

E-commerce stores and how they work

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How an e-commerce store works

If you've ever bought something online, you know what it's like to make a purchase from an e-commerce store. You've already learned about e-commerce stores and how they work. In this reading, you'll learn more about how customers navigate an e-commerce store and review the basic elements that make up an e-commerce store.

How customers navigate an e-commerce store

When customers visit an e-commerce store, they might search for a specific product or just browse until they find products that meet their needs.

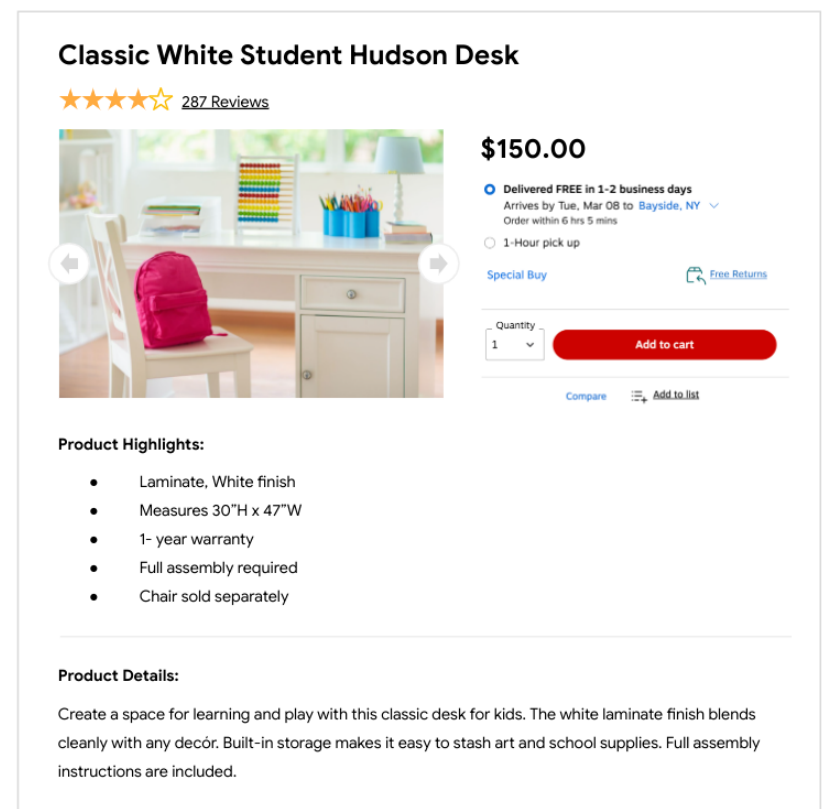
For example, imagine a customer is searching for a desk that their child can use at home. The customer might search for kids' desks using one or more of the following methods:

- Search bar (usually located at the top of the page)
- Navigation menu (usually located at the top or left-hand side of the page)
- Links to specific categories or products on the page



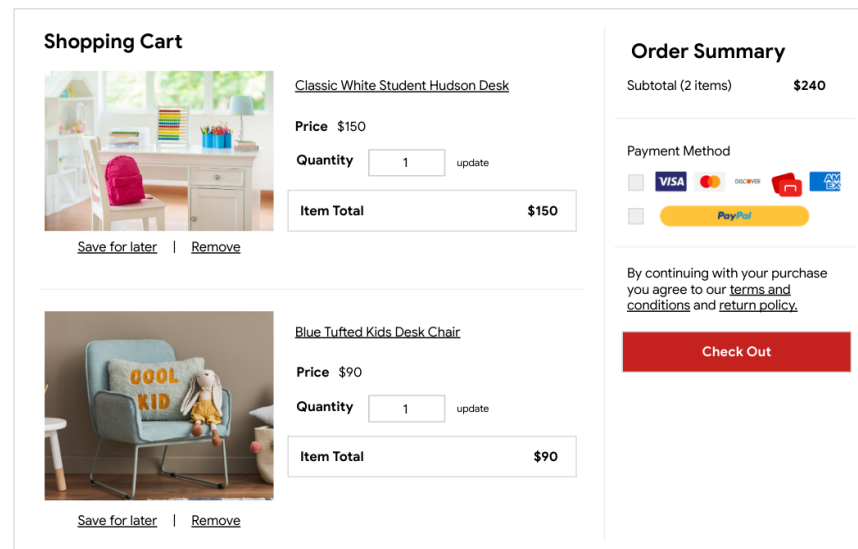
The customer might also research products in more detail to decide which one meets their needs or desires. For example, the customer searching for a kids' desk might research the different types of desks available and what features they offer, such as storage compartments or a keyboard tray. They might research products on the e-commerce store's website as well as other websites or sources. If the e-commerce store offers a buying guide, blog, or other information about buying a desk, the customer can learn more about the products they're interested in buying without leaving the e-commerce store's website.

