eCommerce Architecture Best Practices

An eCommerce website may have everything. But if it doesn't have structure, it will hardly have traffic and sales.

Today, I am going to teach you a 10-step process on how to improve your online store's architecture. You may choose to do one or more of the steps. You don't need to do everything. You just need to consider having an organized structure for your website for higher ranking and sales.

Why You Should Create a Good Ecommerce Architecture

Having a good website architecture has its advantages. Here are some of them.

It Makes Your Site Easier to Index and Rank

Search engines depend on structure to discover all the pages in your website. Without structure, there is always a risk of leaving some pages unindexed. This is the reason why submitting a sitemap is very important especially if you have a big eCommerce website. But more than the sitemap, the structure of your website should be easy to understand for better indexing and rankings.

It Makes Your Site Easier to Navigate

A good structure is not only good for the search engines. It is also good for your customers. Nothing is as scary to customers as not finding

what they are looking for. And if you don't give them what they want in

the moment that they need it, they will click 'back' and look somewhere else. Therefore, it is your responsibility to have a website with a good structure. With a good structure, your customers can easily click through categories or navigation links to go where they want to go.

Google Featured Snippets

There has been much talk about Google Featured Snippets. These are the bits of information that you immediately see at the top of the page when you search for something. For example, if you search for 'Brad Pitt Birthday', you will not be directed to a list of sites. The search engines will 'answer' your question with a set of snippets.
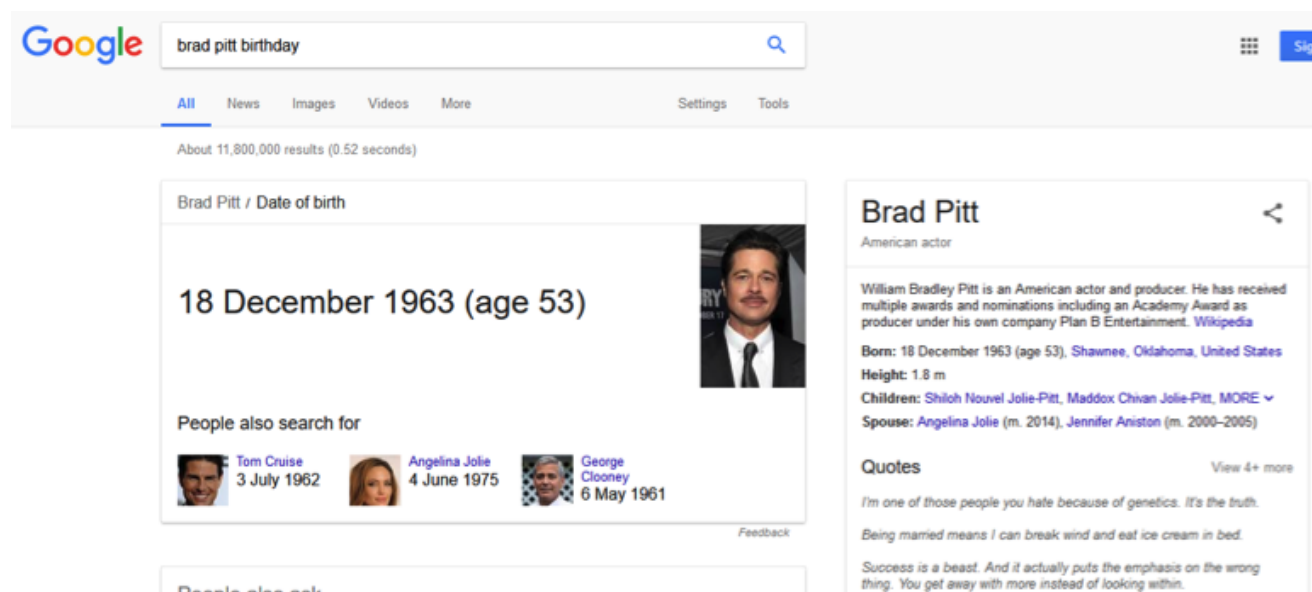
A lot of search engine optimization enthusiasts are now looking into snippets because of their ability to zoom to the top of the search engines. As long as your snippet is featured, you no longer need to 'work your way up' the search engines. You'll immediately be on top.

However, search engine robots are only able to index snippets based on URL structures. So if your website doesn't have a good structure, you'll generally have a lower chance of getting featured.

Now that you know the importance of having a good website architecture. Let's proceed to the 'how'.

