

Unit

1



Product Selection



Selecting the Products
for Your Online Store

Understanding Cross-border E-commerce

Text A How to Select a Product

transactional 交易的

start-up 起始(阶段)的

niche 商机, 市场定位

mark-up 提价幅度

retail 零售

margin 利润

category 种类, 类别

access 进入权, 接触的机会

abundant 充裕的, 丰富的

What products are you going to sell online? Where do you start when it comes to choosing these products? How do you get the products? Clearly, there's a lot to think about when you decide to open an online store. Details such as **transactional** and shipping costs become trouble for **start-up** e-commerce stores and cumulatively can bring you success or failure.

Understanding the following six types of product opportunities is key to helping you identify the great products to sell online.

Passion or Margin

A starting point in regard to direction would be either to pick a **niche** for which you have some passion and sell those particular products to that particular market, or to find a product (or product line) whose **mark-up** is quite high, so that your store can carry these products at a discounted **retail** price, still make the **margin** your business requires, and compete against other e-commerce stores carrying products in the same **category**.

Global Appeal

The Internet provides you with **access** to a global market, so it's really wasting that advantage if you sell products that are only useful within a limited geographic area.

There is another twist on this as well. If you can identify something people need that is in short supply in one location but **abundant** in another, you can make money by buying from a place of

abundance and selling in a place of shortage.

Potential to Add Value

In this day and age, anyone can throw up products and add a **shopping cart** to their website—so when there are other people selling the same product, what makes your store different?

There are many ways to add value—the easiest and most effective is to provide information that no one else is providing. Can you educate your potential customers about your product in ways that nobody else can or is doing?

Another way to add value is to remove the paradox of choice. In a world where there are literally billions of products available, who has the time to **sift** through so many products to see what they like? If you can position yourself and establish authority, you can provide value by **curating** your product out of many choices.

If you are not selling an existing product, but manufacturing your own, then the value can be in-built into the product. This makes your job much easier!

Size and Weight

Most e-commerce stores aren't **equipped** to handle the **traffic** or the sheer number of products. Products that are small in size and don't weigh too much are ideal products to sell online since you can ship them very cheaply. The larger your product is, the more costly it gets to ship.

With today's e-commerce **landscape**, it's inadvisable and inappropriate to offer anything other than free shipping, so you'll probably have to eat those costs yourself.

Smaller and lighter products are also less likely to get damaged during **transit**, which means less **hassle** and trouble for you. A really tough item to sell are large glass **chandeliers**. They are big, heavy, and highly **prone** to break in transit—an item like this is really tough to sell.

potential 潜力，可能性

shopping cart 购物车

sift 筛选

curate 挑选，选定
(展品等)

equip 装备，配备

traffic (货物) 运输

landscape 形势

transit 搬运，运输

hassle 困难，麻烦

chandelier 枝形吊灯

prone 很可能……的

archery 射箭（运动）

cater to 满足，迎合（某群人的需要）

intermediate 中级水平者

optimize 使最优化

capitalize on 从……中获利

lose out 损失

third-party 第三方的

Well-defined Target Market

It becomes very easy to sell something online when you know exactly whom you are selling to. If you sell **archery** equipment, you are **catering to** a particular niche, but if you sell archery equipment to beginning archers, you are catering to a niche and a target audience.

Catering to a niche can bring you success, but catering to a niche within a niche (your target audience) makes a much bigger difference.

Back to the archery equipment example, your customers may consist of beginners, **intermediates**, or advanced archers. If you get a mix of all the three, you may see that your sales come mostly from the beginners rather than the others.

What if you could **optimize** your site to target those beginners specifically and **capitalize on** them? You won't really **lose out** on the intermediate and advanced sales, but your sales from the beginners will rise.

The Statistical Way

If you'd prefer to do a little statistical analysis to find out what's selling and what's not, then don't worry—you can do that.

For example, eBay makes all their market data available to **third-party** developers through what's called a “programming interface”—this basically means that you have a wide choice of programs that can take market statistics from eBay and then analyze those statistics for you.

Besides, there are also volumes of data and knowledge published regarding what products are most commonly sold through e-commerce.

There's no such thing as a perfect product, unfortunately. But you'll just have to weigh the products' strong points against their weak points, and decide which one is better.

