

# Be the next dotcom success

**How to start your UK online business today!**

by people who've actually done it!



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who are thinking of becoming online entrepreneurs! Good luck!



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## PREFACE

This ebook includes helpful advice gleaned from our own experiences which will help you more easily set up your own e-commerce store. We examine the important areas that must be studied and the decisions that must be made, from choosing payment processors and shopping carts to maximising your position in the search engine results pages (SERPS).

Ecommerce has its own jargon and areas of necessary expertise and we hope to shine a light on the acronyms and slang you will come across as well as giving you access to the experience and knowledge of people who have actually been through the process and set up their own e-commerce business. We set up conceptTshirts from scratch; there was no offline store before we started the website, so we can really explain the steps we took to get our website up, running and selling!

This ebook is primarily aimed at the person who would like to set up an online company based in the UK. Of course much of the information is relevant for all online ventures, no matter where you are based in the world, but all the special links and information and experiences relate to the UK.



This is the first e-commerce e-book we know of to be aimed at the UK audience, which means that you can use the links as they are rather than having to struggle to find UK equivalents of US sites. Most requirements are available here in the UK, so that you can use companies that you can phone if necessary and so you don't feel you are trusting your business to a faceless American corporation somewhere in Seattle or Darkest Texas. It at least feels safer if your payment processor is based in Cambridge, England rather than Cambridge, Massachusetts!

You do not need to be completely computer literate; in fact we shall concentrate on getting a system working with very little need for technical computing skill. This leaves you free to run your business. If you read the whole of this e book then you will have a good idea of how to go about starting your on line business and how to avoid pitfalls and expensive mistakes.

This ebook is full of useful web addresses to help you get started. We've included all the URLs that we wish we'd known about when we set up our online business. We have also added a glossary to help you understand some of the jargon involved in e-commerce.

Each chapter has a convenient summary so that you can easily find the



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information you require at each stage.

Written by people with experience - the writers set up the artist T shirt store at [www.conceptTshirts.co.uk](http://www.conceptTshirts.co.uk), using [www.worldpay.com](http://www.worldpay.com) as a payment processor, click and build store design software and the world wide web as a global customer base. Since then we have developed the site by writing our own HTML pages (a language that is easy to learn!), gained traffic through links and online advertising and business has taken off!

Remember, it's going to be hard work. If ever there was a time on the net when you just had to build a site and people would come, it isn't like that anymore. Like off-line businesses it needs planning and experience – and as it is hard to have experience of something as new as ecommerce, that is where this ebook comes in.

We will give you the benefit of our experience and hopefully help you to set up a successful online business.

We reckon on allowing at least a year to see if your online business works. It takes time to build links and traffic, it takes time to get a good site up and running, it takes time to gain trust and make sales. But this does come. After a year we could tell that we had a good idea and that people were buying. Of course, not enough were visiting and we weren't



making as much as we'd like, but it was clear that with work, advertising, seo (search engine optimization – explained later!) we could make a business that would really rock.

We hope that you find this ebook useful and that it helps you to set up and run your own ebusiness. Don't expect over-night success, but with a good idea and hard work – just like in the off-line world, you can succeed. Good luck!

### **SUMMARY**

- You do not need to be fully computer literate to set up a working online store.
- This information is relevant to all but specific to the UK
- Written by people who actually have experience – we share the information and links that we wish we'd known about when we were starting.
- It's going to be hard work.
- Don't expect results too quickly. We were online for four weeks before we made our first sale!



## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your decision to enter the online market place! Now is definitely the time to get started in e-commerce, whilst virtually unlimited potential still remains. There is no need to have a 'real world' store or business, the costs of getting started on the net are low enough that everyone can buy a domain name, get hosting and have a web shop! This is how we started – with an idea and a dream. If we had tried to start a 'real world' shop we would have needed thousands, business plans, trips to the bank – but with the net we turned the dream into reality with an initial investment of less than £500!

Internet shopping is continually growing. This true everywhere, but in the UK we are on the verge of an online shopping explosion. Enough people have computers, internet access and credit cards to make the UK online industry an area of constant expansion for the foreseeable future. There is room for thousands of new online ventures. As long as you get the basics right - a great looking website, good customer service, great products - then you can make a successful online business. You do not need a current real-world business. Just choose your product and go for it.





The UK is the second best environment in the world to do ecommerce business. This means that after the United States, which is miles ahead in terms of ecommerce, if you live in the UK you are living in a superb arena to make a successful online business. And of course if you sell the right product there is no reason why you can't sell to the US consumers as well! There are 60 million Brits, but over 250 million Americans! Add the rest of Europe which will catch up every year and the market-place is huge! Sell to even a small percentage of these consumers and then you really are on the way to internet success!

### **Example costs**

These were the costs involved in getting our site ([www.conceptTshirts.co.uk](http://www.conceptTshirts.co.uk)) onto the net.

Payment processor, including cart and store software and hosting for one year	£482 <sup>1</sup>
Register domain name <a href="http://www.conceptTshirts.co.uk">www.conceptTshirts.co.uk</a>	£7
Total	£489

Don't worry, all these things will be explained in this ebook!

These are the basic costs involved in the online side of the business. They

<sup>1</sup> This was reduced in the second year to £176+VAT per year. You have to pay more in year one to get the service.



gave us the software to build our store, the credit/debit card processing and the URL (= web address) to promote around the net.