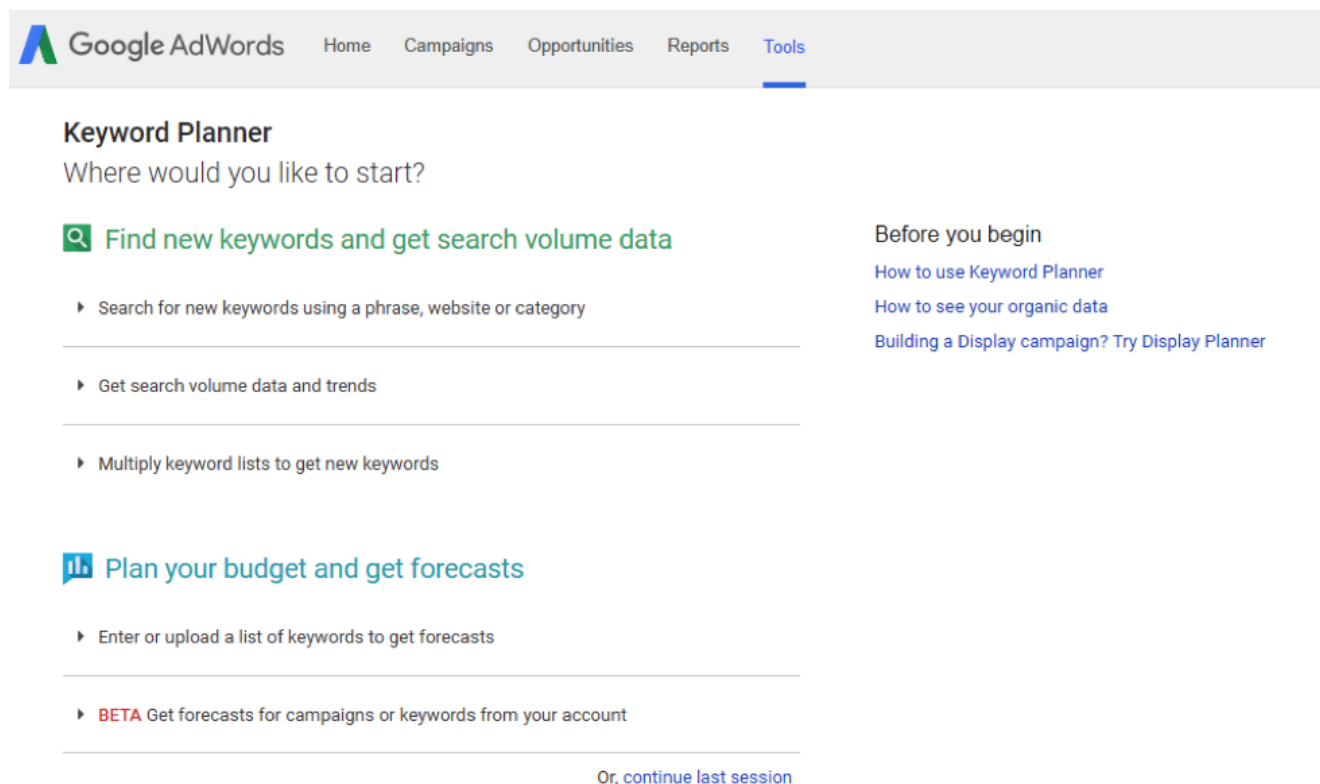**How to Create a Good Ecommerce Website Architecture - 10 Tips**

This article contains 10 ways on how you can improve your website architecture. You don't need to do everything. In fact, doing one can already improve your architecture in an instant. The key is to take these factors into account as you create your eCommerce website.

