



APCICT

Asian and Pacific Training Centre
for Information and Communication
Technology for Development



Course on

E-Commerce and Digital Marketing

E-Commerce and Digital Marketing

Women Entrepreneur Track



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Technology for Development

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PREFACE

The Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), launched in 2016, is APCICT's flagship ICT capacity-building programme for women's entrepreneurship. It aims to enhance the skills of women entrepreneurs in utilizing digital tools in their businesses. It also seeks to support policymakers in creating an environment that is conducive for digitally-empowered women entrepreneurs.

Recent challenges in the global landscape, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitated a review of APCICT's training support for women entrepreneurs. The pandemic was a wake-up call that significantly impacted women-owned enterprises and underscored the importance of the digital transformation of businesses. It not only exposed vulnerabilities but also the need for women entrepreneurs to harness the power of technology in a holistic manner.

APCICT revamped the WIFI programme (now called WIFI DX) to equip women entrepreneurs with practical tools to navigate disruptions and harness the benefits of digital transformation effectively. With WIFI DX, new courses have been developed, encompassing e-commerce and digital marketing, digital financial literacy, data analytics, trust and security, and business continuity planning.

It is our hope that WIFI DX programme will serve as a valuable resource for women entrepreneurs in the region, so that their enterprises can thrive, become more productive, and sustainable.

Kiyoung Ko
Director
APCICT/ESCAP

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course is divided into two main parts. The 1st half of this course equips entrepreneurs and marketers with essential digital marketing skills in 5 modules:

1. **Digital Marketing Basics:** Master digital marketing fundamentals
2. **Social Media Marketing (SMM):** Utilise social media for effective audience engagement
3. **Search Engine Marketing (SEM):** Drive online sales and leads through advertising
4. **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** Enhance website visibility and rank on search engines
5. **Emerging Trends:** Utilise AI for Efficient Content Production

In today's digital age, a strong online presence is essential for business success. This comprehensive digital marketing course equips entrepreneurs and marketers with the necessary skills to navigate the ever-evolving marketing landscape.

This part of the course focuses on building a strong digital marketing foundation. We will delve into the core principles of digital marketing, exploring how it can amplify brand awareness, generate customer interest, and ultimately drive sales. From there, we will gain practical knowledge of key digital marketing channels, including social media marketing (SMM), search engine marketing (SEM), and search engine optimization (SEO).

The course culminates with a focus on emerging trends, exploring how cutting-edge technologies like AI-powered content creation tools can streamline your workflow and free up valuable time to focus on strategic marketing initiatives.

The 2nd half of this course equips entrepreneurs and marketers with knowledge to build an online e-commerce presence in 5 modules:

1. **Introduction to E-commerce:** Understand e-commerce basics and types
2. **Product Research and Creation:** Conduct product research and opportunities sizing

- 3. E-commerce Management and Operations:** Understand ecommerce operations
- 4. Getting Your Brand and Products Online:** Getting the brand and product online
- 5. E-commerce Digital Marketing Strategy:** Utilise ads and tactical campaigns to grow

This course navigates the exciting world of e-commerce. Participants will delve into the fundamentals, exploring various business models like drop shipping and white labeling. Market research techniques using tools like Google Trends will empower you to identify profitable product opportunities.

Next, participants will tackle the practicalities of running your online store, gain insights into Content Management Systems (CMS) that streamline store management and understand the associated operational costs for e-commerce. And they will go through optimal store type – marketplace, self-managed, or social commerce – based on a crucial framework: the 3Cs.

Finally, the course will cover how to leverage social media communities, paid advertising, and strategic partnerships with complementary brands to expand your reach and achieve success in the competitive e-commerce landscape.

Course Target Audience

Women entrepreneurs, women marketers, and policy makers.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Learn digital marketing basics
2. Understand the types of digital marketing channels
3. Practice on the different digital marketing tools
4. Perform market sizing, audience segmentation and product research
5. Understand e-commerce sales channel management, logistics and operations
6. Optimise women entrepreneurs' e-commerce business

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Apply knowledge learnt to enhance digital marketing
2. Utilise digital marketing channels to promote business/ product
3. Drive online sales and leads with advertising
4. Enhance website visibility and rank on search engines
5. Identify, size and venture into e-commerce business
6. Understand and operate basic e-commerce operations
7. Market and optimise ecommerce business for growth

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PART 1: DIGITAL MARKETING

MODULE 1: DIGITAL MARKETING BASICS

Description

Module 1 will explore the fundamentals of digital marketing and how to harness the different types of digital marketing channels for businesses.

Objectives

- Understand digital marketing basics.
- Understand the importance of digital marketing.
- Comprehend the pros and cons of digital marketing.

Key messages

The module key message

Digital marketing: Promoting products and services online.

Why digital marketing: Increase awareness, drive sales, create demand.

Lesson 1: Introduction to digital marketing

In the Y2K era (around the late 1990s and early 2000s), online marketing was still in its nascent stages but was gaining momentum with the increasing popularity of the internet.

Today, we are more familiar with the term, digital marketing.

Digital marketing refers to promoting and selling products or; and services online. Instead of traditional marketing channels like TV, radio, publications or billboards, digital marketing involves using online platforms

like websites, social media, emails, and search engines to reach and connect with people who might be interested in the product or service. In subsequent modules, key concepts covered will include Social Media Marketing (SMM), Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) for businesses.

Digital marketing taps on the power of online connectivity to spread the word and connect with customers anytime and anywhere.

Content discussion

Question: Explain what digital marketing is, in your own terms.

Guideline: Digital marketing is traditionally known as online marketing. Digital marketing is defined as promoting and selling products or;and services online.

Lesson 2: Importance of digital marketing

As a business owner or a marketer, advertising and digital marketing are necessary in today's contemporary world. But why? What does it do for our business?

Content discussion

Question: What does digital marketing do for our business?

Guideline: It can be summarised into 3 key themes.

1. Raise awareness
2. Increase sales
3. Create demand



Raise Awareness

**Increase
Sales**

**Create
Desire**

Driving awareness

McDonald, a popular household fast food restaurant chain is world's fifth most valuable brand(1). Why do McDonald's advertise and market intensely for new menu launches? The reason is to increase mindshare.

Imagine mindshare as the space a brand takes up in people's heads. It is about how much people know and think about a brand, product, or idea. When we talk about mindshare, we're talking about how well a brand is remembered, recognized, and what qualities or characteristics people connect with it. So, if a brand has good mindshare, it means that people easily remember it, recall it, and have positive thoughts about it when they think of a particular product or service.

Whenever McDonald launches a new menu, they create awareness of the new menu. Essentially, it's about creating a strong and memorable presence in the minds of the target audience, so next time they are hungry, they will recall or recognise the menu or the new food offering.

Increase sales

Digital marketing enables businesses to reach a broader audience, increasing online visibility across countries and continents. Reaching potential customers who may not be accessible through traditional methods. Drive new customer acquisitions from previously untapped geographies and incremental sales from existing audience base.

The longevity of digital content and its ability to drive sales stem from its adaptability, search engine visibility, social sharing potential, and its capacity to be discovered anytime, anywhere.

In the travel industry, accommodation providers and airlines often encourage audiences to book by offering limited-time deals with a sense of scarcity.

Create desire

Luxury brands like Chanel are great at creating wants and demands. Chanel's advertising campaigns often feature high-profile celebrities and influencers to embody the aspirational lifestyle the brand represents.

The brand leverages social media to showcase the brand's lifestyle, enabling consumers to connect with the aspirational qualities of Chanel products. It strategically positions itself as a symbol of prestige, enticing consumers to desire and covet their products as status symbols.

This careful orchestration of branding and marketing tactics fosters a deep-seated desire among consumers to own and showcase Chanel products as a testament to their elevated social standing.

Lesson 3: Pros and cons of digital marketing

Digital marketing has become an indispensable part of modern business strategies, offering a plethora of advantages while presenting its own set of challenges.

The pros of digital marketing include targeted audience reach, measurable analytics, and cost-effectiveness, enabling businesses to connect with their audience more efficiently.

However, navigating the digital landscape comes with cons such as information overload, rapid technological changes and managing widespread negative sentiments/ feedback.

Pros	Cons
Targeted reach	Race for attention
Measurable analytics	Platform and technical dependency
Cost-effective	Managing feedback

Pros

Targeted reach

Digital marketing enables precise targeting of specific demographics, ensuring that marketing messages reach the most relevant audiences. This includes targeting based on geographic location (such as countries, states, or radius), demographics (such as teenagers, working adults, or grandparents), indicated interests, and digital behavior.

Measurable analytics

Digital marketing platforms/ channels provide real-time insights, allowing businesses to track online interactions and engagements. This enables accurate measurement of campaign performance and facilitates optimization using data-driven approaches.

