

# 10 Simple Steps to Finding Customers... and Delivering the Goods



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## LETTER FROM THE UPS STORE

Congratulations on your new venture! With the recent passage of small business friendly legislation, the stage has been set for small business to prosper and fuel the American economy.

Each and every one of our nearly 4,400 The UPS Store® locations is run by individuals just like you—men and women who made the decision to leave behind the daily grind to make their mark with a business of their own. They understand the day-in and day-out challenges and opportunities of running your own business.

Because they stand beside you, The UPS Store franchisees use their experience as small business owners to ease the struggles and stresses of their small business customers—and celebrate their successes. Thousands of small business rely on their neighborhood The UPS Store to help them with the logistics of running their business. You will find a list of our products and services, as well as a store locator, on our website at [www.theupsstore.com](http://www.theupsstore.com).

We are excited to partner with SCORE in presenting the information, examples and resources that follow. We hope they will assist you as you start down your new path as a small business owner.

On behalf of The UPS Store network, let me be one of the first to wish you the best of luck as you begin your exciting journey!



**STUART MATHIS**, President  
The UPS Store

## DEAR ENTREPRENEUR,

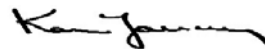
SCORE—[www.score.org](http://www.score.org)—as mentors to America's small business is proud to bring you a practical workbook to help you pursue your business ideas. Small businesses in America account for 50 percent of the private work force, which makes personal entrepreneurship a vital component of the American economy. SCORE, in cooperation with The UPS Store, presents this guide for anyone who seeks to succeed with their business idea, turning their dream into a reality. SCORE and The UPS Store share the common goal to bring useful resources to entrepreneurs. This booklet is intended to be a concise primer on how to enhance your identification of your target customer and deliver. The following pages feature practical information ranging from pre-marketing ideas and starting as a home-based entrepreneur to shipping and outsourcing areas that will let you focus on doing what you love; running your business.

With nearly 4,400 locations, The UPS Store network is dedicated to helping entrepreneurs succeed and has partnered with SCORE to make educational resources available to help you plan for success. You don't have to go it alone. Great resources like SCORE counseling and this workbook can help. It's about living your dream.

SCORE's 13,000 volunteers give their time and expertise to help small businesses with confidential, free business advice. Founded in 1964, the SCORE Association has helped more than 9 million entrepreneurs build, expand, and protect their small businesses. You can find the SCORE office nearest you by going to [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).

On behalf of SCORE, we are pleased to unite with The UPS Store to bring this resource booklet to entrepreneurs. We wish you prosperity and success.

Regards,



**KEN YANCEY**, Chief Executive Officer  
SCORE Association

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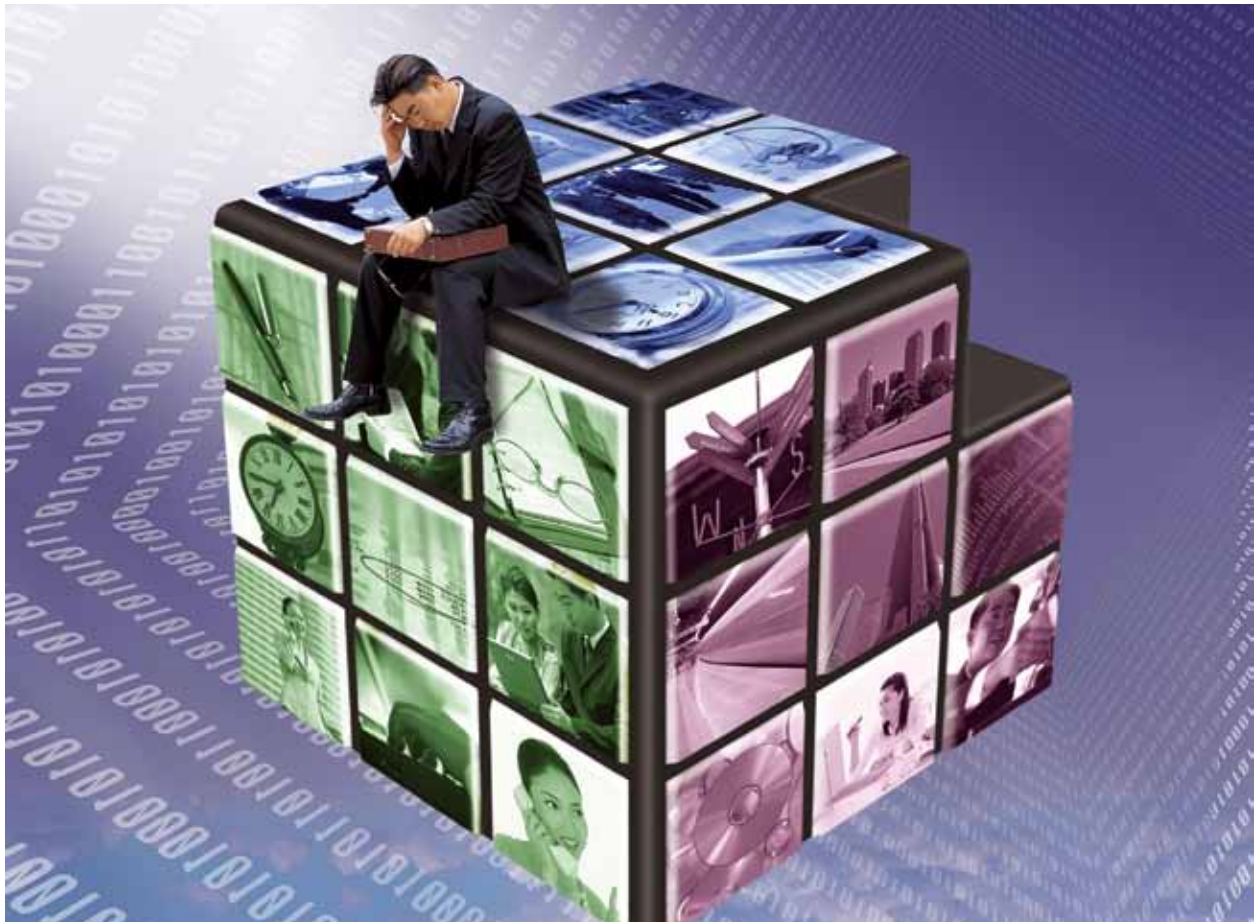
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# STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR TARGET MARKET



