



The Get-Started Guide to Growing Your Ecommerce Customer Base

Take your business' mission and turn it into a desirable brand by connecting with your target audience to foster loyalty and trust.

What you'll learn

- ✦ How to find the right product(s)
- ✦ How to optimize your product listings
- ✦ How to sell with Amazon sponsored ads

INTRODUCTION



Building Your Audience and Returning Customers List

Acquiring and retaining loyal customers are the pillars of any successful business. In fact, The Harvard Business Review found that retaining customers who have already converted is [5-25x cheaper](#) than acquiring brand new customers. However, the process can often prove more difficult than initially thought, particularly for new brands. In this guide, you'll learn how to take your business' mission and turn it into a desirable brand by connecting with your target audience to foster loyalty and trust.

Part 1: Position Your Brand For Success

- a. Determine what makes your business unique
- b. Get to know your audience
- c. Design for your brand

Part 2: Create Brand Awareness Online

- a. Perform a competitive analysis
- b. Foster user-generated content (UGC)
- c. Invest in paid advertising
- d. Get social

Part 3: Encourage Customer Loyalty

- a. Start a Rewards or Loyalty Program
- b. Establish a Referral Program
- c. Aim to provide "wow" moments

Start Growing Your Customer Base

Position Your Brand for Success

Good brands facilitate a visual and emotional impact that is inviting to their audience. Your branding should be the thing that initially draws a customer in and will keep them coming back over time. Your brand identity can be displayed in many ways, from your fonts and website color scheme to your mission statement, products, and logo. Your brand identity should be unique and apparent, and should showcase who you are as a company to help your audience decide why they should buy from you and not your competitor.

Branding is more than just pretty design. Brands are defined by several factors, including customer's perception of a

business' reputation, customer service and interaction, product offerings, advertising strategies, and other elements.

The best way to position your brand for success is to ensure that it comes across as professional, trustworthy, modern, and intentional. Investing in a well-researched branding strategy will help you earn trust before the first sale and maintain interest in your business afterwards. Read on for steps you can take to develop an approach to branding that will benefit your business.

a. Determine what makes your business unique

As the ecommerce market continues to grow, the competition is becoming more and more fierce. The online global market is oversaturated with hordes of similar brands across all industries. This makes obtaining a good spot in the marketplace difficult, even if you've been selling online for a while. Before you think about growing your customer base, you must identify your niche and unique selling points.

Identify your niche

Your niche should be extremely specific to your offerings and highly-focused on a relevant demographic. "Smaller is bigger in business," according to Lynda Falkenstein, author of *Nichecraft: Using Your Specialness to Focus Your Business, Corner Your Market and Make Customers Seek You Out*. Don't waste time trying to sell everything to everyone. Instead, focus on tailoring your offerings to a specific audience.

For example, let's look at one of the most successful fashion brands out there today: Zara. [Zara](#) is not simply a "fashion" brand because fashion is not a niche, it's an industry. "Fast, affordable fashion for stylish millennials" is Zara's niche, and the company is successful because it has created a niche for a very unique audience.



Develop your USPs

If you're having difficulty identifying your niche, your unique selling points (USPs) can help you find how your products fit into a specific industry and craft a niche around it. USPs are those special qualities that your brand or products bring to the table. Why would someone choose your product over another? What differentiates your product or brand from the competition? What are you offering that no one else in the market is? Answering these questions can help you pinpoint your niche and define the special qualities that live within your brand.

Examples of USPs:

- Awards or industry distinctions
- Partnerships with organizations or charities
- Social enterprise policies
- Excellent customer service
- Consistent free gifts with purchase



b. Get to know your audience

Once you identify your niche, it's time to research your target market. You should learn their values and interests, how to speak to them, and how they think. A good way to do this is with demographic data, whether through [Google Analytics](#), social media, or even newsworthy articles. It's important to fully understand the buying patterns of this specific target market so that you can better identify selling opportunities and trends that you can jump on.

Create user personas

Creating personas can be extremely helpful when getting to know your audience. [User personas](#) are figurative representations of the business' target market. By creating 2-4 separate personas, businesses can internalize the way potential customers perceive the brand and how the brand can solve problems for them. It also gives a clearer understanding of where customers are coming from so you know where and how to approach them most effectively.



