

eCommerce Systems - Buyer's Guide

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1. Preface

eCommerce Systems

This Guide will help you learn how to choose the right eCommerce system.

Running your own Internet shop can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. From talking to customers, meeting people at trade shows and building working relationships with suppliers, business over the Internet is as much about people as it is technology. It is important to remember that at all times you are in control of how much time and effort you want to put into running your shop.

Your Internet shop comes in two distinctive halves. The first half is the actual shopping side (Shop-Front) of it, where your visitors can read about you and your shop, browse your products, add items to their shopping cart and ultimately order items from you.

The second half of your Internet shop is a password protected set of shop keeper administration pages (Back-Office) that allow you to maintain the contents of your shop, including your contact details for customers, shopping departments, products, news articles, links, and most importantly the Order you want to process.

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2. Introduction to eCommerce

2.1. What do I need to Start Selling Online?

Domain Name

A domain name locates an organization or other entity such as a website or online store on the Internet. For example, www.urbanshops.co.uk

You will need a domain name for your online store so the people around the world can visit your store from anywhere.

Email Account

Electronic mail, often abbreviated as email or e-mail, is a method of exchanging digital messages. You will need email address to receive various notifications such as Orders, Payment notifications etc.

Bank Account

You will require a Bank Account to receive Payments. Any High Street Bank will assist you opening a bank account.

Merchant Account

A merchant account is a type of bank account that allows businesses to accept payments by debit or credit cards. A merchant account also serves as an agreement between a retailer, a merchant bank and payment processor for the settlement of credit card and/or debit card transactions.

Products

You will also need something to sell, it could be anything such as baby products, hair accessories, home accessories, article of clothing, electrical goods etc.

and some spare time...

2.2. Definition of eCommerce

eCommerce (short for "electronic commerce"), these online stores works well as an extra sales channel that is open 24/7, in all types of industries. Most consumer products are good candidates for eCommerce such as clothes, household items, arts and crafts, pet supplies, specialty foods, electronics, and more.

Components of an eCommerce system

An ideal eCommerce should have following integrated components into one system.

Storefront

The shop front is the interface presented to the customer. This often incorporates an online catalogue that enables them to browse for products and identify those they wish to purchase. The intention of the shop front is to make sales, and in order to do this it should have certain attributes. Customers should be able to find the product quickly. The design of

the shop front should make shopping intuitive, with the customer knowing at all times what stage of the buying process they are at.

Shopping Cart

This is the software that facilitates easy selection and payment for products purchased by a customer from an eCommerce website. Once the goods have been selected, the customer should find the checkout clearly signposted, so that they can proceed to pay for the goods.

Payment Processor

Online payment processing refers to the purchase of goods and services over the Internet typically using a credit card. The financial transaction is processed electronically in “real time.”

Administration

Manage orders, customers, products, shipping, tax, specials and more via the browser based administration facility.

Secured Hosting

Security is a major concern in conducting e-commerce and one of the top consumer barriers to shop online. To ensure the safe delivery of online payment transactions, and secure storage of data, maximized security has been emphasized throughout the whole registration and payment process. Data integrity is ensured through high-security hosting, including such advanced features as intrusion detection, multiple firewalls, data encryption and data redundancy.

3. eCommerce System Hosting

eCommerce systems can range from basic storefronts that simply manage email orders to complex systems integrated with multiple aspects of your business. To determine how you want to proceed, there are a few basic questions you need to answer about your eCommerce hosting and management. This will help you determine which providers to focus your search on.

3.1. Who will host the eCommerce system?

You can host the software yourself. That means that you buy and install the software on your own servers. This includes purchasing an SSL certificate for security and setting up appropriate connections to the other parts of your web site and company databases. This option is best for companies that already host their own web site and have sufficient technical staff to maintain everything. The main drawback is that it can require a lot of time to implement. Plus, ongoing maintenance can be a drain on your internal resources.

The other choice is to have a hosted eCommerce system by an external company such as **urbanshops** that considerably reduces your operational burden. This path is probably best for companies interested in little investment as possible or smaller companies looking to eCommerce as a supplement to their existing business.

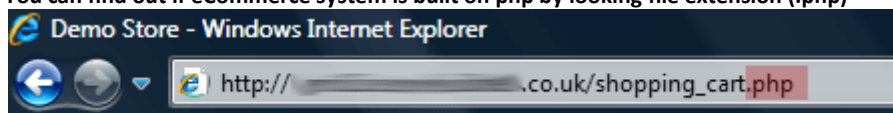
3.2. Hosting Servers and Technologies?

There are two main types of Server Technologies ecommerce system providers are using.

Open Source Technologies

These are FREE Software and Technologies such as ZenCart, OsCommerce, available to download, use open source FREE php Technology running on FREE Apache Servers.

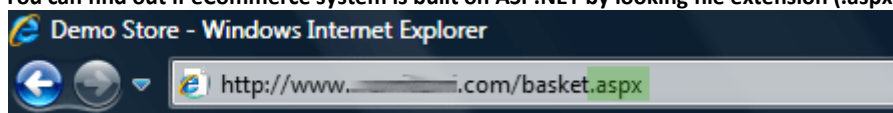
You can find out if eCommerce system is built on php by looking file extension (.php)



ASP.NET

This is Microsoft's proprietary web development technology provides robust approach to develop small to large scale projects. eCommerce systems developed using ASP.NET are more reliable, secure and faster to run.

