

YOUR GUIDE TO

SELLING ONLINE WITHOUT A WEBSITE



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INTRODUCTION

The huge growth of the internet over the past two decades has infiltrated many areas of our lives and revolutionised the way many companies and entrepreneurs do business.

There's no doubting that e-commerce is increasingly big business. The UK is the biggest e-commerce nation in the world by population, with 1 in 5 British consumers reporting that they now spend more online than they do in-store and a further 18% saying they spent roughly the same online and in-store.¹

Pre-Christmas online shopping hit a monthly peak of £10 billion in the UK in November 2013² and the trend shows no signs of reversing any time soon. Whatever your feelings on the import of the Black Friday sales from the US and the corresponding online 'Cyber Monday', there's no denying the sheer volume of sales they generated. According to internet retail experts IMRG, an estimated £810 million was spent online in a single day on Black Friday in the UK, with a further £650 million on Cyber Monday.³ Even people who prefer to conduct their shopping face to face are increasingly conducting research such as price comparisons and reading reviews online before going to make their purchase.

The screenshot shows a news article from The Guardian. The headline is "Cyber Monday sales eclipsed by £810m spent by British Black Friday shoppers". The sub-headline reads "Christmas bargain hunters logged 404,835 orders on Black Friday, at the start of the payday weekend". The article is by Zoe Wood and Rebecca Smithers, dated Monday 1 December 2014 20:47 GMT. There are social media sharing options for Facebook (36), Twitter (101), Google+ (6), LinkedIn (40), and Email. A list of related topics includes Business, Life and style, Money, Technology, and More news. A photograph shows a crowd of people in a store, and a cartoon illustration of a woman walking a dog is visible on the right side of the page.

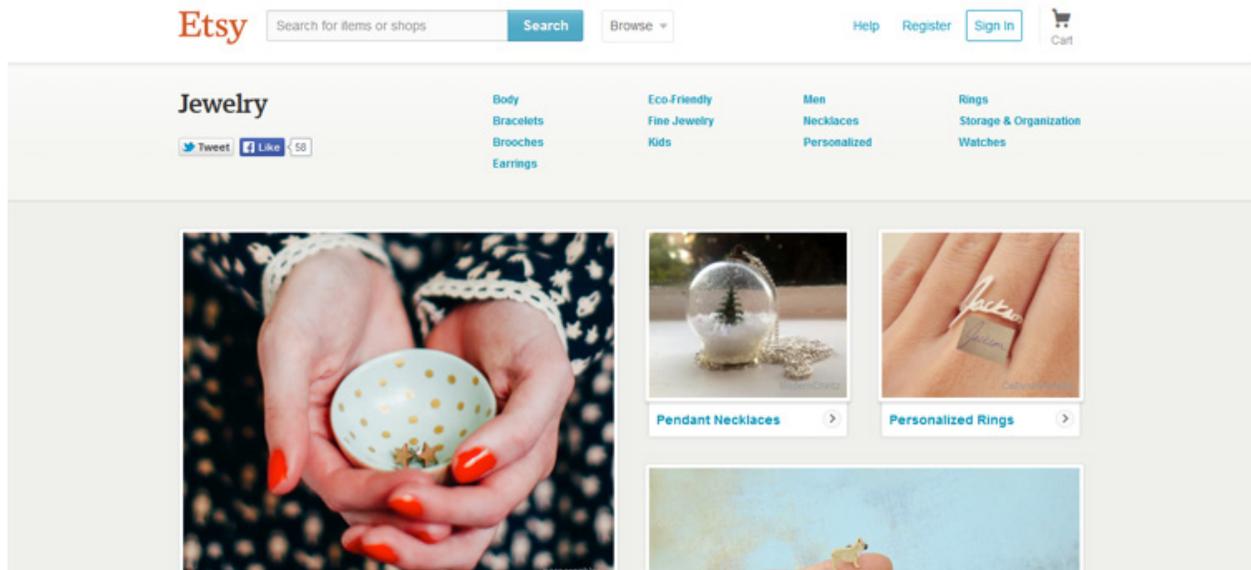
Online shopping is not a phenomenon restricted to the UK of course. Sales continue to increase globally and e-commerce can help you reach new and sometimes unexpected markets overseas.

