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Getting started with eCommerce: How to choose products to sell

Once upon a time, choosing products to sell online was much more of a romantic affair; selecting items simply because you liked them, because they looked good, or perhaps, even because they helped people. Now in the age of all-out retail warfare, fledgling sellers can struggle to compete with the retail behemoths that dominate the web space. However, smart sellers - big or small - can use simple, methodical research to shine and compete with top brands on major retail platforms. Below are three helpful rituals that can be implemented to your research, compatible with selling on all eCommerce platforms, from drop-shipping to stand-alone stores, to private label.

Start simply and systematically

An ideal way to get started in eCommerce is by being your own personal guinea pig. Make a list of every physical product you touch for one day and work into this list further by thinking of five products that can be used in conjunction with that item. For example, you have your morning cup of coffee – think of products relevant to that action that you could sell. You play an afternoon game of badminton – think of five products you could sell in relation to that action. The idea is to set your mind thinking about not just the obvious, but the consumable add-ons, niche extensions, and current trends that might also make for profitable margins. Think of items in which you might have a certain expertise - such as hobbies - where you can spot a gap in the market. There are no wrong ideas at this stage, but keep some parameters in mind; ideal items are small to mid-size, easily postable, affordable to purchase wholesale and for the consumer – say $20 - $100 retail value, plus affordable enough that you can mark them up by at least 50 percent at retail to make a decent profit. Check for example wholesale prices on Alibaba and Aliexpress, so you know right off the bat if an idea has potential.

Embrace keyword research

The next step is to ascertain which of these ideas could be a realistic opportunity for sales. Use Google AdWords Keyword Planner; a unique - and free - tool which allows you to see how often your product search terms, known as "keywords", have been searched for in a specific region, or worldwide. This will give you a good idea of the demand for this kind of item, and whether it could be a profitable product. Search terms of three words or longer (also known as "keyphrases") are ideal – such as "buy black espresso cups" or "gold-trim espresso cups", to weed out those simply researching, and those looking to buy, buy, buy.

Dissect the data

Merchant-based platforms such as Amazon and eBay are a virtual goldmine of data, even if you don't plan to sell on those platforms specifically. Look up similar products and start asking questions: how are they priced? Do they have a lot of sales/reviews? Is there something missing from the listing that could be improved: poor copy, poor images, not offering speedy delivery? Note the negatives consumers have referenced about the product, that you could improve in your product offerings; sometimes you can prevail simply by correcting where others have failed.

Specific applications can now be used in conjunction with these sites – Jungle Scout being the most popular for Amazon. This allows users to track data of many similar products, see how much competitors are making, as well as providing a host of other functions that makes researching easier and faster, giving you the edge over your competition.

By completing these three tasks every time you perform product research, you should be able to define real commodities of interest and have a strong idea of not just your competitors, but how you could market your product and potentially add real value and authenticity to the marketplace.