1. Determine Your Target Keywords

You simply cannot skip to the structure right away. You need to know what you are optimizing the structure for. For that, you'll need some keywords.
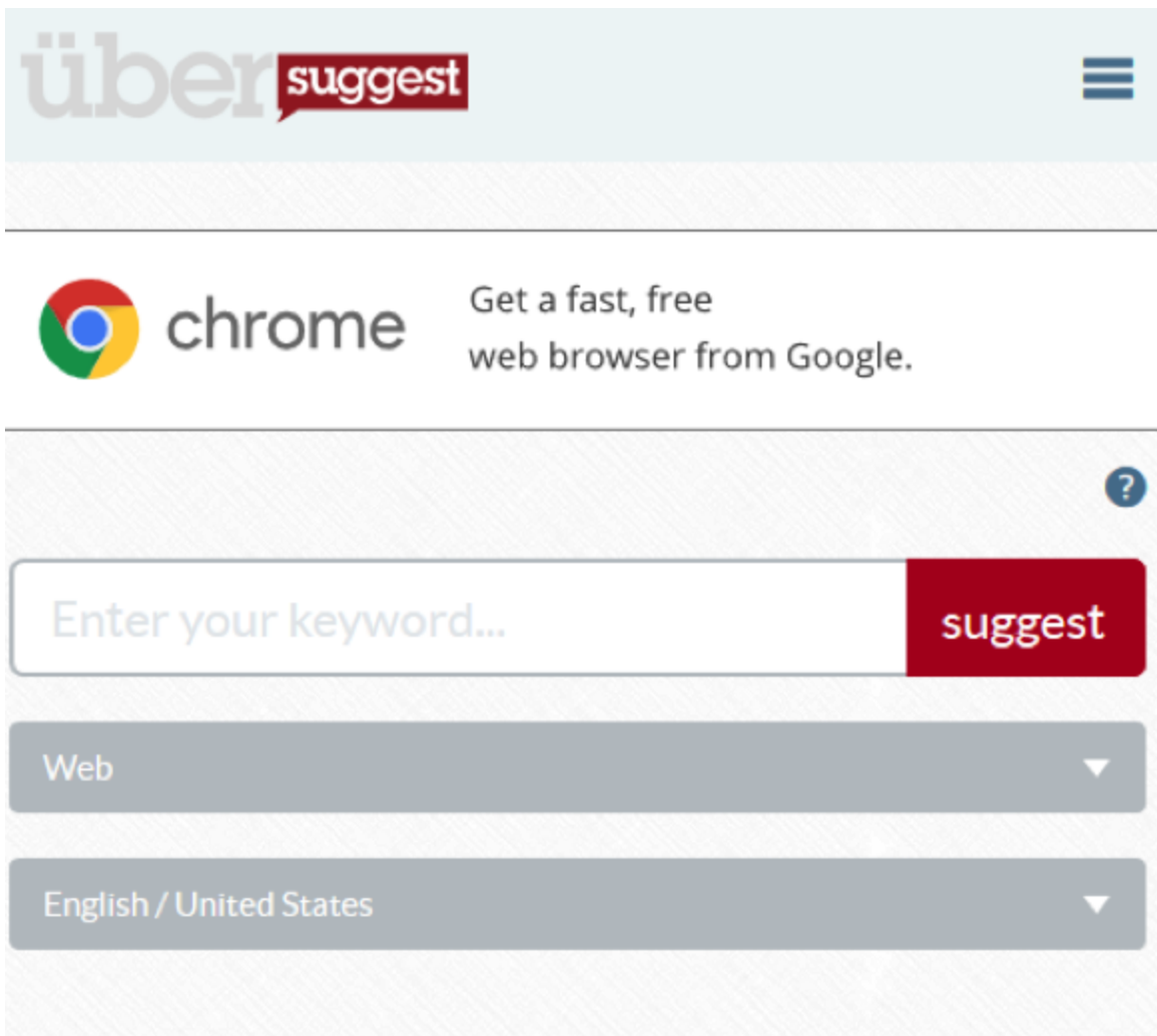
There are many ways to uncover some target keywords.

First, you can get other keywords from your seed keyword or from a website URL. A good tool for this is Google Keyword Planner.
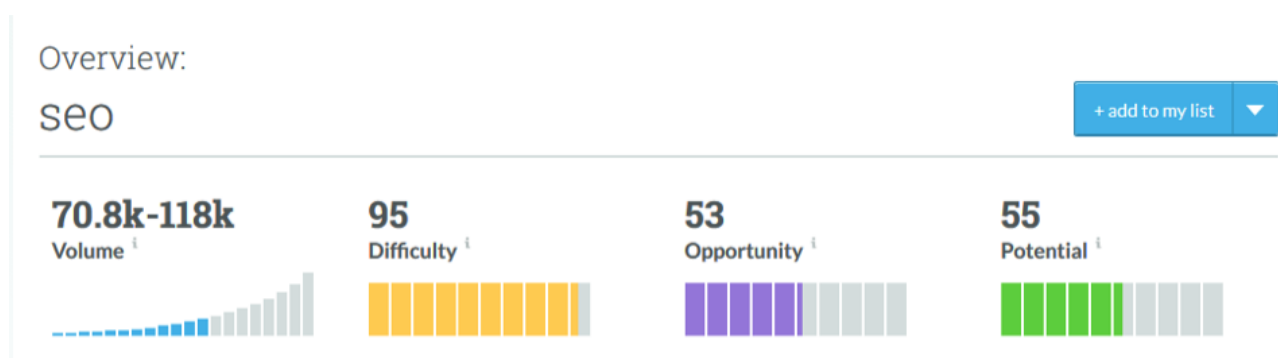

Then, you can also use a seed keyword and get other keywords from that. You can use a free tool such as Ubersuggest for that.

There are other tools that you can use such as Moz and Spyfu. I think that these tools can give you more insights on your keywords and may help you select the right keyword to target.

As a rule, I tend to go for keywords with a considerable amount of volume (1,000-10,000 is fine) and relatively low competition. This way, I know that I am targeting keywords that I have a chance to rank for. From here, I proceed with the next step.

2. Sort Your Keywords into Product Names and Categories

If keywords will only remain as mere words, they will not help you rank

for anything. It is with this reason that you have to transform them into product names and categories. In this section, you'll learn about the types of keywords that you should use for your categories and product names.

For categories, I generally go for medium-tail keywords. These are keywords that has 2-3 words. Note that I am limiting it to 2-3 words. Don't go over that for 4 words is just too many.

Q: Should you Use Brands for Keywords?

If it is relevant to your products, YES. It will also help your customers find the products that they are looking for. This is very effective in some niche (ex. Skin Care Products) where brand is very important.

