THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
AMAZON SEO

Optimize & Update Your Product Listings to Rank Organically

cpcstrategy + **BIGCOMMERCE**

Table of Contents

Introduction

When it comes to ranking highly on Amazon's search engine results page, there's no silver-bullet strategy.

However, there are some known ranking factors that determine whether your "ergonomically designed dog leashes" end up at the top of page one—or buried at the bottom of page five.

Here's what you'll get from this guide:

- ✔ An inside look at Amazon's top ranking factors
- ✔ Step-by-step directions for listing optimization
- ✔ An essential guide to updating your product feed (the easy way)

And the best part is, these aren't just theories. They're strategies that have been tested and proven to work by the experts at CPC Strategy. So don't just read this guide—put it into practice, and see how it affects your rank.

How Does Amazon's Ranking Algorithm Work?

How Does Amazon's Ranking Algorithm Work?

Amazon's A9 search algorithm takes all of the following into consideration when determining product ranking for a given product search. At CPC Strategy, we call them "**direct factors**."

1   **Sales Performance History**

2   **Text Match Relevancy**

3   **Price**

4   **Availability (in stock history)**

Then there are things that Amazon doesn't necessarily weigh in search results, but they help influence the direct factors. We call them "indirect factors".

1   **Fulfillment Method**

2   **Reviews (number of reviews & review score)**

3   **Images**

4   **EBC / A+ Content**

5   **Advertising**

6   **Promotions**

Honestly, we could fill up an entire guidebook with just one of these factors—so in this guide, we'll keep things simple and focus on a direct ranking factor every Amazon seller can influence for better results:

Text match relevancy.

Most Amazon shoppers look for products via search and not by sifting through filters, so it's important to develop product content with the right product field optimizations.

"Text match relevancy", aka "Amazon SEO" encompasses the content of your product listings from titles to backend search terms. And just like Google search engine optimization, it's the key to elevating your presence on Amazon's SERP (search engine results page).

A Note Before We Start

A Note Before We Start

No matter how much you optimize your listing, the truth is that Amazon content ownership is shared.

In other words, there is no guarantee your data will be surfaced on an Amazon detail page, because Amazon algorithmically pulls what it deems to be the best content to display for the shopper.

The only exception to this rule is for brands that are part of the Amazon Brand Registry. This program allows sellers who manufacture or sell their own branded products to have higher authority over their product listing content.

If you want to learn more about Amazon's Brand Registry and how to sign up, bookmark this post:

New Amazon Brand Registry 2.0 Opens Enrollment
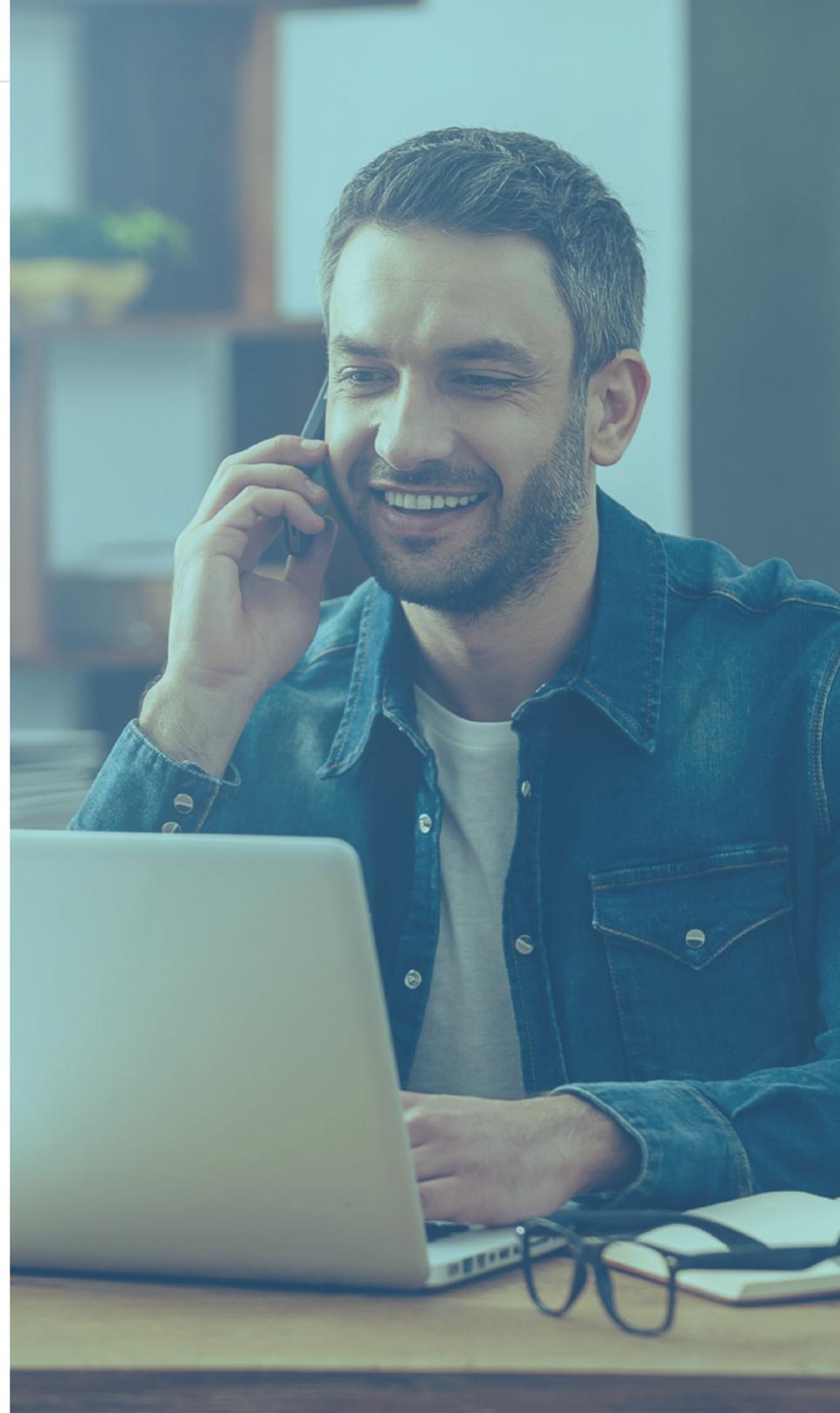
The Most Important Parts of Your Product Listings

