THE ECOMMERCE WEBSITE BUILDING HANDBOOK

6 Industry Experts Share What It Takes To Start A Successful Ecommerce Website
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The world of ecommerce has experienced a massive growth spurt in recent years, with the rise of online shopping and the ease of access to technology. With the rapid increase in the number of online shoppers, businesses must adapt and improve their online presence to stay competitive.

In this handbook, we’ve assembled a group of experts in the field of ecommerce to share their insights and best practices for building a successful ecommerce website. From branding to platform selection, data analytics, and other essential aspects, this handbook covers all the crucial components that go into building a robust ecommerce website.
These experts bring years of experience and knowledge to the table, and their insights will prove invaluable to any business owner or entrepreneur looking to build or improve their ecommerce website. Whether you are just starting or have an established online presence, the tips and tricks shared in this book will help you take your ecommerce game to the next level.

I am excited to introduce this handbook and the valuable insights it contains, and I hope it will inspire and equip you to build a thriving ecommerce website.

Francois Marchand
Editor, The Ecomm Manager
THE BRAND BOSS: JESSICA POSTIGLIONE
Jessica Postiglione is the Founder & CEO of Bonny, a prebiotic fiber supplement powder flavored with real fruit that tastes amazing. Not only is Bonny vegan, gluten-free, and fab but it’s also packaged in infinitely recyclable tins.

COMMUNICATE WHY YOUR PRODUCT IS DIFFERENT AND HOW IT HELPS THE END USER

There are new websites popping up every day, and it is important to stand out. How do you do that? Make sure your product or service is offering something your competitors are not, and that is clearly presented on the website. That can be innovation in terms of ingredients, application, form factor, or simply offering a comparable product at a much lower price point. I see this a lot with start-ups; the product is great, but it’s not clearly communicated on the website.

MAKE IT EASY FOR THE CUSTOMER TO CHECK OUT SECURELY

Sadly, fraud does happen online. Make sure you are using a payment provider that is secure and clearly communicates that during the checkout process. Equally important, there shouldn’t be extra steps that extend the checkout process. Extra steps are more opportunities for your potential customer to abandon their cart.
Answer potential questions or objections upfront. Skepticism from site visitors is normal, especially if you are a new, unknown brand. So many companies claim to be the best at X, which is impossible.

**PUT YOURSELF IN THE SHOES OF SOMEONE WHO DOESN’T KNOW YOUR BRAND**

What do they need to know in order to buy your product? Examples include, “How long does it take to get this product?” and “How do I actually use this?” These answers should already be on the page and in the FAQ section.

**SHOW, DON’T TELL**

Your website is your virtual showroom. It’s important to have high-quality images of your product and visualize your marketing message as much as you can. That can be with embedded explainer videos or utilizing gifs. Site visitors will scroll past long paragraphs of text. Challenge yourself to say more with less.

**OPTIMIZE FOR THE MOBILE VIEWING EXPERIENCE**

The stats on mobile viewing change weekly, but it’s overtaken desktop and is projected to only increase. Potential customers are most likely to interact with your ecommerce website on their mobile device first, which is a smaller size screen to design and develop for.
THE DATA GURU: MATT RANTA
ALWAYS BE TESTING

You should 100% always be testing something—hopefully multiple things on your ecommerce website, about your pricing, in your marketing, and more. What happens when you change the subject lines of your email? What if you have two checkout buttons instead of just one? What happens when you reduce prices by 3%?

You don’t have to have a super powerful A/B testing platform if you’re not ready for one, although they’re nice and can help drive increases in revenue. You can just track things in Excel or Google Sheets. Test everything, all the time. Come up with a list of experiments, track the results, refine the ideas, and put them into use if they’re better than what you’re already doing. Always be testing.

LISTEN TO THE DATA—DATA IS GREATER THAN OPINIONS

Ecommerce businesses have a wealth of data constantly at their fingertips: What’s your conversion rate, what’s the AOV, which pages are people entering the site on, what are people searching, which pages make people leave?
In other words, there’s a constantly updated set of information that tells you exactly where you can make positively impactful changes to your ecommerce website. People always exit on this page? Change that page, don’t send people there. People search for these five products the most? Put them on the home page in a featured area. It goes on and on.

The data is there. Listen to it, and let it drive you.

Answer potential questions or objections upfront. Skepticism from site visitors is normal, especially if you are a new, unknown brand. So many companies claim to be the best at X, which is impossible.

**THERE ARE NO SILVER BULLETS**

Anyone who promises you that they have the one answer to driving massive, unbelievable growth for your ecommerce website is just that: unbelievable.

You must improve little things on all fronts on an ongoing basis. You’re going to make small corrections, changes, and additions that, in aggregate, will drive your revenue up, improve your conversion rate, increase your average order value, and more.

