MOVING ONLINE
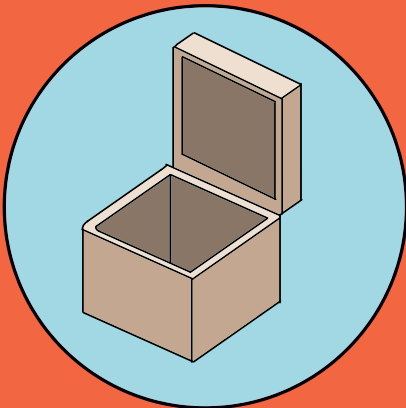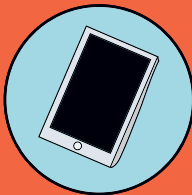
A MIDDLE EAST RETAILER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO COVID-19 DISRUPTION

Tips, Tools, and Know-How for a Fast Ecommerce Transition

Perhaps ecommerce was never in your business plan, or maybe it was a to-do for the future. Either way, moving online is the one option you have right now for retail survival. It's the one option for continuity, and for your business not just to survive, but to thrive in a world disrupted by Coronavirus.

Your customers are still out there. They still need you, but what they need most is a phygital link that lets them continue to give you their custom. With a little initiative and innovation, you can grant them that link. This guide will help you to provide it—and to do it **FAST**.

Get the Phygital Advantage

You can exploit existing assets, your **distribution network and outlet(s)**, for example, by repurposing them for an omnichannel environment. A store may have been a mere point of sale before, but now it can be so much more.

This guide will help you get your operation set up quickly for **online sales and fulfillment**. We'll show you how to use the latest technology and services, and to work with your outlets repurposed as distribution or **click-and-collect** points.

We want to help you reestablish your physical connection with your customers, supported by digital systems that can't be broken by COVID-19. That's the phygital advantage—and now is the time to grasp it.

Sound good? Then let's get going!
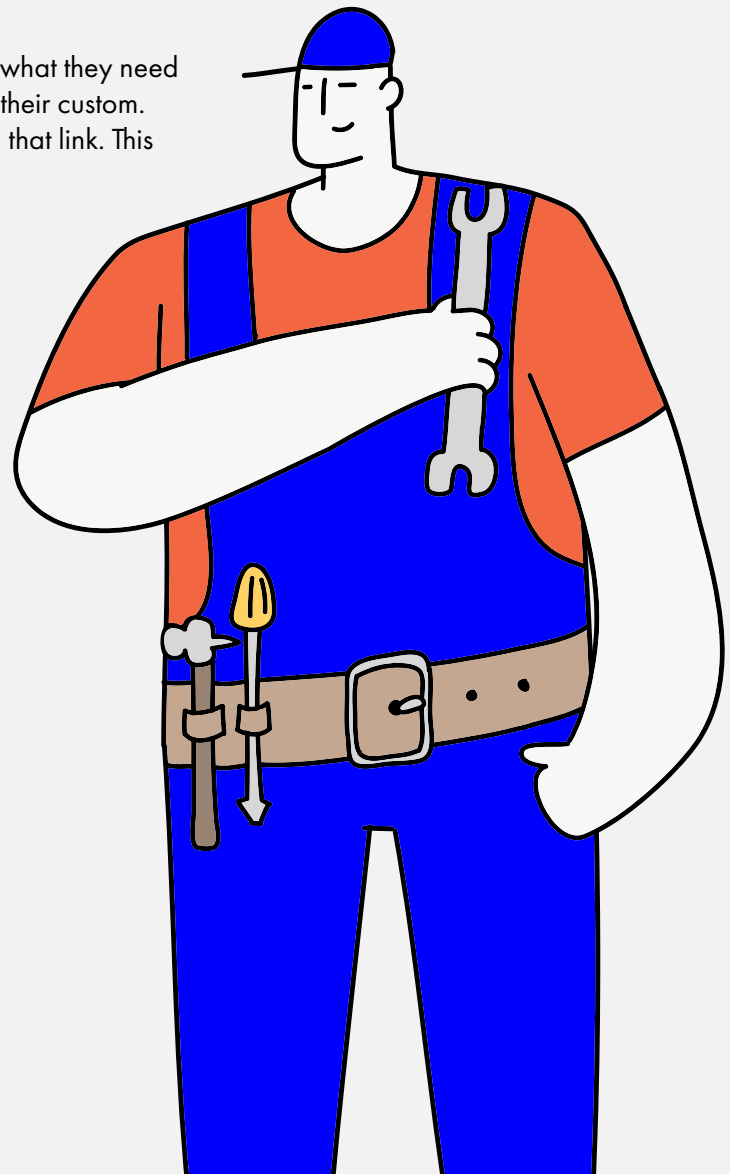
FIRST
Establish Your Brand and Ecommerce Business

Everything in this guide is focused on helping you establish an ecommerce operation **FAST**. We're taking you through the process step-by-step, without frills. It's all about getting you **back in business** within days.

