

Strategies for Scaling E-Commerce Startups with Limited Resources: A Case Study of Amazon and TikTok E-Commerce Training

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Keywords: E-commerce Entrepreneurship; Limited Resources; Expansion Strategy; Supply Chain Management

Abstract: This article examines growth strategies employed by e-commerce startups operating under resource constraints. Using Amazon and TikTok's e-commerce education as case studies, the research explores the fundamental activities, primary challenges, and coping mechanisms of e-commerce startups from their inception to growth phase. The initial stage emphasizes the importance of market analysis and positioning, product selection, supply chain management, and resource allocation. During the growth stage, the paper examines critical elements such as brand establishment, market expansion, multi-channel sales implementation, user experience enhancement, and customer relationship management. It proposes effective expansion strategies for resource-constrained environments, encompassing efficient operations, strategic collaborations, and judicious application of technological tools. Additionally, the article explores ethical dilemmas and competitive dynamics in e-commerce entrepreneurship, suggesting strategies such as establishing ethical standards, enhancing compliance management, and promoting corporate social responsibility. The successful growth trajectories of Amazon and TikTok serve as crucial guides for other e-commerce startups.

1. Introduction

As the Internet gains popularity and e-commerce evolves rapidly, an increasing number of entrepreneurs are entering the e-commerce sector. Startups in this field often face resource constraints initially, and the challenge of efficiently utilizing these limited resources for rapid business growth has emerged as a critical concern. This study aims to explore growth strategies for resource-constrained e-commerce startups by thoroughly examining the effective e-commerce training instances of Amazon and TikTok, offering valuable guidance for entrepreneurs.

2. The Initial Stage And Challenges Of E-commerce Entrepreneurship

2.1 Core Tasks In The Initial Stage

At the beginning of e-commerce entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs face various challenges that directly affect their prospects for growth and survival. Market research and positioning are the first

steps in developing a business strategy. Understanding market demands, the competitive landscape, and consumer behavior forms the basis for effective strategic planning. Through in-depth market analysis, entrepreneurs can identify their target customers and suitable products. Entrepreneurs should strategically allocate their resources based on market opportunities to help them stand out in a competitive marketplace.

Product selection and supply chain management are essential in the early stages. Product selection should not only cater to market needs but also consider the entrepreneur's resource limitations. Given limited resources, entrepreneurs are advised to avoid product expansion without careful assessment. Instead, they should concentrate on a targeted selection of high-potential items to ensure quality and positive market response. Supply chain management covers all stages, from supplier selection to logistics. Effective supply chain management helps lower costs, ensure optimal inventory levels, and expedite product distribution, thereby enhancing market competitiveness.

Effective resource management is crucial for the smooth operation of a startup. Businesses experiencing resource restrictions must allocate available resources efficiently, which is critical for promoting both employee productivity and operational efficiency [1]. Entrepreneurs should formulate a detailed budget, strategically allocate funds, and focus investments in key areas that directly support their company's survival and growth.

2.2 Major challenges

First, in the E business sector, resource-constrained startups encounter challenges that affect not only their market adaptability but also their potential for growth. The primary barrier for many businesses is the availability of financial resources. E-commerce startups require monetary support for platform development, inventory management, marketing, and customer service. However, many struggle to secure adequate initial funding, which leaves them vulnerable to established competitors[2].

Second, developing effective market entry strategies is another challenge. Startups entering the e-commerce world must confront established entities with market dominance as well as a growing number of new competitors. Consequently, startups need to adopt innovative approaches regarding market positioning, product pricing, brand development, and other aspects to attract and retain customers. The complexity of the market makes it difficult to effectively develop and implement these strategies. Startups will need to have a deep understanding of the market and flexibly adapt their strategies to manage competition[3].

Additionally, the complexity of platform policies poses a significant challenge. Startups, whether operating on Amazon, TikTok or other platforms, must comply with a range of platform policies.[4] These policies cover product listing, content review, transaction processing, customer assessment, and various other elements. Startups often make mistakes due to frequent updates, particularly when they are unfamiliar with these policies. As a result, they may face consequences from the platform, damage the company's reputation and potentially result in significant financial setbacks. It's essential for startups to allocate adequate time to understand and comply with platform policies, ensuring full operational compliance with platform guidelines.

