

Intro: Hey everybody and welcome to another episode of How I Built It! In today's episode, my friend Patrick Rauland talks through everything you need to think about when setting up an e-commerce site. So this is less asking, "how did you build that," and more, "how _would_ you build that?" It's a great conversation and Patrick offers some great advice and insights when making an online store, especially with WooCommerce. We'll get to that in a minute, but first, a word from our sponsors.

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And now...on with the show!

Joe: Hey, everybody. Welcome to another episode of How I Built It, the podcast that asks how did you build that, or in today's case, *how would you build that*. Today my guest is Patrick Rauland. He is an ecommerce educator guy. We were talking about this right before we started recording. I asked him what his title wanted to be and then I forgot the end after educator already. Ecommerce educator guy. Patrick, how are you today?

Patrick: I'm doing really good. I'm on my second cup of coffee, so it's just a good, just a good day.

Joe: Very nice, very nice. It is later in the day for me, but I'm still like, I nurse my coffee. This is still my first cup. It's really cold now and stuff too, but I'm generally a peppy guy anyway.

I'm really excited for today's episode because we're breaking from the normal format of,

"Hey, tell me about a thing you built." Instead, Patrick, you're very well versed in WooCommerce. Would you say that?

Patrick: Yeah, yeah, I'm all that, so yeah. Yes, I can say just the simple word yes, but I can also explain it, in that I was just thinking about this the other day, I used it as ... First, I used it for an agency and I built sites for clients, and then I was a support person at Woo and then developer and then product manager and then I built extensions for them or/and for myself and then I wrote books about it and created courses, and I created a conference. I think I'm like almost at eight or nine different roles relating Woo stuff, so I've got a good impression of it.

Joe: Yes. I'm really glad you went through that rundown because I didn't want to try to remember it from the last time we spoke or anything like that. I'm really excited about today's topic. You went through your credentials for being a WooCommerce guy and today we're going to talk about how would you build your online shop with WooCommerce? And we came up with a pretty interesting concept for this.

Patrick: Yeah. It was actually literally something I was googling yesterday. My partner, she's very big into comic books and nerdy TV shows and all this stuff, and we're like, god, and she loves plants and so she wants to merge nerdiness and plants, and we were trying to find nerdy pots and we could not find much. We could find a couple, but there weren't many. I was just thinking, "If someone had a store that was just nerdypots.com, you could make a killing with all the people that have that intersection in their life." She would love like a Bulbasaur that has like a little back where little plants could grow out of it, that'd be awesome, right?

Joe: Yeah, very cool. Not like a chia pet, but like a real plant, like a real pot.

Patrick: Like a planter, yep.

Joe: Cool. If some enterprising young person or older person listening to this episode wants to make that site, we're going to blueprint that site for you.

Patrick: Yes.

Joe: Let's start with this. We have our idea. What kind, like how would you start researching this? How do I know that this is a good idea for me to sink my time into?

Patrick: Okay, so there's a whole giant thing we could talk about with choosing a product, but basically if you know that there's a need and you can know that there's a need by either talking to people around you or by doing Google SEO SEM type of research to see how many traffic queries there are a month, that type of thing, or you can see what ... There are some nerdy potted plant things on Etsy that we found earlier, but there's only a couple. As long as you know that there is something people want, you can, that's the first step. Do people want it? If so, proceed.

Then you need to make sure that you can make money on it. That means you need to ... Let me, I'm trying to give a good example here, where like if the cure for cancer was

\$500 billion, everyone wants it but no one can afford \$500 billion. That's not a viable option. There's lots of things like that. You want to sell artisanal coffee. People want it but they're not willing to pay \$60 a bag. *You just need to make sure that you can make it at a price that people want it at.*

My rule of thumb is you need to be able to sell it for twice what you bought it for. If you're selling planters, let's stay with the same example, if you can buy them for \$5 a unit and people will purchase them from you at \$10 a unit, that's probably something you can make money on.

