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Preface

Congratulations on taking the first step in your ecommerce business building adventure. I say adventure because it will be full of great learning experiences and challenges all designed to help you reach your goal of owning and running a successful ecommerce business.

Why An Ecommerce Business? Over the past few years there has been phenomenal growth of online businesses, and many internet millionaires have been created with just a few short years of work.

The good news is that even with all this tremendous growth, we have still only begun to scratch the surface.

As more customers become familiar and comfortable with shopping online there will be an explosion of possibilities in the ecommerce industry.

This growth will also create a level playing field where small companies and even a one person operation can compete successfully online.

All over the Internet you will find stories depicting the amazing growth and revenues that business owners receive through their ecommerce channels.

It is not uncommon to see online stores with 20% or more growth from one year to the next.

This guide is designed to give you the blueprint needed to launch your own ecommerce store successfully.

The focus of the ecommerce stores discussed in this book will be on selling directly to the end consumer, as this is the type that I have the most experience with.

However, you can also take the concepts discussed and apply them to a business to business online ecommerce site.

With that being said, I would like to give you a little background about myself and why I am even qualified to give you advice on launching an online store.

About Me:

When I decided to launch my first ecommerce store I had been recently laid off from my job and vowed to myself at that time to never allow another person to dictate my financial security.

I then began searching for a way that I could make money online that offered longevity.

I tried a few ways to make money online such as Google AdSense, Affiliate Marketing and flipping websites.

I did have some small success with those methods, but I was hungry to make more and really earn a substantial living online.

After much research, I decided that opening an ecommerce store would offer the opportunity to make a decent amount of money while creating a real asset that I could grow over time.

I opened my first Ecommerce store in 2011 (using the techniques outlined in this guide).

I was very proud because I designed everything myself.... and I mean everything. I wrote all the content, took the photos for each product, set up all the social media accounts, graphics-- you name it I did it.

Partially, this was done because I had a very limited amount of start-up capital. But, the main reason was that I wanted to know how to do everything required to set up a store from start to finish.

I still remember the day that I received my first sale on the new website; it was so exciting as I knew that I was on the right track!

Fast forward one year later, my self-made ecommerce store brought in over six figures in sales and after expenses I netted more in gross income that year than I had ever made working at my old job!

I am now in the process of opening more ecommerce stores and plan to build an empire of small ecommerce websites so that I can have the financial security I have always dreamed of.

However, during the process of researching my next store, I saw that there were a lot more people like me out there.

Regular people that were desperately searching for a way to make additional income or replace the income they made from a job that they hated.

Everywhere I looked on forums, chat groups, etc. I found people that were just as frustrated and tired of making someone else rich as I was when I started online.

That desire was the catalyst that drove me to write this book, to detail exactly what I did to “crack the code” and earn a comfortable online income.

Now, let me just point out that I am not a guru. But, I will detail in this book what steps I took to achieve my success in a way that will be easy for you to replicate for yourself. (If you just do the work!)

I don't see the success in having all the money in the world if you are not helping others, one of my favorite quotes comes from Danny Thomas the founder of St Jude Children's Research Hospital:

“All of us are born for a reason, but all of us don't discover why. Success in life has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It's what you do for others.”

I am truly honored that you have chosen to take this journey with me and I am confident that this book will equip you with everything you need to launch a successful online store.

The process is completely do-able for a newbie and you don't need any technical skills to get your online stores set up and making money--Now let's get to business!

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Chapter 1: Legal Structuring (A Basic Overview)

Since the goal of this book is to get an online store set up and producing income, then it is necessary to start this new business off correctly.

In a nutshell, we will either be sourcing products for wholesale prices and then selling them to visitors on our site at retail prices, or creating our own products and then selling them for a profit on our website.

There are several ways to secure products to sell online and we will discuss this further in the book. However, I feel that it is very important to set up a legal structure for your business.

Fortunately there are several different types of business formations to choose from such as an LLC (Limited Liability Corporation), Sole Proprietorship, Limited Partnership, etc.

I chose to set my business up as an LLC, because it offers more protection and is a better fit for my needs.

With an LLC my online stores are a separate entity from myself and if for some reason the business is sued, etc. then the person cannot come after my personal assets.

It is pretty easy to set up the LLC and I did the paperwork, and filing on my own through the mail. I did not use any type of preparation service as it was not necessary for me.

By choosing this structure I do pay more annual fees than if I would have if I set up a Sole Proprietorship or another structure. However, the benefits far outweighed any negatives.

I am not a lawyer and suggest that you contact your accountant or attorney for more specific information on setting up a business entity.

In addition, you can also visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov and search for business structures or visit your local Secretary of State website for forms and additional information on setting up a business entity.

Chapter 2: Niche Selection

This is the make or break it part of the entire process, doing this one step properly is the foundation to ensuring that your ecommerce business is a success.

There is a lot of information available regarding niche selection, and when I first started researching a possible niche for my store I saw a lot of information stating that you should choose a niche that you are passionate about or one that you have a lot of experience in.

That information is definitely true if you are passionate about an area that many other people are also interested in. Most importantly, it must also be an interest that people are willing to spend their hard earned money on. This type of niche is also known as a “buying niche”.

My suggestion is that if you are interested in something extremely obscure, that you refrain from making your first e-commerce site from that niche as our goal is to get an e-commerce store set up quickly that turns a profit.

What Is A Niche?

I've done a good amount of talking about niche selection, but I haven't necessarily discussed what exactly a niche is. For our purposes, a niche is the market that you plan to enter into.

For instance, you might be interested in the toupee niche and after doing some research you find that narrowing your selection down to “synthetic toupees” is a good area to enter into.

This new term is now a niche that is a highly targeted towards a very specific area. When launching e-commerce stores it is best to have a highly focused “themed” website.

Not only will this increase your rankings for search engine traffic; but it is also a competitive advantage as you appear to be a go-to source for all things related to that specific niche.

For instance, you don't want to have a store that sells synthetic-toupees and also sells Nike running shoes as this is completely unrelated and will possibly cause the store to lose credibility with potential customers.

So, at this point we've talked a lot about a buying niche, but how exactly do you go about finding one?

Characteristics of a Good Niche

As stated previously it is very important to look for buying niches. What exactly does that mean you might ask?

A buying niche is simply a niche area that people are willing to spend money in, there are literally millions of niches that you could enter into. However, not all of them can be

regarded as a buying niche as some niches are simply informational. Of course, since the goal is to create an ecommerce sites that brings in sales we need to stay away from informational niches.

However, it is to our advantage to include highly informative descriptions and articles for each product listed on our website. (We will discuss this more later)

Below is a checklist that I always run through to ensure that the niche I choose is a good buying niche to enter into.

Niche Checklist: Factors To Consider When Choosing A Niche:

1. Think of items not easily found at local stores, but that have high demand.

2. Perform Google searches for the niche that you are considering entering into. During these searches look for

other e-commerce sites selling the product that you are interested in selling.

If there are many sites then chances are good that there is a strong demand for the product. You should also click on a few of the e-commerce sites selling products you are interested in selling to find their social profiles (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

The purpose of doing this is to see if there is any interaction with their customers on the social pages. This is a great way to find out if the customers are happy with the product.

In addition, you might also find areas where your store could have a competitive advantage. For example, perhaps the customers are complaining about the product or making suggestions on what they would like to see improved.

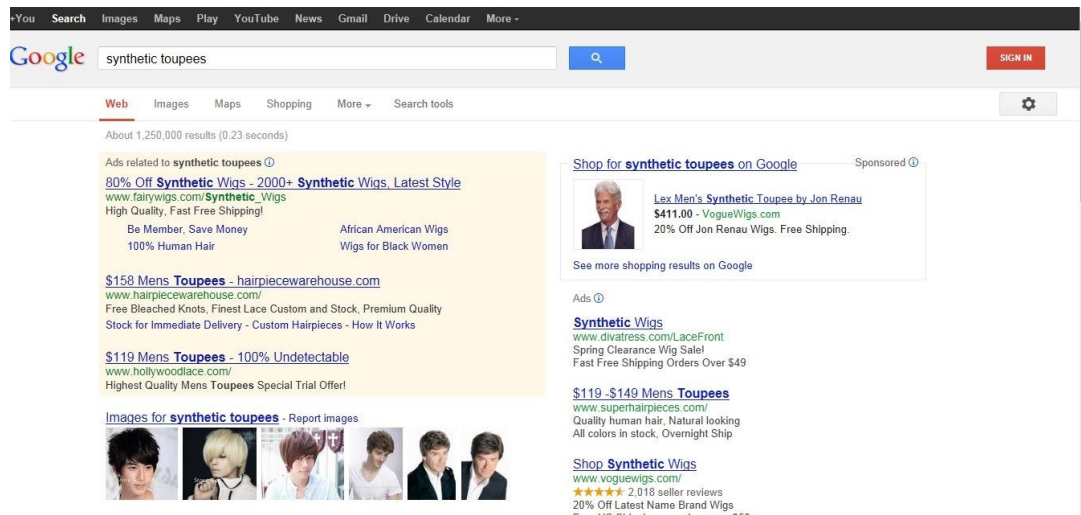
Whatever you find make sure to take note of it as this could be the one competitive advantage that helps to skyrocket your sales.

3. Think of time you wanted a particular product, but had a hard time locating it online, chances are others feel the same way, and this could be a good niche for you to enter into.

4. This relates to step #2 and we will need to once again type the niche we are interested in into the search engine.

We are now specifically looking for an estimation of how popular the particular niche is. This can be accomplished by entering the “niche” into Google.

In the example below I typed in the phrase “synthetic toupees” and got back the following results:



Google returned over 1.2 million results (pages) that are related to my topic in some way.

Keep in mind that the 1.2 million is not an accurate depiction of how many stores will be your direct competition, but it gives you a general idea of how popular the topic or niche is.