Take Sephora for example. They sell some skin care products. While they have a navigation bar that includes the types of products, they also have a 'Brands' option in their top navigation. When a customer visits this, he is taken to a page that lists the available brands in alphabetical order.
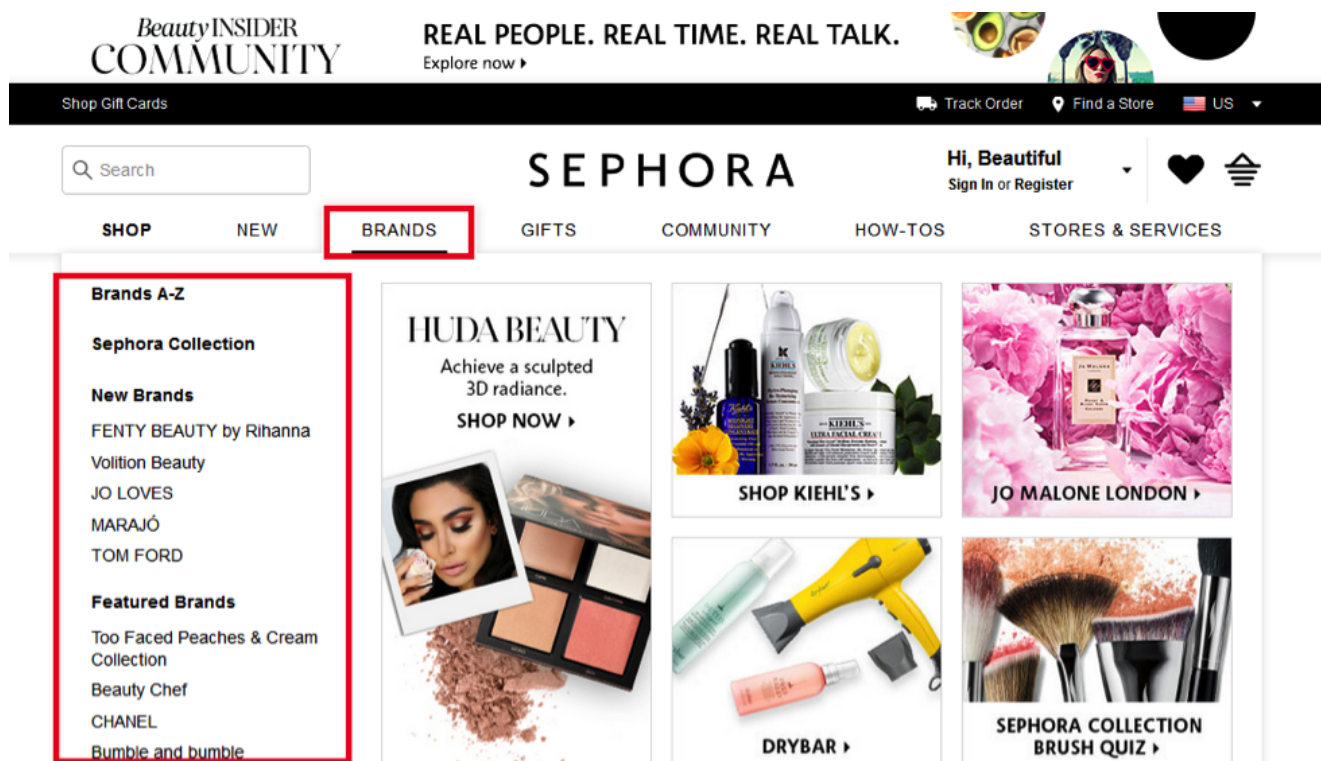
How about the long tail keywords that you have discovered? Don't

worry. I got you covered. You can use that for your product names. However, be sure to limit your product names to a maximum of 6 words. Anything more than that is just way too complicated to be indexed by the search engines.

3. Plan Your Website's Structure

You cannot proceed with tweaking your website structure without a plan. If you do that, you'll be like a gunman without a target - You'll just be shooting bullets everywhere.

To create a plan, it may be best to write (or type) everything so that you can clearly see your website pages. It doesn't need to include every page but it must include all of the major pages in your website. For example, you can put product pages and category pages together. But you must treat the About Page, Delivery Page, Blog and Contact Page separately.

It may help to really get down and look at the main pages that you want to have in your site. List everything that you need. Then, plan how the links will go. Plan the links on each major page and all the automated links in your product pages.

Then, draw it. Your architectural plan should contain an image overview of how your website will look like and it should uncover if there are links hidden deep within your structure.

Now, drawing a website architecture plan may take some time. But it is worth the effort. You must take the time to discover your linking habits. This way, you'll know how your website architecture looks like to the search engines and to your customers.

4. Insert Keywords in Product Page Links

Now that you have your keywords, it is time to put them inside your website. The first place for this is your product page.

But before you can do that, you must first clean your permalinks. These are the links that are appended to your domain. It is surprising that

there are so many eCommerce websites with unclean permalinks. When really, cleaning it is as easy as changing the link from a random letter or number combination to an actual keyword.

