LEARNING BOX OF UNPLUGGED ACTIVITIES

Starting a Small Online Business (E-Shop, Marketplaces)

This unplugged activity introduces learners to the basics of starting and managing a small online business. Participants work with scenario cards representing products, pricing options, customer profiles, shipping methods, and marketing strategies. They simulate running a small e-shop or selling through marketplaces by making decisions, identifying patterns in customer behavior, and organizing workflows. The activity connects entrepreneurship with computational thinking in a practical, accessible way.

Target Group

- ☐ Low-skilled adults with low digital competences
- ☐ Low-skilled adults with limited formal education or qualifications
- ☑ Low-skilled adults with low participation in lifelong learning / training opportunities

Learning Objectives

- Understand the main components of an online business
- Learn how to organize products, pricing, and logistics
- Recognize customer behavior and sales trends
- Develop structured workflows for business operations
- Apply computational thinking to entrepreneurial decision-making

Competence Areas

a) Innovation Competences

- ☐ Creativity
- ☐ Critical thinking
- ☐ Problem solving
- ☐ Communication

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Theme

Entrepreneurship and digital commerce

Duration

90 minutes

Level

Intermediate

Computational Thinking Steps Used

- ☑ Decomposition
- ☑ Pattern recognition
- ☐ Abstraction
- ☑ Algorithmic thinking

Methodological Approach

☑ Gamification
☑ Challenge-Based Learning
☑ Collaborative learning
☑ Experiential learning

☐ Collaboration

b) Information Literacy Competences

☐ Ability to access, understand, and critically analyse information
☐ Interpretation of digital and visual content
☐ Awareness of media influence and biases

c) Life and Career Competences

☑ Flexibility and adaptability
☑ Initiative and autonomy
☑ Sociability and intercultural competence
☑ Productivity
☑ Leadership and responsibility

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the activity, participants will be able to:

- Break down an online business into key components (products, pricing, shipping, marketing)
- Identify patterns in customer preferences and sales behavior
- Focus on essential factors for running a successful small business
- Create step-by-step workflows for handling orders and customers
- Make informed decisions about managing and improving a business

Notes

- Use printed cards for products, customer types, and order scenarios
- Include different business situations (e.g., high demand, customer complaints, delivery delays)
- Encourage role-playing (e.g., business owner, customer, delivery service)
- Facilitators can increase complexity by introducing competition or changing market conditions

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Step 1: Decomposition of the Online Business

Participants are introduced to the concept of a small online business using scenario cards (products, pricing, customers, shipping, marketing).

They are asked to:

- Identify and break down the key components of an online business, such as:
  - Products (what to sell)
  - Pricing (how much to charge)
  - Shipping and delivery
  - Marketing and promotion
  - Customer service
- Decide what type of product or service their business will offer
- Organize these elements into clear categories

Facilitator support:

- Ask guiding questions like: “What do you need to start selling online?”, “What comes first?”
- Encourage participants to think of the business as a set of smaller, manageable parts

This step helps participants understand the structure of an online business by breaking it into key components.

Step 2: Pattern Recognition

Participants work with customer scenarios and simple sales data.

They are asked to:

- Identify patterns in customer behavior, such as:
  - Popular or frequently purchased products
  - Repeat customers
  - Seasonal demand (e.g., higher sales during holidays)
- Recognize trends in pricing and preferences (e.g., cheaper products selling more often)
- Discuss how customer needs influence business decisions

Facilitator support:

- Prompt reflection: “Which products sell the most?”, “When do customers buy more?”
- Highlight how patterns can guide better decisions

This step helps participants identify trends and better understand customer behavior.

Step 3: Workflow Creation (Algorithmic Thinking)

Participants design a clear, step-by-step process for managing their online business operations.

They should:

- Develop simple rules such as:
  - “Confirm every order before shipping”
  - “Respond to customer questions quickly”
  - “Check product availability before listing”
- Organize actions into a logical sequence, for example:
  1. Receive order
  2. Confirm payment
  3. Prepare/package product
  4. Ship the order
  5. Handle customer feedback or issues

Finally, participants:

- Present their workflow to the group
- Explain how their process ensures efficiency and customer satisfaction
- Compare different approaches and discuss improvements

Facilitator support:

- Encourage realism: “Would this work in a real business?”
- Introduce challenges (e.g., delivery delays, customer complaints) and ask how workflows adapt

This step helps participants develop structured, repeatable processes for running a small online business.

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Facilitator Guidance

Before the activity

Begin by asking participants whether they have ever purchased or sold products online. Discuss different types of online businesses, such as handmade products, local food, clothing, or second-hand goods. Explain that running a successful online business involves more than selling products—it also requires planning, organization, and customer service. Introduce the computational thinking concepts that will help participants organize their ideas.

During the activity

Encourage participants to discuss each business decision before reaching a conclusion. Ask questions such as: "Which product is most likely to attract customers?", "How would you decide on a price?", or "What happens if several customers order at the same time?" If groups finish early, introduce new scenarios such as delivery delays, customer complaints, or increased demand, and encourage them to adapt their workflow while maintaining customer satisfaction.

