Getting Your Products Ready for E-commerce Sale.

Yes, an e-commerce website can be a viable strategy for growing your small business sales. However, setting up and managing an e-commerce website to sell your company’s products involves a lot of work and knowledge of what might boost or bust your bottom line. In my last few columns I have focused on ideas for setting up the site. But, one topic that needs to be mentioned is what you need to do to get your products ready for selling through e-commerce.

I learned some important steps to do this preparation from Michelle Covey, Vice President, Retail Apparel and General Merchandise at GS1 US. With more than 20 years of experience working with retail supply chains, she is responsible for helping companies achieve source to store supply chain visibility — ensuring that the right product is in the right place at the right time for today’s consumer. Michelle suggests the following steps:

**Step 1: Make your product searchable**

A Universal Product Code (UPC), also called a Global Trade Item Number (GTIN), is used by major retailers and small businesses alike to identify and track product inventories. This unique string of numbers is visible within the barcodes of products we buy and consume every day at retail stores.

Many small business owners don’t know that the identification number encoded in a barcode has online relevance too. They not only help you streamline operations by connecting the digital listing with the physical product, they increase a product’s visibility in consumer search results.

Online marketplaces like Amazon and eBay recognize that these numbers benefit both their buyers and sellers so they have outlined specific preferences for using UPCs in product listings, and some online retailers will even hide listings that do not contain these product identifiers.

To address these specifications, you should ensure that the identification numbers assigned to your products are authentic and include a GS1 Company Prefix, which will provide proof that your brand is linked with your product.

Licensing a Company Prefix from the not-for-profit standards organization, GS1 US, allows you to create product identification numbers (UPCs/GTINs) and barcodes (for scanning in-store) for each of your products. If your company has product variations,
such as various flavors or colors, you will need to have separate identification numbers (and barcodes) for each item.

**Step 2: Help consumers “picture” it**

Every seller hopes to avoid negative reviews or product returns. Think about your own experiences as a shopper—you will likely scroll past a product listed with only one dark image and gravitate toward the one with numerous photos at different angles highlighting the product’s key features. Clear imagery is a necessity in today’s competitive online marketplace and more pictures can lead to higher sales conversions.

In fact, a recent Nielsen study found that the majority of mobile shoppers (62 percent) rated the ability to see product pictures as the most important factor in their shopping decisions. Professional photos of your product taken at different angles are critical to confirm that your product meets your target audience’s expectations.

**Step 3: Present all relevant data for consumers**

You might only get one chance to connect with a consumer—help them find your product and make a purchase by compiling and sharing all relevant details. Packing your listing with helpful and complete information about the product’s unique characteristics (for example, highlighting that a sweater is hypoallergenic and machine washable) can be a great point of differentiation and help sell your product versus the competition.

Not sure how you can accomplish this on a tight budget? There are helpful content providers who are skilled in the art of managing product content and creating accompanying imagery for small businesses without breaking the bank.

Ultimately, retail has evolved in exciting ways to benefit smaller startups with great products just looking for the right audience to break through. While the process of launching products can seem complex at first, applying these best practices can help propel your company forward for future growth and success.

Dean L. Swanson
Southeast Minnesota SCORE
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce
220 South Broadway, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55904

[www.seminnesota.score.org/](http://www.seminnesota.score.org/)

*Dean is a volunteer Certified SCORE Mentor and former Regional Vice President for the North West Region*