



Ecommerce Tips
To Guide You Through 2011
Happy Holidays

elasticpath™

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- 1 Speed up your website: Get a free website performance diagnosis at <http://j.mp/speed-up> and find specific ways you can optimize your site for fastest page loads.

 - 2 Your website header should answer 3 questions: Where am I? What can I do here? Why should I stay? Remember that all site pages are potential "landing pages" and must persuade the customer to stick around.

 - 3 A unique value proposition answers the question: Why should I buy from you rather than one of your competitors? The UVP is very important for conversion.

 - 4 Tell Google which countries your website(s) serve with Google Webmaster Tools for better ranking in local search engines (Google.co.uk, Google.ca, etc.). <http://j.mp/web-tools>

 - 5 Just because Amazon (or your competitor) does something, it doesn't mean it will work for your site. It doesn't mean it's working for Amazon. Test for yourself. <http://j.mp/dont-copy-amazon>

 - 6 If you want to rank better for a search term, put the keyword at the beginning of your title tag, rather than after your store name. E.g. "Chocolate Covered Raisins, www.TrueConfections.com".

 - 7 Clearly link to shipping cutoff dates from every page of your site during all important gifting holidays like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas and Valentine's. <http://j.mp/shipping-cutoff>

 - 8 Showing tax and shipping charges pre-checkout helps reduce "sticker shock"—one of the top reasons for cart abandonment.

 - 9 The best way to attract customer reviews is to ask for them. Consider sending requests post-purchase by email. <http://j.mp/trigger-email>

 - 10 Always allow customers to copy their shipping address to their billing address in checkout.

 - 11 A 404 Not Found page should never be a dead end. Consider adding a search box, category menu or live chat prompt. <http://j.mp/404-ideas>

 - 12 Don't just track conversion rate, measure micro-conversions like repeat visit rate, email sign-ups and link visitor recency. <http://j.mp/microconversions>

 - 13 Ask email subscribers to add your sender name to their address book for best deliverability.

 - 14 Showing products "in context" (in use) to reduce anxiety about buying on the web. Show product on a person. Show product size in relation to common items. <http://j.mp/images-in-context>

 - 15 Prevent dynamic URLs and session IDs from being indexed in Google and Yahoo with re-write tools <http://j.mp/session-id>. This allows for deeper indexing of your site pages and prevents security issues (exposed session data).

 - 16 How accessible is your website to visitors with disabilities? Deque has a free tool to find out your accessibility compliance. <http://j.mp/access-check>
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- 17 Avoid using cart buttons that are the same color as your website theme. A contrasting color often converts better.

- 18 Include value propositions like free shipping in your title meta description tags for higher click through in organic search.

- 19 Test the copy of your Checkout buttons: does "Proceed to Secure Checkout" convert higher than "Proceed to Checkout"?

- 20 Capitalizing The First Letter In Paid Search Ads Is Proven To Increase Click Through. Try It.

- 21 When optimizing your checkout process, begin with the step of the checkout process that has the highest abandonment.

- 22 Web analytics tools can produce a lot of useless reports. Start with an understanding of your site goals and what you want to improve, then focus only on those metrics that address specific business problems.

- 23 Take advantage of free webmaster tools from Google and Bing to find crawling errors, geographically target your site(s) and more. <http://j.mp/webmaster-tools>

- 24 Triple check, even quadruple check your pay per click ads. Make sure the keyword is relevant to the ad, and the ad is relevant to the landing page.

- 25 Industry jargon can be a conversion killer. Think like a customer when writing product descriptions.

- 26 Ask for an email address in the first step of checkout so you can send a triggered email if the customer abandons cart. Mention you will only contact if there is a problem with their order.

- 27 Don't use your product recommendation tool out-of-the-box. Understand the rules you can apply to associate products more strategically (blacklist low margin or out of stock items, pin no-brainers like gift cards to each recommendation, show only products from same category, etc).

- 28 Always mark required fields with an asterisk in web forms.

- 29 When shopping for ecommerce technology, understand the difference between delivery models (build vs. buy vs. software as a service) and which one is right for you. Shortlist vendors within that delivery model, not from different categories.

- 30 On your order confirmation page and email, visually show customers where to find their order tracking number. <http://j.mp/order-tracking>

- 31 If your product pages exist in multiple categories, you may have a duplicate content issue in search engines. You can solve this with a redirect to a default category <http://j.mp/dup-content>

- 32 Segment your email lists by country, region or zip code. Don't merchandise snow blowers to Californians.

