***E-Commerce Strategies***

**Introduction -**

This report will be covering the use of business intelligence tools and technologies associated with it. This report will discuss the choice for dashboards/visuals to help management in their decision-making process.

When talking about ecommerce implementation, articles tend to focus on the problems you may confront during and after it. But who wants to hear about problems at the very start of their business? Here is how our ecommerce team has decided to be more inspirational for you – we will show what business aspects benefit from a successfully implemented ecommerce solution and what to focus on to achieve those gains. Let’s cut to the chase!

## Ecommerce implementation objectives



**Well-orchestrated workflows**

Online shoppers do not see a fraction of back-office wheels turning to set an ecommerce machine in motion. They enjoy an ultimate shopping journey with smart product recommendations along the way and timely order status updates or targeted follow-up emails thereafter. Much work is behind this, and if done manually, it requires a big team and a 24-hour working day.

Naturally, ecommerce companies choose to automate a great deal of tasks to create a working environment where the team doesn’t get bogged down in time-sapping tasks and performs effectively. For example, marketers can prioritize creating relevant content for different customer segments rather than make the segmentation itself. Or vendor onboarding process can be streamlined to avoid delays in the approval process.

Where to focus

Here comes the work for a competent team of business analysts well-versed in ecommerce. Before designing an ecommerce solution, they map all business processes and define key areas where automation is required. Typical ecommerce processes are (the list is dynamic and will differ for each project):

* Managing product information.
* Pricing.
* Receiving and processing orders.
* Processing customer requests.
* Handling returns.
* Managing vendor relationships.
* Resource planning.
* Running promotional campaigns.
* Managing non-catalog content.

System architects further plan what technologies will allow them to cover the required functionality. Let’s say ecommerce software isn’t designed to meet vast marketing needs where standards are constantly growing (e.g., multichannel marketing or extensive personalization of customer communication are already taken for granted). Here, a solution is to engage a dedicated marketing system that suits the indicated requirements and falls within the budget.

The last step is to create a map of how information flows will be managed in a company and come up with the ecommerce solution architecture. In the process of implementation, the systems composing a solution will be integrated to set effective workflows.

**Fast and pain-free solution adoption -**

There is one key aspect influencing the overall team performance that falls within our topic – the adoption of an ecommerce solution by the team. The truth is that ecommerce solution implementation might be fraught with its improper use by the team, their resistance to changes, misunderstandings and stress.

**Where to focus -**

You might think that if the solution was implemented successfully, your team should master it from the get-go. In fact, it’s your responsibility as an employer to introduce the system to them, describe the benefits it offers and go through newly formed workflows – in short, to incorporate a sustainable user adoption strategy with user training at its core. Your implementation partners can help you to choose an optimal training form depending on the solution complexity: how-to guides, remote or on-site sessions in groups or on a one-to-one basis. It’s also important to keep the copies of training materials to facilitate future onboarding of the new staff.

The education of the team gets you closer to a win-win solution – your team works in a comfortable environment for the good of a company.

**High traffic**

Online retailers know that the more visitors they manage to reach and acquire, the more purchases are expected. However, the e-tailing market is quite tough in terms of driving traffic. A chance for potential customers to just stumble upon a website tends to zero (as contrasted with offline retail where a store’s physical location is often a major traffic driver). Thus, certain efforts to reach a potential audience are required.

**Where to focus**

Potential shoppers can come across your web store by searching for general queries (like ‘buy food online in Miami’) and choosing it from search results, clicking on search ads or seeing mentions in influencers’ blogs, listings, etc. Let’s not discount a possibility for customers to come from offline advertisements (for example, banners or flyers). We offer to focus on two core activity areas.

A good SEO strategy will be responsible for winning good positions in search results and driving organic and paid traffic. In ecommerce, categories are the main landing pages to promote, still product pages in some domains may work too (let’s say in electronics when people may search for a particular device model). Supporting category and product descriptions with non-catalog content is critical for the store to rank high. Competitor research may be helpful to see how competing companies conduct their SEO campaigns, learn from their experience and decide whether to develop a similar or a completely different approach. As for the technical aspect, a whole bunch of SEO tactics comes into play to bid for higher search positions – optimizing website performance, building links, adding descriptive URLs, making the website mobile-friendly, improving its architecture and more.

Relying solely on SEO efforts and even with the presence in the top search position, you still risk limiting the reach for the potential audience. Therefore, adding more channels to promote your business is critical. A tricky thing here is to interpret the rule “the more, the better” correctly. We don’t encourage you to promote everywhere and to everyone as you can invest heavily and get little in return. An actionable technique is to go where your target audience can be. Let’s say an online seller of organic superfoods can partner with a sports retailer for cross-promotions: bundled offerings, mentions in social media or reciprocal discounts. Promoting via influencers in Instagram is a proven effective way to attract referral traffic and expand brand visibility for fashion or beauty stores. Meanwhile, online supermarkets with a limited delivery zone can advertise via billboard or branded delivery cars.