Joe: Nice. I love that. Because it's not enough to just ask if people want it. If I asked you if you wanted some crazy thing, you'd probably be like, "Yeah, sure, I want that."

Patrick: Totally. Totally. One of the classic example, and so many people have said this in other circles but just because someone says they'll buy is different than them buying it. Some people when they're doing validation, they will only count validation when someone actually pulls out the credit card to make a pre-order. Because there are a lot of things that people, like, "Hey, Joe, would you buy my Batman mug?" You're probably going to say yes, just to be nice to me.

Joe: Yeah, I like Batman and mugs, like great.

Patrick: Yeah.

Joe: But when the rubber hits the road and you're like, "Okay, that'll be \$20," I'm like, "I don't know, I'd rather spend \$20 on like a Mickey Mouse mug."

Patrick: Totally.

Joe: Cool. I really love that. I've fallen to that trap a lot. Or like, "Do you think this is a good idea? I've started developing this thing. Do you think it's a good idea?" Yes. Oh, people think it's a good idea. At least me and someone else, so I'm going to sink all my time into this.

On that same token, how much time do you spend researching this? Do you create a focus group or just throwing up a landing page or what?

Patrick: You know what? Everyone is totally different, and this totally depends on you, and also if your startup costs are like you need to spend \$500 on product to get started, that's relatively small, but if you need to spend \$50,000, then you need to do a lot more research, right?

Joe: Right. Right.

Patrick: Obviously the answer is it depends. But let me try to give you a little bit more clarity there. I've always used my intuition with the stuff that I do. So I've never done any SEO work on my own sites. I just say, I had this problem with WooCommerce. Here's how I solved it. I assume other people will want it. Some of those blog posts are flat and no

one ever clicks on them, but some of them are great, so I just use my intuition and see whatever is the right thing.

But when you're investing money and not just writing a blog post, then you do want to do some research. People spend months, people do spend years. You could probably get away with a solid day of research if it's a small thing that's a small investment. Try to find other products that are similar. Try to find influencers in your space who have podcasts or blogs or something and they talk about, "Oh, wouldn't it be cool if," and then try to find marketplaces where people might be selling this stuff. And if you can find some traction or if you can find online groups where people are talking about this, that's probably, that's some amount of traction. It's not exact numbers, but that's something to get started.

Joe: Yeah, it's at least a group that you can now market to, to get kind of an initial reaction.

Patrick: Keep in mind before the internet you could not make money selling cat trees for living. Now that the internet exists, there are probably businesses that only sell super hero themed cat trees. You know what I mean? You can be so niched down and still make a killing as long as there's that super tiny passionate group of people that believe in your product.

Joe: Yeah. Again, that's another really great point. I mean if you play your cards right and you market to the right group of people, you have virtually infinite reach. Everybody who is interested in super hero cat trees, or nerdy planters, Pokemon nerdy planters, or superhero nerdy planters, things like that. That's really cool.

You talked a little bit about initial investments, and I imagine that that's also going to be part of your research. We're setting up a WooCommerce shop. WordPress and WooCommerce are open source and both free. What are we looking at for cost for setting up this online shop?

Patrick: Some costs that you cannot escape no matter what, you're going to have to pay something for hosting, let's say \$15, \$20 a month. You're going to have to get a domain name, \$15 a year. WooCommerce itself is free. So that's awesome. You're going to need an SSL certificate. Those used to cost money but now that Let's Encrypt has come out, those are free. You can usually just press a button in your hosting and they'll install for you into all that jazz. I think that's you need bare minimum.

Oh, you're going to need a payment gateway. That's Stripe and PayPal are both free. I should caveat that. If this is your first time to ecommerce, every payment gateway takes a super tiny cut of all sales. But the service itself is free other than a super tiny cut. I mean that's seriously about it in terms of hard cost, but there's, ecommerce can be so ... You can spend \$50,000 on 20 million extensions that all do really cool stuff and then the custom built blank, affiliate system or this or this or this, so you could spend anywhere from let's say \$200 a year at the minimum for hosting a domain and something up to, I mean I think some of the bigger web, some of the bigger ecommerce sites I've built when I worked at an agency were 20 plus, so that's realistically what I think you could spend.

