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Best Practices for Conversion Rate Optimization

2021

Why CRO Is Vital to Ecommerce Success

Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) has long served as a key indicator of success for businesses in the ecommerce sector. While revenue from sales is the ultimate determinant of whether a business is able to stay afloat or even thrive, comparing completed sales to the total number of site visitors can help businesses ascertain how effective their site is at converting window shoppers into buyers.

According to one comparison study, the average ecommerce conversion rate is 2.27%.[1] Businesses can calculate their own conversion rate by dividing their number of sales by their number of site visitors in a given amount of time. By paying close attention to this number and implementing strategies to improve it, businesses can drastically increase their sales and revenue.

2.27%
average ecommerce conversion rate

Calculate conversion rate:

NUMBER OF SALES

DIVIDED BY

NUMBER OF SITE VISITORS

How to Improve CRO for Ecommerce

Optimizing your site's conversion rate is not as simple as making a few changes and considering the task complete—it's a continuous process that requires regularly monitoring your site and how visitors interact with it, and adjusting your digital approach accordingly. Below, we explore some best practices for improving your ecommerce store's conversion rate and provide suggestions for how to implement them throughout different stages of the customer journey.

1. Know Your Target Market

It's a well-known fact that identifying a target market is essential. However, not all ecommerce store owners go beyond deciding who they think would be most interested in buying their products. Square writer Colleen Egan notes that "[d]etermining your target market isn't as simple as guessing who your customers are, or hoping for a certain demographic. Instead, it requires an in-depth review of your products and services, the marketplace, your potential (or current) customers, and more."[2]

Thoroughly researching your target market and building audience personas based upon your research will help you better understand your audience's intrinsic needs and desires. This way, you can more effectively tailor your ecommerce experience to their expectations. For example, if your target market is busy moms who need to make purchases in a hurry, you'll want to ensure that your entire purchase flow from homepage to order confirmation is quick and painless.

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>
> **Colleen Egan** *Writer at Square*

However, if your target market is high-end interior decorators who are looking for the perfect pieces for their clients, you'll want to focus on building value through stunning product images and persuasive descriptions.

2. Enhance Your Site

Once you've pinned down a thoroughly-researched target market, you will need to make sure that your ecommerce site is operating at its full potential and designed in a way that allows your audience to find what they need quickly. Read on for insight into some of the essential actions that must be incorporated into your site enhancement.

Boost Your Site's SEO

If you want your target market to be able to purchase from your store, you first need to ensure that it can be found online easily. A recent Brightedge study reported that **organic search traffic currently makes up 53.3% of traffic across all industries**, and Retail/Ecommerce sees an average of 36.4% of their share of revenue from organic search.[3] These statistics speak for themselves: having a good SEO strategy in place is a highly effective driver of conversions.

To improve your ecommerce site's chances of being found by the right shoppers online:

- Create meta titles and descriptions for every page on your site so that their content is easily identifiable on search pages.

- Incorporate keywords into your product descriptions so that your product pages will rank higher in search for related words and phrases.

- Add category pages to your site with relevant content that is also searchable.

- Submit a sitemap.xml file to Google so that your entire site can be indexed quickly and accurately.

Ensure Your Site's Mobile-Friendliness

With the rise in popularity—and growing necessity—of smartphones has come a rise in shopping from mobile devices. As this trend continues, it is more important than ever to ensure that your online store's mobile site meets the expectations of those attempting to use it. In fact, a survey from Google/Ipsos found that **77% of smartphone shoppers are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps allow them to make purchases quickly**.[4]

The mobile landscape changes constantly, so make sure your mobile site is up to par by incorporating these suggestions:

- Build your ecommerce site on a mobile framework before focusing on the desktop version of your site.

- Implement responsive design to ensure that your site renders well across any device your shoppers may be using.

- Use large fonts so that shoppers will have an easier time reading content on smaller screens—for reference, the web design standard is 16pt for mobile body text on mobile screens.

- Consider using Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) so that your site will meet Google's mobile requirements and rank higher in search results.

Speed Up Your Site

Nothing is more irksome to online shoppers than a site that loads slowly, delaying their ability to find what they need. SOASTA backs up this notion by reporting that a **delay of just 1 second in load time can impact conversion rates by up to 20% in retail**.[5] Every second counts when it comes to keeping online shoppers' attention, so making sure that your site loads as quickly as possible will reduce bounce rates, paving the way for more conversions.

To ensure that your site can load quickly and efficiently for shoppers:

- Host your site on a major Content Delivery Network to reduce the possibility of downtime caused by outages.

- Use server-side rendering to shift the "heavy lifting" of loading a page from your shoppers' browsers to the server.

- Compress all images and CSS so they load more quickly on each page of your site.

- Prevent images from trying to load (and increasing your load time) until the site visitor scrolls down to that section of the page.

