Technological advances and social networking continue to transform the online shopping experience. Meanwhile shoppers’ expectations are set by the best-of-breed ecommerce sites they frequently visit. That means your customers expect a visit to your webstore to be equally engaging, informative, responsive and personalized. At the same time, your ecommerce business faces mounting pressure to attract new customers, convert browsers into buyers, increase the size of each transaction and retain customer loyalty.

Are you taking the necessary actions to thrive in this environment? Or are you barely keeping up?

When did you first build your current ecommerce platform? Or when did you last upgrade or re-platform?

With normally maturing revenue growth, a platform upgrade or re-platforming should take place every four-to-five years.

Depending on your answers, it might be time to re-platform your ecommerce website. The following insights, tips and guidelines can help you make the right choices along your journey to provide a better online retail experience for your customer and optimal results for your business.
One would think it is a good problem to have: your customers’ needs are beginning to exceed your ecommerce system’s ability to fulfill them. Unfortunately it can quickly become a costly nightmare because retailers frequently react to this situation by bolting on various “quick fixes” – such as incompatible software, navigation band-aids and add-ons, or hastily implemented strategies for incorporating new social media elements. What you end up with is a bloated, convoluted ecommerce environment that still doesn’t keep up with demand.

Of course, your ecommerce platform challenges play out in the context of your entire operation. Your core system is by no means stand-alone. Look closely at your current ecommerce platform and – whether it is built on hosted, licensed, open source or homegrown software – you’ll likely see a cobbled-together environment that includes numerous third party and legacy applications. How did you get here?

To keep pace with your business and market demands, your ecommerce platform has likely followed one of these paths:

**More features, more specialization** – With the maturation of your ecommerce business, your webstore’s features have grown richer and more complex. The pace of new requirements may have outstripped the ability of your internal IT teams or platform vendors to deliver. Specialized applications from vendors as diverse as Adobe, Google and SAP, all the way to the US Postal Service, rushed to fill the gap. Integrations to these
applications were often built hastily, without consideration for the overall architecture of the ecosystem.1

**More ways to use your data assets** – Increases in your ecommerce activities have no doubt driven the need for required access to a host of data on customers, products, orders, shipping and site analytics. You may pull data and the resulting reports directly through your ecommerce platform or possibly from a legacy system.

**Reaching beyond your webstore** – Expansion of your ecommerce business has likely driven an extension of ecommerce beyond your webstore. For example your complete online sales channel might include partners, app stores and related marketplaces and possibly links to your retail store or kiosks.

Where does this leave your ecommerce platform? More than you might realize, it has become an ad hoc collection of homegrown and off-the-shelf products and services from different vendors managed by in-house resources and external support providers.

So is it time to replace a plethora of poorly integrated point solutions, including shopping cart, order management, shipping software, search and CRM? If you are shaking your head yes, you may be ready to make the move to a more stable, modern platform for your webstore – one that enables you to also streamline integration and improve your customers’ online shopping experience.
You know the tipping point theory: there is that one moment when something crosses a threshold, tips and changes. Is your ecommerce platform at that point? A confluence of factors is likely at work but the resulting message is loud and clear: the time has come to re-platform your ecommerce site. Here are some of the trends, signs and signals you should look at for.

**Are You at the Tipping Point?**

*Trends, signs and signals to look for*

- Business growth
- Technology changes
- Navigation, search
- Technology support
- Back-end integration
- New goals
- Security, compliance
- M-commerce

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**The good news is your business is growing** – Handling business growth is an excellent reason to consider ecommerce re-platforming. Perhaps you started small, launching and managing your site internally. But it’s never really been your core competency. So why not consider new technologies? A close look at the cost/performance benefits will guide your decision on whether or not it’s time to upgrade and scale your ecommerce platform to remain in synch with your expanding business needs.

**Changes and innovation in technology may be passing you by** – When did you launch the current version of your webstore? Technology changes and innovation move at a rapid clip, so it might be time to bring your site up to speed with the latest capabilities. What areas in particular are driving this change? Do business requirements demand that you track metrics more closely? Does Marketing need to refresh the brand? Or perhaps you need to integrate more editorial elements, mobile commerce and social media components, such as Twitter and Facebook?

**Navigation, coding and search capabilities slowing you down** – Look at your current
navigation structure and URL syntax. Are you spending too much time and too many costly resources tackling difficult upgrades and creating custom code on top of current ecommerce platforms? And what about search engine optimization? Consider improving navigation and search to help your customers find the product they were looking for through a more intuitive interface.

Technology support model in need of a refresh – As your ecommerce site becomes larger, more complex and increasingly dynamic, you need the horsepower to implement changes and handle traffic. What’s the best approach to this support? Do you switch platforms and let some of this site nurturing be outsourced? Or maybe it’s time to move your web servers offsite to the cloud? Offloading non-core activities like technology and infrastructure maintenance and other operational issues frees your own staff to focus more on strategic goals like revenue growth, customer acquisition and profitability.

More back-end integration needed – With every aspect of traditional ecommerce evolving, you might need to re-examine your back office integration capabilities. Re-platforming your ecommerce site provides the ideal opportunity for connecting and/or reconnecting with existing enterprise assets and third-party assets, ranging from ERP and CRM to supply chains and logistics.

