



Start an Online Shop Business

By Vince Holt – Introduced by Nigel Hall, Innovation Centre Sunshine Coast Pty Ltd

The world is changing, it is moving online. Is this a threat or an opportunity? We think it's an opportunity, but then again we are start-up and growth believers so we are optimists! If you operate a retail outlet, by creating a good online presence you can increase your audience, sales and purchase volumes, reducing your buy in costs and overhead per dollar spent and hence your profitability. In fact good operators in this market have turned their retail outlets into show rooms or abandoned them altogether for lower cost warehouse facilities as volume grows.

How to do it right is of course the big differentiator, Vince Holt, managing director of UK based online specialists 11 out of 10, gives some easy-to-apply website tips that can have an immediate and substantial affect on your online income stream.

It never fails to surprise me how many businesses do not look after their website. They create their online presence then forget about it – people know it's there but do not take notice. It has no relevance for them.

Websites are vital, forever changing vehicles for businesses to communicate with their markets and customers online. Successful online shops communicate with customers. If your website can communicate your proposition then it will sell.

The following 10 steps are simple, easy and effective ways to get your business generating income online with the minimum of effort:

Sell from the start

Your online homepage should have featured products, special offers and best sellers displayed large. Not sure? Have a look at Amazon's homepage. You cannot be coy or retiring about your products and services if you want to be a success online.

Homepage special promotions

Your site should always have a special promotion on your homepage, which you change regularly. It keeps visitors interested in your best deals and keeps them coming back to see what the latest offers are. Have a look at Tesco's homepage – it always has its offers displayed prominently to entice you.

Best seller lists

Customers like to know what others are buying. We also like recommendations. It adds to the buying experience to weigh up options, it also adds to the number of goods at check out.

Make searching easy

It goes without saying that your site should be easy to navigate. A prominent search box, with advanced search features if needed, will be a useful tool, as you do not want to lose sales because a customer could not find a product.

Take a look at Watersone's website, they do not shirk from making their search box prominent.

Use eye-catching images

All the best shops are experts in displaying goods to capture the attention and imagination of the shopper. Online shops are no different. Your images should be attractive.

But make sure they are no bigger than 50k. Remember the internet disaster that was Boo.com – partly caused by images that took forever to download until the shopper went elsewhere. Do not make that elementary mistake!

Avoid distractions

Keep distractions to a minimum. If it is not necessary then remove pop-ups, blinking text, scrolling text, animated GIFs and gratuitous flash animations.

Track and register visitors

Build up a relationship with regular visitors with an easy registration process. Perhaps you can entice visitors to register with an offer or discounts. Once registered, use the information to keep them updated with your latest innovative product or promotion.

Give customers peace of mind

Customers can still be nervous shopping online if they do not know and trust your brand. Make sure you reassure them by clearly stating your security, shipping and return policies. Customer service contacts provide comfort for the customer, make sure their contact details are easy to find.

Make your contact details prominent

How many times have you been on a website, been impressed, wanted more information and then spent the next five or ten minutes trying to find out some contact details?

Did you give up? Did the company lose an order? Make your contact details prominent. It is better to over-emphasise them than make a visitor search for them.

Marketing your site

It is no good having the best site with the best products if no one can find it. Make sure your web address is on all your promotional material, from brochures to your e-mail campaigns.

Do your online marketing: search engine optimisation, reciprocal hyper links, Google Adwords, blogs – to name a few methods. These techniques are not as taxing on resources as you might think.

If you are really serious about your online business it is worth investing a little energy for the potential reward available.