



How to select the right eCommerce platform

Tips for retailers, agencies & B2B organisations

It is not only about choosing a platform

Are you interested in starting an online business? Or are you dissatisfied with the performance of your current eCommerce platform and in the market for a new solution? Whatever the case may be, you are looking to make some changes to your online strategy and downloading this whitepaper was the first step towards reshaping your future in eCommerce.

When it comes to selecting your eCommerce platform, making the right decision involves a strenuous evaluation process. The choice between different eCommerce platforms is vast and defining the operational area is not always so straightforward. Many platforms fail to meet the bar set by today's online retailers and some have become outdated in an industry that continues to evolve without an end in sight. This results in a high degree of uncertainty when it comes to the long-term success of your online business. In the age of eCommerce disruption, you need an innovative solution that can be trusted as the technological backbone of your business.

This whitepaper is intended to give you a detailed overview of what you have to keep in mind when selecting a new eCommerce platform. Laced with practical information from industry experts and valuable use cases, it also introduces you to Shopware's best-of-breed enterprise capabilities.

With any questions, you can get in touch with us directly by writing an email to sales@shopware.com or by calling +44(0) 203 095 2445.



Stefan Heyne

*CEO and co-founder,
Shopware*

Platform threats

Things to keep in mind to avoid risks



Total cost of ownership

With additional fees, high hosting costs and possible security threats, it's difficult to determine the exact total cost of ownership of most eCommerce platforms.



Uncertainty around support

Without the guarantee of support, regular updates and ongoing improvements, you're putting your business at risk.



No commerce and content capabilities

Out-of-the-box, most eCommerce platforms fail to offer any powerful content features, leaving you dependent on third-party integrations.



Major breaks

Sometimes there are breaks between two major versions of a software. Updating from an older version to a new one might demand significant effort and resources.



Limited search capabilities

Integrating a powerful search into your shop can require a lot of time and money. You often need third-party solutions to provide the best search experience for your customers.



No drop shipment

Implementing a merchant integration or drop shipping functionality in your shop can be complex and expensive, which can slow down the growth of your business.

Digital transformation

It's time to reassess your business strategy

by Paul Rogers – eCommerce & Digital Consultant

The number of large, global businesses launching digital-focused transformation initiatives has increased significantly in recent years, moving their key functions and operations online or launching direct-to-consumer channels. Strong examples of these types of projects include TAG Heuer (who now sell direct to their end consumers online), publishing brands like Time Inc. (who have moved into selling online) and Land Rover (who now sell fully customisable car models online).

Now is certainly the time to be making these shifts - due in part to constant changes in how users are purchasing and consuming information and in part to new

technologies being made readily available to support these projects. Things such as improved internet accessibility and growth in mobile capabilities have led to far more demanding consumers who expect seamless shopping experiences at every level.

Advancements in retail technology also helped streamline the process of both eliminating technical debt and moving away from legacy systems, with open source playing a big part in this development. Considering these advancements and the predictions around customer purchasing behaviour, now has to be the time for these big businesses to start looking to better service the demand.



Paul Rogers is a London-based eCommerce and Digital Marketing Solutions Consultant, with around ten years' experience in the online retail space, working mainly with Magento over the last seven years. Paul provides consultation for merchants, systems integrators and product companies around eCommerce, Magento and digital marketing.

What's the difference?

Understanding types of eCommerce platforms

by Sebastian Klöpfer – Director Research & Development, Shopware

One of the first and most fundamental decisions a brand makes is the selection of their eCommerce platform. A software solution is the basis of all eCommerce activities, and in the best case, the brand will use it for years. Let's jump into the most common types of solutions available for your online business.

Open source

Open source solutions allow free access to the source code, which is an enormous advantage when adapting the software to meet your specific requirements. Characteristics of open source software include:

- Free distribution of the software and transfer of the source code
- Permission to make further changes to the software
- Transfer of modified source code under the same licence conditions
- Integrity of the source code from the author
- Prohibition of limitations on transferring the licensed software with other software
- The neutrality of the software with regard to other technologies

The proliferation of open source software means that there is a large developer

community constantly working to improve the software. This ensures the flexibility, extensibility and future viability of an open source solution.

