

# Selling Online?

Why You Should  
Add Online Marketing  
and E-Commerce to  
Your Business





# Introduction

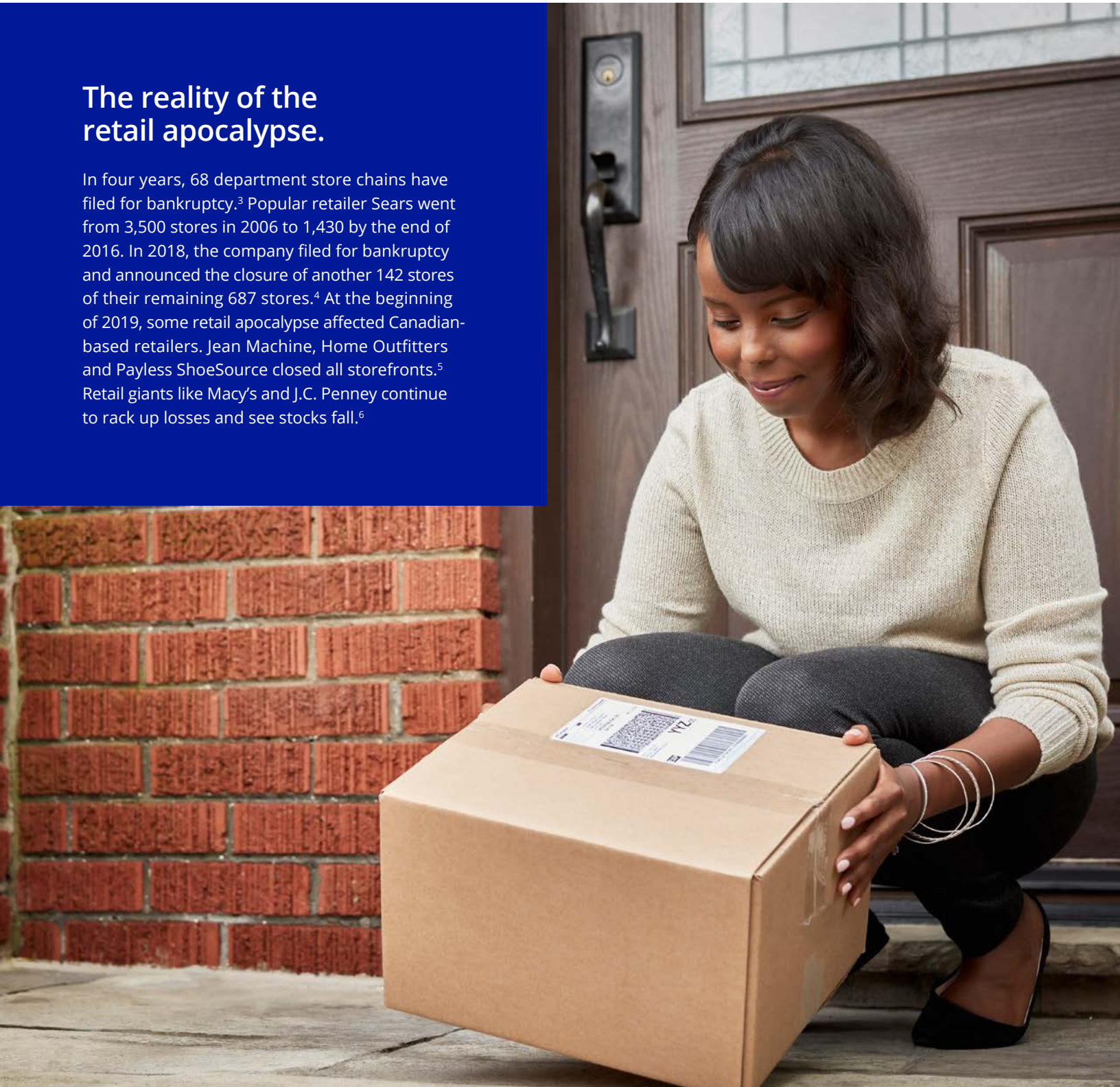


You don't have to research too in-depth to grasp the importance of online marketing and e-commerce. The closure of retail giants like Sears, Home Outfitters and Payless ShoeSource are proof that having a strong brick-and-mortar presence is no longer a requirement for retail success.<sup>1</sup> And while the majority of retail business is still performed in physical stores, the real future of retail is online.

