



FUTURE e-COMMERCE

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*Virtual E-Commerce
Guide and Handbook
for Small Businesses
in Rural Areas*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. DEFINITIONS	3
1.1. E-COMMERCE	3
1.2. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON E-COMMERCE.....	3
2. STATISTICAL DATA ABOUT E-COMMERCE.....	7
2.1. ROMANIA'S E-COMMERCE DATA	8
2.2. TURKEY'S E-COMMERCE DATA	8
2.3 SPAIN'S E-COMMERCE DATA	8
2.4 ITALIA'S E-COMMERCE DATA	9
3. INTRODUCTION TO E-COMMERCE.....	10
3.1. WHAT IS E-COMMERCE?	10
3.2. ADVANTAGES OF E-COMMERCE.....	12
3.3. DISADVANTAGES OF E-COMMERCE	14
3.4. E-COMMERCE BUSINESS MODELS	15
3.4.1. <i>Business-To-Consumer (B2C)</i>	16
3.4.2. <i>Business-To-Business (B2B)</i>	17
3.4.3. <i>Consumer-To-Consumer (C2C)</i>	18
3.4.4. <i>Consumer-To-Business (C2B)</i>	19
3.4.5. <i>Business-To-Employee (B2E)</i>	20
3.4.6. <i>Government-To-Consumer (G2C)</i>	21
3.4.7. <i>Consumer-To-Government (C2G)</i>	21
3.4.8. <i>Business-To-Government (B2G)</i>	22
4. PREPARATION FOR E-COMMERCE	24
4.1. BUSINESS PLAN PREPARATION.....	24
4.1.1. <i>SWOT analysis</i>	24
4.1.2. <i>Creating a business plan</i>	25
4.2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INVESTOR PROCESSES	29
5. TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR E-COMMERCE.....	31
5.1. READY-MADE E-COMMERCE PACKAGES	31
5.2. E-COMMERCE WEBSITE SOFTWARE AND HOSTING	32
5.3. SALES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA (INSTAGRAM, WHATSAPP, ETC.)	33
5.4. SECURITY IN E-COMMERCE	34
5.5. PAYMENT SYSTEMS.....	36
6. OPERATIONS FOR E-COMMERCE	38
6.1. SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT	38
6.2. PRODUCT MANAGEMENT	39
6.3. LOGISTICS AND WAREHOUSING.....	41
6.4. SHIPPING AND HANDLING	42
6.4.1. <i>Outsourcing Shipping and Handling</i>	43
7. MARKETING FOR E-COMMERCE	45
7.1. BRAND MANAGEMENT.....	45
7.1.1. <i>Methods for brand monitoring in the digital environment</i>	45

7.2. SEM & SEO	46
7.2.1. Search Engine Marketing (SEM).....	46
7.2.2. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	46
7.3. FACEBOOK MARKETING	47
7.3.1. Facebook Ads	48
7.3.2. Facebook Ads and Small Businesses	48
7.3.3. Facebook Pages for Small Businesses	48
7.4. E-MAIL MARKETING	49
7.5. OTHER DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS	50
7.5.1. Banner Ads.....	50
7.5.2. Affiliate marketing: growth opportunity for small businesses	50
7.5.3. Blogging	51
7.5.4. YouTube marketing	52
8. E-COMMERCE METHODS.....	53
8.1. SALES AND MARKETING THROUGH INDIVIDUAL WEBSITE	53
8.2. E-COMMERCE THROUGH INTERMEDIARY SERVICE PROVIDERS (E-MARKETPLACES)	54
8.3. E-COMMERCE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA	56
8.4. E-EXPORT	57

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1. E-Commerce

The concept of electronic commerce, which emerged after 1995, began to spread worldwide in the 2000s. The liberalization of trade and the improvement of internet usage enabled the transfer of commerce to internet-electronic environments. E-commerce refers to the buying and selling of goods and services through the internet or other electronic communication networks. Unlike traditional commerce, it is carried out through online platforms without the need for physical stores or face-to-face transactions.

E-commerce enables users to research, select, purchase, and make payments for products over the internet. Various e-commerce platforms on the internet allow businesses to create online stores and showcase their products virtually. These platforms facilitate processes such as users browsing and adding products to their carts, completing payment transactions, and specifying delivery addresses.

The advantages of e-commerce include access to a wide range of products and services, the elimination of geographical limitations, time and energy savings, easy comparison, online discounts and promotions. Due to the convenience and flexibility it offers to both consumers and businesses, e-commerce has become a rapidly growing sector. E-commerce also allows businesses to expand in the international market.

Thanks to the global reach of the internet, it becomes possible to sell products and services worldwide, crossing national borders. This provides businesses with access to new customers and growth opportunities. E-commerce in its current sense was first carried out in 1994. Pizza Hut, founded by Frank Carney and Dan Carney in 1958, made the first pizza sale over the internet in that year and became the world's first e-commerce company.

In summary, e-commerce started with Pizza Hut. When examining the historical development of e-commerce, the establishment of companies like Amazon and eBay in 1995 and their initiation of online sales rapidly propelled the development of e-commerce. Amazon and eBay, the world's first established e-commerce brands, have further developed themselves over the years and made their names in the e-commerce sector.

COVID-19 has led to a surge in the e-commerce sector and made it one of the most popular industries today.

1.2. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on E-Commerce

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on e-commerce have been significant and important. During the pandemic, restrictions on physical stores and social distancing measures have led people to turn to online shopping.

The e-commerce sector in Turkey and worldwide has experienced significant growth and transformation during this period.

INCREASED INTERNET USAGE

With people spending more time at home and unable to visit physical stores during the pandemic, internet usage has significantly increased. This has boosted the popularity of e-commerce and turned online shopping into a crucial channel.

- **Rise of Online Shopping:** During the pandemic period, people preferred to do online shopping instead of visiting traditional stores. They had the opportunity to research, compare, and purchase the products or services they needed through the internet. This led to a surge in demand for e-commerce platforms.
- **Increase in Product Variety:** Compared to physical stores, online shopping offers a wider range of products to people. Many e-commerce platforms have thousands of products in various categories. This allows consumers to shop in an environment that provides more flexibility and options for choosing among different brands and finding the products they want.
- **Information and Comparison from the Internet:** During the pandemic, people have been using the internet more to gather information about products, read reviews, and compare prices. Online shopping provides consumers with the opportunity to compare product features, customer reviews, and prices of similar products, enabling them to make more informed and confident purchases.
- **Discounts and Promotions:** Many e-commerce businesses have offered special discounts and promotions to attract customers and boost sales during the pandemic. Internet users have been able to make their shopping more economical by taking advantage of advantages such as low prices, free shipping, or special campaigns on various platforms. These types of discounts and promotions have increased the appeal of e-commerce and encouraged customers to shop online.
- **Online Payments and Security:** During the pandemic, online payment methods have become even more popular due to the reduction of physical contact and increased hygiene measures. With credit cards, bank transfers, or other digital payment options, it has been possible to complete purchases securely. This has instilled more confidence in consumers when it comes to shopping online.

PHYSICAL STORE RESTRICTIONS

Due to the pandemic, many countries have closed or restricted physical stores. This has led consumers to turn to online platforms and engage in shopping through the internet. E-commerce has provided consumers with a safe shopping experience and allowed them to meet their needs during the pandemic.

Many businesses have accelerated their digital transformation processes due to the closure or restriction of physical stores during the pandemic. Store owners have started offering their products and services to customers through online platforms. This has contributed to the growth and diversification of the e-commerce sector.

SHIFT IN DEMAND

Consumer behaviours have significantly changed during the pandemic. With more time spent at home, there has been an increased demand for essential products such as food, cleaning supplies, health materials, and home goods, which are the categories that e-

commerce has focused on. On the other hand, demand for categories like clothing and fashion has decreased.

LOGISTIC CHALLENGES

The increased demand for e-commerce during the pandemic has led to changes in the logistics sector.

- **Delivery Times and Stock Issues:** The surge in e-commerce demand during the pandemic has caused difficulties in delivery times and stock availability. The high volume in courier companies and airport restrictions have resulted in longer delivery times and occasional delays. Additionally, the rapid increase in demand has led to stock problems and disruptions in the supply of certain products.
- **Supply Chain Adjustments:** Disruptions in the supply chain during the pandemic have forced e-commerce businesses to review their relationships with suppliers. Many businesses have had to increase supplier diversity and explore alternative sources of supply. Furthermore, new strategies have been developed to optimize logistics processes and minimize disruptions in the supply chain.
- **Security Measures and Hygiene Standards:** Logistics companies and courier workers have had to increase hygiene measures due to the pandemic. Extra precautions have been taken to ensure the hygienic transportation and delivery of packages and products. This has resulted in some delays and additional costs in the logistics processes.
- **Storage and Distribution Challenges:** E-commerce businesses have had to reorganize their storage and distribution processes to meet the increased demand. There has been a need for more storage space, and some businesses have had to resort to temporary storage areas or alternative storage solutions.
- **International Logistics Challenges:** The pandemic has caused significant challenges in international trade as well. Inter-country restrictions, customs controls, and limitations have increased the complexity of international logistics processes. This has resulted in difficulties for e-commerce businesses in managing international deliveries and ensuring timely delivery to customers.
- **Returns and Refunds:** During the pandemic, there has been an increase in returns and refund requests from customers. When the products purchased online do not meet customers' expectations or fail to satisfy their needs, the number of return requests has risen. This has posed additional challenges for e-commerce businesses in managing the return processes and providing quick and effective refunds to customers.

NEW CUSTOMER BEHAVIORS

The pandemic has increased consumers' dependency on online shopping and has changed their habits. Many people continue to prefer this method due to the convenience and safety of online shopping. Additionally, with the experience of e-commerce during this period, people who previously did not shop online have also expanded the user base of e-commerce.

INCREASED COMPETITION

With the growth of the e-commerce sector during the pandemic, competition has also increased. Businesses have strengthened their digital marketing strategies to establish a presence on online platforms and attract customers. This has increased competition in a market that offers more diverse options.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant transformation and growth in the e-commerce sector. The limitations on physical stores due to the pandemic and changing consumer behaviour have increased the importance and prevalence of e-commerce. The advantages and secure shopping opportunities offered by e-commerce have played a significant role in meeting people's needs during this period.



2. STATISTICAL DATA ABOUT E-COMMERCE

Statistical data regarding the increase in e-commerce due to the pandemic in the years 2019-2020-2021 and 2022 is highly significant. The interpretations of the e-commerce data for the countries in our project can be articulated as follows:

- **Understanding the Impact of the Pandemic:** The percentage increase in the number of e-commerce businesses helps us comprehend the impact of the pandemic on the e-commerce sector. This increase indicates how much e-commerce has grown during the pandemic period.
- **Measuring Economic Effects:** The percentage increase rate is crucial for assessing the contribution of e-commerce to the economy and its growth potential. A high growth rate emphasizes the positive contribution of the sector to the economy.
- **Identifying Investment and Business Opportunities:** Investors and entrepreneurs use this data to identify potential investment and business opportunities in the e-commerce sector. A high percentage increase rate demonstrates the growth potential in the sector.
- **Planning Business Strategies:** E-commerce businesses can use the percentage increase rate to plan their future growth strategies. For instance, if the growth rate is high, strategies such as business expansion or entering new markets can be considered.
- **Analyzing Competition:** The percentage increase rates in the e-commerce sector help businesses understand their competitive positions. A low increase rate may indicate increased competition.
- **Employment Opportunities:** A high percentage increase rate indicates the potential for job creation in the e-commerce sector, which can lead to increased employment opportunities.
- **Policy and Regulation:** Governments can use this data in the regulation and policymaking processes related to the e-commerce sector. Particularly, if the growth is high, policymakers may implement various measures to support the sector.

To summarize, the percentage increase in the quantity of e-commerce enterprises serves as a vital metric for assessing the potential for growth, economic ramifications, investment prospects, and business tactics within the e-commerce industry. This data aids in comprehending the evolving landscape of the e-commerce sector amid the pandemic era and offers insights into its future trajectory.

