



Review of 5 Enterprise Level E-Commerce Resources

McCord Web Design in an effort to assist those looking for satisfactory solutions to e-commerce providers has done a comprehensive review of 5 different e-commerce resources. In this reports we focused only on providers that offered solutions for between 3000-5000 products. We selected our pool of resources to review from word of mouth referrals from other Webmasters involved with e-commerce solutions.

We will review these resources which are arranged alphabetically:

- <http://www.BizShoppingCart.com>
- <http://www.2CheckOut.com>
- <http://www.ClientReady.com>
- <http://www.MonsterCommerce.com>
- <http://www.NetSuite.com>
- <http://www.ShopSite.com>

Our clients have specialized needs in design flexibility, additional programming needs, database assistance, and shopping cart/product integration. What we have found is that there are resources that have strengths in certain areas that make them better suited for clients with particular need in mind. There was not one resource that was better than the others, but rather each had unique strengths and will be able to serve clients best who are looking for their particular skill sets.

As you read this report, remember, the best match for your e-commerce needs is the resource who brings to the table the things that you consider the most important as you set up your e-commerce enterprise. Not all resources will be suited for your particular business needs. As with all reviews, there still is no better review, then when you, the end user, actually try out the demo store and check out references yourself before you make your final business selection.

Let's get into our review. We will detail the strengths of each resource and any negatives that need consideration, as well as classify the resource in general terms of use.

BizShoppingCart

This resource is owned by Vendor Solutions and is based in Los Angeles, California. Their web site can be visited at <http://www.bizshoppingcart.com>. The demo store location is found at <http://www.gemstat.com/>. We have personal experience with this resource's shopping cart and services.

Strengths:

1. You can use a complex HTML layout for your store pages. The template that you create will be cut up into a header and footer file and used to surround all the store pages which are dynamically generated. This allows for ease of navigation changes for the store when needed.
2. There are several page styles within the store unlike many stores where there is only one style.
3. Technology used: Java Server pages. Indexable by search engines.
4. This resource will configure the server settings to make the dynamic pages search engine friendly and shown with an HTML ending.
5. There are many settings to control title and Meta tags for search engine optimization in the store administration.
6. The store includes: a link exchange management system, coupon code options, gift certificates, an affiliate program and affiliate center, as well as a newsletter program in WYSIWYG/HTML.

7. This resource will work with the client or designer to create the excel spreadsheet for database load, or supply an excel template. They will work with databases in any format.
8. We have found the staff at BizShoppingCart able to offer solutions for stumbling blocks that we came across such as how to search by vendor in category and how to utilize the images on the wholesalers website (with permission) to prevent time charges for image preparation.
9. They were very flexible with helping to do additional programming to sort products with in the store.
10. Hosting for 5000 products is \$74.99 per month. Store set up is free.
11. FTP access to site files.
12. Good web site statistics provided at no charge.
13. Good inventory tracking tools and customer service management tools.

Weaknesses:

1. Some occasional error messages generated by the programming that are minor issues. They advise me that they are working to resolve these things now (September 2004).
2. The online training manual is weak compared to other sites; however the staff will talk you through most issues if you call and ask.

Classification and Recommendations

A product for experienced Web Designers only

Be up front about programming needs in advance

Plan on customization charges

We find this resource offers more than most e-commerce suppliers. Based on our review on the Web, they are strong contenders as an e-commerce supplier, but only an experienced web designer should set up the store. Plan on 8 to 12 hours of time after the store is launched to customize the 75 to 100 store pages to change grammar errors and potential sizing problems when it is integrated into your template, especially if your template for the store is a liquid layout.

You will need to purchase/setup your own SSL, Internet Gateway, and Merchant Account to accept credit cards.

2CheckOut

This resource is based in Columbus, Ohio. The web site can be visited at <http://www.2checkout.com/home.html>. The demo store location is found in the middle of the left had navigation bar.

