

Biotech *on the* Web



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By Susan MH Lewenz, CEO Axxiem

The Art of the Biotech E-commerce Website

As industries worldwide increasingly reap the benefits of new internet applications, so too does biotech look to e-commerce for solutions to meet its highly technical, industry-specific needs.

However, due to the very nature of products for life sciences applications, the move into e-commerce requires far more care and attention than it would for a less specialized commodities business.

Biotech professionals must set realistic expectations and do their research when setting out to launch a product website.

It is unrealistic to shoehorn an off-the-shelf e-commerce application into a site selling specialty reagents, antibodies, proteins, or assay kits, and expect customers to have a successful and pleasant shopping experience.



As compared with other industry e-commerce sites, biotech products often require many more custom fields which, in turn, can vary greatly between product types.

For example, an antibody would not have the same product description structure as an ELISA kit. Furthermore, it may be necessary to have supporting product information readily available for both, such as material safety data sheets (MSDS) or lot-specific certificates of analysis.

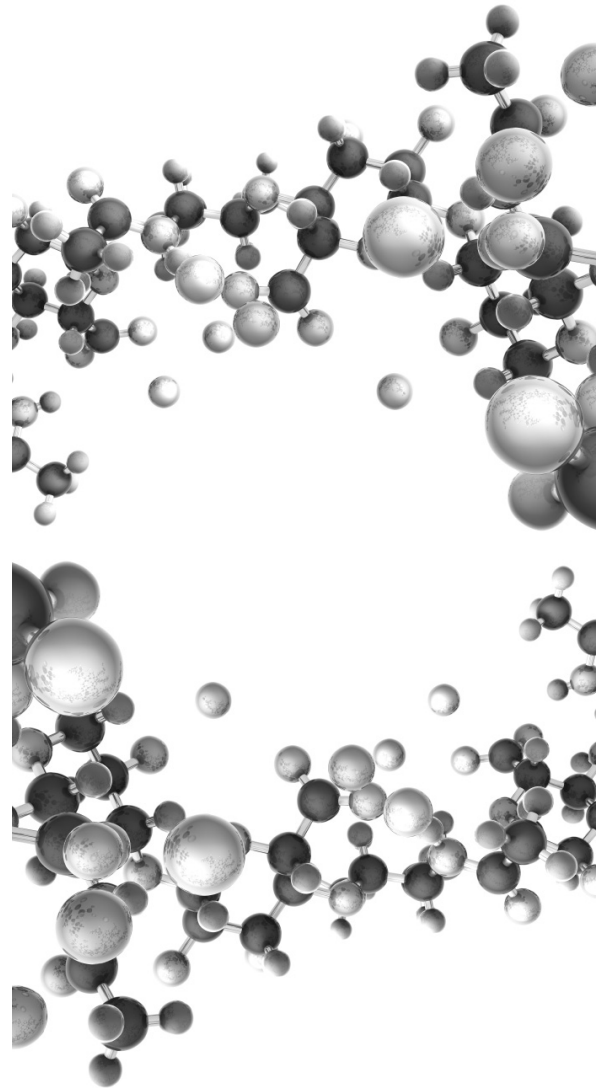
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A good e-commerce site is more than just a list of products and a shopping cart. It is informational. For a biotech website, that could mean easy-to-find, detailed product descriptions and documentation, troubleshooting tips, literature references (e.g. PubMed links or journal citations), and even "how to" instructional videos. Other unique information may include a product's protein sequence that should be formatted in a certain way by convention, but which standard e-commerce applications do not readily handle by default.

Specialized and Versatile

Biotech companies need flexibility in presenting and organizing product information and also in order processing. Often they need to call out custom sizes or services for certain products, or have products with "call us for a quote" pricing. Some products may require unique handling, such as shipment on dry ice. Flexible, robust content management systems and product management systems are the order of the day for this industry.

Biotech and e-commerce are, without a doubt, major growth arenas of the 21st century. We are now beginning to see successful integration of the two. With the right amount of planning and customization, a biotech product website can become the number one resource for customers and a time-saver for the company because all relevant information is on the web.



Ms. Lewenz is CEO and founder of AxxiemWebSolutions, a leading digital communications firm specializing in the biotech/pharma industries. Axxiem recently announced the launch of its latest e-commerce site, www.reagentproteins.com for Reagent Proteins (a division of Pfënex Inc.), the leading supplier of reagents for the biopharmaceutical and vaccine development community.