Unless you’ve done something like forget to have an “add to cart” button, it’s all about regular, consistent improvements across all aspects of your operation.
CHANGE IS A CONSTANT

See above: Always be testing, and no silver bullets prove this. We’re on the verge of, or perhaps amid, massive changes to how ecommerce sites drive growth but aren’t we always in ecommerce?

Things like Copy.ai, Jasper, ChatGPT, and more are changing how content can be created and the scale at which it can happen. Younger demographics are using TikTok more like a search engine and prefer it over Google. Research occurs on Reddit and bespoke blogs.

This is not how ecommerce used to be—by a mile. You can bet that, in five years, things will yet again be massively different.

THIS IS NOT FIELD OF DREAMS

If you build it, they may or may not come—most likely won’t—unless you invest in growing traffic. A former boss of mine says, “Traffic is the lifeblood of the internet,” and he’s 100 percent correct. Without traffic, obviously, your ecommerce business will fail.

So, you must invest in traffic—sorry, no traffic is free—and you still must put hours into writing content, doing outreach, and more for all those “free” traffic sources. You must be prepared that you’re going to spend money on driving clicks, and if you don’t have that in your plan and budget, you will fail.
THE BUSINESS CONSULTANT: OLIVIA JENKINS
Olivia Jenkins is an award-winning business and marketing consultant specializing in serving ecommerce brands in the health, beauty, fashion, and lifestyle industry.

**CHOOSE A WINNING WEBSITE PLATFORM**

It’s imperative to choose an ecommerce-focused website platform such as Shopify. I see many clients make the mistake of using a platform that has not been optimized for ecommerce.

An ecommerce-first platform like Shopify provides you with everything you need at a click of a button and without the need for expensive website developers.

**FOCUS ON STORE ARCHITECTURE**

Your store architecture is essentially your blueprint for your house and if you fail to draw it up correctly, you’ll see it collapse. The same happens with your ecommerce website if the focus is not placed on website presentation and customer experience.

Good store architecture allows search engines to index the website and rank it higher, allows for scalability, enhances user experience, and helps to optimize conversion rate so you can make more revenue from the same amount of traffic.
OPTIMIZE FOR MOBILE FIRST

Customers are shopping from their phones more than ever so it’s critical to focus on a mobile-first experience to optimize your conversion rate. Mobile-first, as the name suggests, focuses on optimizing content for mobiles and tablets first and desktop screens second.

Mobile-first design boasts many benefits, including economical advantages, responsiveness and exceptional growth potential—think of it as a customer-first attitude.

INTEGRATE THE APPROACH TO YOUR WEBSITE, EMAIL, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND ADS

Succeeding in ecommerce is very much a sum of all the parts rather than succeeding in one focused area. Hence the need to integrate every touch point from website to email, social media, paid ads, and everything in between—it is an ecommerce ecosystem, and everything must work together seamlessly to create the ideal customer journey.
FOCUS ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY TO RETAIN LONG-TERM CUSTOMERS

Once your ecommerce website has been built, your work is far from over. After making those first few sales online, you’re at a critical point where your focus should turn to customer loyalty in order to skyrocket your ecommerce success.

Simple ways to do this include prioritizing customer service, offering personalized content and product recommendations, providing exclusive perks and discounts, and developing an irresistible loyalty program.
THE POWER DUO: NIKI WRIGHT AND SCARLETT HAMPTON
UK-based lighting experts Niki Wright and Scarlett Hampton are the founders of lights&lamps. The pair oversee every aspect of their ecommerce operation, from the quality and design of their packaging to the user experience on their website, and have been featured in Livingetc, The Times, and Marie Claire.

MAKE NAVIGATION EASY

Make it as easy for your customer to find what they want as possible. Even better is to make it easy for them to find something they didn’t realize they wanted.

REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CLICKS

Once your customer has found what they want, make it as fast and as simple as possible to finalize their purchase.

DON’T LET THEM LEAVE

Don’t give your customer any reason to leave without purchasing. That could be by always offering the best price so they don’t need to look elsewhere, offering a welcome discount, or making it easy for them to find everything they need without having to search elsewhere for an accessory.
BUILD THEIR TRUST

For a new customer, shopping online can be daunting and often a matter of trust. You can build that trust by fulfilling your promises, but for new customers, make sure to share real experiences of customers gone before.

GET THEM BACK

Keep in touch with emails, social media, and SMS. Tempt your customer back with new products and new offers, but always back it up with a fresh new look. Your homepage is your shop window, it has to look new and exciting every time. Otherwise, they won’t want to walk through the door.
THE DELIVERY MAN: ANDERS EKMAN
PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON ORDER DELIVERY INFORMATION

Introduce delivery information as early in the buying experience as possible, ideally already in your ads or on price comparison sites, and definitely on your product pages. It’s about time we admit that the delivery details no longer belong to the last step of the checkout process!

