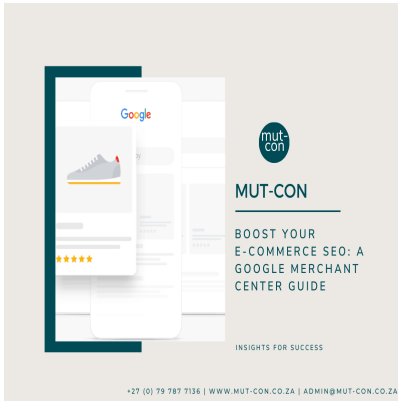




Boost your e-commerce SEO: A Google Merchant Center guide

Description

Google Merchant Center offers an opportunity for e-commerce store owners to boost their SEO and advertise more easily.

The platform integrates with your online store allowing you to add a product feed from various platforms such as WooCommerce, Shopify and Ecwid, or alternatively, you can add your products manually with an XML feed.

Once you have your product feed in Google Merchant Center and your account meets all the account policies set out, you can easily set up Google shopping ads, and your product feed will be eligible to show up in shopping results for organic and paid listings.

It's important to mention that Mut-Con is a Google Ads partner, and Google Merchant Center is part of the Google Ads suite of tools, but our partnership has in no way biased our opinion.

We believe in Google Merchant Center as a great business tool and we have been using it to help our clients sell more and all we've gotten are [positive reviews](#).

1. Introduction Google Merchant Center

[Google Merchant Center](#) is an amazing tool for entrepreneurs in the e-commerce space. Any tool that simplifies [search engine optimization](#) is already a winner in our book but Google Merchant Center does so much more.

At its very core, it's a tool to put your products in front of a broader audience online and showcase your products on the Google Network for free.

With marketing making up so much of small business overheads, no entrepreneur can afford to say no to [free marketing](#), particularly free marketing with as wide a reach as the Google Network.

With an opportunity to show your products on Google Search, Maps, YouTube and other Google products, Google Merchant Center is an essential sales channel for any business.

2. Overview of Google Merchant Center

SEO is a game changer for the modern business owner.

Getting your products on the first page of search results when your clients search for them online could be the difference between the success and failure of your business.

Unfortunately, as the number of businesses online grows, it's becoming increasingly difficult for small businesses to make it to those first pages, particularly small businesses in very competitive niches.

Moreover, this has driven the cost of [PPC advertising](#) beyond the means of many small businesses.

Google has set out to redress this imbalance by dedicating 50% of their shopping results to organic results, greatly reducing the impact of ad budgets on results.

Additionally, Google has launched Google Merchant Center which is designed to help eCommerce businesses get their products listed in these organic results and boost their SEO efforts without the help of high-cost SEO experts.

With Google Merchant Center, you will not only get your products listed easily but also get tips and tricks, additional tools, and data and insights to help your products be competitive in search results.

For a free tool, Google Merchant Center is one of the most important you can add to your e-commerce marketing stack and will elevate your [free marketing strategy](#) to levels seemingly impossible.

3. Setting up your Google Merchant Center

To [create your Google Merchant Center](#), you can simply sign up on [Google's Retail Solutions](#).

You will need an active Google account to sign up so if you don't have one go to accounts.google.com.

Once you sign in, you can begin the onboarding process that will help you set up your account.

The best part is that Google Merchant Center creates an onboarding process that is tailored to your needs.

You will first need to add your business information including your business name phone, social profiles, logo and business address.

Because this information is used by the various tools in Google Merchant Center, it's important that you add the correct information.

You can always edit this information later, so should any of your information change, be sure to update it.

Next, you will need to specify your product checkout, which can be your online store, your brick-and-mortar store, on Google or some approved third-party providers.

Finalise your account by adding the email Google can reach you on and you are ready to get started creating your listings.

3.1 Set up your account

There are important sections that you will need to add to your account to make sure your products are listed.

Failure to complete one or all of these sections may lead to your products not showing up in free or paid listings, even if the products are eligible themselves, so pay attention to them.

