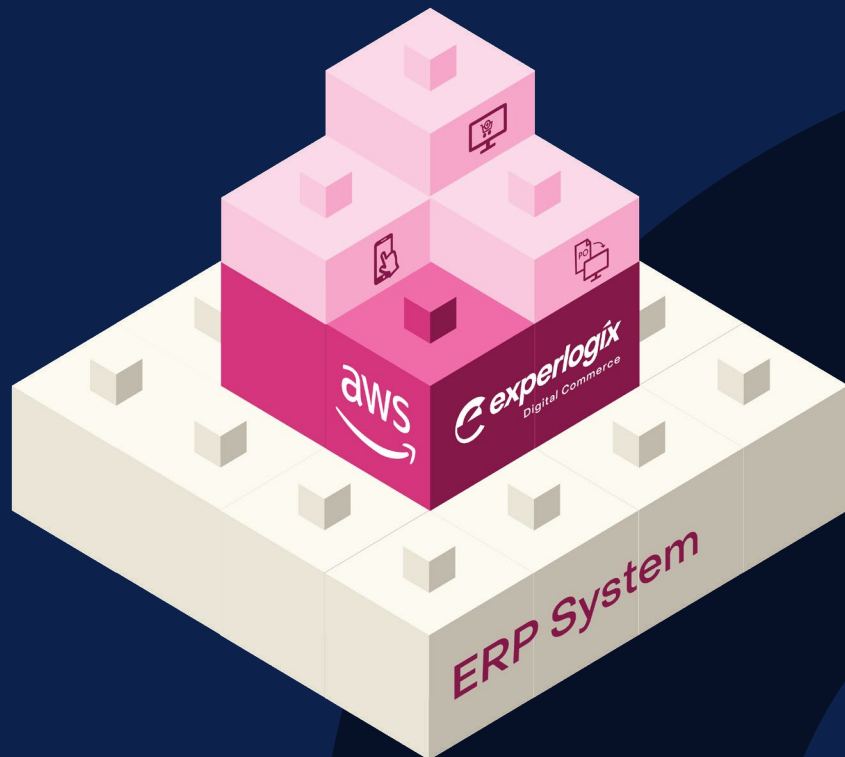


10

eCommerce
Platform
Essentials



Introduction

Ecommerce has grown steadily over the past 10 years. Online sales are rapidly growing year on year, and they're predicted to keep increasing in the future. As well as retail, if you have a wholesale or distribution business, or you manufacture products, an eCommerce site is crucial to capitalise on the explosion in online sales growth.

While you could hire a web development agency or employ your own in-house IT resource to get your business started online, those costs can inhibit your ability to grow rapidly.

Opting for an already-developed eCommerce platform saves you time, money and increases your speed to market.

The stumbling block, however, is that there are lots of options available to you.

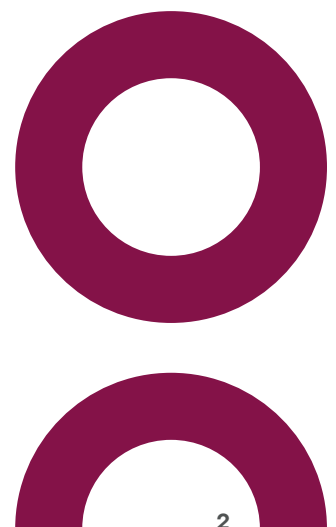
So how do you know that you're choosing the right one?

In this article, we've outlined the 10 essential things you'll need to consider when you're looking for the best fit eCommerce platform for your business.

The top 10 essentials in this guide include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. ERP Integration | 6. Platform Types |
| 2. Third-Party Integrations | 7. Security |
| 3. Platform Scalability | 8. Web Hosting |
| 4. SEO Friendliness | 9. Customer Service |
| 5. Platform Responsiveness | 10. Business Alignment |

Now let's take a look in more detail and help you get a better understanding of why this top 10 is so important.



1. ERP Integration

If you use an ERP system for your business, you should consider eCommerce Platforms that can integrate with the ERP software. This integration will automatically transfer information between your online web shop, your ERP system and vice versa. The result is a unified system that automates orders, order fulfilment, returns, provides real-time stock updates to shoppers, issues low stock alerts, provides full customer account information and a host of other benefits.

2. Third-Party Integrations

No matter which platform you're considering, it should enable you to use your favourite third-party tools, which will make the overall experience much more rewarding as these tools are vital for sales and marketing.

