

Designing a successful online store



By [Jonathan D. Novotny](#)

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Most online stores operated by small businesses in South Africa, fail to provide the user with an experience which leaves them at-ease and confident about their order being processed and delivered. The majority of these problems are easy to avoid. Let's look at the most common issues and a simple solution.

Design

The usual design issues arise from the use of:

- Outdated, irrelevant structures - Ensure that you are using the latest version of one of the global, most widely implemented platforms. These are currently; OpenCart, Magento, PrestaShop or Shopify if you want a DIY solution with no hands on support available.
- Weird, unusual or incomplete themes - If you want to be pro, just purchase a quality theme. This is like your skin and, regardless of how good your structure is, if your site looks like a '90s website, you aren't going to inspire confidence.
- Just downright bad product photos - Get better ones.
- Give people what they want - If they are looking for contact details, don't offer them a form to fill out, or if they want to pay and order online, don't ask them to fill out an order form "...So you can get back to them."

Functionality

If you have time to set up your store and are an IT genius then there is nothing stopping you from implementing this yourself.

- Responsive design means the website scales down to the size and complexity of the device viewing it. For example, mobile devices see a narrow site with small product images and a simpler menu.
- Automatic invoicing - keep in mind that some shoppers may not want to pay via credit card, so give them an EFT option or have the system send them an automated invoice for payment.
- Integration with SA payment gateways - or just setup your own PayPal account & link to that.
- Integration with courier services
- Special offers, coupons & vouchers - you may not be planning on using this straight off, but if you are investing time and thought into your solution, best make sure that it has everything you need to build on.

Vital Final Touches

- Use more & larger product images. Most insecurity online comes from not seeing the product up-close-and-personal. So make it as easy as possible for your clients by having pictures from every side and scalable so they can zoom in.
- As much information as you can - describe your product until there is nothing left. At least your customers can browse, read and discover as much as they want. Do not limit knowledge and comfort with the product by insufficient descriptions.
- Make it easy to pay - don't expect your clients to be like your stunt-loving chihuahua, who loves nothing better than to jump through hoops and eat vitamin-rich doggie treats. Keep your check-out process simple and then simpler than simple. Just choose the checkout that brings it all together most efficiently.

For more information, go to www.cloudsales.co.za.

ABOUT JONATHAN D. NOVOTNY

Jonathan David Novotny is a Serial Entrepreneur/UX & Online Solutions Architect. He is Co-Founder & Projects Director of Non-Profit Change the World Trust which operates IT Learning Academies for under-served communities in Southern Africa. He is also the Founder of www.CloudSales.co.za, an e-Commerce Solution provider for SMEs employing disruptive innovation in its "To-Market" approach. Jonathan's experience is in Social Development in Africa.

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