

PRACTICAL *e*COMMERCE

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Affiliate Marketing

Small ecommerce sites can benefit from an affiliate marketing program.

Contributor Chuck Lasker provides an affiliate marketing primer and suggests methods for setting-up a cost-effective affiliate program. [Page 10](#)

Search Engine “Robots”

Ecommerce merchants can control which pages a search engine, such as Google and Yahoo, actually see. You do this by the use of a “robot.txt” file. Understanding this basic concept can help visitors locate your ecommerce site. [Page 12](#)

Tutorial: Feedback Form

Follow the instructions in this month’s Tutorial. We’ll show you how to build your own, customized Feedback form for your Website. [Page 16](#)

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Got an ecommerce question? Ask Chuck Lasker, our resident ecommerce expert. This month, Chuck answers readers’ questions on customer-contact solutions, SSL certificates and Miva Merchant store issues. [Page 20](#)

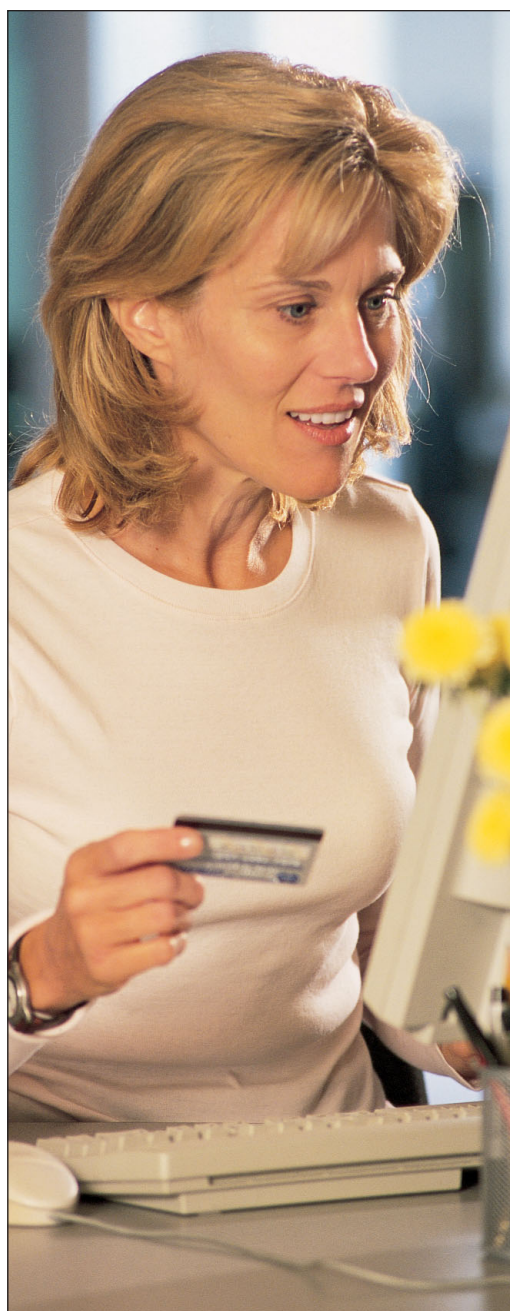
Convert Visitors

For most small ecommerce sites, many visitors never buy anything. Why is this? Mat Greenfield suggests tips and ideas for overcoming buyer resistance and selling more products! [Page 22](#)

Legal: Spam Kills

Ecommerce merchants are responsible for their affiliates and their third-party marketers. Failure to monitor their actions can shutdown your business, says John Dozier in Legal Department. [Page 26](#)

A Magazine to Help Your eCommerce Business



Realistic, easy-to-follow


Welcome to *Practical eCommerce*, the magazine of no-nonsense, down-to-earth assistance for smaller ecommerce businesses.

Ecommerce is different from brick and mortar businesses, yet it has the same common sense requirements for success. Good customer service, a positive shopping experience, quality products and services, and solid marketing are the basics no matter how you sell what you sell.

Like brick and mortar, virtually all ecommerce businesses require some financial investment. It is easy to fall into the trap that an online business is cheap to start. In reality, prepare to invest in software, training, quality hosting, add-ons, marketing and more. Planning for these investments will help make your online store ownership experience a positive one.

Ecommerce business also requires expertise. There’s no way around it. To succeed online, you must be able to use a computer, and be willing to learn about things you never thought you’d need. The good news is, there are thousands of resources available to learn what you need.

Finally, ecommerce success requires marketing. The number one complaint we hear from ecommerce site users is, “I went live with my site and I’m not getting orders.” Remember that there are millions of sites out there competing for business. No matter how good your product or service is, nobody can buy if they don’t know you exist.

Practical eCommerce will offer ongoing expertise to help you succeed. From marketing ideas to selecting a credit card payment processor, each issue will offer practical, easy-to-follow advice. Be sure to check out the web references throughout the magazine as well, for expanded information and educational opportunities. It’s an ever-changing world out here in ecommerce land, so join us as we ride the waves into the future! 

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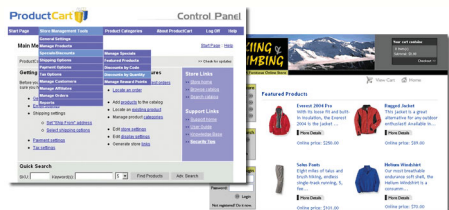


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- ◆ Free shipping on UPS Ground for orders over \$100.
- ◆ Free "Next Day" shipping for preferred customers.
- ◆ Automatic 10% off on your next purchase.
- ◆ Add a discount to an order after it has been placed (e.g. upset customer).
- ◆ Earn points with your purchase, then use them on future orders.

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JULY 2005

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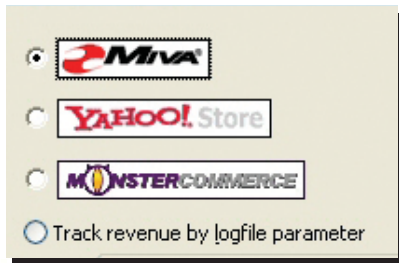
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We got the busiest, most cash-starved business owner to try ClickTracks web analytics for one hour.

The clock is ticking...



Integrate with Miva and other e-commerce systems in just a few clicks

12:47pm Bob, sandwich in hand, starts downloading ClickTracks Pro.

1:02pm Installation completes with Miva fully integrated.

1:10pm Bob learns that visitors from his Google ad campaigns are generating the most revenue.

1:17pm Bob learns that his pricey banner ads are a total waste of money.

	Total	Google	Yahoo!	MSN
Total	\$23474.92	\$13995.98	\$3148.24	\$3695.76
durian	\$2053.20	\$2053.20	-	-
persimmon	\$1847.88	\$1847.88	-	-
pomegranate	\$1334.58	\$1334.58	-	-
fresh fruits	\$1197.70	\$171.10	-	\$1026.60
fresh fruit	\$1060.82	\$136.88	-	\$923.94
fruit loom	\$581.74	\$34.22	\$205.32	\$342.20
airfreight pineapple shipping	\$787.06	\$34.22	\$136.88	\$615.96
organic fruits	\$889.72	\$205.32	\$307.98	\$376.42

See search engine keyword performance as it relates to revenue and conversions.

1:25pm Six keywords from natural searches generate 25% of his sales.

1:30pm Interesting! Returning users spend the most time reading product descriptions of items they've already purchased.

Uh oh, time's up. Bob never got to finish his sandwich, but he's now full of real information that will improve his online marketing – and ultimately improve his cash position. Want to get your fill?



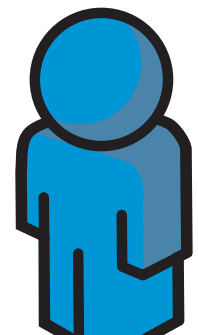
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CHUCK LASKER

("Improve Sales with Affiliate Marketing", page 10; "Ask Chuck", page 20) Chuck Lasker is a contributor and consultant to the magazine. He is President of DoublePlus New Media Marketing, an ecommerce marketing, design and consulting firm, and can be reached at cal@doubleplus.com, or online at DoublePlus.com.

MASSIMO ARRIGONI

("Overseas Customers: Just Clicks Away", page 8) Massimo Arrigoni is CEO and Co-founder of Early Impact, whose flagship shopping cart software, ProductCart, is used by companies worldwide. He can be reached at marrigoni@earlyimpact.com, or online at EarlyImpact.com.

MAT GREENFIELD

("Convert Visitors to Customers", page 22) Mat Greenfield is Co-founder of WebLeadMachine.com, a free on-line resource to assist small business owners in improving their Web presence. He can be reached at matg@webleadmachine.com, or online at WebLeadMachine.com.

JOHN DOZIER

("Legal Department", page 26) John Dozier is President of Dozier Internet Law, PC, a law firm representing small and mid-size online businesses. He can be reached at jwd@cybertriallawyer.com, or online at CyberTrialLawyer.com.

PAMELA HAZELTON

("Miva Tricks", page 28) Pamela Hazelton is an ecommerce consultant, author and speaker. She's the author of *E-Commerce Made Easy: The Official Guide to Miva Merchant*, and can be reached at sales@designextend.com, online at designextend.com.



"Online retail sales are expected to rise to \$172 billion this year."

