Ultimate Guide to eCommerce Replatforming

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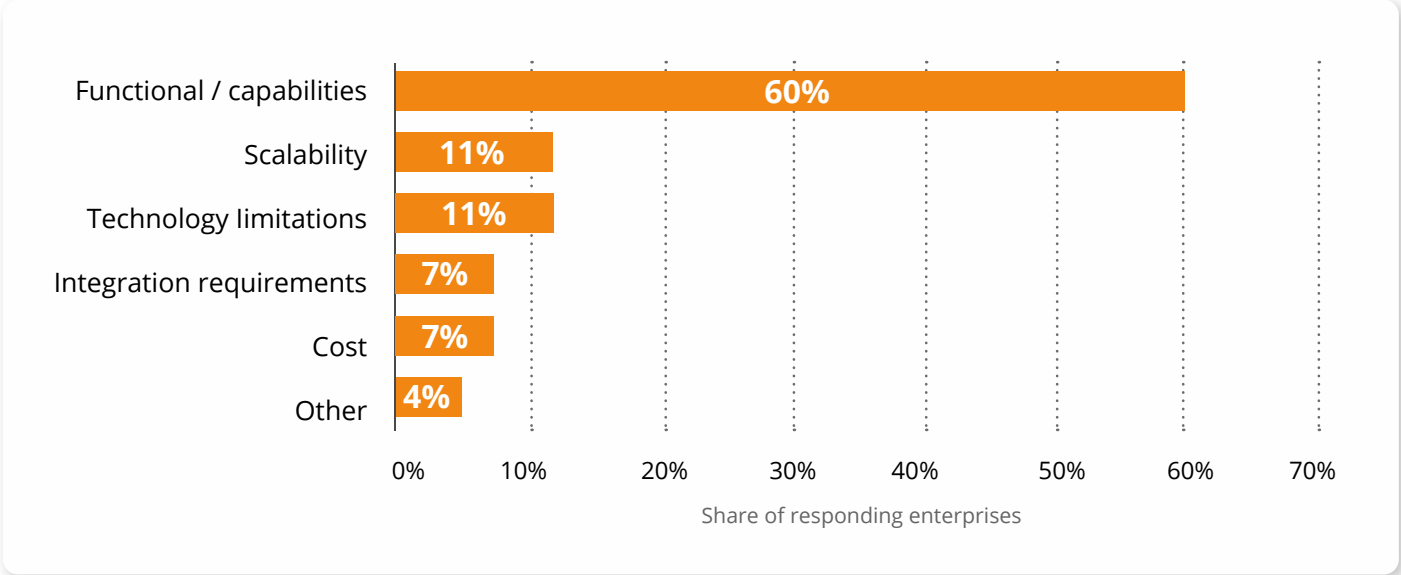
The only thing constant in life is change. No matter how great you think things are going or how tough the circumstances, you can always count on circumstances changing. Whether you embrace change or fear it, it's always just around the corner. And in the digital age, change happens faster and faster. In this dynamic environment, what was state of the art today will be obsolete tomorrow. If your company isn't adapting, evolving, and adjusting to change you're out of business; you just haven't closed the doors yet.

As technology and business models evolve, modern sellers must evolve with them. B2B buyers now have expectations similar to those of B2C buyers and many businesses with a web presence struggle to meet these expectations.

Change is endemic in eCommerce. Companies are moving from one platform to another. Much of this movement is driven by new and improved technology. For example, in 2010 Joomla held 12% of the content management system market and was popular for eCommerce. However, Magento 1 appeared on the scene, soared in popularity, and by 2017 Joomla's market share was cut almost in half. Then with Magento 1 reaching its end of life in June 2020, eCommerce companies once again found themselves looking around and evaluating other platforms. When changes in technology force you to make a move, it only makes sense to evaluate all of your options.

But what if replatforming isn't the result of a platform upgrade? How do companies engaged in eCommerce know when it's time to replatform or if just a redesign will do? In an eConsultancy survey, 60% of respondents cited a need for new functionality as the reason to move their website to a new platform.



Source: Statista

But to successfully replatform, companies need to know how to:

- Identify the signals that migration is necessary
- Overcome the fears associated with such major change
- Plan, test, and execute the actual migration
- Assess the migration results.

These are the topics covered in this guide. So, if you found our series on Replatforming an eCommerce website interesting, you will appreciate this much more in-depth look at this topic. When you are through reading, you should know if your legacy system is still sufficient or if it's time to replatform. And if you must replatform, you'll have an outline for your plan of action.

Identifying the Warning Signs

The signs that it's time to consider replatforming your website can be subtle or obvious. And they come from a variety of sources. Subtle signs such as a jump in the use of onsite search or increasing restraints on marketing are often overlooked. While obvious signs like customer complaints about your website, tech staff complaints about maintenance costs and difficulty, and site analytics are hard to ignore. Let's look at both types of signals in detail.

Listen to Customers

It's always a good idea to keep an eye on social media signals and comments customers make to your Customer Service team.

Increased Calls or Phone Orders. If you're lucky, customers will tell you they are unhappy with the site instead of shopping elsewhere. So an obvious sign is an increase in complaints from your customers about site functionality or usability. Are sales reps and customer service receiving an increase in the number of calls because customers have problems placing an order online? If it's easier to make a call than plan an online order, it's time to replatform. If customers can't easily reorder or upload CSV files to place their order, they may grumble. Remember, to the buyer, making a purchase is a job. Your job is to make their job easier.