Cost-effective

In contrast to traditional channels, digital marketing offers budget fluidity and flexibility, allowing businesses to allocate budgets based on real-time performance. Unlike traditional media, which may require a minimum spending threshold (e.g. Billboard), digital marketing channels allow businesses to start with low budgets and adjust spending as needed.

Cons

Competition for attention

In the digital realm, the landscape is often saturated, posing a challenge for businesses to stand out amidst the noise. As competition intensifies, advertising costs rise, and visibility diminishes. For example, businesses and content creators are constantly striving to produce more creative content on TikTok to break through the clutter of content.

Dependency on platforms and technology

Digital marketing relies heavily on various platforms and technologies, necessitating technical expertise. Moreover, businesses become reliant on third-party platforms, which poses a risk if these platforms decide to discontinue services or increase charges unexpectedly.

Handling feedback

Positive content shared online can significantly uplift a business by enhancing its reputation and attracting more customers. When customers share their positive experiences, it serves as powerful social proof. Conversely, negative feedback, comments, or social media backlash can quickly gain traction online, potentially damaging a business's reputation. Digital marketing exposes businesses to immediate public scrutiny, making the management of negative publicity a challenging task.

Summary of Module 1

The module on Digital Marketing Basics delves into the essential components of online marketing. It highlights the advantages of digital marketing, such as targeted audience reach and measurable analytics, alongside challenges like heightened competition and platform dependency. Despite obstacles, digital marketing remains indispensable for businesses, providing unique opportunities for growth and customer engagement in today's digital age.

MODULE 2: SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING (SMM)

Objectives

- Understand digital marketing basics.
- Understand the importance of digital marketing.
- Comprehend the pros and cons of digital marketing.

Key messages

The module key message

SMM: Be present, post contents and interact with audiences at where they spent their time.

Channels: Choose the channel(s) based on where your audience use and platform advantages.

Follow the unicorn: Replicate your competitors best performing contents.

Lesson 1: Introduction to social media marketing (SMM)

Social media marketing taps on the power of social networks to reach, connect, and interact with their audience.

For businesses, by establishing a presence on popular platforms, it's a way to be present and reach where their potential customers are hanging out online.

Social media marketing tactics involves creating and sharing content that engages the audience, building a community around the brand, and ultimately encouraging people to take action, like making a purchase or sharing the content with their friends.

Social media marketing (SMM) tactics

Common social media marketing tactics includes:

Creating and sharing contents: This tactic entails creating compelling and relevant content tailored to the target audience's interests and preferences. By consistently sharing valuable content, businesses can increase brand visibility, attract audience attention, and encourage engagement with their posts.

Building a community: Building a community involves fostering meaningful connections and interactions among followers or customers. This can be achieved through active engagement, responding to comments and messages, organising events or facilitating discussions. Creating a sense of belonging within the community.

Audience engagement and conversion: Encouraging audience interaction entails prompting followers to like, comment, share, or otherwise engage with the brand's content. Additionally, businesses can employ strategies such as offering promotions, conducting polls or surveys, hosting live sessions, and providing seamless pathways for converting engagement into desired actions, such as making purchases.

Content quiz

Question: Which platform have the most number of monthly active users?

- a. Facebook
- b. YouTube
- c. WhatsApp

Guideline: a. Facebook (Meta) has 3.1 billion active users(2) (user who use Facebook at least once a month)

World's top social media platforms

The world's most used social platform[3] by the number of monthly active users are:

1. Facebook
2. YouTube
3. WhatsApp
4. Instagram
5. WeChat
6. TikTok
7. Facebook Messenger
8. Douyin
9. Telegram
10. Snapchat

Lesson 2: Pros and cons of social media channels

For business considering social media marketing, each of these 10 social media platforms has its own set of pros and cons. Let's examine them in greater detail.

Channel	Pros	Cons
Facebook (FB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive audience reach • Established FB groups • Diverse content formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low organic reach • Require advertising to drive reach
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive audience reach • Facilitates long form content storytelling or product education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video production efforts • Low organic reach
WhatsApp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High engagement and open-rate • Business API facilitates automation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited marketing features • Limited discoverability

Channel	Pros	Cons
Instagram (IG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal for businesses with strong visual content • Brand partnership with influencers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires aesthetic visual content
WeChat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superapp. Messaging, social media and payment • Small apps for various functions within WeChat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Market Focus • Content is subject to censorship • Intricate business account registration setup
TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach younger demographics • Contents virality potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast creativity rhythm and trends • Less developed advertising features
Facebook Messenger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct 1 to 1 conversations • Chatbots availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of adoption • Users preference of more prevalent social messaging app
Douyin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach younger demographics • Contents virality potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Market Focus • Content is subject to censorship • Fast creativity rhythm and trends
Telegram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High engagement and open-rate • End-to-end encryption and self-destructing messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less extensive reach compared to other social messaging app • Limited advertising features
Snapchat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach younger demographics • Leverage on AR for engagements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage predominantly in US, India, France and UK • Audience base largely teenagers and young adults

Interestingly, several popular social media platforms are owned by the same parent company. On their advertising interfaces, businesses can advertise across the suite of channels owned by the same company, offering a comprehensive approach to reaching their target audience.

- **Meta:** Meta is the parent company of Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger.
- **Alphabet:** Alphabet is the parent company of Google and YouTube.

- **Bytedance:** Bytedance is the parent company that owns DouYin and TikTok.

Social media marketing platform considerations

When selecting social media platforms, it's essential to thoroughly understand your target audience and choose platforms where they are most active.

Consider factors such as the platform's content type, format, and features that seamlessly align with your overall content strategy. It's important to focus on platforms that match your available resources, including time, budget, and creative production capabilities, to ensure you can maintain a consistent and high-quality online presence.

Certain content may resonate effectively across multiple platforms, allowing you to optimize your reach and enhance audience engagement.

As the landscape of social media is dynamic and trends evolve rapidly. Stay informed about new features, emerging platforms, and changes in user behavior. By remaining adaptable to evolving trends and performance metrics, you can ensure that your social media marketing strategy stays relevant and effective.

Lesson 3: Follow the content unicorn

Have you seen content creators re-enacting YouTube shorts, Instagram reels and TikTok videos that were already viral?

They are following the unicorns. "Follow the unicorn" is an industry saying whereby we take reference from other competitor brands/ content creator viral contents that did well and re-enact it.

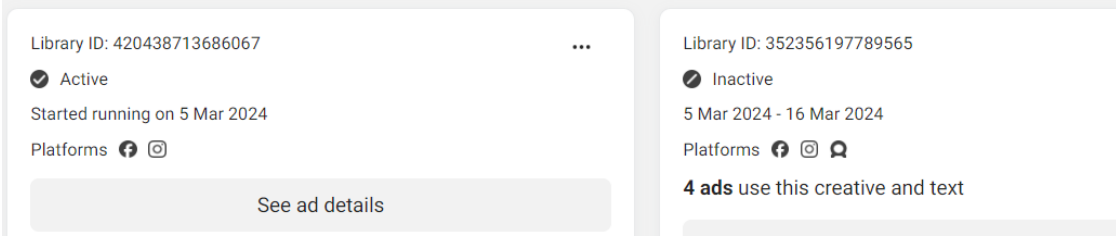
“Unicorn content” in social media marketing refers to exceptionally successful and high-performing content that outperforms expectations, often going viral and capturing widespread attention. Much like a mythical unicorn, this content is rare and stands out from the rest. It has the ability to achieve remarkable reach, engagement, and impact within a short period.

After all, if particular pieces of competitor’s content performed well, chances are it will do well too for you given you are targeting similar audiences.

Content activity: Research Competitor Ads (<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library>)

Guideline:



1. Use competitors Facebook Page Name, not their brand or product name
2. Identify if competitor ads are still running by looking at active or inactive status
3. Identify the platforms where competitor ads are showing on
4. Meta ads library still in development. Not all ads might be shown on ads library
5. Meta is rolling out a newer version subsequently that reflects estimated range of spends and interactions per ad



Library ID: 420438713686067 ...

Active

Started running on 5 Mar 2024




Platforms  

See ad details

Library ID: 352356197789565

Inactive

5 Mar 2024 - 16 Mar 2024

Platforms   

4 ads use this creative and text

Social media platform ad libraries facilitate monitoring by researchers, journalists, and regulators to ensure compliance with advertising policies and regulations.

This public repository provides users with details about ads running on the platform, including advertiser information, ad content, targeting criteria, and expenditure.

The ad library aims to promote transparency in political advertising, mitigate misinformation, and allow users to understand data usage for targeted ads. Thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in advertising.

