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## What To Do About Runaway E-Shoppers

By Jennifer LeClaire  
July 3, 2007 11:16AM

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**If you look at the shopping cart optimization issue, you'll notice a trend: Reducing abandonment rates starts with the quality of traffic you are attracting, says Aaron Grey, executive solutions architect at WebTrends. If you are attracting visitors to your site who have a low propensity to purchase, then you are going to have abandonment problems.**

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» Shopping cart abandonment. It's hardly a new storyline, but it seems no matter how often tech news reporters spotlight the topic there remains an enormous number of e-commerce venues that devour the information.

That's because the problem is still a significant and costly one.

According to a September 2006 MarketingSherpa report, the average shopping cart abandonment rate is 59.8 percent. That means more than half of customers who placed items in their virtual buggies had at least some intention to pay up in the checkout line. But, for whatever reason, they changed their minds mid-stream.

"If only 10 percent of the shopping carts were left behind, the loss to business would be substantial. At 60 percent, the loss must be astronomical," said Eugene Fram, the J. Warren McClure research

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professor of marketing in Rochester Institute of Technology's (RIT) E. Philip Saunders College of Business. Thus, it's no surprise that shopping cart optimization remains a major focus for Internet retailers.

**Shopper Profiling**

Web analytics offers clues that e-tailers can use to optimize shopping carts so that customers can get through the process quickly, with full confidence in the [security](#) of the transaction. Of course, finalizing the sale depends on more than just a user-friendly shopping cart design. Ultimately, closing the sale depends on drilling down to the needs of each individual user. Web analytics has the power to do just that.

"A key trend today is drilling down to a unique visitor, honing in on a particular person, so that the retailer can learn more about [that visitor] and begin to build a one-to-one, ongoing relationship with that person," said Tim Kopp, chief marketing officer at WebTrends, a Web analytics and marketing performance-management [software](#) provider. This approach is much different, Kopp said, than optimizing the shopping cart at a static point in time based on a general sample of the visiting population.

Since the profile of your customers changes over time, there is always room for improvement. But improving shopping cart abandonment rates begins before the visitor ever gets to the shopping cart, Kopp argued. It begins with marketing campaigns, landing page designs and even widget designs. That makes it vital to understand consumer behavior at each phase of their visit so that by the time they get to the checkout line, the chances

of abandoning the sale are already dramatically reduced. [\(continued...\)](#)

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### Examining the Data






If you look at the shopping cart optimization issue from 10,000 feet, you'll notice a trend: Reducing abandonment rates starts with the quality of traffic you are attracting, according to Aaron Grey, executive solutions architect at WebTrends. If you are attracting visitors to your site who have a low propensity to purchase, then you are going to have abandonment problems from the get-go.

Your Web analytics software can show you, for example, if the visitor stayed less than 20 seconds before moving on to the next site. If you see that pattern emerging, then it's likely that the keywords you have chosen for your search engine marketing campaign are drawing the wrong traffic. It is also possible that the keywords you are choosing don't accurately describe what you are selling.

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Another common culprit for shopping cart abandonment, he explained, is when shoppers put multiple products in the cart to compare prices and shipping costs. That typically happens when the site doesn't offer the ability to do those calculations before the customer gets into the cart. That issue can be resolved with a widget that lets customers do the math up front.

It could also be that the site loads too slow or that the shipping charges were too high, or even that the post office would take too long to deliver it. It could be that the lack of a privacy policy or a return policy posted on the site caused the visitor to question the wisdom of the purchase. It may even be that the customer simply had a change of heart. Indeed, there is a laundry list of reasons why customers abandon the cart.

Whether it's ill-chosen keywords or some other issue, Web analytics can help you identify negative trends. However, it's up to you to dissect the data and take measured steps to make changes. "You have to begin to ask questions so you can understand what that visitor behavior means or what the visitor intent is behind the data," Grey said.

**Overcoming Their Fears**

The visitor's intent may be to protect his or her identity. Sixty-five percent of online shoppers have abandoned a shopping cart or failed to complete an online purchase because they didn't get a sense of security and trust when it came time to provide payment information, according to an August 2006 report from VeriSign.