The first thing you will need to do is **develop your brand** and get your operation into **proper legal shape**. The following four steps will establish your presence and support your marketing activities (which we'll cover a little later in this guide):
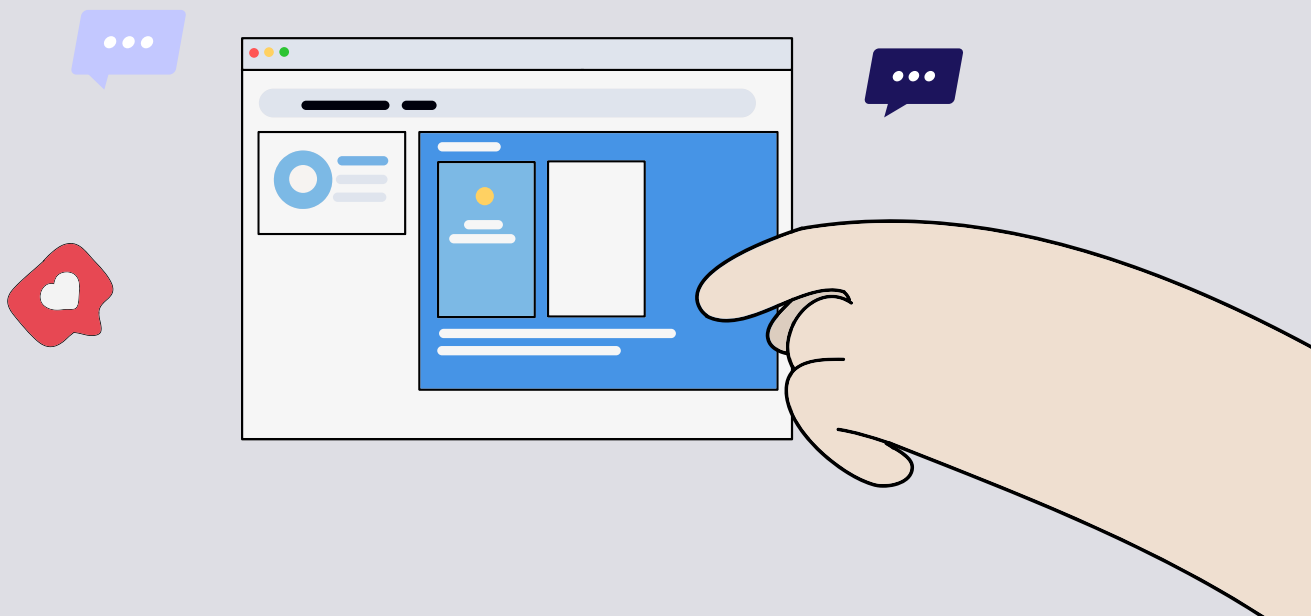
Step 1: Register Your Business

You can skip this step if your business or line of business is already established. If not, it should be your initial priority. Decide upon a business name and register your company. By incorporating, you'll gain access to vital legal protections and tax benefits.

Step 2: Decide on a Name for Your Ecommerce Store

Be sure to give some thought to your brand name. Try to choose a name that fits your business' niche.

## Step 3: Apply for Business Licenses and Permits

Operating an online store does not exclude you from needing specific business licenses and permits. If you're not familiar with the necessary application processes, use a trusted local company setup agent with plenty of resources to help you get started.

Step 4: Identity Creation & Visuals

As you're moving online in a hurry, your identity design needn't be incredibly original, so don't fret over this step too much. Perhaps the most important thing is to make sure that you don't inadvertently copy another company operating in your niche.

Give careful consideration to the colors of your brand and the imagery, typeface, or fonts you'll use. If you have the budget, you might want to hire a marketing firm to create a design brief for your company. If not, you can create your own. Strive for consistency and read marketing tips focused on helping businesses like yours to boost brand identity and image.
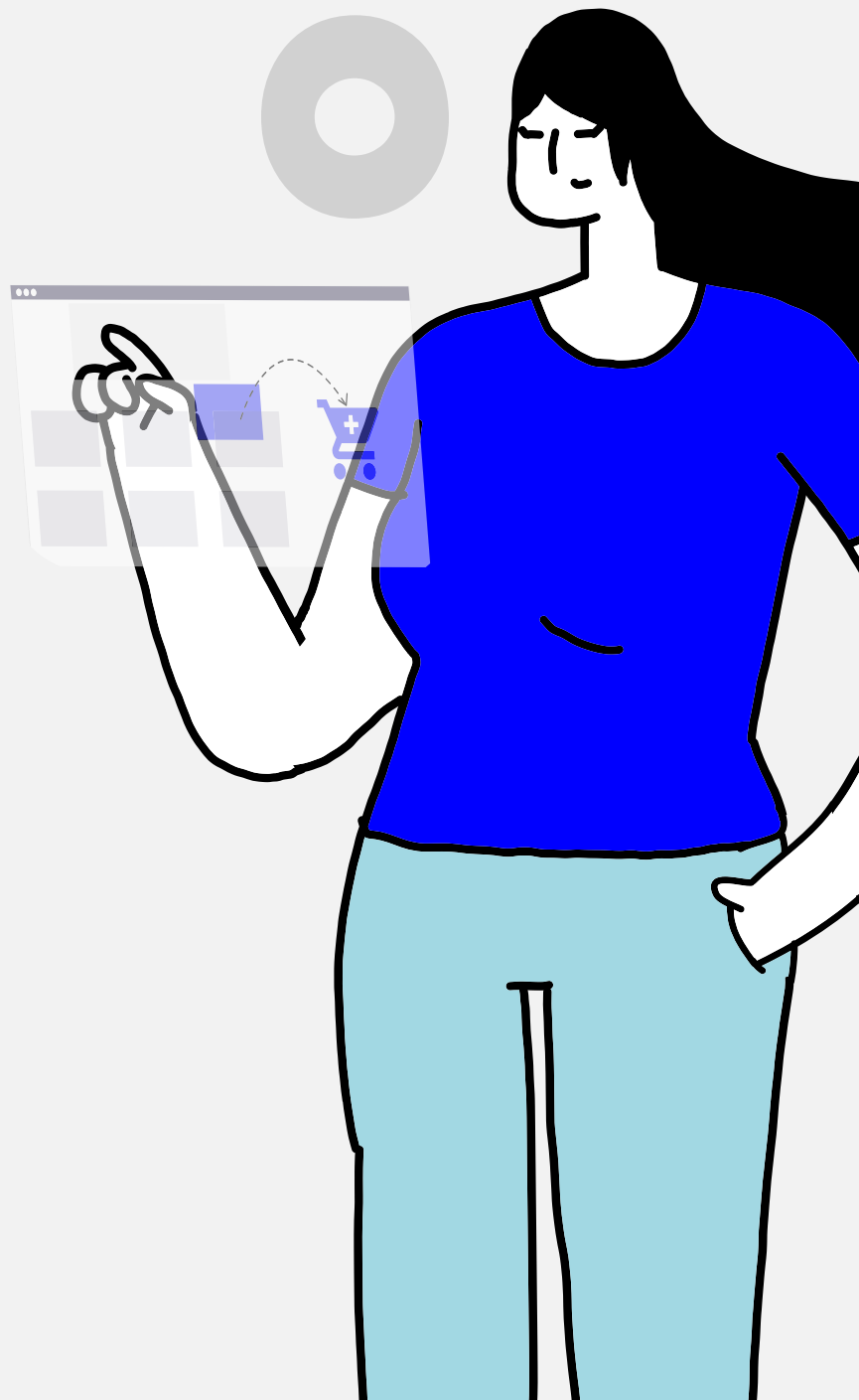
SECOND
Create A Professional Online Store in Minutes With ExpandCart

While there are many tools and services out there to help you get an ecommerce outlet up and running online, we're trying to get your online store set up **FAST**.

