

# Russell Smith Content Sample #1

**Client:** US-based Ecommerce Web Design & Ecommerce agency, dedicated to serving the automotive industry.

**Overview:** Part 3 of a 4-post series on creating a category tree for large inventory Ecommerce stores. Part of a larger campaign to educate their clients (large inventory online retailers of automotive accessories) how to increase conversions and sell more products. The campaign included an educational blog series, email opt-in bait, email autoresponder campaigns and an E-Book.

**Title:** How To Build An Ecommerce Category Tree That Drives More Sales

**Client audience:** Automotive retailers and manufacturers in the US that want to increase their online sales

**Content type:** Explainer post

**Additional info:**

- ✓ High quality, long form content
- ✓ 4000+ words (in total for the series, this post: 1278 words)
- ✓ Descriptive screengrab images w/ annotations & captions
- ✓ Original branded graphics
- ✓ Rich content, great for SEO
- ✓ Promotional email content provided

**Writer:** Russell Smith

**Recommended URL:** /how-to-build-ecommerce-category-tree

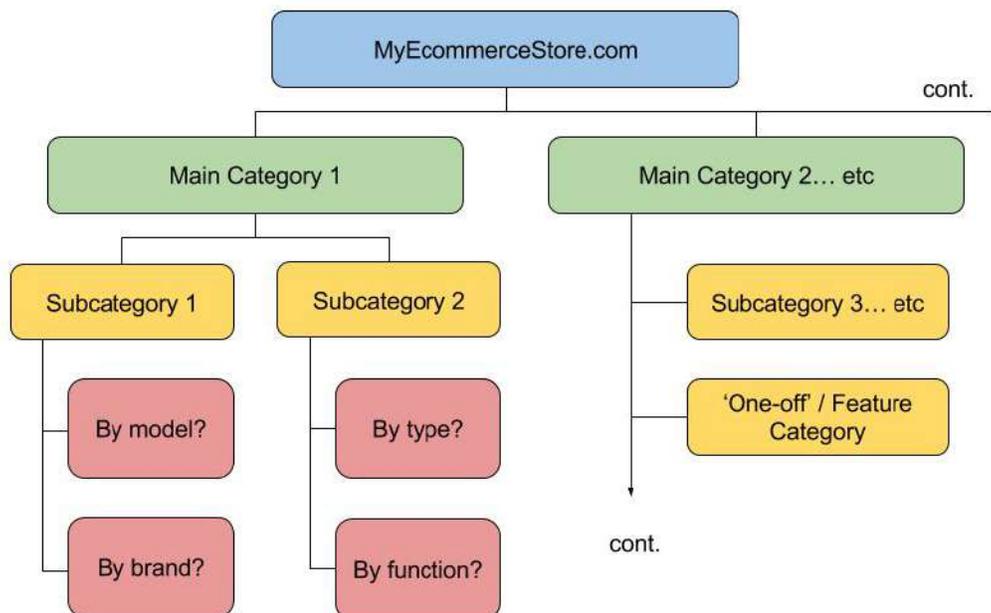
# How To Build An Ecommerce Category Tree That Drives More Sales

Now that [we have our information prepared to get the best results](#), let's start building your category tree.

Think of the following sections hierarchically.

Your main categories will be at the top of the tree, and they will be fewest. Under that will come your subcategories, levels 1, 2 and perhaps 3, and will number higher than your main categories. Finally, you will have set of filters that narrow down the search to the very most specific details of the product.

When it's done, it will look like a Christmas tree, thinnest at the top, and widest at the base, like this:



Original graphic by WebShopManager.com

*An example of how your Ecommerce category tree should start to look. Less main categories, more sub- and sub-sub-categories.*

## **Main categories**

These are your biggest, broadest product groupings. The idea of these categories is to quickly display to new visitors the total scope of what you stock in your store.

If your potential customer is looking to pick up a rear bumper, and your main categories are bumpers, floor mats, lighting and a other cosmetic automotive accessories, they'll dive right into 'Bumpers' and find what they need in a couple of clicks.

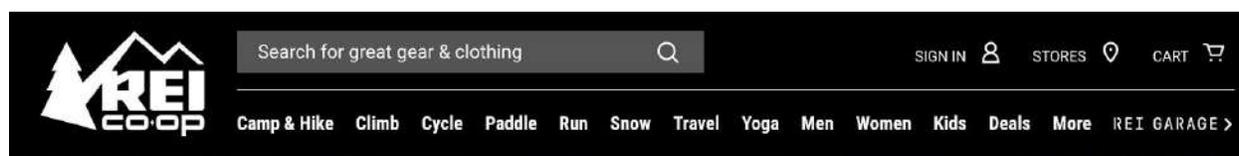
However, if you have that same set of main categories on your site, but this time your customer wants to pick up some electronic components in bulk, and you do stock them, but 'electronics' isn't in your main category list... they're going to bounce to your competitor immediately, because they think you only do cosmetic accessories.