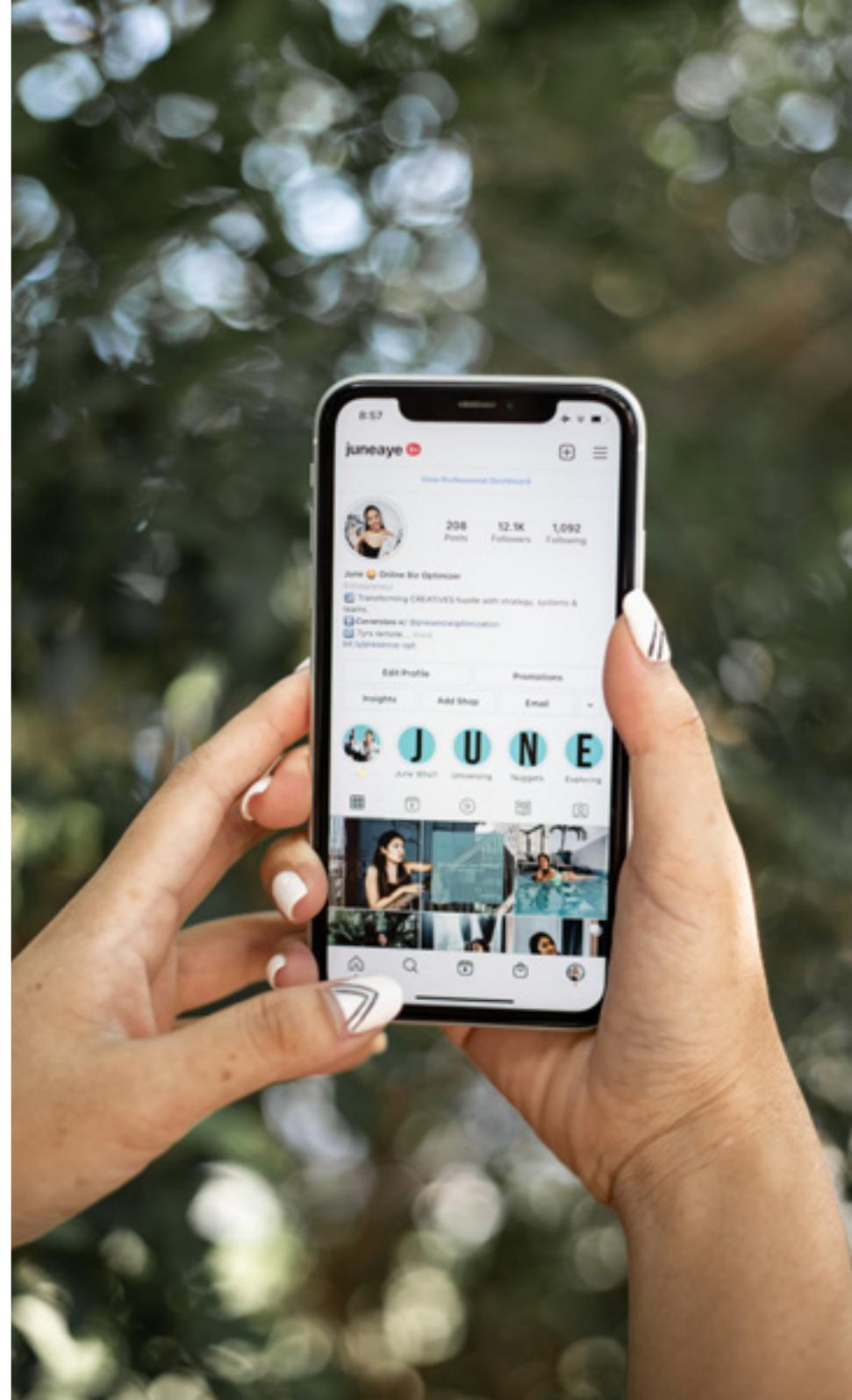
Key information to include in each persona:

- Name
- Job Title & Role
- Demographics (age, gender, income, location, education, marital status)
- Goals & Challenges
- How the Brand Can Help
- Persona Values & Fears
- How to Market to Each Persona

Tailor messaging to your audience

Effective messaging clearly communicates your brand and core values. For instance, if you sell natural cosmetics, you should clearly state your commitment to staying natural in all aspects of your business and let customers know this through the content on your website, on your product packaging, and even on social media.