— The Wall Street Journal
5.24.05

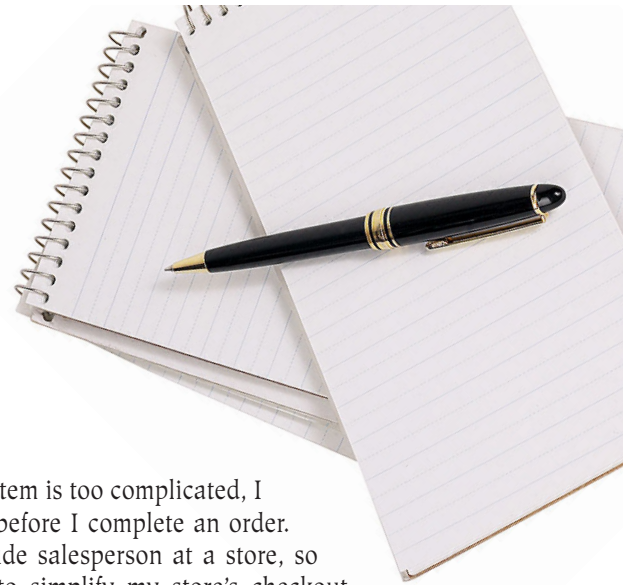
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Publisher KERRY MURDOCK kmurdock@practicalecommerce.com	Contributors CHUCK LASKER JOHN DOZIER MATT GILBERT MAT GREENFIELD PAMELA HAZELTON JASON HENDERSON
Art Director TAMI JO RUSSELL trussell@practicalecommerce.com	
Controller JOY MURDOCK	
Address 2232 N. 7th Street, Suite 15 Grand Junction, CO 81501	Phone/ Fax 970-257-0606 Fax 970-257-0333

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Comments from Readers



Provide Contact Info, Quick Response

It often surprises me how many sites do not have their contact info at every step in the shopping process. Many sites require you to submit a form for contact. I don't know about you friend, but if I cannot get a question answered immediately, I click to the next search result. I don't want to submit my life story simply to get a question answered before I buy.

Your contact info should be readily available on ALL screens. That means your 800 number (You should have one but that is another article), your email address and your hours of operation. Your email should reply with an auto-responder acknowledging the receipt of the email and an estimated time to reply. Your phone message should state a time of estimated reply if you cannot answer at once. Sites that implement these properties and other "Super Selling Strategies" have far fewer dropped sales.

– Mark Johnson
sInternetMarketing.com

Increase eCommerce Profits with Checkout Options

One of my clients came up with a great idea for increasing profits while creating a more positive shopping experience. At *softwaresurplus.com*, during checkout, we ask the customer to choose if they'd like Rush Processing and/or Purchase Protection. For a couple of dollars each, the customer gets guaranteed next-business-day shipping and protection against lost or damaged shipments. This has earned my client a significant additional profit, while shoppers are happier knowing their order will be shipped quickly and risk-free. A true win-win scenario.

– Bill Gilligan
gilliganonline.com

Follow-up For Repeat Sales

I like to follow up with customers. I've found that simply sending an email about a week after the order ships works wonders on reorders. I ask if everything was received okay, if they have any questions, and then I give them a coupon code good for 10% off their next order, with a one-month expiration date. Since the coupon codes all begin with RE (for "reorder"), I can track the success of these e-mails. I now have twice the reorders as I did before this system.

– Joy Wickstrand
ConfluenceBooks.com

Avoid Complicated Checkouts

If a checkout system is too complicated, I end up bailing out before I complete an order. To me, it's like a rude salesperson at a store, so my top priority is to simplify my store's checkout process. I've found that putting graphics and text at the top selling customers what to do on that screen, and how many steps are left, is like holding their hand through the process. Even small complications, like making them enter their email address twice or requiring too many fields, seem to cause unnecessary irritation with my customers. I want to make the sale, so I want it to be as simple as possible for my customers to give me their money.

– Mitch Bettis
WhiteRiverCity.com

Use Simple URLs

If your store has really long URLs for your products, you're making it difficult for the search engines to find them. Question marks, ampersands, equal signs—all are like repellent for search engine spiders. Figure out a way to simplify your URLs. For Miva Merchant sites, there is the SEO (Search Engine Optimization) suite of modules available from *MivaCentral.com* that eliminates the negative characters. For \$120 your site can be more easily seen by the search engines.

– Sally Wayne

osCommerce Templates

I found a great tool for redesigning my osCommerce site! *TemplateMonster.com* now has templates specifically for osCommerce stores. I purchased an exclusive design for \$1,300 that I would have paid at least \$5,000 to have designed for me. If I was better with graphics editors, I'd have just bought a non-exclusive template for less than \$60 and changed it enough to be unique.

– Johan Trinklot

Have a comment or suggestion to help other ecommerce sites? We will provide a complimentary one-year subscription for each comment or suggestion we print. Please send to comments@practicalecommerce.com.

Overseas Customers: JUST CLICKS AWAY

Position your ecommerce site to appeal,
protect overseas customers

BY MASSIMO ARRIGONI

Your Web store is a few clicks away, regardless of where those clicks geographically occur. Clearly, international sales can help you increase your online sales, and many internet merchants are taking advantage of them. But there are several challenges that are associated with selling products and services to foreign customers over the internet.

An April 2005 survey conducted by *Internet Retailer* indicated that in the United States 71% of ecommerce Websites sell outside the country, with 36% of them reporting that over 10% of their sales come from abroad. Canada and the UK rank as the top foreign markets for America-based Web stores. In the same survey, the stores that do not process international orders pointed to the difficulty and cost of shipping as the main reason for doing so. The second biggest concern was fraud.

Let's look at these and other challenges associated with selling abroad.

Massimo Arrigoni is CEO and Co-founder of Early Impact, whose flagship shopping cart software, ProductCart, is used by companies worldwide. He can be reached at marrigoni@earlyimpact.com, or online at EarlyImpact.com.

SHIPPING


Assume that you are selling products that need to be shipped. If not, feel free to skip to the next section. Shipping is a multi-faceted issue:

Calculating reasonable rates

- The first challenge that your store faces is to make sure that it can properly calculate shipping charges on international orders. Many shopping carts include a dynamic shipping component that can connect to service providers such as UPS, FedEx, and the United States Postal Service (USPS) and automatically retrieve rates for a shipment based on the point of origin, the order weight, and the destination address. Some go even further to include features that help you handle oversized items and multiple-package shipments. Since shipping UPS or FedEx to a foreign country can be quite expensive, many Web stores opt to offer their international customers the cheaper USPS rates instead. Look for ecommerce software that gives you this kind of flexibility.

Accounting for the cost of processing orders

- Preparing and processing an international order is more time consuming than a domestic one. Completing custom forms is not going to be your favorite pastime, is it? Time really is money, and more time spent on order processing means reduced margins on those orders. Therefore, a good idea can be to set a minimum order amount for international orders that is higher than the



minimum set for domestic orders (if any). If your ecommerce software cannot handle this automatically, just put a note in different areas of the store and let customers know that their order will be rejected unless it meets your requirements.

Country-based restrictions

- If shipping to select countries is too expensive or not easily done, you might want to consider removing those countries from the list of places to where you deliver orders. Many shopping cart programs include a feature to easily edit the list of countries shown in the various registration or checkout pages.

FRAUD

Fraud is a huge issue and it is not within the scope of this article to review the matter in detail. Let's assume fraud is a problem on your store (it likely is) and let's focus on the implications for selling abroad.

Studies have shown that there is a higher likelihood of fraud in international orders. Especially if you are selling digital goods, fraud should definitely be a concern. How can you protect yourself? Let me describe what we do at Early Impact. Since we sell software that can be downloaded electronically, we see all kinds of fraud on our Internet store. Here is what we do:

- Orders are never processed in real-time. Credit cards are authorized via a leading payment gateway when the order is placed, but our system is setup to keep the order "pending" until it has been manually verified. Software licenses and download links are sent only when the order has been processed.
- All orders are manually checked for accuracy and legitimacy. In most cases, it only

takes a few seconds to figure out if an order is legitimate. If an order is clearly fraudulent, we quickly void the transaction and "lock" the customer account so that the same e-mail address can never be used to place another order.

- If an order exceeds a certain amount, or if there is any reason to believe that it might be fraudulent, we telephone the customer. This has saved us in many cases. For example, we do this whenever the customer uses a free email address or the domain name is not a valid Website.

If fraud is an issue, look at your order processing routine and make changes that will help you minimize the chance of processing a fraudulent order. Make sure your ecommerce software gives you the tools you need to accomplish this.

READY FOR INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMERS

Let's now focus on the positive side of selling abroad: How can you prepare your store so that it is friendlier to international customers? Here are some things you can do to make international customers feel at home on your store:

Show product prices in a foreign currency

- Regardless of the shopping cart software used on your store, it should be pretty easy for you to integrate a service such as the one provided by XE (xe.com/ucc/customize.htm). (Ask a Web designer to help you if you need

assistance integrating these tools.) Customers can quickly see a product's price converted into their currency. The ad-supported version of XE's system is free. The ad-free version is \$540/year. Oanda (oanda.com) offers a similar system, called FXCommerce™, for \$40/month. An alternative is to use ecommerce software that allows you to set up multiple currencies and conversion rates, and allows visitors to your store to choose their currency. The problem is that this typically requires you to regularly update the conversion rates.

