

If you have been researching ecommerce marketing, you have probably seen the word “funnel” everywhere. It can sound like jargon: a tidy diagram that bears little resemblance to the messy reality of running an online shop. But the idea behind it is useful. A funnel gives you a way to understand how people move from first discovering a product to completing an order — and where potential customers drop away.

That matters because ecommerce is harder than it looks. A shop can have excellent products and plenty of website traffic, yet still struggle to make a profit. Visitors might not find the right item, hesitate at the product page, abandon their basket or decide that delivery is too slow. Looking at the customer journey in stages helps make those problems visible.

The funnel is not a guarantee of growth, and it should not be treated as a rigid formula. It is a practical way to connect marketing activity with customer behaviour and commercial outcomes. Here is why ecommerce marketing services talk about it so much — and how to use it without getting lost in the terminology.

What does “the funnel” mean in ecommerce?

The funnel describes the broad journey from awareness to purchase. At the top, people may be encountering a brand or product for the first time. In the middle, they are exploring options and deciding whether the offer suits them. At the bottom, they are ready to buy — or close to it.

In ecommerce, that journey often includes stages such as:

- **Discovery:** a shopper sees a product in search results, on social media, through an advert or via a recommendation.
- **Consideration:** they visit the site, browse product categories, compare options and look for reassurance.
- **Purchase:** they add a product to their basket and work through checkout.
- **Retention:** after buying, they may return, recommend the shop or become a repeat customer.

Real customer journeys are rarely this neat. Someone may discover a product on their phone, read reviews on another site, come back through a search engine and purchase on a laptop. They may also leave and return several times. The funnel is a simplified model, not a map of every individual customer.

Because ecommerce is harder than it looks

Opening an online shop is relatively straightforward compared with earning attention, winning trust and making each order commercially worthwhile. Customers have many alternatives, and moving from a product listing to a completed order involves a sequence of decisions. A weak point at any stage can undermine the work done elsewhere.

For example, an advert might attract the right kind of visitor, but a confusing product page can stop them progressing. A persuasive product page might produce a strong **add to cart rate**, but unexpected delivery costs at checkout can prevent the order from being completed. More traffic will not necessarily fix either problem.

This is why a funnel view can be more useful than looking at a single headline figure such as sessions or sales. It encourages you to ask what happened between the two. Did shoppers find relevant products? Did they engage with the product details? Did they start checkout? Did they finish?

These questions help separate an acquisition problem from an on-site or checkout problem. If few suitable people are arriving, product discovery may need attention. If plenty of shoppers add items to their basket but few orders

are placed, the issue may be further down the journey.

Profitability matters more than traffic alone

Ecommerce businesses often operate with tight margins. The cost of the product, fulfilment, delivery, payment processing, returns and marketing all affect what remains from a sale. A campaign can generate a lot of clicks and still be a poor investment if the resulting orders are too costly or unprofitable.

That is why good funnel thinking connects marketing performance to business outcomes. Instead of celebrating traffic in isolation, it asks whether marketing is bringing in relevant shoppers and helping them buy at a sustainable cost.

Useful measures vary by business, but may include:

- the proportion of visitors who view a product or category;
- the **add to cart rate** for relevant products or traffic sources;
- the proportion of shoppers who start checkout;
- **checkout completion**, or the share of checkout starters who place an order;
- the value and profitability of orders, not just their number;
- repeat purchases and other signs of longer-term customer value.

None of these figures should be judged without context. A high conversion rate can still be unhelpful if it comes from heavy discounting that erodes margin. A lower rate may be acceptable for a considered purchase with a longer decision process. The point is to understand how the stages relate to each other and to the economics of the shop.

Competition and price transparency change the decision

Online shoppers can compare products and prices quickly. They may check several retailers in a few minutes, look for a discount code, or search for a similar item with a different brand name. This relentless competition means that being visible is only part of the challenge. The offer also needs to make sense to the customer.

Price is important, but it is not the only consideration. People may be weighing up product quality, suitability, availability, delivery speed, returns, customer service and confidence in the retailer. If the difference between two offers is not clear, a shopper may default to a familiar brand or the lowest visible price.

