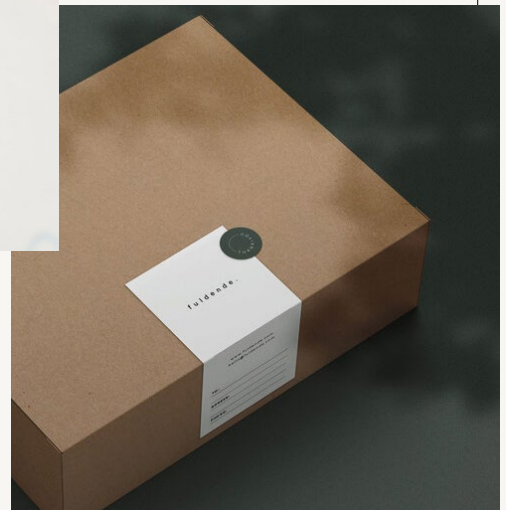
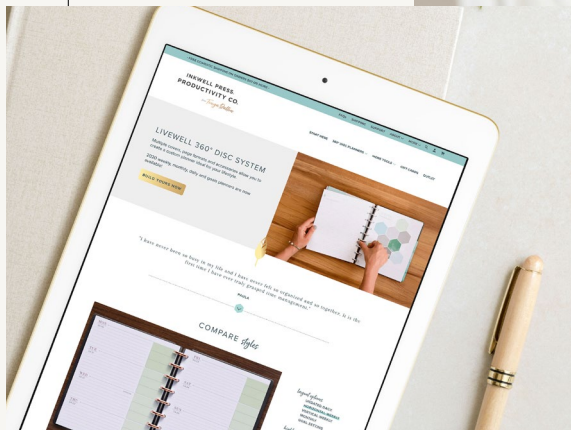


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DESIGN.



# How to Start Selling Products Online

FIRST STEPS FOR OPENING AN ECOMMERCE SHOP

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# Let's open an online shop!



*Hi, there!* I'm Laura, a branding, web, and packaging designer and owner of the boutique studio Dotted Design. We help business build brands that connect with customers and convert them into lifelong raving fans.

You're here because, presumably, you want get started selling online. You might you have a brick and mortar shop that you want to open up to wider, non-local audience. You might be currently selling on Etsy and are ready to break out into an online shop of your own. Or, perhaps you're new to this whole business thing and are excited to explore the possibilities of sharing your product with others!

Whatever your motivation, setting up an online shop is totally doable. It can feel overwhelming, so my hope is this guide will give you a road map for getting started with confidence.

Our absolute top platform recommendation for online product shops is **Shopify** because it was designed exclusively for selling products online with endless powerful features. (You can read my blog post comparing the top website platforms [right here](#) if you want to know more!) Therefore, this guide will focus on Shopify. Of course, there are many other options, so you just have to find what works for you and your products.

## *What are the top reasons to have your own online shop?*

- > You can sell to anyone, anywhere -- you aren't reliant on local customers
- > Set your own rules and don't rely on a marketplace's policies (like Etsy, Creative Market, etc.)
- > Own your customer data so that you can connect directly with them
- > Build a signature brand of your own with loyal customers (they'll say they got it from *you*, not from fill-in-the-blank big box store--how cool!)

*Ready to get started? Let's dig in!*

*Laura*

LAURA HUEBNER  
FOUNDER + CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
DOTTED DESIGN

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# 01. First Things First

There are a few very important questions to answer before you'll be in a confident position to open an online shop.

## *Who is your audience?*

You can have the best product in the world, but if you don't know who you're selling it to, you'll never communicate with your audience clearly. Trying to sell to everyone = selling to no one. Define who it is you want to connect with and make sure all your messaging is about how you are uniquely set to help those people!

## *What makes your product stand out?*

Understanding your unique selling point is key. There may be a million brands that sell sweaters, so why do you always end up buying yours from J. Crew? You probably connect with that brand, appreciate the quality of the product, and have had a positive prior experience with them.



Your customer has to feel like they are getting some sort of value in what they are buying from you and that you are solving a problem they are experiencing. A few examples of ways a customer may define the value you provide could include:

- Convenience/speed (think: Amazon Prime)
- Price point (you'll probably buy the cheapest cotton balls on the shelf, since it's not a premium item)
- Quality (you may pay more for the premium shampoo without sulfates rather than the generic one)
- Social connection (like donating a percent of sales to a cause)
- Uniqueness of product (only place you can find the cute gender neutral clothes for your baby)
- Personal connection (they may love that you are fellow single mom and want to support you)

*Bottom line: clearly define what makes you special in the eyes of your customer and shout it from the rooftops.*

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# 02. Establish Your Brand Visuals

To create a memorable customer experience, you'll need a clearly defined brand. This is integrated into everything from your social media and website to the box and inserts you send when shipping your products.