Comprehension Check

1. Translate the following sentences from the text into Chinese.

- 1) With today's e-commerce landscape, it's inadvisable and inappropriate to offer anything other than free shipping, so you'll probably have to eat those costs yourself.

- 2) What if you could optimize your site to target those beginners specifically and capitalize on them?

- 3) But you'll just have to weigh the products' strong points against their weak points, and decide which one is better.

2. Match each statement with the product opportunity it refers to according to the text.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| _____ 1) Passion or margin | _____ 4) Size and weight |
| _____ 2) Global appeal | _____ 5) Well-defined target market |
| _____ 3) Potential to add value | _____ 6) The statistical way |

- a. You could learn about which products are best sold by analyzing volumes of data.
- b. As an e-commerce store owner, you'd better not charge for delivery in order to attract more customers.
- c. You need to find the product whose price is very competitive.
- d. Convince your customers that your products are unique and special.
- e. Keep an eye on the customers' needs in the whole world.
- f. As an online dealer, you'd better cater to a target audience.

3. Which of the following products would you choose to sell online? Give your reasons according to the text.



Text B Tips on Selecting Restricted Products

get around 避开，规避
specialize in 专门从事
inventory 存货，库存
gated 有关卡的

There are millions of products that are available from Amazon, many of which you can sell as soon as you have signed up for your Amazon seller account. But for some products you will find various restrictions in place.

Some of these restrictions can be overcome quite easily whilst others will be very difficult to **get around**, and some are not flexible at all. We'll discuss the different types of restrictions and what you can do if you wish to sell a restricted product.

Restricted Categories

There are many product categories you can sell on Amazon. Some sellers choose to **specialize in** just one or two, but many will spread their **inventory** across a range of categories. You're probably aware that some of these categories are restricted or "**gated**." This simply

means that you need to ask Amazon for permission to sell products which fall into these categories.

Many sellers will shy away from these categories thinking that they need to be a very experienced seller to gain access, but in reality the application process is generally very simple. As long as you follow Amazon's rules, you should have no trouble getting permission.

Many of the restricted categories are gated because the products are particularly **vulnerable** to **counterfeiting**, and Amazon wants to protect its customers and its own **reputation**. As long as you can prove that you are buying products from a **legitimate** source, and you are able to follow Amazon's guidelines, there's no reason that you shouldn't be able to unlock these potentially money-making categories.

For each category, you can click through to see the requirements before you begin your application. If you ensure that you have everything required before you start the application process, you should have no problems.

Other Amazon Restrictions

There are other restrictions on products sold through Amazon which are not **negotiable**, or significantly more difficult to get **exceptions** for. If you create your own listings and try to get around one of these restrictions, you will end up with a policy violation, which is extremely damaging to your account health. Or you may even be **banned** straight away.

Make sure that you know what is and what isn't allowed because not knowing is not an acceptable excuse.

Restricted Brands

There are a number of brands which you are not able to sell on Amazon. These brands are restricted for a number of reasons: They may be particularly vulnerable to counterfeiting, or the brands may wish to keep their products **exclusive** elsewhere.

There is no official list of restricted brands, but there are many

vulnerable 易受……影响的

counterfeit 伪造

reputation 声誉

legitimate 合法的

negotiable 可谈判的, 可协商的

exception 例外

ban 禁止

exclusive 独有的

blanket 全部的, 全体的
complicate 使复杂化
FBA (Fulfillment by Amazon)
亚马逊物流
warehouse 仓库
intuitive 易懂的, 直观的
cartridge 盒子
specifics 细节, 详情
hazardous 危险的
eligible 合格的, 符合条件的
flammable 易燃的
corrosive 腐蚀性的

that have been put together by sellers and you can find them online. For some brands the restrictions are limited to specific products, but for others there is a **blanket** restriction for all products. To **complicate** things further, for some brands you can list used items but not the new.

In some cases, restricted brands can be sold if you gain approval from the brands. This is certainly not an easy task, but if you are in direct contact with a brand and they give you permission to sell their products on Amazon, you will then need to get in touch with Amazon to find out what steps to take.

FBA Restrictions

If you are using Amazon's FBA program, there are certain products which Amazon does not accept for storage in its **warehouses**. Whilst you can sell these products on Amazon, you will not be able to send them to Amazon's warehouses and will need to fulfill orders yourself.

