

WordPress & Ecommerce

A Simple Guide for Getting Started Selling Products Online



Brought to you by iThemes Exchange,
WordPress Ecommerce made simple

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iThemes Media
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Introduction

By 2016 there will be an expected [192 million people shopping online](#) in the U.S. That's 15% more shoppers than 2011, they'll each be spending 44% more cash on average and the total spending will be up 62%.

In short: **ecommerce is growing**. Are you ready?

It's time for Amazon to move over. They may be the ecommerce king, but now it's your turn. Besides, it took Amazon [eight years to turn a profit](#). You can probably do better.

One way to do better: WordPress. It's not just for blogging anymore. This full-featured content management system has the chops to handle ecommerce.

Why? You get the ease of use that makes WordPress a favorite among clients. You get a single website for your site and your store—no awkward divide and multiple backend systems. You get the flexibility to do what you want to do.

WordPress just works. Now you can make it work for ecommerce. We'll talk about how to make the most of ecommerce, exploring the ins and outs of using WordPress. We'll cover the gory details like shipping, taxes, payment gateways and more. We'll offer best practices and help you get your shop started right.

Ready to shop?

Why WordPress?

7 Reasons to Use WordPress for Ecommerce

Let's tackle the big question: *why* should you build an ecommerce site with WordPress? If you think WordPress is just a glorified blog platform, think again. [17%](#) of the Internet is powered by WordPress. It's good enough for [Fortune 500 companies](#) and loads of these [shopping sites](#), too.

Why WordPress? Here are five reasons you should build your ecommerce site with WordPress:

1. Easy: WordPress is so easy, your mom could do it. It's quick and easy to install. It's simple to use. You don't need to know how to code, you don't need to learn a complicated program and you don't need to call in an expert for the basics. Things can get complicated with ecommerce, so it's important to start simple. You want a backend system that's easy for clients to figure out and hard for employees to screw up.

2. Flexible: WordPress has the flexibility to do almost anything you want. You can change the look of your site by clicking on a new theme. You can add new functionality with plugins. Ecommerce is a fast-moving business and you don't want to be stuck with a rigid site that can't keep up.

3. Inexpensive: Let's just say it: WordPress is highly compatible with cheapskates and penny pinchers. You only pay for what you need. If you're setting up an ecommerce site, that might mean buying a plugin, a theme and any required add-ons. All are relatively inexpensive, one-time purchases, especially compared to pricey monthly subscription ecommerce solutions. They're also developer-friendly, which means if you have high-end aspirations, a developer can build cool stuff on top of them, saving loads of time and even more money over the long haul.

Let's be clear: WordPress isn't completely free. You still have your domain name registration and hosting costs. You'll likely have larger upfront costs compared to a monthly service shop, but over time, a WordPress-powered shop can be cheaper. You could still break the bank with WordPress, but you have the option to pinch those pennies and still get a solid site. Good luck doing that with anything else.

4. Expandable: In the brick and mortar retail world, it's always nice to be able to expand your shop as your business grows, but it's not always an option. The same is true with an ecommerce site. Some ecommerce solutions can't grow with you and require you do the online equivalent of moving your business if you want to expand. Those kinds of changes cost both time and money. But a site that can start small and grow big—like WordPress—saves you time and money.

5. Community: The massive WordPress community is a major bonus. Some people look to the widespread usage of WordPress as a reason to stay away. Popularity makes it a target for hackers, right? Perhaps, but that also means there's swift justice from a large, active and involved community. Besides, most hacked WordPress sites were running old versions of WordPress that didn't have the latest security updates. The WordPress community also delivers a wealth of plugins, advice and even help. It's likely you can even find a local community of WordPress fans in your area, eager to share their wisdom.

6. Content Management System: One of the best reasons to use WordPress as an ecommerce platform is because it's already so good as a content management system, or CMS. This is another reason some folks dismiss WordPress as an ecommerce solution—it wasn't technically built to do ecommerce. That's true, WordPress is inherently a content management system. However, it has two things going for it:

- It's one of the best content management systems out there. If your store is anything more than just a storefront—if you want a blog, for example—you'll want a content management system with some muscle.
- Focus: WordPress was built as a content management system and that's all they focus on. WordPress ecommerce plugins were built to do ecommerce and that's all they focus on. Everybody is doing what they do best, which gives you the best of both worlds. As opposed to a purely ecommerce platform that tacks on blogging or page editing as an afterthought.

