

10 MISTAKES FIRST-TIME ONLINE SELLERS MAKE —AND HOW TO FIX THEM

Online sales stagnant...
or nonexistent?

Check out these ten mistakes
and tips for fixing them—fast!



More and more business owners are realizing the benefits (and in some cases, due to COVID-19, the necessity) of selling online. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), retail ecommerce sales worldwide are forecast to more than double between 2018 and 2023.

IT'S UNDISPUTABLE: online shopping is here to stay and consumers are only going to spend more and more time (and money) with online stores.

However, competition online is fierce: it's estimated that there's anywhere from 12 to 24 million ecommerce sites in the world. And with the availability of build-it-yourself platforms like Shopify, Wix, SquareSpace, and others, many store owners are setting up online stores only to find that no one is buying from them.

Business owners, beware: it's not enough to just have an online store—if you expect to make any sales, your online store must be fully optimized to make it easy for visitors to find, browse, and make a purchase.

HERE ARE TEN MISTAKES FIRST-TIME ONLINE STORE OWNERS MAKE AND HOW TO FIX THEM.



MISTAKE #1: Not testing your site on mobile.



Smartphones have overtaken laptop and desktop PCs as the most common online shopping device in the United States.

IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2019, SMARTPHONES ACCOUNTED FOR 46 PERCENT OF ONLINE SHOPPING ORDERS.

Not only does your site have to be mobile responsive (where the site responds or adjusts to the screen it's being viewed on), it needs to be intuitive and easy to use on mobile devices. There's a difference between a site that's "technically" mobile friendly (i.e., it passes [Google's Mobile Friendly Test](#)) and a site that is fully optimized for mobile—and that difference is sales.

FIX IT!

If your website isn't simple to use on a mobile device, optimizing it for mobile use should be your number one priority.

- ✓ Pay special attention to "tap" areas. Make sure tappable areas like the menu, breadcrumbs, click to expand options, buttons, and size/color selectors are large enough to be easily tapped with a finger and that there's adequate spacing around them.
- ✓ Put key components at the bottom of the screen so visitors who are navigating the site by holding their phone one-handed can easily reach tap areas with their thumb.
- ✓ Avoid complex graphics that won't be readable on small screens.
- ✓ Keep font size large enough to be easily readable on small screens.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #2: A clunky checkout process



Though this may be the hardest step to optimize in terms of technical difficulty and platform restrictions, it's one of—if not the most—important.

According to research by Google, seventy-six percent of smartphone users are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps allow them to make purchases quickly.

THE CHECKOUT PROCESS SHOULD BE AS FRICTIONLESS AS POSSIBLE—IDEALLY, SHOPPERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO CHECK OUT IN AS FEW STEPS AS POSSIBLE.

FIX IT!

Use the following tips to streamline your checkout process (hang in there—we've included a lot of ideas—but using them can make a big impact on your store!)

- ✓ Optimize the “Add to Cart” and “Checkout” buttons on the product pages so they're highly visible and easy to click, especially on mobile. This could include adjusting their color, size, and placement. Use easily recognizable symbols (like a simple shopping cart illustration) to aid recognition.
- ✓ When visitors add a product to their cart, show the total number of items in the cart (in the cart icon in the header of the site) to remind them to check out.
- ✓ Make sure the cart icon is always visible and easily accessible from any page of the site to ensure visitors can check out easily when they're ready. For example, if a shopper puts several items in their cart, then browses to read a blog post or other content page, they should be able to click the “View Cart” and/or “Checkout Now” buttons from that page to finish checking out. The top right of the site is a common location for this.
- ✓ Don't force visitors to create an account. They don't have to do this in a physical store; they shouldn't online. What's more, make guest checkout the first option—show it on the left of the screen for desktop and at the top of the page on mobile.

CONTINUED →

MISTAKE #2: cont. A clunky checkout process



FIX IT! cont.