The more popular the better as it shows that people are interested in the niche.

Additional Questions To Ask When Choosing A Niche:

- Is there an urgent pain or irrational desire?
- Are they (potential customers) actively looking for a solution?
- Are there little or no perceived choices for them?



NOTE: If there are no other ecommerce stores selling the item you are interested in then chances are very high that there is no money being made in that particular niche and you might want to re-evaluate your selection.

With so many companies/products and services available on the Internet is highly unlikely that you landed on a goldmine that no one else has thought of or attempted to sell online before.

[More Help On Finding A Buying Niche](#)

If you are still unsure about what niche to choose, here are a few sites that I have used successfully to help generate ideas for starting my online stores:

[Pinterest](#)- this is a very quick way to find out what products people are interested in, look for products that people are liking and re-pinning as these are the most popular.

In order to find a potential nice first go to categories then click on products, from here you will look at what people are re-pinning and liking as these items they are more than likely very interested in buying.

Make sure to look for photos with at least 15 re-pins as this number is a strong indicator that it is a good buying niche to enter into.

[Alibaba](#)-This is a great site to find wholesale products, you can click on view categories (along the left top side of the page) to find various niches to enter into. I have used this site successfully to find suppliers and potential niches.

[Slickdeals.net](#)- Popular site for deals found on the Internet, to find a potential niche go to the popular deals (right side of the page) from here you will see the type of products people are talking about.

Pay attention to the views and likes to find hot products that people are interested in.



NOTE: There is no such thing as a perfect niche that will satisfy every one of these potential scenarios; however a niche that confidently covers most of them is good enough for starting the online store.

When I initially began searching for niches for my first store, I went through around 30 different possibilities. After using the methods I have outlined here I was able to find one that was a winner.

I tell you this to insist that you do not become discouraged if your initial niche selection ends up not being the one that you actually launch the store with.

It is much better to go through these steps to make sure that the niche you choose for your store is not only a buying niche but also one that people are interested in.

Do not rush this step as it is very important to choose the correct niche. When I was unsure of what niche to enter into I would write down (or use notepad on the PC) every potential niche that I was interested in or had some experience in.

From there I would go through the steps listed above for each phrase. I oftentimes found another highly related niche to enter into that I had not initially thought of.

Chapter 3: Competitive Analysis

By now you have found a niche that passes our checklist (mentioned previously) and you have identified it as a buying niche. That is awesome!

But, don't go launch that store just yet as we need to do another test...I know, I know I have you going through a lot of test. Feels like we're back in high school, right?

But, if it was not for these tests I do not believe that I would have experienced as much success as I did so early on. So, I implore you to do it as your financial security is worth it!

Competitive Analysis: A Quick Way To Evaluate Profitability

This competitive analysis is going to be very straight forward as I don't want you to go into an intense analysis as it is not necessary.

Doing the analysis as I outline will be sufficient in making sure you are entering a viable niche with the highest probability of making money.

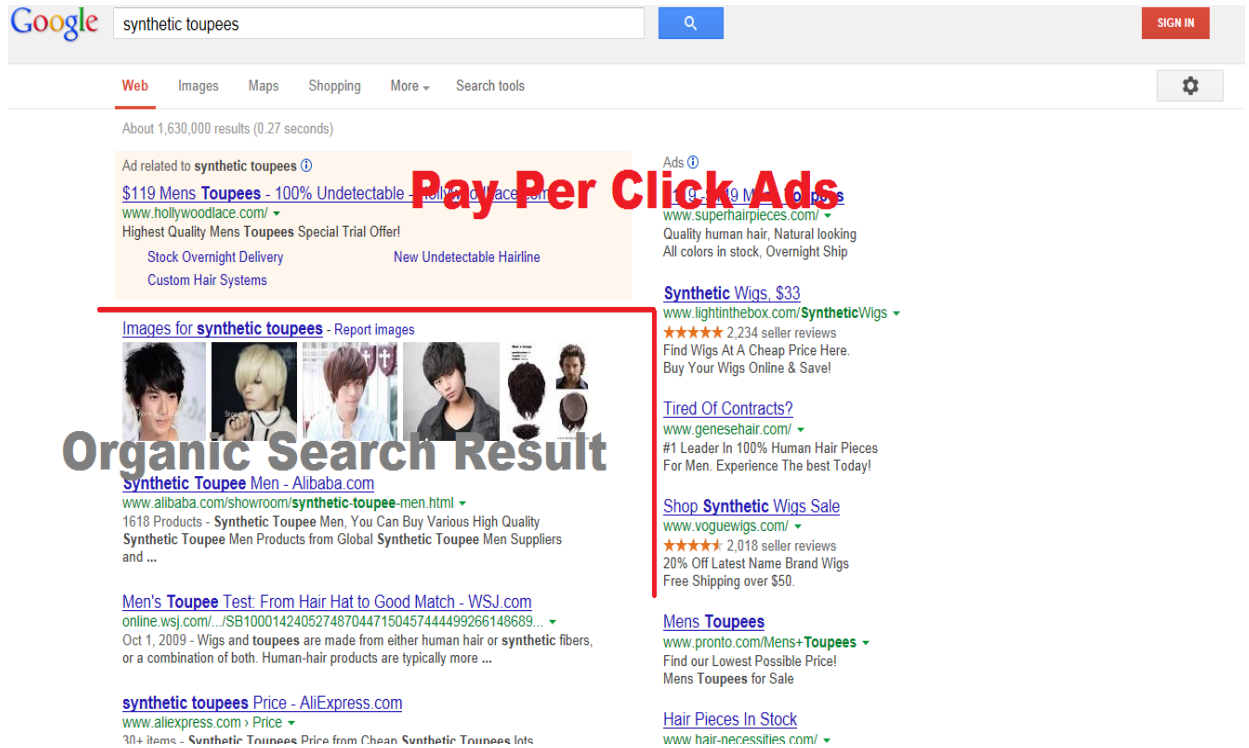
Who Are The Key Players?

After finding a niche that looks promising we then need to look at the top 10 results listed in the search engine. So go to your favorite search engine (I used Google) and type in your newly identified keyword phrase.

What we are looking for now is to see who shows up on that first page of listings, as these are our competitors. Look at the top 1-3 listings... are they large retailers such as Amazon, Wal-Mart, etc.?

If so, this is a big indicator that we will more than likely not be able to outrank them in the organic search (basically organic search are the non-paid listings shown in the search results.)

The image below shows the Organic listings in Grey and the Paid search results in red on top and along the right side.



If you notice a lot of big name companies in the organic listings, don't become discouraged, as we can use other paid methods to get our website shown to as many people as possible.

If your keyword phrase search comes back with a lot of

smaller ecommerce stores then that is good news as you will more than likely be able to rank higher organically without relying on paid advertising methods.

Here are some of the tools I use or have used to determine how competitive a niche is.

1. **Market Samurai- (Paid)** when I didn't have much money to invest I used the free sources. However, as soon as I was able to I invested in this product for all of my keyword and SEO research.

I still use the free tools mentioned below just to double check my efforts in Market Samurai. You can get a free trial version of Market Samurai by visiting their website <http://www.marketsamurai.com/>

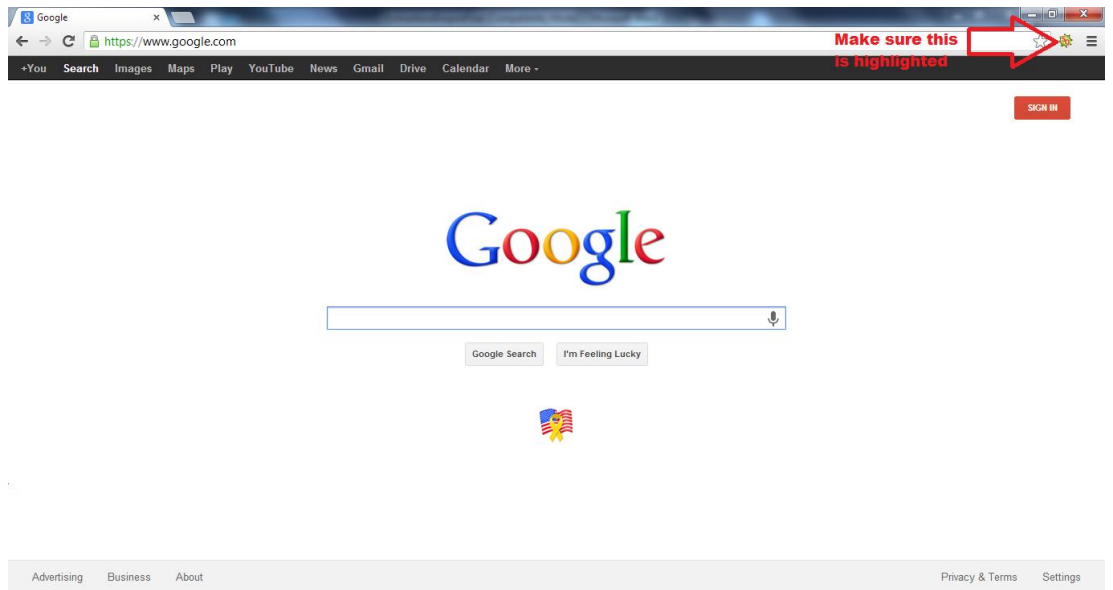
2. **SEOquake extension**- (Free) The only metric I pay attention to is the PR. The page rank is metric/algorithm that

basically assigns authority to a website or webpage. The higher the page rank the more difficult it will be to outrank that page in the search results.

