



## The Newbies Guide to Internet Success

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# Introduction

There is no argument that the online marketplace is one of the most rapidly burgeoning markets today. In fact, a great percentage of businesses today have some sort of an online presence. Therefore, learning how to sell products on the internet is not a skill that is optional; it is a necessary skill particularly for new businesses that do not have the luxury of an already established distribution chain.

Admittedly, learning how to sell your products can be somewhat of a daunting task to many; this is regardless of whether you are tech savvy or not. Of course, there are a few advantages to being tech savvy but that should not worry you at the moment. You need to figure out what your product is, how to come up with the product (whether to purchase or manufacture), how to market these products and finally how to sell and distribute them online. No matter the size, whether it is a main source of income or a side business, building a business can sometimes be a very overwhelming task, and more often than not time is major constraint as there are other things in play such as increased competition and costs.

However, thanks to the advancement of today's technology there are countless ways that this particular process can be made so much simpler for you. A couple of decades ago, in order for you to make any money from your small business then you would have to go through the cumbersome task of locating and negotiating a lease for a store front. You would also need a warehouse if your business handles large amounts of inventory, hire staff to help you run the business, and spend countless nights awake won-

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dering whether the tens of thousands of dollars that you have invested in the renovation of the physical store is going to have any substantial impact or not. Businessmen in the world over can now exhale a sigh of relief that these days are finally gone.

One of the key benefits of conducting an online business is that a substantial portion of the overhead costs that are associated with the business tend to be minimized as compared to a situation where one would be setting up a physical store. This portion of your budget can now be transferred elsewhere where it can serve in growing your business substantially.

By mastering the art of selling products via an e-commerce website also confers the benefit of mitigating a substantial amount of financial risks that you would have otherwise been exposed to. It eliminates the need for you or your business to have a form of physical location or to pen down an expensive multi-year lease.

You should note that this information is not meant to imply that maintaining an online business is a walk in the park. It is, however, true that through the application of the technology that is at our disposal today, you are capable of creating and growing an online business with increased expediency as compare to what it was like a couple of decades ago.

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# How is Technology Beneficial to you when selling Online?

One of the reasons the internet has grown in popularity as a medium for conducting business is the fact that it can allow you to have an easy access to millions of shoppers worldwide. Moreover, because of its global reach an online business can literally be open for 24 hours a day every day. This is tremendous firepower in business and if utilized in the right manner it can help you reap serious rewards.

Admittedly, technology has its limitations as it cannot possibly guide you on tough decisions such as the kind of business to be in, the services to offer, products to sell, or how to manufacture your products in an efficient manner. However, what it can do is offer you with the capacity to present your products to a huge number of prospective customers online and simplifies the process of getting money from the customers' pockets into your own.

In business there are a lot of tasks that are mundane but are important to the business, quite frankly if we all had a choice we would prefer not to do them. Luckily, with automation you have this choice and you can now free up a substantial amount of your time and devote it towards performing more important tasks in your business.

Each and every day, there are millions of shoppers that visit online market places with the intention of finding the right product for them to buy. There are businesses that have already set up their structure to meet this demand and they are moving tons of products already. This goes to show that there is a lot of potential in selling products online.

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If you have already come up with your business model and have products ready to sell, there are a number of sizeable market places which provide you with the opportunity of uploading pictures of your product and commence selling them on the spot. Examples of some of these marketplaces are Facebook, Amazon, Alibaba, Etsy, and many more. The benefit of these sites is that they are capable of matching the overwhelming demand with the appropriate product. Therefore, you will always have a market for your goods thus enabling you to move them that much quicker.

These kinds of marketplaces are great as they provide you with an easy opportunity to market your products online. However, they are not always free and this will eat into your margins. Furthermore, it takes out a little bit of brand image when you use third party marketers. Your business stands to benefit greatly if you are able to create your own e-commerce website. How this can be achieved will be discussed in detail much later.

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# Rationale of Developing your own E-Commerce Store

Here you need to ask yourself one important question. Consider the average on-line shopper that is looking for a specific product but wants the best value for money. Then why would this shopper who is browsing for products on Amazon or eBay purchase your product when it looks almost identical to that of your competitor. You see what these storefronts do is that they arrange their products much like any regular physical store would; according to the category of the product. Coupled with the search function that makes items easier to locate, there is a very high likelihood that the shopper will not see the difference between your product and that of the competitor. The purchase decision will probably come down to mundane things such as color or what is cheaper. Therefore, if you truly want to be successful then you need to consider having your own online store. This will help your product stand out from the crowd and also give your product a sense of authenticity.

