Creating Your Successful Online Store

Guardian Survival Gear

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Creating Your Successful Online Store

Guardian Survival Gear has partnered with thousands of retailers all over the world, who collectively sell several millions of dollars of survival gear every year. Our experience with these resellers has accumulated into a great deal of knowledge and understanding in the field that you are about to enter.

We've grown tremendously over the years, and we've also watched our retail partners travel their own paths. As you can well imagine, their degree of success varies largely. Many of our retailers have established successful online stores selling survival gear, some have only sold a couple products here and there, and several fall somewhere in between.

If, at any time, the steps of this book feel overwhelming or too tricky, we encourage you to consider using our sister company, Bright Ladder. They are a web design company uniquely correlated with Guardian to help people looking to sell Guardian products set up an easy-to-use online store.

A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Our goal is to help you become a successful online retailer of Guardian Survival Gear. We want you to feel as comfortable as possibly with the process of becoming a reseller and establishing your online store. The more educated you are about the process and the more comfortable you are with your business, the more successful you will be. Guardian wants to create a mutually beneficial relationship with our resellers. We know that the more successful we help you become, the more successful we will be in return.

In keeping with this, we've tried to make it as easy as possible for you to succeed. We've developed a series of tutorials, based on the most common questions that we receive. Reading through this manual you'll find information outlined in an accessible way meant to give you a head-start on beginning your online store.

Admittedly, we can't guarantee any specific dollar amounts these guidelines will be worth to your company, but we can say that our resellers have benefited from these methods in the past. We urge you to experience the difference these suggestions can make for yourself. Try what we suggest, and gather your own conclusions.

The tutorials are organized within the following sections:
Get Going
Get Traffic and Sales
Get Social
Get Offline

1. Get Going:
Begin with the End in Mind

Find Your Niche

As a retailer of survival gear, you are competing with several other stores online and offline. This can be daunting as you first face the creation of your company. However, it's important to keep in mind that every market you can imagine is constantly repopulating with new business achieving new levels of success. It seems unlikely that a market as classic and abundant as shoes would still be regenerating with new manufacturers and distributors daily, but these new businesses persist. This is because there's always room for a good idea.

A unique thought or creative theme when putting your store together is the first things that will give your business a better chance of success. Before you delve any deeper into the process of starting a process start brain storming ideas for what will make your company unique.

Brainstorming

As you are brainstorming your store's "unique idea", here are a few ideas to consider:

- Promotion based store—geared around one main promotion (or several).
- Bundled deals—selling complete sets, or package deals.
- Quantity pricing—The "Costco" approach.
- Deal of the day—constantly rotating products.
- Only one product or product category (i.e. a store just dedicated to selling survival food and water)
- Informational site—be the authority on one subject (survival preparations for hurricanes, etc.)
- Review site-dedicated to giving customers pros and cons about each product

If you haven't already, take some time right now to sit down with a pen and paper and brainstorm. Even if you don't have a lightning bolt moment, it's a great way to get organized. Do this for 15-20 minutes and see what kind of ideas begin to float to the top.

When it comes to doing this "raw" brainstorming, there is no substitute for a good old fashioned pen and paper. The process of being able to underline, circle, scribble things out, make spider webs between certain words, and crumple up a piece of paper when you're done with it, can really lend to creativity and free-thinking

Think creatively about what you know in the survival world. Consider what unique insight or experience lends itself to a niche in this market. The options are limitless, but before you move forward, you should be able to have an answer to the question—what is the idea that will make my store unique? This will be the overall foundation that everything else is built on.

Once you have decided on your unique idea, you're ready to begin.

The Two Hemispheres of Your Online Survival Store

An easy way to think about your online survival store is in terms of 2 hemispheres: physical and online.

The physical hemisphere involves the components of your business that are tangible, physical things. These include the products that people are buying, and the logistics of getting them in their hands (warehousing, shipping, etc.).

The other hemisphere of things to deal with is online. A website, which displays your products, is online. The exchange of funds from their credit card to your store's bank account is online. Setting up shipping, advertising, communication, promotions—all of these functions and more occur not in the physical world, but online.

Your ability to establish good systems and effectively manage both fronts is critical to the success of your store. The good news is that there are turnkey solutions to help manage both of these components for you.

You also now have Guardian as a major resource here to help you in establishing your new business. Our goal is to help you be as successful as possible with your online store. Over the years, we have seen many of the mistakes and the victories. Our tutorials are carefully designed to help you navigate through some of the tougher, more confusing parts of your journey.

The Physical Hemisphere is Easier with Drop Shipping

You may have heard the term "drop shipping", but not known what it means. To put it simply, "drop shipping" is a service that Guardian offers, that allows you to sell survival products without ever having to physically store or handle them. This

effectively eliminates the majority of hassle with the physical hemisphere of your business. Here's how it works:

1) Set up an agreement with Guardian, which allows you to sell products in your store that will ship directly from the supplier's warehouse to your customer.
2) Upload product images and prices from the Guardian to your store.
3) When a customer places an order on your website, place the same order with Guardian, who will then ship the product directly to your customer for you.

As one of the leading drop shippers in the industry we know this process well and can lead you through it each time you place an order. We have it down to a science and know how to keep you informed. This is why Guardian is your premium source as a survival store. Guardian manufactures, warehouses, and then ships all products to your customers.

You never have to physically handle the products. And, Guardian eliminates all the related hassles and costs as well (Importing, overhead, personnel, minimum order fees, managing employees, and more).

Put It in Action

If you haven't already done so, take a couple minutes to complete [Guardian's online application to become a reseller](#). It asks for your website address, your state reseller's permit, and some basic contact information. It's easy to fill out, and as noted above, it's your first step to building your online survival store. Fill it out here.

As a Guardian reseller, you have incredible services to make your store a financial success. These include ready designed catalogs and flyers with your store's logo and contact information, follow up emails for remarketing to customers, advertising to new potential customers directly on Guardian's site, and more. Click here for more information.

Drop shipping eliminates the misery associated with physical products, so now you're left with only the online aspects of your store to worry about.

Bright Ladder is the Best Solution

Guardian uses drop shipping to simplify the physical hemisphere of your online store. However, even with the convenience of Guardian's drop shipping system the online aspects can be complicated and costly. Here's a brief look:

- Hire a web designer
- Figure out what language your site will be coded in

- Hire a web programmer (and make sure they're proficient in the languages that your website will be coded in—html, css and xhtml, java, etc)
- Make sure your backend admin panel is working seamlessly with your database
- Purchase a web hosting plan (figure out if you need dedicated, shared, VPS, etc.)
- Search Engine Optimization
- Figure out how to upload your products or pay someone else to do it
- Make sure that your website it working properly across all web browsers (Mozilla, Safari, Internet Explorer, Chrome, etc.)
- Make sure there are no bugs
- Make sure your site is secure and purchase a security certificate (nobody wants to input credit card info on a sketchy website)

On top of all of this you have to look out for possible complications associated with hiring unknown or overseas web designers. This can create challenges in communication and site upkeep. Even with a web designer hired, you often have to go through all the many complicated steps of establishing your site alone. As always, Guardian will do our best to guide you through the process, but there is an easier way to simplify this process.

Though the most common recommendation and solution is to associate your site with a hosted e-commerce platform, this is not often the most effective solution. E-commerce sites do eliminate a lot of complications with establishing a site, but they also provide you with a website template. Having a website based off of a template hurts your Google rankings, effectively pulling you further away from a potential customer base. These sites are also meant for mass trafficking. They usually aren't interested in taking care of you and your needs.

This is where Bright Ladder comes in as the best solution for achieving victory over the online hemisphere of your survival store.

Bright Ladder Over E-commerce

One of the major benefits of Bright Ladder is that they provide you with the complete package to get your online survival store running. And, because of their unique affiliation with Guardian, they can give you a unique connection to your drop shipper that no other web design or e-commerce platform would be able to provide. Bright Ladder pre-installs and pre-supplies

your website with all of Guardian's products. That one service alone will make a huge difference in the amount of time you spend putting your site together.

Bright Ladder also provides you with a unique website. Having a one of a kind web design is highly advantageous. When it comes to web searches you'll be much more likely to be featured or higher ranked. Also, using a unique, well-made site attracts shoppers. Online buyers are intelligent and they're aware of the difference between an e-commerce site and a unique platform.

For more information on Bright Ladder and the options they provide check out their website at brightladder.com.

Have a Guide

The most important benefit of using Bright Ladder is that you don't have to go through this process alone. The rest of this section will provide you with instructions on how to set up various facets of your website. These pages can help guide you through the process to make things a little easier, but essentially you're still going through the complicated and confusing process alone. Even if you utilize the benefits of an e-commerce site, you won't have a company devoted to you helping you along.

Bright Ladder has experience with every aspect of establishing an online survival store. Their affiliation with Guardian gives them a unique insight into the products you're selling and the drop shipping process. They will know your business much better than a generic e-commerce provider ever could.