Some businesses – particularly SMEs – still seem to think that e-commerce isn't for them. It's often seen as complicated, expensive and time consuming but the truth is that anyone can start selling online with a minimal or even zero outlay. You don't even need a website to begin trading and there are many reasons why businesses might choose to sell online without a website. There's no denying that a company website can be a valuable asset but some businesses might simply want to test the waters first. They could also be looking for the simplest solution, which is often to use a ready-made sales platform such as Amazon or eBay.

This guide will cover some of the major platforms that you can use to sell online without the hassle and potential expense of maintaining your own website.

TRADING PLATFORMS

Amazon and eBay are the two big trading platforms that everybody has heard of but there are dozens of alternatives that might be more suitable, especially if you deal in unusual items or occupy a particular niche. Etsy, for example, is a site that focuses on handmade, vintage and unique items. These include artwork, photography, clothing, jewellery, food, bath and beauty products, quilts, knick-knacks, and toys. Some traders also sell craft materials such as fabrics, beads and specialised jewellery tools.



Etsy allows you to set up your own virtual shop and most sellers specialise in a particular area. Tracey Marshall, 52, was made redundant from her £14,000-a-year job at a call centre two years ago and decided to start her own embroidery business, selling through Etsy, her own website, and the UK-based notonthehighstreet.com.

Trading under the name Thread Squirrel she embroiders world maps and countries on to bespoke items such as bags, cushions, pillow cases, Kindle covers and aprons and her turnover was nearly £35,000.

Ms. Marshall said: “I started with generic embroidery work, like embroidering names on towels, but there was a lot of competition. Then I started embroidering maps and it has built up from there. I have found it difficult selling online – I had to learn everything from scratch. My photographs are not as good as my work, for example, so I have just hired a professional photographer. Either you learn to do it properly, or you hire someone to help.”⁴

Not on the High Street (notonthehighstreet.com) claims to be “changing the face of UK enterprise by supporting growing small businesses, offering a route to market for designer-makers who would otherwise struggle for custom or lose out in the battle with high street giants”.⁵

Serving as a ‘unique online department store’ they offer more than 100,000 original lifestyle products, many of which are bespoke and made to order, from more than 4,000 of the UK’s most creative small businesses. Founded in 2006, the site itself is fast growing, rising from a turnover of £134,000 in its first year to more than £43 million in 2012.

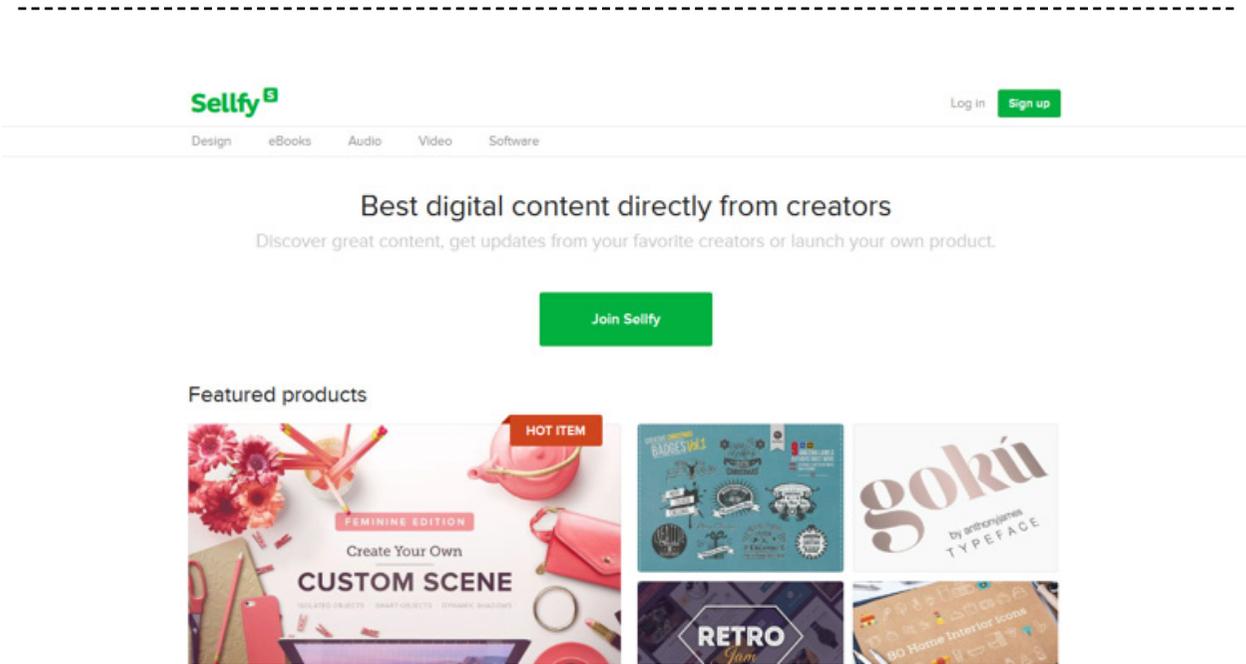
Misi, Folksy, Coriandr and Not Mass Produced are other similar UK-based websites specialising in handmade items.