Your messaging also includes the medium of communication. For instance, if you have an older demographic, the best way to reach them may be through banner ads or email marketing. If your target audience is younger, think about reaching out through social media.



c. Design for your brand

Nothing speaks trust like solid visual branding. If your customers know your brand's personality and enjoy the products your store delivers, they will refer back to your store time and time again. Strong branding within your site can set the tone, giving the shopper an immediate indication into what kind of industry they are browsing. Now that you have identified your niche and you know your target audience, you can combine those ingredients to create compelling graphics that visually define your brand.

Choose consistent colors & fonts

The colors and fonts you choose for your brand identity are critical because they're the first thing your customer sees when they visit your store or shop for your products. Fonts and colors can communicate the look of your brand, but they can also convey the feeling of your brand.

If you pay attention to popular concepts in [color psychology](#), you know that blue colors can convey trust, while green colors can convey a feeling of good health. Think about what you want to convey to your audience as you select your colors and make sure that they align with the message you want to send or the feeling you want to evoke.



Consider your business logo

When you think about brand identity, a logo is usually what comes to mind first. A logo is what customers will remember most readily when they are prompted to think about your business because it boils your brand down to its simplest visual part.

First, consider all of the places where you will need to place your logo. If your logo is intricate and detailed, it may be hard to use it across multiple platforms, so it's important to keep it clean and legible. You will also want to make sure that your logo is unique so that your business can be easily identified. A logo that is too generic might get your business confused with a competitor or forgotten altogether. Additionally, make sure your logo looks modern so your business doesn't appear behind-the-times.

Create Brand Awareness Online

Brand awareness is the extent of a consumer's knowledge of or familiarity with your company. For consumers, brand awareness measures the level of recognition with your product or service. Often aligned with inbound and outbound marketing practices, brand awareness is also one of the more powerful social media marketing strategies out there.

The best way to think about brand awareness is to compare it to knowing where your neighborhood grocery store is located. Once you are aware of its location, you're more likely to choose that specific grocery store based on prior knowledge and recognition alone.

But brand awareness can be a difficult process for most companies not named McDonald's or Nike. Brand awareness should work quickly with spreading your name across the industry and into a household name. Unfortunately, you can't do this overnight—you must be strategic about when and where you promote your product or service. We explore some of the best ways to do that in this section.

a. Perform a competitive analysis

The best place to start is researching your competitors. If you're starting a business selling a specific product, try Googling other businesses that sell the same product to give you an idea of what your competition looks like. You can also take a look at brands on Facebook to get an idea of how they are talking to their customers and representing their company on social media.

Get familiar with at least three competitors and identify what similar attributes they have and what makes them unique. Take some notes: do they all have similar website color schemes such as using blue backgrounds? Are their fonts all traditional? During the research phase, note what you feel you should incorporate into your brand identity. What do you like that your competitors have, and what do you dislike? This will help you create a unique brand identity as you move forward.

One effective and powerful branding approach is to try to stand out from your competitors as much as possible. When you know what shoppers value, want, and need, it's easier to create messaging that speaks to them. Think about brand voice and tone. How will you speak to your customers? Will you be fun and friendly, or professional and educational?



b. Foster user-generated content (UGC)

One of the more popular methods of building brand awareness is through user-generated content (UGC). A white paper from Bazaarvoice found that [84% of millennials](#) stated that UGC on a brand's website has at least some influence on their purchasing decisions.

Not only do companies rely on their customers to deliver content, but even more so on social media. In fact, eMarketer reports that [65% of 18- to 24-year-olds](#) on social media rely on their social networks to find information about products or services when making a decision.

Before we get too far ahead, let's take a look at what we're actually talking about when it comes to UGC and brand awareness.

What is user-generated content?

UGC refers to the various forms of content produced by a user, social media follower, or fan of a business or brand. This content is typically provided for free by the user and is a contribution from some sort of web property.

