Site Checkout & Orders

We’re almost at the tipping point for our online catalog site. Customers can shop, they can put stuff into a cart, but the final piece of the puzzle is still lacking: checkout. Without a way to collect orders and payments from customers, our site is never going to be able to send merchandise to customers and won’t ever turn a single cent of profit.

This is the problem we’re going to correct in this chapter. First, we’re going to implement a quick integration with Google Checkout, where customers shop on your site and then are forwarded to the Google Checkout service to provide their billing information. This lets your customers use their Google accounts securely, and is the quickest solution if you’re looking to deploy your site in a hurry. Google Checkout provides merchants with an interface that allows you to manage orders easily.

Next, we’ll look at integrating our site with Authorize.Net, customizing the checkout process so that customers can complete the checkout process right on our own site, and use the admin interface we saw in Chapter 3 in order to manage order processing. We’ll also look at how to hook in a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to our checkout pages to secure the information we’re transmitting using some custom middleware created by the Python and Django community.

Google Checkout API

To start with, we’re going to go the express route and hook in to the Google Checkout API. The customers on our site will browse the products in our catalog, add them to a shopping cart, and review their purchases on our shopping cart page. Then, when they’re ready to checkout, we forward them to Google Checkout, where they can use their own Google account to log in and pay, or they can checkout anonymously.

So is this really a good idea? I’ve overheard lots of people talk about how unprofessional it seems when you’re shopping on a site, filling up a cart, and when you go to checkout, you’re redirected to some third-party web site to handle the checkout. I agree that this can be a bad idea. It can be a terrible idea, depending on how you implement it, and the company that you choose to use.

I think that one of the main advantages of relying on a third-party site to handle your checkout process is because people are really unsure of themselves when it comes to computers and security in general. Next time you turn on the television, notice how many credit card commercials there are trying to scare the living daylights out of people. One of them uses imagery of thousands of Vikings attacking as a metaphor for identity theft, which means... um, I don’t know.

But the point is that identity theft is not unknown to the general public. Most Internet users are acutely aware that giving their credit card information is not a trivial thing to do, so they tend to be very careful about to whom they provide this information.
So, there is an advantage here, but it’s an advantage that we gain only if the third-party processor that you choose has more credibility than us. People might not trust Modern Musician enough for them to give us their credit card information, but if we decide to forward them to some dippy, obscure checkout system of which they’ve likely never heard, like the Two Guys in their Mom’s Basement Checkout, Inc., then it’s not very likely that they’re going to trust them with their personal information, and in this case, we’ve gained absolutely nothing.

My guess is that people trust Google. They’ve got corporate brand recognition, tons of street cred in the Internet community, and I’m convinced their employees are out helping old ladies cross streets or selling cookies door-to-door for some really good cause. People get that warm fuzzy feeling with Google. It’s very unlikely any of your customers are going to be put off when they go to checkout and Google pops up. This has the added benefit of letting your customers use already existing accounts that they’ve created with Google, and use credit cards that they’ve stored with Google, which is undoubtedly a healthy portion of overall Internet users.

After the customer completes the checkout and the credit card is processed, Google will store the information for each order, and provide an interface that will let you manage and fulfill the orders. It’s nothing fancy, but it’s perfect for a small operation shipping items from a backroom or very small warehouse.

Of course, it’s also worth mentioning that the use of this service isn’t free. Google does take a small chunk of each sale for their trouble. As your site and your sales grow, then outsourcing your checkout process to a third-party probably will, and should, be a placeholder for your own checkout solution later on. For much smaller sites that need to get up and running right now, though, it’s the simplest solution to the checkout problem.

Let’s get started.

Sign up with Google Checkout

The first thing we need to do is sign up for a merchant account with the Google Checkout API. To do this, you just need to sign up for a Google Checkout Merchant Account. If you have a business entity or business contact information, keep it handy. You’re going to need to provide one of three things: either an Employer Identification Number, a credit card number and a Social Security number, or just a credit card number. Don’t worry, they won’t charge you until you have a full account and they have a valid reason for doing so.

You’ll want to make sure that initially, for development purposes, you opt to create a sandbox account. A sandbox account allows you to test your code by putting in test credit card numbers that Google will process and log like regular orders in their Merchant interface, so you can test that your Python code is working correctly. Later, when you’re ready to actually take real orders, you can switch the account from a sandbox account to a live one that will actually process payments.

Let’s take a moment to set up a sandbox account with Google Checkout. 1 Click the “Sign up now” button and you’ll be taken to a screen where you can start creating your account. Make sure when you’re signing up that slanted red text appears in the background reading “Sandbox. This is a system for merchants to test Google Checkout.”

On this sign up form, follow the instructions. You’ll need to create a Google Account or, if you already have one you’re using for AdWords or Gmail and would like to use that account for the Merchant API, then enter that information. If not, create a Google Account with them now.

From here, you’ll be taken to a page where you’ll be asked to provide your company information, contact information, and the nature and name of your site. They’ll also ask you for your financial information at this point. Again, don’t sweat it. They won’t be charging you for anything without a good

1 https://sandbox.google.com/checkout/sell/