Online courses are more popular today than ever before. The eLearning market is now worth more than $200 billion, and it’s expected to grow at a rate of over 8 percent annually over the coming years. This isn’t surprising — individuals and organizations have found that there’s no better way to master a topic or skill from anywhere while learning at your own pace. Given the recent shift to remote work, organizations need to move from in-person, instructor-led training to an online-first approach.

Creating and selling your own online course is a great way to realize extra income and grow your brand by sharing your expertise with others. But to stand out and succeed in this competitive space, you need to take a strategic approach that delivers results. You must craft your courses to expertly target your desired audience, build a sales funnel that delivers consistent results, and make use of reporting to continually refine and improve your offerings.

Let’s dive deeper into the benefits of selling courses online and what you can do to ensure your course is a success.
Why Sell Courses Online?

There are few better ways to earn money online than by creating a quality course.

The financial upside is enormous, and after getting a course off the ground, it serves as a source of continuous income that requires relatively little effort to maintain.

Selling an online course is also an excellent way to generate leads for your business. Whether you’re a software developer, business service provider, or work in any other customer-focused industry, an online course can help you position yourself as an authoritative figure in your field and build trust with your target audience. A prospective customer is more likely to choose you over a competitor if they know that you’ve created a compelling, informative online course.

Last but not least, companies across the globe are using online courses to train and inform customers. Teaching customers how to make the most of your products and services is one of the most effective ways to boost their satisfaction. You can provide courses together with relevant purchases, offer them as paid add-ons, and even market them to interested external audiences. Any courses you create can also be used as helpful resources when onboarding or training employees.
Choose Your Topic

When it comes to selecting a topic for your online course, the sky's the limit. Consider these tips when making this critical decision:

- Evaluate your skills and knowledge. What expertise do you have to share? Take a close look at your career, hobbies, and interests to identify something you know or can do that others may want to learn. If you're a digital marketer, for instance, and you’ve had a lot of success with Facebook ads, you may be a Facebook ad expert.

- Determine what people value. Yes, you can create an online course on how to juggle with your eyes closed. But the chance that others will find it valuable is slim to none. So think about what solutions you can offer to improve lives or address common problems. If you’re unsure of whether others would be interested in a certain topic, poll your friends and family as well as your social network.

- Create a unique hook. Your favorite TV show or movie probably begins with an interesting scene that makes you want to keep watching so that you can find out what happens next. Your online course should include a similar hook or promise of what your students can expect if they take your course. This shouldn't be an overview of your credentials and personal history; instead, distill what your course offers into a compelling value proposition that will appeal to your target audience.

- Follow your passion. Creating a top-notch online course takes work, so it's important you choose a topic you’re passionate about. If you focus on something that doesn’t matter to you, it will be difficult — if not impossible — to engage potential students. To uncover your passion, think about what you like to do for fun or what you really enjoy about your job.

- Don’t overlook popularity. If you have a few different topics in mind, start with the one you believe will resonate with the most people. Look at podcasts, keywords, and other courses to gauge what's most popular. Finding a niche that you excel in is a great strategy, but you should ensure that it’s a niche that provides room to grow and has an existing audience.
Craft Your Course Content

Your audience is looking for original, useful content that effectively teaches them what they expect to learn. Spending the time and effort needed to create, structure, and refine your course's content is critical. You can tackle this task yourself, but the process becomes much easier if you engage an experienced team to assist you in developing the perfect online course.

Planning

The key question to ask yourself when creating your content is simple: what insight do you want to communicate? Everything flows from the core lesson you’re trying to impart and the results your students will get from it. If you have a compelling insight and focus your entire course on communicating it, you’ll capture your students’ attention from beginning to end. Once you’ve zeroed in on your insight, think about the information needed to understand it, and use that to determine what your course needs to contain.

Beyond the topics your course will cover, you should consider how to organize it to keep the information digestible and students interested. Break your course into concise, sensible chunks that won’t overwhelm learners, and group these components as appropriate. You may need multiple organizational levels depending on how complicated your course is.

Your guiding principle should be to keep the course as lean as possible. Remove extraneous steps or details that aren’t necessary for communicating your key insight.

