

Transcript: How to Digitize & Grow B2B Sales With Alibaba.com

David Mantey: Hello, I'm David Mantey and welcome to Alibaba.com, delivering more possibilities for US businesses. With me today is Steve Kohn, Customer Success Manager with Alibaba.com North America. Steve works with manufacturers, distributors, and wholesalers to develop tailored solutions for each business. Thank you very much for joining me today, Steve.

Steve Kohn: Yeah, thanks for having me. I really appreciate IEN for hosting this and David, thank you for inviting me to chat with you about how Alibaba.com can help some businesses.

David Mantey: Before we get into it, a little bit of housekeeping. Please ask your questions in the chat below. Please take advantage of our poll questions and download the assets in the area below. Well, let's kick it right off. Could you tell me a little bit about Alibaba.com?

Steve Kohn: So Alibaba.com is a global B2B e-commerce marketplace. B2B, so everyone knows, stands for Business to Business. And Alibaba.com was actually founded in 1999, believe it or not. It was Alibaba Group's very first business unit, which has now become the world's leading cross border business to business e-commerce platform. You can actually think of Alibaba.com as an always open 24/7, 365 days a year online trade show, where sellers of the world can connect with buyers domestically and globally.

David Mantey: Given the current circumstances of the pandemic, in person trade shows, as you said, aren't really a thing right now, but it's my understanding that Alibaba has a solution for the virtual trade show.

Steve Kohn: We understand that in today's day and age, trade shows are canceled, and it was a large source for manufacturers and distributors to find customers. And we understand that the effects of these trade shows being shut down has hurt small businesses. Alibaba.com has introduced online trade shows that we are hosting online, streaming on other social media platforms, and inviting US businesses, buyers and sellers to participate, to have curated interactions, right? Category specific, invite only, curated one-on-one meetings. We're doing seller presentations that are broadcasted via live stream. There are also keynote speakers and premium content. So you'll be able to get industry insights and trends to help you during these troubling times. It's very important and an easy way for new businesses participating on Alibaba.com to get off to a fast start.

David Mantey: That's reassuring because, with trade shows being canceled, the most critical loss has been that one-on-one communication.

Steve Kohn: It's a crucial customer acquisition for manufacturers and distributors in the world. Attending these trade shows is a way to help continue to grow your business and acquire more customers. And we think we've provided a pretty good digital solution to take place at that.

David Mantey: How often do you hold the events?

Steve Kohn: Once a month. And each month they're specific to a different category or a different industry.

David Mantey: Why is now a good time to go digital?

Steve Kohn: I think it's always important to go digital. Digitizing your business today, now more than ever, is super important. In fact, I think year over year, B2B has outgrown the B2C or Business to Consumer marketplace, our market here in the US. It's growing rapidly, and now more than ever, because of the impact of the coronavirus, digitizing your business will allow you to keep your business open and connect with buyers domestically and around the world.

David Mantey: Could you tell me how Alibaba.com will help manufacturers and distributors expand and grow?

Steve Kohn: By listing your products on Alibaba.com, you're getting access to a network of buyers in over 200 plus countries with over 150 million registered members and 10 million plus active daily buyers. So listing your product on Alibaba.com, showcasing your goods and your business's capabilities will allow you to grow your business.

David Mantey: How easy is the platform to use?

Steve Kohn: In my opinion, and businesses that I've worked with, very easy to use. A lot of businesses that I've worked with have never used an online sales channel before, some have. Either way, it's a very easy user experience. We provide the tools and services that have simplified global commerce. From being able to communicate directly in real time with our messaging tools to being able to transact safely with a buyer anywhere in the world.

David Mantey: You have nine platform features. Could you go through some of them, say what they are and tell us how they could help people out?

Steve Kohn: The most important one is the safe, transactional service. When you're dealing with a buyer that you've never met before, that's thousands of miles away, it's important to know that you're protected, right? And so when you're transacting with the buyer anywhere in the world, you want to ensure that your money is

safe. And so Alibaba provides a service called trade assurance. In other words, it's Alibaba's own escrow. Where the buyer pays the seller through Alibaba, Alibaba confirms the funds had been sent, we confirm the funds have been received, we then release the funds to the seller. That's one of the variety of value added services that we provide in addition to CRM tools for you to communicate and maintain relationships, real time data and analytics on your store's performance, and also advertising and marketing capabilities for you to improve your performance, for you to get in front of more customers, for you to target buyers in specific regions that fit your criteria.