Increase in Onsite Search. Other signs from your customers can be very subtle, and if you aren't looking for the signal you might miss it. For example, if you see a spike in onsite searches, your customers may be trying to tell you something. When you aren't accurately anticipating user intent, you may be serving up irrelevant information and forcing the user to rely on your onsite search bar to find what they want. Onsite search is an incredibly valuable function to shoppers and sellers alike. It starts a dialogue where the shopper says, "here's what I want to buy". But if you find that visitors are searching for the same items and information repeatedly, it's a signal that finding what they want isn't intuitive and your site structure, performance and design might be causing it.

Look at Analytics

Your analytics dashboard is a treasure trove of obvious signals. If you haven't built a custom dashboard for your eCommerce website yet, consider downloading ready-made eCommerce reporting templates for Google Analytics such as the one Michael Wiegand suggests (download Google Analytics templates here).This will give you important insights into the number of new users you are receiving, how quickly they bounce, and the number of pages they visit per session. If your pages are loading slowly, it is reflected in your bounce rate. Today's shopper has little patience for slow loading sites. If your pages don't load in 2 to 3 seconds, visitors will find a faster site.

Image source

General Traffic and Conversion. The amount of traffic your site receives and how well it converts is a function of your marketing efforts, SEO, and platform performance. You can look to the Benchmarking Reports in Google Analytics for an industry comparison. But it might be more helpful to look at traffic trends and adjust for seasonality. Year over year, traffic should be increasing and your conversion rate stay stable at least. Decline in conversion rates may be a signal that customers are not happy with the user experience they are getting.

Bounce Rates. If your pages are loading slowly, it is reflected in your bounce rate. While bounce rates vary by industry, you can figure that a bounce rate of 26% to 40% is in the excellent range. You can consider a bounce rate of 41% to 55% as average and anything above 56% as above average and a reason for concern. So, if bounce rates are high, either your pages are loading too slow or your website's usability is pushing the users away.

SEO-related Metrics. SEO is complex and requires diligent monitoring, especially with an unstable and subpar eCommerce platform. eCommerce websites may have hundreds if not thousands of pages and to get them all properly indexed and ranked can drastically change the amount of incoming business. Keep an eye on your Google Search Console for:

- indexing issues
- repeatedly appearing errors
- site speed performance for both mobile and desktop
- content and metadata duplication issues.

If your marketing team has to fix SEO disasters created your platform or must create workarounds to make the website SEO-friendly, it is time to think about replatforming.

You can customize your Analytics dashboard to provide a plethora of data points. You can now type in the Analytics Dashboard search bar "show worst pages by load speed" and get a look at how your site is loading from the bottom up. No matter what other information you are tracking, monitor the data that indicates how your customers feel about your site: bounce rates and time on site, conversion rates, and pages performance.

Listen to Tech Staff

Tech staff usually isn't keen on the replatforming process because of the dangers inherent in making such large-scale changes. But when they start telling you that it is increasingly difficult to keep the website up to date, secure, and functional it's imperative you listen.

Integration Issues. Little incremental changes over time add up. And these small changes can begin to cause big problems with integration. An update to a theme might cause integration issues with payment processing. A change to the Google Shopping Feed integration causes problems elsewhere. Depending on the number of widgets, plugins, and integrations that are associated with your site, keeping the entire patchwork together may require more time and money than starting from scratch.

Security Issues. As security concerns continue to grow, new rules and regulations such as PCI compliance, GDPR, and CCPA have been passed. Fines are costly, so you can't afford not to comply. But the work involved in securing a legacy architecture may be more than starting with a new, compliant platform.

Difficulty with Updates. You can't afford not to install updates. Updates should keep the site secure and functional. But with a legacy platform, each update can cause a cascading series of failures. As mentioned above, a simple update to the theme can cause a catastrophic failure. If IT is calculating the trade-off between the benefit of the update and the risks associated with installing it, replatforming is in order. When IT starts grumbling about replatforming, it pays to listen.

Maintenance Costs. If maintenance costs and website fees show up in the IT department, they are sure to grumble as these increase. You don't have to wait for the budget cycle to assess maintenance costs.

Listen to Marketing & Sales

If your marketing and sales efforts are hampered by the capabilities of your website, it's time to start thinking about replatforming. These signs can be as obvious as the amount of time and effort it takes to put up a simple landing page or as subtle as duplicated back office activities.

Data Capture. One subtle sign that it's time to update is the inability of your existing platform to capture the data your marketing team needs to evaluate lead generation or doesn't provide the support necessary to execute your latest digital marketing plans.

Customization. Every modern marketer and seller knows the importance of customized content. Does your platform include a CRM or integrate with most popular CRMs to facilitate customized content creation?

Do all forward facing employees have a 360° view of each customer to guide their interactions? When your platform doesn't sufficiently support your customization efforts or give you insights into your customers, it's time to make a move.

Duplicated Data Entry. Are you duplicating tasks such as entering the same data in multiple systems? For example, if you operate multiple companies selling the same products, how many times must you enter the data? Does your current eCommerce platform even have functionality for multiple companies or B2B and B2C eCommerce? Back office employees become so accustomed to performing manual or duplicate tasks they become numb to it. But replatforming may automate or eliminate workflows for increased productivity.