We used Worldpay ([www.worldpay.co.uk](http://www.worldpay.co.uk)) as our payment processor and used the click and build software they recommended to build our store. We chose these options because it was all guaranteed compatible and came ready integrated, so that our shopping cart and payment processor needed NO extra integration. As beginners with no knowledge of the necessary programming languages we felt it was important that everything fitted together without us having to write any code. Also, Worldpay is also owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland, so we felt secure knowing it was not a US operation we had never heard off but was a well-known UK company.

We followed the easy instructions from Worldpay which gave us a web site, added our products and started selling to the world! It really was that simple. Of course when you apply you have to fill in forms and tick boxes. But when it came to the setting up of the store it was a case of clicking to choose the background colour, typing in the prices and the products – we didn't have to get involved in complicated coding, which was a great bonus when you are an artist and not a computer programmer!



So your business can get online for less than £500. Of course there are plenty more costs you can incur. You can get listed on ask.co.uk (a search engine) for one year for £40. You can buy pay-per-click adverts from Google at 6p per click. Or £1 a click! You've probably got to buy stock and a few padded envelopes. But this is a much cheaper way to set up a business than any in the real world. Your rent is your web hosting. Beats setting up in a high street!

## SUMMARY

- It took us less than £500 to get online
- We recommend Worldpay as a payment processor<sup>2</sup>
- If you don't want to build your own store using HTML then you can do as we did to begin with and use store building software such as the click and build system which links directly to Worldpay with no problems. ([www.clickandbuild.com](http://www.clickandbuild.com))

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<sup>2</sup> This means they take care of the whole 'taking credit/debit cards' side of operations and email you when you have a sale and tell you whether the card the customer used has passed their checks.



OK, here we go...!

## **PART I – Getting you ecommerce store to the web.**

### ***the idea***

It's got to be a good one. That doesn't mean you have to sell a unique product, but if you do sell something people can get elsewhere there has to be a good reason why they should come to your online store. Maybe this is price, maybe it is that your site is loaded down with useful information that they need and which will help them decide which particular product they need. Just because your business is going to exist in a virtual world doesn't mean that all the usual aphorisms aren't true - like all businesses the idea is king.

Try selling the wrong thing and it doesn't matter how jazzy your site or how cheap your widgets, the internet won't help. However, sell the right thing at the right price and orders will pour in and you'll get worn out counting the zeros on your bank statements<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an exaggeration



### ***non-physical goods?***

When deciding what to sell, the non-physical good is the ultimate, if difficult goal. Find a non-physical good to sell and you immediately make life a lot easier and profit a lot higher. No physical good to ship and pack means the purchaser pays and then clicks through to the goods - for example, members-only pages of a website, a page where he can download the goods, like ebooks or software. This means you have no need for posting and packaging. More importantly you need to have no money invested in stock. This is where we found problems because selling T shirts and allowing people to choose their size and colour soon means you have to have every colour available in every size. That's a lot of T shirts when you sell men's S, M,L, XL and ladies S,M,L. Immediately we cut out kids sizes, just because of the extra number we needed to stock. Maybe this was a mistake, because we must have lost sales, but we were seeing frighteningly high levels of cash just sitting around in T shirts. So if you can develop a software product, information or anything that can be delivered to the customer digitally, you are ahead of the game!

The downside of non-physical goods is that your customer has to be pretty web-savvy to buy it or even to be interested. Software is the ideal, but most people will either not want your latest development, or wouldn't download it, so you are selling to a narrower market base than if you sell



physical goods that everyone needs (even if they don't know it yet).

### ***physical goods?***

What you can sell is restricted by what you can post. It's no good having a cheap source of life-size bronze elephant sculptures in India if the postage rate to the UK makes the price prohibitive. Also consider what is sensible to post – Lightbulbs R US might not last long even though people need light bulbs. We were lucky with T shirts in that they were easy to post and fairly light – though even a T shirt costs almost £2 to send by Royal Mail Signed For<sup>4</sup>. So make sure that you can post where ever you need to. You can check postage rates at [www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com). Make sure that the price you charge covers the extra postage to foreign countries. We were amazed for example at the postage prices to Ireland and had to stop offering free postage there. We had assumed it was the same as the UK, an expensive mistake when someone ordered from Eire.

It is better to use a recorded signed-for service, so that in disputes you have evidence that the goods arrived. This costs more than the standard rates but we find it a sensible precaution.

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<sup>4</sup> See section on postage for a discussion of signed for versus normal postage



### ***Taking credit cards?***

Barter just doesn't work on the net, so how are you going to get your hands on your customer's cash? This has been a stumbling block in the past, high bank charges making the taking of credit cards prohibitively expensive. But thankfully not any more.

At the simplest level you can take money by putting your real-world address on the web site and asking people to email you their order and send you a cheque. The advantages of this are obvious - you don't have to organise any complicated shopping cart, you don't have to take credit cards. You can start straightaway, just upload a list of products and your address and sit back and wait for the cheques to roll in...

The disadvantages are also pretty clear. Any potential buyer has to send off a cheque to your address. Whilst this sounds perfectly feasible, a person has to be very keen to buy your goods to find an envelope, cheque book, stamp, etc, etc. Especially when there is probably a competitor's site just a few clicks away where they can buy on line. You will get much higher sales rates if people can type in their credit card number whilst they are in the passion of purchase. That's not to say that you will not sell anything using the address and send a cheque method, but we decided from the start that we had to take credit cards. It makes



the business look more professional and allows you to automate the sales procedure. Also there's no lugging bags of cheques to the bank every day, which means you don't get a bad back.

