

Introduction

So, you or a client of yours is ready to sell something online, and the only thing that stands between you and untold wealth is having a web site for selling your stuff.

“No problem”, you think, “I’ll just use Ruby on Rails and whip out a shopping cart in an afternoon. Rails makes building sites really easy, so this won’t take long at all!”

Hold on a second, there, pal -- you’re half right. Building a cart with Rails actually isn’t too difficult. You just list some products, maybe have a few categories, hook up a payment processor, and you’re done. However, building a fully-functional store with gift certificates, affiliate referrals, and all the back-office functionality like returns, split shipments, etc., is a bit more complicated. That’s why there are plenty of cart solutions out there you can buy, but not too many quality free ones. It actually is a fair amount of work to build an online store.

Don’t forget the hosted options, like [Shopify](#) or [Big Cartel](#), where all you need to do is sign up for the service, add entries for the products you are selling, and start taking orders. Though you have recurring costs with a hosted solution, you can skip the startup costs (both time and money) that come with building your own.

If you’ve decided that a custom-made cart is the way for you to go, though, then at least you should be prepared for the road ahead. This book is a quick guide to some of the issues that come up when building a cart. Based on my experiences while creating a music commerce site for 21st Century Music, this book will help you gauge how long your project will take, help you determine what features your cart will support, and help you decide whether you really want to build a cart from scratch using Ruby on Rails.

To give you a quick idea of potential scope of this project, as I write this my code-base is currently about 4,500 lines of code with nearly 6,000 lines of test code.

Miscellany

Throughout this book I use **monospace text** to denote class names, method names, and code snippets. Please note that the code snippets are meant as examples only: though they come from a working implementation, error checking and other miscellaneous bits have been removed from them to keep them short.

Please bear with some of the examples being very specific to a retailer focusing on selling music, but in those cases I felt it was worth it to help illustrate the point. I’ve tried to keep as many examples as possible as generic as possible so you can adapt them to your needs most easily.