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The Shopify Store Launch Playbook

From idea to first sales: a practical, step-by-step guide for small business owners and beginners

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Introduction

This playbook is for anyone who wants to start selling online with Shopify but does not know where to begin. You might be a shop owner in Lahore who wants to take orders beyond your street, a home-based seller in Karachi who has outgrown Instagram DMs, or a first-time founder anywhere in the world who wants to test a product idea without building a website from scratch.

You do not need to be technical. You do need to be willing to make decisions, do some simple arithmetic, and test ideas before spending heavily on them.

By the end of this playbook you will be able to:

- Choose a niche and validate a product before ordering large amounts of stock
- Set up a Shopify store with the right settings, theme and essential pages
- Write product listings that answer buyer questions and build trust
- Configure payments and shipping, including Cash on Delivery (COD) for Pakistan and options for international buyers
- Keep your app list lean so your store stays fast and affordable
- Run a pre-launch check and take your first marketing steps toward real sales

Shopify regularly updates its admin, plans and features. Menu names and options may look slightly different when you read this, so always check the platform's current settings as you follow along.

Chapter 1: Choosing a Niche and Validating Your Product

Most new stores fail not because of a bad website but because of a product nobody urgently wants, or a price that leaves no profit. Spend real time here before you touch Shopify.

What a good niche looks like

A niche is a specific group of buyers with a specific need. "Clothing" is not a niche. "Modest activewear for women who exercise at home" is a niche. A good niche usually has:

- **A clear buyer** you can describe in one sentence
- **A problem or desire** the buyer already spends money on
- **Room for a margin** after product cost, shipping, packaging and marketing
- **Products that ship well** without breaking, melting or being too heavy
- **Repeat or add-on potential**, so one customer can buy more than once

Five quick validation tests

Before you commit, run these simple tests. None of them cost much.

1. **Search demand check.** Type your product into Google, Daraz, Amazon or a marketplace relevant to your target country. Are people already selling it? Some competition is good; it proves demand. Zero sellers can mean zero buyers.
2. **Social listening.** Search Facebook groups, Instagram hashtags, TikTok and Reddit for the problem your product solves. Note the words buyers use. These words will later become your product titles and ad hooks.
3. **Competitor review mining.** Read three-star and four-star reviews of similar products. They reveal what buyers like and what disappoints them. Your listing can directly address those disappointments.
4. **Friends-and-network pre-sale.** Share a photo and a price on WhatsApp status or with a small group. Ask, "Would you pay this today?" Interest is useful, but an actual advance payment or confirmed order is far stronger evidence.
5. **Small test order.** Order a small quantity from your supplier. Check quality, packaging and delivery time yourself before promising anything to customers.

Do the margin maths first

Every product must pass a simple profit test. Imagine you want to sell a leather wallet in Pakistan:

- Selling price: Rs 2,500
- Product cost from supplier: Rs 900
- Packaging: Rs 100
- Courier charge (paid by you): Rs 250
- COD handling fee charged by courier: Rs 50
- Estimated marketing cost per order: Rs 600

Total cost per order = 900 + 100 + 250 + 50 + 600 = Rs 1,900. Profit per order = 2,500 − 1,900 = Rs 600.

That looks fine, but COD orders can be refused at the door. If you assume, for this example, that 1 in 5 COD orders is returned, you lose the courier charge on that order and often pay return shipping too. Build that risk into your numbers. A product that only makes Rs 100 profit on paper will usually lose money in real life.

> Tip: As a rough working rule, look for products where the selling price is at least three times the product cost. This leaves room for shipping, returns and advertising. It is a guide, not a law; check your own numbers.

Validation checklist

☐ I can describe my buyer in one sentence

☐ I have found existing sellers or active discussions about this product

☐ I have read competitor reviews and noted common complaints

☐ My margin calculation includes shipping, packaging, returns and marketing

☐ I have received and inspected a sample

Chapter 2: Setting Up Your Shopify Store

With a validated product, you are ready to build. Shopify usually offers a free trial, so you can set up most of the store before paying for a plan.

Creating your account and choosing a plan

1. Go to shopify.com and start a trial with a business email address.
2. Enter your store name. This creates a default address like yourstore.myshopify.com. You can add a custom domain later.
3. Answer the setup questions honestly; they only customise your dashboard.
4. When the trial ends, pick the smallest plan that covers your needs. Most new stores do not need an advanced plan. Compare current plans and transaction fees on Shopify's pricing page, as these change.

