

Key Considerations in Changing Your Shopping Cart Software

By Geoff Ford. July 09, 2005.

Your current shopping cart software not cutting it? Time to change? Considering osCommerce as the software for your new and improved online store?

This article will discuss a few of the key issues related to changing your shopping cart software and migrating your site from one system to another.

Be clear why you are changing!

Firstly, it is important to get clear in your mind why you want to change your site. This should ultimately guide the change. You want to make sure your new site is indeed better than your old. This information is also useful for your developer. It will give them a clear understanding of what you want and need.

If your existing site has been having problems, **identify the main problem or problems** you are trying to solve.

If your existing site works fine, **identify the key improvements** you would like to make that are motivating your choice to change.

Next you should get clear in your mind what it is you **don't like** about your existing site. Don't stop there though. Think what you **do like** about your existing site. Get clear in your mind what improvements could be made and what you don't want to lose. Think about different aspects of your site, including:

- usability for customers and yourself
- how it looks
- specific ways to browse/search/choose products
- specific features related to operation of the store
- how your site encourages your customers to purchase

Attitude's osCommerce Business Series

key_considerations_changing_cart.pdf

Download from:

<http://www.oscommerce.co.nz/docs/>

For osCommerce installation, customization and support, contact **Attitude.**

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Introduction

Your current shopping cart software not cutting it? Time to change?

Considering osCommerce as the software for your new and improved online store?

- **Be clear why you are changing**
- **Evaluate osCommerce**
- **Practical considerations**
- **Invite your customers to your new store**



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Make sure you think about your customers as you consider changing your site.

- What problems do they have?
- What would your customer like improved?
- What don't they like?
- What do they like?

If you haven't received feedback from customers already that helps answer these questions, make sure you ask some of your favorite customers what they think. If you don't have an easy way to contact customers for feedback (perhaps that is a problem with your old site!), take the time to look at your site from their perspective. A simple way is to imagine you are a new visitor to your site and you are looking for a particular product. Imagine you are this visitor as you attempt to find the product and make a purchase.

Evaluate osCommerce

If you are clear what your reasons for changing are, and you know what you want to achieve with a change, then the next step is to evaluate osCommerce with this in mind. Does osCommerce support the features you require or solve the problems you are having? Will it allow you to keep what you like about your existing site and improve what you don't like?

There are a few ways to answer these important questions:

1. Check out our osCommerce Review at <http://www.oscommerce.co.nz/oscommerce-review.html>. This provides an overview of osCommerce and its main functionality.
2. Try osCommerce! Go to <http://www.oscommerce.co.nz/oscommerce-demonstration.html> and check out some osCommerce Demonstration Stores for yourself. While the standard install might not look or function exactly how you want, it does give you an indication of the major functionality.
3. Ask someone! A developer, like Attitude, who has experience with osCommerce installation, support and customization can answer many of your questions. You may also know other store owners who are using osCommerce and can tell you about their experience with the software.

You may find that the standard osCommerce install does not support the functionality you would like. Fortunately osCommerce is flexible and customizable. There are many excellent contributions, developed by the community of osCommerce users, which expand the features of osCommerce. In the absence of a quality contribution, an experienced developer can customize osCommerce to your requirements. Again a developer is useful at this point to help you evaluate various options for customization, including installation of contributions.



Practical Considerations

After establishing that osCommerce will meet the needs of you and your customers it is time to consider a few practical considerations.

Finding a developer

If you haven't done so already, find a developer who has experience with osCommerce. If you have the necessary skills to do it yourself, remember there is time involved with any change like this. Unless your store is just a hobby and you have plenty of time, it may be useful to have someone more experienced as a backup for support or for more complex changes.

Allowing time for change

Timing is important. Allow you and your developer adequate time for the change. Also, think about having the change finished well in advance of busy selling periods such as Christmas. Avoid trying to make major changes during these times. Be prepared well in advance and always allow adequate time for testing.

Managing the changes

Related to timing, it is good to establish which changes are required before you can go live with your new osCommerce site and which can be done after the site is up and running. Often it is possible to get the main functionality working quickly and then make improvements or less crucial changes once the site is up and running. Remember, improving your store should be an ongoing process.

Migrating data

Unless you have a very small number of products for sale you will probably need to migrate data from your existing cart software to your new osCommerce site. This will most likely require some assistance from a developer. You will need to establish what data you will be migrating. Is it just the product information? Did your old shopping cart software store customer details? Will customer data need to be imported?

Hosting

The last practical consideration is whether your host will support osCommerce. Many hosts will - PHP and MySQL are well supported across a large number of hosts. Your developer will be able to advise whether you need to change hosts and how best to minimize disruption related to these changes.

Invite your customers to your new store

Ready to go live with the new version of your site? Make it an event. Email your existing customers and invite them. Consider inviting your best customers to a pre-release. It is a great time to create a compelling special offer to encourage your customers to visit, create an account, purchase, and provide feedback.

Thanks for reading. We welcome your feedback – contact Attitude on the web at <http://www.attitude.net.nz/contact.html>.