

DESIGNING YOUR ONLINE STORE

for happier customers and
higher conversion rates

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION _____	4
--------------------	---

FOCUS ON YOUR CUSTOMERS _____	5
-------------------------------	---

- ▶ First impressions last
- ▶ Guide the customer's journey
- ▶ Mobile first, mobile fast
- ▶ Always open and up to date
- ▶ Consistency is key

ANATOMY OF A PRODUCT LISTING _____	9
------------------------------------	---

- ▶ Compelling headline
- ▶ Key information bullet points
- ▶ Detailed product description
- ▶ Virtual showcase
- ▶ Links to related information
- ▶ Customer reviews or testimonials
- ▶ Tags and filters
- ▶ Deal toppers or extra incentives
- ▶ Call to action

CONVERSION: CLOSE THE SALE _____ 14

- ▶ Streamline the steps to a sale
- ▶ Last minute changes
- ▶ Guest checkout is fast checkout
- ▶ Security is credibility

SITE-WIDE DESIGN PRINCIPLES _____ 16

- ▶ Calls to action
- ▶ Product images
- ▶ Clean and clutter-free layout
- ▶ Everything works together
- ▶ Keep getting better

CONVERSION-CENTRED DESIGN _____ 19

INTRODUCTION

Retailers have always sought ways to entice customers into their stores, offering better prices or outstanding service to get ahead of the competition. But modern shoppers are looking for something more than just the right product at the right price. They're looking for ways to buy that are quick, easy and convenient—a better customer experience.

Almost two-thirds of consumers rate [customer experience as more important than price](#) when they're choosing between brands. And if you're an online retailer, your customer's experience starts before they even arrive at your ecommerce store. So when you're designing your online store (or hiring someone else to do it), you'll need to consider how you can make your ecommerce website easier to find, quicker to use, and more convenient to buy from. Every element of your design needs to focus on the twin goals of driving traffic to your site and converting that incoming traffic to sales.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know about “conversion-centred design”... but we'll steer clear of that jargon as much as possible, and instead focus on simple, tried-and-tested design strategies.



FOCUS ON YOUR CUSTOMERS

Just as your customers are at the core of your product, sales, and marketing strategies, they should also be at the centre of your design decisions. And we're not just talking about making your online store look good—there's a lot more to it than that. Successful ecommerce store design needs to value form and function equally, focusing on features that improve your customers' online shopping experience while removing any pain points or obstacles.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

The visual design of your ecommerce website creates a lasting first impression for first-time visitors, so it's important to send the right message—one that's consistent with your brand promise. Potential customers are likely to spend more time browsing if your site is attractive and easy to use, so ensure you choose a clean layout that's free from clutter, with plenty of white space. This is especially important on your homepage, to help your customers find what they need and avoid overwhelming them with too many options. (There's more on this in our later section on [site-wide design principles](#).)



GUIDE THE CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY

Each customer that comes to your online store is looking for something different, but most will follow one of your ideal customer journeys, and your store navigation should mirror that. If you're not familiar with [customer journeys](#), don't panic. It's just a way of mapping out all the ways someone interacts with your business before becoming a customer.

Not everyone is looking to buy immediately, but that doesn't mean they're not willing to buy. So spend some time investigating your site traffic to learn what your visitors are seeking. They might be:

- ▶ scouring your product listings to find the best soccer ball for a junior team
- ▶ reading your blog for advice on how to use their new blender
- ▶ trying to exchange a shirt they bought in the wrong size
- ▶ finding out if a wifi-enabled ceiling light will need an electrician to install it.

To make sure you're addressing these needs, design your site as a tour guide for your customer journeys. Group your products in a logical way, ensure your [product listings](#) are full of useful information, and set up your site navigation so that it's intuitive, naturally leading visitors to your checkout.