Next, create an outline for your course that provides details on what you will cover in each part. An online course on Facebook advertising might have modules like “Designing the ads,” “Setting up the ads,” and “Tracking the ads.” This will save you a significant amount of time and result in higher quality content.

Make sure your outline also incorporates ways to check and test students’ progress, like checklists, worksheets, and quizzes. A quiz with multiple choice questions at the end of each module gives your students confidence in what they’ve learned and ensures they’re well-prepared for what’s ahead. Resources like checklists will help your students retain the knowledge they’ve gained from your course.

Media

Consider what types of media you’d like to include for your course. Media includes all of the text, audio, and visual assets that comprise your course, from worksheets to instructional videos to screencasts. You should try to incorporate multiple types of media to keep learners interested and engaged. The media you want to create determines what tools you’ll need for making your course, like a camera or a computer with a webcam for incorporating video other than screencasts.
Vet Your Course

You should thoroughly review and fine tune your course before pushing it live. This will make your final product stronger and help build a list of prospective students you can email and eventually convert to paying customers.

Try finding your target audience on social media outlets like Facebook and LinkedIn and ask them relevant questions. For example, you may ask “What would you like to learn in a course about X?” or “What are your greatest challenges?” These questions provide insight into what your audience is looking for so you can ensure you’re delivering real value.

You may also want to offer a pilot course to a small group of students to test out your course, fix any unforeseen glitches, and ensure it’s 100 percent ready for the public before you officially launch it. To start a pilot course, offer your course for free — or at a discount — for a limited time period. In exchange for the good deal they’re getting, ask that students provide you with detailed feedback on your modules and their overall experience with your course.

Look at how your competitors are structuring their courses as well. Do they focus on video instruction, or are their courses text-based? What topics do they cover? Their ideas are sure to get your creative juices flowing and help you improve your own offering. Additionally, you can use the information you learn to differentiate your course and beat the competition. For instance, if you’re creating a course on Facebook ads and find that competing courses lack good information about advertising on other platforms like Twitter and Instagram, you may want to offer a bonus section that discusses them.
Where Should You Host Your Course?

Once you’ve finished polishing your course, you have to decide how to make it available to your prospective students. There are a variety of hosting options available — self-hosting, using a course marketplace, or implementing a learning management system — and choosing the right one can make the difference between financial success and failure.

Self-Hosted

A self-hosted course lives on your own website. The greatest advantage to this is that you have complete control over everything, including payment methods and refund policies. And since your customers are your own, you’ll enjoy full access to metrics and pocket all the profits.

Keep in mind, however, that with more control comes more responsibility. So you’re on the hook for website setup, data analysis, marketing and branding, and overhead costs like web hosting and security. If you’re busy with other endeavors, self-hosting your online course can turn into a time-consuming hassle.

Course Marketplace

Udemy is one example of a course marketplace with thousands upon thousands of online courses and millions of enrolled students. By hosting your course on a marketplace, you start receiving exposure without paying a monthly fee, in most cases.

While a course marketplace may seem like a convenient home for your course, there are a few drawbacks you should consider. First, you won’t gain access to the names and email addresses of your students, as this information will belong to the marketplace. You’ll also have less freedom because you’ll be required to follow the marketplace’s particular rules and compete with many other people who are trying to sell a similar course on the exact same platform. Finally, a significant percentage of your profits will be paid to the course marketplace, and the marketplace can control and restrict what you can charge for your course.
Learning Management System (LMS)

A learning management system (LMS) is a software application specifically designed for the delivery and management of online courses. With an LMS, you can maintain control over your courses without tackling the daunting task of hosting and delivering them yourself. LMSs make selling courses easy with a wide array of powerful features in a single package:

- **eCommerce capabilities.** The robust eCommerce capabilities of an LMS are some of its most valuable. Students can browse your course catalog and make purchases using a built-in shopping cart that's integrated with popular payment gateways like PayPal. LMSs also let you easily use discount codes for marketing and external tracking codes to collect traffic metrics using powerful tools like Google Analytics.

- **Reporting.** The best LMSs provide ad hoc reporting capabilities that allow you to pull up the exact data you need at the click of a button. You can generate reports on everything from course completion rates to how students have rated specific courses and then use this information to guide future efforts.

