

Online selling options

BUSINESS GUIDE

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Selling your products or services online makes sense. Ecommerce is growing while high street retail outlets struggle to compete with the choice and convenience offered by online shopping. Even if you own a physical store, you should still invest in an online shop. You can be sure your competitors will.

A snapshot of how important online sales are to businesses is given in the Office for National Statistics' Retail Sales bulletin for November 2016.

It reveals that the amount spent online during November 2016 increased by 24.9% compared to the same month in 2015, and by 3.0% compared to the month before (October 2016).

This indicates that while online sales continue to grow at a fast pace, sales at traditionally busy times for the high street are migrating to the internet. Online sales also see a massive spike during special events such as Black Friday.

If your business relies on the sale of seasonal products or services, or items commonly bought as gifts or Christmas presents, you really need to be selling online in order to grow your business.

The options

1. Your own website

If you want to be able to carefully control your branding, don't fancy having to compete with thousands of other sellers on the same platform and want the option to give yourself some flexibility, you need your own online store.

The challenges of meeting consumer rights and data protection laws will apply, along with finding a secure payment gateway, but with adequate promotion you can drive traffic to your online store and build up a new client base from scratch.

Building and maintaining your online store can be time-consuming and tricky, but many website providers now offer good e-commerce solutions that are easy to operate and manage. Monthly fees are also fairly reasonable, if you choose the right package. Shop around until you find the right e-commerce option for you.

Don't forget that SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) keywords help people find you on search engines like Google) and unique content applies to product descriptions in the same way as it does to other website content.

Online market places to consider:

- Amazon
- Etsy
- eBay
- Bonanza
- eBid
- Shopify

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You don't need to invest in expensive photography equipment to take professional-looking images that will really show off your products. You may be surprised to know that many successful online sellers take product pictures on their mobile phones.

With a bit of imagination and flair, you can build an online store you are proud of, although it could take a while to gain some traction. Consider offering a free gift wrap service, or similar, to offer your online customers added value and make you stand out from the crowd. There's nothing like the personal touch to grow customer loyalty.

2. Leading marketplaces

Amazon, eBay and Etsy can instantly put your products in front of literally billions of people across the globe. You won't have to worry about designing and maintaining a website, all you will have to do is upload product descriptions and images and, of course, fulfill orders. If you've got a unique product that people want, you could sell hundreds of thousands almost overnight.

However, there are drawbacks which you should carefully consider before choosing to sell goods via major online marketplaces. See here for more on the pros and cons of online marketplaces.

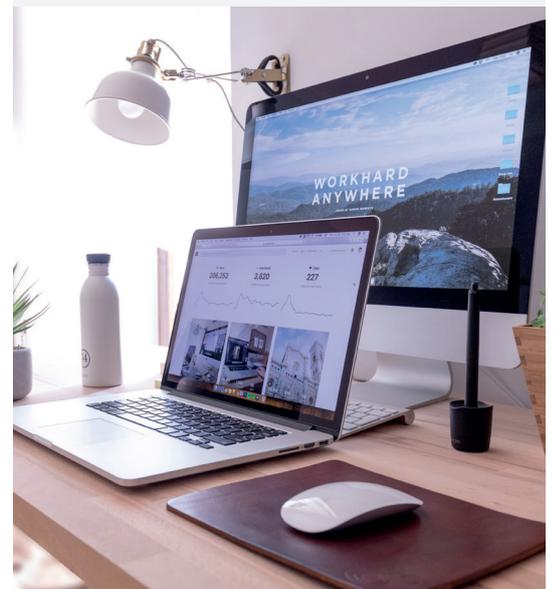
3. Other online selling options

New online marketplaces and selling options are emerging all the time. Ones to watch include options for digital products. Platforms similar to the established 'big three' include Bonanza, eBid, Shopify and a plethora of niche sites which are geared to specific audiences.

Tips for selling online

- Ensure product titles are short, accurate and contain keywords shoppers will be searching for
- Organise products in the same way that you would a physical store
- Make your product descriptions engaging. Use sub-headings and bullet points
- Be consistent with the style of your product descriptions
- Make the most of original, eye-catching images that promote your products
- Review prices and postage fees regularly to reflect market fluctuations and to keep your store competitive
- Don't ignore reviews, respond to negative feedback as soon as possible offering to resolve any issues. Try to ensure there is an easy way in which disgruntled customers can contact you to resolve their issues before using public review channels

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Top links:

1. [Full details about regulations governing online sales](#)
2. [Selling online](#)