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6th Edition

Starting an Online Business

FOR
DUMMIES®

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- Market your business through social media

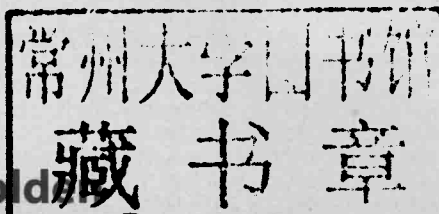
Greg Holden



Starting an Online Business

FOR
DUMMIES®
6TH EDITION

by Greg Holden



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About the Author

Greg Holden started a small business called Stylus Media, which is a group of editorial, design, and computer professionals who produce both print and electronic publications. The company gets its name from a recording stylus that reads the traces left on a disk by voices or instruments and translates those signals into electronic data that can be amplified and enjoyed by many. He has been a freelance writer since 1996. He is an avid user of eBay, both as a buyer and seller, and is a blogger.

Greg recently assumed the role of Director of Communications for the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago. One of the ways Greg enjoys communicating is through explaining technical subjects in nontechnical language. The first edition of *Starting an Online Business For Dummies* was the ninth of his more than forty-five computer books. He also authored *eBay PowerUser's Bible* for Wiley Publishing. Over the years, Greg has been a regular contributor to CNET and the Web site AuctionBytes (www.auctionbytes.com). He also contributes to *PC World* and the University of Illinois at Chicago alumni magazine. Other projects have included preparing a Web site for a hedge fund management firm with NewCor Group, a group of freelance professionals.

Greg balances his technical expertise and his entrepreneurial experience with his love of literature. He received an M.A. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago and also writes general interest books, short stories, and poetry.

After graduating from college, Greg became a reporter for his hometown newspaper. Working at the publications office at the University of Chicago was his next job, and it was there that he started to use computers. He discovered, as the technology became available, that he loved desktop publishing (with the Macintosh and LaserWriter) and, later on, the World Wide Web.

Greg loves to travel, but since his two daughters were born, he hasn't been able to get around much. He was able to translate his experiences into a book called *Karma Kids: Answering Everyday Parenting Questions with Buddhist Wisdom*. However, through the Web, he enjoys traveling vicariously and meeting people online. He lives with his family in an old house in Chicago that he has been rehabbing for — well, for many years now. He is a collector of objects such as pens, cameras, radios, and hats. He is always looking for things to take apart so that he can see how they work and fix them up. Many of the same skills prove useful in creating and maintaining Web pages. He is an active member of Jewel Heart, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation and study group based in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Dedication

To Peggy Lester. Thanks, Mom, for bringing us together.

Acknowledgments

One of the things I like best about this book is that it's a teaching tool that gives me a chance to share my knowledge — small business owner to small business owner — about computers, the Internet, and communicating your message to others in an interactive way. As any businessperson knows, most large-scale projects are a team effort.

While the online business landscape has changed since this book was first published, some basic principles remain the same. One is the fact that the most successful entrepreneurs also tend to be the ones who were the most generous with their time and experience. They taught me that the more helpful you are, the more successful you'll be in return.

I want to thank all those who were profiled as case studies. Thanks go to: John Moen of Graphic Maps; Jeremy G. Alicandri of SimplyVentures.com; Lucky Boyd of MyTexasMusic.com; Mike Holden of Ip2cdsolutions; John Counsel of The Profit Clinic; Jeffrey E. Edelheit; Lars Hundley of Clean Air Gardening; Laura Milnor Iverson; Mark Lauer of General Tool and Repair; Doug Laughter of The Silver Connection; John Raddatz of SoftBear Shareware; Skye Ryan-Evans; Kharisma Ryantori; Sarah-Lou Morris of Alfresco; Judy Vorfeld of Office Support Services; Marques Vickers; and Scott Wills. Special recognition also goes to attorney David Adler (www.ecommerceattorney.com) for his assistance with Chapter 16.

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Thanks also to Neil Salkind of Studio B and to Kyle Looper of Wiley Publishing for helping me add this book to the list of those I've authored and, in the process, to broaden my expertise as a writer.

Last but certainly not least, the future is in the hands of the generation of my two daughters, Zosia and Lucy, who allow me to learn from the curiosity and joy with which they approach life.

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Introduction

You've been thinking about starting your own business for a while now. You heard about the woman whose *Julia and Me* blog was turned into a book and a popular movie. You've heard about young entrepreneurs who've made billions creating popular Web sites such as Facebook. But you've been slow to jump on the bandwagon. You're a busy person, after all. You have a full-time job, whether it's running your home or working outside your home. Or perhaps you've been laid off or are going through some other life-changing event and are ready to take off in a new direction, but the economic upheavals of recent years leave you understandably reluctant to make a big career change.

Well, I have news for you: *Now* is the perfect time to turn your dream into reality by starting your own online business. More individuals than ever before — regular folks just like you — are making money and enriching their lives by operating businesses online. The clock and your location are no longer limiting factors. Small business owners can now work any time of the night or day in their spare bedrooms, local libraries, or neighborhood coffee shops.

If you like the idea of being in business for yourself but don't have a particular product or service in mind at the moment, relax and keep yourself open for inspiration. Many different kinds of commercial enterprises can hit it big on the Internet. Among the entrepreneurs I interviewed for this book are a woman who sells her own insect repellent; a mapmaker; a woman who provides office services for the medical community; a housewife who sells sweetener and coffee on eBay; a sculptor and painter; a young man who started selling electronics online at age 16; and several folks who create Web pages for other businesses. With the help of this book, you can start a new endeavor and be in charge of your own cyberbusiness, too.

You Can Do It!

What's that? You say you wouldn't know a merchant account, a profit and loss statement, or a clickthrough advertising rate if it came up to you on the street and introduced itself? Don't worry. The Internet (and this book) levels the playing field so that a novice has just as good a chance at succeeding as MBAs who love to throw around business terms at cocktail parties.