Five must-haves of a conversion worthy ecommerce website



30-second summary:

- Getting traffic to a website can be difficult, so you need to make sure that visitors are as likely to convert as possible once there
- Quality site search implementation can increase conversion rates by 5-6x, and including elements like CTAs or a system that accounts for spelling mistakes can have a considerable impact
- When working with an online store, think about category pages like aisles and sub-categories like shelves within those aisles
- Breadcrumbs can not only help enhance the user experience but also improve rankings as they help search engines understand how your site structure and relevance

By many estimates, there are over twelve million ecommerce websites on the internet. That’s a lot of online stores, covering a lot of different niches. Getting traffic to these sites is one of the main struggles for businesses, so it’s important that once someone does land on the website, they have the best chance of converting as possible.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how good the rest of your site is, if the commercial pages are poor then you may be throwing leads away.

By 'commercial pages', we mean anything that leads to the generation of revenue, like the product, category, and service pages – even the checkout. What may seem like a minor change can have a huge impact on revenue for these pages.

For example, would you have guessed that simply adding a video to a product page would make users 144 percent more likely to add a product to their cart?

In this article, I take a look at five ways ecommerce websites can take their traffic – but most importantly, conversions – to the next level. We'll start with the largest, and most underappreciated one, first.

1. Prioritise your site search

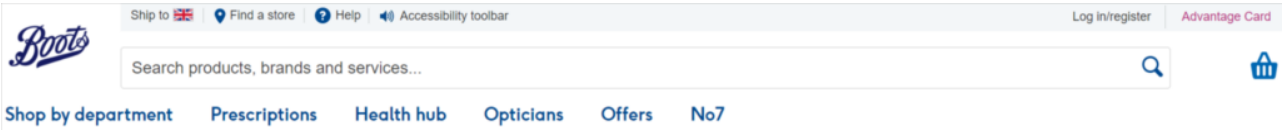
According to Econsultancy, up to 30 percent of ecommerce visitors use the internal site search available to them. This level of engagement means there is a higher level of purchasing intent, which needs to be capitalised on. Why?

Due to the increased level of purchasing intent from these searchers, they're known to be 5–6x more likely to convert than the average visitor that *doesn't* use the site search.

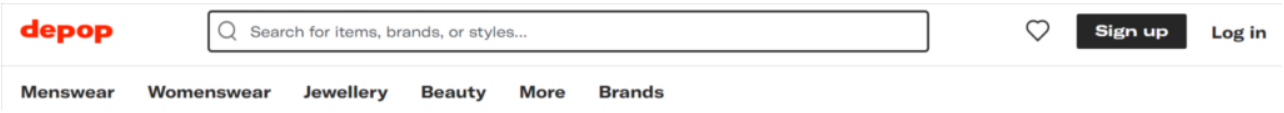
If someone invented a tool that reliably increased conversion rates by 5x, they'd be incredibly wealthy – and the tool would be very expensive. Instead, this is available on pretty much all site builds, but lies unutilized in most cases, even if site search optimization has led to conversion rate increases of 43 percent.

So, how can you optimize your search functionality?

First, include a CTA (call to action) in the search bar by default that encourages users to search, or even just explains what the bar is for more basic users. Below are some examples from major online brands:



Source: Boots



Source: Depop



Source: ebay

In the first word of each of these, they are both educating the user on what the bar is for and are also encouraging them to use it. They also give people an insight into what they provide beyond just products, whether that's services for Boots or styles for Depop. The eBay example is also great copywriting as it supports the brand's character that you can buy and sell anything you want there; they're not limited to brands or styles, you can search for *anything!*

A great site search would also be able to handle misspellings. For example, a website may have items listed as "red t-shirt", but there are a lot of people that would simply search "red tshirt". If your site search doesn't show the same products for either, you're likely losing out on sales.

