SELECTING YOUR ECOMMERCE PLATFORM
FOR MANUFACTURERS, WHOLESALERS & DISTRIBUTORS CONSIDERING AN ECOMMERCE WEBSTORE

Sometimes a change in your business or your customers’ needs, requires you to assess your current digital commerce platform. Alternatively, it may be that you are moving to an ecommerce platform for the first time.

Whatever the reason now is a good time to assess your digital strategy and measure it against your current capabilities to ensure future growth and evolution.

Netalogue is an ecommerce software expert – as our growing client list and customer satisfaction ratings testify. It is important to us that you make the right choice for your organisation – a choice that suits both your business and technical needs. To help we’ve pulled together a checklist of the top considerations our clients tell us were important in their decision to progress with Netalogue:

Technology - Strategy First

We are a superb technology company. We think the Netalogue™ B2B Ecommerce Platform is the best you can buy. Technology is always an enabler of change and often the catalyst for change.

However, we advise that you drive any technology investment by start with your strategic intent. Consider digital strategy, assess your digital capability, and think about your channels to market and current customer experience. Think about how technology investments will be integrated, implemented and supported.

At a minimum, the strategy should answer or outline the following:

1. What is my go-to-market strategy? Online, offline, Omni-channel?
2. How is my Go-to-market strategy linked to financial metrics (for example; revenue growth, profits growth, cost reduction) and to customer experience goals?
3. What is the technology needs of your organisation in the context of your customer experience goals?
4. What data is required to support this strategy?
5. What internal/external resources will be required to operate and support the required technologies at greatest efficiency & lowest cost?
6. Are the tools simply a cost of doing business, or do they offer a competitive advantage? What are the timelines for integration and how do they change with different resource approaches?
7. What are the implications for existing systems, processes and people when making these moves?

Performance & Scalable

It is important to regard an integrated commerce platform as an enabler for your business to interact, engage, and transact with your customers - regardless of channel.

Of course, in this digital age, an ecommerce platform must be “always on”: available 24 by 7, responding to anyone visits and whenever they engage, regardless of the scope of products you are carrying.

And as your site grows in size, popularity and visits, your ecommerce platform must be able to scale with you.
Scale can be measured along a number of different dimensions. For example, it is obvious that your ecommerce platform needs to scale with the growth of customers and the volume of transactions. But think also about the sophistication of your business as it evolves over time. In B2B, buyers often need increasingly sophisticated capabilities including self-service, multilingual, online catalogues and multiple storefronts.

You should also consider scale in financial terms. An ecommerce platform that scales financially means that you can grow your business without dramatically increasing the ‘total cost of ownership’ (TCO) of your platform. A platform with a low initial TCO due to the small business volume will increase as your business grows. Make sure your TCO does not outgrow your business. Otherwise, you’re just passing your profits to the supplier.

Secure

Of course, the ecommerce platform must also conform to the most rigorous of standards when it comes to security, compliance and governance. In a recent survey 93% of B2B purchasers stated that Security and Compliance was of critical or important as a factor when selecting an ecommerce platform.

Governance requires all B2B spend to be controlled and analysed in line with corporate procurement rules. Sophisticated B2B customer now expect their key suppliers to help them manage requisition and workflow controls so that they can streamline their purchasing whilst maintaining corporate standards.

Integration with Back Office

A B2B ecommerce application should not be an island and enhanced integration to ERP and CRM applications must be a mandatory feature. Efficient buying requires that the ecommerce platform takes information from, and pushes information to ERP, Procurement and CRM applications. Indeed, a recent survey noted that 88% of B2B buyers demanded integration to Back-office as critical or important.

Netalogue ecommerce platform, in additional to integrating with all major ERP and CRM applications, also contains an optional feature called “Punch-out”. This enables the platform to be integrated with well-known procurement systems.

Omni-Channel

Your customers are everywhere and anywhere and use multiple devices throughout their buying journeys. That means your platform needs to be Omni-channel, as well. It must be able to connect and transact with your customers on all touch points, from multiple computers, tablets, and smartphones, to in-store, over the phone, or on social networks.

It should also enable you to gather insights about your customers as they shop across all these channels, enabling you to better reach them in the future. At the same time, you will be able to get a better understanding of your customer throughout the buying journey to offer highly personalized marketing offers and exceptional shopping experiences while providing ‘best in class’ service and sales support.

Finally, of course, whether it is B2B or B2C Ecommerce it is hugely important to be able to be able to order products on a mobile device. Whether it be on the factory shop floor, the building site or replenishing the office stationary cupboard - convenience and ease of access is all important.

B2B, B2C, or both?

Many ecommerce platforms are designed just for B2C. Functionality is relatively simple – the individual buyer not requiring the levels of sophistication and functionality required in a multi-site, multi store front, multi lingual B2B environment.

In today’s digital landscape, an organisation can and will often sell through multiple channels to multiple audiences. For example, at Netalogue we have clients who sell through resellers, wholesalers, and retailers
and directly to consumers in certain markets. An ecommerce platform should be flexible enough to support any available business model your organisation requires, whether it be B2C, B2B, or B2B2C!