**B**efore you hit the streets selling or start buying up advertising space as part of your marketing blitz, you need to determine the best markets for your business. Understanding the specific characteristics of the people, businesses or organizations that are going to purchase your products and services is essential so you can spend your marketing and sales resources—both money and time—most effectively.

## YOUR USP

Before reaching out to your market, a little self-examination is necessary. The best opportunities for business prospects are inextricably tied to one little acronym: USP. It stands for Unique Selling Proposition, and it's the key strength or unique quality of your business. In other words, it's what makes you better than everyone else. Your business might bake the best cupcakes in the state. Your turnaround time might be faster than your competitors'. Or your industry knowledge and level of service may surpass the bigger companies in your region.

Remember that your USP should focus on benefits, not features. That means your marketing copy

# STEP 1

should communicate WIIFM, or What's In It For Me? Instead of telling customers what your product or service has to offer (features), tell customers how it will benefit them. For example, your advertising agency might offer a full range of services, but the benefit for customers is headache-free service for all of their marketing needs. It can be tricky determining the difference between features and benefits, but one easy rule of thumb is to ask yourself whether you're trying to sell what you offer or what the customer wants to buy.

## Features vs. Benefits

- **Wide range of services vs. All the options you want**
- **Knowledgeable staff vs. Free advice**
- **Convenient hours vs. Open when you need us**
- **We have business experience vs. You can benefit from our business know-how**

Your USP can take many forms, but it's essential that you understand it, as it is closely linked to your target market and your selling opportunities. Think about what makes your business exciting, fresh or innovative. What are you doing that no one else is doing? Take a moment and list your most important USP.

## HIT THE TARGET

Every business has at least one target market. Many have more than one. Your target market is that portion of all potential buyers who are the best prospects for your products and services. Defining that audience as specifically as possible gives you a better understanding of how you should be promoting your business and letting potential customers know about you.

**Defining your target starts with a series of questions. Take a few moments and answer the following:**

- **Are my best customers local, national or international?**
- **What are the characteristics of my best customers?** (e.g., are they midsized businesses located in downtown centers who need information technology assistance?; are they middle-income, health-conscious consumers within 30 miles of my store?; are they young people around the globe interested in new beauty products?) Be as specific and detailed as possible.
- **What do these customers have in common?** Do they read similar newspapers and magazines, have similar interests, engage in similar activities, or participate in social networking, such as LinkedIn or Facebook?
- **How can I reach these customers?**
- **Who are my competitors?**
- **Why should consumers buy from my business rather than my competition?**

These aren't questions you just answer once and then set aside. As your business grows and changes and as you learn more about your strengths and specializations, you'll find that the answers might change as well. However, by asking yourself these questions and coming up with the answers, you start to paint a picture of your business within the landscape in which you'll be competing for business.

By looking at your selling advantage and your target market, you will begin to see the bigger picture in terms of how your USP can best be communicated to your audience.

## STEP 2: **STARTING AS A HOME-BASED ENTREPRENEUR**



**T**here's no place like home—and that's especially true when you're trying to get a startup business off the ground. Using your home as your business headquarters can save you money on renting commercial office space, as well as on pricier business expenses such as telephone and utility rates. You also can save significant money on commuting when your office is down the hall instead of 20 or 30 miles away.

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Depending on where you live, there may be laws governing home-based businesses. Many municipalities allow home-based businesses, while others require that they be licensed or that they not have inbound traffic. In fact, there are hundreds of different home-based regulations, which vary from community to community. Failure to obey the law could result in stiff fines or penalties. Your best bet is to check on the home-based business regulations in your municipality before you begin setting up shop.

Whether you're running a business in or out of your home, it's important to always maintain a professional image. If you are a home-based entrepreneur, you might not want clients and customers to know where you live. If you're running an e-commerce business, there could be problems with delivery trucks constantly picking up and dropping off packages at your home. In cases like these, it might be smart to "outsource" your address. When you want to convey a certain professional impression, it might help if you had a Beverly Hills or Madison Avenue address. For example, going to a place like The UPS Store, where you can get a mailbox with a real street address, will also allow you to pick up and ship packages

# STEP 2

at these locations, preventing nosy neighbors or others from knowing that you have valuable inventory in your home, which is also a safety factor. Plus, in addition to keeping your business mail and personal mail separate, you have the option of receiving a text or email message when you have a package, eliminating unnecessary trips.

