

10 Basics for Starting Your Online Business

Launching an online business can seem either simple or harrowing, depending on your perception of the Internet. For many, the task at hand will come naturally because they're comfortable maneuvering the 'Net with ease. For others, it's an entirely alien idea requiring heavy guidance.

Everyone who has ever sought out legitimate business opportunities online has probably scoured the Internet for sites that offer both direction and devices to make their journey easier.

Most people are looking for a place where Internet Marketers can make a single stop to gather and implement all of the information they need to carry them from A to Z and a turnkey marketing system that supplies everything they need for success.

There are ten basic steps to initiating and cultivating your dream of starting of your very own Internet-based business. The steps begin the moment you first conceptualize your dream and they culminate with continued revenue from your customers.

1. Motivation and Goal Setting

If you're reading this book, then you have already instilled some of the motivation needed to be a successful online entrepreneur. But are you ready to invest the time and money needed to realize your vision?

Before you ever start the first formal step of launching your cyber-business, you have to have the right mindset and a list of goals that you plan to accomplish one step at a time.

First, you need to gather the support of those who will be closely involved with you in your endeavor. It may be a work partner or your spouse and children if you're working solo from home.

Even if you're interested in signing up with an established affiliate program, you should still set and try to maintain your own personal goals. While some seasoned marketers have long-term success, those who sustain their victories in the marketplace know that they have to put in equal effort to building a successful affiliate network.

Sit down with a list of things you hope to accomplish with this business and be as specific as possible. It may help convince others (and even yourself) if you map out a simple business plan to show them how your idea will come to life. You can see a small business plan outline at www.sba.gov.

If you run into opposition, or self-doubts, then you may want to take some time to thoroughly review your business plan and try to solve any areas of concern before you begin investing too much time or money into your operation.

If you're considering joining an affiliate program, look at it carefully to determine what its drawbacks are, if any. Then, if you still have concerns, contact the administrator or a sponsor of the program and open a dialogue so that you can find out for yourself if these problems really exist, and if so, how they are solved.

Along with the plan itself, you should have several stages of goals that you hope to reach and the timeline to accompany them. Too many people sit down one day and decide to start a business with no direction to go. These people wind up off the path very quickly, and all the time and funds they devoted to their business goes down the drain.

Don't bite off more than you can chew with your goals. Start small and remember that goals are to be viewed as a "living list," and can be altered at any time depending on the success rate of your business.

You might want to set monetary goals – such as hoping to make \$2,000 per month within the first three months. Remember that most new businesses don't even see a profit until after the first year, so don't despair if yours is slow to grow.

On the Internet, your growth rate will be much quicker because your audience is global, not limited to your physical location. Another bonus with online selling is that many products are informational, and don't require the standard upfront investment that other companies do.

When you find a business opportunity that piques your interest, you need to make sure that there is a system in place that offers plenty of member support and training to get your own enterprise underway.

For example, Empowerism is not only a site that houses one of the largest learning environments on the 'Net, but it's also a community where members can interact with one another and get answers on issues that are important to them.

Look for a company that doesn't stop at just putting the facts and figures out there. You want one that takes an active interest in your success, offers a turnkey marketing system, and wants to make sure that your growth spurs more growth within the industry, which is exactly what a company called [Empowerism](#) has accomplished since 1998.

2. *Time Management Control*

If you're working from home or doing this business as a second career until it firmly gets on its feet, then you'll have to set and meet your schedule in order to carefully control your online enterprise.

You don't want to fall at one end of the spectrum – investing too much or too little time into your business. Instead, you want a healthy balance where you've spent enough time working toward your goals and plenty of time to spend enjoying family time or recreational life in general.

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” You've heard the saying. It rings true for many whose lives are consumed by their business. Don't let this happen to you! If you fall into the trap of working yourself to death, your business will suffer in the end because you'll become too frustrated to think clearly and make sound business decisions.

If your online business is your only job, then you can afford to spend 8-10 hours a day working toward its success. But if you're working at home, those 8-10 hours a day might be marred by constant interruptions and personal pauses that so easily take precedence over your work life.

If you have a family at home, remind them that you're going to be putting in formal work hours and that even though you might be available to temporarily stop and help them when they need it, they must respect your efforts to build your business.

