

How to Create, Setup, and Launch a Profitable Online Store (Seriously)



GET THE FULL GUIDE

Grow your ecommerce brand in 2020. Download the complete in-depth, 16 chapter guide.

[VIEW THE GUIDE](#)

We've covered everything from laws and nuances, to how to source product, to even giving you a [free startup template for a competitive analysis](#) in your industry.

By chapter, here's how we've prepared throughout the planning process:

- In Chapter 1, we learned how to decide what to sell.
- In Chapter 2, we helped you make sure you can actually sell it.
- In Chapter 3, you got to know other people who are selling it (and those already buying it).

- In Chapter 4, you learned how to analyze what your closest competitors are doing.
- In Chapter 5, you double checked to make sure you aren't breaking any laws.
- In Chapter 6, you identified your market (and your differentiators).
- In Chapter 7, you learned how you'll source your product.
- In Chapter 8, you learned what you need to know when selecting an ecommerce platform for your online business.

This brings us to Chapter 9 — where you'll learn how to create, set up, and launch a profitable online store.

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Launching Your Online Store

Now that you've picked a platform, committed to a product and worked on winning over a target audience, we can focus on essential tips for creating and launching your store.

While you could whip a website together in a few hours, go live on the internet and just wait to see what happens — all you'll end up with is a handful of visitors and an empty bank account to show for it.

By creating an organized approach to launching your online store, you'll set up your store for long-term, scalable success.

1. Ensure your online store looks professional.

If you want to have a viable online business, you need to focus on quality from the outset.

You need to build a store that looks professional, attracts your target customer, and has the right calls to action to help them convert when they visit your site.

These next three steps are going to show you the basic blueprint to make sure you've got the right stuff to run a successful online store.



It's not about your website, it's about your product.

It is very easy to blur the lines of “design” and “functionality” when building your online store.

Not to say that design isn't important — an attractive website design can definitely drive online sales. But, your design shouldn't outshine what you are trying to sell.

Online shoppers will decide if they trust and want to purchase from your website in about three to five seconds.

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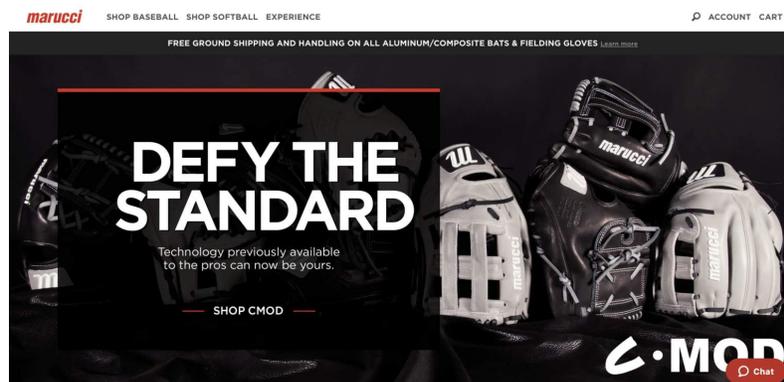
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That means you need to have a simple, trustworthy, and easy-to-use website.

What you are selling and where a customer needs to go to find it should be crystal clear. Resist the urge to overload your website with so many call-to-action buttons, categories, or imagery that people get overwhelmed or lose patience waiting for everything to load.

[Marucci Sports](#) is a great example of clean, focused design. Their unique product is front and center in every way.



Building your design on the right foundation is the first step.

Don't worry about colors or logos yet. Start by selecting a design template that really showcases your products or services.



Your website should serve as a tool for effective online shopping. Overly styled sites run the risk of distracting customers rather than guiding them towards checkout.

Secondly, while picking a design template, make sure that the navigation menu is clear and does not overwhelm your customers.

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By having clear navigation you will be able to present various product categories and ensure your customers know where to go within your store and never get lost.



If you only have a handful of product categories, selecting a theme with menu navigation across the top works great.

However, if you have too many products or more than nine main categories, think about consolidating them as best you can. You may also consider choosing a template that has navigation running down the left or right side.

You don't want to force shoppers to scroll far down the page to get the information they need. Potential customers should be able to see nearly all relevant and compelling parts of your site upon arrival.

Best yet, if you have a lot of categories, you can leverage your homepage design to let customers self-select their shopping journey.



Last, but certainly not least, make sure whatever design template you choose has a rock solid mobile version as well.

You will — without a doubt — lose sales if you don't provide your customers with a great mobile experience and streamlined checkout process.

Once your design is set, there are still a few elements you need to put in place to make sure your store is ready to accept orders.

The following steps are essential in helping you launch your store and setting you up for long-term success.

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2. Pick a payment gateway.

In order to get paid, you'll have to be ready to accept payments. Might be obvious, but it's quite essential to running a successful business.

Payment gateways are how you collect money from your customers. Typically, your ecommerce platform will recommend which gateways work best with their system.

BigCommerce supports over 60 different payment gateways and features one-click, digital wallet options like [Apple Pay](#) and [PayPal One-Touch](#).

Once you have a list of options, you'll need to get a full picture of how it works and how it will affect your bottom line.

You also want to choose a payment gateway that can grow with your business. Before you lock yourself in, ask the following questions about each payment solution:

- Are there setup fees?
- Are there monthly and/or transaction fees?
- Are there penalty fees? If so, what triggers them?
- Is there a minimum balance requirement?
- What about transfer delays?
- When I need help or support who do I contact? How do I contact them? What hours are they available?

