

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

E-Commerce Solutions

Discover the power of a database for e-commerce

Increase your sales by making it simple for your e-commerce customers to research and buy your products or services. Allow them to conduct searches, ask questions and place orders with your business. Own a site that is *effective, intuitive, and responsive*, rather than one that is constructed quickly and carelessly.

Save expenses in the long run by planning carefully when you establish your e-commerce site. If the site is thoughtfully created, adjustments or additional functionality can be implemented easily and cost effectively.

There are several aspects to designing an effective e-commerce site. These include the display of products and information, managing the items purchased (a.k.a. the cart), and processing the payment. In this article, we will be focusing on the presentation and display of information to the potential buyer.

Plan your e-commerce site through your customers' eyes.

- Step through each of the scenarios that your customers might experience when accessing your site.
- Make sure your site is easy to navigate.
- Find ways to customize the experience for each visitor, because nothing sells better than when a person gets the impression that a site was made exclusively for him or her.

Are you establishing or re-designing the customer interface of your e-commerce site? Here are some ways you can create and manage your site:

1. Static HTML with notification scripts.
2. Using a generic e-commerce database service.
3. Create a customized e-commerce database solution.

Option 1 - Static HTML: These sites require pre-made product pages. Any changes to the web site require HTML knowledge by the person making the changes. Each product will have its own page. When a visitor places an order, special programming at the web site sends an e-mail to the site owner with the details of the order. The order is then placed into the order entry system at the company by retyping the information.

Pro: Given a small number of products, this site can be quickly created and easily implemented.

Pro: This can be the least costly option, as long as the number of products offered is quite small.

Con: Any time that any of the information at the site needs to be changed, someone will have to change the web pages and the special programming that handles the transmission of the order.

Con: Static HTML e-commerce sites require the most maintenance. This can be quite cumbersome as the site grows.

Option 2 - E-Commerce Service: Site owners can utilize a generic e-commerce site program located at their ISP, or other location. Site owners get a database driven site that is fairly easy to maintain, and offers a professional look. The web pages that are viewed by the site visitors are *dynamically* generated each time they are requested. This means that the database places the information about the requested product into the proper places within a web page template. Most E-Commerce services offer a kind of 'one-size-fits-all' approach. You make your products and site to fit their templates.

Pro: Customers can interact with the site, build searches, and compare product models.

Pro: Offered as a standard product, it may be the most cost effective database driven solution.

Con: There usually isn't an easy way for the site owner to get the orders from the site into the order entry system.

Con: This is usually a 'one-size-fits-all solution'. The site can only operate in one way, which inhibits the ability to modify its operation to best fit your company and the products that you want to sell.

Option 3 - Customized Database Solution: A customized solution involves creating an e-commerce site that is designed specifically for the site owner. This means that the database structure, the web pages, and the programming that record and display information are completely tailored to the needs of the individual site and the items presented within. Special features and programming can be incorporated at any time. The web pages that are viewed by the site visitors are dynamically generated each time they are requested, just like the previous option. The approach with this kind of site is to make the web pages fit your products and their unique benefits.

Pro: A customized solution enables you to make the site operate exactly the way that you desire.

Pro: You can also have code added to your site that will enable the user to personalize the site far more than the generic services mentioned above. This will allow you to better tailor your web site to the needs of your customers, which will promote a stronger return on your investment.

“More than half (56 percent) of the respondents said they are more likely to purchase from a site that allows personalization, and 63 percent are more likely to register at a site that allows personalization or content customization. The implication for online sellers is that the most desirable customers increasingly want to receive improved service or relevant benefits from Web sites that can remember their personal information and subsequently tailor that information to their personal needs and interests.”¹

Pro: Using a custom e-commerce site, you can have a link created between the web site and your inventory tracking system. Inventory availability information is displayed for each item, which helps your customers feel more confident when making their purchases. This type of integration can also help you better manage your inventory, which can result in fewer out-of-stock problems and possibly lowering your costs. The end result is a more accurate and timely delivery of your customers' purchases.

“Offline retailers who wish to make their online operations a successful part of their business will find it important to integrate online and offline systems. According to a Jupiter Executive Survey, only 31 percent of retailers already provide visibility of store inventory on their Web sites, and another 23 percent expect to offer this capability within the next 24 months.”²

Pro: You can add the ability to track how visitors proceed through your site. You can optimize your site by tracking and analyzing the following information:

- When visitors search your site for products, what search terms are used most frequently?
- How do the search terms used compare to what was actually purchased?
- Which items are viewed, but not purchased?

Analyzing this information can help you improve the structure and responsiveness of your e-commerce site, making your site accessible and more convenient for your customers to utilize.

“Eighty-one percent of the online consumers polled said convenience was an important factor of e-commerce, while only 33 percent cited price savings.”³

Pro: It is easy for the web site owner to alter the appearance of the web site since they have control of the product templates. There is no need to utilize your programmer for most changes.

Pro: A customized database solution is the most flexible option when creating an e-commerce web site. You get all of the benefits of having an e-commerce site that will grow with your company, and you can implement unique features that help you to differentiate your product from your competition.

Con: It may be the most costly to initiate of the three options.

As you are developing or expanding your e-commerce site, think of us as a design resource. We would be happy to discuss your project with you with no obligation.

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Next Month's Topic: Breaking data speed limits - What happens if your database is not fast enough?

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