



How to sell online

A guide to opening your online store

If you've been thinking about opening an online store, you're definitely onto something. Industry experts are projecting ecommerce revenue to grow a whopping 12% compared to last year. Better yet, things aren't expected to slow down anytime soon. By 2014, US ecommerce sales are projected to increase another 66%, reaching an astounding \$223.9 billion.

But how do you go about selling online? It ultimately depends on your situation - if you're looking to clean out your garage or sell a couple of products as a one-time occurrence, you should consider using an online auction site or local listing service. But if you want to sell products or services on an ongoing basis, your best bet is to open your own online store.

Before starting the online business of your dreams, take a look at the following things you'll need to know before launch. Keep in mind that you won't need to do everything all at once, but in order to succeed online, you should definitely think about how to fit them into your strategy.

Highlights

- 1. Figure out what to sell**
The first step in successfully selling online is to decide what you'll be offering for sale.
- 2. Decide on a solution**
Learn about the three main types: hosted, licensed or open source.
- 3. Start building your store**
Set up product categories and enter your inventory. Make it your own by choosing a unique design.
- 4. Secure your domain**
Try to pick a domain name that is short, simple to remember and describes what you're selling online.
- 5. Get paid**
Consider PayPal, Google Checkout or accepting credit cards directly from your store.
- 6. Spread the word**
You've worked hard to sell online - don't be afraid to tell the world about it!

1. Figure out what to sell online

Do you have an amazing product that you'd like to offer to the rest of the world? How about a blossoming fashion line that everyone should be wearing? Whatever the case, the first step in successfully selling online is to decide what you'll be offering for sale. It's important to work with products that you're passionate about. After all, you'll be working with them quite a bit once your online business takes off. Also, make sure you have a way to secure your inventory, whether you're getting it from a third-party supplier or creating it on your own.

Don't have any products? Don't fret. There are multiple vendors and drop shippers that can provide various items to sell on your new online store.

2. Decide which ecommerce solution is best

An ecommerce solution, or shopping cart software, is the platform you'll use to sell your products and manage your online business. There are three main types for you to choose from:

- **Hosted Ecommerce Solutions:** Hosted solutions provide web-hosting and shopping cart software as one. The benefit is that you don't have to worry about securing servers or maintaining them on

your own, which creates a severe drop in initial start-up costs. Hosted solutions also provide continuous software updates. The drawback is that you don't have full control over every fine detail of your store, but the functionality is typically there.

- **Licensed Ecommerce Solutions:** Licensed solutions are out of the box solutions that you install onto your computer, meaning you have to find hosting in addition to acquiring and maintaining servers. Software features are also built in, but you won't receive updates. The benefit of licensed solutions is the increased control you receive over your online store.

- **Open Source Ecommerce Solutions:** Open source solutions are typically free software downloads that require large amounts of custom coding and technical knowledge. Upon download, you'll begin building your online store and all its features from scratch. If you have the knowledge or resources to develop your store this way, there is a higher degree of flexibility. With open source solutions, you're also responsible for finding technical support, hosting and server maintenance.

3. Start building your online store

Now comes the fun part – building your online store. As you become familiar with your chosen shopping

cart software, you'll start setting up your product categories and entering your inventory. You'll also want to start thinking about adding different pages to your new website, including information about your business, contact details, and more. You can easily launch your new online store without having everything on your website perfected – you'll quickly learn that selling online is a dynamic work in progress.

It's also important to begin thinking about the design of your ecommerce site, as it's critical to your success. Even if you're selling the most incredible product, if a customer comes to your site and is underwhelmed, they won't trust your business or purchase from you. Fortunately there are all sorts of design options, including free templates and custom design services. Regardless of what route you take, always have your customer in mind when creating the aesthetic of your store.

“ It was easy to understand for our small company and it really empowered us. Additionally, pricing was transparent with no hidden fees as with other designers. The site looks like a million dollars on a shoe string budget! ”

- Kimberly Cayce, GoKalyx

4. Secure your domain name

A domain name is the web address where customers can find your online store. Selecting the perfect domain name for your business is very important – it's a long-term decision that can make or break your success. Try to pick a domain name that is short, simple to remember and describes what you're selling online.

5. Determine how you'll get paid

No matter what type of product you're selling, everyone's in the game for one reason – to make money! Your next decision is how to receive payment from your customers. There are a multitude of options out there depending on your business needs.

Several first-time online business owners opt to use a simpler method of customer payment, such as PayPal or Google Checkout. These options can be utilized in the beginning if you're on a tight budget. The major drawback, however, is that customers are taken away from your website to enter their credit card information. This drastically increases the chance that they will change their minds and abandon their order before it's complete.

Another option for accepting customer payment is to process credit cards directly from your store.

This allows your customers to select from several payment options, and more importantly, keeps them on your site. Credit card processing also creates a higher level of credibility for your online business. Your customers will know that you're a legitimate entity since you've taken the extra step in providing a convenient and secure checkout process.

6. Spread the word

To truly succeed online, it's not enough to simply have a website. There are millions of other sites out there, all competing for the same shoppers. That's why it's critical to spread the word about what you're selling online.

There are tons of different ways to tell others about your new store. Some of the quickest methods include reaching out to your friends and acquaintances. But to really stand out from the crowd, you'll want to look to search engines for help. Most online purchases begin with a search in a major search engine like Google, so you'll want to make sure that you're getting your piece of the pie.

One quick way to boost traffic to your site is through Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising. Based on various search terms, an ad for your online store will appear within the search results. Another way to boost your ranking in search engines is with Search Engine

Optimization (SEO), which is the practice of crafting your site to become search engine friendly.

Regardless of what you decide, make sure you trumpet your online store to anyone that is willing to listen. You've worked hard to sell online - don't be afraid to tell the world about it!

"Volusion's SEO tool is great. I'm not a technical person and I've gotten a lot of SEO. We're currently ranked five using our Google keywords."

- Lara Shelton, LaPlates

Opening your online business is an extremely rewarding process that will continue to pay off as time passes. If you invest your efforts and energy, selling online can quickly become a huge contributor to your income and will fulfill your entrepreneurial spirit. Keep in mind that the above was a comprehensive overview of the major points of selling online. If you can't afford a custom web design or SEO plan out of the gate, that's not a problem. As your business grows, so will your ability to capitalize on different online business tactics.

Fortunately, Volusion offers an all-in-one ecommerce solution that can provide everything from your shopping cart software to your credit card processing. Join over 20,000 business owners currently achieving their dream - open an online business with us today.