The Most Important Parts of Your Product Listings

Amazon's A9 algorithm has some pretty clear preferences in terms of content ranking factors. The following influencers are numbered in order of importance, 1 being the most important, 4 being the least:

1 **Titles**

2 **Feature Bullet Points**

3 **Product Descriptions**

4 **Backend Search Terms**

Product Titles

Typically, Amazon favors the creator of a product detail page when selecting titles to show, so product titles are especially important when you're the sole seller or there's low competition for a SKU.

Make a list of your most important keywords for your titles—including name variations that your customers are using (ex. "bedsheets and "bed sheets").

This doesn't mean you should keyword stuff your titles. It's a bad customer experience, and Amazon's bots will likely catch on and suppress your listing.

Product Title Guidelines

Characters

General: 80-250*

Right rail ads: 30-33

Mobile: 55-63

check your category-specific upload template

"Check your suppressed listings report to make sure none of your current listings are being suppressed due to title length. If they are suppressed, your product won't show up in search & browse."

Pat Petriello
Marketplace Manager
CPC Strategy

Tips

✔ Capitalize the first letter of each word

✔ Spell out measure words such as ounce, inch, and pound

✔ All numbers should be numerals

✔ Ampersands (&) should not be used in titles unless part of a brand name; spell out and lowercase "and"

✔ If the size is not a relevant detail, do not list it in the title

✔ If the product does not come in multiple colors, the color should not be noted in the title

Do Not Include:

- ❌ Price and quantity
- ❌ All caps
- ❌ Seller information
- ❌ Promotional messages such as "sale" or "discount"
- ❌ Suggestive commentary such as "best seller"
- ❌ Symbols ($, !, ?)

Title Format

Amazon's algorithm correlates higher relevance with keywords that appear earlier in the title.

All category titles should start with the brand and list the product name, but other attributes of the title may include:

- ✔️ Pattern
- ✔️ Model number
- ✔️ Power output
- ✔️ Size, color, quantity (if there is more than one)
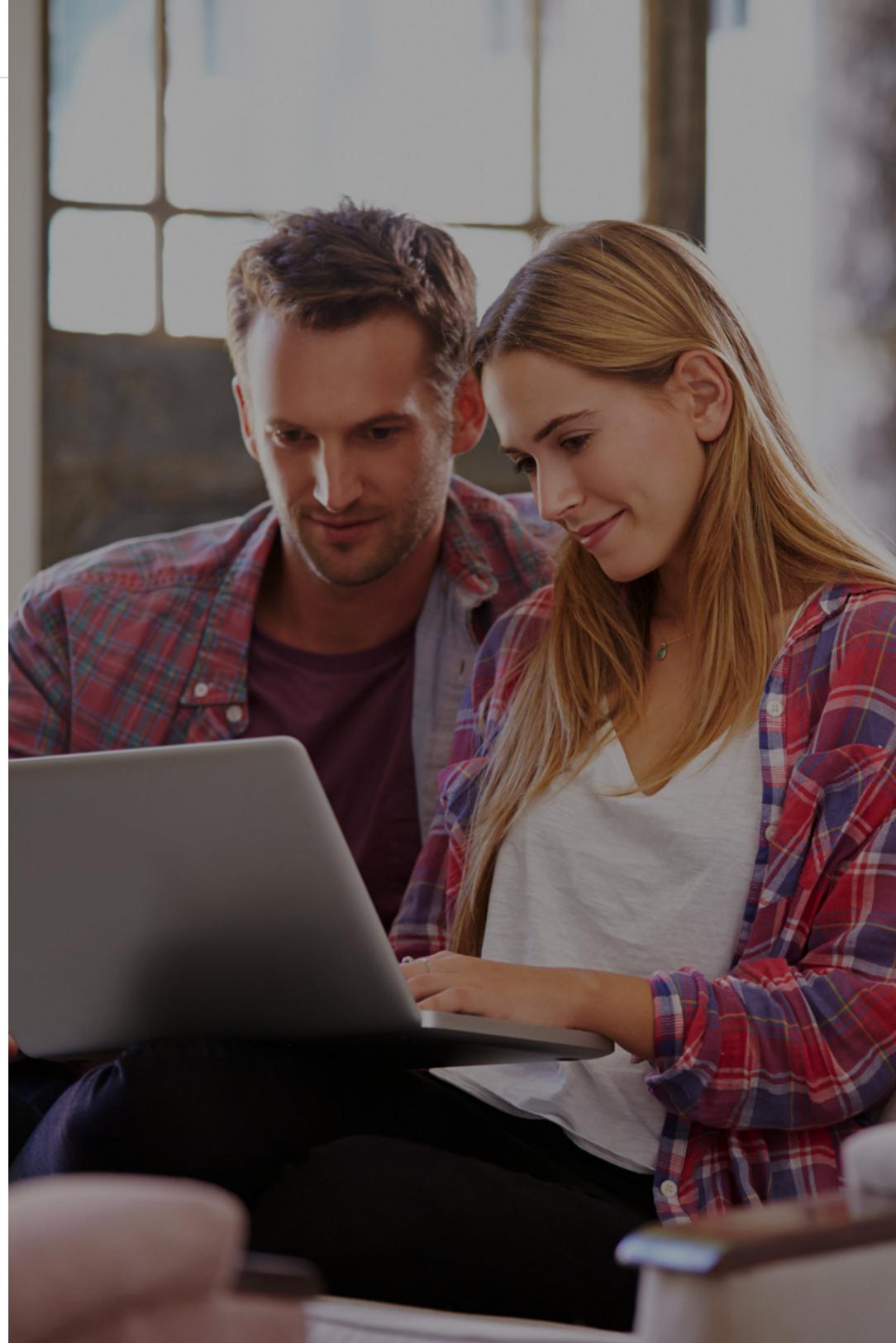
Make use of special characters, like the ones below, to add some style and naturally break up phrases:

✔ |

✔ ,

✔ &

✔ –

A basic formula for product titles looks like this:

[Brand Name] – [Product Type] – [Feature #1] – [Feature #2] – [Feature #3] - [Size, etc.]

