E-commerce Options: Pavement Service vs Shopify vs Square Online

For Chocolat on James - Christmas 2025 Decision

Analysis Date: November 3, 2025
Decision Context: Christmas launch timeline, local-first strategy, "e-commerce light" approach
Important Note: Pavement is NOT a platform - it's a website building SERVICE

Important Clarification

Pavement is not an e-commerce platform like Shopify or Square Online. It's a website building and management service for food businesses. They create and manage your website for you - you don't manage it yourself on a platform. This is an important distinction because:

- **Platform (Shopify/Square):** You manage it yourself, own the data, can migrate
- **Service (Pavement):** They manage it for you, you're locked into their service, harder to migrate

Critical Warning Based on 11 Years of Experience: When you hand over full management to a service like Pavement, you're essentially giving control of your online presence to people who don't know your business. In my experience, businesses almost always end up migrating away from these arrangements feeling frustrated. Ask tough questions before committing.

Quick Comparison Matrix

Feature	Pavement (Service)	Square Online (Platform)	Shopify (Platform)
Type	Website building service	E-commerce platform	E-commerce platform
Management	They manage for you	You manage yourself	You manage yourself
Best For	Local food businesses, pre-orders, local delivery	Simple e-commerce, Square integration	Full e-commerce, scalable growth
Setup Time	Unknown (need to verify with them)	Unknown (never set up before - would need external help)	4-6 weeks
Christmas Ready?	Possibly (need timeline)	Risky (unknown timeline, no capacity to set up)	No
Monthly Cost	Unknown (need pricing)	$0-29/month	$105/month + apps
Commitment Level	Service contract (hard to leave)	Long-term (hard to migrate)	Flexible (can scale)
Local Delivery	Built-in	Available	Via apps
Pre-Ordering	Core feature	Available	Via apps

Feature	Pavement (Service)	Square Online (Platform)	Shopify (Platform)
Local Marketplace	Yes	No	No
Square POS Integration	Unknown (need to verify)	Native	Via apps
Scalability	Limited (local focus, service-based)	Limited	Excellent
You Own/Control	No (they manage)	Yes	Yes
Migration Ease	Difficult (service lock-in)	Difficult (invested time)	Easy (standard platform)
Professional Appearance	Unknown	Basic	Excellent
Support	Through service provider	Limited	24/7

Detailed Analysis

Pavement - Website Building Service (NOT a Platform)

What It Is: - **A service that builds and manages websites** for food businesses - They create your website/storefront, you don't manage a platform yourself - Focused on restaurants, cafes, bakeries - Local delivery, pre-orders, local marketplace exposure

Important Distinctions: - **NOT a platform you manage yourself** (like Shopify/Square) - **Service relationship** - they manage your site for you - **Lock-in risk** - harder to leave their service later - **Less control** - they control the infrastructure

Key Questions to Ask Pavement Founder: 1. **Service model:** What exactly do they build/manage? What do you control? 2. Pricing structure (monthly fees, transaction fees, setup costs) 3. Setup timeline (can it be ready for Christmas?) 4. Square POS integration capability 5. What happens if you want to leave their service? Can you export data? 6. Who owns the website/content? Can you take it elsewhere? 7. Gift box/custom product builder capability 8. Corporate gifting features 9. Customer data/email capture (do you own this data?) 10. Marketing tools (email, SMS, social) 11. National shipping capability (if needed later) 12. Customer reviews/ratings 13. Mobile app availability 14. Ongoing maintenance - what's included? 15. What if they go out of business or you're unhappy?

Best Fit If: - You want someone else to manage your website completely - You want to stay hyper-local forever - Pre-orders and local delivery are the main focus - You don't need complex features or customization - Fast local marketplace exposure is priority - You're comfortable with less control and service dependency

Worst Fit If: - You want control over your platform - You want to scale to national shipping - Corporate gifting becomes major revenue stream - You need advanced marketing automation - You

want extensive customization - You may want to migrate platforms later

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Square Online - The Quick Integration Option

What It's Designed For: - Businesses already using Square POS - Simple e-commerce needs - Quick setup and launch - Unified online/in-store system

Important Reality Checks:

Setup Timeline Uncertainty: - I've never actually set up Square Online myself, so I can't confirm if the "1-2 weeks" timeline is accurate - If you want to go this route, you'd need someone external to set it up (I don't have capacity during this busy period) - Finding and briefing someone would add time to the timeline - Bottom line: Don't assume it's a quick 1-2 week setup - that depends on having someone available to do it

Long-Term Commitment: - **Once you build a Square Online site, you're likely to stick with it long-term** - Not really a "quick fix" you migrate from later - You'll invest time and effort - migrating becomes expensive and disruptive - **This is a 1-2 year commitment, minimum**

Best Fit If: - Budget is tight ($0-29/month) - Simple product catalog is sufficient - Square POS integration is critical - **You're committed to staying with Square long-term** - **You have someone who can set it up for you** (or you can manage it mostly yourself) - You're okay with limited features and customization - You understand the timeline may be longer than advertised if you need help

Worst Fit If: - You need something done quickly and don't have help available - You need professional appearance - Advanced features are required - SEO is a priority - Complex product variants needed - You might want to migrate to Shopify later - You need extensive customization

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Shopify - The Long-Term Growth Option

What It's Designed For: - Serious e-commerce businesses - Scalable growth - Professional appearance - Advanced marketing and SEO - Complex product needs

Best Fit If: - You want best-in-class solution - Long-term growth is priority - Corporate gifting is major focus - National expansion planned - Budget allows for proper setup

Worst Fit If: - You need something live in 1-2 weeks - Simple local delivery only - Budget is very constrained - Minimal technical resources

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Strategic Recommendation Matrix

Scenario 1: Christmas Launch Required (Now - Early December)

REALITY CHECK: We're 7-8 weeks from Christmas. Proper e-commerce takes 4-6 weeks minimum. Rushing creates more problems than it solves.

Option A: Simple Pre-Order System (RECOMMENDED) - Google Forms + Square payments - Can launch in 2-3 weeks - Low cost, low risk - Tests demand without platform commitment -

Learn what customers want -   Manual order management - **Recommendation:** Best option if you need online orders for Christmas

Option B: Square Online -   **Setup timeline unknown** - Never set it up before, would need external help (I don't have capacity) -   Finding someone to set it up adds time to timeline - Lowest cost ($0-29/month) -   Square integration -   Limited features -   Less professional -   Long-term commitment (1-2 years) - **Recommendation:** Only if you're committed long-term AND you have someone who can set it up for you AND you can mostly manage it yourself. I can provide guidance but not hands-on build during this busy period.

Option C: Pavement Service   **PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION** -   Unknown timeline/cost (need to verify) -   Local marketplace exposure -   Built for food businesses -   Pre-order focused -   **Loss of Control:** Handing over management to people who don't know your business -   **Dependency:** You become dependent on their timeline and priorities -   Service lock-in (hard to leave) -   Migration pain if it doesn't work out -   **Experience Pattern:** In 11 years, rarely seen businesses stay happy with full-service management long-term - **Recommendation:** Only if they can guarantee 2-3 week timeline AND you're 100% comfortable with giving up control AND you're okay with potential frustration down the road. Ask all the tough questions first.

BETTER OPTION: Focus on activities that actually scale NOW: - WordPress updates (better customer experience) - Corporate gifting outreach (immediate revenue) - Social media strategy (14K followers ready to activate) - Email list building (foundation for future e-commerce)

Scenario 2: Post-Christmas Launch (Q1 2026)

Option: Shopify -   Full-featured -   Scalable -   Professional -   Industry standard -   More expensive -   Longer setup

Recommendation: Shopify for long-term growth

Scenario 3: Hybrid Approach

Phase 1 (Christmas 2025): Square Online or Pavement - Get something live quickly - Capture Christmas sales - Learn what works - Build customer base

Phase 2 (Q1 2026): Evaluate and potentially migrate to Shopify - Based on what you learned - Volume and complexity needs - Growth trajectory

Recommendation: Start simple, scale smart

Key Decision Factors

1. Timeline Pressure (Christmas 2025)

- **< 3 weeks:** Simple pre-order system (Google Forms + Square) - most realistic
- **Unknown:** Square Online (never set up before, would need external help - adds time)
- **3-4 weeks:** Pavement might work (need to verify) - but risky due to loss of control
- **4-6 weeks:** Shopify (too late for Christmas)