3.1.1 Taxes

[Tax settings](#) can be affected by the country or state you are in, so make sure to read Google's guide on taxes before you get started.

The goal however is to make sure your online shoppers know how they will be affected by the taxes your store charges, and as such your product will not show if this section is not completed.

3.1.2 Shipping

For many consumers, [shipping](#) plays a key role in whether they buy from you or not.

Specifically, buyers tend to evaluate your shipping costs and speed to determine whether to make a purchase or not.

Your shipping will contain various information that affects these factors including regions you ship to, minimum order values, costs and speed when shipping to different regions, and much more.

Shipping settings are a prerequisite for your products to show so make sure you go through these settings carefully to best manage your client's expectations and create a great user experience.

3.1.3 Link Accounts

Your Google Merchant Center account works great with your other online accounts.

Some of these are necessary to access certain tools, for example, a Google Ad account for Google shopping ads.

Make sure to [link all your important accounts](#) to enhance the performance of your listings and enrich the data you get so you can make informed decisions that drive your business goals.

3.1.4 Returns and Refunds

Returns and refunds are an annoying but unavoidable part of eCommerce. Google Merchant Center requires you to [list your terms](#) before your products can be listed.

Make sure to set clear and precise return policies to manage your buyers' expectations and avoid conflicts with your clients in the future.

3.2 Creating products for listings

There are three main ways to get products into Google Merchant Center.

The first is by creating a CSV file with your product details and uploading it, the second is through an integration, for example, with your e-commerce platform like WooCommerce, [Ecwid](#) or [Shopify](#), and the third is [creating a product feed](#) via the Google API.

While we have only worked with WooCommerce, [Ecwid](#) and [Shopify](#), we are sure most of the major e-commerce platforms have a means of integration with Google Merchant Center.

4. Important sections in your Google Merchant Center

Let's take a look at some of the areas in your Merchant Center that will be important in running your account.

It's important to keep an eye on these on a regular basis as they will help you keep your account optimized.

From these sections, you will not only find diagnostic data to help take care of problems with your listings, but you will also find performance data that can help you optimise your products and growth tools that will help you reach a broader audience.

4.1 Overview

The overview section gives you a bird's eye view of your account. The first section is an accounts diagnostic section that looks at problems with your setup.

It's important to keep an eye on this section because problems that arise here can actually stop your products from appearing in shopping searches or your ads from running.

Additionally, you will find a performance overview from here.

These are just a set of graphs that give an overview of how your products are performing in organic searches as well as how your ads are performing.

Finally, the overview section has some announcements from the Google team.

These range from important updates to terms of use to tips and tricks to make the most of Google Merchant Centre.

You will want to keep an eye on these announcements as they can mean the difference between driving revenue from Google Merchant Center and not being listed at all.

4.2 Products

This is where you can keep track of all the products you have in your Google Merchant Center account.

Once your products are added, you want to visit the products to make sure that they have all been captured.

Whether you are doing a manual import or using an integration, there are problems that can lead to products not being imported.

Once you have made sure all your products are available and eligible to be listed, make sure all the important information on your products is available,

We cannot overemphasize how much complete product information affects the quality of your listing.

Where you are using integration, make sure to talk to a developer like [Mut-Con](#) and have them make any additions to make sure all your product information is sent over.

4.2.1 Product Diagnostics

Also, check the diagnostics tab under your product to find product issues that need fixing.

The products diagnostic tabs will give you a list of products that are active, expiring, pending and disapproved.

Active items are items that are currency listed organically and in your ads and as such don't really need your attention.

Expiring items need attention because they will cease to be eligible for organic and ad listings in 3 days. Products will be marked as expiring if they have not been updated in 3 days or if they have an expiry date.

In the former case, you will want to update product availability to keep them listed. For integration listings, you likely don't need to do this manually.

Pending products are those undergoing a review process by Google. There's not much you can do here except be patient, except if 3 days have been exceeded.

