

Many online retailers believe that showcasing a “Featured Products” section on their homepage will automatically drive engagement and sales. Yet, this common homepage merchandising tactic often fails to deliver the expected results. If you’re managing an e-commerce store and struggle to gain traction with your featured products, you’re not alone.

In this blog post, we’ll dive into why the popular “Featured Products” approach frequently falls short and what you can do instead to improve your homepage experience. Drawing insights from industry examples such as MrQ, research from the Harvard Business Review, and usability studies like those found on CookieDatabase, we’ll explore critical themes that relate to homepage merchandising, vague labels, and curation strategy.

Inventory Isn’t the Experience

One of the most common mistakes with homepage merchandising is equating inventory with experience. Your store may boast thousands or even hundreds of thousands of SKUs. However, simply dumping “Featured Products” into a homepage block without deeper consideration does not create a meaningful experience for your visitors.

The problem is that inventory is a back-end reality, not a front-end experience. When customers arrive on your homepage, they don’t want to browse your extensive catalog immediately. Instead, they are looking for guidance and signal — cues that tell them what to explore first and why. The “Featured Products” label often presents an arbitrary or internally chosen subset of SKUs that may be too broad, irrelevant, or stale.

For example, consider MrQ, a digital platform that specializes in games and entertainment content. Instead of sprawling “Featured Products,” MrQ focuses on curated game collections and themes that resonate with user intents or current trends. This approach helps prevent customers from feeling overwhelmed and increases engagement.

Customer Mental Models Beat Internal Taxonomies

E-commerce teams often organize products according to internal taxonomies, such as department names, vendor lists, or stock codes. While these classifications help in logistics and inventory management, they rarely match your customers’ mental models — how they expect to find and group products.



The label “Featured Products” itself is a vague, internal-centric term. What does it mean to customers? Are these best sellers, new arrivals, editor’s picks, or discounted items? Harvard Business Review (HBR) stresses that designing navigation and content according to user mental models is a critical driver for usability and conversion.

When your homepage merchandising ignores customer expectations and uses vague labels, shoppers become confused or unsure of what to do next. This friction leads to bounce or erratic browsing without purchase.

Aligning with Customer Expectations

- **Use meaningful and familiar labels:** Instead of “Featured Products,” try “Top Sellers,” “New & Trending,” or “Gifts for Dad” — categories that convey clear purpose.
- **Conduct customer research:** Surveys, interviews, or usability testing can reveal how your visitors categorize products.
- **Leverage onsite search data:** Analyze what terms shoppers use to find products and replicate that language in your homepage content.

Choice Overload Causes Decision Friction

Too many choices can overwhelm shoppers, leading to decision fatigue and eventual site abandonment. This phenomenon, identified in consumer psychology, is called *choice overload*. Unfortunately, many stores make this problem worse by loading the homepage “Featured Products” block with 12, 24, or even 48 items, spanning numerous categories and styles.

Research from the Harvard Business Review shows that reducing the number of options when customers first arrive helps ease cognitive load and nudges them toward purchase.

For example, CookieDatabase (cookiedatabase.org) — a comprehensive resource for privacy-conscious cookie management tools — employs a straightforward user interface with limited visible options at each step. Their cookie consent manager UI allows users to easily “manage options” or “manage services” without displaying an overwhelming vendor count that can lead to frustration.

Similarly, your homepage should feature a small, curated selection rather than a giant, unfiltered list. This approach reduces decision friction and helps customers take action quicker.

How to Avoid Choice Overload

1. **Limit featured products to 4-6 items:** This number is manageable and allows users to scan quickly.
2. **Curate thoughtfully:** Choose products that meet common user goals or popular trends instead of trying to show a broad category.
3. **Guide with clear calls to action:** Use buttons like “Explore More” or “Shop by Category” that offer paths for additional discovery.

