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Guide To E-Business
What you have to know in e-Marketing. All about Tactics and Tips!

How to start your Business Online

The first question often asked by small business owners just like you who want to go online with their business is what do I need to know to get started. They know people are buying online and they know they need to get their business online to compete in today's marketplace. But they have no idea on how to get started.

After reading this guide, you'll have a better understanding of how all the parts of the e-business puzzle fit together.

KEY 1. THE DOMAIN NAME

Most domain names you see and hear today are the dot-coms. The fact is, you are going to have to register a domain name for your Web site. There is just no way around it. The domain name you choose will become your brand on the Internet and give your company a permanent online identity.

How to choose a good domain name?
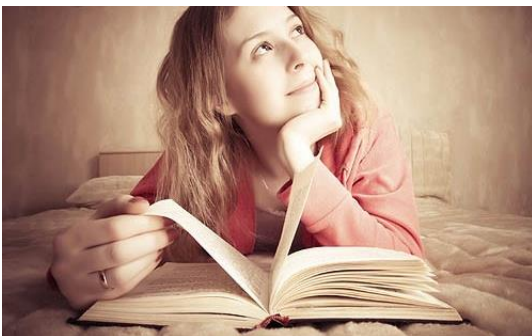
There are many good reasons to get your own domain name, the most important being: Perception - It doesn't say much about your company if you can't afford to have your own domain name.

Mobility - No matter where you decide to host your site, your domain name remains constant. Some search engines rely on domain names and keyword match-ups to send search results to their users. Having a domain name that matches what your company does or sells often means you'll turn up higher in search queries associated with your business. Your goal is to choose a name that's easy for your

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customers to remember, is as short as possible, unique, and reflects what your company does or sells.

The first name you'll want to consider is, of course, the name of your company. It's easy to check to see if any name you choose is already in use. There is a master database containing all the domain names registered on the Internet. This list can be searched to find a specific name. Since there can be only one registration for a particular name, any matches that are found as a result of a search means the name is already taken and is unavailable. Many search engines and Web hosting companies provide a tool that will let you check any domain name for availability at no cost. To check a domain name, simply type the name you want to check in the search field.

KEY 2. THE MERCHANT ACCOUNT

People are making purchases over the Internet and the vast majority use credit cards to complete the financial transaction. It makes sense, then, that to do any amount of business on the Web, your company must have the ability to accept credit cards for payment.

To accept credit cards you'll need to have a merchant account with your bank. If you are presently running a small business, you probably already have a merchant account. You can use this account to conduct financial transactions over the Internet just fine. If you don't have a merchant account and you want to do business over the Internet, you absolutely have to get one. Without the ability to accept credit cards, you're doomed to failure because you will miss sales opportunities and customers.

There are several different systems in use today by online businesses. Among them: Real-Time Processing is the best choice if your business conducts a lot of transactions over the Web. The system uses a program that runs on your Web site and will authorize credit card transactions directly without any manual intervention.

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If you run a store or shop that already has a terminal you can use it to process your Web orders. If you do not have a terminal, the cost for getting one is within reason for a start-up Web business.

KEY 3. THE ELECTRONIC SHOPPING CART

The right decision here will go a long way in establishing a trusting relationship with your Internet shoppers and save you a bundle of money when it comes to building and maintaining your online store. What Is A Shopping Cart? The electronic shopping cart (e-cart) is a program that runs on your ecommerce Web site. It can be compared to the real-world shopping cart you push around your local grocery or department store.

Along each step of the online shopping experience, the customer is kept constantly informed about the status of his/ her order. They have several opportunities to modify and even cancel all or part of the order. It's the easiest way for your customers to shop your site.

Store Maintenance E-carts are usually teamed up with a product database that eases the work involved with maintaining your Web store. By using this one tool, you control your product categories, descriptions, prices, images, shipping information, taxes, and more. Instead of re-writing individual Web pages each time you want to update your products, you only need to update the product database to affect changes.

