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Ecommerce Product Catalogue Structure

BEST PRACTICE



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1.

Introduction



Products are at the centre of an ecommerce store structure. Your products are what customers are looking for, and the reason they visit your online store. However, the Information architecture (the way your products are organised) of your ecommerce website is critical to your website making a single online order.

The structure of your product catalogue is vital for visitors to find products, either within the website or through external search engines. As a direct result, a great product catalogue is built on the following basic principles:

- Website Navigation - How do visitors discover products on your online store?
- Website Search - Can users find relevant products using the site search?
- Product Filtering - Can people narrow down search results to get to relevant products?
- Scalability - Can the store be scaled up or down based on how it's structured?
- SEO - Do you list enough product information to allow users to find your products using search engines?

1.1 Start with the product but think about the user

Best practice for building an ecommerce product catalogue dictates that there's a clear understanding and distinction between product categories, product attributes, promotions and landing pages. As well as that, there needs to be a clear distinction between product search, filtering & sorting. A lack of understanding of these concepts can easily lead to creating a mess instead of a clear structure.



2.

Product Catalogue Structure



2.1 Product Pages

Product pages will hold all the information related to an actual product, from attributes, images and product information, to technical details, customer reviews, FAQs or shipping information. A product page and the information it holds is vital to convince visitors to buy the product and offer clear calls to action to direct them further in the buying journey.

2.2 Product Categories

The correct terminology for the labels used to define product categories is taxonomy, a term used for an unambiguous concept, restrictive & authoritative. Taxonomy is governed by policies for who, when & how new terms can be added. It is most of the time arranged in a hierarchical structure, and facilitates findability in both browsing and searching.

In e-commerce each product category or department can be hierarchical, typically 3-4 levels deep, containing multiple sub-categories per level. Category ordering should not necessarily be alphabetical, but rather popular or logical, aligned to the users mental model.

To easily distinguish categories from product attributes, think of category taxonomies as product types, items or nouns.

2.3 Product Attributes

Facets (the traditional term for product attributes) are used to narrow category sets that are similar and support the same characteristics. They work well for retail products that are sufficiently similar (all shoes, all luggage, all laptops). Attributes or facets appear at lower, more specific category levels, or after executing a search.

To easily distinguish attributes from category taxonomies, think of attributes as product characteristics or adjectives.

2.4 Promotions

Sales Promotions are a set of marketing activities undertaken to boost sales of a product or category of products. In e-commerce, a promotion might consist of a group of products with a special discount, deal or offer applied to them. They are neither taxonomies or categories, nor attributes.

A website might have categories dedicated to holding products that have promotions applied to them, or it might use custom landing pages to hold promotions.



2.5 Landing Pages

SEO best practice for e-commerce includes highly optimised landing pages that will either drive traffic or act as “scent” key points in a user’s journey to discover products and convert.

Category landing pages are set against product category taxonomies and are important especially at the top level of a hierarchy to guide users on their product discovery process.

Custom landing pages can be used to hold promotional information and/ or products, as well as product groups that need to be featured.

2.6 Brand Pages

“Brand” should always be an attribute rather than a category. It should be defined as a characteristic of multiple product types. For example, a fragrance and a lipstick can share a brand attribute. Custom landing pages could be used as brand pages to list products and brand specific information.

2.7 PRO Tips

1. Distinguish a product category or sub-category (products, things, items) from product attributes (characteristics, descriptions, adjectives). Ask yourself: Are there other products on the website with the same characteristic / adjective?
2. Differentiate categorisation methods for multiple categories (*Women Shoes in Women's Clothing* and in *Shoes*) and category crossovers (*Home Theatre in TV / Video* and in *Audio / Stereo*)
3. Differentiate between brand pages, promotion or product category pages to keep the catalogue structure clean and scalable.
4. Use product attributes sets to filter and narrow down the search to relevant products.
5. Differentiate sort options (A-Z, Price ascending / descending, Show products/ page) from attribute Filters (Size, Colour, Brand) in the page hierarchy.
6. Use search by multiple categories, attributes, brands, promotions directly into search bar to shorten the user journey to relevant products.
7. Use quick filters on search results page to shorten the user journey to relevant products.