ExpandCart is a comprehensive ecommerce platform that's not only easy to use, but is also **tailored for Middle East businesses and consumers**. That's why we recommend it as your frontend solution for beating the Coronavirus blues and moving online in a hurry.

You can sign up with ExpandCart right now, and enjoy **6 months free subscription** for a limited period. First, though, you might like to hear about some of the features that we believe make it the right choice for moving your retail business online.

Fast and Easy With Beautiful Templates

When you need to get an ecommerce store in business **FAST**, there'll be little time for designing it from scratch. ExpandCart comes with a host of eye-catching templates, featuring responsive designs, so you can build a store that's instantly available for all device form-factors. Expertly engineered SEO and digital marketing tools are integrated into the solution, so you can get to work on expanding sales right away.

Outstanding Support

ExpandCart imposes no limits to its support structure. Technical support is always on hand, but the service also includes expert help with website design, store management, marketing, sales, and more.

Integrated Payment and Middle East Shipping Options

ExpandCart supports no less than 20 payment methods, via several payment gateways, including Tap and MyFatoorah, and offers numerous shipping options for your customers. Integral apps in the ExpandCart marketplace are available for you to install and configure, to tailor logistics and delivery operations to your precise needs. They include Shipa Delivery's app for on-demand, same-day, and next-day delivery services, and a cross-border shipping app from Shipa Ecommerce.

Supports Multiple Languages Including Arabic

You can add any language you like to your ExpandCart storefront, checkout, and backend, including native Arabic. Multilingual support extends to store templates, allowing you to market and sell your products to all customers across the Middle East region.

ExpandCart's comprehensive range of features, developed especially for Middle East retailers, will save you time and effort in getting your online store in front of customers **FAST**—but what about your fulfillment operation? That's quick and easy, too, when you take advantage of the Shipa range of tools and services.

THIRD

Plan Your Operations for Middle East Fulfillment Challenges

With your business established and your store ready to open, the next thing to think about is how to **get online orders shipped** out to your local, regional, or international customers.

You might choose to work with an outsourced warehousing provider or exploit your existing warehouses or brick and mortar stores by turning them into temporary distribution centers. In any case, to get your ecommerce operation set up **FAST**, you need to look no further than the Shipa platform.
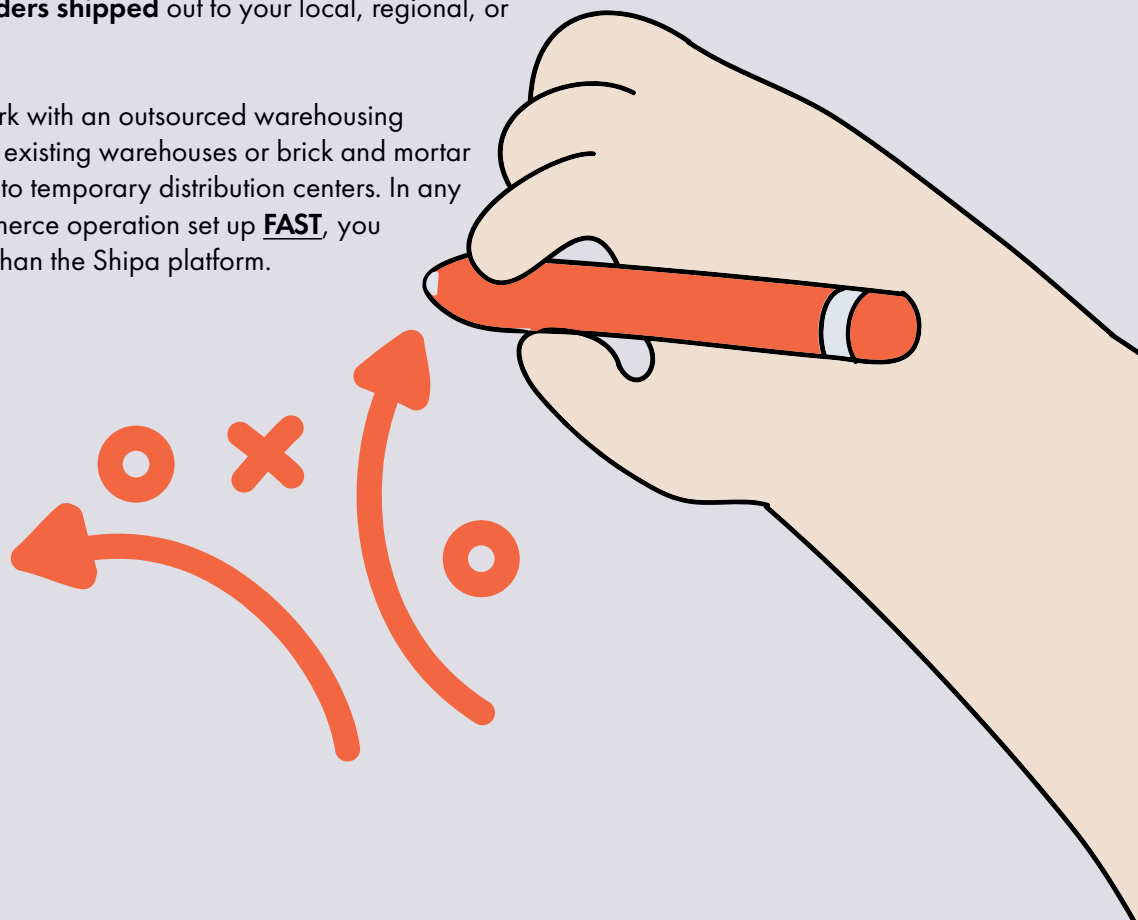
Coronavirus and Other Challenges

While the objective of your strategy is to survive the COVID-19 crisis, you'll also have other specific challenges to overcome, related to your geographic location, and that of your customers.

One reason why many retailers in the Middle East have not moved from physical to online retail relates to speed and cost challenges of warehousing & delivery in MENA.

For example, in the UAE and KSA, the estimated average cost of package delivery is far higher than that of the worldwide average. Failed-delivery rates and customer returns, too, exceed global best practices by a significant margin. Moreover, many customers insist on **cash-on-delivery** payment, increasing the cost of delivery vs. prepaid orders.