Your time is important! You know the saying, “Time is Money” and you will find that to be especially true online where you can spend hour after hour on repetitive tasks that deliver marginal results. Don't fall into the trap of doing the same thing over and over again without results. Look for a true “[turnkey system](#)” that finds, sorts, and sells to your prospects, while you're spending time doing things that contribute to the long haul, like building relationships with your customers.

How many affiliate programs on the 'Net have you found who promise a turnkey investment? Just set it up and it runs itself. When it comes down to it, not many make the grade – then you eventually end up unwilling to spend the necessary time – and failure closes in.

Empowerism knows the difference between hype and truth, and makes promises that are kept by providing actual step-by-step instructions and a turnkey system that will help you make the most of your time.

3. *Product Conception*

Many people go through life wishing they could sell something and become instant millionaires. It rarely works this way, but the possibility still tugs at us and we're always looking for the "magic solution" to our financial stresses.

In order to develop a good product line, you have to look at the marketplace. What are consumers buying? What's being heavily advertised? You know it takes money to market your products, so the successful companies will be advertising greatly because they can afford to.

Is there a need that's not being met? Many success stories come out of regular consumers who couldn't find a particular product to solve their own problems, so they invented one themselves to help others!

Many thriving online businesses do nothing but sell information on the 'Net. Information is the hottest commodity, and almost anyone can do it with very little upfront investment of money.

Think about your own personal experiences. What skills do you have that cause people come to you for help? Are you a wiz at writing? Do you have a knack for investing or real estate solutions?

You can write an eBook to sell on the 'Net and rake in a lot of money – just for sharing your knowledge with others! Why are eBooks so popular? For several reasons, including the fact that they can be purchased and read in seconds from the comfort of your own home.

No bookstores. No traffic. No-hassle returns on most sites. Plus, eBooks usually come with a package deal, so customers get bonus materials just for ordering. This can be an extra eBook, a teaser eBook (a shorter version of the same book, highlighting a few excerpts), or a membership to a free Ezine.

If you aren't confident in your writing skills, but have an idea you'd like to see in print, consider hiring a professional to do it for you. Writing consultants can research and write about topics quickly and gear them toward consumers for about \$20 per page.

Products that are already created can be sold in affiliate programs. The advantages of marketing someone else's products or services are many, including time savings, low monetary investment (and risk), and less work. If that appeals to you, at least as a stepping stone to "bigger and better," then the perfect starting place is [Empowerism](#).

4. *Site Structure*

The structure of your website can mean the difference between a stalled business and a flourishing one. If your website isn't built for the consumer, then the consumer will steer clear.

Have you ever ventured into a store and found it messy or crowded and hard to maneuver? Did you ever go back to that place? Probably not. The same thing goes for your online business.

Some websites are not built for the average customer. They use large graphics that take hours for a 56K modem to download, or their links don't work. If you don't know how to build a website yourself, then hire a professional who knows how to do it for you.

Your site needs to be user-friendly so that customers keep coming back – not only for their first purchase, but also for follow-up sales once they've devoured your initial product.

Some basic tips for building a better website include using professional colors and fonts. You don't want a rainbow site with happy faces and flowery lettering trying to sell your serious eBook on *Investing for Seniors*.

You also want to make sure you have a separate domain for your business. You can register your very own dot com at GoDaddy.com for only \$8.95 per year, and the investment is well worth it for the professionalism it gives your business.

Once the designer drafts your site and your content is in place, ask a few friends or family members to make a test run through it and tell you if they notice any areas where the user would run into problems, like dead links or layout trouble.

Sometimes, something as simple as the browser the customer is using will distort the website and make it appear as if an amateur has launched an online business. Any reputable designer knows how to appeal to the masses, so you shouldn't run into any trouble if you check references and hire someone who's been in the business for at least 5 years.

If you're not quite ready to hire a website designer, there are companies that offer low-cost, ready-made templates that you can customize. [Empowerism](#) will give you 35 templates and teach you what to do with them. You will have a wide variety of options so that your enterprise is created with a personal slant – designed however you choose. These types of tools reduce the usual worries that plague other first time cyberpreneurs. Turnkey!

5. *Constructive Content*

Content can make a big difference if you fail to urge the audience to take action on your site. You have to create words that provoke the reader to continue reading until they are convinced to buy your product or sign up for something on your site.

Some websites run on for pages, causing the reader to scroll forever. Others use a mere paragraph or two to make their point and hope for the best results. What length you require depends on the product you're selling and how much convincing needs to be done to make the sale.

