

Hyde & Co.

FREE RESOURCE · NO. XI

The online store *playbook*

Product pages, checkout, and getting found — for small online stores.

What the research actually supports, what Google currently requires, and which widely-quoted e-commerce statistics turn out to be **vendor marketing**. Includes one deadline that is closer than most merchants realise.

FREE TO USE AND SHARE
COMPANION TO THE WEBSITE PLAYBOOK

AN AGENCY FOR BUSINESS OWNERS
ORLANDO, FLORIDA



A note on the numbers in this guide

E-commerce advice is saturated with statistics. Most of them come from companies selling the thing the statistic recommends.

Where a figure appears here, it comes with what kind of evidence sits behind it and where it came from. Where a well-known figure does not survive checking, it is named in Part 8 so you can recognise it when someone quotes it at you.

One caveat worth stating plainly: the best public research on e-commerce usability comes from the **Baymard Institute**, and Baymard publishes figures from different survey waves across different pages without always labelling them. Where their own numbers conflict, this guide cites one source per topic and says so rather than mixing them.

The headline figure, honestly framed

The most-quoted number in e-commerce is a documented average cart abandonment rate of about **70%**. Baymard arrives at it by averaging across **50 different studies** of cart abandonment.

Be careful how you read that. It is an unweighted average of fifty studies using different definitions, date ranges and site samples. It is a useful reference point, not a precise measurement of anything — and certainly not a measurement of *your* store. Anyone quoting it to two decimal places is over-claiming.

More importantly: Baymard's own survey found **42% of abandoners were "just browsing / not ready to buy."** That is not a leak you can plug. It is normal shopping behaviour, and it makes the popular "\$X trillion lost to cart abandonment" statistic internally incoherent.

Why the rest abandon

Excluding the browsers, here is what US online shoppers said, ranked:

%	REASON
40%	Extra costs too high (shipping, tax, fees)
20%	Delivery was too slow
19%	Didn't trust the site with card details
18%	The site wanted me to create an account
17%	Checkout too long or complicated
17%	Website had errors or crashed
13%	Returns policy wasn't satisfactory
12%	Couldn't see or calculate total cost up front
10%	Card was declined
9%	Not enough payment methods

Source: Baymard Institute. Evidence quality: multi-select opinion survey of US online shoppers, three-month recall window. Baymard does not publish the sample size or field date for this wave on its public pages. Treat these as stated reasons, not measured causes — people rationalise after the fact.

What the top of that list is telling you

The two biggest fixable items are about surprise, not price. Shipping costs revealed at step four, and being forced to create an account, are both moments where the deal changes after the customer committed emotionally.

Neither requires you to be cheaper. Both require you to be earlier.

Guest checkout

24% of US shoppers abandoned at least one cart in a quarter due solely to forced account creation (*Baymard, survey of 4,384 US adults, 2022 — this is their best-documented figure on the subject*).

Yet Baymard's benchmarking found roughly half of sites fail to make guest checkout the most prominent option. In usability testing, users stall at the account step hunting for the guest option, and a fast-moving subgroup never finds it at all.

The fix: guest checkout as the visually dominant choice. Offer account creation *after* the order is placed, when you already have their details and can offer it as a convenience rather than a toll.

The checkout checklist

- ☐ Guest checkout is the most prominent option
- ☐ Total cost, including shipping, is visible before the final step
- ☐ Shipping cost or a calculator appears on the **product** page
- ☐ Delivery **dates** shown, not "2–3 business days"
- ☐ Return policy linked from the checkout itself
- ☐ The fewest form fields you can operate with
- ☐ Correct mobile keyboard for every field
- ☐ Card fields visually grouped and enclosed
- ☐ Error messages say what is wrong and how to fix it, next to the field
- ☐ You have completed your own checkout, on a phone, in the last 30 days

Images are the first thing people use

56% of users' first action on a product page is exploring the images, before reading anything. (*Baymard, moderated usability testing.*)

For an online store, photography is not decoration. It is the product — it is the only sensory information a buyer gets.