- 33** Publish average wait times for all customer service communication methods on your Contact Us page.
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- 34** Twitter is too popular to ignore as a communication channel. Allow customers the option to interact with you through Twitter as an alternative to email or telephone.
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- 35** Even if you're using a pricey enterprise analytics tool, keep a free Google Analytics account as well. If you ever switch analytics vendors you might have to leave your data behind, but you'll have a backup.
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- 36** What's better—showing cross sells along the side of a product page or across the bottom? You'll never know what works best for your site unless you test.
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- 37** Don't bury your secure site badges in header or footer menus in the checkout. Place point-of-action assurances where customers experience anxiety—next to the credit card information input fields.
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- 38** Meta keywords tags have no weight in search engine rankings. Don't use them unless you want your competitors to see what you are optimizing for.
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- 39** In web analytics, "bounce rate" refers to the percentage of visitors that leave a landing page in without clicking through to another page, it's not the same as "exit rate" which is applied to non-landing pages.
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- 40** Track affiliate orders that close by telephone with custom toll-free numbers or priority codes. <http://j.mp/track-affiliate>
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- 41** Test promoting products vs. offering informative content in email campaigns. The conversion difference may surprise you. <http://j.mp/retail-email>
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- 42** Use SSL (secure socket layer) certificates, and make sure you renew them when they expire. SSL certificates protect credit card numbers and personal data, preventing identity theft. Customers do look for them.
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- 43** According to the E-tailing Group, 79% "rarely or never" purchase a product without complete product information. Include as much as you can (image, video, description, reviews) and push manufacturers and suppliers to give you as much product information as they have.
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- 44** When naming your mobile website URL, the shorter the better, since input is harder on mobile devices than on the web. www.m.site.com is easier for customers to type and remember than mobile.site.com or site.com/mobile. Consider registering them all anyway and redirecting to your default.
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- 45** Use geolocation to serve custom store locator pages that show nearest locations based on the visitor's IP address. The more physical locations you have, the better this feature is for usability—but allow customers to override geolocation to view your other locations.
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- 46** The more variables or page versions you want to test, the longer it will take to finish the test. Keep It Simple, Smarty.
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- 47** Preheader text in email is HTML that appears before or within the header of an email. Preheader text helps you get your most important message through even if your recipient's email client blocks images by default or is viewing email on a mobile device.
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- 48** Don't try to cross-sell significantly higher priced items together with lower priced items. Rule of thumb is maximum 10-20% above the price of the product viewed before attachment rates decline.
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- 49** Describe benefits of every feature in product descriptions.
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- 50** When ready to check out, customers scan the top right hand area in search of the shopping cart link. Make sure your View Cart button stands out (the shopping cart or basket icon helps).
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- 51** Display your customer service contact options in the checkout process (phone, live chat, email).
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- 52** Rule of thumb for paragraph length in online copywriting is 5 vertically stacked lines. Make sure your product descriptions, policies, articles and other Web content uses short paragraphs, bullets and headers/sub-headers to facilitate scanning.
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- 53** Adding "Shop by Brand" to your category structure helps attract search engine traffic for branded terms.
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- 54** Measure your conversion rates on keywords that send you the most traffic. Example: Customers who searched for "in-dash GPS" have a 1% conversion rate vs. the site average of 4.2%. How can you optimize your category and product page features, content and design to lift conversion for in-dash GPS?
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- 55** Many email clients block images by default. Make good use of the alt attribute for images. <http://j.mp/gmail-design>
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- 56** Every page is a potential landing page. Include links to important information and promotional offers site-wide.
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- 57** Search engines don't want to see duplicate blocks of content across web pages. Don't use stock manufacturer descriptions—write your own, and consider keyword variations that customers may search for.
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- 58** Unless you have a dedicated web analyst, you're not getting real value out of your analytics tool. Forrester Research reports companies with dedicated web analysts can see 900%-1200% lifts in ROI.
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- 59** Reduce returns by showing multiple views of the product, or 360 degree views.
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- 60** Google Alerts are a great way to track your brand mentions on the web and react quickly to negative comments/reviews. <http://www.google.com/alerts>
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- 61** Never use broad match type in PPC advertising without adding negative keywords and the exposed broad match filter. <http://j.mp/ga-filter>
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- 62** It's the year 2010 and web users are not afraid to scroll. Don't worry about designing everything "above the fold," but realize you should have important calls to action in the fold to be noticed by the majority of users.
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- 63** Before sending out promotions and coupon codes, ensure they indeed work properly. Don't annoy customers and affiliates.
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- 64** Google's free keyword tool is a powerful resource for keyword research that you can apply to organic SEO efforts, paid search, merchandising and email campaigns. <http://j.mp/google-keyword>
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- 65** When deciding which pages to optimize first, look for the top 5-10 pages that search engines send traffic to and aim to reduce their bounce rates.
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- 66** Consider testing cross-sell/up-sell on your cart summary page.
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- 67** Twitter "profiles" don't leave much room for branding, but you can share more information about your company with text on a custom designed background.
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- 68** Don't "pre-check" email sign up options in forms. Customers who don't notice won't appreciate the unsolicited mail. It can damage your brand and your deliverability, should your messages be marked as spam.
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- 69** Allow customers to zoom in on images without a pop-up window (an AJAX hover is much better). Not only does it save the customer a click to open, it also saves a click to close. Include a sentence below the image explaining that they can rollover to enlarge, so customers know they don't have to endure a pop-up.