MOBILE FIRST, MOBILE FAST

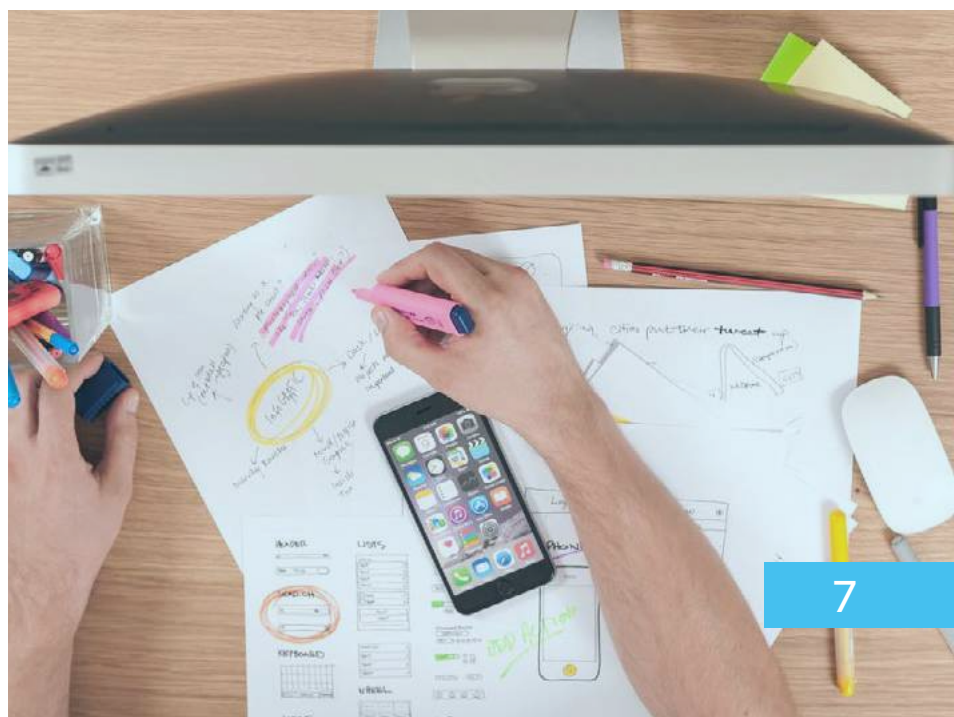
Mobile responsive design has been popular for several years now, which isn't surprising with [70% of online transactions](#) occurring on mobile devices. Starting with a responsive site theme will ensure your ecommerce store looks good on the limited real estate of a small-screen mobile device. You'll also need to test that your navigation isn't cumbersome on a mobile device, and place your most important content at the top where visitors are likely to read it.

But mobile-first design is no longer just about screen space and ease of navigation; it's also about search engine optimisation (SEO). Google has plans to [roll out a mobile-first index](#) that ranks search results based on the mobile version of a website's content, rather than the desktop version.

That's a compelling reason to make sure your site is designed with mobile in mind. Use Google's handy [tool to test your site](#), and follow their advice to reap the SEO benefits. If you don't have an in-house web developer, you may find it easier to start with a customisable ecommerce platform that's designed for mobile shoppers.

ALWAYS OPEN AND UP TO DATE

Customers love the convenience of online stores, which are open 24/7. Make sure you're using a consistently reliable platform and hosting provider so your customers are never disappointed. Keeping your store updated with your newest products, current stock availability, and recent reviews will give your customers an extra reason to keep coming back, while also boosting your search engine rankings.



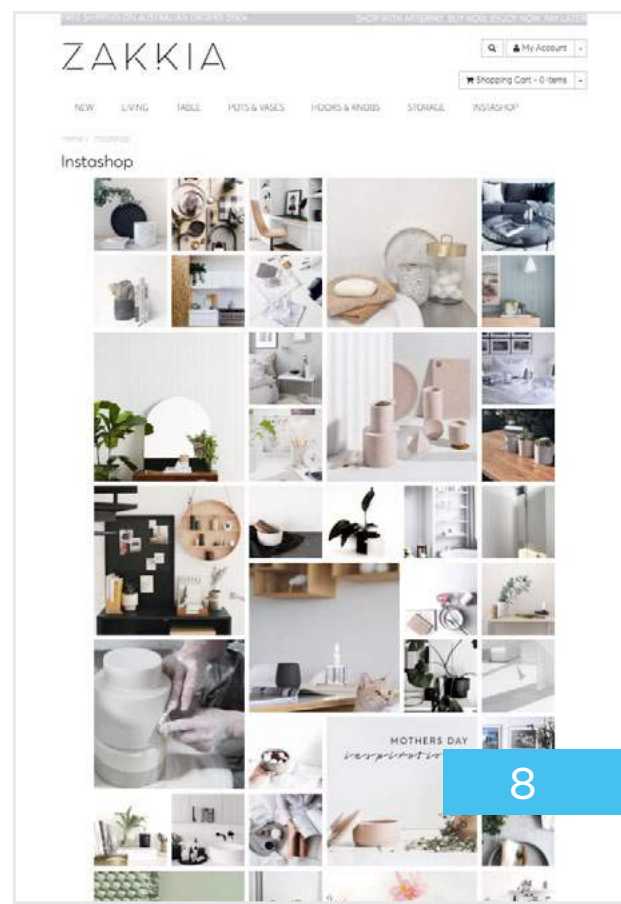
CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Customers can click through to your online store from many different places, including:

- ▶ social media content
- ▶ direct marketing emails
- ▶ search engine results
- ▶ blog posts
- ▶ advertisements on other sites.