**Product Content, Inventory, Order Management**

To maximise revenue great and engaging product content is vital. An ecommerce platform needs to be able to stage a wide variety of product information – from descriptions, prices, specs, pictures, and videos, to customer reviews and ratings. The information displayed needs to be up-to-date, accurate and to encapsulate sufficient detail to make the customer comfortable when buying. The quality of the product content information and the manners in which it is presented drives the effectiveness of a commerce storefront. High quality content and seamless, real-time inventory management leads to an enhanced shopping experience.

And once customers make their purchases, your next imperative is to fulfil their orders to their expectations. An Order Management System (OMS) must be able to support the standard fulfilment as well as more advanced, flexible capabilities customers have come to see as standard, like buy online and pick up in-store. 86% of B2B buyers cited order management as critical or important.

Finally, to help you differentiate, your ecommerce platform should provide real-time, data-driven merchandising capabilities, collecting customer data, analysing buying behaviours, and driving revenue through individualized shopping experiences for each buyer based on their needs and wants or based upon corporate buyer guidelines.

**Personalised, Ease of Use, Self Service & Insight**

The vast majority of us have purchased goods and services online as consumers. As such we have expectations about the manner in which our buying is supported and ease by which our transactions can be processed. B2b ecommerce platforms should have friendly and familiar, ‘B2C like’ interfaces. The best platforms have the sophistication and advanced functionality demanded of ‘enterprise class’ B2B ecommerce coupled with the ease of use and familiarity of a B2C ecommerce web experience.

At Netalogue we also believe that personalised screens and workflows make for greater impact and effectiveness. We understand that customers expect personalised content, prices and functionality.

Equally important is the ability to find the products and services you want to buy. B2B ecommerce platforms require supercharged search ability to find the right product every time. Just like B2C in B2B ecommerce it is hugely important to be able to search and access information about products both quickly and accurately. The best platforms have ‘attribute filters’, guided searching, pre-defined searches, and auto positioning of search results. All are all great ways of ensuring customers find the products they need quickly, minimising mistakes and reducing the cost to purchase.

It takes advanced software design to shape an Ecommerce platform, which can be tailored to specific customer needs (without complex technical knowledge).

B2B customers need the confidence that real people in your organisation are close at hand, accessible and connected to the detail. Knowing that they can easily connect to a human voice is of importance as more business transactions move online. The Netalogue ecommerce platform support live links to enable online chats and dialogue with a sales person. Enhancing your ability to sell and minimising abandoned carts.

Buyer Self Service is vitally important in B2B ecommerce, taking customer service to new levels. Here the requirement is to tightly integrating the ecommerce platform with ERP and CRM applications. The Netalogue self-service features allow customers to do more online to levels normally only accessible to your staff.

Finally, intimacy with a customer and their account is the secret to great customer service and repeat sales. The Netalogue Ecommerce platform comes complete with advance dashboard controls to improve your customer knowledge. Advanced enquiry tools control and measure KPIs to provide real-time intelligence and the best possible customer experience.
Global

It is imperative in the ecommerce purchasing decisions to consider both current and future needs as your business evolves. Such consideration might include overseas expansion and trading (the need for local language) and also multisite ecommerce (the need for multiple store front to reflect different businesses and needs).

Expanding companies should have the option to run multiple commerce sites, each with its own branding, product offerings and navigation, while still delivering a seamless commerce experience. They should be able to interact and transact with customers anywhere in the world, with support for multiple languages, currencies, and other local nuances.

Future Proofed

Since 1994 and the launch of Amazon the world has witnessed an explosion of online commerce and to-date we have seen rapidly developing technologies to support such growth. Digital commerce is a continuously evolving environment and our customers are also constantly evolving - which means you need to evolve to understand and meet their needs. What you understand and need today may not be what you need in two, five and ten years’ time. Technology changes, your business changes, customer needs change, and the future is hard to predict.

At Netalogue we dedicate ourselves to understanding this constantly changing world. It is all we do – and it is field in which we excel. We believe that your ecommerce platform must be a foundation stone for your current needs but also for future innovations. When you purchase an ecommerce platform your chosen partner must be able to show that it has the capacity and commitment not just to support your needs today but also to drive platform innovation by demonstrating its past and future roadmap of development and innovations.

Contact us to find out what we can do for your digital commerce future on +44 1639 816130 or sales@netalogue.com

Further Reading

*Backgrounders - The Importance of B2B Ecommerce.pdf*
*Omni-Channel – From a B2B Ecommerce Perspective.pdf*

About Netalogue


This platform creates B2B ecommerce webstores for successful manufacturers, distributors, and wholesalers who require exceptional functionality, speed of deployment and close business fit with comprehensive integration to a wide variety of leading ERP systems.

Netalogue’s significant B2B ecommerce platform features coupled with deep ERP integration capabilities has attracted the attention of highly successful B2B clients that include Bunzl, Transport for London and Farrow & Ball.