A Guide to Owning Your Online Store vs. Selling on Etsy
When it comes to selling your crafts or handmade goods online, you have an important decision to make: do you list your products on Etsy or sell through your very own online store? While the mass appeal of Etsy may be tempting, there are several reasons why opening an online store of your own pays off in the long run.

Or perhaps you’ve been selling on Etsy for a while and have experienced some success, but are tired of paying fees and are ready to build your own brand. If that’s the case, launching an individual online store is the right move for you.

Regardless if you’re new to selling online or are an established Etsy pro, opening your online store is a fun and exciting process. That’s why we’ve created this guide: to ensure that your new ecommerce site is set up for wild success.

Let’s get started, shall we?
The benefits of selling with your own website vs. Etsy

If you’re on the fence between listing your items on Etsy and selling through your own website, consider the following:

**Problems selling on Etsy:**

**Additional, unpredictable fees:** Etsy charges 3.0% for each and every transaction, not to mention a $0.20 listing fee for each product every month. These fees can quickly add up. For example, if you’re listing 100 products on your Etsy store and generate $1,000 in sales in a month, Etsy would charge $50 in fees, and that’s before you’re assessed even more fees for collecting payment through Etsy or PayPal.

**No design control or flexibility:** With Etsy, there’s very little room for personalization of a listing and even less customization available for your Etsy store. This means that if you’re trying to build a brand or differentiate your store from the rest of the pack, you’ll have a very difficult time designing an Etsy store you’re proud of.

**Extreme competition, lots of clutter:** With over 30 million items listed on Etsy, it’s difficult for shoppers to find your products among thousands of listings in similar categories. For example, searching for “mermaid” in the wedding gown category returns almost 1300 results alone. Not only that, Etsy now allows manufacturing partners and resellers to flood their products onto common listings, making it that much harder to be found on the marketplace.

**Lack of human support:** If you’re looking for help from a live Etsy representative, you’re out of luck. Selling on Etsy means that you only have access to online materials and can only contact someone there through an online submission. This means that if you have an immediate issue you’ll be stuck finding the answer on your own or waiting for a reply.
Benefits of selling through your own website:

**Ability to customize and build a brand:** When selling through your own website, you can control a multitude of design elements to create a truly unique brand, including color schemes, photos, website text, background patterns and much more. This amount of freedom and flexibility allows you to create a customer experience that's tailored to your specific audience, helping further legitimize your business.

**Fewer fees, better technology:** Several ecommerce platforms provide you with tons of built-in selling tools to grow your business, and the better ones don’t charge transaction fees for it. Opening your online store with one of these providers instead of Etsy gives you a lot more power to build and manage your business on your own terms.

**Put the spotlight on your products:** With an online store of your own, there’s no competition from other websites or listings to be found. Instead, the full spotlight is on your items and your items alone. This means that you can better merchandise your crafts or handmade goods, including showing multiple images, providing detailed product descriptions and much more to help boost sales.

**Personalized customer support:** Reputable ecommerce providers offer free, real-time customer support via phone, email and online chat 24 hours a day. This is particularly helpful if you have any questions while building or managing your online store, especially if you’re expecting an influx of traffic or need assistance right away to support an upcoming discount or promotion.

**Marketing opportunities:** Having your own online store means you get additional access to customer data so you can make strong connections and build brand advocates. Even more, you have the freedom to reach new customers via email marketing, social media and search engines, and even have the opportunity to list your products seamlessly through Facebook, eBay and other shopping outlets like Google Shopping. Marketing through these various channels are proven to boost sales.

In a nutshell, launching an online store of your own gives you the freedom and flexibility to build your brand and connect with customers in a way that simply isn’t possible with Etsy listings.

“Having a standalone site allows you to display your branding and message however you like. Especially with a new and unique product, a standalone site builds brand trust.”

- Cassandra, Former Etsy Seller
How to pick the right ecommerce solution for your online store

Now that you’ve made the decision to sell your items through an online store of your own, the next step is to select an ecommerce hosting provider. An ecommerce hosting provider gives you everything needed to build and manage your online store, including a website, shopping cart, business tools and hosting.

Keep in mind that success as an online retailer depends on your early decisions, including your choice of ecommerce provider. This choice influences everything from merchandising and ordering to customer experience and your bottom line. To achieve success, make sure you choose a reliable provider that offers the features and services you need now and that can accommodate your needs as your business grows.
1. **Assess your needs:** Your ecommerce platform should fit your business needs, not the other way around. This means that you should fully assess your needs in terms of how you want to merchandise your items. For example, if you’re selling vintage t-shirts that come in multiple colors and sizes, your ecommerce platform must offer product options, multiple product photos and an inventory system so you can track how many shirts you have in stock for each size and color. You’ll also want to consider how you interact with customers, including an email system and the ability for them to leave ratings and reviews. Finally, don’t forget about logistics like shipping and order management.

