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# Closing the E-Commerce Experience Gap

UX & Design

CRO

*Every purchase begins long before a customer clicks “Add to Basket.” It starts with a need or moment of curiosity that sets a decision journey in motion. From there, customers are constantly orienting themselves, deciding where to look, what to trust, and whether a product is right for them.*

This report explores that journey through three critical stages: discovery, evaluation and finally conversion. By understanding how customers navigate, think, and make decisions, businesses can design experiences that feel intuitive, reduce friction, and ultimately turn exploration into confident purchase.

## Discovery.

### Homepage

- Navigation Orientation
- Category Entry Points
- Trending & Featured Content

### Navigation

- Menu Clarity
- Search Prominence & Function
- Mobile UX

### Collection

- Filter Relevance
- Product Scanability
- Sort Logic

## Evaluation.

### Content

- Image & Video Quality
- Guides & Comparison
- Variant Selection UX

### Social

- Review Volume
- Recency
- Photo Reviews

### Trust

- Delivery Promise
- Returns Policy
- Stock Urgency

## Conversion.

### Basket

- Cross-sell relevance
- Threshold Incentives
- Trust Messaging

### Checkout

- Guest Option
- Reduce Form Friction
- Payment Variety

### Post-Purchase

- Clear Next Steps
- Order Confirmation
- Easy Returns

## *Navigation.*

# The Primary Tool For Orientation

The first five seconds on a new page are a navigation event. Before a customer reads a word of copy, before they look at a product, they're scanning the page to answer a single unconscious question: where am I, and can I find what I need here?

This orientation phase is faster than most teams realise, eye-tracking research from Nielsen Norman Group puts it at 2-3 seconds for an initial scan, and it sets the frame for everything that follows. A customer who orients quickly and confidently is far more likely to stay and convert. A customer who is confused at the orientation phase bounces, and often doesn't come back.

It tells the customer: what this site sells, how the range is organised, where the important parts of the journey are, and implicitly, whether this is a site that understands them. Getting this right is not a nice-to-have. It is the foundation on which every other conversion lever sits

# 70-80%

of e-commerce sessions involve navigation as the primary discovery path<sup>1</sup>

# 30%

of users actually use site search on any given visit<sup>2</sup>

Search usage rate is inversely correlated with navigation quality, high search usage is often a symptom of navigation failure, not a sign of engaged customers.

*References: 1 - Baymard Institute, 2 - NN/g research*



# Navigate By Customer Logic, Not Business Logic

The single most common navigation failure in e-commerce is building a navigation structure around how your business is organised internally, rather than how your customer thinks about their need.

Two main ways a navigation can be categorised:

**Category-Led Navigation**      Navigation organised by what the product is.

**Task-Led Navigation**      Navigation organised by what the customer is trying to do or achieve.

Navigation should follow the customer's mental model, not assumptions. Research reveals that model. Over-investing in search can turn a browse-first audience into a frustrated one.

## *Browsing vs Searching: How Customers Prefer to Shop*

Browsing lets users explore without a precise goal, requiring less cognitive effort and making it easier to discover products or stumble upon new options. Search assumes a specific query or intent, offering speed but demanding more effort to formulate keywords and interpret results. Recognising this distinction helps design experiences that balance exploration and efficiency, letting all users find what they need naturally.

### Navigation



Allows you to explore



Discover things you didn't know you were looking for



Narrow down from a general idea to a specific product

### Search



Works well for specific, high-intent tasks



Looking for a particular product you already know exists



Re-ordering a previous purchase



Navigating to a specific category quickly

# Pick The Right Navigation Tool For Your Shoppers

## ✔ When Mega Menus Win

- Your catalogue spans genuinely distinct categories that customers need to navigate across
- When you need to surface promotional content (sale, new in, trending) alongside category navigation
- When your customer is in browse mode and benefits from seeing the full range on arrival

## ✔ When Search-First Wins

- Customers arrive with specific, well-defined intent (a part number, a product name, a specification)
- The catalogue is too large for browsing to be practical
- The customer base is professional/trade and efficiency matters more than discovery

## ✘ When Mega Menus Hurt

- When they're applied to narrow catalogues, where they feel over-engineered and create visual noise
- On mobile, where they introduce complex interaction patterns that drawers handle better
- When they're built around internal taxonomy rather than customer mental models

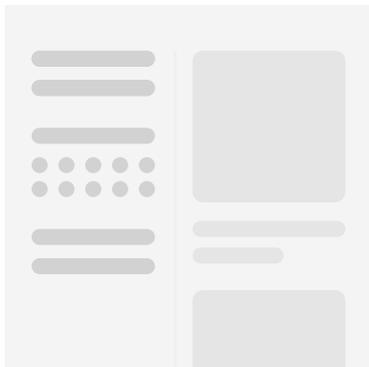
## ✘ When Search-First Hurts

- Where customers arrive with a general intent 'I want something new to wear' rather than a specific query
- Putting a giant search bar on (e.g) a fashion brand's homepage doesn't make the experience better, it asks the customer to do cognitive work (formulate a specific query) that good navigation would do for them

# Let Customers Narrow Down Fast

Faceted filtering: the ability to narrow a product collection by multiple attributes simultaneously, is one of the highest-impact UX systems in e-commerce when done well, and one of the most common sources of frustration when done badly. Most e-commerce teams fall somewhere in the middle: they have filtering, but it's not optimised for the way their customers actually make decisions.