Some industry standards tools you might be considering are:

Email Marketing – MailChimp, Campaign Monitor, Wufoo, etc.

CRM Integration – HubSpot etc.

Payment Gateways – Stripe, PayPal, SagePay, WorldPay, etc.

Analytics & Reporting – Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Hotjar, etc.

Customer Reviews – Trustpilot, Reviews.io etc.

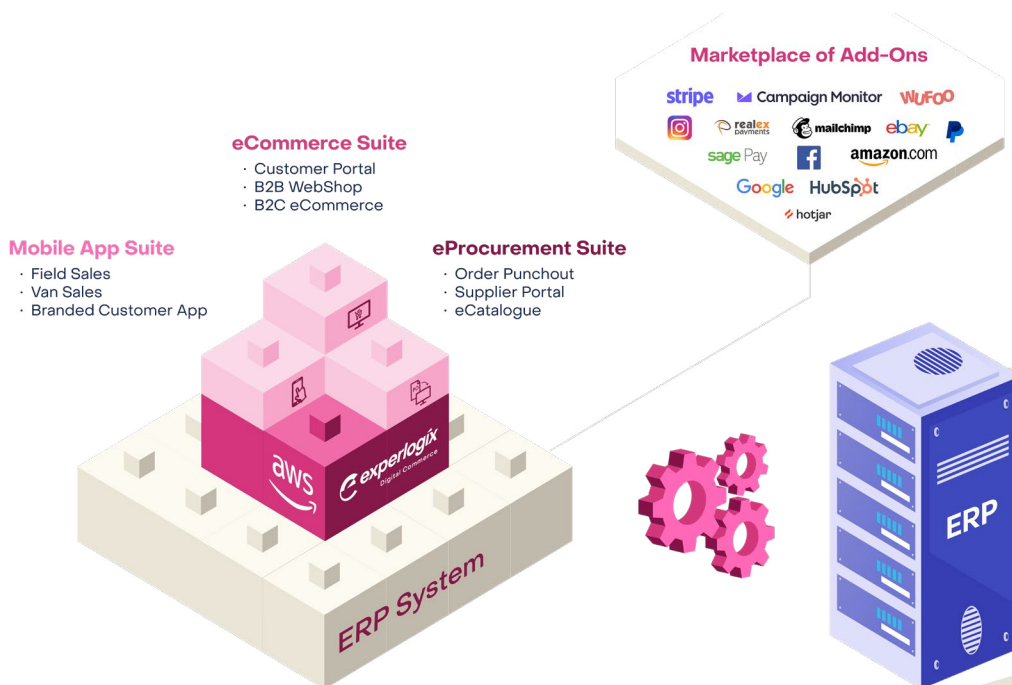


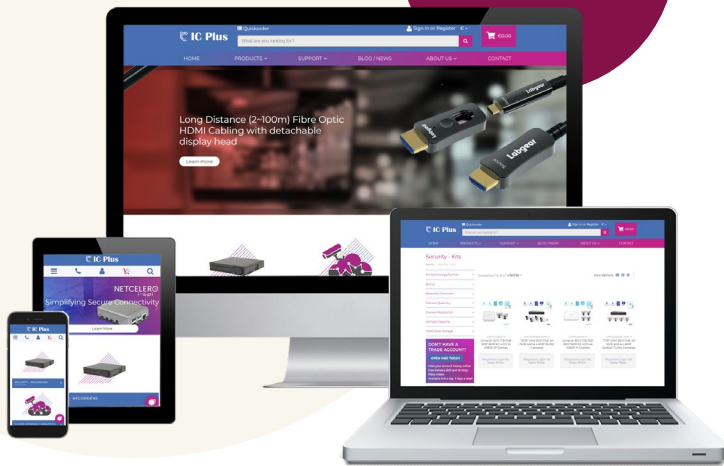
3. Platform Scalability

As you aim to grow your business, you should consider how any platform will allow you to scale over time. Be very thorough when analysing potential eCommerce platforms as they are all quite different.

Here are some questions to ask a potential provider:

1. How easy is it to add required functionality to your eCommerce store to reach new markets?
2. Does the platform facilitate multiple languages, multiple currencies, and multiple territories?
3. Does the platform have other add on solutions that can help your business grow e.g eprocurement tools or mobile apps?
4. Can you leverage the platform to add B2B, B2C, B2B2C or D2C channels?