Here are some category-specific title examples. Test different titles to see what works best for your products:

Cookware, Cutlery
Style: Brand + Line + Size+ Product Type
Example: Sabatier Precision 14-Piece Stainless-Steel Knife Block Set

Cook's Tools & Gadgets
Style: Brand (+ Model Number if necessary) + Model Name + Product Type, Color
Example: Vacu Vin Wine Saver Gift Pack, White

Small Appliances, Home Environment
Style: Brand + Model Number + Model Name + Product Type, Color
Example: KitchenAid KSM150PSER Artisan 5-Quart Mixer, Empire Red

Examples

Good

This product title includes plenty of information to help it surface
on the SERP (and it doesn't hurt that it's also Amazon's Choice):
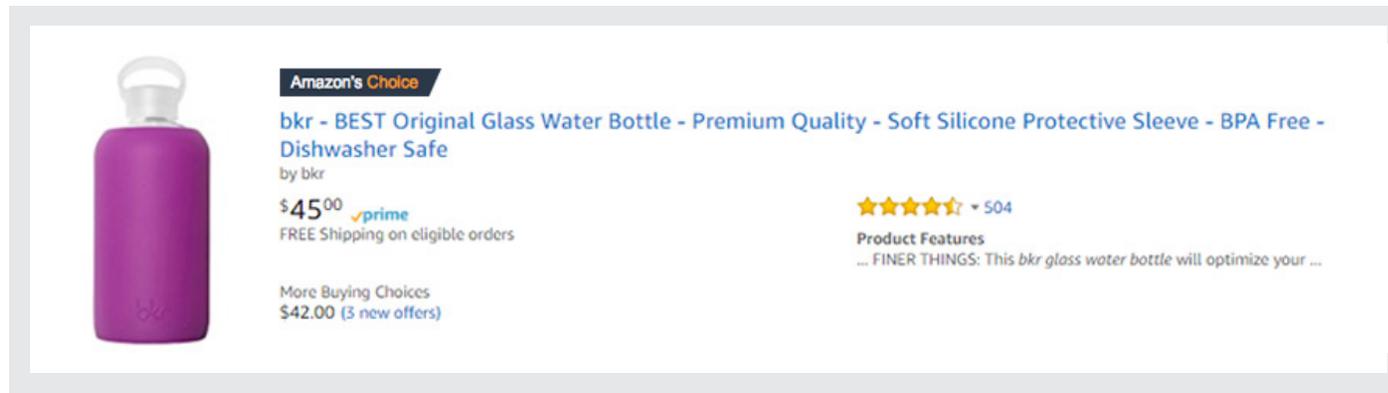
Poor

Not only is this title not descriptive enough to surface it for
enough searches, it also probably doesn't see CTRs as high as the
bottle above due to a lack of information:
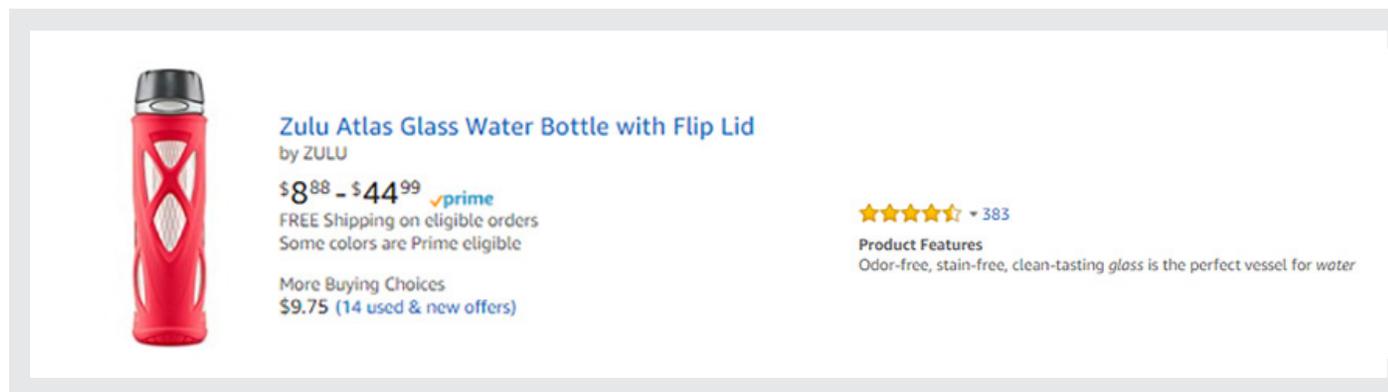
Product Features

Product features are the second most important factor in surfacing your products. Typically, product features are formatted as a bullet point list as shown in the example below:

Some brands consider this section an afterthought, and throw in a few regurgitated lines from the title, but Amazon takes this section seriously, and it could make or break your ability to show up on the SERP.