Core settings to configure on day one

Open **Settings** in the Shopify admin and work through these:

- **Store details:** business name, contact email, phone number and address. Customers and payment providers see some of this.
- **Store currency:** choose the currency you will mainly sell in, such as PKR for a Pakistan-focused store or USD for a US-focused store. Changing it later can be messy once orders exist.
- **Time zone and units:** set your local time zone and the weight unit you will use for shipping.
- **Order ID format:** you can add a short prefix, which helps when talking to couriers and customers.
- **Staff accounts:** if someone helps you, give them their own login with only the permissions they need. Never share your owner password.

Getting a custom domain

A domain like yourbrand.com or yourbrand.pk looks more trustworthy than a myshopify address.

1. Choose a short, easy-to-spell name with no hyphens if possible.
2. Buy it through Shopify, or from a domain registrar and connect it using Shopify's domain settings.
3. Set it as your primary domain so all traffic redirects there.
4. Confirm the SSL certificate shows as active. This gives you the padlock in the browser.

Chapter 3: Picking and Customising Your Theme

Your theme controls how your store looks. The goal is not to win design awards. The goal is to help a visitor understand what you sell, trust you, and buy quickly, especially on a phone.

Free theme or paid theme?

Shopify's free themes are well built, fast and regularly updated. For a first store, a free theme is usually enough. A paid theme can make sense later if you need a specific layout or feature that would otherwise require several apps.

When comparing themes, check:

- How it looks on mobile, since many visitors will be on phones
- Whether product pages support multiple images, variants and video
- Whether it has built-in sections you need, such as FAQs, testimonials blocks and trust badges
- How recently it was updated

Customising without overdoing it

Open **Online Store > Themes > Customize**. Keep these principles in mind:

- **Use two fonts at most** and two or three brand colours.
- **Make the main button colour stand out** from everything else on the page.
- **Put your strongest message at the top** of the homepage: what you sell and why it is better, in one line.
- **Use real photos** of your product wherever possible. Clear, well-lit photos on a plain background often work better than heavily edited images.
- **Avoid auto-playing sliders** with many slides. Visitors rarely wait for them.

A simple homepage structure

1. Announcement bar (for example, "Free delivery on orders above Rs 3,000" or "Cash on Delivery available")
2. Hero section with headline, short subheadline and a "Shop Now" button
3. Featured collection or best-selling products
4. Three short benefit points (quality, delivery, returns)
5. A short brand story or "Why choose us" section
6. Customer reviews section, added only once you have genuine reviews

7. FAQ block covering delivery, payment and returns
8. Footer with policies, contact details and social links

Chapter 4: Essential Pages That Build Trust

New stores have no reputation yet. Clear pages and policies do a lot of the trust-building work for you, and some payment providers and ad platforms expect them.

The pages every store needs

- **About Us:** who you are, why you started, and what you stand for. Keep it honest and specific.
- **Contact Us:** a form, an email address, and a WhatsApp number if you use one for support. List your working hours.
- **Shipping Policy:** delivery areas, delivery time ranges, charges, and what happens if a parcel is delayed.
- **Return and Refund Policy:** how many days customers have, what condition items must be in, who pays return shipping, and how refunds are paid.
- **Privacy Policy:** what customer data you collect and how you use it.
- **Terms of Service:** the rules for using your store.
- **FAQ:** short answers to the questions customers ask most.

Shopify offers policy templates under its settings. Use them as a starting point, but edit them to match how your business actually works. A policy that promises seven-day returns when you cannot handle returns will cause problems. If you are unsure about legal requirements in your country or your customers' countries, get local professional advice.

Writing a useful FAQ

Write each answer in two or three sentences. Good questions to include:

1. How long does delivery take?
2. Do you offer Cash on Delivery?
3. What are the delivery charges?
4. Can I return or exchange an item?
5. How do I track my order?
6. Is the product original, and what material is it made of?

Navigation menus

Keep the main menu short: Home, Shop (or your main collections), About, Contact. Put policy pages in the footer menu. If a visitor cannot find what they want in two clicks, simplify the menu.

Chapter 5: Product Listings That Sell

Your product page is where a visitor decides to buy or leave. Treat every listing as a salesperson that works around the clock.

The anatomy of a strong listing

- **Title:** clear and descriptive. Include what it is plus a key detail, for example "Men's Genuine Leather Bifold Wallet, Brown".
- **Images:** at least four to six. Show the front, back, side, close-up of material, the product in use, and the size compared with something familiar.
- **Price and compare-at price:** only use a compare-at price if the item was genuinely sold at that price. Fake discounts damage trust and may break platform rules.
- **Variants:** sizes, colours or materials, each with its own image where possible.
- **Description:** benefits first, then features, then specifications.
- **Shipping and returns summary:** a short line near the button, such as "Delivery in 3 to 5 working days. 7-day exchange."