## MAKING YOUR BUSINESS AT HOME

Once you've decided to move forward with your home-based business, you need to determine how much and what kind of space you will need. For instance, if you're launching a personal chef business (be sure you check local health department regulations before you do), you'll need kitchen space, while a bookkeeper can likely convert a spare bedroom into a comfortable office.

First, make a list of the types of activities you'll need to perform in a day's work. This will help you envision how much actual work space you will need. Keep in mind businesses need more space than just where the work takes place. Next, make a list of the equipment, inventory and supplies you will need.

If you find that your business is going to take up more space than you have, or you don't want to buy or lease pricey equipment you will only use occasionally, look elsewhere. For example, you may be able to rent an external storage unit to house inventory and supplies that you don't need on a daily basis. You can ditch shipping supplies, postal meter and scale—and even your fax machine and printer—by using these services at a third party location like The UPS Store.

## LOOKING LIKE THE BIG GUYS

In addition to having a mailbox to give your business a more professional address, there are other tricks to making your business look like your bigger competitors:

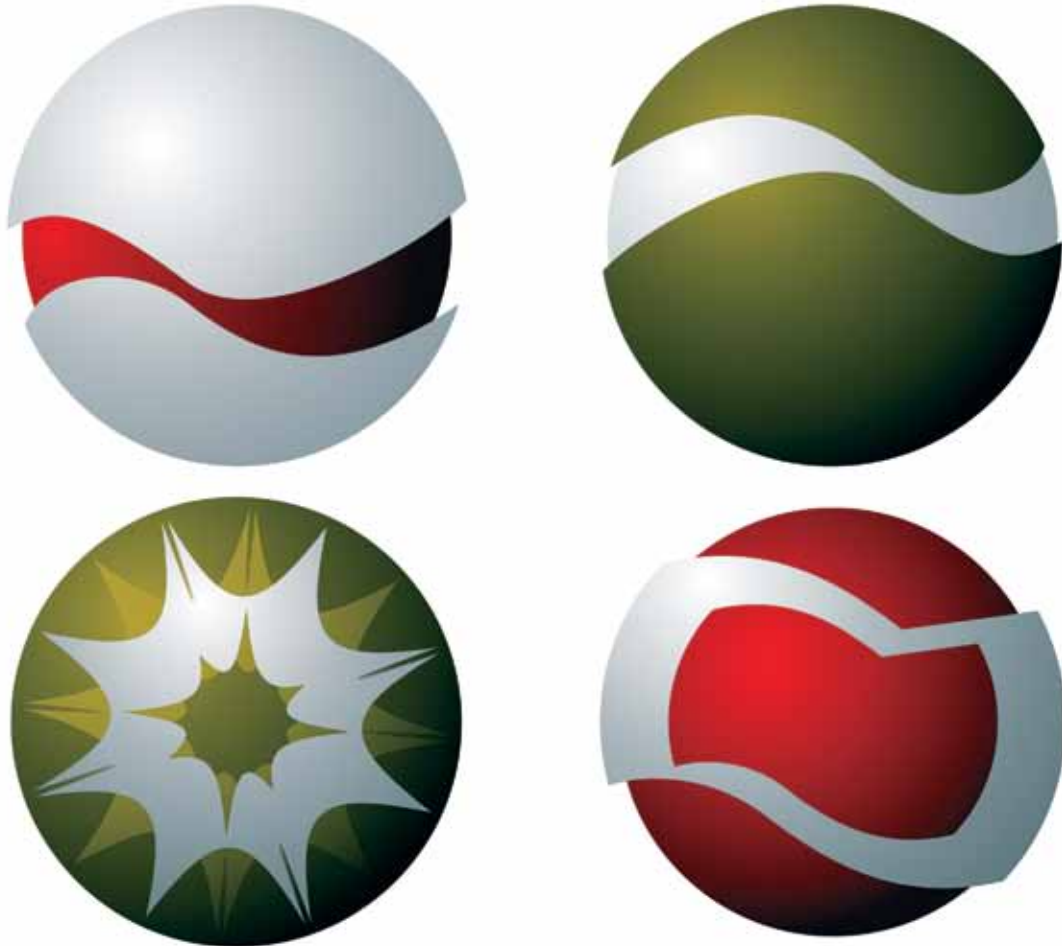
- **Have a dedicated phone line, even if it's a cell phone, with an appropriate voicemail message about your business.**
- **When people call your business, you'll make a much better impression if you answer the phone professionally, so be sure to use your full name or the name of your company.**
- **Create professionally printed business cards and stationery. It all adds to the professional image you're trying to convey.**

If you're serious about growing your business, you need to build a website. Whether you just use the site to promote your business or you actually sell products online, a site is essential to every 21st century entrepreneur. Remember, your site needs to look professional, and your contact information should be easy to find. And, don't forget to link to your business' social media profiles on your website. Make it as easy as possible for your customers and potential customers, no matter where they are, to connect with you.

Align with other professionals who can help solve your customers' needs. If you're a graphic designer, find a good writer with whom you can collaborate. Own a housecleaning business? Find carpet, chimney and window cleaning services that you can recommend or subcontract to when your customers need those services.

Most of all, provide outstanding service. Customers must be able to trust that you'll stand behind your products and services. They want to be treated as valued assets of your business. Providing excellent service, solving problems quickly, and living up to your word are the best practices all small business owners should follow.

