

Design An ———
eCommerce
STORE

————— *That Sells*

EXPERT INSIGHTS



 **HORTON**

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <u>Introduction</u> | 1 |
| <u>What are some of the recent trends in eCommerce that you've seen?</u> | 2 |
| <u>As a developer, how do you create an eCommerce site that works for a client?</u> | 4 |
| <u>What are some of the most common mistakes that people make when designing an eCommerce site?</u> | 5 |
| <u>How do you use the concepts of UI and UX when designing an eCommerce site?</u> | 6 |
| <u>Can you explain why visual hierarchy is important in a online store?</u> | 8 |
| <u>What are some of the best tools that we have to make that happen?</u> | 9 |
| <u>How do inbound marketing methodologies shape the way you develop and design a website?</u> | 11 |
| <u>What is the benefit for a client by developing an inbound friendly eCommerce site?</u> | 13 |
| <u>I know that Horton Group is a Bigcommerce partner, but what does that mean? And why Bigcommerce?</u> .. | 14 |
| <u>Conclusion</u> | 11 |

A portrait of Mike Lawrence, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a green and black plaid shirt, set against a brick wall background.

Design an eCommerce Store That Sells

MIKE LAWRENCE
INTERACTIVE DEVELOPER

Introduction

Mike Lawrence, an interactive developer with Horton Group, puts his varied background in new media, film production, animation and graphic design into action by developing clean, modern websites built to attract visitors and convert sales. The Columbia College alumnus and Horton stalwart took a few moments to share his thoughts on building effective eCommerce websites that sell.

What follows is not only a full transcript of our conversation with Mike -- which covers the latest in trends, challenges, common pitfalls, UI and UX, eCommerce tools and the relationship between eCommerce and Inbound Marketing -- but also expanded research and tips from our inbound marketing and content experts.

In this eBook, we'll discuss -- and you'll discover -- how to improve online sales, attract qualified customers to your online storefront, make the most of eCommerce design theories and design an eCommerce website that makes buyers want to shop online with you and more.

“What are some of the recent trends in eCommerce that you’ve seen?”

Sam Bradshaw

INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGIST

Visually things are becoming a lot more simplified. Users are embracing that flat design that everyone really likes, the minimalism. I think that buyers are so much more experienced and fluent in shopping online a lot of that noisy chrome is being stripped away. It’s really coming down to clean interfaces that are very simplistic. Larger images, fewer items per page.

But technology-wise, we’re seeing an increase in searchability and filterability and the asynchronous JavaScript-like approach to eCommerce means vendors are able to serve up a catalogue very quickly. I think speed and adaptability to different screen sizes are the most important things with eCommerce. Overall I think people want to spend less time browsing and to be able to buy a lot quicker. Think of it this way: modern eCommerce is less about online shopping, and more about online buying. The less your interface can get in the way, the better.

Additionally, the analytics of eCommerce have gotten so robust that the success of your store is really going to be measured more by data and than by looks. If you’re not clean and easy to navigate, well, everyone else is, so you’re not even on the radar. What really pushes a site forward beyond all the other ones that look similar is being able to perform the analytics and to target specific user groups. Being able to offer a faster way to shop, ease of use and reordering.

eCommerce is less about the visuals and more about leveraging the technology that we have in our pockets.

eCommerce Quick Facts

- \$1.6 trillion market worldwide
- Over 12 million online stores
- 5% of stores have less than \$1,000 revenue annually
- 20.9% growth from 2014 to 2015
- 11% of the 1 million most visited websites are eCommerce stores
- 94% of people consider custom eCommerce stores to convert better
- eCommerce accounts for 10% of total retail revenue in the US

eCommerce and Mobile

- Over 75 million smartphones users have made a purchase online in the last 6 months
- Mobile devices account for nearly 10% of total eCommerce revenues - over 100 million dollars annually
- 52% of consumers are less likely to buy from a business after a bad mobile experience
- 84% of of consumers have experienced difficulty in making a mobile eCommerce purchase

A Bit More on Mobile and eCommerce

We're all familiar with our nation's addiction to smartphones and mobile technology. From the incessant need to check our feeds, posts, and latest news, to surfing the web and making purchases, our social and commercial lives are becoming more mobile every day. This is not just an American reality, and in fact, mobile technology has played a huge role in African innovation over the past few years. Considering that only 10% of Africans have access to the Internet, and 50% have mobile phones, mobile technology is the highest penetrated modern infrastructure in Africa today. It wouldn't be crazy to assume that mobile tech will only experience higher adoption across the globe every year for the foreseeable future.