Think of it like this: if an e-commerce platform like Big Commerce is the big box store of online store design, then Bright Ladder would be the locally-run business. An e-commerce platform is going to be a little bit colder and more distant. They will give you everything you need, but without the quality and personal assurance that Bright Ladder offers their customers.

If you'd rather make the trip alone or you're just not sure about using Bright Ladder, the rest of this section will take you through the steps necessary to establish your store using a generic e-commerce site or if you're designing your website on your own.

The Alternative: Ecommerce Platforms

Hosted ecommerce platforms are essentially a plug n play store, ready for you to customize and make your own. They make it incredibly easy for internet newcomers to sell products on a website without having to become on expert on web design. For a monthly fee of between $19 and $99, you can get everything you will need for a successful online store.

Finding a Quality Ecommerce Provider

Fortunately, hosted ecommerce solutions are abundant, with more and more being created all the time. Simply search the terms "ecommerce" or "hosted ecommerce solutions," and you will see a listing of many in the search results.

For overall ease of use and inexpensive costs, two of our favorites are Big Commerce and Core Commerce. Both of these offer a variety of easy to use features, great looking designs, responsive customer service, and a starting price tag of less than $30 a month.

It's a good idea to evaluate potential hosted ecommerce platforms thoroughly, paying close attention to which features are available them. For the best look at how they work, sign up for a free trial (which most platforms will offer for 14-30 days). You can sign up for multiple trials at the same time, and then cancel the ones you don't end up choosing.

How to Register Your Store's Domain Name

One of the essential steps you need to take in building your survival store is registering a domain name. A "domain name" is a website's address. If you want to visit a friend, you use their address to find their house. In much the same way, web browsers like Internet Explorer and Firefox use your domain name to help visitors navigate to your website.

Your domain is also used by search engines to help them know what your site is about. For this reason, it's better to pick a domain name that's as closely related as possible to your unique idea. For instance, if your unique idea is to target people wanting a survival for hurricanes, a good domain name might be:

Hurricane-survival-kits.com

Or

Hurricane-kits.com

Choosing a Domain Name

There is an entire art and science related to picking domain names, which we will not go into here. For our purposes, it is enough to mention just a few simple recommendations.

Give some careful consideration to your domain name, but don't make it your life's work. This is an area that should not be the entire focus of your site creating process. There are many more important factors to concentrate on when building your survival store.

Here are just a couple of suggestions on registering domain names:
1. Descriptive names are better than cute names (i.e. www.survival-kits.com over kellys-killer-kits.com)
2. Use hyphens for domain names longer than a couple words (i.e. www.the-best-survival-kits-ever.com, not www.thebestsurvivalkitsever.com). Hyphens make a domain name much easier to read.
3. Whenever possible, pick a .com over .net, .biz, .org, or some other extension. The .com extension is still the most common and most trusted. You can purchase additional extensions after you have registered your primary dot.com domain. In recent years, the .co extension has become increasingly more popular, and could potentially be a good second choice.

When you are ready to register your domain name, check to see if you can register it through your hosted ecommerce provider. Many times, they will give you a free or discounted domain registration for having a plan with them.

What if I Already Have A Domain Name Or Don't Want To Register Through My Ecommerce Provider?
Some people will already have registered a domain name, using a low-cost registrar like Godaddy for $10-12 a year. You may also have other reasons for not wanting to use your ecommerce platform to register your domain name. If you use a third party domain registrar, you will need to connect it with your store's hosted ecommerce platform, which can be done in 2 ways:
1) By pointing the "A Record" of your entire domain name (i.e. www.survival-kits.com) to the ecommerce store, so that any traffic coming to that domain name will automatically be routed to your store.
OR
2) By creating a "C Name" record that points only a subdomain of your main domain to the store (i.e. store.survival-kits.com). This is ideal for those who want to reserve their main domain for a blog, or other focus.

Either way, you will need to do some pointing. This process involves two parts:
1) Depending on which of the options you choose from above, you will need to contact your ecommerce provider for either the "A Record" or the "c name" to

point your domain or subdomain to. To create an A Record, you will need a series of four numbers like 24.4.72.19 that points to the ecommerce platform's specific IP address. To create a C Name Record, you will usually use two nameserver values, such as NS29.DOMAINCONTROL.COM, and NS30.DOMAINCONTROL.COM. In either case, your ecommerce platform will be able to provide these for you, so that you can appropriately forward part or all of your domain to the store you have built.

2) Create the forwarding records with your domain registrar (GoDaddy, etc.). You should be able to do this online after you have logged in to your account, but because this can be a confusing process, it doesn't hurt to call your domain registrar's customer service, and have them on the line to walk you through it.

Payment Gateways and Credit Cards

Gain Credibility with a Payment Gateway

In order to process payment online, you need to integrate your store with a "payment gateway." There are several to choose from, each with pros and cons. Although they all vary slightly, they usually charge a monthly fee, and a "per transaction" fee.

Once again, the easiest thing to do is first check with your ecommerce platform or turn to a business like Bright Ladder to see what they offer. If they have comparable fees and capabilities to other providers, use them. It's less hassle to setup, you'll be selling quicker and most importantly it can mean less waiting when a customer clicks the "submit payment" button. This is important in creating buyer confidence.

If you're setting this up alone or your ecommerce provider doesn't have something set up for you. Some of the most popular payment gateways to integrate into your store are:

Authorize.net
Plug N Pay
Merchant E Solutions
QuickBooks Merchant Services
Intuit

We could try to provide an exhaustive list of payment gateways for you, but no matter how thorough it is today, it would quickly become obsolete. If none of the above payment gateways seems like a good fit, do some digging around by googling terms like "payment gateways", and "credit card processors." Read reviews and find a good fit for you and your ecommerce platform.

Google Checkout and PayPal

Google Checkout, PayPal, and a few other sites allow you to accept credit cards without paying a monthly fee. Alternatively, they charge a per transaction fee. These gateways are a good option to have in your store, even if you have another merchant gateway, because **you're only paying when you actually get a sale.**

An even bigger benefit to adding gateways like Google Checkout and PayPal is that many people have already used them. This can make it easier for people to purchase from you, because they likely already have profiles created with all their personal information entered.

Finally, a third benefit is that because these gateways are so widespread and well known, they instill an extra measure of trust in your prospective customers. If a prospective customer is leery of submitting their credit card info on your site, having Google Checkout and PayPal options allows them to use gateways they know and trust. To integrate these gateways on your site:

1. Create accounts at Google Checkout and PayPal.
2. Login to your survival store's backend admin panel and enter the information from the Google Checkout and PayPal accounts you have just created.
3. Once saved, verify that both Google Checkout and PayPal are displaying as a payment option during the checkout process.

Adding Google Checkout and PayPal to your site is time well spent. Your upfront financial investment is nothing and your returns can be as impressive as 30-50% more sales immediately.

Remember, when it comes to converting your survival store's visitors into paying customers, making it as easy as possible is the name of the game.

For More Info on How to Choose a Payment Gateway/Credit Card Processor:
http://www.businessknowhow.com/money/tips5.htm
http://www.ecommerce-guide.com/solutions/secure_pay/article.php/3869546/Buyers-Guide-Choosing-a-Payment-Gateway-Provider.htm

Stocking Your Online Shelves

In order for your survival store to start making sales, you have to have something to sell. This is done easily through your backend admin panel by adding/importing products. Remember that if you're using drop-shippers, that you won't ever be physically storing products. But you do need to have them listed on your site with as much information as possible so that a customer may purchase.

If you've signed up with Bright Ladder, your new website is fully loaded with images and descriptions for all of Guardian's products. If you're using an ecommerce platform or another means of web design, uploading product information to your site is still easier with Guardian. We do this by giving you our complete list of products, ready to be uploaded to your store.

Virtually all hosted ecommerce providers offer the capability of adding one product at a time, or importing products in bulk.

Some formats are created specifically to be used with survival stores using **Core Commerce** and **Big Commerce**. However, if you are using another ecommerce platform, Guardian's Master Product Sheet can be easily modified using Microsoft Excel to create a spreadsheet any ecommerce store will accept.

Even if you have no clue what format your store needs the products in, you can quickly find out. **Follow these steps to seamlessly import Guardian's products into your store:**

1. First, add a couple imaginary products to your store, one by one. Fill out a fake product name, description, weight, etc. You should complete as much of the product information as possible.
2. Do a "bulk export" from your survival store's backend admin panel. Save the file to your computer and then open it to see what format your store keeps product information (i.e. the first column is the SKU number, the second column is the product name, product weight, etc.).
3. Using the format that your store exported your imaginary products in, copy and paste your real products (from Guardian's master product sheet), and then save.
4. Now, using your survival store's "bulk import" feature, **import** the product sheet that you have just created.
5. Save and check out the front end of your store. You should see all your Guardian products displayed for sale.

Uploading Images

The hardest part of uploading products to an online store is uploading the images. Uploading images needs to happen first. Then, once the images are uploaded to your online survival store, you can import another file into your store, telling your store which images should be attached to which photos.

