What's included in this guide?

- Top 3 considerations when adding e-commerce to your selling strategy
- Tips on creating your webstore
Top 3 considerations when adding e-commerce to your selling and marketing strategy

1. Identify the products you will sell online and create a website that provides a positive customer experience that is easy and pleasurable to buy from.
   - Higher margin products, easiest stock fulfilment, most convenient products for shipping

2. Ensure the website can be easily found. This is a whole new shop front that you are opening at a far lower cost than acquiring a new premises!
  - Trial different products, promotions, price points

3. Understand how to track your key metrics to ensure you are maximising your website’s potential
   - Think about what you are trying to achieve
   - From brochure to trading website
   - Think what digital strategy will be required to get customers onto your website.
Piecing together your webstore involves:

- Customer Research
- Competitors
- Data Privacy
- Timeline
- Customer Service
- Website
- Media Channels
- e-Commerce
- Data Analytics
Market size: Estimate how many people could potentially buy your product based on the geographical location and type of client you are targeting.

Customer segment: Define the personas you are targeting. Knowing more about the specific people you want to bring to your web store will help you configure it accordingly. Take the time to consider in detail your consumers’ behaviours and trends.

1. Which computing devices they use?
2. What are their buying preferences?
3. What is their demography?
4. Where are they located?
5. What is their consumer behaviour? e.g. buying cycles, seasonality, influencers impact

Competitors

Be familiar with your competitors’ digital presence. Many aspects of your competitors’ web stores can inspire new ideas for how you can improve your own digital presence. Avoid copying your competitors and create unique content that is better and more engaging. Define a clear differentiation from competitors based on something unique you offer, by outlining the story of your brand, perhaps consider profiling experts on your team and the personal service they provide. Blogs/community building initiatives/product add-ons/discounts can ensure you highlight the added value of buying from your store.
Creating the Website

Specify Your Web Store Requirements

Establish your must-haves: what are the minimum features and functions needed to satisfy you and your customers? Remember you’re not building the website for your own use. It’s your site’s visitors that need to be happy with the design and that is referred to as User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX). Keeping a strong focus on UX while building your site should pay off in higher conversions and lower bounce rates. Include a well-organised menu, an efficient search and intuitive filtering options. Your website has to be modern, quick, responsive and easy to navigate.

Five main considerations when designing the website:

1. **An appropriate domain name** should include your business name. Some useful details of benefits and the process of registering a .ie domain name is very well explained at www.weare.ie.

2. **A suitable webhost**
   Purchasing a domain gives your website an address but you’ll need a webhost to manage the place where you display all your content & products. This platform host (e.g shopify, woo commerce, wordpress etc) provides the features that allow you to build a branded online storefront to locate and sell your products. There are hundreds of web hosts available today providing thousands of varieties of web hosting services.

3. **Increasing numbers of consumers now use mobile** over desktop devices so choose a responsive or adaptive design strategy that migrates the experience across devices i.e. allows the same site to display properly on screens of any size, from a desktop PC down to a smartphone.

Smartphones are on track to contribute more than 50% of online spend by September 2022. People who have a negative experience on mobile are 62% less likely to purchase from that brand in the future than if they have a positive experience.
4. **Include all the necessary information**
FAQs and other important information regarding the products, services, queries, shipping, etc.

5. **Simple language** to future proof your website for voice search or non English native speakers.

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Research by Juniper tells us that smart home devices will carry out more than €137 bn worth of transactions in 2025. That’s more than 630 % growth in five years from the €18 bn in 2020. However, for some brands/sectors visual search will continue to play a more significant part in their strategy.
Remember that an online business needs additional software to manage backend functions e.g. inventory management or payment services.

Your content needs to be well described in terms of images and keywords in order to appear in Google searches. Choose a platform that allows you to easily create and edit content yourself by adding new products or key words at appropriate time of the year e.g. Mothers Day.

**Costs**

Plans range from free with limited options to expensive web hosting services. The plan you choose will depend primarily on how you wish to use your website and how much budget you have available for hosting. Many web hosts offer monthly and annual plans. Cheaper rates can be obtained by paying for a yearly hosting plan. Remember that the more traffic your website gets, and the more features you add to your site, the higher your price will be.
1. **Ask your Digital Service Provider** to help you estimate a project timeline based on your chosen platform. A complete e-commerce platform will come with the tools to walk you through the entire process: hosting, design, pricing and payment options, marketing tools and reports. If you anticipate heavy traffic, a solution that offers lots of online storage space, inventory and bandwidth is a consideration.