*sources

<http://blog.lemonstand.com/just-how-big-is-the-ecommerce-market-youll-never-guess/>

<http://www.outerboxdesign.com/web-design-articles/mobile-ecommerce-statistics>

“As a developer, how do you create an eCommerce site that works for a client?”

Peter Campbell
CONTENT WRITER

It starts with trying to understand the business model. We look at their catalogue and their product or service and try to understand how their business model works. We think about revenue versus margin and about creating the ideal flow of products to and from the online storefront to the customer. Once we understand that, we try to find the simplest path with the least amount of clicks to take the visitor from the main site to actually checking out. We remove as many obstacles as possible and answer as many questions as possible along the way with minimal effort from the user.

Steps Of The eCommerce Sales Cycle

AWARENESS > CONSIDERATION > PREFERENCE/INTENT > PURCHASE > REPURCHASE

How To Streamline Your Buyer's Journey

- Define Your Product's Trigger Moments
- Design A User-Friendly Interface For Your Visitors
- Eliminate Inefficiencies In Your Sales Cycle
- Goal: Get Your Visitors To The Trigger Moment Faster

“What are some of the most common mistakes that people make when designing an eCommerce site?”

Joey Dye
CONTENT WRITER

If you look at something like Google, its strength is its simplicity. The most common eCommerce mistakes I see are information overload and not really making it obvious how they want their consumers to shop. So many storefronts just throw it all at you and expect you to click on something. In reality, most people shop online using filters or by searching for a specific item. Typically, people have a good idea of what they're looking for and don't browse much on an eCommerce site -- they use other platforms for that, like Pinterest.

Top 5 Ecommerce Mistakes

- Unclear value proposition
- Lack of product descriptions
- Use of poor quality images
- No visual hierarchy
- Failure to establish trust

The Power of Pinterest

- 75% of Pinterest users have purchased something on or because of the platform.
- 93% of pinners have shopped online in the past 6 months.
- Pins with prices get 36% more likes
- Pinterest has more than 100 million monthly active users.
- Average Pinterest users remain on the platform for about 15 min. per session.

Simple Websites Work Better

Users judge websites as beautiful or not within 1/50th - 1/20th of a second, and visually complex websites are consistently rated as less beautiful than their simpler counterparts, according to a Google study.

“How do you use the concepts of User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) when designing an eCommerce site?”

Char Vandermeer
CONTENT WRITER

UX concepts are most important when developing applications, but in a way, eCommerce is its own genre of application because it's so specifically driven. There is an end point. With sites like Pinterest and Twitter, there is no end point, it's just sort of out there and you use it, but there's no overarching goal. With eCommerce, the goal is clear: you want your customer to buy something. Understanding usability patterns and being able to embrace what has been done before, and doing it again because it works.

I always use the analogy of a car -- the gas is on the right and brakes on the left, right? If you were to switch those up, you may think you're brilliant and innovative, but you're going to cause a lot of car accidents. Designing a good eCommerce website is a lot like that. You'll want to know who is going to be using the site, but good developers should also have a base of understanding how people use the internet and how people shop. Once we understand this, we can design it in a way that stands out. It could be typography or custom micro interactions that make a site feel very responsive to what the user is actually doing. It's important to use that empathy along with the information you have about the business model.

Top 7 UX and UI Design Tips to Increase eCommerce Sales

#1 -- Use Your Homepage Wisely

- Display Top-Selling Products
- Skip the full-page branding and show your products as soon as possible
- Encourage social sharing

#2 -- Make Your Navigation Clear

- Keep your categories specific
- Avoid jargon and cliches
- Be bold with your "Add to Cart" button and CTAs

#3 -- Welcome Searchers

- Make sure your search function is visible and effective
- Use intelligent search to accommodate your customers' clumsy fingers
- Embrace search engine results pages (SERP) and feature products similar to those your customers are seeking

#4 -- Show Your Stuff

- Create a gallery with filters (size, color, price, rating, etc...)
- Allow your visitors to remove filters without starting over
- Use smart filters to avoid the deadly "no results found" error message
- Add a Quick View option for a more intimate viewing experience
- Let your buyers decide how many products they want to see per page
- Consider an option for side by side comparison

#5 -- Make Your Products Pretty

- Invest in professional product photography
- Include detailed product information and views
- Consider brief product videos

#6 -- Keep Checkout Simple

- Avoid abandoned cart syndrome by featuring a clear shopping cart with counter in your header
- Allow users to update the cart
- Embrace one-click checkout
- Include a guest checkout option
- Keep your forms simple and minimize potential error messages
- Pre-fill information whenever possible
- Remove any distractions from the page that may lead customers elsewhere

#7 -- For the Love of Mobile and the Power of Thank You

- Your eCommerce site must be mobile friendly
- The faster, the better
- Make the most of your "Order Confirmation" and "Order Shipped" messages
- Nothing says "Thank You" like free shipping

“Can you explain why visual hierarchy is important in an online store?”

