



Internet Retailing Getting Started Guide

Bluerock 
SOLUTIONS



e-Commerce

Technologies continue to be developed that change the way we work and live. The Internet is just the latest example of this, moving business from the high street into e-Commerce. The old rules of business may still be the same, but the environment in which they operate is not.

We know that in a world of change a business needs guidance to help them take advantage of new opportunities.

Bluerock Solutions have led the successful transition into e-Commerce for many businesses.

Today the Internet's use is still restricted – both by the technology and also by our imagination. These restrictions are diminishing. Billions of pounds are being poured into making the technology work better and do more. Businesses are constantly innovating and finding new ways to improve the way they do business.

Without doubt, e-Business is rapidly changing - make sure you are part of that change.

This guide introduces Bluerock Solutions' approach to this important area of business and presents practical suggestions on getting started.



What's it all about?

In many ways, what the Internet adds to your business may be summarised as:

- Speed – the electronic world is a near instant world. You can place an order in the USA that is received in London – almost instantly
- Efficiency – computers can communicate directly to other computers in much simpler ways than before to take orders, check stock levels, get references – and a whole lot more
- Location independence – a website or e-mail can reach anywhere in the country (or for that matter the world), just as easily as it can the office next door.

Combine these, and you have opportunities for new ways of doing business that were not available before.

Websites – offer you the prospect of a company brochure that can be seen from anywhere in the world, with changes reflected instantly. Your business could become part of the largest global library ever conceived – and it's interactive.

e-Commerce – utilises the interactive nature of websites to allow trading to take place. Your customers can browse through your catalogue, place an order if they see what they like and make payment immediately with a card.

Not only does this offer the possibility of new sales, but it also has the potential to keep your overheads low (for example, through not having the costs associated with shop premises, call centres and printing).

Getting started – seven steps to e-Commerce

The endless new jargon can be the biggest hurdle to getting started, and in this section we will try to clarify some of that and take you through the basic steps to e-Commerce. However, it is still a major undertaking and like all major undertakings, needs to be managed carefully – and preferably as a number of small steps.

If you are not already on the Internet, you may like to consider these steps:

Step 1: Find out more

There are many good books on the Internet, but for many the best approach is to try it yourself. Ask someone, who you know is already using the Internet how it's done – it is much simpler than you probably imagine and most computers already come equipped. There is nothing like trying it out to begin to understand what it can do and, just as important, what it can't do.

Step 2: Choose a good Internet Service Provider (ISP)

ISP's provide your connection to the internet. Many ISP's also offer additional services such as web-space, email services and domain (website name) registration. At Bluerock Solutions we can offer all the help you need, using only the best ISP services available in the UK.

Step 3: Connect to your ISP

To get onto the Internet you need to connect to your ISP. This can be done in a number of ways, but they all do basically the same thing. The simplest (and cheapest) option is to use a modem with your PC. More and more people now use broadband connections which put simply mean a faster connection – almost essential for business use. At Bluerock Solutions we supply ADSL Broadband at a substantial discount to BT and always ensure you have full support should you require it.



ISP: A good way to think of the Internet is to think of it as a motorway. However, the motorway does not run from door to door – you have to get on and off at certain junctions. Providing access to these 'junctions' is the role of the 'Internet Service Provider' or ISP as they are more generally known.

Dial-up modem: The simplest connection to an ISP is through a normal telephone line and a device known as a 'modem'. This will automatically dial up your ISP and establish a connection for you to receive and transmit data.

Broadband: Is the new high-speed Internet access service designed for people who want to get the most out of the Internet. It uses your normal telephone line to provide an 'always on' Internet connection, and you can still use your telephone line for voice, fax and dial-up services at the same time.

Step 4: Set up your e-mail

Put simply, e-mail provides a convenient and fast alternative to the traditional postal service. It consists of an electronic 'mailbox' and a simple program you run on your computer to send and receive mail to that mailbox.



