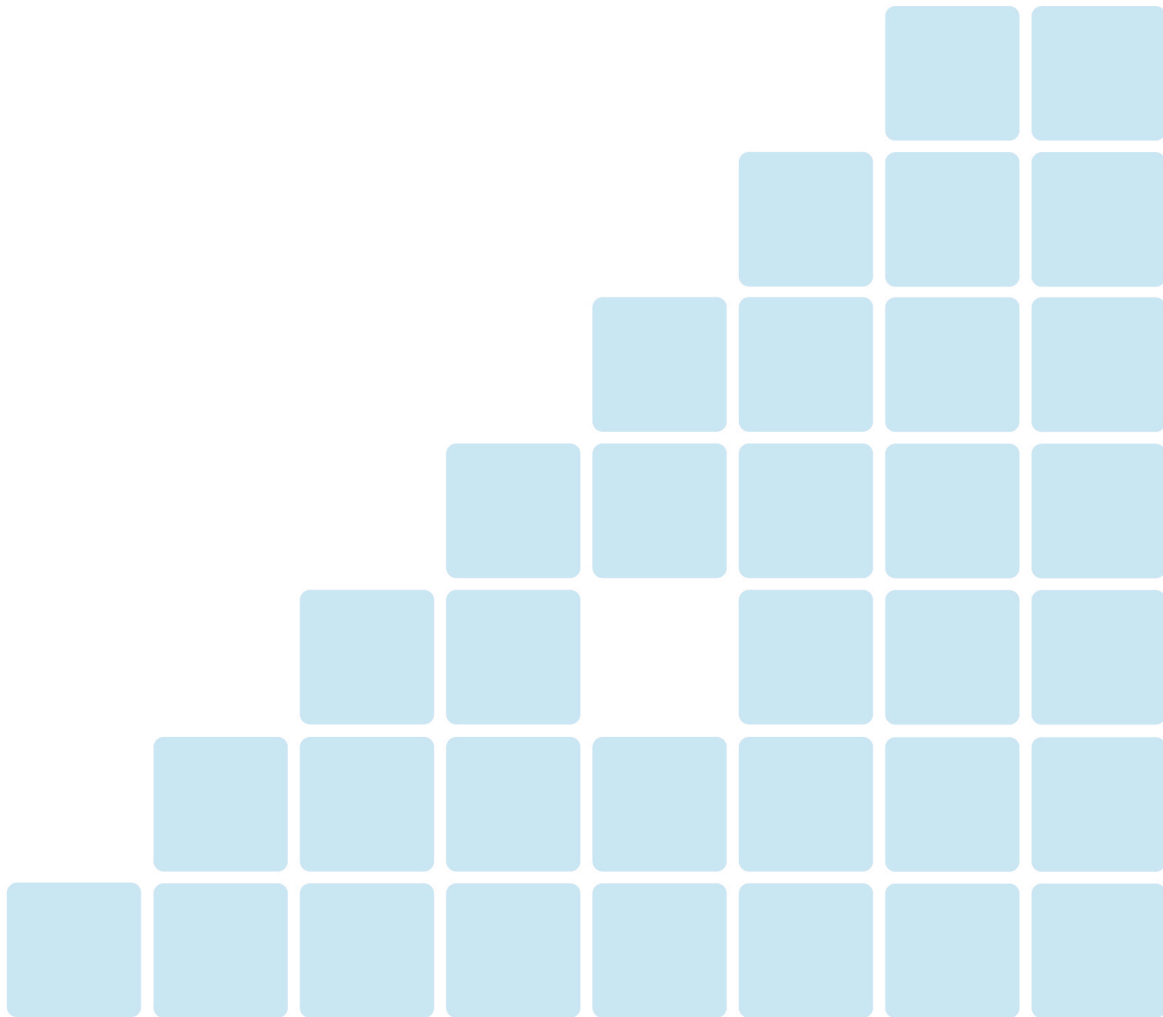


White Paper

eCommerce Catalog Development

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eCommerce Catalog Development

The success of your eCommerce website depends heavily on the quality of your product catalog. While this is probably the most important consideration when building an eCommerce web site, it is unfortunately, often the area that remains most neglected. Many new eTailers choose their eCommerce development partner based on price, graphic design capabilities and eCommerce feature sets.

While price is important when choosing an eCommerce platform, you don't want to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. If you think you can create a successful eCommerce site on a budget of \$2,500.00 you'll find that you would be better off spending that money on a 2-week vacation to Hawaii. A budget of \$5-10K would serve as a more realistic starting point to give your site the chance for success.

