

MAKE YOUR **2002** SITE SELL!



Make Your **Store SELL!**

The other three volumes of **MYSS! 2002**

show you how to...

- 1) develop a great product
- 2) write a Web site that **SELLS** that great product
- 3) attract targeted customers to the site.

Make Your Store SELL! adapts
single product **“get-the-order”** principles
to the **multi-product format** of an online store.

Sell your selection of products
with the same laser accuracy and efficiency.



1. Same... But Different

The site-selling principles outlined in the main volume of **MYSS! 2002** apply specifically to **single product** sites. However, most of these principles effectively serve online stores, as well. Selling, after all, is selling.

Online stores have rather **a unique position...**

- 1) They are **the same** as a real world store in that people are still “**coming in**” to look around and maybe buy something.
- 2) They are **different** than a bricks-and-mortar store in that **there’s no physical contact**. No one can squeeze the bread, smell the leather, or drive the car. You can’t see your visitors and they can’t see you.

In other words, an online store is the **same** as an offline one... except it’s **different!** How will you know when to use offline principles and when to make adjustments?

Elementary, if...

... you become your customer.

[**SIDEBAR**]

We’ll be using particular online stores and malls as examples...

Amazon.com -- <http://www.amazon.com/>
Amazon zShops -- <http://s1.amazon.com/exec/varzea/subst/home/fixed.html>
Bloomingdale’s -- <http://www.bloomingdales.com/>
Egghead.com -- <http://www.egghead.com/>
Lands’ End -- <http://www.landsend.com/>
Macy’s -- <http://www.macys.com/index.html>
PeaPod -- <http://www.peapod.com/>
RedEnvelope Gifts On-Line -- <http://www.http://www.redenvelope.com/>
The Sharper Image -- <http://www.sharperimage.com/>
Wal-Mart -- http://www.walmart.com/estore/pages/pg_g1.jsp
Yahoo! Shopping -- <http://shopping.yahoo.com/>

These are not my “Top 12” -- some are actually great examples of what **not** to do.

Bottom line...

The goal is the same as for **any** sales-oriented site... **to maximize the percentage of people who buy**. Simply adjust techniques, as indicated.

All set? Let's take a look, point by point, at how online stores are the **same-but-different**, and in turn, how to optimize this reality. In simple language, **sell!**



1.1. The Store's The Product

The fantastic thing about having an online store is that **you don't necessarily have to sell your own products**. Actually, it's very likely that you won't!

Netrepreneurs tend to divide themselves into two camps...

1) Single product and direct sales site -- To succeed in this situation, you...

i) create and produce your own product (or exclusive rights to a product).

ii) create a great site that sells!

iii) market like crazy.

Since all your focus is on **one** product, make it a roaring success! (For more on creating your own product, [check the Product Volume](#) of **MYSS! 2002**.) We started our booming brand line with the first edition of **MYSS!**.

SiteSell focuses on selling a high volume of a small number of quality e-books and tools, dedicated to the success of the online small business owner and netrepreneur -- using the motto of "e-commerce for the rest of us."

[SIDEBAR]

Our site is structured to sell **one product at a time** in order to prevent any distractions. We don't use shopping carts. Of course, all that changes when you sell through a store.

2) Store -- Instead of selling one or a few of your own products, you sell tens or

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hundreds or thousands of products that are produced by others. Naturally, since you're selling an extensive range of items, called **SKUs** (Stock Keeping Units), there's no way, as a small business person with limited means, that you could develop and produce all those items.

So your key role is...



... to be an aggregator! (I gotta get a new graphic designer! 😊)

An aggregator is someone who pulls many things together from many places and puts them together in such a way as to create something new, wonderful, and valuable. In a sense, your store is your product -- it's what you sell to visitors. If they **"buy"** your store, they'll buy your products.



Sound beyond you??? Nope, no way.

Actually, it's pretty easy. **What do you love to do?**

Collect figurines, for example? Easy. Go to...



Thomas Register

<http://www.thomasregister.com/>

This company used to publish a million-pound set of books about every American manufacturer of everything and anything. (OK, OK, I tend to exaggerate a bit.) And it was expensive.

Now the same set of books weighs nothing and is free via the Net.

So... complete your free registration and then search for "figurines." There you go... 57 companies. Start contacting them. Group the figurines by theme. For example...

- Motherhood
- Romance

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- Golf (please don't leave out golf!).

See how your store is shaping up? Simple, right?



The Thomas Register is enough, all by itself, to build your online store. But it also serves as a great starting point. As a small business, you'll add value to your store **by aggregating unusual, high-quality goods**. So spend extra time **sourcing**.

Here's how to find more suppliers...

1) Go to Yahoo! or any other directory that you like...



Yahoo!

<http://www.yahoo.com/>

Once there, do a search for "Thomas Register" **(with the quotes)**. You're not looking for Thomas Register -- you already know where **that** is. This search will show you which **categories** contain the Thomas Register site, like this...



And those categories will contain other sourcing directories similar to the Thomas Register to check out. Some sites will provide lists of links to even more directories, increasing your sourcing power to another threshold!

2) Go to AltaVista...

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AltaVista

<http://www.altavista.com/>

Enter **link:thomasregister.com** (no quotes) into the search box and click “Search” like this...

Find this:	<input type="text" value="link:thomasregister.com"/>	Search
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This will turn up every site that links to the Thomas Register.

To increase the chances that the site is about sourcing products, enter **+link:thomasregister.com +sourcing** (no quotes) into the search box and click “Search” like this...

<input type="text" value="+link:thomasregister.com +sourcing"/>	Search
-----------------------------------------------------------------	---------------

There'll be many dead-ends. Consider investing in [high-speed access](#) to streamline the process.

Scattered among the different leads, you'll find gold -- high-value nuggets that will set you off on the yellow brick road of success.



3) Research European sources...



Thomas Register of European Manufacturers

<http://www.tipcoeurope.com/>



4) Leaving Thomas Register, but still in Europe, there is also...

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Europages

<http://www.europages.com/>



5) Focus on a specific industry -- Call the relevant manufacturer's association and/or attend trade fairs.

For example, would you love to run an **off-beat toy store**? The Toy Manufacturers of America is the place to start. And at Toy Fairs (from New York to Germany to Hong Kong, and places in between) you'll find loads of little-known companies with neat products

Here's a good place to start for trade shows. The whole site is outstanding...



International Business Resources on the WWW

<http://ciber.bus.msu.edu/>

Specifically, check out...



Global Edge

<http://globaledge.msu.edu/ibrd/busresmain.asp?ResourceCategoryID=15>



6) Explore worldwide sourcing -- The same site, **International Business Resources on the WWW**, has two great listings...

<http://globaledge.msu.edu/ibrd/ibrd.asp>

<http://globaledge.msu.edu/ibrd/busresmain.asp?ResourceCategoryID=13>

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7) Follow links -- Whenever you find a good source, use [Alexa](#) to find other related sites. Keep finding and linking to more and more related resources.



8) Check locally -- Is there a nearby flea market with some terrific local artisans? Aggregate them into a cool, online store. Do you have a friend with an offline gallery or retail operation? Be partners and run the online division.

Is your area famous for anything? Napa wines, Inuit sculptures, smoked B.C. salmon... all good examples.



Here's the bottom line...

You **can** put a product line together. Just figure out what turns you on, find products to match, and then **assemble it all in a sharp, new and fun way.**

Take your time here. “**Prepare... Don't Repair**” applies to prospective store owners 1,000%. The time you spend finding “just the right products” and developing your concept will repay you one hundred fold.

You'll also find some great little suppliers for your burgeoning store this way. **When you do...**



... don't tell a soul. Your sources are your gold -- don't give them away.

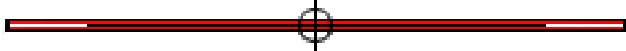


Consider your aggregation of products and your store concept as **your product**. Compare your product development (i.e., store creation) cycle to that of a single-product online entrepreneur. Let's use my experience as an example. I spent 9 months developing PennyGold, my mining stock software. Then I took a full year to create the first edition of **Make Your Site SELL!**

Shouldn't you put the same efforts into getting **your** product (i.e., your store) just right?

This is the single most difficult, and most important, step in building an online store. The rest? Well, you can make it as easy or as hard as you like.

This volume will help you achieve that first step so that you get on with the business of selling, **the fun and profitable part...**



1.2. Photos... Get Them Just Right

A picture is worth 1,000 words. For online stores, increase that value to **10,000!**

Remember, your visitor **cannot** touch your physical product. Worse still, they can't try it out -- people slip on sweaters in real stores. They test-drive cars. They sample the grapes (when no one's looking). In France, they even get to taste the wine!

On the other hand, buying from your store is super-convenient and fast. So your job is to help them **feel** the benefits. Select pictures that show people **using** your product -- wearing the clothes you sell, driving the car, enjoying the succulent grapes, drinking the wine...

... with some good food... on a terrace in Paris... at sunset! 😊



Here's how to prepare photos for your site...

- As you source each product, ask the supplier for photos.
- Get samples of each product as quickly as possible. Borrow, rent or buy a digital camera, preferably one that takes pictures in **JPEG format** (i.e., Web-ready format for photographs). Or take pictures with a regular camera, but get them developed on CD-ROM.
- You need some basic graphic software that can re-size your photos and also compress them into JPEGs for Web delivery. If you don't already have this, these two shareware packages offer the best value for the dollar...

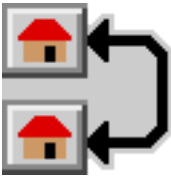
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For Windows... Paint Shop Pro

http://www.jasc.com/download_4.asp

or...



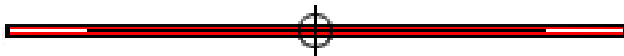
For Mac... GraphicConverter

http://www.lemkesoft.de/us_gcabout.html

- Reduce a photo down to a **thumbnail version** -- users will click on this to see your full-sized photo.

— [**SIDEBAR**] —

If you already have an online store with hundreds of SKUs and no photos, don't get discouraged. I'll bet that 20% of your products account for 80% of your business. Identify your most popular items and add photos about them first.



1.3. As Always... Set and Get the **MWR**

What's the **MWR** of an online store? Simple. It's...

“Buy something... anything!”

This is especially important for the **first-time visitor** to your site. If she doesn't buy, she may **never** be back. So how do you maximize your chances?

Here's one approach... big names, seasonal products, and a clear directory along the left margin. Look at **Yahoo! Shopping**, the largest mall on the Net. It knows what it's doing!...

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Yahoo! Shopping
<http://shopping.yahoo.com/>

And here's another **do-able strategy**...

Lands' End focuses on **seasonal “best bets”** and **special occasions**, with an easy navigation bar across the top of their site. But they go beyond that... see the **“Show Dad you’ve learned the value of money”**?

Nothing like saving money when you have to buy for Dad anyway, right?

And take a look at that swimsuit finder **tool**. One more great time-saver...

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The screenshot shows the Lands' End website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Shopping Bag, Checkout, My Account, My Model, Personal Shopper, Ask Us. Below that, a secondary bar says 'Welcome' and lists categories: Women's, Men's, Kids, For the Home, Luggage, Gifts. The main content area features a large banner for 'Show Dad you've learned the value of money... Buy 3 or more Pinpoints and save \$3 each'. This banner includes an image of a blue shirt and a tie, and text explaining the offer. To the left of the main banner is a sidebar with a search bar, 'All Products' dropdown, and links to 'Catalog/Quick Order', 'Sign up!', 'Special Services', 'International Sites', and 'Our Company'. To the right of the main banner are two smaller sections: 'New & Noteworthy' featuring 'Remember DAD' and 'Dive in! Swim Finder', and 'Find of the Week' featuring 'Two cool fabrics in one cool shirt! Just \$19.50'. Below the main banner is a section titled 'Top 5 Inflation-Fighters' listing items like 'Men's & Women's Mesh Polo' and 'Men's & Women's Super T'.

Lands' End
<http://www.landsend.com/>

Two different approaches... one **MWR**. Get an order.

Mini quiz time... Think about the two Home Pages (Yahoo! Shopping and Lands' End)...

1) **Are they aimed at men or women?** Are they meeting visitors' needs or offering solutions?

2) **Is the presentation clear** or does it cloud visitors' minds and frustrate them?

In some stores, you just don't know where to begin -- there's too much happening at once. It's a sure sign of a company which can't get out of its own mindset. It wants to **get it all** on the Home Page. As a result, the company presents nothing but a blur.

Why? **Because it forgot the customer.**

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Still have some empty space in your resource file? Add this classic winner...

Offer a super deal on something -- a sale, a closeout, a special “Buy 2, Get 1 Free” blitz. Yes, the offline use of “specials” works online, too...



The advertisement features the GE Appliances logo at the top left. Below it is a small image of a GE dishwasher. To the right of the image, the text reads: "Cook it. Freeze it. Wash it. Ship it...Free". Below this, the Ourhouse.com logo is displayed. To the right of the logo, the text says: "Save 10%-30% on all GE major appliances". Below this, a paragraph states: "Ourhouse.com is offering 10%-30% savings on all GE major appliances, such as dishwashers, dryers and refrigerators. Free shipping too! Sale ends 7/7."

Macy's had **two** sales going on its Home Page when I checked them out...

souson sale 3.99 or less!



