

# 10 Questions To Ask When Launching a Company Store

If you have been tasked with researching potential vendor partners for your company store, there are some important questions that you may have not thought of asking. These questions will help you make a confident decision while also giving you the information you need when discussing with your boss.

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## 1. What is my merchandise account managers experience?

Why is this important? Your merchandise account manager will be your direct contact for all merchandise requests and company store questions. The branded merchandise industry is quite complicated, when hundreds a manufactures and thousands of items, it is important to have an experienced account that can sort through the clutter, and deliver thoughtfully selected merchandise that best reflects your company's brand.

Coggins. All of our account managers started out assisting an account manager. There is a huge learning curve to figuring out the branded merchandise industry, and we believe that account assistants should spend at least one year assisting an experienced account manager before being promoted to a manager.

## 2. Can I stock inventory and what does that cost?

Why this is important? If there are fees associated with inbound inventory, storage and order processing, you will need to plug this into your formula when calculating the total cost of running your company store. This is also a hint that the potential vendor may be outsourcing the fulfillment operation to another company.

Coggins. We do not charge any fulfillment fees as long as the merchandise has been sourced from your account manager at Coggins.

## 3. Do I have to pay any monthly fees?

Why is this important? Not only will you need to consider the fees, but this is also a potential sign that the vendor needs outside help and is not in control of the entire operation.

Coggins. Since we own our software, our servers and fulfillment center we do not have to charge

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#### 4. Is there a minimum spend requirement?

Why is this important? When many companies are launching a company store for the first time, they may not know the exact usage. Minimum requirements also cause companies to spend more than necessary in order to avoid any additional fees. This is also a sign the a vendor is not in control of the resources required to administer the operation, and has hired outside help for programming, e-commerce hosting and fulfillment.

Coggins. Since we own our software, our servers and fulfillment center, we do not have to require minimum spending levels.

#### 5. Who owns and operates the fulfillment center?

Why is this important? It is absolutely critical that your company store merchandise vendor own and operate the fulfillment center. When a promotional distributor runs one software system and the fulfillment center runs another system, systems are not streamlined or real-time, which results in many inefficiencies. Separate operations can also lead to quality control issues. How would a 4th party fulfillment center know if your logo was printed correctly?

Coggins. We own and operate our fulfillment center which is tightly integrated, in real-time with our shopping cart and purchasing systems. Coggins is in complete control of order fulfillment, quality and customer service.

#### 6. Is the fulfillment center integrated in REAL TIME with inventory, purchasing and shipping systems?

Why is this important? Real time, tightly integrated systems are a key component to the success of your online company store. Manual keying of information leads to many errors and inefficiencies.

Coggins. Our systems are all part of one tightly integrated ERP system. This allows for seamless order processing, complete reporting and functionality capabilities as well as a reduction in overall cost due to technological efficiencies.

#### 7. Do you have web programming expertise?

Why is this important? No two company stores are exactly alike. You will almost certainly need some type of custom setup, access or functionality built into your store to make it work for your business. It is critically important to choose a vendor with in-house programming resources that has the flexibility to customize the online store and reporting to meet your exact requirements.

Coggins. We have a dedicated team of programmers who can customize any aspect of your company stores functionality.

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## 8. Do you have group buy capabilities?

Why is this important? Group buy is a great way to leverage the spend of your organization. Group buy allows you to setup a product, pricing and cut-off date for placing orders. Once the cut-off time arrives, the bulk order is sent to production, and you have taken advantage of your entire organizations spend.

Coggins. Group buy is a standard feature of every store.

## 9. Can I fully customize my company store design?

Why is this important? Depending on the target audience for your online store, it may be critically important to design the storefront to match the branding standards of your corporate site.

Coggins. If your company has in-house designers, you can provide us with an Adobe Illustrator file. Our programmers will take this design and implement it into the shopping cart. If you don't have in-house designers available, don't worry, we can handle this for you as well.

## 10. Will I have access to online reporting tools?

Why is this important? If you are responsible for managing the store for your company, It is important that you quickly be able to view real-time inventory, order history, tracking as well as many other reports.

Coggins. We provide an online reporting dashboard with all critical reports. We can also add additional reports to meet your exact reporting requirements.