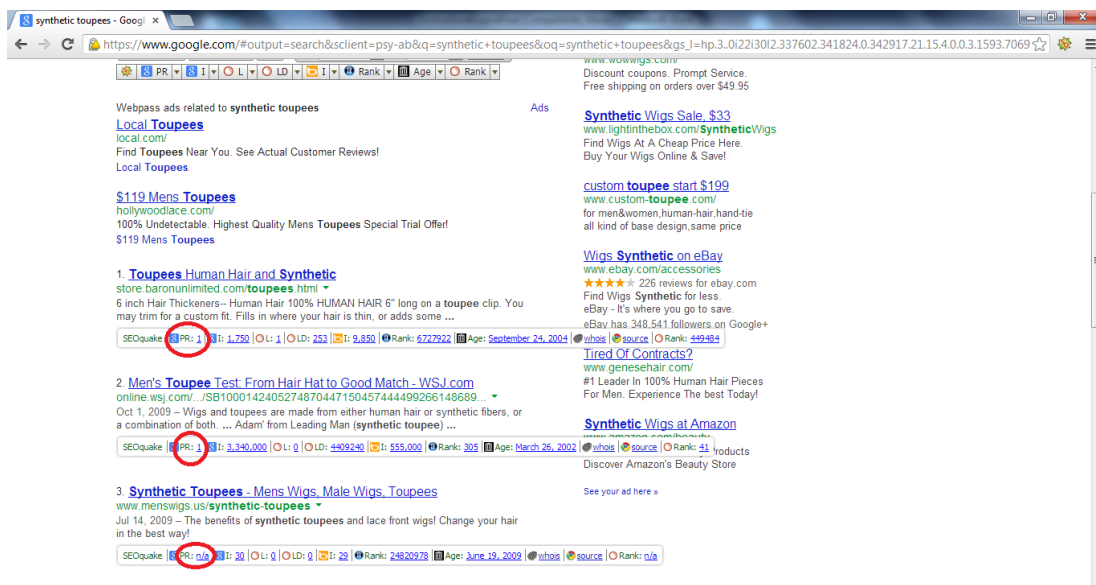
How To Use The SEO Firefox Extension

1. Make sure you have the latest browser, Google Chrome, Firefox, Opera or Safari. (In the screenshots below I am using Google Chrome.)
2. Download [SEO Quake](http://www.seoquake.com/) here:
<http://www.seoquake.com/>
3. After installing SEO Quake we are ready to being our analysis, simply go to www.google.com and enter your chosen niche into the search box.

*Make sure that the icon for SEO Quake is highlighted in the upper right side of the page, to ensure that it is working.



4. Add up all of the PR scores from the top 10 pages listed in the search results for your niche.
(see below.)



5. Next, divide the total of all the PR's by 10 to come up with an average. If that number is below 2.0 then I find that I can rank in the top 10 with less work.

However, if that number is above 2 I usually do not go for that niche as it will take more work and time for me to show up in the top rankings.

There are times when I deviate from this strategy, if the resulting average is slightly above 2.0 and the niche has a lot of interest/traffic (Over 1500 searches per month using the keyword planner or Market Samurai). I would never suggest going above an average of 2.2.



Note: Make sure you only use this tool for keyword research (sparingly) as have been banned from Google for up to 30 minutes as they thought my PC was a bot, due to the excessive pinging.

3. **Traffic Travis**-<http://www.trafficttravis.com/> here is another free tool that is a great option for giving you a better look at the SEO competition within your chosen niche.

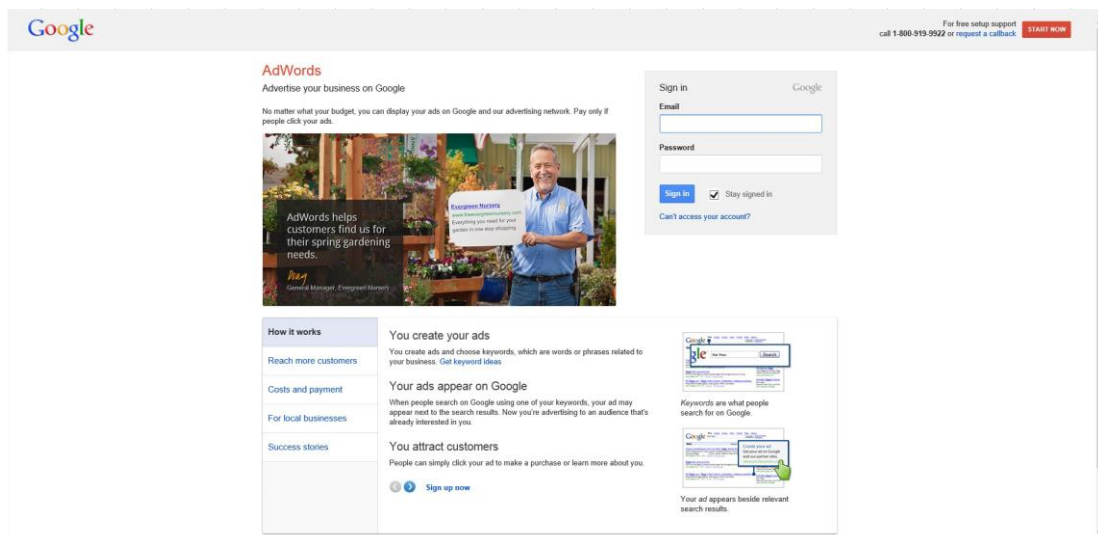
I only look at the SEO Competition module in this phase of research. Just type in your keyword phrase and Traffic Travis will provide you with a calculation as to whether your website could rank into the top 10 results based on how heavy the competition is.

I have found this to be very accurate when used in conjunction with the SEO Firefox extension.

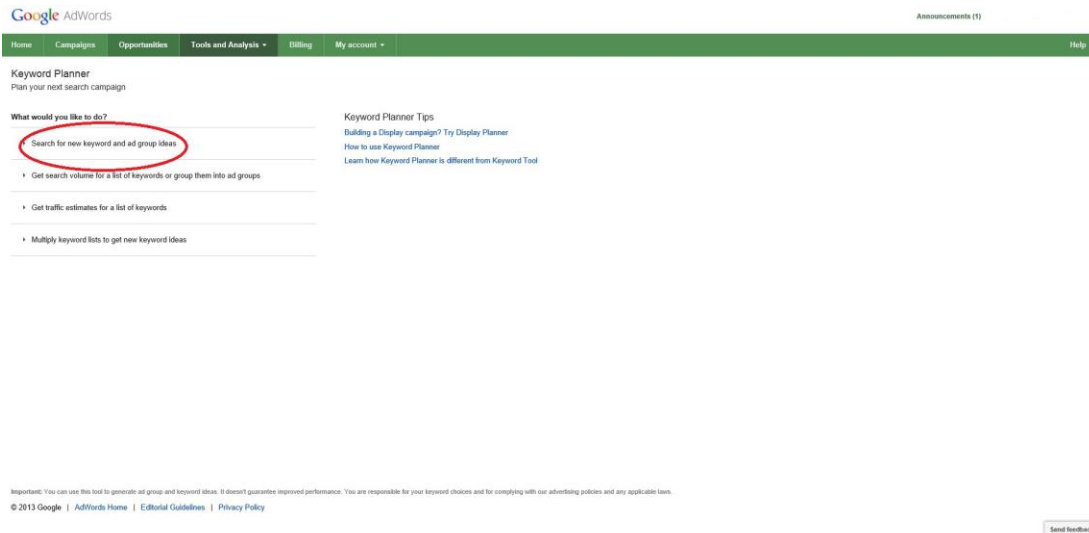
5. Google Keyword Planner (formerly known as Keyword Tool) - <https://adwords.google.com/o/KeywordTool> Recently Google replaced the old Keyword Tool with the new Keyword Planner.

I specifically use this tool to get a clear picture at the amount of people that are searching for my niche on a monthly basis.

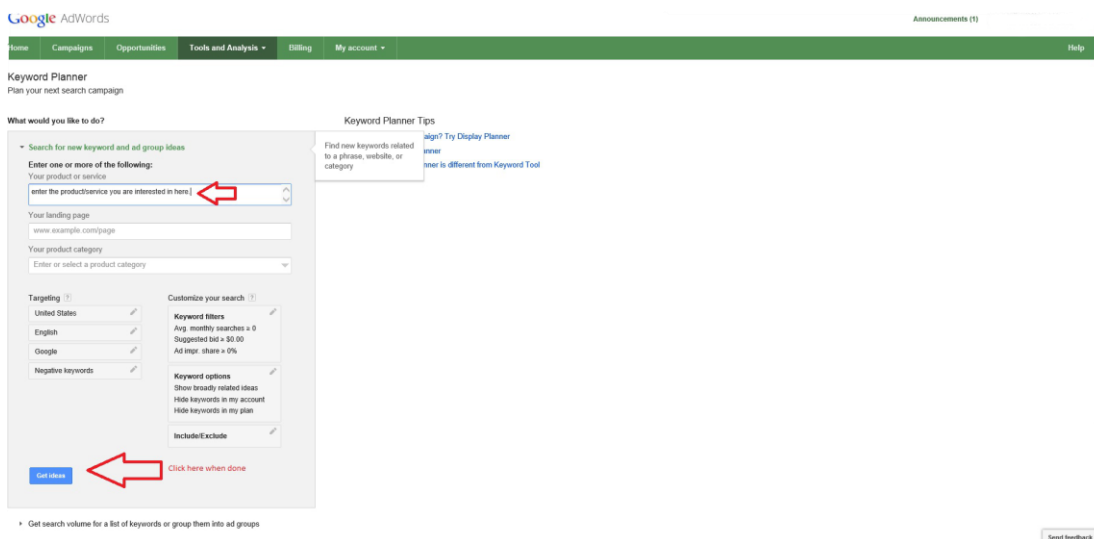
In order to use the Keyword Planner you will need to sign up for a free Google Adwords account found here:<https://adwords.google.com>



Once you register for an account and are logged in click the **Tools and Analysis** drop-down menu and select "Keyword Planner". After doing so you will be presented with an image similar to the one below:



Make sure that you choose, “Search for new keywords and adgroup ideas”



From here, you can research keyword ideas based on:

- A product or service
- Your landing page
- Your product category

Once you enter in your which method to research, click the **Get ideas** button. (I always choose the product/service as I usually have an idea by now of what I am interested in selling on the website.)

