

# E-COMMERCE FOR DUMMIES

Selling on the internet is simple if you...



**UP**  
YOUZZ

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## **What you will learn**

- Creating the big picture (business plan)
- What you need to start your store.
- How to learn Volusion and how long it will take.
- How to get people to your store.
- How to monitor and analyze your progress.
- Other services and sites that will help your store.

# Assumptions



- You have an existing Brick and Mortar Store
- You have a list of products, prices and vendors
- >250 products to sell
- You can categorize your products by departments
- You have photos of your products
- You have done a business plan for your store
- You have an accounting system such as QuickBooks

# Business Plan



You are about to embark on a journey, a new venture that will require lots of new skills and hours of learning. I learned to fly an airplane in 6 hours of flying around the airport with an instructor. It took me years and hundreds of hours to learn how to be safe. One of the hardest calls for a pilot is to say “it is a no go!”. There is a lot of pressure on you to make that business trip but safety comes first. Experienced pilots are just pilots that have made the right calls and had some good luck along the way. A pilot would not take a trip without knowing where he was going, how long it would take and how much fuel he will need. A business plan is such a document. It is perfectly fine to take the plane up for an hour and fly within visual reference to your home town. But opening an online store is a multi-point journey. Create a flight plan before you venture from your home base.

## Will E-Commerce Rake in Sales For Your Small Business?

E-commerce is the fastest growing retail market. Yes, more and more businesses are selling online. Do you think your product or service has what it takes to meet the world market head on and build a bigger, better customer base.

It is a common misconception that e-commerce is for World Wide Markets. Local businesses can benefit from e-commerce and related technologies.

## Can you showcase your product or service online?

Yes	No
-----	----

*Can you offer faster, 24-hour customer service online?*

Yes	No
-----	----

*Do you have an existing Web site that you can position for online sales?*

Yes	No
-----	----

*Are you prepared to invest in a full-fledged e-commerce Website ?*

Yes	No
-----	----

*Is e-commerce a strategic business direction for your firm?*

Yes	No
-----	----

Source: SCORE.org

Service businesses may also benefit from e-commerce stores. Printers, hair salons, doctors are a few. If you sell services from a price list then you can sell services and make appointments via your e-commerce website.



**KISS:** 97% of customers research online before making a purchase. Translation: if potential customers can't find your business online, you're missing out on a huge chunk of your market.

*(After e-comm) When clients called to make appointments, they would take their name and info as usual but this time they also said, I would like to send you a confirming email. May I have your email address? Once they had this info, they then told the client, they could save 10% if they made their next appointment via the website. This studio had very few no-shows as the website took their payments. There was a very lenient policy for changing appointments but no-refunds were given to no-shows.*

Assuming you are ready to move forward the first step is to create a business plan.

Most any business needs a plan. Even if you have a biz plan for your store, you need a different one for the online store.

Sales are the black hole of biz plans. Online sales will be a large black hole until you have visitors and start seeing results.

A/B testing will help you tweak your site, advertising and marketing.

**KISS:** If you are not trying to sell investors or a bank on your new store then you should keep this simple.

*What are your costs of operation?*

- What can you afford to spend on advertising?
- How long can you spend those dollars?
- Will gross profits be lower than your store? How much?
- Why are you doing this? You need to have a good reason just like any business decision would require.

# You have a Brick and Mortar Store



If you do not then your course of learning is much different. An existing storeowner has years of experience in buying and selling products. They have a real sense of what customers want and what they will pay.

We would not discourage you from starting a Volusion store or any other without first hand retail experience but we suggest you first contact your local S.C.O.R.E. office and ask them for a mentor before you spend one dollar. [SCORE is a free service that works with the SBA (Small Business Association.) <http://score.org>

Services or Products can be sold online. Volusion is definitely set up for products. With some adaptations you could set up a very nice photography, frame shop and printing company too.

**KISS:** *Understand from the beginning this is not a temporary change. It will take time. You need to leverage your existing knowledge, clients and vendors to make this work. Take small steps first. Don't add all of your products at once. Add them one at a time. Get that product exactly right before you move on to the next.*

## What kinds of products / services can you sell?



If you do not have many products to sell then you might consider using something besides Volusion as there are many shopping carts at no cost. There maybe some additional reasons for using Volusion even if you have few products. Take advantage of our free consultation so we can help you will sort this out.

