



Sell, sell, sell!

We all respect the knowledge and artistry of a skilled salesperson. They listen carefully, they assimilate your needs, seeking clarification where necessary and they propose solutions, refining and re-focusing them in response to your every comment and gesture. Although we may not always relish being on the receiving end, it is a joy to see them in action.

Seeing similar functionality online has been something of a holy grail for e-commerce. Back in 1999 you would probably have been offered decent odds that e-commerce in 2007 would be filled with avatars speaking persuasively about the insightful suggestions popping out from their artificially-intelligent back-ends.

So, have we failed, are we getting there or did we decide to head in a different direction? Let's look at what a skilled salesperson actually does and explore how close we are to replicating their key skills online. Then, as always, we will end up with some practical tips for making immediate improvements in e-commerce performance.

The first thing a skilled salesperson does is to help you narrow down the range of products under consideration to a manageable number. Face to face, this is done by asking questions, translating the answers into selection criteria and then proposing the best-matching products. Online this is more challenging but, by and large, possible. Facetted navigation enables customers to filter products according to their key differentiating features or benefits. So, for example, look for a kettle on the price comparison site uk.shopping.com and you can narrow the range by price, brand, colour, capacity, design (jug or traditional) and cord or cordless. This is great for the customer ... if they know exactly what they are looking for, which most don't. It is the sales proposition that a real salesperson makes that gets around this problem – “the Kenwood SJ300 is one of our top selling kettles at £23 although we also have some great looking DeLonghi, Dualit and Bosch kettles from as little as £42”.

Online, we have the opportunity to make sales propositions as well, in the form of up-sells and cross-sells. However, surprisingly few e-commerce sites do so and we haven't been able to find any that do so as well as they could.

John Lewis makes a good case study here. They stock 40 different kettles ranging in price from £9.95 to £118 – so lots of opportunity for selling alternative products. They also sell 106 sets of cups and saucers, 43 coffee makers, 38 toasters (many matching the kettles), 37 teapots, 24 cafetieres, 2 water filters and a tea-maker – so plenty of opportunities for cross-selling. Despite this, 19 of their kettles have no alternative products offered, 23 of their kettles have no cross-sell propositions and 10 have neither cross-sells nor alternative products. This makes for a very patchy customer

What exactly are cross-sells and up-sells?

The simplest explanation is that a cross-sell is an invitation to buy something else *as-well*, whereas an up-sell is an invitation to buy something else *instead*.

For cross-sells this simple explanation works: for up-sells, life gets a little more complicated. Alternative products could be more expensive (up-sell), less expensive (down-sell) or the same price – ‘we also have this kettle in silver’ (sideways-sell). In the absence of any accepted term to cover all of these, I refer to them as ‘alternative sells’.

experience – customers never get to the point of expecting and being able to rely upon the sales propositions on the site. They have to do all the hard work of finding suitable products themselves.

Across e-commerce sites in general, having patchy sales propositions is an achievement! My all-time favourite cross-sell is from Harrods (sadly no longer on their site). Whilst their customers are considering the purchase of a Giant Pirate Ship nine feet long and six feet tall, costing £6,500, Harrods helpfully recommend a small gift box to put it in!

Standard UK Delivery £4.95*
*Click here for more details

Harrods

SIGN IN BASKET
ENTER EMAIL for exclusive offers
SEARCH

HOME ▶
Hampers Great Outdoors Clearance Gifts Beauty Womens Mens Children Toys Sports Home & Garden Food & Wine

Harrods.com » Great Outdoors » Children » Outdoor Toys

Giant Pirate Ship

Reference no. 168CFC04

Our versatile Pirate Ship is perfect for both indoor use and outdoor Summer play.

The construction is best quality marine ply with hardwood rails, mouldings and turnings.

Paint is applied to a minimum of 5-coats which has proved to be both hard wearing and water resistant. All topped off with a solid brass bell and nameplate!

Length: 9'
Width: 2'11"
Height: 6'9" to the tip of the mainsail mast which is easily removed for low locations.
Weight: 75kg

Delivery Time: 2 weeks
PRICE £6,500.00 € 10,140,00\$12,229.00¥1,435,915

EXPORTABLE INFO


QUANTITY

Add to basket ▶

This product is in stock

Delivery Standard UK Delivery £4.95 See our [International Delivery](#) charges for overseas shipping Gift messaging service is not currently available with this product.

MAY WE RECOMMEND

 **Exportable item**
The price of this product for a non-EU destination is: £5,531.91. This includes a VAT refund if applicable.