## *Side filters vs. top filters vs. mobile drawers*



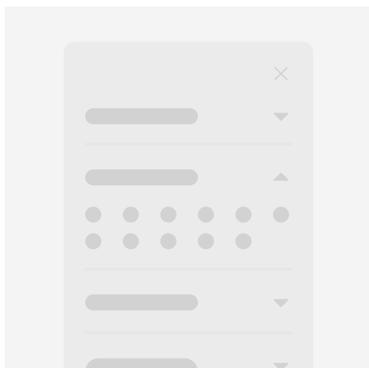
### **Side Filters**

The desktop standard and perform well when filter options are numerous and customers are in a deliberate narrowing mindset. They keep all filter options visible and accessible without additional interaction.



### **Top Filter Bars**

Work better for simpler filtering needs, typically 4-6 key filters, and for catalogue sections where customers know what they want and want to apply filters quickly. They're more space-efficient and feel lighter for focused tasks.



### **Mobile Filter Drawers**

The mobile standard and when done well, perform excellently. The key implementation details: the drawer should slide in smoothly, show result counts next to filter options, allow multi-select, and make applied filters clearly visible with easy removal.

## *Filtering.*

# Four Mistakes To Fix Today

Filters are meant to help customers quickly find what they're looking for, but when poorly designed, they can confuse, frustrate, or even drive shoppers away. Common failures; from overwhelming options to disappearing selections, turn a helpful tool into a source of friction.

Live filter result counts reduce filter abandonment by <sup>3</sup>

30%

Filter persistence improves collection page CVR by <sup>4</sup>

12-18%

- 1 Too many filter options. When a filter panel has 20+ filter groups, customers experience decision paralysis and don't filter at all, leaving them in an unnarrowed catalogue that's harder to browse than if filtering didn't exist.
- 2 Filter labels that use internal terminology. 'Product Family,' 'Collection Code,' 'Fabric Composition ID', these are real examples from real e-commerce sites. Customers navigate by language they recognise, not by your ERP taxonomy.
- 3 Filters that return zero results without a graceful fallback. 'No products found' after a filter selection is a dead end. Always show nearest matches, suggest removing a filter, or surface an 'out of stock/notify me' option.
- 4 Filter state that doesn't persist. Customers who apply filters, click into a product, then hit back and find their filters have reset have to start over. This is a fundamental usability failure and a consistent source of abandonment.

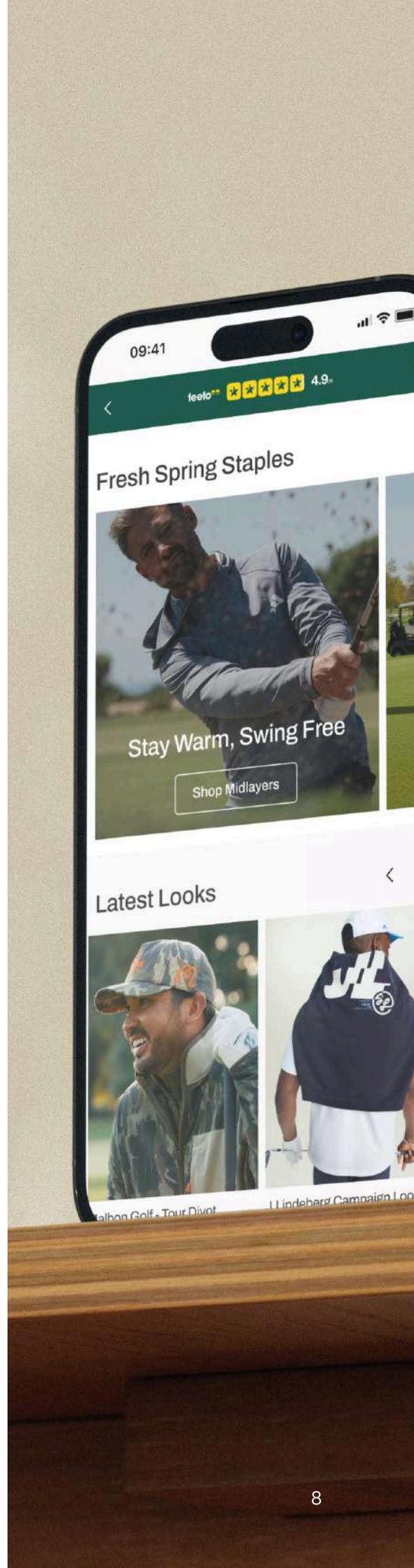
References: 3 - Baymard Institute, 4- NN/g research

# Surface The Right Product At The Right Moment

The goal is navigation that adapts to each customer, surfacing the right categories, products, and content based on who they are and what they've done before. In reality, most sites settle for a 'Recently Viewed' rail and a weak 'You Might Also Like.' That's not a reason to abandon personalisation, but to focus on the interventions that actually move metrics, rather than copying what works for brands with far bigger data teams.