In this case, you may want to reach out to Google support. Disapproved products are not eligible for free listings or shopping ads.

Your Merchant Center account will specify the reason why a product has been disapproved. You will need to quickly get this sorted for your products to show up in searches.

4.3 Performance

The performance tab is where you get to see how your account is performing.

The first tab here is the dashboard, where you get an overview of the performance of your free listing and your shopping ads.

This section may include your performance on Google for non-product actions, so you need to dig deeper to analyze the performance of your products.

You can also build custom reports and dashboards using the metrics that matter the most for your business goals, so you can quickly take a deep dive into your business performance.

This is particularly important because you won't always have the time to go through all the data available as the data is quite rich.

This quick access to data may lead to fast decision-making that could greatly benefit your business.

4.3.1 Products

This is where you can get performance data specific to your product listings.

Performance is analyzed according to your products, the brands you sell, your product categories and the countries you sell in.

The dashboards show some important metrics such as clicks, impressions, CTR, conversions and conversion rates for both ads and organic results.

You can also take a deep dive to understand the trends followed by your products, brands and product categories.

This will help you determine which exhibit upward or downward trends across various metrics over the selected period to help in your decision-making.

4.3.2 Competitive Visibility

Competition analysis is a synch in Google Merchant Center.

Google anonymously gathers information across their platform and makes that information available to you to analyze the performance of businesses in your industry or businesses that sell the same brands and products as you.

Armed with this information, you can make decisions to optimise your own offerings to give you an advantage in the market without having to employ any guesswork.

43.3 Market Demand

Google Merchant Center puts data-centric market research at the tips of your hands with market demand reports.

This report uses data from Google services to show you the demand for your products and brands for a given period.

The data is not limited to the products and brands you list only but extends to products and brands that are available in your industry as a whole.

This includes brands that have been top sellers on the network and products that are gaining popularity.

4.3.4 Pricing

Google Merchant Center is a great resource to check the effectiveness of your pricing strategy.

Using the Google network, Google Merchant Center is able to help you unlock how well your products are priced, particularly when compared to your closest industry competition.

4.4.4 Promotions

You can add promotions to your Google Merchant Center account.

This is great because not only will these promotions show on your free and paid listings via your Merchant Center account but you will also get invaluable data about the performance of your promotions.

You can look at important metrics for promoted products such as clicks, CTRs and impressions.

You can also look into what products and product categories got the highest boost from your promotions as well as which promotions drive the most results and resonate with your customers.

4.4 Marketing

The marketing tab shows data related to your advertising activities.

In order for this data to populate, you will need to connect your Google Ad account and have some shopping ads running.

Once that is done, you will be able to see the shopping campaigns you have launched via your Merchant Center account here.

4.5 Growth

The growth tab lists opportunities you have to improve the performance of your Google Merchant Center account.

These encompass various aspects of online selling including discovering new products and brands, your products's price competitiveness, and the performance of your products as a whole.

This tab also includes some additional functionality for Google Merchant Center that could boost the performance of your free and paid listings including dynamic remarketing, promotions, product ratings, customer reviews and a lot of interesting stuff you and your developer could do with Google's retail API.

Finally, review the shipping experience scorecard card to see how your business compares to other businesses and get yourself a Top Quality Store Badge.

The badge not only boosts user confidence but comes with some benefits from Google as well such as early access to new features and higher rankings in the shopping tab.

5. Key Features and Functionality

At its core, Google Merchant Center is designed to help businesses get their eCommerce products found on Google Search.

Very few free tools out there can elevate your [free marketing strategies](#) like Google Merchant Center can.

The platform does this by allowing you to list your products and showing them in Google's shopping tab of search results.

There are 2 types of results you can leverage with your Merchant Center account. The first is organic results, which are also known as free listings in Google Merchant Center.

According to Google, these now make up 50% of results in the Google shopping tab.

This is a great boost to your SEO efforts as it gives your business a greater chance of showing up in search results.

As an e-commerce business, your strategy is not complete without an optimised Google Merchant Center account.

