

Building resilience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic



COVID-19 guide & action checklist



For medium-sized factories & managers

# Going online: Establishing an online presence

This guide helps factory managers and owners establish an online presence in order to promote their factory and to facilitate communication with buyers.

## Getting started



Includes:  
Platform  
examples,  
checklist

### In this guide:

- ▶ Going digital in the pandemic
- ▶ The basics of being online
- ▶ Recommendations on how to establish an online presence



## 1. Why going digital is key during the COVID-19 pandemic




While having an online presence has become more important for enterprises that would like to be ahead of their competition, digitalisation of businesses has seen a rapid acceleration with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this time of crisis, when physical meetings and travel are not possible, factories must find new ways to interact with buyers and identify sales channels in order to keep production going.

Creating an online presence can help your factory attract new customers.



Creating an online presence can help your factory become more visible, and can help you communicate with existing buyers as well as attract new customers. Even though setting up an online presence might seem daunting at first, many simple solutions that do not require you to invest a great deal of money or to hire staff exist.

To summarize, going digital can help your factory:

-  Become more visible to industry stakeholders
-  Attract new customers
-  Receive new orders in a fast, structured manner



## 2. The basics of being online

In today's digitalized world, there are many different platforms and websites to consider when establishing your online presence. As a factory manager, you need to consider from the outset which are the right channel(s) for you. The way to determine this is by considering why you want to establish an online presence, who you are targeting (e.g. buyers), and what resources (both budget and time) are available to you.

There are two ways to establish an online presence and to reach your target audience; the direct approach and the indirect approach:

- ▶ **Direct approach:** You set up your own website and online store.
  - ▶ **Advantages**



- Direct control of your sales
- Promote your own brand
- ▶ **Disadvantages**
  - Staff needs to maintain the website
  - High initial investment for set up
- ▶ **Indirect approach:** You set up the website and online store through a third-party platform. Examples are platforms such as TradeWheel, Global Sources, Alibaba or Amazon Marketplaces.
  - ▶ **Advantages**
    - Low initial investment
    - No maintenance efforts for website
  - ▶ **Disadvantages**
    - Commission payments to third-party seller
    - You cannot promote your own company in the same way

If you are just starting to establish an online presence for your factory, the indirect approach might be an easier first step, based on its low initial investment and the ease in managing your online profile.



### 3. Getting ready for action

Now that we've reviewed the key benefits of establishing an online presence and discussed two different approaches for doing so, the following steps can help you establish your factory online.



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## 6 steps factories can take to create an online presence

01

### Set your goals

Be clear about your goals and timeline for going online.

02

### Understand your target audience

Define and analyse your target audience.

03

### Find the right platform

Make an informed decision on which platform to choose.

04

### Create your profile on the platform

Set up and complete your profile with relevant and simple information.

05

### Find new customers

Get in touch with your target audience.

06

### Promote your online presence

Leverage your online presence and reach out to your customers.





# Putting the measures in action: Factory checklist

## 1. Set your goals


Before taking any action, you need to be clear about what you would like to achieve with your online presence.

Action	Ease of implementation	Timeline	Check <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Think about your motivation for establishing an online presence for your factory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Do you want to reach new buyers and diversify your customer base?</li> <li>▶ Do you want to shift your interactions with existing buyers gradually online?</li> <li>▶ Do you want to use your online presence to also get in touch with other industry stakeholders, such as other factories, suppliers or associations?</li> </ul>	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Consider what resources you have available to establish an online presence for your factory. Use this information when deciding on the right channel for your factory to establish an online presence (step 3).</p> <p>Questions to ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What budget is available for this purpose? The cost of establishing an online presence can range from being free or costing thousands of dollars.</li> <li>▶ What is your timeframe? Would you like to create an online profile for your business within the next few days or are you willing to undertake a process that may take longer (ranging from several weeks to several months)?</li> <li>▶ How online savvy are you and your staff? Would your sales manager be able to handle customers' inquiries sent to you digitally?</li> </ul>	✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 2. Understand your target audience

Next, you should define your target audience. By defining who you are trying to make your factory visible for online, you can also understand their online behaviour. To reach your target audience, an understanding of their online behaviour is essential. You need to analyse how your audience finds new suppliers and business contacts online, what characteristics they are looking for in suppliers and which platforms they primarily use.




