

How to select the right commerce platform.



Whether you're trying to keep up with constant changes in customer shopping expectations or differentiate your online and physical stores with superior customer buying experiences, the right commerce platform is a business imperative. Every organization is at a different point in their ability to deliver frictionless shopping experiences that customers demand. Likewise, every organization has a different level of familiarity with relevant requirements and capabilities to look for in a commerce platform.

Wherever you are in your commerce journey, investing in a new platform solution is a pivotal decision that will have significant short-term and long-term impacts on your commercial success. Reaching the best decision for your organization will take considerable time and effort that will likely involve you engaging in substantial research and evaluation. To help you in that process, this guide covers some of the most important questions you should ask and issues you should carefully investigate. It also provides tips for navigating the information and targeted marketing you'll encounter along the way to help you make informed, objective assessments of the products and solutions you evaluate.

1. Flexible, agile, and scalable.

Whether you're a small, growing company or an established business looking for ways to differentiate, your business needs will evolve and shift over time. Likewise, market and customer expectations change rapidly. When investing in a commerce platform, it's not enough to make sure it addresses current business needs. It must also provide the flexibility to customize buying experiences as business needs change.

For example, some commerce solutions provide templates that make it easy for a merchant to quickly stand up a store. Unfortunately, too often such solutions force the merchant to remain within the constraints of the template's look-and-feel and out-of-the-box capabilities. Not only does this mean the merchant's store ends up looking exactly like every other merchant who used that same template, but if they want to add differentiating features that go beyond what the template allows, they're simply out of luck. While templates can facilitate store setup and deployment, make sure any solution you consider allows customization capabilities that extend far beyond template confines. The solution should also allow you to forego templates altogether if you prefer to start from scratch.

Look for a flexible solution that doesn't impose any limitations on what you can change or customize. Even some solutions that allow you to go beyond their template framework might limit your ability to modify certain aspects of the store, such as the checkout experience or the way it organizes and presents catalogs. Solutions that restrict your ability to customize also restrict your ability to differentiate your customer experiences and ultimately grow your business.

A flexible solution is one that empowers you to act on innovative new ideas and constantly improve your customer shopping experiences. Along the same lines as flexibility, the ideal commerce platform gives you the agility to rapidly respond to changing market conditions and scale with your business growth. Investing in a commerce solution that doesn't impose limits enables your growth, lowers your overall costs, and lets you to take ownership of the complete customer experience during and after the sale.

Questions to ask:

To what degree can the shopping experience be customized? What limits does the solution impose at a technological level and a presentation level?

2. A single platform for all commerce use cases.

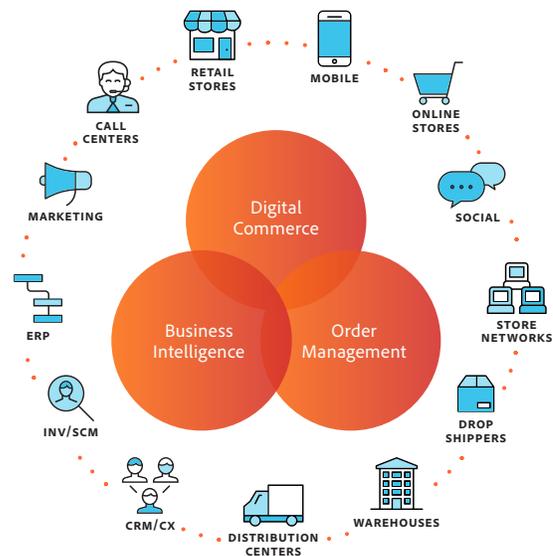
When considering a commerce platform, merchants need to think about all the different use cases they need the platform to support today and in the future. For example, some commerce platforms only focus on B2B or B2C, but a growing number of merchants are looking for platforms that serve both use cases. If you have multiple brands now or plan to in the future, how easily does the commerce platform allow you to set up stores for each of those brands? What about selling into multiple countries with localized sites or using multiple currencies? How well does the platform enable those types of use cases, and how much manual work will it require of you?

