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WORKBOOK

YOUR DIGITAL JOURNEY: HOW TO START, GROW, AND SUCCEED ONLINE

SESSION 1

MARKET ANALYSIS FOR ONLINE SALES



Introduction and objectives

Please introduce yourself.

What are you hoping to learn through this workshop?

ANSWER THE QUESTION



So: you know you want to sell online. You probably also have an idea of where you want to sell, and who you want to sell to.

What information do you think you would need to make sure your target market and customers are the right ones for your business to make a profit selling online?

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Watch the following video and take notes.

VIDEO SCRIPT

Introduction to Market Analysis for E-commerce

So, you're thinking of selling online. That's great! Thanks to e-commerce, the world has really opened up for small businesses. Today, even a farmer, a tailor, or a soap maker in a small town can reach customers around the world, using nothing more than their smartphone.

But here's the catch: while many businesses do have an online presence, only a small percentage truly succeed at selling online at scale. Why is that?

Simply put, businesses too often jump into e-commerce without doing their homework. They create Facebook pages or join online marketplaces... but no one's buying. Not because their products aren't good, but because they haven't clearly defined their value proposition, their target market, or what makes them different.

That's where market analysis comes in.

What is market analysis?

While it may sound complicated, market analysis simply refers to the process of evaluating a market to understand its size, trends, customer behaviours, competitors, and potential opportunities. It involves gathering and analyzing data on factors like your possible market positioning, consumer demand, market access conditions, and any other relevant elements that could help you better understand the conditions in your target market.

Market analysis helps you avoid costly mistakes. It helps you figure out who your customers are, what they need, how much they're willing to pay, and how to reach them effectively. It's about making informed decisions rather than guessing.

So, before you spend money on ads or set up a store, take a step back. This video will walk you through the fundamentals of market analysis, the principles to follow, and some simple tools that can help — even if you're just starting out.

Let's begin by exploring the principles of market analysis for e-commerce.

The principles of market analysis

1. Start with a strong value proposition

Your value proposition is your unique promise to your customers. It answers the question: "Why should someone buy from you and not from someone else?"

This might be:

- The unique quality of your product (such as handmade shea butter soap from Ghana);
- Your price point;
- Your delivery time or local sourcing; or
- Your story — like being a women-owned cooperative.

A strong value proposition is focused, easy to understand, and speaks directly to your customer's needs.

For example, a strong value proposition might be:

"Handcrafted beaded jewelry made by Maasai women — shipped globally with care."

2. Know your target customer

Not everyone is your customer. Trying to sell to "everyone" means that your

messaging becomes vague and ineffective.

Define:

- Where do they live? (for example: urban professionals in Nairobi; eco-conscious buyers in Germany, etc.)
- What's their age group?
- What are their interests?
- What problems are they trying to solve?

Here, it is crucial that you emphasize understanding your customers' pains and gains. What does this mean?

Well, all customers have both "pains"–namely problems, frustrations or challenges that they face, and "gains"–referring to benefits, outcomes or positive experiences that they seek or would value having.

Your job when doing market analysis is to identify your target customers' pains and gains, and articulate how you would solve them.

Doing this is simpler than it sounds. Just ask yourself: "What problems am I solving for my customers?" This will help you identify their pains. Then ask yourself

"What emotional or practical benefit am I offering them?" This will help you identify their gains.

Whether you're selling organic honey or school backpacks, market analysis helps you uncover what matters most to your customers — and speak to it.

People buy products, but they connect with stories, values, and solutions.

3. Understand the market access conditions you will face

"Online" doesn't mean "borderless." Even if you're active in e-commerce, selling internationally involves dealing with:

- Shipping costs and reliability;

- Tariffs and customs rules;
- Packaging standards; and
- Mobile payment or e-wallet access.

Without a good understanding of such market access conditions, opportunities that might have seemed promising at first glance may actually turn out to be difficult to realize, or even wholly unprofitable!

For example: Even though a small fashion brand in Tanzania may benefit from trade preferences under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) when selling to East Africa, they still need to know the delivery times and costs.

Don't overlook domestic e-commerce either — local online sales through platforms like Jumia or WhatsApp Business can be profitable and build your foundation before you "go international."

Tools to support your market analysis activities

OK. So now we have an idea of what market analysis is, why its important to succeed in your e-commerce activities, and some of the core principles that make it up.

Now, you actually have to start your analysis! But how do you go about this? Well, the good news is that there are a number of free tools available, both from the International Trade Centre and other organizations, that you can use to turbocharge your effectiveness. Let's look at each of them in turn.

1. ITC market analysis tools

The International Trade Centre (ITC) has several free, easy-to-use tools that businesses can use to support their market analysis activities. They include:

- Trade Map: See which countries import products like yours.
- Market Access Map: Learn about tariffs and regulations in different markets!
- Export Potential Map (exportpotential.intracen.org): Identify promising markets for what you have to offer!

All these tools were developed specifically with exporters from developing countries in mind, and support for them is available in multiple languages.

2. Google Trends

Want to know what people are searching for on the Internet? Google Trends shows you search interest for specific keywords over time — by country or even by region. This can be gold if you want to identify places interested in what you have to sell

For example:

Let's say you're selling organic skincare. You can check if Internet searches for "natural face cream" are increasing in a specific country you might be interested in selling to. Let's say, "Canada." You can also add in more details, such as, for example, whether interest in "natural face cream" is year-round, or rather seasonal, such as during Canada's famously harsh winters.

You can also compare different terms, like "eco soap" and "vegan soap," to see which resonates more with your audience.

