

# Building Your Digital Toolkit

## 7 Ways Small Businesses Can Leverage Digital Tools and Strategies to Reach More Customers Online

### A new era of e-Commerce has arrived, bringing with it new opportunities for small businesses to stand out online.

For many shoppers, the pandemic-era shift to e-Commerce has become the next normal, and 56% of U.S. consumers now say they prefer to shop online rather than in-store.<sup>1</sup> They're also seeking out small businesses specifically: nearly 6 in 10 consumers say they prefer to shop with small businesses online due to the personalized experience they provide.<sup>2</sup>

But as consumers gain experience shopping online, their expectations continue to rise. Shoppers now accustomed to the tailored and always-on experience of large retailers are looking to small businesses to provide a similarly seamless customer experience — with a fraction of a large retailer's budget.

This shift requires small business owners to step into the role of chief technology officer and use digital tools to blend “big business” service with a small business feel. Those who face this challenge head-on are poised to reap the rewards: the ability to connect with new customers, deepen customer relationships and create the unique and personalized digital experience that drives revenue and accelerates business growth.

In the pages that follow, we'll share insights into how small businesses can adopt digital tools and strategies to meet the ever-evolving needs of modern customers and remain ahead of consumer trends. You'll learn how to get the most from digital tools you may already use, as well as discover additional tools and strategies to consider as you expand your business online.

## 1. DEVELOP YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY

Deploying digital tools means investing time, energy and money, and small business owners must invest their resources wisely. Working from a strategy allows you to make data-driven decisions and carefully weigh the pros and cons of each investment, helping you focus on digital tools that are likely to make a positive impact on the business.

### The Elements of a Strong Digital Customer Experience

Building out your digital strategy begins with a deep understanding of what modern customers crave from their digital experiences — and the essentials that digital tools should help you deliver.

While each small business, and each customer, is unique, develop your strategy with an eye to these four pillars of exceptional customer experience:

#### Personalization

71% of customers expect brands to provide personalized interaction, and 3 in 4 are frustrated if brands fall short.<sup>3</sup>

#### Convenience

This basic of customer care is essential online as well, and nearly 7 in 10 customers prioritize convenience over brand.<sup>4</sup>

Working from a strategy allows you to make data-driven decisions and carefully weigh the pros and cons of each investment, helping you focus on digital tools that are likely to make a positive impact on the business.

#### Consistency

Brands should deliver a consistent experience anytime you interact with customers online, including via your website, social media profiles and email.

Doing so is key to retention: 1 in 3 customers say just one bad experience would sour them on working with a brand they love.<sup>5</sup>

#### Innovation

As customers' expectations shift, they're looking for businesses to evolve, too. Nearly 6 in 10 customers say it's very important or essential for businesses to embrace innovation.<sup>6</sup>

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## HOW TO CREATE YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY

As you begin to create your strategy, reflect on how you are currently addressing these four pillars of the customer experience and the tools that could help you enhance the experience as you pursue your business goals.

The answers will offer insight into where your business excels and serve as a jumping-off point to brainstorm how best to use digital tools to grow your business.

### Ask yourself:

- Which digital tools are you already using and how well are they working for you?
- Where does most of your current e-Commerce revenue come from (e.g., social media) and which channels are underperforming?
- Which digital strategies and channels have not worked so far, and why?
- How will your customer needs change over the coming months and years, and does your current digital strategy allow you to meet those needs?

Then look outside your organization for ways to improve the digital customer experience. Solicit customer feedback by sending a survey to your email list or asking for feedback on social media.

You'll learn what matters most to your customers, what your business already does well, and how you can better meet customers' needs.

