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simple tips
for Ecommerce success

Your practical guide to Ecommerce

Ecommerce for
Sage 50 Accounts
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Ecommerce: a world of opportunity

With Ecommerce you can get to a significant turnover, build loyal customers and make a good profit margin. However, many site managers get caught up in the daily tracking of their business, technical problems or financial issues and don't take the time to analyse their business situation and apply tried and true methods and tips to their site.

The goal of this guide is to help give you some perspective and practical advice to help you evaluate your current situation and provide the advice you need to improve.

"My Ecommerce site makes up 26% of my business, a level I didn't think it would reach!"

Contents

1. Your 'outstanding offer' on your home page

For your ecommerce website to be effective, it has to make visitors want to buy from it. Your site must attract visitors and make them understand what you are offering them right away. This is what we call the "outstanding offer." You should decide what outstanding offer your site is going to give visitors that they'll notice and appreciate.

This outstanding offer should be made clear instantly.

This is what welcomes visitors to your site and makes them want to stay. Think about:

- The quality of the photos you use
- How your site is organised – images vs text
- Use of savings or promotions
- Engaging and descriptive details of the products or services you sell

The below examples are sites renowned for their effectiveness...

ASOS sells over 850 brands, advertising their site as a "one-stop fashion destination" and offers free delivery to over 240 countries. With personal stylist services, their own marketplace and magazine, Asos' message is clear: whatever your fashion needs are, you've come to the right place.

Amazon when you're talking about effective Ecommerce it's hard not to mention Amazon. You can shop by department right from the home page, you have a list of bestsellers and what other customers are looking at right now at the bottom of the page. With one click payments and sophisticated advanced search, Amazon wants to give you the smoothest Ecommerce experience possible.

Tip: In order to determine what your site's "outstanding offer" is, try to write down what one of your visitors should say to their friends after visiting your site "I found this great website for...!" then ensure that this message is present throughout your site.

2. Draw inspiration from your competitors

It's very rare that a customer or prospect will visit only one Ecommerce website to make a purchase, and often she/he will consult several sites before making a decision.

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This means you need to make sure your site is as **attractive, efficient** and **interesting** as your competitors' sites. Then you can add your own touch, the advantages to your site and stronger reassuring factors.

You need to be really familiar with your competitors' sites, to understand:

• What they're doing right

• What's interesting on their sites

• And draw inspiration from them

Of course you would build an original site that's different to your competitors, but it's keeping a constant goal in mind that will help you be successful.

Analyse your competitors' sites and try to be as **objective** as possible. Concentrate on the facts, the arguments they use and their design choices, while focusing on; what their sites do well, what's effective, what about them pleases you as a customer and what you see there that inspires you for your own site.

You should, as much as possible, choose sites in your market that are well-known examples of their size and expertise. You can get to know them in-depth by ordering an item, subscribing to their newsletter or contacting their customer service.

Tip: Check out some of the well-known, exemplary sites for Ecommerce in general are of course giants such as Amazon, Asos, Ikea, eBay etc.

3. The importance of quality graphic design

Some might say that graphic design is a question of personal taste and that you can't measure how effective it is, so every Ecommerce website has a chance. But this isn't true. The quality of graphic design plays an essential role in an Ecommerce website's success.

It's not a question of what's attractive or what colours you choose but rather a question of **efficiency** and establishing a **logical connection** between your site design and what you're selling.

Your main goal should be to promote your site's outstanding offer in a logical way that your visitors understand what they stand to gain. It's a question of giving your brand a modern image in terms of colours, page layout and graphics by drawing on the main Ecommerce sites in your field.

Here are some examples to consider;

• Designs like Gumtree's are fairly minimalist. It's a very effective, free site and their main selling point is their large range of products with better prices than anywhere else.

• Asos' design draws the eye right away with their many images and slide shows. They show a range of products and themes on the first page so everyone will find something they want to click through to and find out more.

• Hunter boots has a very attractive site with a slideshow of images on the home page using high-fashion style photos to draw in visitors. Their product pages are clear, to the point and without distractions with a good use of zoom and colour contrast for Call to Action (CTA) buttons.

