How to Pick a Shopping Cart System that Makes You Money

By Tom Antion

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About the Author

Tom Antion is professional speaker and well-known Internet Marketing specialist. Tom's claim to fame is that he actually makes money on the Internet . . . he doesn't just read about it from a book. He was the chief spokesperson for CBS Switchboard.com in their small business educational outreach program *Main Streets Online.* Tom is also the founder of the infamous *Butt Camp Seminars* where you learn to make money while sitting home on your rear end.

Tom is also the owner of the only facility of its kind in the world the Great Internet Marketing Retreat Center in Virginia Beach, VA. Serious Internet marketers come from all over the world to study with Tom, live in his estate home, and profit from a total immersion learning experience. Check it out at:
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Introduction

Picking a shopping cart system is a very serious decision that you will likely have to live with for some time. It is simply too important a decision to make without knowing the right questions to ask.

So many systems are frustrating to install and once installed are incomprehensible and extremely difficult to use which means lost sales for you. If your customer is sitting in front of their computer with an open wallet, you better not make it hard for them to buy or they will be gone in a flash.

You really want to automate every part of the system so it's less work for you and extremely easy for your customer. Today's smart shopping system technology can make this happen at a price that any small business can afford.

In addition, smart shopping systems will dramatically increase sales because they manage the entire shopping process including upselling the customer, making special offers, handling special sales and discounts and completely managing your extremely valuable database of prospects and actual customers.

There are thousands of simple shopping carts on the market either for free or for a low price. Basically they just take the order like the cashier at a grocery store. They do nothing to help you sell in the first place.

Custom Carts

You will have webmasters all the time trying to sell you a custom shopping cart that can cost you anywhere from a few hundred

dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. They tell you that what you want to do with your site will require lots of expensive programming and custom adaptations. There are very few small business people (and I've coached hundreds) that need anything so sophisticated. Keep your wallet in your pocket when you get around these people.

==You may already have a ton of money invested in your shopping system and you may not have the sales you think you should. It might be time to consider scraping the old system in favor of a new less expensive system that has sales tools built in.== Sticking with an antiquated system just because you have lots of money invested makes no sense and it will continue to hurt your sales in the future . . . what's that saying about pound foolish and penny wise?

What is a shopping cart?

A "shopping cart" is actually a piece of software. The metaphor is, . . . you guessed it, . . . shopping. You push your cart through the "cyber store." When you see something you want to buy, you put it in your cart by clicking on it. Then when you are ready to leave, you "check out" of the store. This is where the shopping cart totals up your purchases and adds the tax and shipping for you.

At any time along the way you can take an item out of your cart. It's just like at a real store when you see a toaster in the men's clothing section. . . . Someone decided they didn't want it and just left it wherever they happened to be in the store. In cyberspace you don't have to feel bad about throwing something out of your cart. At this point you're only moving electrons around.

You then fill in your name, address, phone and shipping info along with your credit card and expiration date. Most carts still give you a chance to make changes, or back out of the deal altogether. Once you hit the final submit button, all the mechanisms kick into gear to send that money hurtling toward your checking account . . . minus the credit card company percentage, of course.

Real Time Credit Card Processing
==The credit card processing is not actually done by the shopping cart.== Many people don't realize this. You still have to have a credit card merchant account to process credit cards. If you don't have the real time processing capability, your shopping cart will simply email you notice of the sale. You log in to your cart to get the credit card number for manual processing later.

When you do have "real time credit card processing" capability (which you must if you want to totally automate your system) the customer puts their credit card in your shopping cart and about 15 to 20 seconds later gets a notification that the sale went through. Sometime later that day the money is deposited in your bank account automatically.

The credit card number is encrypted as it flies through cyberspace so no bad boys and girls can intercept it along the way. This is a process called PGP, or **Pretty Good Privacy**. Hahaha That term always cracks me up. I think I'd rather have Darn Good Privacy, or Invincible Privacy, but PGP is all we have at our level and it has shown to be Darn Good Enough.

After the transaction is complete, in sometimes as little as five seconds, you either get an email regarding shipping the product, or the customer gets a link to download the product directly. And

that's all there is to it. I've simplified it considerably, but believe me, you don't want to know all the details. You just want it to work!

AGAIN I WANT TO EMPHASIZE -- Your shopping cart system is separate from your merchant account and from your real time processing mechanism. The shopping cart must connect to the credit card system, but it is a separate system. If you need a merchant account I will tell you later how to get one in about ten minutes for $99.00

How to Pick a Shopping Cart System

Here are some criteria that are important when it comes to picking a shopping cart:

☑ **Calculate Shipping & Tax**
This is one of the reasons why you have a shopping cart. It's a basic function, but some do it better than others. Make sure you have several options on how to calculate basic shipping charges. Don't forget, some customers will want fast shipping like Fed Ex. Can the cart handle this?