### **Alternatives**

Taking credit cards directly from your site costs money to set up. We were charged almost £500, and we still have to pay a small percentage of every transaction to worldpay. So let's look at the possible alternatives. Unfortunately regarding online payment systems everything is still at an early stage. In a few years the world will have worked out the best system – but we have to live with what is available now.

### **Paypal**

([www.paypal.co.uk](http://www.paypal.co.uk)) is a fairly widespread payment processor from the US that is well-known in the UK. You have to open an account with them (a simple procedure) and then you load your account with money from your card. You can then use this money to pay other people with paypal accounts.

As a merchant you are able to put BUY THIS buttons on your site. When they are pressed the customer is taken to secure pages at Paypal where – if they have a Paypal account – everything proceeds very smoothly.



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The customer agrees for the specified amount to be transferred from their Paypal account to yours and you get an email telling you this has happened.

However – if the customer does not have a Paypal account they have to set one up before they can proceed. This is not the problem it was as it is a simple procedure, but it can cause people to pull out of the transaction. After all, how many newcomers to the net, just daring to use their card online are going to sign up for a Paypal account?

So- Paypal depends on your target audience. If they are web-savvy and been shopping on line for years, especially using ebay ([www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)) then it might work. Many ebay auctions are paid through Paypal, which is a related company. However if your target market is normal consumers, we advise at least having another system as well.

Paypal is cheap and easy to set up, so it is worth considering as a first payment processor, to see if your business has possibilities. But you will be restricting the number of people who will buy from you. Also, make sure you don't hold large sums of cash in your paypal account as there are horror stories of people having their accounts shut arbitrarily on suspicion of fraud and forfeiting the balance.



## **Nochex**

([www.nochex.co.uk](http://www.nochex.co.uk))

Nochex is basically a British version of Paypal, though it has the advantage that as long as the goods being purchased are less than £100 the customer does not have to set up an account immediately. This then is a good possibility, worth looking into. The only downside is that when we were looking at it you could only use the service to take £9000 per annum. Ambitious as we were we didn't want that restriction.

If you are dealing with just British consumers then nochex is definitely worth considering.

## **Others**

There are various other online payment systems around. Natwest has Fastpay ([www.fastpay.com](http://www.fastpay.com)), vodaphone has a pay by phone system. All of these should be examined – maybe for your market taking cash by mobile phone would be a good idea , but from a front of shop point of view there is nothing like taking your own credit cards. After all, the majority of UK residents do not have these accounts. And they do have credit cards. And you want to make it as easy as possible for them to pay for their goods.



So really we reckon:

***you've got to take credit cards***

Online credit cards - to be a realistic force on the web then you have to be able to take credit cards online and securely. This may well seem like a difficult step - and indeed historically it has been. UK banks generally want trading history accounts to peruse before giving you the OK, not to mention a merchant account.

Now there are alternatives, with online payment processors that will take the credit card details and process them for you, sending you a cheque every month minus a small service charge. This is the way forward for small businesses on the web.

The payment processor that we use is Worldpay, which is part of the Royal Bank of Scotland group and can be found at [www.worldpay.co.uk](http://www.worldpay.co.uk) . With a reputable background and easy application process you can be up and taking credit cards in a week.



**Other possibilities for payment processing include:**

[www.ibill.com](http://www.ibill.com)

[www.fastpay.com](http://www.fastpay.com)

[www.protx.com](http://www.protx.com)

[www.netbanx.com](http://www.netbanx.com)

[www.secpay.com](http://www.secpay.com)

[www.kwikpay.co.uk](http://www.kwikpay.co.uk)

[www.securetrading.co.uk](http://www.securetrading.co.uk)

[www.nochex.com](http://www.nochex.com)

[www.Authorize.Net](http://www.Authorize.Net)

**We recommend Worldpay as your credit card processor, with nochex a cheaper alternative if you are selling basket values under £100**

**What sort of store is for you?**

When you want to sell on the internet you need a shop face/web site so that people can find you. This is the equivalent of your shop frontage, it should be bold, unique, catch people's attention and draw them in.

There are several possibilities.



## **Ebay**

If you want to just dip a toe in ecommerce then you can sell very easily on the auction sites, the most famous of which is ebay ([www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)).

Many people are happy just selling items through this path. You merely create an account, list your products and then wait for people to bid on them. At the end of the auction (usually a week) the winning bidder sends you the money and you send him the goods. Simple. You can even set the price, set a reserve price and sell more than one of an item. Each seller has a feedback rating given by the people who have bought from him, which tells you how honest he is.

However, this system means you have no web address to give to people. You just have items for sale, which can only be found by people searching ebay.co.uk, not if they are searching the web. And also, prices on ebay seem to be pretty low, probably because the auction set-up attracts bargain hunters.

## **Ebay stores**

You can also progress to an ebay store, (<http://stores.ebay.co.uk/>) where your goods are laid out next to each other for people to see. However the goods are still sold in weekly auctions that you have to renew. Your shop will look like hundreds of others and so lack the individuality and uniqueness that you must try to develop to get customers to click into



your shop.

**Amazon** ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)) allows you to see goods through their huge system. If you have a second hand version of a DVD to sell it will appear next to the brand new version. This obviously gets your goods put in front of a huge potential audience, who are actually very interested in the goods.

All these systems make you set up your store according to their templates.

Your shop URL - (your www address) will usually be a lengthy, hard to remember mouthful (eg- <http://stores.ebay.co.uk/YourName>)

Ebay stores have to use the ebay system of selling, so everything is part of an auction. You can put a BUY NOW price on the goods, but they still only remain there for a limited period, then you have to re-list them.