**Solid conversion rate**

High traffic can be disappointing for ecommerce entrepreneurs when they get seemingly promising numbers of visits and frustrating numbers of completed purchases. Naturally, many retailers see conversion rates as one of the key indicators of whether ecommerce solution implementation was a success. And it’s rather fair given that a high conversion rate means visitors were satisfied with the assortment, prices, the quality of services you provide and their overall shopping experience.

**Where to focus**

Putting aside purely business aspects such as the product assortment and pricing policy, we focus on what ecommerce solution aspects can influence conversion.

Ecommerce is the sphere where user interface (UI), or the visual component, is of paramount importance as people intuitively distrust poorly designed websites. In the best-case scenario, you should spend some time analyzing how competing companies in your niche present their online space, exploring your target audience and developing your brand identity. This will allow you to speak the same language with UI designers and ultimately achieve the website design that is recognizable, on-brand and unique.

The notion of website design goes beyond the look but defines what experience shoppers get while browsing the store. We are stepping in the area of user experience (UX) design responsibility. Your implementation partners need to think through each step of customer interaction with your web store: what actions customers can perform there, what doubts they may have and how to encourage them to proceed with shopping. UX design is impeccable when diverse customer journeys across the web store are convenient and intuitive.

As products are at the heart of sales, you need to give some thought to how to present them to a potential customer in the most winning way. Online merchandising starts with providing a good description and quality imagery for products and further expands to intuitive navigation, browsing enhancements (e.g., filtering capabilities), user-generated content on product pages and more. What retailers need and what an effective ecommerce solution should offer is a convenient tool for online merchandising that will allow them to experiment with techniques and approaches easily.

**High percentage of repeat customers**

There is no need for sellers to wait until they get a consistently high number of first-time orders to start working on a retention strategy. The proven fact is that acquiring new customers is more expensive than retaining existing ones. So, designing an ecommerce solution aimed entirely at attracting customers isn’t enough – retailers need to keep in mind loyalty building. An effective marketing strategy looms large here, and the question may arise whether marketing has something to do with ecommerce solution implementation. In fact, an implemented solution fully determines what marketing techniques will be feasible. If the strategy wasn’t thought through beforehand, retailers may end up with their hands tied to implement marketing ideas as they simply don’t have a technical possibility for that. For example, the techniques we are talking about below call for advanced technologies to use.

**Where to focus**

* It’s important to stay in touch with a customer after their first purchase. Modern marketing software allows managing different customer communication channels from a single place. Thus, you can both initiate future interactions with customers (e.g., via email) and react to their actions (e.g., respond to social mentions). An effective way to automate communication is by mapping customer journeys when the system triggers a certain action in response to customer behavior. Let’s say it makes sense to send a repeat email only to those customers who haven’t opened the first one.
* Customers will be more likely to stay with you if the shopping experience you offer is valuable. You may win by providing assistance to them throughout their journey with smart product recommendations. And don’t forget to back up your marketing strategy with well-organized customer support. Together, they will act as a virtual sales assistant guiding customers through the product assortment and current promotions, helping to decide upon a product variation (size, color, components, etc.) and solving arising questions.
* Many ecommerce companies put loyalty programs at the center of their retention strategy. This works out best for product lines with frequent but lower-cost purchases like food, apparel or cosmetics. Loyalty programs can be implemented in different ways, but the core idea remains the same: the system automatically assigns points for customer activities (purchases, feedback) that can be later exchanged for tangible perks like discounts, cashback or delivery benefits.
* A proper analytical solution will give a clue to what initiatives from your side yield fruitful results. Having invested in data analytics, you will see smaller patterns and a bigger picture of your business and will be able to make data-empowered decisions.

**Smooth operation of an ecommerce solution**

For all the efforts put into attracting, converting and retaining customers to be rewarded and all the benefits of successful ecommerce implementation to be obtained, retailers need a technical side of their business to function properly. Though the stage of solution support follows the implementation, we find it important to include it in the scope of our article. Retailers should always remember that their business will grow and change calling for a possibility to implement their future business ideas technically.

Where to focus

In your ecommerce business, you need to arrange for the technical support of your solution. This may embrace emergency help (quick fixes and troubleshooting) and continuous support (solution optimization and evolution in line with changing needs). For technical support, you may either stay with your implementation partner or team up with a service provider specializing in support. With luck, this cooperation will last for years so make sure to choose strategically.

**Conclusion andSummary -**

A well-thought-out ecommerce solution can provide you with a number of benefits:

* Well-organized back-office processes.
* Effective solution adoption.
* High traffic.
* High conversion rate.
* High percentage of repeat customers.

All this is achievable if you prioritize business needs at the stage of solution design, rather than try to make the most out of an ineffective solution later. Some of the aspects to think through are ecommerce solution architecture, target audience, marketing, and data analytics. Although not an integral part of the implementation stage, follow-up solution support is important to solution success.