For Wordpress users, changing the permalink is as easy as going to Settings > Permalinks. This may apply to eCommerce website owners who operate their stores on Wordpress (ex. WooCommerce). For Shopify, you don't need to worry so much about permalinks for they are not in the product pages. It is in the Shopping Cart. For that, you don't have to worry about tweaking it for it is okay that it is unique.

With permalinks ready, it is time to edit the keywords in your product pages. One of the simplest ways to do this is to do the 'Dash Method'.

What's the Dash Method? This is where you string a stream of keywords with dashes. So instead of putting 'actionfigures' in your link, you put 'action-figures'. You get the idea.

However, it is important to note that links can only be up to 70 characters. Anything more than that would already be too confusing for the search engines to index or rank. Rankings depend on URL length after all. It may help to remove categories as well as product ranges and variants in the actual URL just to shorten it.
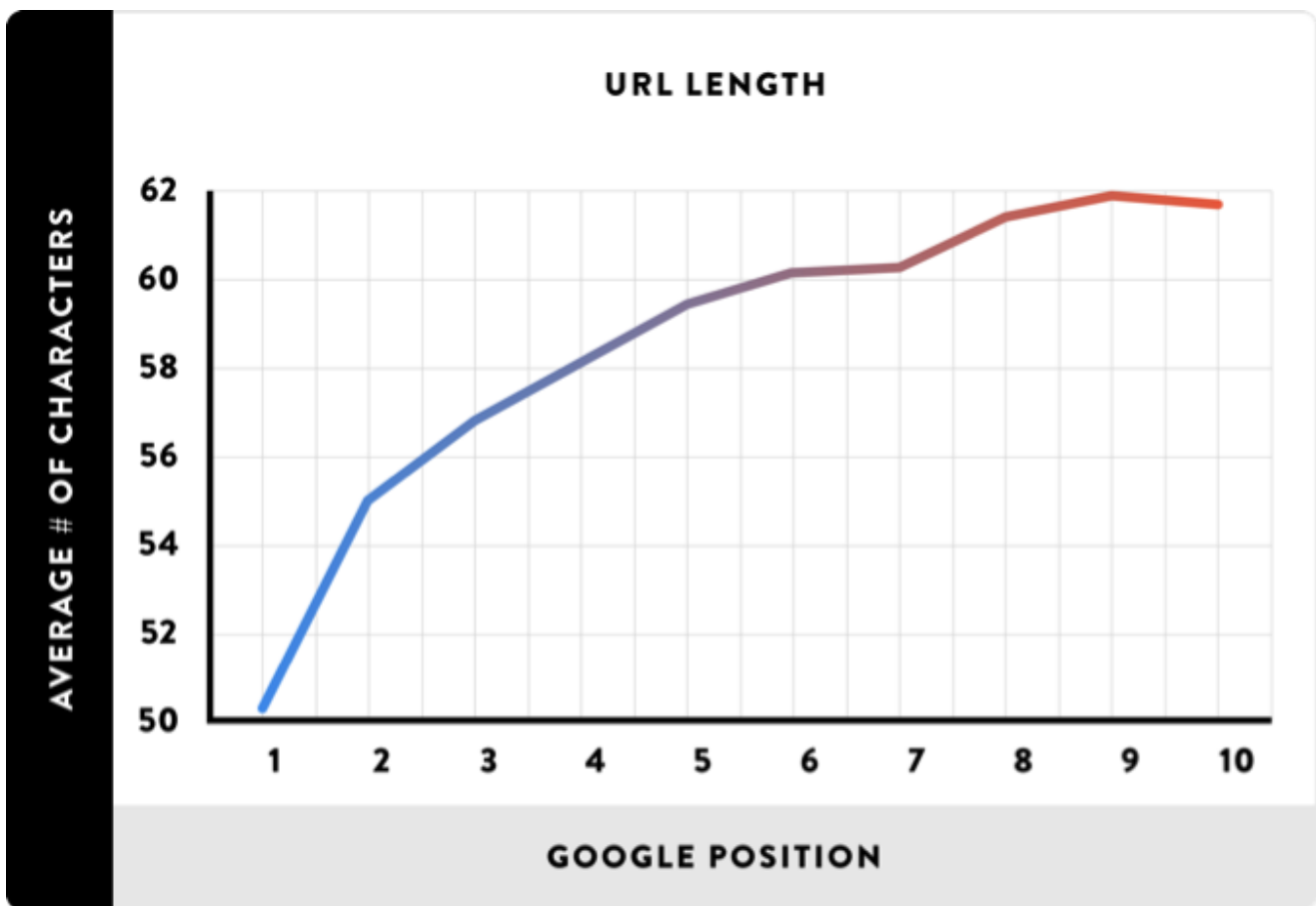
5. Insert Keywords in Navigation Links