What the benchmarking finds missing:

- **25% of sites** fail on image resolution or zoom
- **42% of users** try to judge product size from images, and a substantial share of sites provide **no "in scale" image** showing the product next to something familiar or in use
- **40% of sites** don't support pinch and tap gestures on mobile images
- **52% of sites** don't include descriptive text or graphics on some images

Baymard's guideline is 3–5 images per product minimum. Nielsen Norman Group's e-commerce research puts it more plainly: *"One product view is rarely adequate."* Their recommended set — rotated views, detail views, enlargements, and in-use or in-context shots.

The one most stores skip: the in-scale shot. A bag photographed alone tells you nothing about its size. A bag on someone's shoulder answers the question every buyer is silently asking.

Descriptions

Nielsen Norman Group's e-commerce research found **20% of all task failures** came from incomplete or unclear product information. (*Qualitative usability research — note it dates from 2014, so treat the figure as directional.*)

Their three requirements are still the right frame:

1. **Answer the questions buyers actually have** — not the ones the manufacturer's copy answers
2. **Get to the point** — users skim, and read more at the beginning than the end
3. **Enable comparison** — consistent information across variants and across the category, so a shopper can tell two products apart

Practical additions that come out of the same research: explain any unfamiliar terminology, use a comparison table for specification-heavy products, and confirm explicitly what *is not* included. Baymard found **44% of sites** don't clearly show included accessories or confirm exclusions.

The buy section

56% of sites have bloated buy sections that distract from the primary action (*Baymard benchmark*). The area around the add-to-cart button accumulates badges, upsells, promotions and social icons until the actual button competes with everything around it.

Keep it sparse. The primary button should be the most visually distinct element on the page. And give clear feedback when something is added — without it, users re-add items or lose confidence that anything happened.

Video: the honest answer

You will be told video lifts conversion by 80%. **That number is vendor marketing**, traceable only to video-commerce companies with no stated methodology and no control group, one of which no longer exists as an independent business.

What is actually documented:

- **41% of users watched product videos** in usability testing — meaning 59% did not, and some actively dislike the format
- **35% of major sites embed video incorrectly**, typically hiding it behind a tab separate from the images

Baymard publishes no conversion figure for video at all.

So: video is worth doing for expensive, complicated or top-selling products. Put it **inside the main image gallery** with a play icon, not in its own tab. And treat any specific percentage attached to it as invented.

The research disagrees with itself, which is worth knowing

Two large peer-reviewed meta-analyses have examined whether reviews drive sales, and they reach **opposite conclusions about what matters most**:

- You, Vadakkepatt & Joshi, *Journal of Marketing* (2015), 51 studies — **rating matters more than count**
- Babić Rovira et al., *Journal of Marketing Research* (2016), 1,532 effect sizes across 96 studies — **count matters more than rating**

Both find reviews are positively associated with sales. Neither settles the question. Invest in both, and distrust confident claims either way.

Three findings you can act on

The first reviews matter most. Northwestern's Spiegel Research Center found nearly all of the lift comes from the first handful. Zero to ten reviews is a far bigger move than ninety to a hundred.

A perfect rating is not the target. The same research found purchase likelihood peaks between roughly **4.0 and 4.7 stars and declines toward 5.0**. Flawless reads as filtered.

Negative reviews are not fatal — inconsistency is. Babić Rovira's meta-analysis found negative reviews do not necessarily harm sales, and that **high variability in ratings is more problematic than negativity itself**.

How to display them

From Nielsen Norman Group's e-commerce research: show both positive and negative reviews, clearly differentiated. Allow sorting and filtering. Include reviewer context — size bought, use case, how long they have had it. Verification badges build trust.

Do not hide the one-star reviews. Shoppers who deliberately seek them out are high-intent buyers doing due diligence, and a well-handled negative review with a good reply reassures them more than its absence would.