Harrods Small Gift Box
£3.00

MAY WE RECOMMEND



Harrods Small Gift Box
£3.00

Of course, there are some good examples around. Long Tall Sally recently introduced a 'Get the Look' feature where they suggest other clothes that go with the item you are viewing – great cross-selling and I'm sure it must be doing wonders for their average order value.

And Jessops cameras section offer similar products, best-sellers in the category and bundled offers including the camera and accessories.

Customer Services | Tell A Friend | Store Locator | My Account Shopping basket
Home » Party Wear View item/s (0)

Sequin dress

£89.00

Contrast mesh panel with sequin embellishment at neck. Lined body. 71 (28") waist to hem. Xmas catalogue page 3.

100% polyester

Black

Item no: 08P24




To add a product to your basket, simply click on the colour and size you want on the matrix below, and the add to basket button will appear.

Colour	10	12	14	16	18	20
Black	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key
✓ Instock ✗ Out of Stock 3 No. of weeks wait

Get the Look
We have specially selected these items to help you create the latest looks.
Click on each item to view.

 **Luxury coat**  **Leather gloves**  **Brooch peep toe**

<p>Bundles</p>  <p>SAVE £15.00</p> <p>Nikon Coolpix S200 Digital Camera + Jessops Everyday SD Memory Card 1GB+ Lowepro Rezo Pouch 15 (Black)</p> <p>Only £133.97 (normally £148.97)</p> <p>ADD TO BASKET ▶</p>	<p>Similar Products</p>  <p>Canon PowerShot A460 (Red)</p> <p>£109.99</p>
	<p>Top Sellers</p> <p>Digital Compact Cameras</p>  <p>Panasonic LUMIX DMC-FX30 Digital Camera (Black)</p> <p>£154.99</p>

So, what is best-practice for online sales propositions?

1. Try to offer your customers as much help as possible in finding the best product to suit their needs.
2. On the product page, suggest similarly priced products as well as higher and lower priced products.
3. Ideally, the higher and lower priced products should be qualified propositions. Why is the higher priced product better and what am I missing if I buy the lower priced product?
4. In a way that is visually distinct from the alternative products, suggest additional products they might like to buy with the product they are viewing.
5. Having a theme for these cross-sells can be an effective way of communicating to the customer why you are proposing them (e.g. 'Get the Look' or 'accessories to go with your camera').
6. Sales propositions can also be included on the basket page. There is a risk here that they will simply distract the customer from committing to the purchase (increasing basket abandonment) but the best way to find out is to split-test basket pages with and without the added propositions.
7. Sales propositions should NOT be included at any point in the checkout process (i.e. once the customer has moved from the basket by hitting the 'go to checkout' button). This is the transaction phase of the customer journey (as distinct from the 'proposition' phase) and the customer should not be distracted from handing over their money!
8. Cross-sells should, however, certainly be included in post-purchase emails.

The challenge for most e-commerce managers is that creating cross-sells, up-sells, sideways-sells and down-sells for every product is a huge amount of work – but it needn't be. At Moneyspyder we have just built a tool to automate the matching of products in these ways and it is surprising how effective the propositions can become with a few well-tuned matching algorithms. After just a few weeks of operation initial results suggest a 13% increase in average order value.

Does all of this give us the online equivalent of a real salesperson? No, not yet but we are making good progress. A real salesperson still has a couple of tricks up their sleeve that we are probably a few years away from fully realising online. The first is that humans are much better than e-commerce software at understanding the relationships between products. When comparing two similar products online (e.g. in a comparison table) the customer can discover what each offers but they are largely left on their own to make the comparison between them. Good salespeople are experts at comparing and contrasting similar products. They pinpoint the key points of difference,

they explain those differences in meaningful terms and they highlight the significance of tradeoffs between a feature in one product and a different feature in the other. Web technology is moving in the right direction – the promise of the semantic web is one that will bring meaning to the relationships between different types of information. With the right relational algorithms and meaningful relational metadata, explanations of why one product is better suited to particular needs than others falls within our grasp. The final thing a good salesperson does is closes the sale. We're not very good at that online, yet. The difference between purchase choice ('I know what I want') and purchase commitment ('I've decided to buy it') is purchase justification – a simple, concise yet compelling summary of the reasons why the customer's chosen product meets their needs better than any others they could consider. The core technologies required to produce automated purchase justifications will be in place once we have the ability to compare and contrast products in a relational way, as described above.

If you thought the past 5 years of e-commerce development had been a bit hectic, it's probably nothing compared to the changes likely to happen of the next 5 years. <ends>