Since its inception back in the '90s, digital marketing and e-commerce has significantly shifted the retail space. The convenience, reliability and speed of an online sale have set a new bar for consumers. Going to a physical location simply cannot compete with the accessibility an online store offers. This phenomenon has led to what experts have named the "[retail apocalypse](#)."<sup>2</sup> While this might seem a bit melodramatic, the reality is that the statistics paint a pretty bleak picture.

## The reality of the retail apocalypse.

In four years, 68 department store chains have filed for bankruptcy.<sup>3</sup> Popular retailer Sears went from 3,500 stores in 2006 to 1,430 by the end of 2016. In 2018, the company filed for bankruptcy and announced the closure of another 142 stores of their remaining 687 stores.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of 2019, some retail apocalypse affected Canadian-based retailers. Jean Machine, Home Outfitters and Payless ShoeSource closed all storefronts.<sup>5</sup> Retail giants like Macy's and J.C. Penney continue to rack up losses and see stocks fall.<sup>6</sup>





*So how did we get here?* There are a number of factors that have contributed to the retail apocalypse:

- **The decline of the shopping mall.** For those people who grew up in the 70s, 80s or 90s, a trip to the mall was an event. Whether it was a weekend family outing to the movie theatre or hanging out at the food court with your friends after school, shopping malls were a gathering place for the community. Now, movies can be accessed in the convenience of your own home through *Netflix*, and meals ordered online can be delivered to your doorstep.
- **It's generational.** One of the main reasons for the shift to online is a generational one. It was recently reported that 80% of Canadians shop online<sup>7</sup>, with younger generations being the strongest contributors to that statistic. In fact, a 2019 survey found that millennials do 60% of their overall shopping online<sup>8</sup>, a number that continues to grow. As younger generations take

over the majority of purchases, an online presence is becoming increasingly critical for performance.

Younger generations are also being more discretionary with how they choose to spend their money. They'd rather put their money towards experiences like travel or dining out rather than heading to the mall to get a new pair of jeans.

- **The ease of selling via social media and search platforms.** You no longer need to have a website to be able to sell your goods online. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram have in-app shopping capability. Search tools, like Google, are also upping their services. A "Google My Business" account allows businesses to promote special offers and events straight on the search page.

Clearly, e-commerce is here to stay. And whether you're selling a product or a service, the key to survival and success for today's small business retailer is to have an online presence.





Benefits

# The benefits of bringing your business online.

In this guide, we explore how an online presence benefits your business by:

- ✓ Increasing the visibility of your business
- ✓ Giving you control over your brand image
- ✓ Keeping your products and/or services on par with the latest trends and the competition

Regardless of the retail apocalypse, the online world continues to be a blind spot for a lot of smaller businesses. That's not to say some of these offline businesses don't have an online presence, they just don't "own" it in the same way. A recent audit of almost 10,000 Google Business listings found that 27% of small businesses have no website link.<sup>9</sup> While this is better than no information online at all, there is a risk. Without a website, their reputation is in the hands of third-party websites, like review platforms.

Even the smallest businesses can benefit from having an online presence. And that doesn't necessarily mean selling online straight away, or even in the near future. Developing a company website, or even selling via social media pages help you expand your reach and power.

**Almost half of Canadian small- to mid-sized businesses don't have their own website.**<sup>10</sup>

**91%**

of customers have visited a brick-and-mortar store solely because of its online presence.<sup>12</sup>

