

## 5 Steps to Building a Successful E-Commerce Site

In today's high-tech marketplace, failing to tap into the online market can be the kiss of death for a seller. If you can't provide a consumer with your product or service on the Internet, they'll click right along to a company who can. To stay competitive and enjoy a healthy stream of revenue, creating a robust e-commerce site is critical.

The good news? It's not as difficult as you might think. By outsourcing the creation of your site to skilled developers and designers, you can establish a viable online presence quickly and affordably. Below are the basic steps to building a quality e-commerce site:

- **Step 1:** Register your domain name. This should be done as early as possible, before someone else snatches it up. You can always throw up a "Coming Soon" placeholder or redirect the domain elsewhere until your e-commerce design is complete. You can choose a .com, .net, .org, or .ca suffix, depending on what's available. Select a website address that's easy to remember and spell, reflects your company's branding identity, and clearly conveys the product or service you're selling.
- **Step 2:** Choose a hosting provider and plan. You'll want a reliable, reputable provider who has a long history of satisfied clients, minimal downtime, and first-class customer service. Be wary of free hosting providers that sound too good to be true—often, you'll save on up-front fees, but will compromise on quality of service.
- **Step 3:** Select an e-commerce application software. With literally hundreds of different options available, this can be an overwhelming decision to make. For best results, go with a comprehensive package that includes everything you need—an integrated shopping cart, online catalog, and reliable hosting all wrapped into one tool. Online solutions are most convenient, requiring no software installations and allowing you to administer your site from anywhere.
- **Step 4:** Make nice with search engines. With more than half of all online purchases originating from Yahoo, Google, or another engine, you simply can't afford not to optimize your e-commerce site for organic search. There are dozens of different strategies you can employ to make your online store more visible, including interlinking pages, performing keyword research, integrating the keywords throughout your site's text, creating optimized title tags and description tags, creating a text-based site map, and creating a

navigation structure that's easy for search engines to read. Dynamic content is another key element of increasing organic search rankings; many e-commerce shops have implemented blogs, forums, and product-oriented articles as a means of keeping their sites fresh and appealing to search engines.

- **Step 5:** Bring your site into the limelight. Even the most well-designed e-commerce website won't last long if no-one knows about it. The efforts outlined in Step 4 will increase search engine traffic by default, but a savvy marketing campaign will help to further boost revenue and brand recognition. Banner advertising, PPC (pay-per-click) campaigns, promotional emails, and multi-media advertisements are just some of the proven ways of increasing awareness of your online store.

For most small- to medium-sized businesses, the prospect of building an e-commerce website from scratch can seem overwhelming. By outsourcing the development, optimization, and marketing of your online store, you can save time, money, and headaches, and ensure that the end result reflects the essence of your business while appealing to your target consumer.