## 2. CREATE A BRAND WEBSITE THAT CONVERTS

Creating an attractive website provides shoppers a warm introduction to your brand and a home base from which to drive sales. More than 4 in 5 customers research their purchases online before buying, and 60% of in-person shoppers say they visit a retailer's website before visiting them in-store.<sup>7</sup>

**Data viz: More than 6 in 10 customers say their web or mobile shopping experience influences whether they're willing to recommend a brand.<sup>8</sup>**

But creating an effective website goes far beyond an attractive website design and compelling copy. To truly drive results — and maximize the ROI from your site — business owners must keep in mind these best practices to drive sales:

### Feature a clear call to action

Customers crave an intuitive digital experience. And because users may spend only a few moments on your site, their next steps must be made clear at a glance. Select a website design that focuses on a primary call to action (CTA) so readers can quickly and easily take their most likely next step — for example, viewing featured items or setting up a demo or call with a sales representative.

### Use chatbots to engage customers

Chatbots can play a powerful role in driving sales by alerting customers to deals and promotions, offering product suggestions and nudging shoppers about abandoned carts. Consider deploying chatbots to on-site visitors and use AI-powered bots to provide product information and answer customer questions.

### Make suggestions to upsell and cross-sell

Inviting visitors to upgrade their purchase or pair it with complementary offerings can convert sales — and three-quarters of marketers who use these tactics say it accounts for up to 30% of their revenue.<sup>9</sup> Use plug-ins to offer personalized product recommendations, sell related products or services in bundles, and suggest upgrades and add-ons before checkout to drive up sales.

### Provide personalized product suggestions

Today's consumers crave a personalized experience, and personalized product recommendations can increase revenue by 30%.<sup>10</sup> Consider leveraging product recommendation engines to pair shoppers with items they're likely to enjoy, and add a human touch by curating gift guides for special occasions.

### Direct readers toward your email list

Building your email list can keep shoppers coming back and encourage repeat sales — and 70% of consumers say they're willing to hand over their data in exchange for

discounts.<sup>11</sup> Use banners or pop-ups to prompt users to sign up for your list, offering a small discount as a reward.

## 3. CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS ON ONLINE MARKETPLACES

While many businesses look to their website as their primary hub for online sales, small businesses are increasingly turning to online marketplaces — large e-Commerce platforms that sell goods from several merchants — as part of their e-Commerce strategy.

**Data viz: Online marketplace revenue grew 2.9% year over year in 2022 to a global market value of \$3.25 trillion.<sup>11</sup>**

Online marketplaces often have a broad reach, enabling businesses to connect to millions — or even billions — of shoppers worldwide. And because online marketplaces have established platforms to facilitate merchant onboarding and manage customer interactions, small business owners can often hit the ground running, without the upfront cost of running a branded e-Commerce site.

However, as small business owners flock to online marketplaces, it becomes increasingly difficult to stand out. Maximize your results with the following best practices:



### Write descriptive, keyword-rich copy

Consider how potential buyers may search for your items and incorporate target keywords into product titles and descriptions. Using keywords effectively can help your products rank higher in product search results, particularly if you have unique products or services.

### Use custom photography

Invest in vibrant and engaging photography that accurately reflects each item's appearance. Done well, custom photography may increase revenue and reduce returns.<sup>12</sup> Use high-quality, high-resolution images that help each product look its best.

### Understand each platform's unique audience

While some online marketplaces serve global shoppers across multiple product categories, others cater to niche interests. Consider the unique needs of customers on each marketplace as you identify target keywords and write product copy to optimize your sales strategy for each platform.

## 4. EXCEL AT EMAIL MARKETING

Turning leads into customers — and one-time purchasers into repeat shoppers — requires keeping in touch, and email should be at the heart of your digital marketing strategy. Email marketing is also highly effective: Nearly 8 in 10 marketers reported an increase in email engagement between 2021 and 2022, and each dollar invested in email marketing generates an impressive \$36 in revenue.<sup>13</sup>

**Data viz: Email marketing generates \$36 for every \$1 spent. Email marketing revenue is projected to grow to \$13.7B by 2025.**<sup>13</sup>

However, as customers become accustomed to impersonal brand messages, small businesses must add a personal touch to each email to capture readers' attention, and deploying digital tools becomes essential to create a personalized experience for hundreds or thousands of subscribers at a time.