You also want to make sure that generating new searches and applying filters don't create new, indexable URLs. To test

this, run a search on your website and then find what the search string URL looks like – basically everything in the URL before your search. Paste this into Google and see if these pages are being indexed/are appearing in the search engine results page.

It may be that *every* search is being saved as a new page (which we've seen many times before), which can lead to a huge crawl bloat. Consider search engines like Google as having a really short attention span. You don't want to distract them with pointless pages like these, so make sure you no-index them.

Options like Fact Finder, Doo Finger, and SLI Systems are flexible choices that work fairly easily out of the box. These are great for smaller businesses with tighter resources. For larger businesses that need more from this functionality, Elastic Search and Solr are strong open source options but require a lot of work. This means that they can become totally bespoke, but that it may be overwhelming for businesses without the time and resources.

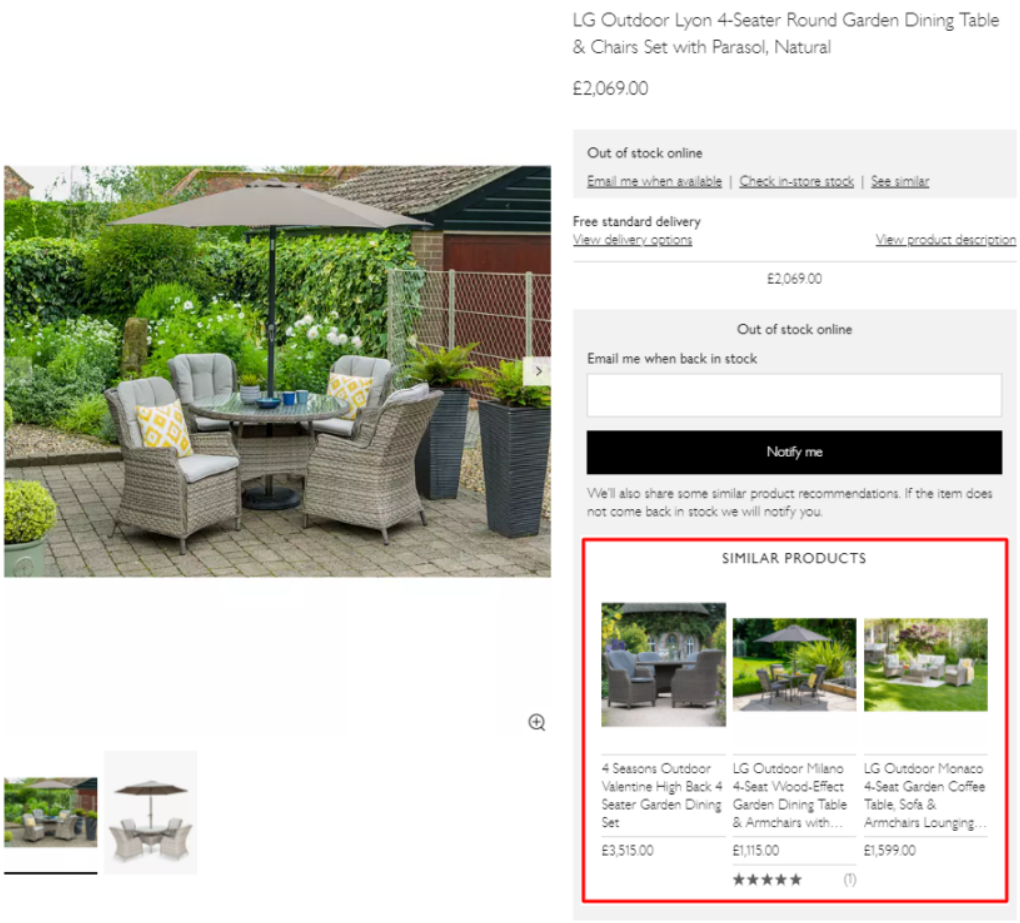
2. Have a Plan B for when a product is out of stock

Most products sold online are finite. Whether you have a lot of stock or a limited amount, almost every product runs the risk of becoming out of stock. This is the nature of an ecommerce business and is often a sign that something is selling well, but you should have a plan for when this happens.