When you are uploading photos to your survival store's backend, you need to use what is called an "FTP Client." FTP stands for 'file transfer protocol', and is basically a program that allows you to transfer large amounts of data in a quick, secure way. Because the file sizes of photos are rather large, this is the best method for quick transfers.

Be patient during the bulk import process. Even if it takes a while, you will still save yourself a significant amount of time compared to how long it would take to manually add products to your store one by one.

Here's how it works:

1. Download Guardian's product images
2. Download an "FTP Client" such as Filezilla. Once Filezilla has been installed

You will notice that on the left hand side are a bunch of files listed under the heading "Local Site." This is your computer. Across the top, from left to right you will see the fields: Host, username, password, and port. You will need to get these from your ecommerce provider. In many cases you will not be required to enter anything next to "port." Unless otherwise specified, try logging in without it first.

When you are logging in, it is best not to copy and paste your username or password into Filezilla. Doing this can sometimes inadvertently include an extra space. Instead, take the extra minute to manually enter these values and then click the "Quickconnect" button.

In the status bar up top, you will see the prompt "directory listing successful", and you will see all the files and folders for your ecommerce store on the right hand side of the screen. Now you can easily drag and drop your photos from the left side to your store's file folders on the right side. This process may take a few minutes, but you will receive a success message. At this point you can disconnect. You have successfully uploaded your survival product photos.

Set Up an Email for Your Store

With your products uploaded, and your payment and shipping tools in place, you are almost ready to begin selling.

The last thing that you will need to open your store for business and begin selling is an email address. Obviously you can use this email address for general correspondence with customers, and suppliers. But even more importantly, your ecommerce platform will automatically notify you via email whenever you receive an order—day or night.

Many hosted ecommerce platforms offer a certain number of free email addresses with your domain name at the end. Depending on your preference you can set

up an email with your name (i.e. Jeff@Guardian.com) or keep it more general (i.e. info@Guardian.com). If availability allows you could set up one of each. Many survival store operators will have an "info" email set up for all general inquiries, order issues, and a personal email for occasions when a more personal contact is appropriate.

Whatever you choose make sure you set up an email where you can have all order, shipping and payment info sent. Having an email address "@yourdomain.com" makes your store look infinitely more credible and will get you much more respect than a Gmail or Yahoo address.

Steps to setting up your official email address:

1. If you can, set up your email address through your hosted ecommerce provider. Usually they will have an easily identifiable tab that allows you to create email addresses.

2. If you're hosting your store on a subdomain (http://**store**.survivalgear.com) or subfolder of your main domain, you will need to create your email address through your domain registrant. Here's how to set up an email address in Godaddy and Hostgator, 2 of the most common domain registrant/hosting services.

3. Once your official store email address is setup, be sure to configure the backend admin panel of your store, so that all your order notifications and incoming correspondence will be forwarded to that email.

Simplify Your Life-The All in One Solution

If you have multiple email addresses that are all receiving mail, you may want to consider integrating them all in one place. This can simplify your life a great deal. Google's "Gmail" makes this possible. By setting up a simple Gmail account, you can integrate as many email addresses as you would like to, from all different email providers.

Additionally, you can respond to emails received using any of your email addresses as the "from" address. That way your recipients aren't confused when they receive your replies. For more information, check out following Google tutorial.

For more tips and tricks relating to email, check out the following resources:
Best practices for quickly dealing with email
How to make auto responders work for you
Tips for email organization
Getting the most out of your email signature block

Receiving and Submitting Orders

With your store configured, your domain and email address attached, it's time to put through an order. When your survival store receives orders, you need to notify your drop ship supplier by placing an identical order on their website. To place an order with Guardian Survival Gear:

1. Login to Guardian's website using the customer username and password you were given when your account was created.
2. Select the items that your customer ordered and checkout (if ordering several different items for the same customer, you may find it helpful to use Guardian's "Quick Order" page).
3. During the checkout sequence, enter your information in the billing section (because you are the one that will be paying for this order).
4. Enter your customer's information in the "ship to" section.

Your customer's order will be shipped directly to them from Guardian Survival Gear, with a packing slip that contains your survival store's information.

You get paid immediately

As soon as your customer clicked "submit order" on your survival store's order page, your payment gateway deposited money into your bank account. When you placed the same order with Guardian Survival Gear, it was for less money than your customer paid you. The difference stays in your bank account and is your profit.

Just another one of the many beauties of drop shipping—you never have to wonder if the products that you buy will sell. You never buy them until they already have sold.

You customers won't know the shipment didn't come from you

Guardian's identity isn't disclosed anywhere on the package or the packing slip. The box itself has a label that reads "fulfillment warehouse" and the packing slip inside doesn't have any of Guardian's contact information on it.

To give your orders an added professional appearance, Guardian offers you the ability to have your own store's information and logo on every packing slip. As part of our "Guardian 2.0" program, you can upload a jpeg of your store's logo that will appear on the packing slip of every order shipped out.

For complete details on the Guardian 2.0 program, click here.

Tracking Shipments

Once your customer's order has been shipped, you will receive an email with the tracking number for that shipment (Even though Guardian's lead time is 1-5

business days, most orders ship within 24-48 hours of order placement). With this tracking number, your customer can monitor the shipment progress.

As a general rule, you should forward the tracking numbers you receive from Guardian to your customers as quickly as possible. This increases trust, and decreases customer service issues. People get excited about their stuff coming in the mail.

Making Sure it All Works: Testing Your Online Survival Store

Anytime you add a moving part to your survival store (like a payment gateway), it's a good idea to test it right away. At a minimum, you should test your store to ensure products are displaying correctly and order processes are functioning.
After you have uploaded products and configured your shipping and payment gateways, you should run a simple test on your store:

1. Log out of your backend admin panel to ensure your screen looks exactly as it will for visitors.
2. Navigate to the homepage of your survival store.
3. Select an item and add to your cart.
4. Using your own personal email address and credit card info, fill out the billing and shipping info.
5. Submit the purchase information and wait for confirmation.

If everything works properly, you should receive a confirmation number in a few seconds. You should also receive an email receipt for your purchase, sent to the personal email you entered during checkout, as well as a "notification of payment received" email in your stores email box. Once you have successfully run this test you can easily login to your payment gateway and easily refund your credit card.

This simple test will give you a good idea if your normal ordering process is functioning correctly. There are other components that are a good idea to test as well, but these are the most crucial in the beginning phase.

Guardian Tip: *When you enter your "shipping info", it's a good idea to input a variety of different zip codes, to ensure your survival store's shipping calculator is charging correctly. After inputting each new zip code, "refresh" or "update" the shopping cart to see if shipping charges are updated accordingly.*

For Additional Resources:

[5 Ways to Test the Usability of Your Store](#)*:*

2. Traffic and Sales

With your store up and functioning properly, you're off to a good start. Now it's time to focus your efforts squarely on getting people to your store, and even more importantly, getting people to buy. For this phase, it's helpful if you think of your efforts in terms of a two front battle:

1. Traffic—getting people to visit your store
2. Conversion—getting visitors to buy something

You're probably at least somewhat familiar with these terms already, but we'll take a closer look at each of them to identify what they mean, and some simple steps that will get results. The first simple step to take is to install your store's measuring stick Google Analytics.

Keeping Track

Before you get started with channeling traffic to your site, you'll need to have a means of keeping track. There is a variety of software that can be installed to watch your traffic, but we recommend Google Analytics. GA (Google Analytics) is tracking software that records information about visits made to your website. It records the number of visits to your site, how long visitors stayed, which pages they viewed while on your site, and even how they found your site in the first place. Best of all, it's a free tool that's highly beneficial and virtually all ecommerce platforms are ready made to integrate with it.

GA will be the compass to guide you in the right direction. It will remove a lot of the guesswork from your survival store, and help you to make decisions based on what your customers want.

How to Install GA on Your Survival Store's Website:

1. Set up an Analytics account with Google <u>here</u>. If you already use other Google services, Analytics can simply be added to your current account as an extension.

2. Integrate your GA account with your store by entering the required data (usually an Analytics tracking code, or your account number) in your store's backend admin panel. Here's what it looks like if you're using Big Commerce or Core Commerce.

3. Login to your GA account and verify that the status says "tracking." This means that Analytics has been correctly connected with your survival store, and is recording data about the visitors to your store.

It can take up to twenty-four hours for Google to really start tracking activity on your site, so don't be too inpatient. There may also not be many visits to record in the beginning.

Within twenty-four hours however, you should be able to see data being collected in your GA account. Even if the visits are just your own, Analytics keeps a record. A simple glance at the dashboard of your GA account will show you just how much information you can collect: number of visits, length of their visits, which products and content pages they clicked on most, and much more.

For a complete overview on Google Analytics, check out:
<u>http://www.google.com/intl/en/analytics/tour.html.</u>

There are other tracking services out there that are extremely sophisticated and can tell you an incredible amount, but in the beginning GA is a great because it's easy to work with and it's free.