One caution on a figure you will encounter: vendor research reporting "reviews lift conversion by 108%" compares shoppers who chose to interact with reviews against all visitors. High-intent shoppers engage with everything. That is a selection effect, not a measured cause.

Extra costs are the number one stated reason for abandonment. This section is where most stores can recover the most money.

Show shipping cost on the product page

64% of users look for shipping costs on the product page, before adding to cart. **43% of sites** don't show them there, and some don't provide an estimate even at the cart stage. (*Baymard.*)

The insight that makes this click: shipping cost matters **relative to product price**, not in absolute terms. \$4.97 shipping on a \$4.34 item reads as outrageous. \$10 on a \$400 camera is invisible. The same shipping fee can be fine or fatal depending on what it is attached to.

If you cannot calculate it exactly, in order of preference: show your lowest flat rate, estimate from the visitor's location, use a returning customer's previous destination, or state a range with the condition attached — *"Estimated shipping (to California): \$5."* Label the assumption. An estimate beats silence.

Free shipping thresholds

32% of sites communicate free shipping only through a site-wide banner, and **27% of users missed or struggled to find it** — ordinary banner blindness. Threshold conditions hidden behind asterisks are routinely missed entirely.

Put the free shipping detail **next to the buy button**, state the threshold plainly, and update it contextually — *"Add \$12 more for free shipping"* does work that a banner cannot.

On where to set the threshold: every "set it 20–30% above your average order value" formula traces to vendor blogs. There is no credible research on the optimal level. Pick something that protects your margin and test it.

Delivery dates, not delivery speeds

48% of sites show delivery speeds rather than dates (*Baymard*). "Delivery April 4th" answers the question. "2 business days" requires the customer to do arithmetic and guess your cut-off time.

Note that **20% cite slow delivery** as an abandonment reason — that is about actual speed, not how you display it. Displaying dates well will not rescue a genuinely slow service.

Returns

13% abandon over an unsatisfactory returns policy. Baymard's benchmarking found a large share of sites either don't display return policies clearly or bury them in jargon, and that **over half** of returns interfaces have substantial usability problems.

There is a behavioural finding here that has held across every round of Baymard's testing since 2012: **a distinct group of shoppers goes to the footer first** — on mobile too — and uses find-on-page for "return" or "shipping."

So: put standalone footer links labelled exactly **"Return Policy"** and **"Shipping Info."** Not buried under "Help," not inside an FAQ accordion. The people looking for them are looking in a specific place, using specific words.

This section changes faster than any other. Everything below reflects Google's documentation as of publication.

Product structured data is alive and fully supported

Important, because the removal of FAQ and HowTo rich results has left a lot of people assuming schema in general is dead. **It is not.** Product structured data remains in Google's current search gallery and is actively supported.

There are two distinct experiences:

- **Product snippets** — for pages where you *cannot* buy directly (reviews, editorial, aggregators)
- **Merchant listings** — for pages where a shopper *can* buy

What is required for merchant listings

Required: name, image, and offers — and within the offer, price (which must be greater than zero) and priceCurrency as a three-letter ISO code.

Recommended and worth adding: aggregateRating, brand, description, gtin or equivalent product identifier, sku, review, availability, itemCondition, shippingDetails, and hasMerchantReturnPolicy.

Eligibility rules that trip people up:

- Only pages where a shopper can actually purchase
- One product per page, or variants at distinct URLs — multi-product listing pages are ineligible
- Distinct URLs per currency
- SKU values must not contain whitespace
- Markup in the initial HTML is preferred over JavaScript-injected

Useful shortcut: meeting the merchant listing requirements automatically makes your pages eligible for product snippets too.

Google Merchant Center is free

Free product listings let your products appear across Google — the Shopping tab, Search, Images, Lens, Maps and Gemini — without ad spend.

What is required:

- Following the free listings policies
- **Return policy information on your website**
- **Shipping settings configured**, or shipping costs supplied in your product data — mandatory in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and most of Europe
- Core product attributes: id, title, link, image link, price, description, availability

New accounts are opted into free listings by default. Older accounts should check the free listings card under marketing methods.