Replatforming vs Redesigning and Optimizing

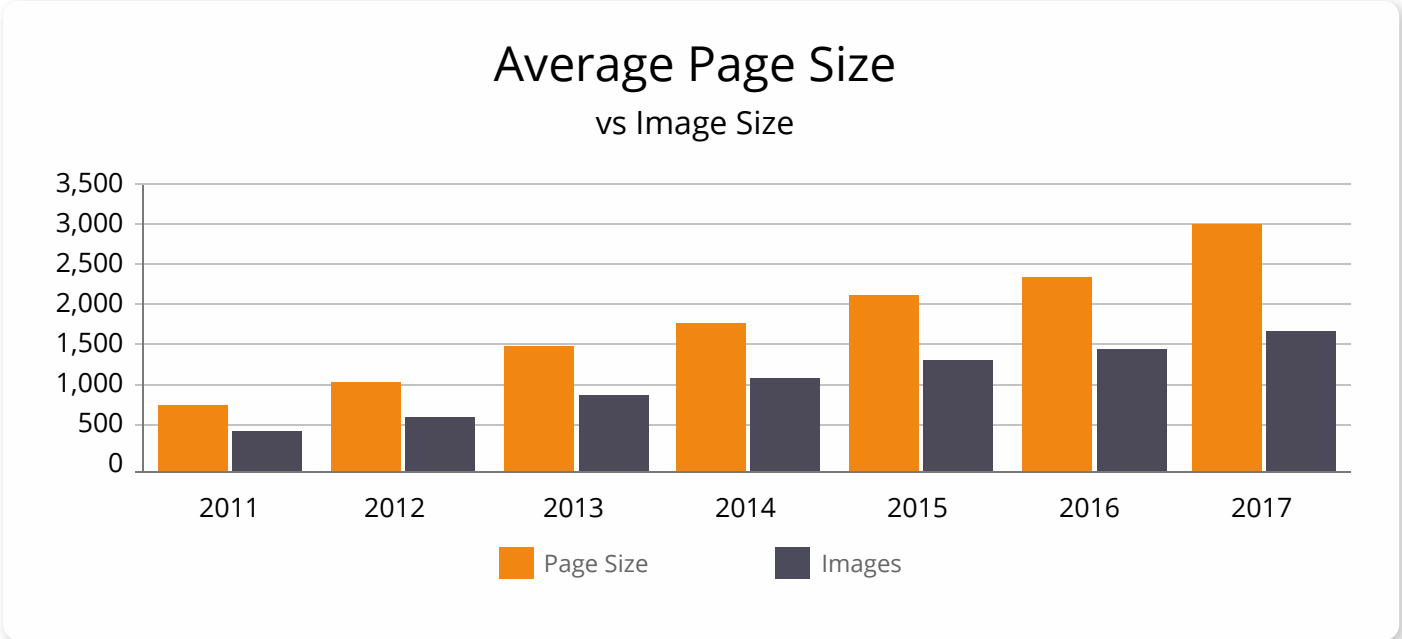
Just because you see performance issues doesn't automatically mean you need to replatform. Replatforming is a big undertaking, and not something to be taken lightly. So, make sure it's really in order before you take that first step. How do you know the difference? Take a look at the root causes of the poor performance.

Onsite Search

As stated previously, use of onsite search in and of itself is not a negative signal. It's generally a positive signal that a visitor is starting the journey and starting a dialogue that indicates their willingness to buy your product or services. It's a negative signal when you see that visitors are searching for the same item or information over and over again. That's a clear signal that there's a problem with site design. It could be in the menu structure – how many levels and clicks does it take to get to the item – or in the terminology you use – are you relying on industry jargon? All a visitor wants is a clean, productive experience. Don't overcomplicate it.

High Bounce Rates

High bounce rates can be a signal that something is wrong, but they aren't necessarily a signal that replatforming is necessary. Dig deep into what's causing the bounces. For example, if your images aren't optimized for quick loading, it can drag down page load times. Slow page load time is a traffic killer. The more images you have, the more opportunities you have to slow the site down. And today, sites have more and more images and the image sizes are larger, as you can see in the chart below.



Reduce your image to the smallest usable size. Use lossy compression to strip out any unneeded file data. Make use of the Progressive loading option for JPEG files. It makes the file at least appear to load faster because the user sees this.

Check your resources as well to see if they are causing a bottleneck. Are you using a CDN to optimize your load speed? This is a computer network, spread throughout the globe, that stores cached versions of your site. When a user's browser initiates a call to load your page, the CDN responds. The page loads faster because it is coming from a geographic location that is in closer proximity to the user and a cached version of the page is served.

Does your server have the resources to handle your traffic? If your solution is cloud based, are you pushing the limits of your provider? An upgrade in cloud service might be a simple solution. Or, if you are premise-based and crunched for resources, a move to the cloud might help. Cloud-based applications run on high-performance servers with lightning-fast processors under the hood. If your platform is available on-premise and in the cloud, talk to your provider to see if migrating to the cloud makes more sense than replatforming.

The final migration versus update decision really boils down to determining if your issues are interconnected and if they point back to your B2B eCommerce platform. For example, if your customers want a smoother checkout or re-order workflow and your existing platform can't be improved, then you need to migrate. If your customers are buying from a competitor's site that provides a user experience that is superior to the one you provide it's time to move. If loading speeds are hampered by your existing technology it's time to move.