Most FBA-prohibited products are fairly **intuitive** and probably won't surprise you. These products include: firearms, fireworks, knives, razor blades (unless they are enclosed in **cartridges**), medicines, loose gemstones, etc. In other words, anything that may cause harm to the warehouse staff is prohibited. These guidelines can vary depending on the marketplace you are selling through, so make sure that you check the **specifics**.

Some of the prohibited products may surprise you. For example, Amazon's warehouses are unable to store alcohol, and some health and beauty products may not be allowed. In addition, products which are regulated as **hazardous** materials are not **eligible**. These include products with compressed gas, and chemicals which are potentially explosive, **flammable** or **corrosive**.

Prohibited Products

There are some products which Amazon simply does not allow to be sold through its marketplace. These are not products you can get

permission to sell—they are simply not allowed. Many are products which cannot be sold legally, and will probably not surprise you.

Animal products such as fur, feathers and ivory are not permitted along with live animals of course. Used clothing is not allowed, only new clothing. Any products which would usually require a medical prescription are not permitted, as well as legal or illegal drugs. **Tobacco** products and e-cigarettes are also banned.

Do your research and make sure that you understand the restrictions. If you know when you have a chance of getting permission—and when there is simply no chance—you will not have any problem.

tobacco 烟叶, 烟草

Comprehension Check

1. Paraphrase the following sentences from the text.

- 1) Some sellers choose to specialize in just one or two, but many will spread their inventory across a range of categories.

- 2) Many of the restricted categories are gated because the products are particularly vulnerable to counterfeiting, and Amazon wants to protect its customers and its own reputation.

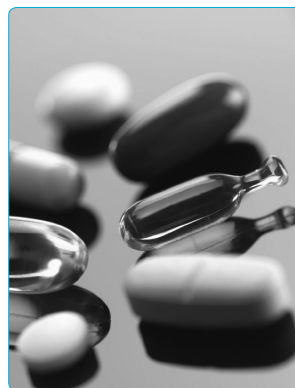
- 3) This is certainly not an easy task, but if you are in direct contact with a brand and they give you permission to sell their products on Amazon, you will then need to get in touch with Amazon to find out what steps to take.

4) Most FBA-prohibited products are fairly intuitive and probably won't surprise you.

2. Read each statement below and decide whether it is true (T) or false (F) according to the text.

- _____ 1) As a new seller without sufficient knowledge about Amazon's restrictions, you might have one chance to be forgiven to sell some restricted brands or prohibited products.
- _____ 2) As a seller, do remember to check the official list of brands which are not allowed to be sold on Amazon.
- _____ 3) With the approval given by the brand, you are allowed to sell the brand's products on Amazon after taking official steps.
- _____ 4) Live animals are allowed to be sold on Amazon while animal fur and feathers are not allowed.

3. Tick off the product(s) that could not be stored in Amazon's warehouses according to the text.



Terms You Must Know About
Product Selecting

Listening & Speaking 1

Audio 1



Words and Expressions

promising 有前景的

tap into 接近, 进入

commodity 商品, 日用品

artisan 工匠

in bulk 大量, 整批

1. Listen to a dialogue and decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F).

- _____ 1) The future of e-commerce is not bright.
- _____ 2) We seldom need to buy commodity products in our daily life.
- _____ 3) You can easily find art works at Amazon.
- _____ 4) Selling commodities is less risky than selling unique items.
- _____ 5) Selling a combination of commodity products and unique products is recommended by the man.

2. Listen to the dialogue again and fill in the table with the information you get.

Types of Products	Examples	Related E-commerce Platforms
Commodity products		
Unique products		

3. Work in pairs and discuss the following questions. Fill in the table on the next page.

If you are going to start an e-commerce business, which kind of products (commodity products or unique products) do you think you can make the biggest margin on? Why?

Types of Products	Reasons
Commodity products	
Unique products	

Listening & Speaking 2

Audio 2



Words and Expressions

browse 浏览

evolve 发展, 形成

profit margin 利润率

trendsetter 引领潮流的人

keep tabs on 密切关注

segment 部分

1. Listen to a dialogue and choose the best answer to each question.

- 1) According to the dialogue, which of the following platforms is NOT mentioned in promoting its lists of top-selling items?
A. Amazon. B. AliExpress. C. Etsy. D. eBay.
- 2) In doing the research, we should mainly focus on the following aspects EXCEPT _____.
A. which types of products offer the best profit margin
B. how many people are selling the products which offer the best profit margin
C. how others design their platform
D. how others market the products which offer the best profit margin
- 3) How can we become the trendsetter?
A. Stay up to date with business news.
B. Pay attention to the latest products.
C. Come up with innovative ways to do things better and sooner than competitors do.
D. All above.

