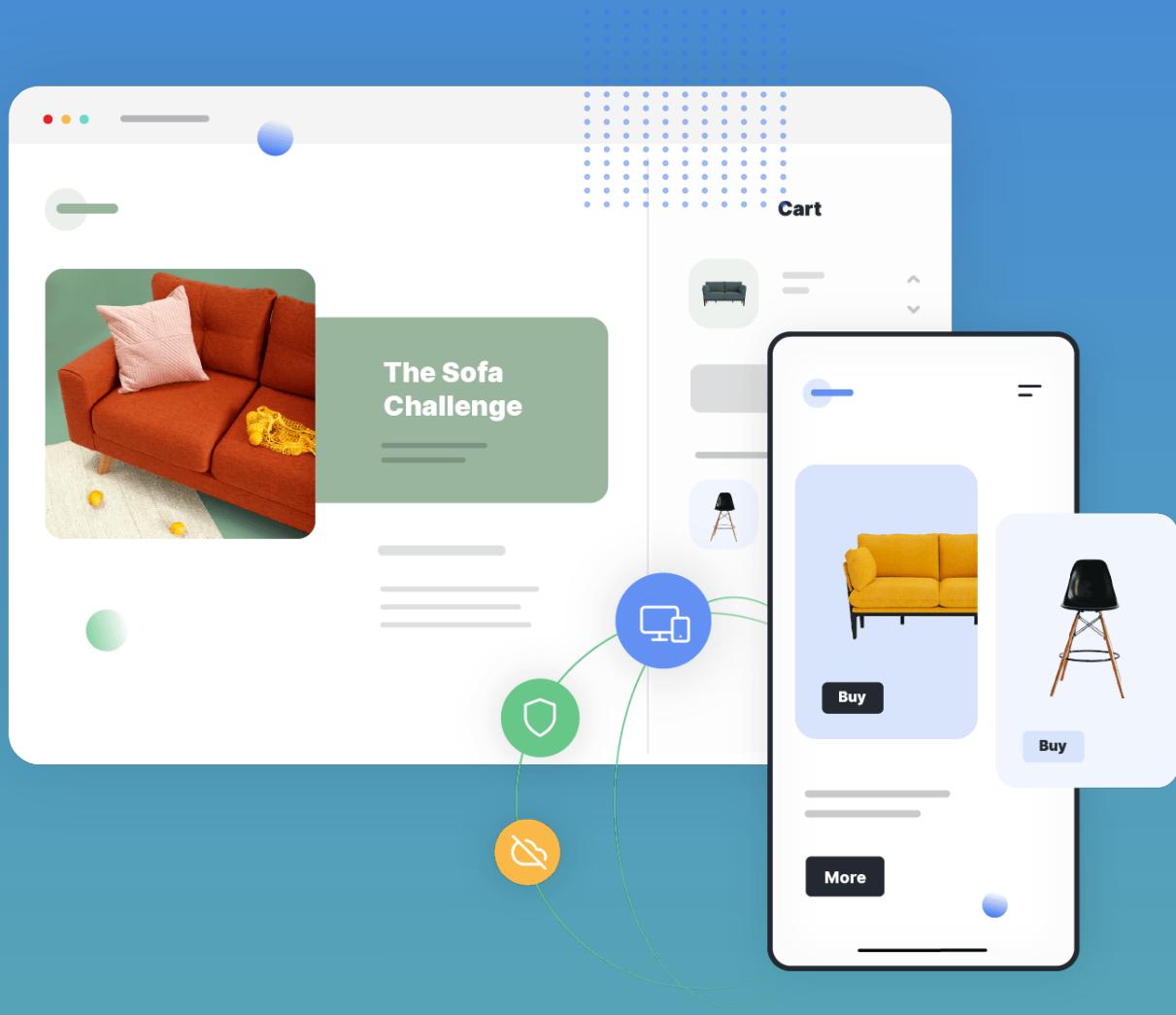




5 Key Consideration When Selecting a Headless Commerce Platform



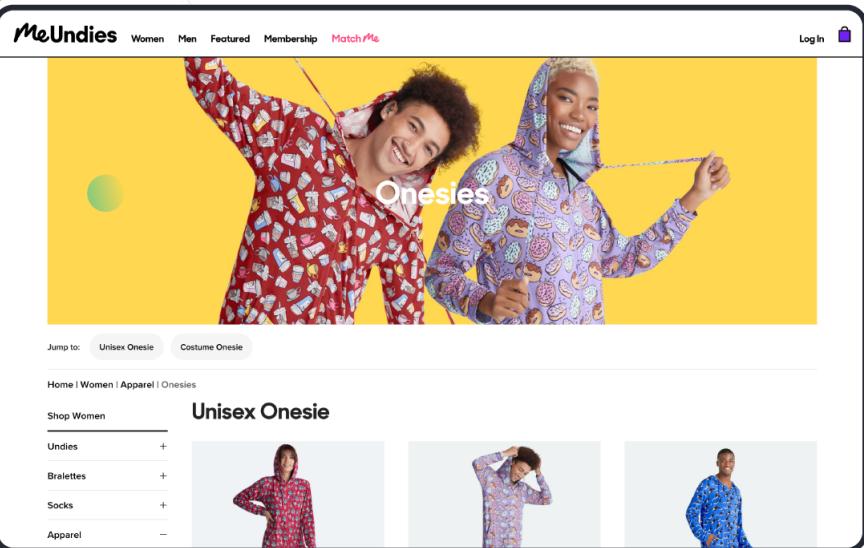


What Is Headless Commerce?

Headless commerce is an eCommerce architecture that separates the front and back end. This model assists brands in crafting an eCommerce experience that puts the customer first through a highly customizable application.

Headless commerce utilizes various resources, including APIs, experience managers, tools, and IT partners. The building blocks used on the platform serve the brand's overall innovation strategy and enable developers to constantly improve functionality and user experience in an evolving world.

