EMPIRE BUILDER ACADEMY

MODULE 07

BUILD AN ONLINE STORE

9 lessons with step-by-step instructions, copy-and-paste AI prompts, exercises, a worksheet, an action checklist, and a knowledge check.

THE ONLINE ENTREPRENEUR BLUEPRINT

From Zero to Your First Online Business

07

BUILD SMART. LAUNCH FAST. SCALE WITH AI.

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MODULE 7: BUILD AN ONLINE STORE

MODULE OVERVIEW: Selling products online is one of the most popular ways to start a business, and one of the most misunderstood. This module walks through the three main product types (digital, physical, and print-on-demand), the fundamentals of running an e-commerce store, how to research products, write descriptions that sell, set up checkout, handle fulfillment, and deliver customer support that earns repeat buyers.

In this module:

- Lesson 7.1: Digital Products
- Lesson 7.2: Physical Products
- Lesson 7.3: Print-on-Demand
- Lesson 7.4: E-commerce Fundamentals
- Lesson 7.5: Product Research
- Lesson 7.6: Product Descriptions
- Lesson 7.7: Checkout Systems
- Lesson 7.8: Fulfillment
- Lesson 7.9: Customer Support

> **NOTE:** Selling products involves legal and tax obligations (sales tax, product safety, consumer protection, intellectual property). This module gives general education only; it is not legal or tax advice. Check your state's department of revenue, FTC.gov, CPSC.gov, and USPTO.gov, and consult professionals as needed.

LESSON 7.1

Digital Products

The Big Idea

Digital products are files or online access that customers download or use: templates, printables, e-books, guides, spreadsheets, presets, design assets, music, courses, and software. They have no inventory or shipping, and once created they can be sold many times. The trade-off: they're often easy for others to create too, so quality, specificity, and marketing matter a lot.

Popular Digital Product Types

Type	Examples
Templates	Spreadsheets, Canva templates, resume templates, business documents
Printables	Planners, checklists, worksheets, wall art
Guides	E-books, how-to guides, playbooks
Education	Mini-courses, video lessons, workshops
Creative assets	Photo presets, fonts (with proper licensing), graphics, music loops
Tools	Calculators, Notion dashboards, spreadsheets with formulas

What Makes a Digital Product Sell

1. **Solves a specific problem** for a specific person ("Wedding budget tracker for couples under $20K" vs. "Budget template").
2. **Saves time** compared to making it themselves.
3. **Looks professional** and is easy to use.
4. **Includes clear instructions.**
5. **Shows exactly what's included** through accurate previews.

How to Create Your First Digital Product

1. Choose a problem from your customer research.
2. Decide the simplest format that solves it.
3. Outline the contents (use AI to help).
4. Create it in a tool you know (Google Docs/Sheets, Canva, Notion, etc.).
5. Test it with 2–3 people from your audience. Fix confusing parts.
6. Create preview images/mockups that accurately show the product.

7. Write a product description (Lesson 7.6).
8. Set up delivery through your store platform or a digital product platform.

Licensing and Intellectual Property

- Only use fonts, images, and graphics you have the right to use **commercially** in products for resale. Check each license.
- Decide your customer license: personal use only, or commercial use allowed? State it clearly.
- Don't copy others' designs, text, or courses.

> **EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL):** A hypothetical teacher creates a "Substitute Teacher Binder" template pack: editable pages for class rosters, routines, emergency procedures, and seating charts. She tests it with two colleagues, simplifies the instructions based on their feedback, creates accurate preview images, and lists it on her own site and a marketplace for educators.

AI Prompt: Digital Product Ideas

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
My audience is [AUDIENCE] and their top problems are [PROBLEMS].
Generate 15 digital product ideas that solve specific problems.
For each: product name, format, what's inside, which tool I could
create it in, and how long it might take a beginner to make.
Rank the top 5 by usefulness to the audience and ease of creation.
```

AI Prompt: Outline My Digital Product

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Create a detailed outline for a digital product called "[NAME]"
for [AUDIENCE] in [FORMAT]. Include every page/section/tab, what
each contains, instructions the buyer will need, and a quick-start
guide. Suggest what to include to make it clearly better than a
free alternative.
```

> **EXERCISE 7.1:** Choose one digital product idea, outline it, and create a first version or prototype.