Shipa as the Solution

At Shipa, we've designed our platforms and services to help you **surmount fulfillment challenges** and succeed in your ecommerce business in no time.

Does your enterprise sell products in large quantities to overseas customers, or do you retail to businesses or consumers within the GCC? Either way, Shipa can help your business tap into global, regional, and local economies.

We bring the **knowledge** you need to buy, sell, or move goods across town, or across international borders. It's all part of making online commerce accessible to all. As you **transition to online sales** to survive COVID-19, Shipa can take care of your operations while you take care of your core business.
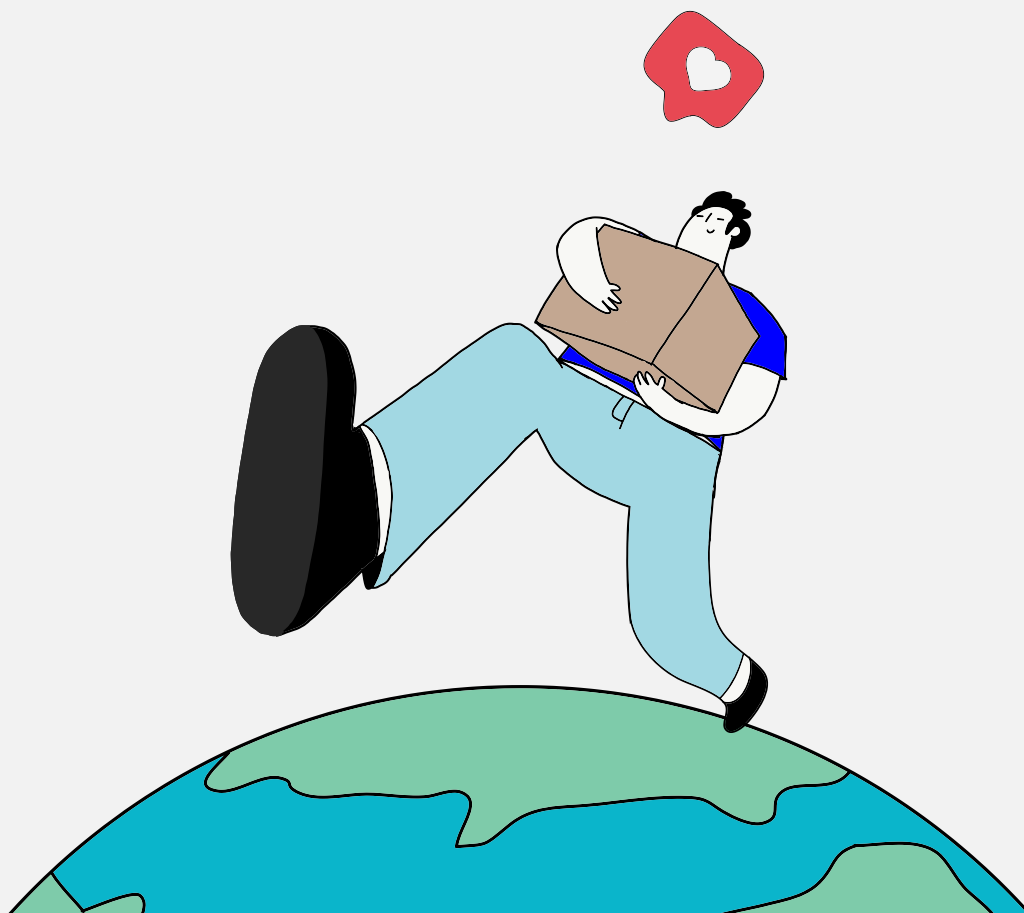
FOURTH
Implement Ecommerce Logistics Solutions

If you have one or more traditional retail outlets, then you might not have known this before, but **you already have a temporary warehouse**. You just need to adapt it for online fulfillment operations.

You might also be able to r**epurpose your outlets** as collection points for customers wishing to order online and collect in person. That's as long as you can apply appropriate hygiene, social distancing, and contactless payment practices, and limit public access to a single collection area.

If these options are impractical, or you want to decouple your ecommerce operations from the rest of your business, Shipa offers the solution to outsource your warehousing, fulfillment, and other ecommerce logistics requirements **FAST**. It's called Shipa Ecommerce—an integrated, digitally-driven ecommerce logistics technology and services suite.
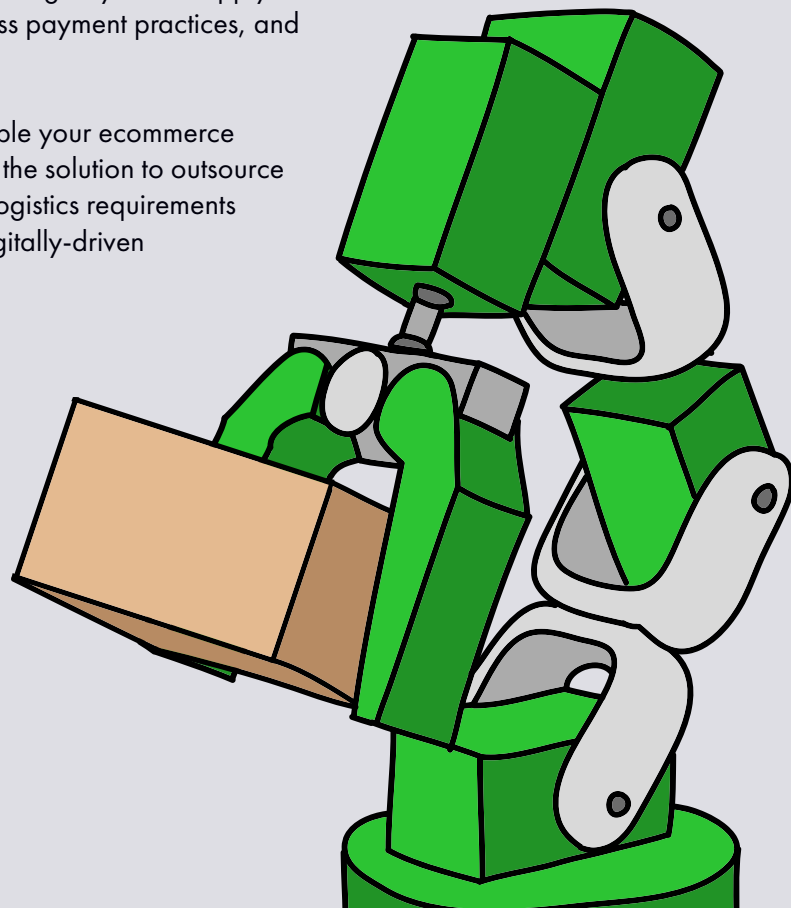
Outsource Your Ecommerce Fulfillment

Shipa Ecommerce gives online merchants access to some of the world's fastest-growing and most complex e-commerce markets. Our integrated **freight, fulfillment, delivery and returns** solutions, underpinned by **easy-to-use digital integration** via APIs and web interfaces, can be deployed in double-quick time, to get you operating as an ecommerce or omnichannel retailer.