# What you will need from your B&M store?



**list of categories** - Amazon is a great source for imitation. They have an extensive list of categories you should consider for your store.

**KISS:** *There are several reasons for this. These terms are very familiar. Also, if you later wish to open a store on eBay, Amazon or Yahoo, they tend to match category names very closely. What you want to avoid is EDUCATION. It is expensive to educate customers and giving the new names for the familiar, i.e. Grande~Large is cute but expensive. Do you know how many times people have to ask, "now what size is Grande?"*

**List of vendors** - Vendor data is not a necessity but you will find that having it in Volusion will be helpful. Dropship vendors can be sent email orders upon the completion of each sale.

**list of customers** - Hopefully, you have been taking customer names, addresses, phone and emails as they will allow you to set up accounts for these customers prior to their first visit.

The exact column headings are not important right now. Before you import a list we will have you learn more about how to format your lists and what data will be required.

## Importing Data

After you know what you are doing, it will be a huge advantage to know Excel and how to create spreadsheets. Much of what you will do during the start-up phase will be completed much faster if you can import .csv files that contain basic product information.

Gather or create the following .csv files:

- list of products, product options, prices
- list of categories
- list of vendors
- list of customers

The exact column headings are not important right now. Before you import a list we will have you learn more about how to format your lists and what data will be required. For now, gather as much information as you have for each list.

# Product Photos



Imagine selling a product without a photo. I bet you have never bought a product online without seeing a photo. There are great photos and there are poor photos. There are no Bad photos as that is a relative and very subjective description.

My preference is; use or take the absolute best photos you can afford.

Existing stores will have lots of products to photograph. I highly recommend you hire a local product photographer to create your image library.

If you prefer to save money and have more control, then learn how to shoot product photography.

**Budget:** Don't underestimate the cost of setting up a photo studio. If you need help, we can assist you with this step also.

## Copying Photos

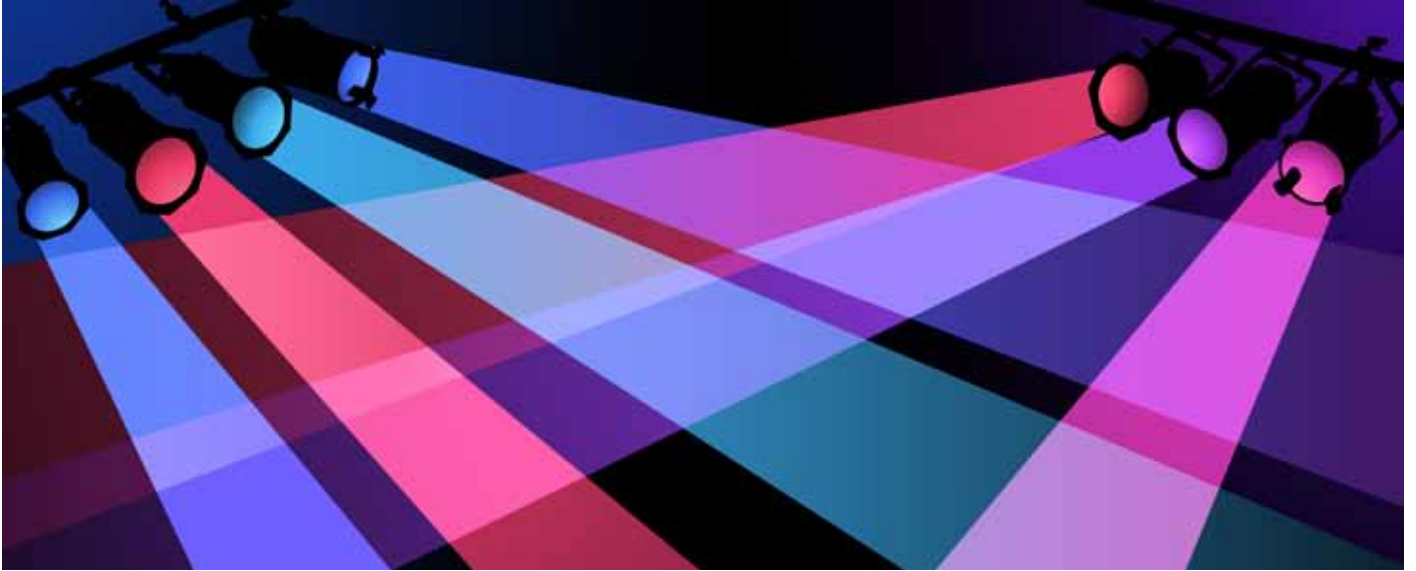
Ok that is of course wrong but it depends upon your products too as it may not be stealing at all. Assume you sell lawn and garden products. You and every other home and garden store sell the same items. The manufacturers normally supply images of their products. Your photos will most likely not be any different than anyone else. (Which is not a good thing by the way.)