If you are looking for more advanced tracking information, including pinpoint heat maps of visitors actual mouse clicks, check out <u>www.crazyegg.com</u>. This service has amazing capabilities at a reasonable price.

Guardian Tip: Once you have verified that your GA account is collecting data and has recorded a handful of visits, add a filter on your account that will exclude your computer from the information you collect. This will ensure that any of your own visits won't skew the data. You can easily add a filter to your account by clicking on the "filter managers" section in the bottom right hand side of your dashboard after you login.

Traffic

Before your store can receive any orders, you have to get people there. This can be an enormous undertaking, but there are a few simple steps that will help you gain a good deal of traction as quickly as possible. Let's begin by working in order of the simplest actions that will yield the biggest results.

Where Does Traffic Come From?

There are two different types of traffic: paid and organic. Paid traffic brings visitors to your site via paid advertising. You create an ad and pay to have it shown; either on a "per click" or "per exposure" basis. When the ad is clicked, they are sent through to your site. When Google displays search results, paid ads are shown to the top and right of the page.

Organic traffic, on the other hand, brings visitors that come to your store via unpaid means (i.e. search engine results or links from third parties). There are pros and cons to both, and we'll cover both here.

Organic Traffic

Organic visitors come to your website, not because you paid for it, but because it is believed that our website has what they are looking for.

- **It is believed by search engines**—if they list you in the main search results (not the paid ads above and to the right)
- **It is believed by other people with websites**—if they have links to you.

It's simple to generate this kind of traffic. Create a website that truly focuses on what your potential traffic is interested in, and then let your potential traffic know. This is all you've been focused on for some time. By now it has several product and category pages, with photos and descriptions. Now it's time to let people know!

Submitting Your Survival Store to Major Search Engines

Search Engines like Google and Yahoo use programs, called spiders or crawlers, that search and monitor websites that are added to the Internet. However, because there are millions of websites added to the Internet each day, it can take several weeks or months before new sites are found.

To expedite the process, take the proactive approach and submit your store's URL (domain name) to the search engines. There are 4 major search engines: Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Ask. Unfortunately, Ask.com cannot be submitted to, they have to find your site on their own. Submitting to the others is free, easy to do, and it's the starting point for getting organic traffic. Here's how to submit your store's domain name to the other 3 major search engines:

[Submitting your URL (domain name) to Google](#)

Once you have submitted your survival store's website to the major search engines, their crawlers will begin to search and catalog your site, to identify what your site is about.

Since you are selling survival products, the search engines will eventually begin to figure that out. But once again, there are ways of speeding up this process as well. One of the simplest is to create **Meta tags** for your store.

What is a "Meta Tag?"

A "meta tag" is a piece of code attached to a product, category, or content page in your website, which helps search engines quickly identify it. This helps search engines display the most "relevant" results to their users.

Imagine that the Internet is a large 3-ring binder full of papers. Meta tags are like divider tabs that can be attached to the edges of pages. There are a few major Meta tags that are used and identified by search engines:

- **Title tag**—the title of your product, category or content page
- **Keyword Tags**—the words or short phrases that accurately describe your product, category or content page
- **Description Tags**—a brief description of your product, category or content page. The description tag is often what is displayed in the search results.

Although nothing is guaranteed in this life, adding Meta tags to your store's website will greatly assist search engines in categorizing and displaying your website. In turn, this increases your chances of getting more traffic to your website. In other words, help them help you.

Adding Meta tags to your store is a cinch. Using your backend admin panel, navigate to a product, category, or content page. In the spaces provided, enter the appropriate title, keyword, and description tags. Save and then repeat these steps. Here are a few suggestions for using Meta tags in your store:

1. **Think narrow and specific.** Remember in the beginning when we talked about your store's concept? The same principle applies in Meta tags. It's much easier to be a big fish in a small pond. When you are creating title and keyword tags for a product, use the brand name, product name as well as the bigger category that the product belongs to (i.e. Two Person Deluxe Kit, Guardian, and survival kits). It's a good idea to use several variations in your keywords (i.e. survival kits, survival kit, kits for survival, etc.)
2. **Separate each keyword tag with a comma**.

3. U**se no more than 5-10 keyword Meta tags for each page**. Some people make the mistake of trying to put everything in the keyword tags field. What this essentially does, is confuse search engines. It's harder for them to really know what each page is about. So your site is listed lower in search results for everything.
4. **Don't duplicate tags**. An equally common error is that many rookies will use the same keyword tags for many pages. This also confuses search engines, because it makes the pages look the same.
5. **Begin with the Meta tags for your homepage**. Then move into the category pages, and finally product pages.

While there is certainly more that could be said about Meta tags, this will give you a more than ample foundation to get going. This is another area where you don't need to stress yourself out trying to find perfection. Meta tags will not make or break you. Review your tags once to make sure you're satisfied, and then continue with your process.

Content Is King

Content is substance. It's examples, videos, how-to's, tips and tricks, stories, answers. Essentially, content is information found on your site. Sometimes we seek it out on our own, like recipes. Other times it just happens to catch our eye, like news stories that we see on yahoo, on our way to check email. Most of the time content is a mixture of both.

However it's found, content is crucial for your store. And for your potential visitors, it's a reason to come to your store. Now, in addition to selling products, your store can be a great place to give customers information.

Selecting Your Information

Be helpful. If you're selling survival knives, offer reviews on different knives, give advice on how to find the best knives. Post videos of knives in action. Give pointers. Think creatively.

What content is related to your products? You can share stories of the gear you sell in action. How did a customer use it? Can you offer your own experiences? Have there been recent news stories surrounding your products that you can paraphrase or repurpose you're your site? You can offer recipes for preparing the food storage items you sell. Tips on storing your survival gear, information on emergency disasters, more.

Aim to be consistent in your approach. In the beginning, consider adding one to two pages of content a week. When you are fleshing out your website with content, start broad and then specialize from there. For instance:

1. First add a page about general survival gear
2. Then add pages below that about knives, flashlights, backpacks, first aid kits, etc.
3. Finally after all those have been added, go back and add "third-tier" pages about specific knives, about specific flashlights, etc.

This approach allows time to work in your behalf. If you are trying to add content pages for a relatively broad topic, it will take some time to add the tier two pages. By the time you are working on your third tier pages, your second tier pages will likely be getting indexed and cataloged by search engines, and therefore available to the public.

You don't need to submit each page to the search engines, after they are created. Once your homepage has been submitted to the major search engines, they will continue to regularly monitor your site, for new additions.

Above all, remember that adding content to your survival store is adding value. This is not a sneaky way of tricking people into visiting. This is a bona fide way to give people solutions. You are helping them out, and they will remember you.

Paid Traffic: Dollars for Clicks

Paid traffic can produce lightning fast results. Within minutes of placing your ads online, you can have visitors to your site and potential sales. But there is one downside to paid traffic; you have to pay for it.

Because of this, it's very important to have a sound strategy in place before you begin. But with the right planning, paid advertising can be a great option for getting initial traffic. Again, refer to Google for help getting things started.

Google's "**Adwords**", is a pay per click (PPC) advertising service that shows ads to billions of internet users every day. Adwords users create campaigns with advertisements that are shown to searchers, and then pay on a "per click" basis. This means that they only pay when somebody clicks their ad. These ads are the ones that appear above and to the right side of your results after you run a Google search for something.

For instance: Advertisers pay anywhere from a few pennies to several dollars per click of traffic that Google sends their way. In the short term, this is a great way to get instant traffic to your site. Here's how you do it:

1) Set up an Adwords account with Google

2) Follow the on screen prompts to create a text ad or series of text ads, according to Google's standards.
3) Using Google's search term suggestion tool, choose the keywords for which your ad will show.
4) Configure settings for daily caps, length of campaign, etc.
5) Enter your payment information.

How to Bid On Keywords for Paid Advertising

When you are configuring your campaign, you will be given the chance to "place a bid" on the keywords that you select. This is how Google decides when and where your ad will be displayed, if they display any at all.

Because there are other people trying to have their ad shown for the same keywords you are selecting, Google essentially "auctions" off ad spots to the highest bidder. If your competition is only bidding $.30 per click and you bid $.40, your ad will be shown above theirs. Of course the reverse is true too. Fortunately, Google will give you a pretty good idea of what the "going bid per keyword" is in order to be competitive.

Once inside Google Adwords, click the reporting and tools tab at the top of the page, and then select the keyword tool.

After entering some potential keywords and running the search, click the "columns" button on the far right, and configure the search results to show the average cost per click (CPC) for each term. This will help you get the most opportunities for what you're paying.

Because Google Adwords is a pay per click (PPC) advertising service, you are not actually charged until someone clicks on your ad. Even if your ad is shown three hundred times and only clicked once, you are only charged for one click.

Google creates detailed reports of each campaign you run, keywords that trigger your ad's impressions, clicks and much more. Truly, it is the most sophisticated, and easiest to use ad network, with the widest exposure in the world.

