

The Ecommerce Exit

How CurtisWiltse Helps Online Business Owners Sell Smart

A Guide for Ecommerce Founders and Operators

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Introduction

The Online Business Advantage

You built your ecommerce business from scratch. Maybe it started as a side project, an idea you tested with a Shopify store and a few hundred dollars in ad spend. Maybe you have been at it for fifteen years and have a warehouse, a team, and a supply chain that spans multiple countries. Either way, you built something that generates real revenue and real profit, and now you are thinking about what it might be worth to someone else.

You are not alone. Ecommerce businesses are attracting more serious buyer interest right now than at any point we have seen. Private equity groups, strategic acquirers, and individual operators are all actively looking for profitable online businesses to acquire. The reasons are straightforward: ecommerce businesses generate trackable, verifiable revenue. They are location-independent, which means the buyer pool is national, not local. Overhead tends to be low. And for buyers who already operate in adjacent product categories, acquiring an established ecommerce brand is often faster and cheaper than building one from zero.

At CurtisWiltse, we have closed multiple ecommerce transactions in the past year alone, across a range of product categories and business sizes. Every one of those deals was sold to a buyer in a different state from the seller. Every one generated multiple competing offers. And every one closed because the data was clean, the process was structured, and the business was positioned correctly.

This guide is built specifically for ecommerce founders and operators. It covers how we value online businesses, what buyers are actually looking at, how our process works, and what you can do right now to put yourself in the best possible position when the time comes to sell. Whether you are running a DTC brand on Shopify, selling through Amazon, or operating a hybrid model with your own manufacturing and fulfillment, the principles in this guide apply to you.



01

The CurtisWiltse Process

Auction-Style M&A for Online Businesses

Most ecommerce owners who think about selling do not know where to begin. They may have seen listings on marketplaces like Empire Flippers or Quiet Light, or they may have gotten a cold email from a broker. But the process of actually selling a profitable online business, one generating meaningful cash flow, is more involved than listing it on a marketplace and hoping for the best.

CurtisWiltse brings the same auction-style process that major investment banks use for billion-dollar deals, scaled and adapted for ecommerce businesses in the \$1 million to \$20 million range. We do not set a price and wait. We let the market tell us what your business is worth by generating competitive interest from multiple qualified buyers at the same time.

How We Build the Buyer List

When we take on an ecommerce client, we immediately start building a targeted outreach list. This is not a passive process. We are not posting a listing and waiting for inbound interest.

We start with our own database. Because we have closed multiple ecommerce deals in the past year, we have a built-in list of qualified buyers who were interested in previous opportunities but did not win. Those buyers are still looking. When a new business comes to market in a relevant category, we already have warm leads to contact.

We also research strategic acquirers: companies already operating in adjacent product categories who could add your brand, your products, or your customer base to their existing operations. This is where some of the strongest offers come from, because strategic buyers can see synergies that a financial buyer might not.

And we work with you directly. You know your competitive landscape. You know which companies are growing, which brands keep showing up in your market, and who might see real value in what you have built. We combine that knowledge with our outreach infrastructure to build a buyer universe that is targeted, qualified, and motivated.

Why Ecommerce Works Well in Our Process

Online businesses have a built-in advantage when it comes to running a competitive sale process. The buyer pool is inherently national. Unlike a local service business where the buyer needs to be in the same city, an ecommerce business can be operated from anywhere. That means more potential buyers, more competition, and ultimately more leverage for you as the seller.

We guarantee a minimum number of offers within 30 to 60 days of going to market. For ecommerce businesses with clean data and solid fundamentals, we often see interest even faster than that, because the digital paper trail gives buyers confidence to move quickly.

02

What Your Business Is Worth

SDE, Multiples, and What Drives Ecommerce Valuation

The first question every ecommerce owner asks is: what is my business worth? The answer starts with understanding how buyers actually think about value.

