

# SETTING UP SHOP

## Selling Your Magazine Brand Online

# Hotsheets

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Magazine publishers no longer ask the question, “Do we need an online store?” It has become as basic and integral as having a copy editor: your magazine cannot survive without it. But selling subscriptions through your online store is only the starting point.

**SETTING UP A STORE, PT. 1:** There are a number of online store services that can be customized and dropped right into your existing website or act as a stand-alone website. Shopify is by far the leader in this field. It’s a versatile service that includes an app that allows you to monitor daily activities or for you to sell items at events by using the app on your phone or tablet as a mobile point-of-sale. There are other online store services like Vend, Square and Wix. If you want to keep it Canadian, Shopify (started in Ottawa with offices in Toronto) is your best bet.

**SETTING UP A STORE, PT. 2:** After determining which products you wish to offer on your online store, the next important task is to create a simple and hassle-free checkout process. The number one reason someone will leave your online store is confusion over how to pay/finalize an order. The least amount of steps possible is what you want to achieve. Depending on the familiarity your readership has with online shopping, you may want to outline the steps it takes to place an order on your site before the checkout stage begins. The more confident a visitor to your online store is with the process, the more likely they will be to make it to the final checkout step.

Your online store needs to be a place that sells your brand. So while it will include subscription options, it also needs to be a place where you can offer a variety of products such as back issues, merchandise and event tickets. Here are a few ideas about what and how to offer on your store:

- **Subscriptions:** Subscriptions are part of the backbone of the magazine industry and your online store should feature this product prominently. An online store can offer a variety of types of subscriptions that can be tailored to the time of year, type of reader or whatever wacky idea your marketing team has cooked up. But no matter what else you have on offer on your store, subscriptions need to be the easiest thing to access and identify.
- **Back issues:** Depending on the type of magazine that you operate, back issues are often sought after by your readers. Selling them through your online store provides you with a chance to thin your warehouse stock and generate revenue on something that you’ve already paid for. The best and most economical option for readers is to buy back issues in a batch—offer up a package that works best for your brand (i.e., seasonal issues, yearly, themes).
- **Events:** If you have an online store, and you’re hosting a ticketed event, there is no reason for you to use Eventbrite or other web-based ticketing services. No doubt Eventbrite is a great tool, but your own online store should be able to do the exact same thing. It’s best to keep your readers’ purchases in one place and not send them to external sites (the chance of them returning to view your website is dramatically lowered once they’ve left your site). An added bonus: if you use a service like Shopify to host/build your online store, it offers better transaction fees than Eventbrite (whose prices can add up to 5.5% +\$1 for every ticket sold [priced as of February 2017], compared to the approximately 3% taken by Shopify).
- **Merchandise:** Selling products related to your magazine has become a vital revenue stream for many publishers. By adding unique products to your online store you’re showing your readership that you understand their interests as well as demonstrating that your brand is more than just your magazine. An additional benefit is that the sale of your auxiliary products has the chance of reaching people who may not read your magazine.



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- **Challenges:** What all publishers have to accept is that the creation of an online store doesn't automatically mean it's smooth sailing from now on. An online store should be experimented with: offer limited-time, bulk sales, free shipping at certain price points or promotional codes at specific events. The ease in which you can change-up an online store allows a publisher to observe and assess successful sales and marketing ideas.
- **Ensuring success:** Too often publishers try to push readers to the magazine's website by promoting it via non-web based formats. For example, a potential reader is much less likely to see your advertisement on a transit stop shelter and then look up that website on their mobile device or commit the URL to memory. You have to promote your online store online. That means trying out social media ad buys (on Facebook, Instagram), sending out regular newsletters that provide direct links to products on offer or promoting your sales during your podcasts (because you're obviously doing a podcast, right?). Dropping an insert into your magazine that reminds them to renew their subscription no longer cuts it—readers want these notices to come to where they can immediately act. And that's through our laptops, tablets and mobile phones.

