The HostGator Guide to Starting Your Online Store
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Introduction

There’s never been an easier time in human history to open a store.

Thanks to the internet, world wide web and the modern miracle of eCommerce, you can set up shop without actually setting up four walls and a roof and lugging products into the empty space. You can reach more people in more places than a local brick-and-mortar shop can on its own. And you can have a business reason to spend more time on social media!

Still, though. Setting up an online store is work, and if you want that work to pay off, you need a plan. From the basic outline of your eCommerce dream to the nuts and bolts of business permits, eCommerce platforms and marketing plans, we’re here for you.

Over the next five chapters, we’ll show you how to set up the practical foundations of your business, plan your store, use an eCommerce platform to build your store, create marketing plans and launch your new online business.

Ready? Let’s get started!
Chapter 1: Get Your New-Business Ducks in a Row

Even the most unique online businesses have a few things in common—like legal and business plan stuff.

Tackling these things first may seem unappealing compared to the exciting ideas you have for your business. But these are the steps that make your business a business, and everything else will be so much easier if you do these things first.

So, let’s dive in and get all your business ducks swimming in the same direction.

Choose your products

Picking the right products to sell on your eCommerce website is essential to your success.

Even if you’re confident the product you have in mind is an awesome idea, if there’s not a market for it, your business won’t get off the ground. A CB Insights analysis found that 42% of startups that fail do so because they’re trying to sell a product that no one needs. Do some consumer research to make sure there’s an audience that will buy the products you want to sell—or to find other products that will sell.

For physical products, you also need to decide who your supplier will be. If you’re creating a new product, you may need vendors for supplies and assembly. (If your products are digital, like courses or eBooks, you can create them yourself or hire someone to make them for you.)
If you’ll be selling products that already exist, you need to find a wholesaler. You can either order the products to come directly to you—then store, package and ship them yourself. Or you can use drop shipping, and find a reputable company to store inventory and deal with order fulfillment for you.

Do your research

As you decide what you’ll sell and how you’ll get it, study the market and competitors. You want to make sure the market isn’t oversaturated, as that can make it much harder to get customers.

Identify your main competitors and study their websites to learn

- How they price their products
- How they position them
- How they describe them

Check out industry publications in your niche to keep up with trends and issues, like regulations that might affect your business.
Develop your brand and positioning

Understanding the state of the industry will help you figure out how best to position yourself within it. At this stage, you’ll want to develop (or at least start thinking about):

**Your unique value proposition (UVP)** – The line that describes what your online store does and what makes you different from comparable choices. The goal is to be able to sum this up in a sentence. Defining your UVP will help you with many of the steps to come.

**Your buyer personas** – A description of the people most likely to buy your products. Knowing who you’re trying to reach will improve your marketing, since you’ll know who you’re talking to, their priorities, and where they hang out online.

**Your visual branding** – Your logo, color scheme, and the images you’ll use across social media sites. If possible, hire a graphic designer to help you with this part.

**Your brand name** – Go for something short and easy to remember. Check to make sure someone else hasn’t already staked a legal claim on it. And bonus points if the .com is available.

If you have the resources, hiring a marketing consultant or agency to help with branding is worth it. If you’re starting your online store on a tiny budget though, you can learn a lot about branding best practices through online research.
Write a short business plan

A **business plan** will help guide you in your early days of building your online store. It’s how you turn big ideas into specific steps. The research you did in the first few steps will be invaluable to working out all the details of making your business a reality.

Items to cover in your business plan include:

**Your budget** – Work out your anticipated costs for the first year

**Funding sources** – Identify how you intend to cover the costs of your budget. Do you have enough saved, or will you look into loans or investors?

**Timeline** – Create a timeline for each of the steps you still need to complete to get your business started. Give yourself deadlines to help you stay on track.

**Return policy** – Returns are an inevitable (and costly) part of running an eCommerce business, so it’s important to make handling them part of your plan from the outset.

**Shipping policy** – Getting your shipping policy right is a huge part of running an eCommerce store. You need to figure out if you’ll be passing those costs onto customers (which could lose you sales) or building them into your product costs.

**Customer service** – Figure out what channels you’ll offer for support (phone, email, social media, etc.), and whether you’ll hire someone or handle it yourself to start.

Inevitably, your business plan will undergo some changes as you see what works and what doesn’t. But having a plan in place will help guide the process of building your online store.
Decide on your pricing

Pricing will often be part of your business plan. But it’s an important enough step that we’re giving it its own section here.

Pricing can be one of the hardest parts of running any business. If you price too low, you won’t make enough money to break even. If you go too high, you’ll lose sales and won’t break even.

Finding that pricing sweet spot is essential. Start by revisiting your competitor research. Make note of what your competitors are charging and how much range there is between them. This will give you an idea of what your audience expects to spend, and what the market will bear for the types of products you want to start selling.

Now think carefully about how your products and positioning compare to your competitors. If you price higher, can you make a case for why in your marketing? Can you promise higher quality, better customer support, or something else that sets you apart? Competing on value rather than price is a winning formula for many merchants.

Try to avoid pricing on the lowest end of the range, as that will make it harder for you to make a profit. But unless you have a strong differentiator for your brand, you also shouldn’t aim for the high end of the range or people will go with someone else.

Consider how much you’ll need to make to cover the expenses in the budget you created. And for each price point you consider, calculate how much you would need to sell to make a profit.

Cover your legal bases

While opening an eCommerce store brings a lot less liability than a physical storefront does, you still need to make sure you do everything required of you by law to set your business up legitimately. Because laws and requirements differ based on where you live, where your customers will be, and what type of industry you’re in, you should really meet with both a lawyer and an accountant for this step.
They’ll help you figure out details like:

- What business licenses you need to apply for
- What type of business entity to create (e.g., LLC, partnership, S-corporation, etc.)
- What permits you need
- How much sales tax to collect
- Getting a tax ID
- Creating a privacy policy that’s compliant with CCPA and GDPR
- Establishing copyright for products or content you create
- Website accessibility and ADA compliance issues

If you’re trying to keep costs low in the early stages of your business, hiring a lawyer and accountant may seem like a big expense. But they can potentially help you save money and avoid legal trouble, which makes the cost worth it.

**Disclaimer:** Snappy is not a business attorney.

He’ll stick to his area of expertise – websites and online marketing – but the folks over at the Small Business Administration have all the details about setting up the legal aspects of your business such as which permits might apply.