Char Vandermeer
CONTENT WRITER

Visual hierarchy is important with a lot of web design, but with eCommerce, specifically, you do have a larger amount of content per page. When you're selling online, you'll probably have several products per page, sometimes dozens, and they all need to be given the proper amount of attention. If the consumer is looking for something specific, you want to make sure that it's easy to find. Hierarchy comes into play when you need to make sure that the information you know is going to be the most important, based on usability patterns and information about that particular user group and industry, is going to be the most prominent.

Typically, images and product names are going to be the most important things. If you go shopping for a pair of Nike shoes, that's how you're going to refer to it or recognize it, you're not going to refer to it by the SKU. The hierarchy can change, though, based on whatever the industry is. If you're looking at the electronics industry, it's highly competitive and there are differences between models that most consumers aren't going to see. All 42" flat screen TVs look essentially the same. Instead, consumers are looking at price and description, so you make those more prominent.

What is Visual Hierarchy and Why is it Important in eCommerce Design?

Visual hierarchy is the arrangement or presentation of content on the page. Effective use of visual hierarchy principles denotes importance and good designers use it to influence the order in which customers perceive the content on your site. In other words, visual hierarchy is a great way to drive your visitors into the sales funnel.

“What are some of the best tools that we have to make that happen?”

Char Vandermeer
CONTENT WRITER

Earlier today I was watching something about Node.js and they were saying that for years and years, Walmart famously had issues with online sales on Black Friday. The volume had expanded so much that their existing database couldn't handle it. Once they switched their online inventory system to Node, they were able to handle the demand. The way the MEAN Stack and Node and those asynchronous libraries work is that you're serving up content only when requested. You're not giving it all and then having to filter all the content down -- you're just requesting specific things.

This ties into speed and that responsiveness, too -- even if something goes on sale or out of stock, you don't have to reload, it's going to be updated real time. Being able to use those more modern libraries is a big deal. Using tools like Mongo.db, which is designed for large databases, very complex data models takes eCommerce site to the next level. And fast, scalable and secure hosting services means that the basic experience of going to buy something has become so fluent and smooth that you almost don't realize you're doing it. It's like people who have the automatic windows in their car -- you don't really think of them until you have to roll a window down manually... and you think, 'Man, this is annoying.' And now it's the same way with eCommerce, if it's not fast and it's not mobile responsive and it's not asynchronous, then it really doesn't matter and no one's going to use it or trust that it's secure.

They say that something like 80% of people's brand trust is built on visuals alone. That's why eCommerce platforms like Squarespace are becoming so popular: they're fast, they look great and they're easy to maintain. I think a lot of eCommerce businesses are realizing there are so many options now that buyers aren't really shopping around for the best product of the best deal anymore, they're looking for something that expands beyond the basic purchase experience. Anytime anyone interacts with your brand, that's part of the user experience. As developers, we deal mostly with the online interaction and our goal is to make it as seamless and rewarding as possible.

How Do You Find the Best eCommerce Platform and the Right Developer? Ask the Right Questions.

The number of eCommerce platforms is overwhelming and finding the right fit for your online store can be a daunting task. Here are a few questions to consider when searching for an solid solution to your digital retail needs.

#1 -- What's the best eCommerce solution for my business?

For this one, it's important to do your homework while keeping an open mind. You're the entrepreneur, not the developer, but it's wise to understand the variety of eCommerce options available to you. Make a list of everything you want your site to do, prioritize your list and share it with potential creative partners. Their answers (and how carefully they address your concerns) will be telling.

#2 -- May I see some example of your eCommerce websites?

This gives you a sense of the designers aesthetic and the variety of their portfolio

#3 -- Can I contact some of your clients?

Don't be afraid to get a little nosy. Great agencies are proud of their work and their relationship with their clients. Often, just asking for the referral is enough; but do take the time to follow through. You'll be surprised to discover that even the happiest of clients may have suggestions that'll help you take your build to the next level.