Which surfaces need Merchant Center: the Shopping tab, Google Lens and Business Profile listings require it. Ordinary Search rich results and Google Images do not — structured data on your site is enough.

Faceted navigation (filters), the short version

Filter URLs multiply fast — colour × size × price × brand generates thousands of near-identical pages, and Google warns bluntly that crawling them *"tends to cost sites large amounts of computing resources."*

If you don't want filter pages in search results: disallow filter parameters in robots.txt, use URL fragments rather than parameters, canonical to the unfiltered version, or add nofollow to filter links.

If you do want them indexed: use standard & separators, keep filter order consistent, and **return a genuine 404 for empty result sets** and invalid combinations rather than redirecting.

Note: the URL Parameters tool in Search Console was retired in 2022. Any advice telling you to configure parameters there is dead.

Pagination

Two pieces of common advice are now explicitly wrong:

- **rel="next" and rel="prev" are no longer used by Google.**
- **Do not canonicalise paginated pages to page one.** Google's documentation warns against this directly — each paginated page needs its own canonical URL.

Pagination, "load more" and infinite scroll are all acceptable. Give each page a unique URL using a parameter, not a fragment.

Out-of-stock products — an honest caveat

You will read confidently that you should keep out-of-stock product pages live rather than removing them. That advice comes from **Google spokespeople in office hours and social posts, not from documentation**. We looked for a documented position and could not find one.

What *is* documented: availability is a recommended offer property with values including OutOfStock and Discontinued, and Merchant Center can auto-update product data when it detects a discrepancy between your site and your feed.

For a store with more than a few dozen products, internal search is a major path to purchase — and a quiet one, because failures are invisible unless you look.

Nielsen Norman Group's longitudinal research across three studies and 500+ participant queries found search success rates improved substantially over time — from 64% in 2000 to **92% in 2017**. Encouraging, but their earlier work found **27% of task failures** came from shoppers being unable to find items that were actually in stock.

Baymard's benchmarking of 344 sites found **22% don't prominently display the search field**, and concludes that search success can be improved dramatically even on major sites — noting that a poor search experience can look aesthetically identical to a good one.

What to do about it

- Make the search field prominent, not an icon hidden behind a tap
- **Read your site search logs monthly.** They are the most under-used data in e-commerce: a list of exactly what customers wanted, in their own words
- Every query returning zero results is either a product you should stock, a synonym you should map, or a spelling you should handle
- Handle misspellings, plurals and synonyms

A caution: the ubiquitous claim that "site search users are 2× more likely to convert" traces exclusively to search-vendor marketing. Shoppers who use search already know what they want — the correlation is real, the causal reading is not supported.

E-commerce guidance ages badly. If a guide you are reading contradicts any of these, it is out of date:

ADVICE	STATUS
FAQ structured data for rich results	Dead — stopped appearing 7 May 2026, documentation removed
HowTo structured data	Dead — deprecated 2023, removed
rel="next" / rel="prev"	No longer used by Google
Canonicalising paginated pages to page one	Explicitly warned against
URL Parameters tool in Search Console	Retired in 2022
Sitelinks Search Box markup	Deprecated October 2024
"Merchant Center Next" as a separate product	Branding dropped July 2026 — it is just Merchant Center
Content API for Shopping	Sunset 18 August 2026 — migrate to the Merchant API
Free listings "conversion tracking"	Renamed "key events," February 2025
llms.txt for AI visibility	Not needed — Google confirmed June 2026
Product structured data	 Still fully supported

If you or your developer use the Content API for Shopping, that sunset date is imminent. It is the single most time-sensitive item in this guide.

Also worth knowing: since 2024, Merchant Center requires disclosure of AI-generated text through specific product attributes, and AI-generated images must retain their origin metadata.