Seller's Discretionary Earnings

For most ecommerce businesses, valuation starts with Seller's Discretionary Earnings, or SDE. This is not the same as your net profit. SDE takes your net profit and adds back your owner salary, any personal perks run through the business, and one-time expenses that a new owner would not incur. The result is the true cash flow a new owner would receive if they stepped into your role.

Getting your SDE calculation right is critical. It is the foundation that every offer will be built on. If your books are messy or your add-backs are not well documented, the buyer will either discount their offer or walk away entirely.

How Multiples Work

Once SDE is established, buyers apply a multiple to determine the value of the business. The multiple is essentially a risk score. Lower risk and stronger fundamentals earn a higher multiple. Higher risk earns a lower one.

In our experience, most ecommerce deals land somewhere in the range of 2.5 to 6 times SDE. Newer or riskier businesses typically fall in the 2.0 to 3.0 range. Solid, stable businesses with consistent revenue and clean operations tend to land between 3.0 and 4.5. And premium brands with strong assets, diversified traffic, and loyal customer bases can command 4.5 to 6.0 or higher.

As a quick reference: if your SDE is \$200,000, a business on the lower end of the range might sell for around \$400,000. A business on the higher end could sell for \$900,000 or more. The difference is driven entirely by the fundamentals.

What Pushes the Multiple Up

Buyers pay more when they see lower risk and clearer growth potential. The factors that drive a premium valuation in ecommerce are specific and measurable. A strong, recognizable brand that is not just reselling someone else's products. Diversified traffic sources, meaning you are not entirely dependent on a single paid channel. A healthy email and SMS list with repeat customers who buy again and again. Clean financials where your Shopify data aligns with your accounting records. Reliable suppliers with backup options, not a single overseas vendor who could disappear. And low owner involvement, meaning the business runs without you being in it every day.

What Pushes the Multiple Down

On the other side, there are clear signals that suppress valuation. Heavy reliance on paid advertising, especially on a single platform like Meta, makes buyers nervous because ad costs are volatile and algorithms change without warning. Revenue that swings dramatically from month to month. Thin margins that leave little room for error. A dropshipping model with no differentiation or proprietary product. Supplier risk concentrated in a single source. And a business where the owner is essential to daily operations, from running ads to fulfilling orders to managing customer service.

Do Not Forget Inventory

For ecommerce businesses that hold physical product, inventory is typically added on top of the business valuation at landed cost. So if your business is valued at \$600,000 and you have \$150,000 in inventory, the total asking price is \$750,000. This is a detail that owners sometimes overlook, but it matters in the final math.

Quick Self-Valuation Formula

You can estimate your value quickly: take your average annual SDE, multiply it by a reasonable multiple based on the strength of your fundamentals, and add inventory at landed cost. This gives you a starting point for the conversation. Our process will then let the market validate, or exceed, that number through competitive bidding.



03

Know Your Numbers

The Ecommerce Metrics Buyers Actually Care About

General financial preparation matters for any business sale, but ecommerce buyers look at a specific set of metrics that are unique to online businesses. If you can present these clearly and confidently, you signal that you understand your business at a level that gives buyers real confidence.

Customer Acquisition Cost and Lifetime Value

These two numbers tell a buyer whether your growth engine is sustainable. What does it cost you to acquire a new customer, and how much revenue does that customer generate over their entire relationship with your brand? If your CAC is \$30 and your average customer lifetime value is \$150, you have a healthy business. If your CAC is \$80 and your LTV is \$90, the math is fragile and the buyer knows it.

Track these by channel. Know your CAC for Meta ads, Google, organic search, email, and any other acquisition source. Buyers will ask, and the more granular your answer, the more confidence they have.

Traffic Source Diversification

One of the biggest risk factors in ecommerce valuation is channel concentration. If 80 percent of your revenue comes from Meta ads, you are one algorithm change away from a very bad quarter. Buyers know this, and they price it in.