2.1. Romania's E-Commerce Data

	2019	2020	2021	2022
The number of businesses engaged in e-commerce	1.376	1.559	1.695	1.754
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year	-	13%	8%	3%
E-Commerce Volume (billion Euro)	3.92	5.6	6.2	6.5
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year	-	30%	10%	4%

2.2. Turkey's E-Commerce Data

	2019	2020	2021	2022
The number of businesses engaged in e-commerce	68.457	256.861	484.347	548.688
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year	-	275%	188%	113%
E-Commerce Volume (billion TL)	136	226,2	381,5	800,7
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year	-	166,3%	168,65%	209,88%

*Source: [Elektronik Ticaret Bilgi Platformu](#)

2.3 Spain's E-Commerce Data

	2019	2020	2021	2022
The number of businesses engaged in e-commerce	686.092	868.129	905.607	1.084.089
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year.	-	6,53%	4,31%	19,705%
E-Commerce volume (million of Euros)	13.365	14.613	16.916	18.190
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year.	-	9,34%	15,75%	7,53%

*Source: [Istituto Nacional de Estadística \(INE\)](#) & [Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia \(CNMC\)](#)

2.4 Italia's E-Commerce Data

	2019	2020	2021	2022
The number of businesses engaged in e-commerce	-	-	67.200	70.000
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year.	16,4%	18,4%	18,3%	18,3%
E-Commerce volume (million of Euros)	441,40	438,70	499,20	513,90
Percentage increase rate compared to the previous year.	-	-0,61%	113,7%	102,9%

*Source: [Digital B2b Observatory of the School of Management of the Milan Polytechnic](#)

3. INTRODUCTION TO E-COMMERCE

3.1. What is E-Commerce?

In its narrowest sense, electronic commerce (better known as e-commerce) is the phenomenon of buying and selling goods and services through the World Wide Web using secure servers (HTTPS protocol), with online payment services (e.g. credit card). It is a commercial transaction process involving the transmission of data and financial information over digital networks such as the Internet. In other words, it is a form of commerce that takes place via online platforms, allowing people to shop from the comfort of their home or from any other location, using Internet-connected devices, such as computers, smartphones or tablets.

Today companies, in step with technological innovation, have applications available that are transforming, or rather have already transformed, the classic way of purchasing goods and services. With electronic commerce, it is possible to conclude contracts without the simultaneous presence of the parties in the same physical place through the use of telematic tools and, in particular, through access to the Internet and the exchange of computer documents. This allows companies to market goods and services, distribute digital content and carry out financial transactions through the Internet, the open network to which everyone can potentially access.

In e-commerce, sellers make their products or services available on a website or online platform, allowing potential buyers to browse products, view descriptions, compare prices and finally make the purchase desired. Transactions are completed electronically, using online payment methods such as credit cards, wire transfers, digital wallets or other electronic payment systems.

An *initial definition* of electronic commerce can be found in the Communication of the European Commission n. 157 of 1997 ("A European initiative in the field of electronic commerce") according to which: "the performance of commercial activities and transactions by electronic means and includes activities such as: the marketing of goods or services by electronic means; online distribution of digital content; the electronic execution of financial and stock market transactions; public procurement by electronic means and other settlement-type procedures of public administrations".

From the first definition, it clearly emerges that electronic commerce is destined to embrace a vast range of activities. The term "electronic commerce" immediately includes both "**direct electronic commerce**" where the conclusion and execution of the contract take place entirely online and "**indirect electronic commerce**" where the execution of the contract does not take place online but traditionally through the delivery of material goods.

To implement the objectives of the Communication of the European Commission n. 157 of 1997, in 2000 the Directive 2000/31/EC known as the "**Directive on electronic commerce**" was issued (Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council n. 31 of 8 June 2000), relating to certain legal aspects of services of the information society, in particular electronic commerce, in the internal market. The Directive deals with the aspects most discussed among operators in the sector close to the 2000s, namely the

establishment of service providers, commercial communications, electronic contracts, the liability of intermediaries who transmit or record data and the out-of-court settlement of disputes.

The directive would like to provide a uniform legal framework by overcoming legal obstacles to the free movement of services but, despite this, e-commerce fails to enjoy a single legal framework. In the Directive, the concept of "electronic commerce" gives way to the concept of "**information society services**" defined as those services provided for remuneration, at a distance, by electronic means, using electronic processing equipment (including digital compression) and storage of data, and at the individual request of a recipient of services.

Information society services, as specified in the Directive, encompass a wide range of activities carried out online and do not include the delivery of goods or the provision of services offline. This includes services which do not always lead to the conclusion of contracts online and also services which are not remunerated by their recipient, in so far as they constitute an **economic activity**, such as the offer of communications or commercial information online or the provision of tools for search, access and retrieval of data.

Briefly defined what e-commerce is, you need to know the difference between **direct and indirect e-commerce**. This classification takes place on the basis of the type of product marketed and the role of the web platform in the transaction and is particularly important from a tax point of view.

Direct electronic commerce concerns digital dematerialized goods (e-books, music, photos, apps etc) or services rendered entirely online with minimal or no human interaction (hotel reservations, e-learning courses, etc.). Its characteristics are:

Indirect electronic commerce, on the other hand, concerns material goods or the provision of services rendered through a decisive contribution from the human component (live streaming courses). In this hypothesis, the order of the goods takes place online but the delivery/shipping takes place through the ordinary channels (carrier or mail).

CHARACTERISTICS OF DIRECT E-COMMERCE



- The subject of the transaction are digital goods or services.
- Minimal or no contribution of the human component in the transaction.
- The purchase process takes place entirely online, without the need for delivery/shipping of the goods.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIRECT E-COMMERCE



- Object of the transaction are material goods or services.
- The contribution of the human component in the transaction is decisive.
- The purchase process takes place online limited to the order, the delivery / shipment of the goods takes place through the ordinary channels.

The regulatory framework that regulates electronic commerce defines all the aspects that a company or a company should consider before undertaking this type of activity.

E-commerce offers many benefits, for both consumers and sellers. For consumers, it offers convenience, 24/7 accessibility, and a huge choice of products. For sellers, e-commerce allows you to reach a global audience, reduce operational costs, access market data and offer a personalized shopping experience, but we will cover this in later sections.

However, e-commerce also presents challenges such as the security of online transactions, the management of shipments and returns, the competition on the digital market and the need to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and consumer preferences.

Despite the challenges, e-commerce continues to grow and evolve, providing new opportunities for global commerce and changing the way people buy and sell products and services.

3.2. Advantages of E-Commerce

E-commerce has radically transformed the way people shop, offering a wide range of benefits. Shoppers can browse and purchase products from around the world, compare prices and reviews, access a wider selection of products than in physical stores, and enjoy greater convenience in making purchases.

Ecommerce platforms often provide tools to search and filter products, offer detailed descriptions, feature product images, provide buyer reviews, and facilitate secure online payments. Common product categories in e-commerce include consumer electronics, apparel, books, housewares, cosmetics, and food.

E-commerce can take many forms, such as standalone online stores, marketplaces that aggregate multiple sellers, or subscription services that offer regular deliveries of

specific products. Furthermore, e-commerce can also involve the sale of services, such as travel reservations, online courses or consultancy.

Over the years, e-commerce has experienced significant growth and continues to expand, profoundly influencing traditional business models and opening up new opportunities for businesses and consumers.

E-commerce offers many benefits, for both consumers and sellers. For consumers, it offers the convenience of being able to shop anytime, anywhere, without having to physically travel to stores. It also gives you access to a huge range of products from all over the world. For sellers, e-commerce offers greater visibility and access to a global marketplace while reducing the operational costs associated with a physical store.

The advantages of this type of trade are many and concern both the supplying companies and the consumer customers.

MAIN ADVANTAGES FOR BUSINESSES



- Cost reduction of the distribution network.
- Reduction of sales times.
- Opening up to new markets.
- Potentially unlimited customer growth.

MAIN ADVANTAGES FOR CONSUMERS



- Savings on the average cost of products.
- Reduction of purchase times.
- Wide range of products and services available.
- Greater protection in the event of non-conformity of the goods / need to return.

In particular:

- **Global accessibility:** E-commerce allows you to reach a global audience. Online stores are not limited by geographical boundaries and can be accessed from anywhere in the world. This allows sellers to expand their market and consumers to access a wide range of products from all over the world.
- **Convenience and flexibility:** Shoppers can shop online anytime, anywhere, without having to physically travel to a store. E-commerce offers the convenience of shopping 24/7 by allowing people to tailor purchases to suit their needs and daily life schedules.
- **Various choice options:** Shoppers can access a wide range of products and services through e-commerce. They can easily compare product features, prices, and reviews from different sources and make informed purchasing decisions.
- **Cost reduction:** E-commerce reduces costs associated with a physical store, such as rent, staffing, utilities, and inventory management. This allows sellers to

offer competitive prices and beneficial promotions. Additionally, consumers can save on travel and time expenses associated with traditional shopping.

- **Personalization and recommendations:** E-commerce businesses may use algorithms and technologies to collect data about shoppers and offer personalized recommendations. This helps consumers find products or services that suit their preferences, improving the shopping experience.
- **Ease of price comparison:** Buyers can easily compare product prices between different online sellers. This promotes greater transparency and competitiveness, allowing consumers to find the best deals available.
- **More possibilities for information:** Online stores provide detailed information about products, such as descriptions, technical specifications and customer reviews. This helps consumers make more informed purchasing decisions and reduces the risk of unsatisfactory purchases.
- **Greater opportunities for small business owners:** E-commerce provides an opportunity for small business owners to compete in the global marketplace without the need for large start-up capital. They can start and run an online store at relatively low cost, reaching a large customer base.

These are just some of the key benefits of e-commerce, which have made it an increasingly popular option for buying and selling products and services.

3.3. Disadvantages of E-Commerce

Despite the many advantages, e-commerce also has some disadvantages. Here are some of the common disadvantages of e-commerce:

- **Lack of physical contact and sensory experience:** In e-commerce, there is a lack of physical contact with products and the sensory experience associated with traditional purchases in physical stores. It is not possible to directly touch or try the products before purchasing, which may affect the shopping experience of some buyers.
- **Security issues:** E-commerce comes with security risks such as online fraud, theft of personal or financial data, and hacking. Consumers have to provide their financial information online, which could make them vulnerable to potential cyber attacks.
- **Delivery times and shipping costs:** Although e-commerce offers convenience and accessibility, the delivery of products can take some time. In some cases, delivery times may be longer than for direct purchases in physical stores. Additionally, shipping costs can add to the total purchase price, affecting the overall cost to the consumer.
- **Possibility of defective or non-compliant products:** Not being able to directly see and touch the products before purchasing increases the risk of receiving defective or non-compliant products. While there are return and refund policies to address these situations, they may result in inconvenience and additional cost to the consumer.
- **Internet connection dependency:** E-commerce requires a reliable internet connection to make online purchases. In the event of connectivity issues or

network outages, shoppers may experience difficulties accessing online stores or completing transactions.

- **Impersonality and lack of direct interaction:** E-commerce eliminates direct interaction with salespeople and sales personnel. This could be a limiting factor for those who prefer the help and support of a real person during the buying process.
- **Restrictions on the size and nature of the products:** Some products may be difficult to purchase online due to their size, weight or particular characteristics. For example, purchasing furniture or fragile items could present transportation and delivery challenges.

It is important to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of ecommerce in order to evaluate starting an ecommerce business.

3.4. E-Commerce Business Models

First of all, e-commerce distinguishes between direct and indirect, depending on the approach chosen for the sale of products or services online. In particular:

- **Direct e-commerce:** In direct ecommerce, a business sells its products or services directly to customers through an online channel, such as its own website or dedicated online store. The company handles everything from inventory management, order processing, shipping, and customer service. Direct ecommerce gives you more control over the customer experience and the ability to build a direct relationship with your customers.
- **Indirect e-commerce:** In indirect ecommerce, a business relies on distribution channels or intermediaries to sell its products or services online. These intermediaries can be resellers, marketplaces or distributors. The company supplies its products or services to these intermediaries, who take care of the sale and delivery to the final customers. Indirect e-commerce can offer greater visibility and access to a wider audience through the use of existing distribution networks.