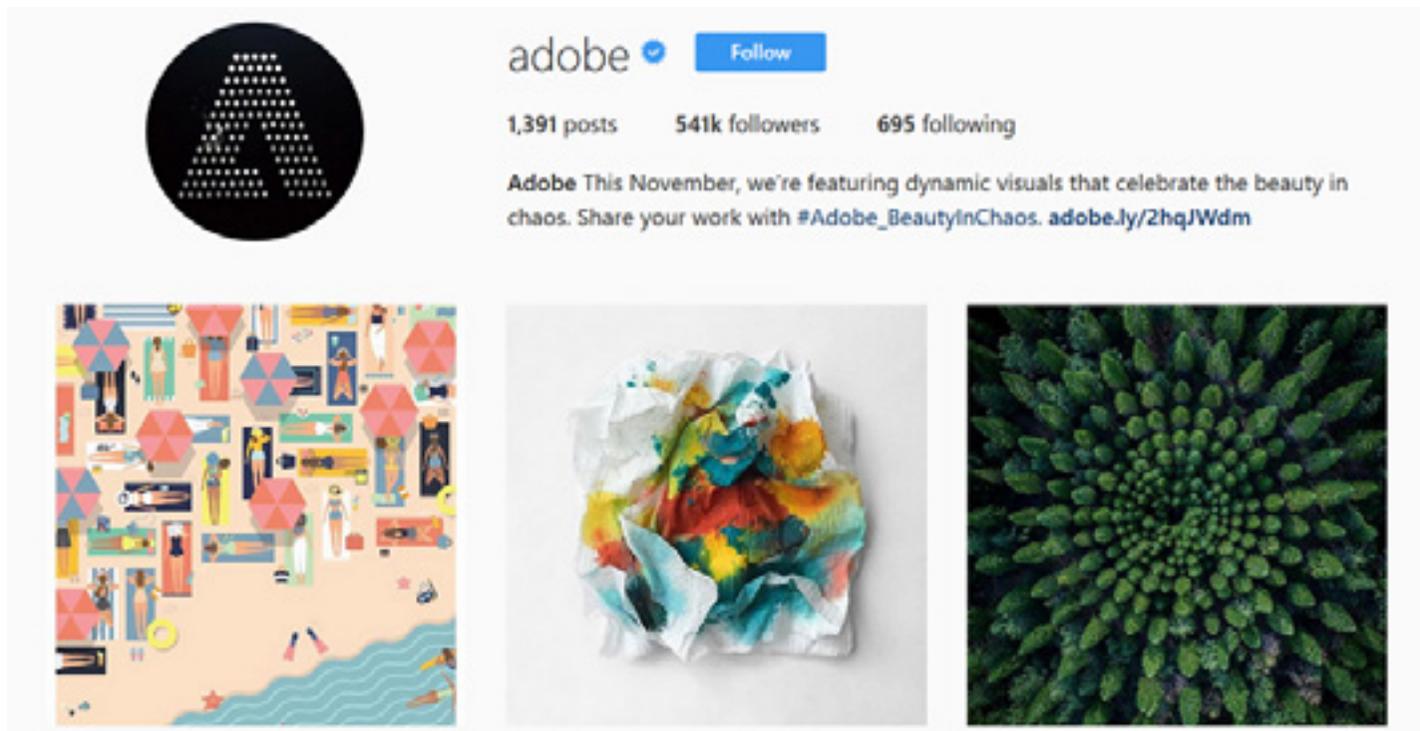
UGC can include things like blog posts, online discussion forums, social media mentions or images, videos, wikis, podcasts, or any other form of unpaid advertisement. This third-party content can live on your brand's web properties or on other non-branded sites.

With the rise of social media, brands can easily connect with users through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other popular platforms. Those direct interactions spark social media engagement and lead to some sort of free advertising or brand awareness.

How does UGC actually strengthen brand awareness?

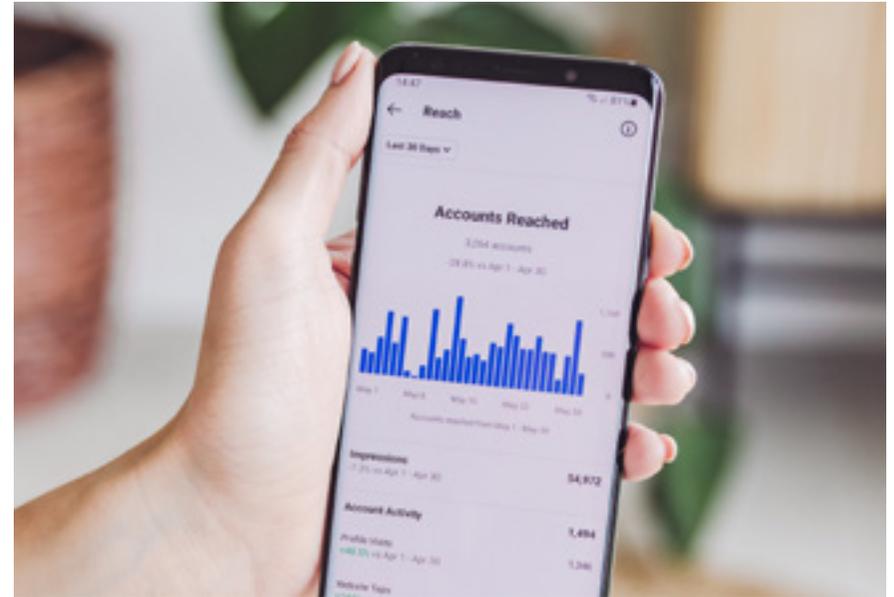
When it comes down to it, people trust others more than they trust brands themselves. According to a Nielsen report, [92% of consumers](#) trust people they know for brand or product referrals. Not only that, but consumers are four times more likely to make a purchasing decision when referred by a friend.

