

Enterprising teenagers are setting up blogshops to sell almost anything.
In the third of The Straits Times series of four features, we delve into this new world of doing business online.

Cost: \$0; Monthly sales: \$10



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Cheap and easy to set up

- **Building a blogshop:** Teens set up an account with LiveJournal, Blogspot or WordPress with a domain name in mind. They then choose a blog template, sometimes customising it if they know HTML.
- **Sourcing:** Blogshop owners go to forums hosted on communities such as Flowerpod for leads on overseas suppliers. They seek out local suppliers in places like Chinatown and City Plaza.
- **Pictures sell:** Teens take great pains to style, shoot and post photos of merchandise. Many owners double as their own models, then take a lot of care writing descriptions of their products.
- **Marketing:** Blogshop owners advertise and promote their wares mostly through e-mail, tag boards in other blogshops and online communities. Regulars get updates via a mailing list.
- **Requests:** Potential buyers can contact retailers via e-mail or the inquiries tagboard. Once an item is requested, an invoice is sent out.
- **Payment:** Expected to be made within 24 hours of getting the invoice, through ATM transfer or Internet banking. Once payment is received, buyers usually get their purchases within three days.
- **Bad buyers beware:** Buyers who do not make payment can be blacklisted by blogshop owners as a warning to other blogshops. A wall of shame at a blogshop may have names, cellphone numbers, e-mail messages and sometimes even the photographs of these buyers.
- **No exchange or returns:** Most blogshops do not offer a return or exchange policy unless the merchandise is faulty. Customers can send the items back but must bear return postage costs.

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Blogshops are easy to run, cheap and fun – so more teens are turning online entrepreneurs

■ BY LIM POW HONG

MS RUTH CHUA is 19 and has a 50-hour work week, but she is not part of the button-down corporate world.

Instead, she scours places such as Chinatown and Little India for kitschy clothes and sells them on her blog, called Lyla Rose.

Ms Chua, a business student at a private college, rakes in about \$10,000 in sales every month on the so-called blogshop.

"The whole business started as a hobby. I didn't expect it to do so well," said Ms Chua, who started the store in January.

An increasing number of enterprising teens are turning to blogshops to make a quick buck. They are lured by low start-up costs and a burgeoning market of Net-savvy youths with a taste for the unique and inexpensive.

The Straits Times recently e-mailed about 100 blogshop owners listed in directories LiveJournal and Blogger, and about 40 per cent were run by teens.

For many, the websites are not just a passing fancy. About 40 per cent of teen blogshop owners polled spend between four and 10 hours a week maintaining their site. Over 30 per cent pour more than 20 hours a week into their business.

They sell everything from second-hand clothes to customised shoes and handmade jewellery. Their stock comes from places as close as Arab Street and as far away as South Korea.

The work gives students hands-on experience in areas such as marketing, sales and web design – knowledge that could pay off later, experts say.

"Today, it is a blogshop. Tomorrow, it may be something bigger," said Mr Lim Kin Chew, a science and technology lecturer at SIM University.

Blogshops went mainstream around 2006 when young people began posting second-hand clothes and handmade accessories for sale on their blogs. They soon found it was easy money, and the trend has burgeoned, even attracting non-bloggers.

Blogshops draw teens because they are easy to set up and cost next to nothing, unlike an eBay shop or a retail website, which come with web-hosting fees and complex credit card transactions.

"There is no red tape in running a blogshop and I do not have to report to anyone," said junior college student Monica Lie, 17.

For others, blogshops are a creative outlet. Budding designer Nurul Shafiezah Mohamed Faddli, 19, customises canvas shoes. She makes a modest \$100 a month from her blogshop, ILoveShoes.

"I set up my blogshop to showcase my designs and earn some money," said the final-year Republic Polytechnic student.

Like her, most blogshop owners are motivated by passion. That is a good thing, since sales

are spotty and most make at best \$100 to \$200 a month. Ms Chua is a rare success story.

Generally, parents are supportive of their children's online entrepreneurship. Delivery driver Ng Ah Tio accompanies his 19-year-old daughter on buying trips for her blogshop, which sells handmade accessories. "I act more as an adviser," he said.

UniSIM's Mr Lim said young virtual retailers are better off experimenting with blogshops than just sitting through lectures. "Teens learn the reality of doing business all by themselves," he said.

As Ms Chua put it: "Running a blogshop is a full-time job. But I find it so much cooler."

Additional reporting by Kristie Chiew and IN Crowd reporters Bryan Lee, Marissa Yeo and Sirin Thongudomporn
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"There is no red tape in running a blogshop and I do not have to report to anyone."

Monica Lie, a 17-year-old junior college student

I never knew...

Madam Ong Bing Hui, 48, housewife, whose daughter Sim Siew Noi, 19, runs the blogshop MYnt (<http://mynt-shop.livejournal.com>), which sells accessories.

I NEVER knew how difficult it is to sort out orders on the internet and I'm really amazed at how Siew Noi does it so easily.

I once checked for orders online and I never knew there were so many steps to even switching on the computer. There were way too many steps to remember, I got so frustrated by all the steps and gave up!

To help her, I sew the belts that she sells. I

also check and pack the merchandise and mail the parcels for her.

Of course, I was concerned about her safety. When she first started two years ago, I went with her to meet customers. Who knows what they might do to her? Thankfully, she's savvy enough to meet them in public places like MRT stations so now, I don't accompany her.

Cheating? I don't worry as much about that. After all, her customers have to pay her first before she sends the merchandise over.

I'm willing to support her with the financial capital if she wants to set up an actual shop. After all, the accessories she sells are beautiful.

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