New goals being set for your webstore – Perhaps you are tasked with beating the average uptime for websites in your industry, or speeding page loads, upping your conversion rate, or reducing your shopping cart abandonment rate. Or maybe the time is right to advance multi-channel capabilities and support for international customers and online marketplaces like Amazon or eBay. In short, you must be able to ensure quick response to rapidly evolving business needs and bring new innovations to market. However your current platform is not quite up to the challenge.

Security and compliance an increasing concern – Without question, you need to make sure your webstore offers the utmost in security – for your business and your customers. That’s why now is the ideal time to upgrade security, not to mention ensure ecommerce regulatory compliance such as Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS)

Mobility’s role in the ecommerce equation – Customers want access to your webstore anytime, anywhere from any internet-enabled device. In fact 20% of mobile shoppers respond to a bad shopping experience by completing their purchase but vowing to never return to the site in the future if they can avoid it. And a further 18% say they abandon the site and seek alternative brands that work better with their mobile device. Clearly your ecommerce site must be able to meet the increasing demands of mobile commerce – and tablet commerce is coming soon.
A recent survey found that 80% of mid-sized merchants see ecommerce growth as very important or critical to their overall business in the next one-to-three years. While driving revenue is always an overriding objective, 40% of the merchants surveyed said they are not satisfied with their ecommerce website’s current shopping experience as it pertains to maximizing revenue potential.

What’s more, 98% of the merchants said segmentation and targeting are important to their overall web and cross-channel merchandising strategy, yet the majority is not satisfied with the business tools they use today.
As a result, improving site search functionalities; improving your ability to offer, control and manage promotions; and improving the “help” and customer service features are among the top reasons driving the move to re-platforming. Because improving your ability to offer, control and manage cross-sells and up-sells encourages more transactions.

Once you make the decision to re-platform your ecommerce solution, additional benefits roll in. You can expect to:

- Decrease hardware and software licenses, maintenance and support-agreement costs
- Increase traffic through better organic SEO rankings and return on your investments in search engine marketing (SEM)
- Boost site performance and uptime measurably as you grab new revenue opportunities
As the saying goes, the devil is in the (scoping) details. Here are some guidelines to help you scope your re-platforming project.

**Understand all the technology touch points** – Look at everything – from the front-end and back-end components to your business partners. We advise defining your technical requirements by quite literally illustrating the inter-dependencies between internal and external systems.

**Pinpoint the pros and cons of your current ecommerce platform** – Take the time to document the good, the bad and the ugly of your current platform so you will know what additional features are required in your new platform.

**Determine from the get-go which stakeholders should be involved** – Sales, marketing, finance, customer support and IT are a given. Any other departments or business units with a vested interest in your ecommerce site? What about business and trading partners?

**Plan a clear resource and partner strategy** – If you are outsourcing work, determine who will be responsible for what. Scope this out to include everyone from internal resources to your external service provider. Documenting responsibilities in advance will help avoid duplication of effort and budget creep.
Map out a clear SEO plan for going forward – You have worked hard on a search engine optimization strategy to drive traffic to your current webstore. Don’t lose your ranking just because you have re-platformed. Make sure you have an SEO plan that optimizes every one of your products, categories, landing pages and your brand to minimize dips in organic search traffic.
You don’t have to go this alone. When looking for the right ecommerce platform partner, **experience** is key. And that means experience with the right technology set, the various functions of the ecommerce platform, and the specifics of your retail business. Because re-platforming requires moving apps and content as well as integrating your new platform with backend systems, you want a partner who has the required experience in processes, operations and the integration of related technologies.

Your chosen provider should understand the complexities and intricacies of an online retail business – and demonstrate proven experience in legacy applications, back-end systems integration, database development, data conversions, content migration, process chains and multi-sales channels, as well information exchange between disparate systems. Look for a partner who can offer a standardized methodology to ensure predictable delivery timeframes and costs. And make sure they have a proven track record when it comes to meeting project deadlines.

One reason for going through the re-platforming effort is to help you stay ahead of the technology curve. Choosing a partner with the domain expertise needed to fully leverage emerging technologies can help you accomplish that.

What sets the winning partner apart is the experience and skillsets they bring to the partnership, along with their ability to help you scale and evolve your online presence.
Re-platforming is no easy task. It’s a major initiative that touches almost every aspect of your retail business operation. And it will average from four to six months, or up to nine months to complete. But inaction is not an option if you want to meet your customers’ online shopping needs and establish a strong presence in today’s dynamic online marketplace.

The secret to success lies in understanding what you want to achieve with your ecommerce platform and whom it affects. Careful planning is essential – starting with assessing your current ecommerce platform, then identifying what features and capabilities you want to include in your upgraded or new ecommerce platform.

Set your criteria for success. And factor in every aspect of your webstore itself, as well as other functions and departments with which it needs to communicate and integrate. Also weigh your options carefully when it comes to your ecommerce platform and service partner choices.

Visualize where you want to go, develop a roadmap with input from your IT team and other key stakeholders, and then move ahead with confidence to the next generation of ecommerce for your retail business.
How Can We Help You?

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