



SEARCH MARKETING

7 Essential Elements for a Successful eCommerce

Site Launch

By [Dave Lloyd](#) on May 15, 2015

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In eCommerce implementations, the technology delivery team places much focus on feature extensibility and functionality. It is only natural that perfecting the features and functions of a new eCommerce platform holds such high importance. ECommerce platforms, such as hybris or ATG, unlock a myriad of important business capabilities.

Having worked on the technology delivery team and now digital marketing, I have found there is a powerful opportunity to ensure foundational digital marketing influence in the project to build the most value for the client.

If the technologist's role is to enable capabilities, then the digital marketer's role is to utilize those capabilities to offer increased growth to the business. Some of the important foundational elements that the digital marketer must influence during an eCommerce site launch are:

- Offsite Search
- Onsite Search
- Onsite Merchandising
- Analytics
- Social
- Site Performance
- Server Configuration

Offsite Search

A site without users is useless. Consider that over 80% of Internet users use search ([B2B Social Media Guide](#)), 75% of users never scroll past the first page of search results ([Hubspot](#)), and nearly 40% of customers come from search ([B2B Social Media Guide](#)). Driving users to the site is fundamental and the digital marketer must take steps to ensure success from search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo!.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting visibility to a website or web page by affecting unpaid, organic search results ([Wikipedia](#)). Many factors go into SEO success and the rules occasionally change. A regularly updated and trusted reference is the *The Periodic Table of SEO Success Factors*. In an eCommerce implementation, the digital marketer should ensure the following SEO-contributing elements are established at site launch:

- A healthy keyword list that takes competition into account
- Comprehensive, accurate, and unique tag coverage
- Proper placement of tags within pages
- Indexable navigation that includes breadcrumbs
- Indexable content
- A frequently refreshed sitemap that is comprehensive and accurate

Once SEO is established, search engine marketing (SEM) becomes easier to establish. Top Internet retailers such as Amazon, Staples, Sears, Office Depot, and Grainger regularly achieve 35%-45% of their shoppers through search engines ([Internet Retailer: Top 500 Guide. 2013 Edition](#)).

Onsite Search

Once a user has made it to your site, it is important that he or she can find what he or she needs. Considering that 71% of buyers would purchase more from a website if the process to browse and purchase were easier and more convenient ([Acquity Group, 2013 State of B2B Procurement Study](#)), searchability of products and content within a

site should not be overlooked. A digital marketer should ensure a foundational baseline that includes:

- A well-organized catalog structure of products and content
- Landing pages for categories and sub-categories not only help users with browsing content, but also provide a place to land broad search terms
- A well-indexed site that allows for relevant search results
- Ability to administer configurations in the search tool that can promote certain products or categories when desired by the business

[MSA – The Safety Company](#) offers a rich, on-site search experience that allows search results to be easily narrowed down by category and sub-category. MSA also has content-rich landing pages for categories and sub-categories. This is achieved through its well-organized catalog structure.

Onsite Merchandising

Product promotion is powerful in helping users discover similar and complementary products. For example, there is a 3% increase in conversion when cross-sell is shown on the checkout page (PredictiveIntent report January 2012). Amazon is a leader in the onsite merchandising space as it gracefully makes relevant personalized product suggestions throughout the user experience. Digital marketer influence over onsite merchandising should ensure a product catalog structure that associates products to:

- Similar products
- Complimentary products
- Upsell products

Men's clothing retailer, [DestinationXL](#), has achieved an excellent merchandising experience that ties products to similar products, and products that other customers have viewed.

Analytics

Measuring conversion success and customizing the user experience are dependent on collection of quality analytics. Digital marketers live and die by the numbers to measure success. The foundation of analytics includes:

- Defining key performance indicators – KPIs should be the top two or three metrics that show the overall picture of performance
- Defining funnels to conversion – Not all funnels are the paths of eCommerce purchases; funnels can be the paths to complete a lead form, complete a quote form, or a digital download that results in a reduction of costs
- Proper tags present on all pages and high-value events
- Role-specific dashboard and distribution of automated reports

Social

With the potential to touch every part of the user experience is social. Considering that social networking reaches nearly one in four around the world ([emarketer](#)), there are many possibilities of success as online retailers find different ways to innovate in social space. A digital marketer should consider the following social foundations to an eCommerce site

Social Login The ability to login to an eCommerce site using social credentials. This has the potential to make the registration process faster and easier for customers. Additionally, this opens the door to leverage social data in a deeper way. As a benefit of social login, Target Cartwheel is able to display indication of products that are in the shopping list of Facebook friends.

Social Plugins The ability to amplify content on the site via social channels. This has the potential to keep customers more engaged on the site and increase key metrics like time spent on site. For example, C. Wonder offers customers the option to share products of interest in via Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

Ratings and Reviews The ability for customers to provide ratings and reviews on products. This has the potential to increase average order value. Chico's brand White House | Black Market has seen a 300% increase in revenue per visitor since implementing Ratings & Reviews and Questions & Answers. ([BazaarVoice](#))

The above social integrations can provide the potential to increase traffic and user growth for eCommerce sites. For example, in 2012, ecommerce site Fab.com, which specializes in daily design, increased membership from 1.8 million to over 4.5 million as a result of social integration. Additionally, Fab observed 20 – 40% of traffic came from Facebook on a daily basis. (Facebook)

Site Performance

As the infamous launch of a recent national healthcare site has shown us, the importance of site performance is something that should not be underestimated. A slow site or one that won't run on your browser of choice may be a deterrent for many potential users. At minimum, the following must be defined and validated:

- Page speed with a range of users and geographic locations
- Browsers and devices supported to ensure a consistent experience

People will visit a website less often if it is slower than a close competitor by more than 250 milliseconds ([NY Times](#)). In the competitive landscape of the Internet, site performance must take priority.

Server Configuration

Last, but not least, a new site implementation runs the risk of traffic drops. URLs change, old pages are removed, and new pages are created. To reduce chances of traffic drops related to these changes, the following should be present at implementation:

- 301, 302 and 307 redirects to redirect the users if the page they are trying to access is moved temporarily or permanently

- Custom 404 page to display is the user attempts to visit a non-existent page on your site
- Custom 500 and 503 pages if an internal server error exists or if the required server is currently unavailable
- Error logging to understand when page errors exist

Search engines, such as Google, give lower priority to sites that have broken links or improper redirects ([Moz](#)). Ignoring these server configurations could result in numerous missed opportunities.

As the above foundational elements are established on the site, the next levels of digital marketing, such as search engine marketing, display retargeting, and email programs, become easier to implement and with which to experience success. As these digital marketing elements work together, the digital marketer can add value to the client and iterate on findings from the analysis.

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