2. **Evaluate features:** Some ecommerce platforms offer features that others don’t, so take a close look to ensure you’re getting the most bang for your buck and aren’t missing out on key business tools. For example, you might need features like batch order processing, one-page checkout, a mobile-friendly storefront or recurring billing to effectively manage your store. Also evaluate the platform’s marketing features, including search engine optimization (SEO) tools, coupons/discounts, daily deals and more.

3. **Select a provider:** Based on your needs and what each platform has to offer, the final step is to choose your ecommerce hosting provider. Beyond the feature set offered, pay close attention to the cost of each plan, whether the provider offers an uptime guarantee for hosting and the level of customer support provided (should be 24x7). You’re also encouraged to call a potential hosting provider to ask additional questions that are specific to your business and ensure there aren’t additional fees for specific features or support plans.

Congratulations! At this point, you’re ready to start creating and designing your store so you can sell to the masses. In this next section, we’ll explore how you can quickly lay the foundation for building your online business.
How to build and design a successful online storefront

This is where the fun begins: building and designing your online store! From selecting the perfect design for your brand to adding your products, your journey to a successful shop starts here. But before you dive in, you'll want to decide on an essential component to your online identity by choosing a domain name.
How to choose a domain name:

Every store, whether online or physical, needs an address so customers know where to find it. For online stores, the address is known as a domain name, like volusion.com. Your store's domain name is a critical part of your business success, so keep these ideas in mind when crafting your domain name:

Keep it short: If you’re selling handmade western goods and you pick a domain name like westernwearwarehouseandemporium.com, you’re already shooting yourself in the boot. Keep things short and simple, like westernwearhouse.com, to help customers quickly and easily visit your website.

Make it descriptive or unique: If your domain name isn’t the same as your business name, make sure it indicates what your website offers. For example, if you’re selling handmade robots, a web address of awesometoyrobots.com would be appropriate.

Avoid symbols and numbers: Shoppers don’t like to type symbols, like ampersands or hyphens, into an address bar. Also steer clear of numbers, because if you tell someone your domain name out loud, they may not know whether you meant the numeral or the word; for example “3” or “three.”

Consider a few alternatives: There are millions of domains registered, so create a list of 5-10 domain names that you’d be comfortable using, just in case your first choice has already been claimed.

Once you have selected the perfect domain name, simply register it – your ecommerce solution should offer domain name registration services for you.
How to start building your store:

The most critical steps to building your new online store are creating product categories and adding your items to their respective category. For example, if you're selling personalized apparel, you could create categories like, “Men's” and “Women's,” or organize your items by type, such as “Shirts,” “Pants,” and “Accessories.” Creating your product categories first is recommended so you can quickly and efficiently add your items to the right place.

After creating your categories, focus on adding your items and creating product listings that sell. Just like on Etsy, your product listings are your primary sales tool for turning casual shoppers into paying customers. This means that they must be well-written and illustrated with attractive product photos.
Start with the basics: The three elements you need to list a product include: a product code, a product name and a product price. Create your product codes so they’re easy to keep track of and ensure your product names and prices are appealing to your target shopper.

Detail product options: Product options are any variations of your base product, such as size, color, texture and add-on features. When creating product options, ensure that each option is clearly described and specify any additional cost if a product option costs extra.

Write stellar product descriptions: Every item in your online store should have a description that eloquently describes and showcases the benefits of your product. To get started, move beyond listing basic product features and tell shoppers why your product enhances their lives. Also, use unique descriptions to differentiate your products and always be sure your descriptions are well-written and error-free.

Add beautiful product images: Product images are critical to your sales as they provide the only chance customers have to see your items before purchasing. This means you should focus on adding high quality photos to each of your listings to show off your items and put your product in context.

Set up shipping and payments: You’ll also want to decide what shipping options you want to provide to shoppers and determine how you prefer to collect payment. These integrations are already built into your ecommerce software, making the process quick and easy. In terms of payment, decide if you want to accept PayPal, credit cards or both.

