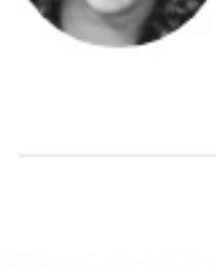


Case study: Moving from Virtuemart to WooCommerce

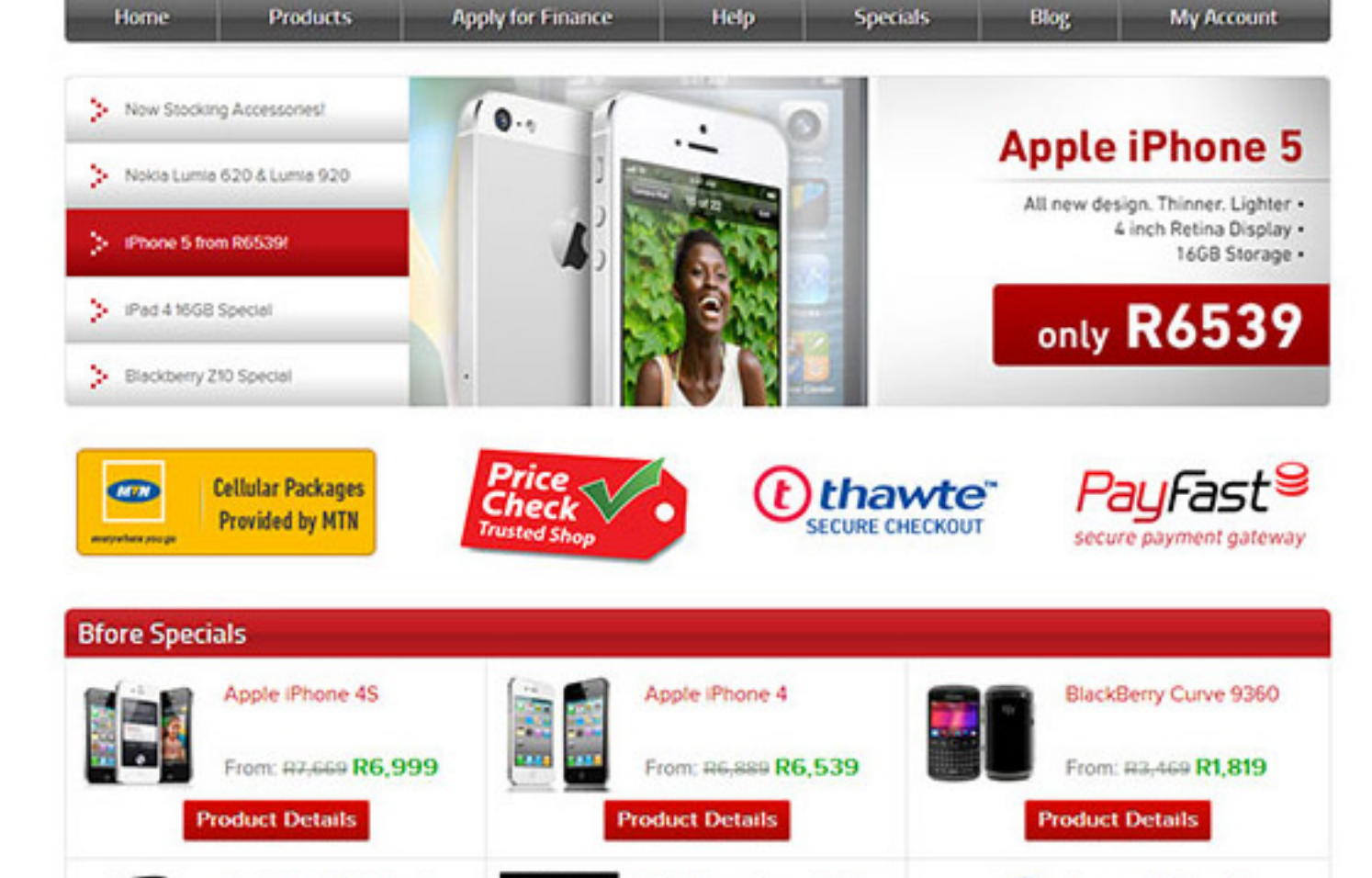


CUSTOMER STORIES WRITTEN BY MARK FORRESTER



I'm Mark Atkinson and I run [Red Giant Design](#) – a digital marketing and design studio from sunny Durban, in South Africa.

