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## No-fear shopping

There are obvious obstacles to selling customized window treatments online. It's often hard for customers to visualize what the product will look like in their homes. And they may lack experience in taking the required measurements and installing products. Finally, given the cost, customers don't want to take a chance that they can't return a customized product.

But Smithandnoble.com has designed its web site to minimize the online fear factor. Through its customer satisfaction guaranty, education programs and the ability to view entire customized packages online, shoppers at this site know what they are buying will be right—and if it isn't, that it can be fixed.

"This site has a lot of special add-on services that set it apart," says Jessica Jourdan, senior research scientist for Perceptive Sciences, which specializes in user experience testing. "These services help people purchase what otherwise could be a very difficult product to sell online."

Among such services is the use of Adobe Scene7 technology to allow customers to configure and view

customized draperies, shades and panels. That lets customers not only view the primary window treatment, but see it along with the various accessories and upgrades they have chosen, such as valances, ladder tapes and decorative trim. Many of the site's competitors allow parts of the total window treatment to be viewed online, but not all the components together, says Anna Gould, director of online marketing at Smith+Noble LLC.

Smithandnoble.com pays a lot of attention to customer education, as well. "Customers often think that the process of buying custom window coverings is intimidating and confusing," Gould says. "However, we walk them through it on the web site so that they gain confidence and build a product they will love having in their homes."

Unique for customized window treatments, Smithandnoble.com offers a customer satisfaction guarantee, an important benefit to customers. "This is about our customers' homes," she says. "We want them to be happy with what they buy so that they will consider us in the future or, better yet, recommend us to their friends and family."