Product Feature Content Guidelines

Characters: 250

Tips

- ✔ Highlight the top five features that you want your customers to consider, such as dimensions, warranty information or age appropriateness

- ✔ Begin each bullet point with a capital letter

- ✔ Write in fragments and do not include ending punctuation

- ✔ Write all numbers as numerals

- ✔ Separate phrases in one bullet with semicolons

- ✔ Spell out measurements, such as quart, inch, or feet

- ✔ Do not write vague statements; be as specific as possible with product features and attributes

- ✔ Do not enter company-specific information; this section is for product features only

- ✔ Do not include promotional and pricing information

- ✔ Do not include shipping or company information. Amazon policy prohibits including seller, company, or shipping information

Examples

Good

Note the words in caps at the beginning of each bullet, the consistent tone, and the informative text—all adding up to a compelling product features section.

Poor

The featured section below is sparse and includes unnecessary information about the company. In addition, there are no product characteristics or dimensions listed aside from "one size fits most teens and adults up to a 42-inch chest".

Product Descriptions

Product descriptions are typically several paragraphs long. They require detailed attention and some light HTML.

If you're selling products in a competitive or heavily regulated category such as health supplements, there are restrictions on what you can write. Make sure you read all requirements before you post your product descriptions.

All of this is doable if you have a few SKUs, but it can get complicated if you're working with thousands. If that's you, you may want to consider outsourcing this part.

Product Description Guidelines

Characters: 2,000

Tips

✔️ Try using light HTML to better split up paragraphs and "bold" certain important words or phrases seller, company, or shipping information

Example of paragraph and bolding light html in description:

```
<p>The K'NEX Mario Kart Building Set <b>comes with 26 K'NEX
pieces</b> to build your own racing kart from the popular
Nintendo video game. These include plastic rods and
connectors that feature vibrant colors and are made with
premium-quality construction. </p>
```

Do not include any of the following in your product description:

✖ Seller name

✖ Email address

✖ Website URL

✖ Company-specific information

✖ Details about another product that you sell

✖ Promotional language such as "sale" or "free shipping"

Examples

Good

This is a long description, but it's broken up in easy-to-skim paragraphs and has bolded words for emphasis:

Product Description

Let your children experience endless building possibilities with **K'NEX 375 Piece Deluxe Building Set!**

This building set from K'NEX comes with **375 different** rod and connector pieces, which can be assembled into 3D configurations. Kids can build **up to 30 different big, movable models**, creating helicopter, trucks, or even animals — whichever they prefer. This activity will keep your children occupied for hours!

It can be a problem to store small plastic toy parts into one place, and the last thing you want is them getting lost! Keep all the K'NEX parts in one place that is easy to access. Store all those precious pieces in this handy treasure chest that kids will always love to open. Storing the many pieces of this set will never be a hassle! Easy-to-follow building instructions come along with the K'NEX 375 Piece Deluxe Building Set. Unleash your kids' creativity as they make their own designs for open-ended fun! This building set is recommended **for kids ages 7 and up**

Help your kids develop a better understanding of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math subjects) with this building toy. As they click the parts together and discover how the building system works, they strengthen their hand-eye coordination, fine motor and problem-solving skills, and spatial awareness. K'NEX rods and connectors are responsibly made in America at a landfill-free, zero-waste green manufacturing facility in Hatfield, Pennsylvania. The strictest quality and safety standards were used in testing this toy to ensure that your child has a successful, trouble-free building experience.

If you need a replacement for any broken or missing part, or for any other reason, just give us a call, and we will get you what you need so your child can get back to building as soon as possible.

For a toy that is not only fun but educational, choose K'NEX 375 Piece Deluxe Building Set!

Poor

This product description resembles a Product Features section more than a Description section. It's choppy and most of the language looks like it's based on a few keywords:

Product description

Color:**Floral Print**

Original and comfortable Cute fashion dog hat for your dog.
Cade dog cap, elastic chin strap.
Visor cap can effectively protect dogs eyes from sun rays and add a stylish appearance to your dogs.
Usage: Grooming
Material: Canvas,polyester
Dog hats with ear holes
Adjustable neck strap
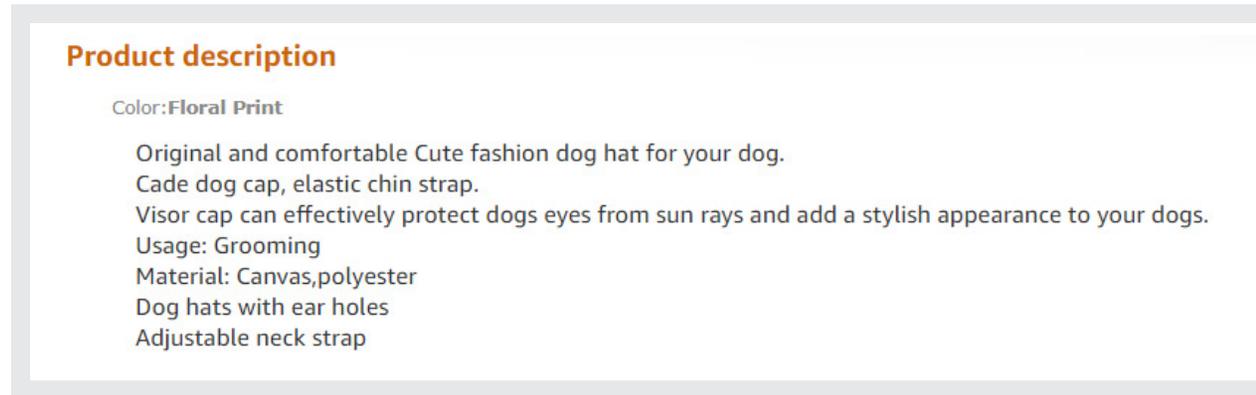
Thinking about investing in Enhanced Brand Content (EBC)?

Not a bad idea. According to Amazon, "Studies have shown that increased traffic and conversion that comes with adding high quality EBC can drive a sales increase of more than 5%."

But don't expect to replace your description with EBC—your description will still be indexed.

"While EBC is not indexed for search by Amazon's A9 algorithm, the product description it replaces on the detail page is still indexed—so you should still include a search-optimized description."

