

## Five Easy Steps to Successful e-Commerce

**1. Think like a consumer** and put your products in more than one category. The online businesses that make their goods and services easy to find reap rewards in two ways: people purchase more and they experience greater overall satisfaction with the website. Consider up sell and cross sell opportunities by offering products that make logical sense together. If you sell paintings and frames, show the frames that best complement the paintings. If you sell a line of products that have a wide range of prices, show the progression from the least expensive to the most expensive. Customers may choose to purchase the higher priced items if they are presented as options.

**2. Keep it simple.** Many people cite overly complicated navigation or too many pages in the purchase path as reasons they do not complete their online sale or abandon their shopping cart. Successful e-Commerce sites simplify the checkout process and display clear pricing and shipping information. They also post clear return policies and access to customer service. Putting your brick and mortar store's phone number in a visible place on your website is a good idea. Studies suggest that consumers feel more confident knowing you are just a phone call away if they have a question or if there is a problem with their order.

**3. A picture really is worth a thousand words,** so use photos of your products and go easy on the text. Online usability studies suggest that people do not read, they scan a web page. It is 25% harder to read on the web, so keep these guidelines in mind for optimum readability: headlines should be eight words or less, shoot for 9-12 words on a line (people do not want to read across the entire screen), keep sentences short (15-20 words) and try to keep summaries under 30 words and hold paragraphs to 40-70 words. In this way you can maintain compelling product descriptions alongside your product offerings.

**4. Market your site once it is live.** It is not enough to just build a website. You need to make an effort to market and promote your website to new and existing customers. Collect email addresses on your website to help you keep in touch with customers and consider creating a newsletter. Seek links from other websites that complement yours. Optimize your website's content for relevance and submit it to the major search engines.

**5. Make payment processing easy.** Online shoppers need a way to give you money online. That is easy these days. You can accept credit card payments with either a PayPal account or an online merchant account. PayPal is ideal for anyone trying out the e-Commerce waters since there is less of an upfront commitment but you may end up paying more per transaction. If you know from the beginning you are going to have strong sales and plenty of online transactions each month, you may want to consider setting up an online merchant account. The thing to note about PayPal is that both the buyer and the seller need a PayPal account, but that is hardly a barrier to entry. It is so easy to create a PayPal account that more than 96 million consumer accounts have been created at PayPal since it was founded in 1998 and it is estimated that PayPal has a 24% share of all U.S. online payments.

## Some "Techie" Things to Consider

Most of the engines have chosen not to keep up and can not spider frames sites. Make NOFRAME sections in web pages.

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Always make sure your website is completely finished, spell checked, online and working properly before attempting to get indexed. One of the most common problems people encounter in getting their website indexed is due to a spider not being able to reach the URL for indexing. Make sure your website is up and responding.

First paragraphs of the text are the most important for search engines. Brainstorm with friends and colleagues, etc and put the most important keywords into a carefully crafted paragraph at the start of your HTML document.

Did you know that approximately 90% of all internet users access at least one of the major search engines to find websites of interest? It is critical that your website is ranked toward the top of these major search engines.

Make sure that the HTML code is using the proper tags in the proper places (called validating your HTML). Most search engines do not tolerate invalid HTML code, that is, if your code contains invalid HTML tags, most search engines will not index your web page or worse yet, not index you correctly.

Most search engines can take up to 3 to 4 weeks before getting around to indexing your website. Be patient. Keep track of when you asked to have your website indexed and check often. Requesting to be indexed over and over again will not help speed up the process.

You must be able to accept credit cards online if you plan to do business on the net by selling products (not reselling). If you cannot, you will lose over 60% of your business.

Order and fulfillment process must be completely automatic, because you want to concentrate all your time marketing your product, but not doing paperwork, processing and shipping orders, especially when you have a successful product.

Talking about how wonderful your company is without making any real contribution to the topic will not endear you to the readers.

Effective web content must be more concise and to the point than content for any other medium. People on the net do not have any time to waste.

Because 70-80% information searchers find in the internet is by using the main search engines, the main way to attract visitors to website is the high ranking in the main search engines. Before submitting your site to the search engines and directories, spend some time reading about how to write your title, metatags and the first few paragraphs of each page to obtain better ranking. After submitting your website, you should periodically review your ranking in the search engine listings by the key phrases.

To improve or maintain position of your website in the main search engines, you may need to rewrite pages, add new content and additional web pages, change your description and keywords, etc. If you need to learn HTML to do this, do it; because the reward is worth the effort.

Whatever promotional activities you choose, be consistent. Do them frequently and do not stop.

The degree to which any website will be successful depends on how professional that site is perceived to be by potential customers.

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