## Set Up an Image Management System

This will be very important the more you grow. One of the worst things that can happen to a retailer is to sell a product that does not exist. Packaging changes a lot for some products. Package sizes, color and layouts change ever so slightly. You must keep track of these changes or you may find your cost of returns to become very high.

**KISS:** *Adobe Lightroom is the best for this purpose. There are others and you can do this with Picaso or other free photo software.*

# Product Videos



According to the Social Media Marketing Report 2011, “Video marketing on the rise: A significant 77% of marketers plan on increasing their use of YouTube and video marketing, making it the top area marketers will invest in for 2011.”

Why is this? YouTube remains the top social networking site. Video productions can be done with no budget or a huge budget depending upon your brand, your market and your budget.

There are many sites that are using video to sell products. Lowes recently started to create videos for their store products. Interestingly, they did them to provide better in-store service to customers.

*Say you are shopping for carpet. You have lots of choices in manufacturers, styles, colors, durability and more. It would be to your advantage to have a knowledgeable sales person to help you out. Hee hee, good luck. Lowes does have them; it is just that they never seem to be there when you need them.*

Solution: videos that provide expert advice on specific products.

Or, this TAG could take you to a webpage where there is a comparison table that will help you choose and then place your order.

More and more Brick and Mortar stores are selling via the Internet via e-commerce shopping carts combined with local store pickup to save time and make shopping more convenient.

Bad Videos:

*Videos that are a waste of time and money are ones that send a bad message, degrade your Brand or do not provide any helpful information. Slideshows are a good example of this. I saw a store that had a video for nearly every product. The video was a single photo that was zoomed in and out with a few words of text on it. The audio was boring and provided no additional information to aid the buyer.*

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Here is how it works. Each carpet sample has a “TAG” that looks like this. Using your Smartphone, you take a photo of the tag which then precedes to download a video that will give you a 60 second sales pitch about this product. It could also allow you to place your order and pay for it. A receipt with a similar TAG would be downloaded to your phone and upon checkout, you would just present it via your phone as you pick up your carpet in the Pick Up area.

**KISS:** Visit [vpbuzz.com/videos](http://vpbuzz.com/videos) for more information about how to use videos, how to produce videos and how to host videos for your website.

# Product descriptions are key to selling.



**KISS:** *WARNING: Do not copy manufacture's text or competitors product or category descriptions. It will hurt your SEO program.*

The concern is not as much with copyright violations but rather search engine optimization [SEO]. Google and other search engines spot duplicate text across the entire web. This will hurt your SEO ranking.