It should be noted that making changes and adaptations to the software is very time consuming and requires technical knowledge. However, it is possible to seek help from experienced external service providers. The resulting costs should be considered when evaluating the software.

Software as a Service (SaaS)

SaaS falls under the umbrella of cloud computing, which is defined by the American standardisation body NIST as follows:

“Cloud computing is a model for easy, on-demand network access to a common pool of configurable computing resources (e.g. networks, servers, storage, applications and services) that are provided quickly and can be released with low administration effort and minimal intervention by the service provider.”

Typically, the SaaS solution is developed and made available to users by an external IT service provider. Instead of installing a licence on local servers, brands obtain a right of use that entitles them to use the software developed by the provider.

The online shop is installed on the servers of the IT service provider and can generally be extended in a modular way. Updates, maintenance and the further development of the software are carried out by the provider. Brands rely on a complete platforms that can be used immediately. The implementation phase is very short and market entry can take place comparatively quickly. Due the complete IT infrastructure being outsourced, brands are able to focus more energy on the core aspects of the company.

Likewise, using a SaaS solution does not require advanced programming skills, because the software is fully developed. However, this also means the design options and the range of functions are limited when using a SaaS solution. Rented shop solutions often have few design templates and do not give many customisation options, which is a major disadvantage for companies looking to fulfill specific requirements.

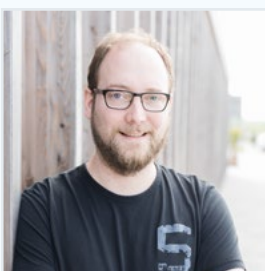
Another problem is data protection, because sensitive data, such as customer data or passwords, are outsourced to an external service provider. Brands are dependent on the provider, considering it's the provider who handles the critical business data and takes over the entire support process for the software.

Proprietary platforms

Proprietary software is owned by the manufacturing company. Online platforms based on proprietary software are developed with the intention of making profits through the targeted distribution of the software. For this reason, manufacturers want to protect the source code and do not make it available to third parties. Users of proprietary software purchase a licence from the manufacturer, which grants them the right to use the software. Users are prohibited from making changes to the source code of the software or copying the software. Only the manufacturer can make adaptations to the software.

Custom solutions

Custom platforms are typically developed for a specific project and require extensive programming knowledge and resources. Online retailers who develop their own online shop can tailor the platform completely to their individual requirements. However, the development of such an online shop is very time consuming and costly because it requires the expertise of multiple disciplines. In addition, the technology of specially developed solutions is often not as elaborate as that of platforms offered by shop system manufacturers. Maintenance, servicing and support also generate additional expenses, so self-development results in ongoing costs for the long term.



*As Director of Research & Development at Shopware, **Sebastian Klöpfer** is responsible for Shopware's product roadmap and implementation; a breadth of responsibility that includes support, quality assurance and technical documentation for all products.*

Making the right choice

How to choose an eCommerce platform

by Richard Jackson – Director, Inviqa

Investing in an eCommerce platform is a significant undertaking that needs to demonstrate tangible ROI. Every choice you make needs to support agreed, measurable objectives, but many businesses lose sight of their goals in the process of selecting a platform.

It's easy to end up following the crowd, getting drawn in by tempting discounts, or comparing eCommerce platforms on a purely feature-by-feature basis. But this type of thinking can see you getting locked into a platform that doesn't support the changing nature of your business and your customers.

Before you make any decisions, be sure to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who are you?

This is the fundamental question your business needs to ask itself when considering a digital investment of this scale. This is basically a question about whether your business wants to be an innovator, or a fast follower. Do you want to disrupt your market, or reap the rewards of letting others tread before you?

How much risk, time, and cost are you prepared to invest in order to achieve your business goals?

Only by identifying your organisation's motivations can you start to understand the type of platform that makes sense for you. As an example, an off-the-shelf solution like Shopware isn't suitable for absolutely everyone, but the SaaS (software as a solution) platform makes a good fit for an organisation selling high-value items, with no in-house technical team or little desire to run their own technical roadmap. Instead of focusing on leveraging technical advantage, these organisations could instead focus their efforts on the customer proposition, personalised marketing, and proactive customer services that drive a competitive advantage.

