

# NET MAN

Business Websites That Work!

“Ask NET MAN” Column  
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**Q:** I have a business and want to get into eCommerce, what do I need?

**A:** ‘Tis the season to wonder if you could raise revenues with an online store! Since you already have a business, you are familiar with many of the challenges that a retail or wholesale operation confronts. There are eight very important points when reviewing or considering an online version of your business.

The online world does offer a much larger potential market for your product sales – which comes with larger competition. The payoff can be great with good planning and the right approach and execution. To be successful in eCommerce you must have:

**A Functioning Business** – I wouldn’t get into eCommerce without experience selling your products already. You need to know what issues are going to come up administratively as well as with your customers. You may have a great idea for an online business, but if it can’t work or be proven offline first, be careful what you’re getting into.

**A Great Website** – Which needs to be professional, frequently updated, compelling, easy to use and have useful information. What websites do you really like to visit or buy from? What design and navigation styles work?

**Sales Presentation** - Not only is content king, but the way in which your Website promotes the availability and desirability of your products is essential to your success. Writing for the internet is very different from all other forms of writing. With precious few seconds to generate a sale, your textual copy has to be perfect, written by a professional and from a customer benefits oriented standpoint.

**Fresh Content and Products** - Keep your products and sales style refreshed. You might just add some new products, information about related products, release a new product line which you really want to promote or tie-in to a regular or seasonal event with specials and information about them. You may need a product database.

**A Complete Sales System** – While shopping carts aren’t appropriate for everyone, you need to know if a simple sales form is too confusing. To sell online you will have to take credit cards on a secure server, preferably with your own merchant account. If you can’t afford a merchant account initially, you could partner with a company which accept cards for you, like PayPal or CCNow.

**Online Customer Service** – You will need to answer questions, change orders and handle all sorts of issues. Your customer service department must be more

consulting • integration • design • maintenance • hosting • marketing

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familiar with the Website than you are, they must be online and they must have email.

**Marketing** – A Website without a marketing strategy is an internet doorstop (just dead weight). If you build it, they will not come. Online marketing takes many faces, from search engine optimization and submission to pay-per-click marketing to affiliate programs and guerrilla marketing, but without visitors to your site and promoting that it exists, you cannot sell!

**Newsletters or Articles** – By providing new and useful information regularly to your Website visitors or email newsletter subscribers, you remain foremost in their minds for your area of expertise. When

those people are ready to make a purchasing decision, they will gravitate towards their information source – you!

The next eCommerce step would be to bring your information to a web developer. I've assembled a list of questions for you that provide essential information at [www.thenetcave.com/checklist.html](http://www.thenetcave.com/checklist.html)

NET MAN and NET GIRL have a holiday gift for you! Pick it up online at [www.thenetcave.com/posole.html](http://www.thenetcave.com/posole.html)

**Please email your Internet Question to [asknetman@thenetcave.com](mailto:asknetman@thenetcave.com)**

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