



Featured Shop: D for Dog

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Since 2004 **D for Dog** have been providing a dog forum, dog news, events, information and funnies plus an online shop. We have carefully handpicked a range of dog accessories and products that are gorgeous yet also practical. Our selection includes dog collars, leads and harnesses, dog beds and blankets, coats, ID tags, bowls, toys, gifts, health care items, pet urns, memorials and keepsakes.

What were your reasons for starting an online shop?

D for Dog was originally an information website and a place for dog lovers to share pictures of their pooches and make online friends. We all seemed to have the same difficulties when it came to finding great dog products with good recommendations from other dog lovers. I decided to start selling products I believed in, so that customers could be safe in the knowledge that if we sell it, it really does come highly recommended. I dislike dog products that are clearly designed for the owner rather than for the dog. Frivolous dog accessories are not our style. At D for Dog we believe it is possible to find sensible, well made products that do their job whilst still being stylish... and we make sure we find them.



What were your reasons for choosing Bluepark?

The first 8 years of D for Dog were quite difficult. I never managed to find e-commerce software that did everything I felt a cart should do and also that was reliable, bug free and easy for everyone to use, both the customer and the backend. I tried 3 other major branded shopping carts over those 8 years and it was always a case of having to live with certain things. The site started to get really big, with lots of information as well as the shop.

I was paying for ecommerce software, a private server for all the html pages, another bit of software for the forum, another for the newsletter and also the blog. It was getting complicated. With Bluepark I have been able to collate everything except the forum, which is hosted elsewhere. On Bluepark I have the shop, all the articles, news and funnies, the blog and also our newsletters.

Did you design your site yourself or did you use an external designer?

I designed it myself. My site relies heavily on one of the standard Bluepark templates. I didn't have to do anything very special. I started with a template I liked, picked my own colour scheme, uploaded my own logo and some other images and that was just about it. I kept it clean and simple.

How did you find the process of setting up your site on Bluepark?

I found it incredibly easy, especially as I am used to cart software and also website design in general. But with Bluepark you don't need to have had any background in those areas. It really is very intuitive. But what really blew me away was the support you get. Firstly the Bluepark team answer everything and anything so quickly and thoroughly, and there are no extra charges for the amazing level of support you get. And secondly the Bluepark forum is so helpful and friendly too. With other carts, if I have become stumped over something I have typically waited days or weeks for any kind of help. With Bluepark you ask, you get the help and you can move on.

I was initially wary about plumping for a hosted cart. I had my own server and was used to hosting my own ecommerce software. I have no idea what I was so worried about. Ditching my server and letting someone else worry about reliability, software updates and so on has proved to be a real weight off my mind.

Have you seen your online business grow since moving?

Absolutely. It was the best move I ever made. I can't imagine not using Bluepark now. The software has been designed with a lot of thought. Bluepark sites are so well designed both from a customer's point of view and also for search engines to pick up. If Google updates its 'best practice' or things change in the internet world, Bluepark are right there making sure all of our ecommerce sites are up to date.

Bluepark offers a gift voucher facility which I set up from the start and have really enjoyed. Quite a few people have been buying them and we can also use them as prizes too. Bluepark also has a built in feedback collection facility, which you can set up to email your customers after a purchase, requesting feedback. People pay review sites a lot of money for that kind of service.

Do you have any advice for anyone starting an online business?

Well, stating the obvious, I wish I had found Bluepark sooner. But don't take my word for it. My advice, when looking for ecommerce software, is not to believe their own hype of what they can do and how great they are. Instead go to their forums and see what the users of the software are actually saying amongst themselves. If the forum is restricted to members only you really have to ask yourself why. If you go to the Bluepark forum you will see lots of very useful discussions and helpful posts rather than disgruntled users pulling their hair out. That speaks volumes.

When D for Dog started out, internet shopping was still in its infancy but the competition now is fierce. Your site and/or ethics need to stand out. Decide what makes your business special and make sure you emphasise those qualities.



For example, D for Dog is a small business and I am able to deal personally with all issues relating to customer care. Our customer care is second to none and I make sure it stays that way. Then to stand out further I made a move away from high street products and started sourcing more unique items from independent craftspeople. There is so much talent out there but their websites never get seen because the big boys are dominating page one of the search engines. So our business has moved more in that direction now, bringing home grown talent to the fore. I love working with all our talented suppliers and it means D for Dog customers always have something beautifully made and special to buy.

And lastly...

Running your own online shop is actually very involved. Working for yourself is great fun and very rewarding but it can be a challenge. You have to be prepared to put in a lot of hours and keep up to date with industry and internet changes too. If you are not passionate about what you are doing it will probably flounder. Anyone can make an online shop. Software like Bluepark does all the hard work for you but success or fail comes from what you do next. 'Build it and they will come' does not apply to the internet. Selling products and dealing with customers is only about one third of your job. The rest of your effort will need to be geared towards getting your site known and getting lots of relevant visitors. That doesn't come easily but go slowly and sensibly to build a natural audience and you can't go far wrong.