- **Course catalogs.** You can use an LMS to create a searchable course catalog organized as you see fit. Look for an LMS that doesn’t limit the number of catalogs or sub-catalogs you can create and that lets you adjust privacy settings on a per-catalog basis. Students can self-enroll and even join online communities you create relevant to the courses they’re interested in.

- **Learning automation.** You should be able to spend your time on creating and marketing your courses, not administering them. By implementing rules regarding who should be enrolled in certain courses and what permissions those students should receive, an LMS saves you a huge amount of management overhead.

- **Unique user experience.** Tailor each student’s user experience with customizable pages and dashboards so they can easily find what they need when they need it.

- **Course completion certificates.** You can use an LMS to create custom course completion certificates to award to learners.

- **Multilingual support.** The top LMSs let you localize for multiple languages across the platform, from the user interface to system data so you can go international from the start.

- **Support for specification standards.** LMSs feature compatibility with the most popular specification standards, like SCORM and xAPI, for easy interoperability with authoring tools and third party course libraries.

While some LMSs can be expensive, there are options available that provide all the features and benefits described above at an affordable price.
Pricing Your Course

How you price your course can determine whether it succeeds or fails. Carefully consider the following before you decide what to charge.

Determine Your Pricing Model

Take a look at the pricing models of similar courses in the same space and think carefully about which model makes the most sense for your course:

- **Recurring fees**: Students will be charged on a recurring basis — typically every month — so they can enjoy the new content you continually add to your courses. This is not a good option if you don’t plan on updating your offerings with fresh content frequently.

- **One-time fees**: With this model, your students pay an initial fee to access your course whenever they’d like. If you don’t plan on changing your course often, this model may be a good fit.

Regardless of which model you choose, pricing tiers can allow you to attract students with a variety of budgets. You may have a lower priced package for your basic modules and a higher priced option that includes bonus modules and extra worksheets. This provides your customers with options while still protecting the value of your course.

Adjusting your prices to real time market changes can be challenging, so consider adopting an LMS that includes demand-based pricing that dynamically adjusts to fluctuations.
Consider the Purpose of Your Course

You should also consider the purpose of your course. Are you looking to maximize profits or leads? If it’s the latter, you may want to provide more affordable options to reach as broad an audience as possible. Every student who learns more about you and your expertise is a prospective customer.

Include Unique Features

To justify a higher price point, consider including some exceptional value-adds that students won’t be able to resist. You need something that demonstrates to students that your course isn’t just offering the same modules as your competitors at a greater cost. You could provide a 30-minute, one-on-one call for each student, or an eBook you’ve written that contains relevant information beyond anything available in similar courses. Get creative and go the extra mile to show your course is one of a kind.

Don’t Underprice

Although your target audience should be able to afford your course, take care that you don’t underprice it. After all, you’ve worked hard to create it and you deserve to be compensated fairly. A cheap course can also degrade its perceived value and make others believe that you’re not truly an expert in the topic you’ve chosen.

Test to Find the Ideal Price Point

Even after taking the steps above, you’ll have to do some tweaking to find the perfect price point for your course. Test your initial pricing model out for a few months and evaluate the results. For instance, say that you start selling your course for $400 and ten people purchase it. You’ll earn $4,000 in revenue. If you change the price to $600 and four people purchase it, you’ll pocket $2,400. In this case, the first price of $400 is what you should use going forward. Perform this type of testing for about six months so you can eventually find the sweet spot.
Creating Your Sales Page

A professional, creative sales page is a necessity. It must describe your course and convince the reader to purchase it. While you create your sales page, put yourself in a prospective buyer’s shoes and think about what they’d want to read. What will get them excited and ready to begin your course? Remember that your goal is to pique their interest and convert them.

There are a few key components of any good sales page:

- You need a great headline that relates to the benefits of your course to draw readers in, an explanation of the important need your course addresses, and a convincing conclusion that shows why your course is the answer to that need.
- You should customize your page with branding, text, and images that differentiate your course from others.
- Add a registration form that captures the information of anyone who wants to enroll in your course.
- Set up email notifications for important events, like when a visitor to your site converts.

If your current platform doesn’t provide these capabilities, look for an LMS that does.
Create a Sales Funnel

Now that you’ve built a great sales page, you need to funnel your target audience to it. While there is no one sales funnel that guarantees results, using email marketing is one of the most affordable and effective ways to create a funnel that continually generates conversions.

