Understanding the Basics of eCommerce Website Development

Whether you own a physical store and wish to widen your client pool by expanding your business online, or you've come up with a promising business idea, eCommerce is definitely one of the most lucrative industries in the digital sphere to go into.

Photo by rupixen.com on Unsplash

And while the opportunities in eCommerce are massive — so is the competition. Therefore, to set up a profitable and successful online store, you need to develop a fast, attractive, intuitive, and functional website.

But for someone new in the industry, such as yourself, how do you know what makes a good and quality eCommerce website? There are plenty of inexpensive, out-of-the-box solutions — and then, there are individuals and agencies providing professional eCommerce development for those ready to make a

substantial investment. To find a proper [eCommerce development company in UK](#), Design Rush's made a helpful list to narrow down your search.

To help you out in building your perfect online shop, we have outlined this guide for eCommerce website development. From eCommerce website types and platforms to detailed steps in planning and executing your site development, here is everything you need to know on eCommerce web development.

What is eCommerce Website Development?

As the name suggests, eCommerce website development is the process of building an eCommerce website, i.e., a website that enables buying and selling products or services online.

To be more precise, the word *development* generally refers to the website's backend only — including the platform on which the site is built, its infrastructure, and the content management system used for storing products/inventory.

However, as website development is entirely intertwined with [website design](#), the two terms are frequently used interchangeably, even though they represent two completely different site elements.

Website *design* is the frontend part of a website, i.e., the one your customers see when landing on your page.

Still, thanks to innovations in website building, such as drag-and-drop platforms and no-code/low-code solutions, web development and web design are slowly merging.

So, before you decide on your eCommerce site's vendor, make sure that you have communicated your needs correctly — and that the other side has been transparent about their services as well.

How to Choose the Perfect Platform for Your eCommerce Website Development

There's a wide array of eCommerce web development solutions available on the market, with differing functionalities, pros and cons, development times, price tags, etc. Yet, all of them can be split into three large categories:

- All-in-one eCommerce platforms
- eCommerce extensions/add-ons
- Headless CMS solutions

All-in-one eCommerce solutions are the low-to-no-code platforms we mentioned earlier. Basically, these solutions offer the store owner the ability to register their domain, host their website, and build and run both their site's back end and front end from a single location.

Generally, all-in-one platforms are quick and inexpensive solutions for eCommerce website development; however, they may not boast the functionalities and security your online store will need.

The second category entails extensions and add-ons that provide commerce functionality to a "regular" website built on a platform such as WordPress. WooCommerce is the first that comes to mind, but there is an abundance of unique extensions for varying needs.

Last but not least are headless content management systems. Building a headless solution can be an expensive and time-consuming choice, but the functionalities available go way beyond the typical needs of an online store.

Headless platforms are super flexible and feature-packed,

making them a perfect choice for companies with advanced content management needs.

Before deciding on the final solution, make sure to discuss your needs with your future development team.

eCommerce Website-Building Platforms

In this section, we'll cover the most popular and widely used platforms for building an online store.

#1 Shopify

Shopify is one of the most popular all-in-one eCommerce solutions, hosting nearly 5 million websites globally. As an all-in-one platform, Shopify serves as your site's host and is used for building the front end and back end of your online shop.

The platform offers five pricing tiers, enabling eCommerce businesses to get what they need at various stages of their growth while leveraging Shopify's features.

Shopify boasts scalable hosting and inventory tracking for in-depth product management.

On the downside, Shopify does have some limitations in terms of design customization, multilingual support, and site speed.

#2 Squarespace

Squarespace is another all-in-one solution for website building. The platform offers 24/7 customer support, easy-to-build site templates, and a free domain name upon registration.

However, Squarespace wasn't initially designed for eCommerce,

but rather for creating small business websites, portfolios, personal blogs, etc. Therefore, to build a fully-functional online shop on Squarespace, you'll have to go with the most-costly options.

Another downside of Squarespace is its somewhat slower performance and limitations in terms of template design.

#3 BigCommerce

BigCommerce can serve as both an all-in-one eCommerce platform and only a front-end solution – depending on your needs and budget.

The platform provides some really great additional features, such as a full marketing suite, extensive SEO tools, customer support, and frequent software upgrades at no cost to users.

In addition, BigCommerce is one of the most affordable options on the market, especially considering its vast number of features.

