

Tips for building a reliable e-commerce store

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Source: pixabay.com

There are some impressive benefits to doing business online. Anyone with a business idea can leverage the capabilities of the internet, e-commerce software and payment tools, and smart website design to reach new customers and markets.

A well-designed and accessible online business gives shoppers access to products and solutions 24/7 and the opportunity to reach a wider, global audience at a lower cost than a traditional bricks-and-mortar store. It also enables business owners to manage effective product delivery, reduce overheads, improve customer engagement and enhance the professionalism of the brand.

But, it's essential that you select the correct building blocks when developing an online store to give it maximum visibility and seamless performance.

Here are five technical steps to online success:

1. Establishing the right domain name

Choosing a business name requires some thought. You need to tick several important boxes before your new company name can sit on letterheads, domain names and business cards.

It should clearly explain the types of products and services you have on offer without being too clever or difficult to spell. Remember to keep it simple and clear and memorable.

Prepare a short list of preferred names and check to see if they already exist online elsewhere. This should help whittle down to your final few preferred choices. Then, consider domain names that can be extended to include international markets such as .com.

If you're only focusing on South Africa, .co.za, should suffice but in every instance, check the domain is available and how much it will cost to maintain.

2. Select a reliable website hosting company

Website hosting companies are essentially the landlords of the internet, 'renting' space on their servers from which people can run their websites. Most offer a full bouquet of web hosting services so you can run all of your business requirements from a single point of contact.

You can register your domain, host your website, and run your email services through a single service provider.

When selecting your provider, make sure they have a disaster recovery plan in place that includes backups of your website and that they can provide reliable uptime and security protocols. It is also important to have FTP access to your site so you can upload files and make your own backups - preferably select a hosting company that offers 24/7 support in the event of a problem. Affordable and well-known hosting services in South Africa include Afrihost, WebAfrica and Hetzner.

3. The online building blocks

A virtual store still needs to provide customers with a way of choosing items, putting them into their virtual shopping carts, paying for goods, and getting those items delivered. It's a good idea to implement a reliable ecommerce shopping cart that drives these capabilities across the following touchpoints: an online catalogue, check-out selection and editing, taxes and shipping costs, payment and shipping information, and transactional data management.

Use a reliable and experienced website developer who can provide expertise around the correct shopping cart solution for your business requirements, SSL certificates, TSL encryption, and any additional integrations or extensions needed for a seamless online experience. Not only will they ensure that the right technology is used from the outset, but they will provide troubleshooting expertise that will minimise downtime.

There are some reliable hosted options such as WooCommerce, Magento, Shopify, Zencart and Prestashop that are easily integrated and used by numerous online businesses around the world.

4. Shipping management

Regardless of whether your online store ships from its own warehouse or serves as a front to facilitate the shipping of products from a variety of warehouses or organisations, it still needs to have a reliable shipping system in place.

Shipping software provides customers with ongoing updates around delivery, product status and timing, and provides the business with insight into any stock delays – if using a third party – or delivery issues. Parcel Ninja, iDeliver, Onthedot, Wumdrop and Aramex are popular courier and fulfilment partners used by numerous online organisations today.

5. Payment gateway development

The payment gateway is possibly one of the most important elements of any online store and customer experience.

It needs to be easy to use, accessible and understandable, use a minimum number of forms, demand as little personal information as possible, and provide the customer with a variety of payment options. Your payment solution must allow for customer choice, letting them select the method they trust, such as secure, instant EFT. Use a reliable service provider that delivers a variety of payment options and that delivers an inherent layer of trust.

Look out for factors such as PCI compliance, high-end security, rigorous regulation adherence, and strong local presence. Solutions such as PayCollect provide aggregated accounts that minimise admin – no need to get an Internet Merchant Account – while maximising accessibility.

Finally

Developing a robust and reliable online store takes time and focus. Invest into the right choices for the business and its long-term goals, selecting names, service providers and solutions that will support its growth and its customer engagement. Start small, get the basics right, and use them as a foundation for sustainable growth into a profitable future.

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