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Tech Connection

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Drop it Like it’s Hot

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Would you like to offer more or different items than you can keep in store? Add an extra day of revenue to the month via an additional sales channel? You may want to explore drop-shipping options. This is when you sell an item on your website and the supplier ships it directly to your customer. It’s a form of e-commerce.

Drop shipping isn’t a new concept in retail, but it’s somewhat new for garden centers. There are all kinds of drop-shipping programs. Individual suppliers offer their own programs, Shopify Collective is a drop-shipping conduit if you have a Shopify store, and John and Souny Kennedy, owners of Boomer Wrangle, LLC, are offering a solution called E-commerce Connect that works with Shopify and WooCommerce websites. Their solution fits well with the entire Connect Space ecosystem. They describe it all as a “digitally connected ecosystem of collaboration and commerce.” I talked with them at length about the setup and highly recommend giving it a look.

So should you try it? How does drop shipping work? What do you need to do in order to be successful? Let’s do a crash course.

How it Works

The details are slightly different depending on what program you use. In general, there are three parts to a drop-shipping program:

1. The supplier: Fulfills the orders (ships the items)
2. The connection between the supplier and retailer
3. The retailer: Sells the items via their website (all customer communication happens through the retailer website)

With Shopify Collective, the Collective app is the connection between the supplier and retailer. In Ecommerce Connect, OrderEase is the connector. In other types of drop shipping, there could be an app or widget that serves as the connection.

Information flows from the supplier to the retailer website and from the retailer website to the supplier through the connection. This is a HIGHLY simplified explanation, but you get the gist.

How to Run a Successful Program

There are a lot of moving parts to drop shipping. These are the essentials that you cannot ignore:

Get expert help: I’ve worked with dozens of clients to set up Shopify Collective. John and Souny have worked with

dozens to get the Ecommerce Connect program set up. Believe me when I say there are enough little details that can trip you up that make it worth working with someone to help avoid shipping, sales tax and customer communication errors.

Do regular email marketing: You MUST tell your customers you're offering the products on your website—they won't just find them. Organic reach for social media is almost non-existent. Your best way to make money with drop shipping is to make sure one email a week has online store products in them. My favorite platform for e-commerce marketing is Klaviyo because it connects well with WordPress/WooCommerce and with Shopify. With data flowing from the e-commerce website to Klaviyo, you can send emails with dynamic product recommendations relevant to the customer's browsing and purchase history.

Train staff to handle e-commerce requests: Anyone who's customer-facing should know how to help a customer that comes in or calls with an issue related to a drop-shipped product. That can be as simple as noting the customer request and sending the info to the retailer's internal point person.
Establish a point of contact with each supplier: This is who your internal point of contact will interface with if there are any issues with the program. You need an email address and a phone number for a real, live human at the supplier.

Clearly post the rules of engagement everywhere: On the product pages—"There is no local pickup for this item. It ships directly from our grower partner to you." On the main online shop page: "We've partnered with trusted growers and makers to bring you a curated collection of items we don't have in store. These items ship directly to you and there is no local pickup. If you have an issue with your order, please email us at shop@myawesomegardencenter.com."

Place a test order: Before you invite your customers to place online orders, place one yourself to make sure everything is working properly.
Have you tried drop shipping as a revenue stream? I'd love to hear your thoughts. **GP**

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GO HERE to learn more about Ecommerce Connect.