We recently redeveloped one of our biggest online stores to date, [BFore.co.za](#). BFore sells cell phones with airtime, tablets, televisions and other home electronic goods online to consumers in South Africa.



The new WooCommerce powered BFore website.

Thanks to [WooCommerce](#), our client now has a website with functionality that is far superior to that which they had when we initially developed the site using [Virtuemart 2](#) and [Joomla](#).

Over the past year, we've really come to enjoy using products from WooThemes, especially WooCommerce. I honestly can't praise the product enough and I'd even pick it over something like Magento.

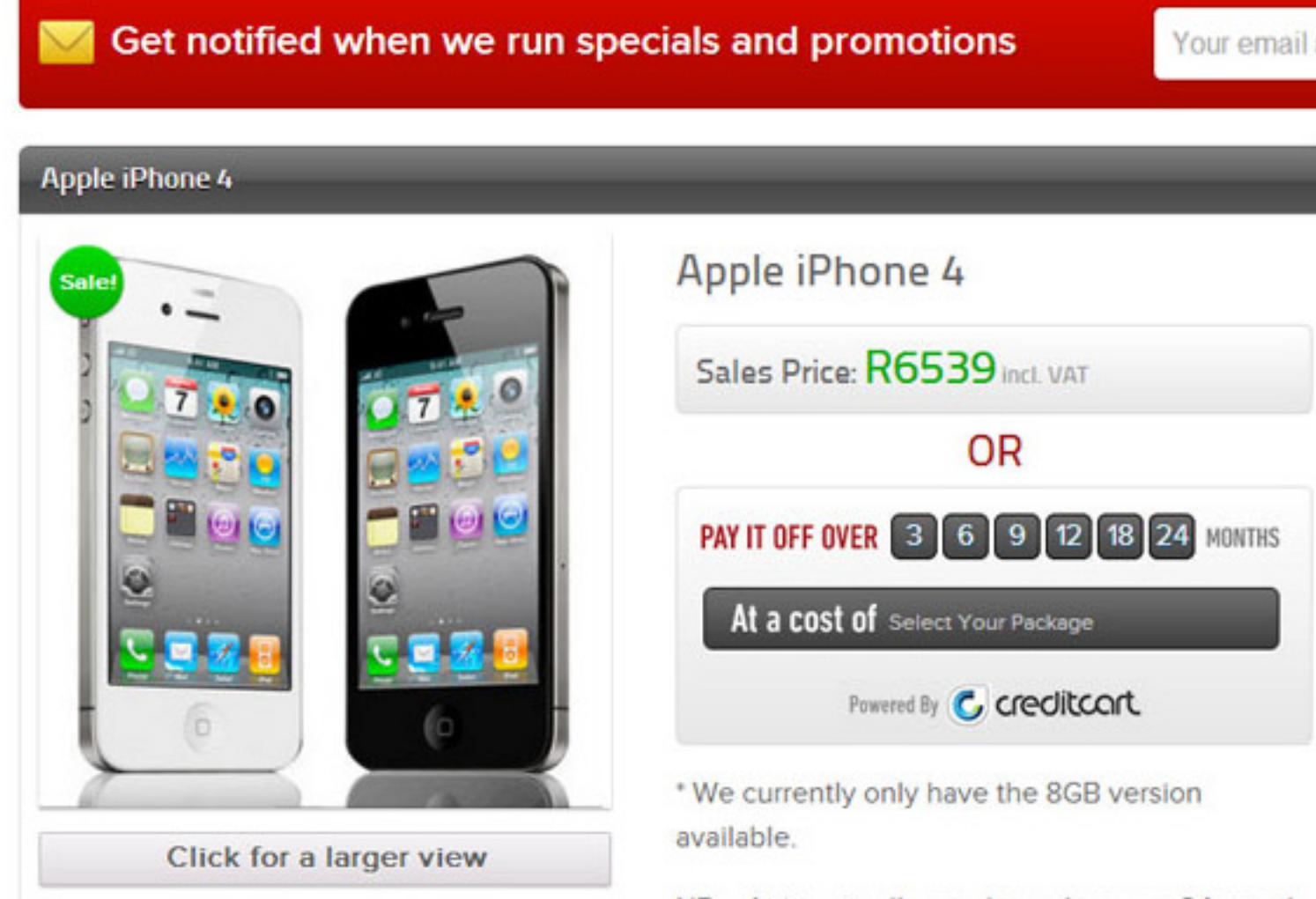
Why we switched to WooCommerce

As mentioned, the site based on Virtuemart 2 left a whole lot to be desired – their support even more so. The BFore team often wanted simple features added for the convenience of both their staff and their customers which took us an absolute age to implement on our side. All of these were features, for example being able to edit a customer's shipping address in the backend, that you would expect in a good online shopping facility, which weren't there in Virtuemart 2.

We wanted our client to be able to use a system that was practical and powerful, while still being able to provide the most user-friendly interface for customers. Because we had used WooCommerce on a few sites prior to this redevelopment, we were confident in the fact that it could produce the goods. So we switched.

Plugins and extensibility

Virtuemart also doesn't come close to the number and quality of third party plugins that WooCommerce is able to offer, paid or premium. It's so frustrating sifting through plugin directories looking for extensions that should actually be part of the core in the first place.



