Using Apsona to Import or Update Products

Apsona StoreAdmin is simply a great tool – one with such power that it's actually easy to make a mess out of your shopping cart. So attention to detail and following these directions are very important.

This document contains information that is not necessary to actually using Apsona. I ask that you read it all anyway because I firmly believe that an educated cart owner is more powerful. The more you know, the better you maintain your store, the less possibly of being scammed by unscrupulous or just unknowledgeable developers and in the end, hopefully, the more you will profit.

You can always skip all of this and go straight to the support pages on Apsona listed at the end of this document.

But first a bit of explanation of what Apsona is. This mod was developed was developed by the good folks at Apsona.com. Their original intention was to use it as a money maker. I vetted it early on and explained to them, though it was a great tool, I thought they would have trouble getting folks to pay $10 a month for it. Surprisingly enough, they ended up releasing it free of charge. And thus never made any money in the end.

They supported it for a long time and charged little for making changes for individual websites. The mod uses their server to push out changes - it's not just a set of files. Even though they no longer support the mod, they continue to provide their server to the Zen Cart community. We hope that will continue forever but I think it's time that the users realize that the mod can stop working at any time due to their total abandonment of the project. I hope that won't happen but I do believe in being realistic.

There is a thread on the forum where information is readily available http://www.zen-cart.com/showthread.php?153990-Apsona-ShopAdmin-a-free-tool-for-import-mass-update-reporting. We are supporting the plug in as best as possible now that Apsona is not working with it so if you experience technical difficulties getting Apsona to work at all, the answers are there. At this writing pay particular attention to this page http://www.zen-cart.com/showthread.php?153990-Apsona-ShopAdmin-a-free-tool-for-import-mass-update-reporting/page61 - post 608 contains full instructions for updating the files that come with your Apsona download.

In the meantime, it is far superior compared to EZpopulate, the only other free export/import tool. But unlike EZPopulate, no template is provided for importing. You have to create that yourself.

Exporting and Importing Products

The first thing to do is export your present products to use as a template and to save the existing products as a backup.

In Apsona, click on Products. On the right hand side, there is a dropdown menu entitled Tools. Click on Export.

Select the fields that the important ones – that may mean a combination of what is important to you as well as important to set up for the import of new products. Many fields have default values and unless you want to change them you don't have to have them in your file. One very important field that does not have a default value is Tax Class. In the US and in some other countries, you must tax certain buyers. The only way that can happen is if you set the Tax Class as Taxable Goods.

At a minimum, the normal export includes Product ID, Name, Description, Image, Price and Category. If you are using a dynamic shipper like UPS, USPS or Fedex, weight would also be required.

If your products have attributes, Priced by Attributes may also be necessary and there are reasons for including other fields as well based on how you are setting up your products. The good news is that this tool makes fixes easily as well in case you don't include a necessary field at first.

Remember one important thing for importing, if you are adding new products, do not include the Product ID field. If you are updating existing products, the Product ID field (or the model field) is required. *You cannot mix new products and updating existing products in the same file unless you choose a specific type of import. See Apsona instructions, links listed at the end of this document.*

The file format is CSV – not excel but can be opened by any spreadsheet program. Be sure to save it the same which normally is going to generate a message from your spreadsheet program to affirm you want to save it in this format as formatting will be lost (like highlighted rows or different fonts, etc).

Do not skip rows. Do not put notes at the bottom. Put one product per line. Never change anything else.

Categories

The categories must match the exact way the names are entered into the database. The category is Lummox. lummox will not do. Lummox with a space after it will not do. It has to exactly match. If the product goes into a subcategory, the format is Lummox: Subcategory. That is category colon space subcategory. You can create new categories when you import by the way by simply flipping a switch in Apsona. But if you do that and your category names differ from the existing categories, new categories will be created – you can easily create a second category called lummox and have two categories with one letter difference.

New categories can also be create by doing a category export/import. A reasonable thing to do if you have a lot of new categories because it is a more streamlined process that is easier to oversee and get correct rather than relying on your product import file.

Attributes

If your products have attributes, it is possible to import them. This is harder to do, however, as the attributes import have to have certain fields. First, and most importantly is the product ID. The product has to exist before adding attributes. So you have to import the new products, export the products to easily get the product ids all at once. If you export all products, sort by product id and the new products will be at the end of the product sequence.

The attributes import does not have any other identifying product information besides product ID which can make it harder to do an import. Any errors in product ID will result in major problems later when trying to figure out what may have gone wrong.

The fields that you need may not be many depending on what the options are. For example, if you have a product that has different colors and no price differences. You will need a minimum set of fields as they are listed in the export: product (ID), option, option value. Option would be color, option values are the actual colors.

If you have different prices for your attributes such as sizes, then you will need to include option value price. Small, medium and large are all $10 but extra large is $12. You have a choice of how these options are entered and therefore display on the product page. If you enter the $10 for the product price, then you will need to add $2 to the extra large size. It displays and +$2 in the dropdown. If this is a simple situation with only that one price difference then that is not unreasonable to do it that way.

If, however, you have 5 sizes and each one are different, your potential buyer will be having to do a lot of math work. Not an optimum situation so the alternative involves a product settings and the entry of full prices on the attributes.

There is a Priced by Attribute setting on the products. Flip that to yes and do not enter a price on the product itself. Then put in the full price on the attribute. The product can then display a price labeled as 'Starting at' the lowest attribute price. If you do all of this except flipping that priced by attribute, your products will only display a price in the drop down box, and nowhere else in the cart.

The other thing that is important when importing attributes is that you cannot create new attributes or attribute pairs with an import. They have to be set up first in Zen Cart Admin.

Apsona Online Instructions

Instructions for product imports are located at http://apsona.com/doc/importing-product-records

Instructions for importing the attributes is located at http://apsona.com/doc/import-upload-attributes-into-zen-cart-or-oscommerce

Some of Apsona's instructions are not well-written, one of the reasons why I was asked to vet the plugin in the first place was because they wanted and needed editing of their text in the original page and emails. They did not ask for my help on the instruction pages, however!