

# Common Pains of eCommerce Websites Migration and how to avoid them

Virto Commerce whitepaper

This Virto Commerce whitepaper provides insight on how to avoid and overcome the ecommerce platform migration problems.



## **Common Pains of eCommerce Websites Migration and how to avoid them**

There comes a point in every ecommerce company's development path when it's time to grow their website beyond its maximum capabilities - so comes the time to migrate. Migrations are scary and often painful, but necessary to let your business grow and achieve new levels.

Your best bet at achieving a smooth migration and minimizing the risk of running into critical issues is having a solid plan!

There are two types of potential issues you need to keep in mind when starting to plan your ecommerce website migration - obvious problems you'll know about and be prepared for when you start and hidden problems that come up unexpectedly during the process. The goal is to minimize the number of the ones from the second category by turning them into the first.



The other important thing is to remember why you decided to migrate your website/store/catalog to a new platform in the first place.

Most commonly the reasons are:

1. Your business has outgrown its current platform and expanding it further or even just managing your day-to-day business processes under current circumstances has become a frustrating experience.
2. Technology has advanced way past your current solution and new options available on the market offer a lot more possibilities for business growth.
3. All of the above. We'll look into it in more detail further along.

So, if you are a big business with a huge system that needs to migrate, it might be too much to handle, if you try to do it in one go. Moving a massive system with a vast catalog to a new platform might take up to 2 years. Meanwhile the market keeps developing and the new system slowly becomes outdated – in the end you're back in the same place you wanted to get away from.

This is why it's absolutely essential to take a step-by-step approach - plan carefully ahead of time and schedule the migration to be executed in stages, build a solid strategy and identify priorities, so you can get all the benefits from the migration you were hoping for without having to commit too much work all at once.

## Prerequisites

Switching platforms is not usually something companies specifically plan in advance. In most cases, there is some sort of issue (or even a complex of issues) that drives a company towards taking the often dreaded decision to migrate. Here is the list of the most common ones:

- Fast growth and the need to integrate a new system promptly
- High maintenance costs of the current ecommerce platform that make it not viable for the brand to continue using it
- The team needs to implement changes that are not going to work well with the existing system and/or it now takes too long to develop new features and your IT team's backlog of projects becomes too big and time/resource-heavy
- Overgrown system has become slow, heavy and hard to manage
  - *Unstable under peak traffic conditions, resulting in slow site performance and bad customer experience*
  - *The database of your catalog can't handle the number of SKUs it accumulated over the years*
- The current platform has a limited call volume on APIs, can only handle a limited number of attributes or associate a limited number of product related images or videos (or even not be able to handle videos at all).
- The market is developing and you are falling behind. An outdated ecommerce solution can prevent marketing teams from acquiring and retaining customers, running effective campaigns or sometimes even from competing in certain key areas entirely.

If any number of these issues could apply to your business, it's time to change platform!



## Solutions

If by now you haven't changed your mind on that whole idea of replatforming, you are truly a brave soul, and the good news is all of the aforementioned pains CAN be avoided or at the very least significantly minimized!

Here is how.



## 1 - Plan carefully

Before committing to the migration, create a full detailed analysis of your business - note current standings of your sales and identify goals for after the migration.

As a part of your business evaluation review common metrics of your current website:

- Unique Visitors
- Number of transactions
- Number of items per transaction and average Order Value (AOV)
- Gross Revenue
- Net and Gross Margin
- Conversion rates

Use them to set realistic improvement goals for 2-3 years after the migration is complete and the new website is fully utilizing the functionality of the new platform. Allow for several months for optimization. Once you have your evaluation ready, add the costs of the ecommerce platform you will be migrating to in order to have the full picture of your investment into this project.



## 2 - Migrate in stages

Migrating the whole ecommerce system is a big task and trying to handle it in one go can prove to be quite overwhelming, not mention it would take up enormous amounts of time, during which your business could be growing rather than being slowed down.

Our solution to this is to split the process into clear stages and to perform one move at a time. The old and the new system would work in parallel, so you can always see both and compare, making sure the move goes smoothly at every step of the way. It's important to have an option to migrate gradually. We start with alpha testing and switch a percentage of live traffic at a time, increasing the load gradually. So, in case anything unexpected comes up you can always return the affected customers to the old system.

In order to prepare properly for the migration you would first need to determine what's in scope for this project. Put together a list of integration points and set a task describing what will happen to each of them during the move.

Make a decision on whether or not you would want to have your catalog and any additional data migrated as well.



If not, we can make sure Virto Commerce platform (<https://virtocommerce.com/try-now>) is properly merged with your existing one.