7. Ownership: One of the most reassuring reasons to use WordPress for your ecommerce site is that you own it. You're not signing on to some indecipherable terms of service. You're not shackled by someone else's hosting, servers or limitations. There are a lot of ecommerce services that can launch quickly and handle the headaches for you—but they own your store. You pay a premium for not owning it, flushing money down the drain in extra fees and losing the control to do whatever you want. But not with WordPress. If you build it with WordPress, you're in charge.

WordPress is Best

You could easily set up shop on Etsy, Amazon or eBay and sell stuff. But you don't have your own shop. You're hemmed in and all you can do is sell stuff. There are other shop-hosting solutions like Shopify, but you still don't own your shop and innovation is dependent on someone else. From ease of use to ownership, WordPress has them all trumped.

Those are some solid reasons to use WordPress. It's the framework that makes everything else possible, the foundation not just for your site, but your store.

For more on why you should use WordPress for your ecommerce site (or any site!), check out our [Why WordPress](#) series.

iThemes Builder Gives You More Control

WordPress is a great foundation for your ecommerce site, and we think [iThemes Builder](#) is a great way to make your store look good. Builder is a powerful WordPress theme that gives non-techie users the ability to structure their own pages. That means non-techies can make changes without calling in a developer and developers have a quick and easy starting point. Plus, there are several Builder child themes designed for ecommerce with more on the way.

Why *Not* WordPress?

5 Reasons Not to Use WordPress for Ecommerce

Let's be honest: we're obviously fans of WordPress. We're a bit biased. But at least we can admit that WordPress isn't perfect. There are some legitimate reasons not to use WordPress for ecommerce. Let's take a look at some of those.

Excuses & Assumptions

People who like to bad-mouth using WordPress for ecommerce tend to make a few of the same assumptions. Based on those assumptions, yeah, using WordPress might be a bad idea. But some of those assumptions are flawed.

Security threat? Yes, WordPress is a security threat if you don't keep it updated, install questionable plugins or use poor passwords. But so is every other software out there.

Not technically built for ecommerce? True, WordPress was built to manage content. And what's a store? A big pile of content. WordPress may not be built from the ground up specifically for ecommerce, but it has the essential tools. Plus, the ecommerce plugins are built to do ecommerce. They have a narrow focus, and that's a win.

Lacking features? Sure, some ecommerce WordPress plugins are lacking, but others are pretty robust. Plus, with the better plugins, you can use the API to create practically anything you want. It's also possible someone's already created the functionality you want and you can buy their work.

Real Reasons Not to Use WordPress

1. Complexity: The biggest reason not to use WordPress for ecommerce is if it simply doesn't fit your needs. If your site is complicated, WordPress might not work. Those complications could vary, but we're talking high-end ecommerce stuff: shipping from multiple warehouses, heavy integration with backend systems, super complex pricing models, lots of automated product updates, etc. A store with 50,000 products is going to need a hefty server, whether you're running WordPress or not.

2. Payment Experience: If you can't get the exact payment and checkout experience you want, WordPress may not be for you. This one is hard to believe though, since most WordPress ecommerce plugins have dozens of payment gateways available. Still, it could happen that whatever you want isn't quite possible with WordPress and that might be a reason to walk away. But do your homework first. It's likely you can do more with WordPress than you can with the monthly-rate hosted shop.

3. Support: WordPress is free software. You're welcome to download and install it anytime. As such, you're not paying for an entire customer support team staffing a phone bank. The ecommerce plugins have varying degrees of customer support, but in general, you're doing it yourself. That doesn't mean help isn't available. There's a giant community, loads of content online and plenty of willing developers who can help you in a pinch. But if you want a simple number to call and say "fix it," WordPress may not be for you.

4. DIY? No Thanks: If you don't want to or can't do it yourself, then WordPress loses a lot of its appeal. It's one of the core values of WordPress, that you can figure it out and do it yourself. Now that doesn't mean you need to be a dyed-in-the-wool techie to run WordPress. But you need to be willing to dive in and get your hands dirty from time to time. Or be willing to find someone else to do it for you. If DIY sounds more like a disease than a battle cry, then you might want to steer clear of WordPress.

5. Set It & Forget It: If you're a 'set it and forget it' type of person—you'd like to set up your site and never think about it again, WordPress may not be a good fit. To keep your website in good, secure working order, you need to keep it updated. That means updating the core code, updating themes and updating plugins. It also means building your site in such a way that routine upgrades don't break everything. Either keep it current, pay someone else to do it or find another platform.