When they arrive, they're expecting to find more information that's closely related to the link they clicked on. Your homepage isn't always going to cut it—it's too general, and they'd have to go searching for the right information. Instead, create a matching landing page with the same images and headline as your marketing content and a simple layout that guides visitors to a single conversion link, or [call to action](#). (More on these later.)

Landing pages have a very specific job, but they're also part of your brand's bigger picture, and that should be clear in a design that's consistent with the rest of your online store. Shopping on your ecommerce site should also match (or exceed) your customers' experience of buying your products through other channels, like online marketplaces or bricks-and-mortar stores, as part of your complete [omni-channel sales strategy](#).

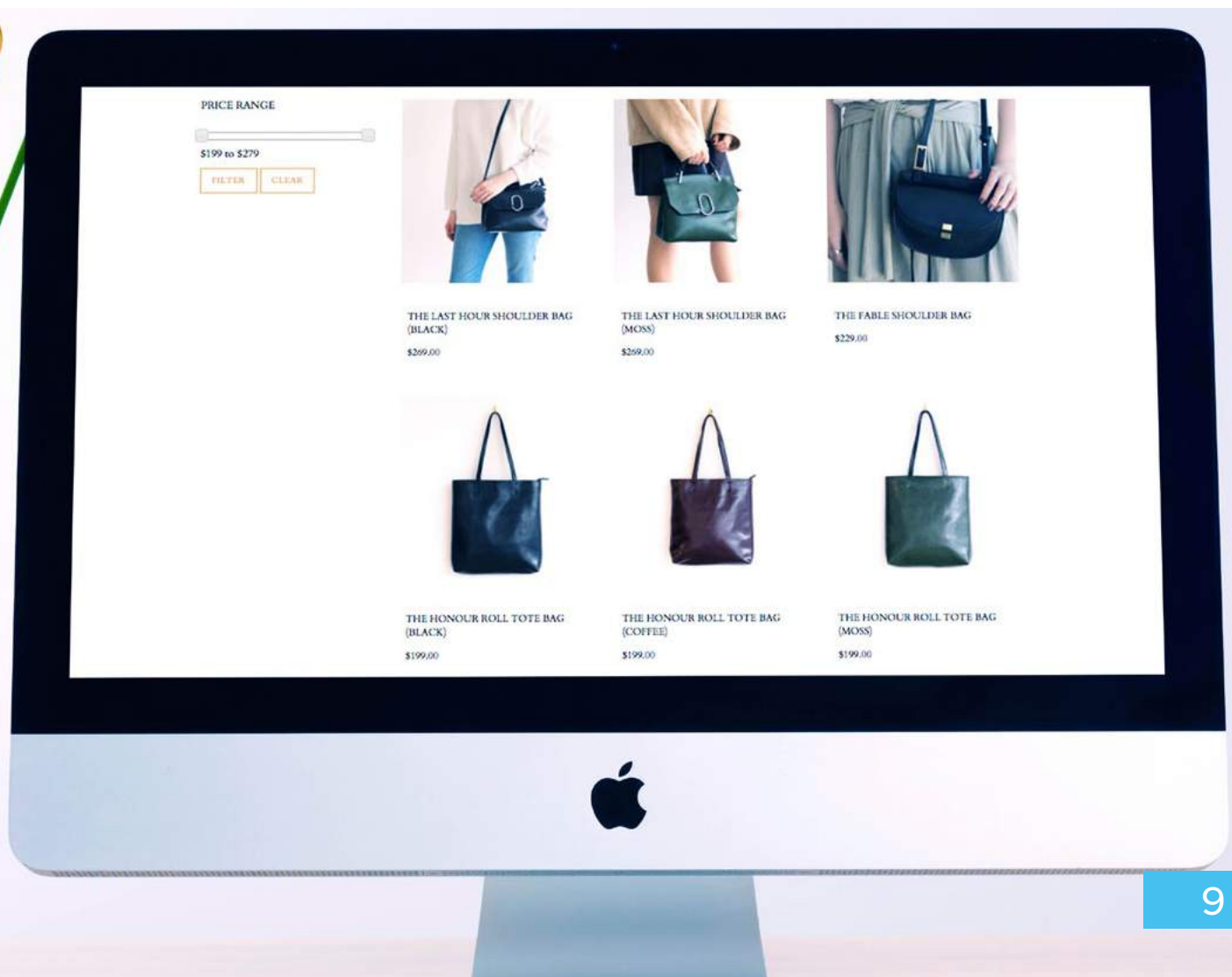


ANATOMY OF A PRODUCT LISTING

Whichever path they've followed to reach a product listing, by the time they arrive, your ecommerce customer already has a good idea of what they're looking for. So the goal of your product listing is to create a compelling reason for them to buy that product now, from your store.

