

When and how to set up your internal online company store

More companies than ever are setting up internal online company stores. During internal discussions on this topic, there are a number of common themes across a wide variety of companies. The purpose of this document is to help you determine whether an internal online company store makes sense for you, how to go about evaluating options, and how to set one up so it works well for your company's specific needs.



Who needs an internal online company store?

As companies grow, their needs grow, too. Most companies start to feel the pains that could be solved by an online company store long before they're ready to make that move. If you're experiencing any of these challenges, it may be time to consider setting up an online store for your company:

- Team members spending too much time away from core responsibilities due to demands of filling internal requests for materials such as corporate branded apparel, sales collateral, business cards, trade show materials, etc.
- Difficulty keeping track of supplies on hand, and/or missing a needed item when someone requests it.
- Too much of some items and not enough of others.
- Employee recognition programs, uniform programs or other internal employee-focused programs take too much time & effort to manage.
- Some employees take more uniforms than they're allotted.
- Team members are stuck dealing with checks or managing payroll deduction for extra uniforms.
- Difficulty handling exchanges and returns.
- Team members tired of packaging materials and either running to the Shipping Department or to the UPS store all the time.
- Difficulty managing International shipments.
- Trouble tracking whether orders have been delivered.

If you're running into any of these issues, you may benefit from an online store.



How does an online company store work?

With a good partner, setting up an online store is fairly simple, and can free up a lot of your time for more important projects. In just a few steps, you can have your online store set up and ready to go.

- 1) *Define your program needs:* Once you define your program requirements, it's a lot easier to find the right partner. Use the attached *Online Store Self-Assessment* to determine the requirements for *your* online company store.
- 2) *Pick your products:* You probably already know many of the products you need. The right partner will help you fill in any blanks or find new alternatives for products you're not 100% happy with. You should also expect to see a proof of each item to make sure it's what you want.
- 3) *Get a customized site design:* Your store should reflect your brand, with your logo, images, colors, etc. You should also expect to see a draft concept of your customized site ahead of time to avoid costly redevelopment later.
- 4) *Set-up:* Once you get everything figured out, it's time to create your site, set up all the users with the appropriate restrictions and approvals, and build your item catalog. While all that is happening, you can get your initial order going so everything is ready to ship as soon as you announce the site to your team.
- 5) *Order processing:* Once your site is up and running, who will manage all the order fulfillment, inventory management, and everything you need to keep everyone happy? Is this something you want to handle, or are you trying to get rid of this headache? What kind of reporting is available online? Are there additional reports you need offline?



What should I consider when choosing an online store partner?

Do they have the products you need?

- Apparel: broad range of brands and products to suit your needs
- Promotional products: wide availability of various product categories and preferred vendor relationships
- Print: forms, business cards, variable data, postcards, brochures, stationery
- Large format: signs, banners, table cloths
- Other needs unique to your business?

Do they have the internal capabilities to ensure quality, consistent representation of your brand?

- Dedicated Account Managers to make product recommendations and help you find the right products
- Graphic Designer(s) to develop proofs, design your custom site, make necessary changes to art
- Reporting or other information needs to successfully manage your store

Do they have other features to make managing your online store easy?

- Ability to restrict items by user/department/location
- Approvals
- Allowances/stipend management
- Online reporting of inventory, order tracking, etc.
- Inventory management assistance and reorder notification
- Product selection assistance
- Digital proofs
- Samples available before purchasing

Do they have the fulfillment capabilities you need?

- Daily picking/packing/shipping
- Kitting
- International shipping
- Mail lists



Conclusion

By now you should have a basic understanding of what an online company store is, what it's for, and how to pick an online store partner that's right for you. If you think an online company store makes sense for your company, a good starting point is to review the attached Online Store Self-Assessment tool. That will help you define your needs so you can determine the best partner to work with.



About Accent Branding Solutions

Accent Branding Solutions has been providing online stores, warehousing and fulfillment for our clients since 2005. Numerous companies have selected Accent to improve their operations, reduce staff time, and remove frustrations related to branded products, uniforms and inventory by setting up online stores. To learn more, visit www.AccentBranding.com or call us at 800-552-4141.



Online Store Self-Assessment

Use this list to determine your online store requirements so you can pick the partner that will best meet your needs. You may not need every feature listed, but this should give you an idea of what to think about when setting up your online store, and what to look for in a partner.

Employee/user considerations

- Who will be able to order? All employees? Only certain employees?
- Will you require approvals on orders? All orders, or just certain items? Over a certain limit?
- Who will pay for orders? Is the company paying, or will employees pay for their own?
- Will you offer allowances or stipends? You can use these for uniforms, or for employee recognition.
- How long will it take you to compile your user list? Should include user name, e-mail, location/department, allowance (if applicable), item restrictions, approvals, etc.
- Will you need to track budgets by department?

Products

- What products do you want to offer? What color(s) of each?
- Do you want to stock every size/version, or have some sizes produced on demand?
- Do you know approximately how many of each item/size/version you need to have on hand? Do you have any historical information about usage?
- Can anyone order any item, or will some items be restricted to certain employees, locations or departments?
- Do you need any kits or other special handling of items?
- Are there new items you want to offer that you haven't had in the past, or that you've been unhappy with?
- Will all online users see/pay the same price for items, or do you have different pricing rules for different users?

Site design & customization

- What design elements do you want included on your site (logos, images, etc.)?
- What color(s) do you want to use in your site design?
- Your store should look like your brand/company, so consider how you'll want to achieve that.
- How quickly do you want to go live?

Order processing & fulfillment

- How quickly do you want orders fulfilled?
- How often do you want shipments sent out? Daily, weekly, monthly, other?
- Who will pay for shipping? Does shipping cost need to be included online?
- Do you want to see open orders, backorders, and shipment tracking online?
- Do you want to see inventory levels online?
- Are there other reports you'll need for accounting or other tracking?