Know What You're Getting Into

We're confident that WordPress can be a great solution for ecommerce. But it has to work for you. Know what you're getting into. If it's not a good fit for your situation, find another solution.

How Do You Know If You're a Good Fit for WordPress?

We've talked about reasons to use WordPress for ecommerce and reasons not to. Still unsure? Let's summarize:

You're a Good Fit for WordPress Ecommerce If:

- You have a small to medium size site that wants control and ownership.
- You don't want large monthly payments just for ecommerce.
- You have a DIY spirit. You're willing to tackle things yourself, whether that's tweaking code, installing plugins, upgrading software—or finding/paying someone else to do it.
- You have some flexibility about exactly what features you want—you're either willing to go without something or willing to pay someone to code it especially for you.
- Your site is more than just a store—adding content is important and has to work well.

You're a Bad Fit for WordPress Ecommerce If:

- You have an especially complicated site.
- You want nothing to do with managing the technical side of things and you'd even be willing to forgo some functionality if it means less work for you.
- When something breaks, you want someone else to fix it right now. You like your support to be 24/7, live and you're willing to pay through the nose even if you never need it.
- You're the kind of person who likes to set up a site and forget it. You never get your oil changed. You don't change your furnace's air filters. You never swap out batteries in your smoke detector. If maintenance is not your friend (and you're not willing to pay someone to be friends with it), WordPress may not be for you.

Ecommerce Isn't So Easy

There's really no such thing as easy ecommerce. We think it gets easier when you use the right tools. But let's be clear: ecommerce is complicated. You need to know what you're getting into and make informed decisions.

Here's how it gets complicated:

- **Payment Processing:** This is how you get your money. So that's kind of important. There are two major options, on-site and off-site, with loads of payment gateways for each. On-site can be even more complicated and costly to set up, but you usually get better rates in return. This is where you really need to do your homework and make sure your plugin, payment gateway and bank can all play nice.
- **Taxes:** Yep, you have to pay taxes even online. There's state sales tax, local state and municipality Internet tax and even European style value added tax (VAT). You'll need to make sure your plugin can handle your situation.
- **Shipping:** Figuring out shipping costs can be a nightmare. Make sure your plugin can handle your preferred provider (USPS, FedEx, UPS, etc.) as well as your preferred setup (flat rate shipping, weight-based shipping, destination-based shipping, etc.)
- **Discounts:** Sales are the cornerstone of retail. But can you offer the deals you want without giving away the store? You'll want options, including buy x get y free, targeted discounts, conditional discounts, free shipping, as well as flat and percent discounts.

- **Variants & Add-Ons:** Shopping can get confusing when you have multiple products with minor variations, like the same hoodie in three colors or add-ons like a carrying case for an ereader. You want the flexibility to give your customers choices and upsell them on options without creating headaches.

Never mind the rest of your site. Keeping your site current can be hard enough without considering ecommerce. With ecommerce money is flowing directly through your site and there are all kinds of options and variables that can drastically impact your bottom line. It's complicated. And you've got to wade through it to increase your margins. You need a tool that can help you crack the complications. Nothing will make ecommerce easy, but the right tools will get you closer.

What Do I Need to Start?

There are some big questions you need to answer before you start your WordPress ecommerce project. It's important that you slow down and ask the right questions before you plough forward with a less-than-ideal solution.

First things first, we're not going to raise the big business questions. There's a whole host of questions you should ask before setting out to open a store. We're assuming you've found your niche, have access to products, put a business plan together and tested the market. We're assuming you're ready for the next step of building your site. If not, you better go back to the beginning.

Website Questions

Let's start with basic questions about the site itself:

- Are you integrating with a current site or starting from scratch? Do you need a website in addition to your store or just a store? This could bring about limitations or opportunities, depending on what you need.
- What are your design needs? Will an off-the-shelf theme work or do you need something customized? Is this minor tweaking you can do yourself or will you need to hire a designer?
- What are your development needs? Will the standard ecommerce plugin options work or will you need to tap into the API and create something unique? If so is that something you can handle or will you need to hire a developer?

- Do you have hosting in place to handle the needs of your store?
Can it scale as your store grows?

Backend/Behind the Scenes

Next, you need to consider how things will work behind the scenes:

- How will you process payments? Do you need to set up a payment gateway? Will it work with your bank? What kind of monthly costs and transaction fees are you willing to pay?
- Do you need a system to track inventory? What happens when you run low? How do you know when to reorder product?
- How will you handle warehousing and shipping? Did you factor packaging weight and cost into your shipping prices?
- How do you manage your catalog? Do you have lots of products that need lots of updating and management?
- What kind of reporting and stats do you need?
- Do you have a backup plan in place?