In recent years, an unfortunate side effect of the simplicity of e-mail to reach a wide audience has been the introduction of so called SPAM mail. This can lead to frustration as your mail boxes become full of hundreds of unwanted and unsolicited mail. Important communications can be overlooked as they are swamped by this unwanted mail. Fortunately there is also a range of tools dedicated to filtering this junk mail. With care, your system can virtually eradicate this nuisance. Many ISP's offer simple SPAM filtering, Bluerock Solutions will set this up for you, and can resolve many other related problems you might have.

Step 5: Design a website

Creating a simple website is within the capabilities of most businesses, and many do. However, it is important to bear in mind that you are presenting yourself to your customers and although it will cost you more, you might want to get a design agency to help you with it. Another option offered by some companies (including many ISPs) is to use a pre-designed template customised around information you provide. This can provide an acceptable site for a fairly modest outlay.

Once you have a simple website it is worth considering what else you can do that would make it more useful: such as, adding product specifications, manuals, answers to 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) and support issues. These are 'easy wins' that make your site more attractive to your customer.

Step 6: Host a website

Now you have designed your website, you must publish it on the Internet so the world can see it. To do this, your website files must be placed on a web-server which is a computer that runs 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Many ISP's offer shared space on their web-servers or you can have your own. At Bluerock Solutions we provide either dedicated or shared servers depending on your needs. We place all our servers at Redbus Interhouse plc which has 7 data centres around Europe including London, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Paris, and Milan. Redbus Interhouse has invested over 100m pounds in building these data centres.

Your website needs a name to identify it, this is often referred to as your domain name. You must register a name in order that your website may be seen. There are thousands of companies offering domain registration, often at very low prices. This can be a daunting and confusing process for the uninitiated, each company offering differing conditions and services, sometimes you don't even get full ownership. At Bluerock Solutions we offer consistently low cost domain name registration with no catches or hidden costs.

Step 7: On-line sales

Once you have customers viewing your products on-line, the next thing you will want to do is capture those sales opportunities. For example, by adding a 'purchase' option on each page that describes a product – and this is the heart of many e-Commerce sites.

Making this work involves a number of things:

- Managing a list of products that your customer is buying (that is, an electronic 'shopping basket') – ideally your system should also know your stock levels and be able to advise alternatives if you are out of stock
- Adding up all the items purchased, as the customer shops
- Collecting card payment details and completing the transaction.

Gaining Internet customers– the ABC's of e-marketing

Of course, without customers, your efforts into e-business are not going to generate the revenues to justify the costs. So you need to make sure that customers can find you easily, this means marketing your website, which must be considered alongside your other marketing activities.

Domain Names

One important way people will find you is through your domain name – a customer will guess it, see it on your stationery, or on the side of one of your vans. For an electronic business it is your most important brand, and choosing the domain name is like choosing any other brand name – difficult!

It can help to choose a domain name based on your company name – such as 'bluerocksolutions.com'. Other companies choose to use an existing brand, or what they do. Unfortunately, you might find somebody already owns the name you have selected, and you then need to find another or see if you can buy it from them.

You will also need to decide what sort of domain name you want. Officially there is a convention that works roughly like this:

- UK based commercial organisations use '.co.uk'
- UK based non-profit organisations use '.org.uk'
- US, or international organisations use '.com' or '.org' respectively.

In practice, many UK companies will register themselves as '.com' so they don't put off international sales, and many non-profit organisations will register themselves as '.co.uk' because the 'org.uk' is already taken. In the UK, if you are a limited company, you already have a name loosely reserved for you. 'ltd.uk' domains are only granted to companies with a similar registered limited company. Some domain names are not intended for business such as '.net' but even these are sometimes used as there is often difficulty in finding the name you want. The rules are often broken!

Most ISPs can help you set up your domain name or you can use one of the companies that specialises in domain name registration. At Bluerock Solutions we can organise registration on your behalf keeping it simple and inexpensive.



Domain Names: The Internet manages millions of connections by grouping them together into 'domains'. These act a bit like telephone area codes but as there are so many of them they are allocated names to make them easier to use – names like 'yahoo.com' or 'bluerocksolutions.com'. They work backwards; com, uk, de are like international codes then the section before the dot takes you to the organization. Large websites may be further divided like mail.yahoo.com and www.yahoo.com.

Search Engines & Directories

Search engines and directories are the most common way of finding things on the Internet.