High-Value Personalisation Interventions for most:

- ♥ *Category affinity prioritisation:* If a customer has shown affinity for a specific category across previous sessions, surfacing that category more prominently in navigation is a relatively simple intervention with meaningful impact.
- ↗ *Trending and Contextual:* Answering the discovery-mode customer's implicit question: 'What's worth looking at right now?' They create a sense of freshness and curation that flat category navigation doesn't provide.
- 👤 *Post-purchase and account-based:* Targeting your highest-value segment, with a tailored experience built around the actions that logged-in customers actually want to perform e.g track order, repeat purchase, access loyalty point.



# Your Navigation Needs Better Product Data

Most e-commerce teams discover this the hard way: they design a navigation structure and then find that their product data doesn't support it. A 'Shop by Occasion' navigation works only if products are tagged by occasion. A 'Shop by Dietary Need' navigation works only if every product has accurate dietary attribute data. Navigation design and taxonomy governance are the same problem.

Large-catalogue contexts require navigation architecture that acknowledges a fundamental truth: no customer will browse their way to a product through category hierarchy alone. The navigation system has to work in conjunction with search, faceted filtering, and guided discovery to get customers to the right product efficiently.

*No customer will browse their way to a product through category hierarchy alone.*

## *Correct Navigation for your taxonomy*

### **Deep hierarchy with strong search integration**

Navigation hierarchy can be three to four levels deep, but it needs to be complemented by search that understands specification language and guided navigation tools that shortcut the hierarchy entirely for customers who know their context.

### **Attribute-rich product data**

Large-catalogue navigation only works with high-quality product attribute data. Faceted filtering requires products to be consistently tagged across dozens of attributes and this data quality work is expensive and unglamorous. It's also non-negotiable. Poor attribute data produces filter results that customers don't trust, which is worse than no filtering at all.

### **Visual mega menus**

The images do motivational work: they create desire for the category before the customer has clicked through to it. The risk is complexity.

The navigation system has to work in conjunction with search, faceted filtering, and guided discovery to get customers to the right product efficiently.

Navigation performance is one of the most under-measured areas of e-commerce analytics. Most teams track overall site CVR and revenue but don't have instrumentation that tells them specifically whether navigation is causing customer drop-off. The result is that navigation problems are invisible until they're severe, and by then, the revenue cost has been accumulating for months.

# In B2B Completing Tasks Trumps Browsing

B2B e-commerce navigation is a different discipline to B2C, and the most common failure is applying B2C navigation thinking to a B2B context. B2B buyers are not browsing for inspiration, they have a specific procurement task to complete, often under time pressure, often on behalf of a business rather than themselves. Navigation for B2B should answer the question 'how do I complete my procurement task?' not 'what do you sell?' The difference sounds subtle but it restructures the entire navigation architecture.

## Navigation by industry and application

The most effective B2B navigation structure leads with industry or application context. Mirroring the way a B2B buyer thinks, they start with their context, not with a product type.

## Account-first navigation for repeat B2B buyers

Logged-in navigation experience should prioritise account-specific features: order history, saved lists, account-specific pricing, quick reorder. A B2B buyer who has been purchasing from you for three years should never have to navigate through the general catalogue to place a repeat order.

## Quick order forms

A navigation pattern unique to B2B that dramatically reduces friction for professional replenishment. They're also a meaningful differentiator, B2B buyers stick with suppliers that make their procurement job efficient.

# Measure What Your Menu Is Actually Doing

## First click rate and first click accuracy

First-click rate shows what customers click first, while first-click accuracy shows whether that click leads toward conversion. Together, they reveal whether your navigation matches customers' mental models.

## Product Views Per Session

Product views per session indicate discovery quality. Multiple views suggest customers are exploring and comparing, while low views (under 3 for browse-focused sites) signal navigation or collection pages aren't helping them find the right products.

## Collection to PDP Click-Through Rate

Collection-to-PDP click-through rate shows how effectively your collection pages drive customers to product detail. Low rates usually indicate product cards, thumbnails, titles, or prices, aren't compelling enough to prompt clicks.

## Search usage and Search Conversion Rate

High search usage on a D2C site often signals navigation issues rather than engagement. If many sessions start with a search right after landing, it shows customers can't easily find what they need.

## Bounce Rate on Category and INADING pAGES

Bounce rate on category pages directly reflects navigation accuracy. If a customer clicks 'Running Jackets' and immediately leaves, the landing page didn't meet their expectations.

# Understand What Happens on a Product Page

There's a psychological process playing out every time a customer lands on a product page. They're not just reading, they're building a mental case for or against a purchase. They're comparing against alternatives they have in their head, validating that this product is right for them specifically, and systematically reducing the uncertainty that stands between them and clicking 'Add to Basket.'

The three things every customer is doing on a PDP

- 1** Comparing: They're comparing this product to a competitor's version they've just seen on another tab. They're comparing the price to their internal benchmark. They're comparing the variant they're looking at to the one they originally wanted.
- 2** Validating: Validation is the process of confirming that this product is right for \*me specifically\*. Is it my size? Will it work in my space? Is it suitable for my use case? Will it look like the photo? The more personal the purchase, the more intense the validation need.
- 3** Reducing Uncertainty: Customers don't add to basket when they're not sure, they bounce, they research more, they come back later (or don't). The job of a PDP is to systematically eliminate the sources of uncertainty that are specific to your product category.