Does the commerce solution let you centrally manage all of your commerce activity? It should make it simple to present as many different storefront variations as you need while tying them all together simply and efficiently on the back end. How well does the platform enable those types of use cases, and how much manual work will it require?

It's important to understand that multiple use case support shouldn't be just about your stores. It needs to cover all aspects associated with a commerce purchase, including payment, fulfillment, and inventory management. Investigate how well the commerce platform will facilitate your current or desired processes in each of these areas. Will it give you the flexibility to deliver and fulfill through several different channels? Does it enable options such as buy online and pick up at the store, or buy in-store and ship to the customer's home or office? Does it make it easy to intelligently source your product, such as shipping product from the distribution center or brick-and-mortar store closest to where the customer lives? All of these capabilities are required to deliver a streamlined commerce journey to your customers—and efficiencies to your budget and staff.

A comprehensive commerce solution enables enterprise merchants to achieve these goals:

- Get to market faster.
- Innovate continuously.
- Scale for hyper-growth and global expansion.
- Engage shoppers/buyers with omnichannel experiences.



As a merchant, you likely work with a network of service partners to handle critical elements of the commerce journey like fulfillment and shipping. Some commerce solutions have limited ability to natively integrate with these partners and their systems. That means the burden of stitching things together

falls squarely on you and your team. A commerce platform that has ties to or easily plugs into your ecosystem of service providers makes it easier to consolidate and effectively manage all aspects of your transactions and deliver a more seamless, end-to-end, holistic commerce experience.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Before accepting a vendor's claims regarding multiple use case support, have them demonstrate the implementation and management of those sites supporting different use cases. Too often they're simply setting up multiple stores as separate siloed instances that aren't tied together, making it difficult to deploy new offers, synchronize content, and report on overall results.

Questions to ask:

From a technical perspective, how do you tie together storefronts that address different use cases? Are they siloed or can all the storefronts be centrally managed?

3. Leveraging customer data for commerce strategies.

You learn about your customers every time they make a purchase or visit your online stores. At minimum, your commerce platform should have dashboards and reporting tools to help you consume and understand that data, but you need much more to take full

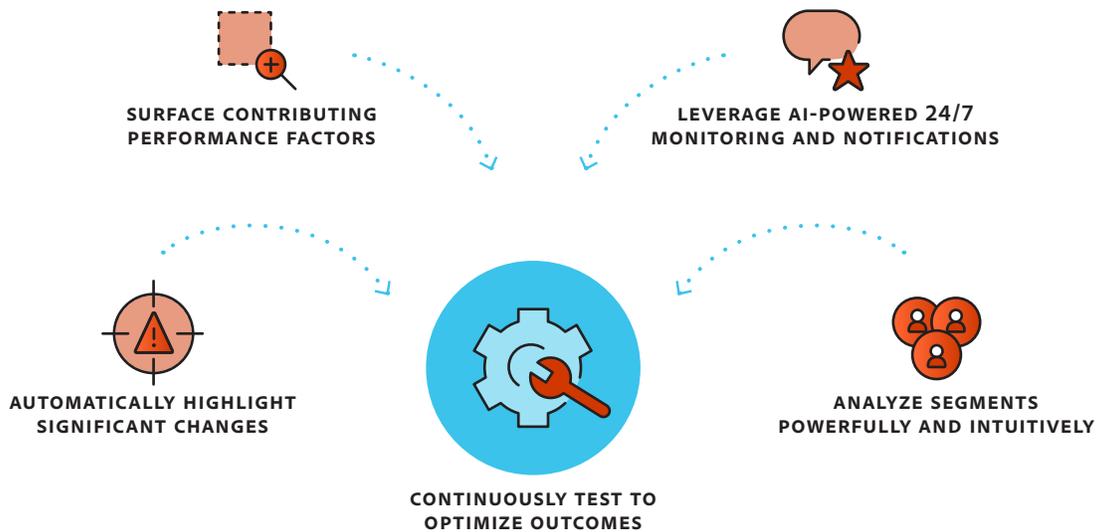
advantage of commerce-driven insights. To turn customer data into business intelligence that drives commerce strategies, a commerce platform must have advanced analytics and built-in artificial intelligence (AI) that delivers actionable insights and enables better decision making. For example, can it help you identify customers generally willing to pay full price to get what they need when they need it? Can it help you expose opportunities among customers in your loyalty program? Most importantly, do the solution's AI capabilities go beyond basic data visualization and help you act on insights when the opportunity is ripe?