## STEP 3: **BUILD YOUR BRAND IDENTITY**



**N**ow that you've got a good grip on your business strengths and your best possible target audience, you can begin building a brand identity. Your brand should be the refinement of how to best position your business to the people who you want as your customers. Far more than just a logo or a color scheme—although those are important—your brand should be a comprehensive approach to how you present your business, which may include:

- **Business policies**
- **Customer service**
- **Location appearance and convenience**
- **Look and tone of correspondence and collateral materials**
- **Attitude and actions of employees**
- **Pricing**
- **Quality**

# STEP 3

That may seem like a lot to include, but think of branding your business in the same way that you think about how you present yourself to the world. You have certain standards and codes of conduct. You may dress and communicate in a particular manner. People know you for certain strengths and attributes: Perhaps you're wildly creative, or a strategic thinker, or you're known for your dependability.

Creating a brand for your business means thinking about how you want your customers to perceive you and then walking that talk. Think about the world of retail: A red bull's-eye brings to mind one image and set of expectations; a yellow smiley face another; and a red, white and blue logo a third. The stores have similar types of merchandise, for the most part; however, each brand has distinct expectations associated with it.

**Take a moment and list five adjectives that you would like people to think of when they think of your brand:**

## My Brand

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_

## WHO ARE YOU?

As you think about your brand and the image you want to present to your audience, be sure that you don't have any obstacles working against you. If you're already operating a business, you may want to ask existing customers what they think of your brand. What are the adjectives that they associate with your brand?

When starting your business, it can be beneficial to survey prospective customers, create an advisory panel and consult with local business owners, such as your local The UPS Store franchisee, and include your SCORE mentor. In today's world of social media, consider joining relevant LinkedIn Groups and posting discussions for members' feedback. Ask their opinions about your branding, marketing and other business ideas, and receive the benefit of insight from more seasoned entrepreneurs and the people who will be making buying decisions about your products and services. In many cases, people will serve on an advisory panel simply because you ask them to and because it's an excellent way to give back to the community. In other cases, you might offer to set up a quarterly meeting where you treat them to lunch or dinner. Of course, the advice of your SCORE mentor is always free.

Also look at the competition in your marketplace. Does your community or industry need another mass-market, low-cost provider, or should you position your business as the higher-priced, higher-service option? Or perhaps the reverse applies. Your brand can be positioned to serve the greatest market need, or it can be created to appeal to a specific niche. Doing a competitive analysis of your marketplace can give you excellent insight into which is the right option for you to follow.

# STEP 4: CREATE YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

Once you've got a good sense of your brand messages and positioning, it's time to think about how you'll get the word out to the masses. Understanding your audience is the key to choosing the right ways to communicate to them. Some effective tactics include:

- **Sending out press releases to get publicity**
- **Mailing postcards or flyers**
- **Hosting a seminar or event**
- **Cross-promoting with another company that targets a similar audience**
- **Networking at industry or local business events**
- **Creating a brochure or newsletter**
- **Collecting names and email addresses for your database**
- **Launching an email marketing campaign**
- **Establish social media profiles for your business**



As you can see, there are so many ways to promote your business that the task can sometimes seem overwhelming. To help select the methods that would work best for your business or for more ideas and resources to help you get the word out, check with your local SCORE office.

That worked for Mary George when she opened her own floral shop. Before she opened her doors, she consulted her local SCORE chapter for advice on how to market her business. She applied those same principles when she opened her The UPS Store location years later.

Consider pre-marketing to let the community know your business is coming to the area. This can help establish demand for your products or services from day one.

You may not have a big budget to spend on expensive advertising or marketing programs. Start small by printing materials in-house, or working with a local small business printer like The UPS Store and distributing on your own. Contact your local media to give them information about your business. If they run a story on your business, it won't cost you a dime.

Join your local chamber of commerce and Rotary Club and get involved in the community. This can help you get to know other business owners, managers and prospective customers. Many people like to do business with others they know.

## KICKING IT UP A NOTCH

Once your grassroots efforts have begun to pay off, it's time to look at how you can take your marketing further. Create a plan that includes the strategies that are working for your business, as well as new

# STEP 4

marketing ideas to try. Devote a portion of your marketing budget (many experts recommend somewhere between 4 percent and 10 percent of your gross revenue or projected gross revenue) each quarter to experimenting with new ideas and replacing any marketing tactics that aren't paying off.

The key to maximizing your marketing, of course, is to find ways to track what's working. Train your employees to ask how people heard about your business, and ask that same question on any response forms posted on your website. You can also code coupons so that you know which coupon delivery systems are working. Most web hosts offer analytics or "stats" that tell you important information like how many visitors your site has had, which pages people visited, how long they stayed, what search engine terms people are using to get to your site, and other data. You can use these analytics to find out what search terms or sponsored links are pulling in the best results. Google™ Analytics offers similar web traffic information and can also be downloaded free of charge from the ubiquitous search engine. More information on e-commerce solutions is included in Step 8.

## GET SOCIAL

While social media has become a buzz word for many businesses, there's no denying the impact it can have on small business—both positively and negatively. It allows a business to talk *with* its customers rather than *at* them, allowing for an entirely new level of customer engagement. It's taken the one-on-one encounters and amplified it to become an intricate web of conversations.

Social media is most effective when it is used to complement your other marketing efforts. Integrating it into your marketing and advertising campaigns will help drive engagement with your business.

