

5 keys to building your ecommerce site



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In 2015, overall web sales across Europe were up 12.6 percent. For the United States, results were the same: The same found that web sales here in 2015 grew by 14.6 percent.

Related: Clearly, consumers in multiple countries are shopping online more often, and that's a trend we can expect to continue. It's also good news for anyone with an ecommerce site or looking to launch and grow one in the future. Today, launching an ecommerce site has become easier. Companies have emerged that offer a complete ecommerce software package deal, allowing you to choose a business name, purchase a domain and establish a theme — then see your website up and running in short order. But such projects are not all easy. If you're running an ecommerce site now, you probably know the many challenges that that entails, including building the site to where you want it to be.

If you're struggling with this task or simply looking for ways to make your site better, here are a few key strategies:

1. Determine the goal for your ecommerce site.

This is an important step for ecommerce site owners. It's easy to get caught up in running your business.

Maybe you had an idea for a product, and things just started rolling from there; you never had the chance to really think about a business goal:

- Do you want to meet certain sales and profit goals?

- Do you want to take on investors and partners?
- Do you want to position the site so it's ready to be sold?

The word “ vision” often brings eye rolls in the business world because it's used so often, but there's a reason for that frequent use. Successful entrepreneurs are the ones with a clear idea of where they want to go; and having that vision allows them to create the steps necessary to get there. So, if this is you, take the time now to assess your situation. Figure out what you want your ecommerce site to look like in 20 or even 50 years. Determine what you want to do as owner of the site and what your sales and profit figures will look like. It's a simple exercise, really.

But by creating a specific vision, you'll make the decisions that will keep your team and business on the path that will get you there. Related: Alternately, if you're looking to build the ecommerce site to be sold, you'll need to understand the . This is something many entrepreneurs overlook, but it's important if you want to eventually sell, and it can help your growing business in the meantime.

2.

Get good at SEO and content marketing.

SEO is not just a " nice-to-have" strategy for your ecommerce site. It's essential. To do business online, you need to put SEO at the core of just about every decision you make.

After all, organic search traffic remains one of the highest sources of traffic for most websites, including ecommerce sites. The traffic from search

engines is also among the highest kinds of traffic for conversion. The SEO basics you need to master include:

- Descriptive product titles
- Thorough, original product descriptions
- Customer reviews
- Organized site structure including internal link structure
- Mobile-friendliness
- Fast-loading times
- Content-marketing efforts

The titles and descriptions for your products are important — and the reason keyword research is important for ecommerce sites. So, strive to use the terms or keywords your customers use most often. For example, if you sell bags and one of your products is a duffel bag, but your customers most often say or search for “duffel bag,” then use the more common spelling and name.

Similarly, search engines need to be able to easily crawl your site just as your visitors need to be able to easily navigate it. Your site structure, including its internal linking, should be organized in a way that makes the most sense. If you sell footwear, for example, it’s common to organize that category by gender. Mobile-friendliness is another essential.

Again, this is no longer an “option” for online users and their mobile devices. It’s crucial. Ecommerce site owners today are approaching web design from a mobile- *first* strategy that designs the mobile experience first and the

desktop version later. You should do the same. Content marketing is yet another element important for SEO.

Content that your target audience finds valuable and shares helps bring new traffic to your site while increasing your brand's and website's authority. So, publish content on your site such as blog posts, video, infographics and more. Look for guest-content opportunities. Take the approach of identifying the questions your target customers are asking in relation to your industry and provide them the answers with the content you create. That is how you provide "value" as part of your content marketing.

3. Learn about online advertising for ecommerce sites.

Having multiple sources of traffic and new sales for your ecommerce site is important. But there's a second great way to bring new business to your site: online advertising. Google's AdSense is the most-used online advertising platform here.

It's a great platform for your ecommerce site because it helps you understand the *intent* of the searcher. Remember the duffle bag example? When someone searches for "green duffle bag," you'll have a pretty good idea that that someone will likely buy upon locating the right one. Social media advertising is another opportunity. Nearly every Internet user has at least one social media account, and many users have accounts on multiple social networks.

Facebook is the largest such site and has made incredible advances in its advertising platform the last few years. Other sites — like Instagram and Pinterest — are important here, too. Know that establishing your advertising

can be quite the undertaking. Many ecommerce sites outsource their advertising to an effective to get the most out of their advertising dollars — an option that may be right for you.

4.

Consider a joint venture and/or partnership for your ecommerce site.

Businesses of all kinds are able to grow through joint ventures or key partnerships. Successful ecommerce sites often look for partnership opportunities. One of the biggest success stories is how eBay and PayPal were able to work together to grow. The best partnerships offer win-win situations for each party.

Your products or services will complement one other, and your shared target customers will benefit from the products you offer together, versus those from either of the companies working alone. Partnership opportunities are possible at every level of your business. You may be able to package products together with a manufacturer or retailer. Or you may find a payment-processing partnership opportunity as eBay did with PayPal. Assess every aspect of your business. Look at the companies that are experts or are growing in those areas and look for partner opportunities.

5. Refine your product.

Ecommerce sites often struggle with their product offerings. Successful sites, meanwhile, have a system in place for refining them.

A common indicator here is profit. Products may be included or removed from the offering based on their profit margin or on profit dollars. But the

scenario may be more complicated than the simple profit dollars on a single item. One item may have a lower margin but may lead to a high number of upsell sales with other items.

In this case it would make sense to keep the item because it's leading to profit dollars in other areas. Some products are also given more exposure in promotions. Include this indicator in your evaluation process so you're not holding on to an item just because its sales were inflated by a promotion. Create a level field of view on every item.

Final thoughts

It's a great time to be in the ecommerce industry. The number of people shopping online continues to grow.

But while the industry is growing, there are still challenges to building an ecommerce site. Use the keys above to help your own ecommerce site grow. Remember that the starting point is a clear vision or goal; the goal may be to reach certain sales levels. Or it could be to exit the business; and if that's the case you'll need to freshen up on and what that process entails. Related: If you start with your goal and follow the keys outlined above, you'll be in a position to succeed.