Bring in the Traffic

The first step is to collect email addresses. Try creating appealing, free content like a template, how-to guide, or eBook that requires visitors to provide their contact information before they can access it. You can also provide access to a complimentary worksheet, newsletter, or video tutorial. While you can create an asset like this from scratch, consider whether you can repurpose content you’ve already created. For example, you can take some particularly enticing information from your course or a blog post and turn it into a gated PDF. Be sure to include content on the page that gates the asset to sell visitors on downloading it.

In addition to gathering email addresses using enticing gated assets, you can create a blog that you regularly update with content related to the topic of your course to generate interest. You can promote your course as a call to action at the end of relevant blog posts or elsewhere on the page. And you can also link to your gated assets in appropriate parts of the post. Blogging on topics related to your course can help you build authority and prove that you’re an expert.

Close the Deal

Once you’ve established a healthy email list, send out regular email blasts to prospective students. Don’t flood their inboxes with sales emails immediately. Instead, take the soft sell approach and provide more valuable free content, like blog posts. This builds a relationship with them and proves your value over time.

After you’ve delivered several emails with free content, then you can consider promotional emails that encourage them to purchase your course. Try offering your email subscribers a limited time discount or an offer that isn’t available to others. You can also offer upsells to existing customers based on their demonstrated interests, and even target them more specifically in response to individual feedback they’ve provided on your courses.
Optimize for SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO) can bring significant organic traffic to your site. To implement an effective SEO strategy, you’ll need to figure out what keywords will draw prospective students to your course and build quality content addressing the needs those keywords represent. An LMS allows you to customize your pages to include the relevant keywords and the content needed to rank organically for the most valuable terms.

Invest in Advertising

Advertising represents an additional financial investment, but it can be well worth it to promote a gated asset, blog post, or your course itself. Consider whether you can find your target audience using a platform like Facebook or Google Ads. While Google Ads helps you find new students through relevant keywords, Facebook helps students find you through their interests and online behavior. Although Google Adwords and Facebook tend to be the most popular ad platforms, you may also consider placing ads on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube if your target audience spends time on them.

Use Social Media

Beyond paid advertising, putting in the work to build an organic following on social media can create a reliable audience for your courses and allow you to gain better insight on what that audience actually wants.

To get started, you’ll need to create a presence on the social media platforms your target audience favors and make it easy for them to interact with you by connecting those platforms to your course pages and other assets like blog posts. Then start to promote free content on your site across your chosen social media channels. You can mix in direct promotions for your courses from time to time, but the best way to build organic engagement is by demonstrating your value, not by delivering sales pitches. You can also use an LMS to incorporate branded links to social media sites or external forums and wikis in your courses to keep existing learners engaged.
Survey students after they've completed your modules to get valuable feedback on whether they're satisfied and what else they'd like to learn. Ask them questions such as:

- How would you rate the course on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being “I loved it” and 1 being “I was disappointed”)? Please explain your rating.
- Is there any information you believe the course lacked?
- Would you recommend this course to others who would like to learn more about X?
- How have you benefited from the course?

After you get their feedback, use it to refine your course so it truly connects with your target audience. If most of your students don’t like a particular worksheet, revise or remove it. If a particular lesson is confusing, rework it. In the event your students believe something was missing from your course, add additional training or resources to meet that need.

You should also measure key performance indicators (KPIs) like average time to completion or average assessment scores for your courses. Accessing and generating reports on this information is easiest with an LMS.

Remember that your course is never set in stone and that you’ll likely need to update it to meet the ever-evolving needs of your students. Satisfied students are the main factor in your course’s success, so you need to do what it takes to exceed their expectations.
The Best Way to Start Selling Courses Online

Selling courses online can do wonders for your business and finances, but using the wrong platform can lead to lost profits, wasted time, and immense frustration. That’s why you need an LMS like Inquisiq with features that address every challenge of selling courses online. It’s easy for all your learners to use, makes promoting, branding, and reporting a snap, and comes with a robust set of eCommerce capabilities and integrations. The experienced team behind Inquisiq can even help you craft a course that’s sure to delight your students.

Claim your free trial of Inquisiq to start on the path to selling your online course today.