#4 -- What's your process?

Many creative agencies use the fluid and flexible Agile work process, because they value interactions and client input. Agile methodologies allow creative teams to adapt quickly as your needs change.

#5 -- What can you do to make my website appear and function securely?

Reputable agencies have your best interests at heart and take security seriously. If they don't talk about SSL certification, regular server updates, patches, PCI compliance, and storing credit card information, ask them.

#6 -- What programming languages to you use?

It's one thing for an agency to be a Bigcommerce partner, a Squarespace expert or a WordPress shop, but it's another thing altogether to be able to customize your site to your needs. Make sure they speak your language.

#7 -- Can I Make Changes to My Own eCommerce Website?

You'll be surprised how many budding entrepreneurs employ the "ask a buddy" strategy to create their webstore. Not only is this a bad idea on a personal level, but you'll want complete ownership of your online storefront once it's live. Most digital marketing agencies offer expert training so you can update product descriptions and images as often as necessary, without added cost or delay.

And there you have it. Look for a creative partner who knows eCommerce and is familiar with a range of products including Bigcommerce, Squarespace, WordPress and WooCommerce and languages ranging from Java to PHP to JSON and NoSQL and MySQL database management. Qualified agency partners will analyze your business, goals and objectives and will build a modern, mobile friendly eCommerce website that comes loaded with industry-leading features like abandoned cart recovery, multiple payment options, one-click checkout and merchant analytics. Great teams will be fluid in custom development and design and will understand the value of SEO, inbound marketing and sales. Once you've found a trusted ally, they'll work with you to develop a fast, secure and scalable eCommerce website that grows with your business.

"How do inbound marketing methodologies shape the way you develop and design a website?"

Joey Dye
CONTENT WRITER

Being able to call upon the client's goals and key buyer personas is really valuable. Understanding how many users they have, who they're reaching out to and what their objectives are helps us create successful eCommerce websites. Being able to integrate email and marketing campaigns, user retention and new customer analytics and being able to integrate all of this with the process of buying makes our sites feel more intentional.

If you understand the strategy involved with the brand as a whole, you can then understand the ultimate end game, which is not only to get people to buy a product, but also to keep them coming back. This kind of information allows us to shape the interface so that it easily integrates callouts and newsletter and includes the proper tracking scripts. Being able to track purchases or when somebody adds something to a cart or when someone leaves a cart helps vendors understand their clients. If that's the information we know is going to be integral the the strategy of the brand, then we need to make sure it gets done in a way that's going to serve the data to them in the right way.

eCommerce Inbound Methodology

- **Attract new customers**
- **Convert traffic into Sales**
- **Personalize the remarketing process**
- **Track and attribute revenue**

Must-Know eCommerce Metrics

- **Cost of Acquiring Customer (CAC):** The amount of money spent to acquire one customer.
- **Conversion Rate (CR):** Percent of visitors who end up buying from your store.
- **Shopping Cart Abandonment:** Percentage of visitors who added a product to their shopping cart but did not complete the checkout process.
- **Average Order Value:** The average value of an order from your online store.
- **Churn:** The percent of customers who never come back to your site.

The Value of Customer Retention

- It costs 5x more to acquire new customers than to keep current ones.
- It cost 16x more to bring a new customer up to the same level of profitability as an old customer.
- Nearly 82% of companies agree retention cost less to execute than acquisition.

“What is the benefit for a client by developing an inbound friendly eCommerce site?”

Peter Campbell
CONTENT WRITER

The thing with inbound, as opposed to traditional marketing, is that it's so much more technology based. It's based in analytics and in digital marketing platforms. When you're using a methodology that cruxes on your ability to reach people through the internet, through technology, it becomes very easy to leverage the knowledge the marketing team has with knowing what tools to use and how to use them. It's easier to figure out how to use those bleeding edge script or programming languages to achieve those things...or to use those particular methodologies in different ways, using tools that are a little more interesting or unique that not a lot of people are using, which allows that interaction with technology to shape people's brand perception.

Why Use Inbound Marketing For eCommerce Sites?

- **Attract New Customers**
- **Get To Know Your Customers Better**
- **Control Your Customers' Brand Perception**
- **Shorten Your Sales Cycle**

Top Automation Software For eCommerce Sites

- Hubspot
- Salesforce
- Marketa
- Oracle Marketing Cloud
- InfusionSoft

“I know that Horton Group is a Bigcommerce partner, but what does that mean? And why Bigcommerce?”