Platforms	Research competitors creative via Ad Libraries
Meta	https://www.facebook.com/ads/library
Google	https://adstransparency.google.com/
TikTok	https://library.tiktok.com/ads/
LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/ad-library/

Summary of Module 2

Module 2 centers on Social Media Marketing (SMM), emphasizing the importance of meeting audiences where they actively engaged digitally.

It underscores three primary tactics: crafting compelling content, nurturing communities, and fostering audience interaction for conversion.

The selection of social media platforms for marketing hinges on evaluating the pros and cons of each platform and aligning them with available business resources.

Lastly, we learned the concept of “unicorn content,” which businesses can replicate successful competitor contents to achieve content success more efficiently.

MODULE 3: SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING (SEM)

Description

Have you ever wondered why certain advertiser ads appear at the top of the Google search ads? How much do they pay for it and how does Google choose which ads to show? In this module, we will uncover the mechanics of search engine marketing and how to excel in them.

Objectives

- Introduction to search engine marketing (SEM)
- Understand how SEM works
- Research competitors search engine ads

Key messages

The module key message

SEM: Be visible when audiences search for your product or services online.

Per pay click: Advertiser only pays when click on ad happens.

Lesson 1: Introduction to search engine marketing

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a paid advertising strategy to make your website show up at the top of search results, increasing visibility and attracting visitors when people search for related keywords.

While search ads drive measurable traffic to the advertiser website, but every click on the ad costs the advertiser. Search ads are also known as pay per click (PPC) ads.

Why search engine marketing (SEM)

It increases your business visibility and attracts visitors to your website when people search for related keywords.

Users searching for your related keywords are often quality audiences seeking for more information. They are in the research stage or have likelihood to convert.

Search ads offer advertisers with:

- 1. Relevance**

Ability to target keywords searches, location and audience.

- 2. Control**

Advertisers get to decide their strategy and daily budget, adjustable at any time.

- 3. Measurable Results**

Tracking clicks and results attributed to the search ads and keywords.

Lesson 2: Research competitor search engine ads

Content activity: Perform a Google search

Guideline: Perform a Google search on the product/service learner is selling (www.google.com)

Prompts for learners to learn better:

1. Are there competitors ads on the search engine results page (SERP)?
2. How do we recognise if it is a search ad? Sponsored wording accompanied the paid search ads.
3. Are competitors search ad copies compelling? The use of offers or clear call-to-action.

On the SERP, sometimes search ads will be shown and sometimes none.

When no search ads are shown. It typically meant that:

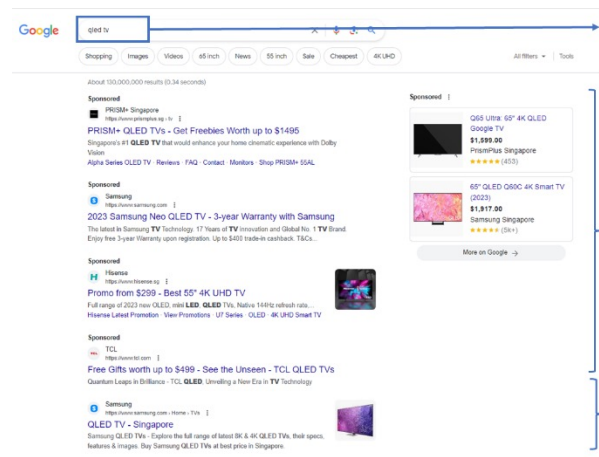
1. Advertisers not bidding for that keyword (which signals low commercial opportunity around that keyword) or; and
2. Bid for that moment is not competitive for search ads to show up (Search engine maintains an undisclosed floor price to each industry. To understand industry's historical lowest and highest bids, research on Google keyword planner)

In the next lesson, we identify the different components related to SEM and advertiser ad position.

Lesson 3: Understand how SEM works

Sections of search engine results page (SERP)

Figure 1. Sample search engine results page screenshot



The screenshot shows a Google search for "oled tv". The search bar is at the top with "oled tv" entered. Below the search bar are tabs for Shopping, Images, Videos, 65 inch, News, 55 inch, Sale, Cheapest, and 4K UHD. The results are categorized into "Sponsored" and "Natural Search (Organic) Results".

Search Term (Also known as Keywords): This label points to the search bar containing "oled tv".

Pay Per Click Ads: This label points to the "Sponsored" section, which includes ads from PRISM+ Singapore, Samsung, and Hisense.

Natural Search (Organic) Results SEO: This label points to the "Natural Search (Organic) Results" section, which includes results from Samsung and TCL.

SERP (search engine results page): SERP refers to the page displayed by search engines in response to a user's query. In SEM, advertisers aim to have their ads prominently displayed on the SERP to increase visibility and drive traffic to their websites.

Search terms: Also known as Keywords. These are the phrases or words

users enter into search engines when looking for information. An advertiser target specific keywords relevant to the business for their SEM campaign.

Pay-per-click (PPC) ads: Also known as paid search ads. When users search for targeted keywords, advertisers ads appear at the top or bottom of the search engine results page (SERP). Advertisers pay the search engine a fee each time their ad is clicked, hence the term “pay-per-click.”

Natural search (organic) results: Also known as free or non-paid listings, these are search results that appear below the PPC ads on the SERP. Organic results featuring companies websites are determined by the search engine’s algorithm based on relevance and authority. Organic results is not influenced by paid SEM but search engine optimisation (SEO).

Search ad position on SERP

Figure 2. Search ads position on SERP



On each SERP, there are 7 search ad slots. Normally 4 ads at the top and 3 at the bottom.

Ads that get to be shown at the top of the page normally receive the

most clicks.

How do search engines decide which advertiser search ads to show, and at what positions on the page? Search engines typically use the ad rank to decide.

Ad rank

Ad rank is a score which search engines use to decide where to place advertisers' search ads on their SERP.

Ads with higher ad ranks are more likely to be shown at the top of the search results, where they're more visible and more likely to get clicked on.

- **Ad rank = Max CPC bid x quality score + expected impact of ads extension**

It's calculated based on below factors:

1. **Maximum CPC Bid:** This is the maximum amount of money an advertiser is willing to pay for a click on their ad. The higher the bid, the better the chance of getting a higher ad rank.
2. **Quality score:** This is a measure to evaluate the relevance and quality of your advertisements. A higher score leads to better ad rank and cost efficiency. There are three factors taken into consideration.
 - **Ad relevance:** How relevant are your ads to people search terms. If a user performed a keyword search Fried Chicken on search engine, are the ads relevant to user needs (e.g. Relevant search ads: Fried chicken delivery vs Irrelevant search ad: Frozen ice cream)
 - **Expected click-through rate:** How likely people are to click

on the ad when they see it.

- **Landing page experience:** How useful and relevant your website's landing page is to people who click on your ad.

3. Expected impact of ad extensions: Ad extensions are extra pieces of information or features that can be added to your ad, like links to specific pages on your website, a phone number or shop location. The more helpful and relevant your ad extensions are, the better your ad rank will be.

Advertiser get charged when someone click on the search ad.

To attain efficient cost per click. Maintain a competitive cost per click bid, continuously optimise for a high-quality score by improving the three factors and implement ad extensions.

Content quiz

Question: What is the market share of search engines?

- a. Google (94%), Bing (2%), Yahoo (1%), Naver (<1%), DuckDuckGo (<1%), Others (2%)
- b. Google (90%), Bing (3%), Yahoo (3%), Naver (<1%), DuckDuckGo (<1%), Others (2%)
- c. Google (86%), Bing (5%), Yahoo (5%), Naver (<1%), DuckDuckGo (<1%), Others (2%)

Guideline: b. Search engine market shares for 2023Q4 Asia Pacific.

- Explain Google search engines tops the preferred choice of search engine globally, with few exceptions of Chinese, Russian and Korean regions.
- Trainer to research local market share of search engines datapoints using <https://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share> for training content localisation
- SEM concepts learnt are applicable across other Search Engines (Yahoo, Bing etc)

Summary of Module 3

Search engine marketing (SEM) refers to paid search ads to boost website visibility on search engine result pages (SERPs).

Advertisers bid on keywords appealing to high intent audiences searching for the relevant products or services, attracting quality click-throughs, traffic to the website.

Improving ad quality score boosts ad position ranking and overall SEM effectiveness.

MODULE 4: SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

Description

In today's digital age, where information is readily available online, people turn to search engines to find what they need, whether it's information, products to buy, places to go, or things to do.

In this module we explore how search engines work and how to rank our website on search engine results page (SERP) when audiences are searching for our products or services.

Objectives

- Understand how does search engines work.
- Understand search engine optimisation (SEO).
- Differentiate between OnPage and OffPage SEO.

Key messages

The module key message

SEO: Getting your website to rank high on search engine results page.

Organic (free) traffic: Clicks on organic listing are free. Sustainable for business.