A simple description formula

Use this four-part structure:

1. **Opening line:** the main benefit in plain words. "A slim wallet that holds everything you need without the bulk."
2. **Three to five bullet points:** each a benefit backed by a feature. "Holds up to 8 cards, thanks to a smart fold-out design."
3. **Specifications:** size, weight, material, colour options, care instructions.
4. **Reassurance:** delivery time, payment options and return terms.

SEO basics for products

Shopify lets you edit each product's search engine listing. Fill these in rather than leaving defaults:

- **Page title:** around 50 to 60 characters, including the main keyword
- **Meta description:** around 140 to 160 characters, summarising the benefit and adding a reason to click
- **URL handle:** short and readable, such as /products/leather-bifold-wallet-brown
- **Image alt text:** describe each image plainly, for example "brown leather bifold wallet open showing card slots"

Organising with collections

Group products into collections such as "Wallets", "Belts" and "Gift Sets". Automated collections can add products based on tags or product type, which saves time as your catalogue grows. Check the platform's current settings for the conditions available.

Chapter 6: Payments and Shipping, Including COD

Payment and delivery options can decide whether a visitor completes an order. They differ greatly between Pakistan and international markets, so plan for the market you are targeting.

Selling in Pakistan: the role of Cash on Delivery

In Pakistan, many online shoppers prefer to pay in cash when the parcel arrives. Offering COD can increase orders, but it also brings risk: some customers refuse parcels, and you still pay the courier.

To enable COD, go to **Settings > Payments** and add a manual payment method, typically named "Cash on Delivery (COD)". You can add instructions such as "Please keep the exact amount ready."

Ways to reduce COD risk:

- **Confirm every order** by phone call or WhatsApp before dispatch. Many sellers find this filters out fake or impulse orders.
- **Charge a small advance** for high-value items or for first-time buyers, if your customers accept it.
- **Offer a small discount for prepaid orders**, such as through bank transfer or a local payment gateway.
- **Keep records** of refused orders so you can recognise repeat problem addresses or numbers.
- **Write clear product photos and descriptions** so customers are not surprised on delivery.

For prepaid payments, check which local payment gateways currently integrate with Shopify for Pakistani merchants, as availability changes. Bank transfer, mobile wallet transfers and local gateways are common options. Always confirm settlement times and fees before choosing.

Couriers in Pakistan

Several courier companies operate across Pakistan and offer COD collection, with the cash amount paid out to you after delivery, minus their fees. When comparing couriers, ask about:

- Delivery charges by weight and city
- COD handling fees
- Payment settlement frequency (weekly, twice weekly, and so on)
- Return charges for refused parcels

- Whether they offer a Shopify integration or app for booking and tracking

Selling internationally

If you target the US, UK, Middle East or other markets, customers usually expect card payments and digital wallets. Options depend on where your business is registered. Shopify Payments is only available in certain countries, so check its current eligibility. Third-party gateways and PayPal are common alternatives. Always read the fees, payout schedules and supported countries before you decide.

For international shipping you might:

- Ship yourself through international courier services
- Use a fulfilment partner or warehouse in the destination country
- Work with a supplier who ships directly to customers (dropshipping), while carefully checking quality and delivery times

Be clear about duties and taxes. Your shipping policy should say whether the price includes them or whether the customer may pay on arrival.

Setting up shipping rates

Go to **Settings > Shipping and delivery** and create shipping zones. A simple setup for a Pakistan store might be:

Zone	Rate	Condition
Major cities	Rs 200	All orders under Rs 3,000
Rest of Pakistan	Rs 250	All orders under Rs 3,000
All Pakistan	Free	Orders Rs 3,000 and above

These numbers are examples only. Base yours on your actual courier costs.

A free shipping threshold can encourage larger orders. Set it a little above your average order value. Imagine your average order is Rs 2,500; a free shipping threshold of Rs 3,000 nudges some customers to add a small item.

Chapter 7: Apps and the Pre-Launch Check

Keep your app list lean

The Shopify App Store has thousands of apps, and it is tempting to install many. Each app can add monthly costs, slow your store and create conflicts. Before installing any app, ask: "Does my theme or Shopify already do this?" Many themes now include reviews blocks, FAQ sections and announcement bars.