## Increase the visibility of your business

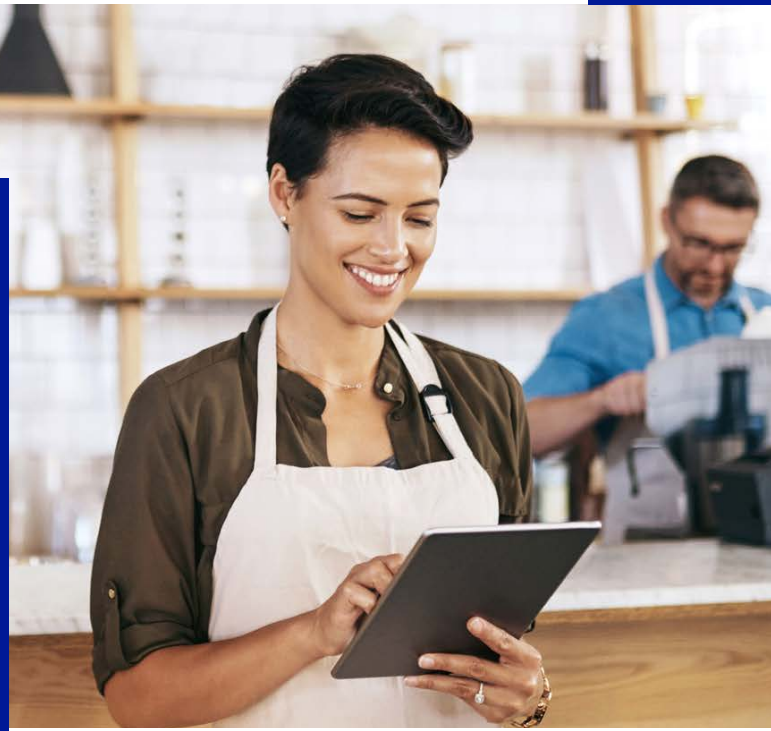
The internet has been hailed "the great equalizer" in that having a robust online presence allows you to compete in a much wider market space, and expanding your reach regardless of the size of your business. By giving your company greater visibility, you can reach more potential customers.<sup>11</sup>





An online presence influences in-store sales more than you may think. Regardless of store hours, the internet never closes, giving customers and prospects 24/7 access to information about your business and its offerings, as well as your business hours and location so they can easily schedule when to visit your store. What's more, 81% of consumers research online before making a purchasing decision in-store.<sup>12</sup>

Being active on social media can also increase your visibility online by providing more search results for your business.



## Control your brand story

Think of your company website as your flagship location. Not only does it have the potential to generate the most traffic, but it can also act as the face of your company and allow you to control your marketing and branding narrative.

Here are a few ways you can use your website to shape and control your brand story:

- ✓ **Write a value proposition on your home page.** Dollar Shave Club's "A great shave for a few bucks a month" is a good example of a value proposition.
- ✓ **Feature product descriptions about in-store items.** Whenever possible, be sure to include product photos, detailed descriptions, videos and augmented reality views to help your customers truly "experience" the product before purchasing.
- ✓ **Create an "About us" page.** It's a great place to tell your story, establish your brand's personality and showcase your expertise.
- ✓ **Have an FAQ section.** Think of your FAQs as an online customer service function. Any questions your customers or prospects could possibly have should be included here.
- ✓ **Publish testimonials and allow reviews** to establish trust, credibility and lend a human touch to your website.

- ✓ **Provide your contact information** to show accountability and offer a better user experience for customers and prospects who might have questions about your business.
- ✓ **Be an active user of social media.** Along with providing another avenue for customer contact, you can easily share real-time updates from your business to provide relevancy and transparency to prospects.

## Keep your business on trend

The online world is ever-changing. Sometimes, it's the trendsetter, other times it's changing to keep up with offline trends. Stay up-to-date with your own online research and see how leading businesses are implementing the new trends that crop up. Once you've established your online presence, consider using some of the realistic trends for your own business.

A good example of a new trend is purchasing via social media. Facebook and Instagram have adapted their platforms to allow in-app purchases. This provides a new level of purchasing ease when a consumer may not even be thinking of buying anything. Facebook users are given purchasing opportunities while scrolling news feeds. And Instagram businesses can add links to buy onto photos, so a product can be purchased immediately in-app.

## Deliveries as reliable as in-store purchasing

For years, e-commerce has been seen as a convenient alternative to visiting a store to pick up items or shop in-store. When many stores were forced to close during the 2020 pandemic, e-commerce became a necessity for customers of all demographics – including customers who hadn't shopped online before. Providing a reliable delivery journey has become more than a convenient outcome, it's opened up a new avenue for traditional retailers to continue doing business. If the purchase and delivery are efficient, there's a likely chance e-commerce will sustain increased prevalence beyond the impacts of COVID-19.