Show buyers a diversified traffic profile. Organic search, direct traffic, email marketing, social media, paid ads across multiple platforms. The more balanced your acquisition channels, the more resilient your business looks and the higher the multiple you can command.

Platform Concentration

Similar to traffic, buyers evaluate where your sales actually happen. A business that sells exclusively through Amazon is subject to Amazon's rules, fees, and the ever-present risk of account suspension. A business with its own Shopify store plus Amazon plus wholesale has a much stronger position. Document your revenue by platform and be clear about the terms and risks associated with each.

Email and SMS List Health

Your owned audience is one of the most valuable assets you have. An email list of 50,000 engaged subscribers who open, click, and buy is worth significantly more than a list of 200,000 people who never open anything. Buyers will look at your list size, open rates, click rates, revenue per send, and how much of your total revenue comes from email and SMS versus paid acquisition. The higher the percentage from owned channels, the better.

SKU-Level Profitability

Not every product in your catalog makes you the same amount of money. Buyers want to understand which SKUs drive the most profit, which ones are growing, and which ones are dragging down your margins. If you have 200 SKUs but 80 percent of your profit comes from 15 of them, that is important information. It tells the buyer where to focus and where there might be opportunity to optimize or trim.

Subscription vs. One-Time Revenue

If your business has any subscription or auto-ship component, break it out clearly. Recurring revenue is worth more than one-time sales in the eyes of every buyer. Show the percentage of your total revenue that is recurring, the churn rate on subscriptions, and the average subscription duration. Even if it is a small portion of your total, highlighting it adds value.

Fulfillment and Return Rates

Buyers will examine your fulfillment costs and return rates carefully. What does it cost you to pick, pack, and ship an order? What percentage of orders are returned? Are you using a third-party fulfillment house, and if so, what are the terms of that relationship? These operational details affect margins directly, and a buyer who understands them clearly is a buyer who can move faster.



04

Why Ecommerce Due Diligence Is Different

The Digital Advantage

One of the genuine advantages of selling an ecommerce business is that nearly everything leaves a digital trail. Compared to a brick-and-mortar business or a service company where revenue verification can be complicated, an online business generates data at every step: customer visits, purchases, email engagement, ad spend, bank deposits. All of it is trackable, exportable, and auditable.

This is good news for sellers. It means due diligence can move faster, buyers can build confidence more quickly, and the gap between signing an LOI and actually closing can be significantly shorter than in traditional industries.

What Buyers Verify

A thorough ecommerce buyer will cross-reference your Shopify or platform analytics with your actual bank deposits. They will match your reported ad spend against the ad platform data. They will look at email campaign performance to verify the revenue you attribute to owned channels. They will check your supplier invoices against your cost of goods. And they will compare all of it to your tax returns and accounting records.

When everything aligns, the deal moves forward with momentum. When there are discrepancies, even small ones, it introduces questions that slow things down. This is why having your Shopify data, your accounting software, and your bank records in alignment before you go to market is so critical.

What Buyers Specifically Scrutinize

Beyond the basic financial verification, experienced ecommerce buyers dig into a few specific areas. Ad spend efficiency: are your customer acquisition costs trending up or down? If you have been spending more and more to acquire the same number of customers, that is a concern.

Traffic trends: is your organic traffic growing, flat, or declining? A business with rising organic traffic has a fundamentally different trajectory than one that depends entirely on paid ads.

Supplier stability: are your supplier relationships documented? Do you have backup sources? And customer quality: what does your repeat purchase rate look like? Are customers buying once and disappearing, or are they coming back?

The more clearly you can present this data upfront, the less friction there is during due diligence and the faster you get to close.

The Ecommerce Data Advantage

In many traditional industries, verifying revenue is one of the hardest parts of due diligence. In ecommerce, it is one of the easiest. Every transaction flows through a platform that records it. Every marketing dollar is tracked by the ad platform that spent it. Every deposit hits a bank account that can

be matched to the sales data. This transparency is one of the reasons ecommerce businesses can often sell faster and at stronger multiples than comparable offline businesses.