Store Experience Questions

Finally let's talk about the experience a customer has visiting your site:

- How are you accepting payments? Do you have multiple options?
What's the checkout process like?
- What kind of shipping services will you offer?
- How will you handle customer support?
- How do you want customers to navigate your store?

The more you can tackle these questions up front, the better idea you'll have of what you want. That will make picking an ecommerce plugin a lot easier.

What About Taxes?

Contrary to popular (and willful) misconception, you often do need to pay sales tax for goods purchased online. In many U.S. states paying or reporting sales tax online is up to the customer. There's a lot of tax evasion going on there, but as a retailer you're off the hook.

However, in many states, you are required to collect sales tax when you sell to someone within your state. In a few states, including New York, California and Ohio, more local taxes have to be added for local municipalities. And more fun: The specific rates vary by jurisdiction.

Some plugins will help you out with this, but some leave you high and dry. You'll want to talk to a tax expert to see what's required for your store and make sure your plugin can handle it.

If you're selling internationally, there are the tax codes of all kinds of countries to contend with. Value-added tax (VAT) is common in Europe, Mexico, Canada, Australia and more. Some European countries also require inclusive taxes where you include the tax in the prices of your products. If that's going to impact you, make sure your plugin can do it.

Bottom line: You should talk to a tax expert to make sure you're doing it right. WordPress or your chosen plugin are not tax experts. However, a good plugin should allow you to do almost anything the IRS requires. So that's a relief.

What About Shipping?

If there's anything that's going to give you a headache in ecommerce, it's shipping. If you don't set it up right, you could lose your shirt with shipping costs that are too low or lose your customers with shipping costs that are sky high. Shipping costs are the [number one cause](#) of shopping cart abandonment. So make sure you're doing shipping right.

The Headaches of Shipping

Shipping is complex. It's hard to automate a shipping price that covers your costs without being too expensive for customers. The problem is the variables are nearly infinite: the quantity, size and weight of items; the size and weight limitations of shipping providers; the size and weight constraints of packaging; whether or not items can be Tetrised into the same box and not damage each other; special packaging required for fragile items; the destination; tracking; insurance. See? Headache.

However you want to handle those variables, your plugin should be flexible enough to do it. Or at the very least, be aware of the corner you're backing yourself into.

How Do You Want to Ship?

There are a lot of ways to price your shipping. Ideally you want a system that finds the right balance between covering your actual shipping costs and not being overly expensive for your customers. Depending on your business model, it might be wise to err on one side or the other. (Value customer service? Plan to eat some of the shipping. Tight margins? Expect some customer complaints about the cost of shipping.)

Here are some ways you can approach shipping:

- **Flat Rates:** This is a fairly simple approach where you set a flat rate based on a variable. Maybe there's a set shipping price based on each item or each order. This can work well if your orders are all fairly uniform: If customers always order one product and all your products are the same size, the shipping will always be the same.
- **Tiered Rates:** A more complicated approach is to offer tiered rates based on different variables. You could base it on the quantity of items ordered, the total price of the order, the weight of the products, etc. So maybe 1 item is \$5, 2-5 items is \$10, and more than 5 items is \$15. A tiered approach gives you a lot more flexibility to narrow in on the actual shipping cost.
- **Live Shipping Rates:** A more accurate approach is to go with live shipping rates directly from your shipping provider. Depending on your plugin, these solutions usually require some type of paid add-on to the plugin. But the real benefit is that you get much more accurate pricing.
- **Free Shipping:** Finally, you can just give shipping away. This can do away with the headache entirely. Not every shop can afford this, but it's becoming more and more common. In many cases, it might work to offer free shipping at a specific price point, say free shipping on orders of \$25 or more. A good free shipping price point is just above the amount of your average order.

Best Shipping Practices

With all these options, it can be hard to figure out what's the best solution. That best solution will also vary from shop to shop. But in general, it helps to limit the variables.