Amazon zshops are only suitable for merchants that already exist and have high sales, so are not suitable for the beginner. If you are interested go to [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and search for Zshops.

All these options allow a cheap entry into ecommerce, and are great for selling the occasional item, but they have large drawbacks that mean they will not be sufficient if you intend to sell professionally on the net.



## ***How's your HTML?***

If you don't know what html is then don't worry, you can still set up your own store using one of the packages for non-programmers. HTML though is a reasonably simple language to learn and with a little knowledge you can easily change colours, change font sizes and link to other pages.

Type *HTML help* into [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and lots of helpful websites appear. Choose any to get a flavour of the language.

When writing in html there are lots of programs that will help make your life easier – as coding is a repetitive business with lots of room for small errors. These can be by WYSIWIG - what you see is what you get, so that you move images and text around the screen to exactly where you want them. The code produced can be bloated, but you can easily write simple pages in HTML, a forgiving programming language.

All html is written as tags, labelled as such by < and > at the beginning and end. If the computer doesn't understand one of your tags it just ignores it, so don't worry about getting it all right straight away.



### **Programs which will help you code HTML include**

Frontpage

Dreamweaver

aolpress

Frontpage express - which can be downloaded from the web. Do a search on google for "Frontpage express freeware download"

When we started writing html ourselves we used Frontpage express, a Microsoft program that used to come free on most PCs and which we downloaded from a freeware site – a good one of which is

[www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com)

There are plenty of sites helping you learn html, eg:

Writing HTML (<http://hakatai.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tut/>)

HTML goodies (<http://www.htmlgoodies.com/primers/basics.html>)

### **Click and build**

If you choose to code your own site you are taking a bigger step than is necessary. We set up our site using click and build software from



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click&build.com (<http://apply.clickandbuild.com/>) This is recommended as an easy way to set up a site. You just upload images and enter text, and they do all the complicated work linking to Worldpay.

This might not sound like much, but when you are setting up a business there is so much else to concentrate on that we found it invaluable to know that the website would run smoothly from the start.

However, there is a concern with how the search engines index click and build pages. We found that some pages got in to google, but others didn't. Because click and build pages are dynamic it seems that they are not indexed as easily as straightforward html.

**For beginners we recommend Clickandbuild as your store software because it is easiest and includes a cart (see below) and all the links to Worldpay. If you feel up to using html yourself then we recommend Frontpage express as a good, freeware html editor.**

### ***Choosing your shopping cart?***

Once you have a means of accepting credit cards then you also need a means of discovering from the purchaser what it is they want to buy. If



you have decided to use click and build then that includes a cart and you do not need to worry about this section. If you are coding yourself then you're going to need shopping cart software comes in. This can vary from freeware to vastly expensive and your choice comes down mainly to one question. *How is your programming?*

A shopping cart will need to be integrated into your website, so that a customer can enter what they wish to buy. It will also need to communicate with your payment processor (eg Worldpay) telling it how much a client is trying to buy so that they can run their checks on the card. If this sounds too complicated, it is a bit. If in doubt use template-driven software packages like that used by click and build. If you want to add a shopping cart to an html site you have written, then these are some possibilities:

[www.mals-e.com](http://www.mals-e.com)

[www.qdcat.co.uk](http://www.qdcat.co.uk)

[www.jshop.co.uk](http://www.jshop.co.uk)

[www.shopfactory.com](http://www.shopfactory.com)

[www.get-trolleyed.co.uk](http://www.get-trolleyed.co.uk)

[www.shopassistant.net](http://www.shopassistant.net)

[www.fastcart.co.uk](http://www.fastcart.co.uk)



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Since changing from click and build to our own html site we have started using [www.fastcart.co.uk](http://www.fastcart.co.uk) which has worked fine for us. We changed because we wanted more control over the site and because we were worried that search engines were not picking up all our pages. However click and build was ideal for our first e commerce site.

All cart software will tell you how to integrate with all the major payment processors, so you will not be entirely on your own. Indeed often to link to Worldpay is merely a matter of filling in some online-forms. However you will have to create all the 'click here to buy' buttons, which though relatively simple is an easy place to introduce errors. And you want that site working as smoothly as possible. If customers find a mistake in your cart they don't tend to email you and explain the problem, they just move on to another store and get what they want there.

Wherever you get the software and who ever fits it and gets it up and running, make sure you test, test and test the code. Make test purchases, try buying everything, deleting products from the cart, changing currency, etc, etc. Do anything that a customer might and make sure that you have no bugs in your code.



## **Broadband?**

If you are going to run a business on line then you need a quality connection to the internet. A dial up connection is adequate – we had to use one for conceptTshirts, but if you are using a lot of images then broadband is worth considering. This will allow you to use the net at approximately 10 times faster speeds than dial-up – a boon if you are on the net a lot - as you're going to be!

Our broadband supplier is [Virgin \(click here for their broadband dept\)](#) - we chose them because they allow an unlimited amount of downloads a month, and you do not have to sign up to a 12 month contract, so if a better offer comes along we can change suppliers without having to wait months.



## **PART II - All about your website**

### **Your website name**

Your URL ([www.yourname.co.uk](http://www.yourname.co.uk)) is the first thing people see of you. Make it special. Get a memorable website name that makes people want to click on it or type it in and visit your store. There are differing theories and no one can prove or disprove each one. The two basic ideas are:

1. Get a completely new name, like Google, Amazon, Overture, something that means nothing else and therefore can help you in branding your company. If you've got the cash to spend on advertising then you can happily go down this route, making everyone aware that [Hahbogglah.co.uk](http://Hahbogglah.co.uk) is the latest thing in online alcoholic drink sales. If you can't back the name up with ads then probably no one's going to notice it at all.