Now you've missed a sale.

Your ideal situation here is that every major product grouping has a 'main category' allocation right at the top of the tree.

They should simultaneously outline what you do and do not stock, and intuitively lead your customer down the right path to find what they want to buy.

REI do a good job of breaking down their main categories, within the wider range of 'Outdoor Gear'



*The clear breakdown of REI's main categories clearly sets the boundary of what they do and do not stock.*

## **Subcategories**

This is where you break down your main categories into specific groups of products from which customers can compare and select the products they want.

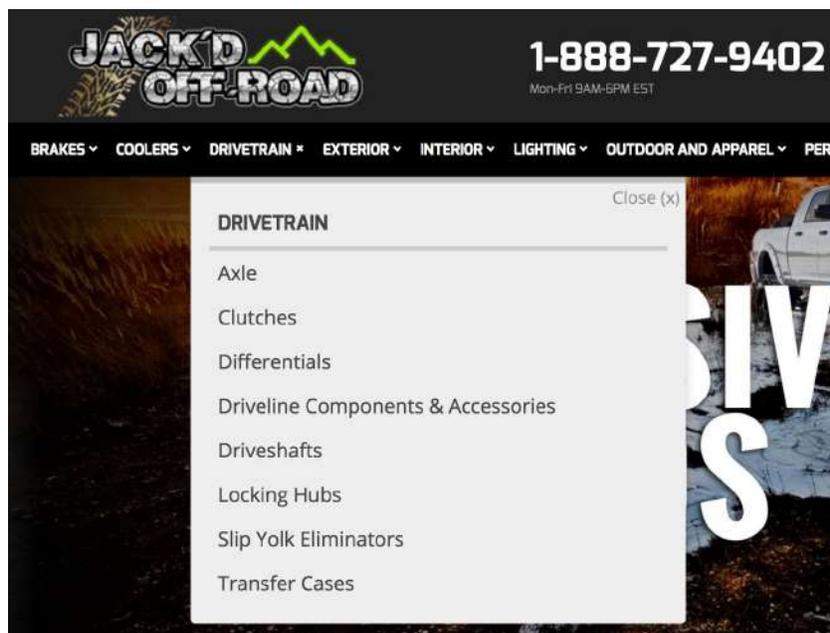
We recommend that you stick to 1-2 levels of subcategories, to stay within the '3 clicks to buy' framework. This will vary if you have especially large inventories.

To use an automotive example, this is where you break down your 'Bumpers' main category into front bumper and rear bumper, and your floor mats into a list of brands or soft vs. hard (depending on how you choose to present your range).

A clothing store might break down their T-Shirt range into v-neck, long sleeve and short sleeve, or their jeans into skinny fit, bootleg, straight cut and low rise.

In general, the subcategory level is too early to go into things like size and material, as listing all those variables in your main navigation would be far too overwhelming for most shoppers. Your goal is to draw customers to the right product grouping, then allow them to play with size and material options to isolate the exact product they are interested in.

Web Shop Manager client Jack'd Offroad do a great job of breaking down their main categories (in this example, 'Drivetrain') into more manageable subcategories



*Break down your main categories into clear subcategories make products easier to find, compare and purchase*

## Feature categories

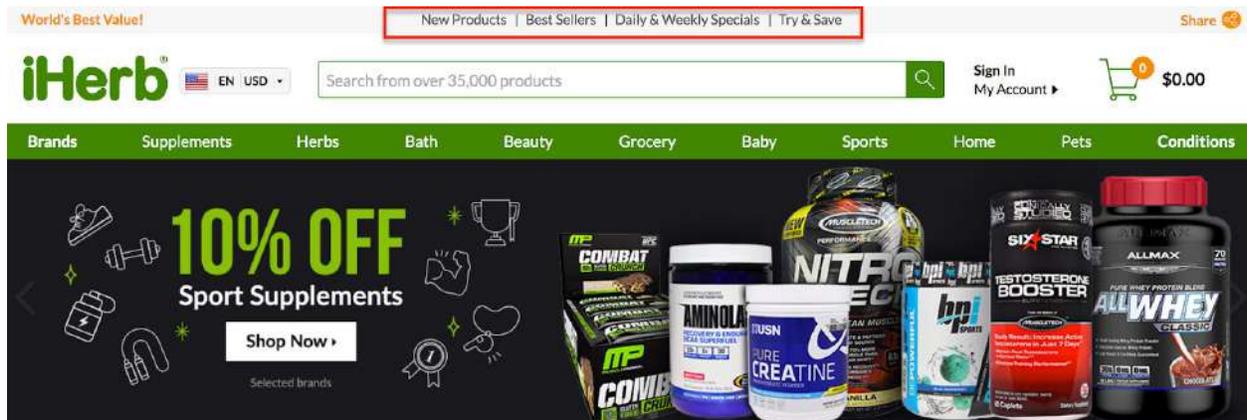
Your feature categories are unique groupings that fall outside the normal range of attributes that you use for your main and subcategories.