The advertisement features a central image of various Souson bath and body products. To the right of the image, the text reads: "Going, going, soon-to-be gone. Act fast, because at \$3.99 or less, luxurious Souson products won't be around for long! Experience instant comfort with the bath and body sensations of Souson, a Macy's exclusive. Click [here](#) to see our selection."

july's regal ruby...10% off



The advertisement features a central image of a large, ornate ruby ring. To the right of the image, the text reads: "Once bestowed upon royalty during coronations, the rich, red ruby was crowned as the birthstone for July. So right now we're offering 10% off all ruby jewelry, which makes this the perfect time to bestow a gift of fiery ruby elegance. But hurry...sale ends July 31."

Pretty good “store copy,” too! (But I’m getting ahead of myself!)

Special offers, deals, sales, coupons, “bargain basement”... whatever it takes. **Get that first order.**

=====

So...

Thumbnail your customer, choose your “hot products” and “super-saver deals” to display on your Home Page. Add some easy navigation. Make it all clear, and **get that MWR!**

=====

1.4. The Backup Response

The concept of [Backup Response](#) applies to online stores, just like it does for any other type of sales-oriented site! What other way(s) can you get that credit card order?

For example, take another look at **Lands' End** Home Page [above](#). See the bottom right corner? Yup, sign up for an e-zine...



Perhaps the customer is **not** in the market for any summer clothing just now. But she **would** like to know when Lands' End comes out with their fall clothing. All she has to do is sign up for news updates.

Nothing cutting-edge about this technique. Newsletters are a common and effective communication tool (if done properly), online and off.

Use proven methods whenever you can. ([See the main volume for a fast refresher.](#))

Why use time and energy to “re-create the wheel” when it’s not necessary?

However, the very nature of online stores opens wonderful **opportunities for diverse and creative** Backup Responses.

Let’s look at a few...

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Bloomingdale's

<http://www.bloomingdales.com/>

How many **Backup Responses** can you spot?...

The "Gift Cards" definitely count as a **purchase**. And the bridal registry is **better** than a purchase... actually, it's potentially 100 or 1,000 purchases!



In all, Bloomingdale's has **three** Backup Responses. But as you see, they are not perfect...

1) **my b profile**... Click on this and they ask you all kinds of information. And what

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do **you** get in return? Their free e-mail and products pitched at you “in your personal dressing room.” They ask for too much, too soon -- for not enough in return.

And the process is painful -- it's clear that the marketing team and techies designed the form, not sales. They're trying, but they're losing 90% of potential signups needlessly.

2) request a catalog -- in the bottom right corner. Good one. But guess what? I have to fill in the same information all over again, even though I just gave it to them for my b profile. Another hurdle.

3) e-mail this page to a friend -- no reward or anything, just e-mail it. “What's in it” for the visitor?

So... is Bloomingdale's improving with age? Nope -- here's a newer version of their Web site...



Bloomingdale's
<http://www.bloomingdales.com/>

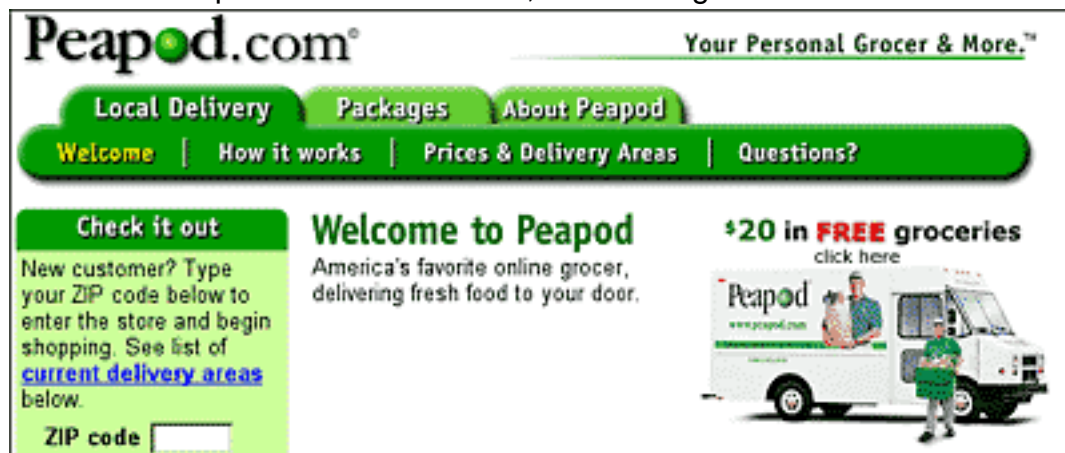
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Notice...

- 1) **my bloomingdale's...** hasn't improved a stitch -- they still ask you for a ton of information, without giving you anything back. Oops!
- 2) **request a catalog** -- has disappeared from the front page. Still accessible by clicking on "email sign-up".
- 3) **e-mail this page to a friend** -- same song, same dance.
- 4) Neither **wedding registry** or **gifts** pack the same punch as they did on the earlier version of this page.



OK. Now compare this with PeaPod, the online grocer...



Peapod.com

<http://www.peapod.com/>

See that **\$20 in FREE groceries**? Hey, ya gotta click, right? When you do, here's the pitch...

“Refer-A-Friend and Receive \$20 in FREE Groceries”

Believe me, lots of people give their friend's address for \$20! Open the Rolodex!

Compare the above sites. Ask yourself who is **inside their customers' heads**, and who can't get out of their own mindset? This is **not** rocket science... but you **do have to work at becoming your visitors**.

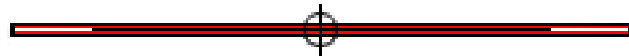
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It all flows from there.

[SIDEBAR]

It sounds like it would be rather simple to “become your customers.” But it’s the hardest thing to do. Why? Because you **don’t** live in their world. So it’s easy to **slip back** into yours. Put a yellow stick’em on your monitor right now...

“Become my customer.”



1.5. Write Words That SELL!

Online stores can sell thousands of **SKUs**. Compare that to my single-product **PennyGold** site, or to SiteSell.com. We sold only one digital book, **Make Your Site Sell!**, for the first year of our existence.

For those two sites, I had the luxury of writing as much as was necessary to build the sale. After all, the customer arriving at each of those sites understood the deal...

“I’m going to try to sell you on one product, and you’re going to resist. Once you read enough, you’ll make a BUY-OR-NOT decision and react accordingly.”

Simple proposition, right? Yes and no -- there’s an entire process to learn, and results **are** skill-dependent. Writing copy for online stores is far **simpler** because stores sell many items and that means you just don’t have the room to build a story.



Here’s an approach that you probably recognize...

“I have a lot of stuff to show you. I hope you pick one.”

The store creates some kind of fancy Home Page, and then it’s a database exercise... show product after product after product, as requested, with meager description, **until customer...**

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... dies of boredom.

The good news... if you make **any** effort at writing decent sales copy, you will have better results than 99% of online stores.

There's no need for me to cover site copywriting in great detail here -- after all, that's the whole point of...

MAKE YOUR WORDS SELL!

Make Your Words Sell!

<http://myws.sitesell.com/>

In **Make Your Words Sell!**, we outline a process that A-N-Y-O-N-E can master.

But let's get you started now. **Here are the three most important things to keep firmly planted in your brain while writing a site...**

1) Become your customer. That mindset virtually guarantees your success as a copywriter.



2) Benefits first, then features. I've said it elsewhere, but I'll repeat it again. **Features** tell your visitor what the product **is** and what it **does**. **Benefits** answer what your visitor will **get out of your product** -- what "pain" it cures, or what "gain" it delivers.

People mix the two up over and over again. This is less likely to happen if you can become your customer, and understand her needs and wants. Still, it's easy to confuse features and benefits. So... the single best way to **convert features into benefits** is **MYWS!'s** technique of **asking...**



... "So What?"

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Just keep asking “So What?” until you can’t ask it anymore. For example, let’s take this copy from [Peapod’s Home Page...](#)

Convenience, pure and simple

- **Shop anytime, night or day**
- **Choose your delivery time -- any day of the week**
- **No more trips to the grocery store. No more checkout lanes. No more lugging groceries.**

OK, take the above and ask yourself, “So what?”...

Shopping fits into your schedule, not vice-versa.

So what?...

“Because you have better things to do with your time.”

BINGO! There’s no “So what?” to that one. It’s the essence of the Peapod experience.

It’s all about benefits, not features. Keep asking “So what?” and you can’t miss.



3) Remember the subtext...

“Text” is what the words say. **“Subtext”** is what’s underneath -- what is said “between the lines.” It’s the hidden message. It’s also what separates the scam artists from the “real McCoys.” Because it’s very hard to fake.

If you write shrill hype like all the scam artists do, it smells of “get rich quick.” But subtext can give away other situations as well.

Subtext is probably the **single hardest part** of copywriting to master. **Even** if you’re pure of heart, the wrong subtext can hurt your effort. For example, if your copy tries too hard, **the subtext says...**



... “I’m desperate -- please, please buy my product.”

I once received an e-mail from a visitor to the site (C. Matravolgyi, delvalle@spiderlink.net) that almost **knocked me off my chair...**

Many "marketing experts" write about people as if they were fish, or some form of lowlife whose only redeeming quality is their credit card.

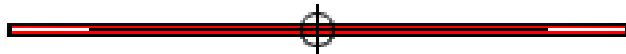
When I read stuff like that, I can't connect to it because I can't forget that, after all, I am a consumer too. I just can't live off duping people.

I like your approach very much. Haven't found a flaw yet. Granted, I don't know much about marketing, but I'm a very experienced reader. Garbage just doesn't impress me.

A writer must impress me by the quality and depth of his or her knowledge, it's as simple as that. You project human warmth--something very hard to find on the net.

See how important subtext is?

OK, with those three important tools in your mental toolbox, let's greet your customer at your "front door." Hurry, here she comes now...



1.6. Write A Winning Opener

The opening paragraph is critically important for every sales site. That includes your online store. It may not be as critical for Macy's or Amazon.com or Wal-Mart. After all, we know these companies already.

But it's critical for any small or startup online store or mall.

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Actually, it's still important for bigger companies. Most of them simply assume that everyone knows them, so there's no need for a great opening paragraph that fires that **Unique Selling Proposition (USP)**.

That's a **mistake...**

Companies which have "household-name" notoriety can make the opener shorter, of course. But to leave out a "got-your-attention" opener completely in order to get straight to business is... an opportunity wasted.

On the Net, you want every encounter with your visitor/potential customer (from beginning to end) to be sterling quality and productive.

If you don't, your competitor will happily do so!



To understand why, let's review two important points from a bit earlier...

1) The MWR of an online store is... **"Buy something... anything!"**

2) Once you set the MWR, design your entire site towards **getting it**. Every word you write, every graphic you include, every form you design, will be chosen to increase your odds of **getting the MWR**.

A great opening paragraph that fires your USP-gun is absolutely fundamental. It's the first important step to getting your customer to **buy something**.

We can use PeaPod as an example...

Peapod.com®

Your Personal Grocer & More.™

[Local Delivery](#) · [Packages](#) · [About Peapod](#)

[Welcome](#) | [How it works](#) | [Prices & Delivery Areas](#) | [Questions?](#)

Check it out

New customer? Type your ZIP code below to enter the store and begin shopping. See list of [current delivery areas](#) below.

ZIP code



Already a Customer?

Please log in to the store using your [username](#).

username

password



Peapod delivers to these metropolitan areas:

- Fairfield County, CT
- NW Washington, DC
- Chicago, IL
- Montgomery County, MD
- Boston, MA
- Long Island, NY
- Fairfax County, VA

Welcome to Peapod

America's favorite online grocer, delivering fresh food to your door.

Top-quality products

- Fresh meat, deli, produce and bakery goods
- Name-brand packaged foods, household items, and health and beauty products

Saving money is easy

- Competitive prices and weekly specials
- No impulse shopping
- Manufacturers' coupons accepted

Convenience, pure and simple

- Shop anytime, night or day
- Choose your delivery time - any day of the week
- No more trips to the grocery store. No more checkout lanes. No more lugging groceries

First-rate customer service

- Trained shoppers hand-pick the freshest and best products - just like you would.
- Friendly drivers deliver your order right to your door.
- Customer Care handles your questions.

\$20 in **FREE** groceries

[click here](#)



OK, good slogan... "Your Personal Grocer and More." But after that, "Welcome to Peapod, America's #1 online grocer" is a so-so, "me-focused" start. They do score some "what's in it for me" points...

- delivery straight to your door
- top quality products
- save money

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- convenience, pure and simple
- first-rate customer service

But the copy is mediocre -- some of their points are features, not benefits (more on this in the next section). I would organize and present “pain and gain” differently, without being “hard-sell.”

However, that’s not the real point here. **Peapod starts the process by selling the customer on the idea of doing business with them...**

Peapod is after their **MWR**.



Here’s an example of how **you could do it...**

Let’s suppose that you want to start a store that sells golf figurines/statues. So you register the **GolfFigs.com domain**. Register golfigs.com as well, just in case people don’t enter the two f’s in GolfFigs.com. You can always use the latter domain as a [Theme-Based Site](#) to build traffic to your main store.

You’ve sourced figurines of all types from every conceivable supplier in the world. Your Home Page organizes them into a **directory** situated in the left margin...