These examples demonstrate the extent that graphic design is a key element in achieving your Ecommerce goals.

In order to highlight the quality of your products, your website should not just be designed to be attractive but to make your visitors want to take advantage of your offers, look through your products, find out more information and, finally, make a purchase.

Tip: You should take a look at sites such as Asos and Amazon regularly as they routinely update their websites and are a constant source of interesting ideas.

4. Reassuring and compelling product pages

Your product pages are an invaluable sales tool. They must:

- Entice visitors (by the quality and number of photos used)
- Answer all of customers' questions concerning your products (technical details, use, maintenance…)
- Reassure customers as to the quality of your services (payment methods, shipping)
- Encourage them to buy with a constant stream of new and compelling offers

Again it's essential that you draw inspiration from your competitors' sites or sites selling equivalent products.

Product pages fulfil several functions, all of which you should try to evaluate objectively for your site.

Appeal: the quality of your photos, page layout and quality of your copy. Information: the length and precision of your text, the range of information you provide, how easily you can be contacted and leave customer reviews.

Reassurance: brand logos, technical characteristics of products, shipping time, payment methods and customer reviews.

Sales: visibility of CTA buttons, promotional offers and gifts.

Tip: Be careful not to copy the description used by the manufacturer as you will be heavily penalised by Google for this. You can, of course, use this text as a source of inspiration, but it is essential to write a new description. When you choose the words you use don't forget the importance of **search engine optimisation (SEO) for Google.** Define the words that online shoppers must type into Google to find your products, create a careful list then make sure you use these words as often as possible for each product page.
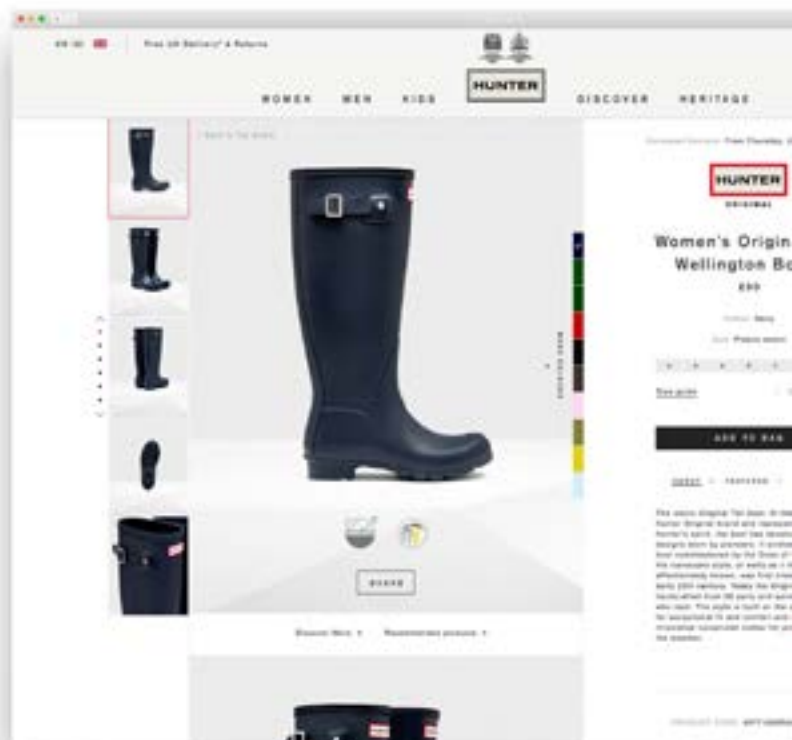
5. Use lots of attractive photos

Studies have shown that using many attractive photos can increase an Ecommerce website's turnover by more than 45%. Don't settle for mediocre photos with the thought that "they'll do for now" or that your customers will be able to tell how good your products are, because they won't! As soon as possible **make obtaining attractive photos of your products a priority.**

Don't forget that online shoppers regularly look at very well-known Ecommerce sites and that they have high standards. When it comes to taking quality photos you have several options. Depending on your budget you can use a photo studio, an independent photographer or a friend passionate about photography: it's the results that count.