The funnel helps retailers think about where to communicate value. In the discovery stage, shoppers need to find the right product and understand why it is relevant. During consideration, useful details can help them assess whether it meets their needs. Near purchase, clear delivery and returns information can reduce uncertainty.

That does not mean every page should be packed with promotional claims. It means giving shoppers the information they need at the point they need it, and making sure the experience matches what the marketing promised.

Product discovery is the start of a useful journey

Product discovery is more than getting a visitor onto the homepage. It is helping the right shopper find a relevant product or category with minimal effort. Discovery can happen through search, paid advertising, social content, email, recommendations, category navigation and other routes.

Once someone reaches the site, the journey still needs to work. Clear navigation, useful filters, accurate product titles and helpful category pages can make it easier to narrow down the options. Search results should be relevant, and product information should answer basic questions rather than forcing shoppers to hunt for details.

It is also worth checking that the landing page reflects the source of the visit. If an advert promotes a particular product or offer, sending people to a generic page can create a mismatch. That disconnect may reduce engagement even when the advert has reached the right audience.

Reviews and delivery are conversion drivers

Product reviews can help shoppers understand what an item is like in use and whether it is likely to meet their expectations. They can also provide reassurance about the retailer. For products that are difficult to assess from images alone, customer feedback may be especially useful.

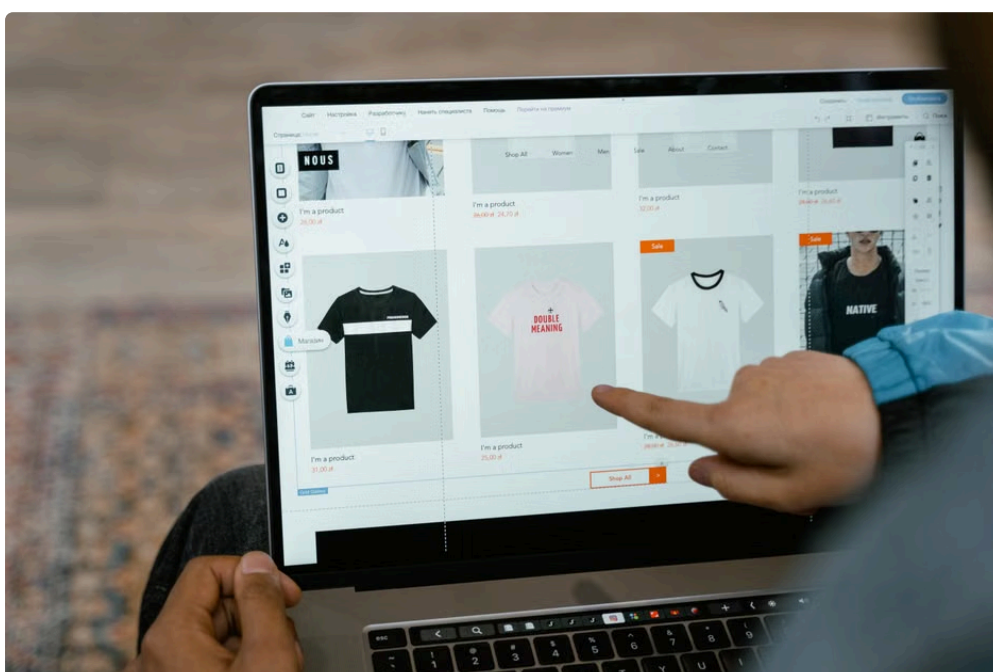
Reviews are not simply a badge to display. Shoppers may look for detail, recency and comments that relate to their own questions. Making genuine feedback easy to find can support consideration, while responding appropriately to customer concerns can show that the business takes service seriously.

Delivery is another major part of the purchase decision. Customers want to know when an order will arrive, what it will cost and whether the options suit them. If delivery information is missing or only appears late in checkout, shoppers may feel that the real cost of the order has changed.

For that reason, delivery should not be treated as an operational detail separate from marketing. It affects the perceived value of the offer and can influence both the decision to add a product to the basket and the chance of completing checkout. Clear information, presented early enough to be useful, can reduce avoidable uncertainty.