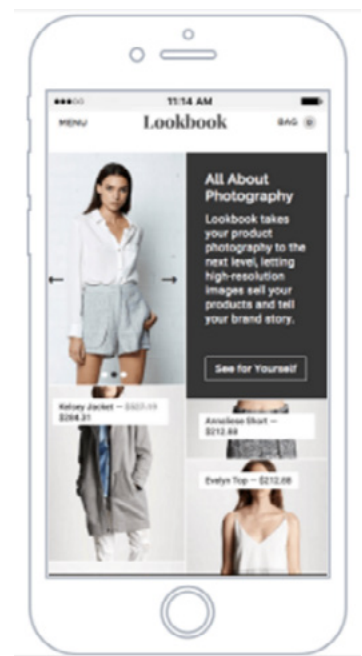
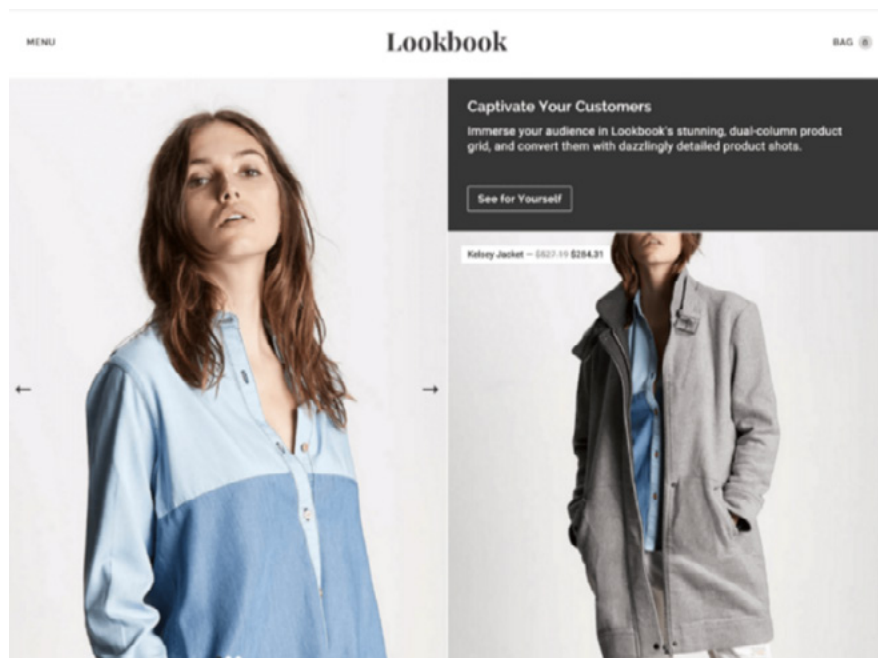
Sam Bradshaw
INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGIST

We develop stores in Squarespace and WordPress, too, but being a Bigcommerce partner means we have access to higher-level API documentation. They're more transparent about how their technology is built so we can look under the hood and connect the way we do things and our technology and our programming experience and language to utilize their platform in the most efficient way. We can custom tailor a Bigcommerce site to a particular client's needs on the eCommerce and marketing side. It also means they've put their trust in us and our development team. They know we're fluent and work with it on a daily basis.

Bigcommerce for eCommerce

- **Bigcommerce's merchant revenues grow 28% a year, twice industry average**
- **99.99% uptime for Bigcommerce stores - including 100% during Cyber Week**
- **1/4th the cost of on-premise solutions like Magento**

Bigcommerce Stores are beautiful, conversion friendly, and easy to manage.



Conclusion

Peter Campbell
CONTENT WRITER

From there Mike had to get back to work. Horton Group's recent partnership with Bigcommerce has kept all of us pretty busy, especially Mike. Staying up to date on all the latest trends and protocols in his industry is extremely time consuming. He works on the cutting edge, continuously pushing and improving on his eCommerce and Inbound methodologies in order to deliver the best results to his clients.

You can take a look at some of the projects he has worked on in the past right [here](#). This portfolio is going to undergo some major growth in the coming months, as Mike and the rest of Horton Group move forward as a Bigcommerce Partner. Stay tuned!

If your business is in need of **dynamic eCommerce solutions**, we are here to help.

Mike and Horton's talented team of developers and designers would love to meet with you to get to know you and your needs. With your guidance, they can design and implement eCommerce software specifically tailored to your business.

Get in touch with us today to [request a proposal!](#)