

# eCommerce: Web design tips for building an online store

**Sarah Whitney**

Chemeketa Small Business Development Center

Here are five tips on how you can create the perfect conversion rate online to help you produce a profit.

## 1 The Customer Journey

Be aware of how customers 'flow' through the website. Remove any barriers that prevent them from purchasing your product or signing up for your service. You don't want your customers to ever wonder 'how do I purchase this?' It should be clear. Any moment of hesitation could mean the loss of a potential sale.

## 2 Online Payments

My absolute favorite eCommerce platform is Shopify because of the features and ease of use. Fast page load speed and SSL are included in the hosting plan. Credit card payments can be made directly through your Shopify store. As long as you have your business connected to a tax id number, your bank account will receive funds transferred directly from your Shopify website. No third party involved. Other platforms include Wix, Squarespace and Woocommerce. Squarespace and Woocommerce payments can be made through Stripe and/or PayPal. There might be a fee with online payments, so be sure to read about all the fine print when signing up for a Stripe or PayPal account.

## 3 Page Ranking on Google

Everyone wants the same thing, to get their website on the first page of Google. While it is helpful to have SEO, the best way to improve your ranking is by having keywords appear in the first 100 words of a page's content. This means the first headline you use, the first paragraph you write, those words



Making eCommerce simple will help your business' bottom line. GEORGE MILTON / PEXELS

are super important. You want to make sure your content is both relevant and authoritative, meaning you want the customer to know what your business is about and also how they can take action towards making an online purchase. The other thing to consider is having the most up to date information and content. Make sure your products are shown with current information, including photography. I highly recommend researching product photography online and watching YouTube tutorials on proper lighting and backdrop. If you have the budget, find a professional photographer to take pictures for you. Having good photos will tremendously improve your website's performance.

## 4 Product Research

One of the first things people do when they search online for a new prod-

uct is look at customer reviews. What did other people think of the product? Is this a product they would purchase again? What was the overall purchasing experience with your online store like? This is the kind of information you want people to see. Reviews are really great shown with a specific product on a product page. Another way to gather an even greater response is to collect testimonials. The biggest difference between a testimonial vs review is that the testimonial is more in-depth. In a testimonial, the customer explains their experience with your product or service, why they chose it, and how it improved their lives. Testimonials should be made public on your site. Collecting testimonials and reviews should also be a part of the sales process so that you get into a good habit of always asking for feedback.

## 5 Product Selection

You will want to streamline your checkout process with as few clicks as possible. Each additional click to another page reduces the opportunity for a completed sale. You want to use very detailed product title descriptions. To help customers find what they are looking for much more quickly, give them the ability to filter and search certain product categories. About 30% of visitors use a site search tool. It's a critical component for any eCommerce site.

*Sarah Whitney is a Business Adviser at the Chemeketa Small Business Development Center. The Small Business Adviser column is produced by the Center. Questions can be submitted to sbdc@chemeketa.edu or call (503) 399-5088.*

# Homelessness

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old as 25 and each person contributed to the plan, she said.

"It's not just an outside consultant saying, you know, here's a top priority, let's do this or let's put money here," Bradshaw said. "It's youth and young adults who have walked that walk saying, 'This is what will be most helpful.'"

The \$3.7 million is not "remotely enough" for all the needs in the system but it is a starting place, she said.

Spencer, President of Backbone, said she is blown away by the progress youth have been able to lead. She also has an 'elevator pitch' ready to go about Backbone and the grant for anyone willing to listen.

"I usually tell people, 'There's a Youth Action Board here in the community of youth and young adults who've experienced homelessness and our job is to end youth homelessness in Marion and Polk County. We recently just got funding from the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program which is a \$3.69 million grant to help end youth homelessness here in our community,'" Spencer said.

## Key goals

More than 170 people representing 72 agencies and organizations participated in the development of the "Mid-Wilamette Valley Coordinated Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness."

The group's shared vision is: Every youth and young adult has a safe and stable place in their community to live, sleep, connect and thrive, where each unique individual feels valued being their authentic self and has supported opportunities to become confidently self-sufficient.

"Kids need a place to stay but also a place where they can thrive and connect with other people," Spencer explained.

The 58-page plan submitted to HUD this week outlines the goals to reach that vision:

- Identify all unaccompanied youth.
- Use prevention and diversion strategies whenever possible.
- Use coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to housing and services solutions that are tailored to their needs.
- Swiftly assist youth to move into permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and support.
- Have resources, plans and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among youth.
- Have a comprehensive youth homelessness system that ensures equity in access, experiences while seeking and receiving services, and outcomes for all across the geographic region.

Proposed projects to reach those goals include expanding sites where youth experiencing homelessness can access information about housing and services. Currently, sites for coordinated entry are based in Salem, but the plan recommends partner sites in Dallas, Santiam Canyon, Silverton and Woodburn. The plan also suggests creating youth-identified ways to access the coordinated entry process such as developing an app to self-refer or request an assessment. The community also needs to adopt a coordinated entry assessment tool for youth younger than 18.

Additional objectives include building out youth and young adult pathways to permanent and non-time limited housing options such as replicating the Host Homes model where families volunteer to host homeless youth, adding a lottery system to the Salem Public Housing Authority plan for 18-24-year-olds, and increasing long-term housing options designed for youth.

The hope and vision are more than

just having shelters and more than just having the necessities, Bradshaw said.

"Our hope is to go beyond that, where each person can connect then thrive regardless of your identity or regardless of where you are geographically," she said.

Once approved by HUD, they can begin the Request for Proposal process where community organizations will be able to submit proposals for funding. A

committee would be formed to review proposals to ensure that projects receiving funding match the priorities outlined in the coordinated community plan.

That committee will be made up of 50% youth and young adults with lived experience with homelessness, Bradshaw said, to continue elevating youth leadership.



Kloi Spencer is president of Backbone, a group of youth working to find solutions to youth homelessness. ABIGAIL DOLLINS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

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