Examples of this are sale or discount items, limited edition ranges, best sellers and new in stock.

You won't want to use all of these as you may risk confusing your audience and devaluing your product range. Choose a few that are most likely to work well for your business.

It might be useful to place them in the main navigation, right next to your main categories (such as 'Discount Items' to catch people who are shopping for a bargain) or you may wish to place a few permanent links, such as 'Best Sellers' or 'New Items' in the top bar or footer.

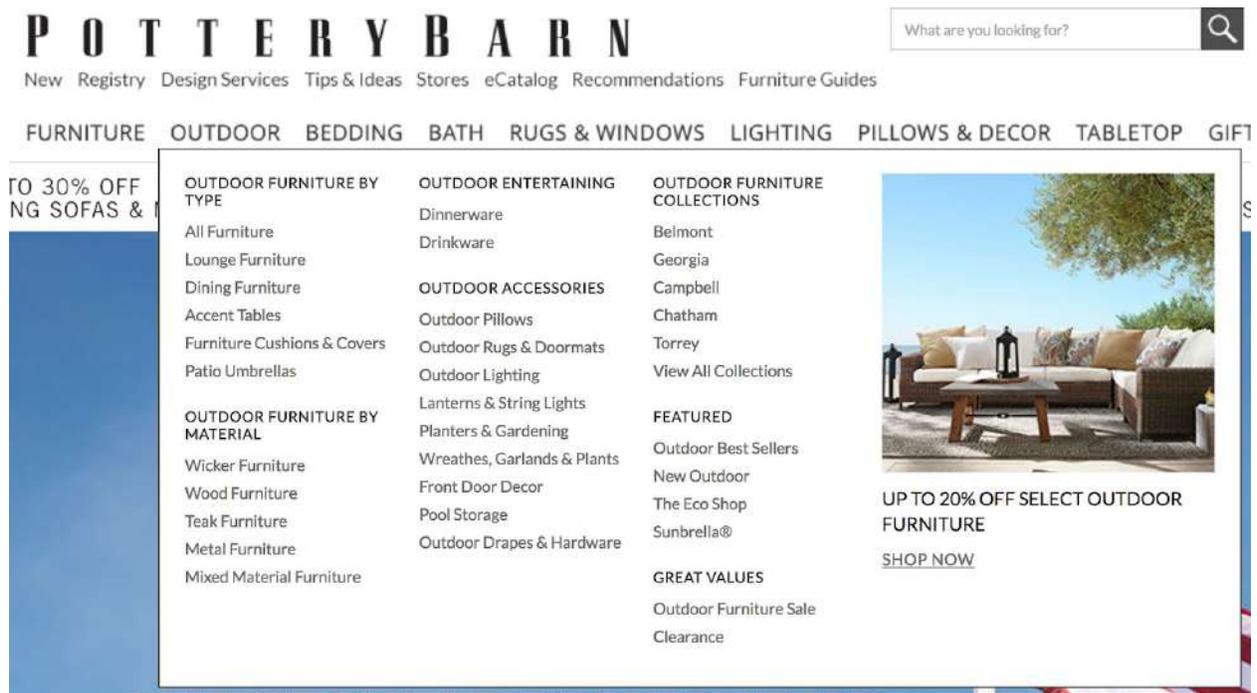
Placing them in a permanent, visible, yet non-intrusive spot such as the top header will create familiarity with your regular customers, who are likely to routinely check back to see what you are offering there.



*Herb.com permanently display their specials, best sellers and new items in the top navigation bar, to train customers to check back regularly for deals.*

This works for seasonal lines, such as Xmas and Halloween, and you can link directly to the category from banners on the main page, or include them in the navigation.

Pottery Barn, a leading Ecommerce store well-known for their split-testing and high conversions, place featured products prominently in the drop down menus.



*Displaying featured categories in the drop down menus works for Pottery Barn, who are dealing with very large inventory.*

## Filters & Tagging

Product filters really dig down into the specifics of your product attributes.

