

How To Select Products & Suppliers For Your Online Boutique

www.brazenprofitlab.com/how-to-online-boutique/
Stacey

So, you decided to finally start that online boutique you've been talking about for years.

[UPDATE] New online boutique checklist added June 2016

You've chosen your domain and ecommerce platform, but as you get deeper into the process of starting your online business, you realise that there's more to figure out than: [how to get started with Shopify?](#)

In fact, the most important part – selecting your stock and finding reliable suppliers – has got you stumped and feeling stuck.

I know exactly how you feel, I've been there!

In this article you'll learn some actionable tips to help you overcome those challenges. I've also included my own personal experiences so you can see I can see you're not alone.

You know: **1) How to get clear on who you're buying for 2) creating collections that sell 3) Choosing your market segment 4) How to sell and make a profit 5) Quality control tips 6) Tips for quality pics on a budget.**

I also think you'd really get a lot of value from my FREE Online Boutique Check List. Click the button below to easily download as a pdf, or print for daily use.

[Download your free online boutique checklist](#)

How to find products & suppliers (without going crazy or broke!)





1. Get crystal clear on who your customer is

Even if you've already launched your online boutique, if you're still feeling 'fuzzy' around who you're selling to EXACTLY, it's okay to go back to the drawing board. **You need an indepth insight, into: who they are, their likes, dislikes, wants, needs, challenges and views on style and fashion.**

With this clear picture of your customer in mind, every time you consider a new product you can run it past the filter of: would (your ideal customers name) wear this?

I knew TBB had a very specific customer in mind even when it was just an idea in my head. But as it came down to brass tacks I realised that idea was not clear enough, so before I spent a penny on inventory for my online boutique I spent some time refining that.

Actionable tip: Quite often if your gut instinct says NO, you're probably right. Don't buy product just because they're cheap, cute, or because you personally *like* it. This business model will leave you with lots of unsold stock that you end up having to sell at steep, steep discounts, if at all.

If you don't already have a customer profile, but you think you probably need one, then you're in luck – you can [steal mine](#) by clicking on the image below.

2. MAKE SURE Your collection lookS and feels like a collection, Not a flea market!

Your collection needs to *look and feel* like a collection. But this can be hard to achieve when you're working with lots of different suppliers and sources. Why? well, you're seeing things at different times, and have no real idea what they will look like when laid out side-by-side in your online store .

Think about those sale stores you go into where you're faced with hundreds of different options, and none of them seem to go together. How often do you find yourself buying from those places?

via [GIPHY](#)

Errr... I heard you roll your eyes and whisper, 'NEVER'. So you need to be careful that your online boutique doesn't become the digital equivalent of that experience.

Actionable tip: [Create a mood board](#) of the inspiration for your current collection for your online boutique. Next, create another board with pictures of all the stock you plan to buy that reflects that inspiration – then, work out how those pieces work together.

While you can do this digitally with tools like Pinterest, I'd actively encourage you to try and do it manually – as it's so much easier to move things around. Just this simple process will eliminate a lot of weak product selection and help you see what's missing. This really is a crucial part of curating any collection, whether you design it yourself or buy it piece by piece.

3. Decide which part of the market you want to play in

In my experience customers fall into different segments, especially when it comes to fashion and accessories:

There's the bargain hunter. They buy often, but are rarely willing to spend over a certain amount. They like throw-away cheap fashion, and are not particularly loyal to any specific brand or boutique.

There's the mid-range customer, who considers quality and wearability when they make a new purchase. They still want a good quality product for a fair price, but they are not as easily swayed by deep discounts because 'cheap' is not their no #1 priority.

Then there's the high-end customer. **They are financially fluid, often fiercely loyal to brands and boutiques** who meet their style needs with great customer service to boot.



They may not shop every month, but they tend to buy in hauls and buy products build to last, so they're looking for quality pieces that they will wear for years to come.

These customers are not as price sensitive, and while being aware of trends, still retain a very clear personal style.

Where you position your online boutique depends on a few things: **your business model, your budget, and your branding.**

It can be tempting to go the 'cheap and cheerful' route as this seems to be an easy way to get started, but this space is also fiercely competitive and carving out a loyal following for yourself can be hard. You gotta be one badass marketer (or able to [hire one](#)) if you want to stand out.

Likewise, [positioning](#) yourself as a high-end boutique can also present stumbling blocks. Your initial outlay is going to be much higher for stock, especially if you're not able to make a large purchase order to take advantage of real wholesale pricing.

while brick and mortar stores will often negotiate consignment deals with new designers to test stock before committing to a P/O, these agreements get much harder to broker when you only retail online.

