
Subject: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [kontor_apart](#) on Tue, 23 Aug 2011 19:33:42 GMT
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A few simple facts to begin with:

- The shopping site is full of undesirable features *
- Despite many requests and complaints from the community, there is virtually no progress
- The occasional "updates" don't produce much except other undesirable features *

Therefore: Is it time to start thinking about our own, co-operatively managed shopping portal ???

The overall idea is to start off with one of the better-known e-commerce packages on a system of our own. Would automatically give us a largely error-free system, a lot more features and freedom to define the shop front-ends and a much better customer experience. Would also give us a better contact line to the customer, allow better control over prices (get away with ugly markups and everything), product variations (aka. co-creator), even multi-part, multi-material products, what-have-you ...

Consumers would browse and order their products right on that shopping portal.

On the back-end, we would (semi-)automatically create the real (Shapeways-) order with delivery to the customer. We had complete control over the order and would shield the entire nastiness of order cancellations etc. from the customer. No more cancellations without a chance to re-submit.

Also, we could switch print providers as needed, e.g. when Shapeways drops the ceramics, we could let Ponoko produce and deliver the item, or, we could get color and steel items produced by i.materialize for a better price. It should not be necessary to maintain the same item on the Shapeways site or elsewhere. The model upload would be done on-demand, just in time with the order. This concept has been known as instant co-creator.

Managing the portal by a team of 3d printing enthusiasts means that it becomes everybody's own best interest to make the site as functional and error-free as possible, small improvements should then be possible in weeks, as opposed to years.

All of this is currently only a dream and I would like to solicit some input here. There is obviously enough of the needed enthusiasm and expertise around, expertise like server administration, PHP, AJAX, SEO, and last-not-least, great designs which really deserve a better place.

People have repeatedly offered (for free, even) their help to improve the Shapeways system.

Shouldn't we not combine forces and let the dream come true?Ã,Â Can we create a critical mass to let the thing fly ? Anybody interested ? Am I completely crazy ?

Please let me have your thoughts. Once again, I can envision this to be a co-operatively managed portal and there should be plenty of room for everybody to promote his/her products and make some profit through own sales.Ã,Â

Ã,Â I for myself could bring server, database and (primarily backend) programming expertise to the table, could help with setting up the base system and connect it to Shapeways and other print providers' sites, be it with or without API.

My prime interest would be the creation of a working (!!!), consumer-oriented shopping portal for 3d printed goods which does not bother end-users with material details, minimum wall thicknesses, order cancellations and other cr*p.

Legend:

* polite mode expression for you-know-what-i-mean.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them

Posted by [mctrivia](#) on Tue, 23 Aug 2011 19:46:03 GMT

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I have actually already started on a back end system to do precisely this. I am tired of the losey shapewasy interface and would rather take the slight pay cut that would result from collecting the money myself and then making the order to shapeways.

The real downside is shapeways refuses to add the features needed to automate the process entirely. I can build the orders automatically but I have to manually purchase it and enter shipping info.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them

Posted by [kontor_apart](#) on Tue, 23 Aug 2011 20:00:22 GMT

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mctrivia wrote on Tue, 23 August 2011 19:46The real downside is shapeways refuses to add the features needed to automate the process entirely. I can build the orders automatically but I have to manually purchase it and enter shipping info.

Have done screen-scraping-type integration for roughly 10 years on fairly complex sites. Shapeways should not be an enormous effort.

I am a bit concerned about critical mass. We would need enough participation and interesting content (i.e. diverse products) to get the traffic and the SEO rank.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [mctrivia](#) on Tue, 23 Aug 2011 20:34:21 GMT
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Have not been doing that for as long but have some experience. Login system stumped me as it seems partially done through javascript. They also love changing html code in small ways that kill parsers.

However I have 11 weeks off so if you can write and maintain the object to interface to shapeways front end I have the object written to handle what they allow on the back end. My server farm is more than capable of handling the site. I would think a modular template approach would be best. Each shop could have almost complete control over their shop. Yet we could all be together still. I can even allow each shop to have its own domain name.

I would not use pre-written commerce programs as they are a hacker's haven.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [bartv](#) on Tue, 13 Sep 2011 10:58:44 GMT
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Hi guys,

we're not supporting 3rd party shops yet and I don't recommend going this way. If you're unhappy about how things work, let us know! We take each suggestion seriously even if we can't act on every wish immediately.

Bart

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [mctrivia](#) on Tue, 13 Sep 2011 11:05:04 GMT

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LOL. That is funny. I have made many suggestions. Even offered to write the code for some of them for free since it would make such a huge time savings.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [bartv](#) on Tue, 13 Sep 2011 11:10:03 GMT
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And I'm sure these suggestions have been noted, discussed and possibly planned! That's how we work, but we like any other company we have limited resources so we have to decide carefully what we implement first.

Coding features for us sound like a great idea, but in reality it's always much more complicated than that. For example, we use a specific development framework and website architecture that you don't have access to. Also, code review and quality control on externally contributed code would probably take more energy than coding it ourselves..

An awesome community initiative that *really* helps us is the 'Community Request Top List'. It would help a lot if you made sure any new suggestions you come up with are on this list as well.

Thanks!

Bart

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them
Posted by [mctrivia](#) on Tue, 13 Sep 2011 11:23:28 GMT
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The problem isn't necessarily that you don't care about the hundreds of hours I have wasted as a result of not having a feature that would take a few hours to write. Or that Shapeways ignores all the complaints of the excessive use of ajax and lowsey markup matrix coding. The real problem is unless you want to spend the time to make your web site skinnable and let me use my own domain for my shop. The site is not going to be well set up for every shop.

For example I have hundreds of models. If I had control of the HTML of my shop then I could sort and show them in a way that would improve sales greatly.

To me it seems my best options are:

1) Find a better supplier of 3d printed parts (looked there aren't any for what my customers will

pay)

2) Make a web site that can sit over top of yours. give my customers what they need with out having to directly deal with shapeways.com silliness

3) Beg and plead that shapeways learn how to write javascript, css and take advantage of many great features in PHP that could easily make this site skinnable.

I have seen some of shapeways code. It is a mess and I can understand why change is hard. But still improvement is really needed and CSV import/export and the markup matrix are just the first things that need to be fixed.

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them

Posted by [bartv](#) on Wed, 14 Sep 2011 15:54:33 GMT

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Hey mctrivia,

oh, I absolutely do care. I know this sucks and I'm doing my best to get things going again.

Let's talk on the phone later this week, if possible.

Cheers,

Bart

Subject: Re: questions - and YES, I am serious about them

Posted by [CuttingEdgeFlutes](#) on Mon, 14 Nov 2011 14:41:50 GMT

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I just want to resurrect this discussion, particularly the comments at the end by mctrivia. The Shop organization is really not designed to handle more than a few models. For those of us with many models, or multiple variants of a model, the need for tools to manipulate many models at once and the ability to present them in an organized way is a must. The ability to bring that to an external website is also crazy obvious - good for the designer, good for Shapeways, as it could drive so much more sales.
