

When To Use 3rd Party Sites To Sell



Get Your Online Store Up Immediately

One of the major reasons that people use 3rd party sites to sell is that it's far easier to use someone else's format and templates to get a site live faster than to try to figure out how to do it on your own. Even though website programming has gotten a lot easier, it can still be a steep learning curve for someone who has never dealt with HTML or templates before. If they don't want to take the time to learn, many 3rd party sites are extremely user-friendly and have a working staff that can help people to get their stores up in record time.

POPULAR 3RD PARTY SITES

We'll discuss more in detail a number of 3rd party sites that others have found user-friendly and easy to get started selling online. You probably have heard of eBay.com as a highly popular way to sell, but there are many others, including Etsy.com, CafePress.com, Amazon.com, and many more. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses and will appeal to a particular audience.

MATCH THE INVENTORY TO THE SITE

The reason that eBay.com is so popular is because you can sell a wide range of products in an auction format, thus getting more sales. However, other sites like Amazon.com can also sell more than books; the public just isn't as aware of the many options available. Etsy.com tends to attract artists, while CafePress.com will appeal to people with an idea who don't want to create products as much as market those products that come from their ideas.

GET HELP ALONG THE WAY

Take advantage of the many ways to get help from each of these sites. eBay.com has a large help support area that is quite responsive, as it makes its money by people selling things on the eBay site. It pays for the people of eBay to help facilitate your experience. It's not going to be a slam dunk, but it will certainly be easier than programming a website from the ground up.

Take a look at other sellers on the site before you get into your own site. See how sales are taking place. Place some of your own orders so you can see the process from the buyer's point of view too. Go into the community forum if they have one and ask your questions there. There's no reason to go it alone when you use a 3rd party site.

No Special Tools To Download Or Install

You will find that these sites are created to be extremely user-friendly. You don't have to download an update if one is necessary. It's all done behind the scenes. You don't have to know HTML, although it can help to differentiate your offerings from others. You don't have to install a specific browser, as they work with most Internet browsers. You don't have to be very technical at all for the most part. It's all done for you by the staff of the online 3rd party site. They understand that their users are not programmers, and they don't expect you to download software programs or to install them either. However, they will offer software features that anyone can learn to use, and you can become a super user without having to really become a technical expert.

OPEN YOUR BROWSER AND GET STARTED

All you have to do to get started with 3rd party sites is to open your Internet browser and navigate to their main URL. They will have an area where you can register with them as a seller, and it will be pretty obvious what button or link to click. Instead of running programs, installing software, or selecting templates, all you have to do is to set up an account by giving them some basic information that is already preformatted as a form for you to fill in. It's really that easy.

LIST YOUR PRODUCTS

Once you have an account, and they know where to send the check to, you can start listing your products. You will be limited to the terms of service for that particular site. No firearms are allowed to be sold on eBay.com, for instance. Know what you can and can't sell by reading the terms of service that comes up when you first register. If you try to sell something that is prohibited, your account will be suspended.

Aside from that, it's pretty easy to list your products, and the sites have tools that make this process very easy. For Amazon.com, all you have to do is to put in an ISBN number for it to pull up the book title, and then you can add information on the quality of the item in your possession that you wish to sell secondhand. That's definitely something you won't have with a standard website, yet with 3rd party sites, these types of tools are common. Whatever makes it easier for their sellers to list their products gets them to list more, which means more commissions for them. It makes sense to provide more

tools to facilitate listings. If you make a lot of sales, premium tools are made available to PowerSellers on eBay.com. Third party sites will try to support your selling activities as best as they can.

Search-Friendly Listings

If you were to put up your own website and then get some good tools for listing your items, like an e-commerce cart, it still isn't going to give you the same exposure as a 3rd party site. The reason for this is that many of these sites are crawled by Google and other search engines frequently. They know that new sale items are coming up every day, and people want to find the listing if they input a description into their search engine for a particular site. That's why they're heavily favored in search engines, in some cases, especially eBay listings, due to the amount of interest and the credibility this 3rd party site has already established.

In comparison, your own personal website, while fancy and slick, needs time to build up the same credibility and interest from search engines. If you want to eventually develop your own site, it doesn't hurt to start by marketing some items on 3rd party sites and then having a reference URL back to your site. That way, you get the advantage of the search-friendly listings of 3rd party sites, but also start to develop your own personal following that will help you with search engines later on.

THINK LIKE A BUYER

When you build your listing, think like a potential buyer. Try to make it easy for your listing to be seen before others' listings on the same site. Third party sites will sell their high visibility features, from bolding to highlighting, or featured listings. You can actually buy these, as well as buy multiple image files. You might get some of these items for free if you progress up their ladder of stellar sellers, but until then, you will probably have to buy the additional features. That's why it isn't just words that sell online; it's also how you use those words.

