

CEI

Women's

Business Center

# E-Commerce Guide

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE E-COMMERCE WEBSITE

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# Anatomy of an Effective E-Commerce Website

## THE BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR AN E-COMMERCE WEBSITE

**Home Page** - including hero images at the top of the page, a short section that clearly describes the business, ways into the online shop, and other blocks that may be more specific to your business.

**About Page** - including images of you and/or your team, behind the scenes/process and a roughly 1-3 paragraph story of your business and why you do what you do.

**Online Shop** - divided into categories/collections that can ideally be sorted/explored in different ways - individual product listings with consistent descriptions and clear photography.

**Informational Pages** - exactly what these are depends on your business, you may not need any or you may find you need several.

**Policies/Shipping & Returns/FAQs Page** - a page that clearly states all of your policies.

**Contact Page** - contact information can be put in the footer of your site, but it is often a good idea to have a separate contact page that includes a message form.

**Privacy/Terms & Conditions** - a privacy page lets your site visitors know how their personal information is being used, a terms & conditions page protects *you* and lets site visitors know how the sites content can be used.

**Links to social media and newsletter sign-up**

# Anatomy of an Effective E-Commerce Website

THE BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR AN E-COMMERCE WEBSITE



## THREE OPTIONS FOR E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS



# Option One: Etsy

**Who it's best for:**

handmade, product-based businesses getting started

**Guide to getting started:**

[help.etsy.com/hc/en-us/articles/115014502448-Beginner-s-Guide-to-Selling-on-Etsy?segment=selling](https://help.etsy.com/hc/en-us/articles/115014502448-Beginner-s-Guide-to-Selling-on-Etsy?segment=selling)

**Help center:** [help.etsy.com](https://help.etsy.com)

**Pros:** Etsy gives handmade businesses an accessible entry point into selling online without creating the infrastructure of a full online shop. Etsy makes shipping easier with built in shipping capabilities. Etsy can create organic traffic thanks to its search as well as off-site ad placements. Some established businesses choose to maintain an Etsy store even after they have built their own freestanding e-commerce website. When a business is starting Etsy's pricing structure typically comes out to be more affordable than the annual costs of a site.

**Cons:** Your Etsy shop is not fully under your control. Etsy has changed fees, search algorithms, and policies over time. You don't have a clear picture of what the changes down the road could be and how they might affect your business. When you send potential customers to an Etsy shop rather than your own site they can get distracted by other shops on Etsy. At a certain volume of sales, Etsy's fees can be more expensive than your own website.

**Associated Tools:** Etsy partners with Square so you can use Square as POS hardware for in person sales and keep inventory in sync. Etsy allows you to print shipping labels directly from your Etsy shop.

**A note for Etsy:** another option is to create a landing page on another website building platform that links to an Etsy store. The advantage of this is that you can claim the domain you would like associated with your business and send customers straight to your own domain so that eventually if you would like to build a freestanding e-commerce site your customers are already aware of your domain, and things like your business cards can remain the same.



# Option Two: Squarespace

### **Who it's best for:**

service-based businesses, fine artists, some product-based businesses

### **Guide to getting started:**

<http://squarespace.com/how-to/build-a-website>

### **Help center:**

<http://support.squarespace.com/>

**Pros:** Squarespace provides a wide array of highly customizable templates. In addition to providing infrastructure for e-commerce, Squarespace also has options for service-based businesses like appointment scheduling which makes it ideal for both service providers and businesses that offer a blend of products and services. Squarespace's behind the scenes interface is intuitive and Squarespace websites are easy to set up on your own.

**Cons:** Because Squarespace is a more generalized platform, their templates and functionality are not as optimized for product-based businesses. For example, offering products with many variants can become cumbersome. Squarespace's behind the scenes tools are not as powerful for product-based businesses as Shopify's.

**Associated Tools:** Squarespace partners with Square so you can use Square as POS hardware for in person sales and keep inventory in sync. Squarespace has a number of extensions for tax and shipping including Quickbooks and Shipstation.



# Option Three: Shopify

**Who it's best for:**  
product-based businesses

**Guide to getting started:**  
<http://shopify.com/blog/start-online-store>

**Help center:**  
<http://help.shopify.com/>

**Pros:** Shopify provides a powerful platform for product based businesses. Their platform is specifically geared toward e-commerce sites and the set up of their themes, as well as the behind the scenes functionality, is optimized for product based businesses. Because they focus specifically on product based business e-commerce websites they are consistently at the forefront of new developments. Shopify's App Store offers hundreds of apps for both the customer facing side of your site as well as aiding with your business's operations.