- **PGA Pros**
- **Non-golfing Celebrities**
- **Trouble Shots**
- **Frustration**
- **Comedy Scenes**
- **Top of Back-swing**
- **Classic Swing Follow-throughs**
- **Famous Golf Courses**
- **Water Fountains**
- **Outdoor Statues**
- **Bookends**

Display a couple of “hot figurines” on the Home Page. (No, not a couple making out in the woods. 😊)

Put one statuette of Tiger Woods winning the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. Add another of the St. Andrews golf course in Scotland, the birthplace of golf. Of course,

Store Volume... Same... But Different

under each, you add an additional link that says “**See the rest of the PGA Pros**” and “**More famous courses around the world.**”

And guess what? You still have some room for an opening paragraph!



Let's take a whack at it...

GolfFig.com... Golf Moments For You

Golf... from **sublime** to **ridiculous...** from shot to shot!

It's a sport that is filled with memorable moments...

- exaltation and triumph
- agony and frustration
- romance and mysticism

GolfFigs.com captures it all... golfing moments frozen in plaster, wood, marble, even gold! There are figurines that will make you laugh, statuettes that will make you wince, and other “frozen moments” that will recall your own moments of victory... and agony.

I hope you enjoy the site as much as I did putting it together. Whether you're a golfer looking for just the right “statement” to display your feelings about the game, or someone looking for “just the right gift” for a golfer, please...

If there's anything you need, don't hesitate to e-mail me directly at [**ken@golffigs.com**](mailto:ken@golffigs.com).

Wishing you great golfing memories,

Ken



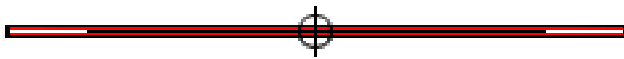
OK, that'll do. I often go over and over my opening paragraph for months. I'm never happy with it -- and you should never be happy with yours either. But this will do to illustrate my point.

Those few lines of copy quickly tell visitors what's in it for them. They create a feel of passion for the game, and for the site, that will be carried throughout. Hopefully, the opening copy creates a **connection** between me and my visitor.

Notice that the copy does not say...

- we're the best, we have the most, etc.
- you'll be able to find whatever you're looking for
- we're passionate about golf, we love it, etc.

You simply understand. ([If this is not clear, re-read "text vs. subtext" -- it's important.](#))



1.7. The 2-Level Description

As I said earlier, writing copy for a store is **far less process-oriented**. You've got hundreds of items to "show and tell" so you can't write twenty pages for each. But you do owe it to your customer, and yourself, to point out all the benefits of each product.

Let's compare a couple of old rivals, Macy's and Bloomingdale's and see how they each handle "Women's Jackets." At this **first product/demo level**, each page has 10-20 thumbnails with ultra-brief descriptions, like these two...

Macy's



Jones New York Woman
Trousseau Jacket, Black
\$ 209.00

Bloomingdale's



Leather jean-
style jacket

Phew! You can see why a picture is worth a thousand words... because there's just no room to squeeze a thousand words on a Web page that has 10-20 product photos like these two. Personally, I'll take a photo with a **person using (or wearing, in this case) the product** over a headless mannequin any day of the week.

What about the words? There's room here for **more, and better words**, than either Macy's or Bloomingdale's used.

You should take 10-15 words at the **first product/demo level**. Use them all.

For example...

Leather jean-style jacket,
buttery-soft lambskin,
inner lining for cool fall evenings.

There is no room to really **sell** at this level, but "buttery-soft lambskin" certainly gets you "feeling" the goods. And the inner lining lets you know that you won't be cold on October nights.



What about Macy's quoting the price? Too early. No true desire in the visitor has been created yet. The goal of this level is to **get the click** so you can start selling on the next level.

So.. at this **first product/demo level**, you...

- use a "people-using-product" thumbnail photo
- craft a 10-15 word description that **gets the click**
- show no price.

Let's go back to the real world. This is the equivalent of your visitor walking past a rack, seeing a jacket that she likes, briefly stopping to run the material between thumb and fingers, and **then reaching out to...**

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... check the price tag.

At this moment, in a real bricks-and-mortar store, a sales person would be there to start selling. This type of personal attention usually translates into more sales.

Here's where **you** have the advantage... an online sales person is right there, in the form of your sales copy -- just at the moment when she wants to know more. Let's not waste the opportunity by telling her about features... she must experience the benefits of this product.



OK. Time to analyze Macy's and Bloomie's next level... the **"make the sale" level**.

Pretend that we didn't see Macy's price tag and that we clicked to...



Now we'll break this level down...

1) Decent copy -- Could it be better? Yes, much. But it tries, and that's better than most. "Feel" should be emphasized more. Yes, say it's "correct for any occasion," if you must, but then add that "this head-turner is especially right for semi-formal evenings out." Romance the material and the construction, the feel and experience of wearing this jacket.

Hey, I'm not an expert in women's clothes, but I do know that there's lots of room for better copy here. This is not a print medium -- it does **not** have to fit a certain space. If the customer is interested, she'll read as much info as you offer, before she makes a decision.

Use this level to **make the sale**.

2) See the "You might also like..."? Great! Cross-sell! Tell me what goes well with this, and you've got two sales instead of one.

They miss an opportunity here to offer similar-looking alternatives, but that's borderline. Sometimes it's not good to **offer** too much choice. Still, I'd be tempted to offer one upselling alternative and one "downselling" alternative... similar clothes at two different price points.



And here's an idea... Let's say that you really like this jacket, but it's a tad too expensive. Geez, it would make a great birthday gift, wouldn't it? Or you'd likely buy it on sale, right? What if Macy's had offered four options...

- Yes, put them in my Macy's bag.
- Put on my Macy's Wish List.
- They're a bit too expensive. Please e-mail me if they go on sale.
- They are not quite right. Show me similar items.

The second and third options are terrific Backup Responses!



3) Close with the specifications (price, size, color, quantity) and add to the shopping cart ("Macy's bag"). That's how this level should end.

Bottom line verdict... I just don't have enough info nor do I have a good enough photo to make a BUY decision on this garment. Hey, it's **not** my fault that I'm not buying this for my wife.

Let's take a virtual **yellow cab over to Bloomingdale's...**

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CLICK!...

Wow! That's fast -- not a single red light en route...

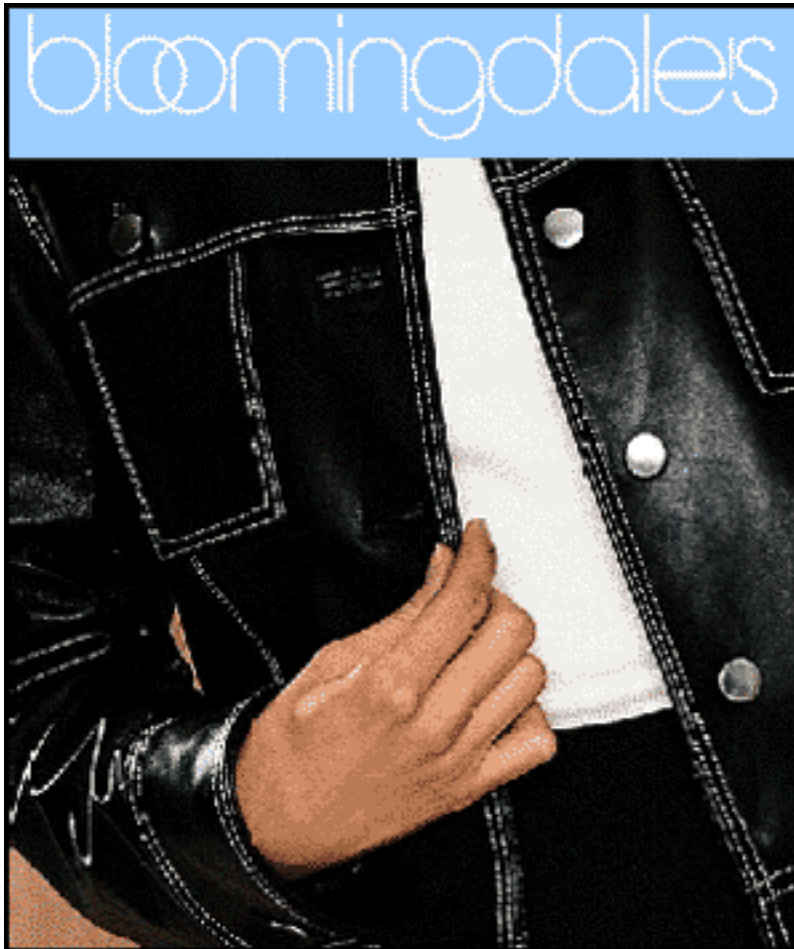



Ready to begin your analysis?...

1) See the “click here to zoom in or out”? You can click on that until you see each and every stitch.

After a couple of levels of zooming in...

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A little menu bar, , let's me zoom in or out, move up-down-left-right, and return to the original, quickly and smoothly. Terrific technology from mgisoft.com -- it satisfies the need to inspect the goods as closely as desired.

No doubt about it... Bloomie's understands **how important pictures are** -- from showing good-looking humans wearing the clothes, to allowing super-detailed inspection. **But how do you explain the copy?...**

Leather jean-style jacket

High-quality lambskin. Off-white topstitching, silvertone button front. Button yoke pockets, banded hem. By Margaret Godfrey.

I can see all that from the wonderful photos. Unfortunately, all I can ask is...

“So what?”

And if I was the copywriter, I'd keep asking that precious question until I came up with **real benefits**. I'd write and re-write until the customer could virtually feel that jacket on her back.. until she could feel the appreciative glances... until she fell in love with that garment.

Great display. Poor words.

So-so results, I'm sure.



2) See the “email this item to a friend”? People don't normally e-mail sites (we all see this request far too often). But I **can** see people e-mailing **items** to a friend. So this is the right level to put this feature...

“June, saw this jacket at Bloomie's and thought it would look great on you.”

Nice use of the Net.



3) As usual, close with the specifications (price, size, color, quantity) and “add to my brown bag.”

Bottom line verdict... The “woman-wearing-jacket” photo and the zoomability come close to selling me. Great words would have pulled my credit card out. Sorry, my dear wife, these retailers just aren't up to separating me from my money.



1.8. Design and Usability... More Important Than Ever

Design and usability... and trust and likability -- take the time to build these key components into your online store site.

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Trust, likability and a good first experience set the stage for a lifetime customer.

And your customers' steadfast loyalty is what will nurture and grow your business.

Go back to the [Peapod Home Page](#) for a moment.

The greens make me feel “grocery.” The pea that makes the “O” in Peapod is clever and fits. The delivery truck and “delivering fresh food to your door” and “Your Personal Grocer and More” start it all off well.

All they have to do now is carry this design through the site. I trust them. I like them.

For some reason, when I see their Home Page...



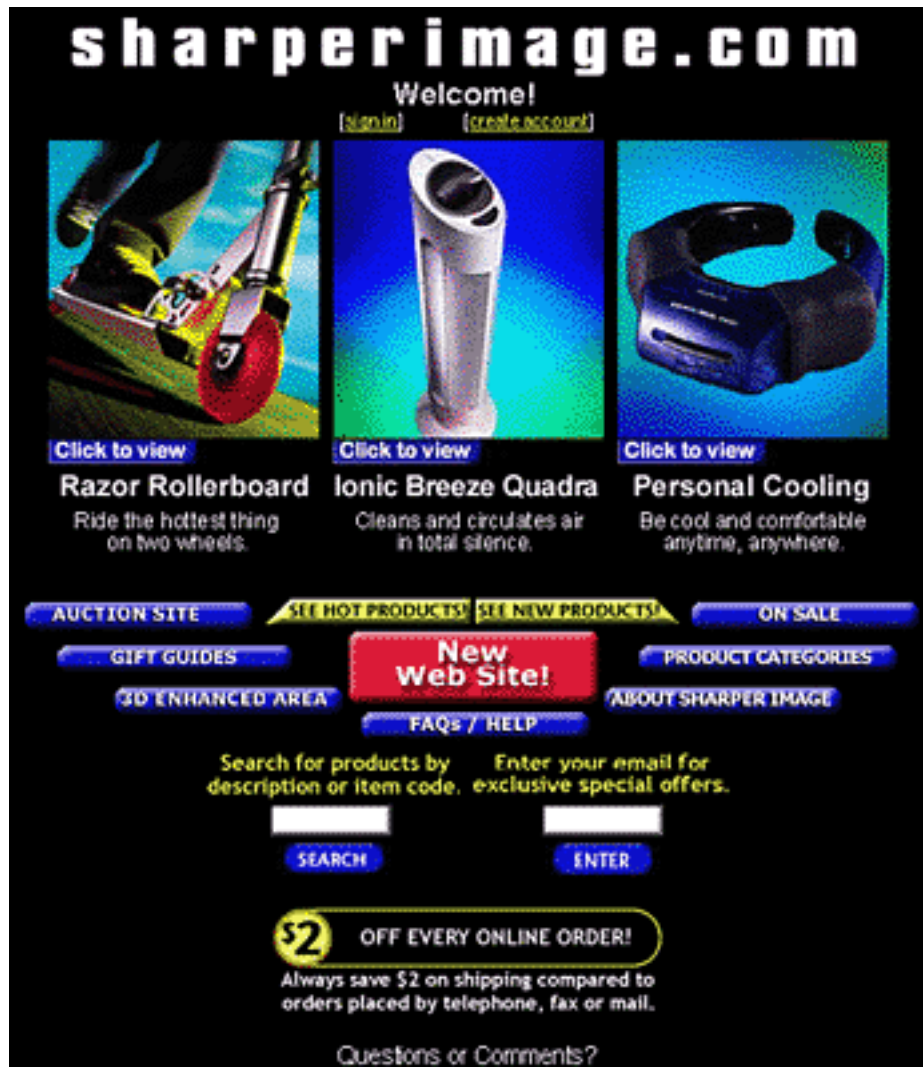
... I feel like buying a nice head of lettuce.