A lean starter set usually covers only:

1. **Product reviews** to collect and show genuine customer reviews
2. **Courier or shipping integration** to book parcels and share tracking
3. **WhatsApp chat or support button**, especially for Pakistani customers
4. **Email or SMS marketing**, which can start with Shopify's own tools
5. **Order confirmation tool** for COD orders, if you get a large volume

When you uninstall an app, check that it did not leave code in your theme. Some apps provide removal instructions.

Imagine the cost difference

Imagine a store owner who installs eight apps at an average of USD 10 per month each. That is USD 80 a month, or USD 960 a year, before a single sale. A lean store with three apps at the same average spends USD 30 a month. The saving can fund a meaningful amount of testing on ads.

Pre-launch checklist

Before you announce your store, place test orders and review every page.

1. **Place a test order** using Shopify's test mode or a real low-value order, then refund it. Confirm emails arrive correctly.
2. **Test COD checkout** from a phone using mobile data, not your home Wi-Fi.
3. **Check every page on mobile**: homepage, collection, product, cart, checkout and policies.
4. **Click every link** in the header and footer.
5. **Review notification emails** under settings and add your logo and contact details.
6. **Check product prices, variants and stock** for every item.
7. **Remove the store password** only when you are ready to accept orders.
8. **Connect analytics**: confirm Shopify analytics is working and connect Google Analytics and Meta Pixel if you plan to advertise.

9. **Submit your sitemap** to Google Search Console so Google can find your pages.
10. **Ask two people** who have never seen your store to buy something and tell you where they got confused.

Chapter 8: First Marketing Steps to Your First Sales

A launched store with no visitors makes no sales. Your first job after launch is to get the right people to see your products, then learn from what they do.

Start with the people closest to you

1. Announce the launch on your personal and business social accounts.
2. Share on WhatsApp status and in relevant groups where allowed.
3. Offer a simple launch incentive, such as free delivery for the first week.
4. Ask your first buyers for honest feedback and, if they are happy, a review with a photo.

Build organic content

- **Instagram and TikTok:** short videos showing the product being used, unboxed or compared. Focus on the problem it solves.
- **Facebook page and groups:** post useful content, not only sales posts.
- **Google Business Profile:** if you have a physical location or serve a local area, create a profile so local buyers can find you.
- **Blog posts:** a few helpful articles, such as "How to choose a leather wallet that lasts", can bring search traffic over time.

Your first paid ads

When you have product photos, a working store and a few orders or positive responses, you can test paid ads. Start small.

Imagine you set a test budget of Rs 1,500 per day for five days, which is Rs 7,500 in total. Using the wallet example from Chapter 1, your profit before marketing is Rs 1,200 per order (Rs 2,500 minus Rs 1,300 in product, packaging and delivery costs). If the ads produce 8 delivered orders, your profit before ads is 8 × 1,200 = Rs 9,600. After the Rs 7,500 ad spend, you keep Rs 2,100. That is a small but positive result, and it tells you the product can work. If the ads produce only 3 orders, you earn Rs 3,600 against Rs 7,500 spent, a loss of Rs 3,900, which tells you to change the creative, audience, offer or product.

Track the numbers that matter

Review these weekly in Shopify analytics:

- **Sessions:** how many visits you are getting
- **Conversion rate:** the percentage of sessions that become orders

- **Average order value:** total sales divided by number of orders
- **Returning customer rate:** how many people buy again
- **COD refusal rate:** refused parcels divided by dispatched COD parcels

If your conversion rate is low, improve product pages and trust signals. If sessions are low, focus on marketing. If refusals are high, tighten order confirmation.

Keep improving

Your first version will not be perfect, and that is normal. Every week, pick one thing to improve: a better product photo, a clearer description, a faster page or a new ad creative. Small improvements made consistently add up.

Quick-Start Checklist

☐ Describe your target buyer in one sentence

☐ Validate demand by checking competitors, reviews and social discussions

☐ Calculate profit per order including shipping, packaging, returns and marketing

☐ Order and inspect a product sample

☐ Create your Shopify account and configure store details, currency and time zone

☐ Connect a custom domain and confirm SSL is active

☐ Choose a free theme and customise it for mobile first

☐ Publish About, Contact, Shipping, Returns, Privacy, Terms and FAQ pages

☐ Write product listings with clear titles, multiple images and benefit-led descriptions

☐ Fill in SEO titles, meta descriptions, handles and image alt text

☐ Set up payments, including COD for Pakistan or card options for international buyers

☐ Create shipping zones and rates based on real courier costs

☐ Install only the apps you truly need

☐ Place and refund a test order on mobile

☐ Launch to your network, then test a small paid ad budget

About DAD Technologies

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