Pat Petriello
Marketplace Manager
CPC Strategy

BRAND SELLER'S GUIDE TO ENHANCED BRAND CONTENT
How to Increase Your Conversions on the Amazon Marketplace

cpcstrategy

DOWNLOAD OUR GUIDE

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ENHANCED BRAND CONTENT

Backend Keywords / Terms

Amazon gives you the opportunity to provide a list of invisible keywords on the backend to enhance product discoverability.

Remember, order does matter for these keywords. If you're used to keyword strategy for traditional PPC, think of these as "phrase match" keywords.

Keywords can be entered in three different ways:

Manually via Seller Central
(Inventory > Manage Inventory > Actions > Edit Details > Keywords)

A bulk upload via an .xml file
(automatic submission)

A bulk upload via a .csv file
(yourself)

Again, consumers never see these search terms on the actual search results page—they are the invisible force that pushes your listings to the top.

Because they're not visible on the front end, search keywords are a good opportunity for you to get creative.
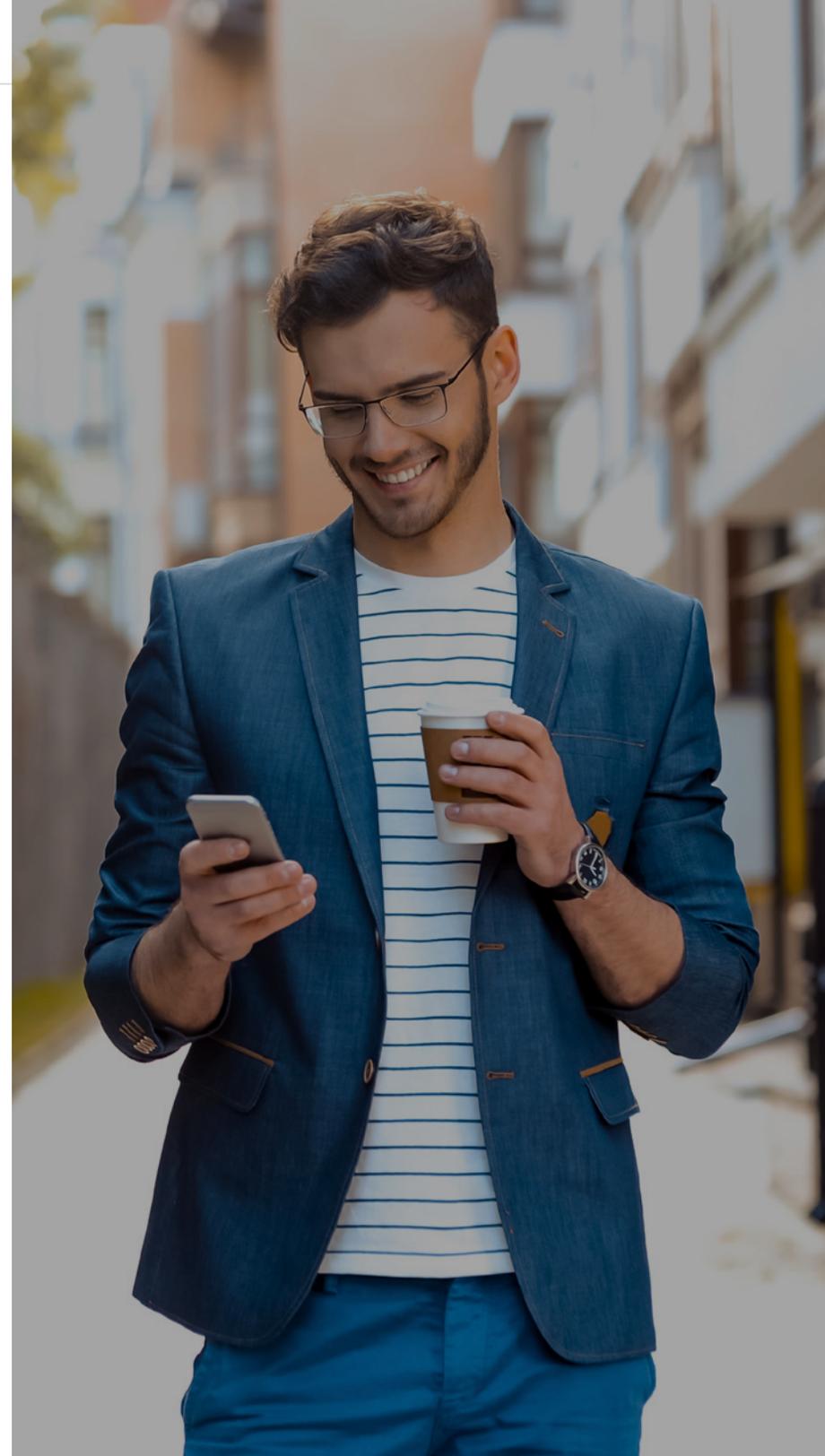
Notice how, in the search results below for "litter box", the top result doesn't even have "litter box" in the title. Instead, it says "litter pan":

"[Backend keywords] present an opportunity for Amazon sellers to target long tail keywords and niche product opportunities."

Pat Petriello
Marketplace Manager
CPC Strategy

Backend Terms Guidelines

Characters: 250

Tips

✔ Include alternate spellings

✔ Add in related search terms

✔ Think of creative, out-of-the-box queries

Example Template

Uploading & Updating Your Feed

Uploading & Updating Your Feed

For sellers with few products, it's simple to update your product listing through Amazon's interface. Unfortunately, for those with more than a few, it's an operation.

This chapter will walk you through exactly how to keep your product feed updated—whether you decide to use an Inventory File Template or an ecommerce platform such as BigCommerce.

Hint: If you don't want to mess around with Inventory File Templates, skip down to *this section*.