Admittedly, it would be simpler to set up your own website and sell your product directly using Amazon, Facebook, Etsy, Alibaba or eBay. In fact, in the recent past these sites have focused on simplifying the task for the average user. There are many benefits to using these sites as they have a greater reach than your starting online store would probably have on its own. However, the most common mistake beginners make is that they rely almost entirely on these sites to run their business. For example, the Algorithm that is employed by Amazon to allow the users to search and find different products is in a state of constant change. Therefore, one day your product may come up in the top

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searches and the next it may not come up. Also, on Facebook, your shares and ads are dependent on a similar algorithm that is always changing. Moreover, you would be required to spend some significant amount of money so that your shares can reach a certain number of people. These are additional costs that cut into your margins. Not forgetting that there are competitors that are selling products that are similar to yours and will often result to undercutting to win over customers. You will be forced to respond in kind resulting in a situation that can be defined as a race to the bottom.

### ***How to Sell On Amazon***

Basically, if you are planning to sell your products on Amazon you will be one of many merchants competing for the same clients. Amazon can be likened to one huge supermarket and you will be one of the many suppliers. Your products will be categorized depending on functionality so there is likelihood that your product will be displayed right next to the competitors' products.

Given this situation, a lot of merchants will resort to reducing their prices in order to stay competitive. While the end consumer greatly benefits from this, you as the merchant will have a totally different experience. It has long been the consensus that a price war will ultimately confer no benefits to the parties involved; it is a race to the bottom from which everyone does not profit. However, there will always be that one desperate merchant that will always slash their prices so that they can win the customer from you. This is just one of those things that you need to prepare yourself to deal with when you trade on this platform.

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After all, it will often prove to be an arduous affair to set apart your brand in marketplaces such as Amazon, Facebook, or eBay. From the consumers' perspective you will only be another merchant that is selling a generic product. The consumers being the rational investors that they are will often look for the best value for money in these platforms; the only way to tell if a product is valuable is through reviews however reviews can also be faked. That being said, the main factor shall always be money and the consumers will look for the cheapest product that has acceptable reviews.

This goes to show that in creating your own brand, in the course of time you will be able to build an online asset that is valuable and unique. A robust brand has the ability to evoke a sense of trust from the shoppers. When it comes to success in online marketing, trust is one of the key features that you need to pay keen attention to.

Put yourself in the position of the shopper, would you purchase an item if you did not trust the brand? Probably not.

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# How to Successfully Build your Online Brand

In today's competitive business environment, being successful is pegged on ensuring that your company name, brand, identity and also your unique personal brand is accessible in every nook and cranny in the internet. Why do you really need a brand?

In the business world of today, people find the need to conduct business with individuals that they trust or have a feeling of attraction to them. Trust is a difficult thing to attain but at the base of it, people will only trust you if they have some sort of relationship with you.

- Building an online brand will mostly comprise of creating some sense of awareness the kind of business that you run, as an entrepreneur the kind of things that you stand for and the whole point of the business.
- Building an online brand will afford you the opportunity to forge a sense of likeability and to facilitate the growth of a much needed fan base in an instant.
- Building an online brand will go a long way towards ensuring that your credibility is elevated, this is simply because you have exhibited that you are willing to embrace that your brand is out there for anybody to find.
- Developing an online brand will go a long way in enabling you to gain trust which is basically one of the most important elements of the sales

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process, which will in turn result into more opportunities, customers and ultimately profits.

### **Understanding Your Brand**

To have a brand basically means that you will define the core values of your company and the promise that you will give to your customers. It can simply be defined as an expression of the traits and characteristics of your business. Branding will go a long way in terms of positioning your company in a way that customers will instantaneously think of it as the one target whenever they need your service or your product. Ideally, the outcome of branding is to make the customers be loyal to your brand and they will be comfortable when it comes to recommending it to any other potential customers that they may know. In order to build a brand that is strong and convincing to the general public, then you will need to come up with a mission statement that will convey your values and your vision. To help you with this process, you can start off by brainstorming phrases and statements that will convey the whole purpose of the business that you are running and its overall impact to your customers.