As BFore is a South African e-commerce store, we required a number of plugins which were specifically tailored to a South African market. As WooThemes is partly South African, we were delighted to see that they have a range of South African plugins ready and waiting, such as the Payfast plugin.

A focus on SEO and analytics

As I head up the online marketing stuff within Red Giant, I'm extremely focused on the SEO, user experience and analytics capabilities of whichever e-commerce platform we use for clients websites.

Virtuemart 2 posed several issues in this department. There was no easy way to track goals and events. There were major canonical issues and site speed was also a bit of a letdown. The checkout was a mess and we required a large amount of resources to get into a useable position.



Enter WordPress and WooCommerce, in combination with the [WordPress SEO by Yoast](#) plugin. What a pleasure.

With barely any customization on our behalf, the site is SEO friendly and all the issues we had before are resolved. No more duplicate content, no more canonical issues, an easy to use single-page checkout, and built in tracking via Google Analytics.

We managed to reduce the number of URLs on the site from 3819 to just 394. That's a 90% reduction! I think that in itself speaks volumes for the efficiency of the WooCommerce code and structure.

Site speed is no longer an issue thanks to the [W3 Total Cache](#) plugin for WordPress. It will soon be even better as we're planning on distributing content using a CDN.

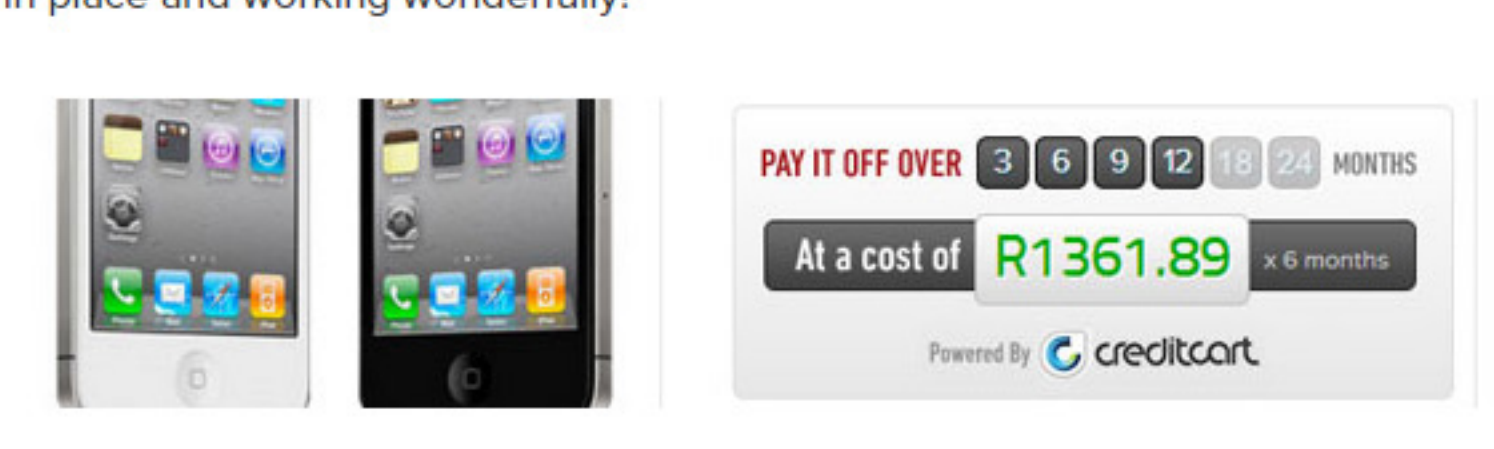
One thing that I was surprised to see with WooCommerce was the built in Schema.org microdata. I didn't expect it to be there, but boy was I glad it was.