The customer can also research specific desks that the e-commerce store sells by visiting the product detail page, reading the product description, viewing the product images or videos, reading customer reviews, and viewing images or videos uploaded by other customers.

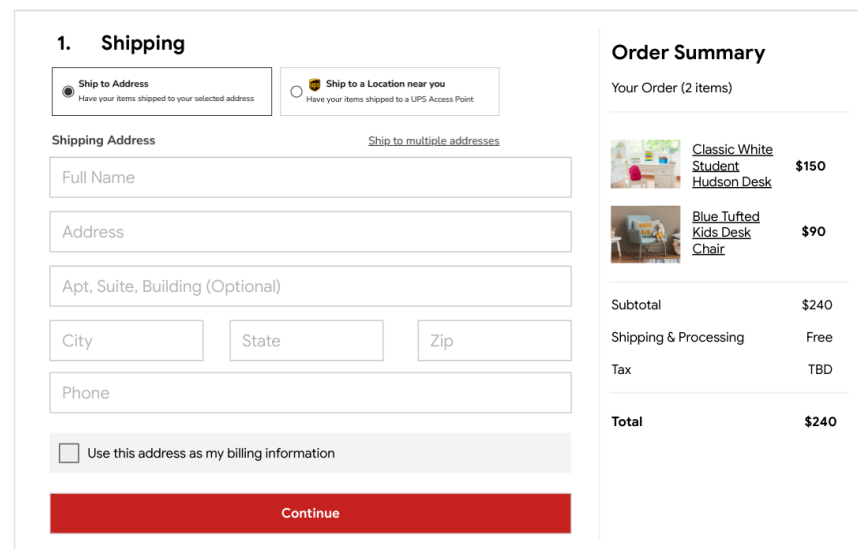


Researching products can happen at multiple times during the customer shopping journey, such as before the customer visits an e-commerce store, after they add a product to their shopping cart, or even after their purchase if the product doesn't meet their expectations and they need to return or exchange it.

Once the customer finds a desk they're interested in buying, they can add it to their shopping cart. Sometimes a customer might add multiple products to their cart while they're still trying to decide which one to buy. The customer might also decide to add other products to their cart, such as a desk chair, to go along with the desk.



After the customer decides which products they want to buy, they're ready to begin the checkout process. At this stage, the customer enters their payment, shipping, and billing information and any other details needed. Then, they complete their purchase.



Basic elements of an e-commerce store

Most e-commerce stores contain certain elements that customers expect to find whenever they're shopping online. Here are some of the basic elements you might find in an e-commerce store:

Home page

The **home page** is the main page of a website. It helps customers understand what types of products a company sells, helps them find the information or products they need, and serves as a main hub that connects to other pages on the website.

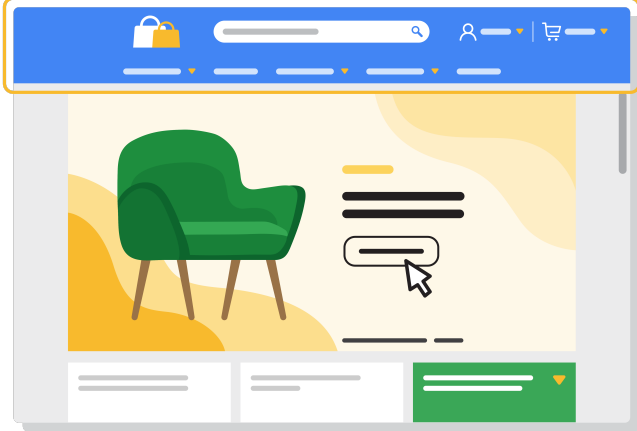


Navigation bar

The **navigation bar** is a collection of links to other pages within the website. It helps customers find the department, category, or section of the website that will be most useful for them. The navigation bar is typically at the top or left-hand side of the page. It's a fixed element, which means that it stays in place even when a customer navigates to a different page on the website.

