

For many e-commerce teams, category pages and product listing pages (PLPs) often become cluttered spaces where inventory simply piles up. It's tempting to think "more is better" when you have thousands of SKUs, but as with a physical store, an overcrowded digital aisle creates friction, confusion, and ultimately lost sales.

If your category pages feel like a dumping ground rather than carefully curated collections, you're not alone. Even big names like MrQ — a major player in gaming and online entertainment — have had to refine their digital merchandising approach to better align with customer expectations. At the same time, insights from research published by Harvard Business Review reinforce how mental models and curated choice sets improve customer decision-making.

This post breaks down what you should fix first when your category pages feel overwhelming or unfocused. We'll touch on how customer mental models beat internal taxonomies, the dangers of choice overload, and how a clean "curated first experience" can set customers on the right path. Plus, we'll briefly explore usability issues around cookie consent management interfaces referencing examples from CookieDatabase.org, illustrating how poor UI design frustrates users and parallels common pitfalls in category page [Click here for more info](#) design.

## Inventory Is Not the Experience: Stop Dumping Everything in One Place

One of the biggest mistakes e-commerce teams make is confusing the total inventory count with a meaningful user experience. It's natural to think that the more products you show, the higher the chance that visitors will find what they want. But research consistently disproves this idea.

Harvard Business Review points to "choice overload" as a critical barrier to conversion. When visitors encounter an enormous, undifferentiated list of products, it can lead to decision fatigue and paralysis rather than satisfaction.

Take MrQ.com's approach to their category pages as a case study. Although they have thousands of games and betting options, they don't just dump everything on a long scrolling PLP. Instead, they use digital merchandising methods to surface curated sections, featured selections, and filters that help users immediately narrow focus.

### Key Fix #1: Prioritize Foundational Curation Over Full Inventory Display

- **Start with curated "featured" or "bestseller" sections** atop the category — these give customers immediate direction and reduce overwhelm.
- **Group products by meaningful themes or use cases** rather than by internal SKU codes or supplier data.
- **Delay or hide less relevant or low-performing SKUs** rather than showing everything at once.

## Customer Mental Models vs. Internal Taxonomies

E-commerce teams often organize categories and filters based on how their inventory data is structured within back-end systems. This is known as an internal taxonomy. While efficient for supply chain or catalog management, it can conflict with how customers actually think about and search for products.

For example, a home goods retailer might tag a product by "SKU12345" with attributes like "fabric type," "season," "supplier," and "color code." But a customer shopping for a "cozy winter throw blanket" has a very different mental model focused on warmth, texture, and décor style.

Harvard Business Review's research on user-centered categorization highlights the importance of matching the site's navigation labels, filters, and grouping schemas with customer language and mental models — not internal

codes.

## Key Fix #2: Rebuild Category Navigation and Filters Around Customer Language

1. **Conduct user research:** Analyze search queries, customer feedback, and onsite behavior to discover how shoppers naturally describe and segment your products.
2. **Map internal attributes to customer concepts:** Translate SKU metadata into meaningful filter and category labels.
3. **Test labeling and groupings:** Use A/B tests and usability testing to validate that people find what they expect under these categories.

MrQ's navigational structures reflect this approach — categories are named and organized to mirror the kinds of games and bets users think about, not back-office inventory classifications.

## Choice Overload Causes Decision Friction

Imagine walking into a grocery store aisle where 100 varieties of cereal are stacked from floor to ceiling, all identical in packaging style and with no subcategories. Even the most dedicated shopper would hesitate and likely buy something familiar or nothing at all.

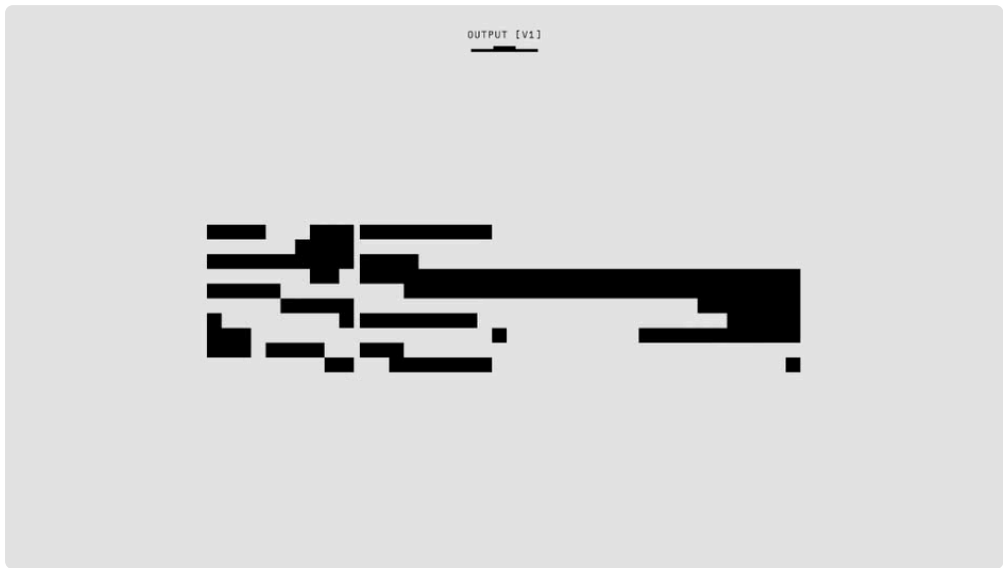
This “choice overload” effect on category pages and PLPs reduces conversion rates and customer satisfaction. Too many options create anxiety, indecision, and a longer time to purchase. Though it may seem counterintuitive, offering fewer, well-curated options can actually increase sales.