LESSON 7.2

Physical Products

The Big Idea

Physical products are tangible items customers receive. They can build strong brands and loyal customers, but they involve **inventory, cash tied up in stock, shipping, returns, and product safety.** Start small and test before buying large quantities.

Ways to Source Physical Products

1. **Make them yourself:** handmade goods (candles, jewelry, baked goods where legal, crafts). Higher control, limited by your time.
2. **Wholesale:** buy finished products from manufacturers or distributors and resell them. Requires research into suppliers and margins.
3. **Private label:** a manufacturer produces a product with your branding. Higher upfront costs and minimum order quantities.
4. **Dropshipping:** a supplier ships products directly to your customer. Low upfront cost, but often thin margins, longer shipping times, and less quality control. Vet suppliers carefully.
5. **Print-on-demand:** covered in Lesson 7.3.

Key Considerations

- **Unit economics:** price minus COGS, shipping, packaging, platform and payment fees. Know your profit per unit before you buy inventory.
- **Minimum order quantities (MOQs):** how much you must buy at once.
- **Samples:** always order samples before committing.
- **Storage:** where will you keep inventory?
- **Product safety and compliance:** some categories (children's products, cosmetics, food, electronics) have specific federal and state regulations. Check CPSC.gov (Consumer Product Safety Commission) and FDA.gov as relevant.
- **Labeling claims:** claims like "Made in USA," "organic," or health claims have specific legal standards. The FTC has guidance on "Made in USA" claims.
- **Insurance:** consider product liability insurance.

Start Small Strategy

1. Order samples from 2–3 suppliers or make a small batch.
2. Sell a limited quantity (pre-orders, local markets, a small online drop).
3. Gather feedback and track which items sell.
4. Reorder winners; drop or improve slow sellers.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL): A hypothetical founder wants to sell eco-friendly kitchen sponges. Instead of ordering thousands of units, she orders samples from three suppliers, tests durability at home, and buys a small first batch from the best one. She sells at two local markets and online, asks buyers for feedback, and decides whether to reorder based on real sales.

AI Prompt: Unit Economics Calculator

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Help me calculate unit economics for a physical product.
- Selling price: [PRICE]
- Product cost per unit: [COST]
- Packaging per unit: [COST]
- Shipping cost I pay per order: [COST]
- Platform fee: [% or amount]
- Payment processing fee: [% + fixed amount]
- Average units per order: [NUMBER]
Show profit per unit and per order, gross margin, and break-even
number of units to cover a first inventory order of [AMOUNT].
Show the math step by step.
```

AI Prompt: Supplier Questions

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
I'm evaluating suppliers for [PRODUCT]. Write a list of 15 questions
to ask suppliers about: pricing tiers, MOQs, samples, production
time, quality control, materials and safety certifications,
packaging, shipping, defects/returns, and communication. Also write
a short, professional first message requesting a quote and samples.
```

EXERCISE 7.2: If you're selling physical products, complete the Unit Economics table on your worksheet for your first product.

LESSON 7.3

Print-on-Demand

The Big Idea

Print-on-demand (POD) lets you sell custom-designed products (t-shirts, mugs, posters, tote bags, phone cases, stickers) without holding inventory. When a customer orders, a POD provider prints and ships the item. You create the designs and handle marketing; the provider handles production.

How POD Works

1. Create a design.
2. Upload it to a POD provider (examples include Printful, Printify, Gelato, and others).
3. Connect the provider to your store (Shopify, Etsy, WooCommerce, etc.), or use a marketplace that offers POD.
4. When an order comes in, it's automatically sent to the provider.
5. The provider prints and ships to your customer. You pay the provider's base cost; your profit is the difference between your price and their costs and fees.

Pros and Cons

Pros	Cons
No inventory or upfront stock	Lower margins than bulk production
Easy to test many designs	Less control over quality and shipping times
Wide product range	Very competitive market
Automated fulfillment	Customer service issues land on you

Keys to POD Success

- **Niche designs:** designs for specific identities, hobbies, professions, or communities tend to stand out more than generic designs.
- **Order samples** of every product to check quality, colors, and fit.
- **Realistic mockups** that accurately represent the product.
- **Clear sizing charts** and production/shipping time expectations.
- **Intellectual property caution:** never use trademarks, copyrighted characters, brand logos, song lyrics, celebrity names or likenesses, or sports team names without permission. Infringement can lead to takedowns, account suspensions, and legal claims. Check USPTO.gov's trademark database for phrases you want to use.