05

Deal Structure for Online Businesses

Location Independence and Strategic Buyers

The structure of an ecommerce deal has some unique characteristics that work in the seller's favor. Understanding them can help you evaluate offers more clearly and negotiate from a position of knowledge.

Location Independence Expands Your Buyer Pool

This is one of the most significant structural advantages of selling an ecommerce business. A local plumbing company can really only be sold to a buyer in the same metro area. Your ecommerce business can be sold to anyone, anywhere. That means more potential buyers, more competition for your business, and ultimately better terms.

In every ecommerce deal we have closed in the past year, the buyer was in a different state from the seller. That is not a coincidence. It is the natural result of a business model that is not tied to a physical location. Your buyers are national, and our outreach process is built to reach them.

Strategic Buyers and Synergy Value

Some of the strongest offers in ecommerce come from strategic buyers: companies that already operate in a related product category and can see clear synergies in acquiring your brand. They might have existing fulfillment infrastructure that can handle your products at a lower cost. They might have a customer base that overlaps with yours. They might see your product line as a natural extension of what they already sell.

These buyers can often pay more than a purely financial buyer because the acquisition is worth more to them. They are not just buying your cash flow. They are buying the ability to grow their own business by adding yours to it. When we build the buyer list for an ecommerce client, strategic acquirers are always a priority.

How Manufacturing and Fulfillment Transfer

If your ecommerce business involves physical product manufacturing, one of the questions buyers ask is: how does the operation transfer? In our experience, this is rarely a dealbreaker. If you are using a third-party fulfillment house, the relationship simply transfers to the new owner. If you have in-house manufacturing, the equipment and processes are typically relocatable.

The key is documentation. If your fulfillment process, supplier relationships, and manufacturing procedures are well documented, the buyer can see exactly how the operation works and what it would take to continue it, whether in the same location or a new one.

Earn-Outs in Ecommerce

Some ecommerce deals involve an earn-out component, where a portion of the sale price is tied to the business hitting certain performance targets after closing. This is more common when the business is young or when there is rapid growth that the buyer wants to see sustained.

Earn-outs can work well in ecommerce because the metrics are clear and measurable. Revenue targets, customer acquisition rates, and retention metrics are all trackable in real time. Unlike an earn-out in a service business where the numbers might be debatable, an ecommerce earn-out is usually black and white. The data either shows it or it does not.



06

Getting to the Finish Line

From LOI to Close Without Losing Momentum

The period between a signed letter of intent and the actual close is where many deals lose momentum or fall apart. This is true in any industry, but in ecommerce, the process can actually move faster than average if it is managed correctly. The data is accessible. The operations are transparent. There are fewer physical assets to inspect. The key is having a defined process and someone who knows how to drive it forward.

The Appraisal

If the deal involves SBA or other institutional financing, there will be an independent appraisal. We push to start this immediately after the LOI is signed. The cost is the same whether it happens in week one or week six, and getting it done early removes a major variable from the timeline.

CPA Coordination and Data Rooms

Ecommerce due diligence involves a significant amount of data. Platform analytics, ad account access, bank statements, supplier contracts, email marketing performance, inventory records. We help our clients organize all of this into a clean, accessible format before the LOI is even signed. When the buyer's team starts asking questions, the answers are already there.

We have a unique capability having Dr. Remington Curtis, CPA and his team managing this process. They field financial questions, explain add-backs, and translate the story your numbers tell. We coordinate between all parties to make sure nothing stalls.

Attorney Selection

We recommend engaging a transaction attorney on a flat-fee basis. Hourly billing creates misaligned incentives in a deal process. A flat fee aligns everyone around the same goal: close the deal efficiently. We provide references to attorneys who specialize in business acquisitions and understand the ecommerce space.