Use Simple Structure & Navigation

Your website can be easily found, mobile-friendly, and fast-loading, but without an intuitive navigation structure, it will fall flat in the eyes of shoppers. Consider this statistic—in a survey of over 600 people, **94% of respondents stated that easy navigation was the most important website feature to them**.[6] Shoppers who can't find what they need quickly will abandon your site for a competitor, so designing your store with this in mind is imperative.

Ensure that your site visitors aren't getting lost in the code by implementing these strategies:

- Set up a clear menu structure so that different categories and pages are easy to identify and navigate to quickly.

- Incorporate search filters into your product pages so that shoppers can narrow down your products to the one(s) that will best suit their needs.

- Make sure your search bar is always visible when scrolling to encourage more searches if shoppers are having trouble finding what they need.

- Use hamburger menus on your mobile site to avoid cluttering the smaller screen.

Iterate A/B Tests

A/B testing can give you valuable insights into what your site visitors react well to despite its sometimes high cost in money and time. In 2007, Barack Obama's presidential campaign committee performed A/B testing on two variations of splash pages for their website. **The winning variation yielded a 40.6% improvement in sign-up rate**, translating to 2,880,000 additional email addresses and $60 million in additional donations.[7] Clearly, testing multiple variations to determine which is favored by site visitors can produce dramatic results.

A few often-cited areas where A/B testing can make a difference include:

- **Homepage Featured Content:** sale items, seasonal offerings, staff picks, and other feature categories can generate different results depending on the time of year.

- **CTA Button Design:** placement, color, font, and shape can all produce unexpected effects on conversion rates.

- **Category & Product Names:** using an assortment of words can put shoppers into different frames of mind—and pull pages up differently in search.

- **Sale Verbiage:** "Buy One, Get One 50% Off" and "25% Off When You Buy Two" equal the same amount in savings, but the values can seem unequal to shoppers.

3. Build Trust

No matter how technologically-enhanced and well-tested your ecommerce site is, shoppers will not buy from your store if they don't trust your business. For this reason, it's important to show them what makes your site credible. Below, we walk through the best ways to convince shoppers that they can be confident in your business when making a purchase.

Include Social Proof

Word-of-mouth has long been a powerful driver in purchase decisions. In today's digital world, the most popular way to simulate word-of-mouth is to display social proof in the form of user-generated content. One data deep-dive illustrated that **shoppers who see user-generated content convert 161% more than people who do not**.[8] By adding reviews, testimonials, or other socially-sourced content from real consumers onto your product pages, you can convince new shoppers that your products are high quality and worth their hard-earned money.

Display Security & Other Certifications

Buying products online comes with its own set of risks—especially when it comes to secure payments. In fact, one study reported that **17% of users abandoned a checkout flow within the past 3 months because they "didn't trust the site with their credit card information."**[9] Additional reasons shoppers may be wary of purchasing from an online store include the

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fear of stored personal information being stolen, questions about product quality, receiving a product much later than anticipated, and the risk of spending money on an item that never arrives. To counter these concerns, display security seals and other certifications prominently throughout your site to assure shoppers that they won't regret buying from you.

Have a Clear Return Policy

When shoppers place their trust in your business and decide to purchase from you, they want to know what their options are if your product ends up not working for them. In a survey of over 1,500 U.S. shoppers, **63% of respondents stated that they would not purchase from a business if they could not find the return policy**.[10] Regardless of whether you offer flat-fee return shipping, 100% free returns, or full refunds minus shipping costs, shoppers want to know what they're agreeing to before they commit to buy. Make sure your return policy is clearly stated and easy to find—both on your site itself and in relevant checkout pages—so that customers feel comfortable with their decision.

4. Optimize Your Product Pages

With your site operating smoothly and exhibiting trust indicators, it's time to focus on product pages. Because they are arguably the most important pages on your ecommerce site, making sure that your product pages are presenting your products in the best light is critical to conversion success. Here are a few of the most vital ways to optimize your product pages.

Keep Pages Simple

When shoppers examine a product for purchase, they must be able to do so with as little distraction as possible so that they can quickly determine whether it will meet their needs. A product page with too much extra content (related products, ads, links to other areas of your site, etc.) will pull a shopper's focus in too many directions—not to mention that it will likely increase page load times, and consequently bounce rates. Google researchers determined that **as the number of elements (text, titles, images, etc.) on a page increases from 400 to 6,000, the probability of conversion drops 95%.**[11] To avoid bounce and loss of conversions, keep product pages simple with only the most necessary elements that will help shoppers make a decision.