2. What's your commercial profile?

Your organisation's commercial profile and margins will also influence your platform selection process. Each platform will have its own licensing model which may or may not suit the way your business operates. Consider how you will be funding this initiative and the margins your business makes, along with other key factors such as the number of transactions you perform, the markets you operate in, and how these ultimately impact the cost of operations.

3. What's on your digital roadmap?

It's important to start your platform evaluation process with a business roadmap

for the next 3-5 years that will act as a frame of reference for any decisions you make around digital investment.

Thinking in terms of one-off projects doesn't lend itself to long-term success, so you'll need a roadmap that supports continuous improvement and provides enough flexibility to evolve in line with changing technologies and customer behaviours.

An off-the-shelf solution like Shopware is great for organisations that don't want to define their own technical roadmaps. But retailers using platforms like these will still need to have a close understanding of those platforms' roadmaps to prepare for upcoming features and functions.

4. Where can you get support?

If you're planning to work with a technical partner to help create, implement, and support your platform, choose a partner that is transparent, will act in the project's best interests, and puts your business first. Base your partner selection process on track record, industry experience, and cultural fit. Once that's been done, your engagement with the digital partner or consultancy should begin with collaborative stakeholder workshops to prime your initiative for success.

5. Move or improve?

Lastly, invest time in understanding the challenges you're facing, the ambitions you have, and where your

existing solution is proving inadequate.

In the short term you could use custom development, third-party modules, and technology partners to help you drive improvements to your existing platform. You may then decide to use newly-gained revenue resulting from those improvements to fund an investment into a new platform for the longer term.

Once again, this will ultimately depend on your business goals and how your current platform is preventing you from achieving them.

There's no silver bullet to eCommerce success, but remember that you should always base your platform decision on finding the solution that best serves your business goals. Equipped with answers to these five questions, you're primed to start making the right decisions for your business.

Shopware partner Inviqa equips businesses to achieve their goals faster, accelerate growth, and drive innovation. Its digital services provide end-to-end support across the digital product lifecycle – from consultancy and iteration, through to solution-build, implementation, and continuous improvement.

Learn more about Inviqa's Shopware services [here](#).



Richard Jackson is eCommerce practice director at Inviqa and has led major brands to commercial success. Prior to his time at Inviqa, Richard founded Session Digital, an award-winning eCommerce agency that merged with Inviqa in 2016.

B2B eCommerce

6 tips for your digital strategy

by Fanziska Epping – Social Media Manager, Shopware

Merchants and manufacturers take note: B2B is here to stay, and it carries a remarkable potential to increase your turnover. However, due to fear of high programming costs that are slow to pay off, boardrooms are often quick to throw any idea of a B2B online shop overboard. But in order to remain a leader in modern trade, companies can no longer avoid digitisation. It is important to decide for an eCommerce platform that also supports B2B functionalities. Here are a few tips to kick-start your journey into successful B2B trade.

1. Market research & benchmarking

You should first get an overview of the market situation. Market research is distinguished by primary and secondary research, where primary research involves a high degree of effort and expense and secondary research involves investigating external and internal sources of information.

Points to keep in mind during research:

- Demographic data of current & future customer base
- Own distribution structures
- The largest competitors in the industry
- Sales structures of competitors
- Balance sheets and annual reports of competitors

- Industry turnover statistics
- Price lists of competitors
- Prices of potential new competitors
- Analysis of strengths and weaknesses

2. Establishing an eCommerce team within the company

When building your eCommerce team, think ahead of time which employees from your different departments should be involved in the project. The implementation of an online shop should also involve input from parties outside the IT department. This includes the purchasing department, sales team and marketing department. Also think about how the responsibilities should be delegated.

3. Anchoring change management

Once plans are put in place, it's important the entire workforce is informed about what changes they can expect in the near future. Show your employees the benefits of including an online platform in your business plan in order to increase acceptance early on in the project.

Some employees might fear losing their jobs due to the misconception that digitisation means machine will inevitably replace the human. The opposite is actually true – processes must be constantly evaluated and optimised through human intelligence. This is especially for products that require

individual consulting.