As soon as visitors look at your site they'll see the quality of your products thanks to your good quality photos (at least three per item). They will take your site seriously as your photos show that you believe in your products and are trying to show them in their best light.

'Using many attractive photos can increase an Ecommerce website's turnover by more than 45%.'
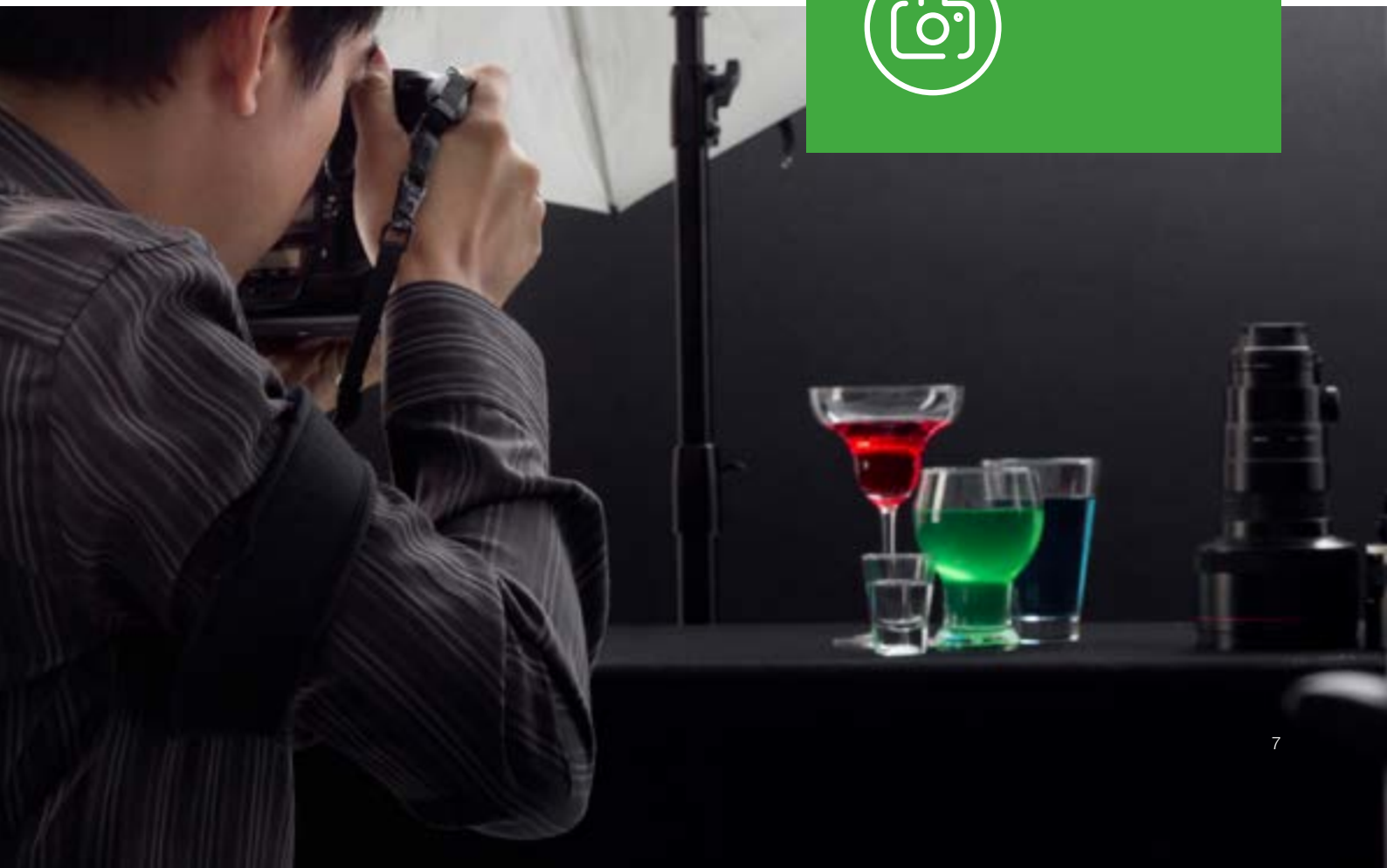
6. Feature new arrivals throughout your site

