

Online Retailer

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Just about every conceivable product is available on the internet today. Easy comparative shopping and delivery right your door mean shopping from home is fast becoming many people's preferred mode of buying. In every niche there is online retail potential. An online retailer manages every stage of the buying process and is responsible for product management, sales and marketing.

Before The Start-Up, Let,s Not Get Ahead Of Ourselves

As a work from home online retailer you'll be responsible for every facet of your store and every stage of the consumers buying process. Familiarity with online marketing techniques, a good grasp of the internet and email is essential.

The Start-Up

Before getting your store setup you'll need a work space, desk and a computer with a high speed connection to the internet. Since you'll be packaging and sorting orders at home another desk will be useful to keep your work space organised and efficient. Take the time to design attractive yet simple packaging slips and invoices for your orders. (Most commercial shopping cart software offers this function)

There are several options available to opening your online store. If you're a programmer or web developer and are starting on a tiny budget consider the free osCommerce and its offshoots Zen Cart and CRE loaded. These open source shopping carts can produce serious technical difficulties; if you do decide to start here you'll most likely progress to commercial software as soon as possible.

Your second option is to buy a commercial shopping cart and website template such as those available from ecommercetemplates.com. This is a great option if you have a basic understanding of PHP and web design. These templates allow you to start your shop for less than \$200. Alternatively you have the option of just purchasing the shopping cart software individually and integrating it into your own store front. If you would like to have a unique store front designed this is a good option.

Finally there are affiliate options available from Amazon and Yahoo Shopping. These super stores allow you to setup a store using their own software and market products they already have in their database. This is possibly the simplest way to begin your ecommerce career. These stores usually charge a nominal monthly fee and take a small percentage of sales. In exchange you get to use their software to establish your store; in addition they provide credit card facilities.

If you've chosen one of the first two independent options your next big hurdle is, how to handle credit card transactions safely. The most traditional way is to open a merchant account at your local bank and integrate it into your store. The integration can be technical so you might have to hire a programmer to complete this step. Besides a merchant account numerous other options exist to accept credit card payments depending on what country you reside in. These include Google Checkout, Authorize.net, PayPal and 2Checkout. Do research into these and other credit card payment providers, just as with a merchant account there are costs involved in each transaction.

The level of service you are able to offer it heavily dependent on your suppliers, choose your

suppliers carefully, ask around at other companies they supply and make sure they are reliable and maintain good stock levels. If possible choose a supplier near to your house, businesses in close proximity to a supplier usually receive orders before those located further away.

Finally to complete your start up you'll need to consider stock. As a small online retailer you have little access to capital and are risk averse. Carrying large amounts of stock is a huge financial risk, stock can get damaged or stolen (shrinkage) or become obsolete. Initially run your store without any stock what so ever, this is known as JIT (Just in Time) stock keeping. As an order is placed and confirmed you will then place the order yourself with your supplier. You'll always have to confirm with your suppliers that stock is available before accepting payment for an order. Once your shop grows and begins to do more regular business, begin to keep small amounts of stock for all those regularly purchased items.

Making It Work

The amount of orders processed manually is a good indication of your sites usability and trustworthiness, initially you'll most likely have to process a large percentage of orders manually. Take this time to build up a list of frequently asked questions and place them on your website. Learn from the established retailers like Amazon and answer as many questions as possible right on your website.

Credit card fraud is still rife on the internet; increase your sites reputability by purchasing a security certificate from a company like Thwarte. This ensures you're site is verified and all sensitive information is encrypted and can't be intercepted by hackers and fraudsters. Most hosting companies offer security certificate setup for a nominal fee.

Marketing

The most cost effective way to market your online store is a pay per click campaign with Google's Adwords or Yahoo's Overture. AdWords can be a little daunting at first so do a little reading before beginning, having read numerous ebooks promising the moon and more we recommend Perry Marshalls, [The Definitive Guide to Google Adwords](#) for a solid grounding and a quick learning curve. Remember that pay per click campaigns require constant maintenance to ensure best results and prevent costs from sky rocketing.

Starting an affiliate marketing program of your own can be a quick way to sell to a much wider audience. A solid terms of service agreement and research into each affiliate before approval is essential to prevent your companies name and products being used or marketed in a negative manner.

Don't Forget

Keeping stock and stock prices up to date is a full time job; not keeping your store current is a quick way to lose customers.