2. Use keywords in your name, so that search engines happily find your site. Key words are words that people will type into a search engine to find your site. Eg - if you sell Arsenal football club memorabilia then *football, kit, programmes, Arsenal* could all be keywords. In other words, get words that people will type in to find you in your domain name. Separate them with hyphens to help the search engines parse them (something we didn't realise with [conceptTshirts](http://conceptTshirts)).



To purchase your web name use a company such as:

[123-reg](#) or [www.UK-reg.com](http://www.UK-reg.com)

We have used both companies successfully. Both have a useful feature on their front pages that allows you to enter your potential url and see whether it is still available. Bear in mind when deciding your web domain name that most of the single word domains have already gone. Almost certainly the perfect name you decide on will have been taken. But do not give up, keep thinking. Adding UK is worth a try if you really have your heart set on a particular word or phrase.

If you are using click and build then you can point the website name you buy at your click and build store. This means that when someone types in your website name they will be taken to your store. The company where you buy the name will tell you how to do this using their system, but it is usually a very easy procedure that you can do yourself on line.

If you have coded your own site, you need to get web hosting and upload your site to the net. This is the place where your site 'resides'. If you have click and build then the hosting is included in the annual or monthly fee. Otherwise [123-reg](#) is again a source we used for easy to configure and understand hosting. Bear in mind that the location of your



hosting is sometimes taken into account by search engines when deciding whether to list you in their results. For example, if you want to be listed in the UK search engine results, it is safer to have UK hosting. This isn't a proven stat, but there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest it is worth considering.

### **.com vs .co.uk**

This decision depends on where your customers are most likely to be and how they are most likely to find you. UK-focused search engines prefer URLs with the UK suffix. Of course search engine algorithms change all the time, and the weighting given to the suffix may be overcome by your UK-centric content, but if you are expecting customers to find you through web searching then you need as many factors on your side as possible. And one of these is having a .uk suffix on the end of your name.

If your customers are worldwide, or you expect them mainly to find you by physically typing in the URL then a .com is fine. It does take up less space on advertising, but the days when .com was more professional are over.

And registering a .co.uk is much cheaper than a .com. A .co.uk costs around £7 to register, for two years, where as a .com is more like £10 for



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one year. US consumers have been known in surveys to say that they click away from any sites that are not .com when they are looking to buy. Our experience disproves this slightly, but if you are looking to crack the US market in particular then a .com is recommended.

### **web hosting**

This is where your site resides, your real estate if you like, your bit of the internet. Even if you create your site on your computer at home you will need hosting. This may come with your cart, or you will need to buy your own. In this case you will have to FTP your html files and pictures to your site and will have to write your own pages and link to your payment processor.

You want somewhere that will always be open, without much down time, so stick to a reputable company. And don't think that free hosting is good enough. Hosting nowadays is cheap enough not to bother with free hosts, who get back their money by putting adverts on your pages. Also search engines are not free-host friendly and you would find it hard to get listed using a free host.

We use the same company for hosting as we do for domain names:



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[123-reg](#). They email you all the information you need to upload your files, including where to download software to help you do it.

Whatever host you choose will give you the codes you need to FTP your pages to your hosting via a program such as WS-FTP, available for trial download at [www.ipswitch.com](http://www.ipswitch.com). You can often download freeware FTP programs from freeware sites such as [www.download.com](http://www.download.com).

You then write your HTML pages on your computer, save the files and then load them up to your hosting to make them available on the web. Only take this route if you are sure you understand the complexities of html and the other web languages you will come across such as PHP, etc.

Look for a good bandwidth – this is the amount of data that people can download from your site, usually measured in gigabytes per month. We started with 5GB/mo and didn't have any problems. You want a host that will not charge you excessively if you exceed your bandwidth and will give you the option of easily and cheaply upgrading if your business gets lots of hits. If you are going to have a lot of product pictures you will need more bandwidth than just text as pictures take up much more bandwidth.



If this sounds too complicated – and for a beginner there's no doubt that it is – do consider the carts that though run on templates are integrated completely with the payment processors. (eg – when we used Worldpay and click and build we had to do no FTPing or html). They may limit your layout possibilities and penalise you in the SERPS, but they give you hosting for your site as well as an easy to use web-based software package to build your site. This is the way we went with conceptTshirts, because it meant we didn't have to worry about masses of html and integration for credit card processing - as this came automatically with the package. The downsides we have discovered are that the catalogue is made of dynamic pages, which are harder to get spidered by search engines than standard html pages. So we were struggling to get listed in google. Also you will be working on a web browser, so you need to be logged on to the internet to access your account – and all your work is done on the net, which if you haven't got broadband makes it a time consuming business.

Although this system is quite simple, you can still use html on every page and can write whole pages in html if you wish. If you wish not to use html you can just enter sentences in the appropriate places and the software will do the html for you.



### ***plan your website***

Look at as many other sites as you can and get a feel for successful sites layout. You will soon find what appeals to you, and what looks good and will appeal to customers. They want information immediately, without any whistles and bells. The colours of your site should be muted, unless you are deliberately going for some sort of shock and awe marketing technique.

You can often look at a site's html by right-clicking on a web-page and selecting view source. This is a helpful way of learning HTML as you can explore the code and work out how the programmer got a certain effect. If you are using a click and build system, look at other sites made with that system and start understanding how to use it to its best.

