

eCommerce Platform Best Practices

1. **Know your requirements, validate their importance.** The single most important step in finding a platform for your eCommerce needs is to define all your detailed requirements and know what you must have and what you can either live without or build later. Having the best new widget is great, but if it is very expensive and only leads to a small improvement in sales, it may not be worth it.
2. **Understand your customers, what makes them buy.** Knowing your customers and keeping them in mind will help you understand what features would set your site apart from the competition and would improve their loyalty and shopping experience.
3. **Platform due diligence is key. Review many options before deciding on any solution.** There are so many eCommerce systems out there. Most look good, but once you compare them to your requirements, to each other's cost, and talk to their customers, there will always be a top group that should be reviewed further. Eliminate the rest.
4. **Realize that your eCommerce platform is a "store" seen by millions of customers.** Your features and design will be representative of you and your brand. Make sure it conveys professionalism and the right message. Cookie-cutter design, subpar features and poor customer support would never make it in an a brick and mortar store; thus, there is no room for them online.
5. **Integration is no longer an option; it is a necessity.** Make sure your eCommerce platform can integrate with all your business functions and third-party tools. Your systems must be integrated and be able accept orders, confirm them, process payments, decrement inventory, print shipping labels, create a pick order, generate reports and update your financials without a human being ever touching it. Even if long-term, you should always be working toward this goal.
6. **Choose or add a solution that helps customers find what they want.** As the number of products you sell increases, so do the merchandising and search challenges. Make sure the eCommerce platform can effectively merchandise and search for the products you have now and in the future, should your merchandise mix change; if not, eliminate it or expect you will need a personalization or search add on.
7. **Give your customers as much product information as possible.** Platforms that either provide or have standard integrations to show comprehensive product data, comparisons, reviews, and rich media techniques such as image zoom, alternate images, color swatches, etc. will improve your customers' product knowledge and will help them to be confident in their purchase, increasing customer conversion.
8. **Try to keep it as easy to use as possible.** Best eCommerce design practices include simple navigation, clear messaging (inventory, pricing, shipping, tax), simple checkout, alternative payment methods, anonymous shopping, multiple ship-to's, wish lists, merchandising of cross-sells and up-sells. Make sure your platform has best-of-breed practices or can customize to meet these changing needs.
9. **Understand each platform's support commitment.** How does the provider support them? With internal IT, you have some control over fixing issues. With an outsourced platform, this is not as easy. Make sure the platform you choose has defined service standards tied to financial implications.
10. **Think about the cost, or savings, of using one platform over another.** Depending upon the platform and the tools that it includes, your internal processes, headcount support needs and cost will be different. Think about these when selecting. Generally, using a platform will help you reduce hosting, support and IT labor costs. There are other efficiency gains from having a more automated eCommerce channel. While cost may not be the deciding factor, you should clearly understand the numbers.
11. **Assess your platform's PCI compliance.** Your customers' credit information is sacred. Make sure your platform is PCI compliant to the level you require (based on number of transactions). Be wary of platforms that are only self- assessed; most levels also need quarterly PCI scans to be fully compliant.

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