CHECKLIST:

Ecommerce Setup

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When you're ready to start selling online, you may feel overwhelmed with options. Just figuring out how to get started can be daunting. There are many things to consider, and in this article, I'll provide an overview of the basics you'll need to plan for – consider this a checklist of sorts, to make sure you'll be starting out without missing a step! The methods you choose will depend on how much work you'd like to do yourself, how much you can afford to invest, and what stage you're at with your business.

Choosing Ecommerce Software

You will need shop software to create the structure of your site – product categories, product detail pages, and, of course, the shopping cart and checkout process. Your choice will depend on features, pricing, customization options, and your own comfort level with building and maintaining a website.

If you are just starting out and don't yet have an established business, marketplace-type shop solutions, such as Etsy, are a great way to get your feet wet. You can experiment with pricing, packaging, and shipping options without much investment.

As a more established business, you will likely find that you want more features, more flexibility, and the credibility that comes with having your own shop on your own domain. When moving from a marketplace to your own shop, one choice will be between hosted software (you sign up to use the third-party service) or self-hosted software (you install the software on your own web hosting account).

At Aeolidia, we now prefer hosted ecommerce software (specifically [Shopify - click here to sign up](#)), trading in a bit of flexibility for these advantages:

- Customer support is often better for hosted software – since the company is managing everything for you, and is being paid to do so, they should also be prepared to answer your questions and help you get started.

- You won't be responsible for upgrades, bug fixes, security, or web hosting. These things can be a hassle when installing and hosting the software yourself.

- Hosted solutions are becoming more and more customizable, with more tools for developers, and apps for shop owners to integrate into their shop.

When choosing a software program, make sure you look through the features list to see if it has what you need. If there's anything unusual about how you plan to sell your items, accept payment, or price shipping, it's worth checking in with customer support to ask about your particular situation before getting everything set up and finding you can't use it. Some cases that may need special customization are: wholesale accounts, selling fabric by the partial yard, tiered pricing, and customizable products.

Setting Up Shop

You've chosen your software, but the fun doesn't end there! Now you have some new decisions to make and things to set up. Plans should be made for the following:

1. Domain name: You will want to register your own domain name – preferably your business name with a ".com" after it, to make it simple for customers to remember. This way, you can have professional-looking email at your own domain, and if you ever decide to change the software program or web host you're using, your site will still remain at the same URL, and you won't lose traffic from search engines, links, or bookmarks.

2. Web hosting and email: If hosting the shop software yourself, you will need to purchase web hosting. If you're using a hosted shop service, you won't need to set up web hosting, but you will want to come up with a way to use email at your domain. You can sign up for Google Apps, set up email with your domain registrar, or find a host that offers an email-only hosting plan.

3. Payment gateway: You will need a way to accept payment from your customers. Check to see what your ecommerce software works with. You may want to offer two different options, such as credit cards through Authorize.net and also PayPal. There are many payment gateways available, some requiring a merchant account.

4. Shipping settings: You can weigh each of your products and use automated shipping calculators, or you can set up flat or table rates for shipping based on order total, number of items, or some other method. You may want to integrate your shop with a service to print shipping labels. Consider offering free shipping at a certain order threshold, to encourage larger orders.

5. Tax rate: You'll need to check the tax laws in your country or state to see which of your customers should be charged sales tax, how much, and what types of products are exempt.

6. Accounting software: You may be able to save yourself a lot of trouble come tax time if you sync your shop with a service like StitchLabs or Quickbooks, to track sales, profit, tax, and more.

7. Security: Most hosted software will provide an SSL certificate to encrypt and protect credit card data as it is sent to your site, but if you're using your own web hosting, you will need to purchase and set this up yourself. A third party service we like for keeping sites secure is Sucuri.

8. Site design: Depending on your software, you'll likely be able to choose from some free design themes, buy premium themes, alter themes with a design tool, or build your own design with HTML and CSS.

9. Content: Getting all the technical, accounting, and policy decisions out of the way is important, but a large part of setting up a shop website lies in gathering and preparing your content, and planning your site structure. You'll need cohesive and compelling product photography, informative and tempting product descriptions, as well as text for your home page, about page, and other informational pages.