Lesson 1: Understand how does search engines work

The role of search engines

Imagine the internet as an enormous library with billions of books. Now, picture search engines as the friendly librarians who help you find exactly what you're looking for in this vast sea of information. The primary mission of search engines, like Google, Bing, or Yahoo, is to organize and index

the immense amount of content available online, making it accessible to users.

Before we can get our website(s) to rank organically on search engine results pages, let's understand further how search engines work.

Mechanics of search engines

1. Spider: Crawling the internet

Just as librarians roam the shelves, search engines deploy “crawlers” or “spiders” to traverse the web. These automated bots visit websites, scanning and analyzing content. Think of them as diligent librarians, diligently cataloging the books (web pages) they encounter.

2. Index: Organising the library

Once the spiders gather information, search engines create an index—a colossal digital catalog. This index is akin to the library's organized shelves, where each book (web page) is assigned a specific location based on its content. This step ensures that search engines can swiftly retrieve relevant information when you type a query.

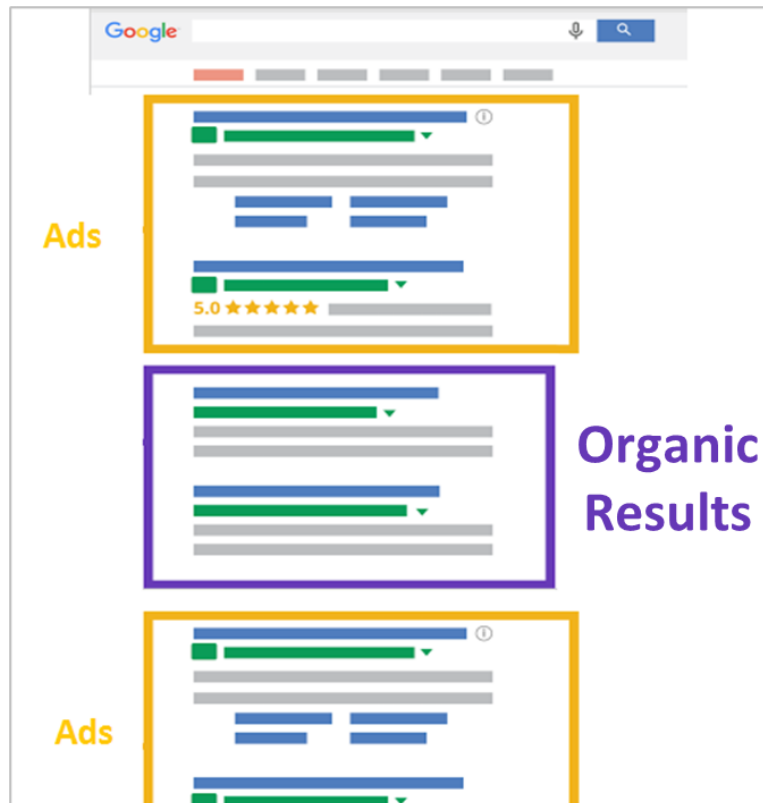
3. Ranking: Selecting the best contents

When you submit a search query, the search engine becomes your helpful librarian, sifting through its organized catalog to find the most relevant books (web pages). Here's where the magic happens: the search engine uses algorithms to assess the quality and relevance of web pages, ranking them based on numerous factors like keywords, content quality, and user experience.

Search engines are like diligent librarians who constantly update their catalog. As new content is created and old content evolves, search engines regularly recrawl, reindex, and refine their algorithms to ensure that your virtual library is always up-to-date and relevant.

Organic results on search engine results page (SERP)

Figure 3. Organic results position on SERP



Organic results position: Organic results appear below any paid advertisements or sponsored listings on a search engine results page (SERP).

List format: These results are typically presented in a list format, and users can identify them as non-highlighted listings without any indication of being advertisements.

Not influenced by ads: Unlike paid results, organic listings are not influenced by advertising spend; they are determined by a search engine's algorithms.

Organic results are primarily ranked based on

1. Relevance to the user's search query:

Search engines like Google aim to deliver the most relevant results to user queries.

This means your website content, title tags, meta descriptions, and even URLs should clearly communicate what your page is about and how it addresses the user's search intent.

Search intent: Understanding the user's intent behind a search query is crucial. Are users looking for information ("how to cook chicken rice"), a product ("frozen chicken delivery"), or a service ("chicken rice restaurant near me")? Optimise your content to fulfill that intent.

Keyword research: Identify relevant keywords users might search for related to your website content. However, don't stuff keywords - ensure the keywords naturally integrate into your website content for a smooth reading experience.

2. Content quality:

Search engines prioritize high-quality content that provides value to users. This includes:

Informative and comprehensive: Content should be well-researched, accurate, and address the topic in depth.

Freshness and updates: Regularly update content with new information or insights to stay relevant, especially for fast-changing topics.

Expertise and authority: Demonstrate expertise by citing credible sources and showcasing your authority in the subject matter.

Engaging and readable: Content should be well-written, grammatically correct, and structured for easy reading with clear headings, subheadings, and bullet points.

3. Website user experience (UX):

Search engines consider how users interact with your website as a ranking factor. A positive UX means users can easily find the information they need.

Mobile-friendliness: A significant portion of searches happen on mobile devices. Ensure your website is responsive and looks good on all screen sizes.

Page speed: Fast loading times are crucial for a positive user experience. Optimize images, code, and server performance for quick page loads.

Navigation and structure: A clear and intuitive website structure allows users to navigate and find the information they seek effortlessly. Internal linking between relevant content pages also helps search engines understand your website's content hierarchy.

Engaged users: Metrics like time spent on page and bounce rate (users who leave after a single page view) can indicate user engagement. High bounce rates might signal search engines that your content isn't meeting user needs.

Lesson 2: Introduction to search engine optimisation

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of improving your website to increase its visibility in on search engines whenever people search for the products/ services you sell.

In short, SEO is the process of improving your website ranking on search engine results pages.

Why search engine optimisation (SEO)

Increase online visibility. SEO helps your business, products, or services rank higher in search engine results, making them more easily discoverable by potential customers.

Cost-effective. Unlike paid search ads, SEO delivers organic results, meaning you don't pay for each click. It's a sustainable long-term strategy for online visibility.

Lesson 3: OnPage and OffPage optimisation

SEO activities can be categorised as either:

- OnPage SEO; or
- OffPage SEO

What is OnPage SEO

OnPage SEO refers to optimisations taken directly on your website to improve website ranking.

Imagine you're inviting guests to your website. Onpage SEO involves fine-tuning your website itself to make it welcoming and informative for both visitors and search engines. This includes aspects like the quality and relevance of your content, the ease of navigation, and ensuring your site functions well on all devices. By optimising these elements, you can help search engines understand what your website is about and why it's valuable to users searching for specific information.

Common OnPage SEO

Fresh and relevant content: Regularly update your website with relevant and informative content that includes the keywords you are trying to rank for.

Fast loading pages: Compressed images to reduce file size (<1 mb) and ensure your website loads quickly, keeping visitors engaged.

Simple navigation: Make it easy for users to find what they're looking for with clear and intuitive navigation menus.

Descriptive URLs: Use clear and descriptive URLs that reflect the content of each page. This helps users understand what they'll find and search engines categorize your website effectively.

What is OffPage SEO

Off-Page SEO refers to optimisations taken outside of your website to improve website ranking.

Imagine building a reputation for your website. Off-page SEO focuses on activities outside your website that influence how search engines perceive its authority and trustworthiness. This can involve things like backlinks from high-quality websites, positive online reviews, and brand mentions on social media.

Common OffPage SEO

Building website authority: Earning backlinks from high-quality websites is like getting positive recommendations. Search engines see these as a sign of your website's credibility and relevance.

Content collaboration: Guest blogging on relevant websites or collaborating with influencers allows you to reach new audiences and potentially gain valuable backlinks.

Positive online presence: Encouraging positive online reviews and brand mentions on social media helps build trust and establish your website as a reliable source.

Content activity: Perform SEO audit on website

Guideline: Perform SEO audit using free tool (www.seoptimer.com)

Prompts for learners to learn better

1. Enter your/ competitor website and click audit.
2. Look at audit scorecard to understand where website is performing and what are the gap.

Free tool might be limited to 1 usage per IP address. If that happens, advise learners to try it again at home.

Content quiz

Question: Which is the best digital marketing channel?

- a. Social media marketing (SMM)
- b. Search engine marketing (SEM)
- c. Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Guideline: All Effective digital marketing requires the use of multiple channels to complement one another.

- A channel that worked well at the start of business, might no longer worked so well as the company grows.

Summary of Module 4

Mastering SEO helps website rank higher in search results, making it more visible to potential customers.

SEO involves OnPage SEO (optimising website itself) and OffPage SEO (building its reputation online). By combining both strategies, women entrepreneurs can attract more organic traffic to website sustainably and complementing their paid search strategy.

