

How to reduce shopping cart abandonment

Posted on August 11, 2011 by Martin Newman



Don't make me think! If it's not 100 percent clear and intuitive what customers have to do next, chances are this will be a 'blocker to conversion', and they will abandon your site during the most crucial stages on the path to purchase.

According to Forrester research, the level of abandoned baskets in Australia is 48 percent – slightly better than in the UK where, according to Coremetrics, it's just over 50 percent. What it means is that one in two people who add something to their bag/cart do not end up making a purchase.

There are lots of opportunities to reduce abandonment and increase conversion at each stage of the checkout funnel; the following are my top 10 key recommendations:

1. Hidden checkout charges

Undoubtedly a major issue is having 'hidden charges' at the checkout. This is where the user lands on the shopping bag but isn't told what the delivery charges are. Sometimes they're told what the options are but not what the costs are, or sometimes what the costs are but not what the options are – guess why customers abandon at this stage! You can easily lose more than 30 percent of your customers who would have otherwise made a purchase.

2. Don't force registration

Not all customers want to be remembered! Offer a guest checkout but promote the benefits of registering. Forrester Research suggests 40 percent of users won't complete their purchase due to being forced to register.

3. Offer wish lists and saved carts

According to PayPal's 2009 survey of shopping cart abandonment, 33 percent of customers will come back and buy even after abandoning their bag and your site. But they won't do if you don't enable them to save their bag!

4. Make it easy for gift buyers

Enable the customer to specify a date for delivery. You need to ensure a customer will receive their gift in time for their birthday! Also make sure you provide excellent gift-wrap options. Online shopping is about convenience – if you don't offer this service it could mean the difference between customers choosing to buy offline and/or on one of your competitor's sites.

5. Include a perpetual bag throughout the checkout

If you don't have a perpetual bag reminding the user of what they're buying and what the proposition is around delivery and returns, you risk taking them away from the page to find this information. Forrester's 2007 Online Retail Checkout report showed 39 percent of online non-buyers didn't purchase online because they thought returns would be a hassle.

6. Eliminate cross-sells and item removal post cart

Once someone has moved from the bag to the checkout, they're ready to buy. This is like being in a store, going to the checkout with your wallet out and then the sales assistant asks if you're sure you want to buy these products! Why would you plant seed of doubt? Make sure you enclose the checkout and eliminate main navigation that way the customer's focus is only on completing their purchase.

7. Use customer-centric error messaging

Intuitive error messaging keeps the user on track to complete their purchase. Contextual help and relevant error messaging can increase conversion at the key checkout/form filling stages by 10 to 30 percent.

8. Provide alternative payment methods

Not everyone has a visa. I'm amazed by how many sites don't offer PayPal. Tokenization and 3D secure (Verified by Visa and MasterCard secure code) are other key considerations at the vital payment pages of a checkout.

Also, make sure you use the right terminology. Too many sites still say 'pay now' when payment isn't until the next page. Believe it or not, some customers will abandon thinking that they've already given you their credit card details and paid for their goods.

9. One-page checkouts

There is enough information to suggest one-page checkouts are now driving a reasonable reduction in abandonment and an increase in conversion – Gap.com is a good example of how to implement this solution.

10. Don't you forget about me

If the customer does abandon their basket, follow them up with an automated email, including an offer to drive conversion (e.g. free delivery, a discount off their first purchase, etc). You can easily drive 50 percent uplift in conversion by doing so.