

Leveraging Alibaba for Small Business

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I recently had the great pleasure on Saturday of attending the inaugural Alibaba E-Commerce Expo in Melbourne, which helped to shed light on the opportunities e-commerce platforms like Alibaba present for small and medium-sized Australian businesses.

Already valued at over USD 16 trillion, online sales are one of the world's fastest-growing retail channels.

Selling online gives businesses access to a whole world of new customers without many of the challenges, risks and expenses that often come with establishing a physical presence in a new market.

To harness this opportunity, it is imperative that small businesses invest upfront in developing and equipping themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to make informed business decisions.

Success in online exporting, as in all business, relies on careful planning, risk mitigation and dedication.

Platforms like Alibaba offer new pathways to market in many ways, each of which may present new challenges for new-to-online manufacturers or retailers.

For example, bricks-and-mortar commerce requires a focus on location, merchandise assortment and display, as well as the in-store experience. E-commerce, on the other hand, requires a focus on order fulfillment, logistics, the online customer experience and customer lifecycle management.

Businesses must also ask themselves a number of new questions, such as: is growing a global business via online channels appropriate for my product or service, and what are the right platforms to consider? What tax or regulatory considerations need to be taken into account? What logistics and financing solutions will be required? How do I protect my intellectual property?

Alibaba's Melbourne conference was a perfect opportunity for aspirational buyers and sellers to explore the cross-border export opportunities provided by ecommerce platforms such as Alibaba. Through exposure to a network of reputable and experienced service partners and buyers, businesses were able to advance the knowledge and skills needed to successfully export to China.

Alibaba is one of many established online marketplaces that Australian businesses can leverage to access the massive international consumer market, but there are also several tools available to Australian businesses who opt for more proprietary solutions to reach new consumers in overseas markets.

Starting a new business or extending market reach overseas is never easy, but by working with platforms like Alibaba and their partners, companies have a new opportunity to grow.

Of course, the Export Council of Australia is always here to help as well. We offer a range of services that can support you to successfully grow your online business, including our international business coaching service and various education programs.

I would like to congratulate Maggie Zhou, Alibaba Group's Managing Director for Australia and New Zealand, for convening such a great event in Melbourne. The Alibaba platform is an excellent tool to assist Australian companies in accessing new opportunities, in particular small businesses interested in leveraging the global marketplace to fast-track their own growth.

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