2. **Factor in time** for a member of your management team to be your Digital Project Champion and to be released from current responsibilities to create your website content and drive the implementation going forward. A good website needs to be nurtured and maintained. It is not just for Christmas!

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**Agree GDPR, Data Privacy & Security Necessities**

A secure website is beneficial for both you and your customers. With a growing number of websites being hacked and data being stolen, security is a pivotal part of a website that must be robust.

1. **Choose a secure ecommerce platform**
   Your online store represents a complex system where multiple components have to interact with each other — your server, web apps, users, and network connection. The important thing is that each of the components must be protected from any forms of threats and malicious attacks.
2. Obtain SSL certificate
This is the online protocol for secure communications over the internet and one of the easiest ways to help secure your e-commerce website from fraud. All websites that have an SSL certificate from Google to validate site content are recognizable because their web addresses include a https:// browser rather than simply http://, which is less secure. A safe SSL connection will show a green padlock next to a https:// link, and customers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of this. Remember google will reward you with your rank in search results.

3. Don’t store sensitive information online eg customer credit card number. Consider using payment facilitators to handle the online payment in whole.

4. Regulations and transparency
Be aware of legal requirements for Irish companies regarding information you must display on your website e.g. privacy statement, cookie regulations, Terms & Conditions re Shopping, registration and VAT number or geographical address among others.
1. **Payment methods and checkout** – provide a number of payment methods (credit card, direct transfer or vouchers). Consider which payment methods your target audience use most often and ensure you offer this method.

2. **Inventory Management/Stock Tracking** – On top of traditional inventory management concerns, (e.g. warehousing and demand forecasting) there are other inventory management challenges faced by online retailers. Digital marketing strategies attract a wide audience, increasing both the number of customers and the level of inventory needed. Omni-channel retailing results in orders coming in from a variety of sources including a brand’s website, apps and social media channels. Moreover, customers expect to be able to return most of them.

3. **Order Tracking** – As an online retailer, it’s very important for your company to provide reliable shipping services. Customers need to trust that they will receive their products on time and without any damage. Who doesn’t love being able to see an estimated delivery date when placing an order, and tracking the packages is also becoming the norm.

4. **Shipping Management** – While you can control most aspects of your customer’s experience, once you send off a package a large part of that customer relationship is outsourced to the company you entrust your online delivery services to. Therefore, you need safe and efficient shipping process.

5. **How to Manage Returns / Refunds**
67% of shoppers check the returns page before making a purchase. Many online shops deal with more returns than brick and mortar shops and therefore you need to develop strategies for returns and reverse logistics. How you handle returns and refunds becomes almost as big a piece of its value to the end consumer as the product and the initial sales experience.
Identify and agree with your Digital Service Provider appropriate media channels for different audiences. Remember that some marketing campaigns take months of work to get satisfactory results. Analyse and maintain a marketing campaign and adjust for current trends and your consumer habits. You need to compel your target audience to take action.
Some of the media / marketing channels you will engage with are:

1. **Social Media Marketing**  - Social media monitoring is a must, quite simply because the majority of people use it to share ideas and opinions. Remember to build and monitor your brand’s presence on social media to improve brand sentiment by interacting with your followers. This can involve instant responses to positive and negative queries and feedback or sharing of positive brand stories. However, you need to be selective as you cannot be on all social media all of the time!

2. **Email marketing**  - Email marketing doesn’t get the appreciation it deserves however a well-timed email that highlights your products, personalised to your target audience, can bring huge returns through click-through rates and conversions.

   A 2019 survey found that over 70% of marketers believe email marketing generates “good” or “excellent” returns as a marketing channel — a higher satisfaction rate than both paid search and organic SEO.

3. **PPC**  (paid Search using Google Ads)  - PPC ads can immediately place your brand and product right at the top of the browser. It can grow your business using instant exposure to your target audience, but it has to be done well.

4. **Content marketing**  - Content marketing is an excellent tool to drive traffic, to place keywords which pop up higher in search engines rankings and lets you publish compelling messaging that draws the attention of your target customers. Use it to promote your business expertise and to stand out amongst your competition. Use different formats for content marketing: infographics, podcasts, videos, blog posts etc. Don’t rely solely on products or services but on other engaging content eg energia’s weekend events map, as a method to bring local search into the mix.
Put someone in charge of your e-commerce strategy (E-Commerce Manager). This person does not need to be dedicated to e-commerce on a full-time basis, but should take responsibility for the launch and running of your online store.