Here are few tips:

- Choose a single shipping provider. Too many choices can be too complicated. Most of the time the U.S. Postal Service is the cheapest option.
- If you can fit your stuff in flat rate boxes, do it.
- Free shipping is a huge bonus if you can pull it off. It makes all these complications just disappear. Just look at the stats: [75%](#) are likely to abandon their cart without free shipping. Plus [93%](#) are likely to buy more if shipping is free. Finally, it's becoming common: [52%](#) of ecommerce transactions included free shipping in 2011.
- Offer three basic choices: Express, priority and standard or maybe fast, regular and free (after a threshold price point). That should give your customers all the options they need.
- Offer shipping time estimates. Let people know when they can expect to get their goods (remember to under-promise and over-deliver). [24%](#) abandoned their cart when no estimated delivery date was given.
- Give customers an estimate on shipping as early as you can in the process (this may require asking for their ZIP code).
- If you're doing shipping based on weight, remember to include the weight of any packaging and the box.
- If you're using the U.S. Postal Service, check out Stamps.com or other services for printing shipping labels, insurance, tracking and more. There is a monthly fee, but it's often more than covered by cheaper shipping costs.

- If you have a retail location, offer in-store pickup. This can take the hassle out of shipping and give shoppers that instant gratification they love.
- Don't be slow. [38%](#) bailed if shipping would take more than a week.

[Research](#) has shown that 45% of online retailers make money on shipping, 45% lose money and only 10% break even. It's hard to get shipping right. You shouldn't have to lose money, but you also shouldn't be charging your customers a premium. Try to find that break-even balance that covers your costs and doesn't drive customers away.

What About Discounts?

Promotions and sales drive retail. Your ecommerce site should be able to handle whatever discounts you want to offer, whether it's the standard holiday sale or something bizarre like free shipping on puppies. The fact is that discounts seal the deal. When asked about [features that influence a buyer's decision](#), seven of the top eight were some type of deal. (The sole non-discount factor? Free returns.)

You want to tempt your customers with discount offers. That means your software needs to be able to handle whatever deal you want to offer. You should be able to offer:

- Different kinds of deals: buy one get one free, percentages off, amount off, etc.
- Based on different conditions: quantity, order total, price, category, etc.
- Within certain limitations: timeframe, customers, orders, stock, etc.

It can get kind of complex, but it's a powerful way to offer discounts, encourage bulk purchasing and reward your best customers.

Then you'll need to see what works. Experiment! Try different deals, sales and promotions to see what works. Different types, conditions and limitations will work better at different stores, so you'll need to experiment and see what works best at your shop.

You'll also want a way to share those deals. Make sure you're collecting fans on social media and through an email list so you can share specials. Treat your best customers right.

On-Site vs. Off-Site Payments

When you're building an ecommerce site, one of the big questions you need to ask is how you're accepting payments. You can do on-site payments where all payment processing is handled on your site, or you can do off-site payments where that payment processing is handled somewhere else (like PayPal or Google Checkout). It's a big decision, but most WordPress ecommerce plugins will let you do it either way. That's good, because each approach has its pros and cons.

Off-site Payments

When you handle payment processing off site, someone else does the heavy lifting, so you get it pretty easy. The big downside is that you're sending people to a different site to complete their transaction. Let's break it down:

Pros:

- Quick and easy to set up.
- No overhead.
- Liability is pushed to the off-site processors.

Cons:

- Extra checkout steps for the customer
- No guarantee that customers will come back to your site when they're done checking out.
- Little to no control over the checkout experience.

So in short, off-site is fast and easy, but it comes with a hefty price of more work for your customer. If you want to mitigate the potential loss of making it harder on your customer, give clear and succinct instructions on how the checkout process works.

On-site Payments

If you're serious about ecommerce you're probably going to do on-site payment processing. It's the serious, full-service approach that puts you in control. The downside is you have to get it all set up. Let's take a look:

Pros:

- Seamless experience for the customer—they never leave your site.
- Simpler experience—fewer steps and less opportunity for confusion.
- You control the checkout experience so you can do what you want—set it up however you like, offer upsells or special offers for their next purchase.

Cons:

- Requires a merchant account, payment gateway, SSL certificate and PCI compliance. Sound complicated? You betcha.
- All that extra complication doesn't come cheap. In addition to merchant account fees, most plugins charge extra for the compatible add-on.
- Extra complication means extra setup.
- All that extra work means time. You might be hard pressed to launch an on-site ecommerce system overnight.

On-site payments are a lot easier for the customer and can mean better conversion for you. Some setups are easier than others (PayPal Pro is pretty straightforward), but that usually has the tradeoff of

higher fees and/or less control. Just make sure you do your research and know all the ins and outs like chargeback, reserve amounts, monthly limits and more.

Good Either Way

The real bonus of building an ecommerce site with WordPress is that you're in control. You could launch your site today with an off-site payment system and upgrade to an on-site system when you're ready. You have loads of options and aren't tied down to a single checkout system.