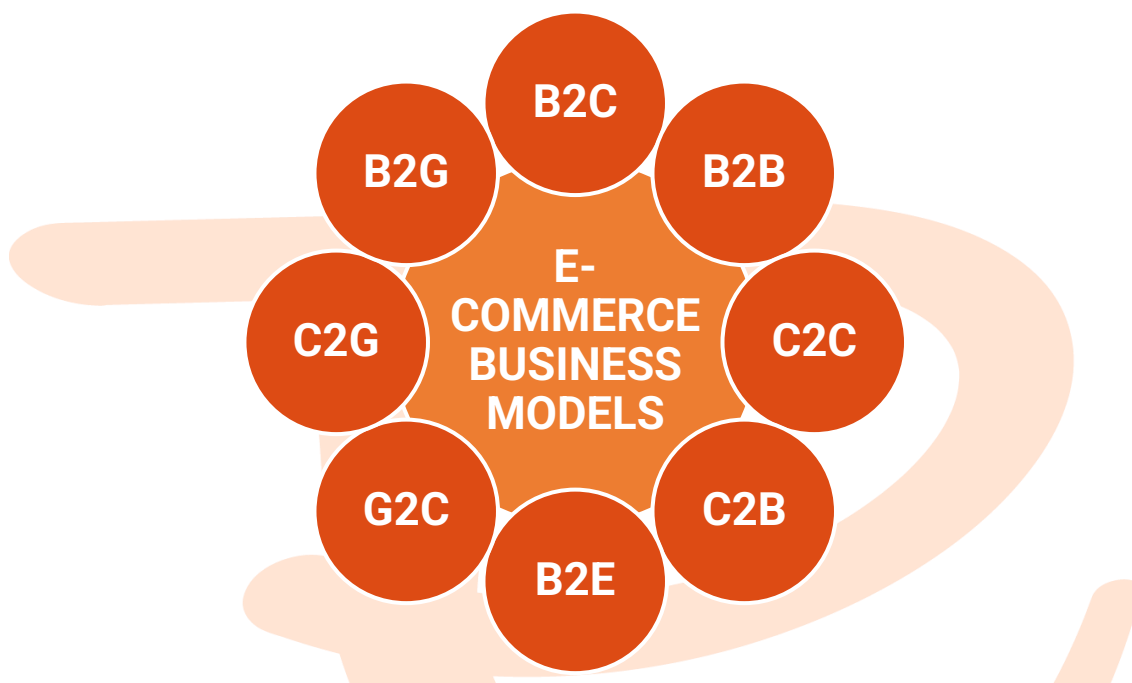
Both approaches have benefits and considerations to consider:

- **Benefits of direct e-commerce:** Direct eCommerce gives you more control over customer experience, pricing, branding, and customer relationship management. The company has a higher profit margin since it does not have to pay commissions or additional costs to intermediaries. In addition, the company may directly collect customer data for marketing and analysis purposes.
- **Benefits of indirect e-commerce:** Indirect Ecommerce allows businesses to benefit from existing distribution channels, an established customer base, and increased visibility through presence on marketplaces or third-party stores. Brokers handle many operational tasks, such as inventory management, order processing, and shipping, allowing the company to focus on other aspects of its business.

Choosing between direct and indirect e-commerce depends on your company's needs and resources, desired control over the customer experience, distribution strategy, and

relationships with intermediaries. In some cases, businesses can even take a hybrid approach, combining both models to maximize online sales opportunities.

There are also several e-commerce models that companies can adopt to operate online. Here are some of the most common models:



3.4.1. Business-To-Consumer (B2C)

Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-commerce is a business model where companies directly sell their products or services to end consumers via online channels. In other words, transactions take place between a business and an individual who purchases the product or service for personal use.

In B2C e-commerce, companies operate online stores or e-commerce platforms through which consumers can search, select, purchase and pay for the products or services they offer. These online stores can be owned by the company itself or they can be hosted on third-party marketplaces that aggregate products from different sellers.

B2C e-commerce offers many benefits for both businesses and consumers:

Benefits for companies:

- **Accessing a massive audience:** E-commerce enables businesses to reach a large consumer base around the world, transcending geographic boundaries and expanding sales opportunities.
- **Reduced operational costs:** Unlike traditional physical stores, e-commerce requires less investment in physical infrastructure and personnel. This can help reduce the company's overall operating costs.

- **Monitoring and data analysis:** Through online stores, companies can collect detailed data on customer behaviour and preferences. This data can be used to analyse consumption trends, personalize the shopper experience and improve marketing strategies.

Benefits for consumers:

- **Greater convenience and accessibility:** Consumers can shop online anytime, anywhere, eliminating the need to physically visit stores. This offers more convenience and flexibility.
- **Choice and variety:** E-commerce offers consumers a wide range of products and services from different companies, allowing them to compare prices, features and reviews to make informed purchasing decisions.
- **Customized shopping experience:** By collecting customer data, companies can personalize the shopping experience by offering personalized suggestions, promotions or offers based on previous purchases or consumer behavior.

B2C e-commerce can take many forms, such as online retail, memberships, booking platforms and much more. Its popularity has grown rapidly in recent years, thanks to rapid advances in technology and growing consumer confidence in online shopping. The market is increasingly characterized by “the absence of frontiers, by internationalization and by the so-called “technological liquidity”.

3.4.2. Business-To-Business (B2B)

Business-to-Business (B2B) e-commerce is a business model in which commercial transactions occur between two or more companies through online channels and platforms. In this context, companies use e-commerce to buy, sell or exchange products, services or information with each other.

In B2B e-commerce, businesses can use different online platforms and solutions to facilitate business transactions. These may include:

- **Dedicated e-commerce portals:** Companies create customized e-commerce portals or websites for business customers to browse, search and purchase the products or services they offer. These portals may include specific features for corporate customers, such as personalized price lists, product catalogues, price negotiation and account management.
- **Marketplaces:** These are online platforms that act as intermediaries between companies that want to buy or sell products or services. These B2B marketplaces offer a wide range of suppliers and buyers who can connect, negotiate and close business deals.
- **Electronic data exchange platforms:** These platforms allow companies to exchange data and business information electronically. They can include tools for automating transactions, document sharing, inventory management, and data synchronization between different business systems.

Benefits:

- **Operational efficiency:** B2B e-commerce simplifies the purchasing process, enabling businesses to place orders quickly and conveniently, reducing transaction times, and streamlining document and information management.
- **Increased market opportunities:** B2B e-commerce enables businesses to expand globally, reaching customers and suppliers in different geographic regions. This opens up new business opportunities and gives you access to a wider range of products and services.
- **Process automation:** Using e-commerce platforms and systems can automate many processes, such as order management, inventory, billing, and shipment tracking, reducing errors and improving overall operational efficiency.
- **Personalization and customer service:** B2B e-commerce can offer better personalization of offers and a greater understanding of the needs of corporate customers. Businesses can provide faster and more efficient customer service, thereby improving business relationships.

B2B e-commerce is widely adopted in various industries, such as manufacturing, logistics, wholesale and professional services. It offers an efficient way for businesses to connect, collaborate and conduct business faster and more effectively than traditional methods.

3.4.3. Consumer-To-Consumer (C2C)

Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) e-commerce is a business model where consumers directly sell products or services to other consumers through online platforms. In this case, transactions occur between individuals rather than between companies. C2C e-commerce relies on the participation of users who act as both sellers and buyers within the platform. These C2C platforms act as intermediaries by facilitating ad posting, negotiation, payment and delivery between the parties involved.

C2C ecommerce platforms usually offer the following features:

- **Free or paid ads:** Platforms allow users to post ads for the products or services they want to sell. There are sometimes costs to run premium ads or to promote featured products.
- **User profiles:** Users can create a personal profile that includes information about themselves, the products they sell, and reviews received from other shoppers.
- **Feedback and ratings:** C2C platforms often include a feedback and ratings system that allows buyers to rate and review sellers. This helps build a reputation and trust in the user community.
- **Means of payment and security:** C2C platforms usually provide secure payment options to facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers. These may include online payment methods or escrow services to protect the interests of the parties involved.

- **Communication and negotiation management:** C2C platforms offer tools for communication between sellers and buyers, such as internal messaging, to facilitate price negotiation, information request and delivery arrangements.
- Some examples of well-known C2C platforms include eBay, Etsy and Airbnb. These platforms allow users to sell products of various kinds, such as used items, handicrafts, temporary accommodation and services.

Benefits:

- **Access to a global marketplace:** Users can reach a large base of buyers or sellers around the world, expanding opportunities to sell or buy.
- **Cost reduction:** C2C e-commerce often eliminates the need for intermediaries or physical stores, reducing operational costs and allowing users to get better prices.
- **Opportunity to earn extra cash:** Users can leverage C2C platforms to sell unused products or services and earn extra cash.
- **Diverse product selection:** C2C e-commerce offers a diverse range of products from different sellers, providing shoppers with more choice and variety of products than traditional stores.

3.4.4. Consumer-To-Business (C2B)

Consumer-to-Business (C2B) e-commerce is a business model where consumers offer products, services or information to businesses through online platforms. Unlike the traditional B2C model, in which companies sell to consumers, in the C2B model it is consumers who actively offer their offers to companies.

In C2B e-commerce, consumers can offer their products or services directly to businesses in several ways:

- **Selling products or assets:** Consumers can sell products they own, such as used items, artwork, or digital goods, to businesses. For example, an amateur photographer might sell his photos to a marketing company for advertising purposes.
- **Provision of services:** Consumers can offer specific services or expertise to businesses. For example, a freelance digital marketing consultant might offer their consulting services to a business that needs help promoting online. Another example an influencer can collaborate with a company to promote its products on social media
- **Generating content or feedback:** Consumers can provide content, reviews or feedback about businesses or their products/services. This can include writing reviews, participating in market surveys, or creating user-generated content for business marketing campaigns.

Benefits:

- **Income opportunity:** Consumers can earn extra cash or monetize their skills and resources through C2B e-commerce. This offers an opportunity for additional income or starting your own business.
- **Flexibility and freedom:** Consumers have the possibility to offer their products or services independently, managing their business according to their needs and preferences.
- **Access to wider markets:** C2B e-commerce allows consumers to reach a large number of businesses and expand their network of contacts globally.
- **Leveraging consumer feedback:** Businesses can benefit from consumer feedback, reviews and opinions to improve their products, services and marketing strategies.

C2B e-commerce represents an emerging trend, in which consumers increasingly become protagonists in creating value and providing solutions to businesses through digital platforms.

3.4.5. Business-To-Employee (B2E)

Business-to-Employee (B2E) e-commerce is a business model in which a company uses e-commerce platforms to provide products, services or benefits to its employees. Essentially, the company creates an online store or internal platform that offers a selection of products or services exclusively to its employees.

The main goal of B2E e-commerce is to provide employees with easy and convenient access to a variety of products or services that could be useful in their daily or business life. This can include special offers on company products, employee discounts on consumables, access to training services or solutions, or even the ability to purchase third-party products through the company's internal e-commerce.

Benefits:

- **Incentives and benefits for employees:** The company may offer exclusive discounts, advantageous packages or special incentives to its employees. This can help improve employee satisfaction, create a sense of belonging and strengthen relationships within the company.
- **Greater convenience and accessibility:** Employees can access the online store or B2E platform at any time and from anywhere, simplifying the purchasing process and offering more flexibility.
- **Greater control and monitoring for the business:** A B2E system can allow the business to track employee purchasing preferences, collect data on consumption trends, and track purchases made. This information may be used to further customize offerings and improve company benefit programs.
- **Potential for building an internal community:** Through B2E e-commerce, employees can share experiences, advice and product recommendations with each other, creating an internal community and fostering collaboration.

B2E e-commerce can be implemented using a custom e-commerce platform developed in-house by the company or through the use of third-party platforms that provide out-of-the-box B2E solutions.

In general, B2E e-commerce represents a way for companies to offer advantages and opportunities to their employees, creating a more engaging and rewarding working environment.

3.4.6. Government-To-Consumer (G2C)

Government-to-Consumer (G2C) e-commerce is a business model in which the government or government institutions provide services or sell products directly to consumers through online channels.

Some examples of services offered in G2C e-commerce include:

- **Paying taxes and duties:** Citizens can use online platforms to pay their taxes, fees or fines to the government quickly and conveniently.
- **Applying for documents and certificates:** Citizens can apply for documents such as birth certificates, passports, driver's licenses or residence permits through government online portals.
- **Booking public services:** Citizens can book appointments for public services such as doctor visits, driving tests or reservations for museums and exhibitions.
- **Access to public information:** Citizens can access public information and data, such as laws, regulations, statistics or government reports, through government websites.

However, it is important to ensure the safety and security of citizens' personal data in G2C e-commerce by ensuring that platforms are secure and comply with privacy regulations.

G2C e-commerce is a significant evolution in the interaction between government and citizens, improving the efficiency of public services and providing greater convenience for citizens.

