



Apps – Plugins – Themes: All you need to know

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Apps – plugins – themes: all you need to know

With the release of the Starter and Professional Edition as cloud hosted software, Shopware opens up a new world of possibilities. By adding these cloud-based solutions to our portfolio, it becomes possible to address a new range of customers and opens up new opportunities for the entire community to gain additional revenue. This is true for merchants, agencies, freelancers, theme developers and everyone else who is part of the Shopware Community.

In this Whitepaper you will learn how to take advantage of these new opportunities and what may or may not change for you in the future. Start developing Apps today and take part in what will be the biggest revolution in the Shopware ecosystem since going completely open source with Shopware 5.2 – a bold move at the time which continues to pay off today.

What is an App

Before getting to the How and Why, it is necessary to understand what an App actually is. The key characteristics of what Shopware calls an App are:

- Apps are activated in Shopware, not installed like plugins.
 - Exception: Themes. This is addressed later in the document.
- The App runs separate from the Shopware installation, usually on a different server.
- An App uses Events, Webhooks and the REST API to interact with Shopware.

These characteristics have multiple implications and need some explanation. Let's go over them one by one.

Installation

In order for Shopware to use the functionality an App provides, it needs to know which server to communicate with and when. This is achieved by creating a so-called manifest file. This manifest file contains descriptive data for the App and definitions of which events should call which URLs in your App. What »Event« means in this context is described below.

The manifest file (among other necessary files) is then uploaded to the Shopware Account. After it is published, cloud users as well as self-hosted merchants are able to purchase, install, and use the App. The business logic of the App, so the code that actually changes the behavior of Shopware, is hosted on the servers of the App developer – Read: *Your servers*.

Hosting

Hosting your own App sounds more exciting than it actually is. Shopware provides templates to get you started with developing and hosting your Apps and is currently preparing a partnership with the service provider platform.sh in order to make the task of hosting your own App as simple as possible. The availability of preconfigured hosting for Shopware Apps is planned for June/July this year. Another implication here:

You can use whatever language you want to develop your App. So if you want to use nodejs, Typescript or whatever – it's possible. You are no longer bound to PHP. Apps are applications that are hosted outside of a Shopware installation.

The key part here is »Shopware installation«:

Apps can be used in the cloud product and in the self-hosted/on-premise version of Shopware. No worries though, plugins are still and will remain perfectly fine and usable in a self-hosted environment. You will see the different use cases later on.

Communication

Since hosted outside of Shopware, Apps do not have the possibility to access the Shopware source code directly. This has strong benefits and in some cases drawbacks, which will be addressed later in this whitepaper.

As defined in the aforementioned manifest file, Shopware provides Events.

The logic is simple:

If this Event occurs, call that URL. Basically your App is providing Webhooks in your App for Shopware to communicate with.

An example Event could be `ITEM_ADDED_TO_BASKET`. Every time this happens, Shopware calls the URL defined for this Event along with the data defined for this Event. Your App in turn receives the data, executes its logic and is then, depending on the type of event, able to call a Webhook in order to report back to the Shopware installation.

Apart from that, your App is able to use the Shopware API if it needs to, and it is able to change the appearance of the frontend or the administration as well.

You could, for example, add a new button to the storefront or display content from your App inside an iFrame in the Shopware administration.

This is described in greater detail in the [documentation](#).

How Apps and Plugins are different

By now you should already have a good idea of what an App is able to do, but what are the limitations? There is only one, but depending on what you want to achieve it could be a major one: Apps can't access the Shopware core.

With plugins, you have the full power of Symfony Bundles at your fingertips.

You are able to build functionality that alters or even replaces the behavior of Shopware in radical ways.

Apps are built to enhance and enrich the Shopware core without changing its inner workings. Before we created the Shopware App technology, we researched how the most commonly used plugins change the behavior of Shopware, and found that a lot of this can be done via the new App system we designed. This is possible mostly because of the powerful API that comes with Shopware 6.

The benefits of Apps

The big question is: With a working ecosystem centered around a self-hosted ecommerce system and plugins, why should anyone bother to create Apps? Actually, there are multiple benefits in realising your extension (or theme) as an App whenever possible.

A bigger audience

Shopware cloud will attract a new range of merchants and enable existing merchants to set up new projects which were previously impossible or impractical. The market for a cloud product, especially with a push to new markets in the international sector, are far beyond what is currently possible. The accessibility of a cloud product draws in new merchants and enables existing merchants to quickly whip up new projects.

The term »projects« here is important. With Shopware 6, and especially with Shopware 6 as a backend in the cloud, you can start thinking outside of the box. As a system being able to run headless out of the box, Shopware is capable of far more than just being a traditional online shop.