But honestly, what's so cool about WooCommerce, and as I said I work with my intuition a lot, so I just do stuff and see if it works, so start with a super tiny store. You start marketing. See if people actually come from Pinterest or Google or wherever to your site. See if they buy it. Oh my god, they start buying stuff, now you start investing in the store. You get a better email software. You start with Mailchimp, which is free and then you upgrade to something that's better. There's so many things that you can upgrade and invest in and get your customers that used to buy just once to buy them a couple of times a year.

Joe: Yeah, absolutely. I want to parse out something that you just said, which is about hosting. So \$15, \$20 a month for hosting. I've seen hosting for let's say, I don't know, \$10, or \$5. Why shouldn't I just go with the \$5 a month hosting?

Patrick: Good question. You know what's interesting, is I think my answer depends based on whether you're selling online or whether it's just a regular blog, in that ... Well, my answer is kind of the same, but here's the thing, when you're selling online, you need to keep, like you have literal transactions, you have to calculate sales tax just in case someone in your own state buys your thing. God forbid you lose it - like your server crashes and you lose all that data and now you owe the government money and you don't even know how much because it was all recorded in WooCommerce but your host crashed and you're stuck. You cannot not go the host or you need to have a host that backs up your data or you need to set up your own service that backs up your data.

I have always used WP Engine just because they were one of the first good hosts that appeared in the, managed the WordPress space and they do daily backups. With daily backups I'm pretty much covered. You can always take it a step further and get in, he and I have a couple of other things that I could use, but a good host will backup your site for you daily. That for me is actually the most important thing. There's lots of other amazing features like a testing site, but for me the most important feature is daily backups.

Joe: Daily backups are so important, and just like that a better host is likely not going to crash on you. If one day 1,000 people come and buy your nerdy pot planters you don't want your site going down because now you're losing revenue, you literally are losing revenue there. If there's one thing that you're going to splurge on, Patrick I think you'd probably agree with me here, hosting should be that one thing.

Patrick: Yeah, I think so. See, you know what's funny, is I don't think I've had my site crash any time recently in the last couple of years, but I have had some weird niggling issues just like some little thing that bugs you like, "Why is this thing not quite working," and to be able to reach out to someone in support and have them actually answer you is, oh, so good.

Joe: **Sponsor:** Hey everybody. I wanna take a moment here to tell you about Event Espresso. If you need an excellent Event management system for your word press site, look no further than Event Espresso. The out of the box event registration and ticketing plug in for word press is now powering over 40,000 event websites. 100,000,000 dollars in

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Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I really just wanted to touch on that because good hosting is so important.

Patrick: Yeah, and I think WP Engine, is it \$15, \$20 a month for their lowest? Maybe it's a little higher than that, but since everything else is basically free, we're talking \$200, \$300 a year for a minimum for a whole online business.

Joe: Which 20 years ago you needed a brick and mortar store.

Patrick: Totally. Oh yeah, the startup costs used to be insane.

Joe: Right, yeah. Awesome. Let's actually get into building it now. We have our hosting. We have our domain. Let's say that we've installed WordPress. Where do we go from here? How do I make a store?

Patrick: Cool. We already mentioned WooCommerce. WooCommerce is one of the best options. I just want to be fair there are other players in the WordPress space, but I mostly have experience with WooCommerce because it's the biggest one. But you just go into your plugin menu. You click or type in WooCommerce. You install it. That is the basic thing that you need.

When you go through the welcome wizard, they will prompt you to install Jetpack. I recommend that you do that. They have a weird phrasing. They're changing their terminology. It might also be called WooCommerce Services and a couple other stuff like that. But install Jetpack which will let you connect to wordpress.com and get a whole bunch of free stuff. Photon loads your images faster. There's some spam protection in there. There's a whole bunch of stuff.