### **Find out the Overall Perception of your Brand by the Customers**

To start off, you need to launch a campaign to find out whether the way you view your brand is the same way the customers perceive your brand. By changing perspectives and viewing your brand from the vantage of the customer will go a long way in enabling you to have a much better insight in to the things that they consider to be really important and matter to them the most. You will then be able to nitpick through the brand elements

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and see which one you need to pay most attention to. Here you will need to pay particular attention to the informal feedback that you are bound to receive from social media platforms, seek out that standout or consistent word that the customers will use when describing your business. It may be of help if you were to make a list of these words that are most commonly used by the customers.

### **Focus on Conveying the Benefits rather than the Features**

It is important to remember that the features of your company will only ever be its characteristics. By themselves characteristics are not particularly helpful. The benefits on the other hand will tell the customers how a certain service or product will be of use to them. If you chose to focus on the benefits that the product or service will have, then there is a higher likelihood that it will leave a longer lasting impression on the customers. Therefore, always aim to ensure that you list the features of the business and translate these features into benefits. A simple way of ensuring that you achieve this is through asking yourself, “How does this feature benefit the customer?” It may further prove to be of great benefit if you were to include a number of case studies or some few testimonials in your website; here the customers can describe the overall benefits of your products or service and their experiences.

### **Try and Foster Relationships, rather than Transactions**

The whole aim of relationship marketing is to create an avenue where you can strengthen and promote your overall brand image. To reiterate, the objective here is to ensure that your company is the first company that a customer will think of whenever they

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need a certain service or product. To help you with this, you may need to consider making use of social media to develop relationships through engaging in a number of conversations with your key customers. Another excellent way of building these relationships is through the use of Loyalty programs; the aim of these programs is often to reward the customers for giving you their business. You may also need to consider creating a mailing list of your customers where you will periodically send them newsletters with interesting information that would be valuable to them thus reminding them of the overall importance of your brand.

### **Be Authentic**

Today more and more value has been placed on being authentic. Customers will often feel like they can gravitate to a company that they feel is transparent in their day to day transactions. It is possible to position yourself together with your team to be front and center of the business brand. The Millennial generation has exhibited a propensity to buying from small businesses and supporting those organizations that have people who they feel are relatable to. To help you to accomplish this, you may wish to share videos and pictures of yourself, team, and your work premises on your various social media platforms. You may add a sense of personal touch by sharing little pieces of information concerning your hobbies, interests and family. Nevertheless, it is quite vital that you make sure that you are making use of only the social media platforms that are relevant to your specific brand and to your consumers in general. To help you with this you should aim to research into the platforms that customers make use of most often and divert all your energy there.

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### **Ensure your Brand is standardized**

It would be beneficial to your brand if you were to ensure that both your online presence and your offline presence are synchronized. The aim of this is to ensure that your brand should be perceived in a consistent manner each and every time that a customer has an opportunity to interact with your business. This is a whole package deal that would be inclusive of online ads, website, print ads, business cards, product packaging, employee uniforms, and office or store signage. Ensure that you are consistent in reviewing as well as updating all the different features of your brand, which could encompass items such as website, content, graphics, images, logo, and colors. This should be done at least on an annual basis. Also you may need to consider giving your brand some sense of personality, to help you with this you can simply decide on the tone that your company will take when it comes to social media. Aim to establish what your customers respond to the most; whether it is cute, touching or more serious posts you should always ensure that you supply them with the right content.

### **Invest in Training your Staff on how to Protect your Brand**

It is important to ensure that all the parties in your team are aware and fully understands whatever it is your brand represent. It is important that you come up with procedures and systems that stipulate how employees should interact with the clients in order to help promote and protect your brand. If you are in a position to provide your employees with regular training, this will go a long way in ensuring that your employees have a grasp on how to effectively convey your brand to the public. You might also want to consider establishing a protocol that will stipulate how to interact with customers on

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social media. Additionally you may want to keep a close eye on all the online interactions with the customers, and provide rewards to those employees who are effective in representing your brand to the public.

### **Ensure that your Brand is Continually Evolving**

It is prudent to come up with a marketing calendar that will outline the different tasks that you will need to undertake each and every month, week, and day in order to market and advertise your brand. A calendar that is effective should include Search Engine Optimization (SEO), online advertising, social media, update your website, email marketing and conventional advertising. Keep track of the results of your social media outreach, SEO and online advertising to view its effectiveness. In the event that you see anything that does not fit, adjust it so that it can be in line with your overall approach. Also seek out the services of third-party companies, whenever the need arises, to streamline as well as simplify the advertising and marketing. The benefit of having specialists deal with your brand is that they may help you to create the impression of a bigger brand.