Now we’ll look in more detail at some of the legal bases your business needs to cover here. **Disclaimer:** Snappy is not an attorney, and you should check with a business lawyer if you have questions.
The fine print: terms of service

Make sure your site complies with your web host’s terms of service (TOS) and acceptable use policy. For example, HostGator’s TOS requires—among other things—that site owners be at least 18 years old and not be in a country under sanction by the U.S. government. The acceptable use policy, meanwhile, prohibits using the service for gambling, bitcoin mining, live sporting event broadcasts, and other heavily regulated or resource-intensive businesses.

Security, data privacy and spam protection

Most consumers worry about brands’ handling of personal data, with good reason. Many of us have been the victims of credit card fraud or data breaches. Even if you have a product that people want to buy, if you don’t go above and beyond to secure customer data, you will miss out on sales.

When you purchase a web hosting plan with HostGator, your website comes with a free SSL website security certificate.

SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encrypts data that is exchanged between a browser and a web server, like passwords, credit card information, banking details, personal data and any other user information. Google requires most websites to have an SSL certificate, and often blocks websites that aren’t secure. You can tell a website is secure if it has a padlock in front of the URL.

While an SSL certificate is sufficient to protect data, it’s also important to use eCommerce payment platforms that are recognizable and secure such as Apple Pay, PayPal, Venmo, Amazon Pay, etc. If you only accept credit cards on your website, let your customers know which payment software you are using and how you are securing their data.
Your customers want to know they can trust you with their information. Data breaches can wreck your business with financial losses, lost trust and legal penalties. And with the EU’s far-reaching General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) now in effect, even the smallest businesses need to step up their security compliance.

**GDPR basics**

GDPR applies to all businesses that offer goods and services to people in the EU, no matter where those businesses are located or how many people they employ. GDPR is a huge law, but the basics for small-business owners are:

- You must have clear consent to collect consumer data. For example, you can add a GDPR-compliant cookie consent banner to your site.
- You must delete customer data on request.
- You need to keep customer data safe or face fines. HostGator’s SSL certificates encrypt data to and from your site, making it compliant with privacy laws and PCI-DSS security standards for card payments. HostGator’s Security and Privacy Bundle protects your website from viruses, malware, hackers, and spam by automatically scanning your website to detect and remove threats.
- You must report serious data breaches to law enforcement within 72 hours of discovery.

**CCPA basics**

California has its own data privacy rules that protect consumers in that state, including

- the right of consumers to be informed about what personal information is being collected about them, where it was sourced from, what it is being used for and whether their personal information is sold or disclosed of discovery.
the ability to opt-out of the sale of their personal information, request access to their personal information, request deletion of their personal information
• protection against discrimination for exercising any of these rights

**Intellectual property**

Technically speaking, you hold the copyright to the stuff you create as soon as you create it, but a copyright notice on your site is always a good idea. If you have registered trademarks for your business name, products or services, include a trademark notice on your site.

**Website accessibility**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that most businesses make their websites accessible for people with vision, hearing and other impairments. The ADA requirement may not apply to your business if it’s small or just getting started. Businesses that operate at least 20 weeks each year *and* have 15 or more full-time employees must maintain accessible websites. “Public accommodation” businesses like transportation and hotels must also comply.

Even if you’re not required to make your website accessible, it’s a good idea, because more than 12% of Americans live with some form of disability. Not only that, accessible features like larger fonts, clear contrast between fonts and backgrounds, transcripts of videos, and written descriptions of images can be useful to everyone. UC Berkeley has a great guide to making your site accessible.

Whew, this chapter was a lot of legal t-crossing and i-dotting—and your business is in a better position because of it! Now we’re ready to move onto planning of another kind—for your business website.
Chapter 2:  
Plan your online store

Before you build your store, you need a plan. What will it look like? What information will it provide to visitors? How will it be organized?

Use this time to think through the experience you want your customers to have on your site—and to make sure the site covers all the must-have information.

Let’s start with the pages every business site needs, then move on to how people will use your website.

**Homepage**

When crafting your homepage, think from the customer’s perspective. From navigation bars to images to copy, you control your visitors’ first impression.

Visitors should clearly understand the point of your site in just a few seconds. You want them to see

- your business name and logo
- a visible call-to-action button
- navigation tools
- contact/customer service information
- and the products or services you sell!

CarMax implements this strategy flawlessly with simple copy and a self-explanatory header photo. Both new visitors and returning customers get user-friendly directions.
About Page

The About page is an opportunity to elaborate on your brand’s vision and accomplishments. Be bold in your statements and discuss how your goals help your customers.

Storytelling is pivotal for this page. You want readers to relate to your brand values, join your journey, and share the message with their family members and friends. You also want to keep your message short enough to skim fast, so visitors can move on to shopping.

Rent the Runway uses its About page to share the company’s vision and mission. It discusses why the co-founders started the brand and explains their relentless confidence. Then, it concludes with an open-ended question for the reader.

Our Vision

Our mission is to make women feel empowered and self-confident every single day.

We were told we were crazy. We’re glad we didn’t listen...

When we’re able to wear what makes us feel our best, we can be our best selves, and in turn live our best lives. Yet we’ve had to compromise – we’ve spent a lot of time and money on our clothes, but never had what we wanted. The result? A closet full of clothes and nothing to wear!

We are changing that by building the world’s first and only ‘closet in the cloud’: a dream closet filled with an infinite selection of designer styles. Imagine every trend, every color, every print, everything you’ve ever wanted to wear but settled for the boring black-dress instead.

Some call it fashion freedom. We call it a fashion revolution.

With an unlimited closet, women can more freely express themselves and dress for the incredible lives they lead – whether that’s a special look for a big event or rotating outfits for everyday. We believe that renting is the future of getting dressed, and we’re only getting started...

What will you do with your closet now that you Rent the Runway?

Jennifer Hyman and Jennifer Fleiss
Co-founders, Rent the Runway
Your blog is a content marketing channel that you control (unlike social media). Use it to feature product updates, the latest trends and respond to buyers’ FAQs.

Successful blogs are ongoing journeys, not destinations. Your blog must capture visitors’ attention and take them on your unique brand adventure. For instance, you may give them a behind-the-scenes look at product design or record a testimonial video with a happy customer. The goal is to establish your business as an expert source of information about the products you sell and how to use them.

In your blog, stay away from using every post to sell products. Instead, offer your visitors solutions and inspire them to live better. For example, jewelry and home retailer Kendra Scott’s blog demonstrates the brand’s mission to help customers celebrate special events and special people in the community. Posts about gift bundles featuring items from Kendra Scott and other local businesses are balanced with virtual party tips and self-care ideas.
Contact Page

It may seem like creating an outstanding contact page is a no-brainer, but you’d be surprised at how many people leave out critical contact information. If someone clicks through to your site looking for contact information, they won’t stick around if they can’t find it.

What belongs on your contact page? The most important thing your contact page needs is a header explaining users are on the contact page.

