

The Product Catalog Planning & Discovery Process

(for Your Ecommerce Website)

By Brian Seidel

Purpose of This Discussion

Identify two of the most frequent “misses” we see on ecommerce website projects and give some steps that can be taken to avoid them.

- Miss #1: Product catalog requirements not completely identified and solved in the plan / scope
 - Will BASE (standard) scope meet requirements?
 - Which standard A LA CARTE modules are needed to meet requirements?
 - Are custom modifications required?
- Miss #2: Staff product / content preparation and cleanup with an under-qualified person
 - Don't understand that this is the #1 cause of delays on website projects (by a landslide)
 - Under-estimate the volume and complexity level of the work required

Topics / Agenda

- Definition of “Product Catalog” vs. “Shopping Cart”
- General Categories of Product Catalog Requirements
 - Help Users Find the Product(s)
 - Ways to find the products (search, browse, nys, order form, fav lists)
 - Once Found, What Do Users See / What Can They Do
 - What content / information is available (photos, videos, descriptions, attributes, customer reviews, related products, compatible products, zoom, etc)
 - What “calls of action” are available (request-a-quote, email-a-friend, signup for stock watch email (if out of stock), post a review, add-to-cart, etc)
 - [THIS DISCUSSION] What choices or input is needed to accurately order the product (impact price & sku, don't impact price & sku, require addition items in order, etc)
- Breaking Your Products Down into “Functionality Classifications”
 - It's generally not the qty of products that determines the scope, it's how many unique functionality “classifications” they fall into that matters
 - Examples of different classifications
- Recap of the Steps Involved in Preparing and Loading Your Production Catalog Data
- The Planning & Discovery Process
 - Four steps to determine the scope of work for the website's Product Catalog
- **Key “Take-Aways”**
 - Understand what we mean by “Functionality Classification” of a product
 - Take time up front to figure out the “classifications” that apply to your product offering
 - Work with WSP to accurately scope the project
 - Put a skilled / experienced resource on the data preparation task
 - That understands the “Required Format”
 - That can handle the content manipulation, conversion, and cleanup

Planning & Discovery Process

The purpose of this process is to identify the product catalog requirements and determine the scope of work to needed to satisfy the requirements.

1. Identify the unique “Functionality Classifications” of products (i.e. books, shirts, cranes, signs)
2. For each unique classification, determine the requirements to collect accurate order information
 - a. What choices does the customer have to make to select/configure the product (i.e. size & color, lift capacity & voltage, etc)
 - i. Which of the choices impact the item # and / or the price (start with “as is” conditions in the ERP system)
 - ii. Which of the choices do not impact item # and / or price (i.e. “comment” or non-item info that fulfillment team needs)
 - b. How many item numbers end up on the order to represent that single “product” (1, or more than 1)
 - i. If more than 1, are the items “coupled” together on the order for a single control point for qty changes and removes
 - c. Are there restrictions, limits, or fees on
 - i. Individual items (i.e. min qty, max qty, required increment) – CATALOG & CART
 - ii. The overall order (min / max \$ amount, min / max qty of lines, etc) - CART
3. For each classification, determine what additional content is needed for the customer to understand the product
4. Sketch out & agree upon a display (that users/customers will see) and determine the “Required Format” of the data