David Mantey: What type of buyers are on Alibaba.com?

Steve Kohn: Buyers on Alibaba.com could be anyone from a retailer, to a wholesaler, to a distributor, a small to medium-sized business, anywhere in the world. In fact, the number one buying demographic on Alibaba.com is the United States. They make up 30% of the buyers that visit our platform. So as I mentioned earlier, we have about 10 million active buyers daily, 30% of those buyers are here in the US.

David Mantey: What are some of the top industries that are on Alibaba?

Steve Kohn: Food and beverage, agriculture, beauty and personal care, industrial machinery, electronics, vehicles, and accessories. These are some of the top selling categories on Alibaba.com from buyers who have submitted direct feedback, from buyers who have transacted on our platform, these are some of the top performing industries.

David Mantey: So how does a company get started?

Steve Kohn: First and foremost, our team here in New York is here to help. Part of getting started with Alibaba.com is connecting with a representative like myself or anyone here from our local New York team to ensure that you are set up for success, right? That includes posting your products,, that includes building your profile and creating a customized storefront where buyers anywhere in the world can access.

David Mantey: Could you tell me a little bit about the search marketing solutions that you provide?

Steve Kohn: When selling on Alibaba.com, you're selling alongside sellers anywhere in the world, right? So being able to get seen as extremely important, right? We provide search engine optimization and keyword advertising tools for you to increase the amount of traffic you receive, to be able to increase the amount of inquiries that you are receiving from customers, and not just increasing the amount of inquiries, but ensuring that you're getting connected to those that fit your needs, right? Targeting the buyers with specific attributes, targeting buyers in specific countries to ensure that you're getting connected with buyers that

you want to do business with. So being able to use those search marketing solutions will improve your performance.

David Mantey: One of the things that you had mentioned previously is that Alibaba is there to help you every step of the way. So what is that sort of interaction with the customer and how does that relationship work?

Steve Kohn: Not only do we provide the setup and onboarding to ensure that your account is set up for success, but we provide dedicated account management, right? So if you need assistance with optimizing your storefront, analyzing the performance of your marketing campaigns, you work closely with an Alibaba representative to ensure that you guys are successful.

David Mantey: How does the typical relationship work with a client? Is there apprehension at first? And then it sort of kind of grows as you guys get comfortable with one another?

Steve Kohn: Over time, the platform can be a self-managed option for our sellers. Where maybe four or five, six months into the membership, you may not need the dedicated support, but we're always there to provide that assistance if you need it. Whether it's helping you engage with customers, educating you on best practices, we want to ensure that you are successful and see value in our platform since our goal is to foster quality relationships between a seller and a buyer.

David Mantey: Could you talk a little bit about seller retention? Is there a lot of turnover? Or do people once they turn to Alibaba typically stick with the platform?

Steve Kohn: This program is fairly new actually. Alibaba.com, of course, has been around for 20 years. But never before were U.S. businesses able to sell on Alibaba.com. This actually opened last summer, I'd say late August, so we actually just hit our one-year anniversary. And so as we continue in this program, we continue to get seller feedback. We'll continue to make improvements to the platform. But seller retention is by far and away, the most important thing from our side of the aisle.

David Mantey: If people want to get started, what should they do next?

Steve Kohn: Getting started is fairly simple. Of course, the requirements to be a seller on Alibaba.com is you must be a registered business here in the United States. Every single seller on Alibaba.com goes through a verification to ensure that you're in good standing and to ensure that we can provide quality of doing business with our customers. Once we can assure you are verified, there is a membership fee. The membership is fairly simple, it's billed annually. There are two options to choose from. There is a basic package, which is 2,400 for the first year. There is a premium package, which is 4,200 for the first year. And it's important to note that Alibaba.com does not take a percentage of the sale.

David Mantey: Okay. That is good to know, and I think it offers a little bit of peace of mind that that initial vetting is kind of done off the bat.

Steve Kohn: Absolutely. That's there to ensure that our buyers and sellers can trust each other, and so we can foster quality relationships. Our buyers want to know that our sellers are vetted and our sellers want to know that our buyers are vetted. We feel as if that ensures trust of doing business.

David Mantey: Excellent. Well, thank you very much for walking me through it today, man, I really do appreciate it.

Steve Kohn: Absolutely, thanks for having me.