Not Mass Produced say: “We believe...we can redistribute wealth in favour of individual makers and small businesses rather than global giants.

“We believe that choosing products produced by known artisans adhering to ethical and environmentally sustainable practices, not only helps keep traditional skills and crafts alive for future generations but will help recover our economy.” 6

Not every online marketplace is dedicated to arts, crafts and bespoke items. EBid, for example, is a UK-based auction site that can be seen as a good alternative to eBay. It’s smaller than eBay, meaning there are fewer potential buyers to view your items, but the seller fees also tend to be smaller.

If your product is somewhat less tangible meanwhile, Sellfy serves as a market for digital creators, selling everything from apps and other software to custom fonts and icons, videos and eBooks.



CLASSIFIED SITES

Classified websites such as Gumtree and Craigslist have sprung up to provide an online equivalent of the traditional inky classified papers and classified ads in the back of local and national newspapers. They can be used by those looking for jobs, a new place to live, or even romance, but they can also be used to sell a wide range of items.

They are most commonly used by non-professional sellers looking to get rid of unwanted items but they can also be used to sell on a wider scale for business purposes. There are plenty of classified sites out there but Gumtree is the biggest in the UK, with more than 8 million unique visitors a month. According to the site itself, almost one in five (17%) of the UK's digital population visited Gumtree in September 2014.⁷ Alexa currently rates it the 30th most visited site in the country, with visitors viewing an average of 8.76 pages and spending just over 9 minutes on the site.⁸

Business sellers can open a Gumtree Business Account, which provides you with discounted prices for multiple ads as well as various payment options and access to a personal account manager.

Gumtree Search 1,667,076 ads in United Kingdom on the UK's #1 Classifieds site

I'm looking for... All Categories in Postcode or location + 0 miles

Get cosy this winter

Snuggle up on a new sofa and escape the cold

[Search furniture](#)

[Motors](#) [For Sale](#) [Property](#) [Jobs](#) [Services](#) [Community](#) [Pets](#)

Latest Ads in **Motors** [View all](#)

- £1,725
- £2,695
- £2,999
- £2,745

Save money on the Dartford Crossing charge by setting up a Dart Charge account

Craigslist is perhaps the most popular and widely known classified site worldwide. Started in San Francisco in 1995 as an email listing of local events, the site now attracts more than 50 billion page views per month, with over 80 million classified ads being posted each month. It has more than 700 local sites, grouped by city or region, in 70 different countries.⁹

The site clearly has a huge reach but it is largely used as a local resource so an item posted in Leicester, Loughborough or even London is only going to reach a fraction of users. Visitors can browse posts by category or search by keyword however, so your listings will still have a good chance of reaching the people you want them to. The format is not necessarily ideal for selling smaller items in bulk but it can be great for selling individual items and the occasional promotion.

SPECIALISED SALES

SITES

Abebooks is a slightly more specialised sales website, focusing on those who love to read. It's home to professional booksellers, those with a few going spare and even to university students looking to sell their old course texts.

The site aims to help people to find and buy any book from any bookseller anywhere in the world and six international websites. The inventory of texts is home to a number of those no longer printed, some which are signed by their respective authors and millions of new and used books too.

Monthly fees apply, which vary depending on the numbers of books being listed, while a company name will appear next to every listing as a point of contact. You are also in control of your shipping and delivery rates, allowing your business to stay competitive in the market place.

