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Sample whitepaper: Ecommerce

Replatforming your ecommerce store: why, how and when

Introduction

Markets don't stand still and neither does technology. Both these factors can impact your ecommerce store's performance. Making sure your store continues to compete effectively may mean you need to replatform it.

Replatforming your ecommerce store requires careful and strategic planning, and a clear understanding of why you're doing it and what you want to achieve by doing it.

Think about:

- The essentials you must have
- The things you'd like to add
- What you'll need in the future.

Once you're clear about these different elements, you'll then need to plan your project and select the right provider.

A key way of ensuring that everything goes according to plan is to work with an agency that will be your trusted platform partner, giving you the reassurance and confidence you need.

Here, we take you through the basics and benefits of replatforming.

1. What is replatforming?

In general terms, replatforming is when you migrate from one technical system to another. With ecommerce, it means switching to a different ecommerce platform.

At a basic level, this involves moving data from one online store to another. The physical equivalent would be changing the location of a shop on the high street.

Like moving premises, replatforming involves a whole process, from comparing platforms and installing a new system to transferring data and setting up the new website.

2. Why replatform?

The ecommerce store you start out with might not be the best vehicle for the online enterprise your business is growing into.

Businesses don't stand still, and the basic features and performance your platform has provided you with may not be able to keep up with how you're developing.

Markets change as do customers' expectations and your store needs to keep up with these changes.

We talked about how replatforming is like moving store location. Imagine if you had a physical store but it simply couldn't compete effectively because it was too small, or not in the right place to exploit footfall. Simply refitting it or updating your stock wouldn't solve the issue.

It would require a wholesale shift to give it the best possible advantages in competing for customers and meeting their needs and demands.

Replatforming is how you make fundamental changes to your online store to make the most of things like new features, improved functionality and performance and better support.

3. Listing problems and improvements

If you've got a clear idea of why you want to migrate your ecommerce store to another platform, you've then got to plan the entire process.

The first thing to do is list all the things that you don't like about your current platform, such as:

- Performance problems
- Site speed
- Poor administration
- Time-consuming maintenance.

Then list the types of features or improvements you'd like to get from your new platform, for example:

- Improved user experience
- Better functionality
- Easier administration
- Accessible analytics
- Future-proofing.

Include all your requirements and the benefits you'd expect in this list.

4. Comparing platforms

You don't want to end up jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. This is why you must be clear about your objectives and how your platform's capabilities should meet them.

Platform comparisons can be tricky – what you gain from one, you lose with another, but then gain something else. Some platforms will come with higher infrastructure costs, others will have more built-in features or better integrations.

Integrations are a critical consideration. Will the third-party systems you currently use work with your new site, or will you need to look at equivalents? Integrations can also have an impact on your replatforming budget.

Future-proofing is important. Don't just consider your immediate needs, but also the direction in which your business is heading, and what you'll need from your ecommerce platform in the future.

Do weigh up costs, but also consider the scope for your future growth and development. If you can ask for a demo from platform providers to help you choose.

Once you've got a clear understanding of all pros and cons involved, you can make your decision.

5. Planning your data migration

Define the data you'll need to migrate.

There's obviously the essential stuff, including customer, product and order data. But also consider whether you need legacy data and, if so, what impact this might have on the speed of your new site.

Replatforming should run seamlessly, with the right support and guidance. But it's still best practice to backup your current data first.

The migration itself requires careful planning. It's not just about pressing a button. Depending on the age of your current platform, for example, you might need to translate your data first so that the new system will read it.

You need to address all the aspects of the data you're migrating. For example, gift card data should include the giver and recipient. Where you have specialist products, think about any custom fields you've created.

6. Managing content and SEO

A new store on a new platform will still need content. Replatforming is an opportunity to refresh or rewrite your content.

But there may still be details you wish to carry over from your old site. Therefore, put a content strategy in place.

You don't want to hamper the launch of your new site by omitting key content or including content that doesn't match your business objectives.

This brings us to another critical factor, SEO.

When migrating any content, make sure you keep your SEO history. In fact, SEO can make or break your project. If you don't factor it in, you may risk losing up to 50% of your organic traffic, and therefore a large number of potential customers.

When replatforming, make sure the new platform will import and apply all your core SEO data, including:

- Metadata
- Meta descriptions
- Category descriptions.

Your new platform should also redirect any legacy URLs to make sure users don't get errors when clicking on links.

7. Designing your new ecommerce site

Logically, you want everything in place ready for when you migrate your data.

How different your new site looks will depend on your choice of design but also on the platform and how versatile and flexible it is. You'll need to understand the relationships between your different strands of legacy architecture and your new site, such as:

- Storefront
- Point of sale
- Content management
- Order management
- Customer management
- Payments.

You don't want your site design to compromise any inherent benefits you're getting from replatforming, so consider and plan this aspect of your move carefully.

This is also where your decisions about content will make a big difference. You should ensure that any legacy content you've kept will flow naturally within your new site design and that you've covered all the bases when it comes to fresh content.

8. Migrating your data

Having chosen your new platform, backed up your existing data and completed your new site design, you can now migrate your data.

The best way of doing this is to rely on the expertise and support of a platform partner agency. They will ensure your data migration is smooth, streamlined and secure.

You want to minimise downtime and potential disruption to your customers so that when you launch your new store on its new platform, they will see the immediate benefits.

9. Launching your new site

This is the culmination of your replatforming project, but it's only the beginning of where you can next take your online store.

Replatforming should prepare you for the future. As part of this next phase, you should look to your partner agency to provide you with ongoing support and training.

This way, you familiarise yourself thoroughly with the new platform and you gain the necessary knowledge and skills to maximise its capabilities.

When is the right time to replatform?

Do you feel that the platform you're currently paying for isn't giving you the performance and support you need? Has your site become too slow and cumbersome to manage effectively? Is this impacting your customers' experience and affecting your profits?

Change is challenging, but often it's necessary.

Replatforming can seem like a daunting prospect, but with a systematic approach to this change, you can put your ecommerce enterprise in the best possible position to reap future benefits.

- Understand your objectives
- Do your research
- Audit your data, content and SEO
- Choose your platform
- Design the new website
- Migrate your data
- Launch your ecommerce site on its new platform.

Our answer to ecommerce

We'll act as an extension of your business, helping you grow and thrive on our lean, functional and versatile ecommerce platform.

You'll have our full support and help throughout the replatforming process, ensuring a smooth transition for your site, and from there, we'll help you achieve your future goals with our dynamic platform management.