Although there could easily be volumes written on Google Adwords here are a few simple tricks to get you started:
1) **Create multiple ads, and enable the feature that has Adwords randomly rotate them.** This gives you the benefit of being able to see which ads work the best. Sometimes changing just a couple words can have a dramatic effect.
2) **Make the scope of your ad narrow**—one product, one product family, etc. Trying to promote everything you sell, or your store in general is not specific enough for searchers who are ready to buy something to click through.
3) **Include a promotion in every ad**. 30% off, $10 off, buy one get one free, etc. Every ad you create is for a special promotion.

4) **Think about how your customers will be searching**. If you are promoting something specific, then target specific keywords as well. If your ad is about "survival flashlights," don't target keywords like "survival gear" or "survival equipment." Someone who is truly trying to buy a survival flashlight will search the term "survival flashlights." More general clicks will almost always be more expensive and more heavily competed for.

5) **Calculate your thresholds for profitability**. In other words, how many clicks will one sale pay for? If one sale generates $100 in profit, and each keyword is $1.00 per click, then each sale will pay for one hundred clicks. If your campaign is averaging a better than "break even" rate of return, great! If not, change things up, put your campaign on pause, or otherwise re-evaluate your traffic efforts. It doesn't make sense to keep losing money.

6) **Let the customers be the ultimate judge**. Once you have several ads created with several keywords selected, sit back and observe. Keep what's working, and be willing to do away with what isn't. It doesn't matter if you think an ad is great—if it's not working don't waste the money.

7) **A watched pot never boils**. Monitoring your pay per click advertising can work you into a frenzy. After it's set, don't check it more than once a week.

For a complete overview of Adwords tips and strategies, refer <u>here</u>.

Conversion

Now that we've at least skimmed the surface of traffic, let's turn our attention to conversion. As was mentioned before, conversion is the process of turning a prospect into a buyer.

This is one of the most important aspects of your survival store. Because it incorporates so many things however, it's easier said than done. But easy or not, it needs to be addressed. One of the first and most important things to consider with regards to the conversion process is to determine why people on the internet might come to you.

People are on the Internet for solutions. They call them answers, ideas, services, and products. But it all amounts to the same thing. They want to check things off their lists. Your conversion rate will depend largely on our ability to do that.

Brainstorm for a moment—what problems or challenges might prompt someone to be searching for survival gear? Perhaps they recently experienced a natural disaster. Maybe they already have survival gear and are now purchasing for a family member of loved one. Maybe a friend was recently stranded in a broken down car without any survival supplies.

It could have been a myriad of survival situations, but in any case, you should think about these reasons as you are building your site. These are problems that you want to be the solution for. This "solutions" based approach to conversion can be infused in several different areas of your store.

Your Greatest Advertising

More than a press release, mission statement, or any other official "marketing pieces" you put out, **your customers will read your product descriptions**. This is what they are interested in. They want to know how big it is, how heavy it is, what it can do, and how it can help them.

Tell them everything you possibly can about that product. Details, details, details!!!! How can it be used? What situations will it save you from? Be creative. This is the fork in the road for average and superior survival stores.

While Guardian does provide detailed product descriptions for you use, remember that several people will be downloading the exact same descriptions. Not only does this generate duplicate content, which lowers your Google rankings, it also makes you seem like just another survival site. The more you make these descriptions your own, the more notable your company will be. Make sure you remember that you're giving your customers a solution to their problems.

Pictures

Pictures are essential. Selling products can be difficult online, because the customer doesn't have it directly in front of them. Retail stores can show and demonstrate the way a kit works, but an online store has to rely on product descriptions. Including pictures makes the product more immediate and fulfills a thousand words worth of detail.

Like classified ads for puppies, you automatically are drawn to the ads showing the fluffy little puppies than the ones with a cold, small description. **The more you can help your visitors connect with your products, the more successful your survival store will be.**

Photos are great for this, and videos are even better. Buy a handful of your best selling products, and have them shipped to you. Click away several photos of each and, if possible, make a short video for each as well. Then add these to your product's description page. This is powerful.

Consider the advantage. Your prospect has navigated their way from the big huge World Wide Web to you survival store, looking for a solution to something. They navigate through your homepage, the category pages, and are now staring at the product they want. The mouse is now hovering just inches from the "buy" button,

and they're trying to decide if they should do it. Adding more photos and videos to your product pages is definitely worth it.

Online Reviews

Word of mouth is a powerful factor in the things we purchase. In an online world, you have the opportunity to take advantage of powerful word of mouth recommendations given by complete strangers—in the form of customer reviews.

Customer reviews are a quick, easy way for a prospective buyer to get objective feedback. Once again, that feedback is on the product page, just inches away from the "buy" click. Having a glowing recommendation within eyesight of a product is highly encouraging for a prospective buyer.

Customers can comment on the product, your store's customer service, or anything else related to the buying experience. If you are using a hosted ecommerce platform such as Core Commerce, or Miva Merchant, adding customer feedback can easily be done form the product page.

You Can Facilitate the Review Process

A couple weeks after a customer purchases, send a simple follow up email politely asking customers for a rating. If your email is personal and brief, and you include a link to the page where they can input their review, you would be surprised how many people will help you out.

Some retailers offer a 10% coupon or, other discount, for customers who participate. Using this method does tend to elicit unrealistic feedback however, and isn't a bulletproof strategy. Instead, if you are going to use discounts at all, a better approach is to send them to customers after they submit a review. Authenticity is the best way to illicit positive customer response to the posted reviews.

Promotions

Promotions are a great way to motivate people into visiting and buying. It can add to both traffic and conversion. There are a variety of options when it comes to generating a promotion for your site:

- Percent off
- Dollar amount off
- Buy one get, one free
- Gift with every purchase
- Gift for all orders over a certain dollar amount

- Free shipping
- Category-wide sales (all knives, all bags, etc.)
- Brand-wide sales

If you need a reason for having a promotion, they are abundant. You can, and should, literally have a promotion or two going all the time. Here are just a few excuses for having a promotion:
- Kickoff sale
- Closeout sale
- Holidays
- Black Friday
- Your store's anniversary
- Sporting events
- Seasons

With unlimited options, there are plenty of opportunities to have some fun with these events. Find ways to always have some kind of promotion going on all the time, so that whenever you talk to someone, you always have at least something that you can mention.

Email Marketing

Email Marketing is an incredibly powerful way to "re-market" to your existing customers. This is true for a couple reasons:
1) You already know they are the type of people that will purchase.
2) You know that they trusted in your store enough to purchase once before. This doesn't guarantee you eternal sales, but it does increase the likelihood of another purchase, especially if you stay in touch with them via email.

How Does this Work?

Once again, hosted ecommerce platforms make this process easier. All of your customers are automatically put into a customer group, called the default. You can also assign customers to groups of your choosing. These customer groups are automatically converted into email lists, which can then be sent an email with the click of a button.

Type the email, choose which customer groups you would like to receive it, and send it off. Your email will go to every customer on the list designated from the customer groups you have created.

What Type of Emails?

Imagine that their purchase was your initial introduction or virtual handshake. This email is your chance to strengthen the friendship, so it's important to be a friend. Send them something that will help them. Obviously you would love to do business with them again, but you don't have to turn the email into a pushy sales pitch.

Perhaps you have a list for customers who have purchased knives. You can send them a how-to on knife sharpening, that they might appreciate. You could send them a video, or a link to something useful. You could also have a link to a knife sharpener that your store sells, or a related promotion.

Whether you include a sales pitch or not, remember that people are on the internet looking for solutions. Be sure to make the overall tone of your emails about friendly, relevant solutions. This is why people will like you and, consequently, they will buy from you.

Surprise Your Customers

If you want to really show your customers how important they are to you, try sending out a handful of completely personal emails, just to follow up. Don't make a mass message, anything pre-drafted, or force a sales agenda. Just use the opportunity to check-up and see how they like their products, if they have any recommendations, or if there are any other products they are searching for.

You would be amazed at the results. Apart from being incredibly appreciative, they often have great suggestions too. Getting a personal email from someone is so rare, that it goes a long way. It's a big compliment for someone to get an email from the survival store just to say hello.

This could obviously take a long time, but a good way to handle it is sending a few each week. You can copy and paste some of the content from email to email, but the whole point is to make it personal, so be sure to include something specific to their location, their purchase, a question they asked, etc.

Remember, this part is about becoming friends.

3. Get Social

Over the last several years social media has become key in the marketing mainframe. Terms such as "social networking", "bookmarking", or "social marketing" have become common place in not only web vernacular, but all business relations. People reference Facebook, Twitter, blogging, video sharing (like YouTube), and many other social media sites quite commonly.

However, most of us didn't take "Twitter 101" and it can be difficult to simple navigate these sites let alone utilize them to the advantage of your company. This difficulty brings many people to simply ignore the opportunities these sites present. Many are left wondering why they should bother with these sites.

Why are these sites so important?

