



BIZNET

A Program of the North Coast Small Business Resource Center

www.northcoastsbdc.org

520 E Street • Eureka, CA 95501 • Phone (707) 445-9720 • Fax (707) 445-9652
225 H Street • Crescent City, CA 95531 • Phone (707) 464-2168 • Fax: (707) 464-1349

Checklist for Starting an E-Commerce Venture

- Choose a web host for your site
 - Web hosting service
 - Identify your needs first, then shop around for the best deal
 - Easier to upgrade services than downgrade
 - Web site address (domain name)
 - Google search for domain name if only registering a new one
 - Keep it simple enough to remember, deals directly with business
 - Look for a package deal where you can register a name with your hosting service
- Web page design
 - Outsource web design or do it yourself
 - There are many options available for hiring someone to design your site. Shop around locally or online for a web designer that best fits your needs.
 - Layout and maintenance
 - How do you want your site to look? How easy is it for you to change text, prices, and pictures? Will you be charged for each change? Can you do it yourself?
 - Product pictures and descriptions
 - Do not underestimate the value of good product pictures. It is the only thing your customer will see before choosing to purchase. Make sure to focus on what you are selling and avoid distracting items that might confuse consumers.
 - Policies section: privacy statement, return policy, terms and conditions, and shipping policy.
 - Check some of your favorite websites for examples of these policies
- Payment structure
 - Law requires the shipping of products within 5 days of when payment has been charged
 - Paypal: www.paypal.com
 - A very useful tool to accept payment (includes credit cards) over the Internet. Keeps complications and costs to a minimum for businesses just starting out.
 - Merchant account:
 - Gives you the ability to accept credit cards online with differing business solutions
 - There are many options to choose from both online and locally for your choice of a merchant account.
 - Mail in payment: Checks or cashiers checks
 - Beware of fraud or inadequate funds
- Managing security
 - Is security an issue? How do I overcome this issue?
 - Security is a major concern for many people shopping over the Internet. Make sure to address security in your policies, specifically your privacy statement.

Paid for under the current grant with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the San Jose State University Foundation. NCSBRC Program is nondiscriminatory and available to individuals with disabilities. This material is based on work supported by the U.S. SBA, the NCSBRC, and San Jose State University Foundation. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U. S. Small Business Administration, the NCSBRC, or the San Jose State University Foundation.



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- If accepting credit cards over the internet or phone make sure to have the proper software protecting this data from theft.
- Managing sales
 - How to manage your sales? How much inventory will I need to have on hand? What happens if I run out of a product? What happens if my supplier runs out something and I cannot fill an order?
 - Sales management is very important, especially if you intend to take payments via credit card. Ensure that you have products available to ship as soon as the order has been received. If you are unable to do so, make sure that the customer knows how long it will take and set their expectations accordingly.
- Shipping structure
 - What company best fits my needs? The most common shippers are USPS, UPS, and FedEx.
 - Do you need them to pick up the orders daily from your house or will you take it to a drop off site? Do you need to track your shipments? Is it a high value product that requires insurance?
 - Shipping prices can be computed before purchase so that the consumer knows how much they will be charged for shipping.
- Marketing your site
 - Determine your target market (Free marketing basics workshop at NCSBDC to help)
 - Utilize search engine results pages (SERPS) to make your site more accessible.
 - Utilize press releases when a major event occurs.
 - Link, link, link! The more links you have out there the easier it is to find your site.
 - Find a way to keep people coming back by offering free coupons or new products every 3rd Thursday. Any sort of catch to ensure repeat traffic.
- Setting your expectations
 - It takes time to make your site profitable. Marketing must continue throughout the life of your site or sales will not continue.
 - You will need a catch to keep people coming back to your site
 - Make sure to have everything set up and tested many times before launch.
 - There will be issues that will arise. Be flexible and open-minded. Remember that you will only get back what you put into the site.
 - Keep your expectations realistic.

Contacts:

North Coast Small Business Development Center: Business counseling and workshops, 445-9720, www.northcoastsbdc.org

Redwood Region Economic Development Commission: Business Lender, 445-9651

Small Business Administration: Great site for business information, www.sba.gov

CalGold: A comprehensive listing of every permit you may need, www.calgold.ca.gov

Arcata Economic Development Corporation: Business Lender, 822-4616

Redwood Technology Consortium, <http://redwoodtech.org/Expo.cfm>

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