The ultimate goal of replatforming should be to generate and support additional income.

Addressing the Fear of Replatforming

If migrating to a new platform is an opportunity to increase traffic, conversion rates, and average order size why does it frighten everyone from the IT Department to Sales and Marketing? It's because where there is a great opportunity there is also great risk. People fear:

- Wasting resources
- Commitment to and responsibility for a large project
- Failure
- Pain
- Change

Humans are not fearless. It's in our nature to avoid situations that could have negative consequences. Because there are so many ways a platform migration can go wrong, it's a project that is more feared than embraced. However, if you use the right tools and develop and follow a comprehensive plan, there is nothing to fear. Simply plan properly, execute the plan, and anticipate and identify obstacles before you begin implementing. Let's break down those fears and address them one by one.

Fear of Wasting Resources

There's a cost associated with replatforming. Even if you use a free, open source solution, there's the expense associated with customizing your solution and making sure it integrates with your other technology solutions.

You have to have a way to get data from one platform to another, so there's data migration costs. There's the cost of testing and staging (which can't begin to compare with the enormous cost of NOT testing and staging).

Then there's the cost of new content to consider. In addition, you may be tempted to think about the sunk cost of the existing platform. Don't fall for the temptation. Sunk costs are not recoverable and shouldn't be considered. On the other hand, there's a very real opportunity cost to consider. The resources dedicated to the replatforming project can't be used to upgrade your manufacturing equipment or invest in product research. Resources are precious and you don't want to squander them. So, the fear of wasting resources is very real. But this fear can be addressed by careful planning, budgeting, and allocation of resources.

Fear of Commitment to and Responsibility for a Large Project

It's not just personal relationships where we have a fear of commitment. Switching to a new platform means severing the relationship with your existing platform, even if it is a love/hate relationship. The fear of commitment is usually based on a lack of trust. You fear committing to and being responsible for a new platform because you don't completely know and trust it. In addition, no one wants to be responsible for a large, important project that goes bad. Fear of personal responsibility is why a company may tolerate a sub-optimum situation until it can no longer be ignored. In small organizations, employees might look to the owner to take on responsibility for projects of great magnitude. That's a problem. The owner probably already has enough pressure from the existing projects and people they are managing. In larger businesses people may look to the C-suite for guidance when in fact the C-suite is looking at the lower level for innovation. There's quite a bit of emotional pressure associated with the responsibility for a large project. Not everyone has the intestinal fortitude to handle it. But the true leaders and innovators in a company put those fears aside, take responsibility, and risk failure.

Fear of Failure

Alongside the fear of responsibility, you'll find its twin, fear of failure. Fear of failure can drive the fear of responsibility and vice versa. No one wants to fail. It can cost you your job. But the greater the risk, the greater the reward. Fear of failure is one of the easiest fears to address. As the old saying goes, "no one plans to fail, but they do fail to plan".

Simply put, don't plan to fail. Just plan. The careful planning, budgeting and resource allocation that addresses fear of wasting resources is the same solution to address fear of failure. Make sure you have buy-in on the project from a group of enthusiastic supporters, do careful and diligent research when it comes to selecting a vendor, plan the migration carefully, test and stage and don't be afraid to release when you're 80% complete.

Fear of Change

Most of the fears associated with replatforming can be boiled down to fear of change. And fear of change is just human. The only change we don't fear is change that we perceive to be in our favor (no one turns down an increase in pay). If you are the project leader, then it's your job to understand that people fear the change because it is the unknown. This fear is easily eased by open communication and once again stressing how this change is good for the company and good for them.

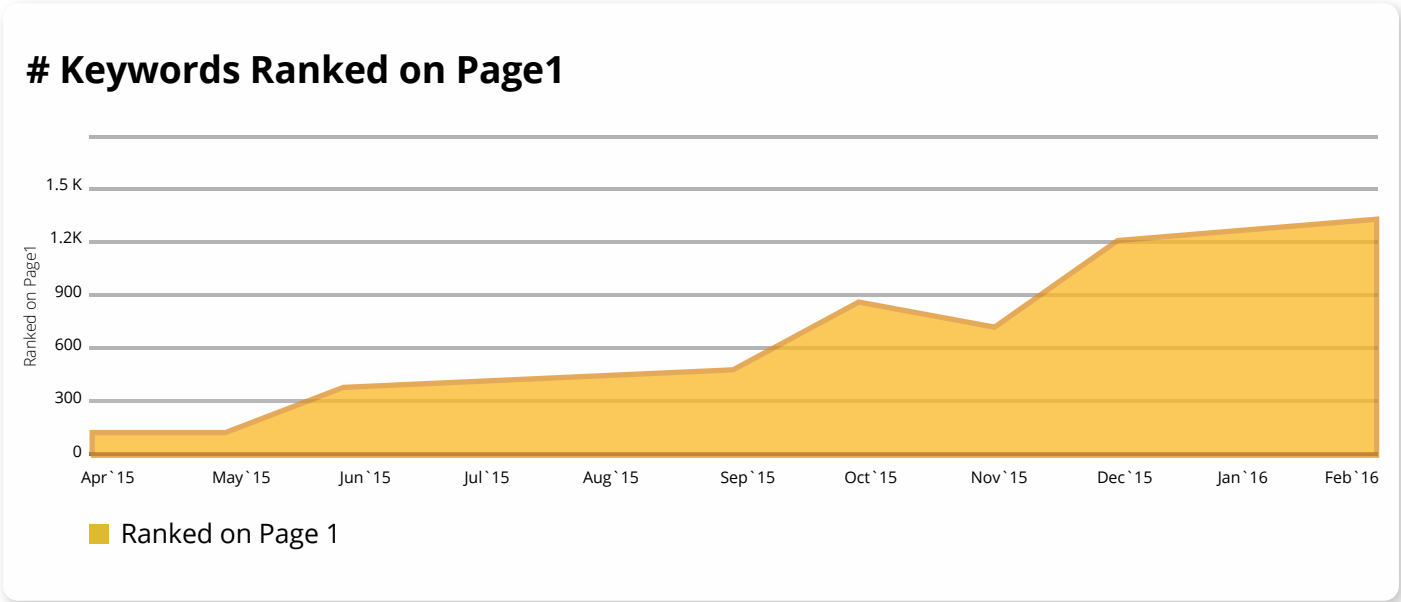
When it comes down to it, all fears associated with replatforming are addressed by planning and communication. By careful planning and open communication, you will allay the fears associated with replatforming even if you can't completely vanquish them.