Understanding the role social media plays in small business can be the key to unlocking the power of this new medium. A Nielsen Company study (Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey) indicates that 90 percent of consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from friends than from a business' advertisement. Even more telling is that 70 percent of those same consumers will trust the recommendations of a complete stranger versus a business' advertisement. This indicates how important it is to connect with and engage your customers.

**Here are some tips to consider when using social media for your business:**

- **Consider getting involved with the top social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, foursquare and Google+.**
- **On your business' website, add links to your social media pages.**
- **Connect the offline to the online.** Introduce your offline customers to your social media presence and invite them to take part in the conversation. Be sure to provide them with an incentive to let you into their network.
- **Share content that's meaningful, relevant and engaging to your audience.** Ask questions, respond to local comments, and take the time to get to know your customers. Engagement builds a loyal following and opens the two-way conversation for suggestions, feedback and collaboration.
- **Dedicate time daily to moderate and engage your audience on social media.**
- **Listen to your audience on social media.** They could help you identify changes you need to make to accommodate what customers really want. Listening can enhance the way you do business. Be on the lookout for patterns and resist the temptation to overreact to individual posts.

# STEP 5: HARNESS THE POWER OF DIRECT MAIL

According to a recent study by Roost.com\*, just 15 percent of an average local business' social media fans come from the city where the business is located. Small businesses must do more to reach their nearby customers. And that starts with direct mail. If you think of direct mail as “junk mail,” think again. A 2009 study by advertising and direct mail giant Vertis Communications showed that consumers continue to respond to direct mail. Seventy-six percent said that they read direct mail sent by retail businesses, with females 35-49 consuming the highest amount at 86 percent.

And, according to the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), the industry's foremost trade organization, the return-on-investment (ROI) of each dollar spent on direct marketing, including direct mail, is \$11.73, versus ROI of \$5.23 from non-direct marketing expenditures. The process of creating a direct mail campaign includes:

- **Outsourcing your lists or creating them in-house**
- **Writing copy**
- **Designing the piece**
- **Printing**
- **Assembling any loose components (e.g., stuffing letters into envelopes, etc.)**
- **Affixing postage**
- **Transporting the mailing to be delivered**



## CHECKING YOUR LIST

The backbone of an effective direct mail campaign is the list. This is where knowing your target audience is critical. Lists can be created based on any number of criteria including, for consumers: geography, age, income, gender, marital status and many others. Among businesses, you can target specific size, geography and the job title of the individual most likely to purchase your product or service. The greater your understanding of your target audience, the more precisely you can pinpoint your direct mail list. The more precise the list, the more effective your direct mail program will be.

Finding a good mailing list broker is essential. You want to deal with someone who is reputable and versed in current direct mail and direct marketing laws to ensure that the list is compliant with all local

\*link to [http://blogs.wsj.com/in-charge/2011/08/01/most-facebook-fans-not-local/?mod=google\\_news\\_blog](http://blogs.wsj.com/in-charge/2011/08/01/most-facebook-fans-not-local/?mod=google_news_blog)

# STEP 5

and federal laws. Find list brokers through the DMA ([www.the-dma.org](http://www.the-dma.org)), through online searches or by asking colleagues whom they use.

You may also consider using a new, cost-effective tool called Every Door Direct Mail – Retail™ (EDDM-R), which The UPS Store offers in collaboration with the U.S. Postal Service. This service helps small business owners create, print and send direct mailings to every address in a designated area, without the need for a mailing list.

Jim Lafeber, owner of Simon’s Shine Shop, a high-end car wash in Chicago, used the EDDM-R program to reach prospective customers in his immediate community. He selected his target zip codes and provided The UPS Store with his design file. The UPS Store handled the logistics of printing and mailing more than 20,000 coupons. This saved Jim the valuable time and expense of having to purchase a mailing list or travel from printer to post office.

Using the EDDM-R program not only connected his business to a new audience without spending a lot or dealing with the logistics of a mass mailing, but it also brought in new customers to redeem his coupon.

## MAKING AN OFFER

The other critical component of your direct mail campaign is the sales piece. Effective sales pieces or letters generally have a compelling offer (e.g., buy one, get a free gift), a call to action (e.g., visit our store or website today), and a timeline (e.g., expires May 10).

Different offers work best for different audiences, so it’s smart to test them to find out which work best for your business. Send one combination of offer, call to action and timeline to a small part of the list—perhaps 250 or 500 names, depending on how big your list is—and another combination to another small part of the list, or in the case of EDDM-R, to two different zip codes with similar demographics. This allows you to determine which offer has a better response rate. If your product has a long selling cycle, you may need a longer timeline on your offer than other businesses do.

One tip that many direct mail pros use is to include a postscript (“P.S.”) in your sales letter. Many people read the P.S., so use it to reiterate your offer and call to action in one or two sentences.

## GET THE WORD OUT

Allow enough time to design, print and mail your piece. If you let your timeline slide too much, your pieces might end up being delivered after the expiration date on your offer.

The design and printing can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks, depending on the complexity of what you are sending. Tom Bellino, co-owner of four The UPS Store locations in Chicago, Ill., says let them handle the logistics of your direct mail for you.

“We can help simplify the direct mail process. With EDDM-R, you provide the mailing design, and we’ll handle the printing and mailing, including the bundling and completion of documentation and coordination with the local post office.