You, as part of our community, are now free to focus your creativity and awesome ideas not only on enhancing the customer experience in a Shopware installation, but also on creating and implementing new solutions that perfectly fit the ever-changing markets of tomorrow.

The best of both worlds

Although already briefly mentioned, this is actually a major and very important fact to know about Apps: Apps are available in every Shopware 6 installation. This is not a cloud-only technology. So by creating Apps you are actually creating extensions for every Shopware 6 user out there, whether they use the Shopware Cloud or a self-hosted installation.

As of June 2nd, you will be able to develop Apps and Themes and upload them to your Shopware Account. For this to work, you need to install the »App-System-Plugin« in your self-hosted Shopware installation. When the App and Theme Store will be launched officially (around August) the App system will be part of Shopware 6 and the »App-System-Plugin« will no longer be necessary.

Full insight

When creating Apps, there's a huge shift in what level of insight you get. Since the App is running on your server, you actually know which features are used, which ones may need to be cut off, and which features are worth expanding on.

By being able to get detailed usage statistics on your Apps, you are now able to fine-tune your business model to an extent that is simply impossible with a normal Shopware Plugin. And since Apps work in self-hosted environments, you are also able to include data from those projects in your optimizations.

What Apps are capable of

The capabilities of Apps increase over time and the first release will by no means be the final stage of evolution. Instead, it is a base to build upon; already capable of the most common tasks that are usually achieved via plugins.

Examples include: Extending the frontend with new functionality, adding your own forms to the administration, or adding custom data to the database via custom fields.

Since the App system now exists as a solid base to work with, more capabilities first and foremost means more Events in Shopware. While we will be adding new Events in Shopware ourselves over time, you are always able to propose new Events and add them to Shopware via a pull request on GitHub. Overall, the Shopware Cloud is still Shopware 6. Just »in the Cloud«.

Apps and Themes

When adding new functionality to Shopware via Apps, oftentimes you want to change the appearance of the storefront. For this purpose, Theme extensions can be included in an App. This takes a special role since Themes actually are running in the Shopware installation and do not need to be hosted by you.

That means if you only want to change the appearance of Shopware without adding or extending functionality, you can create an App without the need to host anything yourself. This may be obvious since a Theme usually has no business logic, but it's worth pointing out anyway.

Because a simple Theme does not need a backend and Apps can be used in the Cloud and in self-hosted Shops, you should always implement Themes as Apps. This way you are extending your customer base without any additional effort.

When to write a plugin

With all that said about the new App system, of course there are still scenarios where a plugin is the only way to implement certain functionality. And there will always be customers that need or want to use a self-hosted version, and there will be many.

As a rule of thumb: If possible, write an App. If absolutely necessary, create a plugin. In the first iteration you will find some limitations that will not be present in later iterations of the app system. For example, changing prices during checkout or having a synchronous checkout, which is necessary for implementing payment or coupons, will not be possible right from the start. So in case you are trying to implement something and are missing functionality, reach out to us in order to get informed about when and if implementing this functionality will be possible via the app system. It is even possible – and we encourage you – to take a look at your existing plugins and think about if you could re-implement part of the functionality as an App.

How to get your App published

Apps (and Themes of course) will be distributed via the Community Store and the soon-to-come App and Theme Store inside the Shopware Administration, which is planned for this August.

You are already able to upload your Apps via your Shopware Account. With that in mind, you should start right away and get into App development in order to be fully prepared for when the journey starts.

Quality Guidelines

If you have already published plugins in the Community Store in the past, you already know about the Shopware Quality Guidelines. The quality of Plugins, Themes and Apps is important to us. Because of that, extensions are only published if they meet our Quality Guidelines and, as in the case of traditional plugins, pass the code review.

In order to be prepared for this, get started by reading the [Quality Guidelines for App developers](#).

The timeline

To summarise:

- You can now learn more about App development and start developing right away. [To the documentation](#)
- In June / July we are planning the above mentioned cooperation with platform.sh (we will of course inform you about this more in the future).
- The apps are expected to be available in the Community Store and App and Theme Store inside the Shopware Administration in August
- In addition, we will use webinars and training courses to provide you with even more information on the Shopware Cloud.

Conclusion

Shopware 6 – self-hosted or from the cloud – and the App system provide new opportunities for all of us. Start right now and participate in the next major evolution of the Shopware ecosystem – you can help make the future even more secure, diverse, and in the end, even more profitable than it is today. Together, as a community, we will be able to pull this off and build what will become legendary in the future.

You have questions about Shopware Cloud or the App-System?

Feel free to contact us at any time:

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