Include keywords that people are searching for in the heading and subheading of your listing. Try to describe your item in words as best as possible. Make sure the listing is accurate too, as you will be held to your word, and it can affect your standing in the community if you misrepresent a product that sells. Pay close attention to the heading, as this is what people see of the listing first.

Similarly, the image file is very important, as that is the next thing they will look at. While 3rd party sites won't take pictures for you, they try to provide the best guidelines to help your pictures be at their best. You can buy the

option to list more than one image, and that can be a way to help differentiate your listing from others. Keep in mind that while 3rd party sites offer many perks, they can cost you in terms of additional fees that eat into the final selling price of the product. Take that into account when structuring your sale on these sites.

When You Want An Instant Audience

Third party sites that are well-established have a large audience of fans and frequent visitors that will come back again and again. This is one of the main advantages of using third party sites when you can't generate the same traffic as these established sites. As the saying goes, "If you can't beat them, join them." That's exactly what millions of business vendors are doing to help generate interest and sales at a site that already has a large audience, instead of trying to build their own high-traffic site. Of course, the hope is that by aligning themselves with a major player, they can siphon off some of their buyers back to their own sites eventually and not have to pay commissions on their sales. Until then, a commission is a small price to pay for a higher volume of sales from increased opportunities.

THEY ARE THERE TO BUY

Unlike visitors who come to your personal or business website, these people who frequent 3rd party sites are there to buy. They aren't just there out of curiosity or to visit and move on. They usually show up because they have a purchase in mind, and they're going online to look for something specific or to browse available listings. Thus, the audience isn't just large, but it's a large audience of people buying, not just dilly-dallying.

EVERY SELLER HAS A CHANCE AT THE SPOTLIGHT

Even though there are tons of other sellers, the sites are usually set up to show the most recent item posting or the auction that's ending soon. In addition, these sites help their sellers to categorize their offerings by giving them a list of possible categories and sub-categories that people coming to the site might want to browse. This helps the seller to showcase his/her items in the right areas where people who show up for those categories will be. That way, they're not competing with car part sellers when they're selling antique dolls.

HIGHLY ORGANIZED INVENTORY

The sites themselves are very organized to make it easy for sellers to classify their items and for buyers interested in buying to find them. They have search engines that help people locate specifically what they want, which is why sellers should describe their items carefully. It's not enough to offer a table lamp. Offer a porcelain table lamp with a bird design that features two blue birds. That seems like overkill, but you don't know what a buyer will put in the search engine. If it's blue bird paraphernalia, you want to show up.

You're Brilliant, Just Not Crafty

Plenty of people assume that to get on these 3rd party sites, you have to be able to create products with your own two hands or hire a work force or factory to create them for you. Actually, that's a huge misconception! While there are many success stories of artists and craftspeople selling their products online, there are also less talked-about people who sell things that they just imagine without creating a physical product or outsourcing to get it done either. They're just brilliant at turning a phrase or spotting a golden opportunity.

CAFEPRESS.COM

You can set up a store that just puts out promotional materials with witty slogans and catchy phrases using CafePress.com. As long as you aren't infringing on anyone's copyright, you are free to publish whatever you want on an inventory of products like cups, mousepads, and t-shirts. All you do is send the phrase in the font you want, and they will imprint it onto a number of different things that you choose from their inventory of products. They add those products to your store, and all you have to do is to market them to your friends, family, and associates.

This is often how people get started with 3rd party sales: by using them to fundraise for specific organizations. They can create any number of promotional items and have a store set up fairly quickly. Sending out the URL to the organization's membership and parents can be a nice way to create some income for that club. The nice thing is that it costs nothing to join and nothing to create the products, which remain virtual until someone buys one. Then, they are printed out and shipped, with CafePress.com taking a commission off the top and you getting the rest.

KUNAKI.COM AND CREATSPACE.COM

Another 3rd party site that deals with music CDs or ebooks on CD is Kunaki.com. You can set up a free account and transfer your information to their site. You can have people order from them and have it drop shipped directly to the customer for another fee, besides the commission. This is a good site for bands that want to start distributing their music CDs or for clubs that are setting up informational materials that they want to send all over the country.

Another great site for authors who want to send out a printed book is CreateSpace.com. You just send them the files, pick a template for a book cover and for the text, and you'll be able to sell your book on Amazon.com directly through CreateSpace.com too.

When You Want Things Drop Shipped

With eBay.com, you have to sell a physical product in the auction section. How it gets to the customer is your issue. There's a lot of trouble involved in selling on 3rd party sites, especially if demand exceeds your ability to ship things on time. To solve that issue, you have to be careful to see which 3rd party sites will ship things for you and which won't. When a 3rd party site ships an item for you in your name, that's called drop shipping. The customer isn't even aware that you don't have a warehouse, don't have any inventory, or didn't even spend time to ship anything to them. It's a seller's dream.