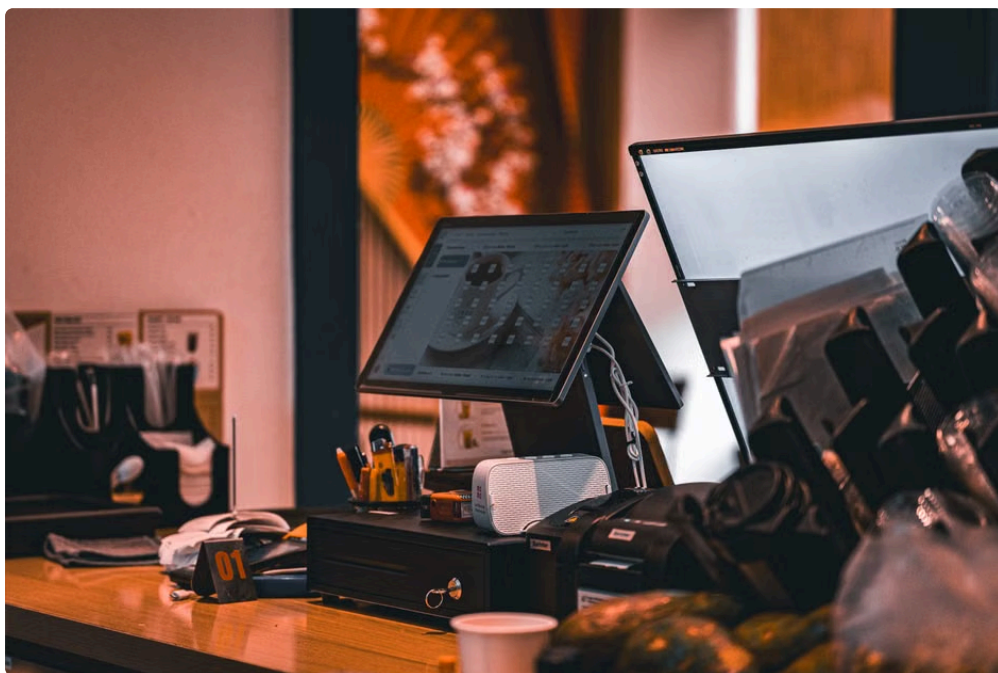
Curated Sections Help People Start

Rather than trying to highlight “everything” upfront, a strong curation strategy helps shoppers start their journey with confidence. Creating meaningful, curated sections on your homepage is both a practical and user-centered approach. It fosters a sense of personalization and relevance, building trust and reducing browsing anxiety.

Here are a few proven curation tactics that many successful stores use:

- **Thematic collections:** Group products by theme, season, or occasion, such as “Summer Essentials” or “Back-to-School Must-Haves.”
- **Problem-solving bundles:** Show products that together solve a specific problem or fulfill a need.
- **Customer favorites & reviews:** Highlight highly rated items with social proof.

Successful EU retailers also carefully integrate cookie consent user experience. For instance, the EU cookie policy page references often encourage transparency about data management, with easy toggling of vendor counts and consent levels directly on the UI, as seen on CookieDatabase’s consent management interface. This thoughtful interaction design builds credibility—something your homepage merchandising can also achieve through curated, trustworthy product presentations.



Key Takeaways for Your Homepage Merchandising

Problem	Why It Happens	What to Do Instead
“Featured Products” feels vague and confusing	Label doesn’t match customer mental models; no clear purpose	Use descriptive and familiar category names like “Top Sellers” or “New & Trending”
Choice overload with too many products	Too many options overwhelm shoppers, causing friction	

Limit featured items to 4-6 and curate thoughtfully Homepage looks like an inventory dump Confusing internal taxonomies rather than user-focused design Create curated thematic or problem-solving collections Customers bounce without taking action Lack of clear guidance and calls to action Use clear CTAs such as “Shop by Category” to guide discovery

Conclusion

The common “Featured Products” block on a store homepage is often an oversimplified tactic that doesn’t align with how customers think, shop, or want to engage. Instead of defaulting to vague labels and unfiltered choices, shift your homepage merchandising strategy toward clear, curated, customer-centric presentations.

By embracing customer mental models over internal taxonomies, limiting choice overload, and creating compelling curated sections, you’ll help visitors start their shopping journey with confidence—not confusion.

Remember the lessons from companies like MrQ, the research insights of Harvard Business Review, and the cookie management best practices highlighted on CookieDatabase when designing your store’s homepage experience. A strategic, user-focused curation approach is the key to unlocking true homepage merchandising success.