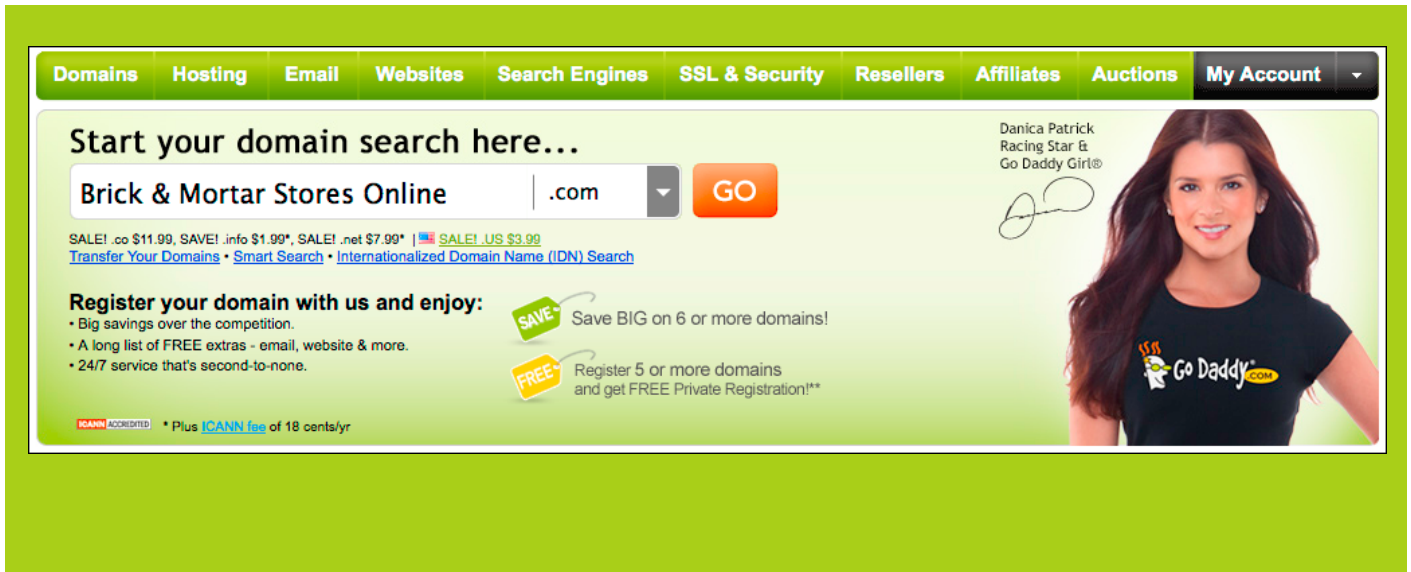
Depending upon your products, you may need to hire a professional copywriter. Sharper Image was known for its catalogs and what they did right was to have really great copy.

How much copy to write is another issue you need to establish. The one rule that will never change about search engines is this: **Content is King**

Just give visitors a little at a time using **read more...** links when appropriate.

Volusion allows you to have multiple tabs for content descriptions, technical specs and one extra tab for more content. You can name these, as you need for your store.

# What you will need to start your store.



## Domain Name

*YourCompany.com* may or may not be taken. If it is then your domain name does not have to be your company name.

Assume your company name is: *Taylor's* and you sell Kitchen Cabinets

*Taylor.com* is not available but the next best choice might be *taylorskitchencabinets.com*. The problem I have is that it is a lot of characters to type and people may forget the exact spelling of your website.

**KISS:** *Stay away from using .biz, .us, .info and others. Most software and most of us are well tuned into the .com as a URL extension.*

It helps to know what people are going to be searching for, i.e. "kitchen cabinets". If you are not in a niche market, i.e. kitchen cabinets for churches or schools and you don't manufacture your own products then you can go with *MemphisKitchenCabinets.com*. *SchoolCabinets.com* or *churchcabinets.com* would be great if they are available and that is your specialty.

Google, IBM, Yahoo are all names that have no meaning. But it takes years and lots of money to brand them into the heads of people too.

**KISS:** *Choose a URL that is easy to remember. Choose a URL that contains your most common keyword(s). Add your city name if that will help you get what you need. Long domain names are not helpful as people need to remember them.*

*MemphisKitCabs.com* is a good secondary name for a URL. Buy both if you can. You can have more than one URL for your site. One for Search engines and one for clients that is easy to remember. *Mkitcabs.com* is another variation that would work especially for email addresses. [barry@mkitcabs.com](mailto:barry@mkitcabs.com) is very easy to remember.

## Hosting Account

I use Godaddy. There are others (tons) but Godaddy has been cheap, reliable and compared to one other I did try they have the best customer service department ever!

