Beginner's resource guide to starting an e-commerce business

For military-connected entrepreneurs and passion-driven founders

1. What Is e-commerce and why does it work for military families?

E-commerce refers to the buying and selling of goods or services using the internet. It includes a variety of models:

- B2C (Business to Consumer)
- B2B (Business to Business)
- D2C (Direct to Consumer)
- C2C (Consumer to Consumer, for example platforms like Etsy or eBay)

Why e-commerce appeals to military spouses and veterans:

- **Portability**: You can run your business from anywhere, which is ideal for PCS moves.
- **Low overhead**: Many models require little up-front investment.
- **Schedule flexibility**: Balances well with caregiving, transitions, or deployments.
- **Creative outlet**: A way to turn hobbies into income.

"I wanted to build something that could travel with me, no matter where we were stationed." – Monica Fullerton, founder of Spouse-ly, e-commerce entrepreneur and military spouse.

2. First steps: what to know before you begin

✓ **Research and business planning**

- Identify your niche and target customer
- Perform competitive analysis
- Build a lean business plan (use resources like SBA's business guide)

✓ **Legal setup**

- Choose a business structure (LLC is popular for small product businesses)
- Register your business and get an EIN (IRS)
- Learn about sales tax obligations by state (use TaxJar)

3. Choosing your e-commerce platform

Each platform has pros and cons depending on your product type, tech skills and budget.

Platform	Best For	Pros	Cons
Shopify	Product sellers (scalable)	Beautiful templates, all-in-one dashboard, built-in payments	Monthly fee
Etsy	Handmade/vintage/unique goods	Community built-in, easy to start	High fees, limited branding
Squarespace	Creatives and small catalog shops	Beautiful design, easy site building	Limited for complex product management
Wix eCommerce	Beginners	Drag-and-drop builder, low learning curve	Limited inventory management
Amazon Handmade	Artisan product sellers	Large built-in audience	High competition, strict policies

Tip from Fullerton: "Don't be afraid to start small with Etsy or Shopify and expand as you learn. You'll evolve your brand with time."

4. Essential tools for launching and managing your store

E-commerce management tools

- **Shopify admin / Etsy dashboard** – Inventory, payments, customer service
- **Square** – Point-of-sale integration for in-person markets
- **ShipStation** – Shipping label generation and order tracking

Branding and design

- **Canva** – For social media posts, logos and product mockups
- **Fiverr / 99designs** – Hire affordable designers

Analytics and marketing

- **Google analytics** – Track web traffic

- **Meta Business Suite / Pinterest analytics** – Social media engagement

- **Klaviyo / Mailchimp** – Email marketing automation

Fulfillment

- **PirateShip** – Discounted USPS shipping

- **Printful / Printify** – Drop shipping for custom products like T-shirts

- **Amazon FBA** – Fulfillment by Amazon (high barrier but scalable)

5. Key considerations before scaling

Consistency over perfection

- Launch with a minimum viable product and iterate.

- Use customer feedback for improvement.

Community building

- Engage with your audience through email, social or text.

- Start building your brand voice and customer trust early.

Inventory management

- Don't over-order! Start with limited runs to test what sells.

- Use spreadsheets or tools like Craftybase or QuickBooks Commerce for inventory tracking.

Taxes and accounting

- Track everything from day one.

- Use Wave, QuickBooks, or Bench for finances.

6. Expert Resources and Where to Learn More

- [V-WISE Program – Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship](#)

- [The Rosie Network – Supports military spouses and veteran entrepreneurs](#)

- [Military Spouse Chamber of Commerce](#)

- [D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) Bunker Labs – Community and support for veteran startups](#)

E-commerce optimization guide for established entrepreneurs

For military-connected founders scaling their product-based businesses

1. Operational efficiency and automation

- **Inventory management tools**: Use tools like Cin7, QuickBooks Commerce, or TradeGecko for real-time syncing across platforms and wholesale orders.

- **Fulfillment optimization**: Consider 3PL (Third-Party Logistics) providers like ShipBob or Deliverr for faster delivery and less warehouse overhead.

- **Automated workflows**: Platforms like Zapier can link email marketing (Mailchimp, Klaviyo), CRMs and fulfillment systems for seamless operations.

2. Advanced marketing and customer retention

- **Email automation**: Use Klaviyo to build flows like abandoned cart recovery, welcome series and loyalty campaigns.

- **SMS marketing**: Tools like Postscript or Attentive offer high ROI through direct text engagement.

- **Content strategy**: Start a blog or YouTube channel to drive SEO and deepen brand loyalty. Focus on storytelling and educational content.

- **Affiliate/referral programs**: Tools like ReferralCandy or Social Snowball can activate your customer base as brand ambassadors.

3. Scaling with multi-channel selling

- **Expand to Marketplaces**: Use Amazon, Walmart Marketplace, and eBay alongside your Shopify or WooCommerce store.

- **Social commerce**: Set up native storefronts on Facebook Shops, Instagram Shopping, Pinterest and even TikTok Shop.

- **Wholesale or B2B:** If relevant, create a wholesale portal with Shopify Plus or Faire integration.

4. Financial health and analytics

- **Profit margin analysis**: Use BeProfit or Lifetimely to track CAC, LTV and profit across channels.

- **Bookkeeping**: Consider Bench, Xero, or a dedicated accountant with e-commerce expertise.

- **Sales tax compliance**: Stay compliant with Avalara or TaxJar. That is critical as you expand into multiple states.

5. Strategic partnerships and ongoing learning

- **Veteran-connected resources**:

  - Rosie Network's Service2CEO

  - Bunker Labs' Veterans in Residence

  - VEA Academy by AMSE

- **Online masterclasses**:

  - Shopify Compass (free)

  - Coursera's Digital Marketing Specialization

  - ClickMinded SEO or Google Ads course

- **E-commerce podcasts**:

  - My Wife Quit Her Job

  - The Unofficial Shopify Podcast

  - Side Hustle Pro (especially for women entrepreneurs of color)

Key questions for this growth phase

1. Are you prioritizing profitability over vanity metrics?

2. Have you identified your top-performing channels?

3. Is your tech stack serving you or slowing you down?

4. Are your systems ready to support scale (seasonal surges, collaborations, wholesale, etc.)?

5. Are you telling a clear brand story that resonates across platforms?