Use High Quality Images

One of the biggest challenges in ecommerce is convincing shoppers to purchase products that they cannot examine in person. A good way to combat this challenge is to use high quality images—and many of them—to give shoppers a better idea of what the product is like in person. Additionally, Scott Albro, founder of research and consulting firm TOPO (recently acquired by Gartner), explains that "high quality images create the perception in the mind of the customer that the product being offered is high quality—that in turn leads to higher conversion rates."[12] The better your product images, the more likely you are to sell the products in them.

Include Product Videos

Another way to give shoppers a closer look at a product using digital means is through product videos. This medium has the distinct advantage of giving shoppers a more tactile impression of the product even though it is behind a screen. Product videos are statistically proven to convert well—Bynder reports that **viewers are 85% more likely to purchase a product after watching a product video**.[13] While it may seem like a superfluous expense, investing in videos of your products can have a huge payoff in the long run.

85%

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Write Detailed Descriptions

Not all details about a product can be conveyed visually—for that reason, informative product descriptions are also an important way to ensure that shoppers have all of the information they need about a product before they buy. As cited by CXL, a Nielsen Norman Group study showed that **20% of purchase failures could be attributed to incomplete or unclear product information**.[14] Investing time and effort into improving your product descriptions can counteract this effect. In addition to product descriptions, consider adding an FAQ section to your product page—this will save you customer service time by giving shoppers answers to all the questions they may have upfront.

Price Items Competitively

In a survey of over 2,000 U.S. adults, Hawk Incentives found that **89% of respondents named price as a top factor affecting their purchasing decisions**.[15] Finding the right price for a product is a complicated process, and the psychology behind it depends on a combination of perceived product value, deal-seeking behavior, and other factors. To ensure that you are offering a price that is attractive to shoppers, research competing products to determine their similarities and differences to yours. Then, make these differences apparent in your product descriptions and images, and price your product accordingly. If shoppers feel they are paying a fair price for the quality of the product, they will be willing to buy it from you.

Personalize with Product Recommendations

In today's digital world, personalization is key. Shoppers want to feel special, and one of the ways to show that you care is to offer personalized product recommendations using a product recommendation software. Invesp reports that **49% of consumers have purchased a product they didn't initially intend to buy after receiving a personalized recommendation**.[16] By paying attention to a shopper's likes, your business can demonstrate

49%

of consumers have purchased a product they didn't initially intend to buy after receiving a personalized recommendation

that they care about retaining the customer's loyalty. Even if you have little or no prior information about a shopper, suggesting upsells and cross-sells related to the item(s) the shopper is considering purchasing on the product page can boost sales as well.

5. Offer Valuable Incentives

Even if you are offering the best products in your vertical, it can still be difficult to convince shoppers to purchase from your business. For this reason, it's important to offer incentives that will push consumers from "shopper" to "buyer." Read on as we discuss a few of the most popular ecommerce incentives that have proven to be valuable to shoppers as well.

Free Shipping

In a survey of 1,600 U.S. shoppers, **79% of consumers stated that free shipping would make them more likely to shop online**.[17] With behemoths like Amazon offering free shipping on a majority of their products, most consumers now expect to never have to pay shipping costs. If you are concerned about reducing profits by offering this incentive, build shipping costs into your product prices—shoppers are willing to pay more if they have the opportunity to get 100% of their money back with a return.

Free Returns

Similarly, online shoppers have grown to expect free return shipping as well—according to Narvar, **74% of survey respondents stated they would not make a purchase if they had to pay for return shipping**.[18] Unfortunately, some returns are inevitable in a scenario where products cannot be fully examined until they arrive in the mail. Ecommerce return rates vary by industry, but if you are confident in the products you sell and include as much product information as possible before the checkout process, the likelihood of having to invest in return shipping for the benefit of your customers should be relatively low.

Limited Time Discounts & Sales

In an era where coupons are widespread and unemployment is common, shoppers are constantly searching for ways to cut costs while still consuming. Invesp reports that **more than 64% of online consumers wait to buy products until they go on sale**, and more than 59% search for promo codes before buying anything online.[19] To reach these deal-seeking shoppers, consider offering loyalty coupons, new customer offers, or displaying a "sale" price next to a marked-out higher price—offering customers your products for what seems like a lower price than usual can be the ultimate conversion booster. In addition to making shoppers feel like they are getting a great deal, limited time sales and discounts like these create urgency that convince shoppers to buy now.

6. Simplify Your Checkout Process

Unfortunately, some shoppers add products to their cart and make it to the checkout process, but ultimately do purchase. Curbing abandoned carts is a major challenge across the industry, but simplifying the checkout flow can help immensely. Below, we list a few ways to keep shoppers from abandoning carts once they reach the checkout flow.