Ecommerce platforms like BigCommerce can help you get the lowest possible rates. For instance, the rate offered to a BigCommerce customer who use PayPal powered by Braintree is the lowest possible one out there. Research it. Go ahead. We'll wait.

3. Set up shipping integrations.

This step can feel a little overwhelming to someone just starting an online store.

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Shipping options depend heavily on your product, your business model, your target audience, and your ecommerce solution.

The secret to success is making sure all of these factors work together. Fortunately, we have some tried-and-true best practices to put your mind at ease and increase your sales.

Shipping is an important value proposition for your store. It has the power to attract customers, but it can also push customers away.

So if you are new to selling online, think about starting small.



That means you may want to stick with domestic shipping and master that before you dive into international shipping.

There are a couple tips to keep in mind when you're getting started with online shipping.

1. **Start by researching your competition.** You may uncover some really great insights on what works and what doesn't in your category.
2. **Make your shipping policies are very straightforward.** This will prevent confusion or surprises, making it more likely your potential customer will follow through with their purchase.
3. **Lastly, offer multiple shipping options** based on different shipping speed or carriers. How quickly a shopper gets their product can be just as important as how much they pay for shipping.

Now, if you can offer free shipping on your products, do it! As of November 2018, [high shipping costs are the number one reason for cart abandonment](#).

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Added bonus: You can actually increase your average order value with free shipping or by offering free shipping at a minimum order amount.

Getting something for free has a huge impact on the psychology of making a purchase. Also, if you can provide **BOPIS** — buy online, pick up in store — as an option, you should. It's often easier for everyone involved, plus the customer doesn't have to pay any shipping costs. Talk about a win-win situation.

On the back end, you'll need to plan and organize your order fulfillment process.



A lot of new merchants neglect this step, and that can be extremely detrimental to your business as you grow.

If your products are sprawled across your coffee table right now, you have work to do. Even if you only carry a few items, you need to work on drafting up a procedure for what happens when an order is placed.

Here's what you should ask yourself regarding fulfillment:

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1. How are you notified of a new order?
2. How do you print the invoice? How do you print the packing slip?
3. What packaging materials do you need?
4. What information goes with the product in the box? Directions for assembly or use, batteries or additional parts? Maybe a thank you note or coupon? The options are endless.
5. What does the presentation look like when opening the box? Does the look and feel of your packaging reflect your brand?
6. How do you organize products that need to be shipped? Are they in bins, refrigerators, rooms, or a warehouse? Can you place the product location in your online store so it prints on the invoice for a more streamlined approach?

If you don't spend time planning out this process, your customers may not get their orders on time, which makes for a bad first impression.

You've already turned a browser into a buyer, so do everything you can to keep them happy and coming back for more.

Just like chivalry isn't dead — neither is fighting for your customers' loyalty. You must continually provide a leading customer experience. Think about it — you wouldn't give less than 100% of your efforts to someone you care about, right?

4. Set up taxes properly.

I'll admit it, when I hear the word 'taxes' — I cringe. But, the reality is that setting up your taxes correctly from the beginning is a game changer for your business.

Luckily, we're talking about taxes for your business at this point, not local sales tax. So this step is pretty short and sweet — all you need to do is speak with a tax professional.

This doesn't necessarily have to be an accountant or CPA — it can also be a state comptroller or another authority on taxes in your area.

They will help you do things like attain your tax ID and understand your area's tax classes, rates, and structure. All of this can vary from location to location.

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Trust me, you'll save money and headaches in the long run by consulting a pro.

5. Choose a great domain name.

Equally fun and challenging — picking a domain name for your website is critical. Your web address should speak to your brand and serve as an important marketing tool.

Your domain name will be a way for potential customers to find you and then come back to buy more. So keep it simple. Resist the urge to include difficult spellings or unknown acronyms.



If you have an established business already, don't change lanes and switch your domain!

Choosing a credible domain will instill confidence in customers and build customer loyalty, so take your time.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ECOMMERCE SEO.

Your domain name is important for a variety of reasons — but likely the most important reason is because it is the URL off which you will build your entire brand. And that means it is the bedrock of your SEO strategy.

Make it irrelevant to the products you sell, and you'll have a long road ahead of you in communicating to Google (and the world) what your site is about.

Learn more about SEO best practices in the guide below.

[THE SEO BASICS YOU NEED TO KNOW.](#)

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6. Set up analytics to measure your success.

You need data and benchmarks to grow your business.

We recently highlighted 55 ecommerce metrics you should be tracking. [Download the spreadsheet to get started with that here.](#)

To start, examine your platform's in-store analytics.

At the minimum, your platform should be able to help you with basic metrics like:

- Unique visitors,
- Conversion rate,
- Most popular products, and
- Average revenue per customer.

Also take a peek at platform options like in-store site search that could provide you with valuable insights into what your customers are looking for.

It's pretty safe to say that no matter what platform you're on, you should use Google Analytics for your online business.

This will help you understand what the search giant sees happening both inside and outside your store. [Google Analytics](#) can give you the following insights to help you expand and improve your business:

- Get to know your target audience,
- Track where shoppers come from, where they go, and where they leave,
- Track how your visitors engage with your store, and
- The ability to annotate your efforts.

That last one is my personal favorites. You can tag the important actions or events on your timeline, like adding new products or a sale, so you can see the impact they have on your store.

Analytics in general are a key element in helping you act on facts rather than assumptions about your customers and business.

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You're Ready to Launch

Tackle these key areas — site functionality, business basics, and analytics — and you'll have created the solid foundation you need to build out your online store.

Now, you'll need to read up on how to drive traffic to your online store.

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