

Online Catalog / Catalog Management Best Practices

1. **Think in terms of online AND offline.** If you provide, or wish to provide, an offline catalog to your online customers, select a system that works well for both or integrates easily with your offline catalog tool.
2. **Define a complete set of requirements.** You must define your complete set of requirements and match them to the vendors who provide offline and online catalog, catalog-imaging and search services.
3. **Leading online catalog solutions may not meet your search needs.** Online catalogs and search capabilities are vastly different but they need to be considered separately and together.
4. **Plan carefully to support integration requirements of your online catalog.** Nearly all eCommerce applications and most search tool providers include online catalog features. When you add in applications to support offline catalogs and online catalog imaging, integration across these needs to be understood and planned.
5. **If you just want an online catalog, consider capabilities from eCommerce providers.** For some retailers, having an online catalog may not be synonymous with eCommerce. They may want to show their products on the web but not sell them on the web. eCommerce providers generally have online catalogs tied to search and can prevent ordering online.
6. **Consider consolidation of tools.** Separate online catalog, online search and offline catalog tools may or may not be needed. Some tools can satisfy your needs for two out of the three, leaving only one integration for the third tool. You may find that a search tool can support your online catalog needs or vice versa.
7. **Know how your customers like to see your products.** Customers who first were introduced to your brand through your print catalog go online only to see new products or online specials. They may then call in their order. Find out what features all of your customers need and define your requirements to help them.
8. **Create a learning path for existing customers and a design to attract new customers.** Your online catalog solution should help offline customers become comfortable finding products and eventually ordering online. However, it should also target and attract online-only customers, as they are a growth opportunity for you.
9. **Think carefully about the data you need.** Migrating your product catalog to a new system may give you support for eCommerce or reporting features that you currently don't have. These features normally tie to data that is needed, but nonexistent, on your current system. Plan the data you need to support your site, reporting, and product roadmap to ensure you do not need a redesign or need to replace it with a new system in the short term.
10. **Tie print catalogs to online catalogs.** If you have an offline catalog that has a good following, it may be beneficial to consider an online catalog tool that mimics a print catalog, where they can see and "turn" pages.