That said, it's important to be aware that not all AI is created equal. It's always a good practice to request a demo of how the commerce platform's AI works and what type of business intelligence it can surface. Is it limited to giving surface-level recommendations? Does it only display eye candy graphs that offer little or no intuitive insight? Or does it allow you to spot anomalies that represent new opportunities or indicate a need to shift focus? Can it give you insights as to why traffic spikes occur at certain hours of the day? Can it help identify certain behaviors of loyal customer so you can reward them with exclusive promotions or private sales? Can it help you understand what a particular trend might mean and how you can capitalize on it? Does it deliver the business intelligence you need to run your business more efficiently and execute smarter strategies?

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Some commerce platforms provide smart search and product recommendations, but fall short of providing actual business intelligence. Other platforms may provide AI capabilities, but they don't integrate intelligence from one part of their portfolio to the next. This effectively limits their ability to help you generate insights across the customer journey.

Artificial Intelligence uncovers unique and actionable insights.



4. Ecosystem of support.

When evaluating a commerce platform, make sure you find out the extent and areas of expertise of the vendor's support ecosystem and whether it will measure up to your needs. There are multiple aspects of the support ecosystem that should be explored. One of the most pressing is in the area of implementation. What's the depth and breadth of the vendor's solution partner ecosystem? Do they have solution partners familiar with setting up e-commerce experiences for your specific type of business? Are you happy with their level of expertise? Do they have full service partners that go beyond deployment to offer coding, consulting, training, support and other services? What is their geographic coverage? Do they have local offices near you? Do they have an international reach and have partners that speak your language and understand your culture?

Another aspect of the vendor's support ecosystem to consider is the technology partners that can enable integrations and expand the capabilities of the solution with add-ons and extensions that meet specific business needs, such as payment security, accounting, shipping and fulfillment, marketing, customer support, site optimization, and more. You should also find out how active

the vendor's developer community is. A thriving developer community is a good indicator that the commerce platform and its partners will be able to innovate and continue to meet your needs as markets evolve and your business transforms.

Question to ask:

How many of your community developers actually focus on commerce? Some large vendors boast a large developer community, but only a small percentage of their community focuses on commerce.

5. Open environment.

How open is the commerce platform you're evaluating? Can it easily integrate with your existing systems or other systems you may need down the line? For example, can it tie into your

inventory management system or enterprise resource planning (ERP)? Some commerce platforms don't allow data to pass between their repositories and other systems. Or they might allow data exports to other systems, but they don't allow data imports, which leaves you with synchronization problems and siloed data.

Similarly, as you seek to add new capabilities to your technology stack, what will it take for the commerce platform to tie into those new technologies? Is it technologically neutral, or does the vendor force you to use its own proprietary technology, thus limiting your flexibility? Without an open environment that fosters integration and communication with other essential technologies, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to create holistic commerce experiences.

The more open and extensible your commerce platform is, the greater your ability to tie into and leverage other technologies to enhance your commerce experience. When evaluating commerce solutions, assess the catalog of third-party extensions for each. Does it encompass the needs of your particular industry and use cases? And is it based on open standards that make it easy for any third party to build connectors down the line? Open, standards-based solutions have a distinct advantage here, since they offer the greatest number of options for integration, expansion, and customization. These solutions also benefit from the added innovations and enhancements generated by their respective developer communities.