If you have several items to add to your online store, consider adding their details to a spreadsheet and importing them into your ecommerce software. This approach will help save time so you can start selling faster.
How to design your online store:

A great-looking web design is one of the most critical elements to your online success. Beyond making your shop visually appealing, stellar web design also establishes credibility, helps customers find the products they want and builds customer loyalty. Unlike an Etsy store, having your own website grants you the absolute freedom to build a design that’s as unique as you, and empowers you to build an actual brand that stands out from the crowd.
When designing your online store, consider these best practices:

**Start with a template:** Think of a design template as the shell of your website. It appears on every page and controls the appearance and position of various elements, including your website background, header/footer and even where your products are positioned. To get started, browse through the templates offered by your ecommerce provider and try out several of them to see which fits best. Keep in mind that you can quickly swap templates, so don’t settle until you’re satisfied.

**Consider your brand every step of the way:** When choosing a template, the most important factor is your brand. For example, if you sell handmade baby products, choosing a template with soft colors and gentle design elements would be a good fit. If there isn’t a template that fits your exact needs, you can also explore custom web design so you can have an online store that is truly unique to your brand.

**Focus on navigation and the shopping experience:** Online shoppers want to find and purchase your products quickly and easily, so direct your customers exactly where you want them to go. To do so, ensure you have clean, organized categories, your logo is easily recognizable and you have contact information readily available on your site. Also make sure that your web design is mobile-friendly, using what’s known as a “responsive template” so your site looks great on all screen sizes and devices.

**Make the most of your homepage:** Nine times out of ten, your homepage is the first impression shoppers receive of your online store, so make it count. You also want to guide shoppers deeper into your website, so try showcasing some of your most popular items or highlighting your latest discount. Also include clear calls-to-action to direct customers to specific product or category pages. Your homepage is a valuable piece of real estate for your online store, so don’t make it an afterthought in your overall web design.

**Build additional pages for context:** Unlike an Etsy store, you can create several pages on your website to showcase your brand and tell your story. For example, build an “About Us” page that talks about how you make your items and explain how your passion got started. You should also create a “Contact Us” page that tells your customers how they can reach you, be it phone, online chat or email.

Remember that your web design is the ultimate representation of your overall brand, including your logo, color scheme and even the style of your product images. Creating a beautiful web design gives you a major leg up on the competition and truly sets you apart from Etsy sellers.
Transitioning from Etsy to your online store:

If you’re currently selling on Etsy, you might be wondering what to do with your Etsy store while building your new online shop. The good news is that you don’t have to choose one or the other – you’re absolutely able to sell your items on both. Doing so can help keep your sales flowing while you’re ramping up your new store.

Here are some ideas for you to consider while transitioning from Etsy to your online store:

Continue selling on Etsy: If you’re already making decent sales on your Etsy store, keep things open as you continue to inform customers of your new online store. This approach will help ensure you’re not losing any sales and keep your cash flows moving while you ramp up your store.

Link to your online store from Etsy: Start referring your Etsy customers over to your new online store by linking to it directly from Etsy. You can point out that you’ve got a brand new website and encourage your existing Etsy customers to go check it out.

Offer a discount for shopping at your new store: Encourage shoppers on your Etsy store to buy from your new website by offering a coupon or discount for their first purchase. This approach will serve as a great incentive to train customers to buy from your website instead of on Etsy.

Share your new store on social media: If you already have a Facebook page or Twitter account for your existing Etsy store, share the news that you’ve opened a new website with your fans and followers. Again, offering a discount to your audience is useful in driving traffic to your new store.

Decide on a threshold for completing the transition: At some point, your online store will be generating enough sales where you can turn off your Etsy store. Keep in mind that transaction fees with Etsy eat into your overall profits, so once you’re making enough money with your individual shop, you can protect your bottom line by moving off Etsy completely.

At the end of the day, your Etsy store can actually help boost business for your new online store, so use it to your advantage.
Conclusion

Opening an online store of your very own is a highly rewarding experience that provides a level of success otherwise impossible by only selling on Etsy. Not only do you have full control of your brand and customer experience, you have the opportunity to grow your shop into an online empire. All you need is your already-excellent products, a little creativity and the desire to sell your items (along with a little help from your ecommerce provider).

So whether you’re new to online selling or are already listing your items on Etsy, launching an online store that’s truly yours is the way to go.

Best of luck, have fun and happy selling!
Volusion is the all-in-one solution for selling online. For over 15 years, the Volusion platform has powered the success of thousands of online merchants, including entrepreneurs and small business owners. Volusion offers everything you need to succeed, including website, shopping cart, premium hosting, tons of money-making tools and personalized, 24x7 support.

See why more online stores are successful with Volusion.