- **AI designs:** if you use AI-generated art, review it carefully for errors, similarity to existing works, and the platform's rules on AI content. Copyright protection for purely AI-generated works may be limited; see the U.S. Copyright Office's guidance.

> **EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL):** A hypothetical nurse creates a POD line of humorous-but-kind designs for night-shift nurses (original phrases she wrote, checked against the USPTO database). She orders samples of each shirt and mug, photographs herself wearing one, and lists five designs to test which resonate with her audience.

AI Prompt: POD Design Concepts

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

I want to create print-on-demand designs for [NICHE AUDIENCE]. Generate 20 original design concepts (phrases and visual ideas) that reflect this community's humor, pride, or values. Avoid any trademarks, brand names, copyrighted characters, song lyrics, celebrity references, or existing well-known slogans. For each, suggest which product type it fits best. Remind me to search USPTO.gov for each phrase.

> **EXERCISE 7.3:** If POD fits your plan, create three original design concepts, search each phrase on USPTO.gov, and order one sample.

LESSON 7.4

E-commerce Fundamentals

The Big Idea

Running an online store means managing a set of connected systems: **storefront, products, payments, shipping, taxes, policies, and marketing.** Understanding these fundamentals helps you avoid costly mistakes.

Where to Sell: Your Store vs. Marketplaces

Option	Examples	Pros	Cons
Your own store	Shopify, WooCommerce, Squarespace, Wix	Control, branding, customer data	You must drive traffic
Marketplaces	Etsy, Amazon, eBay	Built-in shoppers	Fees, competition, platform rules, less control
Social commerce	Facebook/Instagram Shops, TikTok Shop	Sell where people scroll	Platform-dependent, changing rules

Many sellers start on a marketplace for built-in traffic and build their own store over time. Diversifying reduces dependence on a single platform.

Essential Store Pages and Policies

- Home, Shop/Collections, Product pages, About, Contact, FAQ.
- **Shipping policy:** costs, processing times, delivery estimates, regions.
- **Return/refund policy:** timeframes, conditions, who pays return shipping, how to request.
- **Privacy policy** and **Terms of service.**

Consumer Protection Basics

- The FTC's **Mail, Internet, or Telephone Order Merchandise Rule** generally requires sellers to ship within the time stated (or within 30 days if no time is stated), and to notify customers and offer options if there's a delay. See FTC.gov.
- Be truthful in advertising and product claims.
- Honor your stated policies.

Sales Tax Basics for Online Sellers

- Sales tax rules are set by states (and some localities).

- You may need to collect sales tax in your home state and in other states where you meet "economic nexus" thresholds.
- Many marketplaces collect and remit sales tax for sellers in many states (marketplace facilitator laws), but your own website sales are generally your responsibility.
- Digital products are taxable in some states and not others.
- Most e-commerce platforms offer tax calculation tools. Register with your state's department of revenue as required, and consider a tax professional's help.

Key E-commerce Metrics

- **Conversion rate:** orders ÷ visitors.
- **Average order value (AOV):** revenue ÷ number of orders.
- **Customer acquisition cost (CAC):** marketing spend ÷ new customers.
- **Gross margin:** (revenue – COGS) ÷ revenue.
- **Repeat purchase rate:** customers who buy again ÷ total customers.

AI Prompt: Store Policy Drafts

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Draft a clear, customer-friendly shipping policy and return/refund
policy for my online store selling [PRODUCTS] from [STATE] to
[REGIONS]. My processing time: [DAYS]. Shipping methods and costs:
[DETAILS]. Return window: [DAYS]. Conditions: [CONDITIONS]. Digital
products: [REFUND RULES]. Use plain language and headings. Add a note
that I should have the policies reviewed for legal compliance.
```

AI Prompt: Choose Where to Sell

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
I plan to sell [PRODUCTS] to [AUDIENCE]. My budget: [AMOUNT].
My marketing strengths: [e.g., Instagram, SEO, none yet].
Compare selling on my own store vs. 2-3 relevant marketplaces vs.
social commerce, covering fees structure (tell me to verify current
fees), traffic, control, and effort. Recommend a starting approach
and a 6-month plan to diversify.
```

EXERCISE 7.4: Choose your sales channel(s), draft your shipping and return policies, and research your state's sales tax registration requirements.