The next screen you will be presented with a screen that is divided into two tabs one is called **Ad Group Ideas** the second tab is **Keyword Ideas**.

The screenshot shows the Google Keyword Planner interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Home, Campaigns, Opportunities, Tools and Analysis (selected), Billing, and My account. Below this, the 'Keyword Planner' section is active, with the search term 'synthetic toupees' entered. A red arrow points to the 'Keyword ideas' tab, which is highlighted. The main content area displays a table of search results for 'synthetic toupees'. The table has columns for 'Keyword (by relevance)', 'Avg. monthly searches', 'Competition', 'Suggested bid', 'Ad imp. share', and 'Add to plan'. The results include various related terms like 'real hair wigs', 'hair extensions', and 'wigs for women'. On the left side, there are several filter panels: 'Targeting' (United States, English, Google), 'Customize your search' (Keyword filters, Keyword options), and 'Include/Exclude'. On the right side, there is a 'Your plan' section with a 'Send feedback' button at the bottom.

Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Suggested bid	Ad imp. share	Add to plan
real hair wigs	2,900	High	\$1.25	0%	
hair extensions	165,000	High	\$1.50	0%	
wigs for women	8,100	High	\$1.67	0%	
clip in hair extensions	33,100	High	\$1.50	0%	
real hair wigs for women	480	High	\$0.90	0%	
african american wigs	8,100	High	\$0.83	0%	
wigs for sale	5,400	High	\$0.92	0%	
hair extensions clip in	8,100	High	\$0.91	0%	
hair weave	12,100	High	\$1.02	0%	
wigs for cancer patients	3,600	High	\$1.96	0%	
natural looking wigs	880	High	\$0.90	0%	
cheap wigs	6,600	High	\$0.81	0%	

Since we will be using the tool for research purposes select the **“Keyword Ideas”** tab. Once you do this the results will be presented to you. If you need to further refine the results look

in the upper left side of the page to the section titled *Targeting*


here you can search by the following:

- The geographic location for your research
- The language
- The basis for your research (Google or Google and search partners)
- Negative keywords



When moving to the left side of your screen, you'll see the *Customize your search* section. Use *Keyword filters* to set a minimum for the *Avg. monthly searches*, I always look for at least 1500 searches per month.


Customize your search [?](#)

Keyword filters 

Avg. monthly searches ≥ 0


Avg. CPC $\geq \$0.00$

Ad impr. share $\geq 0\%$

Keyword options 

Hide keywords in my account

Hide keywords in my plan

Include/Exclude 

You will then be given the approximate number of times that your keyword is being searched in a given month.

Remember anything over 1500 searches per month is usually a strong indicator that there is a market for your product.

This by no means is an all-inclusive list of tools available, but these are the tools that I have used to successfully launch my six figure ecommerce business within a year.

If you have other tools that you have used and they are effective for you then by all means continue to use them.

The purpose of this section is to make sure that you understand the profitability and risk of entering into a new niche before you invest time, money and effort into building an e-commerce business.

Although, it might seem overwhelming to work through so many steps to find a good niche, it is well worth it. As you will have the security in knowing that you have given your new business venture the best opportunity for success.

I have read on countless forums all over the Internet how people skip this section and they end up wondering why they haven't been able to make money.

Isn't your financial well-being worth investing a little time to ensure that you pick a niche that will bring in real money worth it?

To Recap: What To Look For In Good Niche To Enter Into

1. Look at the top competitors for your chosen niche using a search engine. (Better to not enter into a niche that has big retailers such as Walmart, Amazon, etc. listed heavily in the top 10 organic listings.)
2. Use tools to gauge how strong the completion is.
3. Use keyword planner and choose keyword phrases that have at least 1500 searches per month.

Chapter 4: How to Find Suppliers

Now that you have found a niche it is time to find high quality suppliers for the products.

The great news is that there are tons of suppliers willing to drop-ship the products directly to your customers. Or, if you are comfortable and have the accommodations then holding some inventory is another good option.

One of the simplest methods for finding a supplier is to take your chosen niche topic followed by words such as “drop shipper” “wholesale”, “supplier”, “drop-shipping” and enter that search phrase into a search engine of your choice.



**Note On Finding Suppliers: There is a list of suppliers included with the purchase of this guide; the list includes 43 suppliers in several niches.*

You will more than likely find a supplier that carries the

products that you intend to sell in your online store.

The list is just a helpful tool in locating a supplier; I have not used each of these. But, the list will get you started in the right direction if you choose to use them.

As always, do your due diligence to ensure that you are working with a reputable supplier.

There are also tons of suppliers on Alibaba.com I have used them successfully to find suppliers, many of which I have done business with for several years.

However, if you choose a supplier from that site make sure to use PayPal initially for any transactions as not every supplier listed is trustworthy.

I have heard numerous horror stories of people getting ripped

off for several thousand dollars, usually the main theme with each of these stories is that they used payment methods other than PayPal such as MoneyGram, Western Union, wire transfers, etc.

If the supplier that you are interested in does not accept PayPal as a method of payment, move on to another one that does.

I suggest at using Paypal for your initial orders with the new supplier, once you have established a relationship with the supplier you can begin using other payment methods.

When I started my online store I did a lot of research on potential suppliers; as it was (and still is) very important to find a supplier that would be honest with good business practices.

I remember how excited I was when I thought that I had found the perfect supplier for my first store. After researching the

company website, I noticed that they claimed to be located in Brazil.

I figured I would still give them a shot as they offered the exact products I was looking for at a great price. However, on their website the phone number listed had an area code associated with New York.

“No biggie” I initially thought as maybe they have a satellite office in the states for US buyers. I decided that I would give them a call to verify what I saw on the website and to get a general idea of their business.

But, to my surprise when I contacted the number the person answering the phone did not greet me with the business name instead they answered with a simple “Hello”.

Of course, I was shocked and immediately asked the person on the phone if they were XYZ Company to which they replied “Yes”.

After speaking with them a few times (after our initial conversation) I decided that I would still like to place a test order for their products, as prices were really appealing and a lot less expensive than the other suppliers that I found.

Unfortunately, they only accepted MoneyGram/Western Union and I was not comfortable with that. I then decided to perform a little more investigation with help from the Internet (using the company name as a reference when searching).

To my disbelief I found several complaints from customers stating that they never received their merchandise from XYZ Company after making the payment.

Others claimed that they only received partial orders from the supplier. Needless to say, I did not move forward with that company.

This is the reason that it is very important to make sure that you perform research to make verify the company you are planning to establish a business relationship with is reputable.

Don't be afraid to contact the supplier via phone to get an idea of their business operations, this will also show potential suppliers that you are a serious business owner.

Additional Key Points To Consider When Choosing A Supplier:

1. Order samples from at least two different suppliers to gauge the wait time, communication and product quality.



**Note: If your emails go unanswered or if it takes several days for the supplier to respond, move on to the next supplier as this lack of communication is more than likely a key indicator of what the relationship would be like if you chose to do business with them.*

The key to remember is that you need responsive, quality suppliers as this is the backbone of your business being successful.

Choosing the wrong supplier can cause numerous problems such as delays in shipping, back-ordered items, etc. and all of this equates to unhappy customers which means you will lose money.

Although this is not a perfect method for picking out a supplier, if you pay attention to the little clues in the beginning

you could end up saving yourself a lot of headache down the road.

2. Once you receive the products if possible take your own photos for inclusion on your website.

If the supplier has stock photos you can also use those; but keep in mind that everyone else selling the products will also be using those exact photos on their website.

Taking your own photos using a high quality camera will help set your ecommerce store apart from the others stores selling the same item as you.

If you decide to take your own photos make sure to use a neutral background (think basic white) that can easily be integrated into your website.

One other thing I would like to mention regarding suppliers is

to not rely on just one. It can be disastrous to have one supplier and have something unfortunate happen to them.

Such as heaven forbid.....the supplier going out of business. But, this is real life and things like this can happen.

If you are not prepared, this could completely ruin your business. For this reason once you find one solid supplier you should begin looking for another one.

By doing this you will be less dependent on one. Upon starting my online store I had just one quality supplier and they have been a supplier for me for years.

Several months after my store launched I found a second supplier to work with. With the new supplier I also went through the same process to ensure that they would be a good match for my needs.

I now use the second supplier as a back-up to my primary supplier. Ultimately, the moral of the story is **“Don't keep all your eggs in one basket!”**

Chapter 5: Dropshipping V/S Holding Inventory

Drop shipping is an excellent way to go with running your e-commerce store as you will not need to keep any inventory on hand.

Drop shipping involves you partnering with a supplier to sell their products on your website. Then you would forward all orders to the supplier and they would fill and ship the orders out to your customers.

This is all done seamlessly and the customer will never know that the product did not ship from your store. In addition, your supplier will also handle the returns or defects that that might come up, which will leave you with more free time.

Some dropshippers will also include your company name on the packaging when shipping the orders to your customers.

One of the biggest advantages to dropshipping is that you don't have to deal with the physical shipping of the end product to your customer.

Holding Inventory

After you have been in business you might notice that some items tend to sell really well, if so then it is best to keep that item(s) in stock by holding some inventory. Don't worry, I promise that holding inventory in your home office or garage is not as big of a nuisance as you might think; especially if your products are relatively small.

I have a special closet in my home that I use to store all of the hot selling products from my websites. By holding some inventory I receive a discount for ordering larger quantities and I am confident that you can also negotiate a discount with your supplier.

The entire process for shipping your items out to the end customer is also relatively easy (my teenager helps me with packaging on occasion for a little extra allowance, so if you have older children this will be a good bonding experience—plus cheap labor!)