A potential drawback for some online store owners may be its complicated inventory management process.

#4 Adobe Commerce (Formerly Magento)

Adobe Commerce is an end-to-end platform boasting a page builder, inventory management, and mobile optimization.

The solution, formerly known as Magento before Adobe's acquisition in 2018, is integrated into the Adobe system of products and today represents one of the most customizable, SEO-friendly, flexible, and scalable eCommerce platforms.

However, Adobe's solution comes with a hefty price tag, especially for businesses just starting out in the industry.

#5 WooCommerce

WooCommerce is a free-to-use, customizable, open-source eCommerce platform used for building online shops.

It must be built on top of a WordPress website, and the solution is super easy to integrate with either a new or existing WordPress website.

WooCommerce is a great option for those who wish to monetize an existing WordPress site.

The starting version of WooCommerce is free, however, add-ons and functionalities require some investment.

What Are Your eCommerce Website Development Options?

Going with WooCommerce doesn't necessarily mean you are required to use a predesigned theme for your website.

Custom WordPress (and hence, WooCommerce) theme design and development have been all the rage in recent years, as they offer businesses the best of both worlds.

Free and paid themes

The fastest and most affordable option is to go with an out-of-the-box solution.

Both free and paid themes can be put together in a matter of days — you install a theme, customize the colors, add photos, text, and products, and your site is ready for launch.

However, this solution brings some restrictions in terms of customization, as any larger design overhaul isn't an option.

Page builders

A level up from themes, page builders are an affordable, fast, and highly customizable option for eCommerce site development.

With page builders, you basically customize an existing online store, that has no code, by simply using a drag-and-drop feature.

As their name suggests, page builders allow you to build pages from the ground up — or even more, import themes and customize them to match your needs.

Fully coded websites

Fully coded websites are the most time and cost-intensive web development approach, but they provide your eCommerce business with the broadest range of features and functionalities. Check out a few examples of eCommerce websites. Customization options are virtually unlimited and solely depend on your budget and your developer's skills.

To build such a solution, you'll need to partner with a web development agency or hire a dedicated freelance developer.

However, even a fully-customized solution has drawbacks. Depending on its size, the website can have a slow loading speed.

Moreover, any substantial alterations to the site's design or features will have to be done by a professional, resulting in new costs and time expenditures.

Failproof eCommerce Website Development Step-by-Step Guide

#1 Determine Your eCommerce Business Model

- B2C — eCommerce business model focused on meeting the needs of end consumers.
- B2B — eCommerce stores designed to promote and sell products/services to other businesses.
- C2C — third-party eCommerce websites that enable individuals and retailers to promote and sell their products or services to end-users.

#2 Identify Your Audience

Understand who your potential customers are — their demographics, the problems your products/services can help solve, and the ways to approach your target buyers — and plan your eCommerce development accordingly so that everything is tailored to your customers.

#3 Choose the Right eCommerce Website Solution

From eCommerce platforms to development methodologies, we have discussed a variety of options for building your online store.

Nevertheless, before you make up your mind, discuss your options with your development team, and assess the features and functionalities your site will need to boast, such as responsive design, product management, a CMS, secure payment processing, etc.

#4 Brand Your eCommerce Website

Create — or transfer (if you already own a store) — your eCommerce business' branding in terms of colors, logo, voice, and style. Ensure your branding is recognizable and in line

with your industry and target audience.

#5 Map Out Your Website

Work with your development team to decide what pages your online shop will need and how they will link to each other. Have your dev team create a website map to get a better idea of how users will navigate to find the products they want.

#6 Determine Intuitive Product Categories

Categorizing the products intuitively is extremely important to help your potential customers find the product they need without much trouble. Ensure your online store's navigation, CTAs, and other conversion drivers are on point.

#7 Write Compelling, SEO-Friendly Product Descriptions

Product descriptions are among the vital elements of your online store. They inform customers more about the product, thus helping them decide whether that purchase is right for them.

Moreover, product descriptions help optimize your content for search engines, therefore boosting your online rankings.

#8 Test, Deploy & Adapt

Test your eCommerce website's usability, customer experience, and bugs to ensure smooth shopping for your users.

After deployment starts, the never-ending process of keeping your site ahead of competitors, adapting to the latest trends, and growing your product offering begins.