Accept payments in a foreign currency

- There are payment gateways that allow your customers to pay for an order in their own currency, and with a payment method that they are familiar with. For example: have you heard of Switch? There are some 23 million Maestro/ Switch cards in the UK. WorldPay (worldpay.com) and 2Checkout (2checkout.com) are two of the payment gateways that provide this feature. PayPal (paypal.com) also provides this functionality.

Provide different language versions

- Some ecommerce software packages allow you to enter product descriptions in different languages. This might not be a feasible solution on your store, especially if you are dealing with a large product catalog. If that's the case, you might want to focus on other areas of your store. For example, translate your "Customer Service" page in a few, popular foreign languages. ☞

In the United States 71% of ecommerce Websites sell outside the country, with 36% of them reporting that over 10% of their sales come from abroad. Canada and the UK rank as the top foreign markets for American-based Web stores. ”

Improve Sales with Affiliate Marketing

Proven success requires diligent oversight

BY CHUCK LASKER

One of the most popular methods of website marketing is called affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing is a method of paying “affiliates,” who are basically online sales people earning commissions based on sales from their referrals. Commissions are usually a percentage of the referred sale, but may include pay-per-click or a set dollar amount per referral. Once an affiliate signs up, they place some form of advertisement on their site. An example of this process follows.

A music review site applies for the Apple iTunes affiliate program, which pays a 5% commission on referred sales. Once approved, Apple gives the new affiliate a special URL that includes their affiliate

Chuck Lasker is a Contributor and Consultant to the magazine. He is President of DoublePlus New Media Marketing, an ecommerce marketing, design and consulting firm, and can be reached at cal@doubleplus.com, or online at DoublePlus.com.

code. The music review site places some text, maybe some graphics and banners, in their site that link to the iTunes site with their URL. Apple uses the special URL/affiliate code to track sales that are referred by the music review site, and sends monthly checks to the affiliate for 5% of those sales.

Examples of highly successful affiliate programs to learn from are amazon.com, landsend.com, buy.com, clubmom.com, allposters.com, and ehealthinsurance.com. Look for links to pages with the words “Associate” or “Affiliate” in them to find their information.

Becoming an affiliate is easy. There are thousands of programs available. Beginning your own affiliate program at your site is more difficult. Done right, your affiliate program can boost sales many times over, or even become your sole source of sales. Done poorly, you can waste a lot of time. It is worth studying, preparing and even hiring help to do it right.

Affiliate marketing requires a serious commitment. Affiliates are, in essence, a sales staff that uses its site to sell your products and services. So, as sales

people, they need ongoing sales management. This could be in the form of e-newsletters, personal emails, telephone contact, being available to answer questions, providing training and advice, creating incentives to keep them motivated, etc.

To set up an affiliate program, you must answer some questions.

How much are you able to pay in commissions? Keep in mind that you’ll probably want to have occasional short-term incentive programs with increased payouts.

Do you want a few strong, committed affiliates who have the ability to bring a lot of traffic, or many affiliates who may each bring only a few referrals?

Will you set up your own affiliate tracking system using affiliate management software (myaffiliateprogram.com, vikingcoders.com), or will you contract with an affiliate tracking company (clixgalore.com, directtrack.com, cj.com, linkshare.com, performics.com)? When invest-

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tigating your options, be sure the one you choose is compatible with your shopping cart software.

Will you manage your affiliates yourself, or hire a third-party affiliate management company (team-affiliate.com, affiliatemanager.net, partnercentric.com)?

When setting up an affiliate program, keep a few things in mind.

You need an affiliate agreement that protects your rights, especially your trademark rights, and provides affiliates with the confidence that they are protected, too. The agreement is highly important in attracting professional affiliates, so give it serious attention. Look at the agreements on other affiliate programs and hire a professional and/or a lawyer to do it right the first time. (Editor's Note: Columnist and e-commerce attorney John Dozier addresses affiliate legal issues in this issue's Legal Department.)

Affiliates will only promote high conversion sites that provide superior customer service. Is your site ready to respond to affiliate referrals? Some affiliates might send an email to 50,000 people and your

site could get hit hard and fast. Be prepared.

Affiliates expect fast and accurate payment and solid reporting of their results. Test your software for accuracy before beginning your program. With thousands of affiliate programs available, affiliates won't stick around if they believe they are not being properly paid.

You need to provide the proper tools for your affiliates to succeed. These might be sample text to put into their sites, product graphics, logos, banner ads, and even customization of your site for each affiliate.

Once you commit to an affiliate program and you have your program set up, it's time to find and recruit affiliates. There are many methods.

Place a link, or even a banner ad, on your site promoting your affiliate program. Your best affiliates might be your customers.

Look for non-competitive, related sites, especially content sites, and invite them to join your affiliate program.


“ **Your affiliate program can boost sales many times over, or even become your sole source of sales.** ”

Send press releases to news sites, content sites and blogs in your industry.

Go to abestweb.com and purchase an announcement for \$50. Be sure to look through previous announcements, as well as the responses they've gotten, so your announcement gets the response you want.

Look for other announcement services, such as affiliate-announce.com and makelinks.com.

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and drop-shipping. It seamlessly integrates with accounting systems and credit card gateways. And it works painlessly with shopping carts from *Miva*, *Yahoo*, *Amazon*, *MonsterCommerce*, *Shopsite*, *OSCommerce*, *AbleCommerce* and more. Looking for a complete order-management system that's affordable and easy to use? Call for more information today!



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Search Engine Tricks: What's a Robots.txt file?

Help potential customers locate your ecommerce site

Search engines look at millions of Web pages to generate search results. They do this with what we call "search engine spiders." This makes sense - spiders crawling around on the Web. But another word for them is "robots" because they are simply unmanned programs gathering data automatically.

In the beginning, these robots would spider every page, and every file attached to the Web. This caused problems for both the search engines and the people using them. Pages that really aren't worth looking at, such as header files to be

included in all pages on a site, were being spidered and appearing in search results. Have you ever searched on Google and gotten a partial page as a result? Or, worse, a forum post from four years before?

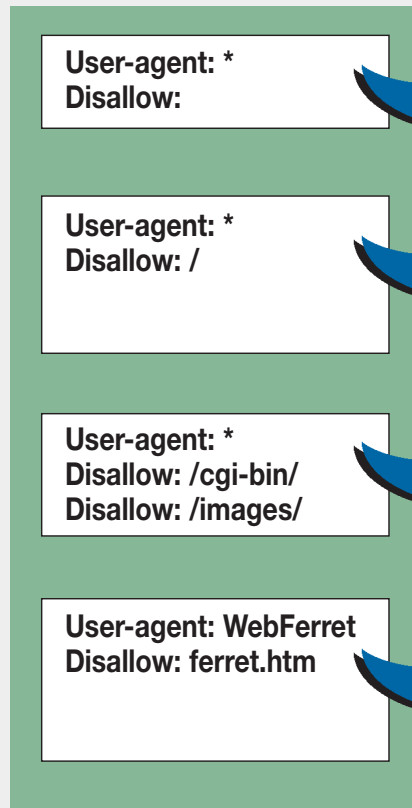
The solution was for Google and other search engines to begin looking for a "robots.txt file". The robots.txt file is placed in the root folder, meaning directly where the home page file is located to determine what should and shouldn't be searched. This is named "The Robots Exclusion Standard." It's not a standard that

is backed by any organization, it's simply a format agreed upon by search engine companies. You can learn more at robotstxt.org/wc/robots.html. This simple text file, created with Notepad or other simple text editor gives you complete control by telling the robots not to spider, or access, certain folders in your site. The result is happier visitors who come to your site from search engines and get only full pages that you want them to see, not partial, test or script pages you don't want them to see.

Look at the examples below to get started. 📌

robots.txt file example

It is important that the file is a simple text file – do not use Microsoft Word to create it because it adds formatting that can make it unreadable by the search engine spiders. And be careful of how you type – it must look exactly like these examples, with caps only for the first letter, just the right spacing, etc. A poorly done robots.txt file could harm your site more than help it. To test that you've created your robots.txt file properly. You can use a cool online robots.txt file validator at searchengineworld.com/cgi-bin/robotcheck.cgi.



This allows all robots to spider all pages on your site. The * is a "wildcard" that means "all spiders."

This is the opposite of the previous example. This one tells all robots to NOT spider your whole site. You might want this if you have a test site, for example, that is not yet live.

This example tells all robots to stay out of the cgi-bin and images folders.

This example uses a robot-specific code (WebFerret) to not spider the page. If you did not want Google to spider the page, the user agent code would be googlebot.



Order Management Software Improves Efficiencies

Multiple features streamline shipping, inventory

The most visible part of an ecommerce business is the Website. But like any business, how the back-end operations are handled is equally important. The most beautiful and usable Web store in the world won't succeed if orders do not get shipped quickly and efficiently. To process these orders in a rapid, cost-effective manner, many sites use order management software.

If your store is only getting a couple orders a day, processing orders by hand is probably adequate. But as the orders increase, it will become necessary to get an order management system. An order management system is a software package that resides on your local computer, not online, and allows you to manage your orders offline. These packages can save an immense amount of time, reduce payroll expense and greatly streamline your operation.

For the most part, their functionality is very similar and requires the following steps:

1. You synchronize your store's data with the order manager software.
2. You process your orders through your order manager – credit cards, shipping, packing slips, inventory, etc.
3. You make changes to product and customer information and upload them to resynchronize.

