

Growing from the Inside Out: Simple Solutions for Rapid Expansion

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Growth. It's a natural process, not a magic word. Flowers and trees do it, and businesses do, too... some faster than others. Everybody wants growth. The real question is: are you ready for it?

With growth comes greater complexity. This is true even if said growth does not entail changes to your [product catalog](#), marketing strategy, distribution method or other logistics (which it almost always does).

But at the very least, your business will be dealing with more clients and taking more orders, which quite simply means more to keep track of. Start-ups and small businesses may only deal with a few customers a day. When an order comes in, it's fairly easy to transfer it to accounting, shipping, and other relevant departments.

If these same companies start taking 50-100 orders daily, however, it's going to be a lot more difficult to get all that information where it needs to go quickly. Businesses that are not equipped to handle a high volume of orders can ironically end up being held back by their own success, as the orders will take longer and longer to fulfill.

The solution here is to automate most of the process by using an e-commerce platform that [integrates](#) with your accounting software or ERP.

With an integrated platform, from the moment a new client creates an account on your web store, his or her information is automatically copied to your ERP. When the client places an order, the order information is likewise copied. As you process the order in your ERP, the client's invoice is then sent right back to your web store along with your updated inventory and other important data.

In other words, integration allows your web store and ERP to function as a single unit, making all the critical information immediately available in both systems. Companies that don't integrate are forced to copy all this information back and forth, leaving a significant margin for human error over and above the time involved.



In short, any business planning for even moderate growth should be using an integrated solution to support and facilitate that growth. It enables rapid expansion; but, of course, expansion itself happens through the front end, by making sales and retaining clients. And that, in turn, depends largely on [user experience](#).

"User experience" can mean a lot of different things, depending on whom you talk to. To be sure, optimizing user experience is a task which changes from industry to industry, and even from one business to another. Nevertheless, there are really just two basic elements to consider here: the general experience and the personalized experience.

The general user experience is what greets all your web store's clients and guests. It consists of site features like ease of navigation and intuitive search tools, mobile-friendly web design, rich media product pages, contact options for your business (including [social media](#) links and live chat), and the overall look and feel of your store.

The personalized customer experience, by contrast, comprises the unique ways your relationship with a particular client builds over time. For instance, when a customer makes a purchase, do you simply add it to an order history that they can view through their account page? Or do you show them



past purchases the moment they log in? What about items they've searched for? Or similar items? Or substitutions, if what they want is out of stock?

If a client makes a repeat purchase, do you provide them with a way to automate recurring orders, should they wish to buy again?

Flexible e-commerce platforms allow you to create custom catalogs and pricing structures for clients based on their purchase patterns and individual needs. One common application of this functionality involves offering a unique discount to first-time visitors.

This strategy obviously acts as an incentive for the new guest to create an account and make a purchase. But it does more than that. Psychologically, it gives prospective clients the sense that you are making them a special, personalized offer. And the same holds true for returning clients. Like the deli owner who knows your name and asks after the kids, this kind of personal touch will go a long way toward building customer loyalty.

Growing your business doesn't always take complex strategizing. Sometimes even simple details can promote major expansion. For instance, one of the easiest ways to seed growth for your online business is to allow customers to rate products and leave reviews.

Customer reviews benefit your site in two major ways. Obviously, they help other clients by providing information and feedback to aid their purchasing decisions. Customers will often leave reviews not just of the items themselves, but also of their experience with your company. If you provide an excellent service, this is where people will hear about it.

But potential customers aren't the only ones looking at reviews. Each new review a customer leaves creates unique, high-value content for your web store's pages, which is then picked up by search engines. This boosts your product pages' relevance and credibility and ultimately contributes to a higher Google ranking.

Of course, the big question here is: what about negative reviews? Isn't this, at least potentially, a double-edged sword?

The important thing to remember is that there are independent review sites all over the web. Which means that customers who feel motivated to leave negative reviews will be able to do so regardless. By giving your clients the freedom to leave reviews on your site, you are positioning yourself to see and respond to negative feedback directly.

If a customer has had a bad experience, you can usually turn it around by responding to the situation yourself and doing what you can to make amends. This then leads to even more positive reviews, imbuing your company with a reputation for transparency and good service, and building a sense of trust with both current and prospective clients.

All of which only leads to more growth.

About k-eCommerce

k-eCommerce is a leading provider of innovative e-commerce solutions integrated to Microsoft Dynamics™. Built on industry best practices, k-eCommerce simplifies and accelerates online sales and offers mid-market businesses a complete omnichannel e-commerce platform to support both B2B and B2C engagement models. For more information, visit www.k-ecommerce.com. ^{GP}