Compare this with a previous Home Page of **Sharper Image**.

What's your reaction?...

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Sharper Image.com

<http://www.sharperimage.com/>

Holy Mackerel! I'd tell you what I think of this Home Page, but my lawyers made me take it out. So let's soften it a little...

This site has nothing of the sharp, upbeat, cool-gadget feel that I associate with Sharper Image -- it should be called **Duller Image**.

The layout and design of the Web page is strictly high school level. Black backgrounds are deadly. The buttons and layout are amateurish.

Usability is poor. I have to click on a button just to see some "Product Categories" --

Store Volume... Same... But Different

a left margin directory (or across the top, if you don't have too many categories) is a **must**.

And what the heck is that big red button???... "New Web Site" -- does that mean I'm on the old one now?

Bad, bad start. This site just spent my offline good will. **I make a couple of heart-not-in-it-anymore clicks...**

... and leave.

Luckily, Sharper Image changed its Home Page!...

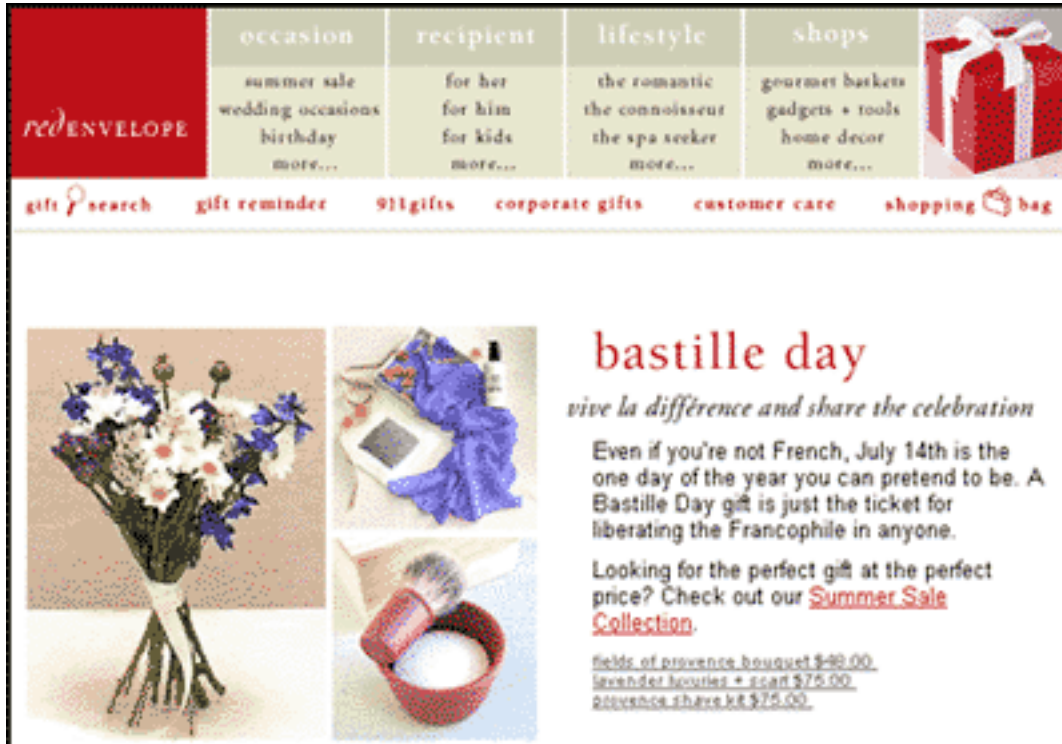


Now that's sharp!



One more example...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



RedEnvelope.com

<http://www.redenvelope.com/>

Red Envelope is a mid-traffic gift site. Most people still have not heard of them.

The design is nice... **subtle elegance**. Visitors will get a smart, sophisticated feeling by being here. That translates into a positive mindset.

Usability is terrific. They have organized their gifts according to...

- the occasion
- who's getting the gift
- lifestyle
- kinds of shops.

And, as you see, they are offering their version of a hot product... gifts from Provence, France, for Bastille day. Many months later, something more topical grabs center stage...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



In other words, they keep their site fresh by updating **seasonal or special-occasion** content. But the look-and-feel (the design and usability) stays the same. So yes, 10 out of 10 for consistency, solid usability and graphic impact. But...

The lack of a slogan is a big surprise for a site that gets so much right. And, without an opening paragraph, the Home Page is too subtle -- it needs to be backed up by a few more words (remember, they are **not** Bloomingdale's!).



The graphic above is what many 800x600 monitors will see. Below it, there's an **"About RedEnvelope"** button. Most people will miss that button. **If** they do click it (few people click "About us" buttons), buried in the midst of a lot of boring copy, there **are** a few nuggets...

- We understand the art of gift-giving, and seek to make the beauty and joy in giving as effortless and rewarding as possible.
- At RedEnvelope, your personalized message is printed on a gift card and carefully tucked inside a red envelope. It's a sign that the gift is special, and has been chosen with care.
- Gift-giving should be effortless, but it should also be meaningful. That's why RedEnvelope's exclusive collections include only the best gifts from around the world. We also commission talented artisans to create

one-of-a-kind pieces, available only from RedEnvelope,

This copy is a good example of [text vs. subtext](#). They should make the reader **feel/understand** these things through better copywriting (hope they read **MYWS!**). The raw material is good, however. Here's what I would do, on the Home Page...

Develop an elegant slogan about gift-giving, together with a single strong opening paragraph -- one that would crystallize this site instantly in every new visitor's mind. A confused or wondering visitor is not a good thing... think about yourself. When you know exactly **what's what...** aren't you happier and more receptive to more information?



Back to our developing example site, **GolfFig.com**. By now, you should be able to see the Home Page design in your mind...

- Our [directory of goods](#) appears on the left margin.
- We have **two “hot products”** to include in the middle.
- We still have room available, across the top and on the right hand side of the page, to include functions like...
 - drop-down navigation
 - search
 - your “New Figures” free e-zine
 - your “e-mail a hint to a friend” script
 - gift certificates
- Lay out the **name, slogan and opening paragraph** so these are the first things the eye sees. The design should be very high-end, classy, and emphasizing the feeling of passionate mysticism that you have for the game.
- As a small vendor, **work on trust**. Get BBBOnline to certify you. Create great content about each statuette. Great content creates trust and likability subconsciously. Let's use **GolfFig.com** as an example -- I could either list a bunch of figurines with a product number and price and order button. Or I could...

- Give each figurine's thumbnail sketch a charming name and a one-liner.
- Make each thumbnail photo link to an "actual size" photo, with more copy that tells a short story about each. Your dioramas of famous golf courses? Include the photo you took when **you** played at Pebble Beach. And the photo that your buddy took of you playing at St. Andrews.

In other stores, the thumbnail could link to a page that shows the product in super-detail, or perhaps, three different people having a blast using it -- supported by fun, exciting copy.

Each of these "large photo and copy" links should have an "Add to Shopping Cart" button, of course.

[**SIDEBAR**]

Consider zooming technology like MGI's **Universal Viewer...**



MGI

<http://www.mgisoft.com/>

... if it meets the needs of your customer and product. Be careful, though -- don't do it just to be cool. It must provide true sales value for the visitor considering your product.

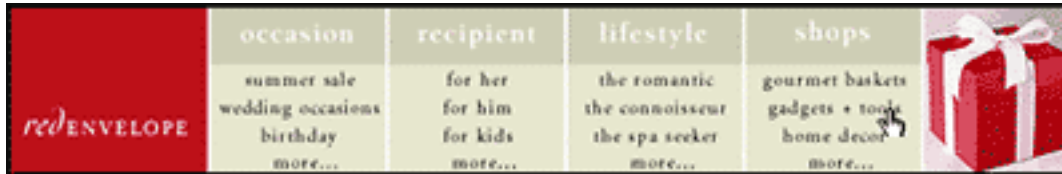
People buy from stores they like and trust. It's that simple.



1.9. 3-Click Navigation

OK, let's say my wife is on the Home Page of RedEnvelope.com, looking for a gift (for me, I hope). She sees that nice clear listing of categories and sub-categories...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



Red Envelope

<http://www.redenvelope.com/>

Under shops, she sees the category of “gadgets & tools”... **CLICK #1** takes her to a direct choice of gadgets or tools...



CLICK #2 on “tools” takes her to a catalog page of tools (they should try for stronger captions)...



And then!... She spies **the** gift. **CLICK #3** takes her to an enlarged photo and description...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



stanley home + auto tool set

Supposedly, anything with ratchets is a great gift for men. Stanley's home and auto tool set comes with a complete set of them, plus sets of Phillips screwdrivers, regular screwdrivers, and hex keys. Also included are pliers and a pair of wire cutters that can chop or strip just about anything that comes their way. Compact urethane case is lightweight, portable, and perfect for the home or car trunk. A surprisingly affordable set from the first name in tools. **\$42.00.** With giftwrap \$46.50.

click image to enlarge

[SIDEBAR]

She can even click on the photo to get a wonderfully detailed, larger photo -- a great (necessary) feature.

Here's the general principle of store navigation via product directory...

In your drill-down directory of products, 3 clicks must get your customer to the product. No more.

Of course, you can bend the rules a little. Let's analyze **Egghead.com's** navigation...



EGGHEAD .COM

NEW PRICE DROP! TWO packages to choose from starting at **\$429⁹⁹**

HP XE783 System includes additional 54MB memory, CD-RW, extended service plan, and much more!

MyEgghead Help Home Hardware Software Networking Accessories Office Electronics Clearance After Work Auction

Register | Buy on Account | Order Status | Customer Service | Reference | Business | Government | Education

We want to buy Norton AntiVirus, so **CLICK #1** upon **Software**, which takes us to...

Store Volume... Same... But Different

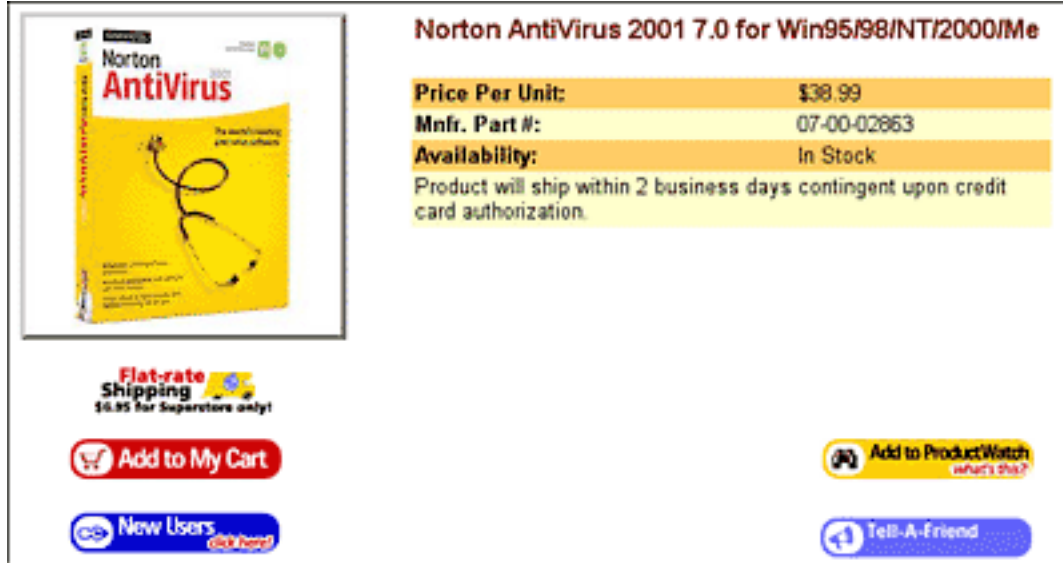


EggHead.com
<http://www.egghead.com/>

Notice that Egghead takes the opportunity to display best sellers (for a given category) while you're drilling down. This is a smart use of the 80-20 rule. Since most people are looking for bestsellers, odds are they will find what they want. This avoids the need to click to the next sub-category -- instead, you shortcut straight to the product.

And there it is... first row, on the right. If it was not there, two more clicks would almost certainly take us there. The next subcategory would have shown it and then one more click to show the product...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



Norton AntiVirus 2001 7.0 for Win95/98/NT/2000/Me

Price Per Unit:	\$38.99
Mnfr. Part #:	07-00-02863
Availability:	In Stock

Product will ship within 2 business days contingent upon credit card authorization.

Flat-rate Shipping
\$5.95 for Superstore only!

[Add to My Cart](#) [Add to Product Watch](#)
what's this?

[New Users](#) [Tell-A-Friend](#)
click here!

[SIDEBAR]

I personally like their hierarchical listing...

You are here ► [Egghead.com](#) ► [Superstore](#) ► [Document/Imaging/Management](#)

Remember this important bottom line for your product directory...

Arrange your directory so that your visitor can drill-down to any desired product in **3 clicks, or less**.

• Other types of navigation

i) Search Engines -- Some people don't like drilling down. I call these people the "I feel lucky" type. They'd rather search for an item and see if they can find their quarry on the first try. So **do** provide a search function.

ii) Drop-down menus -- These are useful, but they don't seem to be too popular with online stores. Menus can be great shortcuts. Your drop-down should list your first-level categories and their sub-categories. The user selects one of the sub-categories, which gets her there in "one click" instead of two.