- ✓ Minimize the number of fields you include. It's possible to get the number of checkout steps to as few as five; aim for five to seven. Only include fields like gender and birthdate if you really need that information. If you do ask for personal information like that, explain in a tooltip why you're asking for it (for example: so we can send you a special surprise on your birthday!)
- ✓ Add progress bars. This will help show visitors that the end is in sight!
- ✓ Note which fields are required, and which are optional—this helps ensure visitors will fill out the information they need to as they go, rather than having to go back and scan the fields for the one they missed when they click “Pay Now” and it doesn't work.
- ✓ Implement the right touch keyboards so when a shopper on a mobile device taps on a credit card field, the number keyboard is triggered. This makes it easier to type in numbers, rather than having to select the numbers from the regular text keyboard.
- ✓ Display updated cart totals at every step of the checkout process (for example, after the shopper enters their address, which allows the system to calculate tax and shipping charges).
- ✓ Show delivery estimates for the various shipping options. If possible, show the date their order will arrive rather than “5 business days,” which forces them to look up or calculate the actual day their order will arrive.
- ✓ Include a variety of payment options, including regular credit card payment, but also consider including PayPal, and digital wallets like Google Pay, Samsung Pay, Apple Pay, Venmo, etc.
- ✓ Clearly label your “Order Review” page to help shoppers avoid mistaking it for the “Confirmation” page, otherwise they may inadvertently abandon the site at this step, thinking their order is complete. Add “Place Order” or “Submit Order” buttons prominently at the top and bottom of the Order Review page to solve this.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #3: Your website loads slowly.



Picture this: a visitor finds your site listed in the search engines...they click the link...their browser redirects them to your website...except...nothing shows up! Then, a “page loading” symbol appears. The circle spins...then an image appears! A headline! A...oh wait, the visitor hasn’t waited that long—they’ve already clicked the “back” button and they’re now browsing your competitor’s site.

ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY KISSMETRICS, 47% OF CONSUMERS EXPECT A WEB PAGE TO LOAD IN 2 SECONDS OR LESS.

It’s a fact: a slow-to-load site will have visitors clicking the back button rather than waiting around. Within just a few seconds of landing on a website, visitors determine if they’re interested in browsing further. If your site hasn’t loaded in that time, you’re already off to a rocky start.

Improving site speed can also help improve conversion rates (the percentage of visitors to your website who complete a desired action, such as making a purchase). In some tests, a one second site speed improvement increased conversions by 2%.

FIX IT!

Page speed issues can stem from a number of problems, including

- ✓ The platform it’s built with (Wix, Weebly, SquareSpace, etc.)
- ✓ Using a commercial WordPress theme with lots of “bloat”
- ✓ Uploading images and videos without paying attention to file size
- ✓ Using too many tracking pixels or embeds such as the Facebook News Feed
- ✓ Inadequate hosting

[Test your page speed here.](#)

For an easy fix, make sure you’re compressing images using a tool like [shortpixel.com](#) before you upload them to your website.

Embed videos from YouTube or Vimeo, instead of hosting them on your website itself.

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MISTAKE #3: cont. Your website loads slowly.



FIX IT! cont.

Finally, if you're using a CMS (content management system), minimize the number of plugins or widgets you're using.

Beyond that, most performance fixes are going to require working with a web developer, who can help with things like:

- ✓ Using asynchronous loading JavaScript files
- ✓ Minifying your HTML, CSS, and JavaScript files
- ✓ Optimizing CSS delivery
- ✓ Minimizing HTTP requests
- ✓ Deferring JavaScript loading
- ✓ Enabling lazy loading for images
- ✓ Enabling browser caching
- ✓ Reducing the server response time by switching DNS providers
- ✓ Choosing the right hosting package for your needs
- ✓ Utilizing a Content Delivery Network (CDN)

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #4: Not using enough product photos.



Visitors to a physical store pick up items and inspect them from different angles, and they want a similar experience online. If you're not including enough photos—and enough *good quality* photos—it's going to be difficult for shoppers to make a purchase decision. They simply won't have enough information.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS...

FIX IT!

Numerous, good quality photos help bring the “in-person” shopping experience to your website. As a general rule of thumb, aim for at a minimum three to five photos of each product:

- ✓ Show multiple angles
- ✓ Include “lifestyle” photos showing the product being used (this helps provide scale and helps the shopper envision themselves using the product)
- ✓ Include close-up photos of special features to call attention to them
- ✓ If there are variations such as color or size, show photos of each
- ✓ Include photos of any accessories or add-ons that come with the product

Make sure all photos are of high enough quality that shoppers can zoom in—for example, they may want to read the printing on the label, or see the texture, or inspect a certain feature.

If you can, include video—this amplifies the experience even further.

EXTRA CREDIT:

Don't overlook the written product description. Optimized product descriptions will help with SEO (search engine optimization), will help make the product easier to find in your site's own search results, and can help engage the visitor by pointing out key features and selling points.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #5: Poor UX (that's user experience).



