



Is E-Commerce As Easy as it Looks?

These days, it seems that everybody is selling products or services on the Internet. You can find everything from unusual books to used cars, from home mortgages to hard-to-find phonograph needles. And as online shopping becomes more of a habit and less of a novelty, more people will let their mouses do the walking.

You may feel that your business belongs in this rapidly-expanding cyber-market. But remember that e-commerce is not for everybody, nor is every product or service suitable to be sold online. Like any other new market, e-commerce requires research, analysis, planning and a significant investment in technology. Even then, the benefits don't always outweigh the costs.

Is your company ready to take the leap into the world of e-commerce? Find out by taking this quick quiz.

- 1) Does your company currently have an Internet presence?
Yes No
- 2) Do you have a dedicated IT staff and/or budget?
Yes No
- 3) Are your product/service offerings easily bundled and priced?
Yes No
- 4) Do you currently accept credit card payments from your customers?
Yes No
- 5) Do you have established supply and delivery chains?
Yes No

Is E-Commerce As Easy as it Looks? Did you answer mostly YES? Your organization sounds ready to begin the process of developing an e-commerce strategy. "Most of the required infrastructure is in place, which helps to mitigate a significant amount of risk", says Milton Cooper, President of HelpNet Inc. a Vienna, VA-based design firm that provides creative, design, and marketing consulting services to organizations nationwide. "Still, a compelling business case to transact online, careful planning and a whole-hearted commitment to the project and your customers are critical ingredients. You may want to look to an experienced consulting firm that will help you connect the dots, avoid the landmines and help deliver on the promise of e-commerce."

Did you answer YES and NO equally?

Don't buy that Super Bowl ad just yet. "There are enough red flags here to keep you at the drawing board for now," says Milton Cooper, President of HelpNet Inc. "Take a long, hard look at your customer base to determine whether an online presence will facilitate their ability to purchase your goods and services. Analyze your infrastructure and create a needs list of hardware, software, middleware, functionality and the supply/delivery chains. Develop a rough

timeline and budget expectations. Risk identification and mitigation are the key elements to your success."

Did you answer mostly NO?

You have pieces of the infrastructure puzzle in place, but need to develop or mature some systems and processes. The amount of risk is manageable, and a thorough requirements analysis will help flesh out any additional issues. "Make sure that your organization is ready and fully committed to make this work, because time, money and (invariably!) pain will be involved," says Milton Cooper, President of HelpNet Inc. "Some call it growing pains, others call it investment; either way, there is a price for progress. Consult with experts you trust to get your arms around the project scope before jumping in with both feet."