## Email Service

I do not recommend you buy hosting from Volusion.com. The reasons are many. GoDaddy.com is a better choice - A

place to do this for standard emails.

If you wish to set up an email program, then you will need a different option for that. I use MailChimp and have used Constant Contact. Both are good and depends upon your volume and needs.

## Complete Merchant Services Application

You should contact Volusion sales to set up your merchant credit card processing account. Even if you have an existing store front merchant account, you will have to set up one for your online store. The good news is that this account can replace your existing account. Not all store front processors will support Volusion. I used Intuit for my store but had to change to Authorize.net. The costs were about the same. Authorize.net will then set up an account with another company that will actually make the payments to your bank. It's complicated but Volusion is there to help you navigate this.

## SSL

Secure Site License is what you must have to take credit cards. It will cost you about \$100. You have no choice or options. Just tell Volusion you want it.

Ok, you have one option: PayPal does not require SSL but that is not a good option in my opinion for a serious site.

## Logo

Your logo will need to be converted to png and jpeg. Other art work will be needed from time to time. Hire a graphic artist or learn Photoshop. Dealing with new logos and art will become a constant requirement.

## Choose Template

Go with the free templates even if you don't much like any of them. Volusion seems to believe that they must give away a few, not so great templates, to get people started. I have seen several companies invest thousands of dollars developing a template for a new store only to find out that what they thought they needed was wrong a year later.

**KISS:** *This is a journey. You will not know all the hills, turns and hidden dangers until you have traveled the path.*

You can always change templates later. Let your site pay for itself first. Only use profits to pay for such improvements. [If you have lots of money then go for it! The other thing to remember is first impressions are important but good design does not necessarily equate to good sales either. The psychology of website sales is very important. Read more on Landing pages and visit my **expert** on conversions, [Brian Massey](#), the Conversion Scientist, for a far better understanding of what to not do with a webpage.

## Spreadsheet Application

I use and have used Excel for a long time. Google and Apple make alternative spreadsheet applications. There are others too.

If you have lots of products, you will find yourself using Volusion's Import and Export features a lot.

## Photoshop

Photo editing is just a basic function for all websites.

## Basic understanding of html

Ok, you can put this off but believe me you will never be free from html. Volusion does make it easy to modify

your text entries but eventually you will need to know a few things to get you out of trouble or to improve your presentations. Lynda.com is the best for training that I have seen. W2.org is free and has lots of great info too.

## List of Categories

Amazon is a great source for general category names. If you are thinking of selling products via Amazon.com you should see what categories they have for you to choose from.

Look at competitor's sites too. Naming categories to be different is not a good idea as the category name will be included in your page URLs and thus a source for building your SEO ranking with search engines.

## List of Products

You should have a list of all your products but start out with just a few. Select your best sellers first. What categories are they in? Build those categories first. Now add one product per category. Evaluate what you like or don't like. Tweak your categories and products as if they were final before you begin to add more products.

## Vendor List

Depending upon your products and how many vendors you do business with. You could leave this to last. You don't have to have them to sell. You do need them to do drop shipment auto notifications.

## Customer List

Hopefully, you have been keeping track of your customers for years. Got their emails? Know what they have purchased? If not, you will need to figure out some ways (incentives) to get their emails.

I find that most people don't mind giving you their email address when you ask and add this "we don't share your email, you can always opt out later if you prefer." We needed to inform our clients when their order was ready so getting their email for that purpose worked well.

## Articles of Policy

Policies that work for your store, if you have them in writing, may not work for online. Some of the policies you will need are:

- Warranty
- Guarantees
- Returns and Exchanges
- Shipping

## Shipping Vendor Accounts

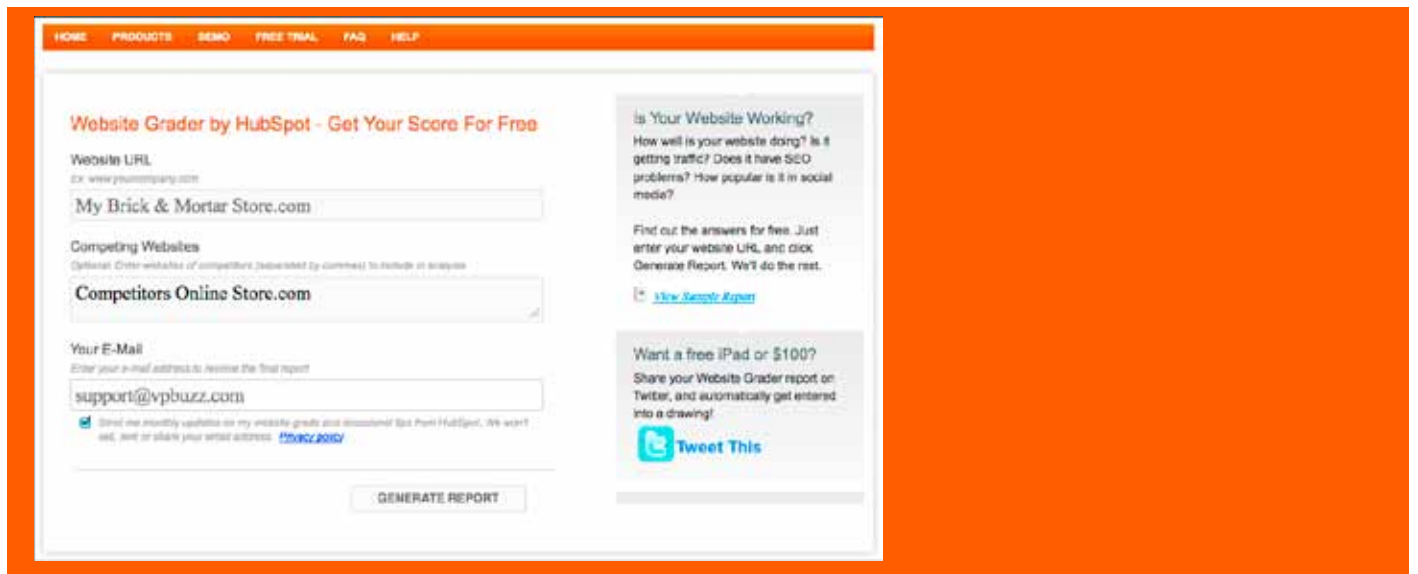
You will be able to calculate shipping costs and charge them on your orders.

- FedEx
- UPS
- USPS

## FAQs

You should think about common questions you answer daily at your store about your store, your policies and your products.