You can be straightforward and write “contact page,” or get more creative with something your users will find self-explanatory yet amusing. Try: “Let’s connect,” “say hello,” “get in touch,” or something to that effect.

Next, include the actual contact information:

- If you have a physical location, post your street address and a link to an interactive map so people can find you.
- All businesses should post an email address and a phone number.
- If you have a live chat option, include that on the contact page along with hours of availability.

Make sure your contact information is “above the fold,” meaning users can see it without scrolling down.

Finally, don’t limit your key contact information to your contact page.

Put your email, chat and phone number on every page of your website – like in your website header. The less work visitors have to do to contact you, the more likely they are to engage.
Product Pages

The product pages are the heart of your online business, so they need the most careful planning. This is a long section, so you might want to grab your beverage of choice and settle in to make some notes. Eventually, you’ll add all of this information into a product page template in your online store.

Great product pages start with keyword research!

Unlike keywords you would include in a blog post or publication, keywords in product pages should be transactional in nature. Your product page keyword research needs to be hyper focused on the intent of the user.

As you research, keep an eye out for keyword phrases and questions including words like buy, purchase and find. The people searching for these types of keyword phrases are further along in the purchasing funnel and are actually looking for places to purchase the product in question.

Go beyond basic keywords like ‘boys’ sandals’ to so-called long-tail keywords that help people find exactly what they want to buy: ‘boys soccer sandals’ or ‘toddler boys suede sandals.’ This takes time, but it will help your product pages rank higher in the kinds of specific searches people do when they’re ready to make a purchase.

Think about your product page template

The goal of each product page is not only to sell products. It’s also to get found by Google and people who are searching for what you sell.

No matter what CMS (Content Management System) you’re using, you’ll need to use a page template. Both WordPress and Gator Website Builder give you many page
templates to choose from. Look for a template that lets you add lots of information.

Why?

An SEO-optimized product page will be full of content. While 20 years ago you could have gotten away with adding some FAQs and long-form content at the bottom of your product page, content now needs to be woven throughout your template.

9 elements of effective product pages

For now, let's get acquainted with the basic elements that belong on each product page. This will help you figure out what information you need for your product pages, and it will help you choose the most effective product page template when you build your site.

1. **Product name**
   The name and type of your product are the heading of your page.

2. **Product description with keywords**
   Here's where the magic starts – content creation! While the content you add to your product page will be primarily determined by the product page template you chose (which is why that was your first step), you should ideally include the following elements:
   - The name and type of your product as the heading of your page.
   - A brief description of the product as your initial subheading.
   - Purchase CTAs (calls-to-action) throughout, including above the fold of each page.
   - An explanation of why consumers should choose your product.
   - Descriptions of your product features and capabilities.
   - Internal links to your other relevant resources, like blog posts or other product pages.
Frequently asked questions about your product or business

Not only should your content be naturally keyword-rich, but your headings should be used for their valuable keyword real estate. Each product page should contain a single H1 that contains the page’s primary keyword target. You can then further use H2s as subheadings to organize your page’s content into easily digestible sections. If you need further organization, take advantage of H3s and H4s. Not sure what all these Hs mean? Check out our free intro to SEO webinar.

Ensure that each product page is primarily composed of unique content and that your product pages are easily accessible for site visitors and Google – adding them to your main navigation is the ideal choice.

Photos and video

Highlight multiple angles of the product and allow users to zoom in and out. When applicable, shoot a short video to show how the product functions.

Optimize your images. Large image files can slow down your page load speed. That leads to lower search rankings. Tools like Smush can compress your image files so they load faster.

Adding captions to your images is beneficial, too. And remember that your image filenames and other metadata can give your SEO a boost, so try to use relevant keywords for each image.

Don’t skimp here.

More than 20% of product returns happen because the product doesn’t look like the photo. And photos are essential for social media shares.
4. **Price**

Put the price above the fold (i.e. before scrolling down the page), including shipping. Consumers don’t like to hunt for information while they shop, so make it easy for them.

5. **Sizes/colors/other options**

Your eCommerce platform (which we’ll choose in upcoming chapters) will have tools so you can display color, size and other attribute options for each product.

6. **Metadata**

We’re going to nerd out for a moment here because metadata helps search engines—and therefore searchers—find your stuff.

Create your title tags and meta descriptions. As a reminder, this is what your metadata will look like in the SERPs (search engine result pages):

**What Is Shared Hosting? | HostGator Blog**

[https://www.hostgator.com/blog/what-is-shared-hosting](https://www.hostgator.com/blog/what-is-shared-hosting)

Mar 1, 2019 - Shared hosting is one of the most popular hosting options for those who are building out their first websites. But, what is shared hosting, and ...

The blue text is the title tag, while the gray text below is the meta description. Title tags are fairly large contributors to rankings, but meta descriptions don’t directly contribute to your rankings. However, meta descriptions can improve click-through-rates which can boost your rankings.

Write your title tag using your main target keyword for that page. Keep the format you use for your title tags consistent throughout your pages and determine if you want your brand name to go before or after the expected pipe or dash.
For meta descriptions, briefly describe what readers will find on your page and end with a short call to action like “read more.” Here are the widely accepted character counts for title tags and meta descriptions, but keep in mind that Google is highly volatile and will often truncate your metadata.

- Title Tag: 60 characters
- Meta Description: 150 characters

**CTAs**
Include CTAs (calls-to-action) throughout your product page, including above the fold of each page. These should include:
- Social share CTAs
- Add to list or favorites CTAs
- Add to cart/buy now CTAs

**Contact information**
Include email, phone and chat so customers can ask questions about the product.

**Short version of shipping and returns policy**
For example, if you offer free or flat-rate shipping, free returns or 30-day returns, summarize that information on each product page.
Search Engine Optimization for Product Pages

**Schema markup for product pages**

You can add schema markup to your product pages to generate rich results in Google searches. The easiest way to do this is with Google’s Structured Data Markup Helper. Enter your page URLs and start tagging.

![Structured Data Markup Helper](image)

**SEO-Friendly URLs**

When you build your store in upcoming chapters, you’ll be creating URLs for every page. Write them with SEO in mind. Why?

*Your URL structure* is the foundation of SEO. It pops up in Google searches. It’s remembered by consumers. And of course, it directs people to your valuable content.
To support your SEO goals, it’s vital for your URL to adhere to a specific structure. If not, your webpages might get buried on Page 10 of the search results. (And no one wants that!)

In the image below, the **four labeled parts** make up the URL structure. The file name is where you will add relevant keywords to describe the page.

Avoid including prepositions in the file name. It will complicate the URL structure and make it less readable.

