Performance, Aesthetics, Relevance Checklist

Let's evaluate your e-commerce website.

The Shopping Journey: The Key to Online Sales

The pressure is on for you to deliver big online sales growth. You need to turn more shoppers into buyers. You can't afford for your hard-earned traffic to bounce. That's why it's more important than ever to optimize your e-commerce website for an incredible shopping experience.

Savvy shoppers now demand a fast and delightful online shopping journey. Every moment counts - from the first second they land on your site to their purchase. Any way to speed the path to purchase can improve your conversion rates.

SLI Systems is hyper-focused on connecting shoppers with the products they're most likely to buy right now. We understand what your online shoppers want, having served the most relevant products to 18 billion queries annually.

The P.A.R. Checklist taps into that experience and the proven insights from powering more than 600 online retailers.

What is P.A.R.?

The P.A.R. Checklist gives you 14 best practices to analyze the key areas that matter most to your customers. These best practices are proven to accelerate the path to purchase and increase online sales.

You have three major themes to evaluate your e-commerce website:

✓ **PERFORMANCE**
✓ **AESTHETICS**
✓ **RELEVANCE**

The P.A.R. Checklist identifies the functionality your e-commerce site offers and provides simple suggestions on what you can do to improve.

Let's break down each of those critical elements.

Performance

Visitors to your website have high expectations. Shoppers react to the performance in the first millisecond. You want to be fast.

A slight delay in product page load, a search query response, or while browsing your catalog may result in a lost customer. Forever.

Intuit increased conversion rates 24% when they cut load speed from 15 seconds to 7 seconds. And they gained an additional 8% conversion boost when load time went from 7 seconds down to 2 seconds[1].

If that wasn't enough pressure, Google now analyzes page speed as a key factor for its organic search-ranking algorithm.

So you need to be fast. Or your competition may get more traffic and steal your sales.

Aesthetics

Online businesses all want beautiful websites. You want your products to appeal to shoppers. But a beautiful website doesn't mean it's tuned to sell.

Your key pages need to be focused on sales and appearance.

Your top priority is to drive transactions. You want your shoppers in a buying mindset right away. Otherwise, those shoppers are "just looking." And you're dramatically less likely to make a sale.

Be a merchandiser at every opportunity. Get your visitors directly to a product page where they can purchase.

Relevance

Arguably the most critical part of the buying experience is fast product discovery. Shoppers can't buy what they can't find.

Your customer experience needs to be tuned to answer one question: "What is my visitor most likely to buy now?"

That's relevance.

Relevant product discovery is proven to increase site-wide conversion rates 19% and average revenue per visit 72%[2]. So you need to merchandise hyper-relevant products throughout the shopping journey.
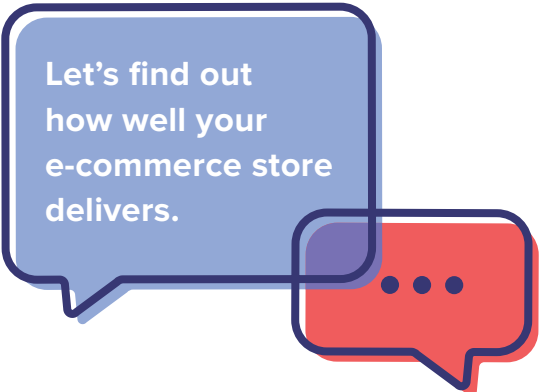
Is Your E-commerce Website Up to P.A.R.?

You understand why Performance, Aesthetics, and Relevance can have a big impact on your online sales. Now it's time to evaluate your e-commerce website.

The P.A.R. Checklist

Check each box of the 14-point P.A.R. Checklist based on your e-commerce website. These best practices are proven to increase online sales.

We also provide simple suggestions on what you can do to improve.

Let's find out how well your e-commerce store delivers.

Performance

Start with four site performance elements that zoom shoppers straight to checkout.

☐ **Pass Google PageSpeed Insights Test**

Visit **Google PageSpeed Insights**. Enter your website URL. See how Google rates your performance. *Give yourself a check if both your mobile and desktop sites get the green by performing in the top third of all websites.*

Your website is full of product images, content, Javascript, and CSS page elements. That bloats your every webpage. Your best first step is to reduce your page size.

Your Action: Analyze your site on **Google PageSpeed Insights**. Follow Google's optimization suggestions to get your site up to speed. Also check out **How to Improve Your Conversion Rates with a Faster Website** on Moz. com.

☐ **Load Faster with Page and Image Caching**

Check the box if you have implemented page caching and/or image caching on your website.

Your code makes a lot of requests to your customer's browser just to to render a webpage. But many requests ask for the same elements for each page. Page loads are unnecessarily slow when the same elements are repeatedly downloaded. Cache those elements in memory to serve content faster, and your customers won't have to wait.