Challenges we needed to overcome

Despite WooCommerce being an absolutely phenomenal system, there were many curveballs thrown at us (there always are) which needed to be dealt with. Some of the challenges we experienced with the redevelopment of BFore were:

Developing a custom payment plugin

BFore recently signed on with [CreditCart](#), a system that allows customers to pay for their purchases over up to 24 months. We needed to code a custom payment plugin to integrate CreditCart with WooCommerce. This took quite some time to implement, but is now in place and working wonderfully!



A custom payment plugin that integrates CreditCart with WooCommerce.

The Release of WooCommerce 2.0

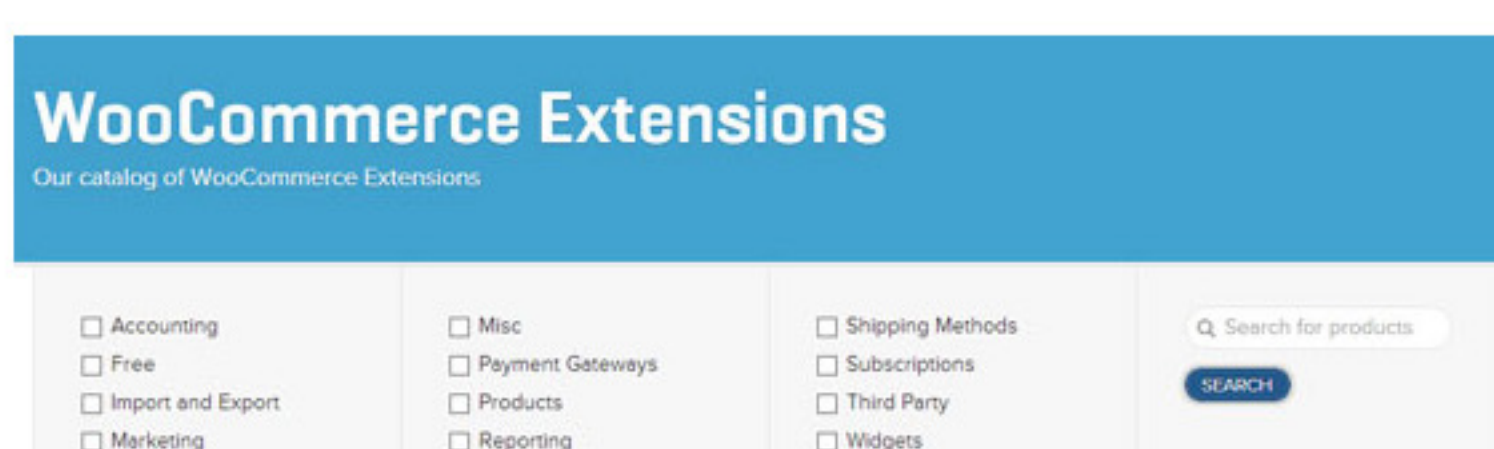
WooCommerce 2.0 was released midway through our development of the new site. This was something that we hadn't anticipated, but figured we needed to implement anyway to future-proof the site. Certain nuances in WC 2 took some time to wrap our heads around and delayed our development by a week or so, but were eventually sorted out.