Many websites are sheer sales propaganda, and it often works! Your sales strategy should reflect the customer and how they approach buying on the Internet. Many people like and expect to see testimonials sprinkled throughout your home page, for instance.

Whenever you work on your content, make sure that you answer the 5 W's: **Who** (who the product is for and who you are as well); **What** (what the product is exactly, along with any other bonus materials included); **When** (when the offer expires – an often crucial element in making the sale tonight as opposed to never); **Where** (where they can reach you in case they have any questions or need assistance); and **Why** (why they need your product above any others selling on the 'Net).

You might want to write your online sales content like a personal letter, complete with an image of your signature at the bottom of the page. Don't forget your Postscripts (P.S.) – you can have up to five Postscripts where you sum up the important facts and urge the client to purchase now or miss out on the deal altogether.

Your content will play a key factor in your search engine placement, so you will need to learn how to “write for the search engines” and incorporate that whenever possible. If that's something you're not familiar with, Empowerism offers a full training module on keyword and keyphrase integration for search engine optimization.

Content isn't confined just to your website! Email marketing is a vital aspect of Internet Marketing, and the content of your communications to your prospects and customers must be professional, with a good blend of relationship-building, soft-sell, and hard-sell copy. This is also something that [Empowerism](#) excels at, in fact you can pick up a complimentary Email Marketing Course on their website, which addresses email content, among other critical topics. The last thing you want to do is offend a prospect or appear amateurish in your communications!

6. *Search Engine Support*

Without aiming for a decent search engine ranking, you might have difficulty in achieving the kind of sales results you're after. In addition to content, addressed in the previous section, there are several tools you can use to help you increase your search engine placement.

While many engines have their own criteria for developing their unique ranking system, most rely on a combination of keywords, relevancy, and even link reciprocation. In order to move into the top ten, most coveted positions, you have to know how to play their game.

First, sit down and brainstorm the keywords most used to describe your product. Google has a keyword tool that helps you determine the most widely used search terms for your business. You can find it at:

<https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox>.

For example, if you enter "investing," the tool will return the following terms to you: Real estate investing, online investing, socially responsible investing, value investing, stock market investing, stock investing, investing online, gold investing, drip investing, & investing money – and these are only the top 10 out of 50+ terms it returns.

How do you use these search terms? You use them both behind the scenes and on center stage. Your web developer will want to include many of them in your META tags, which allows search engine spiders to classify your site more easily.

You'll also want to use them in your keyword content when crafting the home page of your website. When the spider crawls onto your site, it scans the keywords to make sure the site is really relevant to that particular subject matter, and not just a scam to get traffic in the door.

You will need to continue recreating your search engine strategy, since many engines change their formula to keep everyone on their toes. Google and others, for instance, now factor into the ranking formula the number of other sites who have a link to your site. This is known as link reciprocation.

Don't have a web developer? It's easy to learn this from [Empowerism](#). Not only will you learn about issues such as link reciprocation, but you'll see how to generate targeted traffic to your website using search engines and free tools reserved especially for subscribers. Or you can always use their [turnkey system](#) and never have to worry about anything related to search engines again!

7. *Advertising Issues*

Advertising will be the lifeblood of your business, so this is where the majority of your time, money, and effort will be spent. Your goal is to build a database (list) of prospects and customers you can sell to time and time again.

In the ever-changing (and challenging) world of online advertising, there are two primary categories: **Free and Paid**. The basic rule of thumb is that if you have much more time than money, Free advertising may be your most logical choice. However, if you have even just a little room in your budget for advertising, Paid advertising, combined with effective free methods, will save you bundles of time and is the most direct route to success.

The entire goal of your advertising efforts should be to drive targeted traffic to your website, where visitors are encouraged to add their name and email address to your database. Plain and simple. Database Marketing 101.

Free online advertising methods include (but are not limited to) posting to free safelists, engaging in message board discussions and including your tagline on each post, posting to free classified ad sites, using traffic generators (surfing/clicking for credits), submitting your website to search engines, banner exchanges, reciprocal linking with similar sites, submitting free ezine ads, writing articles and including your byline at the end, and writing a press release about the launch of your site or a new product and submitting to online news media.

These methods can be tedious and frustrating, but when you're starting off, with no extra funds, if you can choose two and stick with them religiously, you will most likely generate enough profit to form a Paid advertising plan. Empowerism can help you get started with any of these, as well as teach you how to test and track your results, which is vitally important to your sanity!