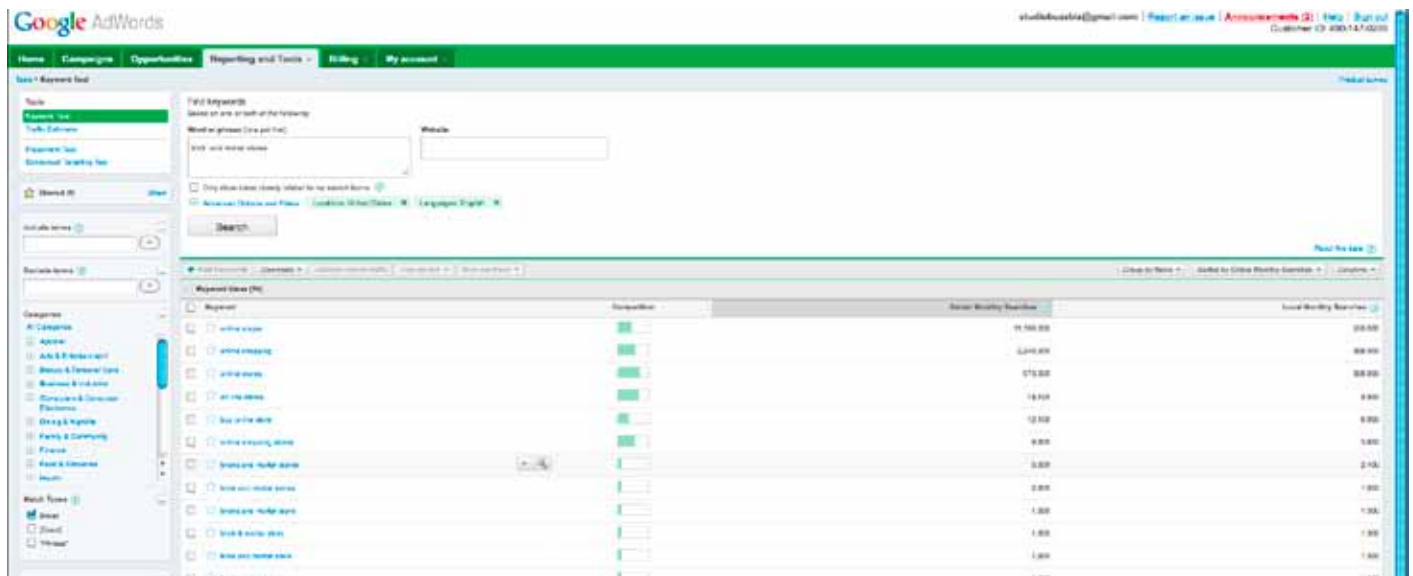
# Competitive Website Evaluations



The image shows a screenshot of the 'Website Grader by HubSpot' form. The form is set against a white background with an orange border. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for HOME, PRODUCTS, DEMO, FREE TRIAL, FAQ, and HELP. The main heading is 'Website Grader by HubSpot - Get Your Score For Free'. Below this, there are three input fields: 'Website URL' with the example 'www.yourcompany.com' and the user input 'My Brick & Mortar Store.com'; 'Competing Websites' with the instruction 'Optional: Enter website(s) of competitors (separated by commas) to include in analysis' and the user input 'Competitors Online Store.com'; and 'Your E-Mail' with the instruction 'Enter your e-mail address to receive the final report' and the user input 'support@vpbuzz.com'. There is a checkbox for 'Send me monthly updates on my website grade and occasional tips from HubSpot. We won't sell, rent or share your email address.' with a link to 'Privacy Policy'. A 'GENERATE REPORT' button is at the bottom. To the right of the form, there are two promotional boxes. The first is titled 'Is Your Website Working?' and asks 'How well is your website doing? Is it getting traffic? Does it have SEO problems? How popular is it in social media?' and offers a 'View Report Now' link. The second is titled 'Want a free iPad or \$100?' and asks 'Share your Website Grader report on Twitter, and automatically get entered into a drawing!' with a 'Tweet This' button.

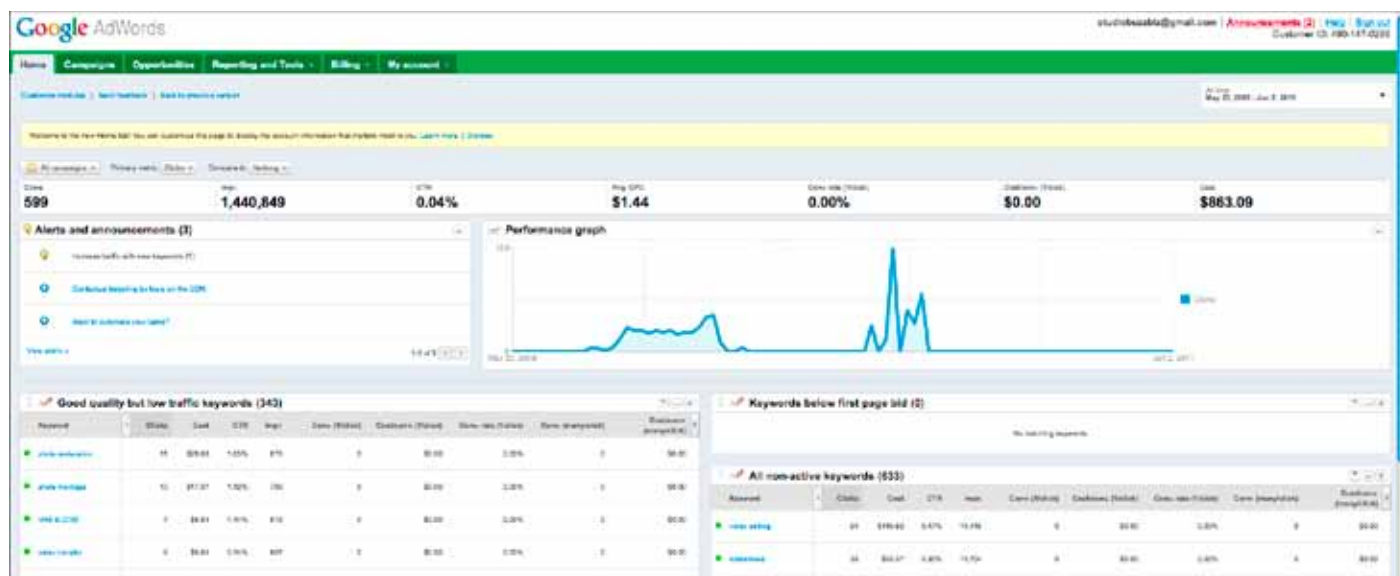
You might as well find out who your new competitors are. Your customers will know. Evaluate them as if you were going to buy something. Make a list of what you like and don't. Ask yourself, why did they do this? How would I do this differently?