- 4) Baidu Index is quite _____ .
A. helpful B. useless C. expensive D. time-wasting
- 5) Baidu Index _____ .
A. is a stock market ticker
B. can tell us search query volumes and trending topics
C. is an e-commerce platform
D. is quite popular among consumers

2. Listen to the dialogue again and decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F).

- _____ 1) We could identify e-commerce trends and consumers' interests by doing research.
_____ 2) Reading e-commerce and technology blogs can do nothing but waste our time.
_____ 3) If we want to succeed, we must stand out from online retailers by catering to a niche.
_____ 4) Focusing on selling products to a particular group of people cannot bring us success.

3. Work in pairs and discuss the following questions.

- 1) Suppose you are going to start a new business, what are the strategies you will take to find out whether your product has market potential or not?
2) Discuss with your partner about new trends which are suitable for a start-up business (e.g. resurgence of board games or picnics in the park).

Oral Practice

Step 1. Group Discussion

Directions: Suppose that you are going to start an e-commerce business. Work in groups of four to discuss and find the most favorable and competitive product your group would like to sell online.

The following factors can be taken into consideration:

- Commodity product or unique product
- Your competitors in the market
- Your potential group/your target market
- The size and weight of your product

Step 2. Presentation

Directions: Each group makes a presentation to introduce the product you would like to sell online. The following sentence patterns are for your reference.

Your presentation may include the following parts:

1. Introduction

- a. Greeting the audience
- b. Introducing yourself
- c. Introducing the product you are trying to sell

2. Body

- a. Information about your product
- b. Your potential group/your target market
- c. Selling points of the product
- d. Price (optional)

3. Conclusion

- a. Asking the audience if they have any questions
- b. Thanking the audience for listening to your presentation

Expression Bank

1. Starting the presentation

- Good morning/afternoon/evening...
- My name is...

2. Introducing the topic

- I'm here to talk about...
- I'd like to introduce...
- I'm glad to have this opportunity to...

3. Showing organization (when presenting your target market or selling points)

- First (of all)/Second/Third/Finally...
- Let me start/begin by giving you some details about...
- The first point is...
- First, let me tell you about...

4. Showing advantages

- Compared with similar products in the market, our...
- ...makes us stand out in the market.
- Our product is unique in the market for the following reasons.
First...

5. Showing appreciation

- Thank you for your time.
- Thank you for listening to my presentation.



How to Write a Product Description

Providing key product details is critical if you want customers to click “Add to Cart” and differentiate your e-commerce website from those of others.

Journalists utilize the “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How” method for getting across the facts of their stories, and you should follow the same process when crafting a compelling product description.

(1) Who is this product for?

The target audience can be an age group (e.g. kids, college students, middle-aged people or retirees), a gender group (e.g. female or male) or some other defined group of people.

(2) What are the product’s fundamental details?

These may include a variety of aspects such as dimensions, materials, product features and product functions.

(3) Where would someone use this product?

Is it meant for indoor or outdoor use? Or is it meant for your car, your home or your office?

(4) When or under what circumstances would people use this product?

Is it meant to be used at a certain time of day, seasonally or for a specific type of occasion? It is important to point out if a product can or should be used every day or year-round.

(5) Why is this product more useful or better than its competitors?

This can be anything from quality to value, and to features. Think carefully about the benefits that your product will bring to customers and consider how images can complement your product copy.

(6) How does this product work?

This may not be necessary for every product, but if you are selling something with moving parts or electronics, it’s a must-have.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned fundamental questions should be taken into consideration if you want to accurately describe your product.

1. Cloze

Read the following introduction to the Webtogs, a website selling backpacks and rucksacks, and fill in the blanks with the words given in the box. Change the form when necessary.

ripstop	resilient	best	feature	single
compartment	trail	reliable	duration	ultra-lightweight

Every journey outdoors requires backpacks and rucksacks that not only are 1) _____, comfortable and durable, but have various 2) _____ depending on the type and 3) _____ of the trip. We have brought together bags from all the 4) _____ brands like Montane, The North Face and others, from 5) _____-day backpacks and heavy-duty mountain rucksacks with a number of 6) _____ and attachments to kids backpacks perfect for camping trips. While some are made to be more 7) _____ and have waterproof and 8) _____ fabrics, making them ideal for extended trips into the wilderness, others are 9) _____ for minimalist gear, making them ideal for 10) _____ running and climbing. Every type of backpack you need is right here at Webtogs.