It's not enough for your listings to inform shoppers about the features and specifications of the products you're selling. You need to put them right in the picture by educating them about the benefits of a product and making it hard for them to imagine life without it. It's an idea that's been around as long as advertising: selling the dream. To do this, you'll need to piece together the perfect product listing.

Let's take it from the top.

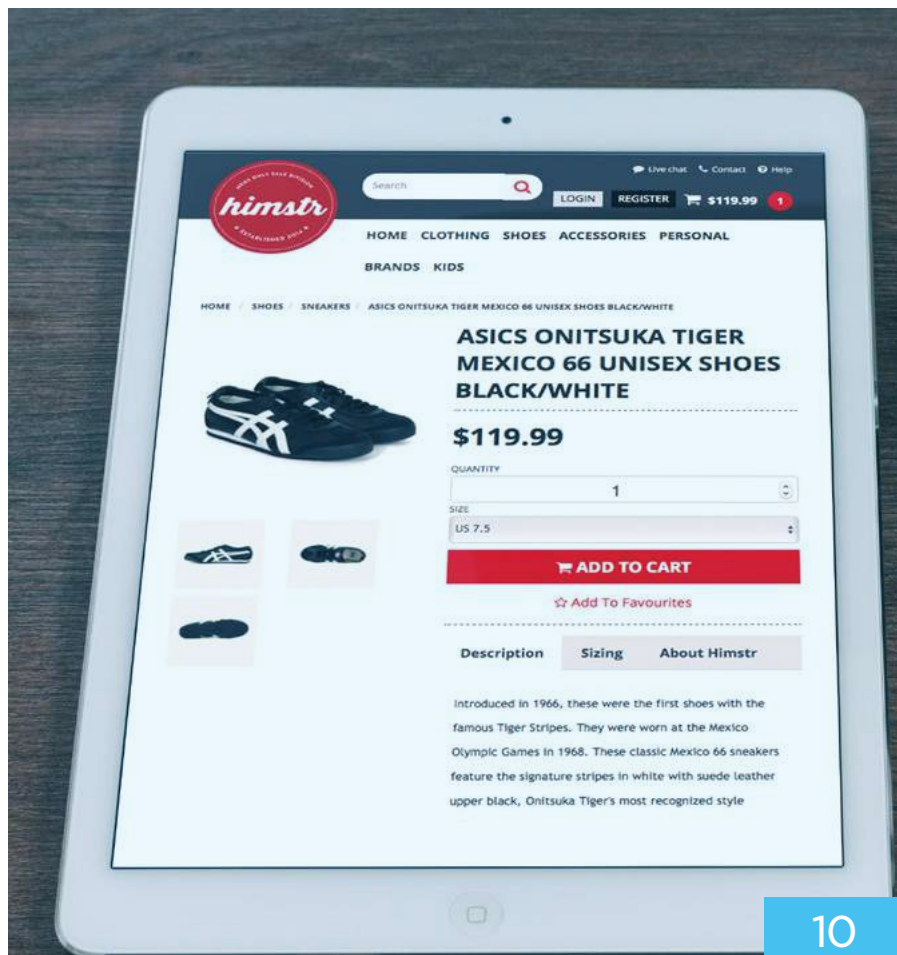
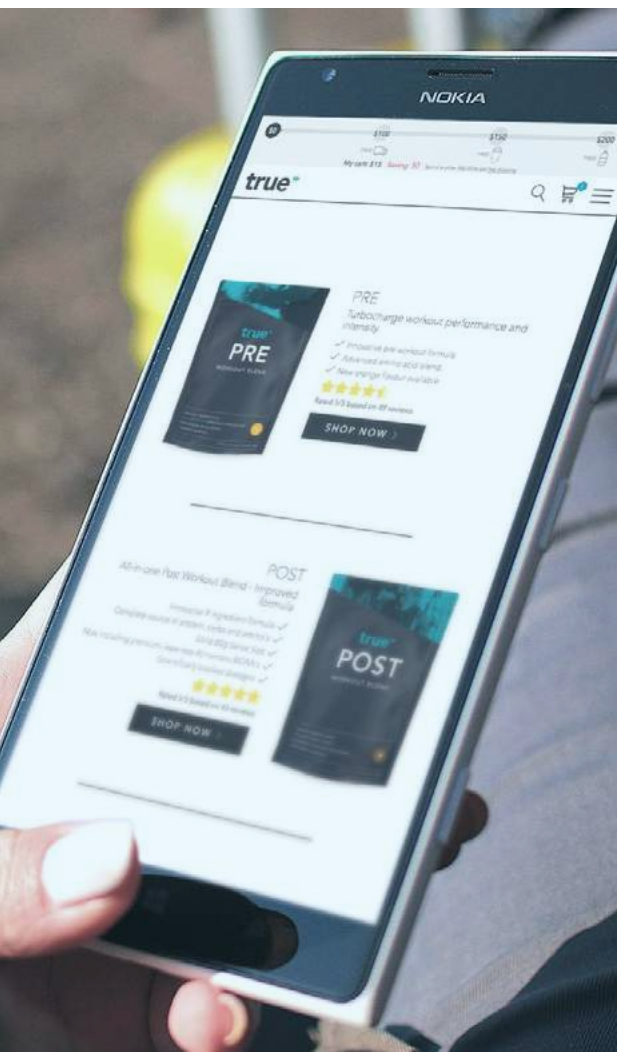