### ***photos of your products***

These must be high quality. You can use a digital camera, but you don't need one as you can use a normal camera and scan the resulting photos



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on a scanner. Remember that many of your potential customers will still be using 56K modems, and graphics will take along time to load. When pages take a long time to load the usual reaction is to move on - and you will have lost a potential sale. So, keep the graphics to a minimum. Keep them small. Rather than deluging the customer with pictures straight away, show them a small product picture, with a link to see bigger ones. That way the viewer has made a conscious decision to see the bigger pictures and is more likely to wait as they load.

Also make use of the html alt tag which lets you give a written description of each photograph. This can be a boring process, adding information to each picture tag, but some people surf the web without graphics at all and you want them to know what is going on in case they are after the very thing that you are selling.

### ***Welcome to a global customer base!***

Soon you're going to have a global customer base to sell to - the internet allows you to sell to people all over the world! All someone has to do – where-ever they are in the world - is log on to your site, fill in a form and bingo you have another order! People on the other side of the world can be buying all night and when you wake up you'll have more sales!

However there's a but.



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The global customer base brings with it new problems. Certain countries are hotbeds of attempted internet fraud. Top is Nigeria. Speak to online companies and most of them will have experienced attempted fraud from Nigeria. Indeed many online companies – our selves included - refuse to take orders from Nigeria because such a high percentage of them are fraudulent. In fact, when we first set up, our first two orders were fraud from Nigeria.

How can you tell its fraud? They often order lots of the same size, even not filling out the form properly. For example, we sell T shirts with Latin sayings on them. The customer chooses Latin T shirt, and then chooses which saying they want. One of our fraudsters ordered fifty Latin T shirts without realizing they had to specify the saying on them!

Other countries from which a higher than normal amount of attempted fraud emanates include:

Bosnia  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Egypt  
Indonesia  
Iran  
Iraq  
Israel  
Malaysia  
Nigeria  
Pakistan  
Romania  
Russia  
Serbia  
Yugoslavia



This is not to say that every order from these countries is fraud, or that every order from the UK and other countries is not. But study orders from these countries very carefully for anomalies, and if not sure, don't fulfill the order.

Don't let this put you off your online business. It just has to be taken into account, and there are ways to avoid being caught out. We found these out by being caught out, but we know what to do now and explain it in the section on online fraud prevention.



## **PART III - You're on the web, let's start selling**

The net differs from offline shops in that no one will necessarily walk past, see the display in your window and come in. But then again, you are by no means limited to the people who walk past. The smallest site can get huge numbers of visitors, and visitors translate into sales.

### ***Tell everyone you exist!***

To get visitors and customers you have to get working. Firstly let's look at search engines. These are the work horses of the net, like Google, altavista, and lycos, through which most people find what they need on the web.

### ***Basic SEO – Search Engine Optimisation***

Search engines work their way through the web in a process known as spidering. So they go to a web page, then follow every link on that page, then every link on that page...etc, etc, recording the information they come across so that they can retrieve the page if anyone wants to see it. The algorithms they use to list pages in response to user enquiries are very complicated and constantly changing, but there are basic rules. The words the user types into the search engine are called keywords and the



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search engine will then check all the web pages it has read for these key words. It will then show the ones that it believes are most relevant. Which means in practice it shows pages that have a good sprinkling of the key words.

This means that you should build pages that concentrate on one keyword, or on a keyword phrase, as this gives you a better chance of being found by the search engines. We sell T shirts, so we have pages concentrating on (or 'optimised for') 'Latin T shirts', 'Fun T shirts' and other phrases that we know people type in when they are looking for T shirts.

### ***How do we know what people type in when they search?***

There is a great tool by Overture that we marveled at when we stumbled across it at <http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>. Here you can type in a keyword – eg T shirts and you will be shown all the similar or connected phrases that users type in when searching. This is an important part of getting visitors – see what phrases and terms people would use to find your site and then put a few of these keywords in your text.

NB- it has to be normal, natural prose, don't stuff keywords all over the page or you will be penalized. Just mention the vital words.





## **Meta descriptions**

Make sure that you have filled in your description and keywords at the top of each page. Fewer and fewer of the big search engines give these much credit, but it is important to fill them in. If you are using HTML the code is as follows:

```
<title> Put your title here </title>
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="Put keywords relevant to the page here ">
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Put a description of the page here, repeating the major keywords ">
```

Meta search engines will often collect these as the information they show when your page is listed.

## **Download the google toolbar**

This is an important tool that helps you see how important web pages are in Google's eyes. And as at the moment Google is the most important search engine this is very important. Basically – Google likes high Page Rank pages, and it treats links from them with respect. So if you can get a link from a high PR page then Google will smile on your page. All inward



links are worth getting, but one's from high PR (=page rank) pages are worth getting the most.

Download it from: <http://toolbar.google.com/>. It is free and also blocks pop-ups, so it is well worth getting. It has a section called pagerank, with a green line underneath. This is google's rating of the page, out of ten. However even google.co.uk only rates a nine! You will see the page rank of the site you are on in the tool bar.

### ***Inward and outward links***

Do not think that because a site is small it is not worth getting a link from. All inward links are worth having. Be careful about outward links though. We used to not link out at all, but gradually we have started, but only where it helps the user – for example if we review a book, we link to a site where they can read more or buy it. But we didn't get involved in the reciprocal linking that some people do from un-connected websites. Many people do this, a smaller percentage see it as a bad idea. We're in this group, thinking that search engines will eventually clamp down on links that are there purely for the sake of being a link. But it is a decision you have to make yourself. Beware of linking to 'bad neighbourhoods' that have no PR on the google toolbar. By aligning yourself with any site



that google dislikes or has banned you are running a risk of being tarred with their brush.