Read: things are hard to find. Online shoppers do not want to work hard to find what they're looking for. They might poke around a little, but probably not for long.

LUCKILY, THERE ARE A VARIETY OF BEST PRACTICES YOU CAN FOLLOW TO HELP ENSURE A STELLAR UX.

FIX IT!

Add the following navigation aids to help support every style of shopper:

- ✓ Set up intuitive product categories. Conduct some keyword research using a tool like Google Ads' Keyword Planner (available to Google Ads advertisers only) or Google Trends to see how search volume varies by term, which will help provide insights into how searchers look for your products and can help you determine which categories will be most intuitive.
- ✓ Keep main menu items to seven or fewer—any more becomes overwhelming for visitors (not to mention, you'll likely run out of space).
- ✓ Offer filters to allow visitors to “drill down” by things like price, color, popularity, etc.
- ✓ Include a prominent site search in an expected place—the top right is common; visitors will know to look for it there. Ensure the site search is robust and returns expected results; ideally it will be “smart” enough to understand misspellings, etc.
- ✓ Make highly searched for information especially easy to find—this includes things like contact information and your return policy. Including this information, especially contact information, in the header and footer of the site makes it easy for visitors to access it from wherever they are on the site.
- ✓ Consider adding live chat functionality. If it's monitored and used actively, it can be a great way to provide exceptional customer service to customers when they need it.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #6:

Telling shoppers how great your store/products are instead of allowing others to do it for you.



In a 2019 study by Trustpilot, nearly all respondents said positive customer reviews increased their trust in a brand. That study also found that 76% of those surveyed would be less likely to buy something from a retailer that didn't have reviews or ratings on their website.

WE CALL THIS “SOCIAL PROOF.” IT CAN INCLUDE THINGS LIKE PRODUCT REVIEWS (INCLUDING STAR RATINGS), TESTIMONIALS FROM SATISFIED CUSTOMERS, AND CASE STUDIES SHOWING HOW CUSTOMERS USE AND BENEFIT FROM YOUR PRODUCTS.

FIX IT!

Use the following tactics to solicit and display reviews:

- ✓ Enable or add review functionality to your products. Ensure the reviews are highly visible and it's easy for customers to leave reviews. Platforms like WooCommerce on WordPress have review functionality built-in, and reviews can be limited to “verified owners” only.
- ✓ Monitor your website, directories like Yelp, and social media for mentions of your products or company name (use tools like Google Alerts or Mention to do this). When you find a really stellar review, consider sharing it on your social media platforms, website, and emails to help amplify it.
- ✓ Schedule an automatic email to be sent about a week after a purchase to ask for a review; include links to the products purchased where buyers can leave the reviews directly (include a note asking for constructive criticism to be sent directly to the business owner or customer service representative instead of published online).
- ✓ Consider including a notecard when you ship the order expressing thanks to the customer for ordering the product, encouraging them to visit the website to leave a review if they're satisfied, and information about how to contact customer service (or the business owner) if they're not satisfied.
- ✓ Respond to all reviews—positive and negative—to demonstrate that you're engaged and appreciate feedback. Responding calmly, fairly, and publicly to negative reviews also helps demonstrate a commitment to customer satisfaction.
- ✓ Offer incentives such as discounts, free gifts, and contest entries to encourage reviews.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #7: Only enabling SSL on the checkout page.



If your site only has SSL enabled on the checkout page (where visitors actually enter their credit card information), they may leave the site before they even begin browsing out of fear that the site isn't secure.

WEB SHOPPERS ARE INCREASINGLY SAVVY AND KNOW TO LOOK FOR THE “CONNECTION IS SECURE” MESSAGE IN THEIR BROWSER WINDOW.

FIX IT!

Build trust by including an SSL certificate and enforcing it on all pages of the site, not just the checkout page. You can also include a disclaimer on the checkout page and/or in the FAQs that the website does not store credit card data.

EXTRA CREDIT:

Another way to improve shoppers' trust in the site is to display badges or accreditation from industry associations and other credentialing organizations like the Better Business Bureau.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #8: Charging too much for shipping.



CONSUMERS HATE PAYING FOR SHIPPING.

However, this doesn't mean you need to cut into your margins in order to reduce what you charge.

FIX IT!