LESSON 7.5

Product Research

The Big Idea

Product research reduces the risk of investing time and money in products nobody wants. The goal: find products with **real demand, manageable competition, healthy margins, and a reason customers would choose yours.**

Product Research Methods

1. **Marketplace research:** Search Etsy, Amazon, and eBay for your product idea. Note prices, review counts, ratings, and how many sellers offer similar items. Read 2–3 star reviews for unmet needs.
2. **Search trends:** Use Google Trends to see if interest is growing, stable, declining, or seasonal.
3. **Social signals:** Look at what's being discussed, saved, and shared in your niche (comments asking "where can I buy this?" are especially useful).
4. **Customer conversations:** Ask your audience what they want and what they've bought.
5. **Competitor stores:** Review best-seller sections and new-arrival patterns.

The Product Scorecard

Score each product idea 1–5:

Criterion	Question
Demand	Is there evidence people buy this?
Competition	Can I stand out? (5 = little direct competition or clear differentiation)
Margin	Can I earn a healthy margin after all costs?
Differentiation	Do I have a unique angle?
Simplicity	Is it easy to produce, ship, and support?
Fit	Does it fit my brand and audience?

Red Flags

- Fragile, heavy, or oversized items (shipping costs and breakage).
- Products with complex safety regulations unless you're prepared.
- Trend-only products that may fade quickly.
- Items that infringe on trademarks or patents.
- Markets dominated by a few sellers with thousands of reviews and very low prices.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL): A hypothetical seller considers three ideas: phone cases (very crowded, low differentiation), handmade dog bandanas in sports-neutral seasonal patterns (moderate competition, she can sew, light to ship), and glass terrariums (fragile, costly to ship). Her scorecard favors dog bandanas. She reads reviews of top competitors and notices complaints about sizing, so she plans a clear size guide and adjustable snaps.

AI Prompt: Review Mining for Product Gaps

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Here are customer reviews of competing products (mostly 2-3 star):
[PASTE REVIEWS]
Identify: the top complaints, features customers wish existed,
quality issues, sizing/usability problems, and packaging/shipping
complaints. Suggest 5 specific improvements my product could offer.
Use only what's in the reviews.
```

AI Prompt: Product Scorecard

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Score these product ideas 1-5 on demand, competition, margin,
differentiation, simplicity, and fit, based on the research notes
I provide. Put results in a table with totals and explain the top
pick's biggest risk. If my notes don't support a score, say so
instead of guessing.
Ideas and notes: [PASTE]
```

EXERCISE 7.5: Score at least three product ideas using the scorecard on your worksheet and mine reviews for your top choice.

LESSON 7.6

Product Descriptions

The Big Idea

Online shoppers can't touch, try, or ask a salesperson. Your **product description and images** must answer their questions and help them imagine owning the product, honestly and clearly.

The Product Description Framework

1. **Title:** clear, descriptive, searchable (what it is + key attribute + who it's for).
2. **Opening line:** the main benefit or feeling.
3. **Benefit bullets (3–5):** how it improves their life.
4. **Details:** materials, dimensions, weight, care instructions, compatibility, file formats.
5. **What's included.**
6. **Shipping/delivery and returns** summary.
7. **Size guide or FAQ** if relevant.

Writing Tips

- Write for your target customer, using their language.
- Be specific: "Holds up to 15 lbs" beats "very strong."
- Use sensory words for physical products (soft, crisp, matte, warm).
- Scan-friendly formatting: short paragraphs, bullets, bold key details.
- Include keywords naturally for search (especially on marketplaces).
- No exaggeration or unprovable claims (e.g., health benefits) and no fake scarcity.

Product Photos Checklist

- Clean main image (often white or neutral background for marketplaces).
- Multiple angles and close-ups of details.
- Scale reference (in hand, in a room, on a model).
- Lifestyle image showing the product in use.
- For digital products: accurate previews of actual pages.
- Consistent lighting and style across your store.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL): Title: "Weekly Meal Planner Notepad — 52 Tear-Off Sheets with Grocery List, 6 × 9 in." Opening: "Plan your week's meals in five minutes and never forget the milk again." Bullets: tear-off grocery list, magnetic back for the fridge, thick paper that resists ink bleed, room for seven days of meals and snacks. Details: dimensions, paper weight, materials. Shipping: ships in 2 business days.