In order to get started you will only need a few shipping supplies such as envelopes/packing peanuts. For all my shipping purposes I use the USPS (United States Postal Service) at www.usps.com

They offer economical prices, convenience plus they will deliver the packaging supplies to your home for no cost! In addition, you can schedule pick-up for your packages which means you don't have to leave your home to ship them out.

Another benefit to shipping the products yourself is that you will have more control over the packaging; this is great if you decide to include gifts or other freebies for your customers.

There are also some times when dropshipping will prove to be the better option for your products, here are a few things to consider to help you determine which course of action will be best for your specific situation.

Things To Consider When Deciding To Hold Inventory Or Dropship

- How large is the product--will you need a large space to hold it? (Might be easier to drop-ship the product instead of holding inventory.)
- Will you receive a bigger discount by holding the product in stock and ordering the quantity up front?
- Is the product perishable? (if so dropshipping is the easiest way to go.)
- Is the product one that is updated frequently?--You don't want to get stuck with the old model.

- How much does the product weigh?

After performing an evaluation of your business needs you might find that a combination of both drop-shipping and holding inventory will be best.

Only you can determine what the best method will be for your store. I do a combination of both as I receive a discount for ordering larger quantities all at once in addition, I like to keep the most popular items in stock for quick shipment to my customers.

Chapter 6: Setting Up Your E-Commerce Store

At this point we have accomplished the following:

1. Identified a buying niche, it gets a decent amount of searches per month. (at least 1500 searches per month when using Google Keyword Planner) and the other stores listed in the search results do not look extremely competitive.
2. Sourced products that we can sell on our website for a profit.
3. Have photos that we can upload to our website once it is ready.

The next step in the process is to find a domain name. I recommend against using your company name for the domain name as you lose valuable SEO benefits.

With my first e-commerce store I used the company name as the domain name. In hindsight it would have been more effective if I had used my main keyword as the domain name (or some variation of it).

With that being said, it is useful to use your company name if you are focused on building a big brand. For our purposes, I suggest sticking with using the main keyword (niche) for your domain name.

For example, in keeping with our synthetic toupee niche we could set up the domain name synthetictoupeeshop.com, synthetictoupees.com or buysynthetictoupees.com.

I usually add the ending of store, shop, source or even the word online to the end of the keyword phrase when I am not able to get the exact top level domain name of the keyword phrase plus the .com extension.

I have also found that both .com and .net extensions work for stores. But, my first choice is always the .com as this extension immediately lets the searcher know that your site is an online store where they can find the product they are looking for.

Also, when securing the domain name stay away from .org .biz as most online shoppers associate the .com with a reputable website.

I always purchase my domain name from [Go Daddy](#) (and usually with a little digging, I even find a coupon code for a discount!)

Chapter 7: Selecting a Platform

There are many platforms available to choose from when it comes to launching your online store.

Some of the more popular platforms are [OsCommerce](#), [Magento](#), [Shopify](#) and [Wordpress](#) has many themes and plugins available that allow it to be customized into a full blown e-commerce site.

Initially, I almost chose Wordpress for my platform as it was very user friendly and I had already launched a blog using it.

However, after much research I found that [BigCommerce](#) offered the best opportunity for growth and ease of use for my needs.

In addition, it was easy for a “non-techie” person to use and get up and running very quickly. BC also offers a variety of themes that were easily customizable and they have great video tutorials to walk through almost any design feature that I wanted to implement.

It was almost like having a personal consultant at my fingertips to help with any questions. The customer support has also been very helpful, I never felt uneasy or apprehensive regarding calling them to ask questions.

For instance, I recall an incident where my images were not formatting correctly and the representative re-sized them for me while I was on the phone to make sure that they were correct.

They also have several plug-ins that can be incorporated into the store for added functionality. Many of the plug-ins offer substantial benefits in terms of making sure your store is

visible to as many potential customers as possible.

BigCommerce will also automatically feed your products to Google Shopping. However, in order to reap the full benefits of this feature you will need to set up a Product Listing Ads in AdWords.

On top of the excellent service, they also offer a free 15 day trial. During the trial you will be able to test drive the back-end as well as the themes to find out if it will be a good fit for you.

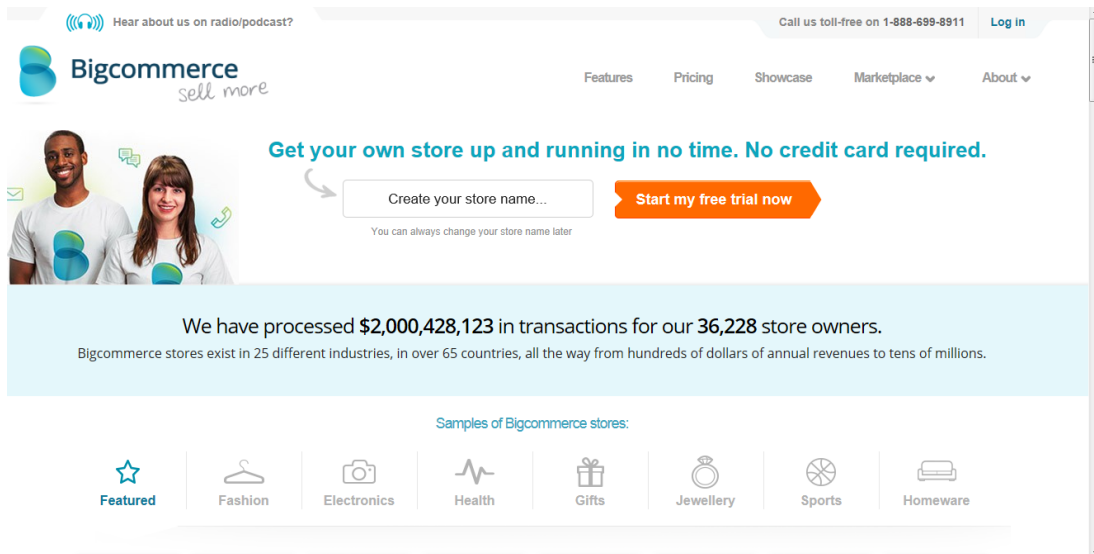
I was also impressed with their SEO commitment and my site has done very well in the Search engines from the initial launch of the site.

Big Commerce also uses the same military-grade security and encryption that the big banks use, and they average a 99.99% uptime. (Which is highly important for any online store) for these reasons I can recommend it as a solid platform.

If you decide to start your store with the BC platform, then the basic plan will be a good place to start, as you can always upgrade later as your store grows.

The great news is that setting up your store with BigCommerce is very, very easy and the following will give you a quick overview of how to sign up for a new account:

1. Visit www.bigcommerce.com to sign up for a free trial, enter in your store name. (Don't worry you can change this later after your trial has ended.)



2. After you sign up for the free trial you will be presented with a screen requesting more information regarding your new store.

Great, we just need a few details before we get started:

What will you sell?

Where are you based?

Your First and Last name

Your Email address

Create password

Your Phone number

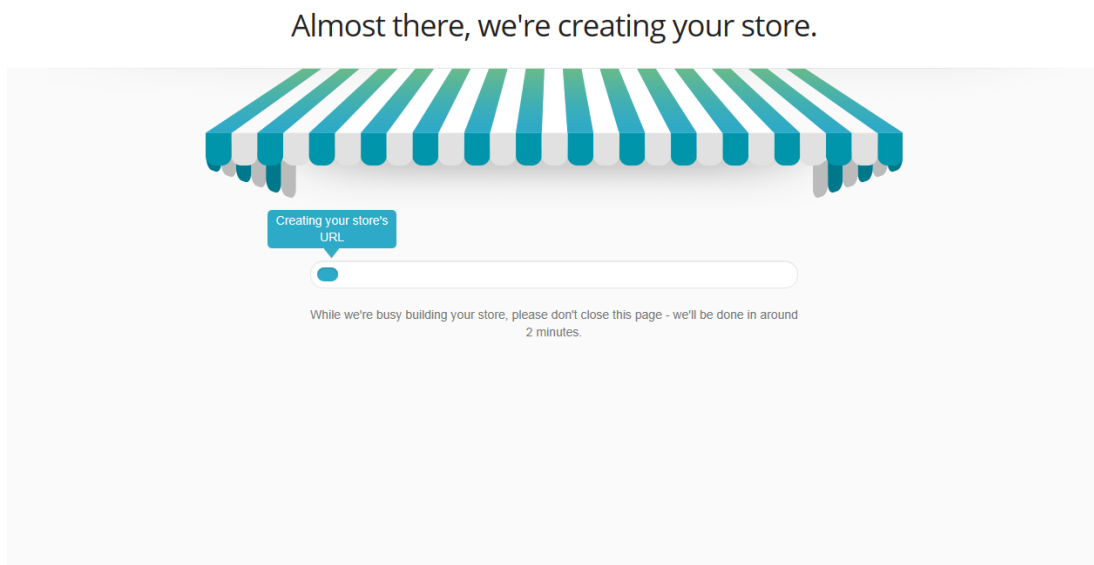
Optional, but appreciated

By clicking below to signup, you're agreeing to our [terms of service](#).

Just fill in the information to the best of your ability, and click

on the “Create my store now” button.