2. Budget Constraints

- **Very tight:** Square Online ($0-29/month)
- **Moderate:** Pavement (unknown, need pricing)
- **Flexible:** Shopify ($105+/month + apps)

3. Feature Needs

- **Simple:** Square Online or Pavement
- **Complex:** Shopify
- **Local focus:** Pavement
- **Growth focus:** Shopify

4. Integration Requirements

- **Square POS critical:** Square Online (native) or Shopify (via apps)
- **Pavement integration:** Unknown (need to verify)

5. Long-Term Vision

- **Stay local:** Pavement or Square Online
- **Scale nationally:** Shopify
- **Unsure:** Start with simple, migrate later

Questions for Dale to Consider

1. **Timeline:** Can you wait 3-4 weeks for Pavement, or do you need something in 1-2 weeks?
2. **Budget:** What's your monthly budget for e-commerce platform?
3. **Features:** What features are "must-haves" vs "nice-to-haves"?
4. **Scale:** Do you plan to expand beyond local delivery long-term?
5. **Integration:** How critical is Square POS integration?
6. **Migration:** Are you comfortable potentially migrating platforms later?

My Recommended Approach

HONEST ASSESSMENT: E-commerce done poorly hurts more than no e-commerce. Rushing before Christmas is risky.

For Christmas 2025:

Option 1: Simple Pre-Order System (BEST IF YOU NEED ONLINE ORDERS) - Google Forms + Square payment links - Can launch in 2-3 weeks - Low risk, tests demand - Manual but manageable - Learn what works before investing in platform

Option 2: Focus on Scaling Activities (BEST FOR GROWTH) - WordPress updates (this week) - Corporate gifting outreach (immediate revenue) - Social media activation (14K followers) - Email list building (foundation) - **These will move the needle MORE than rushed e-commerce**

Option 3: Pavement   (PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION) - Only if they guarantee 2-3 week launch - Only if you're 100% comfortable with service lock-in and loss of control - Only if pricing and contract terms make sense - Need to verify everything first - **Major Risk:** Based on 11 years of experience, businesses almost always end up leaving these arrangements frustrated. You're handing over control to people who don't know your business.

Option 4: Square Online (IF COMMITTED LONG-TERM + HAVE HELP) - Only if you're committed to Square for 1-2 years - Only if you have someone who can set it up (I haven't done it before and don't have capacity) - Only if you can mostly manage it yourself (I can provide guidance but not hands-on build) - Only if you're comfortable with limited features - Setup timeline unknown - would need to find and brief someone, adds time - Risky to rush before Christmas

For Q1 2026:

- **Proper e-commerce launch with Shopify**
- Professional photography
- Proper setup and testing
- Staff training
- Marketing setup
- Do it right, not fast

My Approach: Setting You Up for Success (Not Managing for You)

Important: I'm not here to manage your website or business as an agency. My goal is different:

What I Do: - Help you set up systems so YOU can manage them yourself - Advise on best e-commerce practices to help you succeed - Build things in a way that you can customize in the future without huge expenses - Enable you to expand to different marketplaces or channels when you're ready - Provide guidance and support, not ongoing management

What I Don't Do: - Take over management of your website or business - Create dependencies where you need me for every change - Lock you into expensive ongoing service arrangements - Build systems you can't understand or modify

The Goal: Put you in the driver's seat. Set you up with the right foundation, teach you what you need to know, and then you run your business. You own it, control it, and can scale it without being dependent on someone else's timeline or priorities.

This is why I'm cautious about service-based solutions like Pavement - they create the opposite dynamic (dependence vs. empowerment).

Next Steps

1. **Watch the Shopify marketing course** I sent (about a week and a half ago) - it covers everything about e-commerce business setup and management
2. **Contact Pavement founder** with specific questions (see list above) - but proceed with extreme caution
3. **Get timeline commitment** for Christmas launch (if considering Pavement)
4. **Get pricing details** (monthly fees, transaction fees, setup costs)
5. **Verify Square integration** capability

6. **If considering Square Online:** Find someone who can set it up (I don't have capacity and haven't done it before)
7. **Compare feature set** with actual needs
8. **Make decision** this weekend or early next week

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