It must also be made clear to the sales team that an online shop can help increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. If your B2B shop is designed as an all-encompassing portal where the customer can order spare parts and pull up their customer data, this may lead to a reduction in workload for the customer service team. Gather ideas, suggestions, concerns and evaluate employee feedback.

4. Create a profile of your requirements

In order to define the requirements for your online shop, you should first gather an overview of all processes together with your employees and map the touchpoints of the individual departments.

Then look towards the requirements of your customers. What services do your customers expect throughout the consultation and purchasing process? Are there any reoccurring problems that could be solved?

5. Finding the right implementation partner

Especially for companies with complex structures, it makes sense to contact an external partner. Shopware has a rich partner network of agencies that specialise in eCommerce and help companies successfully implement their projects.

When selecting a partner, make sure they have experience implementing projects in your branch. Our partner listing provides you with an overview of the Shopware partners in your area.

In the best case, you have already defined a project team in advance that can be involved in the entire pitching process.

6. Create a strategic marketing concept early on

Actually, the term “project” in connection with the implementation of a B2B shop is wrong, because a project has a beginning and an end. In reality there is no end to a fundamental change in the sales process, rather one goal that should be clearly focused.

When it comes to your strategic orientation, measurable, realistic and controllable key figures must be defined. These should keep your eye on the goal and help you define measures and carry out a mid-term evaluation (and possible reorientation) of the sales strategy.

In order to effectively introduce your online shop to your customers and create acceptance, you have to start planning marketing measures well in advance.

Conclusion

Even if online business is not yet booming in your industry, investing now in a scalable platform is absolutely worth your while. One thing is certain: digitisation is an irreversible process. The Internet is here to stay.



Franziska Epping is passionate about eCommerce and spearheads marketing for the Shopware partner network in the United Kingdom. With a degree in business economics, she is a social media expert and also responsible for all social media activities of the eCommerce platform. Next to B2B commerce, Franziska's area expertise includes enterprise eCommerce and the latest trends in the digital age.

Smart solutions

How Shopware strengthens your online business



Lower total cost of ownership

One-time license fees and numerous standard features, incl. SEO, marketing tools, multi-currency and store setup, make Shopware a leading platform with one of the lowest TCO in the market.



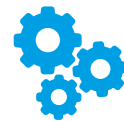
Long-term security

Long-term support and an open roadmap guarantee you can securely grow your business. Enterprise customers benefit from 24/7 emergency support.



Emotional shopping

Shopware offers a wide range of unique CMS functionalities that create immersive shopping experiences and bridge the gap between content and commerce.



Seamless integration and upgrades

With easy update paths, a highly flexible architecture and an open API, existing system infrastructures can be seamlessly integrated with Shopware.



Enterprise search fully integrated

With Shopware Enterprise, you benefit from Elasticsearch being natively integrated. Your customers will always connect with the products they are looking for.



Drop and stock shipment

Shopware Enterprise offers merchant integration as a standard. You can seamlessly integrate new merchants into an existing system infrastructure, along the likes of [EURONICS](#).

Case Study: Hughes

The digital evolution of a classic retailer

It was an online shop that seemingly had it all: Consistent growth, superb customer reviews across the board, a spot in the 2017 IRUK Top 350 and the “Domestic and General Internet Retailer of the Year” award. But from their experience as a retailer approaching centenarian status, [Hughes](#) knew maintaining the status quo would not be enough to keep them at the top of their retail game.

Investment in innovation: Relaunch using Shopware Enterprise

What started as a radio repair shop in 1921 has since grown to become one of the leading specialist electronic retailers in the UK. The secret to their success? The ability to anticipate, understand and react to their customers’ needs.

“In order to remain competitive in the current retail climate, we realised it’s absolutely vital we have full control over content, including the ability to launch new promotions and landing pages in a matter of hours. Since our former online shop couldn’t keep up with this demand, we decided a relaunch was a necessary next step,” Hughes CEO Robert Hughes said of the project background.