## 56%

of adults have abandoned a purchase due to inadequate product information <sup>5</sup>

## 10-15%

reduce in returns on PDP's that have strong sizing guide UX <sup>6</sup>

## PDPs Are Often the Biggest Conversion Lever

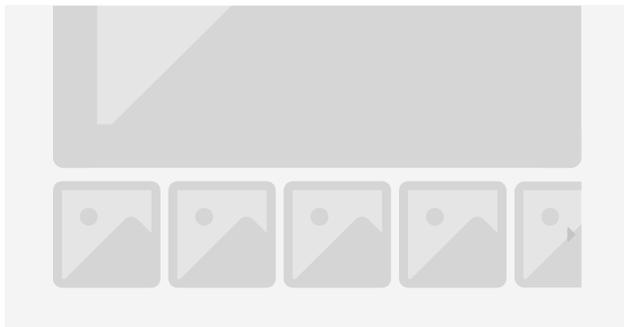
The product page is where purchase decisions are made. All the marketing spend, all the homepage design, all the collection page filtering logic, it all funnels down to a customer standing in front of a product page trying to decide. And the conversion rate at that moment is overwhelmingly determined by the quality of that page, not the quality of the ad that brought them there.

*References: 5 - Baymard Institute, 6- Benchmark Data*

*PDP.*

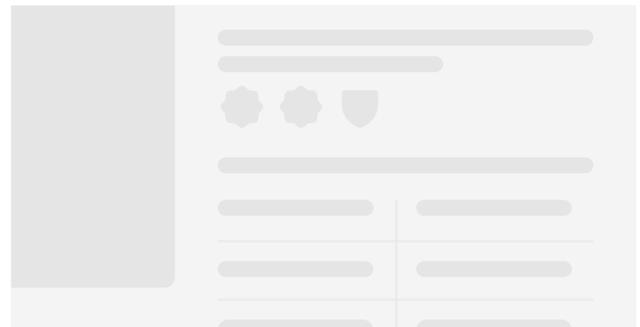
## Design Around How Customers Buy

The most important decision in PDP design isn't which CMS component to use or whether to use tabs or accordions. It's understanding what type of product you're selling and what your customer's decision-making process looks like. That understanding should dictate everything else.



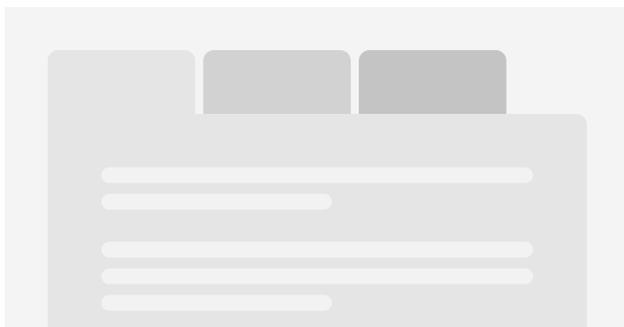
### Image Led

Multiple high-quality images that collectively answer every visual question a customer might have. The sequence matters: lead with the most persuasive image (usually the lifestyle shot that creates desire), follow with functional shots that validate.



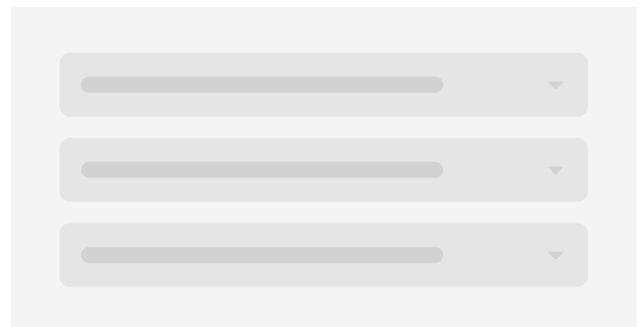
### Spec Led

It should be scannable, complete, and structured around the questions a buyer actually asks. Comparison within the range, certification badges, and technical documentation download links are all first-class citizens on these pages.



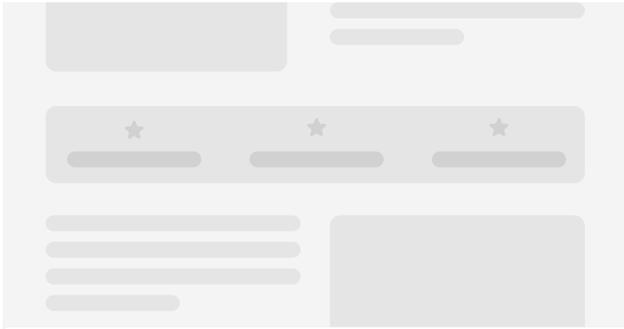
### Tabbed Content

Tabs hide content behind a click, but when your PDP has genuinely distinct content sections that are mutually exclusive tabs can work well.



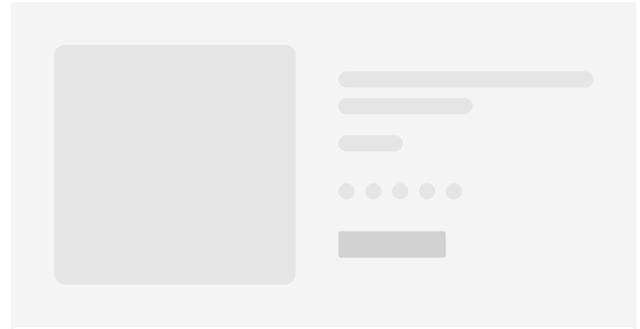
### Accordion Content

Accordions are scannable, a customer scrolling the page can see all available content headers and choose what to expand.