MODULE 5: EMERGING TRENDS

Description

Feeling overwhelmed by content creation? AI tools can help! This module explores how AI can reduce your workload and streamline content production.

By effectively utilizing AI, marketers can redirect their time towards more strategic tasks.

Objectives

- Practice AI tool for more efficient content production.

Key messages

The module key message

AI application: Use AI tools to reduce content production time.

TikTok video script generator: Generate script for TikTok video, Meta reels and YouTube shorts.

Lesson 1: Leveraging on AI to produce video script

Content creation can be laborious, time consuming and daunting if we are producing contents in a non-native language. This is where AI creative tools can help.

TikTok video script generator

This tool helps you create scripts and storyboards for short-form video content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.

ChatGPT for contents copywriting

This tool helps you with social media post captions and ads copies creation.

Content activity: Create video script with TikTok AI.

Guideline: Select industry, input product name and a few product descriptions

(<https://ads.tiktok.com/business/creativecenter/script-generator>).

1. All input fields need to be completed.
2. Give at least a few product (service) description prompts.

Summary of Module 5

Leverage AI tools to generate initial content ideas and visuals, freeing up time for strategic planning and execution.

DIGITAL MARKETING COURSE WRAP UP

In today's digital landscape, a strong online presence was crucial for businesses to connect with their target audience. This course equipped participants with the tools to navigate the ever-evolving world of digital marketing.

The course began by exploring the core principles of digital marketing, highlighting its power to amplify brand awareness, generate customer demand, and ultimately drive sales. You gained insights into selecting the most suitable social media platforms for your brand, allowing women entrepreneurs to engage with their audience where they spend their time through social media marketing (SMM).

Moving on, the course delved into search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). Through SEO strategies, participants learned how to optimize your website for organic search results, ensuring their business appeared prominently when potential customers searched for particular products or services. Paid SEM strategies to complement women entrepreneurs' organic reach is also explored.

Finally, the course explored cutting-edge trends like AI-powered content creation tools. By leveraging such AI tools, participants could streamline content production, freeing up valuable time to focus on strategic marketing initiatives. This course empowered them to confidently navigate the digital marketing landscape and market the business in the digital space.

PART 2: E-COMMERCE

MODULE 6: INTRODUCTION TO E-COMMERCE

Description

This module will explore the foundations of e-commerce business, exploring its definition, advantages, challenges and various business models.

Objectives

- Understand e-commerce basics
- Differentiate e-commerce business models
- Comprehend pros and cons of e-commerce business models

Key messages

The module key message

E-commerce: Any form of commerce transactions that happen online.

Why e-commerce: Reach new markets, flexible and cost effective to scale business.

Lesson 1: What Is E-commerce

Content discussion

Question: Explain what e-commerce is, in your own terms.

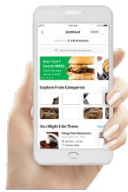
Guideline: E-commerce is any form of commerce transactions that happens online.

E-commerce typically have these traits:

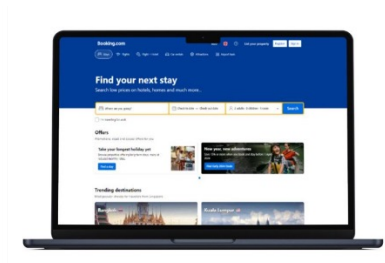
1. **Online transaction:** Commerce transactions that happens online.
2. **Product exchange:** Involves the exchange of products, services, or information.
3. **Exchange medium:** Utilises digital platforms to facilitate the journey from marketing to sales and customer service.

Examples of e-commerce transactions

Figure 4. Examples of e-commerce transactions



**Ordering Food
Delivery via Grab**



**Booking Hotels via
Booking.com**



**Buying Products
via Shopee**

Importance of E-commerce

E-commerce channel is increasingly becoming a standard expectation for consumer.

But what does it do for our business?

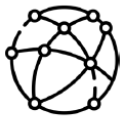
Content discussion

Question: Explain what e-commerce can do for our business, in your own terms.

Guideline: 3 key themes: Reach, Scale & Cost-effective.

E-commerce channel offers the below advantages for businesses.

Figure 5. E-commerce advantages for businesses



Global Reach
New markets



Flexible Scalability
Tech infrastructure



Cost Effective
Lower sunk cost

Global reach: E-commerce transcends geographical limitations, bypassing traditional brick-and-mortar store setup and establish a presence in any market with internet connectivity. Imagine overseas customers ordering your products/ services with just a few clicks. Expands customer base exponentially, opening doors to previously unreachable demographics and revenue streams.

Flexible scalability: E-commerce platforms boast remarkable scalability. Platforms and technological infrastructure can seamlessly accommodate increasing sales volume without the constraints of a physical store. This means we can add and remove products on the fly, expand into new regions without incurring the significant sunken costs associated with additional brick-and-mortar locations or staffing. Think of scaling business as and when you require.

Cost effective: E-commerce offers a significant advantage in terms of upfront investment. Compared to traditional retail, women entrepreneurs can avoid the high costs associated with physical store rent, staffing multiple locations, and maintaining extensive inventory in each one. This translates to a lower barrier to entry, allowing them to start our business with a more manageable investment. Profits earned online can then be strategically reinvested into further growth initiatives (e.g. Digital marketing).

E-commerce challenges for business

While e-commerce offers global reach and efficiency, it requires business to focus on seamless customer experience, data security, and multi-channels approach for long-term success.

Some of the challenges commonly faced are:

Seamless customer experience

A seamless customer experience is the cornerstone of e-commerce success. However, several challenges can create friction. Logistics delays can leave customers frustrated, especially if communication is lacking. Inaccurate product descriptions, whether due to missing details or misleading information, can lead to a surge in returns and dissatisfied customers.

Finally, a website with a clunky User Experience (UX) can make it difficult for customers to find what they're looking for and complete purchases efficiently. Entrepreneurs must prioritize efficient logistics partners, invest in high-quality product information, and create a user-friendly website to ensure a smooth customer journey.

Data security and privacy

Data security and privacy are paramount concerns in e-commerce. Customers entrust businesses with sensitive information, such as payment details and personal data. A data breach can not only damage a brand's reputation but also lead to legal repercussions. E-commerce businesses must prioritize robust security measures, including encryption of sensitive data and compliance with data privacy regulations. Building a culture of data security fosters trust with customers and allows them to shop with confidence.

Platforms dependency

While e-commerce platforms and marketplaces offer valuable features, and access to a large customer base, over-reliance on them can create challenges. Businesses may have limited control over branding and customer relationships when solely operating within another service provider ecosystem.

This can make it difficult to build a distinct brand identity and cultivate loyalty directly with customers. E-commerce businesses should explore ways to strike a balance. Leveraging platforms for reach and functionality is crucial, but establishing a secondary brand website can help cultivate a more direct connection with customers, strengthen brand control and not over reliant on platforms/ marketplaces.

Lesson 2: Types of E-commerce business model

In this lesson, we delve into the different types of e-commerce business models.

Model	Description
Drop shipping	Business sells products without holding any stock, relying supplier to fulfill and ship orders directly to customers
Reselling	Middleman who buys products from manufacturers or distributors and sells them to end consumers for a profit
White labeling	Company orders Minimum Order Quantity (MOQ) from OEM and sell under its own brand
Manufacturing/ Do-It-Yourself	Business creates products and sell directly to consumer

Model	Description
Drop shipping	Online accessories seller
Reselling	Avon cosmetics
White labeling	Daniel Wellington watches
Manufacturing/ Do-It-Yourself	Online home bakery

Each e-commerce business model presents its own set of advantages and considerations, and understanding these nuances is crucial for business before investing resources into establishing a thriving online presence. The following section will delve into the pros and cons to help identify the business model that best aligns with various capabilities and needs.

Lesson 3: Pros and cons of E-commerce business models

1. Drop shipping

- **Pros:**
 - **Easy to start and scale:** Drop shipping requires minimal upfront investment in inventory. The supplier will store, package, and ship products directly to your customers. This allows entrepreneurs to launch their online store quickly and scale the product offerings easily without managing physical inventory.
 - **Low overhead costs:** Since this type of entrepreneurs do not hold inventory, they can avoid storage and fulfillment costs. This frees up capital for marketing and other business development initiatives.

- **Cons:**
 - **Competitive market:** Drop shipping is a popular model, leading to high competition and potentially lower profit margins due to price wars.
 - **Limited control over brand and quality:** These type of businesses rely on the supplier for product quality, packaging, and shipping speed. This can limit entrepreneurs from being able to control the product quality and differentiate their brand.

