Building Your Online Store

Today I will provide some direction relating to building your online store. This task can be as easy as choosing the right solution. My most important suggestion for this stage of your development is to urge you to take the time to consider the alternatives and make sure that you choose the right path that matches your business needs.

I asked my contacts at Verisign for some tips on choosing the right eCommerce solution. I include them in the following comments.

Start by looking at your needs. Are you just selling one product or needing a more complex shopping cart? There are many online solutions that are available based on your business’ needs. Consider this range of options:

1. **Simple**: You’re selling a single product and only need a way for customers to pay, you may only need a “Buy Now” button, like PayPal.

2. **Hosted**: If you need more than a payment button but don’t have the time, money, or bandwidth to install e-commerce software, you can utilize a hosted solution. A hosted provider like Shopify or Bigcommerce allows you to create a store and host it on their server for a monthly fee. Or you can create an online presence using an existing online marketplace like Etsy, Amazon, or eBay. Going with this solution there are many positives such as set-up is quick and easy, there’s a built-in base of potential customers, and it’s a great way to get started with a low-commitment, low-budget online presence.

3. **Do it yourself**: For a robust shopping cart, there are many commercial (off-the-shelf solutions that require a license) and open source products, like Opencart, to choose. When assessing any product though, determine if it supports the particular payment methods you want, what type of support and help is available to you after purchase, and how frequently the product is upgraded.

Also, consider building a website if you don’t already have one. Many website builder tools (even the free ones) offer integrated e-commerce functionality. If you already have a website, check with your host provider to see what e-commerce options you can add.

Arguably, the most important part of establishing an online storefront is how you structure your payment process. People who shop online most often want to be able to pay easily and quickly. Many online shoppers use a credit card for online purchases. To accept credit cards online, you will need to establish a merchant account with your banking institution to process transactions into your business account. Contact your bank
to get more information on how to establish one. For security reasons, they will probably require you to work with a payment service provider (PSP) or “payment gateway.” If this is too complex for your needs or if there are other barriers to this more traditional route, consider an interface with a third-party payment service like PayPal.

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