A huge priority is ensuring that you live up to what your business stands for and what your customers have been promised. If a customer receives their package late (or it's undelivered due to no one being home) chances are they will call your customer service to complain about it – not the delivery provider. Some delivery providers offer tools to keep your customer in the loop throughout the journey of their delivery. Tracking services and notifications can notify customers about the status of each shipment. In turn, the added communication will likely encourage new e-commerce users to repeat purchases. Some services even have the ability to go further than just tracking. Customers can now give additional delivery instructions such as a safe drop-off location and even sign for packages digitally, freeing up the need to be home for the delivery.





## The impact of COVID-19. Staying in business when stores are closed, and even when they reopen.

In 2020, we've all witnessed the impacts of a global pandemic on brick and mortar locations. In Canada and beyond, non-essential businesses were forced to close-up shop or offer curbside pick-up for an indefinite period of time. As a result, non-essential businesses of all sizes saw e-commerce become mandatory in order to stay in business – rather than just an important feature. The Salesforce Q1 Shopping Index shows that e-commerce revenue grew a whopping 24% in the first quarter of 2020 in Canada.<sup>13</sup>

E-commerce growth has been staggering, but this is vastly due to the lack of alternative ways to buy during these times. After pandemic restrictions are eased, and customers are allowed to shop in-store again, an important question remains: will they actually want to?

Chances are it will take some time to get to a “new normal”. Experts predict that sales will depend on the category of products. Popular categories to buy online before the pandemic (such as books and electronics) will see their online presence strengthened. Products that were generally purchased in-store, such as hardware and groceries have experienced a rise in e-commerce as people are forced to “test” this way to buy. If the experience has been good, these categories might see a change in buying preference, even when stores become more accessible again.<sup>14</sup>

---

# 24%

e-commerce growth  
in 2020 Q1 due to the  
unprecedented impacts  
of COVID-19.<sup>13</sup>

---

## More Canadians plan on regularly buying groceries online

---

# <2%

before COVID-19

# 9%

since COVID-19.<sup>15</sup>





Building Relationships



# Use online marketing e-commerce to build better relationships with customers and prospects

An e-commerce functionality does more than provide an extended market space. Online strategies, tools and channels offer a wider – yet more focused – way to reach your customers and prospects than offline retail marketing methods. You're able to foster a focused relationship with the audience you want.

## The importance of SEO to target the right audience

There are millions of online stores, so you need to know how to be visible and relevant. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a strategy you can deploy to help search engines find and index your website. It helps your audience find you in a search query. Search engine bots crawl millions of websites to identify and offer up the webpages most relevant to the user's search query. Apart from keywords, algorithms consider internal links, page titles, title tags, meta descriptions, and many more.

The best way to increase your web page visibility is to educate yourself on SEO. Look at the top-performing pages for relevant searches to gain awareness of what's working. By understanding what keywords and other features you should use, you can boost your search relevancy. Measure your search success by using a service such as Google Analytics. A tool such as Google's allows you to track the amount of web traffic from search results, so you can continuously improve your chance of showing up on page 1 in the search engine results.

## Sell with product descriptions that create a story

To differentiate your e-commerce site from the competition, it's important to put time into your product descriptions. Not only does this help with SEO in terms of improving the relevance of your site, it also helps you develop a better relationship with your audience.

When purchasing online, it's harder to make a product feel "real" until it's delivered. With quality content that describes what you're looking at, a prospect can create a compelling story around your product. Connect with your audience by providing rich product descriptions and high-quality images, video demonstrations and augmented reality. Try describing the benefits of your product, its features and how your product can solve a problem.



---

# 87%

of consumers rated "product content" an extremely important factor when deciding to buy.<sup>16</sup>

## Showcase your reviews to nurture existing relationships and create new ones

While it may feel nerve-wracking to provide reviews on your site, it often does more good than harm. Good reviews help support realistic product descriptions. They also work as an organic advertisement, boosting sales when prospects see that others have tried and love your products. It can also help with SEO strategies and bolster relevant keyword search terms.

Positive online reviews also help increase customer loyalty and trust. 84% of consumers trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation.<sup>17</sup> Even negative reviews allow you to develop a better relationship with customers. Genuine responses to reviews that are reflective of your brand ethic can smooth over difficult situations. No business is perfect – reviews that show 100% satisfaction seem unreliable to most. Showing authenticity in your responses helps build a positive relationship with your consumers and prospective customers. Reviews that aren't as positive but provide constructive feedback can help you improve your products or services, as well as the customer experience.