**Areas of e-commerce that your team need to focus on include:**

1. **Product & Content Administration** – With the right content, you can generate interest among prospective customers. You will have to keep creating, improving and maintaining engaging content and managing its distribution to online channels and social media platforms to increase traffic. The more online audiences organically engage with your content, the more Google and others will prioritise it, which helps additional online prospective customers find it.

2. **Website Optimisation** – if you want people to discover your website, search engine optimisation (SEO) is essential. When done effectively it will bring more traffic than any other approach to digital marketing, which in exchange will increase conversions and grow revenue. Create great content with keywords in mind. Also, your website needs to be adaptive to any device. Additionally, you do not want to have a site that takes too much time to load - something Google is now penalising. Make sure that your page is always up running at maximum speeds.

3. **Customer Services** – while you don’t encounter customers face to face, your team should be in constant communication with customers on regular basis via chats, calls, automated emails or social media. Part of customer care includes processing returns efficiently, handling complaints but also following up on the customers to make sure they are satisfied with the order and have had a good customer experience.
4. **Order Processing & Fulfilment** – this involves processing customer’s information (name, address, contact number) in order to handle the orders. The person will manage inventory, prepare products and ship them to the customers. Remember that customer expectations around the speed and cost of shipping are constantly changing.

5. **Digital Marketing Strategy** – establishing the goals and e-commerce plan, evaluating existing digital marketing presence, understanding your buyer’s journey – how do they transfer from being a stranger to loyal customers, building buyer’s personas, creating content strategy, keeping track of the results. Remember that digital marketing is a continuous process and you may not be getting it right every time. Learn from it and try again.

6. **Training and Building Capability Across Other Employees** – ensure all your employees are aware of the digital strategy, that they can deliver the required customised experiences, that they understand how to maximise digital sales and ensure the digital strategy is compatible with the brick and mortar shop sales.
Agree with your Digital Service Provider how you will be measuring and analysing online success. Gathering data is one thing but understanding it is another. All of those words, numbers and percentages can seem intimidating. Don’t worry, most of the top tracking software presents data in relatively straightforward terms to enable you to track your customers’ behaviours easily. Your role is to ensure you analyse all the available data, draw conclusions and make decisions.

**Data Analytics**

Are the results on track?

Do you see trends in your data?

Are visitors on mobile converting well?

Constantly seek improvements. Then test and continuously optimise your web store as your knowledge and experience grows.
Some analytics to examine include:

1. **Overall Website Traffic** – total number of visits to a website

2. **Traffic by Source** – where your website traffic originated from:
   - Did they find me using a search engine?
   - Did they click on an email link?

3. **Exit Page** – you want to know what was the last page a potential customer browsed on before leaving your website. A page might have a high exit % if the information on it is considered by customers as not relevant or valuable. You need to review pages with high exit % and identify the reason behind the visitor choosing to leave.

4. **Cart Abandonment Rate** – it is incredibly frustrating to successfully move a prospective customer through the sales funnel only to lose them at the point of purchase. Therefore, you need to measure cart abandonment statistics to understand the reasons why customers fail to complete their purchases and to be able to correct issues. Then you can avoid making unnecessary mistakes, create a friction-free customer experience and increase conversions.

5. **Conversion Rate** – probably the most important metric of all as it can have a significant impact on your website’s profitability— if you can increase your conversion rate from 1% to 2%, your profits double!

6. **Social Media Engagement** – in most social media settings content can be both shared and replied to. You want to know how people are participating in the conversation about your brand? What are they doing to spread your content and engage with the topic?
A final word

Digital capabilities are now fundamental to successful retailers. 2020 has condensed 8 years digitisation into 1 year and new skillsets are now required by retailers to harness the complexity of the omnichannel landscape.

Covid has radically changed consumer sentiment and shopping trends with some analysts forecasting that in the future retailers will transition to showcasing products or brands for customers who will subsequently complete the buying transaction in another channel after the physical trip i.e. online when they get home.

Embarking on your digital journey may seem like a daunting prospect at first, however, your understanding will increase with each task you complete and the tools to enable the building blocks for your digital presence are now widely available.

Other useful tips on getting started including a template for your website development tender can be found at www.weare.ie/sme-start.

See details on support from Enterprise Ireland’s Online Retail Scheme at www.enterprise-ireland.com/retail.