With traditional eCommerce models, keeping up with changing customer expectations can be grueling, as a minor change requires updating both the front-end and back-end system. Headless commerce streamlines the process of adapting your eCommerce network.

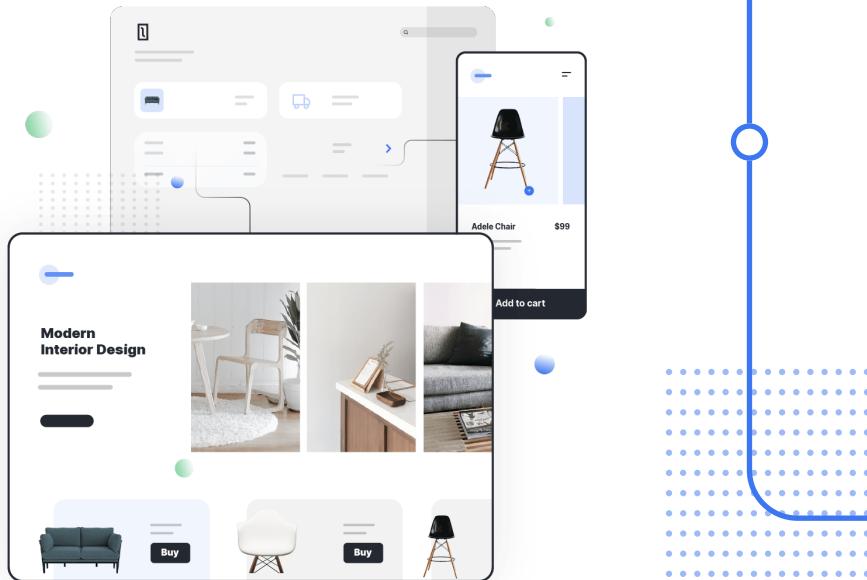


Why So Many *Digitally Native Vertical Brands* (DNVBs) Are Switching to These Platforms

One of the primary disadvantages of operating as a DNVB is that many don't have a brick-and-mortar storefront to provide an in-person shopping experience. But with headless commerce, DNVBs can bridge the gap between eCommerce and the personalized shopping experience.