When designing your piece, make sure it complies with postal regulations, or you could end up paying significantly more in postage or having the packages denied for delivery entirely. Oversized envelopes or odd-shaped packages may be creative, but they also can cause more headaches than they’re worth—and could end up making a very poor impression on your customers if the package comes with postage due. Check with an expert in mailing and postage at a retail pack and ship location to ensure that your ideas comply with regulations.

## STEP 6: **HANDLING DOMESTIC SHIPPING NEEDS**



**D**epending on the type of business you're starting, you may have to spend a lot of time thinking about running your office and shipping your product. From monthly invoice statement mailings to direct mail promotions to shipping out products, there are likely going to be a number of items that need to be sent out from your business. You will also need to keep copies of important records.

Dealing with mailing and shipping can be a time-consuming task. The combination of the prevalence of e-commerce businesses, along with increased mailing costs and regulations related to homeland security, mean that the mailing and shipping needs of any business are more complicated than ever before. And you may want to consider all options, prior to hiring someone to manage shifting postal regulations and requirements from carriers.

As a business owner, it's important to think of your time as a precious commodity, so consider how you should be spending it. After all, if you assume a 40-hour work week (although most entrepreneurs work more, especially in the early days), and subtract out two weeks for vacation, five sick days, national holidays and an hour for lunch every day, that leaves about 1,340 hours a year for work. Clearly, that limited time is better spent researching new products or services, finding new markets, hiring good people, and selling than it would be if you spent an hour packing up a group of samples and sending it

# STEP 6

to a prospective client, standing in line to mail it, or tracking down a missing package.

What other ways can you maximize your time through outsourcing? Don't fall into the trap of trying to do it all yourself. Your business can only grow if you find ways to free up your time and let others take on various responsibilities.

**Take a few moments and list some tasks that you could affordably delegate to someone else:**

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## MAIL ROOM FOR HIRE

Mary George, a Kearney, Nebraska-based The UPS Store owner, helps business owners save valuable time because her business operates as an outsourced mailroom for them. Unlike the U.S. Postal Service, her location accepts package deliveries from any commercial carrier. She offers customers a physical street address instead of a PO Box, which conveys a more professional image, she says. Customers can have packages shipped to her location, so home-based entrepreneurs can avoid creating commercial carrier traffic in their neighborhoods, while protecting their privacy by keeping their residential addresses separate from work correspondence. Additionally, Mary's location, like many The UPS Store centers, offers 24-hour mail box access, allowing her customers to retrieve their mail at a time convenient to them.

Entrepreneur Ike Spears, a New Orleans-based attorney, provides useful services not just for business owners, but for other professionals as well. Spears experienced firsthand the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina when his law office was flooded. But instead of closing up shop, Spears quickly recognized that the rebuilding effort would require support services. A reconstruction effort that might last for years would include insurance agents; construction companies; public services; professionals like attorneys, accountants and doctors; as well as new businesses—all of which would need support services like copying, mailing and shipping.

The building Spears owned had coveted parking and a good downtown location, so he opened up a location of The UPS Store on one side with his law office on the other. He offered free services to police officers, acting as an adjunct office and mailing center, since the police precinct was operating out of a temporary trailer. This goodwill gesture jump-started Spears' business and made people think of his The UPS Store location as an extension of their own operations, relieving them of the busywork of mailing, shipping, copying and other services.

Services like these offer an important way that small business owners can cut down on administrative tasks that take time away from strategically growing the business.

# STEP 7: HANDLING INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING NEEDS



In the business world, there is a great deal of talk about the “global economy.” Indeed, the Internet has made it possible to do business almost anywhere in the world through just a few mouse clicks, opening up countless sales opportunities for your business.

If you plan to do business internationally, you need to understand the international shipping regulations of each country to which you’re sending products or information. Mary George, who owns The UPS Store in Kearney, Nebraska, says that the regulations can be surprising to people in the United States because they often seem to restrict innocuous items. For example, she says, some countries do not allow playing cards to be sent within their boundaries, as they are considered gambling devices. Other countries do not allow over-the-counter medications, vitamins or food supplements to be sent, as they are considered drugs, while others restrict the import of commodities like coffee. Australia quarantines any shipment that contains wood because of the potential of introducing damaging parasites onto the continent.

# STEP 7

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**TIP:**

If you are looking to grow your business, you'll want to consult someone who is an expert in international shipping.

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If you don't abide by the regulations, your package could end up being held indefinitely by the customs department of that country. Worse, it may never get to your destination at all.

International customs and completing the proper paperwork can make overseas shipping a complex process. Consider outsourcing the hassle of international shipping so you can focus on growing your business.

## RULES AND REGULATIONS

Your commercial invoice is an essential document in international shipping. It describes the product being shipped, its country of origin, how the product will be used and its estimated commercial value. Some countries require that your commercial invoice be on your company's letterhead. Also, if items, such as address, product code or other information, are inconsistent across various forms, then it's likely that your delivery will be delayed by customs.

### **When you begin your international shipping efforts, keep these points in mind:**

**KNOW YOUR FORMS.** Various forms are required depending on where you're shipping, the value of what you're shipping, and the quantity of what you're shipping. For example, you may need a U.S. Certificate of Origin to authenticate that your products were manufactured in the United States. If you're shipping to Mexico or Canada, you may need a NAFTA Certificate of Origin, which may reduce or eliminate duty charges. If you're shipping more than \$2,500 in commodities, you may need to fill out a U.S. Shipper's Export Declaration.