There's also relating to WooCommerce specifically they just installed, oh boy, I forget the name of it but it's a free-ish ... Not free. It is free live rate shipping. That means you can get a quote on exactly how much it'll cost you to ship your bulbasaur planter from point A to point B, like \$3.24 and they'll, they figure out how big the box is, how big the package is, and they send all that data to USPS. It returns to your site. Then the user sees it and does all the magic. That used to cost like \$50, \$75 a year. Now it's built into that plugin for free.

That's cool. Once you have that, you have all your shipping set up. When you're going through the installation process, they'll prompt you to import tax rates, so that's basically set up. You should look into what nexus means. It's basically where you have business presence. This will vary state by state so please don't quote me or ...

Joe: ***We are not lawyers or accountants.***

Patrick: Yes. Thank you. But basically nexus is where you have a business presence, so that means if you have an office space, that's where you have a business presence. My home office is in Colorado. Even if I moved out of Colorado, as long as it's that home office, I have nexus there and I have to pay taxes there. You're going to want to collect taxes there. You just click a couple buttons and WooCommerce does the rest.

It'll prompt you to do payment which is I recommend Stripe and PayPal to start. Stripe is for credit cards. People can just enter their credit card number. Oh, here's the thing that people always stumble on. **Your site never touches the credit card.** Because of JavaScript wizardry and iframe wizardry they're basically entering the credit card number on an iframe which is a piece of Stripe's website basically and that goes directly to Stripe's servers. They verify that all the money is there, that it's the right credit card number, it's not expired, etc. It returns a yes, no to your site. You never see the credit card number. You don't need to worry about PCI compliance issues. There is technically a form you should look. It's a one page form that says I don't handle it that you're supposed to fill out, but yeah, Stripe does that. PayPal is good just because so many people use PayPal as fun money. I totally do that where my PayPal money could be like, sometimes I look at my PayPal account, I'm like, "How? What am I doing with this huge amount of money in there? This is absurd. I should buy a giant toy with." So definitely have PayPal on there for that reason.

Joe: I'm going to stop you right there real quick. I want to ask you, well, so with Stripe, with PayPal, the analogy that I thought about is essentially you have an armored car guy. You have a guard. He goes into the bank. The bank hands him money. He's handling the money and bringing it to his armored car. A bank employee is not carrying all this money to the outside world.

Patrick: I like that analogy.

Joe: You definitely want your armored car guy because like Patrick said, PCI compliance is a whole other thing where you're totally on the hook if credit card fraud happens on your website.

Patrick: That actually happened in a company I worked for a few years ago where they, basically someone hacked their website and then because they weren't doing it in a smart cool way they could read what people were typing in and then they stole these credit card numbers, and that company that I worked for was responsible. They had to pay a fine, which is relatively small for how big the company was, but still several thousand dollars. So don't do that.

Joe: Yeah, exactly. And then with having Stripe and PayPal, I mean when I launched my shop I did it with just Stripe. I figured I will give people one clear option, but the very first question, like within 10 minutes of launching, was "do you have PayPal?" So I just turned it on real quick. Thank you WooCommerce for enabling me to do that. But it's just funny. I was like, "People, they'll be able to pay with their credit card. Who cares." But like you said, PayPal is fun money for a lot of people.

Patrick: People care. Yeah. What I will say is PayPal gives a little bit more control to the consumer. The consumer can very easily sort of say cancel a payment. I mean you basically need to provide no proof, so consumers really like it for that reason. Of course as a business, now let's say you're selling \$5,000 pieces of furniture. You do not want to give the consumer just a quick easy button that you basically have no recourse against. Doing that for your credit cards it's possible, but it's just more steps and more complicated and you can contest it.

Joe: You have to call somebody usually. Yeah, that's cool. I stopped you right at payment gateways.