Autotrader works in a similar fashion for new and used vehicles. Ads can cost less than £15 to place and the site prides itself on being twice as likely as any other to sell a vehicle in the first week of listing it. While the site is mainly targeted at individuals looking to sell their cars and motorbikes, it can also be used by car dealerships. The site offers buying, selling, marketing and managing services and has more than 44 million monthly users, meaning most vehicles receive a lot of attention.

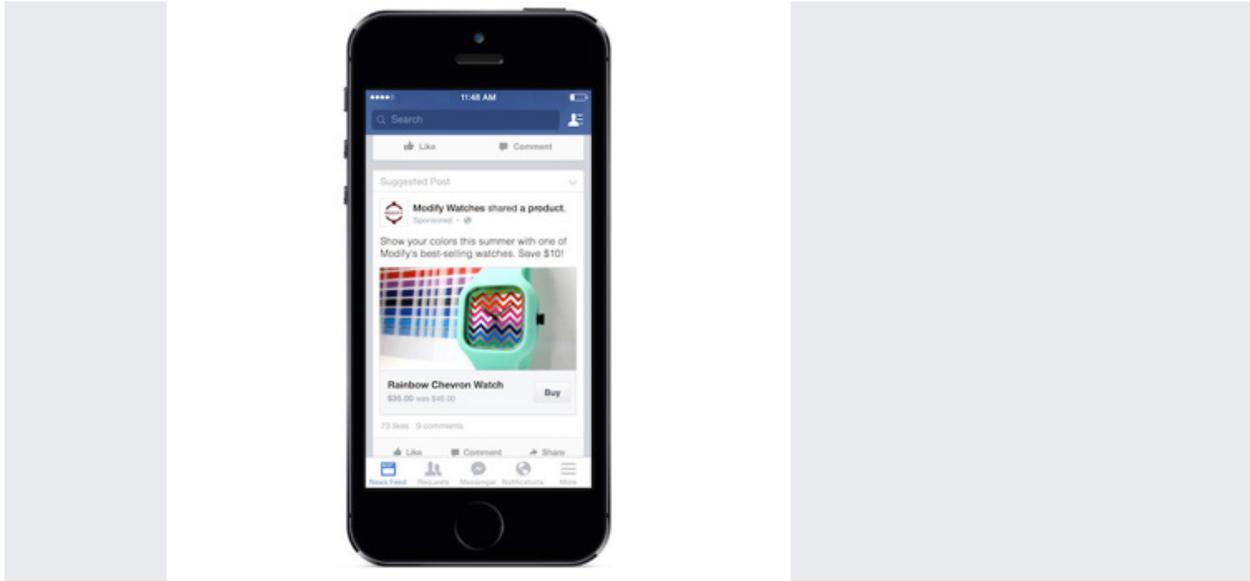
Autotrader uses several sources to find appropriate vehicles at the right cost while it enables sellers to put their vehicles in front of as many people as possible – exceeding the audience range of similar sites. It also promotes businesses via its many digital channels and can provide assistance for any dealerships looking to ensure they get the best deals for their vehicles leaving you in control when it comes to buying and selling.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have become a huge part of many of our daily lives. We can use them to catch up with old friends and while away idle minutes but they are also increasingly being used by businesses of all sizes to promote their brands and forge deeper relationships with their customers. According to Hubspot, 92% of marketers claimed that social media marketing was important for their businesses in 2014, with 80% saying their efforts had increased traffic to their websites.¹⁰

When it comes to actually making sales through social media rather than increasing brand visibility and loyalty, getting people to visit your website and all the other peripheral benefits of social media marketing, you might have to think a little more creatively.

In September, Twitter caused waves when it trialed a 'Buy' button available to "a small percentage of U.S. users" and with a limited number of commercial partners, including pop star Rihanna, fashion brand Burberry and non-profit group Nature Conservancy.¹¹ This buy button would be used alongside messages pushing a particular product or service and the first items to be sold by this method are likely to be limited-time items such as concert tickets and limited edition products.



The time when any business or individual seller can incorporate a buy button into their tweets would appear to be a long way off but that day will probably arrive eventually. Facebook has also been trialling a feature to allow users to make purchases without leaving the site, with the tests again being limited to “a few small and medium-sized businesses in the US”.¹²

For now you can offer items for private sale via your social media profiles, making arrangements for payment, collection or delivery, but you will obviously be limited by the number of friends, followers or contacts you have. There are also thousands of pages and community groups dedicated to buying and selling items, and the number is growing daily. Most are ‘closed groups’, which means you have to click to join the group and wait for an administrator to give you permission.