Other Worthy Features

As we've explored building an ecommerce site with WordPress we've covered taxes, shipping, discounts and payment options. Those are some big-ticket items, but there are other cool features you're going to want in your ecommerce site. Here's a sampling of must-have features:

- **Inventory Tracking:** One must-have feature for ecommerce sites that want to run with the big boys is inventory tracking. We're talking SKUs, bulk product updating and even sending notifications when you're running low on a popular item.
- **Variants & Add-Ons:** Sometimes your products can get complicated with different options and extras. Variants might include size or color options—something that doesn't require an entirely separate product listing. Add-ons are extras that might go nicely with whatever the customer is buying. It's basically an up-sell option, but one that's tied closely to a specific product. For example if you sell yo-yo's, an obvious add-on is extra yo-yo string.
- **Related Products:** Another popular cross-selling feature is to show related products.
- **Customer Accounts:** One standard ecommerce feature is to allow customers to create their own login. This can speed up repeat purchases, but you have to be careful about requiring customers to log in—forcing customers to create an account can kill their purchase.

- **Product Types:** What kind of products are you selling? Physical, virtual, services, downloads, donations, subscriptions, membership? Not every store is simply shipping goods. If you're selling something different—or one day might—you'll need to make sure your plugin can handle it. Some are better suited and offer special features for different types of products (like managing download links).
- **WordPress Integration:** How easily can you integrate with WordPress? You should be able to seamlessly plug your products across your site. Use simple short codes on pages or posts, or use widgets across your site to highlight products, show off bestsellers, related products and more. Any respectable plugin should make this easy.
- **International:** Will you be selling worldwide? Better make sure your plugin can handle translation and localized numbers, dates and currency formats.

Best Practices for Ecommerce

We've talked about why you should and shouldn't use WordPress for ecommerce. We think it's a great way to go. But as with any choice, you'll need to optimize all the variables. Below are some best practices to make your ecommerce site a success:

- **Good Photos:** High quality, zoomable product images from multiple angles are a must. One of the frustrations of shopping online is you can't always see what you're getting. Give 'em a good show. This will help minimize returns and complaints.
- **Product Videos:** Take it a step beyond photos and offer video of your products. Give your customers a bigger, better view of what they're buying.
- **Descriptions:** Your product descriptions need to be well written, engaging and informative. Don't just stick with the dull copy from the manufacturer. While detail is good, don't make them too long. It's a product description, not a blog post.
- **Titles:** Write titles as people would search for them and you'll get an improved rank in search engines, plus better sales.
- **Transparent Policies:** Instill confidence by having clear, easy to read and readily available policies, FAQs and procedures regarding returns, defects, items that never arrive, etc. You want to put people at ease so they're willing to do business with you.

- **Simple Registration:** Registration needs to be simple, quick and voluntary. Don't force people to do it and offer an incentive when they do (it could be as simple as \$1 off their current order).
- **Short Process:** The checkout process shouldn't drag on and on. Make it short and quick. Only ask for what you need to complete the process. Some stores like to put all the options on a single page and others like to break it into a few steps. But keep it short and simple.
- **Clear Contact Info:** How can customers contact you if they have a question? Make contact info clear and easy to find. If you really want to impress customers, offer a phone number for immediate answers.
- **Answer Questions Quickly:** You need to answer questions as soon as possible. Customers are ready to buy but they're waiting on you to answer their questions. Don't make them wait.
- **Stats:** Have good stats so you know what people are buying, where they're coming from, what's hot and what's not. Google Analytics can provide some of this. Your ecommerce plugin should provide more. An especially handy stat is search queries so you can see what people search for and add keywords and items to help them find what they want.
- **Big Buttons:** Customers like big buttons. Make your "buy" buttons large, prominent and above the fold.
- **Make People Happy:** Anyone can stick a product in a box and drop it in the mail. But standout service will win you customers for the long haul.
- **Get Social:** Add links to social services like Pinterest and Facebook. Product reviews and ratings can also be helpful. Out of the box you can use the WordPress commenting

system for reviews and there are loads of extra WordPress plugins that can handle ratings.