Last, attracting and retaining customers is a long term challenge for businesses. In the realm of e-commerce, the cost of acquiring new customers often escalates, requiring startups to make more effort in securing their initial client base due to limited brand recognition and consumer trust. However, acquiring customers is only the first step, maintaining customer loyalty and lowering churn rates remains an ongoing challenge. Startups must focus on not only delivering high-quality goods and services, but also building strong customer relationships through tailored effective customer relationship management.

2.3 Case study: Starting strategies of Amazon and Tiktok startups

The initial Amazon's and TikTok's e-commerce successes are rooted in their distinct experiences, offering valuable insights for future market entrants. Amazon, a global leader in e-commerce, demonstrates a strategy of gradually building market presence by strategically positioning itself and consistently expanding its product range, even with limited resources at its early stages.

Founded in 1994, Amazon initially concentrated on online book sales. Choosing books as the entry point was influenced by prevailing market needs and logistical advantages of that era. Due to their durability, uniformity, and ease of sourcing and storage, books were well-suited for mail-order sales, making them a practical choice during a time when internet usage was not yet popular [5]. Through its user-friendly web interface and streamlined purchasing process, Amazon was able to secure an initial online user base and establish brand recognition gradually. As the company grew, Amazon expanded its product range beyond books to include music, electronics, and various consumer goods, effectively transitioning from a single-product retailer to a diversified business.

TikTok, initially launched as a short video-sharing platform, has embarked on a distinct journey by evolving into an integrated social media and e-commerce service. TikTok rapidly attracted substantial user base by leveraging highly efficient content creation and distribution system in its early stages. The platform's unique algorithms played a crucial role not only in enhancing user interaction but also in providing targeted marketing opportunities for brands and products [6]. With a significant user base in place, TikTok pursued e-commerce revenue streams using strategies such as live streaming and integrated short video advertisements. Through the integration of entertainment and retail activities, TikTok has successfully attracted young shoppers and empowered startups and individual sellers in achieving business success on this platform. TikTok's entry into e-commerce relied on its core competencies in user engagement and content algorithms, which allowed for a rapid and streamlined expansion without considerable extra resources.

These examples demonstrate that success in the initial stages depends on selecting an appropriate entry point, achieving precise market positioning, and gradual expansion of products and services. These cases show that startups, even with limited resources, can successfully develop unique market niche and achieve sustained growth through innovative strategies and effective execution. Whether it's Amazon's transition from a single-retailer to a full marketplace, or TikTok's expansion from a content-based recreational social media platform to a hybrid entertainment and e-commerce platform, they demonstrate the different yet similarly effective approaches that startups can employ to develop under resource limitations.

3. Expansion strategy under limited resources

3.1 Key factors in the expansion phase

During the growth period, it becomes essential for them to scale operations beyond initial stages. At this stage, building a compelling brand and expanding market reach are crucial for continued business success. A brand represents a company's image and value, holding significant strategic importance in a competitive market. To achieve long-term competitive success, businesses must actively and consistently promote and market their brand [7]. At this stage, companies should focus on establishing a unique brand identity that distinguishes them from their market rivals. Market expansion strategies must be tailored to suit different target markets, and it's important for businesses to ensure the brand's successful entry into these new markets.

Employing a multi-channel sales approach is important for increasing sales and enhancing customer engagement during expansion. In e-commerce, it is challenging to satisfy diverse market needs through a single sales channel. Businesses should proactively create varied sales channels to

ensure sales diversity. This approach helps companies expand their client base while also enhancing both customer conversion rate and loyalty. Business engaged in multi-channel sales must ensure consistent branding and continuous customer engagement across different channels for efficient resource management.