"Video on product pages increases conversions 80%." Vendor marketing from video-commerce companies. No methodology, no control group, and the primary source company no longer exists independently. Baymard publishes no conversion figure for video at all.

"Site search users are 2× more likely to convert." Search-vendor marketing only. No traceable original study, and confounded by intent.

"Reviews lift conversion by 108%." Observational vendor data comparing self-selected engagers against all visitors. A selection effect presented as a causal one.

"A one-second delay reduces conversions by 7%." Traces to a 2008 press release from a research firm, sponsored by two web-performance vendors, based on a survey of organisations' opinions. Eighteen years old.

"\$X trillion is lost to cart abandonment every year." Calculated by multiplying an abandonment rate by total e-commerce volume — which assumes every abandoned cart was a lost sale, contradicting the finding that 42% were just browsing.

"88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations." A 2014 online panel survey about *local services*, run by a review-software company, where the 88% is a sum of conditional answers. Frequently misapplied to product pages.

Any "optimal free shipping threshold" formula. Vendor and agency blogs only. No credible research exists.

The short version

1. Show shipping cost on the **product** page — extra costs are the top stated reason for abandonment
2. Make guest checkout the most prominent option
3. Three to five images minimum, including one showing scale
4. Delivery **dates**, not delivery speeds
5. "Return Policy" and "Shipping Info" as plain footer links — people search for those exact words
6. Get your first ten reviews; don't chase a perfect 5.0
7. Show the one-star reviews and reply to them
8. Product structured data: name, image, price, priceCurrency at minimum
9. Set up Merchant Center — it is free and it requires a published return policy
10. Read your site search logs every month
11. Complete your own checkout on your own phone, monthly

— IF THE LIST IS LONG AND THE SEASON IS SHORT

We build stores that *hold* the sale.

The checklist in Part 1 is the highest-value hour in this document, and it costs nothing but attention.

When the work is structural — checkout, feeds, product data — that is what we build. **Hyde & Co. is an agency for business owners** — built, hosted, watched, and owned by you.

i. We complete your checkout on a phone and tell you where it loses people.

ii. We check your product data and Merchant Center setup against current requirements.

iii. You decide what to fix, and who fixes it.

No obligation, and no charge for the conversation.

[Book a consultation](#)

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WE BUILD ASSETS, NOT JUST WEBSITES

Sources

USED IN	SOURCE	EVIDENCE TYPE
Parts 1, 2, 4	Baymard Institute — cart abandonment reasons, guest checkout (n=4,384 US adults, 2022), product image benchmarks, shipping cost visibility, returns and footer behaviour, buy-section and video findings	Opinion survey, benchmark counts, moderated usability testing
Parts 2, 3, 6	Nielsen Norman Group — <i>E-Commerce Product Pages</i> (2019), <i>Product Descriptions</i> (2014), <i>The State of Ecommerce Search</i> (2018), across three longitudinal studies	Qualitative usability research
Part 3	You, Vadakkepatt & Joshi, <i>Journal of Marketing</i> 79(1), 2015; Babić Rovira, Sotgiu, de Valck & Bijmolt, <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> 53(3), 2016; Chevalier & Mayzlin, <i>JMR</i> 43(3), 2006; Spiegel Research Center, Northwestern (2017)	Peer-reviewed meta-analyses and observational studies
Part 5	Google Search Central — <i>Product structured data</i> , <i>Merchant listing</i> , <i>Product snippet</i> , <i>Faceted navigation</i> (updated Dec 2025), <i>Pagination and incremental page loading</i> ; Google Merchant Center Help — free listings requirements	Primary documentation
Part 7	Google Search Central changelog; Google Merchant Center announcements changelog; Shopping Content API release notes	Primary documentation

A transparency note: Baymard's most detailed research sits behind a paid subscription. Everything cited here comes from their freely accessible pages. Where their public figures conflict across pages — and several do, because they come from different survey waves — this guide has used one source per topic rather than mixing them.

This playbook is free to use and share.

The only goal is better websites and better results.