The big deal is this: Over the last decade, the Internet has become a platform for large-scale business, advertising, shopping, entertainment, news, dating and more. Software has become much more user-friendly and inter-compatible, and technology has become more inexpensive and accessible.

Creating a professional-looking website is now easily affordable. It's free to have your own YouTube channel (or Justin.tv for your own live television channel). Drop shippers like Guardian give you access to hundreds and thousands of products you can sell from you own site with the push of a button. With these tools and gifts so accessible, it is easy to see why businesses such as the one you're starting are so successful.

The ease of these services can lead to major success

The more these services and tricks are utilized the more successful businesses become. Too often it is the case the more successful a business becomes

the more they lose touch with the core of their business, their customers. Businesses get big, become streamlined, powerful, and important. At that point one-on-one conversations become obsolete. Businesses can feel they are too important for a personality or too professional to be human.

While to some this may seem like the goal, it can negatively affect your business in some major ways. Here are some ways in which this detached approach can damage business:

1) **Lost sales.** People don't want to buy something from a big, all-powerful presence that rolls over them and tells them to they aren't important. They don't want to be one of a million customers. They want to buy something from their friend who will personally take care of them. They want to know your name.

2) **Missed information** (which invariably leads back to reason #1). Pure, accurate feedback about your products comes from one source—the users. Distancing yourself from customers means cutting yourself off from the feedback. This means suggestions for better products and increased efficiency, which means more sales.

Small is the New Big

Social networking platforms help companies stay small while they grow.

These social networking sites are the key to helping your company grow without losing the personal effect of a small company. They allow you to connect directly with your customers and hear their feedback. These sites are a means to convey personality and humanity to your customers. You can connect on levels that aren't strictly business. This way you can be accessible, be a trusted advisor, and ultimately be friends.

Your survival store has a vital opportunity with social networking. You have the chance to be friends with everyone who ever purchases something from you, with survival enthusiasts, other survival store owners, gear manufacturers, related stores and manufacturers, and more. Even if you've never met any of them.

It's important to remember that the central purpose of social networking is to give solutions and be someone's friend. While it is important that you make sales, this social networking strategy is based on the premise that people buy things from their friends. Customers want to trust you before they buy from you.

Studies and experience have shown this to be the case, but if you don't believe this, there's no reason to do social marketing at all. If you do believe this however, then make sure you stay with the process as you begin and grow your social media connections. Offer solutions, be a friend, and stay a friend.

Take care of your friendship first

We don't recommend that you refrain from using the resources available to you while marketing your products or promotions. There will be plenty of opportunities to advertise along the way. It's simply important that this isn't your **primary** motive in your social communication.

Think about the friends you spend time with. You likely experience a variety of different activities and conversations with your friends, and frequently influence their thinking and decisions. They do the same for you. Your friends have influence over so many factors in your life:

- Who you date
- Your religious beliefs
- Your politics
- Your purchases and money habits
- Where you live
- What you do for work

However, none of these reasons is the sole purpose that they are your friends. And that's why you believe them so much. As much as possible, this is the type of friend you want to become with your online social network. In the beginning your common ground will be your survival store and their love of survival. As your social networking continues the goal is to have your connection be independent of whether or not they buy something from you.

When this is the case, as you process any orders they do place, you'll try to get them the best deal possible (a la coupons, discounts, etc.), like you would a friend. Even if they never do buy anything from you, you will still have plenty to talk about.

This is the ultimate goal of using the social networking platform. Successfully using social networking to achieve that goal mainly involves the use of a blog.

Become a Blogger

The Cornerstone of Social Networking

Your blog is the most important part of the social networking process. It will be the hub of all your social networking activity. This is the center of your connection to your readers. Your blog is where you share your goods with the world. All the great discoveries you make and your solutions are posted here. If the other social networking platforms are fishing lines, your blog is the boat that all the lines are cast from and reel back to.

There are many components to creating, using, and maintaining a blog. Through doing all of these things it's important to keep in mind the basic strategy of becoming a

blogger. As previously stated, the goal is to become friends. The formula for achieving that goal as you maintain your blog has two parts:

1) Creating conversation
2) Contributing to other's conversations

Creating Conversation is pretty simple—that's your blog. This is your platform to offer interesting ideas and solutions. The second part of this formula consists of the comments you leave on other blogs. If you want to truly create a snowball effect of social networking growth, you can't neglect this half either. Both parts work together to build your platform to a place of influence.

Commenting on other blogs

Though this can sometimes seem like an irrelevant strategy, it is a unique strategy in the world of blogs. Everybody has an opinion, and idea, an answer. On the other hand, many people lack patience. Listening to others, and contributing to what they're interested in, is not a natural thing. This creates a huge opportunity for you. It becomes your chance to do something better than most people are doing it.

You will have much better odds of being remembered as the person who wrote a comment, than as the person who blew the world away with some new idea. It's a strange thought, but you want to establish your place as a listener before you start becoming someone that others want to listen to. Again, this goes along with the principal of being their friends. You have to listen to them as well.

Where is your blog?

There are essentially 3 different options for where to install/host your blog that we'll go over in order of ascending recommendation:

Option #1: On a Subdomain. A subdomain is a prefix to your main domain, and looks like this: http://blog.survivalgear.com. It's generally free to create subdomains of a main domain you have already registered. Doing this keeps your blog's identity clear to visitors (i.e. your blog is easily identifiable as part of your survival store).

The downside of this arrangement is that **search engines and 3rd party entities largely view a subdomain and a main domain as 2 totally separate things**, not connected in any way. This means that as your blog begins gaining traffic, links, and rankings, it does nothing to boost your store.

Option #2: In a Subfolder. While subdomains and root domains aren't viewed as being part of the same thing, a subfolder is a branch of your existing survival store "tree." It looks like this: http://www.survivalgear.com/blog. Because of this

arrangement, the rankings of your blog (and everything under it) do boost the rankings of your overall survival store's website. A rankings boost would be majorly beneficial to your site.

Option #3: On Your Main Domain. If you do this, you would need to move your store to a subfolder, such as http://www.survivalgear.com/store. This is similar to the above, but in reverse.

This is a bold move, but if you are committed to a long-term strategy of social networking, and your store is less than 2 months old, this is your best option for a couple reasons:

- In the eyes of searchers, you just changed your primary reason for being online from money to solutions. Your store is now a side note.
- Blog software is inherently easy for search engines to scan, index, and access later. So all the articles, videos, how-to's, and other content you create has a better chance of showing up in search results.

No matter which of these options you choose, you can still create PPC advertising that will send visitors directly to your store's product pages, and all other features of your store will function normally. If you have already selected and created a store with a 3rd party hosted ecommerce solution, check with their service department to see what your options are.

Blogging with Word Press

By far, the best blogging platform is **WordPress**. It's coding structure, template designs, and built in features for search engine optimization are incredible. Due to the fact that there are millions of WordPress users worldwide, there are constant improvements, updates, and plug-ins (add-ons for your blog) that you have access to.

With so many users, it's also easy to find answers to questions. WordPress has a support forum, with the answers to thousands of questions. If you are having trouble finding your answer there, just Google "WordPress" in combination with whatever you're having trouble with. Such as "WordPress add new theme" or "WordPress add photos." No matter what you search, you are bound to find answers and/or people that can help you get more answers.

Setting Up Your WordPress Blog

If you chose option two above for hosting your blog (in a subfolder of your store), your hosted ecommerce provider will need to install and set up your WordPress blog, since you don't have access to the files. This should be relatively easy for them to do. If

you choose option one or three, you will need to get hosting space of your own. This can be purchased easily from GoDaddy, Hostgator, or a variety of other providers.

Once you purchase your hosting plan, you need to call your host's service department, and explain to them that you are trying to:

1) Host a WordPress blog on a subdomain of your main domain (i.e. http://blog.survivalgear.com)

OR

2) Set up a WordPress blog on your main domain, and then have your store moved to a subfolder such as http://www.survivalgear.com/store.

Essentially this means that your website's files will now be stored in two places. What will need to happen in either case is that a domain will need to be "pointed." This is how visitors will be routed back and forth between where the blog files are kept and where the store files are kept.

Because this process can be a little bit confusing and vary from provider to provider, it's best to get on the phone with the customer service departments for both your store and hosting until the kinks are worked out and everything is displaying properly. In any case, once your WordPress blog is installed, it's up to you to expand upon your blog with content. You will have a username and password to access the backend admin panel, where you can give your blog a title, write posts, set up pages, and decide how it will look.

Pages and Posts—What's The Difference?

Though they can feel similar and it's easy to mix up the two, these two types of blog medium are quite distinct. Pages and posts serve distinctly different purposes, and should be treated accordingly.

Pages are best used for content that incorporates broader umbrella themes and topics. These should be things that give a background to the angle of your blog or address the most basic questions. For a blog on survival gear, you could have pages on:

- How to choose survival gear
- The 5 most important pieces of survival gear
- Where to buy survival gear
- Emergency preparedness tips

You could also have pages such as:

- About—explaining your background or views
- FAQ—giving some quick helps and addressing the most common of reader questions
- Resources—for more reading, etc.