Patrick: But I mean we're basically done. At that point, so we did shipping, taxes, payments. Those are the big ones. Then you just need to start entering your products. In your WordPress admin you go to Products, you click Add New. If you've never used WooCommerce before, it looks just like the or very similar to the Edit Post page. There's the title up top. There's the description beneath that. Then beneath that there's a couple extra fields for price and how much does it weigh, which helps you determine shipping cost and a couple extra things. Of course, you want to upload your image, but then that's it.

I should say, this is something that people forget, is that you need to spend a little bit of time doing copywriting and having nice product photography. I am not a photography expert, but even non-experts like myself can recognize when there's bad photography. If you spend two, three hours looking at how to light a product, just ... You can Google this. You can find some free courses. You can find paid courses, whatever. Just look at how to light a product and then you can use your iPhone and take ... It's going to be 10 times better when you spend a little bit of time and maybe a little bit of money on lighting your products and taking nice photos of them.

Joe: Absolutely. There's this lighting box that you can buy on Amazon for \$50.

Patrick: Oh cool. Love it.

Joe: So copywriting and photography, always an afterthought for me, but super important.

Patrick: Totally. While I'm on copywriting, one thing that people do not get about humans is that their emotional bit ... I think this comes from Brine Brown, but I could be wrong with the quotes, so please don't hate me if I get the quote wrong when she says, *"People always think that human beings are thinking machines that occasionally feel, but we're actually feeling machines that occasionally think."*

I really like that because we totally think we're always totally logical except for maybe two minutes a day where we're upset or angry or whatever. ***We are almost always driven by emotion*** of, "I wish I looked like that," and then you buy clothes, or, "I wish people thought I was that cool," and then you'd buy this toy or this whatever. You would be surprised at how emotional we are. So you need to write, "this is how you feel after you buy the product."

Joe: I love that, this is how you feel. I mean, yeah, I think I am like a logical guy, but man, I'm also an Italian guy and Italians are very emotional people.

That's a really good point to touch on. We have our shop set up. What theme should I use for my WooCommerce shop?

Patrick: Good question. First of all, you can use anything, but I think a great place to start, they have a free theme called Storefront. It is a great place to start. It's one of those things where a lot of WordPress themes are sort of gray by default, but then you just go into the Customizer under Appearance Customize and you just pick whatever brand colors you have and it'll look pretty good, it'll be a pretty darn good start because you can customize the header and the side bar and all the footer and all the stuff. I think that's the best place to start.

You can if you want spend \$50 to \$100 on a premium theme. The nice thing is, one thing I like about premium themes is they're usually a one-time purchase and you can use them for a couple of years and then if you want to switch to something new or keep it or build your own if you ever, if your store takes off and build your own if you want.

Joe: And just going back to that point, using Storefront at first, copywriting is going to be more important, as long as your site doesn't look like crap the copywriting is going to be the thing that makes the person buy, not the design of the site.

Patrick: Absolutely. Yes. When someone lands on a site, one, it should load fast, another reason to get a good host. Make sure it loads relatively fast. Have good product photography. Have good headlines. And then as well the main copywriting. That will actually draw people in. They'll actually click onto your product pages and then those are serious chance they'll buy it.

Actually while I'm on that, just to set standards, **a typical conversion rate is going to be 1-2%**. If you have a brand new store, once your mom's already purchased, those purchases do not count against your average, once your mom or your best friend has purchased, if you get 100 people to your site and one person buys, that's actually a great start. That is serious expectation. Sometimes people need to come back multiple times or it just wasn't for them or whatever. 1% is a solid start, and if you're an awesome ecommerce company you might eventually get to two or three or maybe four if you're crazy.

Joe: Man. So that's a very telling number, because in your head you think, "I'm launching my shop. I'm opening the doors. People are going to come buy my stuff now. How do I get a lot of people?" I mean we're coming up on time but I think this is a really important thing.

Patrick: I love this topic, which is why in the last couple ... This is what I've been focusing on for the last year or so. I made this thing called ... Can I pimp my thing?

Joe: I was going to ask you at the end, so yeah, let it go.