Some things lend themselves well to being drop shipped, while other things don't. Original artwork does not lend itself well to being drop shipped, unless you're selling graphic copies and not the original piece. We've already discussed one site where drop shipping is available: Kunaki.com. They will actually put your own branding on the shipped item instead of their own. If you sell through CreateSpace.com, even though you're not actually doing the shipping, it's not technically drop shipping, as they'll put their name on the branding and not your name.

WORKING WITH TWO 3RD PARTY SITES

The way that many eBay sellers get around the need to carry a physical inventory to list on the auction site is to hire a 3rd party drop shipper to handle any orders. They automate orders using autoresponders, while all they have to do is to keep listing items in the drop shipper's inventory. It's a very slick setup, but also one that is well known. You will be competing with many other people who have already figured out how to do this.

SELL YOURSELF AS AN EBAY EXPERT

If you get really good at attracting attention to your listings and think you want to expand your inventory, why not check out some original offline stores who want to go online? They can be your drop shipper, as they already carry the inventory. You post the listings for a small fee or simply take a commission off of the sold item. You pass along the sale information to the actual manufacturer of these items, and they put your brand on it for the return address. They can keep the branding on the actual piece that is being sold, as you aren't actually representing yourself as the manufacturer of that product, just as a retailer. In this case, you would be working with two 3rd party sites and one original manufacturer. As long as you automate orders and have an established way to reconcile the partnership so everyone gets a fair share, it can be a great way to expand without adding shipping.

For Special Sales Events

If your baseball team is fundraising, a 3rd party site can be an ideal way to set up a quick online store without actually having to hire a programmer. If you have a website that already is selling, but not as well as you had hoped, you can gain more exposure by putting up special promotional sales on 3rd party sites to attract attention to your brands. Not every business owner does business all year round. Some are seasonal workers who only want to put up a quick online presence during certain holidays and not bother with it the rest of the year. It just doesn't make sense to sell in some cases, such as selling Halloween costumes in January. Depending on whether you have a full lineup of costumes or just happened to corner the market in which costumes for a yard sale, you may just want to put it up during a specific time period and forget about it for the rest of the year.

NON-PROFITS, CLUBS, AND FUNDRAISING

Having a virtual garage sale is fun and takes far less effort than trying to find a space to house everything in one place. It can also run for a whole lot longer than just a couple of hours. You don't have to use eBay.com for this, as it would be hard to track. However, Craigslist.com is a bulletin board where you can post multiple pictures and have a price next to them. They can pick up the item at a central place, like a church or office, and help you fundraise this way without too much fuss.

HOLIDAY SALES

Just like you know that people want Christmas tree decorations between Thanksgiving and Christmas, you are going to want to expose these items

when they are most likely to be purchased. You don't want to go through the hassle of building a full site just for some special holiday sales, as there will be large periods of time when you might not be selling anything. A website like that will quickly lose its audience. That's why a 3rd party site makes the most sense. You can update a listing when it's time to sell and disappear for the rest of the year, and no one is going to notice your disappearance since there are many other sellers continuing to sell on the 3rd party site throughout the year.

RARE OFFERINGS

If you have a one-of-a-kind item that's very valuable, you can post it on an auction site with a good reserve and see if it sells. Someone may be scouring the Internet for just such a find, but be unable to find it on your site because the site shows up on the 15th page of the search results. On search-engine-friendly 3rd party sites, such a rare sale will climb to the top of the search engine rankings.

Third Party Payment Sites

Another place where 3rd party sites shine is in the area of payment collection. Here, we have to distinguish between transaction processors, like PayPal, and the systems in place to collect payment for people who join sites like Elance.com, a freelance site. Either way, business people who are new to the Internet may wonder how to collect payment online or how to end up not getting stiffed. There is fraud on the Internet, and when it comes to collecting payment from a total stranger halfway across the world, it pays to deal with systems that have already been proven successful.

PAYPAL.COM

PayPal is a revolutionary way to do business online and allows even people who don't have credit card merchant agreements to collect payments via credit cards. You can put PayPal buttons on your own website; however, it's so fully integrated with other 3rd party sites that you don't even have to do that anymore. On eBay, for instance, all you have to do is say that you accept PayPal, give them your PayPal username, and you're done. No need to create buttons.

Setting up a PayPal account is ridiculously easy. You will link it to a bank account where money can be deposited when it is received by PayPal. There are fees for this service, but there also ways to reduce the amount of fees that you pay. Check the terms of service to see how to get paid to reduce your fees. It will verify the bank accounts of people on PayPal, so you know that you're dealing with someone who actually has money. You can even pay

people in other countries in their country's currency, even though the payment originates in your own currency. This is useful if you're outsourcing work from other countries.