3.4.7. Consumer-To-Government (C2G)

Consumer-to-Government (C2G) e-commerce is a business model in which consumers provide services, information or participate in commercial transactions directly with the government or government institutions through online channels. In this case, citizens act as service providers or as an active party in interacting with the government.

This model can involve several activities, including:

- **Providing services or products:** Citizens can offer services or products directly to the government or government institutions. For example, a business or independent professional might offer consulting, software development, or construction services to a government agency.

- **Participation in government projects:** Citizens can participate in projects or initiatives promoted by the government. For example, they might be involved in sustainable development projects, social initiatives, or scientific research programs.
- **Providing information or feedback:** Citizens can provide information, data or feedback to the government on specific issues. For example, they may participate in surveys, complete questionnaires or provide opinions on public policies or proposed legislation.
- **Participation in funding or tenders:** Citizens can participate in funding processes or tenders to obtain government contracts or funding. This may involve submitting proposals or bids for specific projects.

It is important that C2G e-commerce processes are transparent, fair and based on principles of impartiality and competition. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure the security of citizens' personal data and to comply with privacy regulations during online transactions and interactions.

C2G e-commerce presents an opportunity to foster citizen participation in governance and leverage their resources to improve government effectiveness and efficiency.

3.4.8. Business-To-Government (B2G)

Business-to-Government (B2G) e-commerce is a business model in which businesses provide goods, services or solutions to government institutions through online business transactions. In this case, businesses act as suppliers of products or services to meet the needs of the government.

B2G e-commerce involves several activities, including:

- **Provision of goods and services:** Businesses offer products, supplies or services to government agencies. These goods or services may include equipment, materials, software, consulting services, maintenance services or other professional services.
- **Government procurement:** Firms participate in tenders or procurement processes organized by government institutions to obtain contracts for specific projects. Companies submit bids and proposals to compete for the government contract.
- **E-procurement systems:** Government institutions use e-procurement platforms to manage the purchasing and supplier selection process. Businesses can register on these platforms and bid for the projects or services required by the government.
- **Consulting and professional services:** Firms may provide consulting services, legal services, financial services, or other specialized expertise to government institutions.

Benefits:

- **Access to a large market:** Firms have the opportunity to reach out to the public sector as a customer, which represents a significant and stable market.
- **Stability and continuity:** Contracts with government institutions can offer greater stability and continuity of business than private customers.
- **Credibility and reputation:** Working with the government can give companies credibility and reputation, strengthening their position in the market.
- **Opportunities for growth:** The government often promotes the inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises in public procurement, providing growth and development opportunities for smaller companies.

However, B2G e-commerce can also present challenges, such as complex procurement procedures, specific regulatory requirements, and competition among businesses for government contracts.

To participate in B2G e-commerce, businesses need to be aware of procurement processes and selection procedures, as well as specific government requirements and regulations. Furthermore, it is important to guarantee the quality of the products or services offered, respecting the contractual terms and compliance standards required by the government.

These are just some of the ecommerce models that businesses can adopt. Sometimes, companies combine multiple models to create a more complete offering and adapt to market and customer needs. In fact, nothing prevents a company that does B2B trade from also doing B2C trade. But 2 separate sections of the site must be dedicated to the two categories: one for the company/purchaser, and the other for the consumer/purchaser.

See more:

<https://www.ice.it/it/quaderni-tematici-ice-edizione-2021>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3XR03wLt5I&ab_channel=UnioncamereCalabria

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_m8yxFsR2g&ab_channel=CameradiCommerciodiVerona

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK8SL5iY12o&ab_channel=CameradiCommerciodiMantova

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrCGR2oOEhw&ab_channel=StudioTecnicoVarr%C3%A0

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG00sozNMbs&ab_channel=AvvocatoAccanto

4. PREPARATION FOR E-COMMERCE

4.1. Business Plan Preparation

A business plan is a written document that outlines the goals, strategies, activities, and resources of a business or project. In short, a business plan is a roadmap that demonstrates how an organization or venture will operate, grow, and succeed.

However, before preparing the business plan, conducting a SWOT analysis can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the current situation.

4.1.1. SWOT analysis

After conducting a market analysis, a SWOT analysis can be performed using the collected data. SWOT analysis (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) is a type of analysis that compares strengths and weaknesses with opportunities and threats. SWOT analysis provides entrepreneurs with a realistic perspective.

To better understand SWOT analysis, let's examine a fictional analysis:

It would be a good step for a small ceramic artist to conduct a SWOT analysis before starting to sell online. Here's a SWOT analysis evaluating the ceramic artist's situation:

Strengths:

- **Creative and unique products:** The ceramic artist's handmade products can be unique and creative, making them stand out in the market.
- **Skill and experience:** The artist's expertise and experience in ceramics can help produce high-quality products and enhance customer satisfaction.
- **Distinct brand and story:** The artist can associate their products with a story, providing customers with a meaningful experience. This can contribute to the formation of a loyal customer base.
- **Low production costs:** Ceramic products often come with low production costs, creating an opportunity to offer more competitive prices.

Weaknesses:

- **Limited production capacity:** Handmade product manufacturing can be time-consuming and have a limited capacity to produce a certain number of items. This can create challenges in meeting the demand.
- **Lack of marketing and technology knowledge:** There might be deficiencies in marketing and technology skills for online sales, resulting in a weak online presence.
- **Supply chain challenges:** Issues in supply chain stages like material sourcing, production processes, and shipping can affect timely deliveries.

Opportunities:

- **Broad market access:** Online sales offer the opportunity to reach a wide customer base regardless of geographical limitations.
- **Social media and visual platforms:** Ceramic products are popular on visually-oriented platforms (e.g., Instagram). Promoting products through these platforms is possible.
- **Customizable products:** Offering custom orders and personalized products to customers presents a chance to enhance satisfaction and create differentiation.
- **Education and content creation:** The artist can become an authority in the industry by producing educational videos, blog posts, or guides about ceramics.

Threats:

- **Competition:** The ceramic field could be highly competitive. Large ceramic brands or other handmade crafts producers could compete in the market.
- **Technological issues:** Website problems, payment system issues, or other technological challenges could negatively impact the customer experience.
- **Changing fashion and consumer preferences:** Fashion and consumer preferences can change rapidly, leading to fluctuations in product demand.
- **Quality control challenges:** Ensuring consistent quality in handmade products might be challenging, affecting customer satisfaction.

This SWOT analysis can assist the ceramic artist in assessing their business. Based on the analysis results, the artist can develop strategies to improve their business, strengthen weaknesses, and make the most of opportunities.

4.1.2. Creating a business plan

A business plan is essential for entrepreneurs who have decided to venture into e-commerce, as it helps them prioritize and set a roadmap.

Furthermore, from the perspective of entrepreneurs, a detailed and realistic business plan is crucial for embarking on e-commerce.

A basic business plan can vary based on examples. However, a business plan that can be used by entrepreneurs generally consists of the following sections:

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

It includes a summary of all your business plans related to your venture. The summary encompasses the business to be conducted, the entrepreneur's characteristics and goals, the state of the industry, marketing strategies, and a synopsis of the required financial resources for the operation. Investors decide whether your venture is worth investing in by looking at this created summary.

COMPANY ANALYSIS

Company analysis involves the strategic evaluation of your existing or prospective company. The following questions and similar ones should be included in the company analysis section:

What products and services can differentiate your company?

With what strategies can your company capitalize on opportunities?

What is the organizational structure of your company?

MARKET ANALYSIS

Examples of e-commerce ventures that achieve significant volume and rapid branding, driven by entrepreneurial spirit, indeed encourage those who share that spirit. However, only a few of these ventures truly succeed.

Just as before opening a physical store, factors such as local customer potential, demand for the product being sold, and estimated sales volume are researched and analysed, a proper market analysis is essential before embarking on an e-commerce venture.

STATE AND POTENTIAL OF THE MARKET

Knowing the size and potential of the market where your e-commerce venture will operate is crucial. Understanding the size and potential of the market provides insight into the growth potential of the venture. If the market is sizable and promising, numerous players will naturally participate.

Competitors

Before engaging in a venture within a specific business model, it's important to determine whether there are other ventures in the same field, the scale of these ventures, and their market shares. Being the first often offers a significant advantage. If you're not the first, analyzing how much market share you can capture from your competitors in relation to the market size is crucial.

Good and Bad Examples

It's important to thoroughly analyze both successful and unsuccessful examples previously attempted in the field where you plan to venture. Understanding why certain ventures succeeded and others failed, along with assessing how the market reacted to these initiatives, will guide you when formulating your action plan.

Market Trends

Determining how market trends will affect your company and strategies, and how to turn them into opportunities, will play a crucial role for your venture in the medium and long term. For instance, we can cite the general trend in the e-commerce sector, which is the rise of mobile e-commerce, and companies that invest in this are likely to gain a competitive advantage. Recognizing market trends at their early stages and developing

appropriate strategies for them will make a difference, as first movers are usually remembered.

CUSTOMER AND COMPETITION ANALYSIS

Analyzing the customer profile and competition in the market is crucial for differentiation. Business owners can stand out from their competitors with successful marketing strategies. In this section, in preparation, business owners should answer the following headings:

- Customer needs;
- Demographic structure of your customers;
- Product/service demand structure;
- What strategies are your competitors using?;
- Strengths and weaknesses of your competitors;
- Possibility and timeframe for your competitors to imitate you.

MARKETING PLAN

The plans for reaching the target audience with products and services, as well as the marketing activity plan, are included in this section. A marketing plan consists of the following main sections. Every business embarking on e-commerce should possess the following topics:

- Marketing strategies;
- Products and services;
- Pricing;
- Advertising and promotional budget;
- Distribution;
- Sales plan;
- Customer relations.

PRODUCTION, SUPPLY, AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The product or service production workflow, production/supply planning, necessary personnel (workforce), inputs, and establishment location and specifications of the workplace are covered in this section.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Planning for non-production activities such as procurement, sales, marketing, and support processes, organizational structure, and the roles and responsibilities of personnel should be prepared.

FINANCIAL PLAN

One of the most crucial sections of a business plan is the financial plan. It encompasses the investment and working capital needs for establishing the business, the total investment required by the business, potential financial resources, the business's credit requirements, calculations indicating projected cash flows and profitability.

The financial section of a business plan holds paramount importance in ensuring a business's successful initiation and sustainable growth. Particularly for entrepreneurs venturing into new e-commerce enterprises, financial planning constitutes one of the foundational pillars.

Below, I will provide a more comprehensive overview of the details within the financial plan:

- **Investment and working capital needs:** Determine the initial investment and working capital required for the core operations and potential expansion of your business. The investment may cover costs such as website development, product inventory, logistics, and marketing. Working capital, on the other hand, addresses the cash flow necessary for day-to-day operations.
- **Total investment requirement and potential financial resources:** Calculate the total financing requirement for your business. This includes both investment and working capital needs. Potential financial resources may encompass equity investments, external sources (credit, investor funds, etc.), or grants.
- **Credit requirement:** If you intend to partially fulfil your business's financial needs through loans, you need to specify the appropriate types of loans (commercial loans, business credit, etc.) and outline the repayment plan.
- **Projected cash flow:** Create a cash flow statement that illustrates the income and expenses derived from your business activities. This is of critical importance to understand how much cash flow your business will require during specific periods.
- **Profitability calculations:** Calculate your business's anticipated revenues and expenses to determine its profitability. This helps you understand when your business will start making a profit and how much profit it can generate.
- **Risk and scenario analyses:** In financial planning, assessing potential risks and different scenarios is essential. Evaluate how scenarios like lower-than-expected sales or increased costs could impact your business.
- **Budget and control mechanisms:** Establish budgeting and monitoring mechanisms to keep expenditures in check during your business operations. This way, you can compare actual financial status with projections and make adjustments as needed.
- **Presentation for investors and partners:** If you're considering obtaining financing from external sources, the financial section of your business plan should include a presentation prepared for investors or potential partners. This presentation should offer a clear picture of your business's financial health and potential.

In conclusion, a financial plan is a critical tool that guides your business's future success. A well-crafted financial plan empowers business owners to make informed decisions, manage resources effectively, and handle potential challenges.

APPENDICES

This section includes external documents such as spreadsheets, legal document copies, various records, and diagrams.

4.2. Entrepreneurship and investor processes

An entrepreneur is an individual who, often possessing an innovative idea, identifies opportunities and takes risks. A person who is an entrepreneur is talented, courageous, and knowledgeable. Therefore, it would not be accurate to label everyone who starts a business as an entrepreneur.