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- 70** Before you delete a paid search keyword that has a high cost-per-conversion, look at the landing page to identify possible reasons for low conversion, then consider split-testing an optimized page.
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- 71** "Targeted selling" can improve conversion and customer loyalty by delivering a more relevant and "personalized" shopping experience. Find a number of examples in our targeted selling webinar recap: <http://j.mp/targeted-selling>
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- 72** When designing mobile applications for handsets without a pointer device or touch-screen, provide keyboard shortcuts (access keys) for links repeated across pages for easier navigation.
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- 73** If you offer ratings and reviews, allow customers to sort category and search listings by rating.
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- 74** Allow email subscribers to choose how often they want to hear from you in a "preference center". Link to the preference center from every email for easy update any time.
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- 75** Banner blindness is epidemic. Never place important calls to action in design elements that may resemble ads.
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- 76** SiteScan is a free tool that detects any pages on your site that are missing a Google Analytics tag. www.sitescanga.com
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- 77** Great affiliates typically aren't actively looking to join new programs in affiliate networks. You may need to do some prospecting to find them. Google searches and a little creativity help.
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- 78** Avoid placing a "Clear Form" button next to "Continue" or "Next Step." If the customer hits it accidentally, all the input disappears—along with your customer.
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- 79** For better SEO and usability, label categories how customers describe a product—not how the industry does. For example, customers rarely refer to jackets as "Outerwear".
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- 80** Check your site search logs. Which terms return 0 results? Add appropriate keywords (spelled correctly) to product pages, this will also help in organic search.
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- 81** Always include a few bullet points on the advantages of signing up for a customer account or receiving email offers.
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- 82** Segment your web analytics data by referring source/marketing channel, rather than looking at a site average.
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- 83** When planning a website redesign, share your mockups, wireframes and site maps with your SEO expert so a decision that could hurt your rankings will not go forward. Typical examples are poor navigation design or site structure.
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- 84** Light text on a dark background is hard on the eyes. It's always better to use dark text on light background, with a high contrast (preferably black on white).
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- 85** If you offer print-friendly versions of pages, make sure they are blocked from search engine spiders with a robots.txt file or noindex meta tag to avoid duplicate content issues.
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- 86** Read your live chat transcripts to understand how to improve product descriptions and site usability.
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- 87** Rather than throw more budget at driving traffic, invest in conversion rate optimization to glean more profit from the traffic you already receive.
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- 88** When handling errors in the checkout process, put a clear notification beside the form field with the error. Don't rely on tiny red text at the top of the page.
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- 89** Use keyword research to determine labels for categories and sub-categories, especially for country-targeted sites. What's more popular in your country, "running shoes", "runners", "sneakers" or "trainers"? Google Trends can help. <http://j.mp/intl-trends>
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- 90** On Twitter, share links to interesting articles from other websites and short messages and tips that relate to your products or industry. Twitter isn't all about selling, Make sure you provide value to your followers.
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- 91** Consider adding filtered navigation to site search results (e.g. narrow down by price, brand or category).
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- 92** Stick to sans-serif type font for website copy, it's easier to read.
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- 93** Let customers know your email program is 100% opt-in/opt-out near the call-to-action (sign-up link or input box).
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- 94** If your site needs to go down for maintenance, use a 503 error code so search engine robots understand your site is only down temporarily.
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- 95** Don't be afraid to include prices in your paid search ads. They discourage clicks from shoppers who find your price too expensive; saving you money and improving conversion rates. Just make sure your prices are always up to date.
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- 96** Bigger, bolder cart buttons tend to convert better. Test them. <http://j.mp/button-size>
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- 97** Merchandise your emails and offline advertising with top-rated products. This tactic has had huge payoff for many retailers.
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- 98** Bullet points facilitate scanning and are helpful in product descriptions.
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- 99** Personalizing SMS messages with the customer name increases response rates. Make sure your mobile marketing provider supports this.
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- 100** Product pages are landing pages too. Include your store's value proposition for every product in the content area (as opposed to headers and footers). Example: <http://j.mp/value-props>
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- 101** The simplest way to conduct user testing is through UserTesting.com, which has a large panel of user testing subjects (humans!). For each user test you receive a video and written summary of their experience for about \$29. The majority of usability problems will be uncovered with only 5 tests.
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- 102** If you experience a sudden drop in traffic or sales, consult your analytics report and segment by traffic source. You may discover a drop in organic search, paid search, email or direct visits that may signal a major problem within the channel like a search engine penalty or technical glitch.
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- 103** Place your add to cart button as close to the product price as possible, and never low on the screen where it may slip under the customer's "fold".
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- 104** Customers search for non-product information too. Make sure your customer service policies are available in site search.
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- 105** Web and email designs can look great in IE, horrid in Firefox, and vice versa. Test across browsers, operating systems and devices.
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- 106** Coupon code boxes encourage shoppers to search for promo codes in Google. Save profits by showing boxes only to customers referred with a code (affiliate or email). <http://j.mp/coupon-box>
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- 107** Link to privacy policies whenever you ask for personal information.
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- 108** Test dollar vs. percentage discounts in promotions.
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- 109** When testing more than one paid search ad in an Ad Group with Google Adwords, make sure to set ads to rotate evenly, rather than showing the best performing ads more often.
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- 110** Prioritize your calls to action. Never make buttons the same size and color when one is more important than the other (e.g. add to wishlist vs. add to cart).