Action	Ease of implementation	Timeline	Check <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Decide who your target audience is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Is it your existing buyers? If so, are your customers typically other domestic factories? Or do you have an export license and do you typically sell to international buyers?</li> <li>▶ Do you want to target other industry stakeholders? For example, agents or supplier factories.</li> </ul> <p>Keep in mind that you may need a different approach to reach different audiences. Therefore, choose one target audience (for example domestic factories) to start with.</p>	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>

<p>Develop an understanding of your target audience by asking yourself the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What is the profile of your target audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Size of business</li> <li>▶ Product offering</li> <li>▶ Geographical location</li> <li>▶ Preferred communication style</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ How does your target audience typically find new suppliers?</li> <li>▶ What online platforms does your target audience use?</li> </ul> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> To answer these questions, you could research online and talk to contacts who already have an online presence (if you know any).</p>	✓	 Short-term / Mid-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### 3. Find the right platform


Eventually, you need to decide which is the right platform for you. This should be an informed decision in which you consider information that you collected in the previous two steps. Since using the indirect approach is an easier option if you are just starting your online presence, the following actions are designed to help you determine the right platform for your factory.

**Useful tip:** Use the list of suggested platforms and evaluate them with the help of the checklist in Appendix A.

Action	Ease of implementation	Timeline	Check ✓
<p>Start by reviewing the list with suggested platforms in Appendix A. You should also approach your industry association or other factories about what kind of platforms they know of and would recommend to you.</p> <p>Prepare a list of platforms that could be good options for you.</p> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> You can use the list provided in Appendix A for this purpose.</p>	✓✓✓	 Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Evaluate the different platform options based on criteria that are relevant to you. Criteria could include (if you want to, you can remove/add criteria):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What is popular among your target audience</li> <li>▶ Ease of setting up, managing and maintaining your profile</li> <li>▶ Costs / commission of the platform suited to your budget</li> <li>▶ Ability to customize/ edit the profile for your factory</li> <li>▶ Ability to upload photos and price details of your products</li> <li>▶ Ability to send direct messages to factories/ buyers</li> <li>▶ Ability to sell online</li> <li>▶ Availability of search tool to find other profiles</li> </ul> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> You can use the checklist provided in Appendix A for this purpose.</p>	✓✓✓	 Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Based on your evaluation, decide which platform is best for you to register your factory on. You can even register on several platforms if you have the time and resources to maintain an online presence on each.</p>	✓✓	 Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 4. Create your profile on the platform

Now that you have chosen your platform, you can set up your profile. Having a complete and informative profile will increase the likelihood of reaching your target audience.

Action	Ease of implementation	Timeline	Check ✓
<p>Familiarize yourself with the platform and its functionalities.</p> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> Some platforms offer webinars or explanatory videos for guidance.</p>	✓✓✓	 Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>

<p>Look at profiles of other factories with similar products to understand the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What information is needed to complete your profile?</li> <li>▶ How do these factories present themselves with text and photos?</li> </ul> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> Appendix B shows an example of a factory profile.</p>	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reach out to other factories who have successfully launched their profiles on the platform. Ask them for tips when setting up your profile.	✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write a text about your factory. Convey the most important information about your factory, including: the products you produce, your production and sales volume and the number of employees. It will be an added bonus if you can include information on the advantages of doing business with your company.	✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
The text should be transparent, positive and simple so that a reader will gain a good impression of your factory.			
Add information on any available certificates and sustainability/ compliance practices of your factory.	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Add your contact details such as phone number, email or skype ID so that interested companies can reach you.	✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
During the pandemic, potential customers may also find information on your COVID-19 response useful. Write a short paragraph on the measures your factory has taken to address COVID-19 and the health and safety of your workers. Add this to the description of your factory.	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take photos of your factory and your products. Make sure that your photos are well-lit, have the right perspective and clearly show what you want to portray.	✓✓	»»»»» Short-term / Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remember what you display conveys the quality of your company and its products. You should avoid uploading cheap or low-quality images.			