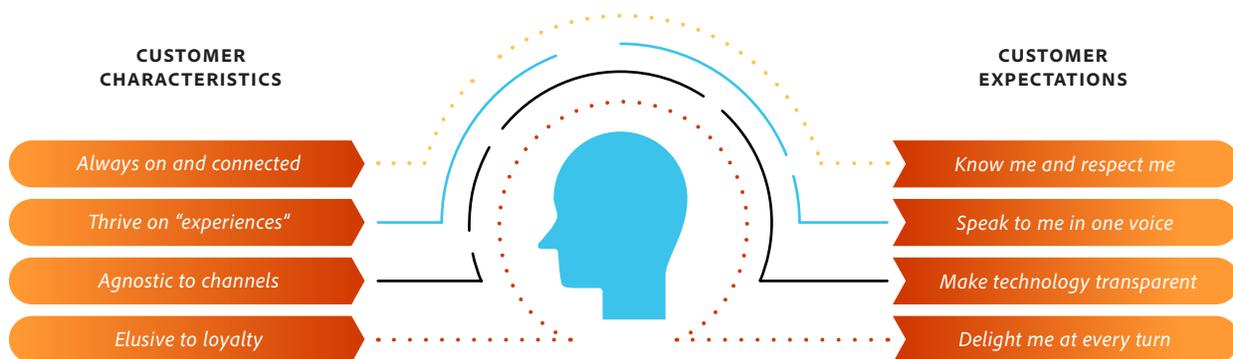
Question to ask:

What will it take to integrate the platform with my ERP, CRM, and inventory management systems and other aspects of my technology stack?

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Be aware that some commerce solutions inhibit integrations with third-party technologies. Some may limit how much data you can surface to key parts of your technology stack to preserve the stability of their code base or to force you to purchase their own proprietary add-on technology.

Digital commerce solutions need to evolve with ever-changing customer behaviors.



6. Focus on value.

It's easy to find low-priced commerce solutions, but there's truth in the saying, "You get what you pay for." Don't make the mistake of focusing primarily on the upfront price tag. Only when you objectively look at the actual value a commerce solution delivers can you envision the potential total cost of ownership and return on investment. Does the solution provide a flexible licensing model? What will it cost to integrate it with your technology stack? Does the solution deliver the capabilities your business needs today? A year from now? Three years? Will it foster business growth and scale, or hinder your evolution into new frontiers?

If you outgrow the limitations of your initial lower-priced investment, what will your costs be to invest in, deploy, and learn a completely new commerce platform in a year or two? How much effort and expense will it take to migrate your data to a new platform? And what will the IT resource requirements be? Look at all the factors that play into the costs of your investment. A lower-priced solution doesn't necessarily translate into lower overall costs. Whether the costs seem high or low, make sure you understand the actual value your business gains from the commerce solution you invest in.

There's significantly more value in solutions that go beyond helping you sell merchandise to empowering you to create great customer experiences where loyalty and business growth flourish. To do that, you need more than just a shopping cart. You need a comprehensive commerce platform that gives you the capabilities and freedom to transform your customers' shopping experiences in any innovative and game-changing ways you can imagine.

That requires a solution that can integrate with your other marketing technology solutions and has the full range of features and attributes needed to deliver a complete commerce journey from start to finish with the engaging and consistent experiences that customers expect all along the way.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Merchants sometimes purchase commerce solutions based on upfront price and the feature set they need today, only to have to reinvest in a new platform a year or two later when they outgrow the old solution's limitations.

Recognized commerce platform leader.

As a Leader in the *Gartner Magic Quadrant™ for Digital Commerce*, a Leader in *The Forrester Wave™ for B2B Commerce Suites for Midsize Companies*, and a Top Performer in *The Forrester Wave™ for B2C Commerce Suites*, Adobe Commerce Cloud is uniquely positioned to address all the critical elements covered in this buyer's guide. Adobe Commerce Cloud delivers the most flexible commerce solution available and offers the largest commerce ecosystem in the world, enabling merchants to move and innovate faster. It empowers merchants to support a wide range of business models and channels, addressing the needs of both B2C to B2B use cases, and making it easy to manage multiple brands on a global scale.

To learn more about what Adobe Commerce Cloud can do for your business, visit <https://www.adobe.com/commerce/magento.html>.