We created our integrated, state of the art platform amid a backdrop of fast-growing, complex ecommerce markets, to provide parcel-level visibility for online merchants.

Technology is at the heart of Shipa Ecommerce. We serve you across multiple supply chain touchpoints, with a **partner-agnostic, neutral approach** to online retail fulfillment. Our services include:

- **First-mile** - including pick-up and fulfillment
- **Middle-mile** - including line-haul and freight
- **Last-mile** - including customs clearance and delivery services from your preferred provider

We can help you move your materials and products from the United States, Europe, or China to locations throughout the GCC, manage your fulfillment requirements in Dubai, and **connect you** to a wide range of last-mile delivery options.

A Turnkey Solution for a Fast Ecommerce Transition

Backed by Agility's global freight management network and capabilities, our platform and services help you to integrate partners across your ecommerce supply chain.

The payoff? You can serve your customers effectively by moving your products faster, more accurately, and at less cost.

We'll keep your goods moving across borders, even those closed or impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our one-touch solution provides you with end-to-end, integrated logistics services, and enables straightforward access to real-time visibility. Digital integration with your ExpandCart ecommerce store, via EDI, APIs, and dashboard interfaces is fast and easy—perfect for a rapid and painless transition from traditional to ecommerce retail.
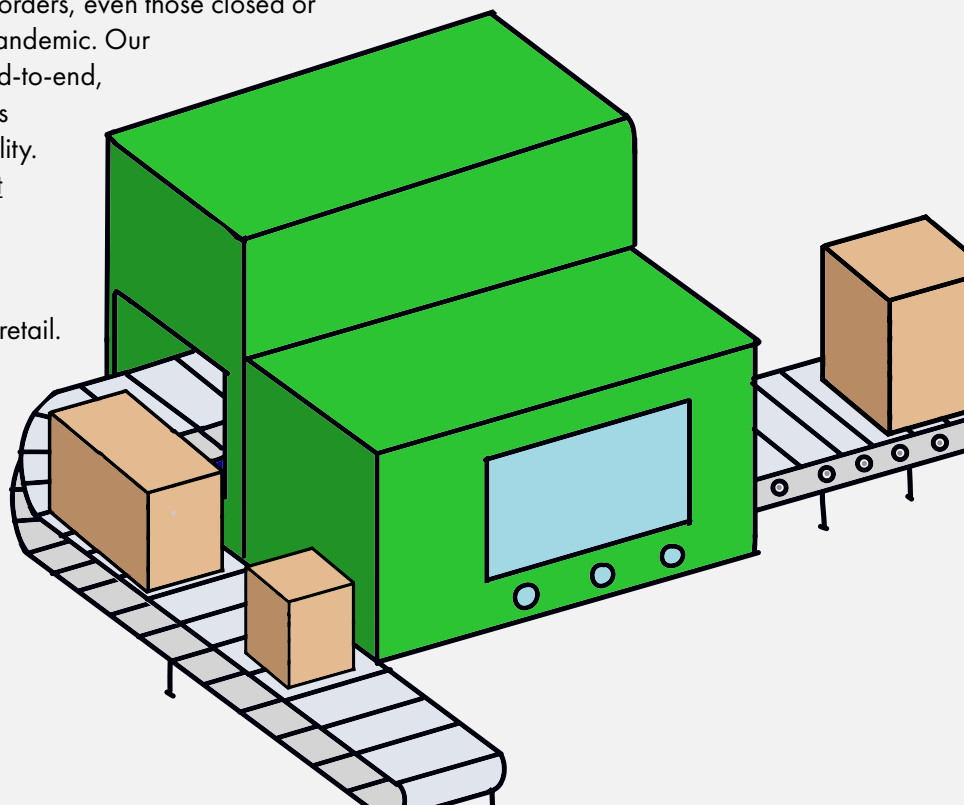
FIFTH

Leap Into Last-Mile Delivery

If your customers can't come to you, your products must go to them. A click and collect service from your physical retail outlet(s) may suit some of your customers, but not all. Then there is the possibility that tightening movement restrictions might remove that option from your retail arsenal. If that should be the case, **last-mile delivery** will become an **essential component** of your ecommerce setup.