2. Reselling

- **Pros:**
 - **No need for manufacturing:** These entrepreneurs source products from brand owner or distributors, eliminating the need for manufacturing or product development. And allows them to focus on marketing and sales.
 - **Established product:** Resellers can work on products that are well established and well recognised by the market.
- **Cons:**
 - **Lower profit margins:** Resellers typically have lower profit margins compared to other models due to restriction on selling price.
 - **Commitment and contracts:** Some of these reseller contracts are annually renegotiated on commercials and contract renewal may be subjected to scrutiny based on annual sales revenue contributed.

3. White labeling

- **Pros:**
 - **Minimum production risk:** White labeling allows the entrepreneurs to brand generic products without the high costs and risks associated with large-scale manufacturing. They can request for customised packaging that are in line with their brand identity.
 - **Potential for premium pricing:** By offering a unique brand experience and potentially higher quality packaging, entrepreneurs can command a premium price compared to generic products.
- **Cons:**
 - **Limited control over manufacturing:** While these type of entrepreneurs have more control over branding than drop shipping, they still rely on a manufacturer for production. Finding a reliable supplier with consistent quality is crucial.
 - **Competition from generic products:** Customers may be able to find similar unbranded products at lower prices, impacting sales.

4. Manufacturing/ Do-It-Yourself (DIY)

- **Pros:**
 - **Full control over quality:** Entrepreneurs have complete control over the manufacturing process and product quality, ensuring the brand reputation and customer satisfaction.

- **Customization flexibility:** The ability to quickly customise offerings based on customer feedback or trends allows entrepreneurs to cater to specific market demands and potentially create premium offerings.
- **Cons:**
 - **High production costs:** Manufacturing requires significant upfront investment in machinery, materials, and labor. This can be a barrier to entry for new businesses.
 - **Longer lead times:** Developing and manufacturing one's own products can take longer compared to other models, impacting the time to market.

Businesses can choose to start off with a business model and subsequently switched to another (e.g. Start with drop shipping, then switch to white labeling once customer base is built).

It is wise to always test the market receptiveness with the following before investing heavily into the business model.

Model	Description
Drop shipping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order one product for trial • Assess product quality
Reselling	
White labeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get pre-orders first • Assess market demand
Manufacturing/ Do-It-Yourself	

Summary of Module 6

This module covers the fundamentals of e-commerce and key business models. We explored the advantages of e-commerce, including global reach and efficient operations. However, challenges like customer experience, data security, and platform dependence demand attention. By understanding the pros and cons of different models – drop shipping, reselling, white labeling, and manufacturing – entrepreneurs can select the one that best aligns with their goals and capabilities. Remember, the chosen e-commerce business model can evolve alongside the business growth.

MODULE 7: PRODUCT RESEARCH AND CREATION

Description

Learn critical product research skills. Identify market needs, assess competition, and ensure your product is positioned for success before launching into a new product, category, or market.

Objectives

- Conduct product research.
- Determine market demand.
- Perform opportunity, feasibility and domain advantage study.

Key messages

The module key message

Product research: Research before expanding product category or market.

Google trends: Understand seasonality and demands.

Lesson 1: Product research

Thinking of expanding your horizons? Before diving headfirst into a new market or product line, product research is your secret weapon. Entrepreneurs need to understand the demand, opportunities and feasibility. This ensures them to focus their efforts on commercially viable products with long-term potential.

Lesson 2: Determine market demand

Below are some of the ways to quickly conduct market demand research on our own, without the exorbitant fees of engaging a professional research firm.

In ascending order of efforts:

1. Online research (low effort):

Leverage the power of social listening (e.g. Facebook groups) and search volume analysis (e.g. Google trends) to understand current market conversations and gauge search interest for your product category. This approach provides data-backed insights into customer needs and potential demand.

2. Gap analysis (medium effort):

Conduct a competitor analysis to identify unmet needs and potential gaps in the market. By understanding your competitors' strengths and weaknesses (e.g. Looking at competitor websites services offerings), you can position your product to fill a void and offer a differentiated solution.

3. Market research (medium to high effort):

Consider surveys and interviews to gather quantitative and qualitative data directly from your target audience (e.g. Seeking survey response from 25 - 50 persons that are potential customer audiences). This research helps refine product concept, price the product, and inform marketing strategy.

4. Pilot test (high effort):

For a real-world validation of your product concept, consider a pilot test. This involves launching a limited batch to a targeted audience and gathering feedback (e.g. Releasing a beta or getting pre-orders for a small batch). This approach allows for crucial product iteration and test the market receptiveness before a full-scale market launch.

Content activity: Assess demand with Google Trends

Guideline: Search product/ service learner is selling
(<https://trends.google.com>)

Prompts for learners to learn better

1. Select location at country/ region/ province
2. Select data period to 1 or 2 or 5 years
3. Analyse seasonality and patterns

Lesson 3: Opportunity and feasibility study

Content activity: Conduct opportunity and feasibility study

Guideline: Participants to complete the table on their own writing material or on computing device

Prompts for participants to attempt the table better

1. Work on your own product/ service; or
2. Choose a new product/ service you like to explore

Fill in the description.

Consideration	Description
Product Keyword	
Target Market	
Volume & Frequency	
Decision Makers & Purchasing Cycle	
Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)	
Operational Complexity	
Competitive Advantage	

Here are prompts to help you get started.

Consideration	Description
Product Keyword	What is the product?
Target Market	Who are the target buyers? (Age, location, interests)
Volume & Frequency	How many quantity do customer buy on average? How frequent do they order?
Decision Makers & Purchasing Cycle	Who makes the decision to buy? How long the purchasing decision takes?
Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)	Predicted lifetime purchases value from an average customer?
Operational Complexity	Any foreseen distribution, inventory, and fulfilment challenges?
Competitive Advantage	Any unfair advantage against competitors?

Example

Consideration	Description
Product Keyword	Diving watches
Target Market	Age 30 - 55 Mostly males Europe & US Watch lovers Divers
Volume & Frequency	1 x per lifetime 1 piece of watch
Decision Makers & Purchasing Cycle	Watch wearers Immediate to 2 weeks

Consideration	Description
Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)	USD500 x 1 = USD500
Operational Complexity	Taxation at customs Straps doesn't fit them
Competitive Advantage	1) Exclusive connection w Seiko 2) Technical expertise 3) In-house designed

Summary of the Module 7

In this module, we learnt to identify commercially viable products through market research techniques and opportunity analysis.

Using the various research methods taught, we can conduct cost-effective online research to pilot launch. Using the opportunity and feasibility study, we assess factors like target market, competition, and operational complexity to determine a product's potential for success.

This elaborated but necessary approach helps us make informed decisions on products.

MODULE 8: E-COMMERCE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

Description

From secure payments to shipping, this module shows what happens behind-the-scenes and cost involved to keeps your e-commerce business running 24/7.

Objectives

- Understand payment gateways.
- Select storage and shipping providers.
- Understand common operational cost breakdown.

Key messages

The module key message

Content Management System (CMS): Online app to manage your online store.

Operation costs: Annual (CMS, domain) and variable (Marketing, shipping, storage).

Lesson 1: Payment gateways

Payment gateways are likened to the digital cashier of your online store. It is the technology that facilitates the transfer of payment between your website, the customer, and the bank.

When choosing which payment gateways to integrate for your e-commerce channel, prioritise the gateway that serve your target audiences' preferences (e.g. WeChat pay for Chinese audiences, Crypto Pay for Crypto users, Cash on Delivery for geographies that prefer cash payments etc)

- **Transaction processing fees:**

Typically payment gateway will charge a flat nominal fee and a percentage of total transaction value. For instance, if the processing fee is USD 0.30 cents + 2-3 per cent of transaction value

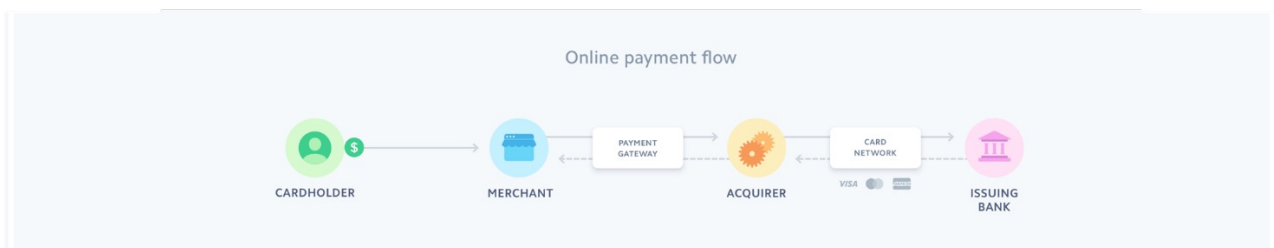
For a USD 100 dollars e-commerce sale. The E-commerce site will receive USD 97.70 dollars.