More than product pages, you should also include your keywords in your navigation links. It is not just for the search engines. It is also for your customers. Ideally, you'll want your customers to be able to see your product types and brands in one place.
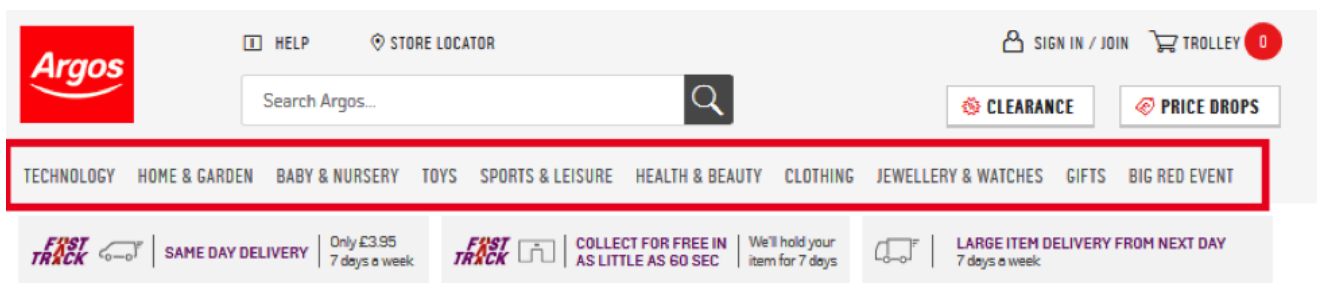
For this, you may need to decide on a few things.

First, you will need to decide if you'll have a straight or threaded navigation. Straight navigation only have general categories while threaded navigation have sub-categories. Both has its pros and cons. Straight navigation allows you to have all of the categories out in the

open. But it can limit you to choosing only a few keywords. Threaded

navigation, on the other hand, can help you target some longtails. But some of your keywords can get drowned because you are already using too many keywords. The choice is up to you.
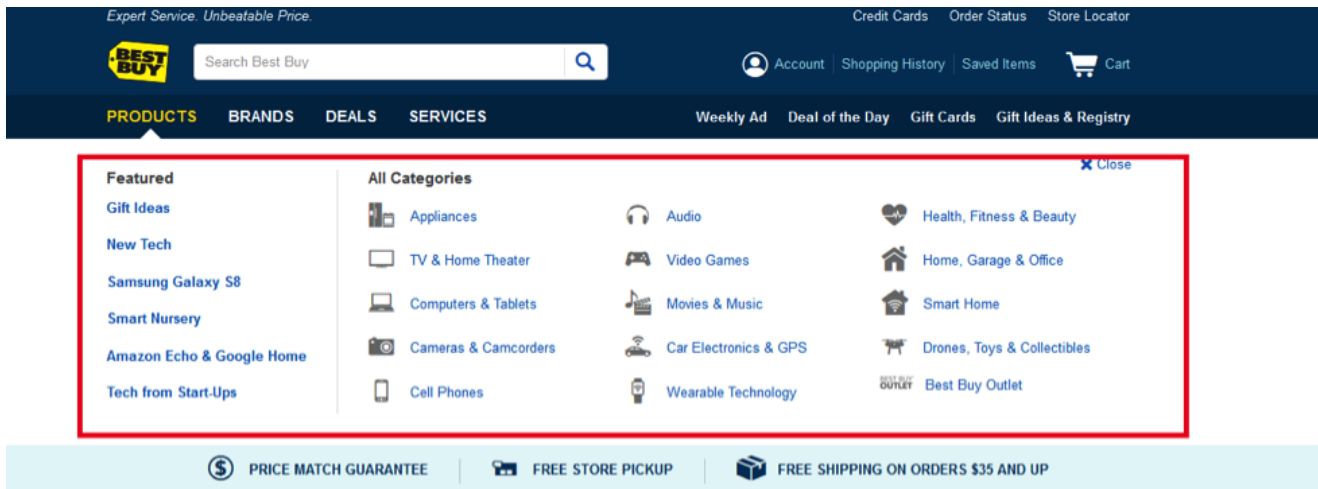
Next, you also need to decide on the design of the navigation. Will you use text or include images? Some popular eCommerce websites include product images in their navigation because it is more enticing for their customers. However, it may not be a good choice for SEO. Again, it is up to you.

Lasly, you should choose your keywords with care. Remember that you can only put a few chosen keywords in your navigation bar. Be sure to choose the keywords that properly describe your products.

6. Don't Forget Breadcrumbs

Another place where keywords play a vital role is in breadcrumbs,

Breadcrumbs are the links that you see on the top of the page when you are shopping. It usually includes a general keyword followed by a more specific category or product name.

Take this for example. The general category is Home and Garden followed by Kitchen Electricals. This is then followed by Food and Drink Preparations, Blenders and Smoothie Makers and the actual product name.

FAST TRACK | SAME DAY DELIVERY | Only £3.95 / 7 days a week   FAST TRACK | COLLECT FOR FREE IN AS LITTLE AS 60 SEC | We'll hold your item for 7 days   LARGE ITEM DELIVERY FROM NEXT DAY / 7 days a week

‹ Home and garden   ‹ Kitchen electricals   ‹ Food and drink preparation   ‹ Blenders and smoothie makers   ‹ Simple Value Jug Blender – White.