Posts, on the other hand, are typically much more specific in their focus, zeroing in on one specific thing. You could write a post about a new idea you found, a book you read, or other survival related experiences.

Other Components of a Successful Blog

Aside from the words that you write, you have other opportunities with your blog that are critical to take advantage of in order to fully engage your visitors.

Photos, videos, and links to other places on the web are a few. These things create a richer experience for your visitors, and help them with their solutions.

Reader's comments are a major way to add value to your blog. When a visitor sees other reader's comments, they can see that other people have already read your content and found it interesting enough to say something. So make sure that your comment settings are set appropriately. The more comments there are, the more likely other people are to read your post. The bandwagon effect when it comes to your blog can be very helpful.

There are some really great ways to get comments on your blog's content, which we'll explain in detail later. For now though, it's enough to keep this in mind, as part of your blog's big picture.

Another great way to keep an ongoing connection with readers is through an **RSS feed**. RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication", and makes it possible for people that subscribe to your blog to be able to automatically receive any new posts or updates, without ever even visiting your blog.

To take advantage of this, make sure that you set your RSS Feed option as available in the WordPress backend admin panel for your blog. You should see a little orange icon like the one on the left appear on the front of your blog.

Users click the RSS button and then designate how they would like to be notified of future updates. They will typically have the option to make your blog's updates available on their Yahoo or Google login page, or an internet browser homepage, such as Mozilla Firefox.

Once your visitors have subscribed to your RSS feed, any new content will automatically appear, after they have logged in to the page designated.

How Often Should I Blog, And what's The Best Approach?

As with many things in life, the best approach to your blog is to grow it consistently—starting with 1-2 posts a week, of the solutions that you find. Think about growing your blog like you would develop a tiny spark into a fire—just enough kindling at just the right time. The consistent approach is best, because when the first few people start to discover your blog, you want to give them just enough to keep them interested. Not too much, not too little.

When it comes to deciding what approach to take in blogging, think back to the idea of small being the new big. Your goal in utilizing social media is to become friends with the people you're in contact with. As a guideline to keep the correct approach in mind consider the difference between visiting Home Depot and visiting a public library.

Home Depot vs. the Public Library

Home Depot is a giant warehouse. It has cement floors, florescent lights, and big shelves piled high with tons of stuff. It echoes, it smells like lumber and fertilizer, and it probably inventories 100,000 products for sale.

The public library is cozy. It's warm, it's carpeted. People whisper to each other. They hang out for a while. They meet up for business conversations. They gain inspiration. They plan out their day. They read and get ideas, they get excited about life.

It's ok if your **store is like Home Depot, but your blog should be like the public library**. It's interesting, it gives people ideas, and it's largely free.

A good goal for your blog is to **give people access to interesting people and resources**. Offer the kind of solutions that people will think about later, and hopefully talk about with their friends. Your blog is interesting enough to make people want to check back for new ideas, new inspiration and new solutions—just like the public library.

How to Use Facebook and Twitter to Build Your Survival Store

Commenting

Facebook and Twitter are Internet applications that help you to create conversation and contribute to conversation with other people in the survival world. Strategies on using both of these applications take a lot more light-hearted interaction than posting from a blog.

For both Facebook and Twitter, you create a member profile with your basic information. Once your profile is created and you have an account, you can search survival related keywords to find related profiles. These profiles will have the name, website and basic information of the people that created them. One click on their website's address and you will be looking at their "conversation." This is where you want to be. **Read their conversation (articles, blog posts, pages, whatever) and then contribute to it.**

In the comment section below, you can ask a question, talk about the part you liked, or reference something the conversation made you think about. This comment can be anything as long as you provide something legitimately adding to the conversation. After you've contributed to the conversation you're immediately on their radar. The next time they log on, they will see your comment and probably stop by your blog.

They are interested in who you are because you were interested in who they were. This is exactly the strategy you mean to take in all of your social media efforts. Being a genuinely interested, good listener really does work.

Both Facebook and Twitter have millions of users who are searching, scanning, and connecting every day. They are the lifeblood of your social networking. This is the active, daily medium that will generate the most direction towards your blog.

For a complete introduction to all the features and tools you can take advantage of with Facebook, click here. For Twitter, click here.

Sending Out Messages

Above and beyond the ability to search profiles and connect with people, both Facebook and Twitter offer the ability to share small thoughts and ideas directly from your profile. This allows the people in your network to see a few lines from you as soon as they log in to their profile. In Facebook this is called a "**status update**," and on Twitter it's called a "**tweet**."

Both of these tools give people an up to the minute, single glance feed on solutions, without having to invest a bunch of time traveling to a blog and reading an entire article. Both tweets and status updates allow you to include a link, so you have the opportunity to send people elsewhere for more information, if they care to read more.

For instance, if your survival blog and store both focus on preparing for natural disasters you could send out a tweet or status update to draw people in at a glance. For example, your status or tweet might say "The 9 essential pre-hurricane season preparations" with a link to an article you found online about it.

The major difference between tweets and status updates is that **tweets can only be 140 characters long**, whereas status updates can be any length. This means you have to keep your tweets short and to the point. If you are including a link, it's a good idea to use tinyurl.com or bit.ly or another URL shortener, so that you don't use precious characters on a link.

Other Flavors of Social Networking

How YouTube Can Build Your Survival Store

Another incredibly powerful social platform available to you is YouTube. YouTube allows members to create a "channel" (profile) and then upload videos. This is great because once your videos are hosted on YouTube's website, they can be viewed by anybody, commented on by anybody, and bring more people to your blog.

It's another fishing line like Twitter and Facebook.

Imagine that you made a couple videos on your digital camera about where to store your survival kit and how to create an emergency plan for your family. You can upload these videos from your computer to your YouTube channel, for people to watch. You can also add a description and related keyword for each.

Now people searching related keywords will have an opportunity to see your videos. If they watch one of your videos, they will also have the chance to see the other videos you have created, check out your channel, and see a link back to your blog. Here they can check out your conversation and solutions, and contribute some of their own.

YouTube integrates seamlessly with tons of other web applications—one of which happens to be WordPress. This means that **you can easily embed your YouTube videos directly in your blog posts.** Simply copy the code for a video from YouTube, and paste it in the "HTML" layer of your new post screen, and then save.

Now check out the front end of your blog, and you'll see the video player right there. For a complete introduction to YouTube and all of its unique features check out this link: http://www.youtube.com/t/about_youtube.

Take Advantage of Forums

Besides Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, there are a variety of ways you can leverage social platforms to increase your contacts, friends and grow your business.

You may have heard about "**forums**", but not be super familiar with them. It's time to get familiar. Forums are networks of people interested in a specific topic. There are cooking forums, sports forums, and forums about survival. These forums allow members the chance to give and get feedback about specific questions (create and contribute to conversation). A member will post a question, and then open it up for feedback. As other members log on, they see the questions that have been posted, and join in to add comments of their own.

Users that comment on the original question, or "thread," can elect to be notified when other comments are added, so each question has the potential to become a huge conversation, with more and more people constantly being notified as others contribute.

Another benefit to using forums every time you post on a thread, asking or answering, **your signature appears with a link to your website.** This does 2 things:

1) Creates another line of access drawing readers to your blog.
2) Search engines and other Internet monitoring applications "see" links scattered around the web that point to your site. These make your website look like it has a bigger presence, and reflect favorably in behalf of your website,

because they assume that people wouldn't have links going to your site if it weren't good.

There are a number of forums focused on and around the survival community, but some of the largest and most prominent are:

www.survivalistboards.com

www.whenshtf.com

www.areyouprepared.com

These forums have thousands of members, many of which post regularly. The best strategy is to pick one of these forums and start being a regular. Log on twice a week and post 4-5 responses on threads that you find interesting. You can also chose something of your own to begin a new thread about. It's amazing how many replies come so quickly.

The Most Common Social Networking Mistake

It's easy to think that the goal of social networking is to get the most people to add you as a Facebook friend, or "follow you" on Twitter. But it's important to keep in mind that this should not be your focus. The goal is to have a personal connection with as many people as possible, and to actually be their friend. Focus on the quality of your relationships with your followers and friends rather than the quantity.

Many people rip through Twitter, just frantically searching and following as many people as possible, in hopes that those people will in turn, also begin following them. However, this practice doesn't do any actual good. There is no personal connection made. Remember how important it is to think about staying small while you grow. The entire focus of social networking is to form real relationships with potential customers. Frantically searching for new friends and contacts takes away from the relationships you've already formed.

Don't post garbage

Another equally counter-productive practice is spitting out a tweet or status update simply because you feel you're due for one. Don't let your feed get populated with garbage because you're finding anything to say and just saying it. On a larger scale, the same thing goes for blog posts.