Where do shoppers drop out?

Funnel analysis is most useful when it leads to a specific question rather than a broad assumption. A dip between stages does not automatically tell you why it happened. It points to somewhere worth investigating.



Stage What to examine Questions to ask Discovery Relevant visits, landing pages and product views Are the right shoppers finding suitable products? Does the landing page match the promise that brought them there?

Consideration Product engagement and add to cart rate Are prices, product details, reviews and availability clear

enough to support a decision? Checkout Checkout starts and checkout completion Are delivery costs, payment options and required steps clear? Is anything creating unnecessary friction? After purchase Repeat orders, returns and customer feedback Did the product and service meet expectations? Is there a reason for customers to return?

Use the table as a starting point, not a diagnosis. A low add to cart rate could relate to the offer, product information, traffic quality or something else. A decline in checkout completion might be associated with delivery costs, form usability, payment choices or technical issues. Customer feedback and careful testing can help clarify the cause.

How to use the funnel without becoming obsessed with it

The funnel is a framework for asking better questions. It should not become a collection of targets detached from customer experience or profit. A sensible approach is to work through a small number of steps:

1. **Start with the business outcome.** Be clear about what matters: profitable orders, repeat purchasing or another relevant goal.
2. **Map the main customer journey.** Identify how shoppers discover products, assess them and complete an order.
3. **Find the biggest area of uncertainty.** Look for a stage where customers appear to struggle, rather than assuming more advertising is the answer.
4. **Use evidence to investigate.** Combine performance data with customer questions, reviews, support feedback and usability observations.
5. **Make a focused change and assess it.** Test an improvement where possible, then evaluate its effect in context.

This process is more useful than trying to optimise every metric at once. It also recognises that stages interact. Improving product discovery may bring more qualified visitors, while clearer delivery information may influence earlier decisions as well as checkout.

What the funnel does not tell you

A funnel cannot explain customer motivation on its own. It shows patterns in behaviour, but it does not tell you exactly why someone left a page or chose a competitor. Nor does it account perfectly for cross-device journeys, repeat visits, word of mouth or purchases influenced by several channels.

It is also easy to mistake measurement for progress. Tracking more events does not automatically improve the shopping experience. Numbers are most valuable when they help you make a decision: what to investigate, what to prioritise and whether a change appears to have helped.

Different products and audiences will behave differently. A low-cost, familiar item may be bought quickly; a more expensive or specialist product may require research and reassurance. Compare like with like where possible, and avoid treating a single benchmark as a universal standard.

Why ecommerce marketing services keep talking about it

Marketing services use funnel language because it connects the different parts of ecommerce growth. Acquisition can help people discover products. Site experience can support consideration. Product information, reviews and delivery details can address concerns. A usable checkout can help more shoppers finish the purchase. Retention work can encourage customers to come back.

But the useful question is not whether a business needs a funnel diagram. It is whether it understands the journey well enough to identify what is holding back profitable growth. A funnel can provide that shared structure without implying that every retailer needs the same tactics, tools or sequence.

If you use AddToAny sharing widget on your site, it can make it easier for visitors to share useful product or editorial pages. Treat sharing as one possible route for discovery, rather than assuming that a widget alone will generate meaningful traffic or sales. As with any channel, its value depends on whether it reaches relevant people and contributes to outcomes that matter.

Make the journey easier to buy from

The reason ecommerce marketing services talk about the funnel is simple: sales do not happen at the moment someone clicks an advert. Customers need to find something relevant, understand its value, feel confident in the retailer and complete a purchase on acceptable terms.



For a retailer, that means paying attention to product discovery, the add to cart rate and checkout completion — while keeping margins, competition and customer expectations in view. Reviews and delivery are not minor details at the edge of the journey; they can help shape the decision to buy.

Use the funnel as a way to spot friction and focus your effort. Then check whether the <https://smenews.digital/why-specialist-ecommerce-marketing-services-deliver-better-results> changes improve the experience and contribute to profitable results. That is when the language becomes more than a marketing diagram: it becomes a practical way to understand how your shop earns the next order.