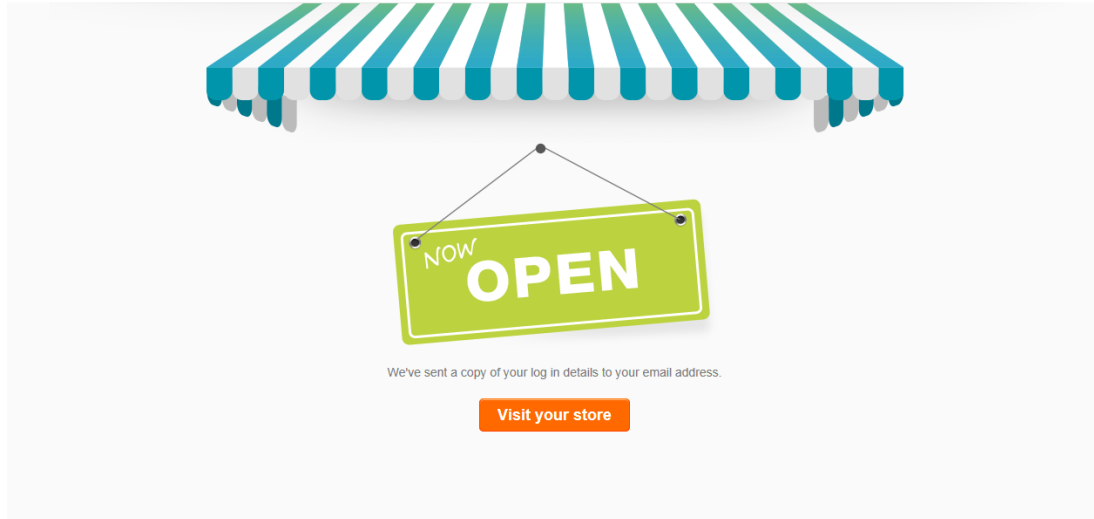
3. After you fill in the information requested from the previous screen you will then see a screen similar to this one stating that your store is being prepared for you.



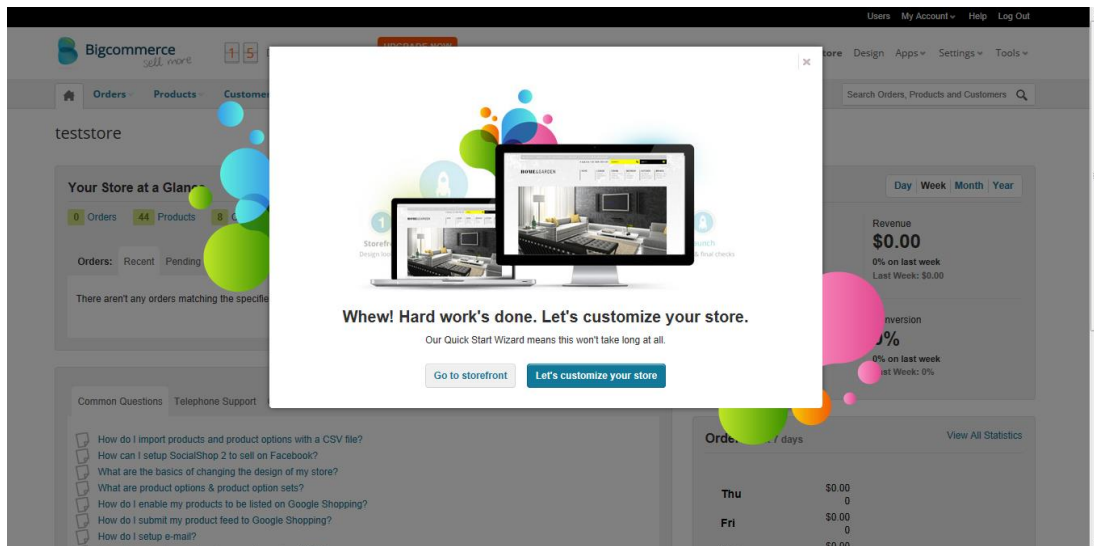
4. After your URL is set up, and the other required information populated through the BigCommerce system, the next screen shows you that the backend for the store is set up and ready for you to customize.

Big Commerce will also email you the login credentials for your new website, so make sure to use a valid email address.

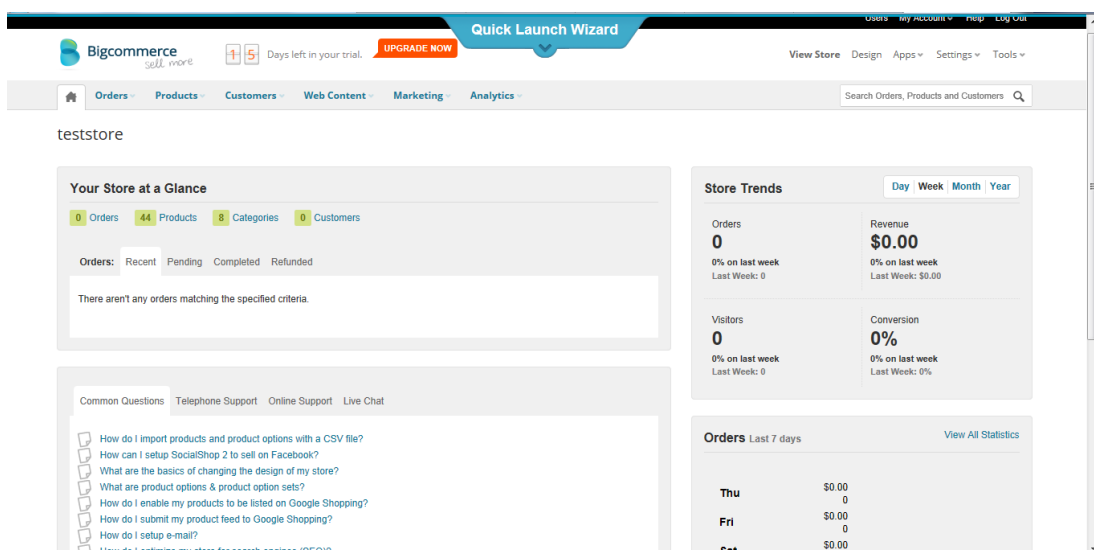
Yay, your store is ready!



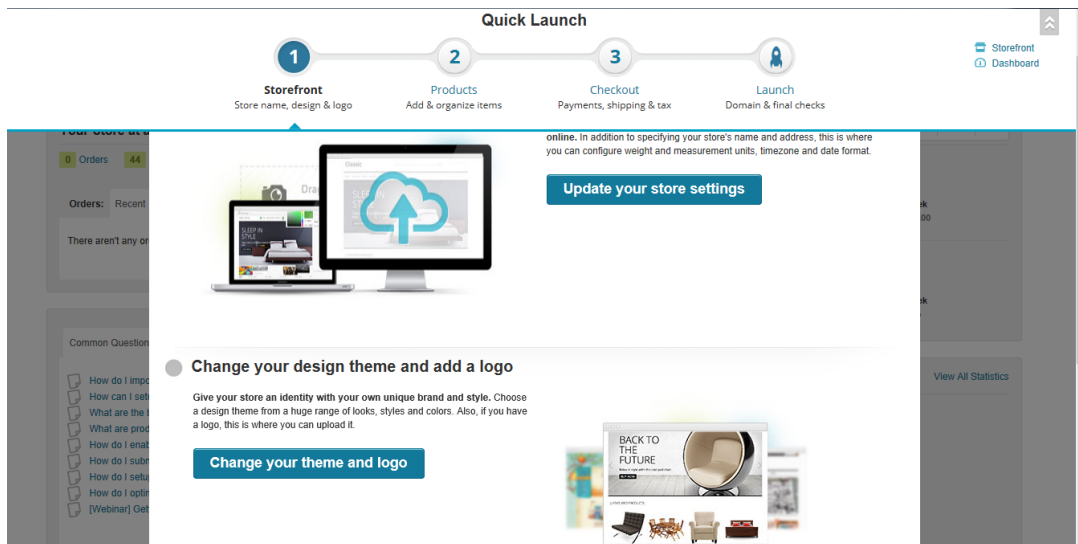
5. You are now inside of the BC backend and ready to start customizing your new store. As you will see the quick launch wizard makes getting everything set up a breeze!



6. Here is a quick shot of what the interface looks like, and above in the middle of the screen there is a blue button titled “Quick Launch Wizard” which you can click on at any time to go through the store set-up (customization) process.



7. Here is an additional view of the steps in the quick launch wizard that will need to be completed. Simply follow the step-by-step directions included in each individual section (4 sections including storefront, products, checkout & launch.)



Setting up the store following BC proven methods will ensure that your store is set up properly.

The entire process of setting up the platform is really quite

easy and as you will see you can begin to set up the framework for what will be your new store with just a few easy steps.

With that being said if you do further research on some of the other platforms available and find that they are a better fit, then by all means give them a try. [BigCommerce](#) is not the end all be all to the success of your online store.

Now get started securing your platform, you can do it!

Once you have found a platform for your store it is now time for you to start the next phase of your ecommerce store.

Don't worry you are over half way through and almost ready for the launch of your store!

When I was preparing for this step I remember feeling

overwhelmed as it seemed like there were so many steps to take to get the store set up.

Being that I had never done something like this before my initial reaction was to think “What did I get myself into?”

Nevertheless, I was determined to stick through and get my store launched.

After going through the process I realized that it was really quite easy and I had my store completely finished in less than a week (working only a few hours a day).

Do not become discouraged by all the steps that have to be taken, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just take it one step at a time and you will look back and think that this entire process was really quite simple.

Chapter 8: How To Write Product Descriptions That Convert (Think WIIFM?)

By now you should have photos (either from your supplier or the photos that you have taken on your own) that you will be uploading to your store. Now we need to begin writing descriptions for our products.

First let me add that we do not want to just go to a competitor's site and copy their descriptions verbatim, instead we want to make sure that our descriptions are unique.

However, it is perfectly ok to look at your competitors descriptions as a reference on how your product descriptions should flow.

Doing this small amount of research is a great way to make sure you are not missing any features or benefits when you begin to write your own descriptions.

When coming up with product descriptions, think of interesting or unique features of the product. Can you think of a need that can be solved using this product?

If so, mention it in the description. Just because it is obvious to you does not mean that your customers will know this!

While you are writing the descriptions keep your customers in mind and ask (WIIFM?) *What's In It For Me?* Doing so will help you to remember key points that will appeal to your buyers.

