4 Tips for Taking Your Brick-and-Mortar Store to the Online Realm

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This year has been rough for brick and mortar retailers. Data from Yelp shows that 60 percent of temporary business closures related to COVID-19 have now become permanent. Many big-name brands have filed for bankruptcy as they've seen retail sales dry up.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, ecommerce is thriving like never before. Statista reports that ecommerce site traffic in May and June of 2020 actually eclipsed the traffic levels of the 2019 holiday shopping season.

As brick and mortar stores continue to struggle with government restrictions and the public's desire to avoid outings that could lead to COVID-19 exposure, the need to take businesses online has never been more urgent.

Even if you're late to the online game, however, you can still make a successful transition.

1. Choose the right hosting platform

First things first: you have to claim a domain for your store and choose a hosting platform that will let you make online sales. While working with an agency could help you get a more

customizable layout, platforms such as Shopify and Wix make it easy to get your site set up quickly, with a clean and efficient design.

Such platforms can also address common ecommerce concerns like site security and order tracking. This will help you run your online store efficiently and deliver superior service to your customers.

Try to select a domain name that matches the name of your brick and mortar store. If your store has a longer name, consider a shorter URL that will be easier for your customers to remember. If the name you want isn't already available, look for alternatives that are close to your store name or your business's area of focus.

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2. Bring your brand to life in a digital realm

The in-store experience is filled with branding. Everything from signage and uniforms to interactions with employees helps foster your brand personality and image. It's a big part of why customers choose to shop at your store.

While a digital storefront may not have the same in-person feel, you should still incorporate elements that help your brand shine through. Your logo and color scheme are a given, but copy and image selection can also help evoke the right feel for your brand. Create content that is true to the experience you try to create in-store, and your website will be more memorable and authentic.

You can't afford to skimp on these branding elements. A website that looks like it was slapped together at the last second won't inspire confidence from your buyers.

Professional-grade photography and copy will be more appealing to potential buyers and showcase your brand in the best light.

3. Consider how to sell products or services online

Determining how you will sell products or services online can be a major challenge. If you sell a diverse range of products, you may wish to initially only offer a select few online — focus on your top sellers. Each product will need its own page that allows customers to add it directly to their cart. Attractive product imagery and detailed descriptions will help customers buy with confidence.

What if you are more of a service provider? Some outside-the-box thinking can help you successfully transition online, as happened with Clairissa Cruz, founder of Bare at Home.

In an email, Cruz explained, “When my body sugaring salons closed because of COVID, I had to find a way to keep my business from going under. I tried to put myself in my customers’ shoes as I thought of ways I could pivot and realized I could turn my service into a product with an at-home sugaring kit. Finding a way to sell a productized version of my service created a new revenue stream during a time when other sources were cut off.”

4. Plan for customer service

Customer service for an online store looks a bit different. After all, you can’t give your customers a handshake and smile as you resolve their concerns. But a lack of face-to-face interaction doesn’t make customer service any less important as you take your business online.

A positive experience is still key to getting customers to shop with you again — and as HubSpot reports, 77 percent of

those customers will also share their positive experiences with others. For online businesses, this often yields positive public reviews that drive more traffic to your store.

At the very least, your website should list a customer support phone number, where you or a staff member will be readily available to address customer questions, concerns and complaints. Account for varied user preferences by also including options for email and online chat. Make it easy for them to reach you, then provide the same friendly service you would in-person.

Related: 12 Ways to Deliver Excellent Customer Service

Nail the transition

Taking a brick and mortar store online can be intimidating. But it doesn’t have to take months to successfully bring your brand online. With an online store that is available 24/7, your loyal customers will be able to make purchases whenever is convenient for them.

Chances are, you’ll also bring in new customers who would never have discovered you otherwise. By setting up your website for success, you will lay the foundation for lasting online revenue generation.

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