Depending on the specific software, other options include:

- A. Online order status reports that customers can access and review
- B. Link into QuickBooks or other accounting package
- C. Customer communications
- D. Returns management
- E. Phone order entry
- F. Vendor, fulfillment and drop ship management
- G. Point-of-sale system

Each order manager package has its own unique feature set. Evaluate each one to determine which one best meets your needs. Do you have an order fulfillment company? Do you drop ship? Do you use QuickBooks? Will you have more than one person processing orders on different computers? Do you have more than one store, or plan to expand to more than one store? Does the order management software charge for additional stores? Will you be expanding to eBay, YahooStores, or use multiple shopping cart software packages? Carefully look at what you're doing now, and what you expect to do in the future. Make certain that the order management system works with your online shopping cart and otherwise fits into your existing operation. None of these software packages are inexpensive, so be sure to invest in a package that will meet your needs far into the future.

Four popular order management software packages are detailed below.

Make certain that the order management system works with your online shopping cart and otherwise fits into your existing operation.

	Platforms	Cost	System Requirements	URL
The Stone Edge Order Manager	AbleCommerce4 Amazon.com Americart / Virtual Cart eBay, Global Web Cart Miva Merchant Monster Commerce osCommerce, ShopSite Yahoo!Store	Software: \$995 With Extended Support: \$1,250/year Order Status: \$250/year	Microsoft Windows 98 or higher Microsoft Access 97, 2000, 2002/XP or 2003	stoneedge.com
Merchant Companion	Miva Merchant 4 Yahoo Store MonsterCommerce AbleCommerce osCommerce Comersus	Software: \$999 Telephone Support: \$299/year Order Status: \$25/month Remote Installation: \$149	Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP	merchantcompanion.com
Netpush Order	Miva Merchant	Software: Product Version \$295 Standard Version \$695 Pro Version \$1,495	Windows 98, NT, 2000, and XP Microsoft Access 97, 2000, 2002/XP or 2003	netpush.com
ShipWorks	Miva Merchant Yahoo!Store eBay and eBay Store	Software: \$599 per store Support Contract: \$199/year	Windows 98, NT, 2000, and XP	interapptive.com/

MistralSoap.com Doubles Online Sales

Soap making learned from master craftsman

In 1993, Matthew Tilker, Mistral Soap's founder, was studying in Provence, France. There he met a 70-year-old master soap maker. In a family factory, the man crafted soaps according to a 300-year old traditional triple-milling process, always using the finest natural ingredients. The soap maker's artistry, love of his craft, and extraordinary knowledge and experience in soap making left a lasting impression on Matthew. After returning home to California, Matthew imported soaps directly from Provence and sold them from his mother's home during the 1994 holiday season.

The soaps were so popular that within months Matthew opened the first Mistral boutique on a quaint street in his hometown of Solana Beach, California. In 2001, a second Mistral boutique opened in Los Angeles.

Currently, the Mistral line offers customers thirty soap fragrances, as well as a full range of

Mistral-scented personal care products. In addition to the Mistral stores, customers can shop online at the **mistralsoap.com** website, the Mistral catalog, and at fine stores and boutiques in the US, Canada and internationally. We asked Matthew a few questions about his experience with a relatively new ecommerce Website.

Q: WHEN WAS THE CURRENT SITE LAUNCHED?

This current site was launched last November. However, Mistral has had an ecommerce site since 1994. This is our fourth version.

Q. ARE YOU PLEASED WITH THE SITE AND HAS THE SITE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

We have a successful brick and mortar business, both retail and wholesale. The Website has always provided a nice additional income,



Matthew Tilker, Mistral Soap's founder, has had an ecommerce site since 1994.

but was not the focus of our business. About two years ago, we decided that this should be a priority and spent some time and money to build a state of the art Mistral Website. This is the first site that is achieving the growth levels we want and reflects the image we want to get across to the customer.

Q: HOW MANY PRODUCTS DO YOU HAVE NOW?

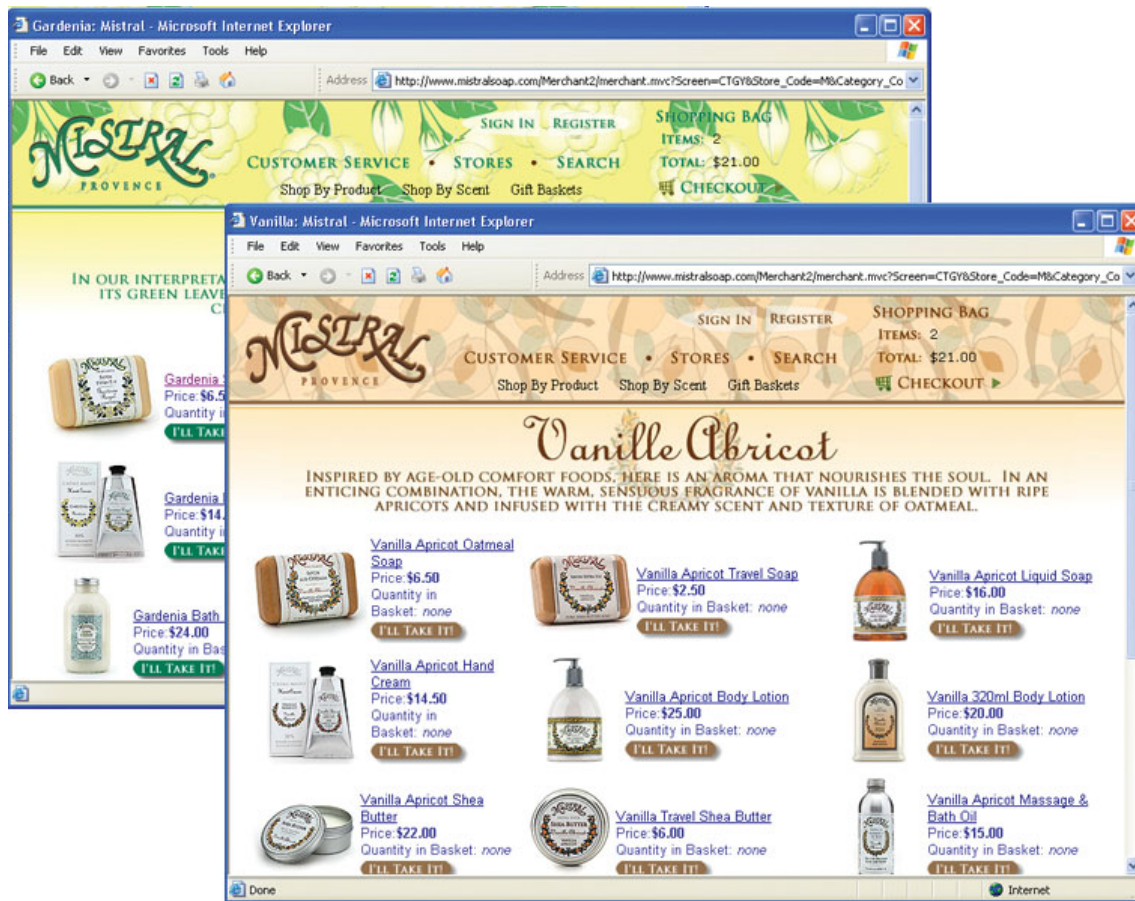
We have 242 products on our site, about double what we had last year.

Q: HOW MANY DID YOU START WITH?

Maybe, 20 to 25.

Q: WHAT HAS ANNUAL REVENUE PERCENTAGE GROWTH BEEN?

It goes in spurts. From '02 to '03, it increased about 70%. Last year, while we were working on our new site, business increased only about 15%. This year, we'll see explosive growth in the 80% to 100% range. We anticipate gross revenues from the Website to reach \$300,000 in 2005, which is about 10% of our overall total.



“ This year, we’ll see explosive growth in the 80% to 100% range. We anticipate gross revenues from the Website to reach \$300,000 in 2005, which is about 10% of our overall total. ”

Q: HOW MANY WEB-RELATED EMPLOYEES DO YOU HAVE?

This is hard to determine, since we all wear many hats, but figure two and a half employees. This includes order fulfillment, customer service, copywriting and marketing.

Q: WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A PROFESSIONAL WEBSITE DEVELOPER, VERSUS DOING IT YOURSELF?

We wanted a site that reflects the quality of our products and the brand image we are building. I researched the ecommerce landscape and culled from that which sites had the best look and feel, along with ease of use. That led to picking Tammy Moore, who owns Kaleidoscope Web Development (kdw3.com), to build the site that we envisioned.

Q: HOW DO YOU MARKET THE SITE?

Since we sell our products to hundreds of

stores and the URL is on all of our packaging, we have a built-in audience that grows with the rest of our business. In addition, our public relations firm has gotten our products and Web address into some great magazines, including *Oprah* and *Lucky*. We started with pay-per-click advertising in February, 2005, and the results have been dramatic. Our beautiful new site makes it easy to make changes to take advantage of the paid search results.

Q: HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU INVEST TO GET YOUR SITE GOING?

