

E-Commerce Start-Up Checklist

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Starting an e-commerce business requires a plan, focus, and a disciplined approach. The steps below provide a list of the major tasks you must accomplish in order to start your business on the Internet. Following this checklist can help prevent false starts, save money, reduce start-up time, and help make your site more effective.

KEY STEPS

1. **Goals.** Determine your company's Web site goals (What do you want to accomplish on the Web?) Decide what you want to sell on the Web and how you it will make money. Then use this information to develop an Internet business plan.

The two key steps in goal setting are:

- Identify your Web site's niche (target market)
- Make a profile of your "ideal" customer(s) and determine what they would like from your Web site, e.g., features, products, information, etc.

2. **Domain Name.** Select a domain name for your company & register it. Do this as soon as possible since good domain names go fast. Be sure to have several different variations of your company's domain name. Try to select a domain name that is easy to remember. You can get a domain from one of the following:

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--------------|
| Network Solutions | www.networksolutions.com | 888-642-9675 |
| Regiser.com | www.register.com | 800-899-9702 |

3. **Equipment.** Get the basic equipment for your business such as a computer, printer, scanner, Web access, Web site host, and e-mail account.
4. **Trademark.** Once you get your domain name be sure to protect it with a trademark. You can do this yourself by going to the US Patent and Trademark Office at www.uspto.gov You can also get this done by consulting an attorney.
5. **Benchmark.** You need to scope out your competition before you design your Web site and develop a Web marketing plan – this can be done using www.google.com and/or www.ccr.gov . You should also check out the best overall Web site design by checking out the best-of-the best at the Webby Awards site (www.webbyawards.com) . Benchmarking helps you understand what needs to be done to make sure your Web site stands out.
6. **Webmaster.** A key person in your e-business plan is the Webmaster. He/she can help you translate your ideas into an effective Web site for your business. A Webmaster is also essential to keep your site up-to-date.

7. **Web Site.** The Web site is the heart of your e-business. Key steps in this area are:
 - Prepare a written specification that specifies what your Web site will do and what information it will contain (See the “**Website Planning Worksheet**”)
 - Develop an e-mail reply capability
 - Become electronic data interchange (EDI) compliant
 - Get electronic payment capability
 - Establish “firewalls” to protect your site from hackers, viruses, worms, etc.
 - Globalize your Web site, e.g., metric system, multilingual, etc.
 - Get data rights to all Web site content
 - Include a "Privacy Statement"
8. **Graphics.** Set graphics, colors, and a design layout for your Web site. You should also develop a company logo.
9. **M/WBE Certification.** Be sure to put your M/WBE certifications forms on your Web site. Make it so a buyer can click them and get a printed copy.
10. **Payment System.** The key steps are to set up a business bank account, get a Web merchant account, and set up an online shopping cart.
11. **Web Host.** You need to put your Web site on a computer (server) so it can be widely accessed and protected. A Web host will provide your site with a home and should also provide you with domain name e-mails, e.g. **info@yourcompany.com**.
12. **FTP.** File Transfer Protocol is the process of putting your Web site’s HTML files on a server (Web host). This transfer your file to the World Wide Web.
13. **Testing.** Once your Web site is developed you need to test it. Testing make sure everything works and is an easy way to identify and fix small problems before they become big ones later on. This is best done by an independent person or group (someone who didn’t develop the site) who can be objective and provide honest feedback.
14. **Marketing.** There are over 4 billion Web sites. Your site will get lost in the crowd unless you develop a Web Marketing Plan. When it’s completed, be sure to register your Web site with the major Internet search engines and directories. This makes it easier for corporate and government buyers to find your business on the Web. Be sure to check your ratings each month in the search engine listings, to make sure you don’t lose your position to newer entries. For small, minority, and women-owned businesses who want to do business with the Government, they must register as a contractor (www.ccr.gov) If you are MBE or WBE then should also register with Diversity Information Resources at: www.diversityinforesources.com

15. **Training.** Train your staff on how to use the company's Web site.
16. **Updates.** Perform quarterly Web site performance reviews. Things to check for are outdated content such as price lists, broken Web links, old information, etc. One of the fastest ways to lose customers is to have outdated information. This is why quarterly reviews are essential.
17. **Alliances.** No Web site should be an island. Creating alliances with related Web-based businesses, e.g., portals and e-markets is essential to online survival. Alliances help refer customers to your site, can help reduce costs, and add credibility to your Web site (if you have chosen the right partners). Alliances can also help provide M/WBE suppliers with additional capacity so they don't lose contracts due to contract bundling.

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