



# intelligence

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## ONLINE RETAILING: PART 1 OF 4

# How are you leveraging the power of online?

The internet presents some incredible opportunities to engage customers, tell your brand's story and help you succeed as a merchant. In this four-part series, we'll present practical tips and tools to help make sure you are thinking strategically to optimize your retail business for the online and digital world.

**IT'S** true that everyone is online. It's where the vast majority of people in your neighbourhood and around the planet search for and find information. Thanks to mobile devices like phones and tablets, the digital reality has also never been more present in our lives. This presents retailers with a seemingly endless, and sometimes overwhelming, number of possibilities and opportunities to attract new customers, strengthen relationships with existing ones, and increase traffic to stores.

So... how are you going to leverage the power of online? It might not be the easiest question to answer, and with so many options it can be a bit daunting. But it doesn't have to be. Assessing the internet as a tool at your disposal and looking at the ways it can be leveraged from the perspective of your store's needs will help you develop a plan that's right for your business.

In this four-part Shop/Intelligence™ series, we make it easier for you to understand what will work for your store by breaking down online and digital into four components: 1) getting an online presence and optimizing your website, 2) becoming e-commerce-ready, 3) developing a social media strategy, and 4) becoming accessible across all devices. Keep reading to find tips and tools to help you get your business online.

### Another way to be found

The internet has become a marketplace for retailers all around the world. But being online doesn't just have to be about sales. For Bob Ianson, President of Heirloom Linens, it's simply about being there.

"You don't need to have e-commerce available," he says. "You don't need to have all the bells and whistles. Just being online allows retailers to build their brand



### Keep it simple

**Fred Pritchard of Golda's Kitchen on keeping it simple:**

*Don't overdo it:* "Make sure you don't start trying to be everything to everyone by getting sucked in to all of the latest technology. Just because there's an application for your site that lets people upload pictures to see what new tiles in their kitchen might look like doesn't mean you need to incorporate it. Bells and whistles don't make for a great customer experience. Being honest about who you are and why you're in business might.

Visit Golda's Kitchen at [goldaskitchen.com](http://goldaskitchen.com)

## Something they want

Heirloom Linens' Bob Lanson on giving customers something they can use:

*Be relevant:* "Your customers are visiting your site because they want to know more about you. So, tell them about your business. And give them content that is relevant to them—stuff they can use. It might be an article on the latest bedding trends. Or maybe it's a promotion for your products. Either way, make sure it's something that they will want to read or find out about."

Visit Heirloom Linens at [heirloomlinens.com](http://heirloomlinens.com)



## More channels, more traffic

Rent frock Repeat's Kristy Wieber on driving traffic to your site:

*Get creative:* "Once you're online you'll eventually want to start increasing traffic to your site. To do this, cross-promote with other retailers in your neighbourhood, or do blog exchanges with local respected bloggers. It doesn't take much, just a bit of imagination."

Visit Rent frock Repeat at [rentfrockrepeat.com](http://rentfrockrepeat.com)

by engaging customers in a different way, telling their story through an additional channel."

If you don't already have a website, don't worry; it's never too late to get online. And, it's easy to get started. Many independent retailers have started small by building their own 'do-it-yourself' websites. There are some amazing tools online to help you do this, including [Wordpress.com](http://Wordpress.com), [Wix.com](http://Wix.com), [SquareSpace.com](http://SquareSpace.com) (we'll be discussing e-commerce solutions in greater detail in Part 2 of this series). Basic versions of each are free, and building with these tools usually means your site can be experienced on mobile devices—a very important consideration. However, given the limited time you have as an independent retailer, you might want to consider hiring a professional to design and develop a basic site for your business. There are a number of design companies out there to help you get online for a minimum fee. For a suggested list of web design companies, visit Retail Council of Canada's Supplier Directory at [RetailCouncil.org](http://RetailCouncil.org).

## Getting ready to start

Before you start building your site, or start working with your preferred designer who's going to help you with your digital property, Wieber suggests coming up with a plan, not unlike one that you'd develop for every other element of your business. This will help you determine what your website will look like, what it will feel like, and what you put online for your customers to see.

"You need a strategy," she says. "You have to develop that before all else. Otherwise you're just throwing spaghetti at the wall. And when you're considering your strategy, keep in mind that your website is not just a few pages online—it's an extension of your store and your brand. It needs to in some way reflect who you are and why you're in business."