3. Online Cost & Pricing Calculators

Before setting prices or deciding on a market, it's important to calculate your total "landed cost." This is the total cost – for you – that includes:

- Your product cost (how much it costs you to produce your product);
- Your packaging cost;
- Your shipping cost;
- Any tariffs you might have to pay;
- Any platform fees you might be charged (if you sell on online platforms like Amazon or Etsy); and
- All the taxes you will owe

There are various online pricing tools and calculators to help you arrive at an accurate landed cost for your product. A good example of one is ITC's E-commerce Cost Calculator. It can help you easily compare selling fees between platforms

such as Amazon, eBay, Etsy or Shopify, enabling you to drill down and calculate your margins on each!

Some e-commerce platforms, such as Shopify or Etsy, also offer their own pricing tools. Of course, if you prefer, you can also create your own spreadsheet and do your calculations yourself.

4. Social Media Research

You can do a lot of research on your competitor and gather significant insight on your customers by checking Facebook, Instagram, and online marketplaces. What are people saying in comments or reviews?

Look for:

- Common customer complaints;
- Price ranges; and
- Questions people frequently ask

The best part? You can do a lot of social media research without spending any money! All you need is some time and curiosity.

5. Talk to real people

Don't underestimate the power of simply asking your current or potential customers what they want directly. You can do this in person, via WhatsApp groups, or through some simple social media polls.

For small businesses, this kind of local insight can be more valuable than expensive reports.

Conclusion

So, what have we seen?

Well, e-commerce has created massive opportunities for small businesses all around the world — and yes, even in rural areas. But it's important to remember that

the ones who succeed in selling online aren't just lucky. They do their research. They do their market analysis, in other words.

As we have seen in this video, market analysis helps you:

- Know your customer and your value for them;
- Understand the market entry barriers you might face;
- Calculate your costs and pricing; and, ultimately,
- Make smarter decisions, based on facts.

And the best part? You don't need a big budget or a degree to get started. Many of the tools are free. Your customers are online — and with the right strategy, you can meet them there.

Pause. Analyze. Plan. Then go digital — and go global..

KNOWLEDGE CHECK



1) Based on what we have seen so far, why do many small businesses fail in e-commerce?

2) In your own words, explain what each of the following steps for conducting market analysis for e-commerce involves:

a. Define your value proposition

b. Understand the needs and behaviour of your target customers

c. Understand the market access conditions in your target market.

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d. Use tools and research to test market opportunities

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3) Match each tool with its primary purpose:

Tool	Purpose
A. Google Trends	1. Understand tariffs and regulations
B. Market Access Map	2. Explore search interest for keywords
C. Export Potential Map	3. Find promising markets and products
D. Trade Map	4. Identify where products like yours are imported

4) What are some ways in which you can work to better understand the needs and preferences of your customers?

5) Why is it important to calculate your “total landed cost” before setting prices for online sales?

COFFEE BREAK



EXERCISE – SCENARIO

Sandali is a Lebanese footwear company. The SME, founded in 2018, produces sandals locally. It currently sells in-person, through "traditional" shops. However, the owner would like to develop her brand and start selling online, both in Lebanon and internationally.

Examples of products produced by the company:



Question 1: Identify the HS code for this company's product.

Run an interest search for "leather sandals," "footwear," or "open-toe shoes."

Would different types of sandals (i.e. rubber vs. leather) fall under the same code?

Write the HS code(s) you have identified for Sandali in the text box.

Question 2: Sandali is aiming to export to the United Kingdom. Given this, identify whether it could benefit from any preferential trade agreements and if so, which ones.

We recommend using ITC's **Market Access Map** (https://www.macmap.org/) and HS code 640359. Remember to set the "Exporting Country" to "Lebanon" and the Destination Country" to "United Kingdom"

Question 3: Use Google Trends to compare the search interest for "leather sandals" (or a related term) in the UK vs US over the past 12 months. What differences do you see?

Use trends.google.com to input terms like "leather sandals," "summer sandals," or "handmade sandals" and compare search popularity by country and over time. What trends do you notice? Are there seasonal spikes? Which market shows stronger or more consistent demand?



Discussion

Think about your own business and your own plans for selling online.

What is an assumption that you have in terms of the type of customer or geographical destination you are intending to sell to?

What is the reasoning behind making this assumption?

Would you be required to modify your value proposition based on this assumption?

WRAP-UP

So, what have we learned?

- **Market analysis helps businesses make smarter export decisions** — from identifying HS codes and trade preferences to assessing market demand through platforms like Trade Map, Market Access Map, and Google Trends.
- **A clear value proposition tailored to your target market is essential** to stand out in competitive e-commerce spaces, especially when entering new international markets.

Understanding practical barriers like tariffs, logistics, and consumer behaviour enables small businesses to plan more effectively and increase their chances of success when going global.

Q&A

Do you have any questions for the facilitator before we finish this session?

END OF SESSİON

Thank you very much for your participation.

SESSION 2

CREATE EFFECTIVE CONTENT TO SELL ONLINE

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

Welcome!

The objectives of this session are to:

- Evaluate why creating good content is important;
- Assess the different types of content you will need to create to sell online; and
- Evaluate what makes content effective to boost online sales.

ANSWER THE QUESTION



Is the following statement true or false?

“With the rapid spread of artificial intelligence (AI), creating effective content for online sales is now easier than ever before!”

☐ Yes ☐ No

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Watch the following video and take notes.

VIDEO SCRIPT

Creating Effective Content for Online Sales

In today's online world, customers make decisions fast — sometimes in just a few seconds. If your content doesn't catch their attention and build trust quickly, they'll scroll away or click to a competitor.