## Key Fix #3: Manage the Number of Choices Shown

- **Limit initial product exposure:** Display fewer SKUs by default on categories, with clear pathways to see more.
- **Use progressive disclosure:** Allow users to expand and explore deeper into the catalog but not overwhelm at first glance.
- **Help with filters and sorting:** Empower users to narrow down large assortments quickly.

## Curated Sections Help People Start

Digital merchandising is no longer about just listing products. It's about crafting experiences. The best category pages become launching pads — thoughtfully curated collections that provide orientation, guidance, and inspiration.



Sites like MrQ show curated picks, new releases, trending items, and personalized recommendations above or beside the main product grid. These curated entry points give shoppers a sense of confidence and reduce the cognitive load involved in browsing.

### Key Fix #4: Build Clear, Curated Entry Points on Category Pages

- 1. **Featured Collections:** Highlight seasonal or thematic sets that align with customer goals.
- 2. **Top Sellers and New Arrivals:** Show what’s popular and fresh to build trust and relevance.
- 3. **Personalized Recommendations:** Use machine learning or rule-based logic to surface items based on a customer’s prior behavior.

By doing so, you reduce the “dumping ground” feeling and make the experience more inviting and focused.

### Parallels in UX: Cookie Consent Manager Interfaces

While primarily thinking about category pages and product listing pages, it’s useful to consider other interface points where excessive options and confusing navigation degrade user experience. Cookie consent manager UIs provide a perfect parallel.

Many cookie consent forms let users “manage options” that include managing services and vendors. Unfortunately, a high *vendor count* combined with poor grouping and insufficient labeling leads to choice overload and decision friction here as well.

Sites referenced by CookieDatabase.org reveal common problems such as:

- Vendor lists that feel like an endless dump of legal jargon and checkboxes.
- Confusing labels for cookie categories that don’t match user expectations.
- Cumbersome navigation across layered options with no clear curated defaults.

The lessons for category page UX are clear: reduce complexity, use customer-friendly language, and curate the experience so users can make confident decisions quickly.

## Additional Tips: Leveraging EU Cookie Policy Page Concepts

EU cookie policy pages are required to follow strict compliance rules that ensure transparency and user control. Many have adopted:

- **An initial simplified consent interface** with choices to “Accept All” or “Manage Preferences.”
- **Layered navigation** where more granular controls appear only if users elect to dive deeper.
- **Clear vendor groupings and descriptive labels** that align with user concerns like “analytics” or “marketing.”

This layered and curated approach can inspire category page design, prompting teams to:

- Offer overview highlights upfront and detailed exploration on demand.
- Make toggling and filtering easy and meaningful with terminology customers understand.

## Summary: Fix Your “Dumping Ground” Category Pages with These Priority Actions

|                                                                 |                                                                            |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Problem                                                         | Recommended Fix                                                            | Outcome                                             |
| Cluttered product listings showing entire inventory             | Lead with curated and featured sections; hide less relevant SKUs           | Reduced overwhelm; clearer discovery paths          |
| Taxonomies based on internal labels and SKU data                | Reorganize categories and filters to reflect customer mental models        | Improved findability; higher customer satisfaction  |
| Too many choices causing decision paralysis                     | Limit initial visible choices; enable progressive disclosure               | Faster decisions and higher conversion rates        |
| Lack of curated entry points to help shoppers start             | Build thematic collections, bestsellers, and personalized recommendations  | More engaging experience and increased relevance    |
| Complexity and poor UX in cookie consent UI (Analogous problem) | Apply layered navigation, clear vendor groupings, and user-friendly labels | Lower user frustration; better compliance and trust |

## Final Thoughts

Your category pages are not just product dumps — they are pivotal wayfinding and merchandising tools that shape how customers experience your brand. Embrace the principles of curated discovery, customer-centered navigation, and choice management. Examine how teams like MrQ use these to lift engagement, and consider insights from places like Harvard Business Review to inform your strategy.

Don’t wait until your PLPs feel like chaotic dumping grounds. Take the first step today by reevaluating your category page UX through the lens of your customer’s mental model, and watch your engagement and sales

improve as a result.