4. SEO Friendliness

One of the greatest benefits of selling online is that you can be found by every person on the planet. Therefore, you want your products to be found when a customer is searching with intent. That's why you need to look extensively at the SEO features supported by the platform. It will be these features that will boost your chances of being found before your competitors online.

Supported features would need to include:

1. Meta tags, keywords and descriptions
2. Navigation and architecture
3. Pagination
4. Ability to access and update XML
5. SEO friendly URLs
6. Captions and image alt descriptions
7. Canonical tags
8. Schema mark-ups
9. Redirections
10. Multimedia support

5. Mobile Responsiveness

As most shoppers have become accustomed to shopping online using their smartphones, it's of the utmost importance that an eCommerce platform is 100% mobile responsive. This means your webshop can be used on desktop, laptop, tablet and smartphone with no compromise on user experience, which has a major impact on your SEO in terms of rankability. If the platform you are evaluating is not mobile-friendly, you're going to miss out on a lot of potential sales due to low ranking on Google, poor page layout or poor user experience.

6. Platform Types

There are three main types of eCommerce platform, these are; **on-premise, cloud-hosted, and SaaS**. Each one of them has many benefits depending on the individual business use case.

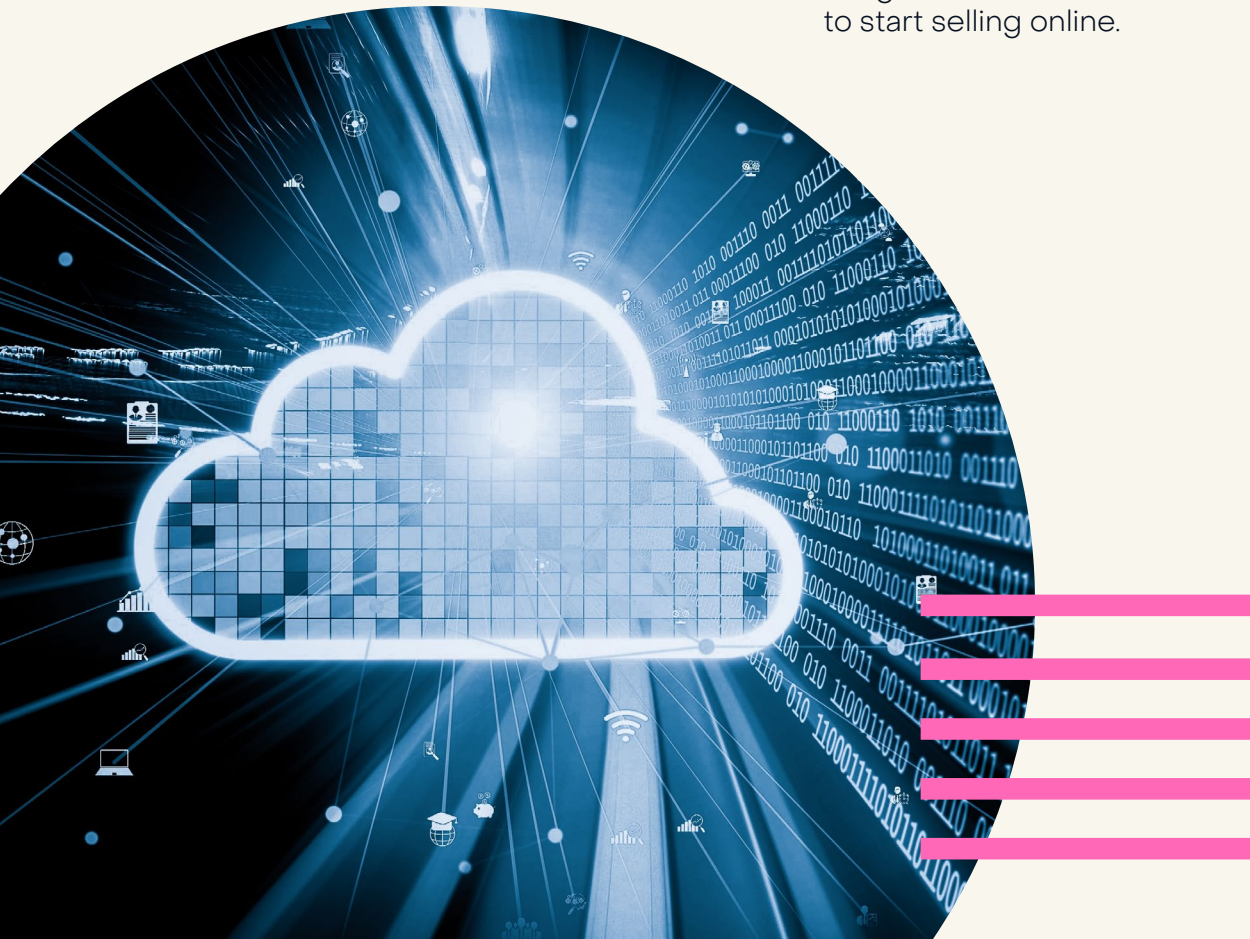
With advances in technology, it's now proven that cloud-based or SaaS platforms are more common due to the low cost of ownership. This is directly due to the cost of managing and maintaining an on-premise platform, which isn't future-proof, isn't scalable and hasn't got the agility that cloud or SaaS does.