That's why good quality content is essential if you want to succeed in e-commerce.

Think about it:

when you walk into a clean, organized shop with helpful staff, you're more likely to make a purchase. The same goes for your online storefront — your photos, product descriptions, company information, and even the way you reply to questions all help build a positive first impression.

Trust is everything here. Especially when you're selling online — where customers can't touch or try your product — they need to believe in your brand and feel confident buying from you.

But here's the good news: quality content also makes economic sense.

- It increases the perceived value of your products — helping you charge fair prices;
- It improves your visibility on platforms like Google and social media;
- It strengthens your brand identity — making you stand out from the crowd; and
- It saves you time — with clear, complete info, you spend less time answering repeat questions.

In this video, we'll explore how to create content that helps your business look professional, build trust, and boost sales — using tools that are free or affordable, even for small businesses in developing countries.

Let's begin.

Steps to create e-commerce content

There are three main steps to creating effective content for e-commerce:

1. Capture the information — take notes, photos, videos, and gather the full story of your product and business.
2. Edit the content — clean up your photos, write clear descriptions, and adapt it to your target customers.
3. Organize everything — so you can find, update, and share your content easily.

Different people in your business may help with this — from the owner to a photographer to someone writing copy. Keep in mind, though, that it may be worth your while to get some professional help if you feel that you don't have the necessary skills to create solid content "in-house." It's probably a better idea to pay for a professional photographer, rather than try to save money but end up with unattractive photos of your products cluttering your online storefront!

Different types of content

E-commerce content comes in different forms. There is company content, product content, and operational content, which is made up of things like policies and pricing. Each plays a role in convincing customers to buy from you.

Company content

Your company content is what helps customers understand who you are, what you stand for, and why they should trust you. Basically, it's all the materials that describe your company as a whole. The main piece of "company content" that will go on your website is your company description. This is "your story." You need to

keep it short, friendly, and clear. It should include:

- Your business name and location;
- What you sell or do;
- What makes you different — your values, your history, your mission; and
- How customers can contact you

You can also include a photo or short video of you or your team. This makes your brand feel more "human" and relatable.

For example:

"We are a women-led craft business in Dakar, Senegal, creating handmade home decorations using traditional techniques. Our mission is to support local artisans and bring West African creativity to the world."

Product content

Let's move on to your product content. This is what helps customers understand, trust, and fall in love with what you're selling. Note that what we call "product content" here can also apply to services. But for ease of understanding, we will just refer to it as "product content" in this video. Here's what it's made up of:

1. Product title and description

Your product's title is basically just what you call your product on your online storefront. It should be short, descriptive, and include keywords that your customers might search for.

For example:

"Rustic Handwoven Basket – Medium Size – Natural Brown"

Sure, it's not very "romantic." But think like a customer. What would they type into Google?

Next is your product's description. This is a longer paragraph that shows up just under your product title. While there is no "correct" way to write a description, using a short emotional or persuasive sentence is a good way to start. The aim is to "hook" the customer from the start, with a good explanation of what makes your product special. Then, follow with some technical details, such as size, material, and care instructions).

For example:

"Bring natural charm into your home with this handwoven basket. Made from sustainable palm leaves by artisans in Sierra Leone. Measures 30cm wide and 25cm high. Perfect for storage or display."

2. Photos and video content

Photos and other visual elements are absolutely key if you want to be successful in e-commerce — they're the first thing that most people look at online. Poor quality photos are a surefire way to make potential customers quickly click away, without even giving you products a second glance. Here's some tips if you want to take some good quality photos yourself:

- Use your phone's back camera — it's better quality than the front one.
- Shoot your product from multiple angles — front, side, top, close-up.
- Use natural lighting near a window.
- Keep the background clean and white.
- Don't zoom — move closer instead.
- Save your photos in JPEG format. Make sure they are the right size to be uploaded to your website.

In some cases, it may be a good idea to take some videos of your product. Here's some tips to do this effectively:

- Keep it short — under 2 minutes.
- Use a tripod or other support. Nobody likes a shaking camera!
- Make it practical. Show how the product works or is used.
- Use simple editing — text overlays or background music are fine.
- End with a call to action: "Order now" or "Visit our website."

- You don't need fancy equipment — your phone and good lighting are enough!

3. SKU and HS Codes

To manage your products efficiently and avoid delays when shipping internationally, it's important to use both SKU and HS codes.

An **SKU**, or Stock Keeping Unit, is a custom code you create to track your products — like "BAG-BLK-MED" for a black medium-sized bag.

HS codes, on the other hand, are standardized 6-digit numbers used globally to classify goods for customs and shipping. Together, these codes help you stay organized and ensure your products move smoothly across borders

Operational content

Operational content in e-commerce includes all the practical information that supports transactions, such as pricing, shipping details, return policies, and terms of service. While it may not market the product directly, this content is essential for building customer trust and ensuring a smooth shopping experience. It also plays a key role in managing expectations and reducing post-purchase issues. Let's look at what this involves in detail:

1. Business terms and conditions

These are your "house rules" — simple statements that explain how your business works. Use plain language to cover:

- What you're selling and at what price;
- How people should pay you;
- Delivery details; and
- What happens in case of delays, cancellations, or complaints.

You don't need legal training to write business terms and conditions — just be clear, honest, and specific. Customers will feel more confident buying from a business that's upfront about how things work.

2. Return and refund policy

Handling customer returns is an unavoidable part of doing business online. Make it clear:

- How many days customers have to return something;
- What kind of refund you offer (whether it's money back, replacement, or store credit);
- Who pays for return shipping; and
- What condition the item must be in in order for you to accept it.