While it is a good idea to at least be somewhat consistent in your social networking efforts, it is much better to forgo posting something for an afternoon (or a day or a week, or whatever), than to send out something useless or disconnected from your message. The goal is to be a genuine, real person, devoid of all pretense and image. If

you post or tweet something that feels forced or insincere, it will only move you further away from the goal of becoming their friend.

The most effective way to use your social networking tools is to truly try to personally connect with as many people as possible, by creating and contributing to real conversation.

In summation:
1) Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and forums are platforms that allow you to connect with other people so that you can…
2) Create AND contribute to conversation through…
3) Posting on your own blog, and posting comments on theirs, which helps you…
4) Stay small personal, and friendly no matter how big your business gets, and eventually…
5) Sell more, because people like to buy things from their friends instead of strangers

If you begin to get too swamped with the details, it's important to remember the view from 60,000 feet. The overarching truth is that people like to buy things from their friends. This is the entire goal of the social networking strategy. The Internet has created several avenues for people to connect with each other. As you're using these methods remember to stay small, stay approachable, and be friends.

It's time to get real.

4. Get Offline

Up to this point, our discussion has primarily been about online tools and solutions for your survival store. But it's important to consider all the thriving business functioning completely offline. While it doesn't make sense to waste time or money doing something offline that could be done better online, there are still offline methods and techniques that can be used to propel your survival store forward.

The thing to keep in mind with offline efforts is: Don't miss opportunities. Having a growing online survival store, doesn't mean forfeiting the use of alternative avenues that can augment your business.

Consider the reasoning behind businesses that remain offline and maintain a store front or other physical location. Offline sales happen for 3 reasons:
- Geography—what is closest to a customer or easily within reach
- External suggestions—unplanned purchases that someone else suggests
- Immediacy—the customer can have the item as soon as they've made the decision to purchase it

For instance, imagine you're walking down the street one day, and you see a lady on the side of the street selling t-shirts. Although you weren't planning on buying a t-shirt that morning when you got out of bed, you buy one anyway. This sale happened because:
1) **Geography**—the t-shirt happened to be where you were
2) **External Suggestion**—the t-shirt lady was there suggesting it
3) **Immediacy**—you didn't have to go to a computer, navigate to a website, go through a lengthy checkout process or wait for a week for it to come in the mail. The entire transaction took less than 30 seconds, and now you're enjoying your new t-shirt.

What are some other transactions happening offline, and why?
- Groceries—geography and immediacy

- Concerts and other events—geography
- Movies—geography
- Food at events—geography, external suggestion, and immediacy

In these ways, offline sales truly do have a leg up over online sales. The list could go on, but the point stands—there are still compelling reasons for people to buy things offline.

Ordering Your Product

Because you have been using a wholesale drop shipper like Guardian, you don't have inventory lying around to sell. If you are now going to be selling things offline, you need to actually have product to sell. This means you need to now assume some financial risk because you will need to purchase product upfront.

Once you have physical products to sell however, there are a variety of different ways you can do so. There are a couple ways to take advantage of these three factors and pick up some offline sales.

Trade Shows

Trade shows happen all over the place, with a variety of different emphases. In exchange for a registration fee, vendors are given a small area where they can demonstrate and sell their products. These shows usually continue for three to four days. Trade shows can be a great opportunity because you know that the people in attendance will be interested in your products. Also, because your products are right there, there is an immediacy with trade shows that doesn't happen online.

Take the time to find out some information about these events. What trade shows happen in your area? Who will be attending? Will there be people that might be interested in your survival gear? Are there related products being sold?

To begin brainstorming, here are a few places you can check for upcoming trade show opportunities in your area:
- Chamber of Commerce
- Local business associations
- Local industry organizations

Additionally, there are many online databases to check with for ideas of upcoming trade shows in your area. Here are a few:

http://www.biztradeshows.com/
http://www.bvents.com
http://www.conferensum.com

http://www.eventseye.com
http://www.eventsinamerica.com
http://www.exhibitions.com
http://www.expocentral.com
http://www.expodatabase.com
http://www.expopromoter.com
http://www.expofairs.com
http://www.globalsources.com
http://www.jupiterevents.com
http://www.mytradefairs.com
http://www.thetradeshowcalendar.com
http://tradeshow.alibaba.com
http://www.tradeshowplaza.com
http://www.tradeshowweek.com
http://www.tsnn.com

Contact the trade show organizers for registration information, including deadlines, vendor rules, and applicable fees. Consider these factors along with the timing, and the attendance in years past.

Some trade shows may not allow you to physically exchange any goods, only to collect signups and distribute literature. However, these aren't all bad either. Even though you lose the immediacy of being able to sell something to a customer right there, you also don't have to have product ahead of time either. So you can collect a list of signups, and then submit your orders to Guardian to drop ship for you. However, if you plan on selling products directly from your trade show booth, you will need to first get the products, as mentioned above.

There are also opportunities to sell products at swap meets, flea markets, conferences, festivals and more. For each, you have the opportunity to conduct a booth or table event, much like you would at a trade show.

How to Conduct a Table Event

Success at an event can rely upon several different factors—where your booth is located, how many people walk by, the promotions you offer at the trade show, and more.

Depending on the nature of the event, some exhibitors spend thousands and thousands of dollars in decorations, promotional giveaways, displays, printed collateral, and other marketing materials. These are all costs you'll have to recuperate before you can make any money. For this reason, it's important to start off with a small operation, and then gradually expand upon your marketing strategies.

For a complete guide to attracting traffic, designing promotions, ordering tradeshow materials, and all things tradeshow, check out: http://www.trade-show-advisor.com/index.html.

Fundraising

Keep your options open for helping others with fundraising opportunities. Are there local school, church, scouting groups or other non-profit organizations in your area, which need to raise funds? In these situations you can often offer to sell products to them at a discount, which they, in turn, can resell to raise funds. Maybe you can offer an even better discount for purchasing in bulk.

For fundraising, it isn't necessary to have products ahead of time. People can solicit orders and collect purchasing info, which they later submit to you. Then you can have the items drop-shipped directly to the customer's homes or to the organization leader if it's preferred.

Join the Survival Community

Many opportunities exist to rub shoulders with people in your local survival community. This is opportunity is one step above making connections online. Face to face interactions with the survival community are sure to garner closer relations with potential customers. Here are a few places you can find these opportunities:

- Emergency preparedness classes at a local Red Cross or fire department
- HAM radio classes
- Volunteer organizations like CERT, CEMP, CAP (many of the individuals in these organizations are very survival minded people)
- Survival meet-up groups are available in most areas. These are groups of survival-minded people who meet regularly to learn new skill and discuss survival topics.
- Volunteer to host a neighborhood "Preparedness Night" in your home; you can invite your neighbors and give a 30-45 minute presentation on the survival basics. Even if you don't directly bring up your survival store, it will come up organically at some point on its own. Even if nobody buys something from you on the spot, people will now know you as the "survival expert."
- Volunteer to give a free preparedness workshop somewhere in your community (school, church, non-profit group). Gather some interesting stories and facts and put together a little slide show or power point.

Be Prepared With Offline Materials

It's a good idea to have a few of your products, such as kits, on hand in case your friends or associates ever want to purchase them. You can keep them in your car with a simple receipt book. That way, you people want to purchase, you can utilize the factor of immediacy. Plus, it's never a bad idea to have a couple survival kits in your car no matter what.

Another important material to help you offline is printed collateral. Create a simple, but professional looking, business card using the predesigned templates at a print house such as PS Print or 48 Hour Print. Use these when you meet new people. A card is a great way to get somebody to ask a question about your business even without having to bring it up.

You may also choose to have a simple flyer made up, that features images and prices for a handful of your best-selling products. These can be used to distribute as the opportunity arises.

For a low monthly fee of $19.99, Guardian 2.0 gives you access to an entire line of collateral, including brochures, flyers, and even your own multi-page catalog. Simply enter your company information (including your logo), and your prices and you're ready to download your very own survival store catalog.

Business cards, flyers, brochures, and catalogs are great ways to leave people with a little something to get excited about. It's a good idea to include a coupon code on your printed collateral to make them special. This increases the likelihood that people will hang on to them, visit your website, and place an order.

5. Reap the Benefits

Getting everything started is the hardest part of opening up your online survival store. Going through the process step by step with the helpful hints available in this book, you'll eventually have a complete, working website. The hard part will be over and you'll be able to reap the benefits of your efforts with only minimal website upkeep. At the beginning, it can all seem overwhelming, but having a working survival store backed by Guardian's excellent products and customer service will make the process complete worth the effort.

Now that you're finished with set up there are only a few things you need to manage to keep your site going. Continuously transfer orders from your site into your account with Guardian so we can drop ship your orders usually within a 3-5 day time frame. Remember to update available promotions on your site and monitor your ad programs to bring in traffic. Constantly build relations with your customers through a blog and other social networking sites. Utilize offline marketing opportunities and reach out to potential customers through trade show and survival groups.

Congratulations on your new online survival store. Guardian is happy to have your business and provide assistance any time you need us.