Even though an on-premise solution can give you complete control over security, hosting and the management of your platform, these systems significantly drain time, money and resources from your business.

Cloud eCommerce platforms are often assumed to be SaaS, but they're not always. With a cloud platform that is not SaaS, you still have to undergo initial development and customisation as you would with on-premise or open-source platforms. All while maintaining security and manually applying upgrades.

A SaaS eCommerce platform offers you the fastest route to market, as your platform is ready to roll out. You simply pay a subscription fee for the platform and the eCommerce provider will take care of everything else for you such as hosting, security, maintenance, upgrades, new features and much more.

All you need to do is add your logo,
branding elements and content
to start selling online.



7. Security

Online security is one of the most essential things you need to consider when choosing an eCommerce platform. Even if you invest in the best possible solution, if your eCommerce is not secure, your customers won't buy from you. Any lack of security features will be flagged by search engines long before a visitor even has a chance to make a purchase.

To achieve a high level of security for your eCommerce platform, you will need to familiarise yourself with the following things:

- Open-source or closed-source software
- HTTPs support
- SSL certificates
- PCI compliance (for secure payments)
- GDPR compliance (for compliance with EU regulations)
- CCPA compliance (for California regulations)
- ERP certification (if platform integrates with ERP software)
- Regular security audits (to ensure the platform is always compliant)

Note: Open-source software is more prone to cyber-attacks

Key takeaway:

Be sure to run through the above security checklist with any potential eCommerce provider.



8. Hosting

Hosting is essential if you want to offer customers a fast, reliable shopping experience with as little downtime as possible. SaaS eCommerce platforms are hosted out of the box, so you do not need to look for a hosting provider.

Not all eCommerce platforms offer hosting though. In that case, some of the best hosting providers to consider are Amazon Web Service (AWS), Microsoft Azure or Google Cloud Platform.

9. Customer Service

No matter what eCommerce platform you end up choosing, it's inevitable that at some point you will need some help with it. Make sure that the support team of your chosen provider is always available during your main business hours.

eCommerce providers, and in particular SaaS providers can provide their software anywhere in the world. They may not even be located in the same time-zone as you, so it's always worth noting where their support is based.

Key takeaway:

Be sure to ask what support systems are in place for contacting customer support e.g. can you log tickets out of hours, can you chat to someone online or can you call support directly?



10. Business Alignment

Selecting an eCommerce platform provider means you'll also be investing in a digital partner who will help shape the digital future of your business.

Seek to find a partner who understands your business and can provide fit-for-purpose software that's proven in your industry. You should do this because not all eCommerce platform providers understand or lend themselves to the complexity of B2B sales; some platforms are only built for standard B2C sales.

Key takeaway:

Be sure to ask a potential provider, do they understand the nature of your business? Have they provided solutions in your industry before? Can they provide proof of how they helped a business like yours in a similar industry to grow?

In Conclusion

Hopefully, you have a better understanding of the ten essential things you need to consider when choosing an eCommerce platform. By now, this guide should have provided you with the information and the confidence you need to find an eCommerce platform that will digitally transform your business.

While many platforms may meet some of your requirements, not all of them will be sufficient. That will depend on what you need when you need it, how big your budget is and if the platform aligns with your industry goals.

In our opinion, a fit for purpose eCommerce platform should meet all of the ten points mentioned in this content as standard. This should allow you to quickly disqualify the ones that don't.



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