



Using ZenCart to build your online shop

What is ZenCart?

ZenCart is an on-line shopping system. It enables companies to operate an on-line store front. It provides the user with a large selection of functions such as unlimited products, unlimited product categories, in-built tools for sales, product promotions, gift certificates and product downloads.

Where can I download it?

ZenCart can be downloaded from the ZenCart website at <http://www.zen-cart.com> by selecting the downloads link from the top navigation menu. A number of website hosting providers include the ZenCart software within their easy to install toolsets, allowing the end user to install the required software at the click of a button from within your website hosting control panel.

What is involved in the implementation process?

To implement ZenCart you will need to collate information and images about the products you intend to sell on the website. These products should be put into suitable categories for ease of location on the website. Items can be easily inserted into a number of different categories using the link manager tool provided within the ZenCart software. You will need to decide how to handle items that are available in different sizes, colours, materials etc, so the shopping system can be set up to enable this. ZenCart also enables you to create standard information pages, for terms and conditions, about us etc. so some thought as to the content of these pages should be carried out.

With regards search engine optimisation as with all websites you should think about the page titles for each category and each product, as ZenCart enable you to modify the page title, page description and page content for all pages, products within the on-line shop.

All websites require a good look and feel, ZenCart has been constructed to enable the end user to change the layout and look of the website easily. However before embarking on the design of the website you should have an idea of what is required and suitable images for headers, logos, font types and colours should be identified. This will speed up the process of getting the site live. This also relates to pictures to use for product categories, as images can make all the difference to a users perception of your company by the impression they gain from viewing your website.

What are the costs?

ZenCart is an open source solution, which means the actual software is free to download and install. The actual cost of using the tool is dependant on your ability to configure and modify the design of the site. Additional costs will be incurred if you use an on-line payment provider to take credit card transactions, or implement a secure webserver enabling you to take credit card payments yourself.



All websites require you to have somewhere to locate the website and this is referred to as hosting, unless you happen to have website costing already you will need to purchase website hosting that has mysql database access and php scripting enabled.

What technical skills are required?

With the tool now being an easy install from some website hosting packages, technical skills are becoming less important. However the ability to understand Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and how to add additional modules / tools to the website, some level of technical knowledge is required.

Is it easy to update and maintain?

ZenCart provides a version checker, that goes an automatically informs you that your site is out of date. If you are using a website hosting installed version of the tool, then an easy update mechanism is usually in place to enable this process. If you have been ambitious and downloaded the tool and carried out the install yourself, ZenCart includes an upgrade tool and various help files on the website to step you through an upgrade.

What are the main features of the ZenCart system?

Categories / Products

- unlimited category depth
- physical merchandise
- downloadable virtual products
- products can reside in multiple categories
- product options as dropdowns, radio buttons, checkboxes, and text input

Global e-commerce ready

- multiple language support
- multiple tax support
- multiple shipping methods
- multiple currency support
- multiple payment methods

Customer retention tools

- periodic newsletter in plain text or HTML
- order status emails and records in the customer account
- referral tools
- gift certificates

Promotion sales & discounts

- individual special prices
- global sale reductions
- category-wide sale prices
- discount coupons
- customer group discounts
- quantity discounts



The National B2B Centre
Helping growing businesses make smart e-business decisions

- one-time charges
- minimum and maximum purchases per product
- prices by attributes

What are the benefits?

It provides you with a low cost, easy solution to enable the development of an on-line shop. It is an easy to use and manage toolset, that is function rich.

Where can I find further information about ZenCart?

<http://www.zen-cart.com>

What are the alternative options for hosting/setting up my online shop?

There are many different solutions for setting up on-line shops some are listed below.

- Ebay shops
- Actinic catalogue – commercial solution - different versions available – dependant on number of products
- FishCart – open source solution

Author: James Pennington, Lead IT Consultant, B2B Centre, 5 February 2007