To help with your strategy, Wieber suggests doing some research.

"Find out what your competitors are doing on their websites. What do you love about their sites? What would you change about them? Free webinars on good user design and experience are readily available online and can give you some great ideas to get started."

## What to put online

Once you know what you want your website to convey and the look and feel you want to achieve, the next step is to determine what you want to show on your site—what visitors to your site will see when they open the page.

Fred Pritchard, Co-Owner of Golda's Kitchen, says that this step doesn't need to be overwhelming for those testing the online waters.

"Don't overcomplicate things," he says. "Keep it simple. Put up photos of your product, show a map of your location, and talk about the things that make you and your business unique."

He says many retailers, whether they realize it or not, likely already have a wealth of content to put online. You just need to leverage what's accessible and relevant to you.

"Ask your suppliers for their digital content. They usually already have great product shots and descriptions for the things you're selling. Use what they already have, and tweak it, if necessary, to fit your brand. This is a great way to get started and to begin building some momentum."

## Optimizing your presence

So, you've developed a plan, found the right platform and have seen it through—you're online. Congratulations! Now what? This is when, as Pritchard points out, you'll want to think of optimizing your website so that you and your business are easy to find for those who are looking for you. And, although optimizing your website for greater web traffic might sound intimidating, it's not. It might, however, be the difference between being found and just being there.

"You don't want to do all of this great work on your website if you're ultimately not going to be seen by anyone," says Pritchard. "In the end you want to be found on the web; you want to show up on Google Maps, and you want to stand out in online searches."

Ensuring these things are happening is critical to any retailer venturing into the online world. And, again, this step is made relatively easy by simply sharing the right information about your business. For tips and tools to help you optimize your web presence, visit [google.ca/business](http://google.ca/business). It just might be the 10 best minutes you spend on your business all day.

If you aren't yet online, following these simple tips and using the tools provided can help you get there fast. But, remember—it's a marathon, not a sprint. Do what's best for your business. Start with a plan. Think about the design of your site. And start engaging your customers in a way you never have before.

Look out for part two of our ShopIntelligence™ series in our next newsletter where we'll dig in to the benefits of e-commerce and how online can become a seriously powerful channel of growth for your store.

## Who's minding the store?

Why proposed legislation regarding parental leave might make running your retail business *much* harder

**THE** federal government made a platform commitment to provide increased flexibility to maternal and parental leave benefits under the Employment Insurance (EI) Program in Canada. In response, Retail Council of Canada (RCC) is meeting with government to outline the challenges the proposed changes will present to Canadian independent retailers if passed.

This proposal would allow individuals the option of taking paternity leave at a reduced EI benefit rate for a *period up to 18 months*, rather than the current 12 months.

More importantly, there is potential for EI benefits to be divided *into several periods over 18 months*. And because provincial legislation requires that an employee taking maternal/parental leave is entitled to return to the same or a comparable position at the end of that leave, it could be a real challenge for independent retailers to properly staff their stores and train their employee(s).

To stand up for independent retailers on this issue, RCC is meeting with the responsible ministries and will also raise these critical retail challenges with the EI Employer advisor. For more information concerning RCC's government advocacy efforts, on behalf of independent retailers visit [www.RetailCouncil.org/advocacy](http://www.RetailCouncil.org/advocacy).

## RCC continues to fight for lower credit card fees for Merchants

Despite "voluntary" reductions in rates established in 2015 by the previous Federal Government, Retail Council of Canada (RCC) is the only national merchant association that still believes that rates are far too high!

**IT'S** a fight that was waged in more than 30 countries across the world: the fight to lower debit and credit card merchant fees. RCC maintains there is still much to do in order to ensure the protection of merchants against high rates (referred to as "interchange").

In comparison to the average 1.50% interchange rate in Canada, those in Australia are capped at 0.50% and at or below 0.30% across most of Europe.

"There have been reductions made, but they haven't gone far enough," says Karl Littler, RCC's VP, Public Affairs. "And we don't believe that the 'voluntary' approach is the right answer. We'll continue to push for regulation of these fees."

A Liberal MP's private members bill (Bill C-236) has been introduced that would empower the Minister of Finance to regulate fee caps on interchange under the Payment Cards Networks Act.

