

Is Your Product Suitable for the 'Net?

By Angela Wu

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You've probably been subjected to the many hyped-up claims about how easy it is to make money on the internet. Simply grab a product, put a photo of it on a web page, and thousands of eager customers will flock to your site, credit card in hand!

Obviously it's not that easy. The internet is a wonderful tool -- but just like in the 'real world', some types of products sell better than others. Consider the following:

___Is there a more convenient alternative?

Products that aren't easily available at a local store have a better chance of selling online. Not only is it often more convenient to simply drop in and pick up whatever you need, you aren't hit with additional shipping or handling charges (which can be significant when shipping heavy products).

Pet food is an example: my household of pets dictates that I'm often running out the door to pick up more food. At one point I investigated ordering it online -- imagine, door-to-door delivery! -- but in the end, I decided against it: not only would I have to wait for it to be shipped to me, but the shipping costs were nearly as much as the food itself!

___Is your product something a customer needs to feel or see before making a purchase?

A simple example is a wedding dress: most women want to try it on, walk around in it, and simply see how they look and feel in the dress before they make a purchase.

That's not to say that you won't be able to sell something

that the customers generally prefer to see or feel; if your marketing is good enough, you might actually make a great many sales. However, customers that discover that your product doesn't fit or didn't meet their expectations are likely to drive up the return rate -- which means less profit and more hassle for you.

___Are customers normally cautious about buying your type of product or service, even offline?

Many people are still naturally hesitant to purchase anything online. So if you're selling something that they normally hesitate to buy in the real world, then your challenges are compounded.

For instance, some people don't think the services of a financial planner are necessary -- they might only make an appointment with one due to persuasion on the part of family or friends. They discuss their situation with the financial planner and make a decision about whether or not they feel they can work together.

Now imagine if a financial planner sets up shop online. He claims that he's wildly successful, and offers to help manage your money over the phone or by email. Most would probably hesitate to take him up on the offer -- without actually *meeting* him, viewing his office, etc. it's harder to gauge his honesty or credibility.

___Is there a market for your product, at the price at which you intend to sell it?

This is what it all boils down to. There must be sufficient demand for your product at a price that allows you to earn a reasonable profit after all expenses are paid.

Be aware, too, that some audiences just don't tend to use the internet much -- or they use it sparingly. For example, you will have a hard time if you target a bunch of retired folks who are terrified of technology, or low-income families who may not have access to a computer.

Obviously nothing can guarantee the success of a business. However, careful thought and research can help you to build a thriving online business.

Angela is the editor of Online Business Basics, a practical guide to building an Internet business on a shoestring

budget. If you're tired of hype and just want solid, down-to-earth information, then visit us now -- and in moments you can have access to loads of instantly useable tips, specifically chosen for beginners!

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