Fear of Losing Traffic

In addition to the fears of failure, wasting resources, responsibility and change, which are psychological fears there is the very real fear of loss of your search rankings when you replatform. You've worked hard to achieve your rankings and don't want to lose them. With a well mapped out strategy, you can minimize loss.

One of the top ways to preserve your rankings when replatforming is to make sure that you resist the temptation to make a complete overhaul of your website, changing design and content. Making major changes to the content on your pages when replatforming is not a good idea. As tempting as it may be, if you make major changes to content and then replatform and things start heading south you are going to have a hard time troubleshooting the changes. With so many data points changing at once, the picture won't be clear, and you won't know how to adjust. In addition, if Google has been crawling your site regularly, it expects to find certain content. When you change all of this in addition to your site architecture, Google sees more than just fresh content and can "notice" your site in a very bad way. However, when you follow a strategy that sticks with the content you currently have, migrates to your new platform, waits for rankings to stabilize, and then considers this the new benchmark you can reduce some of that fear. In addition, you need to have a concrete migration plan that let's Google's search bot know that you've made changes in a friendly manner. When Stanley decided to combine two websites into one and launch on a new platform, they used a very careful strategy that maintained site categories and content while carefully mapping, planning, and auditing URL redirects. The results were impressive.

The new site launched in September and by February they had a considerable increase in the number of keywords ranked on page one of search engine results. There's no guarantee that you'll see the same results and won't lose SEO ranking when you replatform, but to lessen the risk, make mapping and planning of your redirects a major part of planning the project.



Planning Your Replatforming Project – The Key to Success

Addressing the fears associated with replatforming, whether they are psychological or SEO-related is possible by thoroughly planning the project. It's also the key to a successful project. So, let's look at the elements of a successful plan, from selecting the right solution to planning your redirects and updating related marketing materials.

Selecting the Right Solution

The first step in a successful replatforming project is deciding what features you need and then selecting the right solution to deliver those features.

Functional Features

Start with assessing the functional features you need. As previously mentioned, the need for additional functionality is the most common driver for platform migration.

These may be features such as:

- **Multiple Catalogs and Price Lists.** Would your customers benefit from custom catalogs and price lists? If so, your site requires functionality to support multiple catalogs and price lists. Most B2B companies need these features, but you don't commonly find them in B2C eCommerce platforms.
- **Large SKU Numbers.** Most eCommerce platforms do not mention a limit on SKUs but if you carry a large number of products or if your products have many variations, the number of individual SKUs can add up quickly. Make sure the platform's engine has the functionality to handle hundreds of thousands of SKUs with positive results.
- **Product Management Features.** What product management features do you need? Think about your need for custom attributes for products, multiple units of measure for a product, or even multiple warehousing for products. If these are current or near future needs, make sure your solution provides complete product management functionality.
- **Request for Quotes.** Do new customers frequently start by requesting a price quote? Do existing customers need quotations on new products? Then you should provide them the ability to make these requests online. Make sure your platform solution allows for an RFQ workflow.
- **User Defined Roles and Authorities.** Many B2B transactions require multiple approvals and involve many people in the purchase decision. If that describes your customers, you must ask if the platform allows your customers to define roles and authorities to meet their needs
- **Checkout Workflows.** What checkout scenarios do you need to provide? Do you want to provide the convenience of guest checkout and payment with credit cards or PayPal?

Do your customers pay on terms and you need functionality to assess credit risks immediately? Is factoring a part of your business model? If so, these are mission critical function features that your solution must include. Since many B2B buyers make the same purchases at regular intervals, will your website allow quick reorder forms and one-page checkout to make the buyer's job easier?

Technical Features

You must also consider the technical features you need, and your customers want. The user experience you provide to customers is also defined by the technical capabilities of the platform.