The second is paid listings, or Google shopping ads.

These use a connected [Google Ads](#) account to show your listed products in the shopping tab, but the clicks to your products are paid for.

Just like with SEO, no [PPC](#) strategy is complete without adding some paid ads to your Google Merchant Center account.

But Google Merchant Center does more than just help you list your products, boost your SEO and easily launch shopping ads.

It's a great place to get data on your eCommerce activities. You can use Merchant Center to gain a better understanding of how your products, brands and product categories perform.

This includes essential data like market demand and the countries where your products enjoy the most traction, making it a great tool for market research.

This includes competition research because you can use your Google Merchant Center account to assess the effectiveness of your prices against your competition among other important metrics.

Finally, Google Merchant Center answers one of the biggest questions in eCommerce, what should you sell?

Your Merchant Center account comes with some great product discovery tools.

You can use data from across the Google network to explore the best-selling products in different countries as well as products that are trending upward across markets.

This takes the guesswork out of stocking your online store and significantly boosts your chances of success.

All in all, Google Merchant Center is an indispensable tool for eCommerce business owners you should be making the most of right away.

6. Google Merchant Center Best Practices

To get the best out of your Google Merchant Center account, you are going to want to employ some best practices to keep your account optimal.

While there are quite a number, some need to be implemented on a more regular basis than others. Specifically, you will want to;

- Keep an eye on updates to Google's policies to not only make sure you are always compliant but also to unearth opportunities that were previously unavailable. At Mut-Con, we are still waiting for the day we can list [our services](#).
- Log in to your account regularly. Your listings will not perform well if you just intend to leave them on autopilot.
- Check notifications and Google announcements regularly, again to stay ahead of compliance issues and make the most of new opportunities.
- Make sure your product listings contain as much information as possible even the fields that are optional for a listing.
- Use a combination of free listings and shopping ads. While you can get a lot of mileage with free listings, adding Google Shopping Ads will give you the edge in a competitive SEO world.
- Constantly evaluate the performance of your account and always find areas to improve.
- Make sure your Google Merchant Center efforts line up with your overall [SEO](#) and [PPC](#) strategies as well as your overall [online presence](#) strategy.
- [Use data and analysis](#) from your Google Merchant account to inform your decisions across your business as part of a bigger data strategy.
- Build custom reports and dashboards that show data important for your business goals which will allow you to make important decisions even when you are short on time.

7. Checking your Google Merchant Center Performance

Like most great marketing platforms, Google Merchant Center gives entrepreneurs exciting opportunities to use data to [improve their marketing performance](#).

7.1 Product Performance

Use your Google Merchant Center to better understand the best-performing products, brands and product categories in your store.

The data is quite granular, allowing you to do some deep-dive analytics.

Not only will you be able to analyse the products that get the most free and paid clicks, but you will also be able to break down the performance of your products by country, which will greatly inform your international go-to-market strategy.

You can contrast your demand data with your availability data so you can optimise your stock levels by basically holding more of what is demanded and less of your stragglers.

You can also analyze your promotions data to launch the best promotions to help give a boost to these struggling products.

7.2 Competitor Analysis

In eCommerce, price competitiveness has a larger bearing on the success of your business than it did in the brick-and-mortar days.

Because your target market can access suppliers from pretty much anywhere globally from the comfort of their homes, it's now more important than ever to make sure your prices are competitive.

Use Google Merchant Center's price competitiveness tab to see how your products, brands and product categories perform against an averaged benchmark that is determined by a large pool of merchants that use free and paid listings.

You will want to be consistently below benchmark to attract customers, but being at benchmark is also competitive.

Being above the benchmark price will definitely cost you customers and hurt the prospects of your products.

It's important to remember that your price is not the only thing that determines if your clients will buy from you, but a competitive price will definitely help.

7.3 Market Analysis

Google Merchant Center is a great barometer for the demand for the products, brands and product categories you sell.