Headless commerce opens the door for niche brands to provide a customer experience that leaps off the screen. This separates their products and services from their competitors, fostering brand loyalty and higher profit margins.

Instead of being limited to traditional eCommerce models, DNVBs can adopt omnichannel-driven strategies such as voice-activated retail, smart displays, IoTs, and non-mobile touchpoints. All of this is possible through the highly customizable headless architecture.



Benefits of Headless Commerce

Headless commerce offers multiple benefits for all eCommerce players.

Customization

As you're probably starting to recognize, customization is a core component of headless commerce. Customization brings brand recognition, higher conversion rates, and LTV. Moreover, you aren't pigeonholed into a rigid template or forced to follow the rules set by a software vendor.

You have complete control over your front-end and can apply your ideal UX design to make your brand stand out from the crowd.

Freedom to Experiment

Instead of making one change that affects the rest of the platform, you can isolate one aspect without altering the rest of the ecosystem. This gives you the opportunity to learn faster, foster a culture of innovation, and limit your dependence on IT. A headless system enables you to run simple tests, like A/B examinations, or develop more complex operations, like an Amazon Alexa skill.

Many traditional eCommerce architectures make you alter front-end and back-end code at the same time. And often, one change or experiment leads to an application shutdown. A headless architecture keeps the rest of your system safe while you play around.

Agility

If you're working in a decoupled environment, you can deploy UX changes more efficiently. With teams working in parallel, you can develop your platform and make changes faster than you would if you had to test the back-end as well.

The speed of headless commerce provides you with efficient software maintenance and the freedom to adopt trendy or seasonal promotions.

Effortless Growth

By keeping the front-end and back-end separate, you can scale each system independently without affecting the other.

Add New Touchpoints

Because headless structures work through an API connected to multiple front ends, you can quickly add social channels, kiosks, mobile apps, or in-cart marketplaces to your system. This saves you the time of having to create a brand new back-end every time you want to add a new front-end.

In turn, you'll be able to launch new touchpoints before your competitors and build brand loyalty with your target audience who views your brand as relevant to their lifestyles.

Disadvantages of Headless Commerce

Headless commerce offers multiple benefits for all eCommerce players.

Possible Extra Costs

Decoupling your platform may lead to your front-end and back-end needing their own hosting and maintenance. Depending on the headless commerce system you use, you may have to pay for the front-end and back-end individually.

Learning Curves

If you're adopting a new system, you have to train your employees to use that system. You may need to take time to train current team members or hire a specialist to maintain your site.

Your Team Has to Be in Sync

Because your system is decoupled through headless commerce, you have to ensure everyone is on the same page. It could lead to delays in time-sensitive campaigns, launches, and content updates if they're not.

Types of Headless Commerce

There are multiple options for employing a headless commerce solution, and they vary from the monolith traditional commerce model to different degrees. Each option (in the order we present them) will move farther away from the legacy out-of-the-box commerce package that combines the front and back- ends.

Cart and Checkout Addons

Cart and checkout addons tack on a few features to an existing website to facilitate buying and selling. These solutions are often considered to not count as a “clean” headless commerce model because they only offer a limited amount of freedom over the traditional model. But in some cases, it provides the path of least resistance to get an eCommerce page up and running. However, it is not a good option for companies who want a fully customizable platform.

Decoupled Front-Ends

Decoupled front-ends are solutions that use an API to connect to an eCommerce platform. These systems only offer a solution for the front-end, enabling developers to choose a separate back-end. This helps developers create a more customized front-end by keeping it separated from the back-end.

APIs

API-based headless commerce solutions provide developers with the building blocks to craft an entirely customized solution. While front-end solutions are decoupled, they still offer a complete unit for the business’s front-end. APIs allow developers to play around with customizing both their front-end and back-end. API-based platforms take the most time for development because they have to be crafted from the ground up, but they give brands the most options and often lead to success when used to foster the brand’s vision.