Strengths:

1. Very easy interface to use online to generate product links.
2. \$49 set up fee with \$.45 per sale and 5.5% of each sale amount. There are no application fees, no monthly fees, and no statement fees. You will not need to buy a SSL or Internet Gateway or Merchant Account. You will still need a web domain and separate hosting with another agent.
3. You can sell products, reoccurring subscriptions, access to membership sites, and services.

Weaknesses:

1. Order processing is done through 2CheckOut's secure server. The address bar will change from your domain to theirs.
2. You are considered a supplier to 2CheckOut and you receive twice monthly bank transfers based on your sales online.

3. You can not use a fully customized template as the store section only allows you to import a header and footer. Unless you design accordingly, the store will not appear seamlessly integrated.

Classification and Recommendations

A great alternative to PayPal

Easy for web design beginner or do it yourselfers to integrate shopping code links into their pages.

Not practical for 1000's of products as links are all generated one at a time.

We find the real place for this resource is as a step up solutions from PayPal or for the novice web designer/client do it yourselfer who finds the PayPal set up too confusing. The inability to truly customize this solution does not make it a good match for the experienced web designer or client who is using a web designer for their project. It is however a great way for a client to try out e-commerce with literally no start up costs as an alternative to PayPal. It is easier to set up and use than PayPal is for a website, but the fees are higher.

Client Ready

This resource is based in Sacramento, California. The web site can be visited at

<http://www.clientready.com/>. The demo store location is found at <http://test.clientcart.com/> and the demo site administration link is <http://test.clientcart.com/login/> use test and test to enter.

Strengths:

1. You can use a complex HTML layout for the store. You will insert a header and footer file into a template box that will create an include file for your store section. All of the store pages will be dynamically generated inserting content inside your custom template header and footer file.
2. Technology used: PHP and MySQL database. Google does not index PHP files at this time, but this resource can configure the server to server them as HTML files and therefore search engine friendly.
3. Users can set up individual page titles including the product name and id for better search engine indexing.
4. There are many settings to control title and Meta tags for search engine optimization in the store administration.
5. The store includes: a coupon code option and gift certificates. Related product options are available and cost an additional \$5 per month.
6. Custom programming options are available as well as set up and installation services.
7. Hosting for 5000 products costs \$50 per month plus \$5 for coupons, \$5 for related items.
8. Flexibility to assist a client with particular needs or special set up.
9. Database upload function is built into the site control interface.
10. Options to integrate real time UPS/shipping charges.
11. Able to create one database for multiple web sites allowing cross selling between domains without leaving the originating site.
12. FTP access to site files.
13. Good inventory tracking and customer service management tools.

Weaknesses:

1. There is only one style of page template inside the store unlike some resources where there are a variety of store page styles.
2. When checking out, the URL changes from your domain name to clientcart.
3. There is not an affiliate or newsletter program available with the e-commerce hosting package as there is with many others.

4. Web site statistics are weak and not detailed enough based on the statistics products similarly available for other solutions.

Classification and Recommendations

A product for experienced Web Designers only

Be up front about programming needs in advance

Plan on customization charges and time to learn the interface

This e-commerce resource is a small business with a staff of 6. They pride themselves on their responsiveness. We have not worked with this supplier, so we do not know the validity to that statement, but they were highly recommended to us. We find this resource offers more customization options than most of the large e-commerce solution providers. The management interface seems complicated at first, but is understandable with a little study. There is FTP access to the files. Clients can change features for their site within site control fairly easily. This appears to be a resource very similar in scope and product to the BizShoppingCart.

You will need to purchase/setup your own SSL, Internet Gateway, and Merchant Account to accept credit cards.

Monster Commerce

This resource is based in Columbus, Ohio. The web site can be visited at <http://www.monstercommerce.com>. The demo store location is found at http://www.monstercommerce.com/shopping_cart_comparison_demo_new.asp. Use monster and guest for the test.