- **Return or refund processing fee**

Businesses need to watch out for returns and refund processing fee as the costs may add up significantly if multiple returns or refunds add up. For instance, payment gateway may charge USD 5 to 20 dollars per transaction to reverse the payment to payee.

Some businesses have a non-refundable or returns policies to simplify processes and avoid incurring such costs. During sales and promotions, it is common to see e-commerce businesses stating outrightly that products purchased will not be eligible for any refund or return.

Figure 6. Online payment flow



Lesson 2: Storage and shipping providers

Next, we delve into storage and shipping.

Storage:

- **Flexibility is key:** Think of storage like your home - you would not use a huge apartment just to store a few boxes. A tiered approach is recommended as your business grows:
 - **Start small:** Utilise home storage if your business is just starting out.

- **Graduate to a warehouse:** As your business grows, consider a shared storage facility or fulfillment center. This allows you to scale up space efficiently based on demand.
- **Avoid long-term leases:** Opt for flexible storage solutions to avoid being locked into unnecessary space. Unexpected factors might result in sudden fluctuations in product and inventory demands.

Shipping:

- **Cater to different needs:** Customers value choice. Offer a variety of shipping options - from expedited delivery for those who need it fast, to more economical options for budget-conscious buyers.
- **Offer real-time tracking:** Provide real-time shipment tracking so customers can follow their package's journey. This builds trust and reduces servicing customer inquiries on deliveries.
- **Local or global couriers:** For domestic deliveries, local couriers often offer the most cost-effective solution. For international deliveries, international couriers have enhanced networks and insurance options available to see through your delivery globally.
- **Prepare for the unexpected:** Anticipate potential issues like shipping delays, damaged packaging, or lost items. Keep these considerations in-mind and manage situations with adaptability as it comes along.

Lesson 3: Operational cost

Below is a breakdown of the common operational costs for e-commerce business.

Fixed costs (annual)

- **E-commerce CMS: (USD120 - 2,400)**

Choose a platform that fits your budget and features needed (e.g., Shopify, Wix).

- **Optional email & domain: (USD100 - 250)**

Invest in a professional email address and custom domain for brand trust (e.g., yourstore.com).

Variable costs (cost structure)

- **Office space (flexible)**

Start with a home office or virtual office, scale to dedicated space as needed.

- **Storage (flexible)**

Utilize home or office initially, consider warehouses or fulfillment centers for higher volume.

- **Shipping (negotiable)**

Negotiate with providers as delivery volume grows to reduce per-shipment costs.

- **Marketing (scalable)**

Start small, increase investment as it remains profitable and your operations can handle growth.

- **Staffing (scalable)**

Leverage family or part-time help initially, consider hiring virtual assistants and full-time employees as you scale.

Summary of Module 8

This module empowers participants to take control of their online store's operations. Understanding payment gateways is crucial. These secure platforms process customer transactions, so choose options popular with the target audience (e.g., WeChat Pay for China). Be mindful of transaction fees and factor in return processing costs to avoid surprises.

Next, storage and shipping strategies is explored. Start with home storage for a new business and scale up to warehouses or fulfillment centers as one's business grows. Offer a variety of shipping options with real-time tracking to cater to different customer needs and build trust. Remember, local couriers are often the most cost-effective solution domestically, while international options offer expertise in global reach.

Finally, keep financials optimal by optimising both fixed and variable operational costs, adopt a tiered approach and scale up when required.

MODULE 9: GETTING YOUR BRAND AND PRODUCTS ONLINE

Description

Unleash your brand online! This module equips participants to choose the ideal e-commerce store approach, secure a domain name, and create visuals that resonates with customers.

Objectives

- Assess e-commerce store approach.
- Secure website domain name.
- Learn creative best practices.

Key messages

The module key message

Types of e-commerce store: Marketplace, Self-managed online store, Social commerce shop

Ideal store type: 3Cs. Capability, Customer and Competition

Lesson 1: Types of E-commerce store

Generally, the types of e-commerce stores which businesses operate on can be classified as a marketplace, self-managed online store, and social commerce store.

We can choose to have only establish an e-commerce channel via one or multiple stores from the options below.



Marketplace

i.e. Grab



Self-managed Online Store

i.e. nike.com



Social Commerce Shop

i.e. TikTok shop

Marketplaces: Think of bustling online marketplaces like Amazon or Grab. These platforms connect buyers and sellers, providing a space for businesses to list, sell their products and reach a readily pool of audiences.

Self-managed online stores: This approach allows the entrepreneur to build their own digital storefront, offering complete control over branding, product presentation, and customer experience. Platforms like Shopify and WooCommerce empower them to create their own e-commerce webstore.

Social commerce shops: Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram are now integrating e-commerce functionality. This model allows businesses to showcase products, interact with social media users, and even facilitate sales directly through these social channels.

Platform	Pros	Cons
Marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick store setup • Huge customer base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense competition • Lacks brand loyalty • Restricted design
Self-managed online store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full control on brand and user interaction • Reduce comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires marketing for awareness • More set up efforts
Social commerce shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of integration with social media • Tap on social interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to platform policies and algorithm • Less control on design

Content quiz

Question: Which is the best e-commerce store approach?

- Marketplace
- Self-managed online store
- Social commerce shop

Guideline: It depends.

Selecting the optimal e-commerce store approach depends on the 3 C factors

- 1. Capabilities:** Evaluate the available resources, technical expertise, and budget. Do you have the capabilities to support a self-managed store's development and management, or is a marketplace's lower upfront efforts more suitable initially?
- 2. Customer:** Identify company's target audience's online behavior. Do they frequent social media platforms or prioritise the convenience of established marketplaces? Understanding their preferences and presences are essential.
- 3. Competition:** Analyse the competitors'. Are they successful on marketplaces, or do they have thriving self-managed stores? This knowledge can inform decision-making process.

While businesses may start with a single model, the future of e-commerce leans towards a multi-store approach. By strategically utilizing a combination of marketplaces, self-managed stores, and social commerce shops, businesses can expand their reach, cater to diverse customer preferences, and ultimately achieve sustainable success.

Lesson 2: Setting up a self-managed online store

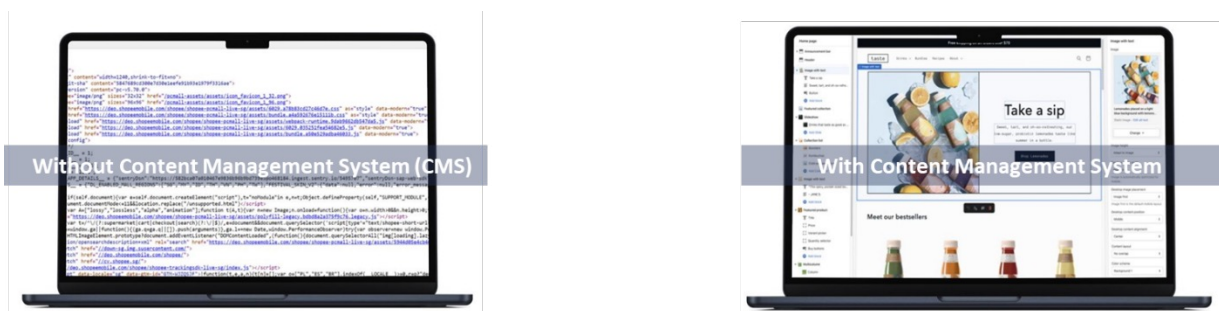
For many businesses today, managing an e-commerce store doesn't require complex coding knowledge.

Content management system (CMS). Think of a CMS as your online store's pilot cockpit. It provides a user-friendly interface, allowing users to create, edit, and organize all of the essential e-commerce elements – without needing to write extensive programming code. This empowers businesses of all sizes to build and manage their online stores efficiently. Here's how a CMS streamlines e-commerce operations:

- **Product management:** Easily add, edit, and update product descriptions, images, prices, and inventory levels.
- **Content creation:** Craft engaging product descriptions, blog posts, and other website content to attract and inform customers.
- **Customization:** Many CMS platforms offer a variety of themes and plugins, allowing sellers to personalise the look and feel of the online store to match their brand identity.
- **User management:** Control user access levels, ensuring only authorized personnel can manage the store's content.

A CMS is a necessity tool for e-commerce businesses to manage their self-managed online store and scale flexibility based on demands.

Figure 7: E-commerce site management interface without CMS (L) versus with CMS (R)



Below are 5 of the world's most common(4) e-commerce CMS alongside with their pros and cons. Each of the platform CMS may offer differentiation in terms of pricing, features and support.

Unless justified, businesses generally stick to the platform as migration from platform to platform often comes with considerable work.