Keep your file name between two to four words. You don’t need to use underscores or periods to separate the words—a hyphen is fine.

URLs are case-sensitive. Therefore, mixed case URLs will represent different content. You can eliminate this issue by writing your file names in lowercase.

**Submit your product pages to Google Search Console**

Make a plan now to submit your product pages to [Google Search Console](https://console.google.com) after they’ve live, for quicker indexation. Plan to promote them on social media and invest time in generating backlinks to the page. Spending this extra time at the beginning of a page launch will ensure your page gets the boost it needs to be successful in the SERPs.
Plan your site’s navigation for smooth sailing

Today’s customers expect a frustration-free experience when they search for products in online stores. Most say finding stuff fast is their top priority when buying online. But many stores—even those with websites that cost millions to build—aren’t giving shoppers what they want.

The solution? Better site navigation and product search tools. Before you yawn, consider what the Baymard Institute learned when it tested user experience with the product listings and filtering functions on 19 eCommerce websites:

Baymard’s testing found that eCommerce sites with “mediocre product list usability” had abandonment rates ranging from 67% to 90%. However, sites that were just a little bit better at helping customers find what they wanted had much lower abandonment rates, ranging from 17% to 33%.

This is good news for smaller online stores, because clearly, a huge budget doesn’t guarantee a good product search experience.

What do you need instead? A good understanding of how customers look for products in online stores now is the place to start. Then you’ll know if you need to reorganize your product categories and add new tools to your site.

Shoppers now expect easy mobile site navigation. And some would rather use a search bar, voice search or a virtual shop assistant to find what they want. Here’s a quick example of how many ways customers can search a store now.
Not every online store can offer all these options. But remember, even small improvements can keep more customers on your site. Let’s explore ways you can make your product search and navigation better.

The product **category tabs on your website** should guide your customers toward your most popular items as well as to your top-level product categories.
For example, Nordstrom’s category tabs include designer collections, sale items and brands even though those could be included as subcategories within the women, men and kids’ categories. But customers who like specific designers and brands, plus those who love deals, are more likely to shop if they can go right to the good stuff from the homepage.

The same principle applies to your category menus. See how new markdowns are the top menu item for Sales subcategories? Nordstrom wants frequent bargain hunters to be able to check out fresh items fast.

If you have a lot of products, filters can help shoppers narrow their choices to a manageable number, although many customers now like to get relevant results faster in the search bar.
Search tools

Your store needs to have a search bar, but not just any search bar. WordPress offers one for its sites, but there are more feature-rich options available for eCommerce platforms.

Why upgrade from the built-in search function? Because customers say relevant results are the most important part of a store’s on-site search, according to a survey by Digital Commerce 360 and Bizrate Insights. A search tool designed for your eCommerce platform can show customers what they’re looking for in ways a basic search can’t—and make them more likely to buy.

Features to look for in an on-site search tool are:

- Autocomplete suggestions.
- Rich search results with product suggestions and thumbnail images.
- Compensation for misspellings.
- AI-driven personalized search results.

Chatbot assistants for product search

A chatbot “shop assistant” can help your customers find the exact product they need from your store, or it can offer them options. For example, if you’re looking for a blue T-shirt, a good chatbot assistant can show you several options with links to their product pages. It can learn to recognize customers and their shopping preferences for more personalized service with each visit.

As you test out different options for improving your site navigation and search, remember to track your conversion and abandonment rates, and listen to customer feedback, so you can see which changes deliver the best results.
Whew!

We’re done with most of your planning, and now we’re ready to move on to an exciting next step: Building your online store.
Chapter 3: Create your store in WordPress

Does your website already run on the WordPress content management system? Is WordPress your choice for building a new site for your business? This chapter is for you. We’ll cover how to set up WooCommerce, a WordPress-supported eCommerce platform, and customize it for your business.

WooCommerce is a free plugin for WordPress that can transform any WordPress website into a full-fledged eCommerce store that sells physical and digital products.

Here are a few reasons why WooCommerce is popular:

- It’s entirely free to install on your site, just like WordPress.
- It’s also open source, like WordPress, so you’ll find a massive library of free themes, add-ons and more.
- It’s straightforward to use and built with complete beginners in mind.
- You have control over the final design, via a full library of WooCommerce themes.
- Your store is mobile-friendly right out of the box, so it will look and perform great no matter what devices your visitors are using to shop.
- You can add a ton of different features via the plugin library, just like how you usually add features to a standard WordPress site.

4 Steps to Install WooCommerce

These steps will take you from no website to a WordPress site with WooCommerce installed and ready to customize.

Already have a WordPress site? Skip ahead to Step 3.
1. Get Hosting and a Domain

The first thing you’ll need is a hosting account and a domain name. If you’re starting fresh, then you can secure both of these here at HostGator. Head over to our WordPress hosting page and choose your plan:

![WordPress Hosting](image)

On the next screen you’ll be able to add a free domain name to your order. If the domain you like isn’t available, then keep searching until you find the perfect domain.

Once you’ve completed your order it’s time to move onto the next step.
2. Install WordPress

Installing WordPress only takes a couple of clicks. Check out this YouTube video about how to install WordPress using Softaculous installer.

3. Choose Your WordPress Theme

With WordPress installed it’s time to choose a WooCommerce-friendly theme. Themes let you customize your WooCommerce store by changing its appearance and creating the user experience you want your customers to have.

And without a WooCommerce compatible theme, your store won’t work.

If you already have a WordPress site, you must check to see if your current theme supports WooCommerce. If not, you’ll need a new one.

These are our top picks:

**Storefront**

This a free theme created by the WooCommerce team. It includes schema markup for SEO, and it has a responsive design to so it looks good and works well on all kinds of devices. Storefront’s developers built it for fast loading and easy use. It’s easy to customize Storefront, and it’s compatible with lots of payment, shipping and SEO plugins.
To install this theme, you can select it when you run the WooCommerce setup wizard (in the next section.) Or you can log in to your WordPress dashboard and navigate to Appearance>Themes, then search for Storefront.

Click Install, and then Activate, and you’ll now have a WooCommerce ready theme as the face of your site.

**Astra**

Like Storefront, Astra is WooCommerce compatible and uses schema markup to help your store’s SEO. Astra’s developers recently released a free library of blocks you can use with the WordPress Gutenberg editor to customize your site without coding.

Astra is extremely fast—it takes less than 0.5 seconds to load, using standard WordPress data—and it only uses about 50KB of resources. That means your store pages will load fast and keep your shoppers from bouncing before they see your awesome merchandise.
eStore

Another popular theme for WooCommerce, eStore is responsive, SEO-friendly, and designed to help your pages load quickly. If you’d like your customers to be able to make and share wishlists from your store—a feature that can earn you more conversions—eStore is compatible with the YITH WooCommerce Wishlist plugin.