Inventory File Templates 101

An Inventory File Template is an Excel document that contains multiple columns for describing and listing your products. It also contains definitions for each column. The templates you need to create product pages and listings can be downloaded from Amazon here.

Amazon provides templates for individual product categories or niches. Just scroll to find your niche and download both the template file and the Browse Tree Guide (BTG).

Note that some listings will need approval before they can be listed live (and there might be glitches—you've been warned).

Listing Unique Items (Recommended)

Download the inventory template file that corresponds to your selling category. Then, walk through the following processes in that Excel document:

STEP 1

Save a copy of the file as an Excel worksheet on your hard drive. Enter your product data into the Template tab, using the guidelines below.

STEP 2

Print the Data Definitions sheet for reference. That tab contains the acceptable values that can be used as you fill out the Template tab. The Data Definitions tab also indicates whether a field is required, preferred or optional.

STEP 3

As indicated in the Data Definitions tab, some fields require that you use terms from the Valid Values tab. These terms are specific to the product attribute and are used for product discoverability and categorization. Some cells require that you use valid codes from the Browse Tree Guide (BTG). The BTG is a separate Excel file that can be downloaded.

BTGs are category-specific and contain the rules that Amazon uses to assign products to categories on the marketplace. In the BTG for your category, find the category most appropriate for your product, then use the corresponding query to determine what field and value you need to put in your template to place your product in that category.

STEP 4

Refer to the Image Info tab for Amazon's image standards. Images you upload to Amazon must conform to these standards.

STEP 5

Save your Inventory File. When you have finished entering your product data into the Template tab, save the Template tab (only) as a Text (tab-delimited) (*.txt) file. This is your inventory file that you will upload via the Upload Products & Inventory tool in your seller account.

STEP 6

Validate your data and upload your file to Amazon at the same time by clicking the "Upload file" button on the Amazon.com toolbar. Before your offers are uploaded to the site, the system will automatically validate your data.

Data that fails validation will be outlined in red in your file and an explanation will appear in the cell comment. You can read the cell comment by selecting the cell.
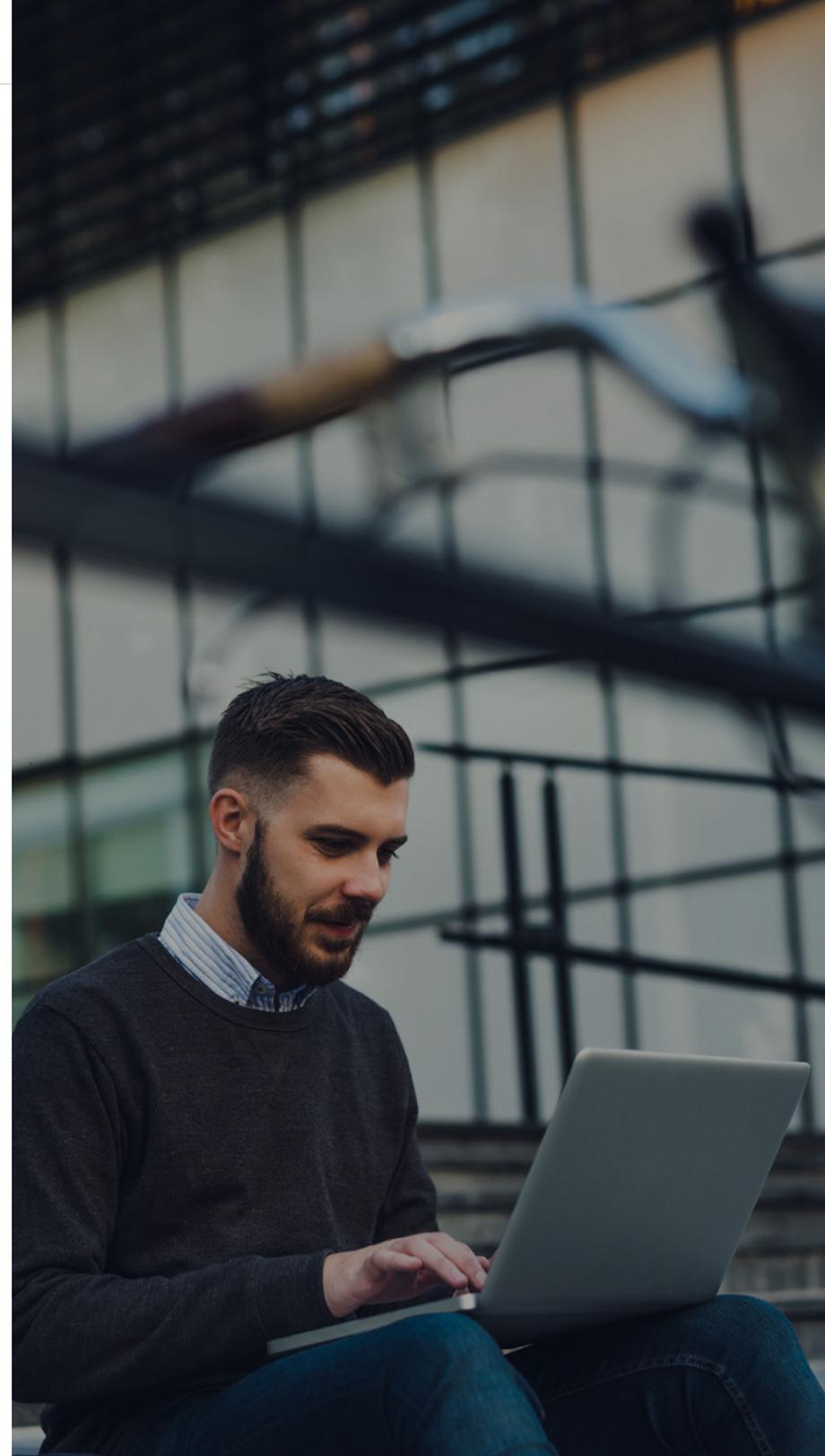
When the validation process is complete, you can choose to upload whether or not validation was successful; however, if validation was not successful, your upload may be rejected. Any errors in the upload will appear in a Processing Report. This report can be downloaded from the "Review File Status and History" section of the Upload Products & Inventory page in your seller account. You can also run validation without uploading the file by clicking the Validate button on the Amazon.com toolbar.