Email marketing platforms can help small businesses execute and scale their email marketing strategy, including:

#### Welcoming new customers

With automated drip campaigns: automatic email sequences sent in response to a consumer behavior (such as signing up for your email list) that introduce your brand and convert subscribers into customers.

#### Fine-tuning each message

With tools to create magnetic subject lines that entice customers to read more, build custom templates and designs, and automate email sends across multiple campaigns.

#### Cleaning email lists

Allow inactive subscribers to opt out of future emails so lists are populated with subscribers most likely to engage with your content.

#### Providing real-time data and feedback

So you can measure the results of your email marketing and get the insights you need to fine-tune your strategy as you go.

### Create More Effective Emails

While an email platform can help you optimize your marketing campaign, it's important to keep the basics in mind to send effective emails:

#### Focus on one CTA

Each email should have one job, such as viewing new arrivals, taking advantage of a new promotion or downloading a resource.

#### Keep subject lines short

Subject lines should generally be kept to 65 characters or less to ensure they display fully on any device. Consider using acronyms or emojis to get your message across quickly, if it's appropriate for your audience.

#### Add personalization

Impersonal emails get ignored — or worse, end up in shoppers' spam folders. Use personalization tags to address subscribers by name and consider using subscription preferences that allow readers to opt in to relevant messages.

#### Test before you send

Avoid a potentially embarrassing mistake by sending a test email first — every single time. Additionally, have someone other than yourself read the content to make sure there are no typos or grammar errors.

#### Use A/B testing to refine your strategy

A/B testing divides your audience in two, sending similar emails to subsets of your list so you can measure which one is more effective. Send emails that differ across only one variable, such as subject line, sender name or send time, and choose one metric — such as the number of readers who clicked the link in your email or the revenue generated — to compare each email's success.

Use testing regularly to learn what works best for your audience.

## 5. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

More than 7 in 10 Americans use at least one social media platform — and of those who do, the majority check social media at least once each day.<sup>14</sup> Establishing a social media presence can help raise consumer awareness by integrating your brand into customers' daily routine. This can lead to additional sales for you!

**Data viz: 3 in 4 customers have purchased a product they first discovered on social media.**<sup>15</sup>

The often casual and informal nature of social media can deepen relationships, enabling businesses to showcase their brand voice and highlight their values to connect with like-minded shoppers. However, despite the “free for all” nature of social media, businesses should ensure their social media presence aligns with their goals and enhances the customer experience.

### Create a consistent experience

Your social media presence should be easy to find and be instantly recognizable, so keep social media handles and branded images consistent across platforms.

### Develop an editorial calendar

Maintain a consistent posting schedule and plan your content in advance. Working from an editorial calendar helps businesses to leverage social media to support key launches and promotions, as well as create a strategic mix of content that will resonate with viewers.

### Be yourself

Trending tags, topics and sounds can spice up your editorial calendar — but it's essential to stay authentic. Research each trend thoroughly to ensure it aligns with your brand voice and core values, and is likely to resonate with your customers.

### Consider each platform individually

Each social media platform is unique and may have slightly different audiences, so adjust your editorial calendar to appeal to your target customer on each one.

**Combine e-Commerce with social media**  
Make online shopping easy and convenient by allowing users to buy your goods directly through social media marketplaces — and consider investing in social media ads to attract prospective customers.

## Filling Out Your Editorial Calendar: What Should Businesses Post?

Businesses should balance promotional content with fun, informative or interactive posts, so consider incorporating a mix of the following into your editorial calendar:

- Promotional content (product launches, sales)
- Informational content (tutorials, explainers)
- Behind-the-scenes insights
- User-generated content
- Seasonal and event-oriented content
- Viral content (trending topics, challenges)

## 6. CREATE A SEAMLESS CUSTOMER CARE EXPERIENCE

The internet never sleeps, and small businesses must be prepared to offer 24/7/365 customer service to meet shoppers' needs. Deploying digital tools can help you meet customer expectations while also streamlining workflows for your staff.

