

Ask SCORE

I have been working on a business plan to sell sewing supplies online and am about ready to begin developing my website. What advice can you offer before I sit down with a web designer?

Setting up and managing an e-commerce website to sell your company's products involves a lot of work and knowledge of what might boost or bust your bottom line. While specific features and functionality requirements may vary depending on your type of business, some considerations are universally important.

A few of the must-have characteristics of an e-commerce website include:

Mobile friendly

According to data from Custora's E-commerce Pulse (as of October 2015), the share of mobile orders (phone and tablet) out of all e-commerce increased to 28% in 2015 (up from 23% in 2014). With more potential customers using mobile devices to buy products, it's increasingly important to ensure your e-commerce site will deliver ease of use to desktop and mobile users alike.

Easy to navigate

The easier you can make it for your website visitors to find and buy the products they're looking for, the more likely you'll convert those product searches into sales. Structure your e-commerce website so potential buyers can easily find what they want in as few clicks as possible, and make sure the checkout process is simple and straightforward. Also make it easy for visitors to find your refunds and exchange policy.

Transparency about shipping charges

According to a 2014 e-commerce survey cited by Kissmetrics, 28% of shoppers abandon shopping carts when discovering unexpected shipping charges at checkout. Consider disclosing shipping options and costs earlier rather than waiting until near the end of the checkout process.

Search engine-optimized product descriptions that are also reader friendly

Brief, clear, well-written content with relevant key words will help visitors find your products quickly and learn what's most important about them. Keep in mind content that consists of more than a few sentences may seem to go on forever on a smartphone screen. Make sure you've included product descriptions that give enough detail without becoming redundant and boring.

Professional images

"A picture is worth a thousand words." How often have you heard that? For an e-commerce website, a picture can mean thousands of dollars.

According to an article on Kissmetrics, “When it comes to running an e-commerce store, images are not optional. Before buying, shoppers like to check out an image to get a visual sense of the product. And the image can make or break the sale.”

You’ll want to share images that bring out the best of your products. Consider contracting the help of a professional photographer who has experience in taking photographs for e-commerce websites.

This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit merrimackvalley.score.org for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