Instead of simply stating “This synthetic toupee comes in a variety of colors”...You could say “This synthetic toupee comes in a variety of colors making it easier to ensure you get the perfect match!”

One sentence sounds like a blanket statement, but the second sentence really lets your potential customers know that they will get the perfect toupee for their color needs.

Remember this key point when writing your descriptions and you will see a substantial increase in your sales!

Don't worry you do not have to be an expert writer or have a PhD in literature to write descriptions that compel your visitors to buy.

By using just a little creativity you will be able to formulate descriptions that scream "Buy Me Now"!

Now that you have winning product descriptions it is time to upload your product photos that you either received from the supplier or taken yourself of the product.

Since each platform is different I will not go into detail regarding how to do this. However, if you use BC and you need any help feel free to send me an email at help@onlinestoreempire.com and I will answer any questions you might have.

Chapter 9: Merchant Account/Payment Processor

Since we will need a way to accept payments from our customers, it is imperative that we set up the infrastructure to allow this process to happen seamlessly in the background.

In order for that to happen we need so set up a merchant account, so let's start by defining what a merchant account is:

A merchant account is simply a type of bank account that allows online merchants (you) to accept payment via credit cards and debit cards through your online store from your customers.

In addition to a merchant account provider (required to establish a merchant account) you will also need a payment gateway.

A payment gateway is an e-commerce service that authorizes payments for online retailers (you).

Most merchant account providers have their own payment gateways and others use a third party payment gateway.

The gateway usually consists of a virtual terminal, which allows a merchant to securely login and key in credit card numbers (think phone orders).

Merchants also have the ability to have the website's shopping-cart connect to the gateway allowing for real time processing from the merchant's website.

This entire process is quite easy to set up through BigCommerce and they have their own list of recommend providers to make sure your accounts are set up properly. In

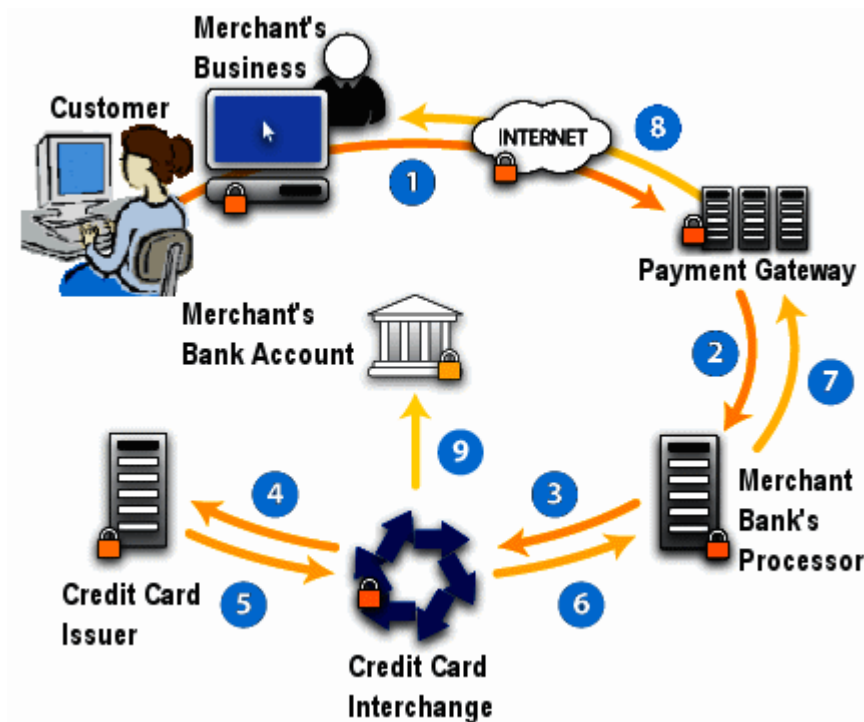
addition, they will set up everything for you which means little to no work required on your end to get everything set up.

If you use a platform other than BigCommerce they should also offer tutorials and further suggestions on setting up the merchant account/payment processors.

What Happens During An E-Commerce Sale?

We've done a lot of talking regarding merchant account and payment processors, but we haven't discussed how this all comes together when a customer makes a purchase on your website.

Below is a representation of what happens when the customer makes a purchase through your online store.



1. Customer checks out the shopping cart, and enters their personal and financial details through your secure website.

2. The secure transaction details are received and then transmitted via a secure connection to a payment gateway service.

3. The payment gateway service securely submits the transaction information to the financial entities that are

responsible for the processing, clearing and settlement of the credit transaction.

4. The Credit Card Network routes the transaction to the Customer's Credit Card Issuing Bank.

If everything checks out correctly and the credit card is clear for purchases the credit card company sends an acknowledgement back to the card processor that the amount requested *can be* transferred.

If the credit card company denies the charge it sends a code back to the credit card processor which will disclose what the problem was.

5. Upon success the credit card processor initiates a funds transfer (settlement request) to the merchant account

company for deposit into the merchant's bank account that it has on record.

Once all funds are cleared, the money is deposited into your business account. It seems like a very drawn out process, however this happens within seconds and the money is usually deposited into your account that day.

Merchant Account Info-Continued

When setting up the merchant account/payment processor a business checking account is usually required as this is where the money from your sales will be deposited.

When I opened my first checking account for the online business it was strictly in my name with a reference to the business name on the account.

I did this partially because the bank that I normally conducted business with did not offer business checking accounts.

My suggestion is that you go ahead and open a business checking account as keeping the money from your business separately from your personal finances will make everything much easier.

Keep in mind that if you decide to set up a merchant account then a credit check will be performed by the merchant. Think of it this way; when the customer makes a purchase on your website using their credit card, the merchant will then deduct that amount from your customer and send it to your bank account.

If later, that customer requests a return or states that the purchase was fraudulent then they will need to re-coup the money from your account to give back to the customer.

The credit check is used as method of determining the likelihood that you are credit worthy. The approval process is usually very quick (I was approved for my merchant account within 24 hours.)

When I initially applied, my online business had no credit history. Therefore, they used my personal information for setting up the account.

However, do not be discouraged if you do not have good credit as there are many types of programs for almost every credit type. In addition, we will also discuss other options that do not require a credit check.

Account Fees

With any processor there will be fees associated with the service and the fees can vary significantly based on the volume of sales or average per dollar transaction.

Some trusted companies that many online store owners use for processing payments include the following:

Payleap- www.payleap.com

Authorize.net- www.authorize.com

Stripe - <https://stripe.com>

Braintree- <https://braintreepayments.com>

Paypal-www.paypal.com

Google Checkout- <http://checkout.google.com>

We Pay- www.wepay.com

Amazon Payments www.payments.com/amazon

Third Party Processors-Additional Option

When just starting off online (and if you are worried about the credit issue) it is a good idea to use a third-party processor like PayPal, Google Checkout or Amazon Payments.

A third party processor is basically a payment gateway and merchant account rolled into one. In addition, you can always

switch to a merchant account after you build up your sales volume, which will help you to receive lower transaction rates.

There are numerous other merchant accounts/processors that can be used for your store and you can perform a search using the keyword phrase “merchant account” for more information.

Make sure you do your due diligence and read the terms and conditions of the contract before committing to any processor or merchant!

I know this may seem like an overwhelming step, but don't let this process deter you from launching your online store. It is really quite easy once you get started and I was able to set everything up on my own relatively quickly.

The best thing you can do is start taking action, even if you are feeling a little uneasy about the credit issue. Remember there are options available no matter if you have good or bad credit such as PayPal and Google, so don't let that fear stop you.

The sooner that you take action, the sooner you will be able to achieve your goals to get your store running and make sales!

CHAPTER 10: LAUNCH YOUR NEW STORE TO THE PUBLIC

Launch Store—Congratulations you now have all the fundamental aspects in order to launch your online store.

I will never forget the day that I received my first real order from my website and neither will you. You have worked hard to get to this point and you should be proud of your accomplishments!

In the next pages I will give you more assistance to help promote your new site to ensure that you begin making sales quickly.

Chapter 11: Promote Your Site With Traffic Generation Strategies That Work

You have finally reached the point that your store is ready for launch, it is very important that you begin to promote your new store to get it in front of as many people as possible.

Now you have this wonderful site set up but you need to promote it...How you might ask? Well there are a few ways (both paid and free) that can be implemented.

Press Release- I have had great success with press releases; but make sure that the news you put out is newsworthy! The launch of your new site is definitely newsworthy as well as any new products or services.

I have used both paid and free press release services, without a doubt I have received the most back links, Google news inclusions and traffic from the paid press release service, specifically PRWeb.

Since there are so many new websites popping up on the Internet daily, you need to give your store the best advantage as possible.

It really builds the credibility of your store if you use a paid press release as it has the highest probability of getting picked up by the media.

Other Press Release Sites:

[24-7 Press Release](#)

[E-Releases Press Release Service](#)

As stated, press releases have been one of the most effective promotional tools that I have used for my online stores.

When formatting your release make sure that it is not overly-promotional but one that compels the user to read the press release and then click over to your site.

It also helps if you include a coupon code or promotional discount to entice more customers to click over to your site.

A. Social Media- Make sure you set up the social profiles for your new store. Once you have those establish hold a give-away for the initial store launch.

These types of giveaways can be done on almost every social site including YouTube, Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter.

People love FREE stuff, and this incentive is an awesome way to create buzz about your product and website.

C. Paid Advertising (PPC) I have had mixed reviews regarding Pay Per Click advertising. When I initially began advertising I started with Google Adwords, and spent nearly \$20,000 my first year on advertising.

I set my spend at \$50 a day initially as my goal was to attract new customers as quickly as possible. Since my profit margin from selling one item was from \$55-\$70, I knew that just one sale a day would cover my advertising costs.

Although my store was able to do six figures that first year; I still wanted to explore other options to reduce those advertising cost but still make sales.