Zoe Chapman from Tunbridge Wells in Kent runs a fabric, gifts and stationery company called Ollie &Roo.

She told The Guardian: “I have tried a number of Facebook groups for selling items locally; I find the smaller village pages have more successful and easier results, leading to a smoother transaction. I guess this is because people know each other in a small community and it is an easier way to exchange items and name your price.”

Trust is an important factor when making direct sales over social media. Large trading platforms like Amazon and eBay have safeguards and resolution processes in place but on social media the seller is trusting the buyer to go through with the transaction and the buyer is trusting the seller to provide the item as described. Many transactions are done on a cash and collection basis rather than a distance payment followed by postal delivery.

It’s also possible to drum up interest in items you have for sale via a blog, but again you have to reach enough potential buyers to actually make a sale.

First choose your blogging platform – Tumblr is an easily searchable, linkable and editable platform but there are many others that could be suitable. Create an information page, explaining what you are selling and giving further details, such as whether you are selling in person only (cash on collection) or accepting payments online. If the sale is going to be ongoing, make sure people know to check back regularly to see your new items.

Finally, start promoting your blog. You can use your existing social media lists as a starting point but posting an ad on sites like Craigslist with examples of items you have for sale can also drum up interest. If you are concentrating on local sales you could also use traditional methods such as putting up flyers with the blog address.

PRESENTING YOUR PRODUCTS

Online shopping is on the rise but one of the reasons frequently given by those still resisting the trend is that they can't tell what the item is actually like or how it will look or feel in real life.¹³

When selling online you can't provide the same experience of actually being able to touch and look closely at an item, which is one of the reasons many consumers still prefer to conduct research online then make the purchase in person. What you can do however, is provide as much detail as possible.

Clear photographs can be hugely important when selling online. The best format and style will depend on the nature of the product as well as the platform. Some items work best taken on a plain white background whereas if you were selling handmade jewellery on Etsy, you might prefer to take a picture of a piece on a model's hand, wrist or neck. Sites such as eBay hold stock photos for some items but if you take the photos yourself use as high a resolution as you are able to upload to get the cleanest, crispest pics. Multiple photos taken from different angles can give a better idea of what the item is like.

You should also be thorough in your description, giving any technical details or specifications as well as a more general description. If the items you are selling are not new, detail their condition and any faults or defects thoroughly and honestly.

PRICING AND **POSTAGE COSTS**

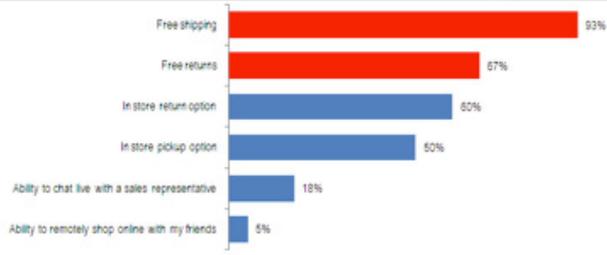
Pricing is, of course, central to every business model, whether you're selling online, in-store or even by mail order. Factors such as overheads and the costs of manufacturing or sourcing products have to be balanced against the need to make a profit and existing market forces such as the prices offered by competitors. This last factor can be particularly important when it comes to selling online as consumers can easily make comparisons without having to visit multiple in-store retail locations.

If you are selling through a retail platform like Amazon or eBay it's easy enough for you (and your potential customers) to see how much others are charging for the same or similar items. If you are offering unusual, unique or bespoke items you will have your own ideas on how much you need to or are able to charge. There's often a delicate balance to be struck between trying to maximise profits by charging as the market will bear and making a lower profit on each individual sale but increasing the number of sales by lowering prices.

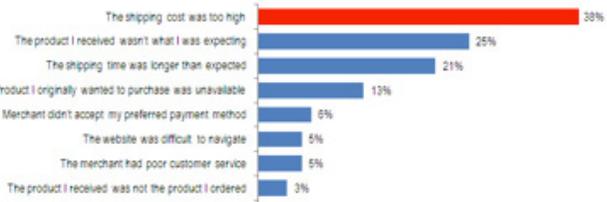
Another factor that you don't have to worry about when making in-store sales is the cost of postage and packing. This can be a significant cost to you but should you always pass it directly onto the customer?