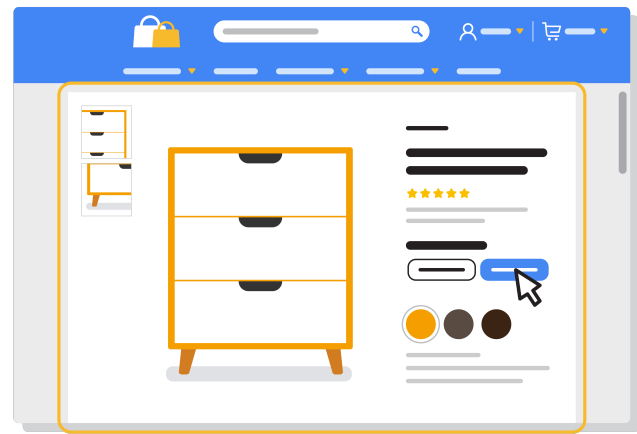
The navigation bar usually includes a search function and a navigation menu to help customers find what they need. It may also include a link to the shopping cart and the customer's account, as well as other helpful links. If the company has physical locations, the navigation bar may include a store locator.

The navigation bar also includes a menu with links to department or category pages. For example, an online store that sells furniture might include links to the kids' furniture category or other furniture categories. Within these categories, a customer would be able to find desks.



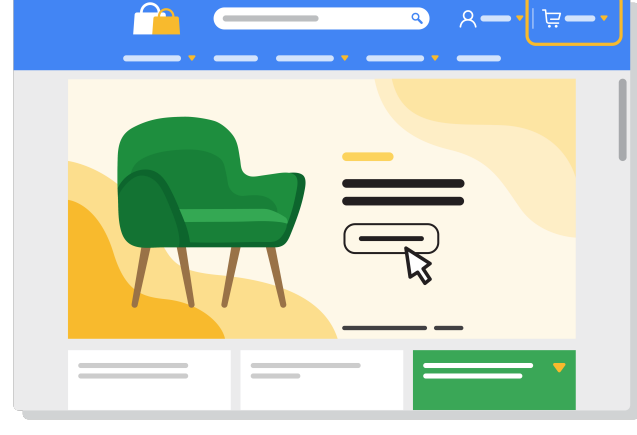
Product detail pages

Product detail pages—sometimes called **PDPs**—are pages on an e-commerce site that provide information about a specific product. They typically include a product description, specifications or technical details, product images or videos, customer reviews, and any other relevant information about the product.



Shopping cart

A **digital shopping cart** is the virtual equivalent of a physical shopping cart. It holds all of the products a customer is planning to buy. The customer can add multiple products to their cart or remove products at any time. After the customer is finished shopping, they can click on their shopping cart and begin the checkout process.



Checkout

During the checkout process, the customer enters their billing and shipping information. E-commerce stores use a **payment service provider**, which is a secure way to process transactions online.

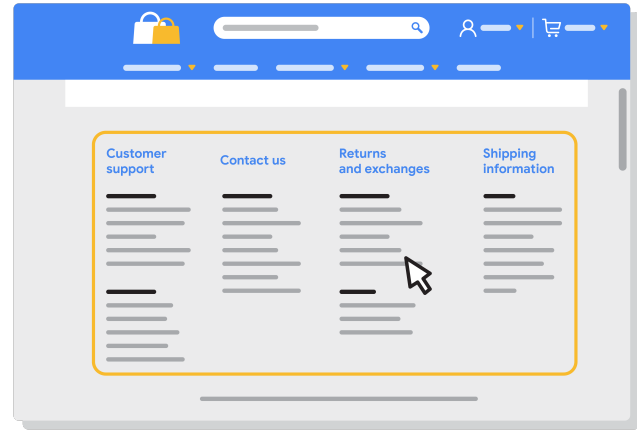
If the customer has already created an account with the store, they can sign in to their account before checkout. This offers a faster checkout option, since the customer's address and other information automatically populates in the required fields.

Help and support

E-commerce stores also include options for customers who may need help or support during or after the buying process. For example, the store might include a chat function so that customers can ask questions and receive answers online. There are often multiple ways to contact customer service and find all help resources.

Typically, the store's website also includes links to helpful information, such as frequently asked questions (FAQs), return and exchange policies, shipping policies, contact information, and details about the company and their values.

Links to these pages are often included in the **footer**, which is a navigation section at the bottom of the website. It includes a collection of links to other pages within the website. These are often supporting pages, such as customer support and services, policies, and information about the company.



Key takeaways

An e-commerce store should include several basic elements that customers expect to find on almost any e-commerce site they visit. This makes it easier for customers to navigate an e-commerce store, find the help or information they need, and complete their purchase.

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