In Ecommerce everything is a question of attracting customers and giving them outstanding offers (products, prices, and services), quality information (content, advice), quality photos and featuring your products effectively. In this array of things to remember, don't forget that new arrivals play a big part in attracting customers. Regularly announcing the arrival of new products or special prices is a key success factor for any Ecommerce site.

What would you think of a bricks and mortar store that didn't offer new items? A store in which all of the products are visibly old and no effort is made whatsoever to update the products or services and there are no regular sales? You would be disappointed. It's the same for the world of Ecommerce.

To organise your new arrivals effectively, it's important to be prepared and organised in advance (if possible a month in advance). This way you'll be able to prepare the launch of your new products and think about strategic pricing, promotions over certain periods on particular products, offering new loyalty services, new shipping options or, for example, private gifts or contests. New arrivals are often linked to specific dates such as Valentine's Day, summer holidays, back to school, special collections, etc.

7. Reassure customers throughout your site

When customers or prospects land on your site, as with each of the subsequent steps, they need to be reassured. They need to know that you're offering them a quality product or service.

An attractive home page and aesthetic site aren't enough, you need to be able to **guarantee customers** that their purchases will be delivered on time, that they can contact you if there's a problem and that **they will be entirely satisfied with your products**.

There are numerous ways to reassure your customers:

- Your years of experience in the business
- The leading brands you sell, your products' specific technical aspects
- Your shipping delays
- Your customer service number
- Customer reviews
- Percentage of satisfied customers
- Where your products are made
- When your site was founded, etc.

In some cases you can add a "satisfied or your money back" guarantee, the logos of the brands you sell, your partnerships with well-respected organisations, shipping company logos and PayPal.

Examples of reassurance

In the case of Topshop we can count 17 reassuring elements on their site:

1. Free shipping in the UK
2. Collect from store for free
3. Next-day order until 9pm with home delivery
4. A current weather indicator
5. Guaranteed secure payment
6. About Topshop
7. Student discount
8. Number of Facebook likes
9. Store finder,
10. New arrivals
11. Size guide
12. Current stock level
13. Customer reviews
14. Celebrity picks
15. Free shipping for returns in the UK
16. Customer service telephone number
17. Contact form

Tip: Analyse top sites such as John Lewis, Asos and ao, you'll notice the lengths they go to to reassure customers first on their homepage, then on their product pages and throughout the checkout process. It's up to you to decide what you want to focus on to reassure your customers.

8. Quick access to products the customer is interested in

When customers land on your site, they are generally looking for something specific or suggestions amongst a specific group of items. If they don't find what they're looking for right away they will quickly get discouraged and leave your site.

To satisfy your customers' browsing habits, put yourself in their shoes...

Think about what questions your customers will naturally ask when searching through your products and write down the answers.

Although sites like Amazon often have six or more different search methods, generally speaking there are three main ways to search (i.e. use, material, technical) which you can use to organise your product categories.

Access to your items must be clearly defined, precise and efficient. Even the most attractive product page won't be effective if the parent categories are not clearly visible.

When you sort each product into several categories, offering your customers several ways to search your site makes their lives a lot easier and will increase your site's effectiveness.