Shopping carts not only allow you to have all this control, but they let you make changes from almost anywhere at any time. All the tasks associated with keeping your store current can be accomplished from your home or office because the shopping cart uses a browser-based interface. This means you can use any Internet connection and Web browser to build and manage your store. How you handle payment is up to you.
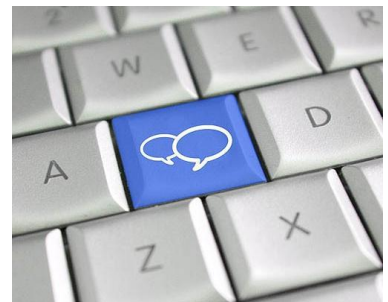
Asking your customers to call a telephone number to make a secure transaction is silly mistake. Think about this a little. Your customers are shopping online because it's convenient. If you are serious about conducting business over the Web, the order form is not an option. Automation is the solution.

KEY 4. WEB SITE HOSTING

Your site must be placed on a computer that is connected to the Internet and running Web server software so it can be made a part of the World Wide Web. Ideally, this computer will be connected to the Internet via a full-time high-speed connection. It will also have to be running any Operating System (OS) for which Web server software is available. This combination of hardware and software is called a Web Server. But, running a Web server is not as easy and trouble-free as the makers of server software would have you believe. You're also going to have to deal with security issues, backups, machine maintenance, and other duties expected of a technician.

It's much easier to pay someone else to take care of all this technical stuff while you concentrate on your business. The free or low-cost Web space an ISP may offer is primarily offered to the home user for a personal Web site.

KEY 5. WEB DESIGN

Now you're ready to start building your Web site. Many small business owners decide to make their own sites and this is perfectly acceptable. However, if you don't have the time or desire to make your own site, there are thousands of Web Design firms who will gladly take on your project. Some Web hosting companies even provide all the tools and services a small business owner needs to create and maintain a Web store without extra hardware or software.

Today, you can purchase a program for your computer that will automatically build and manage your Web site for you. Some of these programs even have Web page templates for you to use. All you need to do is supply your own images and text. The end result can be an acceptable Web site ready for you to upload to your Web server with just a few hours of work.

To give the best impression for your future customers, you'll want a site that looks professional. Your pages must load FAST. Be consistent. This means use the same colors, same backgrounds, same

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typefaces, etc. throughout your entire site. If your menu is on the left on your home page, then keep it on the left for all your pages.   Don't mix too many typefaces. Don't use music on a business site, unless you are operating a music site. Go easy on the high-tech.

Make sure your customers can easily find your company name, address, and telephone numbers easily. Don't hide this information. Begin by deciding what you want your site to accomplish and round-up all the tools and materials you'll need to build your site.

KEY 6. WEB PROMOTION

You have your merchant account and payment processing system in place. You've uploaded your site to your Web hosting provider. You've tested your shopping cart and all your pages. YOU ARE READY FOR CUSTOMERS!

But how do people know you have all these great products and deals? The Internet is an unbelievably huge place with tens of millions of Web pages for people to explore. A good way to jump-start your Web site is to create and distribute a press release to the media. If your budget allows, you can contract with a media company that specializes in creating and distributing press releases. There are hundreds of sites on the Web where you can learn all about search engines and indexes and how to submit to them to get favorable listings.

Other Promotion Methods Search engines are not the only way to get visitors to your site and a common sense approach will go a long way to helping you get people to your site. Use your domain name and Web address in ALL your company's promotional materials. This includes business cards, brochures, newspaper ads, classified ads, flyers, PR activities, fans club, SMS etc.

KEY 7. O2O PROMOTION

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If you have a real store, make sure your Web address is printed on everything that leaves with your customers including register receipts, shopping bags, and product packaging. Have a placard printed with your Web address close to every register where every customer can see it. You can even have small business cards printed with your store name and Web address. Place these on the sales counter so customers can take them. Make sure your Web address appears in EVERY display ad in local publications. Even include it in your radio commercials. Some communities have a local cable channel that advertises local businesses. If you use this media, get your Web address there too.

The basic guide to small business e-commerce. On the surface, e-commerce can appear simple once you learn how all the elements work together.

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