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What to consider when migrating eCommerce platforms

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Even though you are well aware of the pitfalls of your current eCommerce platform - be it rigidity, technical debt or the inability to innovate quickly; the thought of re-platforming can be a scary one. It can be costly and time-consuming, and as a result of these factors, the question of whether it's all worth it, creeps in.

There are also many factors to think about when looking for a new solution - do you move to a headless commerce platform, or to an out-of-the-box solution? Or do you stick with the platform you've got and attempt an upgrade instead? What data should you move? Should you change your hosting provider? Should you think about redoing your storefront?

This post aims to give you some food-for-thought when considering re-platforming and migrating, as we understand just how much of a difficult project it can be. For a more in-depth evaluation of factors to consider when choosing an eCommerce platform, check out our ultimate eCommerce buyer's guide!

Picking the right platform

Picking the right platform is important - it can ensure website maintenance isn't taking over from focusing on actual revenue making opportunities and growing your business.

If you're looking to migrate to a new platform, I imagine it's because when you first launched your online business, all platforms were rigid, expensive, and difficult to maintain which has left you in a spaghetti mess of trying to tie all of your systems and processes together; all while trying to add to that legacy platform in an attempt to innovate and keep up with consumer demand.

Today, eCommerce platforms have evolved to make your life easier. There are many solutions focused on taking the heavy lifting of website maintenance and hosting out of your hands to make it as simple as possible for you to build and choose the technology stack that's right for you. This leaves you with time and flexibility to capitalize on customer experience and grow your business.

This post will try to cover all major points to take into account when choosing another platform and what parts of your software you should consider for migration. Please note that this is just a generic picture that will give you a universal idea, which may differ at a more granular level, depending on the chosen solution.

Which type of commerce platform should you move to?

The platform you choose of course depends on what features you already have and the features you are looking for. For instance, if you're after a solution that allows you to control everything through a dashboard, solutions like Shopify or Magento are probably the best fit for you. Similarly, if you are content with an out-of-the-box website generated through a ready-made template and don't see the need for modification and flexibility, Magento is a great, although somewhat pricey, option.

For those who are after speed, flexibility, and custom data management, solutions like Moltin or BigCommerce will be more suitable than Magento. Those who want to grow their business around various third party services plugged in with their own solution should go for anything that supports the services they're after or a true headless solution that will support any third-party provider.

The platform you are currently on will also play a vital role in your decision, as all the data you need to migrate will have to play nice with the new solution. And so, if your solution is heavily customized, it will be so much more difficult to move to a monolith solution that is not as flexible as headless and can easily break if not handled properly.

What to consider before migrating to a new eCommerce platform

It's important to not dive in head first when picking a new eCommerce solution. After all, this decision is one that (should) last you a long time, and no doubt will have some financial burden on your business during the move. You want to make sure you've made the right choice for the long term.

Define project scope

Knowing what you want out of your new platform is crucial for success. This is not just for now, but for the future, too. Do you require flexibility to add additional eCommerce channels further down the line? Do you need personalization and customization? Do you want to localize your content? Do you have a complex business tech stack with lots of third party tools and systems that your solution of choice needs to fit into?

Map out your technology stack and architecture

Before you move, make sure you have you your technology stack mapped out. This way you can make sure you know exactly how all of your systems will integrate with each other, how your new eCommerce solution will fit into this, and how easy it is to integrate into your existing architecture. You should even be able to lean on your solutions implementation teams to ensure what work is required to ensure you get the processes in place to enable the technology architecture you desire.

Try it out yourself

Don't just read up on different eCommerce solutions. Try them out. Make a checklist of what you require from the platform of choice, then get stakeholders in the project to try each one of them. Evaluate features and functionalities, monitor the response times, look at their integrations functionality and ability to customize data.

Think of data migration

Have a plan for being able to migrate data from your current platform, so that you are sure that you can do it with ease and with limited impact on your project and store.

What parts of an eCommerce platform are typically migrated?

Product catalog

As the actual content of your store and your source of income, this is the most important data to migrate over. Make sure that you migrate over to a solution that is able to recreate your catalog structure without too much hassle. Otherwise, this may significantly impact development time. Likewise, make sure your inventory management system works well with the new solution.

Customers and orders

Migrating customers and orders, especially those still unfulfilled or not processed is also crucial for a smooth migration effort. At this point, it is important to mention security. Make sure that your customers' credentials post-migration are updated by either sending each customer a password reset link or an email informing them about the migration and a need to change their password.

Custom data

If your platform is heavily customized, it's probably best to look for a solution that will easily adopt any data with any data type to its own specific rules. Look for a platform that specializes in custom data, otherwise, you can end up spending a lot of effort and resources on rewriting your custom data schema to match the chosen platform.

Reporting, shipping, taxes

Whether it's custom-built or outsourced to a third party, make sure you don't forget about the cornerstones of what makes your store ticking. There are many great third party services dedicated to these areas, so creating a custom solution is a bit like kicking at an open door. Even if your solution served you well for years, take a look at what best-of-breed third party tools have to offer, and consider plugging a third party service that will save you a lot of development time and resources and will be able to grow together with your business.

Third parties integrations

If your solution has some third party integrations, it should be an easy switch. Some eCommerce platforms don't support all integrations out of the box, so make sure you've consulted the list of supported tools of your chosen solution. Typically, it is so much easier to plug an integration into a headless solution than a monolith that may need a separate extension or a plug-in to support your integration.

Summary

Migrating platforms is cumbersome, but at the same time it is unavoidable. If you want to grow your business and pursue innovative solutions, you need to make sure you're on the platform that caters for all your needs. Stale, slow-loading pages drive customers away. If your platform has grown into an unruly monster that takes ages to update, you know it's time to move on. There's a lot of great commerce solutions nowadays, so you have a lot to consider before making the move.

If you are interested in a headless commerce, but would like to know more about it, take a look at the Headless Commerce 101 eBook that describes the evolution of commerce and explains why headless is now considered the best approach to commerce.

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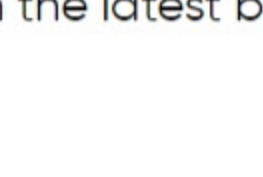
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