Having a clear return and refund policy written down will protect your business and give your customers peace of mind.

3. Privacy policy

A privacy policy explains how you collect, use, and protect your customers' information. Even if you're a small business, you need to let people know:

- What info you collect, whether it's their email, phone number, or anything else;
- Why you collect it (whether it's for shipping, to send updates, newsletters, etc.);
- Who you share it with (such as the shipping company, a bank, or any other third party); and
- How you keep it safe.

If you plan to sell to customers in Europe, be aware of GDPR rules — you must ask for permission to collect personal data and be ready to delete it if requested.

4. Pricing your products

Customers want to know exactly how much they're going to pay. This means that you need to show your prices clearly and consistently across all platforms, using both your local currency, as well as some internationally-used currencies such as Euros or American dollars. Make sure that you break down the different elements of your prices, including the actual product cost, as well as any shipping costs you will charge. This is also where you will want to mention whether any free shipping is available – such as for orders above $50, for example. Remember, transparent pricing builds trust, which will help your business!

Tools that you can use to create e-commerce content

Today, there are a number of useful tools that you can use to create attractive and effective e-commerce content, even if you aren't great at writing copy or boosting your brand on social media.

AI Large Language Models, such as ChatGPT, can help you:

- Write product descriptions;
- Translate text;
- Create "About Us" content; and
- Plan social media posts.

For example, you could ask ChatGPT to help you using the following prompt:

"Write a short product description for a handmade leather wallet, focusing on quality, craftsmanship, and gift appeal."

Of course, you will still need to review and edit the text, but using artificial intelligence to come up with a first draft can save you time and give you ideas.

Another good tool to create e-commerce content is Canva. It's a free, beginner-friendly design platform that lets you easily create Instagram and Facebook posts, product labels, promotional banners, video covers, and posters. With its wide range of templates, you can produce professional-looking visuals even if you've never designed anything before

Conclusion

Let's recap.

Creating great content is not about expensive tools or perfect grammar — it's about being clear, honest, and professional.

- Quality content makes customers trust you — and helps them choose your product.

- Company content tells your story and shows you're a serious business.
- Product content gives all the details customers need to buy with confidence.
- Photos and videos show your product clearly and attractively.
- Clear pricing, terms, and privacy policies build trust and avoid confusion.
- Tools like ChatGPT and Canva make content creation easier and faster.

If you remember one thing from this video, it's this:

Your content is your online shop window. Make it clear. Make it beautiful. Make it you.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK



1) What are the benefits of having high-quality e-commerce content?

2) How can online content help reduce the number of abandoned carts in your online shop?

3) How does company content differ from product content, and why are both essential for building customer trust?

4) Match the following elements of e-commerce content with the purpose that each of them plays.

Content Type	Purpose
A. Company Description	1. Explains your rules for refunds and returns
B. Product Photos	2. Shows what you sell and who you are
C. Return Policy	3. Builds trust by visually representing your product

5) In what ways can poor operational content affect customer satisfaction and your business reputation?

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Discussion question

Creating content takes time, and is quite technical. How much time, money and effort should you be dedicating to creating content? Would it be a good idea to outsource content creation? Why, or why not?

EXERCISE – 1

Look at the following picture of a mug. Pay particular attention to the mug's key features, such as colour, texture, and materials. Then, complete the following activities.

1. Create a product title

Write a concise product title incorporating the product's distinctive features.

2. Draft a product description

Write a 50-100 words description focusing on the mug's:

- Material quality and aesthetic appeal.
- Functional benefits, such as microwave and dishwasher safety.
- Artisanal value, emphasizing individual craftsmanship.



EXERCISE – 2

Use ChatGPT to develop a compelling "About Us" page that accurately reflects the mission, vision, and values of your business.

1. Log in to ChatGPT

Go to https://chatgpt.com/auth/login

2. Prepare your prompt

Jot down the key points about your business that should be included on your "About Us" page:

- Business mission and vision
- Core values and principles
- Brief history of the business
- Achievements or milestones
- Any unique aspects that set them apart from competitors

3. Input your notes into ChatGPT as a detailed prompt.

- For example: *"Write an 'About Us' page for a company that sells eco-friendly office supplies, founded in 2015 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Our mission is to reduce office waste and promote sustainability. We pride ourselves on using recycled materials and having a transparent supply chain."*

4. Editing and refining

Review the generated text, making notes on any adjustments or refinements you might want to apply. Enhance it with personal touches or additional details that might have been missed by the AI.

WRAP-UP

So, what have we learned?

- Quality content makes customers trust you — and helps them choose your product.
- **Company content** tells your story and shows you're a serious business.
- **Product content** gives all the details customers need to buy with confidence.
- **Operational content**, such as clear pricing, terms, and privacy policies build trust and avoid confusion.

Q&A

Do you have any questions for the facilitator before we finish this session?

END OF SESSİON

Thank you very much for your participation.

SESSION 3

SELECTING THE RIGHT ONLINE SALES CHANNEL, PAYMENT AND LOGISTICS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Welcome!

The objectives of this session are to:

- Evaluate the pros and cons of different sales channels (social media, online platform, own website, in order of maturity);
- Select the appropriate channel for you to successfully conclude online sales; and
- Understand the other aspects important to selling online, such as selecting payment and logistics providers

ANSWER THE QUESTION



What kinds of things should you be considering when you choose the online channel you want to sell on?

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Watch the following video and take notes.