OFFER MULTIPLE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Consumers shop based on the delivery experience, so it’s important to let them choose what works best for them on a given day. Deliveries are contextual. What works for one consumer one time might not work the next time for the same consumer, depending on what they’re buying, how many deliveries they expect, how much they paid, and so forth.

Do not shy away from having local delivery options specific only to certain cities. If that’s what your online shoppers want, try to set it up! On that note: Keep in mind that a proper delivery strategy doesn’t necessarily mean you have to offer all the delivery options in the world—it’s more about finding the right balance between what your customers need and what’s feasible for your business.
SET A DELIVERY PRICING STRATEGY

One of the most popular delivery pricing tactics is offering free shipping on all orders. I've seen this time and time again—for many ecommerce companies, it still seems like a must in order to stay competitive.

I don’t think it’s the best idea for every business, though. To make an informed decision, start by looking at your product catalog. Products with high margins could have a lower delivery price and vice versa. Also, try setting a free shipping threshold that works for your business, or make your premium delivery options free.

With the right set of tools, you can experiment with your delivery prices and free shipping offer to figure out the best options for everyone involved.

SIMPLIFY YOUR ADDRESS FORM

Nobody likes filling in endless address form fields when buying online. Keep things focused on the purchase—think clean design, fewer address fields (you could, for example, use a single field for the full name rather than separate first and last name), and make sure to autocomplete and validate address details as much as possible.

The faster (and less error-prone) the checkout process, the better for your customers and your business.
PAY ATTENTION TO THE ORDER CONFIRMATION PAGE

For some reason, there’s rarely a detailed overview of the ecommerce order after finalizing it. Did you notice? From my experience, many consumers forget what delivery option they selected, so why not remind them about it on the order confirmation page?

If possible, give them the opportunity to correct the details as well. This little trick can really reduce your support errands afterward.
THE HEADLESS MASTER: CHRIS BACH
EMBRACE HEADLESS WEB ARCHITECTURE

Rather than embrace a monolith that tries to cover all use cases but is best in class in nothing and is slow, bloated, and ungovernable, build your solutions with each best-in-class component. This gives you a number of advantages, including speed, efficiency, flexibility, scalability, and security.

EMBRACE FULL COMPOSABILITY

Choosing headless APIs like a headless commerce solution and a headless content management layer is not enough. If you want to cash on the potential benefits like faster time to market, performance, and flexibility, you need to use a workflow and frontend cloud to abstract away the traditional operations. This will enable service from multiple points of origin and incorporate edge infrastructure and serverless into a single source of truth using centralized release management.
MIGRATE GRADUALLY

If you’re familiar with web development, you know that traditional re-platforming has consisted of “lift and shift.” You build out a new monolith, migrate all the old content, feature lock, and, ultimately, go live with dated software 18 months later. However, the headless architecture allows you to gradually migrate. You don’t have to off-board the monolith all at once. Instead, you can start in a corner, get live in weeks, and move from there.

UNDERSTAND EACH STAGE OF YOUR CUSTOMER’S JOURNEY

No tool will replace your need for understanding your customers and how they use different digital touchpoints. Collecting upfront data and truly understanding the user journey help inform what kind of tools you need where and what changes will drive impact, thereby helping you understand where to start your journey towards headless architecture.

PRIORITIZE FRONT-END OPTIMIZATION

Choosing a headless commerce solution and a front-end cloud are ingredients for success. But make sure you optimize your actual digital experiences. Optimizing load sequences, minimizing code, setting up the property for SEO, using the right lightweight frameworks, and applying best practices around image optimization are all considerations when building a great customer experience.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

READ THE COMPLETE INTERVIEWS ON THE ECOMM MANAGER:

Jessica Postiglione (Bonny)
Matt Ranta (Nimble Gravity)
Olivia Jenkins (OIC)
Scarlett Hampton and Niki Wright (lights&lamps)
Anders Ekman (Ingrid)
Chris Bach (Netlify)

USEFUL TOOLS AND SOFTWARE RECOMMENDATIONS:

6 Essential Elements Of Effective Ecommerce Website Design
10 Best Ecommerce Website Builders To Create Your Online Store
20 Best Ecommerce Tools For Businesses
ABOUT THE ECOMM MANAGER

The Ecomm Manager (ECM) brings you the latest and best insights for your business’s ecommerce strategy, including expert advice on customer experience, content, marketing, social media, sales, inventory management, shipping, and logistics.

Through in-depth articles, interviews, podcasts, software reviews, and analysis from industry professionals, ECM covers the entire ecommerce ecosystem—from the first customer interaction to last-mile delivery.

With a roster of 100+ expert contributors and 20,000+ monthly visitors, ECM is the go-to resource for ecommerce managers who want to make the most of their online store.

Subscribe to our newsletter to have all the latest insights delivered to your inbox.