This theme has a couple of cool design features in its free version: the ability to color-code your product categories, and a template that lets you feature all products in a collection on a single page, as well as in their categories.

Got your theme? You’re ready for the next step.
4. Install WooCommerce

Finally, it’s time to install WooCommerce. Navigate to Plugins>Add New, then search for “WooCommerce.” Then, click ‘Install Now’, and ‘Activate’ to enable WooCommerce on your site.

Once the plugin is installed and activated, you’ll have a new ‘WooCommerce’ tab on the left-hand side of the site.

This is where you’ll be able to manage orders, adjust your store settings, browse the extension library and more. Once WooCommerce is installed it will also automatically create new site pages, like your Checkout page, Cart page and more. You can edit these pages by navigating to ‘Pages’ on the left-hand sidebar of your dashboard.
Set up Your WooCommerce store

You’ve got the plugin. Now the real fun begins—building your store.

Start by clicking Activate under WooCommerce in your WordPress plugin menu.

Now, Use the WooCommerce Setup Wizard to get the basics done.

Enter your location and currency.
Select the payment methods you want your store to accept.
Share the units of measurement your store will use to calculate shipping.

Shipping

How would you like units on your store displayed?

Weight unit—used to calculate shipping rates, and more.

- oz

Dimension unit—helps for accurate package selection.

- in

Continue

Want to save even more time setting up your store? In the Extras section of the Wizard, you can

- have WooCommerce automatically choose Storefront as your theme
- let WooCommerce handle your sales tax calculation and collection

and more.

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**Storefront Theme**
Design your store with deep WooCommerce integration. If toggled on, we’ll install **Storefront**, and your current theme **Twenty Seventeen** will be deactivated.

**Automated Taxes**
Save time and errors with automated tax calculation and collection at checkout. Powered by WooCommerce Services and Jetpack.
The last step in the Wizard is connecting your store to WooCommerce Services in order to automatically handle sales tax on your sales.

Review your settings, to make sure your location, currency, sales tax processing and other choices are correct.
Ready to add your first product? Here’s how

Grab the product page notes you made in Chapter 2. Now you get to use them.

1. Click “products” in the left menu, enter the name of your product and write your description.

2. Farther down the page, create a unique SKU for each product you sell, for inventory management and sales data analysis later on.
3. This box—the Product Data box—is where you’ll enter most of the information about each product. Use the menu on the left to include stock data, thresholds for reordering, shipping data, and attributes like size and color.

4. Use the Linked Products tab to recommend related products. Upsell links show similar products on the product page. Cross-sell links show related products at checkout. For example, if your product is a handbag, you could upsell other bags in similar styles and cross-sell matching wallets and phone cases.

5. The Advanced tab lets you customize notes to send to customers who buy the product, enable or disable customer reviews and more.
6. On the right menu of your product page, you can assign categories and tags to your product.

7. Below the category and tag box is where you can select your product photos. (As with WordPress blogs, you’ll upload them to your Media Library first.) Choose one to be your main product image and you’re ready to go.

With the product page basics set up, you can move on to customizing your store.
Pick your store extensions and plugins

Extensions are WooCommerce’s version of plugins, and you can use them to add all kinds of functions and features to your store. Explore them all in the WooCommerce Marketplace or start with our top WooCommerce/WordPress plugins for different tasks.

Dropshipping plugins

**AliDropship**

AliDropship makes it super easy to import products from AliExpress directly into your WordPress site. If you’re using AliExpress to source and sell products, then this is a plugin you absolutely need.

With this plugin, you can import an unlimited number of products and fulfill an unlimited number of orders. Any products that are listed in your store will also be updated automatically to reflect any price changes. Plus, orders will automatically be fulfilled by your suppliers, and a tracking IP will be automatically sent out to your customers. To help with product
**DropshipMe**

DropshipMe is another plugin from the creators of AliDropship. If you can’t figure out what products you want to sell, then this plugin is going to be your best friend. The team behind this plugin is continuously on the lookout for bestselling products.

You’ll find virtually every niche of products represented as well, so no matter what market your store is in, you’ll be able to find dozens of products you can sell to your customers.

Plus, it’s incredibly easy to use. All you have to do is install and activate the plugin, then start searching for products you can sell. Once you’ve found a product you’d like to sell all you have to do is click import, and the product will automatically be added to your storefront. This plugin works well with AliDropship.

**Dropshipping plugins**

DropshipMe is another plugin from the creators of AliDropship. If you can’t figure out what products you want to sell, a The easier your store makes it for customers to keep track of their purchases, the more likely they’ll be to shop with you again. Here are a few tools to consider for your online store.
ShipStation

ShipStation is a comprehensive shipping app that handles orders from all your eCommerce channels, finds the best rates among multiple carriers, updates customers on their order status, simplifies customer returns, tracks inventory and provides analytics.

ShipStation supports major shipping carriers and offers discounted rates. It lets you build a branded tracking portal for mobile and desktop that shows your customers where their order is and how soon it will arrive. This keeps your customers on your site, where they can shop, rather than sending them to the carrier’s website.

ShipStation offers a 30-day free trial. Plan rates range from the $9/month starter plan for up to 50 shipments to $159/month for up to 10,000 shipments.
Shippo

Shippo lets you fulfill orders, create branded tracking updates, allow easy returns and find the best shipping rates.

Shippo supports WooCommerce plus the Mercari, Etsy, eBay and Amazon marketplace platforms. Shippo works with major US and international carriers, with deeply discounted rates available.

Shippo offers a no-fee pay as you go service for 5 cents per package, plus postage costs. Shippo’s professional plan starts at $10/month, with a 30-day free trial. It gives you the ability to brand email and text shipping updates to your customers, and you can create branded tracking pages on your website.
Payment processing apps
A good eCommerce payment method fulfills two requirements.

1. **It’s secure.**

   When people give you their sensitive financial information, it’s your responsibility to make sure that doing so doesn’t put them at risk. That means investing in basic security measures like an SSL certificate and security software, and using a reliable program for processing payments.

   Some hosting providers offer security packages that cover most of your bases, and picking the right payment processing app will cover the rest.

   **HostGator offers free SSL certificates on all hosting plans.**

2. **It’s easy.**

   Convenience is key when selling online. People aren’t going to write a check and put it in the mail or provide their bank account information for a transfer. In short, you have to accept card payments, directly and through digital wallets like PayPal and Apple Pay. All of the best online payment processing apps make this possible and keep it convenient for your customers.