During the expansion period, managing strong customer relationships and ensuring a positive user experience becomes essential. With increasing competition in the market, the high-quality customer experience has become a vital factor to a business's success. Enhancing user experience boosts customer satisfaction and loyalty [8], which leads to increased word-of-mouth referrals and more repeat purchases. Businesses should focus on improving the customer shopping experience, including but not limited to product listing quality, payment convenience, logistics delivery, and after-sales support, with a focus on customer-oriented enhancement in these domains. It is important for businesses to build lasting customer relationships through comprehensive data analysis, personalized services, and tailored product recommendations.

3.2 Effective expansion strategies when resources are limited

E-commerce startups with limited resources must adopt effective growth tactics for sustainable growth. Therefore, businesses must optimize their operational strategies and efficiently utilize technological tools to maximize their limited resources.

Operational efficiency is crucial when resources are limited. Optimized processes help businesses improve performance while reducing costs. Companies can achieve this by optimizing inventory control, enhancing demand forecasting, and strengthening supplier relationships. Additionally, companies should concentrate on targeted marketing by using data analysis to understand customer behaviors, thereby allowing for more efficient advertising and minimizing marketing costs.

Amazon's expansion strategy relied heavily on enhancing its logistics capabilities by establishing a comprehensive warehousing and distribution system, which allowed Amazon scaled operations while minimizing costs associated with third-party logistics. The Fulfilled by Amazon (FBA) program demonstrates this efficient approach to resource allocation, enabling small and medium sellers to use Amazon's logistics infrastructure without significant investment in their own supply chains [9].

Businesses with limited resources can leverage strategic collaboration as a critical growth strategy. Such collaborations allow shared resources, mutual benefits, and expanded market reach. Businesses can cultivate markets and enhance productivity by forming strategic partnerships with supply chain partners, industry peers and service providers. TikTok's collaboration with content creators and influencers illustrates effective use of limited resources. TikTok leveraged its network of popular content creators to expand its e-commerce venue, incentivizing influencers to promote products during live streams. This strategy allows TikTok to rapidly convert content consumers to online shoppers without incurring high marketing costs [10].

Efficient use of technological tools is essential in resource-constrained situations. As digitisation and smart technologies advance rapidly, e-commerce businesses can employ various tech solutions to enhance their operational efficiency, improve customer interactions, and reduce costs. TikTok's recommendation algorithm strategically promotes e-commerce products, minimizing advertising expenses while maximizing the potential for user conversion [11]. Similarly, Amazon uses A9 algorithm to optimize its content recommendations to customers, thus enhancing both conversion rates and customer satisfaction.

3.3 Case study: Expansion strategies of Amazon and Tiktok

Amazon and TikTok, as leading global e-commerce platforms, have adopted unique growth strategies tailored to diverse markets and resource environments, contributing to notable achievements. It can offer crucial guidance for emerging e-commerce businesses by studying their approaches.

Amazon's growth strategy is remarkable, particularly due to its focus on self-established logistics networks and global expansion. At the beginning, it partnered with major carriers such as UPS, FedEx, and USPS. However, the company kept receiving numerous customer complaints related to delayed deliveries, damaged, or missing packages, which led to significant financial losses to Amazon. These issues, combined with high logistics costs and limited control over service quality, pushed Amazon to consider a different strategy [12,13].

Consequently, Amazon realized the necessity to establish its own extensive warehousing and distribution infrastructure. Although this endeavor was capital-intensive, it was seen as a strategic move aimed at higher service quality and reduced costs in the long run. Despite incurring substantial losses over the years, Amazon succeeded in enhancing logistics efficiency, eliminating reliance on third parties. Today, Prime members in North America benefit from one-day delivery or two-day delivery for a wide range of products, something unattainable in the past [12,13]. This ongoing logistics focus on optimization has given Amazon a significant competitive edge in various markets. The in-house logistics system has also greatly enhanced order fulfillment efficiency, lowered operational costs, improved customer satisfaction, and thereby further strengthened Amazon's overall competitiveness.

TikTok's growth strategy focuses on building a network of content creators and developing targeted marketing tactics. As a social media hub concentrated on short videos powered by a sophisticated content recommendation algorithm, TikTok has successfully managed to attract both amateur contributors and top-tier influencers/Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) from established platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and even extending to celebrities from various industries, political figures such as current French President Emmanuel Macron and former U.S. President Donald Trump. This diverse creator community significantly enhances the platform's content richness and user engagement [14].