Actionable tip: Decide which end of the market you want to play in from the beginning . But remember, it's much easier to have higher prices and offer lower priced products to an already loyal and engaged money spending audience, than it is to pitch yourself to the lower end of the market, then start throwing in random, premium priced products.

This was a tough decision for me. But I figured it would take **just as much work to market to a clientele less willing to spend money, as it would to those who where.**

[Download your free online boutique checklist](#)

4.mAKE SURE THAT shipping DOESN'T kill ALL YOUR profits.

[Shipping costs](#) can be a major point of friction, especially for international customers. As I write this blog post I'm sat in Bali. In a few weeks I'll be in Berlin, and while my situation isn't the norm, shipping costs, storage and order fulfilment are something you need to think about carefully when selecting products and suppliers for your online boutique.

And here's why...**Slim profit margins are fine to test the market on a new product**, but they are not sustainable in the long term if you want to keep offering that product and you don't want to go broke.

You also need to factor in the cost of shipping your items to you – even more so if you're buying from overseas sources. What are the shipping costs to get your stock to you? What will you need to pay customs and excise? Remember this: the long-term success of your online boutique all depends on your understanding of your numbers.

Actionable tip: Try and bake in a little extra profit into all your products to allow you to offer free shipping over a certain spend, and to account for any costs in getting products to you.

But don't forget, unless you are using a product fulfilment centre, running an online boutique does not give you the same sort of flexibility as some other business models. Lastminute.com holidays? Think again!

5. dECIDE HOW YOU WILL HANDLE Quality control and customer service?

It's pretty much impossible to run an online boutique without running into some quality control issues at some point. But those problems become even harder to manage and regulate if you're not able to touch and see all of your merchandise.

That's why if you're considering [dropshipping](#) as part of, or as your primary business model – you need to seriously think about that. A bad reputation for offering poor quality products can quickly ruin a new online boutique. And this is where a non-negotiable commitment to providing excellent customer service will either make or break your new business.

If your customers face looks like this when your product arrives... you're doing it wrong!

I made the decision that since the fact that I chose not to hold inventory is not my customers problem – and they were already being affected by longer delivery times -, I would **offer a no-quibble returns policy** for anything sent back within 14 days.

However, knowing I was offering a return policy that heavily favoured the customer, made it even more imperative that I was confident the suppliers I worked with had a focus on providing quality products.

Actionable tip: If you're going to offer favourable return and refund policies to your customers – which you should – **make sure you do some due diligence when choosing suppliers and vendors**, otherwise slim profit margins could end up as no profit margins.

When searching for reputable suppliers ask questions in groups and forums, do your research online – **the dirt is often hidden on pages 2/3/4**, and ask other boutique owners for their own experiences.

If you're in anyway unsure about a supplier ask them to send you a sample – whether you're buying wholesale or dropshipping. Reputable suppliers and wholesalers who stand by their product will usually say yes, but you will need to ask.

[Download your free online boutique checklist](#)

6. FACTOR IN THE COST OF QUALITY PRODUCT PHOTOGRAPHY

If you're getting your inventory directly from your wholesaler and have the physical product in your hand, you really have no business using the stock photography that comes along with it.

Why? It's boring, bland, and makes it clear your online boutique is not serious about building a brand. Oh! And every Jo smo is using it. But if you do end up using it, **you really need to get creative and find a way to make it your own.**

[Quality imagery](#) is what makes the difference between a boutique which looks professional and high-end, and helps immeasurably when it comes to building credibility and trust with your buyers.

Many new online boutique owners fall into the trap of creating online stores that they themselves would not buy from. The shops are ugly, have a poor user experience, and are bulging with bad quality, non-branded images. Don't let that be you.

I faced a slightly different problem.

With multiple vendors from all over the world, and a constantly changing address, it's very difficult to get samples sent. I haven't 100% found a work around for this problem, but here's what I'm doing for now:

Heavily photoshopping and editing images already created by my suppliers and where possible, getting them to create imagery for me that fits the TBB visual style guide. You do have one of those right?

It's not ideal, as it means I can't be as **creative with branding and as aggressive with marketing** as I would like to be, but this is one of the downfalls of my particular business model.

Actionable tip: **If you've got your products in your hands, spend as much on quality imagery as you can afford**, and try to get as much and as many marketing assets from those images as you can. Great product photography rarely comes from the wholesaler.

What next?

As a location independent entrepreneur and eCommerce business owner, I've personally faced all the above challenges when it comes to sourcing products and suppliers for my online boutique, and no doubt they'll be a lot more – so stay tuned as I take you along for the journey.

If you haven't already grab 2 free online boutique checklists, the first two a series of 6, this will definitely get you on the right track.

[Download your free online boutique checklist](#)