The CurtisWiltse Turnkey Approach

We manage the entire process from LOI to close. We coordinate with your accountant, your attorney, the buyer's team, and the lender. We keep the timeline on track and address issues before they become delays. For ecommerce deals specifically, we also help manage platform access handoffs, ad account transfers, and domain/IP transitions. The goal: a defined path to closing with no surprises.



07

Case Studies

Real CurtisWiltse Ecommerce Transactions

The best way to understand how our process works is to see it in action. Here are three transactions we have closed that illustrate different aspects of selling an ecommerce business.

The Herbal Tea Startup

Two partners launched an online herbal tea brand from their basement. Within a year, they went from zero to \$300,000 in revenue, selling directly to consumers through their own website. They outsourced fulfillment to a third-party warehouse to keep up with demand. The business was growing rapidly, and projections suggested they could double again the following year.

But one partner had twins, and the other had a full-time job. Neither had the bandwidth to manage the growth. They came to us even though the business was only three years old, which is younger than what we typically represent. But the data told a compelling story: strong repeat purchase rates, a growing customer base, and clear upward momentum in every metric that mattered.

We ran our standard process. Multiple offers came in quickly. The sellers were surprised at both the speed and the price, which exceeded their initial expectations. The buyer was in Pennsylvania while the operations were in Utah. The transition was smooth because everything was digital and the fulfillment was already outsourced.

Why This Deal Worked

Provable growth trajectory. Trackable data at every level. Outsourced fulfillment that transferred easily. Repeat customers who demonstrated real product-market fit. Even with a short operating history, the fundamentals were strong enough to attract serious buyers and generate a competitive process.

The UTV Windshield Manufacturer

This owner had been in business for more than fifteen years, manufacturing and selling replacement windshields for UTVs and side-by-sides through his own ecommerce site. He got a significant boost during COVID when outdoor recreation spending surged. Revenue was strong and the business had a long track record of consistent performance.

We targeted our outreach toward companies already selling replacement parts for recreational vehicles, golf carts, and boats. The logic was straightforward: a buyer who already had customers in adjacent categories could add windshields to their product line and sell to their existing base.

That is exactly what happened. An Ohio-based company that manufactured parts for golf carts and boats acquired the business. They could use the same tooling, the same materials expertise, and some of the same people to adapt the windshield manufacturing to their other product lines. The equipment,

which weighed several tons, was shipped to Ohio and set up in an industrial space near their existing operations.

Why This Deal Worked

Long operating history with verified revenue. A strategic buyer who saw clear synergies. The location-independent nature of the business meant the manufacturing could relocate without disrupting the customer-facing side. And the ecommerce platform continued to operate seamlessly through the transition.

The Anatomical Models Company

This was a higher-value transaction involving a company that sold anatomical models and medical training equipment to universities, medical schools, and hospitals. The business operated as B2B ecommerce with a twist: their customers were institutional, which meant recurring orders backed by purchase orders from recognizable organizations.

The combination of ecommerce operations with institutional B2B relationships created a unique value proposition. The recurring nature of the revenue, combined with the credibility of the customer base, supported a stronger valuation. The business was based in Miami, but the buyer was in California. Once again, the location independence of the ecommerce model made the geography irrelevant.

Why This Deal Worked

Institutional customers with recurring purchase orders provided predictable, verifiable revenue. The B2B model reduced dependence on consumer ad spend. And the ecommerce infrastructure made the business fully transferable regardless of the buyer's location.



08

Preparing for Your Exit

What to Do Now to Position Your Business for the Best Outcome

The ecommerce businesses that sell fastest and at the highest multiples are the ones that are best prepared. Everything we have covered in this guide points to the same conclusion: the work you do before going to market determines the outcome you get. Here is a practical checklist of what to focus on.

Align Your Shopify Data With Your Accounting

This sounds basic, but it trips up more sellers than you would expect. Your platform analytics and your accounting records need to tell the same story. If there are discrepancies between what Shopify reports and what your books show, fix them now. Buyers will catch them, and every unexplained gap creates doubt.