## *Why is this important?*

- **Creates familiarity.** People make a purchase when they feel confident and familiar with a brand.
- **Creates loyalty.** Once someone knows what to expect from you, they will want to keep coming back.
- **Signals this is a business—not a hobby.** It's the best way to connect with your audience and create a customized, premium experience.



You can work with a pro to design it, DIY it, or go somewhere in between with a semi-custom brand (*like these awesome ones in our [shop](#), wink wink*).

## *Where to start?*

01. My best recommendation is that you first **articulate your “why.”** Why did you start your business? Did you want to share your skills with paying customers? Do you have a product that will make people's lives better? Keeping this motivation top of mind will not only help you discover the path to take with your branding, but it will help inspire you keep going on tough days. We can all use a bit of that!

02. From there, **identify what values or principles you abide by in your business.** Your values are what make your company special and make people want to choose purchasing from you over someone else. Perhaps you believe in selling only local, sustainable products, or that customer service is above and beyond expectations. Keeping these top of mind as you design your visual identity will make a world of difference.

03. Another important item is to **understand your target market.** You can create a beautiful brand, but if it isn't a good fit for your audience, there will be a disconnect. Your brand will evoke certain feelings and reactions in your customers: do you want them to feel inspired? Comforted? Delighted? Invigorated? If you want them to feel soothed, a bright red might be a poor color choice. If you want to feel playful and fun, a stark, serif font could send the wrong message. Think about what your audience is seeking, and help them understand how they can get it from your business.



04. **Take a look at your competitors or peers.** It's important to understand what else your customers are considering in the marketplace. If everyone in your industry is using watercolor floral accents on their websites, you'll know that you want to steer clear of that concept in order to stand out. It can be easy to get caught up in trends and feel like you should hop in bandwagons—like with popular fonts or colors—but you'll make more of an impression with strong, purposeful design choices.

05. **If nothing else, keep it simple.** If you are new business and can't afford to invest a designer yet, my best advice is to try not to go overboard with your brand visuals when you dive in. Nothing says amateur like trying to incorporate five Photoshop techniques that you just learned on YouTube into one tiny logo. Choose a classic typeface and create a type-based logo. Select a small color palette of two to three colors and a neutral or two (like white, cream, pale gray, etc.). Purchase a few solid stock photos to use on your website.

### *Which brand elements do I need?*

You'll want to have:

- Primary logo and alternate logo versions
- Defined color palette
- Selection of brand fonts
- Brand patterns
- Photography style

### *Anything else?*

I cannot overstate the importance of staying consistent. Nothing confuses an audience more than a constantly changing visual. You might feel like things are repetitive, and that is because you see it every day. Think about how many things your customer sees each day: having a consistent look means that your brand becomes familiar to your customer in a sea of visuals.

*PS Helpful blog post link: [Simple Ways to Make Your Packaging Feel More High-End \(without the high cost\)](#)*

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# 03. Master List for Shop Set Up

There's so much to think about when it comes to setting up your online shop, some of it fun (product photoshoot!) and some of it mundane (establishing shipping policies). Here's what you need to consider, broken down by category.

## *Pages all shop sites need*

- Homepage:** this is where you introduce what you sell, to whom, and why. Think of it as a table of contents for your site: show all the ways one can interact or purchase with you, and links to do so.
- Category pages:** depending how many products you have, they may be broken down into categories. For example, if you sell jewelry, you may have a page for all bracelets, one for necklaces, one for earrings, and so on. (Hint: in Shopify, these are called "Collections.")
- Individual product pages:** this displays information specific to a certain product, like a description, price, photos, and relevant details. Try to answer as many questions as you can think of to instill confidence in your customer. (Bonus: see [this blog post](#) about the product photos you'll need!)
- About:** a place to tell your brand's story and further connect with your audience. This page is super important if you plan to get any press for your business. Journalists always want more than a great product for their story!
- Contact:** you definitely need a place where customers can contact you with questions or issues.
- Privacy Policy / Terms & Conditions:** this is a must-have any time you collect customer data. You can work with a lawyer to create something custom, or you can purchase a template like *this one from The Contract Shop*.