Fortunately, Shipa Delivery is an ideal, fast-to-deploy solution for last-mile deliveries, locally and across the GCC. With on-demand, same-day, next-day, and cross-border service options available, you can start your delivery operations pronto. Not only can you begin operating quickly, but you can offer your customers **FAST** delivery too.
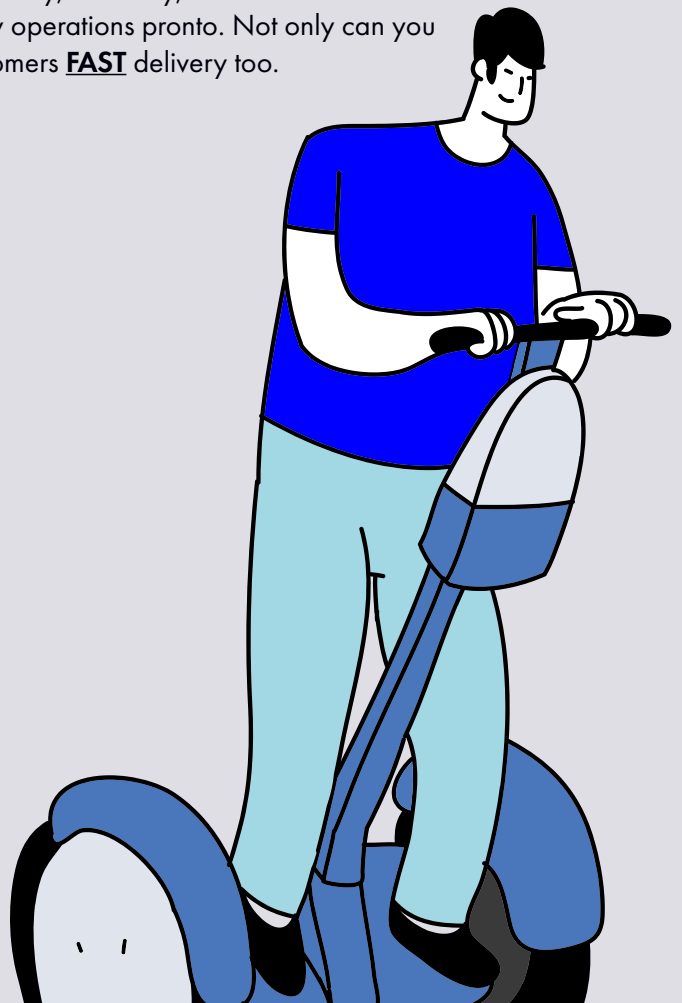
Shipa Delivery Does it All

For enterprises, Shipa Delivery provides last-mile peace of mind with a suite of digital tools, including APIs and dashboards. All solutions include real-time, turn-by-turn tracking and status notifications, offering **full visibility** of your last-mile deliveries—for you and your customers.

You can **connect your business effortlessly**, through APIs, to our powerful platform, or access an easy-to-use dashboard allowing you to upload your daily orders. Both solutions give you instant access to all the information necessary to steer your delivery operation—and will enable you to manage performance in real-time.

Customer Confidence Assured

Most MENA countries suffer from inadequate address systems that directly impact delivery speeds and failure rates. Shipa delivery's technology geocodes any delivery locations. Our drivers follow a turn-by-turn, map-based guidance system that takes them straight to your customers.

Better still, instead of waiting under lockdown with time to worry about their orders, your customers can track live delivery progress and receive regular SMS updates.

Zero Contact – Total Satisfaction

At the point of delivery, customer-confidence will remain unwavering, thanks to our new, built-for-COVID-19, zero-contact payment and proof-of-delivery (POD) solutions.

Your customers can **pay on delivery** with credit cards via a link sent by SMS to their phones. They can **sign for deliveries** on their own mobile devices or confirm receipt with a **unique delivery code**. There is no need for them to step outside their homes or offices except to retrieve packages from their doorsteps.

Our drivers remain present at the point of delivery until payment and POD are complete, while maintaining a distance of two or more meters from the customers' doors.

SIXTH
Ship Internationally Around the World
(If You Need To)

Of course, your business might be engaged in retailing to overseas companies, using the services of a **freight forwarder** to help you with international shipping. However, with traditional freight forwarders subject to COVID-19 disruption, an alternative, **online shipping solution** might better meet your needs right now.

Shipa Freight combines the agility of its proprietary, industry-leading technology platform for international freight forwarding, with the power of Agility, an industry-leading logistics provider. We can help you navigate the volatile, Coronavirus-impacted **global shipping** landscape with ease.

With no complicated contracts to set up and a simple online signup process, you can execute on your international orders **FAST**, and with significant reductions in complexity.
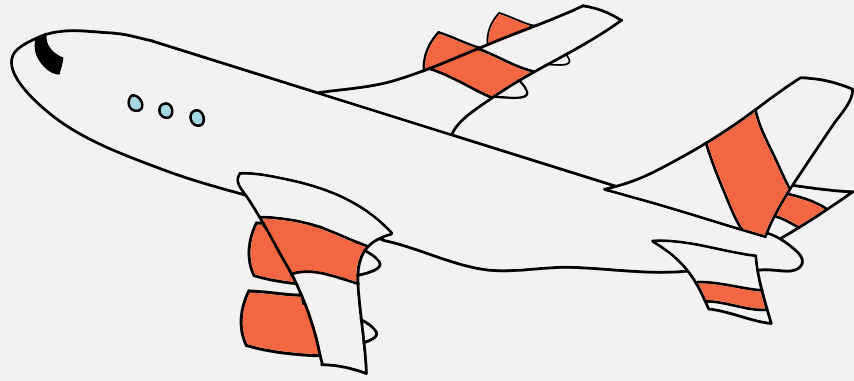
An Awesome Force for Your Freight

The harmonious pairing of Agility's global presence and Shipa Freight's digital environment provides capabilities unmatched in the freight-forwarding ecosystem. **Straightforward and seamless shipping** is assured with our online freight booking platform—which provides a 100% digital end-to-end experience.

With Shipa Freight and Agility, moving freight has never been this easy and secure. Even while COVID-19 rocks the waves and airways connecting nations, we'll keep your international retail business alive.

Our services include:

Air freight shipping with the world's most trusted carriers, ensuring the best prices available and exemplary on-time performance.

Ocean freight shipments aboard vessels from leading shipping lines for smooth sailing, even across the troubled waters of a locked-down world.