Let's say we have already attracted our buyer into the category 'Bumpers', and they chose to continue on the search into 'Rear Bumpers', which they know they need.

When they reach this section, they most likely still have many questions about which product they want to buy and we can help them answer those questions with filters.

Often appearing on the left side of the screen, perhaps as drop down menus, check boxes or slider bars, customers can easily refine their search using the parameters you set.

Zappos, who are dealing with a huge inventory, use checkbox filters on the left of their category page screens.

*"Carry Ons" we found 444 items!*

Sort By Relevance

**Narrow Your Choices**

Shop All SALE ITEMS

SHOW SALE ITEMS

**BAG SIZE**

Small (17in to 22in) (361)

Extra Small (16in and under) (38)

Medium (23in to 25in) (11)

Large (26in to 29in) (1)

**COLOR**

Black (161)

Blue (55)

Red (33)

Multi (32)

Gray (23)

Navy (23)

Olive (21)

Brown (16)

**BRAND**

Baggallini (30)

Betsey Johnson (1)

Billabong (1)

Bric's Milano (7)

Briggs & Riley (44)

Brighton (3)

**PRICE**

\$50.00 and Under (13)

\$100.00 and Under (51)

\$200.00 and Under (220)

\$200.00 and Over (227)

**GENDER**

Women (139)

Men (63)

Girls (6)

**YOUR SELECTIONS:**

BAGS  LUGGAGE  CARRY ONS

<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Herschel Supply Co.</b> Highland <del>\$129.99</del></p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Herschel Supply Co.</b> Highland <del>\$129.99</del></p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Quiksilver</b> Horizon \$150.00</p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Dakine</b> Carry On Roller 40L \$135.00</p>
<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Dakine</b> Carry On Roller 40L \$135.00</p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Dakine</b> Status Roller 45L \$170.00</p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Dakine</b> Status Roller 45L \$170.00</p>	<p><small>NEW</small></p>  <p><b>Dakine</b> Status Roller 45L \$170.00</p>
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<p><small>NEW</small></p> 	<p><small>NEW</small></p> 	<p><small>NEW</small></p> 	<p><small>NEW</small></p> 

Zappos using checkbox filters to organize their large inventory into manageable product groupings.

In the image above, Zappos use several 'product specific' filters such as features, strap or handle style, closures and pattern to narrow down the search for Carry On Luggage, which in total has 444 items.

You may choose to offer filtering of maximum price, minimum price, size, color, brand, model, age, application, style, customer rating or any other attribute that applies to your product range.

Our hypothetical customer can choose to refine their search in rear bumpers using color and price, because they know their budget and color of their car.

This will bring the number of applicable products in category down to a manageable number, which the customer is able to compare, contrast and make a purchase decision.

Here I narrowed down my Zappos 'Carry On Luggage' search to four items, using just two checkboxes: small and burgundy.

The screenshot shows a search results page for 'Burgundy Carry Ons' on Zappos. At the top, it says 'Burgundy Carry Ons' we found 4 items! and a 'Sort By' dropdown set to 'Relevance'. Below this is a 'Narrow Your Choices' section with 'YOUR SELECTIONS: BAGS LUGGAGE CARRY ONS SMALL (17IN TO 22IN) BURGUNDY'. On the left, there are filter sections for 'BAG SIZE' (Small (17in to 22in) (4) is selected) and 'COLOR' (Burgundy (4) is selected). The main product grid displays four items:

Brand	Product Name	Original Price	Current Price
Delsey	Montmartre Spinner Trolley Tote	\$280.00	\$139.99
Delsey	Montmartre Spinner Trolley Garment Bag	\$540.00	\$269.99
Briggs & Riley	Sympatico - International Carry-On Expandable Spinner		\$529.00
EPIC Travelgear	GRX Hexacore EX 22" Trolley	\$450.00	\$225.00

Offering search filters on category pages makes it easy to narrow down a large volume of inventory and make a purchase decision.

If your customer feels they have narrowed the search down too far (perhaps they don't like any of the options, or there is not enough of a range in that narrow of a search) they can easily re-adjust the filter parameters, perhaps increasing the maximum price to see what products are available if they spend a little more.

Had we provided all these options as subcategory options, the customer would most likely have never gotten down to product level on their purchase journey.

## **How do I make sure my category tree is performing at the highest level?**

Check out our next and final post in the series, where we take a look at some ways to make sure your newly built tree is tuned in and optimized for high performance.

**Have questions building your tree? If you need help, let us know in the comments below!**

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### **About Russell Smith**

I create high quality content for digital marketing agencies, to help grow your audience and sell more services.

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