With upwards of 6,000 products and over 60 brands represented in the shop, Hughes needed a sophisticated solution that seamlessly connected with their existing business processes and gave their dedicated

eCommerce team the freedom to change content on a moment’s notice. According to Enterprise implementation specialist [CB Squared](#), the decision to relaunch using Shopware Enterprise ultimately came down to the ability to flexibly manage content on a massive scale.

New features to meet diverse customer expectations

Next to providing the customer with valuable content throughout the shop, Hughes focused on improving usability. From searching for a product to the checkout and payment, every aspect of the shop was overhauled with the end customer in mind.

One way this was solved can be seen on the product detail page, where the customer can expand or collapse boxes to view information relevant to their purchasing decision – an effect which is both informative and supported by a clean design. The content of the collapsible boxes includes financing

options, reviews, product specifications, product details and additional services that can be easily booked directly through the website.

Commenting on the new digital experience of the shop, Mark Howes, Business Development Director of CB Squared said: “With this project, we incorporated the competitive strengths that made Hughes so successful in traditional retail, including exceptional service and detailed product information, into the online shop.” Reporting a 5x increase in mobile revenue, the new online presence from Hughes proves the effectiveness of evolving to meet your customer’s online shopping needs.

When it comes to searching for products from specific brands, Hughes customers now have multiple resources at hand. Next to a separate category reserved for brands and the ability to filter brands in other categories, CB Squared built a solution so that individual landing pages for each brand can be implemented using Shopping Worlds. This extensive feat was made possible by making clever use of Shopware’s standard marketing functionalities in combination with custom programming.

One hour click & collect via real-time connection with over 54 retail locations

Shopware’s customisation possibilities were another major draw for the brand. Not only was the entire template completely rebuilt to meet the project requirements, but CB Squared made extensive use of Shopware’s open API to build a number of custom extensions.

Eager to gain complete control over managing data, CB Squared built a real-time integration with their ERP system. Now when a customer views a product in

the online shop, they can see if it is available on display in a specific retail store or for one hour click & collect. For this, the checkout process was also improved to accommodate the requirements of click & collect, once again bridging the gap between service offline and online.

Sights on B2B

The company has also grown to include a special trade division – Hughes Trade – which will be one of the first projects to migrate to Shopware’s [B2B Suite](#). Paul Chisnall, General Manager Hughes Trade: “The B2B industry is going through a digital revolution. The Shopware B2B Suite will allow us to stay ahead of the curve, providing our trade customers with a more efficient and easier online ordering process”. Supported by CB Squared, the Hughes project will be the first B2B Suite launched in the United Kingdom.



Testimonials

What agencies think about Shopware



“Shopware provides a visually appealing and technically powerful platform, it is our primary choice for migrating clients off Magento.”

Ben Burch – Managing Director, Infinite Codeworks



“Shopware has everything a modern eCommerce business could want in their product. What’s more important is the people. Nothing is too much trouble for them. Being able to offer our clients end-to-end superb support is what makes the difference.”

Simon Wharton – Managing Director, PushOn



“Shopware offers a great spectrum of out-of-the-box functionalities. It is a very powerful platform, with the flexibility that makes it a joy to work with, and it will enable our clients to really grow their online presence in 2018.”

Timothy Willis – Cofounder & Client Services Director, C3 Media



“Our dedicated eCommerce team now has complete control when it comes to quickly implementing new content, including landing pages, special offers or individual brand promotions, which was exactly the goal of the relaunch.”

Simon Cox – Director eCommerce, Hughes

A platform for agencies

How GPMD decided for Shopware

by Mark Slocock – Managing Director, GPMD

When and why did you decide to add Shopware to your portfolio?

Since 2006, [GPMD](#) has focused on delivering projects using open source PHP platforms. Our first selection was a CMS called SilverStripe and then we started developing with Magento when it launched in 2008. By 2015 our business was 90% eCommerce and we were able to support our clients' growth by building some great sites on Magento, but in 2016 we decided it was time to widen our focus and specialise in more than one eCommerce platform.

We started looking around and evaluated a number of platforms before we found Shopware. Most platforms we looked at hit a dead end for various reasons early on in our evaluation process. However, we liked Shopware from the start and the more we evaluated it, the more we liked it.