VIDEO SCRIPT

Introduction

E-commerce has transformed the way small businesses connect with customers. Today, you're no longer limited to your neighbourhood or even your country: you can reach buyers across borders with **just a few clicks**.

But here's the hitch: not all online sales channels work the same way. Some are quick to set up but require constant attention. Others demand more effort upfront but give you far more control in the long run.

So, the real question is: which channel is the right fit for you? The answer will depend on your resources, your digital skills, and the type of customers you want to reach. Pick the wrong one, and you risk wasted time, low sales, and frustration. Choose well, and you set yourself up for steady growth and loyal customers.

In this session, we'll look at three main types of digital channels:

- **Online marketplaces** like Jumia, Etsy, or Amazon;
- **Your own website**, where you control everything; and
- **Social media platforms** such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok.

We'll explore the strengths and drawbacks of each, and the kinds of businesses they suit best. For example, social media can be a great entry point for beginners, while marketplaces are useful if you're ready to tap into an existing pool of buyers.

But selling online doesn't stop at choosing a digital shopfront. You'll also need a trusted payment system to enable your customers to pay easily, and a reliable logistics partner to get products into their hands safely and on time.

By the end of this video, you'll have a clearer picture of which channels, payment solutions, and delivery options make sense for your business, so you can move forward in e-commerce with confidence.

Online marketplaces

Online marketplaces are digital platforms where many sellers list their products. Customers browse, compare, and buy from different sellers — all in one place. Popular examples include Jumia, Takealot, Konga, Amazon, eBay, and Etsy (especially for handmade or craft goods).

Pros:

- Access to a **built-in customer base**.
- **Simple sign-up** and setup.
- **Integrated payment systems**, so no need to arrange your own.
- **Customer trust** — shoppers often feel safer buying from well-known platforms.

Cons:

- **Fees and commissions** reduce your profit margin.
- **High competition** — your products appear alongside similar ones.
- **Limited control** — marketplace rules and design templates restrict your flexibility.
- **Dependence** — policy or fee changes directly affect your business.

Best suited for:

- SMEs with ready stock, product photos, and descriptions, but not yet ready to invest in their own website.
- Businesses looking for regional or international reach without handling all the technical details themselves.
- Sellers wanting to test products in new markets before investing heavily in their own site.

Your own website

Your website is your own online store. You decide how it looks, how products are

presented, and how customers experience your brand.

Pros:

- **Full control** over prices, design, and policies.
- Strong **brand building** opportunities.
- **No sales commissions** — profits stay with you (minus hosting and payment fees).
- Access to **customer data**, which helps with marketing and building loyalty.

Cons:

- **More work upfront** — hosting, design, and setup take time.
- **Marketing is essential** — you need to drive traffic yourself.
- **Technical maintenance** — regular updates are required.
- **Costs** — domain, hosting, and possibly professional design services.

Best suited for:

- SMEs with digital skills or access to web development support.
- Businesses with a clear, strong brand identity.
- Sellers focused on long-term independence and willing to invest in marketing.

Social media channels

Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business are powerful tools for engaging customers and creating brand awareness.

Pros:

- **Low cost or free** to start.
- **High engagement** through comments, likes, and shares.
- Ideal for **storytelling** — share your process, customer reviews, or behind-the-scenes content.
- **Direct interaction** through instant messaging.

Cons:

- **Time-intensive** — regular posting and interaction are needed.

- **Unpredictable algorithms** can suddenly reduce your reach.
- **No built-in payments or logistics** — you'll need external solutions.
- **Less formal buying process**, which can make tracking sales harder.

Best suited for:

- SMEs just starting out in e-commerce.
- Businesses that can invest time in creating engaging photos, videos, and stories.
- Sellers with visually appealing or story-driven products (like crafts, food, or fashion).

Payment and logistics providers

Even the best online shop can fail if customers can't pay easily or if products don't arrive as promised. This is why you need to pay particular attention to how the payment process will take place online, and who you will work with to make sure your goods reach their destination on time, and in one piece.

Payments

Whatever payment method you use, it must be not only secure, but also trusted by your customers. While credit cards are of course an option, many people don't have one, and their fees are likely to eat into your profits. Other options you might consider include mobile money, such as M-Pesa or MTN, bank transfers, or online payment gateways such as PayPal or Flutterwave.

Whatever you choose, keep in mind that offering multiple payment methods increases trust and boosts sales, especially when it comes to cross-border trade.

Logistics

Your customers expect **fast, reliable delivery**. A poor delivery experience will damage both your reputation, and your chances for repeat business. This is why you will need to choose a solid logistics provider to handle your shipments, from local deliveries to international shipping. Here are a few tips to do so:

1. **Match your provider to the methods your customers already use.** For example, if your customers often use a particular courier service, such as DHL or UPS, or a local delivery option, such as postal services or certain mobile delivery apps, it's better to work with a logistics provider that offers these same options.

2. **Check costs for both you and your buyers.** Remember, you will pay to ship your products, and your customers will also pay for the shipping. Make sure you understand how much you'll pay your logistics provider to ship your products, whether they charge a flat rate, weight-based pricing, or distance-based pricing. Then, consider how the shipping fees will be presented to your customers: many buyers are turned off by high shipping fees, so it's important to choose a provider that offers affordable rates, or allows you to absorb the cost without hurting your profit margins too much.

3. **Test reliability — send a sample order to measure speed and quality.** Before you make any long-term commitment, choose a product, place an order, and send it through the logistics provider to see how they perform. This will help you assess things like delivery speed (how quickly the product reaches the customer) and quality of service (whether the product arrives in good condition, with no damage or delays).