Document Your Ad Strategy and SOPs

If you are running the ads yourself, a buyer needs to understand exactly what you are doing and how to replicate it. Document your campaigns, your targeting, your creative process, your testing methodology. The same goes for any other operational process: customer service workflows, product sourcing procedures, fulfillment management. The more documented your operations are, the more transferable they become.

Diversify Your Traffic Sources

If you are heavily dependent on a single paid channel, start building alternatives now. Invest in SEO and content. Build your email list. Develop organic social media presence. Every additional traffic source you add reduces buyer risk and increases your multiple. This is not something you can do overnight, which is why starting early matters.

Grow Your Owned Channels

Email and SMS are the most valuable marketing assets in ecommerce because you own the relationship. You are not renting access from Meta or Google. Every subscriber you add to your list, every automation you build, every campaign that generates revenue is an asset that transfers to the buyer. If you are not investing here, start.

Reduce Owner Dependency

If you are personally running the ads, managing the supply chain, handling customer service, and packing orders, the business is you. And a buyer cannot buy you. Start building a team, even a small one. Hire a VA for customer service. Bring on a freelance media buyer. Use a fulfillment partner. Every

piece of the operation that does not depend on you personally increases the transferability and value of the business.

Strengthen Supplier Relationships

Single-source supplier risk is one of the most common valuation suppressors in ecommerce. If you rely on one factory for your product, what happens if that relationship breaks down? Buyers see this immediately. Develop backup suppliers. Negotiate documented agreements. Build relationships with alternatives even if you do not use them yet. Having options on the supply side gives both you and the buyer confidence.

Get a Preliminary Valuation

You do not need to be ready to sell tomorrow to have a conversation about what your business might be worth. A preliminary valuation from someone who knows the ecommerce M&A landscape gives you a benchmark to work toward. It tells you where you stand, what you could improve, and what the market is currently paying for businesses like yours. We offer this as a free consultation.



Appendix

Ecommerce Seller Readiness Checklist

Use this checklist to assess where your ecommerce business stands. You do not need to check every box before picking up the phone. But the more you can address, the stronger your position will be when it is time to go to market.

Financial Readiness

- SDE has been calculated with documented add-backs
- Shopify/platform analytics align with accounting records
- Revenue can be broken down by product, by channel, and by month
- Cost of goods is tracked at the SKU or product-line level
- At least two to three years of clean financial history are available
- Bank deposits reconcile with platform-reported sales
- Inventory is valued at landed cost and documented

Customer and Revenue Metrics

- Customer acquisition cost is tracked by channel
- Customer lifetime value has been calculated
- Repeat purchase rate and retention metrics are documented
- Recurring revenue (subscriptions, auto-ship) is broken out separately
- Customer concentration is analyzed (no single customer dominates revenue)
- Email/SMS list size, engagement rates, and revenue attribution are documented

Traffic and Marketing

- Traffic sources are diversified across multiple channels
- Organic traffic trend is documented (growing, stable, or declining)
- Ad spend and ROAS are tracked by platform and campaign
- Email and SMS marketing performance is documented with revenue per send
- Marketing SOPs and campaign strategies are documented and transferable

Operations and Supply Chain

- Fulfillment process is documented (in-house or third-party)
- Supplier relationships are documented with terms and agreements

- Backup suppliers have been identified for key products
- Inventory management process and reorder points are documented
- Return rate and customer service processes are documented

Transferability

- The business can operate without the owner for extended periods
- Key operational roles are filled by team members or contractors
- Platform accounts, ad accounts, and domains are ready for transfer
- All SOPs are documented and accessible to a new owner
- A professional M&A advisor has been consulted

Ready to Start the Conversation?

Whether you are thinking about selling your ecommerce business this year or just want to understand what it might be worth, we are happy to talk. No cost or obligation. Just an honest conversation about your business, the current market, and what it would take to put you in the strongest position possible.

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