Making a change to a cell will automatically remove that cell's red border and cell comment. Amazon recommends first uploading 15 or fewer products for testing purposes. You can upload the rest of your inventory once you have completed a successful test.

It's a lot of work. Here's are a couple helpful notes from Amazon on how to fill out the Template tab and import data properly:

1 The Template tab contains the template from which you will create an inventory file. Column headers in bold indicate required data. For best results, also submit as much preferred and optional data as possible for your products. If you are not providing data for a particular field, leave the cell blank. Feel free to add color, bold, borders and other formatting (not additional text) to the template if it is helpful to you. Please note that high ASCII characters (such as ®, ©) and HTML tags are not allowed.

2 If you have data in an Excel file that is in another format (such as with different field names in a different order), you can use the Import button on the Amazon.com toolbar to import it into this template. Data in columns with headers that are exactly the same will be matched automatically, regardless of where they appear in the imported file. You will be given the opportunity to manually match headers that are not the same.

Uploading Products on Amazon The Easy Way

Managing inventory in various spreadsheets and formats isn't ideal for any business. Plus, the steps to upload a product to take up valuable time that could be spent elsewhere.

Ecommerce platforms such as BigCommerce integrate directly with Amazon so you can ditch the Inventory File Template.

Tailor your existing BigCommerce products' data (such as name and price) specifically for listing on Amazon, and get total control over how your products are featured.

Orders from Amazon show up in your BigCommerce control panel and are fulfilled just like your other orders for optimal workflow. Inventory stock levels are automatically synced between your storefront and Amazon in real time.

Amazon maintains a high standard when it comes to product information (as you saw in the sections above), so the integration between the two platforms features streamlined error handling to help identify specific product listing issues quickly and in easy-to-understand terms.

Once you open your Amazon Seller Account, and if you have your own BigCommerce store, here's how you upload your products to Amazon –– no template file needed.

STEP 1

Go to Products › View and click Storefront › Create Listing next to the product you want to list on Amazon.
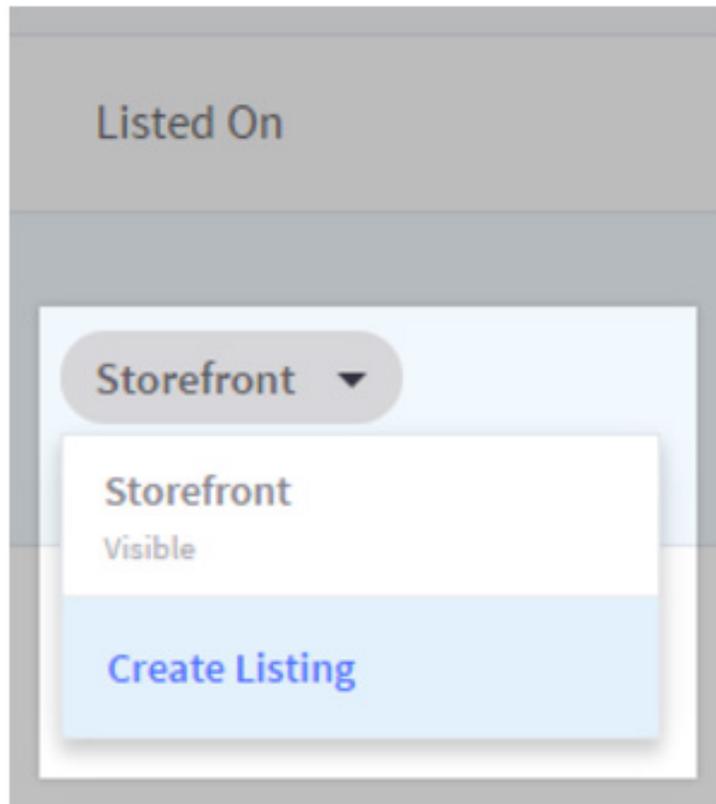

STEP 2

On the Product Listing Details page, select Amazon under Channels (it will already be selected if Amazon is the only channel enabled in Channel Manager).
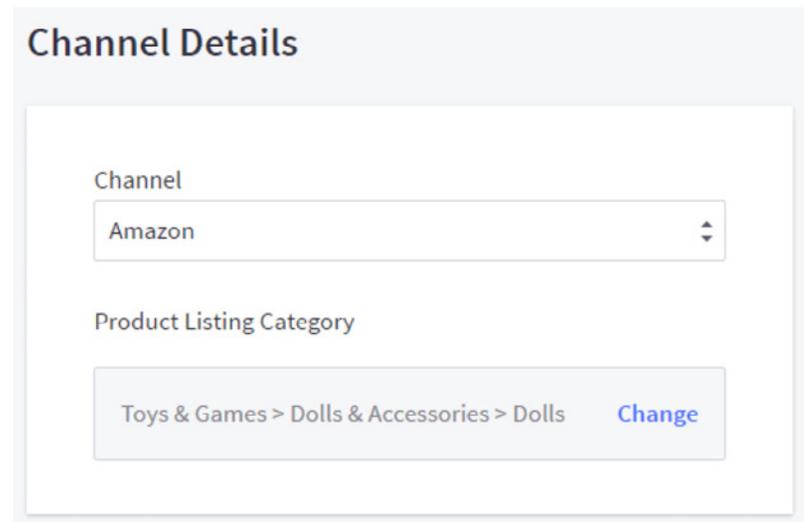
STEP 3

Product Listing Category will be set according to the Category Mapping settings you made during setup. Click Change to manually select an Amazon category for the product (this will not affect the product's BigCommerce category).