UGC is a way to build that trust between marketers and consumers. For example, Adobe used the hashtag #adobe_beautyinchaos to share Instagram photos of their loyal customers tagging the brand in their own feed. Not only is this a great way to show appreciation for your customers, but you're also getting in front of the user's audience with proof that your product works.



c. Invest in paid advertising

Sometimes the best way to ensure that your brand can get noticed is to simply pay to guarantee that it will. Paid advertising can take a lot of different forms, and there are plenty of guides that get specific about how to succeed with each, so we'll simply provide a short breakdown of some of the most popular types below:



Social Media Ads: If your target audience spends a lot of time on social media, this may be the best way to get their attention. Promote your posts or [create social media ads](#) specifically for the platforms your target customers frequent most.

Pay-Per-Click Ads: If your audience spends a lot of time on the general world wide web, [investing in pay-per-click \(PPC\) ads](#) might be your best bet. These ads are displayed on Google (or other search engines of your choice) when people search for specific keywords that relate to your ad.

Influencer Marketing: If your target audience is young and online often, [paying influencers](#) to promote your products to their followers could work for you. Services like [YouTube Brand Connect](#) and [Trend.io](#) can help you connect with influencers whose followers intersect with your industry.

d. Get social

Devoting marketing talent to social media is a popular move for marketers because of the vast potential reach social media brings to your brand. While using social media to increase brand awareness is nothing new, marketers still struggle to get content to resonate. Social media is a great tool for getting people acquainted and familiar with your business. Shares, retweets, comments, and mentions all help you build a long-term relationship with your customers.

Engage with your audience

The best way to make moves on social media is to simply begin engaging with your audience (if you don't already). Reply to comments and messages to show that you care about your customers and their overall experience with your brand. Publish posts that ask open-ended questions or use polls to spur followers to interact with you. The more they interact with a brand, the more customers will think of that brand even when it's not right in front of them.

Use hashtags effectively

Hashtags are a great way to spread the word about your company and increase your visibility. UGC-specific hashtags are perfect for marketers because they're typically actionable. Branded hashtags like [#MyBeautyMySay from Dove](#) are powerful emotion-drivers—Dove's campaign specifically inspired other users to incorporate the hashtag within their own stories or experiences being judged as an athletic woman. With this campaign, Dove showed their audience that they strongly believe in empowering women, which makes the brand trustworthy, relatable, and engaging.

Hold contests and giveaways

Social media networks are ideal for holding contests. Here, you can ask users to share your branded hashtag or tag you with their content relating to the contest (UGC, anyone?). This is a simple and fun way to get more eyes on your brand, and it also gives your new customers a chance to interact. Before you hold a contest, however, make sure you check the social network's terms and regulations. And remember: it should be simple, fun, and pleasurable to share to other networks.

Encourage Customer Loyalty

We've already established that retaining customers can be [5-25x cheaper](#) than acquiring new customers. Customers who have purchased from your brand previously are an ideal target for marketing because you have already achieved brand awareness with them. The goal here is to remind them how great your brand is and convince them to purchase even more.

To do so, you should encourage customers to engage with and talk about your brand, and make them feel important. This will increase buzz and also strengthen customer loyalty. Sure, sales are most important when starting a business, but a strong brand will keep customers coming back for more. Effective branding will turn a one-time customer into a brand ambassador.