Patrick: Yeah. Okay. So I made this thing called Lift Off Summit last year, which was basically online marketing for new store owners, and it's basically here's what Facebook does, here's what Instagram does, here's what Pinterest does, and I'll try to summarize this and make it relevant for your audience. You don't need to do all of these things. I think a lot of people get stuck going, "Okay, I need to be on Facebook, I need to be on Twitter, I need to be on Pinterest, I need to do this," and you do not. Just pick two to three places where your people can find you somehow, it doesn't have to be a social network, but that's one option, and then just start marketing to those people, start testing what headlines work, getting the most resonance people respond to it, start seeing which ones have the most click-through rates, but you do need to do something.

I think everyone thinks that if you have an online store people will just show up. That is totally not the case. You need to spend a lot of time marketing it. I spent for Lift Off Summit I spent for marketing, the marketing event I spent probably maybe 100 hours marketing it, probably not quite that much, but 100 hours marketing it and that got 400 users. That was for a free event. Imagine if I had to make people pay from the get go, maybe dozens of hours for maybe 40 users, you know what I mean?

Patrick: It's a long time, it's a long process and I think a lot of people give up.

Joe: Right. I hear a lot of, "Well, I tried this and it didn't work for me." How many people actually give it the old college try. It takes time.

Patrick: What's cool is that because we're focusing on WooCommece I want to give people the one thing that I think works really well for WooCommerce and that's content marketing. *Because your WooCommerce is built on the best, the most flexible content marketing platform out there, you should definitely look at the content marketing*, which is basically writing a lot of blogs that will help your users. If it's okay Joe, I can recommend, I can give away some of those content marketing lessons from Lift Off Summit away?

Joe: Oh yeah. That will be amazing. Yeah.

Patrick: Cool. I'll put together a landing page. Let's just do liftoffsummit.com/howibuiltit all one word. Is that cool?

Joe: Perfect, yep, and I'll link that in the show notes.

Patrick: Cool. So I'll put together, I have a couple talks on content marketing. I'll put those in there. If you just sign up, I'll send them to you. You can watch them. It's so powerful. Over the last couple of years my personal blog generates tens of thousands of hits a month, and I do, I have no paid marketing. I just wrote about stuff that interested me and it interested other people and it drives a lot of traffic.

Joe: Nice. That's amazing. We might have to have you on for a follow up because this is a thing that creates trust. You're teaching people stuff, they trust you, and then they'll inherently trust your brand.

Patrick: I also had a session on trust building at Lift Off. Did you watch that? Oh, it was so good.

Joe: I don't think I did actually.

Patrick: Oh, it was with Chris Lema. It was really good.

Joe: Of course it is.

Patrick: Building trust is such an important thing and basically it's the core that I got out of it is consistency, you just need to be there consistently. You can't just try it for a week and then give up.

Joe: Awesome.

Patrick: Building trust is hard.

Joe: Awesome. I love that.

Patrick: Cool.

Joe: Well, we're going to ... I mean, we're out of time so let's wrap up. You've given us so much, but I always like to ask at the end, do you have any trade secrets for us?

Patrick: Any trade secrets, oh my goodness, I was not ready for this question. I should have been. I think my trade secret is patience. I'm just going back to all the stuff we're just saying. A lot of stuff ... oh, I don't want to say that. I think a lot of people give up without being persistent and you need to keep trying and trying and trying sometimes. Sometimes you need to know when to give up, but a lot of the time it just takes a little bit longer to get going than you hear any, "I wrote one blog post and generated \$50,000," not telling you about all the stuff they did before that.

Joe: Yeah, I mean I love that, because I mean, again, you hear about the overnight success, but you didn't hear about all the other nights that they were not successful.

Patrick: Absolutely.

Joe: Awesome. Well, Patrick, thank you so much for joining me today. I really loved this conversation.

Patrick: You're welcome. It's been a blast.

Outro: Thanks again so much to Patrick for joining me to talk all about building a great online store. This is stuff that's worth thinking about for both you and your clients, and I definitely have a lot of great takeaways.

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