AI Prompt: Product Description Writer

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Write a product description for [PRODUCT] for [AUDIENCE].
Facts: [MATERIALS, SIZE, FEATURES, WHAT'S INCLUDED, CARE].
Shipping/returns: [SUMMARY].
Provide: 3 title options (marketplace-friendly, under 140 characters),
an opening line, 5 benefit bullets, a details section, and an FAQ
with 4 questions. Brand voice: [VOICE]. Use only the facts provided;
no unprovable claims.
```

AI Prompt: Marketplace SEO Tags

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Suggest 13 search tags/keywords (each under 20 characters) for my
[MARKETPLACE] listing for [PRODUCT] aimed at [AUDIENCE]. Include
variations on product type, use case, recipient, style, and
occasion. Avoid trademarked terms and irrelevant keywords.
```

EXERCISE 7.6: Write a complete description for one product using the framework and plan its photo set with the checklist.

LESSON 7.7

Checkout Systems

The Big Idea

Checkout is where interest becomes revenue, and where many potential sales are lost. A good checkout is fast, trustworthy, mobile-friendly, and transparent about costs.

Checkout Options

- **Built-in store checkout** (Shopify, Squarespace, Wix, WooCommerce).
- **Payment links and buttons** (e.g., Stripe Payment Links, PayPal, Square) that you can add to any website, email, or message.
- **Digital product platforms** (e.g., Gumroad, Payhip, Lemon Squeezy, Podia) that handle checkout and delivery.
- **Invoicing** for services (send invoices with a "Pay now" link).

Payment Processing Basics

- Processors typically charge a percentage plus a fixed fee per transaction; check current rates on each provider's official pricing page.
- Offer common payment methods: cards and widely used digital wallets.
- Payouts go to your **business bank account** (Module 2).
- Never store card numbers yourself. Use reputable processors that handle security (PCI compliance).

Checkout Best Practices

- **Show total costs early** (shipping, taxes) to avoid surprises at the end.
- **Guest checkout** option (don't force account creation).
- **Few form fields.**
- **Mobile-optimized** design.
- **Trust signals:** secure checkout, clear return policy link, contact info.
- **Confirmation page and email** with order details and next steps.
- **Test** with a real low-cost purchase and refund before launch.

Abandoned Cart Recovery

Many platforms can automatically email customers who started but didn't finish checkout (only where permitted and in line with your privacy policy). A short, helpful reminder ("Still deciding? Here's your cart, and our return policy") can recover some sales without pressure.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL): A hypothetical printable shop owner tests her checkout on a phone and finds the shipping field appears even though her products are digital. She updates the product settings to "digital product, no shipping required," which simplifies checkout to email and payment only.

AI Prompt: Checkout Audit

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

Here's a step-by-step description of my checkout process (or screenshots described in text): [DESCRIBE]. I sell [PRODUCTS] to [AUDIENCE], mostly on [MOBILE/DESKTOP]. Identify friction points, missing trust signals, and surprise costs. Suggest improvements in priority order and write my order confirmation email.

AI Prompt: Abandoned Cart Emails

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

Write 2 abandoned-cart reminder emails for [STORE] selling [PRODUCTS]. Email 1 (a few hours later): friendly reminder + answer a common question. Email 2 (next day): highlight the return policy and support contact. Each under 100 words, with subject lines. No fake scarcity, no pressure, no discount unless I specify one: [DISCOUNT or "none"].

EXERCISE 7.7: Set up checkout (or a payment link), complete a real test purchase and refund, and record the results on your worksheet.

LESSON 7.8

Fulfillment

The Big Idea

Fulfillment is everything that happens between an order and the customer receiving it: picking, packing, shipping, delivery confirmation, and handling returns. Smooth fulfillment builds trust; delays and errors destroy it.

