

Should I Make the E-Commerce Jump with My Business?

These days it feels like everything is online and if you don't have an online presence you're being left in the dust. But there are plenty of businesses existing only on a Facebook page. Some feel like they don't have the time to create a website while others don't even know where to start.

Facebook is just easier. But there's one problem.

You don't own it.

Facebook, even with its cool new rollouts focused on small business, could freeze your account tomorrow or worse shut it down and you'd have nothing. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be there, but it shouldn't be the only place you are.

The same goes for your brick-and-mortar business. I'm not suggesting it's right for every business to move to e-commerce, nor should you *necessarily* give up a brick-and-mortar existence just because everything is online these days. However, it can help you reach a completely different customer.

Let's take a look at the arguments against it:



Argument #1: My Business Is Local. Why Go Online?

It's a popular misconception that going online means you're selling things to people across the country or the world. Consider for a moment the direction restaurants are going in. McDonalds is on Uber Eats, they already have a drive-thru that's open 24-hours in some places and yet their business is telling them that people would rather order fast-food online then go get in the car and pick it up.

Your business may be local, and your e-commerce business may be too. Think of busy parents who just don't have time to go shopping or others who just want what they want and don't like the parking, fighting the crowds, and browsing through your store. Maybe they have something very specific in mind and when they see it online, they can purchase it right away without the hassle.

Consumer desires are changing. When people go out of the house, they want the experience but sometimes they want the product without all of that. People buy from Amazon not because it's cheap (sometimes their prices aren't the best). They buy because it's convenient and Amazon can get it to you faster than you can go out and find it around town.

Argument #2: I Don't Know How to Do the Tech Thing

You don't have to create an e-commerce shopping cart experience on your website. You could begin making friends with the "enemy." Ebay, Walmart, and Amazon all allow for third-party sellers. It's not necessarily the best way because you'll give them a cut but it's an easy way to start selling immediately to a large audience.

There are also several ways to sell with them. Product can come from you or their warehouse, so you don't have to handle fulfillment. It might not work for every business but it's an easy entry to start experimenting with e-commerce.

If you want to move past that, there are several WordPress plug-ins that can help you with shopping cart functionality such as Woocommerce and the PayPal shopping cart. You no longer have to build the tool from scratch and integrate it into your website.

Argument #3: It Will Take the Personal Experience Away

Small business's edge over Amazon is the experience they offer their customers. So many small business owners assume that if they go online, they'll be giving up their customer service difference. That's not true because while Amazon excels at getting things to people faster than they can change their mind about them, the process is largely impersonal. Sure, they provide great updates and tracking but I've never received a pleasant surprise from Amazon, a nice

personal note or a free bumper sticker. The only time that happens is when something is coming from a third-party on their site.

You can still shine as a small business owner by including something memorable in the package like a signature gift wrap, personal note, request for them to take a selfie with the item, a fortune or a poignant quote on a note card or bookmark. These things aren't expensive, but they do standout. Pure Vida sends stickers, and everything is wrapped beautifully. You feel like you're getting a gift. It surprises and delights. Their jewelry isn't expensive, but you feel like it is when you receive the package.

You'll also want a lenient returns policy, fast or free shipping (at least on orders over a certain amount. Shipping charges are the number one reason people abandon shopping carts) and something that makes your customer feel special.

Ultimately whether you enter the e-commerce world or stick with your brick and mortar, is up to you. Think about your current customer and ask if they might not buy more from you if convenience was a factor. If you don't think it would change their purchasing habits, ask yourself if you can see a new market expansion for your product. Do you want to reach one who is increasingly becoming conditioned to conveniences like ordering McDonalds from Uber Eats?

People are ordering more from home these days and saving those big experiences out for things like date nights and special occasions. If you're a business that has sold itself on believing that what you provide over Amazon and other major retailers are experiences, you need to know that shopping experiences aren't all the rage they once were. We're seeing a shift in consumer activity. If you want to provide experiences, it's going to come in the form of events not just inviting them to browse aimlessly in your store.

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