"We're in touch with the MPs and plan to mobilize merchant support around the Bill," says Littler. "This includes the development of a website tool that will enable direct contact between retail merchants and employees and their Members of Parliament."

RCC's 'Stop Sticking it to Us' campaign has saved retailers over \$400 million. For more information about the fight against payment interchange rates, visit [www.RetailCouncil.org/creditanddebit](http://www.RetailCouncil.org/creditanddebit)

## ShopIn™: A program for independent retailers



Running an independent retail business is complex. RCC makes it easier.

Vibrant communities are the lifeblood of the Canadian economy. And successful independent retailers like you are critical contributors to the communities you serve.

With this in mind, RCC has established a program that provides tools, support and information to meet the needs of independent retailers.

ShopIn™ is a Retail Council of Canada MySTORE program developed to support independent retailers with:



Marketing tools and templates



Original Canadian research (ShopInsights™)



Topical information (ShopIntelligence™) to help you strengthen your business

For more information about RCC's ShopIn™ program, visit [www.rccshopin.ca](http://www.rccshopin.ca).

**PASS THIS INFORMATION TO ANOTHER INDEPENDENT RETAILER IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD.**

# Plum: reaping the fruits of its labour

## Vancouver-based family-business celebrating 35 years of success

**A LOT** has happened in the retail industry over the course of the past three-and-a-half decades. Developments in technology and changing consumer attitudes and behaviours have helped to alter the retail landscape considerably. And through it all, celebrating its 35th anniversary this year, has been Plum Clothing Ltd.—the western Canadian family-run retailer that has built a solid reputation for providing high quality women’s fashions and superior customer service.

Plum opened its first store in Kitsilano, British Columbia in 1981. It’s since expanded to six locations across the province’s lower mainland, as well as one in Calgary. The company’s growth is impressive. But it begs the question: as an independent retailer in such an unbelievably competitive market, how has it managed to not only survive, but to stand out amongst its competitors?

According to Ed des Roches, the company’s Founder and President, aside from delivering an exceptional personalized experience, it’s all come down to differentiation based on exclusivity and superior craftsmanship.

Plum made the decision a long time ago to invest significantly in the hiring of talented designers to design and develop the store’s very own private label brands. Some of Plums private label lines include Simone (dresses), Tobias (jackets and coats), acapella (blouses), and wink wink (casual clothing line).

The decision to invest in this way has turned out to be a savvy one. It’s paid dividends amongst the store’s patrons who value the designs and expertise behind the quality. And, what’s more—all of the private label brands offered are made in Canada.

“All of our private label garments are designed in house and manufactured in Vancouver,” says des Roches. “Buying and wearing clothing that’s manufactured in Canada is becoming increasingly important to Canadian women.”

Plum also found that beyond the feel-good factor that ‘made at home’ elicits, there are also other, more tangible, benefits to the business that results from in-house design and in-province production.

“Manufacturing locally ensures greater quality,” des Roches points out. “And because all of the production is local we have easy access to everything, and there’s a really quick turn-around when it comes to receiving our garments. From the start it just really made more sense for us.”



*“We try to help our customers however we can. It’s why we’re here. We offer everyone who comes through our doors the same high level of attention. We like to help them find out what’s right for them and to make their visit with us an experience that they won’t forget, and one that they’ll tell their friends and family about.”*



Something else that’s always made sense to Plum is the way it engages with its customers. The company is online and accessible to those looking for high-quality fashion with a sophisticated website ([plum.ca](http://plum.ca)) where all of its products can be found.

Plum also has a blog ([noguru.ca](http://noguru.ca)) where it provides its customers with consistent commentary about dressing, wardrobing and the product that is currently available in its stores. And a Facebook page ([facebook.com/plumclothing](https://facebook.com/plumclothing)) allows them to get even closer to their customers. But all of this, as des Roches highlights, only serves to support the business. The real key to its success is the way it treats its customers.

“We try to help our customers however we can,” he says. “It’s why we’re here. We offer everyone who comes through our doors the same high level of attention. We like to help them find out what’s right for them and to make their visit with us an experience that they won’t forget, and one that they’ll tell their friends and family about.”

To find out more about Plum, visit [plum.ca](http://plum.ca).

Not a member of Retail Council of Canada? Questions about your membership?  
Call 1-888-373-8245 or email [membership@retailcouncil.org](mailto:membership@retailcouncil.org).