4. **Look for services that integrate easily with your store.** Ideally, your logistics provider should offer software or tools that easily link-up with your e-commerce system. If you're using a platform like Shopify or WooCommerce, you want a logistics provider that can automatically update shipping details, track orders, and notify customers about delivery status without needing manual input. This will save you time and reduce errors, making the entire process smoother.

Conclusion

As we have seen, choosing the right online sales channel is a strategic decision that can shape your long-term success.

Here's what we've learned:

- **Marketplaces** give quick access to customers but charge fees and limit control.
- **Your own website** builds independence and brand strength but requires effort

to attract visitors.

- **Social media** is perfect for starting out and building relationships but takes time to turn engagement into sales.

Whichever option you choose, reliable payments and logistics are essential for keeping customers happy and loyal.

The best choice is the one that fits your current resources, skills, and target customers — and remember, it can evolve as your business grows.

Start where you are, make use of the tools available, and build step by step. Whether through social media, a marketplace, or your own branded site, your goal is the same: to deliver a smooth, trustworthy, and enjoyable buying experience. to choose a solid logistics provider to handle your shipments, from local deliveries to international ship

KNOWLEDGE CHECK



1) In your own words, explain the main differences between selling on an **online marketplace**, your **own website**, and **social media**.

2) If your goal is to build a strong brand identity and collect customer data for future marketing, which online channel would you choose and why?

3) How would you weigh the trade-offs between using an online marketplace versus using your own website, if your business is an SME in its early stages? What factors should you prioritize when making this decision?

4) Imagine you're planning to expand your business internationally. How would you adapt your choice of payment systems and logistics providers based on the different markets you're entering? What local factors would you need to consider?

COFFEE BREAK



EXERCISE

1. Take 5 minutes to answer these foundational questions:

Question	Your Answer
What type of product or service do you sell?	
Where is your target customer most likely to discover and buy from you?	
Do you already have an audience or will you need to build one?	
Do you have budget and/or time for promotion, logistics, and platform setup?	
Are you looking for long-term brand control or fast access to buyers?	
Have you checked if the platform/channel is available in your target countries? (e.g. supported locations, payment gateways, shipping)	

2. Rate each statement from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) based on your business's situation and capabilities.

A. Social Media Shop

Statement	Score (1-5)
I'm okay with customers completing purchases on my website (outside the app).	
I have time and creativity to create content consistently.	
I want to build strong, personal connections with my audience.	
I am comfortable handling comments, including negative ones, publicly.	
I prefer platforms that require minimal initial investment.	
My product or service is highly visual or shareable.	
I want to use built-in ads and analytics to grow my reach.	
Subtotal:	/35

B. Marketplace Shop

Statement	Score (1-5)
I want fast access to a large, existing customer base.	
I don't mind paying commissions for visibility and trust	
I'm okay with limited brand customization.	
I'm prepared to meet platform compliance and listing requirements.	
The platform supports my country (e.g. seller registration, payment solutions).	
International reach is a goal for my business.	
Subtotal:	/30

C.Own e-commerce Site

Statement	Score (1-5)
I want full control over branding, design, and user experience.	
I'm willing to invest time and money in web development and maintenance.	
I want to control customer data and build long-term loyalty.	
I have (or will build) digital marketing skills (SEO, email, ads).	
I want higher profit margins	
I can set up and manage payment gateways and logistics in my target region.	
Subtotal:	/30

3. Compare Your Results

Channel	Total Score
Social Media Shop	
Marketplace Shop	
Own eCommerce Site	

4. Analyze and Decide

- Highest score = best fit to explore first.
- Close scores? Consider hybrid strategies (e.g., start with a marketplace and expand to your own site).
- Before committing, research each channel's regional availability, fees, and supported features, especially if selling internationally.



Discussion

If you are currently selling on an online marketplace (i.e. you have some e-commerce experience), what are the things that you should consider when developing your own website for online sales? What is the best way to integrate payments and logistics?

WRAP-UP

So, what have we learned?

- **Choosing the right sales channel** is crucial for business success, with online marketplaces, your own website, and social media each offering different advantages based on resources and goals.
- **Effective integration of payment systems** and logistics ensures smooth transactions and reliable delivery, enhancing customer satisfaction and trust.
- **Building a strong online presence** requires continuous investment in marketing, user experience, and scalability to stay competitive and grow over time.
- **User-friendly website design** and payment options are key to creating a positive shopping experience and encouraging repeat business.

Q&A

Do you have any questions for the facilitator before we finish this session?

END OF SESSİON

Thank you very much for your participation.

SESSION 4

ACTIVATING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Welcome!

The objectives of this session are to:

- Assess the importance of “activating” your online presence;
- Evaluate what activation actually involves; i.e. setting specific, measurable goals, boosting visibility, converting your traffic, looking after your customers; and
- Use tools and techniques to activate your online presence (digital marketing, search engine optimization, good customer service, etc.)

ANSWER THE QUESTION



You've created effective content for your e-commerce operations, and you've selected the right channel for your online sales. Now, it's time to **activate** it. In other words, you need to make it **live**, **discoverable**, and **transaction-ready** so to drive **visibility**, **engagement** and **sales**.

So, what might you need to do to get there? **What kinds of actions do you think you would need to take to "activate" your channel?**

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Watch the following video and take notes.

VIDEO SCRIPT

Congratulations — you've reached the final session of this training. By now, you've learned how to research your markets, create content for online sales, and choose the right digital channels. But here's where many small businesses stumble: they assume that once they're online, the job is done.

