

Build your Brand *with* Amazon

While it may seem at first blush that Amazon is a quick route to easy money, it takes much more to build a successful brand.

by Christine Gable

Every week we receive calls and emails about how to sell products on Amazon. From handcrafters selling at local markets to up-and-coming bloggers, these small business people want to expand their sales volume with Amazon. And that's smart business sense, for on average, U.S.-based Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs) sell more than 4,000 items per minute on Amazon.

What small business doesn't want (or need) to bolster their bottom line with a powerful partner who has built the infrastructure to make this possible?

Since 1999, third-party gross physical merchandise sales - primarily comprised of SMBs selling in Amazon stores - has grown from \$0.1 billion to \$160 billion in 2018.



There are 30.2 million small businesses in America today - that's 99.9% of US businesses. They truly are the lifeblood of America. Our passion is helping small businesses reach more customers on Amazon.

There is untold groundwork that goes into earning the rights of having an established brand. Anyone who has ever started a business knows that's not something to be taken lightly. The passion needs to be embedded deep in your bones.

I reached out to three brand owners - successful business owners each in their own right - to find out what nuggets of wisdom they would be willing to share with us, on their brand building journey. One that started long before their products were ever for sale on Amazon.

“You have to go in and be serious about it - give it 100% - and do what it takes to make it work,”

says Michael Hemphill, founder and owner of both the Michael Christopher brand and Michael Christopher Salon & Day Spa. “It's a process and you have to stay afloat in the meantime.” Michael's career path has taken him from stylist and salesperson through research and development to salon owner and product creator. He knows the grit it takes in not only starting a business but in launching a new brand and product.

He said it all revolves around the solution to a problem as you are sitting on the fence of opportunity. “On the left you know what it’s taken to get where you are. You look at the right and see how it’s going to take more of everything. You know you’re going to have to stretch.”

In Michael’s line of work, having his own products in the showers of his clients was like having a billboard in their home. “Ask customers what they want and then figure out how to get it to them ... I always think outside the box.”

“Surround yourself with people who know what they’re doing. You can’t do it alone,” concludes Michael.

Bradley Smith, President of Marsha’s Buckeyes LLC, concurs. In continuing to build Marsha’s Buckeyes from his mom’s candy-making side job for extra spending cash into a household brand with national distribution, Brad has found strength in connecting with other business owners.



“For the most part you would be surprised how other business owners in your own industry are willing to share, both expertise and struggles with you. Many times all it takes is the willingness to set aside your pride, step a bit outside your comfort zone. Don’t be afraid to pick up the phone and ask for help.”



“Business growth is a challenge ... it’s not going to happen by accident. It’s important to be intentional and to be fully involved.”

The most important question any brand owner needs to start with is, “Do you believe in your product?”

All will fall into place after that answer is clarified.

“Everything is a risk. You need to be willing to step out in faith,” says Brad. “Every business owner has to make significant sacrifices personally to achieve growth and ultimately goals ... if your goals and dreams don’t match your habits, it’s time to change your habits or your goals and dreams.”

Michael Hemphill agrees: “There are problems waiting to be solved all around us. The trick is in figuring out what you have and then how you are going to get it to them.”

When you can't find the product that you wish existed in the current marketplace, it's time to create it.

That's exactly how Daniel Fisher, owner of Marilyn Faye's brand and Fisher's Wire Products LLC, uncovered the market for his products. "It's important to adapt and adjust to what customers are asking for," says Dan. "The sales and marketing are easy if what you have sells itself."



His business today is the result of a process that evolved over a period of twenty years in building a strong base of customers in the Plain Community and mom-and-pop stores throughout the US and Canada.

When it became obvious that there was a growing demand for his products, he put the necessary time into creating a brand name and obtaining a registered trademark. Amazon provided the perfect way to reach even more customers.

"You can't sell ice to Eskimos," says Dan. "Sure, you can package it up beautifully, run 'Buy One Get One Free' deals, but you first need to have a product that people want."

Another part of the winning formula on Amazon requires an investment in advertising -- Amazon's search algorithm favors products and brands that invest in visibility. In conclusion, here are the top tips from one of our partner companies, Web Talent Marketing.

What have you seen new brands fail to do when launching on Amazon?

A lot of new sellers jump into Amazon without doing the proper research beforehand. Having a good grasp of the marketplace is critical with a new launch. It will be *extremely* difficult to make an impact on Amazon if there are already dozens of similar products listed that have built up equity and ratings over the years.

Sellers also underestimate the costs associated with listing new products on the platform and dive in with unrealistic expectations of their margins. Amazon is a great option for online sellers, but you need to be prepared to earn less on sales.

What are your top 3 recommendations to new brands starting out?

1. Advertise

When starting out, brands should allocate some of their budget towards advertising. Advertising has nearly become a necessity for gaining traction and product awareness within the Marketplace. The costs of advertising may make Amazon an unprofitable venture for the first few months, but it will pay off in the long run.

Advertising also plays into Amazon's flywheel effect where vendors who sell more products are more prominently featured in organic results - getting you more brand recognition and more sales.

2. Optimize for Amazon's Algorithm

Similar to online search engines, Amazon's search results work with an algorithm, and there are ways you can boost your listings to rank higher. Put your traditional SEO (Search Engine Optimization) skills to work by optimizing your product titles, features, and descriptions to get better visibility organically.



A little keyword research into *how* shoppers search will help you create better written copy.

3. Remember Not All Reviews are Created Equal

Any positive review is good for your product, but not all reviews carry the same weight in your star-rating average. Amazon places more weight on reviews that are longer, from verified purchasers, and include high-value images and/or video. Develop a feedback strategy that intentionally targets these types of reviews. There are software programs that can help you streamline the process by setting up automated email campaigns as well.

What services do you provide?

Web Talent Marketing is here to help your business maximize its return on Amazon. Our team of tenured strategists understands the marketing tactics unique to Amazon and helps brands stand out amongst their competition. When you're ready to take it to the next level, WTM's Amazon pay per click advertising, SEO, and content creation services will optimize your account and get you selling more.



Christine Gable is the founder of Beech Tree Trading, a small business in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania that operates as a single authorized seller. In addition to partnering with local companies and brands in the grocery and beauty categories, they also provide resources to help small businesses become more successful.

A big thanks to the contributors to this article - we couldn't do it without you:

Content: Daniel Fisher, Michael Hemphill, Bradley Smith, Megan Snyder & the team at Web Talent Marketing.

Editorial: Jacqueline Gable, Jody Hess.