E-commerce platforms and domains

Distinguishing between open source and software-as-a-service (SaaS) is essential for any e-commerce specialist. If you know the difference, you can identify what internal and external resources you may need to manage your website. In this reading, you'll learn the advantages and disadvantages of each e-commerce platform. You'll also learn about registering a domain for your e-commerce store.

Open-source versus Software-as-a-service (SaaS)

Both open-source and SaaS have benefits and drawbacks. You may not be tasked with deciding which is right for your brand if you work for a larger company, but you may need to at a smaller company. Plus, it's important to understand the difference.

Open-source refers to software that allows the user to access and edit the original source code. The following are some benefits and drawbacks of open-source e-commerce platforms.

- Open-source platforms are fully customizable. You can make your website look exactly like you want.
- They require basic knowledge of coding, development, and design. If you don't have that expertise, you may need to hire someone that does.
- They may take a lot of time to build.
- They may be less expensive than monthly subscriptions.
- They typically do not offer customer support if you have trouble with your website.

SaaS is a web-based software available on a subscription basis. The following are some benefits and drawbacks of SaaS e-commerce platforms.

- SaaS platforms typically do most of the website building, development, and design for you.
- Saas doesn't allow you access to the original code and therefore it is not fully customizable.
- E-commerce stores using a SaaS platform take less time to build.
- SaaS can be more costly than open-source platforms.
- They typically provide customer support if you have trouble with your website.
- SaaS platforms include built-in analytics for metrics like traffic, clicks, and more.

Examples of open-source e-commerce platforms

There are lots of open-source e-commerce platforms available, so deciding which to use can be overwhelming. They all have their own benefits and drawbacks. **WooCommerce** ↗ is popular among industry experts because of its ease of use. **Adobe Commerce** ↗ offers vast capabilities but is more expensive, and **CubeCart** ↗ offers more robust technical support than other platforms.

Examples of SaaS e-commerce platforms

Much like open-source platforms, there are many SaaS platforms to choose from. **Shopify** ↗ is one of the most trusted SaaS platforms and the one you'll learn the most about in this course. **Squarespace** ↗ is considered to be one of the most user-friendly options, while **Wix** ↗ emphasizes the importance of design and customization.

Domains

Whether you end up using an open-source or SaaS platform for an e-commerce store, you'll need to register a domain. A **domain** is the URL (or web address) for your website—it can be found in the address bar at the top of your browser window. For example, when you learn about Shopify later in this course, you'll notice the domain name we are using in our example store is www.bathecoshop.com. Your domain must be unique, which means that no one else has registered the same domain name.

Note: Purchasing a domain requires an upfront cost and then an annual fee to keep it active.

Some SaaS platforms, like Shopify, allow you to purchase domains through the platform. For open-source solutions, you can register your domain through a site like Google Domains ↗ or GoDaddy ↗.

Key takeaways

Choosing between open-source and SaaS platforms can be overwhelming because there are so many benefits to each, but keeping everything you learned in this reading in mind will help you choose the right path for your business. Even if you aren't tasked with selecting an e-commerce platform or registering a domain, familiarizing yourself with these concepts will make you a more effective e-commerce specialist.

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