Fulfillment Models

Model	How it works	Best for
Self-fulfillment	You pack and ship from home or a workspace	Starting out, handmade, low volume
Print-on-demand / dropship	Supplier fulfills automatically	No-inventory models
Third-party logistics (3PL)	A warehouse stores and ships your inventory	Higher volume
Marketplace fulfillment	Marketplace stores and ships (e.g., Fulfillment by Amazon)	Marketplace-focused sellers
Digital delivery	Automatic download link or access email	Digital products

Self-Fulfillment Setup

1. **Packing station:** boxes/mailers, protective materials, tape, scale, label printer (optional).
2. **Shipping software or platform shipping tools** to compare carriers and buy discounted labels.
3. **Packing checklist** for each order (item, quantity, condition, insert/thank-you card).
4. **Processing time** stated in your policy (e.g., ships in 1–3 business days) and honored.
5. **Tracking numbers** sent automatically.

Shipping Strategy Options

- **Free shipping** (built into product price).
- **Flat-rate shipping.**
- **Calculated shipping** (based on weight and location).
- **Free shipping above a threshold** (to encourage larger orders).

Whatever you choose, be transparent and make sure your margins still work.

Digital Delivery Checklist

- Automatic delivery email with download link.
- Link works on mobile and desktop.
- Clear instructions (how to download, open, or copy a template).
- Backup option if a link fails ("Reply to this email and we'll send it directly").

Handling Delays and Problems

Follow your stated timelines. If delays happen, notify customers proactively and offer options (as required by the FTC's Mail Order Rule when applicable). For lost or damaged packages, have a clear process: confirm details, file carrier claims if insured, and resolve fairly.

> **EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL):** A hypothetical candle business batches packing every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Each order follows a printed checklist, gets a handwritten thank-you card, and ships with tracking. When a supplier delay affects one scent, the owner emails affected customers the same day with the new ship date and an option to swap scents or cancel for a full refund.

AI Prompt: Fulfillment SOP

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Write a fulfillment standard operating procedure for my [PRODUCT
TYPE] business shipping about [NUMBER] orders per week from home.
Include: daily order check, picking and packing steps, quality
check, labeling and shipping, sending tracking, handling address
errors, delays (with customer notification), damaged/lost package
process, and returns processing. Format as a numbered checklist.
```

AI Prompt: Delay Notification Email

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