We make it easy for you to get started quickly and easily, with online freight payment by credit/debit card or wire transfer. You can also request business credit to streamline your business cash-flow with 15 and 30-day payment terms.
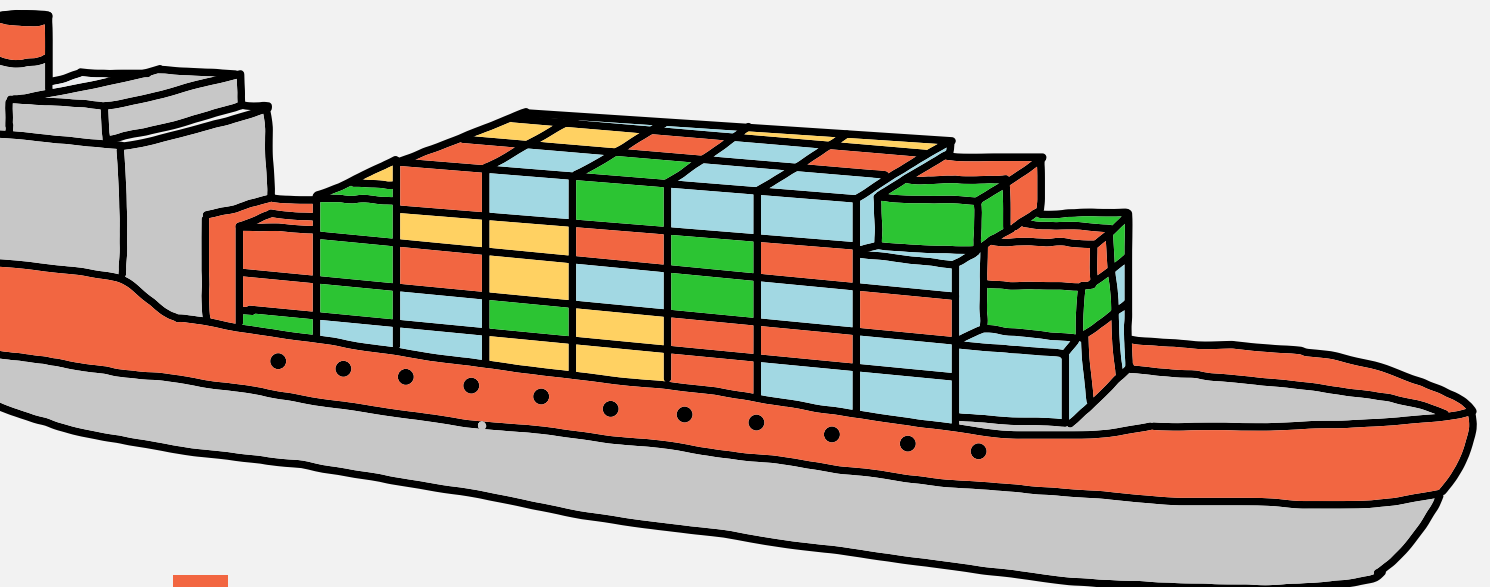
SEVENTH
Do Your Digital Marketing

So your brand, business, online store, and operations are all set up. Now you can get back in business to survive through the COVID-19 crisis, however long it may last. But do you just plan on survival, or will you reach for something more?

Ecommerce has proven an extremely profitable retail channel, so now you're in it, why not go all out to win it?

Whether you're in survival mode, or in the mood to improve, it would be a shame to have come this far, only to fall behind your competitors. A digital retailer needs **digital marketing** to survive and thrive. That's why we've compiled ten ecommerce marketing strategy ideas that you can try out to boost your online sales **FAST**.

Sound good? Then let's get going:

1. Use the Google Shopping Ad Platform

Google Shopping shows users products related to their Google searches—and when that user clicks on an item, they are ushered directly to the seller's site. When you use Google Shopping to narrow your audience, you may receive fewer clicks in total. At the same time, though, you should see a substantial rise in CTR and conversion rates. Direct integration with Google Shopping is one of the key benefits provided by the ExpandCart ecommerce platform.

An affordable way to capture top-of-funnel traffic is to use Google's Showcase Shopping Ads. It gives you the capability to group related products, helping to flag your brand to shoppers searching with less specific product terms.

2. Use Schema Markup on Your Pages

Be sure to apply schema markup to the backend of your store's product pages, as it will help search engines to index them accurately. It will also make it easier for search engines to interpret the information on a given page, providing the potential to boost your pages' rankings as well.

3. Optimize Your Store for Voice Search

As online shoppers increasingly switch on to voice search, optimizing your content for voice presents opportunities to capture more organic search engine traffic. While popular voice-search term analysis tools are not yet abundant, we believe SEO and content will begin to accommodate voice more comprehensively this year. If so, you'll have a perfect opportunity to utilize more long-tail keywords without needing to stuff them into your content.

4. Get Your Site up to Super Speed

You should try to ensure that your website is literally "up to speed." Like everything else we've discussed in this guide, your site should be **FAST**. Rapid loading and rendering will help to boost your site's click-through rates and overall visibility. Remember to add alt text to your product images to ensure they rank in product-related image searches. Your pictures should also link to the appropriate product pages, making it easy for site visitors to learn more or even make a purchase.

5. Make Plenty of Relevant Videos

Launch YouTube channels with videos to answer questions relevant to your audience. Some well-produced videos on your site can increase visitors' time-on-page considerably, perhaps adding a minute or more per page.

6. Gain Leverage with User Generated Content/Influencer Marketing

Encourage your social media followers to create content for you in exchange for an incentive. That will increase engagement, lift conversion rates, and generate trust across your digital community. Many shoppers place great store in influencer recommendations when making purchase decisions, so influencer marketing is a great way to create trustworthy content.

7. Be a Social Seller

While not a new concept, social selling has never been as essential as it is now, with business customers and consumers denied the ability to socialize and purchase in person. The tools to facilitate social selling are improving all the time, and the current crisis presents a natural opportunity to pursue excellence in this powerful retail technique?

8. Run Personalized Email Campaigns

Email marketing works—especially when you take the personalized approach. For example, you can incentivize signups to your customer loyalty scheme with lures, such as coupons and personal discounts. Pay attention to the tone of your emails. Use catchy subject lines, but avoid words associated with clickbait, which can trigger spam filters in your customers' email software.

9. Create Blog Posts

To survive in ecommerce, even in normal times, let alone right now, it's not enough to have an online store and products to sell. You'll also need to generate lots of content to stimulate organic interest in your brand and products.

Guest blogging, for instance, can be a cost-effective content strategy, especially while many people have more time on their hands than usual for browsing and reading. We recommend using a tool like MozBar to target sites with high domain authority, so that you can reach out to them for guest blogging opportunities.

10. Other Marketing Initiatives

In addition to the nine strategies above, the following activities will be critical, or valuable, in marketing your new online retail channel for maximum competitive advantage:

Critical Activities

- Customize all outreach and marketing emails with your brand colors and logo.
- Create compelling product descriptions for all items sold in your online store, and capture high-quality images of the products for display on your storefront.
- Understand and employ recovery techniques for when visitors abandon their online shopping carts.

Valuable Activities

- Engage in digital advertising on Facebook and Instagram.
- Launch an affiliate marketing program, enabling your store visitors to promote your products and earn commissions or discounts.