In today's world, the allure of the Internet economy and the opportunities presented by it have led to changes in the entrepreneurial profile. Entrepreneurs in the pre-internet era consisted of individuals with capital. However, nowadays, someone with a good business idea and a business plan can bring their idea to life and become an entrepreneur by obtaining the necessary capital support externally. Many successful e-commerce projects also have a similar entrepreneurial story behind them.

TURKISH EXAMPLE ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INVESTOR PROCESSES

Turkey, with its young population, has an advantageous demographic structure for Internet entrepreneurship, but the entrepreneurship culture is still in the early stages of development. In Turkey, the percentage of those who receive entrepreneurship education in schools and outside of schools is 6.3%, while it's 21.2% in Germany, 18.4% in the UK, and 13.6% in South Korea.

Entrepreneurs who want to bring their business ideas to life and need financial support have various options to secure venture capital. Among these options, the riskiest one is for entrepreneurs to use their own resources by taking loans. More reasonable solutions to secure venture capital, also known as risk capital, include reaching out to fund-holding investors or seeking grant support.

To evaluate the opportunities of entrepreneurial investment in Turkey, we can look at the possibilities for finding financing. For instance, the percentage of obtaining necessary financing for establishing new companies is 96% in the US, 85% in the UK, 48% in Germany, and only 12% in Turkey. The ratio of angel investor networks to the population is 1.10 in the US, 1.00 in the UK, 0.51 in Germany, and 0.07 in Turkey.

There are three stages of financing needs in the development process of an enterprise:

- **Startup stage:** The phase where the entrepreneurial idea forms, develops, the company is established, and it enters the market. This is when a startup is weakest in every aspect.
- **Growth stage:** The period when the company is established, open to the market, the business plan is drafted, and revenue begins to flow. During this time, rapid growth is expected to cover the expenses with incoming revenue.
- **Maturity stage:** The phase where the company reaches maturity in terms of revenue. Rapid growth gives way to a steady growth rate and a sustainable revenue model.

In Turkey, government support comes in the form of direct grants and loans, as well as indirect assistance such as tax exemptions or bank credits with collateral and guarantees.

Six institutions in Turkey provide support to entrepreneurs:

- KOSGEB;
- TÜBİTAK;
- Ministry of Science, Industry, and Technology;
- Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey;
- Ministry of Economy;
- Regional Development Agencies affiliated with the Ministry of Development.

Although these entrepreneur supports are not exclusively designed for Internet-focused ventures, Internet entrepreneurs can also benefit from them.



5. TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR E-COMMERCE

5.1. Ready-made e-commerce packages

When it comes to establishing an e-commerce business, having the right technical infrastructure is crucial for success. Here are some key components of the technical infrastructure for e-commerce:

- **Website platform:** Choosing a robust and user-friendly website platform is essential. There are various options available, such as Shopify, WooCommerce, Magento, and BigCommerce. These platforms offer ready-made e-commerce packages that provide the foundation for your online store.
- **Hosting:** Selecting a reliable hosting provider is important to ensure your website is accessible and performs well. Look for hosting providers that specialize in e-commerce and offer features like scalability, security, and 24/7 technical support.
- **Domain name:** Registering a domain name that reflects your brand is essential. Consider choosing a domain name that is easy to remember, relevant to your business, and aligns with your target audience.
- **Payment gateway:** Integrating a secure and user-friendly payment gateway is crucial for processing online transactions. Popular options include PayPal, Stripe, and Authorize.Net. Make sure to choose a payment gateway that supports the currencies and payment methods relevant to your target market.
- **SSL certificate:** Implementing an SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) certificate is vital to secure the transmission of sensitive customer data. An SSL certificate encrypts data between the user's browser and your website, instilling trust and protecting against potential security breaches.
- **Product management system:** An efficient product management system enables you to organize and showcase your products effectively. It should allow you to manage product listings, pricing, inventory, and related information easily.
- **Customer relationship management (CRM):** Implementing a CRM system helps you track and manage customer interactions, including orders, inquiries, and support requests. It enables you to provide personalized customer experiences and streamline communication.
- **Analytics and reporting:** Integrating analytics tools like Google Analytics provides valuable insights into customer behavior, website traffic, and sales performance. This data can help you make data-driven decisions to optimize your e-commerce strategy.
- **Security measures:** Implementing robust security measures is vital to protect customer data and ensure a secure shopping experience. This includes regularly updating your software, using strong passwords, implementing firewall protection, and performing regular security audits.

Remember, choosing the right combination of technical infrastructure components depends on the specific needs and scale of your e-commerce business. It's always recommended to consult with professionals or e-commerce service providers for tailored solutions that align with your goals and requirements.

The 6 best e-commerce website building platforms for online stores in 2023:

<https://zapier.com/blog/best-ecommerce-shopping-cart-software/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKX2AJbelG8>

5.2. E-commerce website software and hosting

When setting up an e-commerce website, choosing the right software and hosting provider is crucial. Here are some options for e-commerce website software and hosting:

- E-commerce Website Software:
 - a. Shopify: A popular and user-friendly e-commerce platform that offers a wide range of features and customization options.
 - b. WooCommerce: A plugin for WordPress that transforms your website into an e-commerce store, providing flexibility and scalability.
 - c. Magento: An open-source e-commerce platform that offers robust features and customization options, suitable for larger businesses.
 - d. BigCommerce: A fully hosted platform that provides an all-in-one solution for building and managing an e-commerce website.
- Hosting Providers:
 - a. Bluehost: A reliable hosting provider known for its WordPress hosting plans, suitable for WooCommerce websites.
 - b. SiteGround: A popular hosting provider that offers optimized hosting for various e-commerce platforms, including Magento and WooCommerce.
 - c. HostGator: A well-established hosting provider with affordable plans and features tailored for e-commerce websites.
 - d. AWS (Amazon Web Services): A cloud hosting service that provides scalable and flexible hosting solutions, suitable for larger e-commerce businesses.

When choosing a hosting provider, consider factors such as reliability, speed, security, scalability, customer support, and pricing. Additionally, ensure that the hosting provider supports the specific e-commerce platform you plan to use.

It's also worth noting that some e-commerce platforms, like Shopify, offer their own hosting solutions, simplifying the process by providing an all-in-one package that includes both software and hosting.

Before making a decision, thoroughly research and compare the features, pricing, and user reviews of different e-commerce software and hosting providers to find the best fit for your specific needs and budget.

The best e-commerce hosting providers:

<https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/software/best-ecommerce-hosting/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OwDQoo87y4>

5.3. Sales via social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.)

Selling products or services through social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp can be an effective strategy for e-commerce businesses. Here are some key tips to maximise sales through social media:

- Create a strong social media presence: Create engaging profiles on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or other relevant platforms. Optimise your bio, profile picture and website link to reflect your brand identity and make it easy for customers to explore your offerings.
- Engaging images: Post high-quality images, videos or product demos to captivate your audience's attention. Use professional photos or user-generated content to showcase your products in an engaging and authentic way.
- Product descriptions and details: Provide clear and concise descriptions for each product or service you offer. Include important details such as prices, sizes, colours and unique features. Make it easy for your potential customers to understand what you offer.
- Use shopping features: Take advantage of shopping features available on social media platforms. Instagram, for example, offers posts and tags that allow users to view product information and make purchases directly from the app. WhatsApp can be used to share product catalogues, answer queries and facilitate transactions.
- Interact with your audience: Actively engage with your followers by responding to comments, direct messages and queries in a timely manner. Engage in conversations, offer personalised recommendations and provide exceptional customer service to build trust and loyalty.

- Run promotions and contests: Use social media to run exclusive promotions, discounts or limited-time offers to encourage purchases. Contests or sweepstakes can also help increase engagement and attract new followers.
- Collaborate with influencers: Partnering with influencers or micro-influencers in your niche can help you expand your reach and expose your products to their followers. Seek out influencers whose values match those of your brand to ensure authenticity and relevance.
- Track and analyse results: Use social media analytics tools to monitor your performance and gain insight into customer behaviour. Track metrics such as engagement, reach, click-through rates and conversions to evaluate the effectiveness of your social media sales efforts.
- Remember, consistency, authenticity, and providing value to your audience are key to successful social media sales. Regularly evaluate your strategies, adapt to trends, and experiment with different approaches to optimize your e-commerce sales via social media platforms.

Facebook e-commerce – The complete beginner's guide:

<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2019/02/25/facebook-ecommerce>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3umy2fCcjBQ>

5.4. Security in e-commerce

Security is of utmost importance in e-commerce to protect both businesses and customers from potential threats. Here are key aspects to consider for ensuring security in e-commerce:

- **Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) Certificate:** Implement SSL certificates to encrypt data transmitted between the user's browser and your website. This encryption safeguards sensitive information such as personal details, payment data, and login credentials, providing a secure connection for customers.
- **Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) Compliance:** If you accept credit card payments, ensure your e-commerce platform complies with PCI DSS standards. This set of security requirements helps protect cardholder data and prevents fraud. Choose a payment gateway that is PCI DSS compliant to ensure secure payment processing.
- **Secure payment gateways:** Partner with reputable payment gateways that offer robust security features. These gateways should encrypt payment data and employ fraud detection measures, providing a secure payment environment for customers. Popular options include PayPal, Stripe, and Authorize.Net.

- **Strong authentication:** Implement strong authentication measures to prevent unauthorized access to customer accounts. This can include using multi-factor authentication (MFA), where users provide additional verification beyond a password, such as a code sent to their mobile device.
- **Regular software updates:** Keep your e-commerce platform, plugins, and other software up to date. Regularly install security patches and updates provided by the vendors to address any vulnerabilities and ensure the latest security features are in place.
- **Data protection and privacy:** Clearly outline your data protection and privacy policies, informing customers about how their data is collected, stored, and used. Comply with applicable data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and provide an option for customers to opt out of marketing communications if desired.
- **Robust password policies:** Encourage customers to create strong passwords by implementing password complexity requirements. Educate them about the importance of using unique passwords and changing them regularly to enhance account security.
- **Regular security audits:** Conduct periodic security audits of your e-commerce infrastructure and website. This includes vulnerability assessments, penetration testing, and code reviews to identify and address any potential security weaknesses.
- **Customer education:** Educate your customers about common online security threats and best practices, such as avoiding phishing emails, using secure Wi-Fi networks, and regularly monitoring their financial statements for any unauthorized transactions.
- **Secure hosting and backups:** Choose a reliable hosting provider that offers robust security measures, including firewalls, intrusion detection systems, and regular backups. Ensure your website's backups are stored securely to prevent data loss and aid in recovery in case of a security incident.

By implementing these security measures, e-commerce businesses can enhance the protection of customer data, prevent fraudulent activities, and foster trust and confidence among their customers.

E-commerce – Security systems:

https://www.tutorialspoint.com/e_commerce/e_commerce_security.htm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30HhB05eGY0>

5.5. Payment Systems

Payment systems are essential components of e-commerce that enable businesses to accept and process online transactions. Here are some common payment systems used in e-commerce:

- **Credit and debit cards:** Accepting major credit and debit cards is a standard practice in e-commerce. Merchants can integrate payment gateways, such as PayPal, Stripe, or Braintree, to securely process card payments. Customers enter their card information during checkout, and the payment gateway handles the transaction.
- **Digital wallets:** Digital wallets, such as Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Amazon Pay, provide convenient and secure payment options. Customers can store their payment information in the digital wallet and complete purchases with just a few clicks or taps, without entering card details for every transaction.
- **Bank transfers:** Bank transfers allow customers to pay directly from their bank accounts. E-commerce platforms can integrate with payment providers that facilitate bank transfers, enabling customers to initiate payments through online banking or electronic fund transfer systems.
- **Prepaid cards and gift cards:** Prepaid cards and gift cards are popular payment options in e-commerce. Customers can purchase these cards and use them to make purchases on your website. Integrating with payment processors that support prepaid cards and gift cards allows you to accept these payment methods.
- **Cryptocurrencies:** Some e-commerce businesses accept cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum, or Litecoin as a form of payment. Integrating with cryptocurrency payment processors enables customers to pay with digital currencies, and the transactions are securely processed on the blockchain.
- **Alternative payment methods:** Depending on the target market, it may be beneficial to offer alternative payment methods. These can include regional or country-specific payment systems, such as Alipay (China), iDEAL (Netherlands), or SEPA Direct Debit (Europe). Integrating with local payment providers allows you to offer these preferred methods to customers.
- **Cash on Delivery (COD):** Cash on Delivery is a payment option where customers pay in cash when their order is delivered. While less common in online transactions, COD can be relevant in certain markets where customers prefer or have limited access to other payment methods.