## 5. Find new customers

After creating your profile on the platform, you should explore ways to get in touch with your target audience. On some platforms you have the option to reach out to other users directly, other platforms only allow factories to be contacted by buyers.

Action	Ease of implementation	Timeline	Check ✓
<b>If the platform allows you to approach other users directly:</b>			
Start searching for your target audience on the platform and create a list of users that you want to contact.	✓✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write a short text you can use to approach potential buyers/ factories. The text should include:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Why you are contacting the buyer/ factory</li> <li>▶ What products you produce and what makes you stand out from other factories</li> <li>▶ Your approach to sustainability and employment conditions</li> <li>▶ What you would like to explore with the buyer/ factory</li> <li>▶ Your contact details</li> </ul>	✓✓	»»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact the users on your list. <b>Use the direct messages cautiously:</b> Do not send multiple messages without replies from your contacts and try not to be too forceful.	✓	»»»»» Short-term / Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow-up with the buyers/ factories you contacted after one week.	✓	»»»»»	


		Short-term / Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If the platform allows factories to be contacted by buyers:</b>			
<p>If only buyers can contact you on the platform, then you need to optimize your profile to appear in search results of your target audience. To optimize your profile, analyse what buyers/ factories are looking for. Note keywords and look at the way the text is written in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The profiles of other buyers/ factories</li> <li>▶ Order description pages</li> <li>▶ Profiles of other successful factories</li> </ul> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> For some platforms you can also pay to appear at the top of search results lists. While this can create good results, it can also be very costly.</p>	✓✓✓	»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Adjust your profile according to your findings and analyse whether you receive more contact requests from buyers. If not, think of how to optimize your profile again to increase your chances of being approached.</p> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> Talk to other factories who have successfully set up their profile and ask them for tips. If possible, you could also contact your existing buyers and ask what look for on such platforms.</p>	✓✓	»»»» Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Promote your online presence</b>			
<p>Setting up your profile on the platform will not be enough to find new customers and to improve communications with your buyers. To achieve your goals, you will need to leverage and promote your online presence by informing your buyers and suppliers about your profile.</p>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Ease of implementation</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Check</b> ✓
<p>After creating your profile on the online platform, write an email to your business contacts such as buyers, suppliers and peer-factories to inform them about your online presence.</p> <p><b>Useful tip:</b> You can also consider using a QR code with the link to your profile. This code can also be used on your stationary.</p>	✓✓✓	»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Share your new online profile on your social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn).	✓✓✓	»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you are a member of an industry association, ask them to add a link to your platform profile on their website.	✓✓✓	»» Short-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adjust your email signature as well as your business cards to include the link to your profile on the online platform.	✓✓	»»»» Short-term / Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider setting up a profile of your company on other online platforms to increase your reach.	✓✓	»»»» Medium-term	<input type="checkbox"/>





# Appendix B: Example of a factory online profile

**EASTMAN EXPORTS** **Eastman Exports Global Clothing Pvt Ltd** A member of FOURSOURCE



### About us

## Eastman Exports Global Clothing Pvt Ltd

Tirupur, Portugal

One of the leading Apparel manufacturers in India, at the forefront of design, innovation and full-scale production specializing in producing knitwear, high-end apparel and accessories of the highest quality to high-end global fashion brands and boutiques across the globe. Eastman Exports is perfectly positioned to stay on top of the latest trends in the ever-changing world of fashion, with a commitment to provide exceptional products which meet the high expectations of our customers.

### Key Facts

Employees	Revenue / Year	Pieces / Year
<b>200</b>	<b>\$4,500,000</b>	<b>600,000</b>


### Reference Customers

Gucci   Hugo Boss   Montblanc   Patagonia   zara   Hermes   FCUK   Holister

H&M Zara

### Production & export countries

Production countries   Main export countries   Production & export countries





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For more guides and resources to help you navigate the global COVID-19 pandemic, visit:

▶ [ilo.org/covid19](https://ilo.org/covid19)

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**DECENT WORK**

A better world starts here.