The truth is very different. With millions of websites, social media accounts, and online shops out there, simply being online doesn't mean customers will find you. **Real success comes from activating your online presence** — managing it, optimizing it, and making sure it serves your goals. Many small businesses set up a website, a marketplace profile, or a social media page and then wait for customers to come — but in today's digital environment, that's not enough. You need to take deliberate actions to make your channel active and effective.

So, how do you activate your presence? The first step is to set **SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**. Without clear goals, it's easy to lose focus and waste effort. Along with goals, you'll need **KPIs — Key Performance Indicators** — to measure progress. For example:

- If your goal is more sales, a KPI might be conversion rates.
- If your goal is brand awareness, a KPI could be social media reach.

Once your goals are set, the next step is strategy — choosing the right tools and activities to achieve them. In this session, we'll explore four key tools to activate your digital presence:

1. Social media marketing
2. SEO (search engine optimization)

3. Email marketing
4. SEM (search engine marketing, such as paid ads)

Finally, we'll look at customer service — because getting customers is only the beginning. Keeping them happy and loyal is what drives long-term success.

By the end of this session, you'll know how to make your online presence active, visible, and effective — helping you reach more customers and build lasting relationships.

Social media marketing

Social media isn't just for sharing photos with friends—it's one of the most powerful tools small businesses can use to boost visibility and connect with customers.

First, it helps build awareness. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn give you access to millions of potential customers, both locally and worldwide.

Second, social media doubles as a business tool. Features like Facebook Shops, Instagram product tags, and WhatsApp Business let you showcase products, answer questions, and even complete sales directly.

But success takes more than random posts. You need a clear approach. Here are a few tips:

- **Be consistent**: Post regularly to stay visible.
- **Share your story**: Let people see the journey behind your products—authenticity builds connection.
- **Use visuals**: High-quality photos and short videos grab attention.
- **Engage actively**: Reply to comments, answer questions, and earn trust.

Most platforms also provide analytics. These show which posts perform best, when your audience is active, and what kind of content sparks engagement. Use this data to refine your strategy.

For many small businesses, social media is the best place to start building an online presence. It's low-cost, simple to set up, and flexible — making it ideal for growing step by step.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

Have you ever searched for something on Google and noticed which businesses appear on the first page? That's the power of SEO.

SEO helps your website or online store show up when people search for products like yours. It's a long-term investment that brings in *organic traffic* — customers who find you without paid ads.

The key areas of SEO are:

1. **Keywords**: These are the words your customers type into Google. For example, instead of just saying "soap," you might use "organic shea butter soap Ghana." Adding the right keywords to your titles, product descriptions, and blog posts increases your chances of being discovered.
2. **UI & UX (User Interface and User Experience)**: Your site should be easy to navigate, mobile-friendly, and fast. If visitors can't find what they need, they'll leave quickly — and Google will rank you lower.
3. **Technical optimization**: This covers site speed, mobile responsiveness, and secure connections (HTTPS). Simple steps like compressing images or using a clean site structure can make a big impact.

SEO takes time, but it pays off. For small businesses, even small steps — like improving product descriptions with keywords and making your site mobile-friendly — can significantly boost visibility.

Email marketing

Some people think email marketing is outdated. The truth? It's still one of the most effective ways to build customer relationships — when done right.

Myths vs. facts:

- *Myth*: "People ignore emails."
  Fact: People open emails that are relevant and personal.

- *Myth*: “It’s too technical.”
  Fact: With tools like Mailchimp or Sendinblue, even small businesses can get started quickly.

Benefits:

- Speak directly to your customers.
- Share promotions, product launches, or updates.
- Build loyalty and encourage repeat sales.

Challenges:

- You need a customer email list — and that takes time to grow.
- Poorly written or too many emails risk ending up in spam or frustrating your audience.

Best practices:

- Collect emails ethically, through sign-up forms or at checkout.
- Segment your audience so different groups get messages tailored to them.
- Keep emails short, friendly, and focused on value.

For small businesses, even a modest list of 50–100 customers can make email marketing worthwhile. It’s a cost-effective way to strengthen relationships and drive repeat purchases.

Introducing SEM (Search Engine Marketing)

While SEO brings free traffic over time, SEM — or paid search ads — helps you reach customers right away.

The most common tool is Google Ads. Here’s how it works:

- You choose keywords related to your business.
- Your ad shows up when people search for those terms.

- You only pay when someone clicks — this is called Pay Per Click, or PPC.

For example, if you sell handmade baskets in Kenya, you might run an ad for "buy woven baskets online Zanzibar."

Advantages:

- Instant visibility.
- Targeting by location, interests, or demographics.
- Clear metrics to measure performance.

Challenges:

- You need a budget.
- Poorly managed campaigns can quickly waste money.

Tips for SMEs:

- Start small with daily spending limits.
- Focus on specific, long-tail keywords — like "organic Rwandan chili sauce" instead of just "chili."
- Monitor campaigns closely and adjust based on results.

For small businesses, SEM works best for short-term goals, such as launching a product or promoting seasonal sales — while SEO and social media build long-term visibility.

Customer service

Getting a customer to buy once is great — but real success is getting them to come back. That's where customer service shines.

Think of the customer journey:

1. They discover your brand.
2. They consider buying.
3. They purchase.
4. They receive and use your product.
5. They decide whether to return or recommend you.

Great service strengthens every step.

Tools:

- Use customer journey maps to identify pain points.
- Apply a sales funnel to guide people from interest to purchase.