   **WooCommerce enables you to accept Stripe and PayPal payments,** but what other options are out there? Here are a couple of top picks.
**Braintree**

Braintree allows you to accept payments via credit cards, PayPal, Venmo and wallets. They offer both a drop-in user interface you can use to easily set up your checkout process, or a custom user interface that allows you to tailor the details.

They offer Level 1 PCI compliance for security, as well as additional features you can use for fraud protection. And they have features that make it easy to save billing info for repeat customers to make check out easier. They charge a per transaction fee of 30 cents, plus 2.9% of the total purchase.

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**2Checkout**

2Checkout’s shopping cart product is easy to get set up and provides both an inline cart you can use that’s designed to be intuitive, and a gallery of different templates you can work from if you want a different cart design.
All of their cart options are responsive, so you can count on them to work seamlessly on mobile as well as desktop. They accept payments from all the major credit cards, PayPal, Apple Pay and bank transfers, and can process payments from all over the world. Their fees start at 3.5%, plus 35 cents for each sale.
Sales tax

How do you figure out sales tax for your orders, and which orders require you to collect sales tax? What should you charge for shipping, and how do you avoid losing money on it? There’s a plugin for that.

You have lots of options for plugins to automate sales tax calculation and collection, set shipping rates based on actual costs, and let you get on with running your business. Here are two top picks.

**AvaTax**

*AvaTax* is a plugin for subscribers to its service, which offers paid plans based on the number of taxable transactions your store has each year. AvaTax service plans start at $50 per year for 250 transactions and include a 60-day free trial period. AvaTax lets you set up exemptions for certain categories of sales (like government or charitable group purchases) and calculates international VAT, duty and customs fees.

**TaxJar**

*TaxJar’s plugin and subscription service* (starting at $17 per month) cover your WooCommerce site with tax rates, exemption tools, reports and automated filing options. TaxJar supports multichannel collection and reporting, so if you sell on eBay, Amazon, or other marketplaces in addition to your online store, you can keep all your sales tax info in one place.

Once you’ve got a plan in place for dealing with sales tax compliance, you can focus on delivering the goods.

Now that your store is set up, you may be ready to take it live. Before you do, we’re going to cover some things you need to do in advance. In Chapter 5, we’ll help you develop a marketing plan to lay the groundwork for a successful store launch.

**Ready? Check out Chapter 4 now.**
You can also set up product categories that allow customers to display products grouped by attributes they have in common. While you can also create category pages in the Editor, this automates the process and makes it easier for you build out the different possible categories your customers may want to filter product results by.

And that’s it! Your store is almost ready to go live. First, let’s lay the marketing groundwork for a successful store launch.
You’ve done so much already – getting your business ducks in a row, planning and building your website, and developing marketing plans to help you win and keep customers.

Now let’s focus on officially launching your online store!

By now, you know there’s going to be some planning first, because we want your store to be a great experience for your customers on Day One.

Get pre-launch feedback

If possible, join a community of eCommerce store owners. You can learn from their mistakes and pick up a few pointers to improve your store.

Think outside the box when finding communities. You may have to join multiple Slack groups or sit down face-to-face with folks in your local area. Prepare to ask specific questions and offer your skill set to others.

Initiating a beta consumer group also is an effective way to get feedback before your launch. That way, you get real-life scenarios of what’s working (and not working) in your store.

Ask your beta users to navigate through your website and report any challenges that arise. You’ll also want to know if the products resonate with them.
Get your launch announcements ready to go

Pull up your plan for finding customers and start writing!

For your social media channels, post pre-launch announcements a week and a day before you go live. Then announce your shop is open after it launches, once you’ve seen that the store is working.

Once the store is up and running, share a press release about it with local news outlets.

Ready, set, launch!

It’s time to log in to your website’s dashboard and flip the switch to “Publish.” Once that’s done, check to see that the live version looks and works like the drafts and previews you’ve been working with. Fix any issues that you find, and then let people know that you’re ready to go!

Your store is live! What’s next?

Sit back and profit. The end. (Just kidding!)

Take some time to congratulate yourself and the people who’ve helped you take your online store from idea to launch. That’s a huge accomplishment. Well done!

Then, it’s back to work to make sure your new store survives and thrives. That requires an ongoing cycle of monitoring, optimizing and marketing so that your store is always the best it can be.
In Chapter 5, we talked about the importance of listening to customer feedback and reviews. Those are two kinds of monitoring. You can also monitor data by using Google Analytics and Google Shopping Insights.

**Google Analytics**

Sign up for [Google Analytics](https://analytics.google.com) for free and you can see where your visitors are coming from, which pages they linger on and how they move through your store. The Enhanced Ecommerce tool shows you which products get the most attention, generate the most sales, and get you the most repeat buyers.

You can use this data to adjust your website for easier navigation, run promotions on popular items, offer subscriptions for items that are repeat-purchased a lot, and more.

**Google Shopping Insights**

[Shopping Insights](https://shopping.google.com) finds trends from data generated by Google Shopping, the search engine's product search and comparison-shopping tool. Google's keyword analysis monitors the pulse of online shoppers' habits, with daily search data available for the past 12 months. The dataset covers every designated market area in the U.S., 5,000 product categories and more than 45,000 brands.

Here's what you can do with all that information.

1. **Adjust your content**

   Effective keywords come and go, depending on consumer trends, shopping seasons and other variables. To attract the most customers, you want your site to feature keywords they're searching for now. There are a couple of ways you can use Shopping Insights to do your research.
First, compare the popularity of the items you offer. For example, if you own a music store, you can see which of the beginner electric guitars you carry is the most popular in searches. Here’s a year’s worth of search data. It looks like shoppers consistently look for the Fender model more than the other two.

Next, create or update your content to feature the most searched-for products. To get more traffic from searches, you can feature the Fender Modern Player Telecaster on

- your guitar category landing page.
- any other relevant category pages, like student instruments and great gift ideas.
- how-to content on your site, like a guide to choosing a beginner guitar.

See which products and categories do best during certain shopping seasons. You can search Shopping Insights by season to see which item or category searches spiked on, say, Cyber Monday. Here’s a good example for our hypothetical music store owner:
Looking at the 2018 winter holiday season, you can see that there were a lot more searches for guitars than for drum kits and bagpipes. You can also see that there were more searches for guitars on Cyber Monday than any other day of that season.

Based on that, you might consider updating your holiday gift guides, blog posts, and Cyber Monday landing page to include more information about guitars versus pipes and drums.

2. Make your online store work better

We’ve blogged before about the importance of setting up store categories that make sense for your customers. It’s tempting, if you’re a logical person who likes order and patterns, to organize all your category pages and navigation in the same way.

But that may not help your customers find what they want. In fact, it may slow them down and turn them off.