It's easy for a potential sale to end when they see that 'out of stock' message. However, the truly great ecommerce stores will know this isn't the end of the customer's journey – just because the product they originally wanted isn't available doesn't mean they can't be sold on another.

After all, if you were doing your online grocery shopping and the usual meat feast pizza you buy isn't available, that probably doesn't mean you're just not eating pizza anymore. Instead, you'd likely look for a similar meaty pizza from a different brand. This mindset works for other products, too.

First, you should consider related products on out of stock pages as absolutely essential. Take this example from John Lewis:



Source: John Lewis and Partners

In this case, the outdoor set is out of stock, but they are straight away suggesting similar products that would scratch the same itch the customer has. They're also high up the page, which is important. If people see a product they want is out of stock, they may click away very quickly, so having similar products above the fold means you have a good chance of grabbing their attention before they move away.

As well as including related products, there should also be a channel for communication with the customer so you can contact them when the product comes back in stock. You can't just assume that they'll remember your website to check again in a few more weeks. It's much more likely they'll just find the product on a different website and give them their money instead.

While you can't stop them from looking elsewhere, a section asking for their email address means that you can now communicate with them directly for marketing purposes but also let them know as soon as the product becomes available. This means that not only can you draw the customer back to the page for a purchase, but you could also sell them on more products over email!

Finally, if a product is out of stock and you don't ever plan to restock it again, then consider removing it from your sitemap. For example, if you sell a calendar designed for 2018, this may very well be out of stock and very unlikely to come back in stock. With this in mind, deleting it from your sitemap would mean that search engines don't bother looking at it and can instead focus on pages of yours that you actually want the likes of Google and Bing to be looking at.

3. Build a category structure that makes sense

A considered and effective category/sub-category structure is essential for online stores. Not only does this help search engines understand what it is you sell and what your most important pages are, but it also helps the user.

If there were no aisles in a supermarket, customers would be searching blindly for what they need. There'd be no structure and no space for using initiative. Instead, there are frozen aisles, canned aisles, fresh aisles; if you need some frozen

french fries or some fresh peppers, you know where to go. Once you're in that aisle, there are then shelves which can help you get even more specific. There likely wouldn't be a tomato aisle, but a tomato shelf in the fresh aisle makes sense.

When working with an online store, think about category pages like aisles and sub-category pages like shelves within those aisles. Shopping online should be as seamless as this.

Consider what your biggest categories are and 'zoom in' smaller and smaller so you can find what your sub-categories are. It may be that you don't have enough products to necessitate a sub-category.

Toby Dean, the Associate Director of SEO at Add People, believes that "As a rule of thumb, if there are more than 25-30 products in a category, you may want to sub-categorise that down to improve relevance, rankings and UX."

Just like how people rarely click on page nine of Google search results, customers will rarely look at page nine of a category. Sub-category implementation will give them a better guide as to where they can find the products they want. For a clothing store, this might look like this:

Clothing > Men > Jumpers > Roll Neck Jumpers

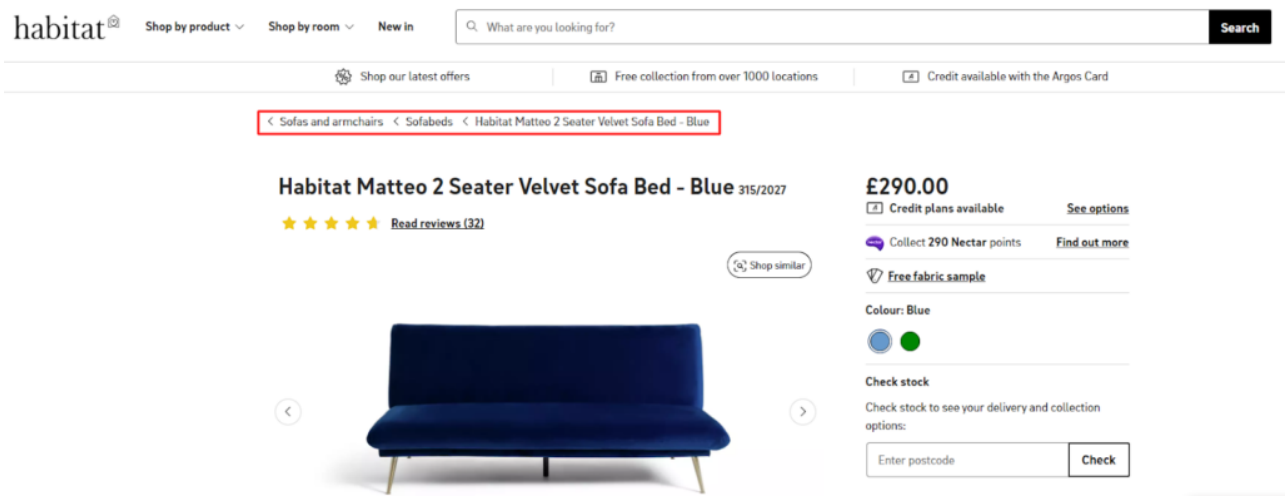
Not having these is the equivalent of a supermarket having all of their food in one humongous aisle. Good luck trying to find what you need in there!

4. Include breadcrumbs

Breadcrumbs aren't on every category or product page, but they should be. They essentially show the user's journey from the root category page to whatever page they're on at that point. Using the example above, if you were on a product page for a roll neck jumper, you might see the "Clothing > Men > Jumpers > Roll Neck Jumpers" as a breadcrumb near the top of the page.

Each of these should be clickable, giving the user a chance to go as far back as they would like to in their journey. This massively improves navigation on these pages and means that if they end up down the wrong path, they can quickly 'turn around' and go back the way they came. This helps increase conversions and lower bounce rates.

Habitat, an online furniture provider, use this to good effect on their pages:



Source: Habitat

From a search engine perspective, it also helps pass link equity throughout all the pages. The more internal links something like Google detects going to a page, the more it will consider that page important. With that in mind, including breadcrumbs means that you will be linking to many pages at once. This means that they will quickly develop an understanding of how your website is structured, which should make ranking for relevant terms even easier.

Everything else

These tips below don't need a whole section to explain, but could still be key movers for your traffic and conversions.

- Include trust points and reviews on product pages

According to a BrightLocal survey, 91% of 18 to 34-year-old consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. This means that your product pages should include reviews of the item and the rest of your website should include testimonials from customers alongside your ratings on services like TrustPilot or Google.

- Use photos and videos to sell to the customer

Shoppers expect more than one photo per product now. They want to see it from different angles and in use, in both a photo and video format ideally. One study found that those shoppers who saw videos on product pages were 144% more likely to add a product to their cart.

- Add filters and sorts to pages

While some popular ecommerce platforms have this as a basic feature, plenty still don’t. With that in mind, make sure that you can apply filters that are relevant to your products. If a website sells shoes, it may need a size filter. If a website sells food, it may need a vegetarian-friendly filter. Regardless of the niche, all pages should also have the ability to sort by price and ratings.

- Include optimized copy

After a recent Google update saw some websites crash in rankings, it became even more apparent that optimized copy is crucial for ecommerce-focused pages. By including keywords and matching the intent of the typical customer, you can draw in organic traffic and help them convert while they are there; all while appeasing search engines and assuring them that you’re relevant to the searches your customers are making.

- Consider brand-focused pages

If you’re getting a lot of brand-focused searches and interest, you may want to create a dedicated page for that brand and connect all the relevant products to it. This will

help establish your relevance for these searches, while also collecting all of the products people are interested in to one place.

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