## Upsell with exclusive perks to increase loyalty

This doesn't need to affect your bottom line though. Calculate your average shipping costs, and incorporate the price into your product costs. You can also put in place a minimum spend to activate free shipping. According to one study, retailers who offer free shipping could see a 10% increase in direct revenue.<sup>18</sup>

There are many other effective ways to upsell online, too. Encourage further purchases by showing customers related items in your store through a “recommended items” feature. Alternatively, acknowledge new and returning customers alike. Provide a discount or special perk for a customer's first purchase. Work on your customer loyalty by offering a loyalty program that provides perks such as free shipping, or access to exclusive sales.

Where a customer doesn't make it to the final sale, consider strategies to push them back towards the checkout button. Remarketing is a tactic to target and re-engage customers that showed some action towards your brand such as ‘viewed a product’ or ‘signed up’ to a newsletter. By capturing their interest in your brand with targeted marketing, you may convince them to come back.

# 93%

of customer respondents said that free shipping encouraged them to buy more online.<sup>18</sup>







Stability



## Improve stability and savings for your business

Adding an e-commerce aspect to your business may seem like a large cost upfront. For example, factors such as shipping and the website's cost itself can impact your bottom line. But, with some forecasting, e-commerce can be a great investment for your business in years to come.

### E-commerce can provide stability in the long-term

The success of your storefront and the amount of sales you make relies largely on foot traffic and accessibility. However, the amount of foot traffic in your store is often determined by factors you can't control, such as the weather or even the day of the week.

An online presence helps tone down those risks. Customers can visit your online store anytime, with minimized limitations. It allows you to make sales and revenue without having to focus on drawing people into a store. Plus, there's stability in the cost of e-commerce. While starting up an e-commerce site has associated costs, it's far less expensive when comparing store costs, such as rent and overheads.

### Potential to secure for inventory

For commercial businesses, safeguarding product inventory is essential to maintaining profitability. Many stores keep their inventory in their location, which can sometimes lead to problems. Unlike large big box stores, small businesses or mom-and-pop shops don't have a lot of space to successfully store merchandise. Products can get damaged or misplaced if there isn't enough space to have a designated stock room. Shop floors can become cluttered with overstock, potentially leading to damaged or broken products, and even stolen merchandise.

While e-commerce inventory can also be kept in-store – it can also be easily kept out of sight. Once necessary, consider renting a warehouse space for online-specific inventory. Businesses without additional space can partner with a delivery provider for warehouse use. Using a warehouse space ensures your product inventory is safely stored, available and accounted for. Often these warehouses are in strategically placed spaces for shipping too.





Shipping Options

# How you can overcome geographical limitations with a delivery partner

E-commerce has brought speed and convenience to shopping. Instead of having to rely on the local mall, customers can get what they're looking for from many online sellers. An online store has the opportunity to reach potential customers who may never have the chance to visit your physical location.



## Get your business global with the right shipping options

Broaden your customer base beyond your direct vicinity, whether it's your general community, city or region. Reach customers anywhere in the world with a delivery partner that has a large network to get your business shipping internationally.

## Simplify international shipping with the expertise of a delivery partner

For a small business, shipping globally can be a cumbersome and difficult task. Customs regulations and restricted items must be taken into account when expanding your reach. Often, delivery providers have access to the expertise you need to confidently sell your products around the world.