Best Practices:

- **Be responsive**: Reply quickly on social media, email, or WhatsApp.
- **Be clear**: Share accurate information on prices, delivery times, and returns.
- **Follow up**: After delivery, ask for feedback or reviews.
- **Resolve issues fast**: Fixing a bad experience well can turn an unhappy buyer into a loyal fan.

Customer service isn't just about solving problems — it's about building trust. In competitive markets, great service can be your strongest advantage.

Conclusion

Activating your online presence means moving from simply being online to being visible, engaging, and effective.

Success starts with clear goals and KPIs. From there, use tools like:

- **Social media marketing** to boost visibility and connect with audiences.
- **SEO** so customers can find you in search results.
- **Email marketing** to build relationships and loyalty.
- **SEM** to drive quick, targeted visibility.
- **Customer service** to keep customers happy and coming back.

Remember: activation takes ongoing effort — consistent action, regular measurement, and continuous improvement. The payoff is worth it: more visibility, stronger relationships, and sustainable growth.

As you move forward, start small, track your progress, and build step by step. With the right strategy and commitment, your online presence won't just exist — it will thrive.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK



1) What is the difference between simply being online and activating your channel?

2) Which of the following is the BEST example of a **SMART goal** for activating your online presence?

A. “Get more followers on Instagram someday.”
B. “Increase sales by 15% through Instagram within the next 6 months.”
C. “Be the most popular fashion brand in Africa.”
D. “Try to improve my website soon.”

3) Arrange the following activation tools from **low-cost / organic methods** to **paid methods**:

- SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
- SEM (Search Engine Marketing with Google Ads)
- Social Media Marketing (posting and engaging)
- Email Marketing

4) You are running a Google Ads campaign for your handmade basket business in Kenya. Which of the following keywords is MOST effective for SEM? Why?

A. “Basket”
B. “African products”
C. “Buy woven baskets online Nairobi”
D. “Handmade”

5) Why do you think many small businesses stop at just “being online,” and what challenges do they face in moving toward an active online presence?

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DISCUSSION - SCENARIO

Read the following scenario, then discuss the questions:

Scenario: A Tanzanian fashion business on Instagram

Mary runs a small online fashion boutique in Dar es Salam, selling handmade dresses through Instagram and WhatsApp Business. One day, a customer from Zanzibar orders a dress for her daughter's graduation. Unfortunately, the delivery is delayed due to courier issues, and the dress arrives a day later than promised.

Mary responds quickly:

1. She immediately apologizes and explains the situation honestly.
2. She offers the customer a small discount on her next order.
3. She personally follows up to confirm the dress fits well and that the customer is satisfied.

The customer appreciates the fast response and the thoughtful gesture. A few weeks later, she shares photos of the graduation on Instagram and tags Mary's boutique, praising the quality of the dress and the excellent service.

1. How did Mary's reaction help her retain her customer? How is what she did an example of activating her online presence?

2. How can good customer service help you activate your online presence and retain customers? Share examples or scenarios of good customer service that you've experienced or come across.

EXERCISE

Follow the instructions to set up and/or optimize your Google Business Profile to enhance your online visibility.

Instructions:

Step 1: Google account setup and SME information gathering

- Ensure you have a Google account. If not, create one (follow step-by step previous page)
- Gather necessary information for your business profile:
    - Business name, address
    - phone number
    - Business category and attributes
    - Hours of operation
    - A brief description of their business
    - Digital photos of your business (interior, exterior, products, or services)

Step 2: Set up your profile

- Go to the Google Business Profile website and log in with your Google account.
- Click **"Manage now"** and enter your business name. Check whether it already exists or create a new profile.
- Fill in your address, location details, and service area (if applicable).
- Complete your contact information, business category, and attributes.
- Add your hours of operation, business description, and photos.

Step 3: Optimize your profile

- Use clear, keyword-rich descriptions to make your business easier to find.
- Upload high-quality photos to attract more customers.
- Keep your profile active by updating information regularly and managing customer reviews.

Creating a Google Business Profile: Step-by-step instructions

1. Navigate to the Sign-Up Page:

- Open a web browser on your computer or mobile device.
- Go to the Google Account sign-in page at accounts.google.com or the Gmail page at gmail.com.

2. Start the creation process:

- Look for and click the "Create account" button.
- Select the option for "For my personal use".

3. Enter Personal Information:

- Fill in your first and last name.
- Enter your birthdate and gender.

4. Create Your Username and Password:

- Choose a username that will be your email address. Google will suggest options or tell you if your desired username is already taken.
- Create a strong, unique password and confirm it.
- Click "Next".

5. Verify Your Account:

- Enter your phone number to receive a verification code via text message.
- Enter the code you received to verify your account.

6. Add Recovery Information:

- Provide a recovery email address (optional) if you want to use it to recover your account in the future.

7. Accept Terms and Conditions:

- Review Google's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.
- Click "I agree" to accept them.

8. Your Account is Ready:

- Your Google Account is now created and you can start using it for various Google services.

WRAP-UP

So, what have we learned?

- **Being online isn't enough**: Activate your presence by setting **SMART goals** and tracking **KPIs** so effort aligns with outcomes (e.g., conversion rate, reach).
- **Use the right tool mix: Social media** (visibility/engagement), **SEO** (organic discovery), **email** (relationships/repeat sales), and **SEM** (quick, targeted traffic). Start small, measure, and iterate.
- **Make service your engine:** Strong customer service across the journey (fast responses, clear info, follow-ups, reviews) turns buyers into loyal advocates—driving retention, word-of-mouth, and sustainable growth.

Q&A

Do you have any questions for the facilitator before we finish this session?

END OF SESSİON

Thank you very much for your participation.