By default, your new Amazon product listing will use the same name, description, brand, and price details your product has in your BigCommerce store.
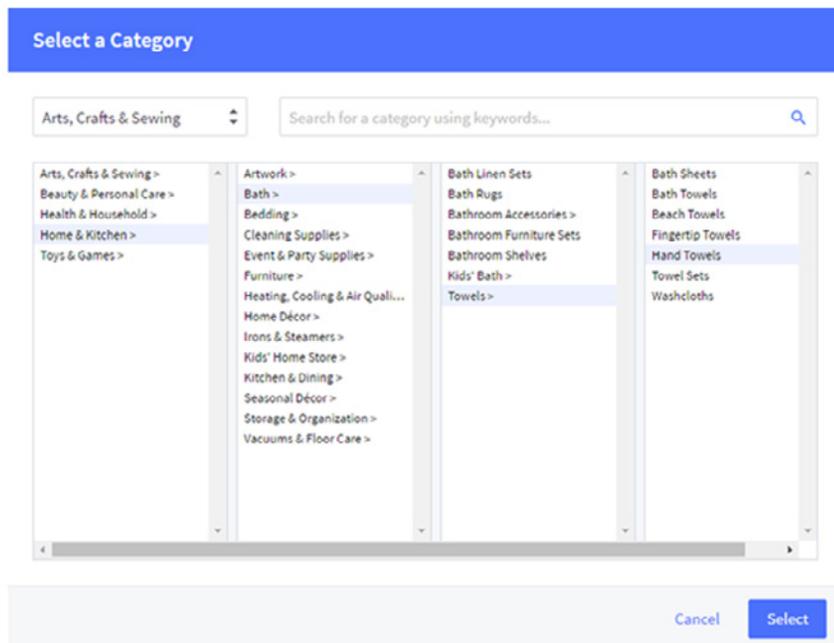
Optionally, you can override these to be specific to Amazon. These edits are only reflected on Amazon.com — not on your BigCommerce store or other marketplace listings.

STEP 4

Depending on the selected Product Listing Category, you may be presented with additional Channel Listing Details required by Amazon. You can also add Bullet Points for your listing here. Click Show All Listing Details to see any optional/additional fields for this category.

STEP 5

Save your changes. Once saved, your product will show an Amazon status of Pending. After your product has been successfully listed, its listing status will change from Pending to Active.

New and updated listings can take up to 30 minutes to appear on Amazon, and images can take up to 24 hours.

If you attempt to list a product from BigCommerce that is already on Amazon, the integration will sync your BigCommerce and Amazon catalog for that item (e.g. price, name, stock level updates) provided they share the same identifier (e.g. UPC, EAN, GTIN).
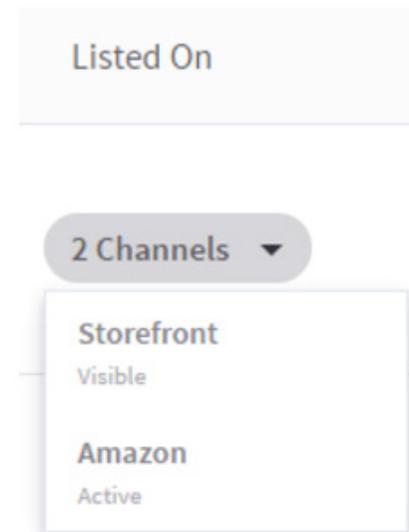
Conclusion

Conclusion

You should now have a solid understanding of how A9 works, which means you're ahead of the knowledge curve (and hopefully, ahead of your competitors). You also know the effects content can have on your rank in the search results, and the best practices around optimization.

But that's not the end of the story.

Remember those indirect factors such as images and EBC content that we mentioned briefly before? You'll need an action plan to stay on top of those.

Get more information about indirect ranking factors in these free resources:

✔ The 2016 Guide to Fulfillment by Amazon (PDF download)

✔ Amazon's New Early Reviewer Program (Blog post)

✔ How to Create Optimized Amazon Product Listings for 2017 (Video)

✔ Brand Seller's Guide To Enhanced Brand Content (EBC) (PDF download)

✔ The Brand's Guide To Amazon A+ Content (PDF download)

✔ The 2017 Amazon Sponsored Products Guide (PDF download)

✔ How To Create Your Own Amazon Promotions in Seller Central (PDF download)

Take the Next Step

Schedule Your Amazon Strategy Evaluation

CPC Strategy's Amazon Strategy Evaluation is a complimentary 60-minute analysis and assessment of your Amazon Seller Central account, advertising programs, product order volume, and profitability metrics.

SCHEDULE MY EVALUATION

cpcstrategy

We Turn Browsers Into Buyers

Sell More Effectively and Efficiently

BigCommerce is the leading ecommerce platform for fast-growing and mid-market brands.

SONY   HARVARD UNIVERSITY   NELSON EDUCATION   PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL

GP Georgia-Pacific   CAROLINA PANTHERS   GRAND CANYON   Delaware North   GORILLA

BENZAC ACNE SOLUTIONS   BEN&JERRY'S   CAMELBAK   mywit   ASSURANT

TOYOTA   QVC   Cetaphil   SILK Better Commerce   PT THE PLUM TREE GROUP

PAUL MITCHELL   COALITION   americaneagle·com

According to analysis conducted by market research firm Ipsos, online stores built on BigCommerce grow approximately twice as fast as the ecommerce industry average. BigCommerce's cloud-based platform enables merchants such as Cetaphil, Dorco, Duck Commander, Martha Stewart and Travelpro to cost-effectively grow their businesses with more traffic, higher conversion and superior performance. BigCommerce supports clients from its headquarters in Austin, Texas and offices in San Francisco and Sydney.

1-866-581-4549   **REQUEST A DEMO**   BIGCOMMERCE