A quality graphic design is definitely important and will certainly help improve conversion rates, build brand and give your customers a sense of confidence. However, when it comes to the overall design, it is most important to have a clean, usable, easy to navigate design rather than trying to impress visitors with a flashy, over-designed website. Think of it as more of a shopping interface that helps your customers find products. I have seen dozens of eCommerce websites that gross over a million dollars in sales each year and that have relatively weak graphic designs.

eCommerce feature sets can also be a great factor in determining your eCommerce partner but what good are ancillary features such as Gift Certificates and Wish List modules if no one comes to your site anyway? These types of extras are great for expanding sales once your successful.

Don't get me wrong; cheap, beautiful, feature-rich websites are a great thing. Just remember that the success of your business is all going to come down to a well-developed product catalog. If you can't hire a company to develop that catalog for you, be prepared to do some work. If it were easy, everyone would own a million dollar Web business!

Planning your eCommerce Catalog

In SCUBA diving they say, "plan your dive and dive your plan". The same thing holds true for your online product catalog. Develop an outline for your catalog that includes categories and sub categories (this would be a good time to consult with an SEO - search engine optimization specialist). It is important to have your category and product names align with phrases that people actually search for. You want to carefully consider your navigation/category structure in this early planning stage to ensure that you are using words that can generate traffic to your site. The keywords in your navigation system are very important for search engine visibility. It is easier to get it right the first time.

Don't bite off more than you can chew. A big catalog is great. A complete catalog is better. You want to get your site live as soon as possible to start laying claim to your important keyword phrases. Search engine visibility takes time to develop. You are better off having your website go live with 25 products rather than waiting 9-months to develop the content for 200 products.

No Duplicate Content

Your content needs to be unique. Your category and product descriptions cannot be borrowed from another website, even if the manufacturer says it's ok to use their content. Google will know and punish you for it. Google only displays the first page it indexes with that same content. Your page will end up in the supplemental results. Trust me, this will be very bad for your site.

Typically you will have to write your own quality, keyword rich category and product descriptions. If you are competing with several other sites and you are all getting your products (and content) from the same manufacturer, your site will stand out from the pack in the Google rankings if you craft unique content.

eCommerce Content Development

A successful sales person has an in-depth knowledge of the products they sell. Similarly, if you want to sell online you need well-crafted product descriptions, several professional grade photographs for each product, as well as supporting documentation when possible. Brochures, spec sheets, instructions, and user manuals will play a big part in converting sales. An SEO specialist can leverage these content elements to generate relevant search engine traffic.

You can expect there will be several other competing websites in your market space. He with the best content will win (i.e. sell more).

Cross-selling and Up-selling Features

Popular products, related products, and also purchased, are the names of popular up selling and cross-selling feature. The idea is to try and show products to your site visitors that they might be interested in purchasing. If they are looking at a sweater, show them the matching hat, scarf, and gloves. It is worth the effort to understand these feature sets and to take the time to implement them.

Refined Catalog Look

Develop a refined catalog look, it will help convert sales. Large, bold fonts with loud colors don't help. Nor do big ugly clunky buttons. Take a look at what the big boys (target.com, macys.com, homedepot.com) are doing. You don't see big ugly buttons or loud colored fonts there do you? You don't need them on your site either.

Search Engine Considerations

It is important for search engine visibility to have keyword rich product categories listed on your homepage. Also consider developing good category short and long descriptions as well as product short and long descriptions.

Hire an SEO firm to research traffic patterns and degrees of competition for relevant search phrases. To capture traffic from search engines, it is extremely important to integrate targeted, highly relevant keywords into your category and product names and descriptions.

To achieve rankings in search engines, be sure to include the following elements in your product catalog:

- Keyword rich category names on the home page
- Category short and long descriptions
- Keyword rich title tags for your category pages
- Keyword rich product names
- Keyword rich title tags on your product pages
- Keyword rich product short descriptions of at least 1-2 sentences
- Keyword/content rich product long descriptions consisting of several paragraphs of text, bulleted lists of product highlights benefits and support files such as PDF, EXE, and PPT
- Multiple quality product images

In Summary

Because you can't always be there to answer your customer's questions in order to help sell your products, you must create the best catalog possible. Painful? Yes, but it will help big-time with your search engine rankings and conversation rate.

For More Information

To learn more about Mountain Media product and services, please visit www.mountainmedia.com or call 877-583-0300.