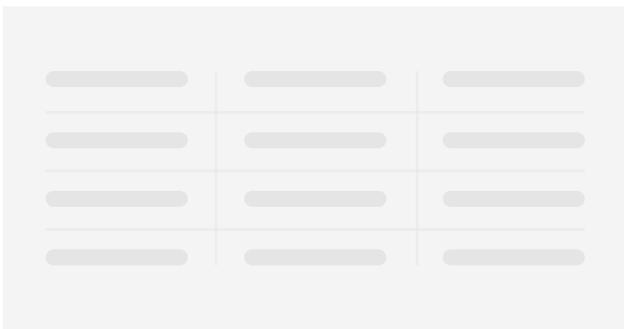
### Long-Form Storytelling

High-consideration goods, a £500 jacket, a subscription pet food service, a piece of furniture, earn long-form PDPs because the customer needs to be convinced, not just informed.



### Concise, Functional Layouts

Low-consideration goods, a snack box add-on, a replacement filter, an FMCG replenishment, need concise, frictionless pages that get out of the customer's way.



### Comparison Tables

Comparison tables are one of the most underused PDP features in e-commerce. A well-designed comparison feature keeps them on your site rather than heading to a third-party comparison tool, where they might encounter a competitor.

**Not sure where to start?**  
[Speak to us about User Interviews](#)

One of the most effective ways to understand how customers actually think and make decisions. Revealing the motivations, expectations, and frustrations that analytics alone can't show, that align with real customer behaviour rather than internal assumptions.

Once you understand how customers evaluate that product, the structure of the page becomes much clearer. The information that answers their biggest questions should be the most visible and easiest to access, while supporting details can sit further down the page. When PDPs are designed around the customer's decision process rather than a fixed template, the experience feels intuitive and helps shoppers move from consideration to confidence much faster.

# Make Reviews Do The Selling For You

Reviews are not a feature. They're infrastructure. The presence or absence of credible social proof is, for many product categories, the single biggest determinant of whether a first-time customer will buy. But most e-commerce teams implement reviews as a bolt-on, a widget at the bottom of the page that shows a star rating and some text. The brands that are using reviews as a genuine conversion tool are doing something much more intentional.



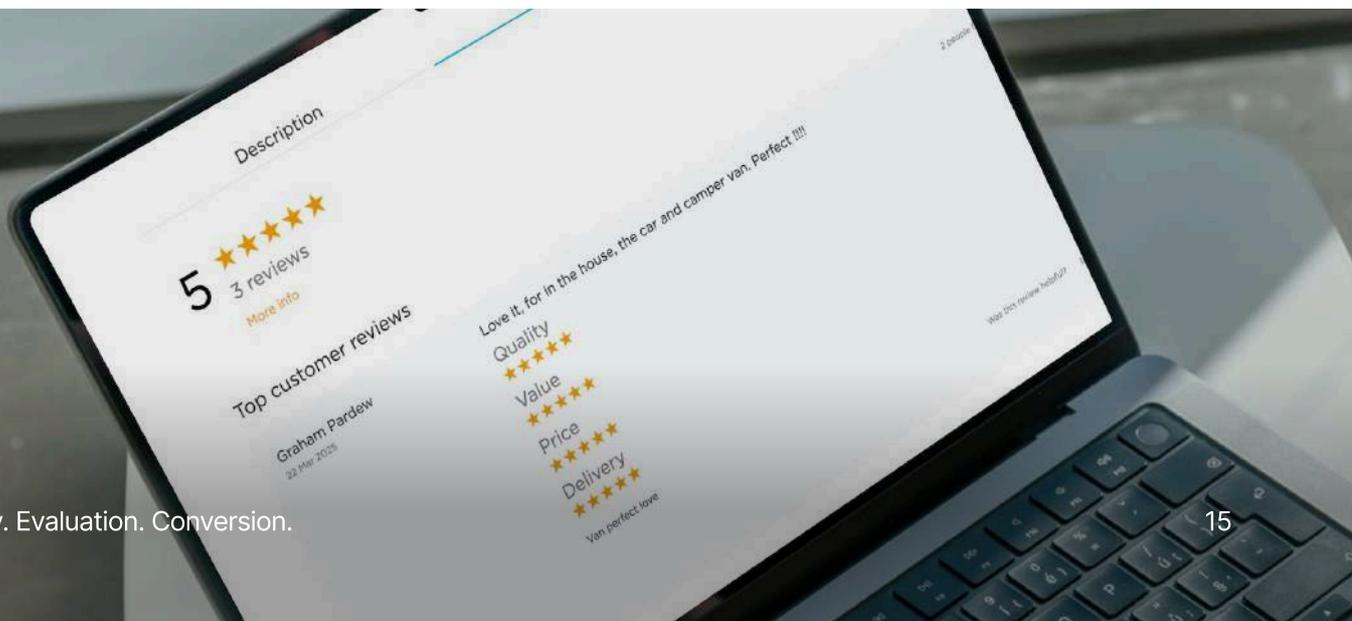
*Review Filters:* A wall of unfiltered reviews is far less useful than a smaller set customers can easily navigate. The most effective review sections allow shoppers to filter by factors like star rating, verified purchase, relevant attributes (such as reviewer height or size), and keywords, while also sorting by 'most helpful' or 'most recent.' These tools help customers quickly find the feedback that's most relevant to their situation.