For addressing simple customer queries, automation is key. Nearly three-quarters of customers prefer to use self-service options to solve product and service issues, and 81% attempt to solve issues themselves before contacting a service representative.<sup>16</sup>

Building a knowledge base and deploying customer service bots can help customers help themselves, and automate simple tasks including tracking orders, updating billing details or subscription preferences, or arranging returns.

**Data viz: 73% of customers prefer to use self-service options to solve product and service issues,<sup>16</sup> but digital tools can help you add a human touch to customer service when you need to.**

Phone and video conferencing technology can help customer service representatives offer more in-depth support for complex cases or provide fully personalized support for your highest-value customers.

Finally, deploying a customer service platform can help customers access omnichannel customer support — including via social media, text, chat, phone and video.

By helping the service team track queries across multiple platforms, agents can provide a seamless experience for customers — and allow shoppers to access support through their preferred platforms.

## 7. SEEK OUT INNOVATIVE PAYMENT SOLUTIONS

The shift to digital hasn't just changed how customers prefer to shop. It has also transformed how they prefer to pay. Traditional point-of-sale solutions should be the starting point for small businesses, and those looking to remain ahead of customer expectations must explore new ways to receive payments.

**Data viz: 82% of U.S. customers now use digital payments,<sup>17</sup> and 60% use Buy Now, Pay Later services.<sup>18</sup>**

Contactless and digital payment solutions are on the rise. More than 8 in 10 Americans now use digital payments, up from 72% in 2017.<sup>17</sup>

Solutions like Apple Pay<sup>®</sup> and Google Pay<sup>™</sup> have become the norm for many consumers, and small businesses must adjust their payment technologies to accept a wider range of payments to meet customers' ongoing needs.



Businesses are also increasingly looking to offer consumers more options to finance their purchases. Six in 10 consumers used Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) services in 2022<sup>18</sup>, and the global BNPL market is expected to surge to \$438B by 2025.<sup>19</sup>

## Selecting the Right Payment Provider

Staying ahead of the curve on customer payment preferences calls for finding the right payment provider — a partner who deeply understands your needs and can offer support tailored to your business as you open your virtual doors.

As you weigh your options, keep an eye to the following considerations:

### Do they offer flexible solutions that meet your customers' needs?

The right provider should offer payment options that work across multiple e-Commerce channels, including branded websites, online marketplaces and social media marketplaces.

### Do they have a track record of innovation?

Strong partners should remain ahead of the curve on payment trends and regularly expand their offerings, enabling businesses to meet customers' evolving payment preferences.

### Can they offer industry insight and expertise?

Look for partners with a proven track record of serving small businesses within your industry. An experienced partner can better anticipate and adapt to your needs, as well as provide insights that help you grow your business.

### Do they have a strong data security strategy?

Customer privacy should remain top of mind as you explore payment providers. Look for partners who offer end-to-end security options — including encryption, antivirus solutions and anti-fraud measures — to keep customers' information safe.

### Do they provide a seamless customer experience?

The ideal payment provider should share your commitment to exceptional service — and offer 24/7/365 client care to help you solve issues quickly and conveniently.

## THRIVE IN THE NEXT ERA OF E-COMMERCE

Although the stakes have been raised for small businesses operating online, opportunities abound, and brands that leverage digital tools can curate an exceptional customer experience that stands out from the competition.

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Our business banking and [e-Commerce solutions](#) help you:

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e-Commerce Payment Solutions help small business establish an online presence and accept card payments online.

### Expand your business online

Innovative payment methods, including digital wallets, for getting paid the way your customers want to pay you.

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