If it makes the most sense for your business to go for the catalog migration, however, be sure your migration plans include a review of any catalog transfers that will be necessary.

For example:

- any product catalogs
- content assets for catalog items (e.g. images, videos, etc.)
- customer data

If your current website is at least a couple years old, there is a chance people who set it up in the first place are not in the company anymore, so you might want to consider working with a good product analyst who will accurately evaluate the existing solution and make sure the migration includes everything.



## 4 - Avoid SEO disaster

SEO recommendations are essential since the early stages of the project to make sure the migration process goes as smooth as possible. One of the main factors in a successful website migration is full feedback and clear tasks from SEO team. Get your SEO specialists involved in the project at the planning stage! Or, if you're working with a SEO agency or consultant, bring them in at the very beginning.

To prep for a smoother migration, make sure your SEO team provides precise technical task descriptions and helps your development team understand the strategies, tasks and sub-projects involved to make sure your eCommerce website stays SEO-friendly after the migration.

Make sure the team has clear objectives.  
Those can include, for example:

- Minimum ranking drops
- Minimum loss of referral traffic
- Maintaining key rankings and head traffic
- etc.

Here are a few more essential tips:

- Plan an evaluation process of your new site's SEO standpoint against the current one. You would also need benchmarks that allow you to pinpoint and troubleshoot problems.

- Before you make any changes use a crawler application like Screaming Frog (<http://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/>), Xenu Link Sleuth (<http://home.snaful.de/tilman/xenulink.html>), Integrity for Mac (<http://peacockmedia.co.uk/integrity/>), etc. to crawl the entire website. This will allow you to take note of all of the URLs that currently exist and of the important information about each of them. For example, it will show you which ones might have any internal links pointing to them.
- Gather key metrics and trends to compare the current site with your new one. After the new version is ready, the team can compare the old and new version to make sure the google index stayed intact. Include Google/Bing rankings on your keywords, natural search traffic, page load times, and number of indexed pages.
- Prioritize customer experience above traffic and rankings.
- Submit your updated XML sitemap to Google & Bing Webmaster Tools to notify them of your new URL structure.
- Install Google Analytics/Tag Manager and Webmaster Tools.
- After the migration is complete, check for broken links. Most commonly the sales drop after the migration not because of some sort of a newly appeared problem, but due to mistakes made during the migration. So, it's crucial to make sure all the links are fixed, transferred and monitored for a while after the proves is complete.

There are a number of articles on the web with various recommendations on how to best set up the SEO part of a migration project. This one from Branded3 (<https://www.branded3.com/blog/website-migration-guide-building-an-seo-checklist-for-moving-your-site/>) provides a good checklist along with some useful metrics and examples.

## **4 - Share your plans**

Companies often don't consider including sales team member and key clients in the process of transferring to a new ecommerce solution. As a result clients get ambushed with a new website once it's ready, and what you thought was an ideal solution might turn out to not be quite ideal to them... Aside from that, your clients might have key knowledge of your platform's functionality, that you might not be actively aware of anymore. So, it's always a good idea to include them in the migration process. Confirm that all stakeholders have been given an opportunity to share their requirements and look into all business processes that interface with the ecommerce platform.

We found it very helpful to also involve key customers in testing the new solution. We help closed testing and show-and-tell sessions for key clients and later on set up public access to new versions of the website before migration and gathered feedback.

Consider providing beta-versions to your main clients. Slowly increase traffic to the new platform (as opposed to turning the new one on with one switch) to monitor how it works and how clients like it.



## **5 - Be ready for a sales increase**

At the end of the day that's the whole point of the migration, isn't it? So, if everything is done correctly, your sales will increase and your new solution needs to be able to keep up, not just initially, but for a long time.

Cloud architecture will allow for growth with the increase in sales. That's why cloud-based solutions are highly recommended. Switching to cloud will save your business a significant amount of budget money on IT, hardware and scaling.

You can find more details on that in this blog article:  
(<https://virtocommerce.com/blog/five-reasons-to-switch-ecommerce-to-cloud>).

## Conclusion

Migration of an entire system to a new ecommerce platform is a complicated process that needs to be executed with surgical precision in order to avoid disaster. But when done right, it's well worth the effort!

A modern ecommerce solution allows you to speed up and streamline business processes; it increases your frontend performance - site speed, stability and security. On top of that a good platform is cost-effective, which lets you save budget and invest in growth of your brand instead of day-to-day system maintenance.

Although, general unpredictability of both the market and the migration process make it a scary move, with careful analysis, planning and risk management it can be smooth and straightforward. We have the methodology, as well as lots of gathered knowledge and experience to make it easy and painless.



## CONTACTS

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