*Photo Reviews:* Photo reviews are worth disproportionately more than text reviews for visual products. The UX question is not whether to show photo reviews, but where and how prominently.



*Recency and Volume:* A product with 3,000 reviews from three years ago feels less trustworthy for a new purchase than one with 200 reviews from the past six months.



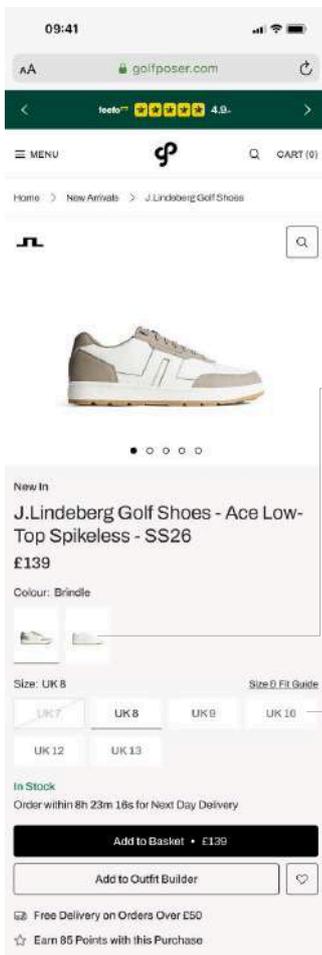
# How Product Structure Should Drive PDP Design

## High-consideration goods: Earn the conversion with depth

For products where the customer is making a significant financial or personal commitment, premium fashion, furniture, pet food subscriptions, specialist equipment, the PDP has to work harder. Specifically, it needs to address every reasonable objection and question before the customer leaves to find the answer elsewhere.

## Low-consideration / FMCG: Remove friction, not just steps

For products a customer buys on impulse or in replenishment mode, snacks, consumables, low-price accessories, the PDP's job is to get out of the way. These customers don't need to be convinced; they need the path to purchase to be frictionless.



## Multi-variant products: the variant selector UX problem

Variant selection is one of the highest-friction moments in the purchase journey. Get it wrong and you get abandoned baskets, size errors, and preventable returns. Get it right and you remove one of the last barriers between intent and purchase.

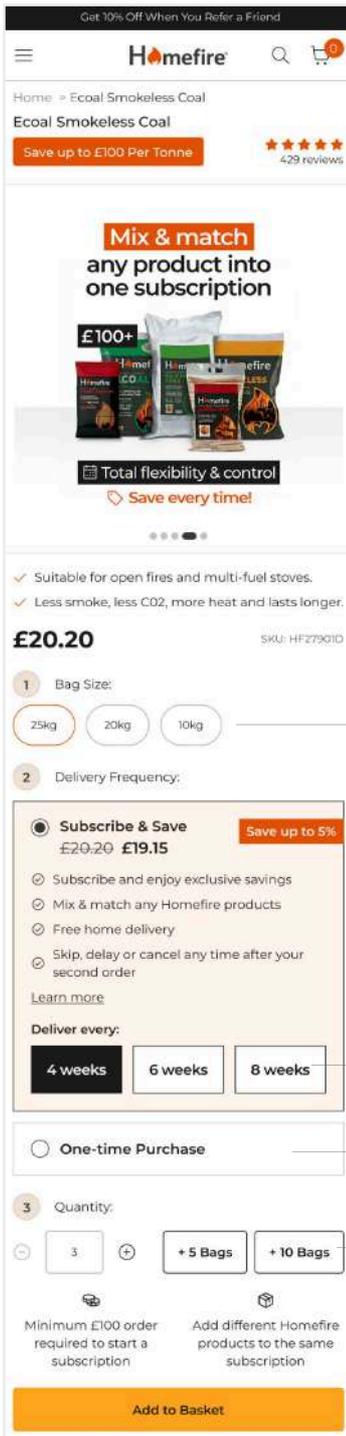
*Colour and visual variant:* Swatches should always show the actual colour/texture, not a colour name. 'Midnight Blue' means different things to different people, the swatch is unambiguous.

*Size selectors and size guides:* Size selectors are where variant error rate (customers selecting the wrong size and returning) is born. The interventions that reduce variant errors

*Multi-step variant selection (configuration products):* For products with multiple dependent variants, 'choose your subscription frequency, then choose your flavour variety, then choose your delivery date', the UX pattern matters enormously.

Multi-step variant selection - Configurable Products

For configurable products, purchasing isn't a single decision, it's a sequence of choices. From selecting colours and sizes to choosing additional features, customers move through a series of steps to create the product they want. Designing these multi-step variant selections clearly and intuitively helps reduce friction, prevent errors, and keep customers moving toward purchase.



*Usual Variants:* Many products come in multiple variants such as size, colour, or style. Users expect to quickly understand what options exist. Organising variants logically, either in a single step or multi-step flow, reduces errors and frustration.

*Subscription or One-time Purchase:* Users often expect flexibility in how they buy a product. Clearly presenting the choice between a one-time purchase and a subscription helps reduce hesitation and sets expectations upfront. Highlighting benefits of subscriptions, like convenience or savings, can guide users toward a preferred option without creating friction.

