

# Planning Ecommerce

A Guide to the Essential Elements of a Web Store Project



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## PLANNING ECOMMERCE

This guide will serve as an outline of topics that you need to consider as you plan to implement a new or upgraded ecommerce solution. Experience has shown that the 100 questions in this guide come up in most ecommerce projects. Some topics are important to you and others are not, and we need to understand key issues in order to channel actions in the right direction.

## EVALUATE YOUR SITUATION

### WHAT IS THE STATUS OF YOUR CURRENT WEB SITE?

Start by taking stock of your current situation.

- What is going on right now?
- How would you characterize your current web site?

#### General Status

1. How do you take orders today?
2. What impression do your customers, suppliers, and employees get from your current site?
  - a. Does your web site make you look larger or smaller than you actually are?
  - b. Is your web site an authoritative best place to get information about your products today?
3. Is the information on your current site up-to-date?
  - a. What is the last date information was posted to your site?
  - b. What is the copyright year at the bottom of your web site?
4. Do you take orders on-line?
  - a. Do you take retail orders?
  - b. Do you take wholesale orders?
  - c. Do you take orders from customer service or sales representatives?

#### Competitive Status

1. Do your competitors take orders on-line?
2. Do some of your customers order on-line from your competitors?
3. What information do your customers want on-line?
4. Do customers in the industries you serve have access to ordering on-line?

#### Challenges

1. What challenges do face with your web technology?
  - a. Do you have to maintain product, inventory, or customer information in two places?
  - b. Does it take too much time to keep the web site current?
  - c. Are you manually entering orders into your accounting system?
  - d. Are orders you take today accurate?
2. Are you faced with budget constraints?
3. Do you know who is in charge of your web presence?
4. Is your web site part of your overall marketing plan?

5. Do your agreements with your vendors and customers allow you to sell on the Internet?
  - a. Will you be shipping outside your assigned territory?
  - b. Will you be selling into your reselling customers' territories?
  - c. How will your vendors or customers view your website?

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## WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO?

Take a quick survey of the information, data, and human resources that you have.

You want to leverage this information for the new site.

### Product and Customer Data

1. Do you have product information in your accounting system?
2. Are prices calculated correctly in your accounting system?
3. Do different customers automatically get different prices in your accounting system?
4. Are the product descriptions in your accounting system clear and understandable?

### Pictures

1. Do you have product images?
  - a. Are the picture files named consistently with the item code as the name?
  - b. Are images uniform in appearance?
  - c. Are images appealing and do they represent your products favorably?
  - d. Do some items require multiple views?
2. Do you have supporting pictures?
  - a. Do you have quality pictures of your products in use?
  - b. Do you have pictures of your plant?
  - c. Do you have professional head shots of any staff or customers?
3. Do your suppliers have high-quality product images available?

### Talent

1. Do you have staff with web skills?
2. Do you have staff that can write short copy?
3. Do you have staff that use web tools?
4. Do you have staff that can take product pictures and prepare them for presentation on-line?
5. Do you have contractors with web skills that you enjoy working with?

### Networking

Think about contacts that you have.

1. Do you have a parent or partner company with web resources?
2. Do you have an association with web experience?
3. Do you have a "friendly" competitor that will share their web experiences?

## ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS & OBJECTIVES

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### GOALS

Does your company have a strategic Internet goal?

If not, could you come up with one?

Examples of strong goals our customers have articulated:

- We want to be the number one source of information about our particular type of product.
- We want the top on-line market share for our industry and distribution.

Examples of more achievable goals:

- We want our web site to be the “go to” destination for our product information for our customers.
- We want to extend our customer service capabilities to 24 hours a day to seven days a week.

Think of a couple of goals that will focus your web initiative to move in the direction you have in mind.

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### OBJECTIVES

Objectives are a little more specific.

Make your objectives time-bound, measurable, and achievable.

- We will have pictures and detail descriptions for the products that generate the top 50% of our sales when we launch the site.
- Come up with measurable, time-bound objectives for your web project.
- The new web store will take \$100,000 in wholesale orders from existing customers in the first six months.
- We will list 60% of our current products for sale on line within one year.
- How many of your current customers would place an order on-line in the first year?

## DOCUMENT KEY BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

Think of a couple of goals that will focus your web initiative to move in the direction you have in mind.

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### TARGET AUDIENCE

Who will use your web store?

1. Current customers?
2. New customers?
3. Retail customers?
4. Wholesale customers?
5. Sales representatives?
6. Brokers or outside sales representatives?
7. Will the site be public?
8. Will all or part of the site be private?

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### HOW DO YOU NEED TO CALCULATE AN ORDER?

The answers to these questions will define the features that you need configured for your web site.

1. How do you calculate a price for a specific item for a specific customer?
2. Do you charge sales tax for some or all items and for some or all customers?
3. Do you have a minimum order size?
4. Do you pay commissions on orders taken over the Internet?
5. Do you offer promotions?
  - a. Buy one, get one free?
  - b. Buy one, get dollars or percent off?
  - c. Buy one; get a free item of a certain type?
  - d. Free shipping promotions?
6. How do you calculate shipping?
  - a. Do you provide a firm shipping charge when the order is taken?
  - b. What shippers do you use?
  - c. Do you ship to multiple countries?

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### HOW WILL WEB ORDERS DIFFER FROM YOUR OTHER BUSINESS?

Web order fulfillment may be quite different than your other orders. Both the warehouse and the accounting staff are affected when your web site is successful. And, your physical plant will also be affected. These questions will help you analyze these needs.

1. What is the cost of fulfilling an order with your current process?
2. Do you need to change your current processes or add a new process for web orders?
3. Will you be able to fulfill many smaller orders than you currently fulfill?

## LAUNCHING THE NEW WEB STORE

Once built, you have to consider the best way to introduce the site and promote it.

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### WEB STORE INTRODUCTION

Is there a deadline that must be met within the next 12 months?

1. Will the web site be referenced at a trade show or conference?
2. Will the new web site be previewed or launched at a company meeting or sales meeting?
3. Do you need to have the site ready for your selling season?

How will new users gain access to your site?

1. Will you allow new customers to register?
2. Can newly registered customers order immediately?
3. Will you allow existing customers to “activate” accounts on-line without having to create a new account?
4. Do you want to have a “beta” test where a small number of customers use the store first?
5. Do you want to introduce the store to groups or classes of customers?
6. How do you want to inform current staff and salespersons about the new store?

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### MARKETING THE SITE

How will you support the site?

1. Do you plan to promote the site with SEO (Search Engine Optimization)?
  - a. What key words do you want to find your site on Google?
  - b. Do you want to pay for key words (Ad Words)?
  - c. Do you want to have a high “organic” search result?
  - d. What key words find your competitor’s web site?
2. Do you plan to offer an opt-in email newsletter?
  - a. Do you have email addresses for your current customers?
  - b. Do you have a newsletter today?

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### THE NEXT PHASE

It is good to think about the steps that might occur after your site is up and running.

- Do you plan to make notes for phase 2 as you complete phase 1?
  - Did you record wish list features that you could not fund in phase 1?
  - Do you need to budget phase 2 as part of the company budget?
- What do the results of your measurements tell you as you reach the milestones?