In its e-commerce expansion, TikTok effectively leveraged its technological infrastructure and extensive user base, demonstrating efficient use of available resources. By converting its audience into active e-commerce consumers, TikTok has achieved high user conversion rates through precise algorithmic recommendations and short-video-based product showcases. Furthermore, TikTok has enhanced the shopping experience by introducing innovative methods, such as live-streaming e-commerce, which has led to improved sales conversion rates and increased monetization capability of the platform [15].

Both platforms have demonstrated impressive growth strategies. Amazon has effectively expanded its operations and diversified revenue streams through enhanced in-house logistics network and global market presence, whereas TikTok has accomplished effective user transformation and rapid platform expansion through content ecosystem development and targeted marketing. For e-commerce startups, these achievements offer valuable guidance to reference. Startups can adopt suitable growth approaches and tactics based on their real-world situations and establish a unique growth path in a competitive environment.

4. Ethical issues and business competition

4.1 Internal moral issues

For E business startups that come with limited resources, ethical dilemmas often come from the conflicts between the need to succeed and moral duties. The internal challenges can take on different forms, threatening the company's long term sustainability.

One major ethical issue is the temptation to manipulate key performance metrics. Due to heavy workload, low salaries and limited career growth, employees may consider to adopt unethical activities, such as inflating order numbers, posting fake positive reviews, or copying successful competitors' product listings. Although these may bring short term gains, these actions compromise the platform's integrity and harm consumer trust, which could threaten the platform's future success.

In the long run, unethical behavior can severely damage a brand's credibility and lead to a loss of consumer trust [16]. Employees inflating order numbers do not reflect true customer demand, leading to inaccurate assessments and misguided business decisions. Promoting products with fake positive reviews can lead to disappointed customers, consequently an increase in negative ratings, returns, and lower customer satisfaction. Replicating competitors can result in legal challenges, weaken company's credibility and reputation.

Due to a lack of resources, startups may have to prioritize operational efficiency over ethics. This focus on improving processes such as inventory and logistics management might come at the cost of supplier relations or employee welfare [17]. Startups must balance operational efficiency with maintaining ethical standards to promote long-term sustainability.

Customer data management is another significant ethical challenge for businesses with limited capital and technological capabilities. These businesses may find it challenging to adopt advanced data security measures, potentially leaving customer information vulnerable to breaches. Such failures not only expose the business to legal issues, but also weaken consumer trust, an essential element for any successful venture [18]. Startups must manage data usage and security, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations while optimizing customer experience through data-driven analysis.

4.2 Moral problems in external competition

In the e-commerce sector, the growing external competition on platforms such as Amazon and TikTok brings both business and ethical dilemmas. The key ones include fair competition among businesses, the potential for market manipulation, and unethical practices used to gain an edge over competitors.

Competing fairly with rivals is an essential ethical challenge faced by e-commerce startups. Some companies use unethical approaches, such as posting negative reviews to damage competitors' listing, placing fake orders and accusing competitors of "order brushing" to have their accounts penalized. Companies may also place numerous fake orders and return them to drive up the return and defect rates of competitors, along with their costs for dealing with return orders. Other methods include taking advantage of platform loopholes or registering trademarks for successful products before the rightful owners can [19].

A major form of market manipulation includes gaining control over critical resources, such as the supply chain, or intentionally changing market dynamics. Certain major sellers on Amazon have been known to exploit their market dominance to stockpile inventory to raise prices and limit smaller competitors [20]. Such behavior damages fair competition, limits opportunities for startups, and restricts overall innovation in the industry.

Order brushing is a common unethical approach in competitive markets. Sellers make fake

orders to create sales performance for higher listing rankings and favourable algorithmic recommendations. This approach has caused serious market manipulation issues on major platforms, with roughly 10% of reviews are considered fake [21]. They are either too positive for the seller's products or negative for their competitors. In addition, order brushing affects about 2%-4% of total sales on some platforms, creating an unfair advantages and misleading customers about the popularity and credibility of certain products.

