

LAUNCH ONLINE GRANT PROGRAM

BEST PRACTICES PLAYBOOK



Congratulations on qualifying for the Launch Online Grant Program!

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the regular shopping experience in 2020.

Traditional retail sales took a major hit last year, but e-commerce experienced a 129% year-over-year growth in U.S. and Canadian orders, with an impressive 146% growth in all online retail orders*. And that was only as of April 2020.

You've known for a while it's time to take your business online, but you have been holding back. Or, perhaps you've already taken a step towards e-commerce, but you realize you need more help. We understand.



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Expanding a business' reach to online sales can be intimidating. For starters, it can be a real challenge to make the time for this big step.

The circumstances surrounding COVID-19 have afforded many entrepreneurs the opportunity to take the time required to bring their business online. Another common roadblock business owners face is not having the upfront investment to put into building a digital presence.

This grant will help alleviate a lot of this pressure.



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That said, the most common issue preventing people like you from bringing their business online, is the lack of knowledge.

You want to do it right, you want to get the most out of it and you know in order to do this, you need help. And with so many marketing companies out there, and DIY-kits, it's not always an obvious choice.

The following guide will help empower you to ask the right questions, and to have a better idea of what type of e-commerce solution your business needs, in order to meet your short-term, and long-term goals.



Before you create your online store, it's important to consider the following:

1. Choosing the right online shopping platform for you

With e-commerce platforms, you can use templates to quickly create a website that includes e-commerce functionality built-in.

You are able to customize the templates to fit your branding and use extensions to add functionalities such as currency converters, or contact forms.



2. Ensure your website is secure

It is very important for e-commerce sites to be secure since people enter their payment information.

You'll want to purchase a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificate and add an address verification system (AVS) and credit card verification value (CVV) to your checkout process.

Google favors SSL secure sites, and your customers could be wary to shop if they are notified your site is not secure.



3. Create a terms-of-use document and privacy policy

Most of your customers have experience shopping online. They understand not all companies operate under the same terms.

One of the most important e-commerce website requirements is a professional, well-written terms-of-use document that customers can easily find on your website.

This document describes the rules for using your e-commerce store and protects you legally.

It is also important to list your shipping terms, refund and exchange policy, as well as other important info to help your customer have the best experience while shopping with you.



4. Make your site PCI-compliant

Your website must be compliant with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS). Major credit card companies require that organizations that accept their cards adhere to this standard, whose goal is to secure and protect the shopper's credit card data.

Your e-commerce platform likely provides everything you need to be PCI compliant.

Lack of compliance means you may not be able to accept some credit cards and you could even face fines if a data breach occurs.



5. Set up analytics tools

Prior to launching your site, make sure you set up an analytics tool. Your e-commerce platform may have with built-in analytics, but you can also use a tool like Google Analytics. This will help track your website's performance and learning more about your site's visitors.

Which will ultimately result in more sales, and customer loyalty.

With Google Analytics you can get information about your transactions, conversion rate, marketing campaigns, and more.



6. Configure email notifications

Email follow-ups are crucial for every online shopping experience. They allow you to follow up with your buyers, provide customer support, encourage upsells, advertise promotions and new drops. They also keep your business top-of-mind, which encourages repeat purchases.

Sign up for email marketing software and set up some basic emails, such as:

- Welcome emails
- Order confirmations
- Receipts
- Shipping alerts
- Email drip campaigns



7. Offer your users a personalized experience

You can deliver a custom experience on e-commerce sites by dynamically showing content, product recommendations, and unique offers based on a user's past purchases, browsing patterns, customer demographics, and other personal data.

Online shopping does not offer the traditional recommendations and experience you would normally receive in-store, when a salesperson is usually available to help you make a buying decision.



8. Good photography & Product descriptions

It is important to take great photos of your products, from as many angles as possible. Good lighting will allow us to show the quality of a product.

It is also important to list dimensions, materials, and care instructions for products.



9. Allow your customers to review your products.

This is a scary one.

Customers can be scathing in their reviews, especially when they are free to comment anonymously.

That said, customer purchases (especially first-time purchases) often rely on the rating of a product.

When a customer loves your product, they will happily review it and encourage others to buy.

And when a customer leaves a not-so 5-star review, use it as an opportunity to learn what your customers' value and desire in a product.

This will help you optimize your customer's experience.



10. Establish a marketing plan

The competition to sell online has increased, and will continue to do so. It is not enough to simply publish an online store. You must have a marketing plan.

Deciding on whether to run paid advertising with platforms like Google, Facebook and Instagram, should be a decision you make based on proper research.

It is also important to craft SEO and social media strategies. Whether you are leaving this in the hands of a marketing team, or taking it on internally, it is important to have a plan.

Some marketing companies offer audits and road maps to help you determine the order of what to improve to achieve your goals.