Allow Guest Checkout

Even if you boast the most stringent site security, some shoppers will still not feel comfortable having their personal information stored in your system. If you require them to do so when purchasing a product, they will go elsewhere to find what they're looking for—Baymard Institute states that **24% of online store visitors abandon cart because "the site wanted me to create an account**."[20] Give your shoppers a guest checkout option so that they don't feel like they are being forced to choose between your products and the privacy of their personal information.

Remove Top Navigation

Sometimes the most unexpected changes can have major results. For example, while analyzing page variations for the VeggieTales website, Blue Acorn found that **removing their store's top navigation from the checkout flow produced a 17.4% increase in revenue per visitor**.[21] Making a similar change to your checkout flow will reduce unnecessary distractions so that your shoppers focus solely on their purchases.

Use Single-Page Checkout

One area that impacts bounce rate is a checkout process that takes longer than expected. When it comes to a checkout page, not much is required from the shopper beyond a shipping address, billing information, and contact information, yet many businesses choose to split this data up between multiple pages. Consider the Official Vancouver 2010 Olympic Store: when Elastic Path tested checkout options for their ecommerce site, Google Website Optimizer concluded that the **single-page checkout option outperformed multi-page checkout by 21.8%**.[22] Consolidating your checkout information to one page instead of requiring shoppers to click through multiple pages to complete an order can reduce friction in the checkout process.

Accept Multiple Payment Options

Consider how frustrating it must be to decide to make a purchase, but then learn that the merchant does not accept your payment method. While most online shoppers will want to pay with a credit or debit card, many others will want to take advantage of other payment options like PayPal or Apple Pay. According to research by Comscore, **56% of online shoppers stated that they want to see a variety of payment options at checkout**.[23] By offering multiple payment options, you will appease a large portion of your audience, paving the way for more conversions.

56%
of online shoppers stated that they want to see a variety of payment options at checkout

7. Follow Up With Everyone

Despite your best efforts, not every visitor to your business's site will end up making a purchase. Regardless of whether shoppers ultimately convert or not, it's important to follow up with all of them to help secure future sales. Here are a few ways to follow up with site visitors—whether they've registered with your site or not—to improve chances of conversion.

Retargeted Ads

Even if you haven't collected any contact information from a site visitor before they leave your site, you can still remind them about your business using retargeted ads. These ads place cookies in your online store that follow site visitors to other areas of the web, displaying ads for your business and/or the product they considered there. Research has shown that

70%
of website visitors who see retarged display ads are more likey to convert

website visitors who see retargeted display ads are 70% more likely to convert.[24] Employing retargeted ads is an effective way to remind previous site visitors what they're missing out on by not purchasing the product they were considering from your business.

Abandoned Cart Emails

As mentioned previously, cart abandonment is a continuous issue for all ecommerce businesses. However, when contact information for site visitors is readily available, cart abandonment emails are an effective method for turning abandonment into conversions. One study showed that the **average email conversion rate for abandoned cart emails was 18.54%.**[25] Shoppers abandon carts for many reasons, but as this statistic shows, simply reminding shoppers about the products they had considered purchasing can be enough to overcome hesitation.

Win-Back Emails

According to Adobe, **returning and repeat purchasers deliver over 40% of U.S. online revenue**—this despite the fact that they only comprise 8% of ecommerce site visitors.[26] While it's still important to convince new shoppers to purchase from your site, another conversion tactic that should not be overlooked involves reaching out to previous customers to convince them to purchase again. Use your previously collected email marketing list to reach out to past buyers and let them know about any new products you may have in stock. Adding a discount or offer to these emails is a great way to incentivize customers who may have forgotten about you to make another purchase.

Measure Your CRO Success

After implementing conversion rate optimization strategies, it's important to examine their effectiveness. Give your newly implemented changes some time to take hold, then calculate your new website conversion rate and compare it to your conversion rate from before changes took place. If you are wondering about the best way to capture this information, Google Analytics is a great place to start.

If you are using retargeted ads and/or emails to try to boost conversion rates, pay attention to their click-through rates within the software you use for insight into how effective they have been at improving conversions. You may not see dramatic improvements immediately, but you will likely see some indication of what changes are worth making in the future.

Final Thoughts

The most important factor in an online business's prosperity is its ability to convert site visitors into customers. While quality of products, customer service, and simple supply & demand factor heavily into a business's rate of conversion, other technical and brand storytelling aspects of an ecommerce site are major influences that are often overlooked. By knowing their target market, enhancing their site, building trust, optimizing product pages, offering valuable incentives, simplifying the checkout process, and following up with everyone, online retailers can maximize their conversion potential.

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About Volusion

Volusion is an all-in-one ecommerce solution that helps entrepreneurs build and manage successful online businesses. Since 1999, our dedicated team of developers, marketers, designers, and technical support experts have been passionate about helping merchants operate and grow their stores, whether startup or established. Two decades later, Volusion has earned dozens of accolades and powered over 150,000 successful online businesses.

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