A study by Compete found that shipping costs played a huge part in consumers' decisions on whether or not to make a purchase online.

Which of the following would encourage you to purchase more products online? [compete.com](#)



Why were you not completely satisfied with your shopping experience? [compete.com](#)



Ebook: Navigating the New Path to Purchase

Free Download

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Some important takeaways from the study included:

- 93% of respondents indicated that free shipping on orders would encourage them to purchase more products online.
- Two thirds of shoppers said they would buy more online if returns were free.
- When asked about their most recent shopping experience, overall customer satisfaction was 10% lower for those who had paid for shipping compared to those who had free shipping.
- High shipping costs were rated as the number one reason why consumers were not satisfied with their online shopping experience.
- 67% of online researchers stated that they purchase items in a store instead of online in order to avoid shipping costs.

Offering free postage might not be sustainable for every trader and every product. You still have to make a profit after you've factored in postage costs but you might well see your sales leap if you can afford to build free shipping into your pricing structure. Again, consumers will usually compare and if a competitor is offering a similar product with lower or free postage costs it seems logical that they'll go for the lowest overall price.

You might also want to offer a range of delivery options, with a free or budget basic service for your cheapest delivery option and higher postage charges for extras such as faster express delivery, tracked or 'signed for' options.

SELLING ON AMAZON **AND EBAY**

If you are looking to sell via a big established sales platform, they don't come any bigger or more established than Amazon. Founded as an online bookstore 20 years ago, the company has grown to become the foremost e-commerce company in the world. At the time of writing (December 2014) Amazon is ranked by Alexa as the sixth most visited website in the world, beaten only by search engines Google, Yahoo! and the Chinese Baidu, the social media giant Facebook and video sharing site YouTube.¹⁴

Online auction and shopping site eBay is another platform that everyone has at least heard of. It still has a reputation as a place to get rid of unwanted junk from the attic and it can be great for small or one-off sales but the site can also provide opportunities for people looking to trade on a much bigger scale. According to The Telegraph more than 200,000 businesses trade through eBay in the UK, generating an estimated £6 billion of sales each year.¹⁵



New offers for **PetSafe Staywell Classic Magnetic Cat Flap** by PetSafe

★★★★☆ 62 customer reviews

Compare: [Offers for this product](#) [Offers for this product and similar products](#)

[Return to product information](#) | [Have one to sell?](#) | Amazon protects every purchase with an [A-to-Z guarantee](#).

Price • Delivery	Condition	Seller Information	Delivery	Buying Options
<p>£16.99 FREE Delivery</p>	<p>New Brand New - Factory Sealed comes complete with full manufacturers warranty. We are an authorised Seller.</p>	<p>Luzern ★★★★☆ 97% positive over the past 12 months (10,397 total ratings)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Dispatched from United Kingdom. International & domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>
<p>£17.56 & FREE Delivery in the UK. Details</p>	<p>New</p>	<p>amazon.co.uk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Want delivery by Friday, 12 December? Order it in the next 18 hours and 16 minutes, and choose One-Day Delivery at checkout. See details Domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>
<p>£16.99 + £3.99 UK delivery</p>	<p>New</p>	<p>Dog Goodies ★★★★☆ 93% positive over the past 12 months (160 total ratings)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Dispatched from United Kingdom. Domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>
<p>£21.03 FREE Delivery</p>	<p>New</p>	<p>Highly Oak Training ★★★★☆ 94% positive over the past 12 months (25,716 total ratings)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Dispatched from United Kingdom. Expedited delivery available. International & domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>
<p>£17.99 + £2.21 UK delivery</p>	<p>New</p>	<p>M J AQUATICS ★★★★☆ 96% positive over the past 12 months (218 total ratings)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Dispatched from United Kingdom. Domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>
<p>£21.75 FREE Delivery</p>	<p>New</p>	<p>EQUESTRIAN PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ 89% positive over the past 12 months (2,952 total ratings)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In stock. Dispatched from United Kingdom. Expedited delivery available. International & domestic delivery rates and return policy. 	<p>Add to Basket</p> <p>or</p> <p>Sign in to turn on 1-Click ordering</p>

Amazon still sell a wide range of products themselves but more than a third of product units sold through the site are from third-party sellers.¹⁶ For many individuals and small businesses, the visibility and resources that Amazon effectively puts at their disposal makes the site a perfect platform for selling away from their own websites.

