

Thinking like a retailer: How online sellers can meet customer expectations

 By [Claire Cobbledick](#)

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Entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of Gumtree. So much so that we have coined the term Gumentrepreneurs for anyone who is building a business, or a making bit extra on a side hustle, through the country's biggest online classifieds site.



This thriving community online retail space, which anyone with an internet connection can take advantage of, is changing the shape of our economy.

But South African online shoppers of all kinds – from those seeking new branded goods to those looking for a single second-hand classifieds item – are evolving. As they gain confidence and experience in the space, these shoppers are changing their behaviours and their expectations.

They're increasingly demanding a good retail experience in ways that every online seller needs to be aware of in order to create the essential trust between buyer and seller.



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Claire Cobbledick 22 Feb 2018



I cannot emphasise enough that this applies to everyone – even if you are simply trying to shift an old couch. If you think like a retailer and meet the consumer's expectations, you are far more likely to make the sale. If you are trying to build a substantial business, then these tips are non-negotiable.

1. Promote yourself well and stand out from other listings through quality product photography and descriptions:

Show your goods in the best light and cover all the obvious angles in terms of a buyer's questions.

2. Price it right: It is only human nature that buyers will gravitate towards the cheapest option and online search tools enable the customer to compare all the time. Ensure you are competitive and, if you're running a business that has any scale, maybe even consider a flexible "we will match any genuine price" offering.

3. Make payment secure: Remove all concerns about the security of online trading (especially on larger sums) by using a third party escrow service like Shepherd to guarantee both sides of the deal. You can price in the small cost of the service or provide a readily available option for the buyer to opt into.

4. Be responsive: Data shows that online shopping is done as much after conventional office hours as during them. Leading classifieds sites will have a mobile app where you can set up alerts, monitor constantly and respond to any enquiry promptly at any time.

5. Delivery: Where possible make it easy for a buyer and add a ready-made delivery option on your items. For smaller things, the Aramex DropBox service delivers across SA inside 24 hours for R99. For larger items, couriers will quote.

6. Have a return policy: Popular online retail sites often thrive because they offer an easy sale-or-return mechanism. This can be burdensome for small businesses but it is worth considering as a way of encouraging trial. Data from eBay in the USA shows that sellers who switched from a no-returns policy to a 30-day free-return policy saw up to 15% lift in conversion.

7. Manage inventory: If you are offering goods or a service then make sure you can deliver timeously. If you are out of stock then change your ads to give a realistic reflection of when you will be able to deliver. Make sure you can scale up quickly to meet demand.

These measures are all part of thinking like a retailer. Think big even if you only have a small business or a single item to sell.

ABOUT CLAIRE COBBLEDICK

Head of Core Business at Guntree South Africa

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