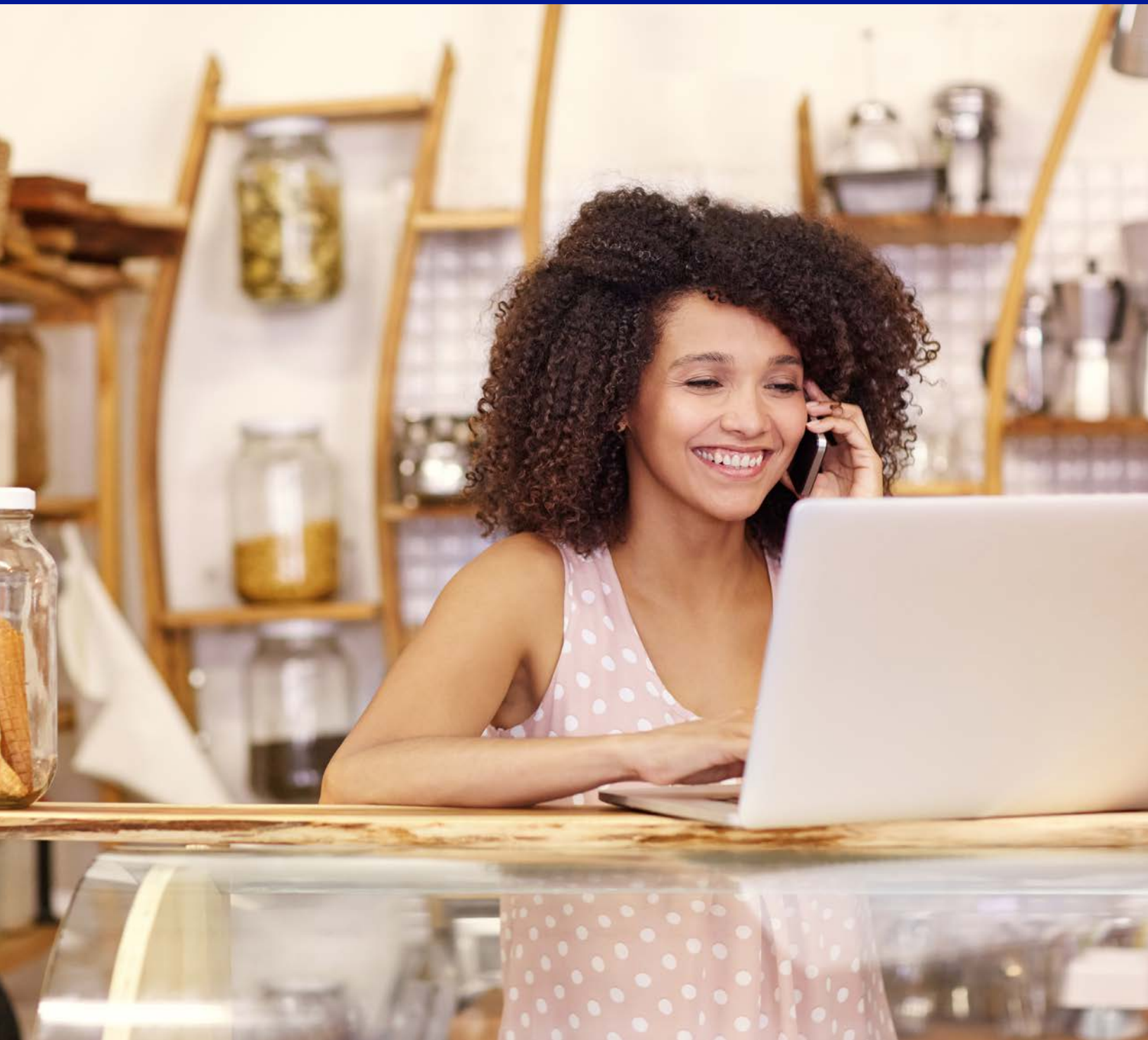
**TIP:** Look for flexibility and a range of delivery options that you can pass on to your customers. From standard shipping times to next-day, give consumers the ability to customize their delivery. Based on the customer's needs, they may be willing to pay a premium for faster shipping, or prefer saving money with a longer wait attached. Choose a delivery provider that can give you and your customers the choice depending on their urgency/cost factor.



## A strong online presence creates an online store with potential.

In order to stay relevant and competitive in retail, it's essential to build and maintain an online presence. A strong online presence then creates the foundation needed for an online store. We've addressed several of the benefits, but these points are in no way extensive. From extending your reach globally to connecting with your specific audience, the

potential of selling online continues to grow, as trends and insights change. And as we continue to see customers' switch from store checkouts to checkout buttons, there will likely be even more reason to sell online. Strengthen your business's potential today and see how far your products could travel.