There are two main ways to sell on Amazon. The Basic selling package allows you to list items individually and be charged on a per-item business. The Pro package requires a monthly subscription but also provides extras such as business reports and tools that allow you to automate your listings and related tasks, making it suitable if you are looking to sell higher volumes on a regular basis.

Meanwhile on eBay, registering as a business seller rather than opening an individual account – or upgrading to a business account – allows you to register with a company name, which will be displayed in all communications with buyers, such as invoices and emails. You could be eligible to qualify for a discount on eBay selling fees and you can automatically display contact details and terms and conditions in all of your listings.

You can also opt for an eBay Shop subscription, which gives you a fixed number inclusive listings built into your monthly fee, the ability to organise your inventory and a place to display all of your listings in a personalised virtual shop window with a unique website address.

There have been some notable success stories from the two sites, such as Sophia Amoruso, founder of the Nasty Gal fashion brand, who The Telegraph reported was worth £60 million after starting her business as a small eBay trader selling vintage clothes in 2006. The paper also highlighted Bamford Trading, which was started by married couple John and Gill Hewitt with just £2,000 of start-up funds 9 years ago. In May 2014 their company passed £5 million of eBay sales, where they still conduct the bulk of their business.

Check out our
Ebay



Visit our eBay Store



023 8063 2198

To see some of our best offers on hard drives, RAM, toner cartridges & other accessories, check out our ebay store!

GO



Picture Product

Bids

Price

Time Left

Whichever option you choose, make sure you make the best use of tools such as the free Turbo Lister, which allows you to store, edit and list thousands of items in bulk.

One word of caution however; eBay frequently changes its rules, fees and policies and it's important to keep abreast of any changes. It can be useful to join one of the many trading communities online or follow blogs such as Tamebay.

CONCLUSION

According to government research, 39% of sole traders and small businesses in the UK have no online presence at all. Given the vast and still-growing scale of e-commerce both here and abroad, these businesses could be missing out on huge potential sales.

Business and enterprise minister Matthew Hancock said: "Thousands of potential customers are searching online for local small businesses and without an online profile businesses will lose out."

Government entrepreneur-in-residence Simon Devonshire added: “Online is the new landline. A landline number used to be a mark of authenticity for businesses. The move to a digital economy has meant consumers are more likely to trust a business with a website and consider a business more credible if they offer the ability to transact seamlessly online.”

Setting up a website is not as expensive or as complex as many small businesses believe and it can bring significant advantages, serving as a virtual shop window and boosting your business or brand visibility, even if you don’t intend to make online sales. The research found that 52% of consumers go straight to search engines when looking to buy from local businesses.¹⁷

There are still some costs and issues involved in setting up and maintaining a website however. You still have to find and purchase a domain and hosting, design the site and put it all online. If you intend to make direct sales from a website you also have to set up a secure ordering and payment system. This could involve a third-party transaction system such as PayPal or, in order to cater to customers who don’t have a PayPal account, setting up your website to take debit and credit card payments. To do this you will have to acquire an internet merchant account (IMA) with a bank or similar financial institution and use a data encryption system to help make transactions secure.

By using other platforms or methods to sell online, you can avoid many of these issues. This can allow you to test the online waters for your products or services before taking the plunge more fully. Alternatively, you might simply want to use the visibility, expertise and infrastructure of existing, established platforms to make selling online a breeze.

SOURCES

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PICTURE LOCATIONS

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² http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/offer-listing/B000RXY4H0/ref=dp_olp_new?ie=UTF8&condition=new

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⁵ <https://sellfy.com/>

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⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/Discover-and-Buy-Products-on-Facebook-Test>

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ipostparcels.com offers next day collection and delivery services to the UK and over 160 international countries, at a time and location to suit you and all at fantastic prices too. So if it's one parcel or several you need to send, the ipostparcels service is ideal for anyone looking for convenience and great value.