*Subscription Frequency:* For subscription options, frequency selection (weekly, monthly, quarterly) is a key decision point. Users benefit from a simple, intuitive interface that clearly shows intervals, pricing, and the impact of their choice. Minimizing cognitive load here prevents confusion and supports confident selection.

*Quantity:* Selecting quantity is a small but crucial interaction. Users should be able to easily adjust quantities while seeing how it affects pricing or availability. Clear feedback and controls, like increment/decrement buttons, ensure a smooth, error-free experience and prevent abandoned purchases.

# Track the Numbers That Predict Purchase Confidence

## Add to Basket Rate

This is the primary PDP conversion metric. It measures the proportion of PDP sessions that result in an add-to-basket action. It's more useful than overall site CVR for PDP optimisation because it isolates the page's performance from post-PDP checkout friction.

## Time on PDP

Time on PDP is a nuanced metric, more time is not always better. For high-consideration products, longer dwell times often correlate with higher conversion because the customer is engaging deeply with content. For low-consideration products, long dwell times can indicate confusion or friction.

## Review Engagement

The proportion of PDP visitors who interact with the review section, is a strong leading indicator of conversion confidence. If customers are reading reviews but not converting, the reviews themselves may not be providing the right kind of validation. If customers aren't engaging with reviews at all, the review UX may be too buried or too low-quality to feel credible.

## Variant Error Rate

Variant error rate measures how often customers select the wrong variant, typically size, and subsequently return. It's one of the most expensive PDP UX problems because it manifests in logistics costs, customer service load, and satisfaction scores, not just conversion rate.

## Return Rate

Return rate is the metric that most directly reflects information quality on your PDP. When customers return a product, it's almost always because reality didn't match expectation, which is a product information failure, not a product quality failure (usually).

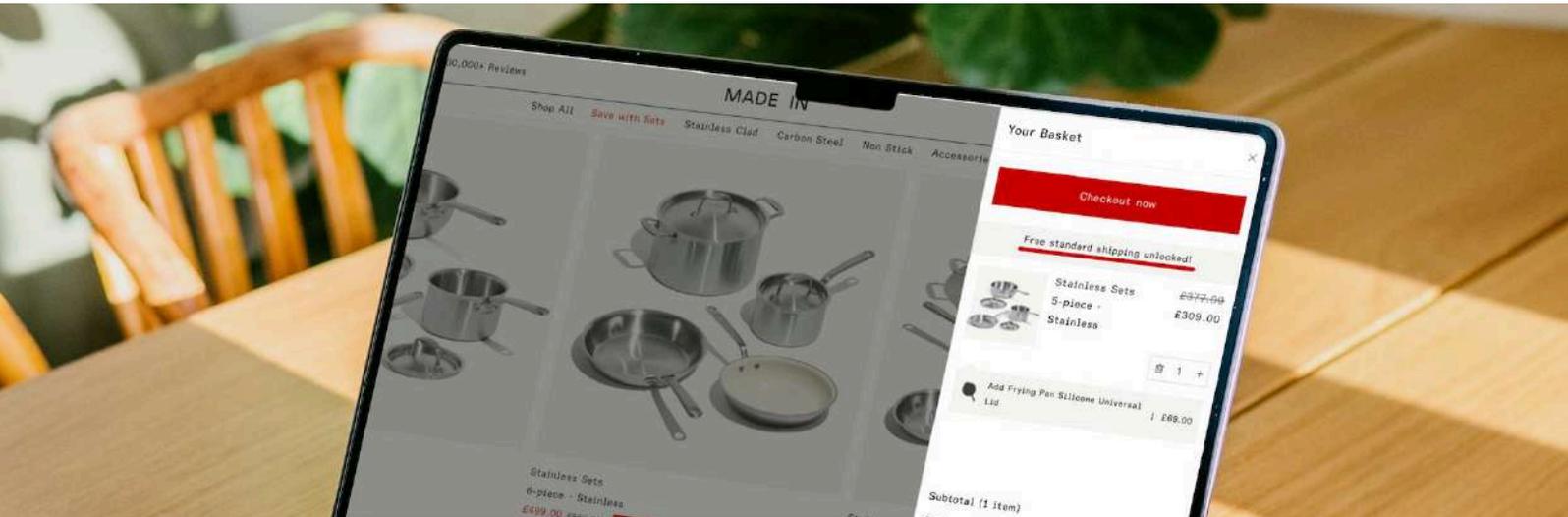


*Basket.*

# Create Frictionless, Clear Paths To Checkout

The mini basket, that drawer or dropdown that appears when you add something to the basket is one of the highest-leverage UX moments in e-commerce. And most brands are wasting it.

Here's why it matters. The moment a customer adds an item to their basket, they're in a state of heightened commercial intent. They've said yes to something. That micro-moment is the best possible time to suggest a complementary product, surface a threshold incentive, or reinforce the value of what they've just chosen. The mini basket is not the place to push hard sells. If you're trying to upsell to a higher-priced alternative in the mini basket, you're creating friction at exactly the wrong moment.