When selecting payment systems for your e-commerce business, consider factors such as security, transaction fees, ease of integration, customer preferences, and the target market's payment behaviour. Providing a variety of trusted and convenient payment options can help increase customer satisfaction and improve conversion rates in your online store.

The best payment systems for e-commerce:

<https://blog.saleslayer.com/best-payment-systems-ecommerce>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwglHo6ZeiQ>



6. OPERATIONS FOR E-COMMERCE

6.1. Supply Chain Management

E-commerce supply chain refers to a series of logistics processes involved in running an online store. It covers activities such as the procurement of raw materials, manufacturing of finished goods, inventory management, warehousing, order fulfillment and last-mile delivery.

In more particular terms, goods and products flow across the supply chain from sellers (or suppliers) to buyers, payments move from buyers to sellers, and information is exchanged along the way at nearly any point due to the online nature of the business. Supply chain management (SCM) in e-commerce involves the management of the flow of resources and information among stakeholders along the supply chain.

It recognizes that the cumulative efforts of different entities, such as vendors, manufacturers and couriers, are pivotal to building a reliable supply chain, and that a missing link might break the entire chain and adversely affect how or when the goods reach their end-users.

e-Commerce supply chain management is therefore concerned with running a supply chain in the most efficient and effective way possible. There are numerous techniques and strategies to help you achieve better efficiency, productivity and profitability in managing your supply chain.

Supply chain management for e-commerce focuses on the overall flow of products, resources and information between different tiers of suppliers and buyers. This flow, also known as the e-commerce logistics process, consists of five key stages and actors.

The Key Benefits of SCM In E-commerce include:

- **Reduced costs:** SCM in e-commerce removes various stages of distribution, retailers, and outlets. The elimination of these stages reduces the overall cost of products. The reduced costs give customers a direct advantage when compared to the cost of products available in physical stores.
- **Trade globally:** SCM enables e-commerce businesses to trade globally. An efficient SCM enables e-commerce businesses to import raw materials from anywhere and export their finished product to any country easily.
- **Enhanced customer satisfaction:** Customer satisfaction is an important factor for the success of an e-commerce business. With efficient supply chain management in e-commerce, enterprises can easily track demand, the time suppliers will require to fulfill the orders and order goods from suppliers to keep the inventories replenished.

Learning materials:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tjuWMOOJ9Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lpp9bHtPAN0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X38ViX6a3e8>

<https://aklogisticsandsupplychain.com/2020/03/02/1pl-2pl-3pl-4pl-5pl-6pl-the-advancement-of-party-logistics/>

6.2. Product Management

It is an organizational function that guides each step of a product's life cycle, from development to positioning and pricing, focusing on the product and its customers first and foremost.

It is one of the most important variables of the marketing mix, which aims to enhance all the elements related to the products or services provided by a company.

Product Management is based on the premise that a product must include the appropriate physical characteristics to respond to customer needs. Therefore, this practice brings together a series of elements to develop all aspects related to the utility that the consumer is looking for. Referring to:

DEFINITION OF THE PRODUCT

The following elements will be considered:

- The capacity of the company.
- The target audience.
- The competition.
- The barriers of the sector.

Depending on what the company wants, you can distribute a single type of product or an entire portfolio. Regardless of what you decide, all the information should be stipulated within your marketing plan.

DESIGN

Referring to the characteristics of the product and its operation. He will analyse:

- The wrapper.
- Special offers.
- Packaging.
- The typography.
- Colours.

However, it is important to keep in mind that this variable is constantly changing, since the design, together with the technology, tend to change a lot throughout the life cycle of an article.

Therefore, a professional Product Management must guarantee that the products are visually updated, that is, that they are in line with trends, without harming the brand image.

BRAND

Defining how the product is presented.

To ensure that a brand remains in the consumer's mind, as well as generating customer engagement, a Product Management professional must find a way to represent the company's image, from the logo of the products it sells to the presentation end of it.

By meeting this goal, the user will quickly identify the company's product. In this way, Product Management makes your company stand out from its competitors.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The user no longer buys products, he buys experiences.

Within the purchasing process, customer satisfaction develops when the user perceives the benefits of the product and understands how it responds to their needs. If Product Management professionals have managed to capture this information correctly, the preference for the brand begins here.

The customer experience is a fundamental factor in customer loyalty, which leads to increased sales while spreading loyalty to your brand.

STUDIES REFERRING TO THE PRODUCT

From launch to the market, as well as throughout its life cycle through customer surveys to find out if they are satisfied with the product or service. These are tests carried out by Product Management professionals:

- **Alpha test:** Interview conducted during the development phase.
- **Beta test:** Questions asked after having tested the product.

The answers of these tests are very important for the development and improvement of the product since they will be taken into account when designing and adjusting the functionality.

Learning materials:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiOpMUrzEfY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMJsouiuQxl>

6.3. Logistics and Warehousing

E-commerce warehouse logistics refers to the flow of people, products, and information through a warehouse environment to keep operations running smoothly. Ecommerce warehouse logistics is an important function for an organization looking to minimize costs, improve customer retention rates, and establish a competitive advantage.

Behind every efficient warehouse operation is a logistics program which meticulously overviews the planning, organization, and management of warehouse staff, physical goods, time, and information. Warehouse logistics also extends to creating policies on how to handle damaged goods, safety policies, handling returns, HR initiatives, and even pest control.

While every warehouse has its own nuances and differences, all warehouses share several key processes. These include receiving products, storage, retrieving items, packing, dispatch, and managing returns.

RECEIVING PRODUCTS

This is the physical act of bringing items into a warehouse and adding them onto an inventory management system so that they can be easily tracked in the future. Items may range from small standalone products to large packets and crates.

STORAGE

Since products cannot store themselves, warehouses must employ staff who are tasked with putting-away products in their respective locations. Ideally, the staff will enter all product-related information into a system and label products with a barcode for easy retrieval in the next step.

RETRIEVING ITEMS

Once orders start flowing in, products must be retrieved from storage and sent to a staging area where they are prepared for packaging and shipment. The staging area is where order details are cross-checked to ensure accuracy of retrieval and impending shipment.

PACKAGING ORDERS

While packaging orders presents a unique branding opportunity, every business must follow certain good practices. First and foremost, products must be packed accordingly given the size, value, and fragility of the item. Moreover, all packed items must be traceable both in terms of where the item came from and its live location while out for delivery.

DISPATCH

Orders are usually processed or 'dispatched' to shipping carriers in bundles which means that warehouses must be able to accurately forecast delivery timings to avoid overcrowded staging areas or late deliveries which negatively impact order fulfillment.

MANAGING RETURNS

Returns (also known as reverse logistics) are an integral part of commerce and a process which warehouses cannot avoid. There's a pre-determined process in place which instructs staff on what to do with returns. Depending on the nature of a business model, returns might be returned to stock, repaired, perhaps even destroyed or discarded. Regardless of the method, and the ability to trace exactly where the return came from can minimize losses.

Breaking down warehouse operations like this makes it easier to identify which department is responsible for certain activities. When any logistics issues arise in the future, warehouses can quickly identify the staff responsible for applying the fix.

More importantly, adopting these logistical processes will improve worker safety conditions, boost employee performance, and provide businesses with valuable data they can use to improve operations and predict future demand.

Beyond that, integrating a smart logistics system helps drive growth. For example, the supply chain – which includes the storage and shipment of products – requires a properly planned logistics system which can seamlessly coordinate the movement of products at the national and global level.

Learning materials:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W71xi9os8U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZWY87oeSOU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65rpWadKLxc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMrcJdlQdoQ>

6.4. Shipping and Handling

In supply chain management, shipping and handling is packing and delivering the goods from the retailer to the customer. It involves picking, packing and ensuring that the purchased items reach the end customer on time and in a proper condition, the way it was dispatched.

With e-commerce growing in leaps and bounds, the need of the hour is a trusted shipping partner adept at handling purchased items. While shipping and handling often go hand-in-hand, this is how one can differentiate between the two.

Shipping is the end-to-end process of sourcing and delivering the goods. It generally covers the cost of transporting the goods, like surcharges, fuel charges etc needed for travelling distances to transport the goods from one point to the next. Shipping charges will, however, vary depending on the end customer's geographical location.

Handling involves several steps required for the order fulfilment process. It includes the labour charges required for receiving the goods, packing and putting them into boxes or cartons, generating shipment labels, loading them properly into a truck and ensuring that the condition of the purchased items remains intact during the shipment process. Handling fees will also vary depending on the several touchpoints of the item.

Satisfying the needs of your customers will always lead your business strategy. Ensuring proper shipping and handling of goods and their delivery on time has a long-term impact on customers, in terms of loyalty and competitiveness.



6.4.1. Outsourcing Shipping and Handling

As an e-commerce owner, you should know when the business has reached a point to divide inventory management responsibilities or outsource the same. When your business grows and expands, it may often become difficult for the team to manage shipping and handling by themselves. In that case, with enough resources to avail, they can always outsource shipping & handling responsibilities to a logistics solution that can help the e-commerce business with a larger warehouse, warehouse in a remote location, handling procedures, etc.

A third-party logistic or 3PL will help in streamlining your shipping and handling process to a great extent. It will not only provide you with the most viable options, but it will also help you with storage. It will offer you the best prices and a technologic factor to automatically update your details.

It will reduce your burden with shipping and handling.

Learning materials:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZBfxmPM4FM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bmFEVnXBv4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZViW1zIXcU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZBfxmPM4FM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI_3FKXU5kM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMJsouiuQxl>

7. MARKETING FOR E-COMMERCE

7.1. Brand Management

The concept of Web 2.0, now commonly referred to as Social Media, was first defined by O'Reilly Media in 2004. According to this concept, Internet content is now collaboratively created by users' participation and interaction, not only by website owners. Among today's marketing channels, digital platforms and social media hold significant influence. Companies must pay great attention to their brand image in digital environments, which have become a primary focus.

Digital brand management in this context involves monitoring and measuring your company's or brand's digital identity, and engaging in activities that regularly safeguard and enhance its value.

To effectively manage your brand in the digital realm, the first step is monitoring. Keeping track of news and articles related to your company and brand allows you to stay informed and take necessary actions promptly. Social media monitoring tools can be utilized, or you can seek services from companies specialized in this area.

7.1.1. Methods for brand monitoring in the digital environment

GOOGLE ALERTS

One of the free basic monitoring tools, Google Alerts enables you to track content such as news articles and blog posts on Google related to keywords you want to monitor. When there is a relevant match with the chosen keywords, Google Alerts sends you an email notification, keeping you informed about news and articles related to your chosen topics. With Google Alerts, you can not only monitor your own brand but also keep an eye on your competitors.

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT

Companies operating in the digital realm can establish their brands more rapidly compared to traditional companies. However, alongside this advantage brought by the digital world, the occurrence and rapid spread of events that can damage brand image also present a disadvantage. This is where the importance of complaint management comes into play.

For effective complaint management, the first step is to define a customer satisfaction policy. A customer-centric, transparent, accessible, and objective approach will contribute to achieving a high level of customer satisfaction.

Within this context, it is essential to address every piece of information, request, and complaint from customers received through the company's website contact form, email, phone, or complaint platforms. Welcoming and addressing these requests and complaints should be regarded as positive feedback for improving your products and services.

7.2. SEM & SEO

7.2.1. Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is a marketing approach that encompasses a range of strategies and activities aimed at increasing a website's visibility on search engines. SEM includes both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) efforts, which aim to enhance organic (natural) search results for targeted keywords, and pay-per-click advertising.

SEM is a crucial tool used to strengthen a website's online presence and effectively reach the intended audience. Paid advertising campaigns involve displaying ads to users with specific keywords or demographic attributes. These ads are prominently featured on search engine results pages, capturing the attention of potential customers.

However, SEM is not solely about paid advertising. SEO employs various techniques and strategies to ensure a website ranks highly in organic search results. This involves activities such as creating high-quality content, selecting appropriate keywords, performing technical optimizations, and building backlinks. The goal of SEO is to elevate the website's natural rankings by making it more meaningful and valuable in the eyes of search engines.