EIGHTH
Customer Service and Support

As a retailer, you probably won't need guidance from us concerning customer service and support. Still, **the way you provide that support** will need to change from the outset of your ecommerce transition.
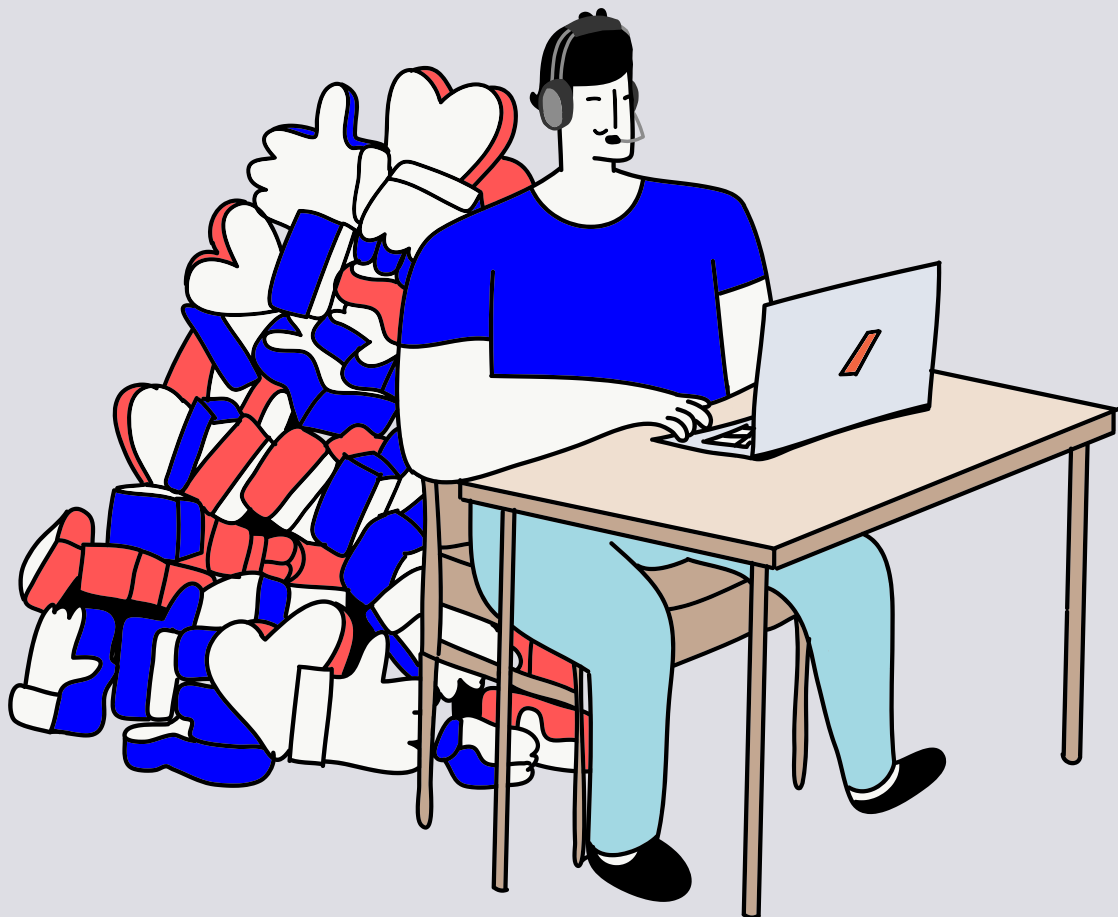
Ecommerce Customer Support During the COVID-19 Crisis

Here are a few things to keep in mind when creating and executing your telephone and online customer support strategy. They are especially relevant during the current period of social/movement restrictions. Furthermore, they will also help you ensure **outstanding customer service** and support into the longer-term future.

1. Customer support (CS) over audio channels doesn't provide the benefit of body language and gestures present in in-store interactions with customers. Your CS team will need to place increased emphasis on active listening and carefully scripted dialog to increase understanding and arrive at satisfactory resolutions.

2. Many shoppers and buyers are currently living under lockdown and presumably, have more idle time on their hands than usual. As a result, your business may receive a higher volume of communications than you would expect in normal times, and more of them will arise from anxiety and impatience.

3. As mentioned earlier in this guide, customers in the Middle East live with much frustration concerning delivery delays and lead time transparency—or the lack of it. Again, this frustration is only likely to be exacerbated by COVID-19-related movement restrictions and curfews.

Your customer service agents will need to be ready for this, and prepared to work patiently with agitated callers. It will make sense to implement a diverse range of communication channels for customers to interact with your support team. For example, in addition to phone and email, you might also wish to take advantage of live online chat and WhatsApp as communication tools.

Perhaps more importantly, though, customers' perceptions of your brand, and their satisfaction, will be influenced by the ability of **your partners in technology and logistics** to maintain a dependable performance at a time of disruption.

Customer Service and Support From Shipa

With a combination of ExpandCart for your ecommerce frontend, and Shipa's ecommerce, freight, and delivery solutions, your business will be in an excellent position to provide **stellar service**. That, in turn, will **minimize the burden** on your customer support resources—and if those resources are lacking, we can help you with that too.

Shipa can provide you with **FAST** access to a **turnkey customer service solution**. You can choose to establish and manage it at your premises, or let us host it at our facilities. We offer a range of options, including **dedicated or shared** customer service agents. Either way, your Shipa customer service team will be trained by you, and then you can leave the **management and execution** to us.

Catch Up With Your Customers - They're Waiting Online...

... But they can't wait forever, and if you can't serve them, established ecommerce competitors will. All the services and solutions covered in this brief guide are **FAST** to set up and implement. Used in concert, they will allow you to transition to an ecommerce sales and fulfillment operation within the next few days.

Once your online retail channel launches, our marketing tips will help you raise the profile of your online business and generate more customers and sales.

Naturally, that part will take a little time, so the sooner you get started, the earlier those marketing efforts can begin to pay off. We're here to help you all the way so that you can survive the COVID-19 crisis and thrive in ecommerce, as well as brick-and-mortar retail, when the world comes out the other side.

Sound Good? Then let's get started!

For more information or to sign up with ExpandCart, visit their website at www.expandcart.com.

To learn more about the Shipa family of tools and platforms; Shipa Ecommerce, Shipa Delivery, and Shipa Freight, visit us on our respective websites or go to www.shipa.com.

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