It is worth noting that to have any sense of success with branding then you need to be patient; it takes time but the rewards are worth the wait. Do not go in expecting to see immediate results. There is need to interact with your customers in a manner that is beneficial in terms of promoting your brand with the intention of yielding results that are long lasting.

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# How to Create an E-Commerce Store to Sell Products online

A few years ago the process of building an e-Commerce store used to be complicated and expensive. It could set you back thousands of dollars to hire the qualified experts to code the necessary details so that your site can run smoothly. Today you can create your own e-commerce site for as little as \$20 per month, and you can do this all by yourself without any overcomplicated technical skill.

Admittedly, once you have reached the decision to launch your own e-commerce site, the process can be rather daunting and confusing. Often there are a lot of decisions that you will need to make with regards to this and when you focus your efforts in the wrong areas there is a likelihood that you will spend a great deal of time in wasted efforts.

The good news for you is that you do not need to randomly guess on what the best approach for your business would be. Research from successful businesses as well as those that were not successful can be used to help you in launching an online store that will be successful.

## **Select a Shopping Cart that is Easy to Use**

Naturally, the more time that you spend on a shopping cart that is complicated, the less time you shall have to concentrate on the aspects of the business that really matter which are creating content that is valuable, marketing your business and interacting with your customers. Therefore, you need to make selecting a platform that is easy-to-use

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one of your key priorities when launching your site. And this needs not be permanent; you can always change this much later on if you feel that is a necessary thing.

If you are looking for a simple way to build your online store then the best option for you is to make use of a fully hosted cart for which you only have to pay a monthly subscription. These sorts of services are very convenient in that they will take care of all the payment registration, hosting and all the technical details. This will enable you to get your site up and running in an expedient manner.

Here, there are a number of options that one can choose from but you are highly advised to make use of **Shopify**. This cart is quite interesting as it has excellent features, support and performance. There are other carts that you can make use of if you are looking for alternative to host your cart. These include: Spark Pay, BigCommerce, Volusion, 3dCart, and many others.

For almost all the hosted carts, you will be required to pay a small subscription fee every month. However, this would be a very small amount to part with in comparison to the convenience that it will offer you; you will not have to worry about security patches, regular updates and server configurations.

However, in the event that you feel that you need more control and you are technically inclined, you should consider setting up a self-hosted cart. There are many options, however **WooCommerce** and **OpenCart** come highly recommended for new store owners.

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WooCommerce is basically a plug in that is used in WordPress that is capable of transforming the ubiquitous CRM into a desirable shopping cart. In terms of installing it is quite easy even for the novice user and comes with a number of pleasing themes.

On the other hand OpenCart is an open source shopping cart that stands alone. It is quite popular for its ease of customization and how it is lightweight. If you are somewhat tech savvy and you do not mind a bit of hard work then this would come highly recommended.

Magento is another popular cart that is currently available. However, for a new online store owner you are advised to stay clear of this cart. This is not to say that Magento in itself is poor, au contraire, it is very powerful but its major setback is that it unnecessarily complex and extremely difficult to host. If you have a small team and do not have a programmer that is specially dedicated to your business then do not use this cart.

There are other self-hosted carts that are available at your disposal and these include: UltraCart, SpreeCommerce, X-Cart, PrestaShop, and Satchmo.

### **Set up and Launch as fast as you possibly can**

Sometimes even the best of us are caught up with our innate perfectionist tendencies. However, when it comes to setting up your online store you may have to let it take the back seat. Launching your store as expediently as possible is one of the most rewarding things you can possibly do for your business.

If you are relatively new to your niche, you may often convince yourself that you have a grasp on what the customers need or who they are. The emphasis here is on that

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sense of delusion because the truth is you may not have an idea on what is going on. Ergo, investing too much time on creating the perfect store that will be able to address all the needs of your customers, their problems and all their fantasies is generally poor time management. You are advised to launch a store that is rudimentary as fast as you possibly can and begin to interact with the customers so that you can learn more about them.

The moment you get more information about your niche then you can progress to making the various improvements that your website would possibly need based on your new found knowledge. Also, as you have been collecting information about your customers you have also been able to make a number of successful sales and a few referrals in the process.

Also a reason that should motivate you to launch your store as quickly as possible is that marketing your store often consumes a great deal of time and effort. The sooner you can manage to get your storefront up and running, regardless of how basic it may be, the faster you can drum up your business and tell the world that you are actually in business.