Breadcrumbs are important because it gives customers tons of options. If they don't like a particular product and is decided on buying some blenders, they just need to click on that category and they will immediately be taken to that page. And if they change their minds and just want to explore other products, they can easily go back to the general 'Home and Garden' category.

Again, keywords are very important in this area. You should make it a point that all of the categories in your breadcrumbs area contain your major keywords. This will make it easier for your customers to find the product that they are looking for and for the search engines to index your product pages.

NOTE: It may be best to stick with 2 to 3 words for breadcrumb navigation links. As you can see, the categories can get very confusing once they are put alongside each other. Limiting it to 2 to 3 words will give you more space for other categories in your breadcrumbs area.

7. Pages are Better than Infinite Scrolling

Infinite scrolling has become quite popular. Most of it is due to the popularity of mobile surfing. It was obvious that mobile Internet usage is slowly catching up to desktop Internet usage back in 2014. But no one expected it to beat desktop in 2015. Today, more and more people are now using Internet through their mobile phones.

Average Daily Internet Usage by Device (in hours)
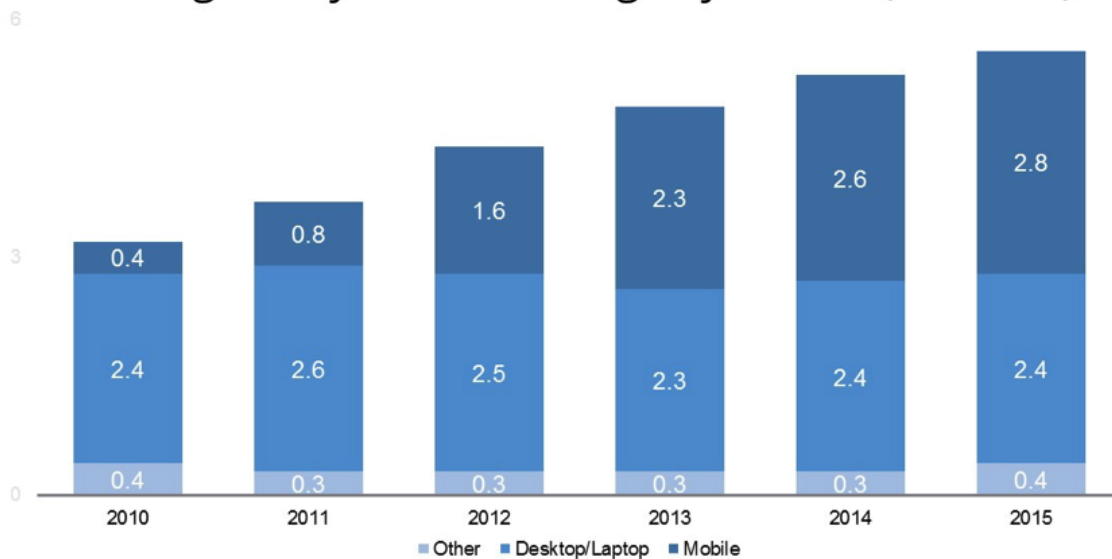
But this doesn't mean that infinite scrolling is better. When it comes to eCommerce websites, pagination is still better when it comes to organizing your website architecture and for SEO.

What is pagination? It is where you organize your product pages in a way that has 'previous' or 'older' pages in the structure. You'll often see product pages in the bottom of the page like the one below.

- 24 of 74 in Front-Loading Washers

As you can see, the pages are in the bottom and it gives the customer the chance to 'browse' through the list of products. This gives the customer a chance to click back and 'find' the product that they like. There is a chance for them to go back instead of 'losing' the product as they scroll infinitely.

The biggest eCommerce websites are still using pagination. In fact, the image above came from BestBuy - one of the biggest eCommerce websites online. This shows that it is still a better choice compared to infinite scrolling.

How can you implement pagination in your website? That's easy. For most eCommerce platforms, pagination is automatic for product pages. But for others (Collections or some categories for instance), you may need to implement a code in order to activate pagination. For Shopify users, you can go to to know about how to have pagination in your website.>span class="Apple-converted-space">