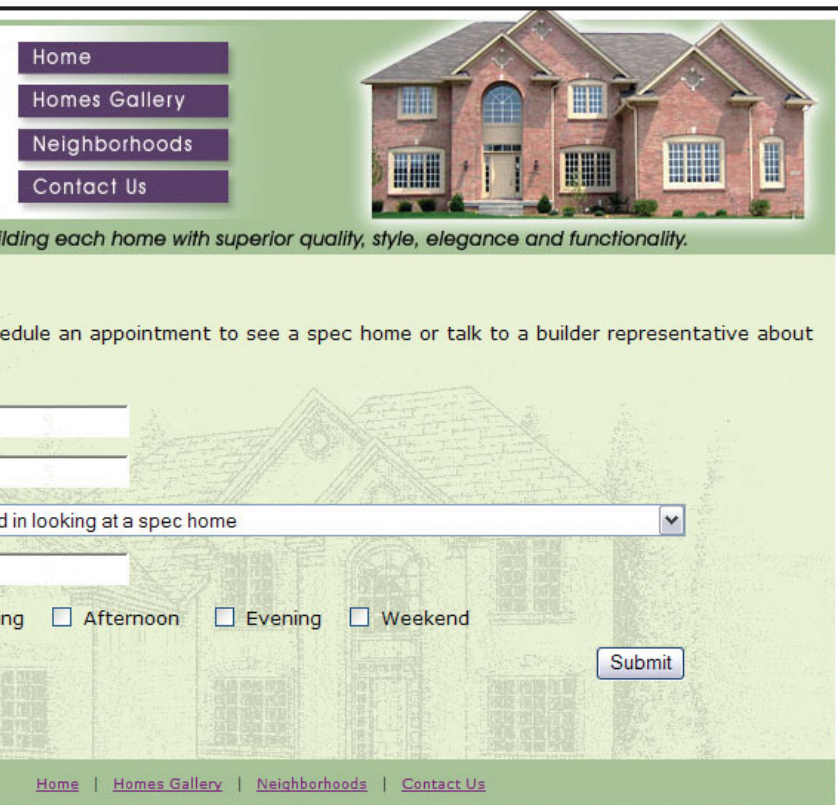
We spent about \$12K to \$15K to get the site running. In addition, we hired the best product photographer we could find, using those images for both the website and a catalog. We are still making a lot of improvements (i.e. spending money) and phasing in new features that we had planned. It comes out to considerably more than what we spent on our original site 10 years

ago, which was a few hundred bucks and a couple of cases of wine.

Q: HAS HIRING A PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM BEEN A GOOD INVESTMENT? HOW MUCH OF THE SITE'S SUCCESS DO YOU ATTRIBUTE TO THIS DECISION?

When you are trying to establish a luxury brand, this kind of exposure is an important component. PR helps all levels of our business. Brand awareness leads a customer to make a purchase at one of our wholesale accounts that leads to them finding our URL on the package, or brand awareness that helps bolster our pay-per-click advertising. It is all good. ☺

Editor's Note: To read additional information about MistralSoap.com including the modules used and the challenges faced in creating it, download Merchant Today, our monthly digital newsletter for Miva Merchant users, at PracticalCommerce.com.



This is an example of a customized online feedback form.

3. Build HTML Code

Now it's time to create the HTML for your form. Here is the most basic form, without formatting of any sort. You can pull down a sample form, fully formatted in a table, at practicalecommerce.com/form.html.

```
<html>
<body>
<FORM ACTION="/cgi-bin/mff.pl" METHOD="POST">
<input type="hidden" name="subject" value="Feedback Form"
/> (enter the subject line for the e-mails)
<input type="hidden" name="redirect"
value="http://www.practicalecommerce.com/thankyou.html" />
(put the Web page you'd like the visitor to go to after
clicking Submit)
<p>Your Name: <INPUT NAME="custname" VALUE=""></p>
<p>Your E-mail Address: <INPUT NAME="useremail"
VALUE=""></p>
<p>Reason for Contact:
<select NAME="custreason" size="1">
<option value="Question">Question
<option value="Comment">Comment
<option value="Suggestion">Suggestion
<option value="Other">Other
</select></p>
<p>Your comments:<br>
<TEXTAREA NAME="custrequest" ROWS=10
COLS=50></TEXTAREA></p>
<p><input type="submit" /><input type="reset" /></p>
</FORM>
</body>
</html>
```

Use **form tags** to complete the form as you desire. Put this into an HTML Web page, upload it, and test the form with your Web browser. It should send an email to you very quickly with the information from the form. If it does not, review in detail and look for mistypes compared to this Tutorial. If it still does not work, the most likely problem is the permissions. The second most likely is the first line in the CGI script. A good host will help you debug.

Still too complicated or your host won't help? Go to formmail.com and check out their form processing plans that begin at \$12 per year for 100 form submissions per month. Sometimes these things get too complicated and it's just easier to pay for a solution. ☹

Help with Definitions

Note certain terms in this Tutorial are printed in **bold**, *green*, *italic* type. These terms are defined at practicalecommerce.com/definitions

practicalecommerce.com localhost); (replace with your Website's domain - Be care-
 host in one place but use a major ISP such as AOL for your email. If you set
 " aol.com, you'll allow spammers to use their script to send to all 100 mil-
 blue should be your domain, and only your domain.)

@practicalecommerce.com); (replace with your e-mail address)

REMOTE_HOST REMOTE_ADDR REMOTE_USER HTTP_USER_AGENT);

8859-1';

%B %d, %Y at %H:%M:%S';

/nms.css'; (replace with CSS file if you're using one - not essential)

0;

END_OF_CONFIRMATION';

it? Upload the file into your cgi-bin folder with an FTP program. Set the **file permissions**
 cutable for Owner, Group and World. See your FTP program help file for more on this if
 ons. Ask your host about the type of servers you use.

New MIVA Shopping Cart: “Dramatic” Improvement



Storeowners have more control and flexibility



The long anticipated newest version of MIVA Merchant is now available. Version 5 is a dramatic shift from previous versions to a new paradigm that makes store creation and maintenance easier and more powerful for the end user. Many tasks that currently require third-party modules and possibly a developer's help are now implemented into the main system.

MIVA Corporation, known for having a strong third-party developer community, broke with tradition for this version by asking the third-party developers themselves for their thoughts and opinions during development. “It was quite exciting working with our third-party development community, and gratifying to be able to imple-

ment their suggestions,” said James Waters, MIVA Senior Software Developer. “Our commitment to incorporating feedback is part of what makes MIVA Merchant a best-of-breed product.”

Most significant in version 5 is a new template-

based design system MIVA calls “Store Morph Technology™.” Each store page has a template that can be edited directly in the administrative area. You can display what you need, hide what you don't, and control the look and placement of buttons, products, category lists and other components.

What does Store Morph Technology™ mean for a MIVA Merchant site owner? First, the owner now has much more control of the look and feel of the site without needing third-party modules. Second, once a template is saved, it is compiled, meaning when a page loads for your customer, it does not have to “create itself” as current dynamic pages do. The difference is that now pages load more quickly, which makes happier customers who stay at your site longer.

“We are really excited about our breakthrough Store Morph Technology™. It enables businesses to easily create their own unique, professional look and specialized functionality,” commented James Harrell, MIVA Director of Software Development. “MIVA Merchant 5 offers a professional alternative to ready-made ‘starter’ stores. We are looking forward to seeing the results of our customers’ creative applications of this new technology.”

MIVA Merchant 5 now supports multiple database formats. The default format is MIVA Corp's new proprietary database format named MIVA-SQL. An alternative is the widely-used MySQL database format. Both are much faster and more



We are really excited about our breakthrough Store Morph Technology. It enables businesses to easily create their own unique, professional look and specialized functionality...



stable than previous MIVA Merchant versions. One doesn't need to understand the databases, however. It's enough to understand that the new system has blazing download speeds and more stability. MIVA Merchant users will understand this—no more packing your data all the time! And, while prior versions didn't perform well with more than a few thousand products, there are no limitations to the number of products and categories in a store with the new database formats.

MIVA Merchant 5 now allows updates at the click of a button. Previously, the update process involved downloading the newest patches and running a complicated, multi-step update process. Most users either (a) never updated, or (b) relied on their hosting companies to do it for them. "The new software updating process is so simple now. It's going to save businesses time and frustration—absolutely painless," according to MIVA Software Developer Alex Kruglyak. Kruglyak also mentioned MIVA Merchant 5's new product, category and customer import/export technologies, saying, "[the] improved import/export functionality means store owners can easily load their product database into MIVA Merchant."

"Creating MIVA Merchant 5 has involved mastering some interesting technical challenges," according to Q Jackson, MIVA Software Developer. "The new database technology makes MIVA Merchant 5 stores quick and responsive, for a better shopping experience."