Your Action: Ask your e-commerce platform and web host how they cache your pages and content. Identify caching plugins or tools compatible with your platform that enhance your caching beyond the "out of the box" solution.

Check out the **Performance Golden Rule** from Google's Head Performance Engineer. This how-to guide gives you the top optimization steps with the biggest ROI.

☐ Get Close to Customers with CDN and Redundancy

Does your site use a Content Delivery Network (CDN)? Do you have server redundancy around the world?

If yes to both, then check the box. Your visitors are from across the country and around the globe. The closer your data centers are to your customers, the faster your website loads. CDN services give you a global network of servers. That shortens the distance to your customers, which your website host alone cannot provide. Also, make sure you run on a redundant server architecture that ensures your site speed won't degrade if a server is down.

Your Action: Sign up for a CDN. There are many excellent services available, including Akamai, CloudFlare, Amazon CloudFront, and more.

☐ Secure Every Page with an SSL Certificate

Check the box if every page of your website is secured with an SSL certificate.

It's no longer good enough to protect just your shopping cart pages. Your customers need to trust your site through their entire experience on your e-commerce store. Additionally, the Google Chrome browser now displays a "Not Secure" warning on every page not secured with HTTPS. That means even your homepage could display a warning. And erode your shopper's trust.

Your Action: Ask your site administrator to implement SSL certificate security on all pages. Also, read this helpful guide from Google on **how to enable HTTPS**.

Aesthetics

A beautiful website doesn't mean it's tuned to sell. Evaluate these four sections of your e-commerce store experience to see if your key pages are focused on sales *and* beauty.

☐ Promote Products on your Homepage

Do you merchandise specific products on your home page?

Check the box if the answer is yes. You want to get your visitors directly to a product page where they can purchase. Yet, many e-commerce sites use valuable homepage real estate to promote general categories and shopping ideas, not specific products. That means more clicks to maybe find what they want. Merchandise specific products that visitors are likely to add to their shopping carts right away.

Your Action: Get shoppers in a buying mindset right away with product recommendations like "Top Sellers" and "What's Hot" on your homepage.

> **Always be testing.** Use A/B tests for any of these recommended aesthetic elements. Then you can determine what has the biggest impact on your sales.

☐ Make Navigation Menus Dynamic

Check the box if your menu structure is tuned to use facets that sell, not just product categories.

Most e-commerce sites set up their navigation menus with their platform theme out of the box. Don't simply choose top product categories and set your menus. Think of menus as a merchandising opportunity. Excite the "just browsing" shopper with navigation menu elements you know drive sales. Adjust them regularly and highlight key facets and products that sell. The results are an accelerated purchase path and more sales.

Your Action: What specific brands, styles, materials, seasonality, or other product features are hot right now? Add those product-option facets directly into your navigation menus to drive even more clicks and sales.

☑ Increase Category Page Sales

Are the products displayed on your category pages automatically adjusted to most?

Many category pages rank product results simply by keyword matching product feed data. Tune your results in real-time based on behavior. This merchandising automation complements your merchandising team and can do it at scale across thousands of SKUs.

Your Action: Use your analytics and transaction data to determine product ranking on your category pages. Show products in order of Best Selling, using sales data, or Most Popular, using pageview and click data.

☑ Upsell in the Shopping Cart

Give yourself a check if you recommend complementary products in your shopping cart.

The point of purchase is the perfect place to increase average order values. Brick-and-mortar stores display impulse-purchase items at check out. Your shopping cart should work the same. Suggest relevant add-ons and complementary items other customers bought based on the products already in the shopping cart.

Your Action: Leverage sales data to fuel "Customers also bought" or "You may also like" recommendations that entice customers to add more products to their purchases.

Relevance

Relevance delivers precisely what shoppers are looking to buy. Let's review six e-commerce elements where better relevance leads to higher conversion rate.

☐ Show Better Site Search Results

Check the box if your search results are ranked by Most Relevant.

Your search box is your revenue box. SLI studies have found that visitors who use search buy at a 2.7x greater rate than visitors who just browse. Better yet, search users have indicated exactly what they want. Specifically brands, specifications, materials, and colors are options that indicate exactly what they want. The most effective e-commerce sites display hyper-relevant search results with the products shoppers are most likely to buy.

Your Action: Ensure the relevance of search results by tuning to the most purchased products that you sell. Don't just calibrate results to keyword matching from product feed data.

☐ Autocomplete Search Queries

Do you offer relevant suggestions when visitors start to type in the search box?

Accelerate the path to purchase with autocomplete functionality in your search box. Display relevant suggestions as soon as shoppers begin to type. Match the letters typed in real-time with products and categories. Make sure to order those suggestions based on popularity to further speed up the purchase path.