COMPELLING HEADLINE

Every product needs a headline that tells your customers in one glance: you're in the right spot. You should base this on your customers' search terms, and be as specific as possible within your space limit. Focus on the item's defining details, which might include dimensions or a manufacturer's product number. For example, instead of listing a "Ryobi power drill", you could describe it as a "Ryobi One+ 18V Compact Cordless Drill with Dual Chemistry Charger R18DD-LL13C".

KEY INFORMATION BULLET POINTS

Beneath the headline, you'll usually have space for a short block of text or a few bullet points. It's here you should draw attention to the next most important details, such as explaining its purpose or describing its materials and country of origin. Avoid repeating points you've already made in the headline, and consider including an interesting statistic or marketing claim, such as "20% longer lasting than the leading competitor" or "as used by the current reigning world champion".



DETAILED PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

The main body of your listing is your chance to fill in the gaps and make it easy for your customers to decide to buy. Cover aspects like sizing, components or ingredients, installation notes, care instructions, and detailed specifications. It can help to think of this section as the one that answers all your customers' questions before they even need to ask. If your customers are regularly asking for more information, you probably need to flesh out your detailed product description.

VIRTUAL SHOWCASE

The best way to put your customer in the picture is to feature those pictures front and centre on your product pages. At a minimum, you'll want photos of each product on a plain background from a couple of angles, as well as a few photos that give a sense of the scale of the item or show it in use. We'll talk more about [how to take those photos](#) later.

Don't forget to add descriptive [alt text](#) to each image, for your visually impaired shoppers' screen readers, and in case your visitors have a poor connection that prevents images from loading. It will also help search engines catalogue the images on your site.



LINKS TO RELATED INFORMATION

Between your compelling headline, your key information and your detailed product information, you should've answered most of your customers' questions about whether the product meets their needs. But they may need further advice before they can buy, such as a sizing chart for footwear and apparel, or a buying guide to make sure it's the best solution for their problem. It's best to hyperlink this information or add it to a separate tab, to avoid cluttering up your product listings. Customers may also want to know more about your store, especially if they've never shopped with you before, so provide links to your FAQs, shipping information, and returns policy.

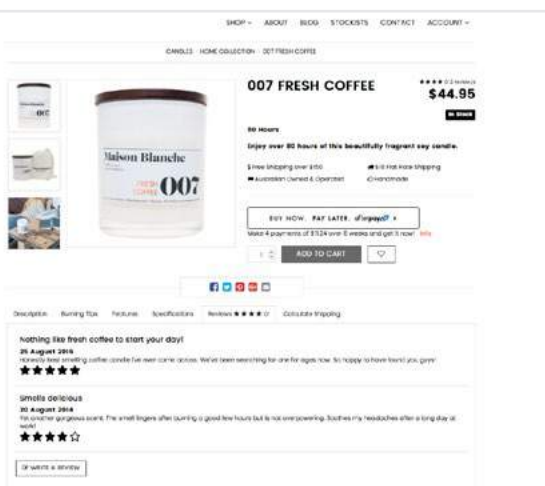
CUSTOMER REVIEWS OR TESTIMONIALS

When customers share their positive experience of owning a product they've bought for you, it reassures potential customers that they're making the right decision. They can also help fill in any gaps in your product listings—it's common to see apparel reviews that say things like "I'm usually a size medium but in this garment I bought a large and it fits really well."