You can find out if eCommerce system is built on ASP.NET by looking file extension (.aspx)



eCommerce systems from urbanshops are custom built using ASP.NET Technologies and hosted on dedicated servers connected with high-speed backbone internet connections providing your site available at all times.

4. eCommerce Systems – Storefront

Storefront is what your customers will see as soon as they visit your online store. Storefront should be easy to use and intuitive with functions to provide browse and search products facilities and allow customer to buy multiple items in their baskets. Storefront should be well integrated in Payment Processors for secure and easy payment transactions.

4.1. eCommerce Systems Features

Most businesses entering into eCommerce need a complete online store that allows customers to shop for multiple products at once and helps streamline the fulfillment process. An online store includes shopping cart functionality and an order processing and management system.

Many purchases involve multiple options: size and colour are two very common examples. In entry-level ecommerce software, you might have to create separate products for blue widgets, red widgets, and green widgets. Adding a "colour" option simplifies the shopping process considerably and cuts down on the amount of work you have to do to manage your store.

Here are some of the features you will find in urbanshops – eCommerce System:

Product Catalogue

This allows customers to browse through Product Categories or Department to view and select products.

Search

Research shows that many web shoppers don't even try to browse their way through catalogue - they go straight to search to quickly locate the products they want.

Promotions

The online equivalent of coupons: by entering a special code, customers can get a discount on their order, free shipping, or other special offers.

Shopping Cart

This allows customers to buy multiple items in one transaction.

Checkout

These pages allow customer to enter their billing and shipping details and other detail to create an order.

Payment Processing

These secured pages allow customers to enter debit / credit card numbers to pay for their orders. Most Popular Payment Processor is PayPal.

5. eCommerce Systems – Administration

Administration Interface a combination of a user friendly environment with full control through a Browser-Based administration control panel allows you to process orders and other management operation to keep your site working.

5.1. Who will maintain the catalogue and manage orders?

As with hosting and initially creating your site, you can maintain the catalogue on your own or through an external company. In most cases, it's better to manage your catalogue in-house. This doesn't require technical expertise - with the right interface, any computer-savvy employee can handle it. You should, however, look for an online interface that's easy to manage.

Doing it yourself is cheaper in the long run, and allows you to be more flexible. You don't want to have to call your provider every time you want to change the price on one of your products.

Urbanshops eCommerce systems provide excellent Store Administration and Management Interface to perform Order Processing, Product Management etc, without the knowledge of HTML or Programming expertise.

5.2. Order Processing

Once a customer places an order, the transaction details need to be delivered to you. You need an ecommerce system that has order handling and tracking built in. Also, look into customer notification: can you customize the emails that are sent out? Are the emails in HTML or plain text, and how do they look?

urbanshops – eCommerce systems, have sophisticated Order Processing System that allows you to receive orders in real time, check order detail and change order status from “PENDING” to “PROCESSING” or “DISPATCHED” etc. Our system will also allow you to edit order details, if required, print delivery notes, invoice and send notifications to customers.

5.3. Managing Products and Categories

A good eCommerce System allow:

- Shop administrator to break your products down in to different categories for your online store. By categorizing your products, your customers will be able to find what they are looking for more easily.
- Setting images for your products and categories so that your customers can see what they are buying.
- Setting various attributes or options for your products. Attributes will allow you to set different sizes, colours, etc.

6. Payment Processing

Running a shop in your local high street or on the Internet is about accepting money from your customers in return for items or services offered. You might be hoping to make enough to pay for a summer holiday each year, or perhaps to buy that nice villa in Florida, so the ability to accept payments from your customers is an important step on your check list.

In order to accept money from your customers, you will need trading accounts. These include a bank account and a payment account that accepts unattended credit and debit card payments from your customers.

6.1. Your Bank Account

Some shop keepers choose to use their own personal bank account to start with, whereas existing retail businesses or more ambitious shop keepers set up a business bank account. Nearly all of the high street banks offer free business and personal banking as long as you stay within their agreed limits. If you already have a personal account with a bank that you are happy with, it might be a good idea to talk to them about opening a business account.

6.2. Do you have a merchant account?

The second type of account you will need is a payment account that allows your customers to pay you through your Internet shop using their credit or debit card. Companies that provide this type of payment account are called Payment Service Providers, usually abbreviated as PSP.

Some examples of payment service providers include PayPal (www.paypal.co.uk), WorldPay (www.worldpay.com) and Protx (www.sagepay.com). Each of these companies provides your customers with a secure payment page that allows them to purchase items.

7. Search Engine Optimisation

7.1. What is Search Engine Optimisation?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the volume or quality of traffic to a web site from search engines via "natural" or un-paid ("organic") search results as opposed to search engine marketing (SEM) which deals with paid inclusion.

SEO may target different kinds of search, including image search, local search, and industry-specific vertical search engines. This gives a web site web presence.

Urbanshops' eCommerce System is Search Engine Optimised and provides built-in options to optimise the store, individual pages and product pages.