Paid advertising methods are virtually endless. Some of the most popular include renting opt-in lists, buying opt-in leads, placing ads in reputable ezines, using pay-per-click search engines, buying banner ad space, and buying targeted traffic. When using a completely turnkey system like the one [Empowerism](#) supplies, your opt-in leads, delivery method, and content are automatically included, leaving you free to try other advertising venues to complement these efforts.

Just because you have an online business, that doesn't mean all of your advertising has to be on the Internet. However, online advertising is usually less costly than offline avenues. You don't have to pay for pricey prime time placement, but you do have to spend more time figuring out where your prospects are so that your dollars are not wasted in your efforts.

8. *Customer Service*

Everyone knows that keeping a customer is ten times harder than getting one initially. We can all recall numerous times when we've purchased something and vowed never to return.

You don't want to be labeled one of those businesses that doesn't seem to value its customers. Word on the Internet spreads rapidly. If you burn one customer, he or she might post that experience on an online message board or mention it in an email discussion list, and no one else will want to do business with you, either.

What does customer service mean? Does it mean the customer is always right? If you want it to! But more often than not, it means that you are willing to listen to a customer's complaints and work toward a mutual resolution.

Sometimes the only resolution that will work means a full money-back guarantee. Yes, even if you know the consumer is only doing this to scam you out of your money.

But other times, the customer is lodging a legitimate complaint, and this can be very helpful to you when it comes to satisfying the needs of other customers. Say a customer emails you with a request for a refund because many of the links in your eBook were dead links (they no longer worked).

First of all, you need to thank this customer profusely because he's just done you a big favor. He's saved you money. How? Because you can instantly refund his money, fix the dead links, and avoid dozens of other returns.

Then you should happily refund the money for this sale and promise him that you'll be repairing the problem and ensuring it never happens again. As a result, you might have salvaged his business for your release of the next edition of your informational eBook.

No matter what the situation, always be courteous and friendly when dealing with a customer – even those who are furious with you for no good reason (that you can see). Remain calm and gently take care of the problem.

The biggest complaint online consumers have in working with customer service departments is their slow reply. To combat this problem, make sure you stay on top of customer contact so that you can resolve any issues before they grow into larger ones.

By aligning yourself with a company with an unprecedented reputation for integrity and fast, friendly service, you will garner the experience to serve your clients with the respect they expect.

9. *Recurrent Marketing Efforts*

Don't think that once you launch a single ad campaign, your efforts are finished. Marketing your products is a never-ending task that has to be factored into the continued growth of your business. Even after you've made the sale, the show must go on – your goal is to keep these customers for life, if not longer!

Whenever you create a product to sell on the Internet, you must have a way to capture and store the contact information of your customer – preferably through email – and let them know they will hear from you from time to time. So long as you provide a way for them to opt out of receiving your emails, this is standard procedure.

When someone becomes your customer, the next time he hears from you will be right after his first purchase – thanking him for becoming a valued customer. From that point on, you can occasionally contact him to alert him to other special offers, upgrades, or complementary products that are available to him at a special discount because he's an existing customer.

Your new best friends will be an auto-responder and your mailing list software. Auto-responders usually come with a mass mailing function, which is very convenient. With auto-responders, the “after-the-sale” marketing is done for you automatically – contacting the customer periodically with various “drive ‘em back” messages. You can either write these messages or hire a professional.

Your mailing list software (or the mass mail feature of your auto-responder) allows you to contact your customers “on the fly” with up-to-the-minute information that would not typically be loaded into an auto-responder. This can be in the form of special reports or a newsletter you send out regularly.

Keep your eye on the media – newspapers, television, even radio – and send your customers a message whenever you find information that could benefit their lives in some way, relevant to their relationship with you. These reports can be drafted in a matter of hours, and can be anywhere from one to five pages long.

For example, if you sell an eBook on lowering telecommunications costs, and you see a story about it on the 5 o'clock news, whip up a short report and send it to your customers. They will appreciate knowing you're on top of the situation and looking out for their best interests. At the same time, you'll be positioning yourself as an expert in your field.

Out of all the tools you'll want to use, one clever tool [Empowerism](#) provides its members is the ability to plug your name and URL into existing material that you can give away to future prospects and customers. The data is already there – you just substitute your contact information, and you've instantly produced a quality product.

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