This version upgrade is really a whole new platform from previous versions. If your site runs third-party modules, you'll want to make sure those mod-

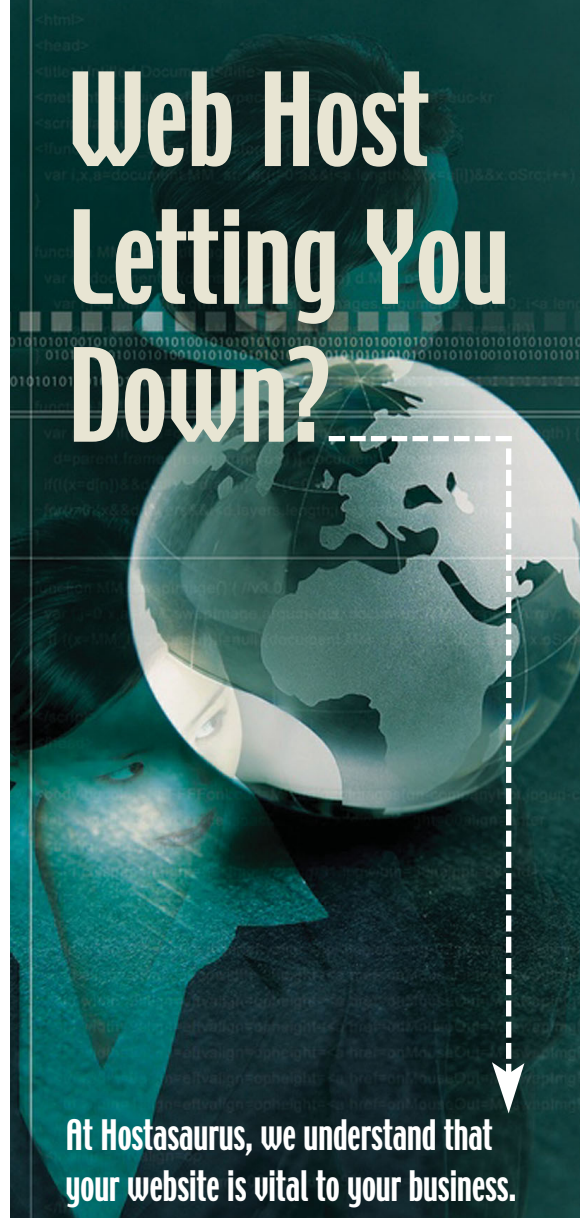
ules are compatible with Version 5 prior to upgrading. As noted below, most third party developers are quickly updating their modules. The good news is you can keep your MIVA Merchant 4 site running while you work on the new version.

There are few third-party modules available for MIVA Merchant 5 at press time. Most third-party developers are working furiously to remedy that. Their first step is to duplicate their MIVA Merchant 4 modules. Then they'll create new modules that take advantage of the new technologies behind MIVA Merchant 5. Expect many new improvements to come quickly from MIVA Corp, as their new Quick Updates feature makes updating MIVA Merchant much easier.

MIVA Corp. charges for online and phone support, with plans priced from \$399 to \$999 per year. However, many users get the help they need from the very active user community accessible through several email-based user groups hosted by MIVA Corp., which maintains a list just for MIVA Merchant 5 users, as well as for MIVA Merchant 5 template developers and module developers. You can learn how to subscribe to these lists at miva.com/support/usr_grps/. The template list demonstrates MIVA's expectation that the new Store Morph Technology™ will spawn a third-party market for entire site templates. When this occurs, a store will be able to change its look and feel in a few quick steps and little or no down time. It's truly a new day for MIVA Merchant users. 📧

— Chuck Lasker

Web Host Letting You Down?



At Hostasaurus, we understand that your website is vital to your business.

You need reliable, available, and affordable hosting. You need ... Fast, in-house Dell enterprise servers. Redundant Tier-1 Internet connectivity. Full nightly backups and free restores. 24/7 customer support. Certified engineers. Over 5-years of Miva Merchant expertise. Free setup. Free transfer of an existing site with no downtime.

Only **\$37.50** per month with **FREE Miva Merchant 5 License**

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8 7 7 - 5 2 4 - 7 2 5 2
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About MIVA's Store Morph Technology™

What is Store Morph Technology?

Store Morph Technology (SMT™) is a completely new store design system created exclusively for MIVA Merchant 5. It provides complete control over the look and feel of your online store.

With SMT, you control the layout and content of each store page. Move buttons, change labels, drop in custom components and more. Every page of your MIVA Merchant 5 online store can be customized to suit your business needs.

What can I do with Store Morph Technology?

Use SMT to control what each page displays, and how it is formatted.

For example, put a search box on your navigation bar. Then customize how that search box looks, what the search

button says, and where the search results are displayed.

You can completely change the layout of any of your online store pages. Move the category tree to the right side of the page—or remove it altogether.

The power is in your hands with Store Morph Technology, making your MIVA Merchant 5 online store truly customized for your business.

How do I use Store Morph Technology?

There is nothing additional to install or purchase. SMT is integrated throughout the MIVA Merchant 5 administration interface. When you begin designing your store, SMT controls will be easily accessible.

Detailed instructions are available at the click of a button (at miva.com), providing helpful insight and guidelines into harnessing the power of Store Morph Technology.

Ask Chuck

Reader Queries: Maintaining Customer Contact, SSL Certificates, More

Q: I sell three different types of candles in a small business I run from my home. My customers are mainly local retail stores who purchase them at wholesale prices. I'd like to set up an online retail store. How should I do this, with just three different products and with a very small budget?

A: There are literally hundreds of shopping carts available that you can use. Popular carts include GoDaddy's QuickShoppingCart, ShopSite, ProductCart and MonsterCommerce. My personal favorite is Miva Merchant because it is so flexible, inexpensive, and easy to maintain.

With Miva Merchant, a beginner, such as you, can begin inexpensively with a basic cart for as little as \$30 per month, including a lease of a Miva Merchant license. If you ever need to expand to more products and more features, Miva Merchant is upgradeable. It even comes with a feature (called Price Groups) that allows you to offer wholesale pricing to specific pre-approved customers while selling at retail to anyone else who comes to your site.

Q: I need an affordable method to stay in touch with my customers after they purchase my products. Ideas?

A: The most affordable, and often most effective, method of communications with customers who use the Internet to make a purchase is via email newsletters. A

whole magazine could be dedicated to this subject, but I'll try to get you started.

First, be sure to ask permission from your customers to send them e-newsletters. You should have a signup form on your site for those who haven't bought yet but want to stay informed, and you should have a check box at checkout asking if the customer wants to be added to the e-newsletter mailing list. Be sure to link to your privacy policy, explaining that you WILL NOT rent or sell their email address to anyone – EVER. The number one reason people don't sign up for e-newsletters is fear of spam.

Once you have permission, there are many ways to send these e-newsletters. You can just use your email program, like Outlook Express, and send emails. But if your list gets to be bigger than a couple dozen addresses, you could get blocked by your ISP for sending too much email. The second best solution is a service such as **ConstantContact.com**. These email services (see list below) charge monthly fees, provide templates for immediate professional look and feel, and maintain subscribe/unsubscribe lists.

If you have a Miva Merchant store, check into a couple of different options that tie directly into your store: Subscribe2 from Wump Services (\$149.95 at **mivacentral.com**), and Scot's Mailing List 2 (\$129.95 at **mivacentral.com**). Neither are as easy to use and feature-rich as Constant Contact, but they are both one-time purchases that tie into your Miva Merchant store.

Here is a list of affordable e-newsletter servers with rates (as of presstime):

ConstantContact.com
Free for businesses with up to 50 subscribers

- \$15 per month for 51 to 500 subscribers
 - \$30 per month for 501 - 2,500 subscribers
 - \$50 per month for 2,501 - 5,000 subscribers
 - \$75 per month for 5,001 - 10,000 subscribers
- See site for higher level rates

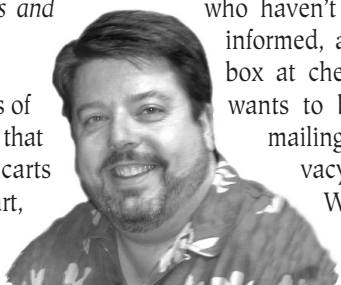
EmailBrain.com
• \$9.95 per month for 1 to 2,000 subscribers
• \$19.95 per month for 2,001 to 5,000 subscribers
• \$29.95 per month for 5,001 to 10,000 subscribers
See site for higher level rates

intellicontact.com
• \$9.95 per month for 1 to 500 subscribers
• \$14.00 per month for 501 to 1,000 subscribers
• \$29.00 per month for 1,001 to 2,500 subscribers
• \$47.00 per month for 2,501 to 5,000 subscribers
• \$74.00 per month for 5,001 to 10,000 subscribers
See site for higher level rates

bighip.com
Free for businesses with up to 50 subscribers
• \$19.95 per month for 51 to 2,500 subscribers
• \$59.95 per month for 2,501 to 10,000 subscribers
See site for higher level rates

mUrgent.com
Free for up to 100 emails in a month
\$9.95 for up to 400 emails in a month
\$24.95 for up to 2,500 emails in a month
\$39.95 for up to 5,000 emails in a month
\$64.95 for up to 10,000 emails in a month

Q: My Miva Merchant site shows one product per row in a category, but I've seen some Miva Merchant sites that have two or three products in a row. This is nice because you can see more products in a category without having to scroll. How did they do that?



Chuck Lasker

Chuck Lasker is a contributor and consultant to the magazine. He is President of DoublePlus New Media Marketing, an ecommerce marketing, design and consulting firm, and can be reached at cal@doubleplus.com, or online at DoublePlus.com.

A: There are several possible ways to accomplish multiple products per row in a category page. All of them require third party modules and OpenUI. The solutions range from "Three Products Across" from Luray (see MivaCentral.com), where it does only the one task, to Category Page Templates from Viking Coders (vikingcoders.com), which can adjust everything within the category page layout in any way you wish. Another option is Display Wizard Pro from Santa Fe Mall (santafemall.com), which helps you adjust virtually every page in your site, including setting columns in your category pages. However, Display Wizard Pro "takes over your store" and is incompatible with many other modules.

For me, it's the template modules from Viking Coders I use the most. If you purchase their Designer's Dream Bundle, you can control your product, category, search and checkout pages, as well as your storefront. It has a relatively easy-to-use template style.

Q: How do I make my checkout screens secure?