Working with the WARP Framework

We based the site off of Yootheme's Warp framework which we enjoy using for its efficiency. Little did we know that when WC 2.0 was released it would wreak havoc with the functionality of the site after the upgrade. As there seems to be no commitment by Yootheme to make Warp compatible with WC 2, we had to make several edits to the theme ourselves.

Feature Additions

Thanks to the WooCommerce extension directory, we were able to add a number of really amazing features to BFore's site which wouldn't otherwise have been possible with a relatively limited budget.



There's probably a WooCommerce extension for that!

I'm convinced that we've probably bought and implemented 70% of all the extensions for WooCommerce, but some of the new features that are really game-changing in terms of the customer experience through BFore are:

Follow-up emails

The potential uses for this plugin are mind-blowing. I'm sure we are only scraping the surface, but we use [Follow-up Emails](#) to send emails asking customers to review their products a month after they've purchased them, as well as to send cart abandonment emails offering customers a discount coupon if they go back and complete their orders.

Reviews for Discount

User-generated content is great for SEO and encouraging reviews is something we've always wanted to do for BFore. What better way to do this than with a combination of [Reviews for Discount](#) and [Follow-up Emails](#)!

Better customer account functionality

BFore's customers can now log into their accounts, view all their orders and all order notes added by BFore's team, as well as pay for orders that remain unpaid using the [Payfast plugin](#)! Customers are emailed (or sent an SMS thanks to the Twilio SMS plugin) whenever their order status is changed or an order note is updated.

It's all so practical.

Other Awesome Plugins

As I mentioned, we probably bought most of the extensions available for WooCommerce. Some of the more important ones that we're using are:

- [Dynamic Pricing](#) – This allows BFore a whole lot more control over category-based discounts and opens up options that previously weren't available.
- [Subscribe to Newsletter](#) – Bfore always wanted their customers to be able to sign up directly to their Mailchimp lists when purchasing. We were really glad to find this plugin available for WooCommerce.
- [Local Pickup Plus](#) – Bfore's customers are able to collect certain products from depots around South Africa so they need to be able to select a pickup address during checkout. This is a function that we had to code manually for Virtuemart 2.
- [Product Enquiry form](#) – All part of helping us improve the user experience.
- [WooCommerce Waitlist](#) – BFore's suppliers are often out of stock and they prefer not to take orders during this time. Instead, they can now offer potential customers the option to sign up to a waitlist, whereafter they will be notified if the product becomes stocked again. We're also using this plugin to add a nifty new "feature" to BFore where we're listing upcoming products for customers to join a waiting list. This is quite nice in an industry where new highly anticipated products are talked about and released often. (Cellular devices mainly)
- [Ajax Layered Navigation](#) – When you're selling something like televisions, it's really useful for a customer to be able to filter your products by attributes such as screen size or panel type. Ajax layered navigation is perfect for this and, once again, represents a feature that was missing from Virtuemart 2.
- [WooCommerce Tab Manager](#) – I feel it's important not to bloat your descriptions with surplus information such as technical specifications. This plugin allowed us to create custom specifications tabs for the products that needed them, so we could separate that information.

My only gripe

As I'm sure you can tell from the above, I feel that WooCommerce is hands down one of the best e-commerce solutions around. Our development process was a thousand times easier than the initial development and the end result has been a very happy client for us.

The one inefficiency that we really would like to see bettered in future versions of WooCommerce is the interaction between order status updates and the emails that are sent to the customer, as well as improved ability to customize this. Although this was somewhat dealt with in WC 2, I feel it could still be improved upon. The emails sent tend to be inconsistent and it's not always obvious what is going to be sent to the customer when taking the payment method and order status into account, especially when resending customer invoices.

Other than that, we really have no complaints whatsoever. We will continue to support WooThemes and WooCommerce while they continue to produce great products and offer top notch support.

BFore was, and continues to be, a really challenging project for us to work on. Now that we use WooCommerce, it's become a real fun!

I'm always happy to chat about our work, or interesting challenges. You can get in touch with me on Google+ or via our website, [redgiantdesign.co.za](#) with any related questions or thoughts. (Also be sure to post your thoughts in the comments below)