GOOGLE ADWORDS

A service provided by Google, a pioneer in the field of Search Engine Marketing (SEM) with the widest market share. This service aims to establish an effective presence in the realm of search engines, particularly within Google's dominant sphere. AdWords allows you to display paid advertisements in search results relevant to the keywords you choose.

AdWords offers the opportunity to reach your target audience with selected keywords and attract the interest of potential customers, making it a critical tool for enhancing the impact of your advertising campaigns. Displaying your ads based on desired demographic characteristics, geographic regions, or other targeting criteria enables you to be closer to potential customers.

Measuring and analysing the success of this process is also crucial. Google AdWords provides powerful tools to monitor the performance of your advertising campaigns and track conversion rates. This allows you to understand which keywords or types of ads yield the best results and optimize your strategies accordingly.

Working in conjunction with Google AdWords, Google Analytics provides you with a deeper understanding. This tool offers detailed statistics to measure your website's performance, analyse user behaviour, and make informed decisions. Thus, you can make data-driven decisions to determine which campaigns and ads are garnering more attention and contribute to the growth of your business.

7.2.2. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a series of processes involving technical adjustments and improvements on your website with the aim of achieving high rankings

and first-page visibility on searches for desired terms and keyword groups, particularly on search engines like Google. Search engines determine the rankings of websites in search results based on their proprietary algorithms. SEO allows websites to perform better on search engines. It's an ongoing effort as search engine rules and algorithms can change, and competitive landscapes can vary.

The examples below encompass various aspects of SEO and can assist in enhancing your website's performance on search engines:

- **Keyword optimization:** Creating content that includes your chosen keywords and is written in a search engine-friendly manner. Using keywords naturally and fluently within the content to provide valuable information to users.
- **Site speed improvements:** Utilizing techniques like optimized images, caching methods, and compression to increase the speed of your website. Search engines view fast-loading sites more favourably.
- **Quality link building:** Obtaining links (backlinks) from other reputable and authoritative websites to enhance your site's authority. It's crucial that these links come from natural and relevant sources.
- **Mobile compatibility:** Designing a website that appears and functions properly on mobile devices. Mobile-friendly sites perform better in mobile searches.
- **Technical SEO enhancements:** Making technical adjustments like creating a sitemap, optimizing meta tags, structuring URLs, and ensuring proper HTTP status codes. These adjustments aid search engines in better understanding your site.
- **User experience enhancements:** Creating a user-friendly design and navigation structure to encourage users to stay on your site for longer. A well-organized and easily comprehensible site gains user approval.
- **Local SEO:** If you have a physical business, using local business listing platforms like Google My Business and targeting local keywords to enhance visibility in local searches.
- **Content marketing:** Providing valuable and engaging content to offer information to your target audience. Sharing and publishing content can help you reach a wider audience.
- **Social media engagement:** Utilizing social media platforms effectively to share your content with a broader audience and drive traffic to your site.
- **Data analysis and tracking:** Continuously assessing your site's performance using analytics tools to monitor traffic and behaviours coming from search engines.

7.3. Facebook Marketing

Facebook Marketing provides a broad marketing network consisting of pages, groups, and applications offered by Facebook. Facebook Marketing stands out with its low cost and the ability to deliver your ads directly to your target audience. As a result, it emerges as a highly effective advertising channel.

7.3.1. Facebook Ads

Facebook ads offer a unique advantage by allowing advertisers to customize and directly access their target audience using the user database. This ad type allows you to tailor your ad campaigns based on specific demographics, interests, and behaviours. This way, your ads reach potential customers in a more personalized manner.

7.3.2. Facebook Ads and Small Businesses

Facebook ads present a unique opportunity for small businesses. This ad type allows advertisers to customize and directly access their target audience using the user database. For small businesses, this opens doors to creating a more specific and effective marketing strategy.

Small businesses can customize their ad campaigns on Facebook's ad platform based on specific demographics, interests, and behaviors. Through this customization, your ads reach potential customers in a more personalized manner. Consequently, you can achieve higher conversions by using your budget more effectively.

Facebook's ad platform offers various optimization options. The cost per click (CPC) model charges you based on the number of clicks your ad receives, making it ideal for scenarios where you aim to drive traffic to your website. The Cost per Mille (CPM) model, on the other hand, requires payment for every thousand times your ad is displayed, suitable for campaigns focused on increasing brand visibility.

Small businesses can utilize Facebook ads for different objectives. For instance, if you want to increase the number of subscribers to your Facebook page, you can create ads that promote your page and reach new followers. Similarly, highlighting featured posts can boost your interaction rates. If you aim to direct more visitors to your website or promote a specific product or service, Facebook ads can support you in achieving these goals.

7.3.3. Facebook Pages for Small Businesses

For small businesses, Facebook Pages offer one of the most effective ways to share your company or brand with a broad audience. Using this social media tool to promote your products and services, share updates, and engage with your followers brings significant advantages.

In today's landscape, potential customers are less likely to visit a brand's website, especially if they don't have a specific reason to do so. This is where Facebook Pages come into play. Through regular postings, you can ensure that your followers remember your brand and actively engage with it.

Your Facebook Page enables closer interaction with your followers. They can comment on and share your posts, participate in polls you organize, and directly message you. This interaction serves as a crucial way to build customer loyalty and enhance brand loyalty.

Beyond just communication, effectively managing your Facebook Page opens doors to business growth. Through creative content, customized page designs, engaging posts, campaigns, and fun applications, you can increase your follower count.

For small businesses, Facebook Pages offer an excellent way not only to introduce your brand to a wide audience but also to establish a closer relationship with your followers. As a result, you gain a powerful tool to expand your customer base, create a loyal customer community, and grow your business. Opening and managing a Facebook page is an opportunity that should not be missed in today's digital marketing landscape.

7.4. E-mail marketing

Email marketing has become an increasingly effective digital marketing channel in recent years. While platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become integral parts of our lives, email advertising still holds a prominent position in customer acquisition. According to a recent study by McKinsey, the return on investment for email marketing is seen to be 40 times more effective than that of Facebook and Twitter. These statistics indicate that email remains a powerful communication tool.

Research shows that 91% of users check their emails daily. This is where email marketing comes into play. By sharing opportunities and updates related to your products and services with subscribers, you can keep them consistently engaged with your brand. Regular email newsletter send-outs, in particular, can enhance brand recall and revisit rates for your e-commerce site.

Email marketing encompasses a range of effective methods. Among these are sending out messages that inform subscribers about opportunities and updates related to your products and services. Additionally, personalized email send-outs have become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Sending personalized emails to remind customers of abandoned cart items is an effective way to boost customer loyalty. These personalized send-outs can potentially increase customer revisit and purchase rates.

By sending out communications about your products and services on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, you can attract customers to your website. You can direct your newsletters to registered customer databases and followers reached through newsletter subscriptions on your site. Moreover, if you collect first and last name information in your newsletter subscriptions, you can create send-outs that begin with more personalized greetings. Such personalized communications assist in providing a more effective customer experience.

However, there's an important point to remember. To avoid your bulk e-mail, send-outs being considered as spam, it's crucial to send them through dedicated servers in compliance with specific rules. Creating permission-based email lists or seeking support from specialized firms can help you achieve more effective results.

Email marketing should be carefully planned to achieve effective outcomes. Redirecting links in your send-outs to relevant pages on your website can increase conversions. The landing pages where your email send-outs are directed will help improve your return rates.

7.5. Other digital marketing channels

7.5.1. Banner Ads

Banner ads refer to the type of advertising where products and services are promoted on other websites through specific-sized advertisement images and flash animations. These ads can be executed through Google AdWords, intermediary advertising companies, or directly through publisher websites. Depending on the publisher's business model, these ads can be charged based on impressions (CPV) and/or clicks (CPC).

In the early years of the internet, banner ads were one of the most effective marketing tools. However, due to increasing competition, they might seem to have lost much of their effectiveness in today's world. In fact, a study by Infolinks suggests that 60% of users no longer notice banner ads. Nevertheless, it's possible to enhance the effectiveness of banner ads through a strategy called retargeting.

Retargeting involves a scenario where a website you've visited or a product you've shown interest in appears on other websites through search engines or social media platforms. These targeted ad displays are designed to match the user's interests, making them highly attention-grabbing. Additionally, showing the ad repeatedly to the user can increase brand recall.

However, it's important to note that repetitive targeted ads can also become bothersome. Therefore, advertisers should consider the user experience while setting the duration of targeted ad displays.

For small businesses, banner ads can still be an effective marketing tool. Especially with the retargeting strategy, you can remind potential customers of your brand and capture their attention once again. However, ensure that your ads are user-friendly in terms of frequency and content. When used with the right strategy, banner ads can help small businesses increase brand awareness and establish more effective communication with potential customers.

7.5.2. Affiliate marketing: growth opportunity for small businesses

Affiliate marketing refers to the method in which e-commerce websites sell and market their products and services to visitors from other affiliated sites on a commission basis. This model benefits both the seller sites and the affiliate partners who make the sales. For small businesses, affiliate marketing offers a highly effective tool to achieve growth goals.

In affiliate marketing, e-commerce websites can create their own affiliate programs or collaborate with specialized intermediary firms. Especially for small businesses, an affiliate marketing program enables them to access a wider customer base and increase their sales.

This method is built on various revenue models. Different revenue models like Cost Per Click (CPC), Cost Per Lead (CPL), and Cost Per Sale (CPS) can be implemented. This

provides businesses with flexibility and the opportunity to create a strategy that aligns with their goals.

Platforms in Turkey such as gelirortaklari.com, reklamaction.com, and zanox.com, which operate affiliate marketing programs, facilitate the use of this method for small businesses. Similarly, worldwide platforms like clickbank.com and cj.com also offer significant opportunities.

Moreover, there are e-commerce websites that offer direct affiliate programs. Large platforms in Turkey like gittigidiyor.com, enuygun.com, and kitapyurdu.com enable small businesses to introduce their products to a broader audience.

For small businesses, affiliate marketing offers the chance to reach a broad customer base, enhance brand awareness, diversify sales, and support business growth. This model stands out as a cost-effective marketing method. Through affiliate marketing, small businesses can achieve their growth goals faster and more effectively.

7.5.3. Blogging

One of the most effective ways for small businesses to increase sales and establish a strong relationship with their customers is by creating a blog. Rather than focusing solely on direct sales content, a blog that features current developments, tips, and informative articles will be more engaging for your follower-customers.

For your blog to be effective, it's important for it to appear prominently in search results. Original and attention-grabbing content that includes the right keywords related to your brand provides a significant advantage in terms of SEO. Additionally, regularly performing SEO optimizations beyond content can position your brand higher in search rankings. By sharing information on your own website, you have the opportunity to strengthen your brand's digital image.

Keeping your blog regularly updated and using an intimate tone is also crucial. Opting for a personal and intimate tone instead of a corporate one encourages more interest from your customers in your blog. By announcing your blog content periodically through email newsletters, you can reach a wider audience.

As a successful example in this regard, we can mention the Istanbul Business School (IBS) in Turkey (<https://ibsturkiye.com/blog>). They regularly share different and interesting content that captivates readers' interest through email newsletters. This approach enables them to successfully capture their customers' attention with engaging articles, as opposed to dull promotional content. This demonstrates the achievement of the goal of an effective marketing strategy.

Creating a blog for small businesses is an effective way to enhance customer loyalty, promote your brand, and ultimately boost sales. With the right content strategy and consistent updates, you can make your brand more visible and memorable in the digital world.

7.5.4. YouTube marketing

YouTube is an effective way to market your brand. Through social video marketing, you can promote your products and services through word of mouth. YouTube, one of the most visited websites worldwide, is an ideal platform for social video sharing. Brands can reach large audiences at a low cost on this platform, which attracts billions of visitors every month.

Videos published on YouTube allow you to effectively showcase your products and services. Additionally, you can capture viewers' interest with content such as tips, tutorials, and interviews with influential figures. This way, you can increase the visibility of your brand and communicate more effectively with your target audience.

YouTube marketing offers the opportunity to reach large audiences at a low cost. Through the sharing of viral videos and creative content, you can quickly raise awareness of your brand. Viral marketing campaigns filled with examples demonstrate just how substantial YouTube's potential is.

For small businesses, YouTube offers the opportunity to reach broader audiences and effectively promote their brands. Making a big impact on a small budget is possible, especially through creative and engaging videos. Therefore, using YouTube marketing to grow and promote your brand helps you stand out in the competitive digital world.