Professor Fram of the Rochester Institute of Technology believes vendors and

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service providers in the security and e-commerce industries need to do a better job collectively of alleviating fears for the sake of individual retailers. "While the actual potential for security problems is modest, this information needs to be circulated more publicly to reduce consumer fears," Fram explained. "This obviously should have some positive impact on the high rate of shopping cart abandonment. The industry cannot depend on the mass media to do the job."

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At the individual e-tailer level, though, you can post reassurances about privacy, security seals, and offer multiple payment options that give customers more comfort. In fact, a Quality Research Associates poll indicates sellers who accept four payment types, such as credit cards, debit cards, online checks and services like PayPal, have higher conversion rates than those who offer a single payment method. Conversely, asking for too much personal information in the shopping cart forms may make the shopper feel less secure about doing business with you.






### Ease of Use

Of course, for all the other strategies, cart design is still a factor and optimizing cart design should not be an abandoned thought. If the checkout process is confusing to your grandma, then your process isn't user friendly enough. Before

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you begin optimizing your shopping cart, be sure to collect Key Performance Indicators such as "cart competition rate," "checkout completion rate," and "ratio of checkout starts to cart starts." You can't measure your improvement if you don't know where you started.

"Navigation that 'is really cool' to a designer or Web programmer is often incomprehensible for online shoppers," said Susan Daffron, co-author of *Web Business Success*. "Avoid the temptation to include overly flashy, bandwidth-hogging bells and whistles. Some people may be using slow connections and even those on broadband often cite slow response time as a prime reason for 'bailing out' of a shopping site."

You should also streamline the checkout process by using as few steps as possible and experts recommend using a progress indicator to let the visitor to know what to expect next in a step-by-step process. Making it easy for customers to change the quantity and using thumbnail images of items in the cart to remind customers what's in there are also winning strategies for reducing shopping cart abandonment. Of course, all sites are different and there is no one overarching strategy. That's where Web analytics come into play.

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### Straight To the Source

One of the best ways to optimize your shopping cart, of course, is to ask customers why they abandoned the sale. WebTrends can trigger a survey that asks the visitors just that. "These surveys give you the opportunity to actually understand what the visitor's intent was," Grey said. "If they were just comparison shopping, then you may need to make some changes that help them get the information they need prior to putting the products in the cart."






Finally, you can leverage Web analytics to trigger marketing events. For example, when someone abandons a sale, you could capture an otherwise lost customer by sending an offer to come back for a special deal.

"Web analytics vendors have a few more tools in the bag to help reduce

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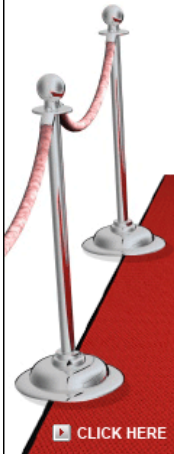
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abandonment rates today," WebTrends' Kopp said. "The fundamentals are still important, but now we can take it a step further by understanding the intent behind the abandonment and approaching optimization with fresh eyes."

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**Network Security Spotlight****U.S. Government Struggles with Data Security**

U.S. Federal Agencies have the unenviable task of striking a constant balance: Keeping top-secret data under lock and key while ensuring that employees maintain a reasonable degree of access.

**IE Plus Firefox Equals Security Breach**

Microsoft's Internet Explorer, used on a machine with the Mozilla Foundation's Firefox browser installed, can create a pass-along security breach, according to security researchers.

**Microsoft's Patch Tuesday Fixes Enterprise Bugs**

Another month, another Patch Tuesday. Microsoft issued six security updates to patch 11 vulnerabilities -- eight of the bugs critical -- in its latest monthly release.

**Enterprise Hardware Spotlight**



#### Dell Introduces New Small-Business PCs

Dell is launching a new line of notebook and desktop personal computers called "Vostro" -- a Latin word meaning "yours" -- that are aimed at small businesses with 25 or fewer employees.



#### Dell Planning a Big Asian Invasion

Dell expects shipments of personal computers, notebooks and servers in Asia excluding China, Japan and South Korea to grow almost 20 percent in 2007 compared with the previous year.



#### Toshiba Fights Back in Next-Gen DVD Battle

While the European Commission investigates possible anticompetitive practices by supporters of the Blu-ray format, the HD DVD camp is trumpeting new features and a price cut on players.

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