8. Use the Power of Internal Linking

You should improve your internal links for the benefit of your customers and the search engines.
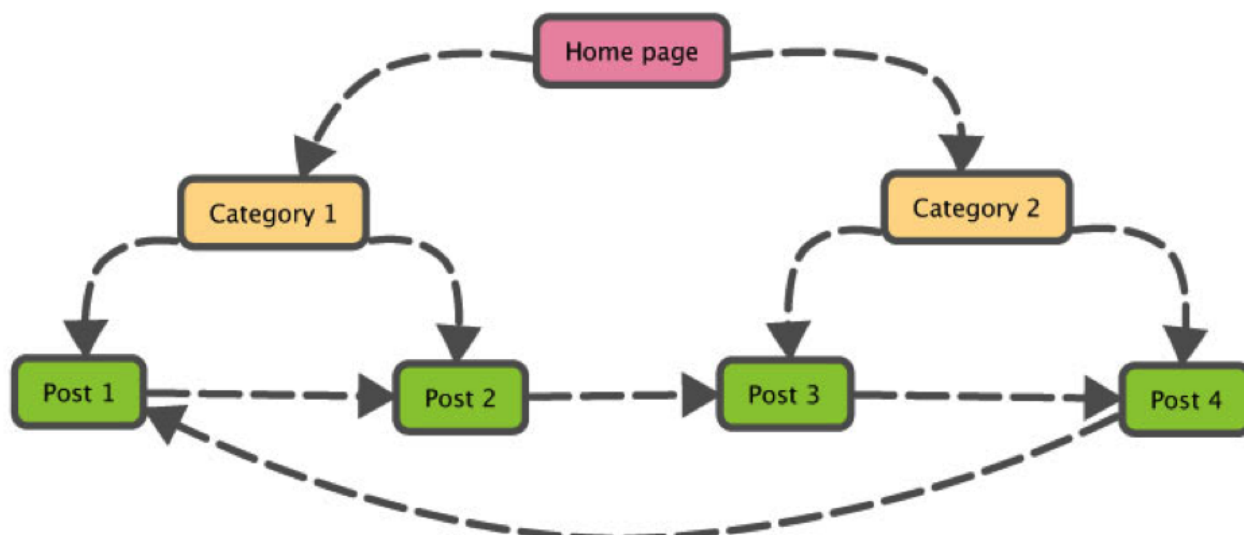
First, it can help your customers find what they are looking for. With user-friendly links, your customers can easily find products through the navigation bar as well as discover related products in the bottom of your product pages. Because of this, internal linking as the ability to increase your overall pageviews and time on site because customers get to 'discover' new pages in your website.

Second, it can help search engines determine what your website is all about. With properly labeled internal links, you'll be able to include your keywords in the anchor texts of your internal links. This will help the search engines relate that particular keyword to a particular page in your website.

There are different types of internal links. The most obvious are navigation links. However, you should not limit yourself to navigation links when you think about internal linking because this includes other types of links inside your site as well.

A creative way to have internal links is to do two things.

First, you should have related products for every product listing. This will give your customers other products to explore as they shop.

Another way is to have some lists. Having a bestsellers list or a top 10 list will encourage customers to weigh their options before buying. It can be good content for your website and may help you sell more products in the process.

9. Solidify your Website Architecture with External Linking

However, you should not limit yourself to internal links. External links are more important after all. External links can do a lot in terms of discovery and SEO. Thus, it can help drive more traffic and sales to your website.

An external link can be defined as any link that points to your website that is located in another domain. These are important for SEO for they act as 'votes' for a particular keyword. If the link has the target keyword, then the search engines will eventually rank the said website higher than others for that keyword. More than SEO, it helps promote your site to other people. As your website accumulate more external links, more and more people will discover you and you'll get more traffic.

However, getting external links is not as easy as it was before. You can no longer go out there sprinkling your URLs all over free-to-link websites. That will simply not work.

Today, you must also plan how you will do your linking. For this, you may need to create a link structure similar to your internal architecture.

But for this to work, you must have something worth linking to. It is not enough to just have another eCommerce store. No one will link to you if you are just merely selling something. You need to offer something special that goes beyond what other websites are offering for people to recognize your site and link to you.

PRO TIP: It may help to look at the external links of your competitors. You can do this by using a link research tool like Ahrefs.

You can just plug in a URL and track its backlinks. You can do this if your store is new and you want to build some links in a particular niche. Simply plug in a popular website in the niche and discover thousands of websites that you can get backlinks from. Pretty neat, right?

10. Prevent Duplicate Content with Canonical Tags

Here's a not-so-secret tip: Search engines hate duplicate content. As much as most marketers know that, they still commit the sin of having hundreds of similar pages on their website. Why do they do this? Well, it is easy to commit this 'sin' if you are in the eCommerce field.

Take product pages for instance. They are often copied and pasted. Only the name of the product, its description and its image is changed. And if you're unlucky, you may even see that the description is the same with other websites. Most eCommerce website owners simply dismiss this as 'normal' and that's where the penalties occur.

Fortunately, you can use some canonical tags. In using this, you'll get to credit the original content.

Using it is easy. Simply add a canonical relationship to your URLs like this:

That's it.

NOTE: You may need to do this for more than just product pages. Remember that you may have also 'copied' your delivery policy, privacy

policy and others. So be sure to check that as well.

Conclusion

A website is ultimately a structure of pages. Like a book, you should know which should go first and which should go last. But a website is more than a chronological arrangement of pages. It can be quite dynamic. For this, you'll need a diagram. But you must ensure that the structure and links are intact so that your customers and search engine robots can easily navigate your site.