So that you can launch as quickly as possible, you are advised to:

***Make use of picture and descriptions:*** As it was earlier mentioned, if you are relatively new to your niche then there is a high chance that you know very little about the products that you are selling. Therefore, at this point you should just make use of the information provided by the manufacturer in order to launch quickly and much later you

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can return to write a copy that is unique when you actually have more information and something unique and authoritative to say.

***Make use of a Pre-developed Template:*** Do not pay particular attention to these so called world class graphics designers who will tell you that you need a custom built template worth \$5000 so that you can succeed in e-commerce. Whether you use a custom built template or a built in template, there is a high chance that the end users will not notice the difference. It is rare that you will hear a customer say “hey! Is that a custom template?”

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# Do it yourself

If this is your first e-commerce site then you are highly advised to do as much as you possibly can by yourself at the start. The rationale behind this is that if you do not have a comprehensive understanding of how the fundamentals of your business work then it will be rather challenging to train staff in the future. Additionally, if you are fully dependent on outsourced labor with respect to web designers and programmers, then each and every time that you would need to make an alteration will result in a rather expensive endeavor and one that you cannot get out of on your own.

Additionally, do in things on your own helps you to have a sense of what is important for your business to move forward and what can take a back seat. This will help you prioritize your efforts. Naturally many individuals are in the habit of dishing out money into a problem as opposed to sitting down and analyzing whether the problem is necessary and/or a good investment. If you get hands on in your business early on, there is a high chance that you will not unnecessarily spend money on items that are not essential.

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# Perform Relentless Marketing

Often, people will tend to overlook the role of marketing in terms of building an e-Commerce business that is viable. Particularly in the early days, it demands a great deal of effort to ensure that your business is recognized and people are generally aware what it is that you do. For the initial six months of launching an e-Commerce site you are advised to follow this time schedule:

**First Month:** Launch a site that is basic

**Second Month:** Make the necessary improvements to your site

**Third to Sixth Months:** Perform intensive marketing like your business depends on it because let us face it, it does.

If you do the math, approximately two thirds of your time will be spent entirely on marketing. This is not to be confused with other aspects such as business streamlining, A/B testing, or coming up with a strategic vision. You should not spend time on improving your logo or design. Just simply spend time on relentless marketing. A great majority of new e-commerce sites are prone to failure because they simply underestimate the significance of marketing in the early stages and the impact is that the business fails to get the necessary traction to get on its feet. Do not make the same mistake as these individuals. At this point you may be thinking to yourself that maybe all this marketing is just hype and it would be more effective if you were to run a couple of advertisements. There is no denying that advertising is an excellent way to jumpstart your e-commerce business when it is starting and there are not many people outside your circle of friends that know

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about it. Also, it allows you to instantly direct traffic to your site thus allowing you to learn about your market as well as interact with the customers. However, the advertising models that are currently available especially the ones that demand that you pay per click such as AdWords are often a poor strategy of marketing in the long term.

The other relatively more effective methods of advertising such as PPC Google ads tend to be very expensive and might end up minimizing if not eliminating your profits entirely. For a beginner, you may need to consider pursuing SEO and other marketing endeavors that are more organic and will offer a relatively higher return on your investment, a healthy level of traffic that is sustainable and in the long run higher profits.

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# Factors for Success for Online Shops

## Product Reviews

More often than not you will find that the best advocate for your products as well as online shop are the customers themselves. As it was earlier discussed, the product descriptions by themselves can only go so far in terms of convincing the customers to part with their hard earned money.

By offering your customers the option of being able to review the products that they have purchased allows them to express what their overall experience was like and the quality of the product itself. A human touch often has a convincing aspect about it and reviews are an excellent way of getting your products to be validated by an independent third party.

There are a number of statistics that help in building the case of product reviews. Findings have shown that reviews can result in an increase in sales by approximately 18 per cent, also having over 50 reviews can result in a conversion increase of about 4.5 per cent.

Over 60 per cent of consumers online will tend to prefer those sites that provide user reviews and 68 per cent of consumers are more likely to purchase a site which contains user reviews.

## Using Quality Images

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Here you need to put yourself in the position of the consumer. Would you really make a purchase if the product you are purchasing has poor images? Probably not. The good news is that even the basic smartphones of today have cameras that are pretty powerful, therefore almost anyone can shoot product photos that are of high quality. Also, you will really have no excuse to

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