

A Musician's Guide to Selling Merchandise Online



Introduction

A web store is a streamlined and simple way for customers to access your merchandise, but implementing a store from scratch is anything but simple. It requires site design, web hosting, shopping cart software, and perpetual maintenance in an ever-changing landscape of technology. Fortunately, there are options available which do all of these things for you in one package.

This white paper will help you choose one to fit your needs, so that you can effectively and reliably sell to your customers while maintaining both your profits and your time to devote to your music.

Options

Dedicated web store

The first option is a platform dedicated specifically to creating a web store. Shopify is the most popular platform of this type¹. Designing the web store is a simple process requiring no experience in web design, and your web store can be up and running within minutes of sign up. The only cost is a monthly fee of \$29/month for the basic business plan.²

Big Cartel is a similar platform which is designed specifically for artists of both music and craft. Shopify has many extra features available, while Big Cartel is a simplified model for small businesses. The cost is lower at \$19.99/month, and ads will not link to other shops from your site. But it lacks some of the security and customer support of Shopify.³

Note:

All of these options include transaction fees for purchases with credit card or payment platform such as PayPal, Stripe, etc., which is normally 2.9% + 30¢ per transaction, but it can change somewhat depending on the quantity of items and, in some cases, the member plan.⁴

Artist site with web store

Some platforms designed for creating a multi-purpose musician web site allow you to include a web store. Bandzoogle is one well known example⁵. Bandzoogle provides a simple interface for designing a web site that is more than a web store, with functions such as a biography, blog or calendar. The cost is a monthly fee of \$12.49 for a standard plan, with no added transaction fees.⁶


Web store on promotional platform

Some promotional platforms such as Bandcamp allow artists to create a personal web store. The advantage is that the artist's music is also included in the Bandcamp store and streaming service. This promotion comes at a price, which is a 10% transaction fee for all physical merchandise. But there is no monthly fee for the basic package, so you only pay when you sell.⁷

Marketplace listing

A final option is to include merchandise in an existing online store such as the Amazon Marketplace. This option does not allow for a personalized web store, the price is high - 15% of transaction plus additional fees – and clothing items require an approval process, but it opens up the items to a large market.⁸

Head-to-head comparison

	 shopify	bigcartel	BANDZOOGLE	 bandcamp	 amazon.com marketplace
Domain Name	shopify.com	bigcartel.com	bandzoogle.com	bandcamp.com	amazon.com
Year Founded	2005	2005	2003	2007 ⁹	2003
Your Site Appears as Own Store	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Description	web store platform	web store platform designed for artists	artist site platform with web store	web store and promotion platform	independent store
What it Gives You	dedicated web store	dedicated web store	artist site with web store	web store and Bandcamp profile	Amazon listings
Shipping Rate Customization	yes	no	yes ¹⁰	yes	no
Support Service	24/7 phone, e-mail, chat	e-mail, business hours chat	24 hour response e-mail, business hours chat	e-mail	e-mail
Customer Accounts	yes	no	no	yes (Bandcamp account)	yes (Amazon account)
Payment Methods	credit card, PayPal, Stripe, and more	Stripe, PayPal	PayPal	PayPal	credit card
Monthly Fee	\$29	\$19.99	\$12.49	none	\$39.99
Per-Purchase Fee	none	none	none	10%	15% + \$1.35/CD
Estimated Yearly Costs Include a universal transaction fee of 2.9% + 30¢ per purchase. Calculated based on the given estimates for products sold each year.					
Yearly Earnings: \$15,000	\$1,053	\$945	\$855	\$2,205	\$4,110
\$30,000	\$1,758	\$1,650	\$1,560	\$4,410	\$6,660
\$60,000	\$3,168	\$3,060	\$2,970	\$8,820	\$12,570
\$120,000	\$5,988	\$5,880	\$5,790	\$17,640	\$26,820
\$240,000	\$11,628	\$11,520	\$11,430	\$35,280	\$47,760

All info taken directly from each platform's own web site, unless otherwise noted.

Recommendation

Each option has its advantages depending on what is required of the web store. If you desire the web store to be just one part of your musician web site, Bandzoogle gives the freedom to expand your site beyond a simple web store. It is also the cheapest option by a small margin.

The two most expensive options, Bandcamp and Amazon, are expensive because they are the only options which market your merchandise to a wider audience. But these options take three to four times as much of your profit as the other options if you sell the same amount. Amazon gives you no web store, and Bandcamp is very limited in web store design and functionality. While either could be used as a marketing tool, neither is an ideal option as a primary web store.



simple and stable

Shopify stands above the rest in simply providing the best web store. While it is not designed only for artists, it provides all of the design templates and functionality that an artist would expect. It is very easy to use, with a guided tutorial, and there are numerous features and plugins that make it easily customized. Security is excellent, and it provides far and away the best customer support.

Shopify is specialized in web commerce, so the efforts of the company are directed toward improving and supporting the most important features of a web store. As a large company, Shopify provides stability and adaptability in an environment where technology and customer expectations rapidly evolve.

A web store with Shopify provides you with a personalized and simple way to offer merchandise to your customers, taking very little profit from you and very little time from your music.

Sources

- ¹ <http://ecommerce-platforms.com/articles/top-6-ecommerce-platform-reviews-2012-shopify-volusion-bigcommerce-magento-bigcartel-3dcart> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ² <https://www.shopify.com/pricing> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ³ See <http://ecommerce-software-review.toptenreviews.com/shopify-vs.-big-cartel.html>, and <http://www.merchantmaverick.com/shopify-vs-big-cartel/> (both visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁴ See <https://www.shopify.com/pricing>, <https://www.paypal.com/webapps/mpp/paypal-fees>, <https://stripe.com/us/pricing>, <https://payments.amazon.com/help/201212280> (all visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁵ <http://www.musicthinktank.com/mtt-open/building-a-band-website-in-2014-what-matters-now.html> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁶ <https://bandzoogle.com/features> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁷ <https://bandcamp.com/pricing> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁸ https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/seller/registration/participationAgreement.html?itemID=200336920&language=en_US&Id=N (visited 8 October 2015)
- ⁹ <http://watchlab.com/blog/off-the-record-bandcamp-and-independent-commerce/> (visited 8 October 2015)
- ¹⁰ <https://bandzoogle.com/blog/big-improvements-to-your-store> (visited 8 October 2015)