A: Secure Web pages, the ones that begin with https:// (note the "s") and have that little lock icon down in the bottom right of the browser, get that way by having a properly set up SSL certificate installed on their domain.

Webopedia.com defines SSL (pronounced as separate letters) as: short for Secure Sockets Layer, a protocol developed by Netscape for transmitting private documents via the Internet. SSL works by using a private key to encrypt data that's transferred over the SSL connection. Both Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer support SSL, and many Web sites use the protocol to obtain confidential user information, such as credit card numbers.

In other words, secure pages are less likely to transmit personal data directly into hackers' computers. If you are selling online and taking personal information, especially payment information, then you definitely want your checkout system to be secure. You can purchase an SSL certificate on your own, or from your host, if your host offers it. (SSL certificates must be renewed annually). In most cases if you buy your own certificate, your host will have to install it to your domain. So step one is to talk to your host about SSL certificates. Once the certificate is installed, all you have to do is make sure your links to your checkout pages start with https://.

There are many companies that sell SSL certificates. The largest ones are listed below. Some people feel the name recognition of a company such as Verisign enhances a store's credibility. Others believe just having the https and the little lock icon on the bottom right of the browser is enough for people to feel comfortable shopping. You'll have to decide yourself what is important to your customers.

<u>COMPANY</u>	<u>PRICE RANGE</u>	<u>URL</u>
Verisign	\$349-\$1,495	verisign.com
Thawte	\$149-\$449	thawte.com
GeoTrust	\$149-\$249	geotrust.com
Comodo	\$139-\$999	enterprisessl.com
DigiCert	\$99	digicert.com

Check with your host before making a purchase to be sure they support the certificate you want. Once you purchase a certificate, be sure to use the code they send you to add their site seal (the little icon that people can click on to see the validity of the certificate). 

Got an ecommerce question? Send it to Chuck Lasker, at chuck@practicalecommerce.com

The most affordable, and often most effective method of communication with customers who use the Internet to make a purchase is via email newsletters.

dotcom
designers™

Miva Merchant™
hosting experts.

Expert staff...
Servers built and optimized...
Complete redundancy implemented...
Systems monitored around the clock...

All for Miva Merchant storefronts.

There is a reason we are
Miva Premier Hosting Partners.

Experience the dotCOM designers difference:

- » No account setup fees
- » No long term contracts
- » FREE site transfer service
- » Zero-downtime site transfer
- » Daily and weekly web site backups
- » 24/7 support
- » Datacenter grade server equipment
- » FREE dedicated SSL certificate (1st year)
- » FREE 'E-Commerce Made Easy - The Official Guide to Miva Merchant' book
- » FREE OpenUI license
- » FREE Miva Script Compiler v5
- » Support for all Miva Merchant versions
- » 30 day Money Back Guarantee
- » No hidden fees
- » **FREE 1st month hosting with this ad**



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Convert Visitors to Customers

OVERCOME Buyer Resistance:

Avoid 'Red Flags'

“**Make it clear to visitors that your connection is secure, by utilizing the 'padlock' type of graphic available from your security certificate issuer.**”

The web has been spoiled by scams, fraud, identity theft, phishing, email address harvesting, and spam-mail. At this point, we are all very wary of disclosing our (somewhat disposable) email address, let alone our physical address and credit card information. We'll call this buying resistance. So, the role of the Web marketer is to overcome that hesitance, and provide an environment of utmost 'comfort' where ecommerce transactions can take place with confidence.

You see, I think that stars and champions – sports, business, movie, etc., have clouded our perception. We have this idea that in order to succeed, we must be 'the best', and so we might be tempted to try to develop the best ecommerce Website in order to overcome the buying resistance that our site visitors feel. Well, on the Web, I don't think that's true.

And that's good news for you, because frankly, developing the best Website out there would be hard... and expensive... and time consuming. So if you don't have to develop the best website, what sort of site do you have to develop? Well, I'm not entirely sure how to describe it, but maybe "the most un-worst" site comes close.

I think that overcoming buying resistance is about the absence of something, rather than the presence of it. It's about the absence of red flags. A red flag in this sense is something on a site that gives you reason to doubt the honesty, quality, or trustworthiness of the site or the products. The bottom line is simple – credibility.

Here are some of the most common red flags (please note, I understand that doing these things on your

Mat Greenfield is Co-founder of WebLeadMachine.com, a free on-line resource to assist small business owners in improving their Web presence. He can be reached at matg@webleadmachine.com, or online at WebLeadMachine.com.



Mat Greenfield

Website doesn't mean that you are untrustworthy, it can just make you appear that way):

No contact information

Not listing your contact information sends the message that you don't want people to reach you. It implies some level of dishonesty. A related problem is listing partial contact information (such as a PO Box rather than a physical address), or listing email, but not phone. For full credibility, be fully accessible to your customers and potential customers.

Home-made look and feel

Most people would prefer to buy from a 'real business' rather than a hobbyist. A Website that looks homemade implies that you're running your business out of your garage (which may be true, but reduces your credibility nonetheless).

Colored backgrounds, animated gifs, pixilated logos, etc., can all make your site look amateurish. A clean and professional look and feel is accessible to all small business owners with many good-looking template designs available for less than \$100. I would probably stay away from the commonly-used free templates that come with web design software. For a great selection, try www.templatemonster.com.

Non-secure purchase pages

I'm sure that none of you are making this elementary mistake, but in 2005 anyone not using a secure connection for ecommerce transactions is highly suspicious. Also, make it clear to visitors that your connection is secure, by utilizing the 'padlock' type of graphic available from your security certificate issuer. If you don't have a secure certificate, contact your host provider or visit verisign.com, or thwate.com.

Shopping-cart shock

A high number of shopping cart 'abandons' (people who place products into their cart, but never complete the purchase process) could be an indicator of some sort of shopping cart shock. Asking for too much information, or the wrong information in the wrong sequence can make the visitor feel uncomfortable. Look at the 'exit pages' report on your Web analytics tool to find out if people are dropping out of your checkout process. Most good host providers offer access to a detailed analytics package for a small monthly fee. If that capability isn't sufficient, consider investing in a third-party package like WebTrends (www.webtrends.com), ClickTracks (clicktracks.com), Omniture (www.omniture.com), Urchin (urchin.com/) or HitBox (www.websidestory.com). 📧

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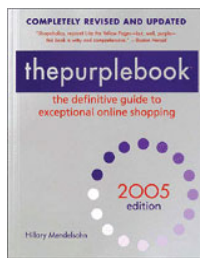
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The Purple Book

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A listing of unique and popular ecommerce sites. Great for ideas to improve your own site.



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E-Commerce Made Easy: The Official Guide to Miva Merchant

by Pamela Hazelton



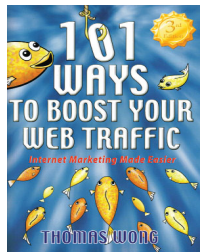
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101 Ways to Boost Your Web Traffic: Internet Marketing Made Easier, 3rd Edition

by Thomas Wong

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intesync.com

What's New

Use The Pepper Pad to Portably Access Your eCommerce Store

Pull-down orders, answer customers' email



“The price is \$799, which is about half the typical wireless Tablet PC price.”


Tied down to your desktop computer while pulling down orders and communicating via email? Are laptops too expensive and burdensome? There's a new product available that could free you to roam around your home or office at an affordable price.

The Pepper Wireless Pad (pepper.com) is a newly-released consumer product. It's a wireless, simple-to-use, Linux-based, portable tablet computer designed for residential use. With the Pepper Pad, you have instant-on access to the Web and email. Anything you do with your ecommerce store through your Web browser, such as maintain your site and process orders, you can do with your Pepper Pad. You also have email access and instant messenger to communicate with your customers. It's an alternate use for a residential product that could make life easier for the small ecommerce site owner.

The two features most important for our readers are the wireless connection and Linux operating system. With wireless, you can stay connected while looking through inventory, eating lunch, or watching television in the evening. Linux is fast and reliable, without the boot-up wait of Windows and the crashes from incompatible software. In the Pepper Pad, Linux is locked down, so virus and adware worries are reduced.




There are limitations. This isn't a PC, so you can't install software like Dreamweaver or PhotoShop. There are no printer drivers (yet), so you'll have to go back to your base PC to print orders and reports. The "keyboard" is really a split keypad that takes some getting used to. For the functions listed here, it's simply a wireless browser/e-mail/instant messenger device. Think giant Palm Pilot.

The Pepper Pad is brand new and expected to ship by the end of June. The price is \$799, which is about half the typical wireless Tablet PC price. Expect to see many reviews and articles extolling the wonders of this home-use product. But this is probably the only place you'll see the Pepper Pad reviewed as a commercial ecommerce maintenance device. 

Online Classes for Search Engine Optimization

Check-out "WebCEO University".

Most smaller ecommerce site owners recognize the importance of having search engines, such as Google and Yahoo, easily find their sites. There's a new, online school that offers classes and instruction on search optimization. It's called WebCEO University. The educational programs at WebCEO are designed to help you master the basics of search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM), or polish your knowledge and advance to the professional level of expertise. You have

a choice of two programs. The Basic program has 27 lessons organized into four stages, 12 video demos, and 14 assessments. Upon completion you receive a CSEM (Competent Search Engine Marketer) certificate. The Professional program has 73 lessons organized into five stages and accompanied by 12 video demos and assessments. Upon completion you receive a PSEM (Professional Search Engine Marketer) certificate. For additional information and pricing, go to uni.webceo.com. 

