

▶ STEP 3

EXCEL WITH ONLINE STORES

Invigorate sales and create repeat business by building online stores for qualified clients.

▶ **Gauge the Necessity:** Before jumping into creating an online store for a client, develop a thorough understanding of how the company runs its business and how they would use the store. “Will the store be for supply items or marketing materials? Is it a service for employees or a revenue-generator for the client?” says Josh Frey, a promo industry veteran who provides online stores for clients that include Fortune 500 companies. The answers to such questions will help you develop the best online solution for clients – or reveal they don’t need one.

“Sometimes, a company’s needs may simply be too small for a store,” says Frey, founder of the Swag Coach Program, a new industry model that teaches others how to start a distributorship.

▶ **Qualify Prospects:** If a client has a genuine need for an e-commerce solution, next determine if they are serious about investing in one.

Often, serious clients have a budget, will be willing to sign a contract, will have a champion to promote the store internally and could be open to paying for inventory up front if necessary, Frey says. “If they tell you no budget, no champion and no commitment to you via contract, be careful before investing the time and dollars into setting up an online store,” says Frey.

▶ **Show the Benefits:** If qualified clients are contemplating investing in an online store, make sure they comprehend the potential benefits of the platform. Frey educates clients about how the store will serve as a central location for purchasing quality products that meet corporate branding guidelines and that fall within approved budgets. Done wisely, distributors can also save clients money by negotiating with preferred suppliers for favorable volume pricing on popular products and supply chain items.

▶ **Know the Client:** So, you have an understanding of how the company operates. You have a general knowledge of how they would use the store. Now, you need to drill down into the minutia of the company’s brand image and particular product needs, as well what specifically the company expects to get from the store. “Maybe they have a ton of buyers and people are buying swag without approved budgets, so you build them a store that is permission-based with orders approved/released by upper management,” says Frey. “Or, maybe they are trying to consolidate their promotional and supply purchases through one central location, so you learn what departments buy what so the store can be for all buyers.”

▶ **Get the Green Light to Market:** An online store generates revenue



for distributors only if people use it. Therefore, obtain permission from clients to market to target buyers. “You have to create marketing campaigns that drive people to the store,” Frey says.

▶ **Find the Right Partner:** To succeed with Web stores, you must connect with technology vendors who can build the e-commerce solutions. Larger distributorships may already have preferred vendors. To find credible partners, go through industry colleagues and/or contacts in your networking groups. Also, look for technology-based LinkedIn groups in which such vendors might be active. Other online research will turn up

candidates too, but be diligent in your vetting.

Case Study

Josh Frey is a proven ace at providing a wide range of online stores to a variety of clients.

From a store that accommodated a business with more than 75 logos to a store for a corporation with more than 20,000 employees, the promo industry veteran is adept at delivering customized e-commerce solutions that leave clients wondering how they ever did without the platforms.

One of Frey’s bigger success stories involves the online store he created for a Fortune 500 client. Initially, the store started with 35 products. Over time, Frey added new items to better serve the company. Now, nearly 100 products populate the store. Since establishing the store two years ago, Frey has generated about \$500,000 in revenue from it.

The key to his success? Getting an exclusive contract, marketing to employee-buyers and “knowing the client’s needs so we can set up categories and provide product options that are relevant, comply with branding guidelines and fit within allotted budgets,” says Frey, founder of the Swag Coach Program.

▶ ACTION ITEMS

Identify current clients who could benefit from an online store and develop a plan for getting them to buy in.

Identify potential technology partners that can build the online stores you want to sell.