## *Pages you should consider including*

- FAQs:** this is a great place to anticipate questions you get over and over from customers and is actually one that's helpful for SEO.
- Blog:** having a blog is great way to up your SEO (Google loves sites that are frequently updated) and connect with customers on a more personal level.
- Shipping Policies:** you will definitely get questions about shipping rates, returns, exchanges. Write up your policies for this so you have a simple place to send customers for this info. Shopify offers templates for most of these that you can start with and customize! Check out *this article from Shopify* for some of the basics on shipping.

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## Preparing your product listings

- ❑ **Make a list of products:** start by listing out everything you will be selling on a spreadsheet.
- ❑ **Photography:** the number one thing that affects purchases is quality photography. If all at possible, consider a professional photoshoot for your products. While quick iPhone shots are great in places like Instagram Stories, low quality shots will look totally out of place on your website and leave customers assuming you aren't serious about your business. You'll also want some wide-angle lifestyle shots (like of people using your product) to use on your homepage.
- ❑ **Descriptions:** tell your customers what they need to know. Depending what you sell, you can include things like materials or ingredients, nutrition, benefits, gifting ideas, reviews--possibilities are endless.

## Other things to consider on your site

- ❑ **Taxes:** you may need to collect sales tax, and *this article from Shopify* can help guide you.
- ❑ **Domain:** this is the URL for your new shop (like [www.shop.com](http://www.shop.com)). You can purchase this from a number of places, like GoDaddy, Hover, or Google Domains, and then connect it to your platform.
- ❑ **Payment methods:** this is how you will collect money for what you sell. Shopify processes credit cards, and you could also accept other forms like PayPal, Apple Pay, Facebook Pay, and so on. Read more on the options in *this Shopify article*.
- ❑ **Email marketing opt in:** it's a good plan to keep in contact with your customers, and adding a pop up or spot on your site to opt in is key. You can use Shopify's native email marketing tools to start, or go for a service like Klaviyo.

## Plan for encouraging sales

- **Set up social media:** this is an obvious one, but plan to connect with your customers where they are hanging out already, whether that is Instagram (elder Millennial women), Facebook (Boomers), or TikTok (Gen Z). Consider what type of content will engage your particular audience.
- **Welcome offer:** consider offering a small discount, like 10% off or free shipping on a first order, as a way to encourage people to sign up for your email list. It creates good will, and you get contact info!
- **Have a free shipping threshold:** we've all been in the scenario where we only need to add *four more dollars* to get free shipping on an order, and you end up ordering an additional \$20 item just to reach it (even though shipping would have been \$5). It isn't logical, but having that shipping threshold can be a great way to get customers to add an additional item or two to their order.

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- **Create bundles:** offer groups of products once you start seeing what people tend to order together. For example, if you sell jewelry, you could offer a coordinating set of earrings, bracelet, and necklace that bundle together for a larger sale (helps to have a slight discount for the bundled items, too!).
  - **Social proof:** incorporate testimonials or reviews into your website, your social posts, and even product descriptions. People feel comforted knowing someone else has loved a product!
  - **Email marketing:** this is a must-do in ecommerce sales. Shopify lets you send branded emails to customers right through your dashboard, which is a great way to start if you're not ready to invest in the more in depth options, like Klaviyo. Email campaigns have conversion rates so much higher than social media!

## *A few favorite Shopify apps*

Apps are a great way to increase your site's functionality without having to get something custom coded (which can get pricey). Here are some great ones:

- **Judge.me:** this a free app that has some better features than Shopify's native review app. *see here*
- **Instafeed:** a simple way to add your latest Instagram posts to your site. *see here*
- **Bold Subscriptions:** if you're considering offering subscriptions on your products, this app can't be beat for extensive functionality and customer service. *see here*
- **Smile IO:** a great way to encourage return customers is through loyalty or rewards programs. This app is a good place to start. *see here*
- **Octane AI:** a great way to connect with potential customers is through a quiz. This builder is a good one. *see here*

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# Ready to get started?

Starting an online shop is such an exciting step! Like we said, Shopify is by far our favorite platform, and you can start a free trial right here to see how you like it:

START A SHOPIFY FREE TRIAL

After the trial, most shops are fine starting on the Basic Shopify plan!

We hope this guide was helpful as you plan to take over the internet! If we can ever be of help in your ecommerce journey, don't hesitate to reach out at [hello@dotted-design.com](mailto:hello@dotted-design.com).

Happy selling!