### **Directories**

These are important places to get links as you are usually not expected to give a link back. Find suitable places to add your link by searching for your Keyword and add url, add site, submit site, etc, etc. Eg, we entered "T shirts"+"add site" on google and found lots of places to add our site. The more sites you can get linking to you the better, as search engines will see you as more important and push you up their results.

### **Other people's sites**

Amateur webbies like adding useful links to their sites. Make sure your site has some good advice or information pages and then search for small or medium sized websites that ask for suggested websites for them to review and add to their links pages. You will be amazed how many people agree to link to you.

Also: When you have downloaded the google toolbar you will see a button marked as a white i on a blue circle. Click on this and you can find 'backward links', which are sites that link to the site you are viewing. This is very helpful, as you can look up competitors' sites and look at their backlinks and see who is linking to them. Then you can email and suggest



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a link to you. After all, if the site has linked to a competitor then they should be interested in your site as well.

### **Sandboxing**

This refers to google's practice of placing new sites in the SERPS for a few weeks, so making the newbie webmaster very proud of his efforts, and then dropping them completely for three or four months, making the webmaster think he has been banned. This seems to be the way that google is working at the moment and there is no way round it. Just devote your time to getting links and making content.

### **Content**

Your website needs to attract people, but it also needs to attract search engines. Luckily both of these can be achieved in the same way – with good quality, relevant content. The more unique content you have the more sticky your website will be – ie – visitors will stay on it for longer. And there will also be more for the search engines to get their spiders into. So devote time to writing decent content, about your products, their history, about you, about special offers – just get as much content onto your site as possible. But keep it relevant otherwise people will click away and search engine spiders will rate it poorly.



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### **Get a counter**

This will help you check what is going on, how many visits you have. You can get a free one from <http://freelogs.com/>, but it is a good idea to search on google for counters and look at all the options. Don't make a big thing of it on the page, you don't want visitors to see it at all. Your webhost may offer you a free means of checking your visitor stats anyway.

### **No extra javascript or html**

New webmasters often succumb to the 'jazzy effects' that are available, like unusual screen wipes, music, etc. Don't do it! For a start they will slow down your page, for a second they are annoying, and for a third they look (and sound) very unprofessional. Your visitors want facts, information and if you give them what they want they might buy. If they get turned off by your site they will leave.

Restrain any urges you feel for extraneous code that doesn't add to your site's core idea and aims.

### **You've made a sale!**

Congratulations! You will receive an email from your payment processor and one from your cart software, telling you the name and address of



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your customer, a report on their card validity and the item (or items!) they have purchased. This is the exciting moment! Fulfil the order and pat yourself on the back!



## **PART IV – Moving on up**

You've made a few sales, you're happy with the look and content of your site, you have a few organic visitors (ie – people finding you without you doing anything, usually from search engines and directories), but you want more! Thousands more! Millions more!

Let's start by trying to get a few hundred more!

### ***What not to do***

Don't succumb to web sites promising to send you lots of traffic for £x.

They might well do so, but it won't be targeted traffic, it will be thousands of people from Asia clicking through with no intention of buying anything.

Your visits may go up, but your sales won't and that's what matters.

### ***Advertising***

Online adverts are the best start. Why? Because then you are dealing with people who are already using the internet, already know what to do.

The UK is the second best internet connected country in the world, but even so there are millions of people who do not use the net yet. Of course they will – more will every year, so get your store up and they will be potential customers eventually. But start off dealing with the people



who are online. Even of these some will be shy of using their credit cards, but not as much as people who don't even use the net. Put it like this: If you have an advert offline what percentage of people who see it will be net-users? Even if the answer is 50%, compare that with: if you have an advert online what percentage of people who see it will be net-users? The answer to which of course is 100%.

### **PPC Advertising**

For small businesses the PPC (pay per click) approach is very good. You can target your ads so that people who click are already wanting to buy and with click prices starting at 4p it is well worth it.

When we started selling Latin T shirts we put up a PPC ad on google that was shown whenever someone in the UK searched on the word Latin.

Within a couple of days we had made two sales through this advert, which had cost us about 32p! So it works! The good thing about PPC is you only pay when someone clicks. And if you make the ad message clear then the people clicking are at least going to be interested in buying. It's self-selecting advertising. The best to start with is

Google adwords ([adwords.google.com](http://adwords.google.com)). You can set them just to appear in the UK, it costs £5 to set up and from 4p a click. If you are in a niche with little competition it is good. If you try and bid on keywords such as holiday or loan or indeed T shirt, it can be expensive. So look for sub-



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areas, instead of the major keyword try and find a smaller one that will has less people bidding on it.

### **Other PPC engines are**

Espotting ([www.espotting.com](http://www.espotting.com))

Overture ([www.overture.com](http://www.overture.com))

Other possible advertising opportunities you will come across:

### **Banner ads**

Are often sold per 1000 impressions, which is good for the site selling the advertising, but not so good for you, as you are paying for 1000 people to see your ad – and there is no saying that they will even look at it on the page. And it might not even be put in front of a thousand *different* people - if your ad is on a site where people look at several pages in a visit one person might be served with your ad three or four times.

Try and find a site that charges by time – by the week or month. The best way to find these sites are to go to google or lycos or another search engine and search for YOUR KEYWORD + “advertise here”. Then you can find sites that will accept your ads and let you pay by time.