Sometimes, ethical challenges come up between businesses and customers too. It has been reported that customers abuse platform policies for their personal gain. For example, some threaten to leave negative reviews to get refunds without returning items, or they abuse return policies by swapping real products with rubbish ones [22]. This type of thing is more common on large e-commerce platforms that implement customer-focused after-sales policies. Moreover, misleading advertisements, fake promotions, and deceptive discounting practices are commonly used by startups to stay competitive.

4.3 Strategies for dealing with moral problems

In order to effectively manage the ethical challenges faced by e-commerce startups, it is essential to first recognize the real obstacles these businesses face, particularly their struggles with limited resources and market visibility. Startups with new accounts on platforms that lack prior sales records often find it difficult to gain traffic and receive their first orders. This difficulty could push businesses to adopt unethical practices for short term gains. However, the effectively implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies can help reduce this risk [23]. It is crucial for platforms to find new ways to fairly balance helping new accounts gain initial visibility while protecting the interests of established businesses. This might include setting up 'sandbox' environments for new sellers, implementing gradual exposure algorithms, or introducing programs that match new sellers with experienced ones.

Another critical method for startups is to set up clear ethical standards and guidelines to avoid engaging in unethical practices. Businesses should develop an ethical framework that covers employee conduct, customer interactions, and fair competition, and then effectively communicate these standards to all employees. It is found that companies with clear ethical guidelines experience 45% fewer incidents of unethical conduct compared to those without such programs in place [24].

Improving compliance management is another essential strategy. Utilizing compliance management tools can assist in monitoring adherence to platform policies, thereby minimizing the risk of violations. Furthermore, regular training sessions are recommended to keep stakeholders informed about changes in platform policies and legal regulations.

Lastly, embracing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provides a long-term approach to addressing moral dilemmas. Through CSR initiatives, startups improve their brand image and build stronger customer loyalty.

5. Training and student development

5.1 Design and implementation of training courses

With the rapid growth of e-commerce, the careful design of training programs is essential to help students succeed, especially when launching businesses on platforms such as Amazon and TikTok. Each platform has unique operational model and policies requiring students to acquire specialized knowledge and skills.

To effectively train individuals for adventures on Amazon, educational programs must cover product selection, supply chain management, pricing strategies, logistics, and customer service.

Metrics like Amazon's Best Sellers Rank (BSR) can effectively help identify product niches with favorable demand and acceptable level of competition [25]. A BSR between 1,000 and 5,000 is generally preferred as it represents a favorable balance between demand and competition. It is found that strategically using high-volume keywords that align with Amazon's A9 algorithm into product titles could increase listing visibility by up to 35% [26]. These tactics represent best practices for maximizing marketing reach while minimizing campaign costs in competitive e-commerce marketplaces.

Training programs for TikTok should focus on developing skills in content creation, video production, and live sales strategies. It is demonstrated that TikTok videos which captured audience attention within the first 3 seconds showed a 60% higher watch-through rate [27]. Training should include these strategies, along with effective hashtag use, compelling hooks and interaction methods, to help students make the most of TikTok's content promotion algorithms for e-business success.

The implementation of training programs should emphasize combination of theoretical concepts with hands-on application. Students should engage directly with various platforms to gain valuable practical experience, particularly those they study. For instance, Amazon training could involve exercises on listing optimization and inventory management, while TikTok training should include creative content generation exercise. Frequent curriculum updates are necessary to keep up with continuous changes in e-commerce strategies and technologies [28].

5.2 Entrepreneurship and development of students

The most effective way to evaluate the success of training programs is to assess whether students can flexibly apply the knowledge they gained to build successful businesses. While E-business offers significant rewards, it also comes with unexpected challenges and risks. Therefore, students must be equipped with both foundational knowledge and practical insights for the real-world situations.

Amazon's marketplace offers a valuable training ground for aspiring entrepreneurs to gain practical experience and sharpen their skills. For example, students can benefit from learning to use tools like Jungle Scout and Helium 10 to help identify products with good market potential by analyzing metrics such as demand (minimum 200 units sold per month) and competition (fewer than 50 reviews on the first page) [29]. Such data-driven tools help students make informed decisions about product selection and marketing strategies. However, students need to go beyond this foundational framework, adapt and refine it to develop personalized frameworks for their entrepreneurial ventures in this field.