5 Key Considerations for Your Next Commerce Platform

Whether you're currently looking to implement your first enterprise-ready eCommerce platform or simply migrate to a new commerce product, it's essential to know what to keep an eye out for. Let's take a look at some of the critical items engineers and business leaders should have on their radar when shopping for a headless commerce system.

1. Philosophy: The Core Purpose of the Platform

Philosophy? Yes, philosophy.

Okay, maybe "approach" is the better word.

Ultimately, you must ask yourself if you're adapting your business to fit the platform's capabilities, or are you able to adapt the platform to fit your unique business needs? The answer to this starts with the "philosophy" of the platform itself.

When looking at your options for a headless commerce system, ask yourself:

- Is the platform trying to be all things to all people (a one-stop-shop approach) or focused on delivering a more defined set of value drivers?
- Is it designed to integrate smoothly with other systems such as CMS, automation, or different back-ends?
- Is it focused on quality and developer usability, or is it concerned with being on-trend and offering the maximum bells and whistles?

One of the reasons you likely started your business is because you realized that you could offer something that wasn't on the market. Your brand is unique, and the last thing you need is a generic, cookie-cutter platform that doesn't showcase your individuality.

Standing out from your competitors means being able to use a wide variety of tools to showcase why you should receive consumer support.

In the past, commerce platforms have put too much emphasis on an IT-controlled experience layer. Of course, having an IT team is essential to guarantee functionality. But if you're only relying on an IT team to develop your commerce pages, it becomes more challenging to cultivate a unique experience.

As you know, the modern commerce experience puts the customer at the nucleus of the brand. Customers will be more loyal to brands they can depend on and consistently provide a fantastic experience.

The easiest way to ensure positive interactions between consumers and brands is to decouple the presentation layer from the commerce engine layer. That's why you're on the hunt for a headless platform in the first place. But the commerce platform you choose needs to understand this as well and recognize that their platform is the conduit for you to develop your buyers' journey.

So instead of choosing a one-size-fits-all solution, you should opt for a platform that has its own set of tools but still allows you to plug in whichever tools you need to employ. While it's great to have a solution that puts a variety of tools at your disposal, what works for one development team won't necessarily work for all development teams, so you need to be able to pick and choose what is best for your team.

Retail is constantly evolving, so you need a platform that will evolve with your brand and the industry. However, your system should enable quick adaptability without trying to stick you with half-developed “trendy” options. Your commerce platform should focus on the user and developer experience. Anything else is a bonus.

Look for a platform that’s brand- and customer-centric, that focuses on letting you create a completely unique interface, and sees itself as the medium that enables you to do your thing rather than being a jack-of-all-trades solution.

2. Flexibility: Ability to Tackle Complex Challenges

eCommerce is complex; there’s no way around that. There are myriad things that happen from the time someone lands on a website to when they make a purchase, so it’s nearly impossible for a single platform to account for all the variations with a standard set of code and actions.

As you peruse different platforms, you’ll want to explore the foundation for the platform, including its core features and how it’s structured.

In terms of flexibility, ask yourself:

- Will this platform accommodate your preferred feature sets, extensions, integrations, and APIs?
- What’s needed to upgrade the platform, and what will that process look like? Can you build a truly customized shopping experience for customers that matches your brand and your audience’s expectations?
- How much customization is possible before you reach the end of the platform’s capabilities?

As we mentioned in the last section, you need a platform that will adapt to your needs.

With a platform that powers a standardized API, you'll be able to develop your platform across multiple use cases and scenarios. Your platform should let you take what you need, leave what you don't, and customize everything in between.

In terms of customization, the possibilities should be endless. Your platform should let you take the reins so you can craft a commerce platform that matches your brand identity. Platforms that come with an open-source codebase with extension points built into every critical intersection will facilitate limitless capabilities.

Developing your eCommerce platform shouldn't be the cause of a massive headache. You should be able to make changes or upgrade your system with little to no resistance. Your platform should make A/B testing a breeze so you can create a platform that caters to your audience through every step in their buying journey.