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- 111** Never use a "Cancel" button in checkout. This is the last suggestion you want to place in the customer's mind.
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- 112** When sending offers through Twitter, use a special landing page so you can track the performance of your campaign. <http://j.mp/twitter-tracking>
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- 113** Give shoppers an idea of where they are on your site. Highlight the tab or text link in the visible navigation menu, or use a triangle marker to indicate which category and sub-category is being viewed.
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- 114** Required registration causes frustration. Allow customers to checkout as a guest, with the option to create an account at the end.
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- 115** There are "dirty affiliates" out there. Manual application approval is important. If an affiliate applies with a free email account, it's a red flag.
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- 116** When designing a mobile site for iPhone, make sure your menu links are large enough to tap without hitting the wrong link.
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- 117** Make sure you have a process in place for pausing paid search ads for out of stock items, and resuming them when they're back in stock.
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- 118** Enlarge the size of your search box so a minimum of 30 characters is visible. Search boxes are more usable when the customer can see the full query in the box before hitting "Search".
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- 119** Reduce costs for live chat resources by offering it only to select customers, such as customers looking at high margin products, or who have lingered on a page for X seconds.
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- 120** Never use the word "Submit" on a button. It has a negative connotation. Try "Continue" or "Next Step" instead.
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- 121** Ask in-store customers to write product reviews through in-store "kiosks" (as simple as a laptop with internet access).
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- 122** Search engines consider the www and non-www versions of your site to be different websites. Use a 301 (permanent) redirect from one version to the other (which way to choose is up to you) to get the combined benefit of inbound links, otherwise they will be "split" and your search rankings will suffer.
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- 123** Offer pop-under surveys (visible when browser closed) when customers leave your site rather than pop-ups when customers arrive.
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- 124** When sending a welcome email, include the customer's login and password information in case the customer ever forgets. (About half of retailers don't do this). <http://j.mp/welcome-email>
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- 125** Site testing is never wasted. Even if your test "fails" to produce a clear winner, you have gained the knowledge that the test you ran has no impact on customer behavior.
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- 126** Show customers where to find the CVV number on their credit card. Many first-time web shoppers don't know and abandon cart.
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- 127** Improve your product descriptions by reading customer reviews—your own and your competitors'. <http://j.mp/prod-desc>
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- 128** Don't just give affiliates banners and call it a day. Go the extra mile with video content and product samples to create enthusiasm.
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- 129** Visit Amazon's category pages for products you carry and sort by best selling. Consider featuring these hot items on your home page and email campaigns.
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- 130** Save sales from out-of-stock items by offering "Email me when back in stock" options.
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- 131** Color blindness affects 8-10% of the population. The Visicheck color blindness simulator shows you how these visitors see your web site colors. www.visicheck.com
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- 132** Too many e-tail blogs begin with a bang and fizzle out. Make sure you have committed resources if you launch a blog.
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- 133** Show thumbnail images in the cart summary, in the correct color, to assure customers they are ordering what they want. <http://j.mp/sku-thumbnail>
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- 134** Track who tweets about your business daily. Great tools include Tweetbeep.com, custom search columns in Twitter clients like Hootsuite, and RSS feeds for search terms. <http://j.mp/twitter-tracking>
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- 135** For better data, don't track your own IPs in analytics (or your consultants, partners and other non-shoppers). <http://j.mp/no-ip>
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- 136** Explain to international customers that duties and fees may apply, so there are no surprises upon delivery and customers don't feel cheated or deceived.
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- 137** TEXT IN ALL CAPS IS DIFFICULT TO READ, ESPECIALLY IN SMALL FONT. Use mixed case for all headlines, labels, links and calls-to-action.
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- 138** SEO-friendly URLs that use keywords rather than long strings of numbers can give you a slight boost in search engine rankings for those keywords.
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- 139** Need some quick feedback on your site's user experience? Example: "Would you buy this bundle? Why or why not?" FeedbackArmy.com, EasyUsability.com and 3rdPartyFeedback.com offer access to real user testers for a very low cost.
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- 140** Place a clear unsubscribe link at the top of email messages. People often hit "report spam" thinking this opts them out of your program. It doesn't. It only hurts your sender reputation.
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- 141** If you don't take a customer to a cart summary page after an item is added to cart, make it very obvious that the item has indeed been added to the cart. <http://j.mp/cont-shopping>
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- 142** Always provide a "View All" option for category and search results.
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- 143** When you run geographically targeted stores, use an IP geolocation tool to redirect customers to the appropriate store, or display a call to action to shop the local site.
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- 144** Numbers in paid search ads catch the eye. Test prices, percentages and other numbers in your copy.
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- 145** Search is an important feature of a mobile commerce site. Make your search box huge, give it prominent placement and make sure your tool handles misspellings. Autocomplete is a good feature for usability, as input on a mobile device is more time consuming and prone to errors.
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- 146** Though a pain to implement, a dynamic width (that adjusts to a customer's screen resolution) provides the best user experience.
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- 147** Include customer service contact options in your thank you emails after purchase.
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- 148** Check your FAQ page and ask yourself if these questions are not better answered in your site copy itself—on product pages, in headers/navigation, AJAX hovers, etc. Don't make your customers dig for important information.
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- 149** Consider segmenting your site traffic to exclude visits that viewed your careers or affiliates pages. These visitors were not likely planning to purchase.
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- 150** Cross-sells and upsells fail when key product attributes differ (e.g., up-selling a king size blanket on a twin, or blue dress when looking for white).
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- 151** Consider split-path testing your checkout process to determine the ideal number of steps. <http://j.mp/split-path>