Strengths:

1. Very nice and intuitive online account management interface.
2. Templates available are adequate and will accept a degree of customization.
3. Forums to ask experienced users how to solve issues and problems. We consider this very helpful for both the novice and expert.
4. 24/7 customer service and tech support.
5. Training is available at \$200 per hour, but can be customized for your needs.
6. The technology used is Active Server Pages and SQL database for the backend.
7. A database load and update tool is free for the first 30 days and then \$20 per month.
8. Database can be used in an excel file format.
9. For \$350 the staff will set up your storefront based on your preferences and then you will be able to customize the additional options. This may be a smart move as the interface is complicated and much easier to change options that are already in place as examples.
10. All images for your site must be loaded onto their servers. You may not reference images from another location.
11. Urchin Statistics for web stats are available for an extra \$10 per month. These stats are exceptional and even though we feel the price is high, they would be worth having for the serious entrepreneur. Other agents charge as little as \$5 per month for these same statistics.
12. You can use the monster SSL or purchase your own.
13. Features include a side bar shopping cart showing purchases on every page.
14. You can use custom HTML in their templates, but not utilizing a fully complex custom design. You can customize to an extent, but there are limitations.
15. Features real-time USPS, FedEx, and UPS information.
16. Monster e-mails you when a new order is placed.
17. Features available are coupon codes, newsletter services, inventory management, related product suggestions, automated best seller list, real-time order tracking for customers.
18. Has a banner ad editor tool and allows you to create custom banners for all of your pages.

19. Provides a variety of solutions, options and pricing. http://www.monstercommerce.com/ecommerce_shopping_cart_pricing_small_business.asp for 5000 products you will pay \$79.95 per month plus a set up fee of \$199.95 which is the first and last month hosting and a \$39.99 account set up fee. If you want the Urchin stats you will be at the \$89.95 per month plan. Monster offers a discount for you to host more than one store with them.

Weaknesses:

1. No built in affiliate program.
2. No FTP access to files. The only access is through an online interface.
3. All control on design and files is through a WSIWYG inter-face.
4. The user must have Windows 2000 or Windows XP installed to use their interfaces online, their product is not compatible with Windows 98 operating systems.
5. The features that you really want in place are available as option upgrades.
6. Search features are weak. If you would like to search by manufacturer as well as category, this information must be in the product title tag. Results were mixed in tests for phrase searches of products on operation web sites.
7. Not a true customizable e-commerce option. There are many features, but you must operate within their parameters. When staff was questioned about additional programming options or additional services, they were not able to answer the questions in an effective way.
8. In their own knowledge base make sure to check out their known programming issues and script problems. As I reviewed these, I saw many listed from 5 months ago that did not have a resolution listed. Some issues were as simple as a misspelling of a word on an error message page. Make sure to review these issues before signing up at <http://kb.monstercommerce.com/development/knownBugs.asp>

Classification and Recommendations

A product for a technically adept client

The best option would be for a technically adept client working with a web designer in tandem

Understand that customization will not be available

Plan on time to learn how to use this powerful interface

This e-commerce resource provides some really great powerful tools for the savvy entrepreneur. The online inventory and site management features are really great. The best scenario would be to have a technically adept client working in tandem with a web designer who would create custom graphics to use within the parameters of the page template options. This is not a solution for a client who desires a high level of unique customization for their design. After speaking with two people in the monster sales and tech area, it is clear that what you see is what you get. They are not really set up to create customized programming for a client. That being said, they do have a nice full featured product that has great possibilities and offers many polished improvements over some of the resources that we have seen in the marketplace. Monster's strength is to offer a pretty good product on a mass scale.

You will need to purchase/setup your own Internet Gateway and Merchant Account to accept credit cards.

Net Suite

This resource operates as a franchise operation, where agents around the country sell and service this online business solution. They can be found on the Web at <http://www.netsuite.com/portal/home.shtml>.

Strengths:

1. If you are looking for full CRM (sales and marketing resource integration) or full ERP (inventory and financial resource integration) this is the product for you.
2. The fully integrated marketing, sales, inventory, and financial options are powerful.
3. This option can scale to your business needs and grow as you grow.
4. Online order tracking is available for online orders
5. E-mail campaign management tools are available.
6. Operates on a subscription model \$1200 for one subscriber to use yearly. Additional subscribers cost \$600 yearly. This price includes hosting, SSL, Internet Gateway, and Merchant Account. They work with the Verisign Pro system.