- **Procurement System Integration.** Is integration with your customer's procurement systems crucial? If your customers need the capability for EDI or punchout catalogs, your solution must meet this need. Flexibility in eProcurement integration may include the ability to implement headless architecture if necessary.
- **Support for Global Commerce.** Do your sales territories expand beyond your borders? International commerce must be supported with the ability to present content in multiple languages and prices in multiple currencies. International shipping may necessitate 3PL integration. If so, your platform must support these features.
- **Mobile Ready and Cross Browser Support.** A mobile ready website is a must. Make sure your solution renders on all devices and across all browsers. Whether your customer is viewing with a Samsung Galaxy tablet using Firefox or sitting at their MacPro using Safari, the platform must render your website impeccably. This technical functionality is a must if you are going to serve up your content in the manner your customers want to access it.
- **B2C and B2B2C Support.** As markets evolve, more and more B2B sellers are selling direct. If you currently sell direct or are planning to sell direct in the future, you need a solution that has the technical capabilities to handle B2B and B2C transactions. While both types of customers desire a similar experience, they have very different needs. Make sure the platform you select can handle all types of eCommerce flawlessly.
- **Customization, Integration, and Hosting.** No matter how hard you search, it's rare to find a solution that comes out of the box 100% in the manner you need. Even the closest match may require a small bit of customization. That's why it's important to evaluate how easy it is to customize the solution. If one small customization requires an enormous amount of change in code, you might not have the flexibility to best suit your needs. When evaluating solutions, you should also consider if the code is proprietary or open source. You may find a wider range of ready-to-install customizations and APIs is already available to you if the code is open source. And because no solution should exist in a silo, you need to investigate how the platform will integrate with your other solutions such as your ERP, CRM or PIM. Some solutions are available on premise only and others give you the flexibility of hosting on site or in the cloud. Hosting is one technical consideration that can't be overlooked.
- **Licensing, Fees and other Vendor Considerations** In addition to the functions, technical capabilities, and ecosystem, you must also take a look at the costs and the vendor behind the platform. Fees. Are different licenses available? What are the licensing costs? What costs or fees are associated with pre-production staging environments. If you elect for a cloud solution, what are the hosting fees? Are there any other fees? These questions give you an idea of the technical cost of implementation.
- **Vendor Support.** What level of vendor support can you expect? Is the vendor committed to a successful migration and willing to help make it happen? Last but not least, what is the vendor's reputation and what is their commitment to security?

With so many features to consider, it helps to take an organized approach to evaluating the various solutions. You can use this eCommerce RFP Template as a starting point. Download the template and customize it to your needs. Add or delete questions as necessary and then submit to the vendors you are evaluating. Once completed, this standard RFP will make the selection of the right solution for your needs much easier.

Planning for SEO Retention

There's no guarantee that you won't see a dip in your rankings or traffic immediately after replatforming. But with careful planning, mapping, and auditing, this dip should only be temporary. Remember, during the migration process, your task is to hold onto all rankings you currently have and avoid creating new issues that have a negative impact on your rankings. Backlinko has created a comprehensive SEO checklist that you should use to check your site before and after the migration. Migration isn't focused on improving SEO, but retaining existing SEO.

Before you begin any changes, make sure you benchmark at least the following data points:

- SEO traffic and traffic by pages
- Keyword rankings
- Top performing pages
- Backlink profile of your domain
- Keyword rankings
- Traffic by page
- Time on each page
- Bounce rate

By taking these measurements, you will identify the pages that must be given the highest priority. These are the pages with the best performance in terms of SEO and generating traffic and the pages that receive the most internal and external links. Without these pre-migration measurements, you won't have a way to assess the effect of changes that occur as a result of the replatforming. Be sure to take measurements of any other key data points you currently track.

Site Architecture

Are you creating new categories? Make sure that key categories remain key and that subcategories are located within the proper key categories. Sounds like common sense, right? You would be amazed how many times this is overlooked. If you use a hierarchical taxonomy, your structure should look like this:

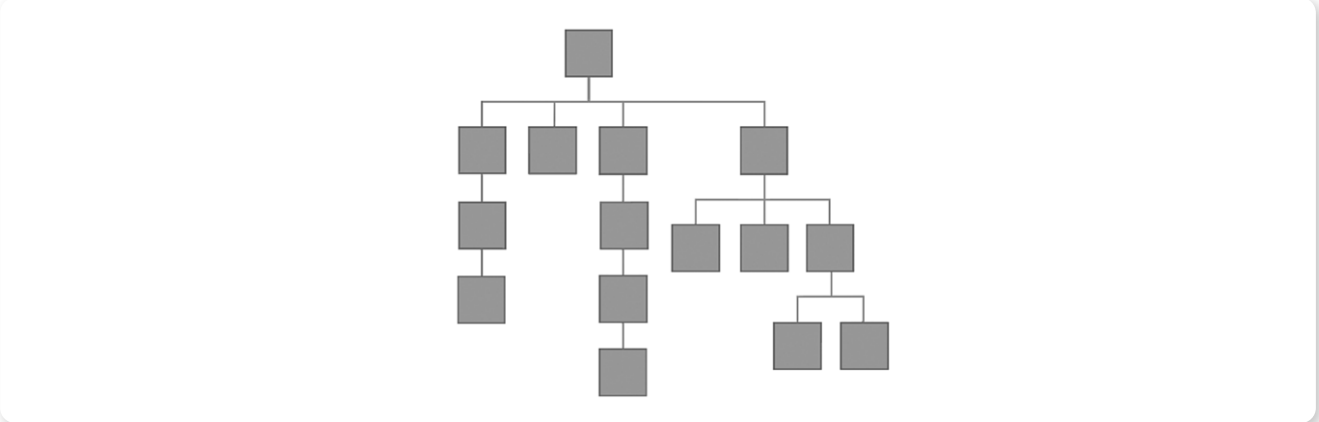


Image source

You have top categories of products and within those categories you have subcategories. When you look at a site like Stanley, this is the structure you see. Strive to keep the number of clicks a buyer must make to reach a page at a minimum. If you get more than three clicks away, re-think your structure.