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- 152** Always make sure landing pages match the offer presented in email campaigns and banner advertising.
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- 153** Got physical stores? Collect email and mobile opt-ins in-store.
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- 154** Customer reviews can help you rank in search engines for synonyms and misspellings of words, provided they are visible to search engines. With some vendors, search-friendly reviews come at an extra cost.
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- 155** Avoid appending your home page URL with /index.html or similar. Search engines see it as a separate URL to your .com/ and will split the value of your incoming links, which will affect your home page's ranking potential.
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- 156** Check your site search logs. Do customers often search with attributes like color or size? You may consider adding new categories like "Shop by Color" or "Shop by Size".
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- 157** If a product's price exceeds your free shipping threshold, include "this item ships free" boldly on the product page.
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- 158** Avoid sending email messages from a no-reply account. Every communication should offer the opportunity to respond to a person and receive a response.
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- 159** Don't land customers on a dead-end thank you page. Provide links back to products and categories or even a special discount on a future order (time-limited).
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- 160** Remind customers that live chat is an option if they're waiting on hold for customer service by telephone.
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- 161** If you're looking for retail experts to follow on Twitter, check out this database <http://j.mp/ecom-gurus>, and feel free to add yourself to the list.
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- 162** Remember US Thanksgiving promotions are not relevant to international customers. Consider merchandising your site and emails differently, redirecting non-US traffic to the alternate home page and segmenting international email subscribers for your Thanksgiving campaign.
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- 163** Rather than do an expensive re-design of your site, invest in testing little things over time.
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- 164** If you must include instructions (like how to use catalog quick order), don't write an article. Keep it as short as possible, preferably in bullet point format. Test copy to see what converts best.
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- 165** Is your website copy customer-centric? Take the "We-We" test. <http://j.mp/we-we>
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- 166** Many sites use large graphical "hero shots" on home and category pages that may not be received well by customers. When you test using hero vs. not using hero, pay attention to bounce rate differences.
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- 167** Use tools like TweetLater or HootSuite to schedule tweets for the future for efficiency.
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- 168** Industry averages are of little value to you. Take your current performance as a benchmark, and aim to continually improve.
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- 169** Encourage visitors to submit customer reviews by offering a discount on future purchase or a chance to win a gift card. Promote the contest on every product page. Example: <http://j.mp/review-contest>
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- 170** Make sure your logo is hyperlinked to your home page. Most people expect it to be.
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- 171** Want to avoid spam filters? Never send image-only emails. Always include some text.
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- 172** Create urgency by showing when product quantity is low. <http://j.mp/low-stock>
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- 173** Affiliates that use loyalty program toolbars cannibalize your profits from other marketing channels. Best to keep them out of your affiliate program. <http://j.mp/parasiteware>
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- 174** Improve usability for visually impaired visitors by converting tabular layouts to CSS which causes fewer problems for screen readers and Braille programs.
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- 175** For ship-to-store orders, ask customers to indicate notification preference—email, telephone or SMS.
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- 176** If you add or change anything in your checkout process (such as adding third party payment options), make sure your affiliate tracking does not break.
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- 177** Did you know: Unless a visitor views more than one page in a session, the time on site recorded for his or her visit will be 0 seconds? Web analytics tools don't calculate the time on a page until the visitor clicks through to another page on your domain.
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- 178** Comparison shopping engines have different guidelines, so it's important to optimize your data feeds for each. For example, Google Products search does not allow you to include "Free Shipping" or "Money Back Guarantee" in product titles, whereas in other shopping engines, value propositions are acceptable and advantageous.
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- 179** Include "Add to Cart" links in category and search result listings on your mobile store or application. Mobile visitors are more likely to be hunting than browsing, and adding directly to cart can save time as pages may load slowly. Example: <http://j.mp/mobi-links>
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- 180** Consider asking for email sign ups from your shopping cart—in exchange for a promo code. Example: <http://j.mp/email-list>
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- 181** Use a “persistent shopping cart” to save cart contents across sessions. Check your web analytics for your typical “days to purchase” when deciding how long to set your persistent cookie.
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- 182** Consider asking for email sign ups from your shopping cart—in exchange for a promo code. Example: <http://j.mp/email-list>
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- 183** When translating content into other languages, it is best done by a native speaker of the local market. Canadian French can be quite different from European French, for example.
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- 184** Consider creating product pages for every product's color. This will help you rank better in search engines for color searches. <http://j.mp/color-pages>
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- 185** Compare your site traffic to your competition with Google Trends for Websites. <http://trends.google.com/websites>
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- 186** Give Order Tracking its own link in header navigation. Don't hide it behind “Help” or “Customer Service” links.
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- 187** Include links to social networks like Youtube, Facebook and Twitter in email messages.
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- 188** Find out if your test is statistically valid with www.SplitTester.com (free).
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- 189** Slipping free samples into packages surprises and delights customers, and may encourage customer reviews and sales.
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- 190** When someone posts a positive comment about your store on Twitter, ask if you can post their testimonial on your site.
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- 191** Create geotargeted paid search campaigns rather than universal (all countries). This allows you to determine keyword search demand by region.
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- 192** Customers generally detest popup boxes. Consider AJAX hover or mouseovers to show content like policies, size charts et cetera.
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- 193** Never show a dead-end image on your page. Make sure banners and product thumbnails are clickable and point to a page that matches the product/offer promised in the image.