Store Volume... Same... But Different

iii) **Site maps** -- These let you divide a store graphically into major departments and sub-categories. Since you have to click to a Site Map, you don't save a click. Wait a second...

I'm thinking mathematically. But guess what? **Many people think in pictures.** Which is why I don't design navigation for myself.

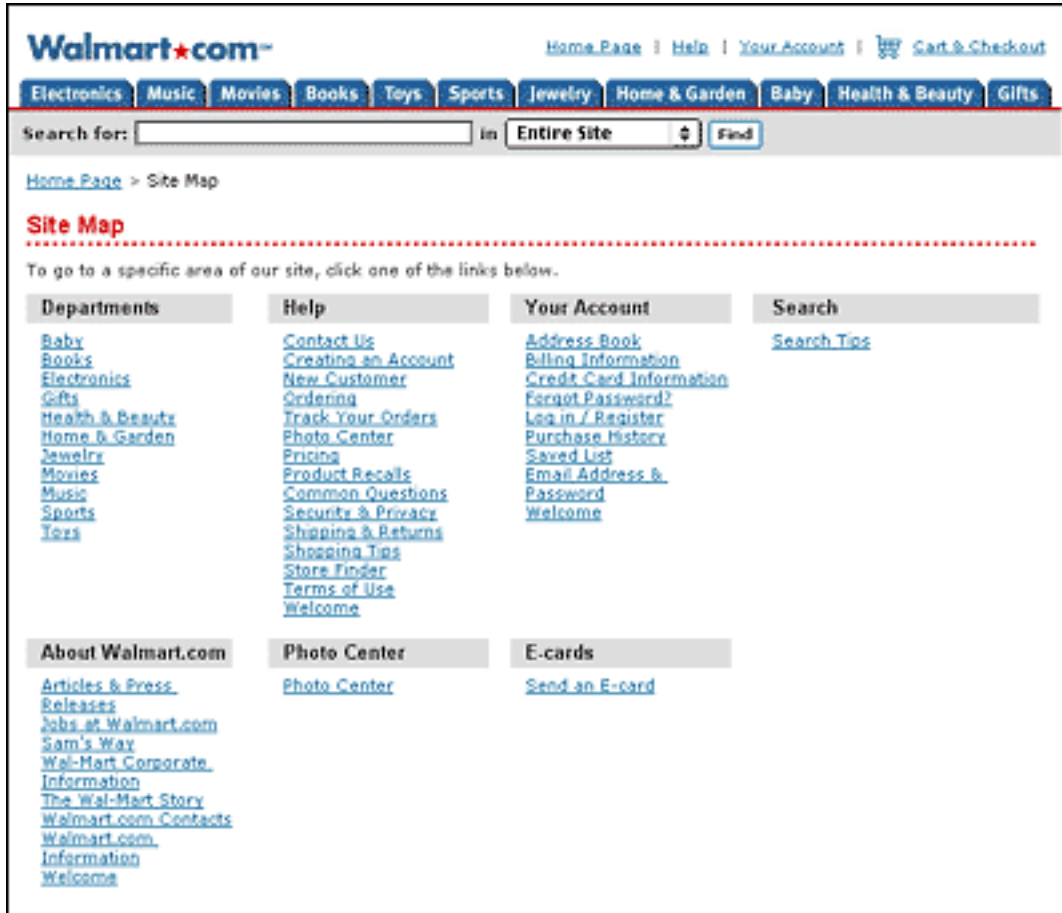
Do you think picture-loving folks would like this site map?...



Remember... **you are not the customer!** And there are **many different types** out there in cyber world. If you only provide one way to navigate, you're hurting your site's usability... **which means frustration...**

... which means you're killing sales. Now for the second part of the mini-quiz. Take a look at the updated Walmart sitemap. Which one is more intuitive?...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



iv) The rest of the page

If you use the **left margin** for a text directory (my favorite arrangement), you've got the top and bottom available to handle remaining functions. Or if you use the **top** of the page, you've got the left margin.

I'm not a big fan of providing a **different** set of links along the bottom than along the top. The two should match. People get confused easily. The alternative is to save the bottom space for copyright notification.



Time for a quick update. **So far your Home Page has...**

- your logo, slogan, and opening paragraph(s)

Store Volume... Same... But Different

- a few “hot products” and/or special offers
- directory (preferably left margin).



Here are some fairly common store functions to include (I've boldened the “must appear” ones)...

- About us
- **Affiliate Program**
- Catalog Request
- **Checkout (Shopping Cart)**
- **Closeouts/Bargain Basement/Overstocks**
- **Contact us**
- Customer support (order tracking, privacy policy)
- **E-zine subscription**
- Gift Certificates

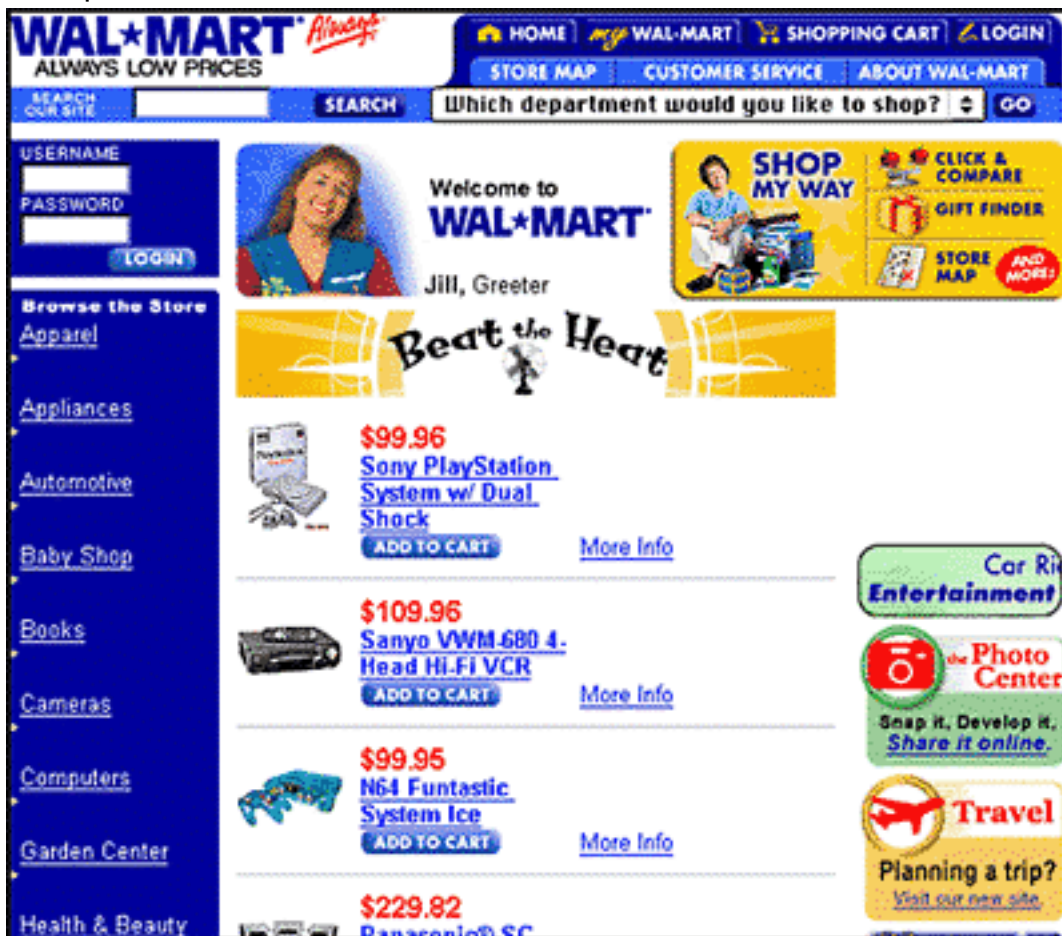


- Gift Reminder
- **Guarantee & Return Policy**
- Hierarchical Depiction of Location
- Login
- Loyalty Program
- New Releases
- **Search box**

Store Volume... Same... But Different

- Special features unique to you (ex., bridal or gift registry)
- Site Map
- Tell a Friend
- What's Hot
- What Other People are Buying

Avoid the temptation to create a right column so you can jam 'em all in. If you do use a right margin, make it a strong, clean, graphic presence. Take Wal-Mart, for example...



Wal-Mart

<http://www.walmart.com/>

Store Volume... Same... But Different

Text directory on the left. Hot products in the middle. Clean, simple graphics on the right for special promotions, offers, etc. A lot of stuff, but pretty clean. And they **do** use that underused effective navigational aid, the drop-down menu. **(Which department would you like to shop?)**

Unfortunately, some designers don't know a good thing when they've got one, so the updated site isn't nearly as intuitive, and it's much busier...

Walmart.com Home Page | Help | Your Account | Cart & Checkout

Electronics Music Movies Books Toys Sports Jewelry Home & Garden Baby Health & Beauty Gifts

Search for: in **Entire Site** Find

Great Values for Summer Camping
Gear up for fun in the great outdoors! From sleeping bags and tents to lanterns and air beds, we've got a super selection at Every Day Low Prices.
★ See all our [camping gear](#).

New customer? [Click here](#) to get started!

No interest for 3 months
When you buy \$200 or more with the Wal-Mart Credit Card until June 30.
minimum payments required [see details](#)

Walmart.com PhotoCenter
Get great prints from your digital photos

Specialty Shops

Digital Camera Collection
See the latest models from the top brands

Pools
Make a splash with pools and accessories

Atlantis
Take home the adventures of "Atlantis"

Top Picks for Summer
20-Piece Value Pack: 6 Strip Steaks, 6 Chicken Breasts, 8 Steak Burgers.
\$50.07

Electronics
[Digital Photography](#), [Computers & Peripherals](#), [TV, DVD & Video](#), [Portable Audio](#), [Personal Electronics](#), [Phones](#), and more

Music
[Best Sellers](#), [New Releases](#), [Coming Soon](#), and more

Movies
[DVD Movies](#), [VHS Movies](#), and more

Books
[Best Sellers](#), [New Releases](#), [Coming Soon](#), and more

Toys
[Pools & Outdoor Play](#), [Preschool & Infant](#), [Electronic Toys & Learning](#), [Video Games](#), [Dolls](#), [Building Sets & Models](#), and more

Sporting Goods
[Bikes & Scooters](#), [Camping](#), [Field Gear](#), [Exercise & Fitness](#), [Sports Equipment](#), [Golf](#), and more

Jewelry
[Bracelets](#), [Earrings](#), [Rings](#), [Necklaces](#), [Bathstones](#), [Watches](#), and more

Home & Garden
[Vacuums](#), [Small Appliances](#), [Housewares](#), [Bed & Bath](#), [Furnishings](#), [Lawn & Garden](#), [Home Improvement](#)

Baby
[Baby Care](#), [Nursery](#), [Strollers & Car Seats](#), [Gifts](#), and more

Health & Beauty
[Massagers & Soaps](#), [Shaving](#), [Fragrances](#), [Humidifiers & Air Purification](#), [Health](#), [Beauty](#), and more

Amazon.com in the past used text in the right margin, and got away with it. But just barely...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



Amazon.com

<http://www.amazon.com/>

Note the simple tab navbar on the top, the text down the left margin and a search function. The very hot products were in the middle. Other important offers and hot items were on the right. You can see that the text was a bit busy in that right margin.

And, after a revision, nothing much has changed, except for the “hot items” and the re-grouping of that huge collection of nav tabs...

Store Volume... Same... But Different



Resist the urge to do major renovations. **Web shoppers just want to get the job done... so do NOT re-arrange the furniture unless you must!**

The take-away lesson...

- Use at least 2 navigational methods (directory and search = the minimum)
- 3 clicks to product
- identify a small number of critical functions and then carefully design the rest of the page accordingly.
- once it works, leave it alone -- don't change it.



1.10. The Path to the Checkout

A pathway is the process by which you get your MWR. There's not much of a sales pathway for an online store. Pathways apply more to the process of selling one or two products, or a service.

An online store really only has the luxury of an **opening paragraph** (max. of three). Then one of your **hot products** or **special offers** should entice an order. If not, it should at least **get a click into your directory of products**.

Unknown stores need to offer a **guarantee**, upfront on the Home Page. Make it as generous as possible.

Do provide an **About us** link on your Home Page. Frame your disclosure according to customers' needs -- not what your lifelong ambition has always been.



In general, an online store does **not** need a FAQ, Closer, or "Last Ditch Pitch."

Your shopping cart should do everything possible to close the sale. If your store sells **classic rock records**...



... like man, stay cool to the end. **But get the sale.**

Many people leave their carts abandoned... a majority, according to some studies. Make sure your **"Order Now"** button is front and center (i.e., unmissable).

And, for the customer's convenience, put a **Checkout** button on every single page of your site. It's a shame for someone to give up her shopping cart because she just can't click back to the checkout lane.



Other ideas to help avoid the disappointment of abandoned shopping carts...

1) Be creative with shipping costs. Absorb shipping costs for orders over a certain dollar amount to encourage bigger orders. For the more price-sensitive customers, bury part of the shipping costs in the actual price of the product. You'll win over folks that you might have lost.