# Keyword Searches



How will people find your store? There are lots of ways but they will do it the same way you do it for other sites. Keywords are very important to finding you. Learn about keywords and how they are used. “school kitchen cabinets” is a keyword phrase. Depending upon how you type it in Google/bing you can get different results. School kitchen cabinets without the quotes will show you schools, cabinets and kitchens. To learn more about keywords visit Google’s webmaster site.

# Marketing Your Store



There are more ways to market now than ever before. The good news is they are easy to try and results are immediate and measurable. The bad news is that are new, not well understood and can waste a lot of money if left un-monitored.

## Social Media Marketing

“Social media marketing takes a lot of time: The majority of marketers (58%) are using social media for 6 hours or more each week, and more than a third (34%) invest 11 or more hours weekly.”—Social Media Marketing Report 2011

## AdWords

What I know is that you can drop a lot of money very fast with AdWords. This is a very complex subject, one that books are written about and revised every six months as the rules are constantly changing.

## Multiple Store Fronts

Imagine having two storefronts in the same mall. Both stores carry the same items and the same prices. Why? Normally, you would never do that but that is what KFC, Starbucks and other vendors do in an airport. Why, because you may never get to their store in the main terminal if your flight is just switching planes. Having your products for sale on Amazon.com or Yahoo Stores or Buy.com or eBay.com may make a lot of sense. The cost is low and it gives you more opportunity to meet new buyers.

Say you sell Worm Farms in your Lawn and Garden store. You also sell them online. You could also sell them on davesgarden.com a blog with classified type sales or Amazon.com or eBay.com. You will most likely have different costs so changing prices may be reasonable. Wish to sell at a lower cost than your B&M or website? Put them on eBay as “Used”.

*I spoke to an artist that sold via a trade booth at art festivals. His painting started at \$600. One day a customer dropped a canvas and it damaged a corner. It was noticeable but would be covered up with a frame. He put that painting in the front with a sign that said, “Sold As Is — Slightly Damaged - \$500”. It sold within an hour. He then went to the back of the booth and damaged another and repeated the process. He sold every damaged painting that day and had the best day of sales ever.*

# How to learn—Where to learn



- **SCORE.org**  
Backed by the US Small Business Association, this group of volunteers is there to help you with any business consulting need you might have and it is FREE.
- **Competition**  
Learn from their mistakes. What are they doing right?
- **Related or similar websites**  
The most important page is Home. What turns you on? Why do you leave others websites?
- Volusion Support and Knowledge Base
- **Find expert blogs**  
There are many blogs on every topic. It will take time to find the best.
- **Read comments on competitors websites**  
Feedbacks are valuable when they come from a reliable source. Many comments you see are CRAPE. You can tell if they seem to be sincere but take them all semi-seriously.
- **Books**  
Marketing books, AdWords, SEO are favorite topics for you.
- **YouTube**  
Many good videos about how to... you have to search them out.
- **Lynda.com**  
For \$25/mo. This is a great source for learning new software apps, html and css. Nothing on Volusion though, sorry.
- **Links:** Visit [vpbuzz.com/links](http://vpbuzz.com/links) for additional links that you will find helpful