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- 194** Staying loyal to one shipping carrier may cost more than rate-shopping, but the advantage is you have more negotiating power for better terms and customer service.
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- 195** When offering a product comparison tool, make sure it includes the product price, a link to the product page and a button to add to cart from the comparison table.
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- 196** Always mention when a product comes in multiple colors in category and search page results. If possible, show color swatches too.
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- 197** 55% of online retailers use product recommendations. Of these, 80% don't know the conversion rates on recommended products (e-tailing group, 2009). Don't be one of them.
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- 198** For clarity, use full color names with color swatches, not abbreviations (Navy Blue rather than NB, for example).
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- 199** If you create personas, try to recruit user-testers that fit these personas. See if your assumptions were right about what they want from your site.
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- 200** IP geolocation can reduce credit card fraud. Use geolocation data to compare the customer's IP address to their provided billing and shipping addresses. If there is a mismatch between the two (shopper is in Russia but using a UK credit card address) you can flag the order for manual review. <http://j.mp/geolocation-fraud>
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- 201** Test larger thumbnail images against your existing size on category pages.
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- 202** Clean your email list regularly and remove "hard bounces" (undeliverable addresses). If you continue to send email to these addresses, ISPs might look on you with suspicion, and you'll have a harder time getting through to the rest of your list.
-
- 203** When linking off your home page to another site (domain) or social network, make sure the link opens in a new tab/window, otherwise you'll increase your bounce rate/exit rate!
-
- 204** Consider extending your returns policy date for holiday shoppers—especially those who start their gift-buying as early as October.
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- 205** "Sell" the benefits of shopping online rather than in-store during the holidays. Include persuasive words like "Avoid the crowds," "Save gas" and "Huge selection" in email subject lines.
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- 206** Promote electronic gift cards as the perfect last-minute gift for holiday shoppers, especially after shipping cutoff date.
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- 207** Post-holiday season, switch promotions to New Year party items or products that will help customers keep their New Year's resolutions.
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- 208** FiveSecondTest is a free service that allows you to upload an image (a home page, landing page, email or banner ad) which is shown to real people. At the end of 5 seconds, reviewers are asked to list what they remember about the image. This is a great way to determine if your value propositions are "getting through" in your creative. www.fivesecondtest.com
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- 209** Read product reviews and research competitor sites to gather ideas for navigation filters. <http://j.mp/filter-nav>
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- 210** When designing an A/B or multivariate test, understand what your conversion goal for the page is—unless it's the final step of checkout, it's not a sale. For a product page, it might be add to cart, add to wishlist, post to Facebook, click on a cross-sell or contact sales rep for more information. Will you be tracking conversions for one or all of the possible actions?
-
- 211** Promote your website, mobile site, mobile application and social network profiles in packing slips and receipts for in-store purchases.
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- 212** Many registered customers forget their login details—another reason to always offer a guest login or express checkout. <http://j.mp/req-reg>
-
- 213** If you sell internationally, provide weights, dimensions and volumes in both Imperial and metric units for best usability.
-
- 214** When designing for mobile, always offer the guest checkout first, before create account/sign in. New mobile shoppers do not want to fiddle with new account sign-up. Existing customers will look for the sign in field. Example: <http://j.mp/mobi-checkout>
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- 215** Resist the temptation to "fire" inactive affiliates from your program. Rather, reach out to them to determine how you can educate them better about your products and get them more active in promoting your site.
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- 216** Don't dump customers back on the home page when they click "Continue Shopping". Go back to the last product or category. Better yet, tell them where Continue Shopping goes. <http://j.mp/cont-shopping>
-
- 217** Mystery shop your site on a regular basis.
-
- 218** Segment your paid search performance by branded (searches that include your business name) vs. non branded keywords. Your branded keywords likely convert much differently.
-
- 219** "Win-back campaigns" can be effective to reach out to lapsed buyers with a special offer (another reason to segment your list!) but avoid sending win-back appeals to unsubscribed contacts as this dips into spam territory.
-
- 220** When showing cross-sells and up-sells on product pages or cart summary pages, allow customers to preview product details without leaving the page. Examples: <http://j.mp/cross-sells>
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- 221** If you use product video, allow visitors to embed your videos on their blogs and social networks. Watermark your videos with your site URL.
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- 222** Don't measure conversion rates without considering revenue. A campaign or traffic source may have a higher than average conversion rate but may be less profitable.
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- 223** Create your own coupon code landing page (e.g. True Confections Promo Codes and Coupon Codes) to rank well in search engines. Customers will search for your coupons, save paying commission to your well-SEO'd affiliates.
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- 224** Ask the least tech-savvy person you know to shop your site in front of you.
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- 225** When you've renamed URLs, make sure you double check that your 301 redirects are set up properly, not mistakenly set up as 302 or other header status. <http://j.mp/status-check>
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- 226** If your product colors are "creative" include more common color names (e.g. "Flamingo" and "Pink"). This helps SEO, comparison engine and site-search success.
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- 227** Scour your product pages for acronyms, and make sure each one is defined.
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- 228** If your left hand navigation or dropdown menus have more than 8 links, consider alphabetizing them for better usability.
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- 229** Yslow is a Firefox add-on that analyzes web pages and recommends how to optimize them to make them faster. <http://j.mp/yslow>
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- 230** When checking your site's search rankings in Google, make sure you're signed out of any Google services such as Gmail or Adwords. Search results skew towards sites you visit frequently and do not represent what other searchers see.
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- 231** Help smartphone users view your email properly; link to a mobile-friendly version at the top of your message.
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- 232** As an alternative to tiered pricing for quantities, consider offering product subscriptions for consumables with delivery interval options. <http://j.mp/repeat-orders>
-
- 233** Allow customers to check their order status by entering a telephone number instead of order confirmation (in case they can't locate the email.) <http://j.mp/order-status>
-