TikTok's platform, on the other hand, provides unique opportunities for entrepreneurial growth through its nature of content-driven engagement. The recommendation algorithm of the application is designed to promote content demonstrating high engagement metrics, such as average watch time, likes, comments, favorites and content referrals. Students must learn to craft compelling content by incorporating techniques such as rapid transitions, visually appealing elements, and striking opening hooks, that capture audience attention within the first five seconds, thereby maximizing their visibility and benefiting from algorithmic recommendations. By engaging with multiple content types—such as interactive live streams, product demonstrations, and user tests—students can continuously refine their approaches and adapt to the evolving preferences of their audience [30].

The ability to manage finances effectively is another critical aspect of entrepreneurship that should be integrated into training programs. Dropshipping is a business model that can significantly reduce upfront costs by up to 80% compared to more traditional retail models, making it an attractive option for resource-constrained startups. It is noted that adopting a pre-order strategy can lower initial financial commitments by up to 60%, allowing for a more efficient allocation of funds

and less financial burden[31]. These financial management skills are crucial for ensuring the sustainability of business. For student entrepreneurs on platforms like Shopify may find that free tools such as Google Analytics offers valuable traffic insights comparable to paid services, potentially saving them thousands in expenses.

5.3 The impact of training on e-commerce ecology

E-commerce education does more than prepare individuals for entrepreneurship; it contributes to the broader e-commerce ecosystem as well by fostering innovation, standardizing practices, and promoting global business expansion.

Training programs on platforms like Amazon and TikTok have contributed to platform growth by producing numerous skilled sellers, further supporting their global expansion and contributing to sustainability efforts [32]. For instance, Amazon's Seller University has facilitated the entry of over 450,000 small businesses into e-commerce, contributing to a 25% year-over-year increase in the variety of products available on the platform. Similarly, TikTok's Creator Marketplace has cultivated a diverse network of over 750,000 creators globally, leading to a 140% increase in content variety between 2021 and 2023.

Traning programs have also played a crucial role in standardizing best practices across e-commerce platforms. They emphasize aspects such as ethical behavior, inventory management, and marketing efficiency, which helps create a more competitive and fair industry environment. The impact of e-commerce training on global expansion is evident in Alibaba's Tmall Global University, which has facilitated the entry of over 20,000 international brands into the Chinese market, with cross-border sales increasing by 40% within the first year of participation.

With that being said above, E-Business training programs can help new entrepreneurs make the most of limited resources available. This leads to a more competitive and innovative landscape.

6. Conclusion

This paper evaluates the growth strategies of e-commerce startups with limited resources, from launch to expansion. It offers a comprehensive analysis of key elements including market analysis and positioning, product selection and supply chain management, financial management and multi-channel sales approach, presenting a series of growth strategies for entrepreneurs in the field.

The study analyzes the ethical challenges and competitive aspects of e-commerce entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of establishing ethical standards and enhancing compliance processes. The case studies of Amazon and TikTok also illustrate the power of tailored strategies and continuous adaptation in varied market and resource conditions, offering valuable insights. Amazon's focus on data-driven decision making, coupled with TikTok's emphasis on content creation and user engagement, serves as a significant indication that suggests startups to adapt their business models to align with the unique features of each platform for effective operation across different e-commerce sectors.

The exploration of training and development strategies provides insights into cultivating the new e-commerce entrepreneurs, contributing to the sustainable growth of the e-commerce business. The impact of e-commerce education extends beyond individual success, shaping the entire ecosystem by driving innovation, standardizing best practices, and facilitating cross-border business on a global scale.

As the e-commerce landscape continues to evolve, the role of comprehensive and platform-specific training becomes increasingly crucial in fostering new successful digital entrepreneurs. The insights presented in this paper offer a roadmap for E-business startups with limited resources in a competitive marketplace. Future research could focus on developing more

tailored strategies and exploring how emerging technologies like AI might reshape the future of digital entrepreneurship.

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