After the activity

Invite participants to present their business model and explain the reasoning behind their choices. Compare different workflows and discuss how organization and planning contribute to business success. Emphasize that there are many possible solutions and that entrepreneurs often need to revise their processes as customer needs and market conditions change. Reinforce how computational thinking supports structured decision-making in entrepreneurship.

SCENARIO CARDS

Starting a Small Online Business (E-Shop, Marketplaces)

Card Categories

- **Products**
- **Pricing**
- **Shipping**
- **Marketing**
- **Customer Service**
- **Order Management**

Priority Levels

Essential

Must be done - the business cannot run without it

High

Important - directly affects customers or revenue

Medium

Helpful - can be delayed when the team is busy

Print and cut the cards on the following slides to use in the activity.

Choose What to Sell

PRODUCTS

When: Before launching

Decide what product or service your e-shop will offer. Research what is in demand and choose something you can source or make.

Priority: Essential

Write Product Listings

PRODUCTS

When: Before launching

Create clear titles and descriptions for each product. Include size, colour, material, and any other details customers need to decide.

Priority: Essential

Take Product Photos

PRODUCTS

When: Before launching

Photograph each product with good lighting and a clean background. Clear photos increase customer trust and sales.

Priority: High

Check Stock Availability

PRODUCTS

When: Before listing & ongoing

Confirm you have enough stock before listing an item. Remove or pause listings when a product runs out.

Priority: High

Set Your Prices

PRICING

When: Before launching

Calculate the cost of each product including materials, packaging, and shipping. Set a price that covers costs and earns a profit.

Priority: Essential

Research Competitor Prices

PRICING

When: Before launching & ongoing

Look at what similar products sell for on other shops or marketplaces. Price competitively without selling at a loss.

Priority: High

Create Offers and Discounts

PRICING

When: Promotional periods

Design special deals such as bundle discounts, seasonal sales, or first-order offers to attract more customers.

Priority: Medium

Review Pricing Regularly

PRICING

When: Monthly / after slow periods

Check if your prices are still appropriate. Adjust for changes in material costs, competition, or demand.

Priority: Medium

Choose a Shipping Method

SHIPPING

When: Before launching

Decide how orders will be delivered: courier, postal service, or local pickup. Compare cost, speed, and reliability.

Priority: Essential

Package Orders Safely

SHIPPING

When: Per order

Wrap products securely to avoid damage in transit. Use appropriate box or envelope sizes and include a thank-you note.

Priority: Essential

Handle Delivery Delays

SHIPPING

When: When issues arise

If a delivery is late, contact the courier and inform the customer promptly. Offer a solution such as a refund or replacement.

Priority: High

Manage Returns

SHIPPING

When: When requested

Have a clear returns policy. Process return requests quickly and issue refunds or replacements fairly and without delay.

Priority: High

Promote on Social Media

MARKETING

When: Ongoing

Share product photos, customer reviews, and behind-the-scenes content on social platforms to attract new buyers.

Priority: High

Collect Customer Reviews

MARKETING

When: After each sale

Ask satisfied customers to leave a review. Positive feedback builds trust and improves your shop's ranking on marketplaces.

Priority: High

Identify Your Target Customer

MARKETING

When: Before launching

Define who your ideal customer is: their age, interests, and budget. Tailor your listings and promotions to appeal to them.

Priority: Essential

Run a Seasonal Campaign

MARKETING

When: Before peak seasons

Plan promotions around holidays, back-to-school, or summer periods when customer demand typically increases.

Priority: Medium

Reply to Customer Questions

CUSTOMER SERVICE

When: Daily / within 24 hours

Answer enquiries quickly and politely. Customers are more likely to buy if they receive a fast, helpful response.

Priority: Essential

Handle Complaints

CUSTOMER SERVICE

When: When issues arise

Listen to the customer's problem without arguing. Offer a practical solution and follow up to ensure they are satisfied.

Priority: Essential

Identify Repeat Customers

CUSTOMER SERVICE

When: Ongoing

Notice which customers buy from you more than once. Reward loyalty with a small discount or personalised message.

Priority: Medium

Receive and Confirm Orders

ORDER MANAGEMENT

When: Per order

Check each new order as soon as it arrives. Confirm receipt with the customer and verify that the product is in stock.

Priority: Essential

Confirm Payment

ORDER MANAGEMENT

When: Per order

Verify that payment has been received before preparing or shipping the order. Never ship without confirmed payment.

Priority: Essential

Prepare and Ship the Order

ORDER MANAGEMENT

When: Per order

Pick, pack, and label the product. Hand it to the courier or post office and share the tracking number with the customer.

Priority: Essential

Track Orders and Follow Up

ORDER MANAGEMENT

When: After shipping

Monitor delivery status and send the customer a follow-up message after delivery to ensure everything arrived as expected.

Priority: High

Spot Sales Patterns

ORDER MANAGEMENT

When: Weekly / monthly

Review which products sell most often and when. Use these patterns to plan stock levels and future promotions.

Priority: High