- 234** Exclude countries that you don't sell to from web analytics to get a clearer picture of your conversion rate. <http://j.mp/no-ip>
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- 235** "Share with your network" is the new "email to a friend". Allow customers to post your product pages or emails to Facebook or Twitter.
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- 236** Reduce returns by disclosing common reasons a product is returned, like Shoeline's Return-O-Meter. <http://j.mp/returnometer>
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- 237** Not everyone knows what RSS is. When offering RSS subscription options, include information on what RSS is and how to get started. Example: <http://j.mp/about-rss>
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- 238** Remove time limits for filling in web forms. Disabled customers may need the extra time to complete them.
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- 239** Track visits, sales and conversion data for iPhone visitors in Google Analytics using Advanced Segments. <http://j.mp/iphone-alytics> This helps you understand a) demand for a mobile site, if you don't have one, and b) how your mobile site performs compared to your web site.
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- 240** Do you know your "customer review abandonment rate?" Consider removing required registration to attract more reviews.
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- 241** Product video is popular with customers but costly to produce. If you're on a budget, ask manufacturers to provide you with their videos, or find local film students to shoot in exchange for product.
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- 242** Never put navigation on the right hand of your site unless you don't want anyone to use it. Web users expect it to be on the left. With the exception of some cultures, we read left to right, our eye scans pages left to right and search engines have taught us to look for link on the left and ads on the right.
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- 243** Improve search engine rankings for a category page by making it more keyword specific. For example, instead of "Accessories," use "Cell Phone Accessories."
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- 244** Avoid changing your email sender name. It can hurt deliverability as you'll no longer be in customer address books and "safe lists," and you may have a lower open rates, and higher "mark as spam."
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- 245** SpyFu is a tool that can help you spy on what keywords your competitors are bidding on in Google Adwords. There is a free version and paid version at www.spyfu.com.
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- 246** When designing for mobile, be careful with tables which often force the visitor to scroll horizontally, increasing your site abandonment. Example: <http://j.mp/mobi-scroll>
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- 247** Run your site map through a broken link checker on a regular basis. There are many link checkers you can use, including <http://j.mp/link-check>.
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- 248** When sending welcome emails, include an offer for the next purchase. <http://j.mp/welcome-email>
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- 249** Early test results can be deceiving, so it's important you let them run until you hit a minimum 95% confidence interval. By that time your "huge lift" tactic could prove to be only a "marginal impact" tactic.
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- 250** Forrester Research reports video in email can increase click through by 2-3X. Many retailers convert video into animated GIFs to get through email filters. <http://j.mp/email-gif>
-
- 251** Not everyone knows what RSS is. When offering RSS subscription options, include information on what RSS is and how to get started. Example: <http://j.mp/about-rss>
-
- 252** When a customer indicates a product is a gift, allow the customer to suppress the price on the invoice and packing slip.
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- 253** Avoid JavaScript navigation menus. Though Google now handles JavaScript better and can follow links, they are problematic for other search engines and customers who don't have JavaScript enabled. Cascading style sheets are a better option.
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- 254** If you have video assets (for products or your business), post them to all the major video sharing sites with one upload with TubeMogul. <http://tubemogul.com>
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- 255** Save customers from mental gymnastics. Show estimated arrival calendar date rather than "X business days" for better usability.
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- 256** When selling internationally, remember not all foreign customers expect to pay by credit card. For example, Dutch and German shoppers prefer bank transfers, and Italians prepaid cards. Consider localizing the checkout (redirecting visitors by IP to the local site) to offer the preferred payment options without bombarding credit card shoppers with too many options.
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- 257** QR codes are 2D images that contain information, most often links and text, that can be scanned by mobile devices. Use them to drive traffic to your mobile site in the offline world. <http://j.mp/qr-codes>
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- 258** Avoid vague link labels in navigation menus like "Discover," "Share," or "Explore."
-
- 259** If you don't want coupon codes leaking to the public, use a "tear off" approach (unique codes can only be used once) or front-end validation that checks customer details to confirm eligibility.
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- 260** Have a product image for every color you carry of a product. Not showing a product's color can be like not showing the product at all.
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- 261** If your site search logs show many searches for branded products you don't carry, consider "searchandising" the results to include similar products. Tell customers "We don't carry XYZ, try these products instead".
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- 262** If you use email to promote in-store sales, add a barcode to a printable coupon that tracks conversion and profitability of your promotion.
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- 263** Consumers trust the opinions of other consumers more than marketers. Test labels for product suggestions like "Customers who bought X also bought Y" against "You may also like," for example.
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- 264** Help Google and Bing find and index all your video content by submitting a video sitemap through their respective webmaster tools. <http://j.mp/video-search>
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- 265** If you offer a wish list, allow the customer to post it to social networks or to email a friend, parent, spouse or colleague.
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- 266** When you don't offer your full catalog to all geographic markets, use IP geolocation in your ecommerce application to filter product listings and apply local currency, pricing, taxes, shipping charges, payment options and shipping options.
-
- 267** Gather customer feedback and add some entertainment to email messages by running polls. Poll scripts don't work in email, but you can ask a single question that can be "voted" with links which can be tracked. You can even use this information to gather customer preferences for better personalized selling in the future.
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- 268** If you carry products that are only sold online (not in your brick and mortar stores), mark them as "online exclusives." This motivates shoppers who usually prefer to shop in-store to buy online, and is good customer service.
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- 269** Make sure your forms use common names for fields so that they're recognized by browser toolbars that have an autofill function.
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- 270** When designing for mobile devices, avoid text-on-images. It's very hard to read on the small screen or in dark lighting. Example: <http://j.mp/mobi-images>
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- 271** Add "review this product for a chance to win" offers to packing slips on in-store purchases.