# Resources

1. *Commercial Real Estate: Failure of Payless and Home Outfitters further shakes retail real estate market.* Vancouver Sun. 27 Feb. 2019, <https://vancouversun.com/business/commercial-real-estate/commercial-real-estate-failure-of-payless-and-home-outfitters-further-shakes-retail-real-estate-market>
2. *Retail Apocalypse.* Wikipedia. 27 Nov. 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retail\\_apocalypse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retail_apocalypse)
3. *Here's A List Of 68 Bankruptcies In The Retail Apocalypse And Why They Failed.* CB Insights. 12 Mar. 2019, <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/retail-apocalypse-timeline-infographic/>
4. Bomey, Nathan. *Gymboree files bankruptcy, closing up to 450 stores.* USA Today. 12 Jun. 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/06/12/childrens-apparel-chain-gymboree-files-chapter-11-bankruptcy/102772792/>
5. Patterson, Craig. *Canadian Retail Forecast for 2019: Slower Growth and Challenges with Opportunity.* Retail Insider. 14 Mar. 2019, <https://www.retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2019/3/canadian-retail-forecast-for-2019-slower-growth-and-challenges-with-opportunity>
6. Thomas, Lauren. *Doom and gloom: Department stores' disappointing holiday sales results spell trouble for 2019.* CNBC. 17 Jan. 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/17/department-stores-disappointing-holiday-sales-results-spell-trouble.html>
7. Canada Post. *Looking to attract the Canadian millennial shopper? Get to know them first.* Canada Post. <https://www.canadapost.ca/blogs/business/ecommerce/looking-to-attract-the-canadian-millennial-shopper-get-to-know-them-first/>
8. Melton, James. *Millennials now do 60% of their shopping online.* Digital Commerce 360. 26 Mar. 2019, <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2019/03/26/millennials-online-shopping/>
9. Ellis, Miriam. *Why Local Businesses Will Need Websites More than Ever in 2019.* Moz. 12 Dec. 2018, <https://moz.com/blog/local-businesses-need-websites>
10. Globe Content Studio. *Canadian SMBs online presence.* The Globe and Mail. 17 Oct. 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/adv/article-canadian-smbs-online-presence/>
11. Nil. *What Are The Advantages Of Having An Online Presence For Your Business?* 21Twelve Interactive. 25 Aug. 2018, <https://www.21twelveinteractive.com/what-are-the-advantages-of-having-an-online-presence-for-your-business/>
12. Funk, Sherene. *12 Small Business Website Statistics You Need To Know To Increase In-Store Sales.* Rain. 17 Aug. 2017, <https://blog.rainpos.com/12-small-business-website-statistics-you-need-to-know-to-increase-in-store-sales/>
13. Salesforce. *Salesforce Q1 Shopping Index.* Salesforce. May 8. 2020, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/salesforcecommercecloud#!/vizhome/SalesforceShoppingIndex/SalesforceShoppingIndex>
14. Davis, Brent. *E-commerce in a post-pandemic world.* The Record. May 6. 2020, <https://www.therecord.com/business/2020/05/06/e-commerce-in-a-post-pandemic-world.html>
15. Charlebois, Sylvain; Music, Janet. *COVID-19 GROCERY EXPERIENCE.* Faculty of Agriculture, Dalhousie University. May 4. 2020, [https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/COVID%20Grocery%20experience%20Mini-Report%20\(May%202020\)%20EN.pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/COVID%20Grocery%20experience%20Mini-Report%20(May%202020)%20EN.pdf)
16. Bloem, Craig. *84 Percent of People Trust Online Reviews As Much As Friends. Here's How to Manage What They See.* Inc.com. 31 Jul. 2017, <https://www.inc.com/craig-bloem/84-percent-of-people-trust-online-reviews-as-much-.html>
17. Chrums, Alex. *10 Stats That Prove the Importance of Product Content for E-commerce [Infographic].* OneSpace. 10 Aug. 2017, <https://www.onespace.com/blog/2017/08/10-stats-prove-importance-e-commerce-product-content-infographic/>
18. Roggio, Armando. *The (Many) Benefits of Offering Free Shipping.* Practical Ecommerce. 1 Oct. 2015, <https://www.practicalecommerce.com/The-Many-Benefits-of-Offering-Free-Shipping>

†Certain restrictions apply. Not applicable to all services. For full details, see Purolator Terms and Conditions of Service or call 1 888 SHIP-123.

Copyright © 2020 Purolator Inc. All rights reserved. Privacy Policy. Purolator Inc | 2727 Meadowpine Blvd | Mississauga | ON | L5N 0E1 | 1 888 SHIP-123 | purolator.com





## Let's Get Started!

Whether you've got a retail store that's on the street or online, our experts are ready to work hand-in-hand to optimize your business operations.

[View retail solutions](#)

***Purolator***  
Promises delivered®