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Tuning Up the Checkout Process

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One of the most important factors to optimizing conversion is fine tuning the shopping cart and checkout process. Sales are won or lost within this crucial component of your site and it is critical to examine the data that will unlock the mysteries of visitor behavior within this process.

A simple rule applies within eCommerce – the lesser the clicks to complete a goal, the higher the percentage that consumers will complete it. Too often however, cart and checkout processes extend through many clicks and lead consumers down a long and winding road. Retailers lose interested customers because consumers lose patience or simply become distracted when progressing. Don't let a poorly designed checkout process frustrate your customers and inhibit your growth.

The following is a preliminary plan to examine your cart & checkout so you can identify changes to increase your key commerce metrics.

Conduct detailed path analysis

Customers behave very differently and varied factors cause them to take certain paths throughout your ecommerce store. Understanding their behavior, more specifically where they drop off within the checkout process, will allow a retailer to re-engineer a process geared to increase sales.

Within your analytics software package, make sure that you have created goals for each checkout step. Every step within your process needs to be tagged with tracking codes so that abandonment rates can pinpointed to exact pages.

Below is an example of the story for which your web analytics may be telling:

- 34% of customers add to cart
- 29% progress to billing information page
- 11% progress to shipping page
- 5% progress to confirm page
- 2% complete the transaction

What do these hypothetical numbers tell us? Primarily, they show which steps within the process need to be optimized. From the example, the major problems are at the billing, shipping, and confirm order pages – as each step is losing more than half of potential customers.

After identifying which pages are losing traffic, the next step is to **identify where customers are abandoning to**. Are customers leaving the site completely? Are they clicking on customer service pages to learn about return policies? Are they attempting to go back to the product page because they may have cold feet about purchasing? This information provides clues into their motivations and reasoning.

When looking at your checkout abandonment points, make sure you are answering these key customer concerns.

Security

With the progression of hacker tactics, security will likely always be a concern of online shoppers. Within your checkout process, make sure to emphasize security with links that explain why your cart is secure.

Use partnership logos from companies such as Versign, Hacker Safe, TrustE, and the Better Business Bureau to reduce the hesitancy from your shoppers. Remember, if you can persuade just one customer out of every hundred to buy who may have not bought before, you will significantly drive your conversion upward.

Shipping

When possible, attempt to message shipping costs at the product page. If that is not feasible, try to message exact shipping costs as soon as possible within the checkout process.

Many ecommerce sites wait until one of the last steps in the process to tell the customer what the shipping costs are. Retailers think that customers have invested too much time and wont abandon. This is a fundamental mistake and is not accurate.

Return policies

Returns are a crucial piece of your overall customer experience. Make sure that you message your return policy with a dedicated link within your cart that triggers a pop up window that explains your policy clearly. By clearly defining how returns are processed your business will be answering another question that is likely within your customers' minds.

Other Enhancements

Other potential enhancements may include utilizing a **persistent cart process** that consistently shows customers what products are in the cart and at what dollar total. This feature is integrated into the main template and is seen on every page within the user experience.

Another proven tactic is to **remove navigation options** after a customer progresses to the first step of the checkout process. Retailers such as Best Buy and Target follow this approach in an attempt to limit any distractions from consumers in the conversion funnel.

Taking the steps to optimize your checkout should be a consistent focus of your eCommerce business. By making the process easier for your customers and by addressing the questions/concerns that they have in buying, your online store will undoubtedly experience increases in key metrics.