A more common structure for B2B companies is a faceted structure. It looks like this:

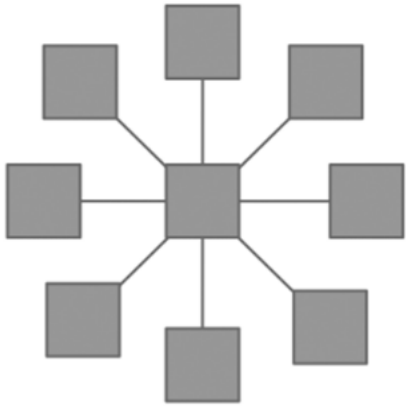


Image source

With this hierarchy structure, your products are classified by their attributes. For example, at the Samuel Hubbard website, a shoe manufacturer, the main product is classified by attributes such as men's shoes, women's shoes, and shoes that are on sale.

Why is hierarchy important for SEO? Well, if visitors hit your site and click through a few pages without finding what they want they will leave. What the visitor sees is chaos and they feel frustrated. What Google's sophisticated algorithm sees is a dissatisfied searcher and Google wants searchers to be satisfied. Google maintains search quality by detecting «bounces back to search». This is interpreted as a sign that a particular site was not relevant to the searcher's query and it doesn't deserve to be ranked well for it. As you can imagine, low-quality sites don't rank well.

In addition, changes to the hierarchy may ruin «link juice» flows within the site and bring some of previously well-ranked pages down. So, pay attention to your product categories when moving to a new platform to continue to send positive signals.

Check for Duplicate Content

When you migrate existing content to the new platform, a new platform may have different rules for URL generation and this can often lead to pages where the exact same page title, meta description, and body text content is duplicated because the same content is available via different URLs.

Also, if your site utilizes an infinite scroll design or if you have a large number of products on a page, you'll want to let users apply filters to help them quickly find what they need. These filters create session pages that duplicate the content you have on other pages. Session pages pull information from various pages together in one tidy spot, which is very convenient for users. However, Google sees these pages as duplicate content and that's something that hurts when it comes to SEO. The answer is to create canonical tags. These tags are bits of HTML code that are placed in the header area of the website to let the Google bots know that URLs with similar content have been consolidated into one URL that should be crawled and the other URLs can be ignored. For example, if you were at the Samuel Hubbard website and used a filter to only look at women's boots in black, it would take the boots from several pages and display them on one page that contains nothing but women's boots in black. Great for the user, bad for SEO. However, by using the code

```
<link rel="canonical" href="https://www.hubbardportal.com/women/boots" />
```

Google knows that the pages for women/boots is the original one and filter pages generated for color and size variations are secondary. Canonical tags protect against duplicate content problems.

Review and Transfer Metadata

If you have great performing metadata, then make sure to transfer it to the new site. If upon review you think your metadata could benefit from a little polishing, now is not the time. Just note the changes you think are necessary and save them for once the new site rankings are stabilized. Do make sure your keywords are in the title tag and appear as close as possible to the start. Front loading gives Google a signal about the relevance of the content to the topic.

Create One-for-One Redirects

In the ideal world, all the URLs for the site on your new platform would be the exact same as the URLs for your legacy site. Unfortunately, we must operate in the real world and not the ideal world. That means that every existing page must be redirected to a new page. According to Moz, a 301 redirect gives the new page 90% to 99% of the Google ranking power of the old page. Bing is a bit more vague and just says "the 301 redirect does not pass all of the value from an old URL to a new one." The 301 redirect tells both search engines and browsers that the information from a previous page is now located in a new location. It works like this:

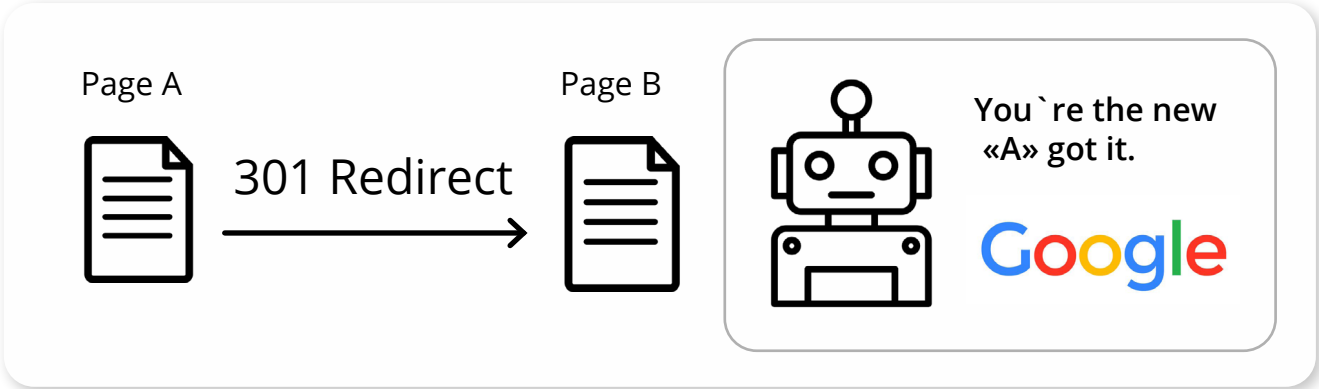


Image source

While the concept of redirecting seems obvious for your existing pages, don't forget backlinks too. It is highly recommended to update the links to your pages that come from external sources to new end URLs, as 301 redirect does retain some of the link juice, but not all of it. There are free and paid tools that help you identify backlinks if you want to perform a link audit as part of the redirect map creation process. Moz has a free Link Explorer tool that can create a list of backlinks and Ahrefs has a paid product that can create a similar report. Either way you go, you do need a list for planning purposes. Along with backlinks, you may even have redirects from a past redesign or replatforming effort that need to be pointed in a new direction.