Weakness:

1. For a full featured custom shopping cart that is truly customizable you would need to trade up to the \$4,800 per month subscriber model introducing the net commerce builder module.
2. With the less expensive product the store template is very limited. Not many changes are possible.
3. If you want training, tech support is prepared to pay an additional \$1000 per year.
4. Training and set up is available. Plan on an additional 50% of your annual subscriber rate for these services.

Classification and Recommendations

This product is best suited for a business that is looking for a complete integration of services and operates a sales staff and warehouse.

Plan on time and money to learn how to use this powerful interface

We feel that for most e-commerce clients that we are working with, that the limitations on the e-commerce side of the product make this item not the best choice for their business needs. However, we can see that for the small business that needs a fully integrated product and wants to save productivity over time, that this may be a really viable option. Although this product is weaker than others that we have reviewed in e-commerce, it may be just the solution for some businesses where e-commerce is one facet of their business and not their only source of revenue.

Shop Site

This resource is not really an e-commerce hosting provider, rather a software application that you install on your computer as an e-commerce creation tool. Their product is sold either as free-standing software or as a packaged option combined with hosting by various agents nationwide. They can be found on the Web at <http://www.shopsite.com/>. You can check out the demo at http://www.shopsite.com/shopping_cart_demo.html

Strengths:

1. You own the product and install it on your own computer.
2. It has a fairly easy to use interface and operates in some ways like many of the online e-commerce options that we have reviewed.
3. All pages are HTML.
4. The interface allows you to make changes to one header, footer or navigation file and then duplicates the changes site wide.
5. Allows you to work with any e-commerce hosting supplier as you do not need to buy their online tool package, so you may save on hosting prices.
6. Has the ability to create a shop button that can be installed on other websites and bring the customer to your site to buy. Great for a banner or add exchange program. (However this can also be done with links as well, without this tool.)
7. HTML pages that are search engine friendly. This was more important a year ago or so, but now nearly all of the main search engines are indexing dynamic pages.

8. Has coupon codes, an affiliate program, and advanced search features.
9. Allows an order download into QuickBooks.
10. Has an additional module for real-time UPS tracking.
11. Cost as a hosted package runs about \$125 per month.
12. There is a degree of customization that is available in the templates. As the files are HTML, they will be easier for an experienced web designer to change.

Weakness:

1. The hosting agent that we spoke to that sells this as a packaged solution could not answer our questions. We were however able to speak to the factory representative who was highly helpful.
2. Although pages are HTML and that is a good thing for search engines really, the e-commerce market is moving forward with new technology using Active Server Pages, PHP, and Java Server Pages and so this feels like old technology. That being said, this may not be a concern for some clients.
3. Support will probably be from the factory and franchise operators may not be able to answer your questions as they come up.
4. You will pay for software upgrades.

Classification and Recommendations

This product is best suited for a do it yourself client or a novice web designer

This application does not offer some of the newest technology tools that are available in other applications.

As we reviewed this product, it seemed like a solid application, but done in old technology. Nearly every e-commerce site is done with dynamic pages today. The issue with this product is that you must have the server space to house a static html page for every product that you feature. Uploads and downloads of files should only be attempted by those with broadband Internet service. It seems cumbersome to have to update all static pages, even though the application offers tools to ease their update. This product certainly will have a following as does Microsoft FrontPage, but there are more robust and technologically advanced options available for the technically savvy client or designer.

McCord Web Design Offers Savvy E-Commerce Solutions

If you are looking for a resource to help you set up and design your e-commerce store, we have the knowledge, expertise, and experience to help you create a store that reflects your unique business identity.

Whether you want a fully customized option, custom graphics to integrate into your own e-commerce page template, or consulting on solutions that would be right for you, we are ready to help you find the solution that works for your needs and budget. Visit our e-commerce service page online at <http://www.mccordweb.com/web-design/e-commerce.html> for additional information and pricing. Or call us at (301) 705-7303 to start work on your e-commerce store today!