2. Guided Writing

Read the following sample.

The KEEN Targhee II walking shoes are quite popular as the shoes are lightweight and will take you where you need to go, with 4mm lugs for traction control and the ESS shank giving you torsional stability so that you can be well supported wherever the trail takes you!

The KEEN Targhee II walking shoes have a whole range of technology and innovative ideas such as the tri-density footbed and S3 support, but what is most important about these walking shoes is that they are comfortable and can be worn for activities ranging from gardening to dog walking, and to trekking. The shoes are truly versatile and really worth a try!

Now it's time to try your hand. Suppose you are going to sell the KEEN women's hiking boots online, how would you introduce your product? Write a product description with the features listed on the next page in no more than 200 words.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is the ability to recognize the different beliefs, values and customs of different cultures. As the Internet helps connect sellers and buyers throughout the world, e-commerce players are facing an increasingly larger market with tons of purchasing power from people of various cultural backgrounds. Yet along with a thrill for the promising prospect of doing business globally comes a complicated decision-making process in which even simple questions like “what to sell” become tricky.

What to sell? It’s an important but difficult question for e-commerce players. To answer it, one has to have a strong sense of cultural awareness, without which no sensible cross-cultural business decision can be made. Dozens of big businesses have failed in another culture simply because they brought their products to a wrong market. Home Depot is one of them.

Do-it-for-me

Home Depot is the largest home improvement retailer in the United States which sells tools, construction products, and services. America’s suburbs are full of tinkerers and home improvement hobbyists, and Home Depot exists to serve them. With aisles upon aisles of power tools, building materials, and hardware supplies, its big-box stores are a testimony to US homeowners’ do-it-yourself ethic.

On the surface, it seems that things might be

similar in China. The country has a growing middle class, millions of new homeowners, and a culture of everyday ingenuity and thrift. Wouldn’t Home Depot do perfectly in China?

That’s what the company thought when it bought into China in 2006. The Atlanta-based firm acquired a local firm, stocked its 12 stores with tools and materials, and waited for the money to roll in. However, what it expected never happened. After six years of struggle, Home Depot shut its seven remaining stores and fired 850 workers in China.

There are several cultural factors behind the failure of Home Depot. The first was the nature of China’s housing market. Unlike Americans, many Chinese buy for investment, not to improve. The second was the store format. As many American retailers have found, Chinese consumers don’t like big, boxy warehouses far away from the city center. Finally, and most

fatally, Home Depot tried to bring the American notion of DIY to a market where labor was relatively cheap and most people simply hired workmen to do things like repairing, etc.

When the company left China, its spokeswoman said, “China is a do-it-for-me market, not a do-it-yourself market, so we have to adjust.”

Is Barbie a Cultural Icon?

In fact, Home Depot was not the only American company that came to China and tried to sell the American vision but failed. Mattel also misread the market and tried to sell a whole range of pricey Barbie-themed clothing, foods, and goods to Chinese consumers. Unfortunately, Barbie is not a cultural icon in China as she is in America, and Chinese consumers couldn't care less about Barbie-branded products. So the company bled money and finally closed its House of Barbie in China.

Culture Matters

So, what to sell? There is no easy answer. But a good sense of cultural awareness will definitely help. It can save companies much effort in finding a niche product. Germans value quality products, while Brazilians prefer cost-effective ones. Spanish people like to have a tan on the beach in bikinis, so tattoo-related products have a great appeal to them. Women are discouraged from showing up in public in many Middle Eastern countries; hence, they prefer to buy beauty and personal care products online.

Cultural awareness can also save e-commerce

players much trouble. Any product made out of cat or dog fur is banned from entering the US. Self-made insect or plant specimens which are applauded in one country may never manage to arrive in another. Being aware of these, companies will not end up in finding that the customs department of another country has confiscated their goods, or a lawsuit has been filed against them in a local court there.

Discussion

1. Which business giants failed in foreign markets due to cultural gaps? Search online to find more cases and share.
2. What cultural factors should we consider in order to make sensible decisions when selecting products to sell?