I was able to cut that spend in half by my second year as I began to focus more on Facebook ads. I found that with Facebook ads I was able to keep the cost very low (I spend half the amount I spent with Google with the same results (sales, new customers, etc.)

For that reason I highly suggest Facebook advertising as a method of reaching new customers. In addition to the relatively low CPM (Cost per Impressions) and CPC (Cost Per Click).

I was also able to further break down my targeting and reach customers that had the best possibility of converting into

customers or even liking my new Facebook page. Twitter also has a new PPC model; however I have not had the opportunity to try that out as of now.

Of course, there are several other paid advertising platforms available. But, in the beginning my goal was to keep things simple as I did not have a lot of time to keep up with campaigns from several different platforms.

I suggest that you keep it small in the beginning, perhaps by testing out one or two platforms. You can always go back and modify your daily limit or campaign spend.

This allows you the opportunity to test our different ads, images and text until you find the one that provides the best response.

D. Guest Posting On Blog Sites

There are tons of blogs out there with good Page Rank that are will be in your chosen niche that allow for guest posting.

Most blog owners are constantly looking for quality content and this is a perfect opportunity for both you and them!

To find blogs in your chosen niche you can set up a Google Alert. <http://www.google.com/alerts> Signing up for this service is completely free.

Just type in the niche that you are in and the service will send you the latest blog post/news and information related to your topic. You can also set up the frequency of these alerts.

It is also a good idea to set up an alert for your store URL (domain name) to find out when any news regarding your store is posted on the web.

E. Videos

Let's face it, the search engines love videos and so do your potential customers. A short video to promote your new store with photos showcasing your products is an excellent way to get started using video.

Don't be overwhelmed as you do not have to make super extravagant videos. Just simple photos with a description and your website URL will be fine.

My first video was simply the photos of my products, with background music and a link back to the website.

That small video received over 1400 views with more than half of viewers clicking over to my website and making a purchase. To top that this video is still bringing in customers to this day!

The most important thing to remember is to just get a video out there. You can always make better videos after your store is producing a profit.

In addition, you can offer your products for free to You Tubers that have a solid following in a niche that is somewhat similar to the products you will be offering in your store.

Usually these people will have a loyal base of fans that are eager to purchase a new product if it comes with a recommendation from someone that they trust.

I have offered my products for free to several people that have active YouTube accounts with a large following. I have had an excellent response back as most are eager to create new videos to provide their fan base reviews on hot products.

Sure, you will have to cough up a little more money as you will be paying for the products yourself. But, the return on your investment should be more than double. This is a very powerful marketing strategy that works, and the more videos the better for your sales!

Chapter 12: My Take On SEO For E-Commerce Stores

So many people become obsessed with SEO (Search Engine Optimization) in a quest to get their store to rank in the top of the search engines.

Let's face it things would be great if our site was prominently listed in the top spots for our chosen keyword phrase. But, for this to happen (and if it does) it usually takes time.

One of the best ways to ensure that you give your site the best chances of reaching a prominent spot in the search engine rankings in my experience has been to choose a solid platform.

From my research, I find that most sites that are not set up using a full blown e-commerce system will not rank as well as on that is.

I'm not saying that you should not use Wordpress to launch your sites, or that if you did you are destined to never rank highly. But, what I am saying is that in my experience for ecommerce they do not rank well.

I have thought about this long and hard and have come to the conclusion that it might be that since Wordpress sites are generally used for blogging, etc. that the search engines might not place as much importance on them as compared to another site that is using a full e-commerce platform.

Ultimately, the choice is yours and I am confident that you will still see success using the methods in the guide regardless of your chosen platform.

Additional Tips To Help With Your Rankings

1. Use the keyword phrase (niche phrase) throughout your product descriptions at least 3 times.

2. Include your product name/keyword phrase (niche) in the domain name for your store.

3. Ensure that your product descriptions include the keyword phrase at least 3 times. You can also bold the keyword phrase and even find ways to underline the phrase in the descriptions to make them stand out for the bots that will be crawling your website.

4. Sign up for a google webmaster tools account at www.google.com/webmasters/tools/. This is a free service, which will provide you with valuable feedback regarding any problems that the Google bots encounter when crawling your website.

Webmaster tools will also provide insight on the visibility of your store online. In addition, it will also give some actionable steps that can be implemented to improve the visibility of the store in the search engines.

5. LinkBuilding: Even with all the Google updates the value of good quality links are still very important. I have been able to naturally acquire links, from videos, blog posts and social media.

With each update from Google my sites rankings remain consistently in the top of the results. I suggest that you focus on building a more natural link profile with a combination of links.

By following the promotion strategies outlined in Chapter 11, you will also benefit by acquiring natural links to your site. Search engines love the organic buzz created when using these methods.

All of this will help to get your store noticed in the search engines, which will ultimately lead to higher rankings and more sales.

Chapter 13: Beyond The Basics, What You Can Do To Make Your Store Stand Out.

The Baymard Institute reports that the average online store will see 2 out of 3 customers abandon their shopping carts. That is a huge loss in potential revenue, however there are a few things you can do to decrease this amount significantly.

Customer Service

I can't tell you how many times I have won over a customer that was on the fence regarding purchasing from my site by providing outstanding customer service alone.

This is one very crucial area that you can use to outshine your competitors, especially the larger stores as they will not be able to offer the personalized service that you will.

Toll Free Number

In order to establish your online store as a serious company then it is important to add a toll free number to your site that is prominently displayed on the homepage.

Something as simple as having a phone number will give your customer confidence, as they know that any time they need to (within your business hours) that they can pick up the phone and speak directly to someone for any questions.

Many of my customers have told me that they keep coming back to purchase from me because they know they will actually be able to speak with a live person.

The phone service that I have used consistently for my 1-800 telephone numbers is Evoice (www.evoice.com) They offer monthly plans and they also offer call forwarding of calls to cell phones.

Trust Badges

Adding a few trust badges to your site can increase your conversions by over 50%....what are trust badges you might ask?

They are seals that pretty much vouch that your company/website is safe and verified.

I have a variety of trust badges prominently displayed on each of my ecommerce sites that are from McAfee, GeoTrust and even Paypal.

In order to get a seal for use on your store be sure to visit the website for the company (such as McAfee, GeoTrust, etc.) to find out what is required to qualify your site for use of the seal.

Below are some examples of the various trust badges available, you do not have to have everyone of these images added to your site but a mix of 2-3 is good start.



Including the major credit card logos on your website is a great way to build trust with your customers, so make sure to include them on your site as well.



Chat Functionality

Chat is an awesome tool when used properly, as your potential customers are already on your website and are interested in your products.

Having the chat feature gives you the opportunity to speak with potential customers when they are most receptive to

taking up your offer/product/etc. There are numerous chat programs out there and they can be easily integrated into your website.

In addition, if you chose BigCommerce as your platform there are several plug-ins available from companies such as Olark that are easily integrated into the store.

Mobile Capability

According to a recent *Skava Consumer Mobile Shopping Survey* “88% of Americans who shop on their smartphones experience negative issues, with 30% never coming back after an undesirable user experience.”

To add to that statistic, more than 1 in 5 visits to e-commerce stores are coming from smartphones and tablets, according to Monetate’s Q1 2013 Ecommerce Quarterly.

What this means for you as an ecommerce store owner is that it is imperative that your shoppers have a pleasant mobile shopping experience.

If you chose BigCommerce as your platform, they also include a mobile optimized version of your website included with your plan.

In order to verify this you can click on 'Design' then select the Mobile option within your admin panel.

In addition, most other platforms should also come with mobile capability for your new store, check the settings to ensure this is correct for your situation.

It is also important to visit your store on a various mobile devices to see how your site looks, and navigates.

Do not automatically assume that the store will look identical to what you see on a normal PC or laptop, as chances are it will not.

Privacy Policy

Even though many don't read it, a clearly visible privacy policy can instill confidence that your company/website is concerned about protecting user data.

Security is a top concern for online shoppers, and having this information clearly displayed will lead to a higher sense of trust for the site.

You don't have to create a professional privacy policy however, something that discusses how you protect your customer's information and whether or not you keep this information on file is good start.

For more detailed information on what to include on your privacy policy page do a Google search for an example of other privacy policies that store owners have on their sites. I found the wording for my privacy policy by googling the words

“privacy policy’ and then clicking through to the ecommerce stores in the listings. I did not copy their privacy policy verbatim, however I was able to structure my own based on the content found.

Perform a Test or “Dummy” Order

Once your store is live, make sure you run through a test order to verify that everything is functioning correctly. You can even enlist a friend to help with placing a test order on the site so that they can give you feedback on the process.

Believe me, you don’t want to miss out on potential sales due to some type of technical glitch that could have been avoided.

When I launched my first store; I failed to test it properly and later saw that I was receiving orders. To my surprise the orders were coming through with no shipping cost calculated into the orders.

To make matters even worse, I received international orders and those orders were calculated with no shipping fee!

After running a few tests on my own, I found out that I had not enabled the shipping option that calculated fee. It was as simple as checking a button to enable it, however it was a tiny oversight on my part that resulted in me paying the shipping fee instead of my customers.

Conclusion: You've Done It!!

There you have it, this is the process that I went through to launch every e-commerce store no matter the niche or product.

By following the steps outlined in this guide you will be able to:

1. Quickly launch an ecommerce store (even with no coding or programming skills!)
2. Produce a lasting asset that can bring revenues for many years to come.
3. Create an ecommerce site that has the highest probability for success!

Personal Message from Jennifer Bradley:

Now that you know the steps it is time for you to take some action to get your store started, the first step is to print out the quickstart guide graphic that is included with this guide.

Having the steps in front of you will help you to stay focused and on track, so don't hesitate get it done right now! You can also visit the Online Store Empire website at www.onlinestoreempire.com to connect with me or if you have any questions.