About [81% of customers](#) research a product online before making a purchase. If you have a solid number of evangelists or influencers recommending your product to others, you will likely see higher sales and a boost in customer retention. In this section, we'll discuss steps you can take that encourage customers to become brand ambassadors.

a. Start a Rewards or Loyalty Program

Everyone loves being rewarded almost as much as they like receiving things for free. To tap into this concept, you should have a [loyalty program](#) in place that focuses on engaging your customer at every touchpoint and awarding them points for specific actions taken. This 360-degree approach is guaranteed to make customers feel more connected to your brand, and may up their average spend by [20-40%](#). Awarding loyalty points gives your customers a great reason to spend more, boosting their customer lifetime value (CLV) in the process.



Choose the actions required to establish loyalty

Your first step will be determining what threshold shoppers need to meet to be rewarded for their loyalty. Some businesses reward customers for a combination of actions, while others focus on just one to improve a specific metric. Some examples of actions you can reward your customers for completing include:

- Making a purchase
- Signing up for your email newsletter
- Sharing social media posts
- Referring a friend

Choose your rewards or loyalty offerings

Your next step will be determining how customers are rewarded for the actions decided upon earlier. Some businesses use a reward or loyalty “points” system and only offer a reward when a certain number of points are accrued, while others simply provide a reward when a specific number of actions have been taken. Here are some examples of how you can reward your customers for being loyal:

- Higher-than-normal percentage discounts or dollars off a purchase
- A feature or shoutout on your website or social media pages
- Free products or samples with purchase
- Swag for your brand

b. Establish a Referral Program

Personal referrals have been crucial marketing tools from the dawn of commerce. Even today, [90% of consumers](#) are more likely to buy a product from a brand recommended by a friend. Word-of-mouth marketing is nothing new, but it has been somewhat revolutionized by the advent of social media brand ambassadors. Subsequently, it is more important than ever for brands to harness the power of word-of-mouth marketing. [Establishing a referral program](#) is a great way to encourage word-of-mouth marketing amongst your customers who already like your business.

Create an incentive for your referrals

Shoppers are likely to check out a business if their friend recommends it, but they're even more likely to try out that business's products if they are incentivized to do so. Offer shoppers who have been referred to you by their friends a compelling discount, free shipping (if you don't offer it already), or other incentive on their first purchase to increase the likelihood of conversion.

Create an incentive for your referrees

As much as we may hope that customers will tell their friends about a positive experience, giving them a tangible reason or reward for doing so is more likely to result in follow-through. Determine what makes your customers/potential referrees tick—specific products, plain old discount, etc.—and offer it to them for every new paying customer (or specific number of new paying customers) they refer to your business. Additionally, give them something trackable—like a unique code—they can pass on to their referral so the new customer can be attributed to them.



c. Aim to provide “wow” moments

Sometimes, all it takes is an unexpected gesture for customers to become loyal brand advocates. A surprising action with a pleasant outcome can go a long way in establishing a positive association with your brand in your customers’ minds. Here are a few ideas you can use to provide “wow” moments for your customers that can elevate their perception of your brand and make them want to come back for more:

- Choose one (or a few) lucky customer(s) to receive a generous free gift
- Offer a special discount to customers on a seemingly random day, like your business’s anniversary
- Send free stickers or other swag with your orders
- Including handwritten thank-you notes with your orders
- Hold product collaborations with other brands your customers might love



CONCLUSION

Start Growing Your Customer Base

So there you have it. As an ecommerce business, the best way to grow your customer base is to invest in your branding to elevate its look and feel, work to increase brand awareness and reach across the web, and turn your past and existing customers into loyal brand ambassadors who will advocate for you. Each of these actions separately can help your business grow modestly, but together they convey a brand that is professional, exciting, and worthy of customers' attention.

For any business owner, growing a passionate and engaged customer base takes time. Some brands spend years trying out different combinations of methods before they find one that works for their business. Other times, brands have a great strategy, but their

industry is saturated and they find it difficult to break through the noise. Don't give up hope—continue tweaking your strategy until you begin to see success.

In the end, your customers and your audience will demonstrate what they want to become more engaged. As long as you pay attention to them and follow their lead, you can't go wrong.

Studio

Special Thanks to the experts at [Grow With Studio](#) for contributing to this guide. Looking for some help growing your customer base? The marketing experts at Studio, an ecommerce-focused digital agency, can create and implement targeted social media, SEO, and advertising strategies that can help you find and keep new customers. [Learn more](#) about Studio's service offerings here.