3 Mistakes to Avoid With Your First E-Commerce Store



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Starting your first website is daunting. Whether it's an online shop for your business, or just a personal project (mine was a David Letterman review page — admittedly an odd choice for a 12-year-old kid), it comes with a long list of questions.

For those looking to launch businesses online, it's never been more important to set aside these mental barriers. Consider this: online shopping made a decade of progress in the last two years, and it's never going backwards again. The latest estimation puts American e-commerce revenue at $767.7 billion in 2021. People are turning to the internet for way more than just David Letterman reviews (but that's still a thing, right?). Entrepreneurs of all sizes and experiences need to be

there to meet them.

My career has allowed me to work alongside hundreds of retailers with different needs, customer bases and products. I've noticed that no matter how big or small they are, they all get stuck on the same things in the early stages.

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Here's the big three and a few tips for getting around these hurdles.

Mistake #1: Overlooking your core competency

I've heard from so many retailers who find the idea of getting all their products online daunting. They fall into a trap of thinking they must have endless aisles, and talk themselves out of it before even beginning.

The reality, however, is that too much choice is often a bad thing. Research has shown that 42 percent of customers abandon their online cart because it's too hard to choose.

My biggest piece of advice is to just focus on your specialty. When your physical store is moving online, most of your customers will be people who already know your brand. You've got their support, so go deep on getting to know yourself. Think about your website in terms of what you do really well, and expand from there.

Start with getting your top-selling 10 or 20 items online and invest in professional photos and strong product descriptions. Don't underestimate the power of focus. It will win you more recognition, and push you to go deeper and develop a name for yourself. Once you have that platform, you can land and expand.

Mistake #2: Blowing your budget on the build

Too many merchants get lured by the bells and whistles of the latest and greatest tech. Don't blow your entire budget building a juggernaut that nobody knows about. Instead, make sure you invest in marketing.

To build a successful e-commerce store, retailers must pull the right combination of three levers – gross margin, conversion rate and traffic. The first two are hard to control out of the gate, but what makes the most impact out of the gate – and what you can control – is driving traffic.

Traffic is a commodity, yes, but it's getting harder to just pay someone to cultivate traffic for you. Merchants must answer three questions – 1) what are we providing that's unique, 2) how can we best communicate that, 3) where will that message be most effective.

Here's a hint: In this increasingly crowded e-commerce space, don't be afraid to think outside the address bar. Marketing dollars don't have to be spent online. Consider old-fashioned ways of expanding your reach, like putting up stickers in your neighborhood or sending out flyers. I've seen that a local focus with traditional touches can still work wonders.

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Mistake #3: Accepting a finished product

Unfortunately, the saying if you build it, they will come does not apply to e-commerce. Too many merchants assume that once they've built the site, the hard work is over.

Websites are an incredible opportunity to continuously learn

about who you're interacting with. When my agency started working with Yellow Shoes, for example, they were a legacy business in Montreal with a functional website that had become stagnant. We delivered a new website, and overnight their conversion rate went up 6x. Did we stop there? No, because doing e-commerce right means playing the long-game, learning from each iteration and improving over time.

It's important to remember that a good website captures the essence of your brand and reflects the story behind the store. Good brands are always evolving to stay relevant, so what message does it send to have a website that never changes?

The e-commerce boom these past two years has made me think a lot about the first – and most important – professional website I ever built. It turned out a lot better than my Letterman website, but that's not to say it didn't take substantial trial and error. One thing I can guarantee is that taking the leap into e-commerce will boost your confidence, provide you with a continuous challenge and ultimately make your business more accessible to the people who want to find you.

Once you've overcome the jitters and mastered these simple lessons above, the next stage of thrilling possibilities begins – scaling customer service, maximizing personalization and ultimately, reaching a global audience.

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