Consider different ways to offer free shipping:

- ✓ Build the shipping costs into your product price
- ✓ Set thresholds where customers will earn free shipping if they meet a minimum purchase amount
- ✓ Offer free shipping as part of a membership program
- ✓ Offer a free “ship to store” option
- ✓ Include free shipping as part of a time-bound offer to drive urgency, for example, “free shipping if you order within the next 24 hours”
- ✓ Help shoppers feel that ordering is risk-free by offering free shipping on returns

And, don't forget there are ways to reduce your actual shipping costs: consider using different, less expensive packaging, or using a different carrier.

When it comes to shipping, take the time to do your research and price out different options—and reassess your current shipping processes and prices periodically to see if there are new, more cost-effective options available.

NOTE:

“Free Shipping” banners at the top of the page are often overlooked; if you offer free shipping, include that information near the “buy” section on each product page, as that may help encourage visitors to buy.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #9: Not using an abandoned cart autoresponder.



Clark Howard, a popular money management podcaster, advises listeners to put an item in their online shopping cart, then leave it there for 24 hours—both to prevent impulse buying, but also to see if the retailer will email them a coupon or discount code. According to research by the Baymard Institute, the average online cart abandonment rate is 69.89% (the percentage of visitors to the site who add an item to their cart but don't complete checkout). As a retailer, why not play along and send a discount code (as long as your margins can support it), if it leads to a sale?

SHOPPERS LOVE A GOOD DEAL, AND DEPENDING ON YOUR BRAND, OFFERING INCENTIVES CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COMPLETED PURCHASE AND A SAD, ABANDONED CART.

FIX IT!

The tactic described above can be accomplished with what's called an abandoned cart autoresponder. WordPress offers a number of free and premium plugins that will add this functionality to your site. Here's some tips for making the most of this feature:

- ✓ Send your first email within an hour of cart abandonment, while your product is still fresh in their memory
- ✓ Include keywords like “discount” or “free shipping” in your email's subject line to encourage recipients to open the email
- ✓ Include the product(s) they had added to their cart in the email—including the product name and images
- ✓ Feature a prominent call-to-action (CTA) button “Buy Now” or “Complete Purchase”
- ✓ Include contact information in the event the shopper had a question or encountered a technical issue

EXTRA CREDIT:

Using the principle of scarcity can help give shoppers the little extra push they need to buy now. Try flagging products with “limited quantity available” or “only 5 left—buy now!” to encourage more sales. Making discounts and coupons time-bound can also help drive purchases.

NEXT TIP →

MISTAKE #10: Not customizing all of your store's emails.



We've already talked about two emails your store should be sending—a request for feedback (reviews) email, and an abandoned cart autoresponder—but there are a number of other emails your store is also likely sending, and they represent an often-overlooked opportunity for branding and customer engagement.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES.

FIX IT!

In addition to making sure each of your store's emails use appropriate branding (your logo, colors) and contact information for customer service, consider the following:

- ✓ **Order Receipt:** include the order details first, as this is a transactional email, and include shipping timelines. It's also important to include customer service contact information and a link to your refund policy. Consider also incorporating “cross sell” items that would complement or enhance their purchase, that they may have forgotten.
- ✓ **Shipment Notification:** Include the customer's order tracking number and a link where they can check the status of their shipment, if possible. This email also presents an opportunity to cross-sell or promote additional products; consider offering a discount that can be used on their next purchase.
- ✓ **Thank You:** Send a “Thank You” email following their first order or upon the anniversary of their first order. Thank the shopper for being a customer, offer a discount on their next purchase, include relevant news or information about your company, and ask for a review/testimonial and invite them to follow your social channels.
- ✓ **Order Cancellation:** In the event a customer cancels an order, you may still have an opportunity to win back their business. Include a coupon code and suggest related items that might better fit their needs. Also include a request to contact customer service (with contact information) to see if there's anything you can do to help.
- ✓ **We Miss You:** Following a cancelled order, or in the event a customer hasn't made a purchase in a while, send a series of “We Miss You” type emails with subject lines like:
 - o Get Free Shipping
 - o Didn't like your last XYZ? We'll Fix It
 - o We'd love to get back together
 - o We miss you! Exclusive come-back offer enclosed
 - o [First name] we miss you – come back and save!
 - o Hurry [First Name] – your chance to save \$10 ends soon!

FINISH →

That's all for now—the wonderful world of ecommerce! It's multifaceted, it's complex, but it doesn't have to be complicated. If you'd like help optimizing your store, or you were reading this because you want to get started building your store, give us a call at 608.709.0476 or send us an email at customer@digisage.com.

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