Customer reviews are also good for SEO, as they add new and unique content to your website. And when you get one of those (infrequent!) negative reviews, you can show off your excellent customer service skills, building trust and loyalty.

TAGS AND FILTERS

Most sales platforms offer extra navigation features such as tags or attribute filters which can make it easier for customers to narrow down their search and compare similar products. For example, an online pet shop might have a product category called "dog food" with subcategories "wet food" and "kibble". They could use the tags "premium", "all natural", and "special diet" or create filters for "puppies", "adult dogs", and "seniors".





DEAL TOPPERS OR EXTRA INCENTIVES

Look for ways to sweeten the deal for your online shoppers, making your offer irresistible. Highlight if the item qualifies for free shipping or [buy now, pay later](#) options like ZipPay or Afterpay, or pair it with a time-based incentive like same day metro delivery for orders placed before 1 pm. If your ecommerce platform has integrated or inbuilt inventory management, you can encourage a purchase by showing your current stock availability.

CALL TO ACTION

Every other word and image on your product listing leads your customers to click this button. We'll talk about these in more detail later, but it's worth mentioning now that your call to action needs to be featured prominently with clear language like "buy now" or "add to cart". Some ecommerce platforms handle out-of-stock situations with a "let me know when this item is back in stock" button that sets up an email alert.

We'll come back to [calls to action](#) soon, when we discuss site-wide design elements. But first, let's delve into what happens when someone clicks that "buy now" button.

CONVERSION: CLOSE THE SALE

Once your customer has added an item to their basket or cart, you want them to take one of two actions: either go immediately to the checkout, or continue shopping and then go to the checkout. And the customer wants to follow the shortest path to the checkout. Anything else that happens along the way is a distraction that could lead them away from your checkout and into the world of abandoned shopping carts.

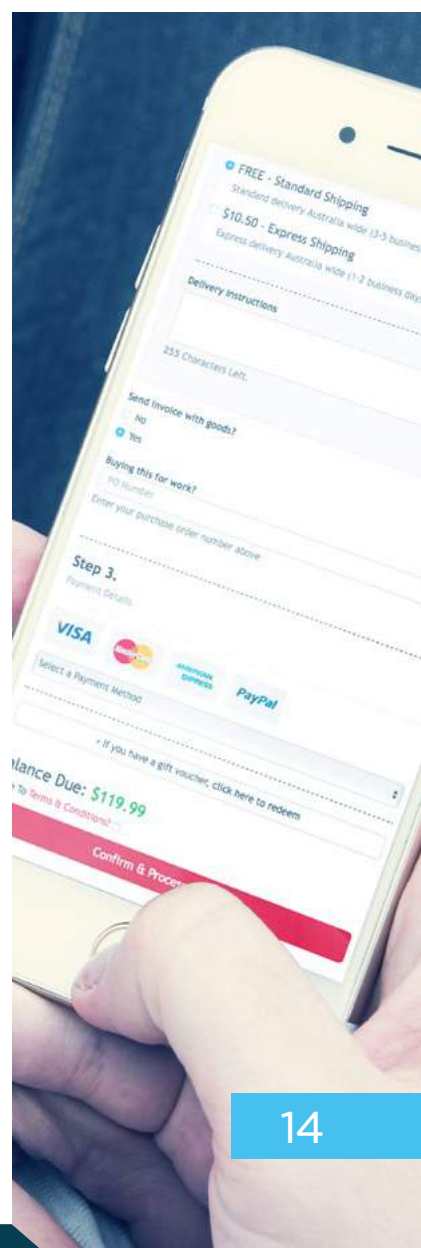
We don't want that! But it's an easy problem to avoid, and many online retailers could increase their conversion rates by as much as 35% simply by [improving their checkout design](#)—replacing pesky pain points with useful features customers are asking for.

STREAMLINE THE STEPS TO A SALE

Your customer is ready to enter their payment details, so don't distract them from the task at hand! Keep your checkout flow as short as possible. Don't be one of the many online stores using more fields and page elements than they need to, or adding extra pages full of suggested extra items. To gain a better understanding of an effective user flow, [check out some benchmark tests](#). (Yes, pun intended!)

LAST MINUTE CHANGES

When your customer gets to the checkout, they might find they've gone over budget and try to talk themselves out of a purchase. If there are easy ways to reduce their overall cost directly from the shopping cart, such as by switching to a cheaper shipping option or editing the quantity of items they're buying, they're less likely to abandon it. Giving your customer one last look at their purchases, with thumbnail images and a link through to the product page, can also reinforce their purchasing decisions.