As with any directory, whether its made of paper or electronic, you look up a product category (e.g. plumbers) and it lists the companies that can supply that product. Kelkoo is an example of an Internet directory (<http://www.kelkoo.co.uk/>).

A search engine, by contrast, is like a massive electronic index. With a search engine you enter a word, or a phrase, and it will search through its database for those sites that are most relevant. The data for the database is automatically collected from the Internet, and how they decide the most relevant content is a complex and often obscure area. Google (<http://www.google.co.uk>) is a good example of this.

It is possible to make sure that you are listed in the directories and search engines by yourself. This is usually free, and the instructions are readily available from the sites themselves. However, this can be a time consuming process and it is often worth paying your ISP or another company to do this for you. However, be wary of promises made by some companies to get you 'number one rankings'. Of itself, a high position in a search engine is not always as helpful as it appears – a top ranking for a rare enquiry is not useful, and a top ranking for a popular enquiry is not usually on offer.

Banner Ads

Banner ads are just adverts inserted into websites. They consist of a simple image that, if clicked upon, will take people to any point in your website that you choose. Many websites sell space for such adverts. Some are specialist sites that enable you to closely target your audience; some are sites of general interest that offer a more scattergun approach – much like magazines. In addition, there are also companies that will pool together advertising space from a number of smaller sites in a co-operative sort of way.

There are two terms that you are likely to encounter when dealing with banner adverts:

- Impressions: these are the number of times an advert will be displayed. This is often the basis of charging
- Click-through rate: this is a measure of how often someone who sees an advert clicks on it and follows the link to its destination. This is a measure of effectiveness. Sometimes this is the basis of charging.

The effectiveness of banner ads is much debated, and the general advice is "use with care".

Any other means

It is often the 'other means' of advertising your website that can be among the most effective – and often the most overlooked. Look for any opportunity to insert your e-mail or web address. For example, if you place an advert in a magazine, make sure it includes a web address – this gets your website known and allows prospective customers to find out more. But, whatever you do, don't use an indiscriminate 'mail shot' with e-mail, this is known as spamming. It can be very easy to do, but annoys potential customers and in some parts of the world is even illegal.



Retaining customers – customer service

Gaining a customer is hard, but keeping them is profitable! On the web it can be even more difficult to keep a customer because your competitor is only a click away.

Here are some tips that may help:

Make sure you understand why they should use you.

If you don't understand your 'selling proposition' then it can be difficult to know where to focus your efforts to protect and extend it. And if you fail to continue to offer what originally attracted your customers, then why should they stay?

Make sure you can deliver.

In an ideal world you should aim to exceed your customers expectations. Sadly, many businesses on the Internet do not even meet minimum expectations. If you say you will deliver in two weeks, then make sure you can. There are plenty of websites that specialise in 'rating' e-commerce sites with customer reviews. There are few secrets on the Web, if you don't perform, the whole world knows.

Try and see the world through the eyes of a customer.

Try and connect to your site from a basic PC using a dial-up modem – just as many of your customers will. How easy is it to use? Ask friends and those you do business with what *they* think. (For a really tough test, ask your kids!)

Respond to your customers quickly.

Whilst most people are happy to wait for a week or two for a reply to a letter, generally they expect a reply to an e-mail or web enquiry within a day or two. If you don't respond quickly they will think you don't care or have ceased trading.

Provide lots of information in easy-to-read format.

Information not only makes it easier for your customer to make a buying decision, but it can resolve a lot of subsequent support issues – improving customer satisfaction at the same time as reducing your support costs. However, make sure they can find their way around your site. It must still be usable!

The best websites provide just the right balance between simple, clean pages and abundant, relevant information.

Make sure your site is reliable.

Your customer may forgive an occasional failure, but if your site is regularly unavailable they will go elsewhere. If your ISP is not delivering the service you require, move. The performance of servers are often quoted as a percentage of uptime, you should expect figures of 99.99%.



Learn from others.

The web is a new medium for business, and all businesses are still learning how to use it effectively. Observe other companies, especially your competitors, and see what they are doing. In particular, how do your suppliers deal with you? What do you like and dislike? Look at other websites, you can acquire inspiration from other sites whether they are in the same business as you or not.

