

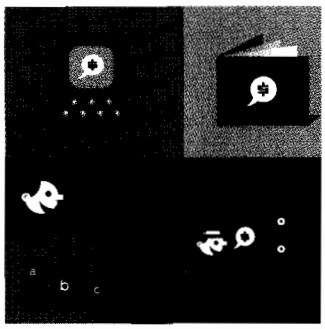
# Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

*Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet*

# E-commerce is alive and well

I am into Woot! in a big way. Woot! is a unique website with the single purpose of selling cool stuff cheap. Here's the rub — it only sells one thing a day. At midnight central time every morning, Woot! posts its item of the day, which could be any consumer product ranging from electronics and computer gear to barbecue grills and emergency kits. It never tells you how many are available, nor does it offer any additional units if the item sells out. The bulletin board on Woot! is soon aflame with people discussing that day's item, with folks noting whether it really is a bargain or not compared with the pricing on other sites.



More often than not, the item quickly sells out. It's unique, addictive and so much fun that Woot! has gained a fair degree of attention, zooming to 200,000 users in just more than a year.

Woot! is a good example that e-commerce is far from dead, with hundreds of thousands of storefronts throughout the Internet offering a huge variety of products and services. The Internet has truly become a global bazaar, offering a vast assortment of goods and services never before seen.

Expect e-commerce to continue to be even more significant in the future, for the simple reason that it is becoming easier for anyone to set up an online store. The past few years has seen increasing investment in both the sophistication and ease-of-use of the infrastructure that supports the use of credit card transactions, online storefront software and other e-commerce add-ons.

Take credit card transactions. Years ago, if you wanted to sell online, you had to go through the long, laborious and complicated procedure of creating a credit card merchant account with a Canadian bank. This often involved (and still does, to a degree) a horrifically complex process involving significant fees, business plans and proof of viability of your idea.

Today, all you need to do is sign up with an online payment processor such as PayPal, which is a subsidiary of the global online auction company eBay. Once your account is created, you can easily generate a bit of code for your website that will provide for a "buy this item" button. That leads to a secure transaction process that will let you accept payment via any major credit card.

PayPal also offers the option of a full-fledged shopping cart that lets people browse through your online store. In addition, there are many other shopping-cart systems online that can be easily integrated into a website. For example, Ontario-based 1ShoppingCart.com provides you with a fully flexible shopping cart that can be the foundation for a very complex, feature-rich online store.

Want to take your site one step further and offer unique branded items in addition to whatever it is you sell? Take a look at Spreadshirt or Café Press — with just a little bit of work, you can add to your online store items including heavyweight cotton T-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, underwear, mesh trucker hats, coasters or buttons, all of which feature your corporate logo or design. You get a cut of every sale that occurs.

That's just a brief overview of what you can do online — there are literally thousands of sites and resources you can use to explore the new world of e-commerce. One of the best places to start is Web Marketing Today, a resource-rich site full of up-to-date information on every aspect of online commerce.

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