Here’s an example. Let’s say your online music store has navigation tabs for strings, percussion, brass, etc. Logical, but is it helpful? We can enter some of the string instruments into Shopping Insights to find out.
Based on the results—searches for guitars dramatically outperformed cellos, violins and upright basses by a wide margin all year long—your store should have a navigation tab and category specifically for guitars so they’re easy to find.

Just below this graph is more information you can use to make your store easier to navigate.

Based on the popularity of Fender and Gibson in searches for guitars, you might want to create separate categories and navigation tabs for each of those guitar brands.

3. Improve your product pages

You can use Shopping Insights results to fine-tune individual product pages, too. Here are a few ways to get started:

- Include the most searched-for products in “other products you may like” recommendations on relevant pages. For example, based on the chart we saw earlier, you may want to include the popular Fender Modern Player Telecaster as an “other product” on the pages for your Ibanez and Epiphone beginner guitar pages.
- To keep up with keyword trends, you can subscribe to Google’s weekly and monthly Shopping Insights updates for the products, brands and categories in your store.

You can also use Google Merchant Center to upload your current product information for easier integration with Google Shopping Ads and more detailed shopping insights.
Now that your online store is published, it’s time to focus on your customers. You’ll need to invest time, money and effort to gain each new customer. Then you have to make that customer acquisition investment pay off by keeping the customer coming back for more.

With every new purchase that customer’s lifetime value to your business increases. And if you delight that customer every time they come back, you may turn them into the ultimate customer acquisition payoff: a brand evangelist. That’s a loyal customer who promotes your brand to their peers and their audience for free.

To attract and keep customers—and turn them into brand evangelists—you need a couple of marketing plans before you launch. One to find customers, and one to keep them. In this chapter, we’ll help you with both plans.

**Find customers for your online business**

To find prospective customers and let them know about your business, you need to go where they spend their time.

**Find customers when they search for what you sell**

Remember all the keyword research and page optimization we talked about in Chapter 2 while we were planning your online store? That was all for this part of customer acquisition—showing up in search results.

If you implemented your plan as you built your store, you’re off to a good start. If not, take the time to go back and optimize your content, page URLs, tags, metadata and image data before you launch.
Find customers on social media

Set up accounts for your business on the social platforms your target customers prefer. Then start a list of ideas for things to post a couple of times a week—starting with some previews of what you sell and when you’re open for business, and, of course, some big splashy grand opening announcements.

Plan now to use these 5 tactics to get more likes, follows and—most important—visits to your store.

1. **Optimize your profile now**

   Get usernames that match your business name, whenever possible. Include a version of your logo that’s the right size for your profile, and make sure it’s easy to read at a glance. Create a tagline that explains what you do and what sets you apart.

   Here’s an example from [Califia Farms](https://www.instagram.com/califiafarms). Their Instagram profile shows a clear image of their logo. Plus, the copy sparks curiosity and spotlights their plant-based mission.

   Include a link to encourage people to visit your site. You can experiment with linking to your homepage or a landing page just for that social platform’s users. Your goal is to increase traffic and keep your new visitors’ attention.
2. **Plan exclusive content for each social channel**

Consumers love the velvet rope treatment—exclusive access to a special offering. It gives people a sense of belonging and labels them as part of the "cool kids" group.

Use this strategy to your advantage by only posting links to specific content on your social media channels. For instance, let’s say you did an interview with a well-known expert. You can post the link to the video only on your Facebook account for 48 hours. That exclusivity will motivate your followers to click the link to your site.

Another idea is to announce product releases on social media. It’ll prompt your audience to follow you on social media and visit the official announcement page. It’s a win-win for everyone: your fans get the exclusive perk and your brand gets traffic.

3. **Think about how you’ll engage with your followers**

Your customers want personal attention, not a bot sending them a canned response every single time they reply to your social account. To truly get people to your site from social media, you must engage them directly.

For now, you may be able to monitor your social accounts yourself. Later, you may want to hire or outsource a part-time social media manager to craft direct responses to your followers. Whether it’s a potential customer looking for a quick answer or a longtime customer needing assistance, you want someone to provide a unique reply in a timely manner.

Footwear and apparel brand Vans offers a good lesson on how to connect with your social media audience. Below the company provides a friendly reply along with a recommended site for the customer to visit.
When building your marketing plan, don’t forget the power of relationships. That can mean connecting with other local businesses for cross-promotions. It can also mean highlighting your customers’ stories—something they can share with their followers.

If you have the budget, it can mean doing business with influencers who align with your brand’s values and audience. When you’re working with influencers:

- Draw up an agreement highlighting the expectations for the influencer partnership. Will they retweet specific posts? Post about your business a certain number of times each month?
- Allow influencers some creative control to develop new social media ideas for your brand (with your pre-approval, of course). Maybe they can post a series of funny videos or do a takeover on your Twitter account. These innovative approaches can generate more interest in your business and drive more traffic to your site.
5. **Promote Special Deals**

A good deal is hard to find. That’s why customers are happy when they find a coupon for their favorite brand. Customers will even go the extra mile to locate a promotional code before purchasing products in their online shopping carts.

You brand can leverage people’s need to save money. Start by offering special discounts on your social media accounts. These incentives will get people to your site, and they give visitors a reason to buy from you now, rather than later.

Check out this example below from Letterfolk. On Facebook, the brand is showcasing a special 20% discount on all their inventory for their Mother’s Day Sale.

Make discounts a special deal, rather than a regular offering. Otherwise you’ll train your audience to wait for deals before they buy anything from you. And be clear about the terms of each offer so no one’s disappointed at checkout time!
How do you find customers via email without running afoul of anti-spam laws? Not by emailing people at random!

Instead, you get people to come to your site from search results, social media posts and news stories, where you invite them to join your email list—and you tempt them with an offer in exchange for signing up. Once they’ve got your offer and see the cool content in your email updates, they may become full-fledged customers!

So how do you get people to take the leap and join your list? You create an opt-in (or lead-capture) form that pops up or lives in a sidebar on your pages. Here’s how oVertone does it:

This form is easy to use and gives visitors a simple choice – sign up and save or don’t sign up and choose full price. All they have to do is share their email.

As simple as it is for visitors, you’ll have to put some work into your opt-in program to turn those sign-ups into repeat customers. There are several WordPress contact form plugins you can use to get started, and Gator lets you add signup forms, too. Here’s the planning to do now with those tools, before you launch your store.
Streamline your opt-in form

Less is more when you’re designing your form. All you really need is a headline with your offer, a field to enter an email address and a call to action button. The simpler the better – the more information visitors have to read or enter to complete the signup, the less likely they are to follow through.

