
ECOMMERCE

Does every retailer really need to have an ecommerce store? Even Scribble Kitty? That's a "Yes" from Dene Mills, software architect at True ERP.

"When you're starting in a business, you can't go past an ecommerce site. You really need to have a way for a customer to buy."

The buying bit is optional, he goes on to explain, but only if you're selling goods that aren't likely to be purchased on impulse. The threshold for this is \$500 – far pricier than any comic I'm likely to be selling.

For retailers wishing to test the waters before opening a bricks and mortar store, Mills says an ecommerce site is the perfect way to test the viability of a business without investing much capital.

"It costs virtually nothing to get an online store working."

Shopify or Magento are both good platforms for beginner retailers, he says. This is primarily because of their established support systems: "On both these fronts, there's people around the world who can help [retailers]."

Mills says the biggest danger for green retailers seeking to develop their own ecommerce sites is building a site with a staff member who will then leave the business, taking their knowledge of the site's back end with them. It's important that the businesses' owner is engaged with their website.

Typically, whichever organisation is providing the retailer's email will also host its site. Mills estimates a budget of \$500 per year will cover the hosting needs of a small independent business, and again, he recommends going for a larger company with an adequate support network.

Web security is still not a high enough priority for small businesses in New Zealand, we're constantly told. Ryan Clark, national manager liability at NZI, told NZRetail earlier this year: "There is a quote that goes: there are only three kinds of companies in the world - those who have been hacked, those who are going to be hacked, and those who don't know they've already been hacked."

Reassuringly, Mills says not to worry about it too much as most hosting companies will take care of security on behalf of their clients.

"They're looking after your website. If you get bombed, they get blacklisted."

In terms of where retailers should direct their dollars, Mills has a dissenting view on social

media marketing: "I'm not a big fan of social media because you end up promoting your social media more than you do your own product."

Former North Beach ecommerce and marketing manager Josh Cragg told the Retail Australasia Summit last year that retailers should choose relevant mediums online and excel at them rather than spreading themselves too thin across many apps and platforms.

He felt social media was valuable because users shared valuable insights on it. For customer-facing businesses, his picks of the

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social bunch were Facebook and Instagram.

Mills says beginner retailers should put funds earmarked for social media investment into Google Adwords or a similar SEO service instead.

"If people go looking for comic books on anything, they don't go to Facebook, they go straight to Google."

As with many of the other aspects of setting up a retail store, branding has a big impact on ecommerce success. In terms of a website's look and feel, Mills is all about simplicity and effectiveness.

"You need a very, very simple logo and a very, very simple website."

The content of the site must match the tastes of your demographic, Mills says. It should favour images over text, and ideally, include some video.

As a name, Scribble Kitty doesn't meet with Mills' approval. It's not wholly unique, giving it poor SEO, and it presents lots of opportunities for customers to misspell it.

I'd be better off with 'S.Kitty,' Mills says: "Everyone can spell that."