```
Write a short, honest email notifying customers that their order of
[PRODUCT] is delayed. Original ship date: [DATE]. New estimated ship
date: [DATE]. Reason (brief): [REASON]. Options: wait, swap for
[ALTERNATIVE], or cancel for a full refund. Apologize sincerely and
make it easy to choose an option. Under 130 words.
```

> **EXERCISE 7.8:** Choose your fulfillment model, write your fulfillment SOP, and set your processing time and shipping strategy.

LESSON 7.9

Customer Support

The Big Idea

Customer support is where reputations are made. Buyers often don't remember perfect transactions, but they do remember how a business handled a problem. Clear policies, fast responses, and fair solutions turn issues into trust.

Support Essentials for Online Stores

- **Contact options:** email and/or chat; consider a contact form with an order-number field.
- **Response time commitment:** e.g., within 24 hours on business days.
- **FAQ and help pages:** shipping, returns, sizing, downloads, order changes.
- **Saved replies** for common issues.
- **Order lookup process:** know how to quickly find an order and its tracking.
- **Escalation rules:** when to refund, replace, or offer store credit, aligned with your policies.

The Most Common Support Requests

1. "Where is my order?" → share tracking and estimated delivery.
2. "I can't download my file." → resend link; give step-by-step instructions.
3. "It arrived damaged." → apologize, request a photo, replace or refund per policy.
4. "I want to return/exchange." → explain the process clearly.
5. "Can I change my order?" → act quickly if not yet shipped.
6. "Is this the right size/version for me?" → helpful pre-sale guidance.

Turning Support Into Improvement

Track the reason for every support request in a simple spreadsheet. Each month, find the top three reasons and fix the root cause (clearer size chart, better packaging, more visible download link). Fewer repeat issues means a better experience and less support work.

> **EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL):** A hypothetical POD shop notices several "Does this run small?" questions each week. The owner adds a measurement chart and a short note ("If you're between sizes, size up") to every shirt listing. Sizing questions and size-related returns drop noticeably in her own tracking.

AI Prompt: Support Reply Library

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

Create a customer support reply library for my online store selling [PRODUCTS]. Policies: [SHIPPING, RETURNS, REFUNDS, DIGITAL DOWNLOADS]. Write templates (under 100 words each) for: where is my order, download problem, damaged item, return request, exchange request, order change request, pre-sale sizing/version question, and a complaint about slow shipping. Warm, clear, solution-focused, with [PLACEHOLDERS]. Never promise anything beyond my policies.

AI Prompt: Monthly Support Analysis

COPY-AND-PASTE AI PROMPT

Here is my support log for the month (reason + short note):
[PASTE]
Group requests by reason, count them, identify the top 3 root causes, and suggest one specific fix for each (website change, product page update, packaging change, policy clarification).

EXERCISE 7.9: Write your support FAQ and saved replies, set your response-time commitment, and create a support log spreadsheet.

MODULE 7

Module 7 Worksheet

Part A: Product Type Decision

Type	Interested?	Why / why not
Digital products		
Physical (handmade/wholesale)		
Print-on-demand		
Dropshipping		

Part B: Product Scorecard (score 1–5)

Product idea	Demand	Competition	Margin	Differentiation	Simplicity	Fit	Total

Part C: Unit Economics

Line	Amount
Selling price	$
Product cost (COGS)	$
Packaging	$

Line	Amount
Shipping I pay	$
Platform fee	$
Payment processing fee	$
Profit per unit	$
Gross margin %	%

Part D: Store Setup

Item	Decision / status
Sales channel(s)	
Shipping policy drafted	
Return/refund policy drafted	
Sales tax registration researched	
Checkout tested (purchase + refund)	
Fulfillment model	
Processing time	

Part E: Product Description Draft

Title: _____

Opening line: _____

Benefit bullets: _____

Details and what's included: _____

Part F: Support Setup

Response time commitment: _____ Support email: _____

Common request	Saved reply ready?
Where is my order?	
Download problem	
Damaged item	
Return / exchange	

MODULE 7

Action Checklist

- [ ] Choose your product type(s)
- [ ] Score at least three product ideas
- [ ] Mine competitor reviews for gaps
- [ ] Calculate unit economics (physical) or outline your product (digital)
- [ ] Order samples (physical or POD) and check quality
- [ ] Check any design phrases on USPTO.gov (POD)
- [ ] Choose sales channels and draft shipping and return policies
- [ ] Research sales tax registration for your state
- [ ] Write product descriptions and plan product photos
- [ ] Set up checkout and complete a test purchase and refund
- [ ] Write your fulfillment SOP
- [ ] Create a support FAQ, saved replies, and a support log

MODULE 7

Knowledge Check

1. Which is a key advantage of digital products?
A) No need for marketing
B) No inventory or shipping, and they can be sold many times
C) Guaranteed sales
D) No competition

2. What is print-on-demand?
A) Buying large inventory in advance
B) A provider prints and ships custom items when an order is placed
C) A type of digital download
D) A shipping carrier

3. Which design is safest for a POD product?
A) A famous cartoon character
B) A sports team logo
C) An original phrase you've checked against USPTO records
D) Song lyrics

4. What does the FTC's Mail Order Rule generally require?
A) Free shipping
B) Shipping within the stated time (or 30 days if none stated) and notifying customers of delays with options
C) Overnight delivery
D) No returns

5. How is average order value (AOV) calculated?
A) Visitors ÷ orders
B) Revenue ÷ number of orders
C) Profit ÷ visitors
D) Orders ÷ revenue

6. True or false: If you sell on your own website, a marketplace automatically handles your sales tax.

7. Which is a checkout best practice?
A) Hide shipping costs until the final step
B) Require account creation
C) Offer guest checkout and show total costs early
D) Add as many form fields as possible

8. What should you do with recurring support issues?

A) Ignore them

B) Track reasons and fix root causes monthly

C) Remove your contact page

D) Raise prices

MODULE 7

Answer Key

1. **B.** No inventory or shipping, and one product can be sold repeatedly.
2. **B.** A provider produces and ships each item after it's ordered.
3. **C.** Original phrases, checked for trademark conflicts, reduce infringement risk.
4. **B.** Ship as promised (or within 30 days if no time was stated) and notify customers of delays with options.
5. **B.** AOV equals revenue divided by number of orders.
6. **False.** Sales tax on your own website's sales is generally your responsibility.
7. **C.** Transparent costs and guest checkout reduce friction.
8. **B.** Tracking and fixing root causes improves experience and reduces workload.