And always offer **two** shipping options... more expensive and cheaper. For our cheaper method, we use regular mail -- no signature required. We have been burned so rarely by people who claim not to have received a package, that it is simply not worth the higher charge for "signature required" service.

2) Reduce customers' worry about their credit cards. Show your **Verisign certificate** and your **BBBOnline membership**. But don't make a huge deal about it, or you can increase anxiety. See our **MYSS! Order Page** for an example... <https://secure.sitesell.com/order.html>

3) Clearly explain your return policy. Include your policy with your Guarantee. The more generous you are, the more comfortable your customers will be. And let me reassure you... after dealing with tens of thousands of customers, I can tell you that 99.9% of people are decent folks who won't abuse your generous policies.



1.11. Checking Out... CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-kaCHING

Getting your checkout process "just right" is a critical task. And here's the ironic part... If you do it properly, **no one will even notice.** And that is just the way it should be!...

Your customer happily completes the purchase, without a hitch. **CLICK-KA-CHING!** You ship the product.

Great stuff! You've just completed the first step in what will be a long and mutually beneficial relationship.

A highly intuitive and usable checkout process is the final cog of the sale-clinching process.

Store Volume... Same... But Different

It makes little sense to spend all your time sourcing and stocking wonderful products, building a Web store that inspires confidence, and carefully writing brilliant copy, only to fumble the ball at the one-yard line.

But it seems to be happening a lot. Stores are reportedly cluttered with deserted shopping carts. Why?...

Usability. Or lack thereof. Plain and simple.

Visitors to your Web store, assuming they don't leave immediately from your Home Page, have two options...

- they select a product (add this product to cart). **CLICK!**
- they don't select a product

Those who select a product are **not** yet customers... they're **potential** customers. **Convert them. Close the sale.**



Okay, a quick recap...

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-kaCHING!

The first **CLICK** -- your potential customer hits the **Buy Now** or **Add to Cart** button.

So far, so good. But that first click isn't a buy. It's an **intent** to buy that sends your customer to a **Confirmation Page** -- she either "Checks Out" (pays for her product) or continues shopping. If she decides to shop some more, there are three possible outcomes...

- she either purchases another item, in which case the process repeats itself

or...

- she decides to check out

or...

- she leaves your site... one more abandoned shopping cart crashing around in

cyberspace. **What a waste of a good first CLICK!**

Your mission, should you decide to accept it (and you must!) is to eliminate the third possibility. Make the **Proceed to CheckOut** super-obvious. The **CheckOut** button must be prominent **on every page** of your site.

Sooner or later, that **Check Out** button brings us to our second **CLICK!** Complete her order in as few clicks as possible. Customer enters her shipping address and credit card info. And then, the moment of truth...

The third and final **CLICK-kaCHING!** She submits the order -- that click clears the credit card, generates a "Thank You" Page, and sends an automatic e-mail receipt/follow-up. And yes, **it is at this point...**



... that you may celebrate! You have a sale!

Bottom line... **3 clicks** from **Buy Now** to **Submit Order** is ideal. Every additional **CLICK** you add to the process **lessens the likelihood** of that most coveted **CLICK-kaCHING!**

[**SIDEBAR**]

Smart e-tailers like Amazon add each customer's information into a database, so they never have to enter it again. Very nice! Once you've made an initial purchase from Amazon, you can bypass all the tedious form-filling, and **buy with a simple one-click process...**



1.12. Check the Checkout

Test your checkout process for usability and then remove bugs and glitches.
Usability first...

Find someone, friend or relative who is similar to your target customer. Explain that he is **not** responsible for making a mistake -- any mistake using the site is **yours**.

Ask your volunteer to locate a widget, something you think that he would like to own. **Can he find it?** Then ask him to buy it. **Is the transaction smooth?**

Ask him to **verbalize** everything he does.

Repeat the exercise with two other people, one at a time (never test all three at once).

Listen very carefully to what your testers have to say. Note where they get stuck. Only help them if they **really** need a bypass.

Fix problem areas, then re-test with three more people.

This simple process will uncover all important usability issues.



Next step? Squish 'dem bugs!

Run test orders, especially test orders from foreign destinations, where address and ZIP code formats may differ. What's one of the most common errors on American sites? Zip code boxes that only accept five characters. Canada and other countries use more characters in their postal codes.

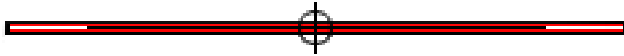
Try to break your order-taking system. Then get some friends to "bomb" it, too.

Verify that confirmation e-mails are sent, your backend reporting is OK, etc., etc.



All clear? Great! **You've just completed your own usability testing and technical stressing of your store!**

An ounce of prevention is worth ten pounds of cure. Sadly, you could easily lose several orders before you ever discover that something is wrong. Stay ahead of the game. Fix mistakes now!



1.13. Re-write⁴ -- Tighten and Activate

In the main volume of **MYSS! 2002**, I said...

“Whoa! You’re not done yet! Weren’t you wondering what that **“Re-write⁴”** means?

It means “re-write to the power of 4.” Re-write. Then re-write it again and again, **and again.**

In other words...



... cut, chop, axe, & prune.

Rewriting is the hard work. Truly hard work.

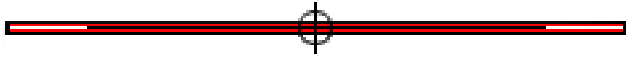
Tighten, chop, activate. Make it so tight that it squeaks... sharp, active, benefit-packed.”

Same goes for your store. Spend a couple of weeks away from your copy. Then re-visit all your words. I guarantee you’ll find some copy that seemed brilliant at the time, **but now leaves you wondering...**



... “What the heck was I thinking?”

Polish 'til it simply can't shine any brighter.



1.14. 10-Point Store Checklist

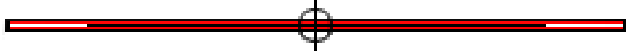
Finished writing, re-writing, polishing and honing? Perfect. Now check to make sure everything is geared towards getting your **MWR...**

- ✓ **1)** Is the store itself a great **product**? Sharp, creative grouping of products, originally presented?
- ✓ **2)** Is your opening paragraph effective? Does it fire that USP-gun? Does it ignite passion?
- ✓ **3)** Can your user reach every product in 3 clicks or better?
- ✓ **4)** Is there an effective use of photos, thumbnails leading to full-size? Do they show people using the product?
- ✓ **5)** Is the copy solid and customer-focused? Strong use of benefits?
- ✓ **6)** Does your visitor understand **exactly what she gets**? Don't take this for granted.
- ✓ **7)** Have you eliminated your customer's **risk** (i.e., guarantee, trial download, etc.). Is that clear to your customer?
- ✓ **8)** Have you set at least two creative Backup Responses?
- ✓ **9)** Does it have a strong look and feel, seamless usability?

Store Volume... Same... But Different

✓ **10)** Is there a smooth checkout (CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-kaCHING) process?

Everything set? You're one step away...



1.15. Pre-Live To ShowTime

You're set to go live and start phasing in operations. See the following sections in the main volume of **MYSS! 2002...**

[Html and Usability Testing](#)

[Showtime!](#)

[Build Targeted Traffic](#)

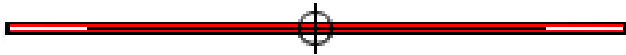
Congratulations! You are now a bona fide e-tailer.

Better than that, you've taken all the proper steps to make your online store successful!



2. Surefire Store-Selling Tactics

Don't expect to sit back and wait for thousands of customers to merrily deliver your **MWR. Work to make it happen**, even after you start to build some decent traffic. Use these surefire sales-generating, cash-register-ringing techniques...



2.1. HTML Formatted E-mail

I've talked repeatedly about the importance of [your own e-newsletter](#). It's the same for online store merchants... but once again... it's different.

The "single product" entrepreneur can get away with a content-rich text-formatted e-zine. But a store merchant **must format her newsletter in HTML** to get the maximum benefit.

HTML e-mail is far more visually appealing. You can send a daily special, or any page of your online store, directly to a customer's inbox. Customers can buy directly from the e-mail... simply by clicking the **Buy Now** button.

Yes, a well-designed HTML newsletter is efficient, attractive, and highly functional. It also provides low cost advertising.

Let's take a closer look...



2.1.1. How to Get the Sign-up

Put your newsletter sign-up front and center. Make it a priority on your site. Every subscription is a potential future sale and long term customer. **So entice visitors to apply... work for those subscriptions!** Offer a bonus of some sort -- maybe a contest entry?

Here's a great example of **NOT** working for an e-mail address. The subscription notice -- **Get Email Updates** -- is stuck in one of the last places anyone looks on a

page. See how long it takes you to find it in the graphic below...



Macy's

<http://www.macys.com/>

Now imagine how much longer it would have taken you, if I had not circled it for you! And what if I told you that most monitors don't even show that row of buttons? They are buried "below the fold."

Finally, why confuse matters with a set of buttons on the bottom, that are different, but overlap some of the links at the top of the page? That whole bottom row needs to be deleted, and the **"Get Email Updates"** should become **Join Buyers Gold Club** and be placed in a prominent spot up top .

A few rounds of **usability testing** would improve this page substantially. And, as you've seen, it's easy to do.



Make your sign-up as simple as possible -- just the e-mail address for now. Resist the temptation to compile a list of customer demographics. You'll alienate your

customers, and lose subscriptions.

Macy's marketing group got a little carried away in their desire to know their customer...

get news you can use

Sign up for macys.com email updates.
You'll get a customized first look at key trends and news about sales, so you can stay on top of trends and save both time and money!

Please fill in your contact information . . .
*denotes required fields.

Email: *
Email Again: *
First Name: *
Address:
Address Line 2:
City:
State: * -----None-----
Zip: *
Age: * -----None-----
You must be at least 13 years of age to use this service.
Gender: * ☐ Female ☐ Male

... and click the topics that interest you.

☐ What's Hot in Women's Fashion
☐ What's Hot in Men's Fashion
☐ What's Hot in Beauty
☐ What's New From Your Favorite Brands
☐ Perfect Gift Ideas

What's the result of a form like this? **No one fills it in!** When people do, studies have shown that a high percentage lie.

Do you see the part of the form where it says...

***denotes required fields.**

Never make anything in a form optional. Why not? Because many people never see it's optional. So they think the form is much longer than it really is. And those that **do** see that it's optional don't volunteer the information. So what's the point?

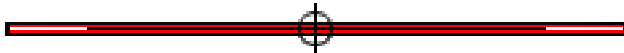
Macy's competitors, Lands' End and Bloomingdale's, offer much simpler sign-ups. I guarantee that they get a higher sign-up rate. [K-I-S-S](#), remember?

The more "work" you make folks do, the more folks you'll lose along the way. Get the e-mail address for now. Once you capture that, you can show them a second screen that asks for their first name and perhaps their special area of interest.

That way, if she refuses to supply any more info, you still have her e-mail address. And once she's on your mailing list, you can **start to build a relationship**. Perhaps later on, you'll get more information as her trust grows.

Pssst! Don't forget to make sure your **Privacy Policy** is accessible.

OK, now that you've got the sign-up...



2.1.2. Make It Work!

The design of your newsletter must be **clean and professional**. Your customer sees this in her e-mail software, not on a full-blown browser window. E-mail windows are often smaller and the HTML takes longer to come in. So keep it nice and tight, not big and elaborate.

Test, test, test.

The biggest problem with HTML formatted e-mail is **browser incompatibilities**. Try...

- MS Outlook and Outlook Express -- by far, the most important e-mail software. This is followed, all with less than 10% of the e-mail market, by the following second-tier players...
- Eudora
- AOL -- clunky software with formatting problems. Does your mailing system address AOL?
- Netscape
- Hotmail

- Yahoo!

HTML e-mail is like sending a small piece of your store bit by bit. Always have a special reason for a sendout, or you risk the “delete” button.

Do this well, and you will have solved the problem of **what to do if your customer won't visit your store...**

Have your store visit her!

Speaking of which, Lands' End just visited my mail box...



Notice how bright and cheery this page is? Notice how your eye immediately zooms into this e-mail? Lands' End is doing a fine job of drawing you into the page.

As I progress down through the newsletter, I'm pulled to **Bargains Abound in Overstocks...**


OVERSTOCKS


BARGAINS ABOUND IN OVERSTOCKS!
Join the daily treasure hunt on our [OVERSTOCKS PAGES](#). Fresh bargains are added every Wednesday & Saturday.

Come see what's making the rounds

On The **COUNTER**

[ON THE COUNTER®](#)


\$29
[Shoulder Satchel](#)


SAVE 35%
[Denim Quilt](#)

[ON THE COUNTER®](#) is bursting with bargains! You'll find over 100 new items previously liquidated to VERY LIMITED numbers — all at their LAST (and impressively reduced) price. When the "counter" rolls, prices drop another 25% off the initial markdown price, then 50%, then the final maximum of 75% off — if anything's left. Better get grabbin'!

[NOT QUITE PERFECT®](#) is where we feature items that didn't quite meet our demanding Lands' End quality standards. In most cases, the flaw is undetectable to the untrained eye. Grab your magnifying glass and see for yourself!

Do I feel like "joining the daily treasure hunt" on their Overstock pages? You bet I do.

CLICK!

Lands' End is trying hard to get my e-mail address and to encourage me to look around its store.

And if the temptation of overstocks doesn't do it, the next paragraph promises discounts up to 75% off regular prices. Still not curious? Maybe the "Not Quite Perfect" section will do it.