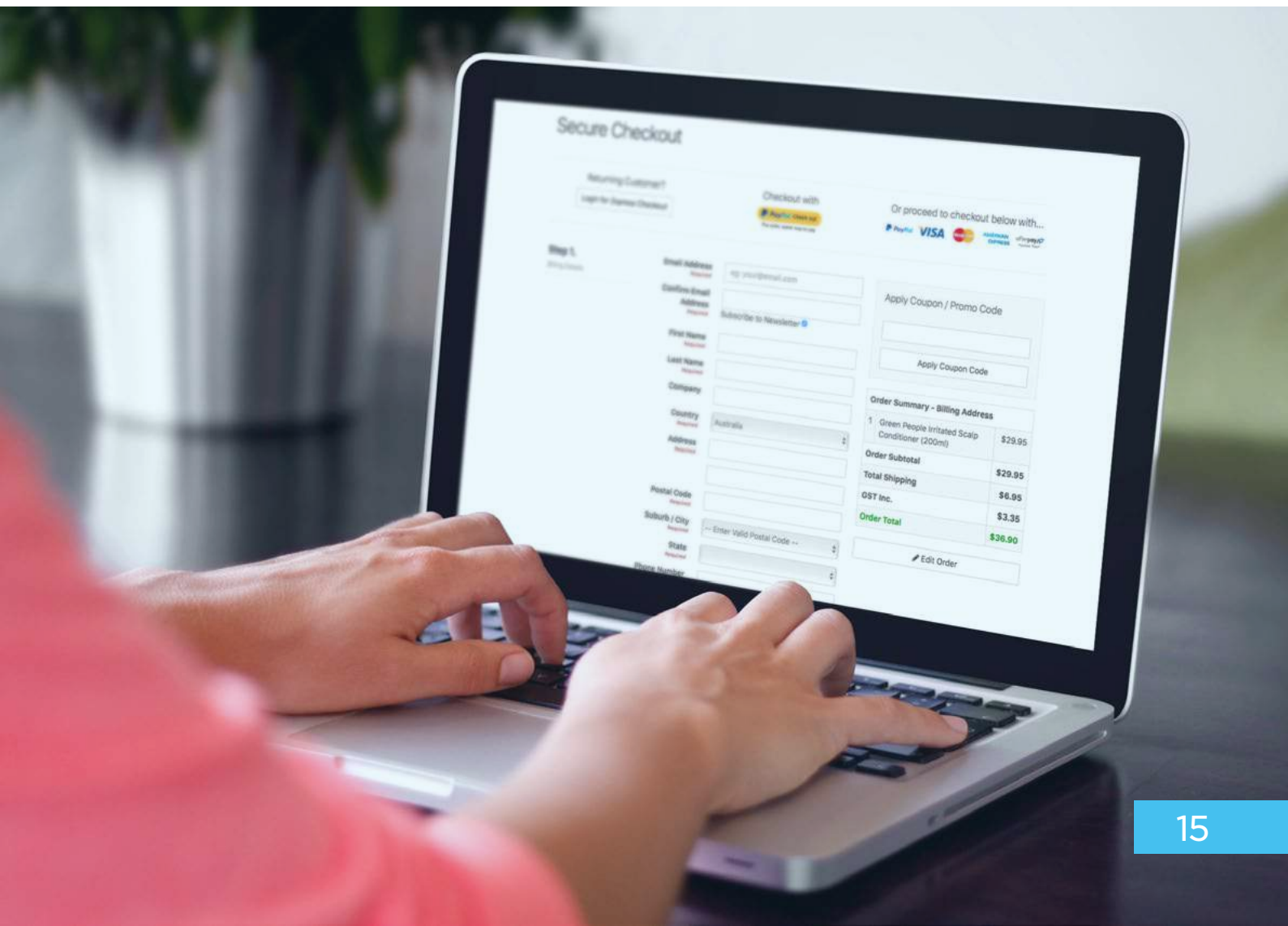


GUEST CHECKOUT IS FAST CHECKOUT

The checkout may seem like an ideal place to gather customer data, but 23% of shoppers will [abandon their cart if they have to create a new user account](#). One study showed that [removing forced registration resulted in a 45% sales increase](#), suggesting it's much smarter to let customers check out as guests, and then encourage them to create an account by listing the benefits on your confirmation screen.

SECURITY IS CREDIBILITY

Many people are concerned about the safety of online transactions. They're trusting you with their personal details, so boost their confidence by ensuring your SSL certificate is current and on-display. This applies to payment information as well, especially credit card details, and one of the easiest ways to ensure security is to integrate with a payment gateway or third party processor. Payment details will never touch your servers, instead being handled by systems specifically designed to meet the exacting standards of industry best practice guidelines.





