world leader in marketing communications. For more information about Catalyst, please visit the company's website at www.CatalystSearchMarketing.com.

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Proper attribution requires that this eBook clearly be identified as "e-Commerce SEO Strategies: Mastering the Art of Online Retail." Copies/PDF of the book can be downloaded at www.catalystsearchmarketing.com/pubs/ecommerce-seo-strategies.

Questions regarding this eBook should be directed to Catalyst Marketing Coordinator, Freddy Dabaghi, at (617) 663-1160 or farid.dabaghi@catalystsearchmarketing.com.

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