You know what they say... **"Everybody loves a bargain."**

Only one goal here, right? To persuade me to check out the store!



2.2. No Surprises!

Your customer...



... doesn't like surprises! She must remain confident throughout the entire buying process. Each surprise cuts her confidence, which in turn cuts your chances of making a sale.

Is your BIG SPECIAL, advertised on your Home Page, back ordered? Your visitor is no longer surprised. She's mad. Say bye-bye to that sale... and to that potential customer.

Be prepared and open...

- If an item not stocked or ready for immediate shipment, let your customer know!
[See how Amazon does it!](#)
- Post return policies clearly.
- Post shipping policies, both for national and international orders.
- Offer a risk-reversal offer -- "If you're not happy for any, and I mean any reason, please return your item for a prompt refund."
- Post contact information in a prominent place.

There is a time and a place for surprises, but online shopping is not one of them.



2.3. Reassure Your Customer

Reassure your customer immediately, the instant she sets eyes in your store. Here are just a few ideas to get you started...

1) Post customer testimonials

You don't often see testimonials in stores. Are testimonials less important for a online store?

If you are a nationally recognized retailer, probably not. For the rest of us, however, the customer will worry about...

- her personal information being respected
- her credit card information being secure
- fast and efficient fulfillment
- what to do if her choice is back-ordered, damaged in shipping, or if the wrong product is shipped
- inferior customer service.

How do you relieve the stress? Share what others say about you.



2) In [Certification Builds Sales](#), I discussed how netrepreneurs could enjoy added credibility by joining one of the "trust" certification programs on the Web. This is equally true for the online store merchant, especially for those who don't have a highly visible national brand.

Privacy and security are top on the list of concerns for most surfers these days, so be sure to address these issues effectively! Display your **Verisign or Thawte logo** proudly on your Order Page.

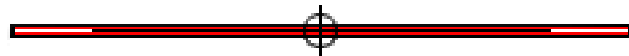


3) **Offer well-known brand name items that the customer is sure to be familiar with** -- This is a credibility builder, in and of itself. Offer lesser-known items, and you'll have much greater difficulty convincing the visitor that yours is a viable business. Of course, only do this if it fits your store concept.

4) Reply to all inquiries promptly and courteously -- optimally within a few hours, but **absolutely** within 24! This is a very simple way to rise above the competition, and build that bond of confidence with your future customer.



Think like your customer. Think back to the old days when you made your first online purchase -- what concerns did you have? What issues had to be addressed by the merchant before you clicked **Buy Now?** Put a comforting cyber-hand around your customer's shoulder -- **reassure her every step of the way, from Home Page entry to Customer Support.**



2.4. Smart Use of the Net

The best **bricks-and-mortar** stores have terrific, in-store support. They can point you to similar items that cost less. They know which products have the features that you seek. They can quote great reviews.

Good news! You can use the Net to do the same.

More and more store-building software packages ([more on these later](#)) provide special features that only the big boys have offered, up to now...

- **Post product reviews from customers** -- This is actually way better than anything you could get in an offline store. Real customers tell you what you need to know. See how Amazon does it...



Amazon.com

<http://www.amazon.com/>

Just search for a book you know and check out the reviews. By posting all product reviews, positive and negative, Amazon provides a valuable service to its customers. It also establishes its own integrity. This, of course, promotes even more sales!

- **Offer alternative suggestions.** Amazon does this very subtly, by displaying several lists...

- i) Customers who bought this product also bought...

- ii) Look for similar books by subject...

People are, of course, curious to see what others do. So they click. Then they find something else of interest. Great cross-sell!



There are other ways to do this as well, of course.

- **A good sales person will steer you in the direction of the right product for you.** Not long ago I ventured over to the local mega-hardware-plex on a quest for a cordless drill. I asked the salesman about a particular cordless model. He asked me what job I had planned. When I explained the job, he steered me to a more expensive, higher voltage model.

Was this an upsell? Absolutely. Nothing wrong with that because it was genuine. Showing me the right tool for the job was helpful -- my original choice was under-powered for that job

Can you do this online? Sure. Some software allows you to offer a link to higher-priced products in the same category. All you have to do is ask, "Are you sure this drill is right for the job?" Then offer two links...

- i) one to a pop-up page of content, matching drills to types of jobs

- ii) the other to a higher-powered drill.

A service like this provides real value to the customer -- as close to the "real world" as you can get!



- **Offer helpful tips and solutions that show you are in tune with your customer.**

For those of us (ahem!) who don't have a clue about what to buy for Valentine's Day, I'd love to see a site that offers...

Survey Results are In! Click here for...
Top Ten Valentine's Day Gifts for Women

What a fantastic place to start! And it's interesting, too. Odds are great that I'll find something wonderful for the woman in my life, right?

Save the day by making great, topical suggestions!



- **Compare features and specs.** Once you get a customer to compare, you're 80% of the way to the sale.

Watch a master do it at...



Futureshop

<http://www.futureshop.ca/>

Let's say you're out and about surfing for a new 32-36" T.V. You drill down to this list of models...




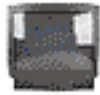


Home / Video / TVs / 32" - 36" TVs

Sort product by brand or price or check up to 8 products you wish to compare, then click the compare button at the bottom of the page.

COMPARE	PRODUCT DESCRIPTION	MFR.	PRICE	STATUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	JVC 36X550L36" TV	JVC	1,499.00	Out
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	JVC AV-32220 32" TV	JVC	899.00	Out
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RCA F32509 32" TV	RCA	799.00	Out
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RCA F32509 32" TV	RCA	899.00	Out
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RCA F35540 35" TV	RCA	1,199.00	Out
<input type="checkbox"/>	RCA F35509 35" TV	RCA	1,399.00	Out

Compare

Select the ones you want and click the **Compare** button...

Add Product			
Model Image			
Availability			
Manufacturer	RCA	RCA	JVC
Model	RCA F32668 32" TV	RCA F36648 36" TV	JVC 36D501 36" TV
Price	\$799.99 Buy	\$1199.99 Buy	\$1499.99 Buy
Mfr. Part Number	03801866	F36648	36D501
480i/480p 720p/1080i Capability	No	No	480i
A/V Input	No	No	Yes
Aspect Ratio	4x3	4x3	4:3
Audio Power	No	No	10 watts
BBE Sound Enhancement	No	No	Yes
Black Level Expansion	Yes	Yes	Yes
Channel Labeling	No	No	No
Comb Filter	Digital 3-Line	Yes	Digital Comb
Commercial Skip	Yes	Yes	No
Dark Tint Picture Tube	Yes	Yes	Yes
DBX Stereo	MTS Stereo with DBX	MTS Stereo with DBX	
Edge Correction	No	No	No

Very beneficial! It is so much easier than visiting each product's page, and making note of the features and specs. It adds real value to the customer's buying experience. And that builds good will.

OK, let's summarize...

- The customer sees which is the best product for him.
- The customer feels great about you, since you made it so easy.
- The customer is still on your site.

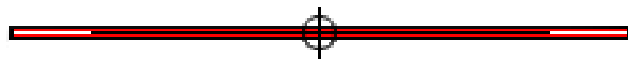
Think you have a good shot at this sale? Without a doubt!

And that's the name of the game.



But don't stop at this point...

Always, always, always... improve your customer's experience and simultaneously move him closer to the sale.



2.5. Promote Special Offers and Incentives

Many, perhaps most, of your customers do not come to your store specifically to buy something. That's **your MWR**.

So catch wandering eyes, and draw them into your store with your page copy. Then turn those casual surfers into paying customers. How? Easy...

1) Place Web-optimized thumbnails of your most popular products on the Home Page. A customer on your Home Page is akin to an offline one who is standing on the sidewalk, peering in the front window. What gets him through the door? Simple -- an attractive product at a good price.

2) Provide special incentives for first time buyers. Absorb the shipping costs on the first purchase.

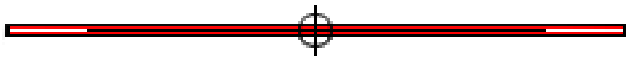
3) Trumpet your sale items on your Opening Page. A tried-and-true offline technique works online, too.

4) Offer time-limited sales. For example -- Today Only, Valentine's Day Heart-of-Hearts Sale, Easter Special, etc. Time limits convince visitors to buy now, rather than put it off until another time.

5) Offer a variety of shipping options. Never lose a sale due to a missing shipping option.

6) Exude warmth and friendliness. So many Web stores are brrrrr... cold. And distant. But **not** yours. Your store is **one-to-one personal**. In the real world, you'd talk **to**, not **at**, a visitor to your store. Do the same thing online.

7) Bundle products and accessories. This builds perceived value in the customer's mind, and increases the sale amount. For example, offer a deal on toner or cartridges with the sale of a printer.



2.6. Be Different

What makes your store stand apart from the zillions of others? What makes it unique? Is it the merchandise? The design and presentation? Atmosphere? Meticulous attention to customer service? All four?

Point is... there **MUST be something unique about your store** that sets you apart from your competitors. More than that, this **differentiator** must add value to your customer's shopping experience and make her more likely to **choose you** over a competitor.

Stroll through your local mall. Many merchants are in direct competition for your time, attention, **eyes and money!** Which ones stand out? The ones **that make a difference to you.**

Stores like Sears don't need to differentiate. The "Sears" brand is well known and respected. It has a section that sells teen clothes and skateboards. But hey, guess where my daughter wants to shop... a nearby store called Freedom. It's very hip, kid-oriented, sharper styles (and higher prices), and totally cool sales people on the floor.



For the small retailer, that point of difference is what allows you to beat the big guys... in your niche. You must...

- **target a niche audience**
- **provide a unique and stimulating presentation**
- **provide a unique atmosphere**
- **provide a unique product selection**

For the online store, you must **narrow** the focus of your store's product line. The e-landscape is strewn with the remnants of "dot-bombs" that tried to be "all things to all women." Instead of **Pets.com**, launch **Parrot-Paradise.com** -- then master that niche.

Differentiate... or die.



2.7. Change The Front Window Often

Okay, back to the local mall. See how the front window displays change according to...

- the season
- changes in stock or fashion
- special holidays or celebrations
- sales-oriented promotions

The window pulls you over to the store. You peer inside. Still interested? You enter!



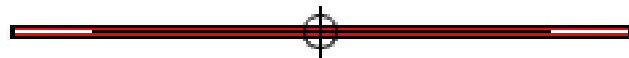
Do the same online!

A new Home Page keeps your site **fresh and up-to-date**. There's nothing worse than still offering Mother's Day gifts by the time Father's Day rolls around.

Shake up the products on the front page every week or two. Do major re-modellings for special occasions -- holiday celebrations, changing seasons, that sort of thing. Hot, topical items have a good chance at an immediate sale, and special promotions pull your customer deeper into your store.

[**SIDEBAR**]

No splash page, please. This adds an extra step. No barriers, right?



2.8. Fast, Efficient Fulfillment

What's the retail (offline) versus e-tail (online) shopping tradeoff?

Retail	E-tail
Entertaining, high-touch	Boring, functional
Time-consuming (travel, etc.)	Fast
Price???	Price???
Immediate fulfillment	Wait to receive

Let's take a look at the last comparison. Customers are impatient beasts. They want it **now**.

If you're selling digital-based goods, no problem! Download and you've got it. This is the Net at its best -- it's **more** than a communications medium. It becomes a frictionless, free distribution medium, too.



But for hard goods, hmmm...

Your eyes grow bleary from staring at a small sub-standard monitor. You add a shiny new 21" Samsung Monitor to your cart and pay for it. Sheesh, if you were offline, you'd be driving it home with you!

But online? There's going to be a wait. This is a **huge** barrier. People aren't used to waiting. There's no way around this one. So you'll have to attack it head-on.

So yes... offer overnight delivery. If it's a high ticket item, absorb the cost if possible. Downplay the wait...

No need to drive to the store, find what you want, pay more, drive all the way home. Just click "Buy Now" -- it'll be at your front door in a jiffy!

Here's the take-away lesson. Attack this big negative head-on. **OVERdeliver on the fulfillment end of your business...**



... and you'll get people talking, and coming back for more!



2.9. Other Keys to a Successful Store

There are, of course, many other points that you **must get right** for your store to become a success, such as [automation](#) and [customer support](#). These are all well covered in the main site-selling volume of **MYSS! 2002**. Since the concepts remain the same, there's no need to cover them here.

However, there is one key point left to cover...

... store-building requires special tools.

Let's find the best ones for you...



3. Building Your Store... Virtual Hammers and Nails

The successful online store delicately balances compelling copy, fantastic photos, and unique product selection, all within the sometimes rigid framework of store-building software. Depending on your financial resources, you may be somewhat restricted. In general, the cheaper the solution, the more restrictions there are in place. The good news is that **even inexpensive software can produce acceptable results.**

Store-building software categories break down as follows...

- [**Free Web Store Template Providers**](#)

Copy-and-paste store-building, at a reasonable cost.

- [**Online Malls**](#)

Simplest way to immerse yourself in multi-product e-commerce. Everything is done for you -- credit card processing, the works.

- [**Shopping Cart Software**](#)

Sufficient for small to medium sized businesses.

- [**Store-Building Packages**](#)

One level up from shopping cart software.

- [**E-commerce Servers**](#)

For the big boys and girls!

Our task now is to analyze each of these categories and find the best solution for you...