Banner design – most banners are 468x60 pixels. Use any design you want – designs have become so complicated that actually a simple design will catch the eye more than a complicated gif file full of animation. So don't worry about your image too much. But make sure that your name is on the advert. Even if people don't click they will be seeing your name which will reinforce your message. If you have a memorable URL then get that in front of people – they will eventually remember it and may come looking when they are after your products.

### **Offline advertising**

This is still worth considering and can bring good results. Relevant magazines, newspapers and newsagents windows can all bring in customers. But you are fighting against the fact that they have to actually turn on their computer and remember your name... Much better to get consumers whilst they are already online.

### **Countering online fraud**

Completely avoiding fraud seems impossible at the moment on the net. It is so easy for people to try that they seem unable to stop attempting it. We have developed a system that we work through if we are unsure about a customer. In the end if it is a big order and we are unsure we



play safe and don't fulfill the order, sending an email explaining the position politely.

### **1. Go pre-auth.**

Pre-authorisation is Worldpay's system whereby when someone makes a purchase the money is not actually taken from their card until you log in and give the go ahead. This protects you from fraud in that if you believe it is a fraudulent transaction you just do not authorize it and therefore do not lose out. Normally you would have to pay the Worldpay fee for the transaction and if it was fraud and the money was charged back you would not get the Worldpay percentage back. This way if anything is suspicious you do not have to go through with the transaction.

### **Top checks-**

Worldpay sends back a report on the card, including whether the address given matches the card address, whether the 3 digit security code matches and whether the country matches the country the card was issued in. If all of these match and the address is in the UK and there is a telephone number then we accept the order.

However, if any of these don't match we make further checks.



Good pointers are – is there a telephone number? Does the email address relate to the person?

***Gut feeling checks-***

Does the level of English approximate to what you would expect from that address?

Does the name approximate to what you would expect from that address?

Is the order unusual (Few legit people buy five hundred T shirts – we've discovered...)



## Part V - Why not..?

- Set up your emails to send an alert to your mobile when you make a sale. This was easy for us to do and stops you having to wait at the computer for the sales to come in. You can look the sale up as soon as it comes in.
- Have a box on the shopping cart for customers to fill in where they heard about you. This is very revealing and helps show which links are working, which adverts are not worth doing again, etc, etc.
- Add a news page to your site that you update every day or so. This gets you in the habit of writing fresh, original content every day, which customers and search engines appreciate.
- Add an email newsletter sign up page. This can lead to new sales as you build up a mailing list of people who have deliberately signed up and so are interested in your product.
- Accept more currencies? Some people prefer to buy in their own currency. Taking dollars and Euros especially seems a good idea – we take all three major currencies (UK£, US\$, €) and have made sales in all three. We were considering Japanese Yen, but



we haven't had enough sales from the Far East yet, so we're leaving it for now.

## Part VI - Glossary

When it comes to jargon and acronyms computers have the competition licked. Here is a list of words and phrases that it helps to know the meaning of when jumping into ecommerce.

Bandwidth	The amount of data customers can call from your site per month.
Broadband	Internet connection much faster (ours is 10x) than normal dial up speeds.
B2B	Business to Business
CGI	Common Gateway Interface – basically programs rather than pages that users can call from your site – to eg – ask them for their email address and send it to you. Complicated to set up, not at all recommended for beginners to get involved in.
FTP	File Transfer protocol – refers to uploading your files to your web hosting
HTML	Hyper-text Mark up Language – the basic language used to code web pages.
ISP	Internet Service Provider
Payment Processor	Also known as Payment Providers, accept credit cards securely for online businesses
Pre-auth	Pre-authorisation –Worldpay's system whereby you have to log in and accept the



SEO	money from a customer, allowing you to refuse it if it is fraudulent.
SERPS	Search engine Optimisation – tweaking your pages to make them search engine-friendly Search Engine Results Pages – the pages of websites that search engines produce when you search on a keyword.
Shopping cart	Not the sort of thing you use at Sainsburies, but an online equivalent. When BUY THIS buttons are pressed on your site the good is placed in the shopping cart so the user can carry on looking at the store until they go to the check out.
Spider	Search engine procedure to travel the web from link to link indexing information
URL	uniform resource locator, means the <a href="http://www.NAME.co.uk">http://www.NAME.co.uk</a> that refers to your site
WWW	World wide web, what this is all about. But I guess you already knew that definition or you wouldn't be here!

Thanks for reading our ebook. We hope it has been useful. Why not sign up for our FREE monthly newsletter? You have the chance of winning prizes, it's free and we discuss online business (as well as art and life and fun and nonsense...) Visit <http://www.concepttshirts.co.uk/win-dvds.php> to sign up.



## Disclaimer

It's sad, but we've got to have one.

Everything we have written here we believe to be true and is a reflection of our experiences setting up our own UK ecommerce site. We hope and expect that this information will be helpful to anyone setting up a new internet venture. However we cannot be responsible for any errors or omissions or the effects of following this advice. We have given this advice in good faith, from experience, but all sites need hard work and diligence to succeed. Good luck!

## AND FINALLY

1. We would love to help set you on the road to success, so please visit [conceptTshirts.co.uk](http://conceptTshirts.co.uk) for more help and advice on starting your own online business in the UK.
2. Email us at [onlinebusiness@concepttshirts.co.uk](mailto:onlinebusiness@concepttshirts.co.uk) for specific questions – we may not be able to reply, but we will try.
3. Help someone else by forwarding this ebook to a friend who is thinking of starting up online.

Good Luck!