The right platform will let you put an unlimited number of tools in your arsenal instead of constraining you to a basic toolkit.

The solution you choose should give you numerous options for extensions and the chance to build your own if you want.

Another important consideration with flexibility is the number of channels you can use to reach your customers. As retail moves closer to a complete omnichannel takeover, your platform not only needs to be mobile-friendly, it should help you engage with your audience through various touchpoints like apps, in-store kiosks, social media, and more.

Flexibility should be one of your top considerations when choosing a headless platform. You need a system that comes with limitless capabilities, so you can create an eCommerce platform that truly reflects your brand and makes it easier for your customers to engage with you.

3. Scalability and Speed: Looking to the Future

eCommerce moves quickly, and you need a platform that can grow with you. Your headless commerce system needs to give your developers the ability to implement UX changes swiftly without interrupting back-end logic. If your business is looking to scale instead of maintaining its current pace with marginal growth, you need a system that will move with you.

Some key considerations for speed and scalability include:

- Do you need a market-ready product from day one, or do you have the option to do some upfront dev work to build and customize your store before launch?
- Can the front-end and back-end be modified independently to efficiently use dev resources and enable your team to focus on necessary work first? Does the platform have the capacity to scale as your business scales?

Your eCommerce platform will act as the centralized hub for the online side of your business. It needs to be ready to grow rapidly and seamlessly.

Every business's goal is to increase profits and scale. If your platform makes it difficult to expand, you won't be able to meet these fundamental goals.

API-based or custom-build headless commerce platforms are widely considered to be the most effective solutions for scalability.

Of course, any platform will let you scale if you put in the time and the effort. But when it's time to scale, you don't want to worry about how long it will take. You want to keep pace in your industry and expand without missing a beat. So scalability alone won't cut it; you need to evaluate the speed to scale.

Sometimes, scaling rapidly requires multiple incremental changes instead of one massive shift. The last thing you want is to be stuck with a platform that only facilitates scaling your business as a single entity. Instead, platforms that decouple your eCommerce engine and storefronts enable you to scale individual aspects of your business as needed.

You need to be able to take advantage of every opportunity presented to you, and that's impossible if your eCommerce platform doesn't let you rapidly introduce changes. The only way to stay in the retail game is to be on the lookout for new plays and effectively implement them if they work for your brand. With the right tools, disrupting the market is easy.

Choosing a platform that prioritizes both speed and scalability helps you create new opportunities for your brand, tackle growing pains, and stay on budget.

At the same time, your system should allow you to build and rebuild before your store (or a segment of it) hits the market. Launches take time and strategy, and you shouldn't feel like you have to scramble to throw something together. Your platform should let you introduce new aspects of your brand on your own terms while giving you the chance to play around with the finer details before launch.

Your headless commerce platform should empower rapid growth through decoupling the front and back-ends so you can make independent

changes as you expand your brand.

4. Support: A Platform That Has Your Back

Support is all about what happens when you, as the engineer, hit a roadblock with the platform. Before you settle on a platform, you need to know if your purchase comes with robust resources available to you or if you'd need to seek out specialized help.

Your headless commerce platform should come with all-around support.

Ask yourself:

- What do the support mechanisms in place look like for the platform?
- Are there developer resources readily available, such as guides, videos, and FAQs?
- Is there a community of engineers working with the platform you can tap into for questions and idea generation?
- Are there online resources like a GitHub repository or Slack channel available for users?

Your platform should offer more than just software. It should also provide a community.

You need to know that if something doesn't quite go the way you expected, you can ask and receive help quickly. As much as you want everything to go perfectly, from time to time, you'll experience technical difficulties. And you don't want to be stuck with a system that doesn't offer follow-up support.

The best systems will not only provide elite software, but they'll also come with guides, instructional videos, an online group (like a Slack community or GitHub repository), and more. When you're browsing the platform's

website, it will be extremely clear which ones offer a high level of developer support because they offer multiple avenues for getting in touch with them.