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- 272** Double check that your emails have the correct landing pages for each link in them. Then triple check.
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- 273** You've heard of "deal of the day" promotions...why not try "bundle of the day"?
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- 274** Remembering the items that a customer viewed in a previous session can help customers re-locate products they may be ready to buy in subsequent site visits, rather than fumble through navigation. Example: <http://j.mp/recent-view>
-
- 275** Screen readers help visually impaired users understand where links go. Be careful with clever link names, like "Not a stranger?" instead of "Sign In to Account".
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- 276** If you remove navigation during checkout, keep your logo hyperlinked to the home page so customers can return to the store if they forgot to add an item to cart.
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- 277** Ask your web developer to write a script that notifies you on every 404 Not Found or 500 Internal Server Error a customer hits so you can correct them in a timely manner.
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- 278** Adding informative articles on topics relevant to your product offering can attract search engine visitors and introduce them to your brand.
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- 279** A simple way to gauge the effectiveness of an online branding campaign is to measure the percent of new visitors to the website. Use a time interval for comparison that equals the length of the branding campaign (e.g. campaign runs June 10-July 10, compare to May 10-June 10), or use year-over-year data.
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- 280** Deferred payment services like BillMeLater can help you convert more orders in a tough economy, especially for high ticket items, and boost average order value. <http://j.mp/defer-payment>
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- 281** Ecommerce webinars make for perfect lunch-and-learn topics for your ecommerce team. Check out Elastic Path's full library of on-demand webinars at <http://www.elasticpath.com/webinars/>.
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- 282** When promoting sales in advance, allow customers to add the event to their Outlook calendars. <http://j.mp/add-event>
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- 283** Create a sense of urgency on sale and clearance items by mentioning the items will not be restocked.
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- 284** If you use a persistent shopping cart (that holds cart contents for X number of days) – tell customers on the cart summary page. It raised conversions over 16% for one Get Elastic reader.
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- 285** If you think you can't afford to offer free shipping, consider partnering with manufactures or drop-ship suppliers to offer it on selected products.
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- 286** When affiliate landing pages like yourestore.com/product-xyz/?affid=1234 get crawled and indexed by search engines, it's possible these pages will be displayed in organic search instead of your regular product pages, crediting the affiliate for the organic search. Block affiliate pages from search engines with a robot.txt file. <http://j.mp/fix-dupes>
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- 287** Though uncommon in online retail sites, double opt-in for email subscriptions is required by many ISPs if you want to be "white listed" (accepted as a reputable sender). It also protects your database from misspelled email addresses.
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- 288** If you offer customizable products, include details of the customization in the cart summary.
<http://j.mp/custom-detail>
-
- 289** When creating coupon codes, avoid letters and numbers that can be misunderstood by customers like the letter O and the number 0, or lower case L and the number 1.
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- 290** Use IP geolocation tools to identify visitors on dial-up connections and show a "lite" version of your site (less flash and Web 2.0, for example).
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- 291** Want more links to your webstore? Run a contest for bloggers. Be creative, and require a link back to your store.
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- 292** For best usability, write product copy for lower literacy and English-as-second-language visitors.
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- 293** Programs like "Verified by Visa" can reduce credit card fraud but also conversion. Use with caution and test.
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- 294** Link to a sample email when asking customers to subscribe.
-
- 295** If you use sessions, store them in a database rather than append them to the URL. This way, search engines won't mistakenly index the appended URL. Also clean URLs are more user-friendly.
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- 296** Attend affiliate conferences to network with and attract "super affiliate" partners.
-
- 297** If you sell to the US, make sure your State dropdown menus in web forms include "District of Columbia—DC".
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- 298** Though they help you fit more content onto a page, tabbed boxes can hide important information when customers don't notice there's more details behind the tab. User-test this feature to see if it's a help or hindrance. Example: <http://j.mp/tabbed-boxes>
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- 299** Measure the "Net Promoter Score" of your customers with a simple exit survey that asks "based on today's visit, would you recommend us to a friend? Yes/No". Allow an optional input box for additional details.
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- 300** Adding a little bit of relevant text on category pages (below product results) can help them rank higher in organic search.
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- 301** If you offer catalog quick order, show a visual example of where to find the catalog code and provide at least 10 input fields.
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- 302** Test free shipping thresholds (e.g. minimum purchase \$60 vs. \$100) and measure conversion, average order value and items per order. You may be surprised that a lower threshold does not convert higher or contribute more margin.
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- 303** Ask your affiliates how they might want to improve your landing pages. Many affiliates are seasoned Internet marketers and can bring fresh perspective.
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- 304** Train your customer service reps to ask callers if they want to opt in to your email, SMS or catalog programs.
-
- 305** When offering bundles or quantity discounts, clearly tell customers which combo is the "best value". <http://j.mp/best-value>
-
- 306** Help search engines crawl and index your mobile site pages by submitting a mobile sitemap to Google Webmaster Tools. <http://j.mp/mobi-sitemap>
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- 307** Mobile web surfers are very concerned about the security of m-commerce. Make sure you over-communicate that your mobile shop uses SSL certificates and is highly secure.
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- 308** Avoid the temptation to stuff alt attributes for images to help with SEO. Visually impaired shoppers who use screen readers will not find this helpful.
-
- 309** Allow SMS subscribers to unsubscribe in every message (e.g. "Text STOP 2 unsubscribe"). Also support words like "REMOVE" or "UNSUBSCRIBE".
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- 310** Always include expiration dates when sending out coupon codes to customers and affiliates.
-
- 311** Question and answer tools like Bazaarvoice Ask & Answer and PowerReviews Answer Box may increase conversion, and can help you understand customer concerns to improve product descriptions.
-
- 312** Make sure your server IP is not stuck on any email blacklists with this tool: <http://j.mp/black-list>
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- 313** Ecommerce optimization is an ever expanding discipline. Resolve to evolve by attending ecommerce conferences and webinars, reading books and following blogs including Get Elastic in 2011!
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