

A whole new world of customers is just one click away

Trailblazing SMEs are harnessing ecommerce via social media to take products to a global audience

IAN WILSON



It is a sign of the times when Britain's top three private SMEs with the fastest-growing exports are all using ecommerce to reach their customers around the world.

Fashion retailers Missy Empire (No 1), Oh Polly (No 3), and jewellery designer Missoma (No 2), each attribute their overseas success to the ease with which international customers can access a website or Instagram, click on a product, and have it speedily delivered to them.

Happily, all three also use

DHL Express to ship these orders, partnering with us to deliver to customers wherever they are in the world.

Successful exporters with an online presence know that their website is the 21st century equivalent of a shop window – with the world looking in.

Technology has driven a tremendous rise in ecommerce. It is now incredibly easy to sell to customers in new markets, which only a decade ago, would have been inaccessible to smaller companies.

DHL Express handled a 30% increase in shipments for UK-based SME online retailers last year, outgrowing our other lines of business and highlighting the huge growth potential for start-ups and SMEs.

According to research by industry group IMRG and consultants Capgemini, £134bn was spent online last year on UK-based online retailers – this is up 11.8% on the year before.

This year's private SME

with the fastest-growing international sales – online fashion retailer Missy Empire – uses our express delivery service, so its customers receive their order as quickly as next day.

Ash Siddique, 38, who founded the Manchester firm with his brother Ish, 36, has helped pioneer this “fast fashion” – the rapid turnaround and delivery of new clothing lines.

Being on top of ecommerce trends is vital to the firm's success. Shoppers can buy products with one click on the Missy Empire Instagram page, and have them delivered overseas by DHL Express.

“Augmented reality and visual search engines are the next game-changers in ecommerce,” Ash tells me, “anything that enhances the buying and shopping experience for customers is always a great step forward”.

Companies that take those extra steps and expand into multiple sectors, such as Missy Empire, create more opportunities for growth,

and are more resilient to shifting markets.

This is especially relevant in the context of Brexit.

In preparing our business for Britain's departure from the EU, we have invested in additional customs agents, operational and customer service staff, and prepared for a wide range of scenarios.

We are working to help businesses, who have traded only with Europe, understand customs arrangements, and encouraging them to look beyond Europe's borders, as there is so much opportunity and customer demand elsewhere in the world.

We can also draw on the experience and knowledge we have gained from helping thousands of British businesses successfully access new markets over many years.

Our unique insights have driven innovative ways to support customers in expanding their businesses, such as our Website Health Check, which provides 10 steps to increase your



SOHAN MANGAL

Marisa Hordern's Missoma (No 2) benefits from fast delivery

ecommerce site's appeal to international customers.

Tips include being clear on your home page that you ship internationally – and adding an express delivery option, which we highly recommend. This one action typically results in a 70% increase in the amount customers spend – and a 20% increase in repeat custom. Be sure to provide payment options that are popular in the markets in which you operate.

The hugely popular Dutch mobile finance app, iDeal, for example, has 1.5m daily users and has registered more than 2bn online payments. Be clear about your returns policy, which should be simple, and not hidden in the small print.

Localising your website is also important, without undermining the unique brand values that make you stand out from the crowd.

Finally, consider including local duties or sales taxes in the prices you quote – not doing so can put off some customers.

There are still challenges, however: the latest trade confidence index that we compiled with the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) found that exchange rate volatility and price pressure on raw materials have contributed to a dip in confidence. But we wholeheartedly concur with BCC director-general Adam Marshall's assertion that business is the force that will bring Britain out of the shadow of the Brexit debate by providing a positive, optimistic vision for the country's future.

The companies on this year's table show that “Brand Britain” is alive and well around the world. Synonymous with quality and creativity – and a force to be reckoned with – British businesses have the ambition, guts and tenacity to succeed abroad.

DHL Express will proudly support them every step of the way.

Ian Wilson is chief executive of DHL Express UK & Ireland