

Shopping for a Shopping Cart? Make Sure you Weigh your Options First!

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By Merle

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If you sell more than a handful of products on your website, you'll need to add what's known as a shopping cart. This is a function that allows your customers to pick out the items they want and send them to a "cart," which holds onto them until they're ready to check out. The program then totals the order and adds any applicable taxes and shipping charges.

So how do you add a shopping cart to your site? There are three different options you can choose from.

- 1) Link out to a third-party service (hosted)
- 2) Buy your own software and do it yourself
- 3) Download a script and configure it to your needs

Let's examine each option separately and the pros and cons involved with each:

THIRD PARTY/HOSTED CARTS

Third party cart services are easy to set up; you can be running in a matter of hours. They require no software to buy or install, but usually charge a monthly fee. Most include a secured server and a merchant account option, if you don't have your own. This is a relatively inexpensive solution for small businesses.

- 1) VCart.com: <http://www.vcart.com>

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Free to try for 30 days then you pay 90.00 for 3 months, 150.00 for 6 months or 1 year for 249.00. Supports 1 to 10,000 products– No CGI to configure and you can use your existing merchant account.

2) FreeMerchant: <http://www.FreeMerchant.com>

Prices range from 19.99 to 40.00 per month with a 30 day free trial. Build your store using their web based interface.

3) Yahoo Store: <http://store.yahoo.com>

You can't go wrong with Yahoo's expert reputation. Easy to build your store on their servers using a point and click interface. You can even upload your own images. Cost for up to 100 items is only 100.00 a month. You can also use your existing merchant account or apply for one through them.

4) Marketers Choice: <http://gta-tech.com>

Believe it or not, this one is free. Supplied by Marketers Choice, this cart calculates totals, taxes, shipping charges and notifies you of new orders automatically. Follow the wizard for easy set up. You need your own merchant account but they supply the secured server. So what's the catch? they try to get you to upgrade to their 150.00 a year package, which is an option. If you continue to use the free one the only trade off is they will display business related ads on all of your cart pages.

SCRIPTS

If you're at all good at programming with CGI, there are limitless scripts you can download for free or low cost. If you're all thumbs you could hire someone to configure the script for you. One of the best online programmers I know of is David Black. He's fast, reliable and his prices are fair. You can contact him at <mailto:DavidBlack@thewavecave.com>

1) CGI EXTREMES: http://www.cgiextremes.com/Scripts/Shopping_Carts/

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You'll find a variety of CGI shopping scripts here ranging from free up to 300.00 in price. They'll work on a variety of platforms. Each one is rated on a scale of 1 to 10 for guidance in selection.

2) CGI Resource Index: <http://cgi-resources.com>

To find the goodies here you'll need to drill down to the appropriate category. Click on programs and scripts, then Perl, then shopping carts.

3) PERLSHOP: <http://www.arpanet.com/PerlShop/perlshop.html>

This CGI script is for sites hosted on a Unix system.

It is free to use with their logo on the pages.

4) PAY PAL SHOPPING CART <http://www.cstafford.com/ppalstore.shtml>

Check out this free CGI Shopping cart script that passes all of your credit card sales over to PayPal for easy processing.

SOFTWARE

1) SALES CART: <http://www.salecart.com/>

Specifically for FrontPage users. Cost is 179.00.
Easy to set up using their step by step wizard.

2) PDG SHOPPING CART <http://www.pdgsoft.com/cart.htm>

Completely customizable to fit your needs. Integrates easily with FrontPage software or Dreamweaver. You can also use this cart to set up your own associate program. Works on Unix, NT servers and others. It is a little pricey at 750.00, but worth it for the features you get.

3) Your E-Ware: <http://www.youeware.com/home/>

Fast and easy to use, with a low price that gives this software an edge. It will hold up to 2,500 products in up to 20 product categories. Works on Win 95.98 and Mac. Download the free demo and take it for a spin. Final cost is under 100.00

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There you have some of the various options to choose from when setting up your online storefront. Before jumping into the e-commerce waters, make sure you weigh your options and choose the one that best fits your needs and your budget.

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Small Business Web Shopping Cart Software: 7 Reasons Hosted Is Better

By Joel Walsh

Why should you pay for a remotely hosted shopping cart for your small business website, rather than just install a free OpenSource shopping cart on your site?

There are a lot of reasons:

- 1) Focus. Your business is selling stuff, not installing and managing a complicated script. You'll have enough issues running a business that you won't be able to outsource to someone else the way you can with a shopping cart script.
- 2) Price. Paid hosted shopping cart software's price is inconsequential: \$10–\$100/month. If that's a significant expense for your business, you need to look into improving your profit margin.
- 3) Support. While support for "paid" business software is included in the cheap price, support for "free" business software is pretty expensive. OpenSource and other free software come without any support except forums for do-it-yourself-ers to share ideas. So, you'll end up paying someone to install and maintain it. Or you do it yourself, which costs so much time it's more expensive than paying someone if your time is worth anything.
- 4) Installation. When you buy hosted software on a subscription plan, installation is already done and support is included. When you have an issue-and have you ever had software that you didn't have an issue with at least once?-you don't have to pay a developer \$150/hour to make it go away.
- 5) Security. Security issues are taken care of for you by the provider-no patching software.
- 6) Speed. Hosted online shopping carts really do work now, out of the box. You just input your inventory and go. OpenSource shopping carts come with dozens of customization options that will take you hours just to decide you don't need most of them.
- 7) Peace of mind. The shopping cart is the jugular vein of an online business. If anything makes the blood stop flowing, however minor the cause, you'll feel it fast. If you are the one who has to make sure

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the blood stays flowing, or if you have to rely on the availability of a freelance programmer, you won't be getting the soundest sleep. Let a specialist do that worrying for you, 24 hours a day.

About the author: Joel Walsh is a business writer. Try EasyStoreCreator for an easy hosted

[Publish this article on your website! Requirement: live link for above

URL/web address w/ link text/anchor text: "shopping cart software" OR leave this bracketed message intact.]



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