The technology stack was familiar to our developers, which meant we are able to pick it up quickly. We also were impressed by the Shopware team's dedication to show us the platform and answer questions.

After meeting in London in February 2017, it was clear to us that Shopware was genuinely interested in delivering successful projects both for agencies and clients. We decided to invest in training our team, learning the

platform and talking to merchants about Shopware. It wasn't a hard decision and we have enjoyed our journey with Shopware since the very beginning.

There were some aspects we particularly liked about the platform:

- The further integration of Symfony
- Smaller code base with less complexity, making it easier to browse and understand
- Using universal PHP libraries like Smarty and Doctrine
- The straightforward upgrade process
- The direct support of the Shopware team

As well as some key features, which we use on a regular basis:

- Multi-site capabilities for international and multi-brand sites
- Multi-warehouse as standard
- Flexible CMS
- Stock and order history reports on each item

We signed our first project in the summer of 2017 and by the end of the year, already had an additional two projects in progress.

As an agency, what are the main advantages of using Shopware?

We are finding that development is considerably faster with Shopware, meaning we can deliver a superior solution for our

clients. This is helped by the support we have had in training the team and being able to discuss different approaches with core developers.

We aren't ones for stereotypes, but in the case of Shopware we have found that German engineering really is exceptional and the approach of evolution not revolution to developing the platform is beneficial for merchants and agencies alike.

The Shopware Community Store offers a wide range of extensions to cover a majority of our requirements and we are looking at the option of creating and marketing our own extensions for the areas that aren't currently covered. We have found that there are some gaps for the UK market, which is an opportunity for us as an agency.

We have enjoyed the possibility of growing the Shopware community in UK by starting the London Meetup group, which meets every quarter to support merchants and developers working with the platform.

We've been impressed by the quick response times from Shopware team and their willingness to improve the code when we make suggestions.

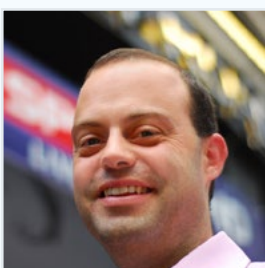
What are the advantages of using Shopware for merchants?

When looking at platforms, merchants should consider a number of points, starting with the features offered out of the box. Shopware offers a number of features that

are attractive for merchants looking to grow their business for the long term:

1. Flexible CMS allows merchants to deliver rich content to their eCommerce stores
2. Pickware ERP solution bundled with Shopware provides some key features such as multi-warehouse support, smart pick and pack solutions, detailed reporting & electronic point of sale
3. Multi-site capabilities allow merchants to easily expand internationally
4. The core modules provide a great set of functionality to the platform with the advantage of being able to pick and choose which features to install, leading to a more efficient code base (i.e. less redundant code)
5. The 3rd party extensions allow a fully featured site to support everything from marketing, internationalisation, payments, email service providers, reviews and shipping
6. Scalability and performance make the platform appealing to enterprise customers

Next, merchants should consider pricing. The different editions of Shopware allow merchants of all sizes to use the right version for their needs and grow with the platform. A one-time fee can be accounted for as a capital investment, allowing merchants to maximise their Profit and Loss account by putting the project costs on the balance sheet and keeping the monthly running costs low.



Having studied Computer Science at Oxford Brookes University, Mark Slocock worked for the Xtreme Network as a systems analyst before starting GPMD in 1999. Mark has a passion for eCommerce, web standards, project management, online marketing and business. Currently Mark is responsible for liaising with clients.

Your simple path to Shopware

Personal consultation

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Meet Shopware in person at the following events:

Internet Retailing Expo

21 – 22 March 2018, Birmingham

eCommerce expo

26 – 27 September, London

Internet Retailing and eDelivery Conference

11 October, London



Deepak Anand, General Manager UK, Shopware

Digital transformation is about remaining relevant in a hyper-connected industry where technology plays an essential role in nearly every step of the customer journey. Do you have the innovative technology you need to move forward with this transformation?

To learn more about how Shopware can help you respond to changing customer needs and serve the ongoing growth of your business, get in contact with us today!