3.1. Free Web Store Template Providers

Web store templates are the simplest, easiest and cheapest way to get a complete Web store up and running in no time flat. The entire process is done online, usually through a series of wizard-driven templates, without any technical knowledge required by the retailer.

Your new Web store is often hosted on the provider's server. Secure payment options, shopping cart software -- everything you need for a blossoming e-biz is usually available with these packages!

Downside?

You have limited control over the look and feel of your site. The result? Your Web store looks like others.

Can you handle that? I think so, since it's unlikely that a consumer sees (or remembers!) a similar-looking store.



Upside?

The price is right! **Free!**

Sort of. There is no Santa Claus. Providers of free Web store service have to generate income somehow -- big surprise, eh? Most find a way to upgrade you to a paying customer. Still, if you're on a shoestring, it's worth checking out...



Bigstep

<http://www.bigstep.com/>

Vital Statistics... You must use **Bigstep's** credit card service (Cardservice International). The cost is US\$24.95 a month, plus \$0.20 per transaction, 2.35% discount rate, and a \$0.15 batch fee that is charged for each day you process orders. Bigstep has the "best of breed" store-builder in this category.



eCongo

<http://www.econgo.com/>

Vital Statistics... All the sites look very similar. eCongo's merchant partner (First Data) charges a monthly \$34 processing fee, a \$10 monthly "gateway" fee, \$.30 per transaction, with a discount rate of 2.49%. A listing in their shopping directory is not worth much, since no one comes here to shop.



FreemERCHANT

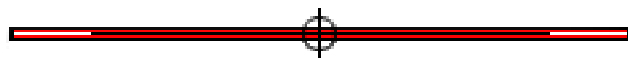
<http://www.freemERCHANT.com/>

Vital Statistics... FreemERCHANT makes its money through partnerships, and by referring you to value-added service providers. The FreemERCHANT service allows existing product lists (stored in database/spreadsheet form) to be uploaded to your new site. Sample Web sites look decent -- this the only service of these three that doesn't paste its own banners all over the host merchant's site!



Bottom line... You'll end up paying if you want to have a full, credible, domain-based store with credit-card-clearing capabilities. Unfortunately, not one of these has any kind of effective traffic-building programs. So you must supplement with a [Theme-Based Content Site](#) to build targeted traffic to your new store.

Speaking of traffic, malls provide that for you...



3.2. Malling-it Online

In the bad old days... there were no malls. My mother used to drive downtown, find a parking space, scurry through a variety of winter elements as she shopped, etc., etc. Yes, shopping, **if you care to remember...**



... was a bit of a task.

But along came the mall. Set on the outskirts of cities, the mall is home to dozens, even hundreds of shops and services, all under one roof. And it is surrounded by a massive parking lot -- **the ultimate in convenience.**

Benefits worked both ways. Consumers gained by having every conceivable retailer within a very short walk. Retailers gained by automatic exposure to huge passerby traffic.

The advantage is geographic. Everything, merchants and consumers, are close together. Does it apply to the Net?

Yes and no.

No... there is no such thing as geography. If I want to go somewhere else, I click. I am not compelled to buy at the mall because of a convenience factor.

Yes... if a mall can bring in significant traffic (ex., Yahoo!), and if I am a merchant, I will benefit from the spillover.



Visit a cybermall and you'll find a collection of commercial sites, all joined together under one... um... roof. You'll often find a common thread or theme running through the mall. They could be grouped together by...

- products/specialties
- industries
- theme
- specific geographic region
- no common ground other than the fact they're commercial.



Fashionmall.com

<http://www.fashionmall.com/>



Buyitonline.com

<http://www.buyitonline.com/>

<http://www.buyitonline.ca/>



EcoMall

<http://www.ecomall.com/>



Does the cybermall offer a way to further leverage the sales power of your own site?

That's a very good question. The short answer is "yes"... **if** the mall delivers the traffic you want ([use Alexa to determine traffic](#)).

See if your store fits a mall by reviewing this directory of malls...



CyberMall.com

<http://www.cybermall.com/>



Found a good fit? Here's what to look for while doing your due diligence...

1) Fast -- Do sites on the mall load quickly?

2) Attractive and intuitive layout

3) A catchy domain name

4) Great tech support -- Test it.

5) Traffic, traffic, traffic -- As mentioned above, use Alexa to check this.

6) Plenty of Promotion -- Does the mall offer coupons? Does it advertise?

7) Monthly fees, commissions, and credit card commissions -- What's it going to cost you?



Some malls also provide all the tools necessary to erect and maintain your business, from store-building software to merchant accounts. For example, Yahoo! Stores provides a comprehensive solution, as does BuyItOnline...



Yahoo! Store

<http://store.yahoo.com/>

And...



Buyitonline.com

<http://www.buyitonline.com/>

<http://www.buyitonline.ca/>



All in all, malls can be a good place for the newbie to get some toes wet, or for an experienced e-tailer to start another profit center. But you must find a good fit that meets the [above criteria](#).

And malls are **not** cheap. **Eliminate dependency on mall traffic by building your own through a [Theme-Based Content Site](#).**



3.3. Shopping Cart Software... The Basics

If you are offering many products spread out over several product lines, you will need shopping cart software to make ordering as easy as possible for your customers. As was said before, you have to make every part of the buying process fast and easy... especially ordering.

If you offer many different products, it's just too awkward for your customer to order using an [HTML-to-CGI Response Form](#). Shopping cart software provides the interface necessary to make choosing and ordering from your many products an easy, intuitive task. **But...**



... this is a competitive arena, with many good and not-so-good products. It's a maze out there. To tackle this labyrinth, use the following checklist to help you decide...

✓ Do **not** choose a shopping cart software that requires customers to fill out a form just to put a product into their shopping carts. This interrupts and inhibits the purchase decision. Instead, a customer simply hits...

"Put this item into my shopping cart." See how simple that is?

The time to fill out a form is **after** they have finished shopping. Don't scare them off when they are only at the "put it into the cart" stage. In general, ask for **only** the information that you absolutely need, and **only when** you absolutely need it.

✓ Make it clear that adding to the shopping cart is **not** an order. The customer can always change her mind and take it out of the cart at any time before going to "check out."

✓ Make the **CheckOut** button “can’t miss,” too. The customer must clearly understand the difference between simply adding to the cart and “checking out.” Think real-world and translate this to online. Remember that **most people have never ordered online and do not understand what you take for granted.**



✓ Even though you have made the process so easy and clear that even a politician could use it, **include a HELP button.**

✓ **Minimize the number of clicks** from the time of adding an item to the shopping cart, until submitting the final order. The more clicks it takes, the more orders you’ll lose.

✓ Good shopping cart software **stores each first-time purchaser’s information.** After that, no need for your repeat customer to complete the “info form.” You already have it!

✓ Customer can click at any time to **review the shopping cart contents**, see what she’s placed in the cart, along with the price, taxes and running total (already calculated). Shipping address is already entered (if customer has been there before).



✓ Software ties in to your **inventory** and alerts customer to **out-of-stock, expected delay, etc.**

✓ It presents **shipping options** (give expected delivery date for each) with prices.

✓ Well-written software is **fast** (you need to have the processing power for this, of course).

✓ It must generate “Confirmation & Thank You” Pages and/or e-mail to confirm the order. Failure to do so creates insecurity in your customer, who might repeat the same order -- really creating a mess!

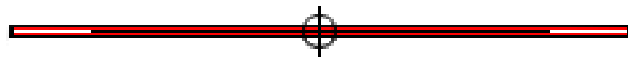


✓ You will be constantly updating your “catalog.” So the shopping cart must be **easy for you to update**. An easy-to-use Web browser interface must make it a snap to add, remove, or change products, prices, descriptions and sales copy, pictures, etc. **This is a must.**

✓ Price.

✓ Add other considerations that are special to your business and products...

Done! Now that you know how to assess the myriad of offerings, here are two good places to get started...



3.4. Shopping Cart Software... Recommendations

Based on the above criteria, here are two good shopping cart products...



Extropia.com's CGI Scripts

http://www.extropia.com/scripts/web_store.html

Web Store is a complete solution for selling products over the Internet. In the authors' words...

Store Volume... Building Your Store...

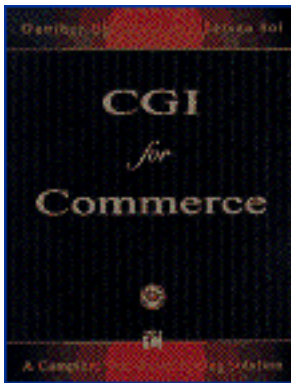
It is the culmination of our experience with Online Shopping Scripts. It adds all-new routines for error handling, order processing, encrypted mailing, frames, Javascript and VBscript and other goodies.

Download it from the above URL. It's well documented, so your techie should be able to install it on your site without too much trouble.



If you want an amazingly complete, detailed documentation on Web Store, see their book, **CGI For Commerce**. The book goes through Web Store in great depth, explaining the intricacies of order logic, PGP, shipping routines, and security on the Internet. It includes Perl scripts, SQL databases, Javascript and VBscript code, as well as finished Web pages. **The enclosed CD** contains multiple shopping cart examples in Perl 4 and 5, e-mail libraries, and HTTP libraries.

Highly recommended if you use the Web Store scripts...



CGI For Commerce

http://www.extropia.com/reference_library.html

ShopSite is an excellent commercial package that meets the criteria on the checklist, and then some...



ShopSite

<http://www.openmarket.com/shopsite/>

Shopping cart software is a field that evolves quickly. The best way to get up to speed, and then stay on the cutting edge, is to subscribe to Ralph Wilson's [Web Commerce Today](#) and visit his [Electronic Commerce Research Room](#). He has tons of state-of-the-art info about these software packages.



3.5. Store-Building Packages

Online store-building packages advertise themselves as “out-of-the-box online stores.” They...

- accelerate development
- offer page templates/order form templates
- support secure payment
- provide database connectivity/data management
- cover many other critical functions required by a Web-based store
- **cost anywhere from hundreds, up to thousands of dollars**
- provide more than the average entrepreneur would need, but are excellent for medium to large sized ventures.

These programs are generally run on your own computer, and may require additional technical knowledge on your part to keep things ticking along smoothly. They generally offer you a little more in the way of customizing your own look than a plain Web store template.



Products in the **lower priced category are best for small to medium sized businesses (5,000 items and less).** These include...

Store Volume... Building Your Store...



ecBuilderPro

<http://www.ecbuilder.com/>



Actinic Software Company

<http://www.actinic.com/index.html>



Breakthrough Software Inc.

<http://www.icommerce.com/>

Next, e-commerce solutions for **medium to large sized businesses**. These programs allow greater customization and flexibility, but command substantially higher prices -- thousands of dollars and up!...



Cat@log

<http://www.thevisionfactory.com/>



INTERSHOP

<http://www.intershop.com/products/>

Then there are the **really** “big boys”...



3.6. E-Commerce Servers

E-commerce server packages are developed and marketed by major companies like **Microsoft** and **IBM**. They offer all the same things as the **store-building packages do...** templates, product catalogs, shopping cart, order processing, secure payment, etc.

But a commerce server is usually **also** part of a bigger proprietary system from the same manufacturer and as such fills the broader e-commerce needs of larger companies. For example, Site Server Commerce Edition is a Back Office Family Member.

At prices that run into tens of thousands of dollars, **they're also big-league expensive...**



WebSphere Commerce suite

<http://www-4.ibm.com/software/webservers/commerce/>

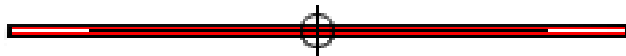


Site Server Commerce Edition

<http://www.microsoft.com/commerceserver/>

Once again go to the expert...

For more details on e-commerce solutions, Ralph Wilson's [Electronic Commerce Research Room](#) has lots of good info regarding store-building software.



4. Summing It All Up!

Even though building and running an e-store is “the same but different,” it **still** all boils down to **the Big 3...**

#1) Develop a great product.

Your **store** is your product. Develop a unique product line, present it in a stimulating and professional manner, and you will have laid the foundation for success.



#2) Write a Web site that **SELLS** that great product.

Look and feel, descriptions, photos, clean and effective checkout, etc. -- get all these building blocks right, and you're 2/3 of the way there!



#3) Attract targeted customers to the site.

Is it possible to get #1 (**product**) and #2 (**site-selling**) right, yet still fail?

Absolutely!

If you don't have traffic, **you're like the proverbial tree far away in the forest...**



... if it falls, does it make a noise? Who knows? Who cares?

What's the best way to drive traffic to your store?

Build a **Theme-Based Content Site** (i.e., build a site around a theme related to your store). Populate that site with hundreds of [**Keyword-Focused Content Pages**](#). PREsell your visitors with great and relevant content. And then refer them to your store (or to the most appropriate product(s) in your store!).

Store Volume... Summing It All Up!

[**SIDEBAR**]

Site Build It! is the best way to do that...



Site Build It!

<http://buildit.sitesell.com/>

For full details to see exactly what **SBI!** does, and how it does it, download the **Action Guide** from the **5 Pillar Club**. Join the 5 Pillar Program at...

<http://www.sitesell.com/affiliateprogram.html>

And, of course, once you get the **Big 3** right, you **will** succeed. You have no choice.

And that's where "**Big #4**" comes in... **automation**. From credit card clearing, to order fulfillment, to customer support... the more you automate, **the bigger/faster you'll grow**.

But, by now, you already know that. 😊

Best of luck in your e-tailing venture!

Ken