Your Action: Turn your autocomplete into rich autocomplete. Expand the suggested terms to merchandise specific products with images. Eliminate extra browsing and make your suggestions visual to enhance conversion rates.

☐ Recommend the Perfect Product

Do you display product recommendations on your product pages?

You have a huge opportunity to boost conversion rates and average order values. Add relevant product recommendation strategies to your product pages. The shopper has already indicated what they are interested in when they view a particular product. Show similar products to provide shoppers with alternatives if the product they're looking at doesn't quite meet their requirements.

Your Action: Tune your product recommendations with relevant alternative products based on what shoppers view. Boost your conversion rate further with social proof. Display the best selling "People Who Bought X Also Bought Y" product recommendation.

▦ Predict More Sales with Personalization

Give yourself a check if you personalize which products shoppers see.

Seventy-five percent of consumers are more likely to buy with a personalized experience[3]. You can provide a world-class customer experience by automatically personalizing critical elements of your site's shopping experience for every visitor. Adapt your merchandising and search results as visitor behavior changes during the shopping session. Your customer will think you've tailored your online store just for them.

Your Action: Add personalization functionality to all of your merchandising elements. Use real-time contextual clues and behavioral data to personalize based on the attributes that mean the most to your shoppers, such as gender, age, brand preference, and location.

▦ Continuously Improve Relevance

Do you use artificial intelligence to continuously learn what shoppers are most likely to buy? Your search results, product recommendations, and merchandising need to adjust in real-time based on shopper behavior. And you need to learn and improve continuously. That's incredibly difficult to do manually across thousands of SKUs, hundreds of thousands of visitors, and millions of data points. That's where new artificial intelligence technology helps improve results and save you time.

Your Action: Take advantage of artificial intelligence technology to automate data analysis and continuously improve relevance of your merchandising tools.

▦ Use Data to Drive More Traffic

Check the box if you build search optimized landing pages for long-tail product keywords.

You want traffic that is high in quantity, but also in quality. Your organic search traffic in particular has to convert. But popular product search terms are incredibly competitive. You're more likely to win traffic and sales for long-tail keyword terms. You already have valuable keyword research from your site search data. You'll rank well for highly relevant search phrases from products you know shoppers want to buy from you.

Your Action: Generate custom product landing pages optimized for the same terms used by your site search visitors. These search optimized pages complement your existing SEO strategy and increase highly qualified traffic.

Was your site up to P.A.R.?

Congratulations! You've completed the P.A.R. Checklist.

How Did You Score?

You can rate your e-commerce website by the number of checks you gave yourself. Each check on the 14-point best practices checklist puts you on a path to increase your online sales.

The total potential score is 14. You can receive up to 4 Performance checks, 4 Aesthetics checks, and 6 Relevance checks.

Your overall score can be summarized as follows:

10-14 Checks

You're a high performer. You are positioned to dive deep into advanced customer experience techniques. Implementing expert strategies can help maximize online sales.

5-9 Checks

Your online store does a good job of helping customers on their shopping journey. You have several quick-win opportunities to take your conversion rates to the next level.

0-4 Checks

This means big opportunity! Companies scoring here can boost online sales by addressing easy-to-execute e-commerce fundamentals.

Your Prioritized Action Plan

Take this checklist back to your e-commerce team. Each best practice can deliver a quick win for your sales.

You've got a prioritized to-do list instantly ready for you. The P.A.R. Checklist provides easily actionable recommendations for each element. And each best practice is ranked in priority order.

- ✓ **Address your Performance.** Get your speed up. All your work to improve key web pages and increase relevance can be undone if your e-commerce site isn't fast.

- ✓ **Tune the Aesthetics of your online store.** Design your critical webpages to sell and be beautiful.

- ✓ **Merchandise the most Relevant products.** Deliver precisely what shoppers want to buy. Use your behavior and transaction data to offer your shoppers a personalized experience.

Now go for it!

References

1 Velocity Conference, **From Slow To Fast: Improving Performance On Intuit Web Sites By Up To 5x**, October 2013.
2 Median results from summary data published in the **40 Retailers' Report**, SLI Systems 2016.
3 Accenture Interactive, **Personalization Pulse Check**, 2016.

About SLI Systems

SLI Systems accelerates e-commerce for the world's top retailers by converting shoppers into buyers, maximizing order values and generating more traffic through solutions that improve site search, navigation, mobile, merchandising, personalization, recommendations and SEO. SLI is the most chosen SaaS-based site search provider to Internet Retailer Top 1,000 retailers.

The SLI Buyer Engine™ is a cloud-based, machine-learning platform that predicts what your shopper is most likely to buy, shortening the path to purchase. The SLI Commerce Console™ organizes key sales insight and tuning capabilities into one easy-to-use, cloud-based console. SLI Systems operates on five continents, powering more than 600 websites and offering solutions in 20 languages.

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