Make your message stand out

Bland “Sign Up for Our Email List!” and “Join Our Email List Now!” messages are better than nothing, but there’s a lot more you can do to motivate visitors to opt in.

Productivity expert Carson Tate has an email opt-in on her homepage with the message, “Step One: Enter your info to get expert tools and coaching.” Taking “step one” makes you feel like you’re accomplishing something already, and wouldn’t you rather get expert tools and coaching than a general newsletter?
The pop-up CTA on the Knitpicks yarn and fiber arts website takes a different but equally creative approach. For crafters, it’s hard to go wrong with “Why, hello there! Be the first to know about special offers, new yarns and inspiration galore!” This one hits a lot of the right notes in 16 words. There’s a friendly greeting, a cure for FOMO (fear of missing out), the promise of deals, and creative ideas — much better than “join our list.”

Give something in return

Besides the promise of awesome email content, visitors need an immediate reward for signing up. Maybe it’s a discount code, or a free tutorial they can download right away.

Include your privacy policy

You don’t want to clutter up your opt-in form with the full text of the data privacy policy you developed back in Chapter 1. A quick summary with a link to the whole thing is enough.
Say thank you!

Everyone who shares their email address with your store—whether it’s to join your newsletter or make a first purchase—should get a welcome email right away. Why?

Welcome messages make people feel valued. And welcome emails can encourage people to come back to your store to buy things they looked at earlier, check out new deals or just browse some more.

Here’s a good example from clothing reseller ThredUp. There’s a positive message, an image that evokes what they sell (fun, inexpensive fashion) and a call to action (“shop now”).

There are also several ways the customer can save money in this message: a referral offer at the top and two discount shopping options at the bottom. (There were even more discount options below the fold in this message.)

The vibe of this welcome email is “this is going to be fun and you’re going to save money.” And that makes their target customers want to go back.
Keep the customers your online business finds

After you attract customers, it’s up to you to keep them coming back. How can you do that? Here are six tactics you can plan before you launch.

1. Provide exceptional customer service.

By far, the most important of all customer retention strategies is providing top-notch customer service. HubSpot research found that 93% of consumers say they’re more likely to become repeat customers of businesses that have good customer service. If customers have a question or problem, they want to know they can trust a company to respond quickly to resolve it. Often customers won’t begrudge a brand the initial problem they experience if the response is good.

There are a few good ways to improve the customer service experience for your eCommerce business:

Be easy to reach.

Have you ever spent way too long trying to track down the right phone number or email address to contact a company’s customer service? Or spent long minutes on hold waiting to reach a human being? How much time it takes a customer to reach someone to begin with is a big part of the customer service experience. Make your contact information easy to find and be available in as many channels as possible.

Practice active listening.

When someone’s upset, often the thing they want most is to feel heard. Train everyone in customer service at your company to slow down and really listen to what the customer has to say. Don’t try to offer a solution before they’ve had time to finish. And repeat back the problem to show they’ve been heard. It’s a simple step to include in the process, but one that goes a long way.
Respond fast.

In our era of constant accessibility, customers expect to hear back from businesses fast. Try to have enough staff to ensure that you can reply to every customer question as quickly as possible. Even if you can’t provide a resolution right away, make it standard practice to send a response saying you’re working on it.

2. Offer subscriptions.

Even if your business isn’t fully based on a subscription model, you can still get some of the benefits of eCommerce subscriptions by incentivizing customers to treat their purchase as a subscription.

By offering a discounted rate or free shipping in exchange for setting up automatic future deliveries at the interval of their choice, you make it extremely easy for customers to commit to buying from you again.

They like that loyalty translates to savings, and they can skip the work of putting in a manual order next time they’re running low on your product. And you’ll increase sales by removing all friction from future purchases. Everyone wins.

3. Ask for customer feedback

Everything you’re doing is about your customers. Let them have a say in things too. Check in to find out how they’re doing. Use customer surveys after each purchase to get a read on how satisfied they are. You can also invite customers to have actual conversations about their experience with your brand, and with any programs you’ve set up to increase customer retention.

Pay close attention to your reviews. A lot of the time, you don’t have to go to the customer to find out what they think, they’ll publish it for all the world to see of their own volition.

Hearing your customers’ feedback is just the first step. Follow through and act based on what you learn. If customers are upset that you don’t provide customer support through their social
media platform of choice, get set up on there with haste! If they love a product, but wish it were available in more colors, get to work expanding your product line to include those extra colors. If they wish all your dresses had pockets, well, you get the idea.

When eCommerce brands actually listen to their customers and act based on their feedback, customers notice. And they’ll show how they feel about it with their purchasing choices.

4. Offer exclusive discounts.

This is another good way to show customers you care about them. Provide them special offers others don’t get.

Make it clear they’re receiving a discount out of appreciation for the loyalty they’ve shown your business. You might consider sending them discount codes for a day you know is important to them, such as their birthday (if you know it) or the anniversary of when they first bought from you.

5. Provide advance access and special giveaways.

Another way to keep your customers loyal is to provide advance access to new products or set up special giveaways only available to customers. If you’re launching a new version of the product or service they bought from you, offer them the chance to buy before the general public gets access. Or set up a contest that only customers qualify for that comes with a big prize, like a paid vacation or an expensive item.

Insider access makes people feel good. By creating an insider circle of sorts and inviting your customers in, you’re further solidifying their relationship with your brand and giving them a good reason to keep coming back.

6. Create a loyalty program.

You might think of loyalty programs as tools to get customers to come back, but that’s not all a loyalty plan can do.

A good loyalty program will provide analytics on your members so you can see which products
they prefer, when they buy, how much they spend, and other information you can use to refine your marketing efforts. Smarter offers can lead to repeat sales and higher order values.

Insider access makes people feel good. By creating an insider circle of sorts and inviting your customers in, you’re further solidifying their relationship with your brand and giving them a good reason to keep coming back.

With your customer loyalty program marketing data and targeted offers, your business should be able to not only retain customers but earn more from them. Exclusive product offers, previews, and upsells of related items are easier when you have accurate information and your customers’ trust.

That trust is valuable—Invesp found that established customers are 50% more likely to buy a new product from a business than new customers are, and those existing customers spend about 30% more when they buy.

There are several tools you can use to add an eCommerce loyalty program to your online store. Your options will depend on the eCommerce platform you use and your budget as well as your goals and customer habits.
That’s it? Now keep learning

That’s it—keep monitoring your store’s performance and your customer’s feedback, optimizing your store and promoting it. The plans you made in this guide will help you stay on track.

You’ve got this!

When you run an online store, there’s always more to learn. Stay ahead of the curve and keep growing your business with resources from HostGator. We’re here to help!