

The checklist for E-Business starters.

So you got this big idea you think was going to be successful. You have roughly drawn a plan on your mental note, about this business idea you had on mind.

Or probably you have already owned a business off the internet (in "real" life ~ or "Brick and Mortar" as we term it) and decided to go for a new share in the cyberspace.

You might already owned a running site which you treat only as a company profile website, or, as some people would call, a "brochure site". While these sites are not totally worthless, they fail to take advantage of the unparalleled opportunities afforded by the new technologies online.

You need an E-Commerce website, that is, a site that can help you gain revenues, either through online means (Credit Card transactions) or more traditional approach ex. setting up money order, debit transactions, or even inviting appointment to your prospects.

If you are still wondering where to start, this article might be helpful for you, as I list all the requirements you need to set up that E-Commerce website you been wanting to have.

1. A solid plan!

Just as in any other business, starting your business over the internet needs a thoroughly considered plan.

Just as guidelines, you might want to start by thinking about these:

Who are your target audience ~ Business people, teenagers, sport freaks, real freaks.

What may attract your target audiences ~ A professionally presented sites may attract professionals, but would look lame if served to young people.

Is there any public needs to be fulfilled by this business?

Do you have a genuine interest with your product / service?

How much time and capital do you have for this business?

2. A good, selling domain name

For my personal opinion, a domain name is good when it explains a bit about the business you are doing. Much better if you already have a business name which explains the area of expertise you are dealing with.

What to do if the name you want to get has already been used by another party?

Do not panic, and forget trying to purchase the name from them. Your money would be WAY better be spent on other areas more critical to your business than that.

It is better to have a name that doesn't necessarily resemble your organisation name but catchy than the other way around. Take for example Sullivan Higdon & Sink, a marketing agency in Kansas, their website name is, I could still remember now even without bookmarking it, www.wehatesheep.com.

Do not bother buying the .net / .whatever if .com is not available either, there are still

a lot of options out there, just keep your eyes wide open.

Spelling problems

Make sure you understood different countries' spelling if you plan to use meaningful words as your domain name. For example this website can be accessed through www.WebExtremeCustomiser.com (OZ & British spelling) and www.WebextremeCustomizer.com (US & Rest of the world spelling).

Abbreviations

This is not a very important point, but if you decided to use a long domain name like mine and you are planning to let your friends / relatives in non-English speaking countries know about your website (over the phone ~ try that with www.WebExtremeCustomiser.com ~ that was wicked!) you might want to buy an abbreviated name. I used www.WebXC.net for this site.

3. Payment Gateway

Payment Gateways are companies providing service to transfer the payment from your customers' account to your company's.

If you want to be able to accept credit card payment, you might want to ask your bank whether they have a Merchant Account service to help with this issue.

My suggestion is, if you are still unsure with the volume of your transactions, to use combinations of per-transaction Payment Gateways like [PayPal™](https://www.paypal.com),

[Google Checkout](#)

, etc. Over time, after your sales volume grows larger it should be more comfortable using a single Merchant Account from your bank.

4. Shipping Information

In certain areas, this is the hardest issue. If you plan to base your business in a developed country, there is virtually no problem with this, as most shipping companies would already have a proper quotation and time calculation method.

Some even already has a web service to calculate that – Your customer can do the calculation from the shipping company's resource & calculator through your website.

I have also seen a shipping company where you can send your products to their warehouse(s) and let them handle the shipping to your customers, but I haven't really elaborated on that. If anybody have used that service before I would like to know. I will post something more soon as I get more information about it.

5. Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)

To ensure your customers' information safety (and to keep their trust by showing them that cool SSL logo) you need to sign up for SSL Certification. By adding SSL Certification to your site, you are making sure that your customers' sensitive information doesn't go to the wrong place.

Try to look around for an SSL Certification provider that would suit your needs.

And for Heaven's sake, please do not use your hosting company's free shared SSL. I will explain it below.

Why not shared SSL?

The most important thing about SSL is to make your customer trust your site. By using that free shared SSL, your browser url would show something like <https://secure11.ssldot.com/~freextyl/> (It was taken from a small website project I done when I was still learning Zen-Cart), ugly isn't it?

By showing that sort of URL, your technology aware customers would think that your company is not credible enough to even have its own secured server, how would you expect them to trust you with their order?

The standard cheapest SSL would cost you around US\$20, enough for you to show <https://www.yoursitename.com> when your customers do an ordering. Use that if you are not ready to spend more on this yet.

Read a very good information about this on: <http://www.zencartoptimization.com/2007/12/04/ecommerce-conversion-security-measures>

6. Find a good Shopping Cart Software

To wrap it up, you need to find a shopping cart software that can support the points above (point 1, 3, and 4).

The questions need to be asked are:

Can the software support the marketing methods of your choice? For example Cross-sell, affiliates, point rewards, etc.

Can it also support the shipping & payment companies you are going to use? Better yet, can you add / use / change to other payment & shipping companies in the future when you need it?

Try to look around in its forum / support centre if it has one. Is the community alive? Are there a lot of unanswered threads?

On my next article I will elaborate on this point more clearly.

More of my articles are available in www.WebExtremeCustomiser.com, my personal site where I offer E-Commerce site customisation service.

About the Author

Jay is a Web Developer specializing in E-Commerce sites and PHP, Javascript, and AJAX programming. He is also an active contributor to an Open Source Shopping Cart engine he been using. Read more about him on his website www.WebExtremeCustomiser.com.

Source: <http://www.thewritemarket.com>