Before you settle on a platform, check out their support options. They should have a comprehensive FAQ or developers guide. The best guides will be segmented, so it's easier for you to find the answer to your question. There's nothing more frustrating than feeling stuck, so you want it to be as easy as possible to get un-stuck.

You want to have access to a team of professionals who can guide you without completely taking over. Your system should follow a governance model where the administrators are there to help but will still let you take the lead on your brand's projects.

You should feel confident knowing that whichever system you choose will listen to you and work to provide a better experience for your entire team.

Your headless eCommerce solution should come with various methods of getting support when you need it so you can keep working toward your goals. By focusing on how to help the developers in as many ways as possible, your solution will eliminate the frustration that can come with platform building.

5. Battle-Tested and Proven: Market Acceptance

Building an eCommerce website is technically challenging. The platform needs to demonstrate that it can handle complex needs so you can focus on more significant issues. You can leverage current users and case things to consider include:

- Does the business community and the dev community seem to accept the platform as viable, capable, and trusted?
- What companies are using the platform?
- What types of eCommerce models are they running (online storefronts, marketplaces, etc.)

Before you adopt any kind of platform, you want to be sure that they will be able to cater to your business's needs. Now, this doesn't mean adopting the platform that ranks the highest on Google or costs the most; it means doing your research.

Thankfully, we live in an era where information is at our fingertips. Take advantage of that information by looking at the responses of other people like you who have adopted a given software. Read what they're saying on online forums or in review videos.

At the same time, each developer will have their own opinion about an eCommerce platform, so take everything with a grain of salt.

Platform websites are designed to sell you on their solution, but you can still learn a lot about a product beyond the advertising. Many software systems will offer a free demo so you can explore how their system will fit in with your eCommerce vision. Take advantage of these demos so you can get a hands-on experience with your top contenders.

Many sites will also offer a list of clients and case studies for you to look at. You can use these to see how well the solution was able to ease a brand's pain points and foster a better eCommerce ecosystem.

Before you make a long-term commitment to a headless commerce platform, see what others are saying and examine the different brands who have had success with the system.

Wrapping Up

There are plenty of things to consider when choosing your headless commerce platform. But at the end of the day, what matters most is that you select a system that helps you work toward your brand's end goals.

The more a system can offer you, the more you'll be able to do. And sometimes, offering "more" looks like having endless customization options, so your eCommerce platform is as unique as your brand is.

Hopefully, this guide has given you some ideas on what should be on your perfect platform checklist. If there's anything you take away from this, we hope it's that you shouldn't settle for a platform that checks almost all of your boxes. We guarantee that there is a platform out there that will give you everything you're looking for and more.

Here's our checklist to help you get started:

- The platform's philosophy puts developer and customer experience first
- The platform is incredibly flexible so that we can create a unique eCommerce experience
- The platform will let us quickly scale and expand our business as we go
- The platform offers multiple avenues for support so that our team members can get help whenever they need it
- The platform has demonstrated that it has worked for other brands and is easy to implement and use

And you can add any other details that are important to you because your business deserves to have an eCommerce solution that helps it move forward. As we said, you need to find what works for YOU.

Solidus for Headless Commerce

Solidus is a free, open-source eCommerce platform that enables you to build, customize, and scale your store without limitations or license fees. Our framework is designed for developers, retailers, and agencies.

We follow a governance model where we provide our users guidance, but we let you do the rest. We hear everyone's voice when it comes to improving our system.

Solidus is built on the belief that quality, developer happiness, and performance are the ultimate measures of the platform.

Additionally, we prioritize quality over quantity. While others focus on business trends, we feel that zeroing in on trends usually comes at the expense of the quality of the product.

We also use backward compatibilities, so upgrading is smooth, easy, and doesn't break your entire system. With stability, you'll be able to produce high-quality code effortlessly and make it easier for your developers to customize your ecosystem.

Above everything else, Solidus believes in developer happiness. If developers have the opportunity to build a system they love, they'll be able to create a phenomenal user experience for their customers.

Get a [free demo of Solidus](#) and discover how you can reinvent your eCommerce system.