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Why design *matters*

eStar senior technical design lead, **Dena Emanuel**, outlines the importance of design to the success of your digital store.

DESIGN, AT ITS heart, is about planning and communication. It is an essential element in any eCommerce project. Design done well will communicate effectively to your customers, foster their trust, and ultimately lead to a higher converting digital store.

Love at first sight

First impressions count. You can have the best product in the market but if your site design doesn't accurately represent your brand, or is not designed well, it will be all for nothing. You only have one chance to make a good first impression on your customers, so make sure they feel comfortable and confident shopping with you by investing in a professional user interface.

Think of your eCommerce site as you would a physical store. A bricks and mortar shop with a well presented front window, clear promotions and easy to find stock is going to inspire customers to enter and increase repeat custom, compared to a store that has poorly crafted signage and chaotic inventory. The same is true online.

Whether it's fair or not, new customers will judge the quality of your product on how your site looks. This is crucial in overcoming the dreaded early exit (over 50% of consumers typically leave a website within viewing three pages of content).

Also, customer loyalty will come more naturally when you make them fall in love with a stunning eCommerce site that they want to revisit over and over again.

All style but no substance

Having said that, great design is not just about how it looks. A well designed site will be intuitive, easy to navigate and have optimised and well planned code.

Thinking about coding standards and user experience isn't as sexy or exciting as the visual aspect of a project, but these things are just as important when it comes to taking your online presence to the next level. A recent survey of 2,000 UK respondents found 41% believe "easy navigation is the most important feature while shopping online".

Prominent designer and user interface expert Jared Spool said "Good design, when done well, should be invisible". Fast loading times and forms that are easy to complete are features that create subconscious positive experiences that go unnoticed when designed well.

Considering these things from the start, as part of a full design process, will make for a smoother, faster, more accessible shopping experience for your customers.

Art for art's sake

Your designer has just created a truly unique masterpiece for your new site launch. It has cool interactive content, an innovative new site menu with nice animations and a completely redesigned product detail page that is exclusive to your site. Exciting!

Although it's tempting to run ahead with something new and different, take the time to consider best practice and how your customers will be using your site. Ask why is the design so different from other eCommerce sites? Is it for a clearly defined purpose or for the sake of being creative? Will it improve the customers' experience or confuse them? Don't be afraid to ask questions of your designer's decisions.

As stifling to creativity as it may seem, best practice design principles exists for a reason. We have learnt over time what works and what doesn't when it comes to customer's eCommerce shopping habits. Going against best practice principles will cost you money in the long run.

By all means, make bold design decisions. However, ensure you have a clear purpose (taking into account best practice) for why you are implementing those designs and have ways to test the impact they have on your customers. Implementing creative design decisions without purpose and neglecting to gauge their impact can be an expensive mistake.

Successful retailers and brands are investing in design for their digital stores and making sure their customers' overall online shopping experience is considered alongside brand. Seeking the services of eCommerce design professionals will put you ahead of your competition and have your customers coming back for more. ∎