“Most of the steps have practical video demonstrations that are followed by assessments that will ensure you have internalized knowledge and qualify for a certificate.”

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Legal Department

SPAM Your Affiliates Can Put You Out Of Business

A funny thing happened on the way to enactment of the new federal spam law known as “CAN-SPAM”. While for the first time it established nationwide rules to follow in using commercial email, it actually did much more. Somewhere along the legislative process the ISPs decided they wanted not only to address the requirements for sending commercial email, but also to enact language making the merchant benefactor responsible for spam, regardless of knowledge. Their lobbyists went to work and got the relief they wanted by way of CAN-SPAM.

One cannot blame the ISPs.

The ISPs found themselves in a difficult position and were justifiably frustrated by a pervasive use of the plea of ignorance by merchants. “The sending of illegal spam by our affiliate marketer was unauthorized and not condoned, and therefore we have no responsibility for the actions of our independent contractor,” the merchant (through his lawyer) would say. Prior to the enactment of CAN-SPAM such a defense virtually precluded an ISP, or anyone else for that matter, from prosecuting a successful civil or criminal case against a website/merchant. No longer is that the case. The Federal Trade Commission has recently filed a major lawsuit against a merchant based upon third party spamming, seized its assets without notice and effectively shut down the business, all at the very beginning of the case. The FBI and Department of Justice are conducting raids and building criminal cases partially in reliance upon this expanded notion of liability. Earthlink, AOL and Microsoft are filing large civil lawsuits against merchants stemming from the actions of affiliates. In an environment in which a relatively small-time alleged spammer was hit with a \$1 billion judgment by a federal court in Iowa, and a spammer operating out of a house received nine years in prison in Virginia, this expanded notion of responsibility carries with it huge implications. These legal actions are being brought against employees, shareholders, executives and



John Dozier

John Dozier is President of Dozier Internet Law, PC, a law firm representing small and mid-size online businesses. He can be reached at jwd@cybertriallawyer.com, or online at CyberTrialLawyer.com.

even board members, often with little consideration given to the extent of personal involvement in the management of the affiliate program. What’s more, courts have already held that spam judgments are not dischargeable in Chapter 7 bankruptcy, so a civil judgment could follow a defendant for a lifetime.

What then, can a merchant do?

Perhaps it is best to start out with what actions will not work standing alone. Not having an affiliate agreement will not work. Having an affiliate agreement that requires CAN-SPAM compliance will not work. Having an affiliate agreement that prohibits all email solicitations will not work. Taking steps so that one is unaware of any illegal spamming will not work. Creating multiple layers of vendors between a merchant and the spammer will not work. All of these common tactics used by many merchants to reap the benefits of commercial email simply don’t qualify as protection any more.

If a merchant uses a third party to market its services and prohibits any commercial email at all in a binding and well-drafted contract, and follows up that policy with a practice of conducting reasonable due diligence, then the merchant is most likely going to avoid liability, although this is not guaranteed as it relates to governmental prosecution. After implementing such a policy, and developing due diligence procedures in selecting vendors and monitoring vendor compliance, the prudent merchant will publicize its policies and practices to the world on its website.

If, on the other hand, a merchant realizes that commercial email is a powerful and highly profitable marketing technique, and wants to authorize third parties to send commercial email, there is little that can be done to avoid any possibility of civil or criminal exposure. But the exposure can be minimized and managed to the point that the reward may outweigh the risk. A prudent merchant will use a well-drafted contract, binding upon each affiliate/vendor. The merchant will develop and conduct extensive due diligence prior to accepting an affiliate, understand the exact source of the emails (affiliates often outsource some aspects of emailing to third parties), and clear each source through due diligence. The merchant should design and implement a serious compliance program to make sure spamming is identified immediately and proactively addressed in a formal process, educate its affiliate managers and executives concerning CAN-SPAM mailing requirements, and document all of these steps throughout.

... and a spammer operating out of a house received nine years in prison in Virginia, this expanded notion of responsibility carries with it huge implications.

In an environment in which a relatively small time alleged spammer was hit with a \$1 billion judgment by a federal court in Iowa ...



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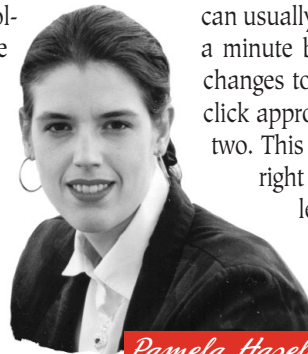
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Miva Merchant Tips & Tricks

Preventative Maintenance

For Your Miva Store

I spend just as much time troubleshooting Miva Merchant issues as I do customizing storefronts. I've found that no matter how much you foolproof something, someone out there can, and will, find a way to break its functionality. Fortunately, users of Miva Merchant often need only follow a few steps to keep their online stores running clean and troubleshoot issues.



Pamela Hazelton

Delete, Pack, Pack

Miva Merchant 4.x and lower database files are DB III compliant (which gives us flexibility to import and export data to and from many applications), and when any items (products, orders, categories, etc.) are deleted in the store, they are flagged for deletion in the appropriate database. This means accidental deletions are recoverable (though it requires working with the databases directly). The process of packing those databases after you delete something keeps database files running clean, and lessens the possibility of record numbers being reused. Reused record numbers are called dupes and can cause corruption of the database files themselves.

Abandoned shopping baskets can also make some database files grow quite large. This is why there's a method to delete expired shopping baskets. And the deleting step should always be followed by packing the store's data files.

Using the Delete and Pack routines under the store's

Pamela Hazelton is an eCommerce consultant, author and speaker. She's the author of E-Commerce Made Easy: The Official Guide to Miva Merchant, and can be reached at sales@designextend.com, online at designextend.com.

and domain's utilities branches is the most important step every user should take to keep their Miva Merchant stores in top shape.

Keep Modules Updated

Checking for module updates frequently will ensure your store is utilizing the latest and greatest of a module's features, and with the fewest bugs possible. While most developers only release major updates when many features are added, bug fixes often result in immediate updates. Updating a module is normally the first step in troubleshooting a conflict with a third-party module.

Test While You Go

I, as well as most module developers, am asked every day to siphon through large blocks of HTML and tokens (used to call in specific content from database fields, or conditionally display content), or check all the settings in the module interface, to find out where the user went wrong. You can usually turn an hour or more of troubleshooting into just a minute by testing design and functionality as you make changes to the store. I recommend users refresh screens or click appropriate links in the live store after each change or two. This helps you catch your own mistakes and fix them right then, rather than having to spend sometimes endless moments trying to figure it out later.

Nearly half the time developers and designers spend making customizations is spent testing as we work, so the process of testing as changes are actually made should be practiced by everyone.

Realize Module Limitations

Not all third-party modules work flawlessly with other modules, or even Miva Merchant itself. That's why it's key to read documentation and also think logically when considering, installing and configuring modules that need to work with other modules. Keep in mind that some modules just won't work with others, especially if they both are written to customize a screen (product, category, etc), and some modules have to be "called in" to other modules. For example, a module that overwrites the entire product screen would need to call in the functionality of a module that changes the way product images are displayed or manipulates bulk pricing of a product.

Seek Support Wisely

When seeking support for your Miva Merchant store, following key steps can cut down troubleshooting time for

“
While there are steps to take, you DO want to take steps to keep your store running smoothly and fix problems as they occur.”

yourself and the developer or support team. Often you can completely eliminate the process of calling someone for support if you go back to the basics.

The first step is to read documentation, including any FAQ files. Many times the answer to a question lies within something already repaired and documented. For HTML or token issues, copying and pasting the current settings, then reverting back to the original configuration so you can plug your changes back in a step at a time will improve your chances of catching the problem quickly.

Knowing who to talk to is also key in resolving issues quickly. Mail server and permissions problems usually are reliant on the host. Errors of missing files are usually attributed to the failure of uploading or installing a file, but they could also be a permissions problem. A developer normally handles module conflicts, and when it's between two modules by two different developers, they will often work together to locate the problem.

The goal here is to save you time and money. While it's easy to open a support ticket whenever you find a problem, consider the time invested by the support team. Many developers support module problems themselves, so great increases of support time can mean other modules aren't being updated or developed, and ultimately can call in a

price increase for their products.

The ultimate goal, however, is to make sure your Miva Merchant store is running smoothly. Errors in the store cost you time and money as well. Having a clear understanding of how Miva Merchant, and any other modules you may be running, work is the best insurance policy you can have when it comes to fixing a problem.

Don't Ignore Problems

You wouldn't ignore a clicking sound in your car's engine, well, maybe you would, but it wouldn't be a wise choice. The same goes for Miva Merchant. While there are steps to take, often many, you DO want to take steps to keep your store running smoothly and fix problems as they occur. And your bank account will definitely thank you. Repairing a corrupt database could run you \$75 or more per occurrence, money that could be better spent elsewhere, like on that nifty, new module you've been eager to try out. ☹

The first step is to read documentation, including any FAQ files.



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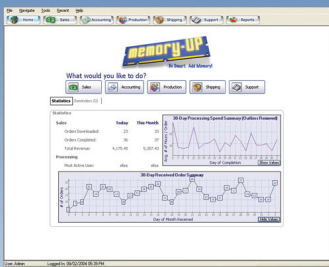
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