It's not a coincidence that many Ecommerce sites show several products on their home page and all of their subsequent pages (sometimes up to several dozen).
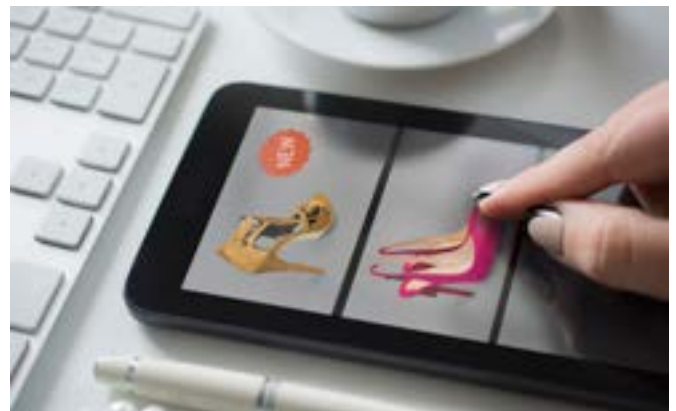
This presentation choice has **two main benefits**:

- It immediately highlights the quality and range of products the site offers (that "outstanding offer" we talked about).

- It allows prospects to click on items they're interested in straight away without needing to search for them.

Tip: Make sure you **test your site navigation in real-life situations.** Ask several friends, customers and partners to select a few items they might buy on your site, then time how long it takes them to find these items. This will give you a good idea of your site's effectiveness. If the results don't meet your expectations, then you have some things to work on.

9. Use marketplaces to generate traffic

When you launch your Ecommerce site, you won't have many visitors at first. Your future customers won't have had time to hear about your site yet. Often they already have their usual sites they shop on and won't have any particular reason to go looking for your site.

A very effective way of generating traffic and starting to build customer loyalty is to use marketplaces and price comparison sites. These general sites are already known to online shoppers, have significant traffic and can help you attract and convince your first customers.

Using marketplaces means extra costs which can scare certain e-tailers as they think it's better to avoid this source of traffic when they're getting started and wait to reach a certain level of profitability and business before using them.

This is not the right approach for **three reasons**:

1. On marketplaces you are billed as a percentage of your sales, so you're only investing a percentage of your success. The sooner you start, the sooner you'll understand the marketplace's expectations and be able to meet them effectively.

2. Marketplace marketing fees are no higher than the fees you should be prepared to invest in other marketing campaigns, and their effectiveness has been proven.

3. You should insert price reduction vouchers for a second purchase on your site in your customers' packages. This will encourage your customers to visit your site directly and will help you build a loyal and profitable customers base.

10. Offer several shipping options

Statistics demonstrate beyond doubt that online customers appreciate being able to choose between several shipping methods and that adding more shipping options increases your number of buyers.

This is natural, as soon as they decide to make a purchase customers wonder about the practical questions of shipping and delivery.

They wonder how long it's going to take, what the guarantees are like, the hours and their own availability. They generally want to receive the product as soon as possible, and it can be a good idea to have them pay an extra fee for this option.

Offering several shipping options and paying particular attention to how you present the advantages of each one will help your customers think ahead to a couple of days in the future when they will receive their purchases.

11. Offer several payment methods

The moment when it's time to pay is crucial in Ecommerce and is a strong indicator of your customers' confidence in your site. Online there is no sales representative available to reassure customers, so it's up to your site to fill this role and attract and reassure customers.

Reassurance goes hand in hand with the confirmation that data is encrypted, bank logos (a visual reminder of the quality of service you offer your customers) and the choice of at least two payment methods. In order to attract customers you'll need a polished page layout for your payment page that goes seamlessly with the rest of your site as the next logical step in the checkout process.

12. Keeping in touch with your customers and prospects

Newsletters continue to be absolutely essential in Ecommerce. They help you keep in touch with your prospects and customers and keep your site fresh in their minds. Without this they might forget about your site.

With a newsletter they are given useful information about your new products, advice, comments from other customers and of course discounts.

It's not a coincidence that all of the top ecommerce sites send out newsletters very frequently (minimum once a week and often every day) they have been shown to be a very profitable communication tool and the figures prove it.

When creating a newsletter, you must follow a logical process.

First you should define what content you want to include in your newsletter:

- Events throughout the year (Valentine's Day, Easter, Christmas…)

- New arrivals (new products, services, announcements about your business)

- Customer advantages you're offering (discounts, free shipping for a certain period)

- Advice and useful information (customer reviews, product details).

Remember. Without quality content your newsletter won't be successful.