8. E-COMMERCE METHODS

8.1. Sales and marketing through individual website

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, the significance of having an individual website for businesses cannot be overstated. This section delves deeper into the critical aspects of leveraging an individual website for sales and marketing.

BENEFITS OF AN INDIVIDUAL WEBSITE

- **Global reach:** One of the primary advantages of having an individual website is the ability to reach a global audience. Traditional geographical barriers are virtually non-existent in the digital realm. Whether your business operates from a small town or a major city, your website can attract visitors from around the world.
- **Brand identity:** Your individual website serves as a powerful platform to establish and reinforce your brand identity. It is a canvas where you can creatively showcase your brand's personality, values, and unique selling points. A well-designed website creates a lasting impression on visitors, fostering trust and recognition.
- **Control:** Unlike some third-party platforms or social media profiles, businesses have complete control over the design, content, and functionality of their individual website. This level of control enables customization to align with your specific branding and marketing strategies.
- **Direct sales:** Websites offer the opportunity for businesses to facilitate direct sales to customers. This means you can bypass third-party intermediaries, reducing the costs associated with commissions and fees. It also allows for more personalized customer interactions and tailored sales experiences.
- **Analytics:** An individual website provides valuable insights through various analytics tools. These tools can track visitor behaviour, demographics, and preferences. Analysing this data is instrumental in refining marketing strategies, optimizing user experiences, and identifying growth opportunities.

Strategies for Sales and Marketing

- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** Optimizing your website content for search engines is paramount for improving visibility. Keyword research, on-page optimization, and quality content creation are key components of an effective SEO strategy.
- **Content marketing:** Creating valuable, relevant, and engaging content is a cornerstone of successful online marketing. Content can take various forms, including blog posts, articles, videos, infographics, and more. Sharing informative and entertaining content not only attracts visitors but also positions your business as an authority in your industry.
- **E-mail marketing:** Building and nurturing a subscriber list is a powerful way to engage with your audience. Email campaigns can be tailored to specific

segments of your audience, delivering personalized content and promotions. Effective email marketing fosters customer loyalty and drives sales.

- **Social media integration:** Integrating social media links and share buttons on your website is essential for increasing your online presence. It encourages visitors to share your content and engage with your brand across different platforms. Social media also offers opportunities for direct customer interaction and feedback.
- **Online advertising:** Utilizing paid advertising channels such as Google Ads and Facebook Ads can boost your website's visibility and reach. These platforms offer targeting options to reach your ideal audience, making your marketing efforts more efficient and cost-effective.
- **E-commerce features:** If your business involves selling products or services online, implementing user-friendly e-commerce features on your website is crucial. Ensure a seamless shopping experience, including easy navigation, secure payment processing, and clear product descriptions.

CONCLUSION

In summary, an individual website is a formidable tool for businesses aiming to succeed in the digital landscape. It provides global reach, supports brand identity, offers control over content and design, facilitates direct sales, and provides invaluable analytics.

By implementing effective sales and marketing strategies, businesses can leverage their individual websites to enhance their online presence, engage with their target audience, and drive growth. As the digital age continues to evolve, having a well-optimized website remains a cornerstone of success in the business world.

8.2. E-commerce through intermediary service providers (E-Marketplaces)

INTRODUCTION

E-commerce intermediary service providers, commonly known as e-marketplaces, have revolutionized modern online commerce. This section explores the significance and inner workings of e-marketplaces, shedding light on their diverse types and the benefits and challenges they present for sellers.

TYPES OF E-MARKETPLACES

- **B2C (Business-to-Consumer):** E-marketplaces like Amazon, eBay, and Walmart have pioneered the way businesses sell directly to consumers. They offer a vast array of products and services to meet consumer demands, making them go-to destinations for online shopping.
- **B2B (Business-to-Business):** Platforms such as Alibaba and ThomasNet specialize in connecting businesses for wholesale transactions. These e-marketplaces cater to companies seeking suppliers, manufacturers, or distributors, fostering international trade.
- **C2C (Consumer-to-Consumer):** Platforms like eBay enable individuals to sell products to other consumers. These marketplaces empower individuals to

become online entrepreneurs, creating a dynamic ecosystem for buying and selling used or unique items.

- **Niche marketplaces:** Specialized e-marketplaces focus on particular industries or product categories. For instance, Etsy caters to artisans and crafters, while Houzz specializes in home improvement products and services.

BENEFITS FOR SELLERS

- **Large customer base:** E-marketplaces provide access to an extensive pool of potential customers. The sheer volume of users on platforms like Amazon and eBay can significantly expand a seller's reach.
- **Trust and security:** Many e-marketplaces offer secure payment processing and dispute resolution mechanisms, building trust between buyers and sellers. This reduces the risk of fraudulent transactions.
- **Marketing reach:** Sellers can benefit from the e-marketplace's marketing efforts and existing traffic. These platforms invest in advertising and promotion to attract a substantial audience, potentially boosting a seller's visibility.
- **Logistics support:** Some e-marketplaces offer fulfilment and shipping services. This can simplify order processing and delivery for sellers, streamlining operations.
- **Global expansion:** E-marketplaces open up opportunities for international sales. Sellers can reach customers in different countries without the need for extensive market research or infrastructure abroad.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- **Competition:** E-marketplaces are often highly competitive environments. Sellers must stand out among numerous competitors offering similar products or services.
- **Fees:** E-marketplaces typically charge various fees, including listing fees, transaction fees, and commissions on sales. These costs can impact a seller's profit margins.
- **Brand control:** Sellers on e-marketplaces have limited control over branding and the customer experience. They must adhere to the platform's guidelines and may struggle to differentiate themselves.
- **Reviews and ratings:** Reputation management is crucial. Negative reviews or low ratings can harm a seller's credibility and sales potential. Maintaining a positive online reputation is a continuous effort.

CONCLUSION

E-marketplaces provide a valuable platform for businesses to tap into a broad customer base and enjoy numerous advantages, including trust, marketing reach, and logistical support. However, sellers should carefully consider the challenges, such as competition and fees, and be prepared to adapt their strategies to thrive in this dynamic online marketplace landscape.

Finding the right balance between harnessing the benefits and managing the limitations of e-marketplaces is key to sustained success in e-commerce.

8.3. E-commerce via social media

Social media has undergone a remarkable transformation, becoming a potent channel for e-commerce. This section delves into how businesses can harness the power of social media to boost online sales and engage with their audience.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR E-COMMERCE

- **Facebook:** Facebook offers a range of features for businesses, including Marketplace and Shops. These features enable businesses to showcase products, facilitate transactions, and connect with potential customers directly on the platform.
- **Instagram:** Instagram allows businesses to create shoppable posts, making it easy for users to discover and purchase products featured in images. Additionally, Instagram has a dedicated shopping section for a seamless shopping experience.
- **Pinterest:** Pinterest supports buyable pins, allowing users to purchase products they discover on the platform. It's a visual platform ideal for showcasing products, DIY ideas, and more.
- **Twitter (now known as X):** Twitter enables product tagging in tweets, allowing businesses to link directly to their products or services. This feature streamlines the purchasing process for users.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is valuable for B2B e-commerce and lead generation. It's a platform where businesses can connect with other businesses, professionals, and decision-makers, fostering partnerships and sales opportunities.

STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA E-COMMERCE

- **Visual content:** High-quality images and videos showcasing products are essential for grabbing the attention of social media users. Visual content should be engaging and visually appealing.
- **Engagement:** Responding promptly to inquiries and engaging with followers is critical. Social media is a two-way communication channel, and active engagement builds trust and loyalty.
- **Ads:** Utilize paid social media advertising to broaden your reach. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer powerful ad targeting options to reach specific demographics and interests.
- **Influencer marketing:** Partner with influencers in your niche or industry to promote your products or services. Influencers have established credibility and can effectively endorse your offerings to their followers.
- **Customer reviews:** Encourage and display customer reviews on your social media profiles. Positive reviews build trust and influence potential buyers. Respond to reviews, both positive and negative, to show that you value customer feedback.

CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Algorithm changes:** Social media platforms frequently update their algorithms. Staying updated with these changes is crucial to maximize visibility. Posting relevant, engaging content is a consistent best practice.
- **Consistency:** Maintain a consistent posting schedule to keep your audience engaged. Consistency helps build brand recognition and keeps your products in front of potential customers.
- **Privacy and Data Security:** Ensure secure transactions and protect customer data. Transparency and clear communication regarding data usage are essential to build trust.

CONCLUSION

Social media has evolved into a dynamic platform for e-commerce, offering a plethora of tools and strategies for businesses to reach and engage with customers. It's essential for businesses to adapt to the changing social media landscape, stay creative in their content, and provide a seamless shopping experience to tap into the full potential of social media as an e-commerce channel.

8.4. E-Export

INTRODUCTION

E-export, also known as international e-commerce, has become a crucial aspect of global business. This section delves into the opportunities and challenges that come with selling products or services to international markets through online channels.

BENEFITS OF E-EXPORT

- **Expanded market:** E-export provides access to a vast global customer base, transcending geographical boundaries. It allows businesses to tap into new markets and customer segments.
- **Reduced costs:** Compared to establishing physical international locations, e-export often incurs lower overhead costs. This cost efficiency is particularly advantageous for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- **Diverse revenue streams:** E-export helps businesses diversify their revenue streams, reducing dependence on a single market or region. This diversification can mitigate risks associated with economic fluctuations or geopolitical events.
- **Market research:** E-export facilitates easier access to international market insights. Businesses can gather data on consumer behaviour, trends, and competitors, aiding in informed decision-making.
- **Digital payment solutions:** Digital payment methods and cross-border payment platforms simplify cross-border transactions. These solutions address currency exchange challenges and enhance the convenience of global trade.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- **Regulatory compliance:** Complying with international trade regulations, import/export laws, and tariffs is crucial. Businesses must navigate a complex web of regulations that vary by country.

- **Cultural differences:** Understanding and respecting local preferences, customs, and cultural nuances is vital for effective marketing and customer engagement in foreign markets.
- **Logistics and shipping:** Managing international shipping logistics, customs procedures, and export documentation can be intricate and time-consuming. Delays and mishaps can impact customer satisfaction.
- **Payment risks:** Currency exchange fluctuations and challenges in payment processing across borders can introduce financial risks. Businesses must consider currency hedging strategies and secure payment methods.
- **Customer support:** Providing multilingual customer support is essential for addressing the needs and concerns of international customers. Effective communication and assistance in the customer's language enhance satisfaction and trust.

STRATEGIES FOR E-EXPORT

- **Localized marketing:** Tailor marketing efforts to specific regions and languages. This includes adapting marketing campaigns, content, and messaging to resonate with the cultural context of the target market.
- **International SEO:** Optimize website content for global search engines by incorporating relevant keywords, meta tags, and content localization. This helps improve visibility in international search results.
- **Market entry modes:** Consider various market entry options, such as using cross-border e-commerce platforms and online marketplaces. These platforms can provide access to established customer bases in foreign markets.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with local distributors, partners, or agents who have an understanding of the target market. This can help navigate local regulations and build trust with customers.
- **Fulfilment solutions:** Evaluate international fulfilment and shipping options, including third-party logistics providers and cross-border shipping services. Reliable logistics ensure timely and cost-effective delivery.

CONCLUSION

E-export is a vital avenue for global business expansion, offering access to a diverse customer base and revenue streams. While it presents numerous opportunities, it also requires careful consideration of regulatory compliance, cultural differences, logistics, and payment challenges. Implementing effective strategies, including localized marketing and partnerships, can enable businesses to thrive in the international e-commerce landscape.

LAST WORD FOR THE GUIDE FROM THE PROJECT TEAM

This e-commerce guide, prepared for small businesses, is designed to help you grow your business in the digital world and create a successful online presence. When you reach the end of this guide, hopefully, you are leaving this journey with valuable information and recommendations.

Keep in mind that the e-commerce world is constantly changing, and to be successful, you need to continue learning, evolving, and adapting to innovations. That's why, never stop in your e-commerce journey. Take risks, experiment, and learn. Success is achieved through patience, determination, and continuous learning.

You are important members of your community, and your businesses play a significant role in supporting the vitality of the local economy. E-commerce can help you expand the boundaries of your businesses and reach a broader customer base. This guide is prepared to assist you in that endeavour. Additionally, you can find a wealth of information that we believe will be useful to you at <https://ecommerceproject.eu>.

Finally, don't forget to share your successes and stories with us. We wish you good luck and success!

Best regards,

The Project Team

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