ELANCE.COM

E lance is just one of many freelancing boards out there. All of them act as an intermediary in the payment collection system so that they can get their cut off the top. There are positives to this system in that if you don't get paid, they won't either. That means that they will aggressively pursue people who you do work for and try many means to get them to pay, all without your interference. The payment contract is set up ahead of time and is transparent to everyone.

On the other hand, if your client has an issue with your work, they may still try to stiff you. Or, if they are committing fraud online, not paying you is still a possibility. However, the occurrence of this is less when you use a 3rd party site that monitors how people pay and how people perform for that pay.

You Gain Instant Credibility

When you put up your own site, your friends and family might make an obligatory visit, but no one else is obliged to show up. If you set up a store on a 3rd party site, the fact that you're there can give you instant credibility. In some cases, the audience will be told that you are a new seller, but that doesn't really stand against you. What you want to do is to start amassing more and more credibility, not just have the initial thrill of being online on a massive community of immense reputation. Guarding and increasing your credibility will help you to stay on top of your game and help you to continue to sell more items when others may be falling by the wayside.

GUARD YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

The best way to make sure that you continue to have a good experience with your online 3rd party site is to guard your selling reputation by seeking to offer the customer service that they associate with their brand name. For eBay.com, that means delivering your product when you say that you will. One of the biggest reasons people get lower ratings is because they fail to ship on time. A customer who waits too long for something to show up is an unhappy customer, and eBay has its own ideas on when things should show up too. If you fail to hit their guidelines, you better have a good reason, like a massive postal strike, which may not be a good enough excuse.

If you are using drop shippers, you want to make sure that they are shipping within the right amount of time or it's your reputation that will suffer.

Customers that get their items late will dock your feedback, and that will affect your ability to progress into some of the sweeter deals that are offered by 3rd party sites. They want to make sure that the people they sponsor or promote are the ones that can handle the added sales that will come from such exposure by maintaining excellent customer service standards.

EASY TO GET TESTIMONIALS

Third party sites will ask their customers to provide feedback on their buying experience, giving your store the opportunity to amass positive feedback and testimonials without much effort on your part. It can work against you if you fail to live up to their standards, but it also helps to keep you functioning at your best. If you have a personal website, you know how hard it is to try to get a testimonial for your website. It's like begging, and it means that if you have to ask, well, they might not be that enthusiastic. With a system in place that automatically asks for feedback and logs it so that others can view it, it serves the purpose of giving your credibility a big boost – as long as it stays positive. Keep doing what you're doing and take care of complaints to the customer's satisfaction to keep a high feedback score.

You Want To Drive Traffic Back To Your Sites

So far, we've only talked about the potential to increase sales by using 3rd party sites. There is another very big reason to use 3rd party sites, and that's to increase your online exposure and to drive traffic back to your sites. The reason for this is that you don't have to post your entire inventory on a 3rd party site. If you're making decent sales on your site, why put that lineup under someone else's banner where you have to pay a commission to sell it too? You wouldn't do that for your entire inventory, but doing so with a few best-selling items now and then can help drive traffic back to your site.

IT'S TARGETED TRAFFIC

Just like people who buy advertising to get more eyeballs to their products, some people will sell a loss leader online on 3rd party sites to get more eyeballs back to their other websites. In the same fashion that some retail stores offer several unbelievable deals during Black Friday to bring more people into their store, you can use 3rd party sites to drive targeted traffic back to your sites. After all, those sites are so well organized that you already know that the people looking at your sale are all in your market niche. Why wouldn't you want to expose them to a few more of your products and services? If you can do that by having a store online that has a

link back to your own site, and it's not against the terms of service, then you can grab traffic from these sites. Even if you can't send them directly back to your site, you can send them to a blog or a social network where they can become more personal and can learn more about you as well as your business.

DRIVE THEM BACK TO YOUR STOREFRONT

EBay also lets its vendors send people from a listing back to an eBay storefront where more of their product offerings reside. It's a way of back-end selling within a 3rd party site, even if you still have to pay commissions on what you sell. A listing and a storefront are two different things. Remember that you want to expose as many of your products and offerings to the massive traffic that these 3rd party sites attract. It's not just about the listings that are currently active, but also about everything that you have to offer on the Internet.

BRAND YOUR PHYSICAL ITEMS

If you're selling something like a USB drive that you can brand with your URL, why not do it? Just like companies have their name or logo on their tennis shoes, you should use every occasion to remind people who buy from you of your online presence. Don't miss a chance to brand the interaction in a way that drives them back online and back to your site. Some people do this with books and CDs by placing other offers or even a website address within the print. If the customer lends that item out, your branding goes with it too, leading to greater exposure and more potential future sales, all from a 3rd party site listing.