- **Upsell:** A cell phone needs a case, a DVD player needs a cable, a stylish pair of pants needs a matching belt. The upsell is a way to boost your profit margin while offering the customer something they need. In brick and mortar retail this is the job of an astute salesperson. Online you can let your website do it.
- **Go Mobile:** You're planning for mobile, right? Whether you're doing a specific mobile site or a responsive site that will work on mobile, you need to have a plan for mobile. Make sure the purchase process is as easy as possible on mobile. Be careful with mobile-specific stats though as mobile is a different beast. A high cart abandonment rate might be OK on mobile, since people are frequently shopping on mobile and buying later.
- **Raise Your Prices:** Experiment with your pricing. Often you can raise your prices and the boost in your profit margin will make up for any drop in sales. (This is exactly the kind of tip that will only work in certain cases, so experiment!)
- **Work with Options:** Offering products with different options—like color—can be a great way to grab customers. It can also leave you with loads of extra, unpopular stock. Find a way to make that work for you. Some retailers offer the unpopular colors for a buck or two cheaper. Others offer a “don't care” color choice for customers who aren't picky, giving the retailer a way to unload whatever color isn't moving. Whatever issue you're having, find a creative way to make it work for you.
- **It's Not All About the Homepage:** Especially with ecommerce sites, people will often go directly to product pages from search results and bypass your homepage. So

don't put crucial details only on the homepage. Stuff like sales, email sign up and more should go somewhere site-wide, like a sidebar, footer or header.

- **It's Not All Sales:** Don't assume that ecommerce is always about taking credit card numbers and making sales. You can use ecommerce software to set up a site that delivers quotes or finalizes sales orders to be followed up by a salesperson.
- **Experiment:** You'll need to try different things and see what works for your site. Try something, test it and see what works. One site had a 5% boost in conversions simply by changing the 'buy' button from blue to green.

Just remember: ecommerce best practices are a tricky thing since everyone's site is different. What works for one store won't necessarily work for another. One industry's best practice is another industry's worst idea ever. So you'll need to take these tips and try them out yourself. Experiment. See what works. Discover your own best practices.

Getting Started Quickly

Need an ecommerce site right now? No problem. You can slap together a WordPress ecommerce site pretty quickly. But the biggest bonus? While you can launch it quickly, it's also a solution that will work well down the road as your store grows.

You can install WordPress and your favorite ecommerce plugin and get your site up and running in a matter of hours. Don't misunderstand—it's a lot of work and you could probably only launch a small shop that fast. But it's possible. Here's how you can do it:

- 1. Domain & Hosting:** You'll need to have a domain and hosting set up and ready to go. A new domain could take up to 24 hours to start working, so if you don't have it yet, you better get it now. If you need help sorting out hosting, check out our free ebook, [How To Pick Web Hosting Without a Computer Science Degree](#).
- 2. Download & Install:** Next you'll want to download and install WordPress and your ecommerce plugin of choice. You also might want to install an ecommerce-friendly theme that's designed to work with your plugin (we offer several Builder child themes designed for ecommerce, including [Threads](#), [Thrifty](#), [Market](#) and [Depot](#)).
- 3. WordPress Setup:** You'll want to add the basics under Settings (especially under General, Discussion and Permalinks) as well as add some pages and then set up your menu under Appearance. You may also want to add any plugins you'll need, like [BackupBuddy](#), All-in-One SEO or others. Our free [Getting Started with WordPress](#) ebook can walk you through everything.

- 4. Plugin Setup:** Now it's time to setup shop. Ecommerce is complicated, so there's a lot to do. It will all vary depending on your plugin, so we can only hit the highlights:
- How you process payments is a major setup item to tackle. Since this is a quick launch you'll be using an off-site payment system, such as PayPal or Google Checkout or maybe a quick on-site system like PayPal Pro. You'll need to set up those accounts, if you don't have them already.
 - Next is shipping. You'll want to set up your rates and install any add-ons you need.
 - Tax time. Add any specific tax rates you need. You might want to consult your accountant or tax advisor to make sure you do it right.
- 5. Content:** Now you're ready to populate your site with content. Add products, images, descriptions, prices, etc. Add some pages to your site—an about page, contact page, maybe an FAQ or policy section that explains how you handle returns, defects, etc. If you're going to have a blog, write an initial post. Add content to your widgets to highlight products or link to your social channels. Take a look at our suggested best practices in the previous section to see what you can implement on the quick.

That's it. Your ecommerce site can be up and running with WordPress in no time. Go!

Secure Your Shop

Security is serious business for any store, and that's just as true online. You need to take some basic steps to secure your shop. We've walked you through building an ecommerce site with WordPress and now we'll show you how to make it safe.

Ecommerce sites can't work without trust. Nobody's going to hand over their credit card info if your site gets hacked. It's a cliché for a reason: Better safe than sorry.