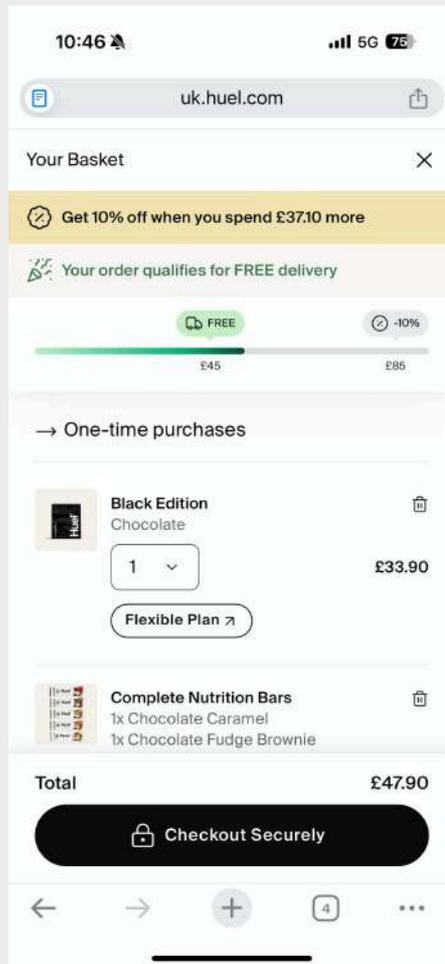
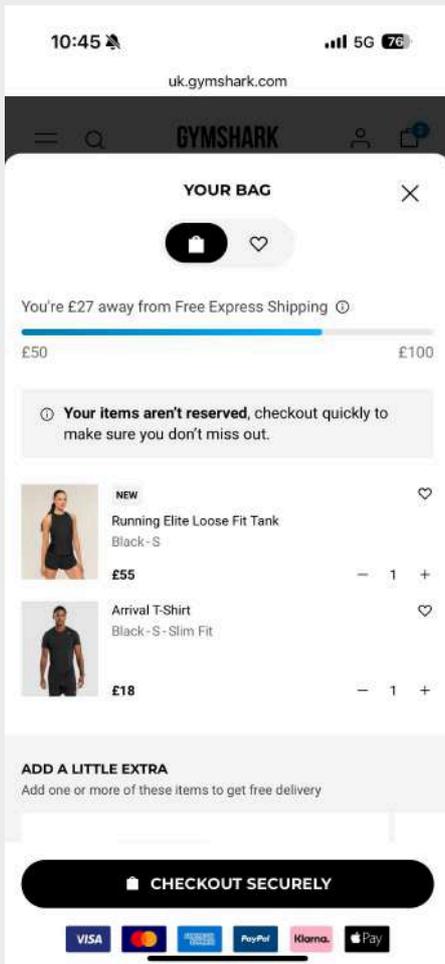


The best mini baskets do five things:

-  Confirm the add clearly and quickly
-  Show basket total with transparency
-  Surface a threshold incentive (free delivery, gift with purchase, etc.)
-  Offer at least one intelligent cross-sell
-  Make it trivially easy to either continue shopping or proceed to checkout

# Highlighting Thresholds To Increase AOV

Free delivery thresholds are the most common, but the brands winning on AOV are getting more creative. Gift with purchase at a threshold, bundle discounts that kick in at a specific quantity, early access or loyalty points multipliers for hitting a basket value, these all work because they reframe the customer's decision from 'do I want this item?' to 'how do I unlock the reward?'



Gymshark & Huel both offer dual thresholds with free express shipping and basket discount respectively on larger orders.

## Continue Shopping vs Proceed to Checkout

The mini basket should not be the checkout. Its primary job is to confirm the add and encourage more browsing. Brands that make the 'Checkout' CTA too dominant in the mini basket often see slightly higher immediate checkout rates but lower AOV, customers didn't add more because they felt pushed to complete. A secondary 'Continue Shopping' link or a subtle design hierarchy (Checkout prominent but not overwhelming) performs better for AOV in most A/B tests.

# Remove The Last Bit Of Friction Before Checkout

## Show Free Delivery Visually

Making users progress towards incentives immediately visible helps guide customer behaviour, and in many cases, well-designed visual signals outperform simple text notifications.

## Improve Mini Basket Cross-Sells

Recommendations work best when they feel personalised and relevant to the items already in the basket, rather than relying on generic 'bestsellers' that may not resonate with the shopper.

## Display The Basket Total Early

Shoppers feel more confident when the basket total is visible at a glance, rather than only on the full basket page, making it a subtle but important trust and usability signal.

# 10-15%

AOV uplift typically driven by mini basket threshold incentives <sup>7</sup>

# 6-12%

CVR improvement when testing drawer-style mini basket vs. page redirect <sup>8</sup>

## Mobile Mini Basket Considerations

On mobile, the mini basket drawer pattern (sliding in from the right or bottom) almost always outperforms navigating to a dedicated basket page.

It keeps the customer in context, they can close it and keep browsing, or proceed. Any pattern that takes them away from the current page creates a mental 'back' problem.

*References: 7 - Baymard Institute, 8- Benchmark Data*

# Design Journeys That Convert.

Every click tells a story. By understanding how your customers explore, evaluate, and decide, you can create experiences that guide them smoothly from initial curiosity to confident purchase.

Get in touch, and we'll help you uncover the key moments where friction occurs, identify opportunities to build trust, and turn interest into completed sales.



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