Provide contact details.

Whilst technology can be wonderful, there will always be times when a customer cannot find what they need on your web site and they will need to contact a real person. This can also be an opportunity to build a personal relationship with your customer – the importance of the personal touch is often overlooked in the new Internet world.

Build relationships.

It is relatively easy to build a relationship with a customer who visits your premises every week. It is much harder to develop that relationship with a customer who you never see. Consider using newsletters and special offers to keep in contact. Consider carefully whether mailings would be viewed as legitimate informative mailings by your customers or just annoying SPAM.

The things that bite

So far we have looked at the main areas of developing an e-Business. Unfortunately, there are a few stings in the tail that you also need to be aware of.

Legal uncertainty

In the UK the law is partly defined by 'case' law. Unfortunately, there is very little case law surrounding a new area like the Internet, and this makes for legal uncertainty. An example of this is the current uncertainty over the extent to which an e-mail is a legally binding document.

Another example is the legal issues that surround global trade. This is not new, but the Internet makes global trade much simpler, and it is easy to overlook issues such as whose laws apply in the case of dispute. There is certain legislation which is important to take account of, such as rules on selling goods and services over the Internet. When it comes to legal issues it is always best to get proper legal advice.

Hacker's paradise?

By opening up your company to the Internet you also open it up to the world and to the hacker. However, things are rarely as dire as they are sometimes painted. Simple measures, like regular back-ups, a simple firewall* to block unauthorized entry and basic virus protection procedures may be all your company needs.

If you are unsure then it is best seek our advice at Bluerock Solutions or seek advice from a reputable security consultant.

Fraud protection

Remain diligent at all times to guard against fraud and always be on the look-out for suspicious circumstances, e.g. large orders for delivery to addresses other than that of the cardholder, or countries other than that of the card issuer.



Hacker: A hacker is someone who solves a problem using trial and error to slowly reduce a problem until it is solved. This term is often applied (as here) to those who use such techniques to break into other peoples security systems – for pleasure, profit or vandalism.

Firewall: A firewall is a device that sits between your monitors traffic computers and the outside world (i.e. the Internet) it monitors traffic in both directions and can block unwanted traffic. However if set up correctly it can be an effective block to unwanted attacks. If not set up correctly it can be as useful as having a door without a lock.

Payment solutions

If you're new to trading on the Internet and are looking for an appropriate, cost effective solution, Bluerock Solutions is able to advise on the best solution for you.

There are a number of different ways in which acceptance of debit and credit card transactions can be made – from a simple payment page from a payment solutions provider to doing it all on your own secure server.

Bluerock Solutions can assist whichever way you choose.

- A Merchant's own Secure Server operation is where a business accepts card details and payments directly into their own website and process them via traditional solutions, such as integrated EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) software.
- A Payment Service Provider (PSP) provides a secure card payment facility for you to accept card payments over the Internet. This reduces the investment cost for a business new to the e-Commerce arena, as you will only pay a fee for the service, rather than having to invest in the hardware and software to process the transactions yourself. Customers often feel more comfortable if they can settle a transaction using a known PSP. An example would be Worldpay.

You can contact Bluerock Solutions for advice and guidance on the solution most suitable to you.



Getting help – the next steps

Whilst most of the issues surrounding e-business are within the capability of any business, there are going to be times when additional help is needed. The best way of getting good advice is from the referrals of others. If you can't get a recommendation from others, then consider the following:

- The DTI provide some useful information through their 'UK on-line for business' initiative.
- Books and magazines can provide useful additional material. A visit to the magazine racks of a larger newsagent can often provide just the information you need.
- A guide for e-Business to the EC Directive Regulations 2002 and related material can be found on the HMSO website www.legalisation.hmso.gov.uk.

For your next steps towards e-Commerce call us on

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or visit our website

www.bluerocksolutions.com

If you have questions, e-mail **info@bluerocksolutions.com** or
telephone our Helpdesk on 01202 503989.

Web Site Design

Domain Name Registration and Hosting

Security Patches and Firewalls

Network Planning and Installation

Mail Spam Filtering and Antivirus

Backup and Recovery

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