Subscribe to our newsletter!

Enter email address

Join Now

SITE-WIDE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

CALLS TO ACTION

We've mentioned calls to action throughout this guide, because they're relevant to a lot of different parts of your online store. Whenever you want your audience to respond in a particular way, you're using a call to action, and there are a few things you need to know.

Avoid confusing customers with too many options. You want them to do one thing, so make that clear. Calls to action are usually presented as a coloured button that suggests something will happen when you click it. They're usually placed at the bottom of a page, but many online stores will use the same button several times throughout the page so visitors can convert as soon as they're ready.

The text is usually written either in the first person ("Send me a free sample"), which helps your customer feel like they're taking action, or in the imperative voice ("Start today!"), which is more like a hard-to-refuse command. On your product pages, use simple text like "add to basket", "add to cart" or "buy now". If your blog post is targeting new customers who are just learning about your products, you might give them two options—one that directs them to make a purchase, and another that leads them to a second blog post.

You'll also use calls to action when offering an incentive for customers to subscribe to your email list, such as "Yes, send me my free guide to omni-channel retail!"

PRODUCT IMAGES

Appealing ecommerce websites use images not only in their product listings but across the entire site. Your images need to be of professional quality; if you cut corners, you'll end up looking like the local classifieds instead of a real shop! But that doesn't mean you need to spend a fortune getting professional photos taken each time new stock comes in.

Invest in a digital SLR camera or a smartphone with an advanced camera, and learn how to use exposure controls, macro filters, image stabilisation, and your editing software. For your product photos, set up your own small studio with a plain background (usually white cardboard or a screen), and experiment with lighting. Pair these with photos that show your products in use by models, who could easily be your staff members. You can also use stock images that match the feel of your brand, but be careful to avoid photos that revert to clichés or stereotypes.



CLEAN AND CLUTTER-FREE LAYOUT

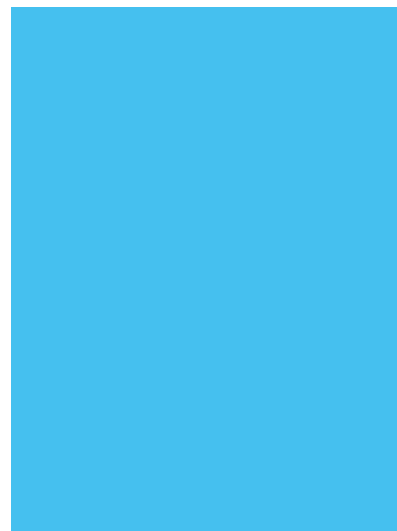
A clean design will make your ecommerce website easy to read and help your visitors focus on what's important. Avoid cramming too much information on a page and leave plenty of white space—the part of a web page or any other document that doesn't have any text or visual elements on it. (Yes, it's still called white space no matter what colour it is.) Improve readability by limiting the number of links you use on any one page, and sticking to just a few contrasting colours and one or two easy-to-read fonts.

EVERYTHING WORKS TOGETHER

Every element of your website design should be working together to create a seamless experience for your customers. Each step must flow logically from the one before, leading customers from a product page to their shopping cart to the checkout in a way that encourages forward momentum. By using smart design principles, you'll create a beautiful online store that's fast and easy to use, giving you the best chance to convert visitors to customers and boost your bottom line.

KEEP GETTING BETTER

Design is a dynamic field; trends are always changing. One of the benefits of modern ecommerce platforms is that they separate style elements from content, so it can be relatively easy to make global changes to your site layout. Once you're happy that your design is working for your online store, you can still make small changes and see if it has a measurable impact on your site traffic and conversions, allowing you to further optimise your design to suit your customers.



CONVERSION-CENTRED DESIGN WITH NETO

When it comes to selling online, the right products are only part of the story. Customers want to shop on a site that's visually appealing, easy to use, and fast, and that's where effective design principles are required. You'll find it simple to create the perfect online store if you choose an ecommerce platform that's designed with customers in mind, featuring ready-made and fully customisable mobile responsive themes and optimised navigation and checkout strategies.

THAT'S WHERE WE CAN HELP.

Neto is the only Australian retail management platform that provides a complete solution for ecommerce, point of sale, inventory, and fulfilment. Our integrated back-end technology enables exceptional and consistent customer experiences via any channel, be it in-store, online or through a marketplace. We automate repetitive tasks and integrate with multiple sales channels to manage orders and shipments.

To see for yourself how Neto can turn your omni-channel strategy into a reality, [start your free trial](#) today.