If part of your content and marketing strategy includes a blog or a mailing list, you'll need some ideas for what to post there, as well.

10. Maintenance: The day-to-day job of running a shop is not particularly glamorous. If you don't like the idea of adding content to your site, updating product info, packing and shipping orders, and doing customer service, you'll need to hire some help!

11. Promoting your shop: I can't emphasize enough how important it is to have a plan to promote your website. Building the website is a good beginning, but you will need to get the word out about your shop, and you will need to do so regularly and consistently. Our most successful website projects have been the ones where the shop owner came to us with a great marketing strategy, or who worked with our team to develop one. You'll want to get Google to notice you, as well as have your shop shared on blogs and social media.

Hiring Help

With the tools and software currently available, it's fairly easy to set shop up online by yourself. However, I'm a big proponent of doing what you're best at, and delegating the rest. Unless you're a web designer and developer, the best way to have a professional, user-friendly site with a design that is custom to you is to hire an expert.

For this reason, at Aeolidia, we offer just about all the services I mention above, from logo design to web design, to product photography and copywriting. Please get in touch via our website to discuss how we can make things easier for your business.

It seems like a lot of work, I know, but much better to start with a good plan rather than jumping in blindly! Best wishes.

Ecommerce Checklist:

DETAILS	STEP 1	STEP 2
☐ Ecommerce Software _____ software chosen	☐ Signed up	☐ Make site visible
☐ Domain Name _____ domain name chosen (and available)	☐ Purchased	☐ Point to website
☐ Web Hosting _____ provider chosen	☐ Purchased or N/A	
☐ Email Hosting _____ provider chosen	☐ Purchased or N/A	☐ Test send/receive
☐ Payment gateway _____ provider(s) chosen	☐ Purchased or N/A	☐ Activate
☐ Shipping options _____ carriers & methods to offer	☐ Software bought or N/A	☐ Setup on site
☐ Tax rate _____ % for state / exempt status	☐ Tax paperwork	☐ Setup on site
☐ Accounting _____ software chosen	☐ Purchased	☐ Linked to site
☐ Security _____ responsibilities	☐ Purchased	☐ Working on site
☐ Shipping Orders _____ who & how	☐ Supplies purchased	
☐ Customer Service _____ theme or designer		
☐ Site Design _____ who & how	☐ Purchased/hired	☐ Visible on site
☐ Product Photography _____ who & how	☐ Photos taken	☐ Photos on site
☐ Product Descriptions _____ who & how	☐ Written	☐ Products on site
☐ Home page text _____ who & how	☐ Written	☐ Ready to go
☐ About page text _____	☐ Written	☐ On site with photo

Know the story of your business and we'll help you tell it!

Our work is transformative and custom to your business. After working with us, you'll be ready for the opportunities that will knock on your door. You can learn about our services on the next page.

Aeolidia

Better yet, your A-Z team. We're the complete package because we can't bear to imagine a beautiful website without a cohesive brand identity, a pretty design wrapped around poor content, or a perfect website with no customers. That's why we always have a few extras in our toolkit:

Brand Identity: You—yes you—are more than a beautiful logo. We design those, too, but more importantly we create thoughtful and engaging brand identities that last and last.

Print & Packaging Design: We delight in creating real experiences for customers using business stationery, product packaging, and printed marketing materials.

Illustration: If you can't quite picture it in your mind, let us do it for you. Express the inexpressible and unleash the intangible with custom illustrations that capture all that's unique about you.

Product Photography: Oh, snap! Presentation is everything, and photography is essential in bringing your product to picture-perfect life as your customer decides whether or not to make a purchase.

Copywriting: You have a story and a mission, but how will you tell it? Professional copywriting gets your message across in a way that speaks truth about you, your voice, and your brand.

Website Design & Development: We understand that for a creative business like yours, an online shop is not just a site, it's a home. Aeolidia is peerless (but never friendless) when it comes to creating websites that engage visitors, boost sales, and attract press.

Marketing Consultation: Your ideas are too amazing to keep to yourself. Launch them with laser-beam precision using a tailored marketing plan that'll help better your presence and boost your media exposure and sales.

Please email **hello@aeolidia.com** to ask about any of these things!