Security Ideas

First, here are two big picture ideas you need to understand about security:

- **There's Always a Risk:** You can never be 100% secure. Good security is about minimizing that risk. If anybody tries to sell you a 100% secure solution, they're scamming you.
- **Don't Blame WordPress:** The haters like to say that WordPress isn't secure. That's not necessarily true—it depends on how you set up and use WordPress. The reality is that 17% of the world's websites are using WordPress, which makes it a huge target. So you need to be smart. Many security issues have little to do with WordPress and more to do with server vulnerabilities, cross-contamination and poor passwords. Bad decisions can undermine your site, and that's true whether you're using WordPress or any other solution.

Security Tips

There are always things you can do to minimize the risk of your site being hacked. Below are a few suggestions, but don't take our word for it. Talk to a security expert and make sure you're doing everything you need to be doing.

- **Strong Passwords:** You need to be using strong passwords for all your ecommerce related logins. Use numbers, capitals, characters and make it long and unique. Your WordPress password can even include spaces and be a passphrase. Don't use the same password in multiple places. Yes, remembering all these passwords is tough, but a hacked site is worse.
- **Don't Use "Admin":** WordPress will often use "admin" as the default username for the primary account holder. If you use "admin" that's one less variable hackers need to get access to your site. Pick a unique username and if you already use "admin," [change it](#).
- **Manage Users:** Go a step better than avoiding the "admin" username and do a good job managing your users. Not everybody needs admin access. The more people with admin access, the more chances to hack your site. Also be sure all those users have good passwords. Your own good password is useless if another admin has a weak one.
- **Limit Failed Logins:** One way hackers can crack your site like an egg is to throw thousands or even millions of passwords at you login screen. These computerized brute force attempts can easily be successful if your password has been compromised or isn't secure. An easy way to stop these attacks is by limiting the number of failed login attempts. Several plugins offer this capability, including [Limit Login Attempts](#).

- **Salt Your Keys:** Huh? This is a security approach that clamps down your site's cookies by using some randomly generated codes. Still confused? Don't worry, you don't need to understand it to take advantage of it. Here's a brief [how-to for salt keys](#).
- **Hide Your Database:** You can't crack a safe if you can't find it, and likewise a hacker can't mess with your site if they can't find the backend files. You can [change the database prefix](#), which basically changes the default file names to something random and can deter some attacks.
- **Don't Store Credit Card Data:** This is usually dependent on your payment gateway, but if you can help it don't store credit card data on your site. Let your payment gateway handle those security issues.
- **Keep It Current:** New releases to WordPress, themes and plugins come out fairly often, in some cases due to security issues. Keep everything current to avoid these kinds of vulnerabilities. You'd rather break your site with an update than risk a break-in, trust us. Also, just because a plugin is deactivated doesn't mean it's not a threat. You need to delete the plugin entirely.
- **Security Plugins:** You can also look into adding some plugins or services that tackle security. Some of the best include [Sucuri](#), [WordFence](#) and [Secure WordPress](#).
- **Back It Up:** Use something like [BackupBuddy](#) to keep safe, secure, automatic backups of your site so you can get back to business quickly if things go bad. As a bonus, BackupBuddy also includes a Sucuri-powered malware scan.

These tips are a start. Security is a big deal and you need to take the right precautions. To learn more about security we highly recommend you check out this webinar hosted by Dre Armeda of Sucuri: [How Anyone Can Hack Your WordPress Site in Less Than 5 Minutes and How To Prevent It](#).

Help!

Building an ecommerce site with WordPress puts you in control—but you'll still want help. Questions are going to come up and something will inevitably go wrong, so technical support is a must. That's good because help is ready. Here are some of your support options:

- Help options will vary greatly between ecommerce plugins. Make sure the plugin you choose has the help you need. Look for support forums, documentation and customer support. Check out their documentation to see how thorough it is. Click through their forums and see how active they are and if questions are appropriately answered. Ask around to see how responsive their customer support is. You'll find complaints online for everything, so sometimes it's better to hear it from someone you know.
- iThemes offers free [WordPress tutorial videos](#) as well as a [support forum](#) and [documentation](#) for our products.
- For general WordPress help you can turn to the official WordPress [documentation](#) and [support forums](#).
- iThemes offers premium training through [WebDesign.com](#), a membership-based community with over 400 hours of training videos and new webinars every week. It's a good way to learn what you need to know to maintain your site yourself.
- If you're really in over your head and need someone to take over, iThemes offers custom WordPress development through our [Creative Services](#) division.

WordPress prides itself on empowering people to run their own sites. The WordPress community is big on DIY. But there's also help available when you need it.