

## Which Shopping Cart Should I use?

Original document compiled by IT Web Experts

### General Issues

That is a common question that we get when clients call. There are so many shopping carts out there it is hard to know which one to use for your web site. That is why we have written this article to help you know the advantages and disadvantages of each cart. We will be reviewing:

- **Magento** (Recommended if you have a good hosting)
- **Oscommerce**
- **CRE Loaded** (Good option)
- **Zen Cart**
- **X-Cart**
- **OSC Max**
- **Joomla & Virtuemart** (For CMS & Shopping Cart Combined)

It is important to know when selecting your shopping cart what features you need. All the shopping carts below feature the following:

- Customer management
- Product management
- Variety of payment and shipping modules
- Order receipt emails
- Ability to use SSL secure layers for ordering process

However the shopping carts vary when it comes to:

- Time it takes to modify the cart to look like a current web design
- WYSIWYG ability to modify product descriptions using different fonts, colors, etc.
- Ability to import/export from Excel spreadsheet
- Wholesale/Reseller Pricing

In this review we will be going over PHP/MySQL shopping carts that run both Linux and Windows servers. We will **not be reviewing pay-per-month shopping carts**. We feel these offer less value because they have expensive monthly fees. Also - they usually do not allow access to the source code of the system or much customization of the shopping cart. The following **shopping carts below are open-source** meaning that you can modify the source code and customize the shopping cart to your needs.



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## Oscommerce MS 2.2 - The Cart That Started Them All

website: <http://www.oscommerce.com>

Oscommerce is the basis for both Zen Cart and CRE Loaded. As such is it is simpler and does not have all of the contributions already added that Zen Cart and CRE Loaded do. It runs well though and is a good back to basics shopping cart.

### **Advantages +**

- + Has the **most available number of contributions** and modifications
- + Recent security update brings it up to date with MySQL 5 and PHP 5

### **Disadvantages -**

- It can take a lot of time and money to install all the contributions you want (add-ons)
- No graphic template system meaning it is harder to modify the design.

## CRE Loaded Chain Reaction Edition of Oscommerce

website: <http://www.creloaded.com>

CRE Loaded is like Oscommerce but with many more contributions installed. Some of the nice contributions it has are Easy Populate which lets you populate your database from an Excel file, coupon codes, administrator access levels, template system, and an affiliate manager. CRE Loaded also has one of the Oscommerce templating systems installed which allows you to more easily integrate a design into the system and control which information boxes show on the left and right columns.

### **Advantages +**

- + Well supported
- + Stable
- + Many contributions from Oscommerce already installed

### **Disadvantages -**

- Contributions from Oscommerce.com can be more difficult to install, but CRE Loaded has many of its own already converted
- Admin interface is a little messy in certain areas due to many contributions installed

### **Additional Information**

CRE Loaded comes in 3 versions. The regular version is free. The Pro version adds better product attribute support and credit card encryption, and the B2B version adds separate pricing level support.

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## Zen Cart - The Art of E-commerce

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

Zen Cart has a very nice wide array of features based on Oscommerce but has gone its own path. You can not install contributions directly from the Oscommerce web site onto Zen Cart. Some of the nice features include product attributes managers, template system, html editor for regular web page contents, built in coupon code system, ability to select what credit cards you accept, and more. An issue with Zen Cart right now is the Easy Populate contribution which would let you import products from an Excel sheet does not work yet. So if you need this feature we recommend the other shopping carts.

### **Advantages +**

- + No licensing fees
- + Stable
- + Many contributions from Oscommerce already installed
- + Nicer looking default designs pre-installed

### **Disadvantages -**

- not possible to use Oscommerce contributions, they must be converted to Zen Cart
- Admin interface is a little messy in certain areas because there are so many contributions installed.

## X-Cart

website: <http://www.x-cart.com>

X-Cart is a commercial package, but one of the most competitively priced and easy to modify.

### **Advantages +**

- + Commercially supported and has very few if any bugs
- + Uses Smarty Templates system which many programmers like to work with for laying out the web site

### **Disadvantages -**

- Licensing fees (figure \$800 + in just licensing fees not including any web development)

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## OSC Max

website: <http://www.oscdox.com>

OSC Max is an excellent version of Oscommerce that has many useful contributions installed. It is just as easy to use in the admin as the default Oscommerce installation.

### **Advantages +**

- + No licensing fees
- + The contributions installed are very useful
- + Has wholesale/Reseller pricing module already installed
- + Well-documented

### **Disadvantages -**

- Has some buggy code in certain areas.

## Joomla & Virtuemart

website: <http://virtuemart.net>

Installing and configuring Joomla & Virtuemart together was a snap. On the Virtuemart website they have a combined installer that installs Virtuemart with Joomla. This is the solution you would want if you have to have your CMS (Content Management System) combined with your shopping cart. Joomla we feel is the best CMS out there, but Virtuemart on the other hand is not the best shopping cart system. It is not a bad one though, it is just not as fully featured as the other solutions.

Overall we would say that Virtuemart is about equal with default Oscommerce, but not the loaded versions of Oscommerce: Zen Cart & CRE Loaded.

### **Advantages +**

- + Easy to install
- + Combines well with the best CMS Joomla
- + Has the basic shopping cart features

### **Disadvantages -**

- Lacks a lot of high-end shopping cart features
- Not as many add-on modules available

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## Shopping Cart Feature Comparison Chart

This feature comparison chart compares the out of the box features of each cart. Sometimes a cart will have an available add-on module to install the feature listed.

	Magento	Oscommerce	CRE Loaded	Zen Cart	X-Cart	OSCMAX	VirtueMart
Free	Yes	Yes	Yes, but has pay versions	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Unlimited Products	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supports SSL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Edit Products	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Edit Customers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Admin Can Edit Products In Order	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Spreadsheet Database Upload	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Product Attributes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multiple Product Images	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coupons	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Costs Extra	Yes	No
Different Pricing Per Customer Groups	Yes	No	Costs Extra	Yes	Costs Extra	Yes	Yes
Graphic Template System	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Live Shipping Quotes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Google Checkout Pre-installed	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Paypal	Yes	Yes, but not IPN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paypal Pro	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Content Management System for Informational Pages	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SEO Tools for meta tags and URLs	Yes	No	Yes, URLs cost extra	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
One Page Checkout	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Multi-Lingual Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-Currency Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-Store Support	Yes	No	No	No	Cost Extra	No	No
Web Hosting Requirements	Semi Dedicated \$25/m - \$100/m	Shared Hosting	Shared Hosting	Shared Hosting	Shared Hosting	Shared Hosting	Shared Hosting
Our Overall Opinion from 1 - 10	7.5	7	8.5	8	7	7	7

## Final Thoughts

If you decide to go with an Oscommerce based shopping cart, we recommend that you start with one of the loaded versions - Zencart, CRE Loaded, or OSCmax - in order to save you lots of money on installing additional modules to the plain Oscommerce version. You can then use your development money to put in your own custom modifications, design, etc. rather than installing all of the basics.

We like Magento but recommend that you wait to use it until they optimize more its speed, and provide better documentation for developers. If you decide to go with Magento, make sure to chose a fast enough web host. As we mentioned, it does not run fast enough on most shared hosting plans.

**Do you need help with setting up, customizing or maintaining your E-commerce web site?** Please contact us and we would be happy to provide you the needed services.