**UNDERSTAND COSTS.** Giving customers an accurate understanding of shipping costs, including transportation, duties and taxes, helps avoid unpleasant surprises.

**FACTOR IN TIMING.** Shipping internationally can take much longer than shipping domestically, so it's important that you give your customers an accurate estimate of the timeline in which they should expect to receive their order.

**ADDRESS PROPERLY.** Print or type your labels—both mailing address and return address—clearly. It's also a good idea to cover them with a piece of tape to prevent the label from smudging, especially if you printed it on an inkjet printer. Before closing the box, place an extra shipping label inside just in case the outside label gets damaged.

International shipping involves many more details than shipping domestically, so it's important that you take particular care to complete the proper forms in a manner that will allow the fastest possible delivery time.

# STEP 8:

## e-COMMERCE SOLUTIONS



**T**hese days, virtually every business can benefit from adding web-based solutions that let you sell or service customers online. Independent retailers with one location can expand their reach to a worldwide audience. Small manufacturers can take orders from anywhere. Even service businesses can consult remotely and offer online spaces to review work with clients. Your web presence is limited only by your imagination. Here's how to get started on your global business conquest.

### FINDING A DOMAIN

The first step in setting up a website is finding a domain name, or URL. This is the website “address” that people will type in to get to your site. While there used to be one company for website registrations, there are now many, and a simple search engine search for “domain name registration” will yield a number of reputable providers.

You may find that your chosen domain name—the name of your business, for example—is taken, as many with .com extensions. You could try the name of your business with a .net or .biz extension, or add a hyphen (e.g. [www.smith-cleaning-service.com](http://www.smith-cleaning-service.com)). Or you could take another approach to make your domain memorable by using it as a branding message. For example, a tour company specializing in New York City might register [www.bestnyc-tours.com](http://www.bestnyc-tours.com), or a bakery might register [www.deliciousbread.com](http://www.deliciousbread.com).

One secret that web professionals know: Having multiple domain names pointed to your website can increase its position in search engine rankings, so don't be afraid to register multiple domains, including your business name with all available extensions, descriptive names like [deliciousbread.com](http://deliciousbread.com), and even common misspellings of your business name so that people will find you even if they mistype your domain. (For example, if you type in [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), you'll still get to Google.)

## BUILDING YOUR SITE

There are many do-it-yourself web design programs and packages on the market. Some may even be offered by your domain registrar. Effective e-commerce sites have a few common elements:

- **A clean, easy-to-navigate look that is consistent from page to page**
- **Clear photos and descriptions of what you're selling**
- **An easy-to-use checkout system with credit card options**
- **Information about your company and its policies (including returns and privacy)**
- **A method of contact—by email and/or telephone—for questions or customer service issues**

From there, you can add all of the bells and whistles you wish: Case studies, videos, on-sale pages, widgets (small programs that perform a specific service like countdown clocks for back-to-school shopping or product-related quizzes), a blog where you can immediately share breaking news about your business, ideas or other information of value to your customers. Take a look at other e-commerce sites to get ideas about the possibilities, and then let your imagination run wild.

When it comes to the actual site building, you can opt to hire a web design consultant or company to help you launch your professional web presence, or you can do it yourself. Your choice should be based on a combination of your budget, the time you have to allot to building a site, and the level of sophistication that you require in programming. For example, if you need a large database to house information about your products or a flexible checkout system that can manage sale items, promotional discount codes and the like, the investment in professional web development can pay off.

## FINDING CUSTOMERS

To make your e-commerce business succeed, you must find ways to attract customers to your site so that they will purchase from you. There are a variety of ways to do this, including:

- **Post your web address on all of your business's promotional materials.**
- **Send email blasts to prospective customers through email address lists that you purchase through a reputable list broker.** Be sure they're opt-in lists, which means the customers have requested to receive information from businesses like yours. If you have any doubts, consult a legal professional to make sure you comply with federal and state regulations.
- **Send postcards to prospective customers.**
- **Buy sponsored links or ads on search engines like Google or Yahoo!** You can find information on how to do so on the "Advertising" sections of their sites.
- **Post meaningful commentary on blogs with links to your site.** You could also start a blog of your own and cross-promote it with other blogs.
- **Engage in social media with links back to relevant pages of your website.**
- **Purchase banner ads on well-trafficked sites.**
- **Generate publicity about your website both online and offline.**
- **Harness the power of reviews. Many consumers now use the web to search for reviews and recommendations of products, services and businesses, so creating an area on your site where customers can review your business or what you sell can help attract customers.**

When people purchase from your website, be sure to ask where they heard about you so that you can get a sense of what marketing methods are working best for you.

## STEP 9: **FULFILLING YOUR ORDERS**



**W**hen you're in a business that creates or sells tangible items, you must have a means of fulfilling the orders you receive. If you're in a service business, the fulfillment might take the form of onsite consulting, repair or other activity, or it could simply be creating a report or some other type of collateral material. However, if you have a retail or manufacturing business, you must have a means of delivering your products to customers. There are many components to fulfillment, and it's a good idea to decide which you are going to use before you make your first sale. Some of your options include:

### **PERSONAL DELIVERY**

Your business may sell items that are too big for customers to carry home themselves, like furniture or plants and trees for landscaping. Perhaps your items need a certain amount of customization—such

# STEP 9

as wedding cakes or embroidered clothing—that requires customers to place an order for the item to be completed at a later date. Service businesses like dry cleaners and tailors also need to return goods to the customer.