This can inform important decisions in your store like restocking, what stock levels to maintain, the promotions to run, where to invest ad Rands and what product lines to expand your business into.

Use this tab to consistently make sure you not only have the best performers available for your clients but also that your cash flow is not being negatively affected by stragglers.

It's also a good way to project the products that the market is warming up to, and make sure you are stocked before the bubble bursts.

This could be a game changer especially if you have a lot of seasonality in your products.

74 Opportunity Discovery

Google Merchant Center takes the guesswork out of stocking up your online store.

Use the best sellers tab of the growth section to discover products that are currently leading in your industry or use Google Merchant Center to find products that are trending upwards so you can stock up while the market is growing.

You can break down this analysis into products and brands, making sure you are more likely to be stocked with sellers at any given time, which is very important because your business can not afford to have funds caught up in inventory.

7.5 Search Performance

Use Google Merchant Center to inform your SEO strategy to help reach your goals.

Analysing metrics like Clicks (the number of times your products are clicked on when they are listed in results), Impressions (the number of times your products appear in results), CTR (Click-Through-Rate, the number of times you get clicks as a proportion of your total impressions), Conversions (the number of times your products are purchased), and Conversion Rate (the number of times your products are purchased versus the clicks you get), will help you make sure your products are optimised to drive results not just through Google Merchant Center but across your SEO and PPC strategies as a whole.

8. Pricing and Value for Money

Google Merchant Center is free to set up. It also shows your accepted products in organic results for free meaning you can start enjoying the benefits of an account for free.

It's always difficult to measure the value for money of a free resource as there is no money involved but Google Merchant Center is definitely worth it.

There is simply no equivalent to it and if you are not currently using it, you are missing out on an opportunity to boost your e-commerce SEO.

Even considering the amount of time you will need to invest, which is not a lot, you will still yield a lot of benefits from your Google Merchant Center account, benefits that go beyond just marketing your products and your e-commerce efforts.

In addition to listing your products in search results and helping you easily launch shopping ads, Google Merchant Center gives you access to tools, data and insights that make it easier to make decisions across your business and because we believe in [insights for success](#), we will always argue that Google Merchant Center is definitely worth it.

9. Pros and Cons of Google Merchant Center

Let's explore the advantages and disadvantages of a Google Merchant Center account.

While Google Merchant Center admittedly has a few limitations, the pros definitely outweigh the cons, making it a worthwhile investment.

It's also important to remember that Google Merchant Center is a free tool, that demonstrably yields results, so despite the few drawbacks, there is really no need to overlook it.

9.1 Advantages Of Google Merchant Center

- Google Merchant Center is **FREE**
- The platform provides data and allows for a level of analysis not available in a lot of tools, not just for your products but for a lot of areas and decision-makers in your business.
- Easy integration with eCommerce platforms makes for a great tool to complement your eCommerce efforts.

9.2 Disadvantages Of Google Merchant Center

- Currently, Google Merchant Center is reserved for businesses that provide physical goods that can be shipped. While businesses like [Mut-Con](#) have shown that eCommerce can be used for the sale of services, Google still insists on Google Merchant Center being reserved for tangible goods, which is a bit of a shame.

10. Conclusion

Google Merchant Center gives your business an additional sales channel that could be an absolute game changer for your business.

Whether you are creating your listing to easily showcase your products on the Google network including Google Search, Maps, YouTube, and more or you are looking for an easy way to get started with your shopping ads, Google Merchant Center is value for money.

At Mut-Con we rarely say no to [free marketing](#), but free marketing is rarely this effective.

With Google committing to having fifty per cent of shopping results be from free listings from Merchant Center Accounts, opening your account is not an exercise in hoping that things work out, it's an investment in marketing efforts that will yield results.

It's still a little disappointing that Google Merchant Center accounts don't work for service-based businesses but that could one day change so even if your business is services, keep tabs on the service.

Please do share how Google Merchant Center has boosted your business.

If you are having any challenges getting set up, Mut-Con is a Google Ads partner and we can help you, [let's have a chat](#).



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