**Cons:** Shopify can require more investment of both time and money to set up. Shopify provides free themes but you may want to purchase a custom theme which can add to the initial cost. Although a Shopify website can be set up by a small business owner without outside help, some small businesses find they want to hire help from a developer with set up for more customized sites which can add to the initial cost.

**Associated Tools:** Shopify provides its own POS hardware for in person sales that syncs with your Shopify site inventory. Shopify allows you to print shipping labels directly from your online order dashboard. Shopify has numerous app extensions in its Shopify App Store including not only plugins for tax and shipping but also for website functionality as well as streamlining behind the scenes operations.

# Best Practices Across All E-Commerce Platforms

YOUR WEBSITE'S MISSION IS TO TELL YOUR STORY AND BUILD TRUST WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

## High Quality Photography

You want to showcase high quality photos throughout your site that tell your story.

Keep your target customer in mind as you work on your site photography. On your home page you will want beautiful photos that help convey the essence of what your business is about. On your about page you will want to include photos of you and/or your team. On your product listings you will want photos that show your product in different contexts: on a white/plain background, styled, and on, or with, a model. Your photography should strive to capture the *feeling* of your products as well as all the actual details.

You want your photographs to do the majority of the story-telling on your site. One way to check whether your site is doing this effectively is to imagine none of the text existed - could you still understand what your business is about and what it offers?

# Best Practices Across All E-Commerce Platforms

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## Well Written Copy

Even though your photography is ideally going to do the heavy lifting your written content is also important. You want to communicate clearly throughout your site. Keep text short! And keep your target customer in mind as you write. Clearly conveying details like dimensions/ ingredients/materials in your product listings is critical. Setting expectations about any logistics is also very important.

You can do this on a page like a shipping and returns page, a policies page, or a FAQ page, depending on which iteration makes most sense for your business. Some businesses may choose to have more than one; a shipping and returns page and a FAQ page, for example. Clearly stated policies not only serve to build trust but also save you time and energy as a business owner if you don't have to start from scratch when situations arise, or field customer service emails that could have been answered on your site.

# Best Practices Across All E-Commerce Platforms

YOUR WEBSITE'S MISSION IS TO TELL YOUR STORY AND BUILD TRUST WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

## Building Trust With Your Customers

Building trust is both concrete and intangible. Clear photography and a consistent tone in your written copy build subconscious trust with your customers. An about page that tells your story and gives customers a behind-the-scenes look also builds trust in your business.

There are also more overt ways to build trust: including a testimonial on your home page and reviews on your product pages and links to coverage from press are two good examples. In general, returning to who your target customer is and what concerns, questions, preoccupations and problems they have is the best way to figure out the specific ways your website can build trust with them.

# Website Audit: A checklist for small business owners to review their own site

- ❑ Could someone clearly tell from your home page who you are and what you offer? Does your **home page** tell a site visitor the who/what/where/why of your business in a concise way - your 'elevator pitch'? Does it include hero photos of your products/offerings? As a site visitor scrolls down the page do they find a way into the rest of the site - especially the online shop? Does it include trust building components like testimonials and/or press badges?
- ❑ Does your **navigation** prioritize what's most important? Does it place pages like your online shop and about page in the main header navigation and place less essential links like your social media in the footer?
- ❑ Does your **about** page tell a concise story about your business that keeps your target customer in mind? Do you include a photo of you and/or your team?
- ❑ Optional: are there **informational pages** specific to your business? Depending on your business this may or may not be the case. In thinking about your business is there something other than your about page and online store that your target customer would want to know? If you have additional pages are they clearly organized, and do they make finding the relevant information easy for a site visitor?
- ❑ Are your products organized into **collections/categories**?
- ❑ Do your **product listings** have clear and consistent descriptions and high-quality photos that show your product from different angles, on a simple background, and in context?
- ❑ Do you clearly communicate your **shipping and returns policies**? And any other policies that might be important and relevant to your particular business?
- ❑ Do you invite website visitors to join your **email newsletter** and include a way for them to sign up? Do you have links to your **social media** (that open in a new window)?
- ❑ Do you make it easy for potential customers to **contact** you either by email and/or through a contact form?
- ❑ Do you showcase **social proof** such as reviews, testimonials, and press coverage strategically throughout the site?
- ❑ Do you have the necessary **legal pages** like a terms & conditions page and/or privacy policy page?
- ❑ Do you use consistent **branding** across the site, including colors, fonts, and photography, that is in alignment with your offline branding such as business cards, packaging and signage?

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