

Top tips for e-commerce business success

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The [Ecommerce Challenge](#), hosted by Ecommerce.co.za on 30 June, gathered experts and entrepreneurs in South Africa's online retail space for a one-day virtual event focused on knowledge-sharing.



Source: [Pexels](#)

The Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be a boon for online retail. In 2020, total growth for online retail in South Africa rose to 66% in 2020, exceeding the 25% growth predicted three years ago, and bringing the total of online retail in SA to R30,2bn, according to the [recently released Online Retail in South Africa 2021 study](#) by World Wide Worx.



Online retail in SA soars to R30bn, comprising 2.8% of total retail

12 May 2021



Encouraging event attendees to capitalise on this momentum, Ecommerce Challenge speakers shared their insights, lessons and top tips for e-commerce and entrepreneurship success. Here are a few nuggets of their wisdom.

Find your differentiator - Manuel Koser

Manuel Koser, cofounder and managing director of disruptive brand builder Silvertree Brands, urged business owners to focus on and exploit what makes their offering unique.

“What makes you stick out? What makes your product or service so much better than the next best alternative – not just 10% better, but 10 times as good? Whether it’s on convenience, price, quality or content, you have to completely dominate.

“Think through your idea. Just because you can put it on the internet doesn’t mean you should,” he said.



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Perfect the basics - O'Conner Smith

In the drive to deliver a world-class shopping experience, remember to get the basics right, said O'Conner Smith, senior project manager and business analyst at retail and e-commerce solutions provider Vectra.

“Focus on the basics ... Find the correct product, make sure it’s actually available for the customer to purchase, and make sure the fulfillment is done properly and in a feasible amount of time,” he urged.

Showcase your products correctly, and to the right customer - Rob Maclean

Managing director at App Developer Studio, Rob Maclean, shared the most important lessons he’s learned building more than 100 e-commerce stores.

- Make yourself easy to find on Google. Think about your target customer and what they’re going to type into search engine. Use keywords, and your website address, and make sure you’re top of that list.
- Put your best products front, top and centre of your homepage. You have 10 seconds to persuade a customer to tap or scroll.
- Take great product photography and showcase your products. It’s amazing what you can do with a smartphone camera these days.
- Design for mobile. You may review and develop your site on your computer but your customers are going to look for it on a cellphone.

Know your customer - Melissa Rowlston

Melissa Rowlston, the owner of South African Shopify experts Maverick Marketing, tapped into her agency insights derived from managing multiple online stores and shared the key online consumer trends they’ve picked up in SA.

- SA shoppers don’t like spending a lot. Lower-priced items sell better.
- SA shoppers want to buy a product that fulfils a need, even if that need is only perceived.
- There’s always a demographic – get the right product to the right person at the right time.

Elaborating on the last point, Rowlston said that the active online shopper demographic locally is between 25 and 55 years of age, but this is changing. “The youth are coming online fast, and the over 55s are too, but they want to be marketed to

differently. Youth hate the hard sell, and the older generation has trust issues.”

“I believe the demographic is intrinsically linked to the product ... Aggregated statistics say [the typical online shopper in SA] is a White middle-aged woman. However, if you were to only sell to them you would bankrupt yourself,” she added.



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Embrace failure - Mushambi Mutuma

The crippling fear of failure stunts human progression, said Mushambi Mutuma, who is MD at creative agency Black Powder and an author, speaker and tech leader.

“It’s related to connotations we have around the fear of embarrassment and loss. But we need to experience failure on a rapid level. We need to face the inevitability of it. If we get away from the guilt and fear we’ve associated with failure, it can be an important tool to level up our lives and businesses. Own that the dips and curves are an essential part of the journey,” Mutuma said.

“Failure is only failure if we stay down. But if we use failure as lessons for growth it shifts opportunity. Look at failure as a propellant of success, not a lack of success,” he added.

Develop a love for learning - Abu Cassiem

Abu Cassiem, founder of angel investor network Jozi Angels, explained that learning is fundamental to entrepreneurship.

“It’s a necessity because you’re going to need to find your way in the dark at some points. All the best practices and frameworks that we apply as entrepreneurs, a central tenet to that is learning; learning about your customer and their motivations so that you can speak to those motivations and sell your product,” Cassiem said.

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