Platform	Pros	Cons
<u>Shopify</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User-friendly interface • Extensive advanced features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited design customization • Subscription based advanced features
<u>BigCommerce</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-channel integration capabilities • More free features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harder to learn at the start compared to other platforms
<u>Adobe Commerce</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-source and scalable ecommerce • Flexibility on customisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires developers for optimal usage • High initial setup and development cost
<u>WooCommerce</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless integration with existing WordPress CMS website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires existing WordPress website • Scalability issues for large catalogs
<u>Wix eCommerce</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick and easy to setup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited scalability • Less advanced ecommerce features

Building trust with a domain name

Your domain name is your online storefront's address. It's the unique web address that customers will type in to reach your store (e.g., [www.yourbrand.com](#)). Securing a domain name helps to establish a professional and trustworthy online presence.

Here's a breakdown of the domain registration process:

1. Choosing your domain name:

- **Brand alignment:** Select a name that reflects your brand identity and is easy for customers to remember. Ideally, it should be short, easy to spell and kept to three syllabuses (e.g. Mc-don-ald).
- **Availability check:** Before purchasing, use of the domain registrar website to verify if your desired domain name is available.

2. Domain registration:

- **Domain registrar:** A domain registrar is a service provider that sells and manages domain names. Choose a reputable registrar with a good track record (e.g. www.godaddy.com)
- **Purchase and linking:** Once you've found your perfect domain name, purchase it through your chosen registrar. Then, link your domain name to your e-commerce website platform.

3. Domain renewal:

- **Annual fees:** Domain names typically require annual renewal fees, which can range around USD 70 dollars or more depending on the registrar and domain extension (.com, .net, etc.). Set up automatic renewal to avoid domain expiration and potential website downtime.

Security considerations:

While not directly related to domain registration, securing your website is paramount. Most of today's e-commerce CMS providers offers complimentary Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificates by default. SSL encrypts communication between your website and customers' browsers, protecting sensitive information like credit card details.

Content activity: Check domain availability and price.

Guideline: .com extension is preferred. Price of domain maybe discounted for the first year if multi-year domain ownership purchased.

Lesson 3: Creatives best practices

High-quality visuals are crucial for e-commerce success. Creatives not only grab customer attention, but also manage expectations by clearly showcasing what a product looks like in detail. Here are three key creative best practices to get you started:

1. Showcase products in use (lifestyle photography)

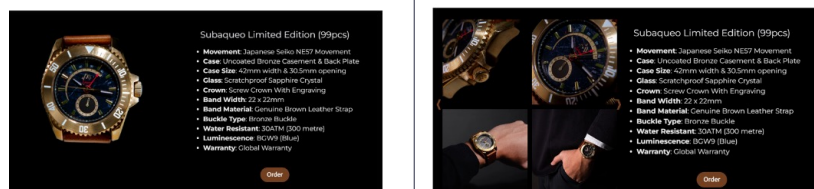
Go beyond product shots: Help potential customers envision themselves using your products. Stage lifestyle photos that depict the products integrated into everyday life.

Target your ideal customer: Consider target audience's lifestyle and aspirations. Showcase your products in settings that resonate with them.



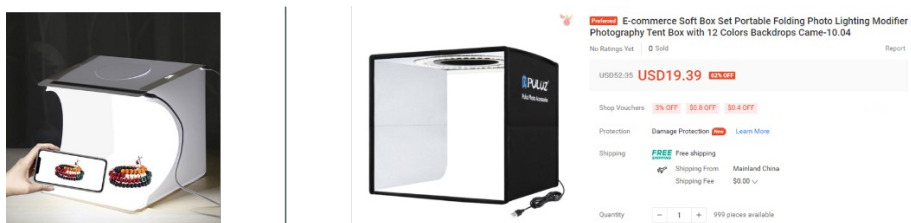
2. Multiple angles and high-quality images (product photography)

Provide a 360-degree view: Don't settle for a single product shot. Include images from different angles, allowing customers to examine the product's details and manage their own expectations before making the purchase.



3. Consider investing in a lightbox

Invest in quality: Grainy or poorly lit photos can portray a lack of professionalism and deter customers. Invest in a lightbox at less than US\$35 where it can provide consistent lighting anytime of the day and facilitate high-quality product photograph.



Summary of Module 9

This module dives into establishing entrepreneurs' online presence. Understanding the various e-commerce store types is crucial. Marketplaces, like Amazon, offer quick setup and large customer bases but limit branding control. Self-managed online stores, built on platforms like Shopify, provide complete control over branding and customer experience but require more development and marketing efforts. Social commerce shops, leveraging platforms like Instagram, allow for easy integration with social media and customer interaction but have limitations on design and are subject to platform algorithms.

Choosing the right model depends on three key factors: Capabilities, considering the resources and technical expertise. Customers, understanding target audience's online behavior. Competition, analyzing how ones' competitors are succeeding online.

The future of e-commerce points towards a multi-store approach, allowing businesses to expand their reach and cater to diverse customer preferences.

MODULE 10: E-COMMERCE DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Description

Supercharge your online sales with proven tactics around social media, targeted ads, partnerships, and innovation.

Objectives

- Learn proven e-commerce growth strategies.
- Learn e-commerce scaling tips.

Key messages

The module key message

Leverage social: Interact with social audiences, encourage User-Generated Contents.

Leverage paid media and partnerships: Social ads, influencers and businesses collaborations.

Lesson 1: Social communities, paid media & partnerships

Now that we have established a foundation in e-commerce, let's explore strategies to scale and grow e-commerce business.

Leverage on social communities

• Foster a community

Social commerce thrives on community. Foster a community around the brand, engage your social media audiences/ followers, poll them for product release ideas, respond promptly to questions and create genuine connections.

- **Invest in visual storytelling and user-generated contents (UGC)**

People connect with stories and relevancy. Showcase your products in action through lifestyle photography and videos. Leverage user-generated content (UGC) – like photos of customers using the products and reviews – to build trust and social proof.

Leverage on paid media

- **Run social commerce ads**

Expand your reach beyond your existing audience with social commerce ads. Target demographics that align with your ideal customer profile. Carefully monitor your return on ad spend (ROAS) – a key metric that measures the revenue generated for each dollar spent on advertising. By optimizing your campaigns, you can maximize your return on investment.

- **Influencer collaborations**

Partner with social media influencers who resonate with your target audience segments. Content creators endorsements and creative content marketing can significantly increase brand awareness, product visibility, and ultimately drive sales. Some content creators are agreeable to be remunerated with a complimentary product or service of yours.

Leverage on partnerships

- **Strategic partnerships**

Explore strategic partnerships with businesses offering complementary products or services. By leveraging each other's brands, you can cross-promote your products to new audiences, expand your reach, and unlock new customer segments.

A successful e-commerce business requires a multi-pronged marketing approach and adaptability to market conditions for growth.

Lesson 2: Scaling E-commerce business

Diversify and conquer

Do not limit yourself to your online store. Build an omni-channel presence by exploring offline sales opportunities. Consider consignment or wholesale partnerships with brick-and-mortar stores, or even pop-up shops to showcase your brand in a physical space. This allows you to reach customers who prefer a traditional shopping experience and expands your brand's visibility.

Innovate or out-date

In the dynamic world of e-commerce, complacency is your enemy. Continuously innovate to stay ahead of the curve. This could involve:

- Identifying and capitalising on emerging trends within your niche.
- Expanding into new product categories that complement your existing offerings.
- Introducing innovative product variations, such as new flavors, sizes, or features.

By proactively innovating, and be your own disruptors, you can prevent product fatigue, maintain customer interest, and differentiate yourself from competitors.

Summary of Module 10

Thrive in e-commerce by going multi-faceted. Engage your social media community, leverage user-generated content, and target ideal customers with paid social ads. Partnering with influencers and complementary businesses expands your reach. But do not be purely online. Explore offline sales through partnerships or pop-up shops.

Finally, prioritize innovation. Identify trends, consider new product categories, and introduce fresh variations to stay ahead. By adapting and using these strategies, you will be well-positioned for e-commerce success.

E-COMMERCE COURSE WRAP UP

E-commerce offers a dynamic landscape for businesses. Leveraging the internet, entrepreneurs can reach a global audience and scale their operations with relative ease. However, building a successful online store requires careful consideration of customer experience and data security.

Before launching, conduct thorough product research. Utilize tools like Google Trends and competitor analysis to identify market demand and potential challenges. Key factors to consider include target audiences, competitive landscape, and the operational complexities of managing the product online.

Once confident in the product, explore the various e-commerce platforms available. Marketplaces, self-managed stores, and social commerce platforms each cater to specific needs. Secure payment gateways are essential for seamless transactions. Choose storage and shipping providers that align with your budget and business scale. Understanding both fixed costs (e.g., platform fees) and variable costs (e.g., per-item shipping) is crucial for financial planning. Finally, establish partnerships, utilize growth tactics and continuously innovate to position your e-commerce for long-term success.

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