Once you've defined what your newsletter is going to be about then you can decide what the general tone and style guide will be. To get ideas look at your competitors or successful sites as this will give you a wealth of information. Generally speaking it's important that your newsletter's style guide or design be consistent with your site in terms of colour, button shapes etc.

Your mailing list will grow with time with your current customers, acquaintances and customer databases you might buy. Don't hesitate to feature your newsletter on your site to make visitors want to sign up.

13. Don't forget about the power of mobile

The figures are in and currently people are buying
more mobiles and tablets than computers.

Customers love looking at products on their mobiles, and purchasing on mobiles is rapidly growing. Your Ecommerce site is not immune to this phenomenon and offering a mobile version of your site will offer you three key advantages.

1. It will expand your customers' shopping experience: they can access your site at any time for more information and to compare and choose.

2. It will also position your site strategically compared to your competitors, especially those who haven't taken advantage of this new sales channel yet.

3. It will generate more turnover for you by adapting to modern consumers' behaviour.

Contrary to what you might think, **most mobile use is not on the go** which would reduce the concentration of your visitors, but in the home.

Individuals have integrated mobile devices into their lives to suit their own personal preferences: they're always available and do not require any set up or booting up time. Despite the small screen, they are very practical in daily life.

More and more sites have understood their importance, which in turn increases their use.

'By offering a quality mobile version of your site you will increase your site's audience and your turnover.'

14. Analyse your performance

You've applied the main tips for an effective Ecommerce site, well done! But it doesn't stop there. Now you need to regularly keep an eye on (every day if possible) the success indicators which will guarantee your results.

Speed: plays an essential role in your site's performance. As you're used to navigating on your own site you don't notice where it might be slow or are willing to wait a few seconds for a page to load, but your visitors won't be. It's been estimated that for every second you have to wait you lose 20% of your turnover, which is a considerable amount. Be strict in this area and your sales will increase.

Total number of visitors: check the number of visitors on your site every day (on computers and mobiles of course) and be ambitious. With a good marketing strategy (referral schemes, loyalty vouchers, marketplaces, purchasing keywords, etc.), effective SEO, good customer service and a regular newsletter results will follow. If your traffic figures are good that's great. You can keep moving in the same direction. If your traffic figures show that they're slowing down, analyse the reasons why and react.

Number of Google visitors: SEO means a source of free customers, so take advantage of this. In general this traffic should represent between 20-30% of your total traffic. There are techniques for this you should apply constantly. First identify the keywords your customers use (Google has free tools that will provide you with this information), then write quality text so that Google can easily find your keywords. Most often it's best to call on an expert's help for the methods you should use.

Conversion rate: once visitors have landed on your site, the important thing to measure every day is the percentage of them that make a purchase. In general, this percentage is around 2%. For 100 visitors to your site, 2 of them should buy a product. By measuring this ratio you'll be able to react, by featuring your bestsellers, highlighting your CTA buttons and helping visitors confirm their purchases by making the checkout process as simple as possible. Don't hesitate to ask friends or acquaintances to visit your site and try to make a purchase as a mystery shopper, as this will give you useful information on your site's user-friendliness.

Average shopping cart: Your existing sales are a source of precious information that will help you improve your business. What products are customers buying? Which traffic sources bring you customers that make purchases? How many customers come back regularly? Amidst all this information one element stands out and that's your customers' average shopping cart. By increasing this number (bundles, free shipping for a minimum purchase etc.) you are guaranteed to both satisfy your customers and grow the profitability of your business.

Hopefully this guide has given you the awareness and knowledge to go away and assess your Ecommerce plans and performance to help you move in the right direction.

By following these tips you can built a successful Ecommerce site and reap the benefits of extending your business online.

Ecommerce for Sage 50 Accounts when combined with **Sage 50 Accounts** and **Sage Pay** offers an all in one ecommerce solution for your business. Whatever your business size, you can safely and securely process online orders and take payments, and be confident that your stock levels and Sage 50 Accounts are being updated in the meantime.

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