☑ **Soft & Hard Goods**
This is extremely important for anyone who wants to sell informational products. A hard good is a physical product that has to be shipped to the customer. A soft good is a downloadable product or software type of product. You want the shopping cart to be able to handle both types of products in the same transaction so the customer doesn't have to go through the ordering process twice if ordering one of your widgets and a downloadable E-book at the

same time. <mark>Also, when the cart is delivering a downloadable product it should generate a webpage for the download that disappears automatically after a short time so that customer can't give the link to all his/her friends.</mark>

✔ Featured Products

These are products that you can add to the bottom of the shopping cart checkout page that your customers may also be interested in purchasing. A powerful shopping cart will let you add additional items you may want to push to your customers. Adding text such as "people who bought this item also bought these products" or "you may also be interested in . . . " will give customers additional choices that they may be interested in. This can mean a lot more money for you.

✔ Related Products

A sophisticated shopping cart will automatically make additional product suggestions based on the item they are purchasing. Related products are similar in nature to the main items the customer is purchasing and gives your customer choices that they can quickly add to the cart at check out for a powerful upselling feature.
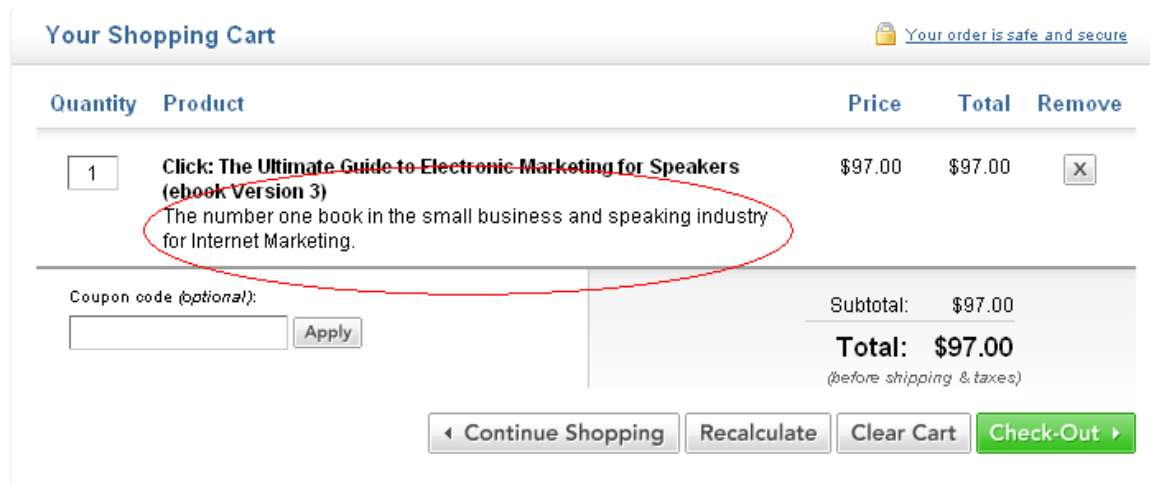
Just like the graphic above your "related products" would be listed right below the cart.

✔ Product Descriptions

Make sure your choice of shopping cart will give you the options of making long and short descriptions of your products at checkout. A short description is a title of your product and a long description will give additional details to your customers to influence their buying decision. Make the long description "salesy" to push your products and convince your customers to buy.

These descriptions also help to combat "shopping cart abandonment" because they help keep the customer excited about their purchase i.e. they complete the transaction instead of loading up the cart and leaving.

✔ Inventory

A great feature every shopping cart should have is the ability to alert you when your product inventory is getting low. If you happen to run out of a certain product, the cart will give the customer an option to "backorder" the item and gives you a chance to keep selling while restocking your inventory.

✔ Customizable "Continue Shopping" Pages

Continue Shopping

Where you send your customers after they add a particular item to their shopping cart can mean a big difference in the amount of money they spend with you. Sophisticated shopping carts allow you to customize the "Continue Shopping" button so it takes the customer to a related product of your choice. This one feature can dramatically influence whether the customer simply checks out because it's too difficult to find related items, or purchases something else because you made it easy.

You should also be able to eliminate the continue shopping button. Why would you want to do that? If you have an expensive item in the cart you may not want people to get distracted by searching around your other less expensive products. They may find something cheaper and delete the expensive product or they may take so long looking at other stuff that they never get around to completing the sale in the cart. THAT HURTS!

✔ Offer Management

Most lower end shopping carts don't have the capability to offer discounts for multiple purchases, or to offer "one free when you buy three" or similar special offers. Having this capability can really increase the average amount that someone spends when they shop with you.

✔ Receipt and Confirmation Emails

The shopping cart should be able to send an email confirmation automatically to the customer and also generate a receipt for you to put in the package if you are shipping a product.

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