In all of these cases, your business can give customers the added value and convenience of delivering them personally. Personal delivery requires that you have a reliable vehicle and the personnel to actually go out and make the deliveries in a timely manner. Some businesses offer free delivery, while others charge a fee. To determine which is right for you, calculate the costs and logistics—fuel, personnel, wear-and-tear on the vehicle and time—necessary to deliver effectively and efficiently.

**This option is right for businesses that:**

- **Have a local service area**
- **Need to deliver added convenience to their customers**
- **Have the time and resources to invest in a delivery program**

## SHIPPING SOLUTIONS

For businesses that need to send their goods or other deliverables nationally and internationally—or even have a high volume of regional orders—shipping is a better option. Ike Spears, the owner of a The UPS Store location in New Orleans, works with a number of businesses that outsource this aspect of fulfillment to him. Coordinating shipping and returns can be a time-consuming process for small business owners. Spears' location handles shipping and returns for customers in a timely manner. This is important because the Federal Trade Commission generally requires that all items that customers order be shipped within 30 days.

**This option is right for businesses that:**

- **Have a national or international service area**
- **Need varied shipping options**

## FREIGHT OPTIONS

For businesses that ship high volumes of product to individual destinations or that need to ship large or heavy items from place to place, freight is the answer. For example, in Norcross, Georgia, The UPS Store owner Sheryl King helped a customer pack and ship large, heavy audiovisual materials and collateral from place to place around the country for that customer's seminars. Freight options, such as plane, truck, train and ship, open up alternatives to transport virtually any item that's legal to ship anywhere around the world.

**This option is right for businesses that:**

- **Have a national or international shipping area**
- **Have shipments that exceed carrier small package regulations**

As you think about your business and what you will need to deliver to your customers, take some time to research your delivery, shipping and freight options, as well as proper crating procedures. Don't forget to calculate pricing carefully, as failure to charge your customers enough to get their items to them could lead to lost revenue for your business.

# STEP 10: **LOOKING AHEAD**



**A**s the pieces of your business begin to fall into place, you need to create a plan to sustain growth. Your plan should include financial projections including income and expenses, as well as estimates for future growth. Your local SCORE chapter has resources to assist in crafting this growth-oriented business plan and help you plot out exactly how you'll make your business bigger.

## **PEOPLE POWER**

To grow, you'll need to find a mix of employees and outsourcing options to help you manage an increased workload. Good employees to whom you can delegate tasks and whose talent you can tap to grow your business are an essential component of growth. Determine what jobs you need filled and write descriptions of the perfect skill sets to fill the roles of your business.

Usually, it's best to avoid hiring someone exactly like you. Instead, hire to strengthen areas where you're not as strong as your business needs. If you're the "big idea" person who hates to be bogged down

# STEP 10

in details, you should look for someone who excels at detail work. If you're not good with numbers, hire someone who is strong in bookkeeping.

Finding qualified people is a challenge, but when looking for employees, a good place to start is your network. Hiring people who are recommended by trusted sources reduces the risk involved in hiring new employees. It's likely that your contact has a measure of trust in the prospective employee, because his or her reputation could be damaged by making poor recommendations. As you hire, it is also critical that you be aware of federal and state laws regarding wages, taxes, benefits and other employee-related concerns. Ignoring these laws could get you into trouble with labor authorities, so work with your local SCORE chapter or federal and state Department of Labor offices to determine what you need to know before you make your first hire.

There are times when outsourcing some functions is a good idea. Outsourcing allows you to hire services that you need without hiring full-time employees—or dealing with the salary, tax and benefits costs that full-time employees carry. For example, Sheryl King, who owns a The UPS Store in Norcross, Georgia, with her husband, Bill, acts as an outsourced mailroom for many of her business customers. You can also outsource marketing, sales, bookkeeping and accounting, and many other functions in areas where your business needs help.

## ADDING LOCATIONS

As your business reach begins to expand, you may also consider adding more locations. Depending on the type of business you own, those additional locations may be a few towns away—or on the other side of the country. With such expansion comes increased management and delegation, so it's important that you be extra careful in selecting the key employees who will oversee the new locations.

Some businesses choose to franchise their ideas as a means of expansion. Franchising lets you license your ideas to other business owners who open locations that share your business name, branding and business practices and pay you an upfront fee as well as an ongoing royalty (a percentage of sales). Franchises are regulated by the Federal Trade Commission, so be sure to check out the requirements and rules involved before you embark on a franchising venture.

## SUPPORTING YOUR GROWTH

As your business needs grow and change, it's critical to keep revisiting your plan to determine if you're on track for the growth you anticipated. Your business needs will inevitably change, so keep your advisors and colleagues apprised of new opportunities and growth. That includes your:

- **Attorney, who can point out changes in laws and requirements for your growing business**
- **Accountant, who will advise you of tax strategies and financial recommendations**
- **SCORE mentor, who can connect you with new resources to support your business growth**
- **Service providers and vendors, who can offer valuable contacts and recommendations for your business**

There are few things more rewarding than building a business from scratch and watching it thrive. By seeking out the proper knowledge, support and mentorship and applying hard work and excellence in the products and services you provide, you're on your way to success in the exhilarating world of entrepreneurship. The opportunities are endless. Go get 'em!



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