It's not a good practice to utilize old redirect maps. It is a much better practice to create a new map that connects the original source URLs found in the prior map to a URL that's part of the replatformed website. Redirect chains might look like a way to save time, but in the end, they present a risk of missing a redirect and hurting rankings. Bing advises that you never stack 301 redirects and that you keep all redirects pointed to pages that are relevant to the original content. If you're taking the time to plan your migration, then you might as well take the time to do it right.

Planning for redirects includes all website pages, including landing pages you've created for current marketing campaigns. Use Google Analytics to create a report that lists all the URLs for your site and their performance. Most times when you look at this report you are concerned with performance. However, when planning your migration to the new platform, the report is a handy checklist for creating one-for-one redirects. Just tick them off as the redirect is added to the redirect map.

It's also a good idea to plan to include all pages in your redirect map. While some people may just redirect their pages with the most traffic, it's well worth the time and effort to include every URL from the existing site into your redirect map. And speaking of existing pages, don't forget your blog is probably coming along to the new platform. Don't forget that existing blog pages need to be redirected to their new location.

Planning for 301 redirects is time consuming. Don't wait until the last minute and rush the process. Careful 301 redirect planning is clearly one of those cases where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to maintaining your search engine rankings.

Create Your Sitemap

Before your site is ready to launch, you must create a new XML sitemap to submit to the search engines like Bing and Google. A sitemap tells search engines the URLs of the pages in your site and the date they last changed. It is important for pages that don't have an internal link pointing to them to be included in the sitemap. Otherwise, they might be missed during a crawl. If you have a large number of SKUs, you probably have a large number of pages. In this case, it makes sense to create sitemaps for your categories and subcategories.

There are a number of tools that are available to help you create these site maps. Platform software like OroCommerce or WordPress contain features that will generate your XML sitemap for you. You can also use special tools (like Screaming Frog) to generate a sitemap.

Don’t Forget Downloadable Assets and Marketing Materials

Finally, make sure your plan includes updates and/or redirects for URLs that you are using for downloadable assets or marketing materials.

For example, if you have an abandoned cart campaign make sure that any links in your emails or push notifications are pointing to the new site. If the location of a downloadable asset like an eBook, whitepaper or PDF has moved, make sure the redirect is included in the redirect map.

Development and Testing Best Practices

Following these development best practices will ensure you can execute your migration plan smoothly and provides a fallback strategy in case anything goes wrong. If replatforming your eCommerce website is being trusted to an external agency, make sure that they follow these recommendations and best practices.

Steps in the Development Process

The development environment (where the changes are made) is separate from the production environment (where users access the end product). It's important to start the process by creating the proper environments.

Establish Server Infrastructure

We recommend the use of standard Developing, Testing, Staging and Production instances during the development phase. Development and testing servers can be hosted almost anywhere, even at local office servers. It's very important that the development and testing server environment is as comparable as possible to the production server environment. Use the same database management system, search provider, cache provider, and message queue. It's also important that the versions used in the development state are the versions that will be used in the production stage.

Image source

Establish Local Development Environment

Every developer working on the project should have a local environment that can run the new platform application. That way developers can create customizations, build new modules, and debug their code.

Create Development Workflow

The actual code development workflow that you use will depend on factors such as the size of the team or the methodology you use. But the following steps should generally be included:

- **Development** (or implementation) includes the actual code writing and debugging to customize the solution. Team members should make use of tools such as Code Sniffer, Mess Detector, or Copy-Paste Detector to help to write better and cleaner code.
- **Automated tests** are highly recommended as an addition to written code. These tests ensure that written code works and performs properly.
- **Code review** is the process of manually verifying the code written by another team member. A list of the checks performed depends on the workflow. At a minimum, functionality, architecture, implementation, tests, and documentation should be reviewed. A detailed code review checklist can remove any friction from this process.
- **Continuous Integration** is an automated tool that checks if the application can be installed, runs tests, performs code quality checks, and deploys the application to a server if appropriate. It is a good practice to use Continuous Integration to verify every code change introduced.
- **Documentation** is essential to train end users on how to use the application and its features. By creating technical documentation, developers working on the platform in the future will better understand how a specific feature was built and how they can modify it properly.
- **Quality Assurance** or quality testing is essential to ensure that each feature is performing as required. During this process, the QA team member verifies the implemented functionality, its behavior from the user's point of view, and the overall user experience. This step may also include acceptance testing based on the customer's predefined scenarios and regression testing.

Importing the Data to the New Platform

Bringing data from the existing platform into the new platform is a very important activity performed during the development process. There are two main types of data imports that are performed: initial and continuous.

- **The initial data import** is performed once at the very beginning of the application development process. This initial import should contain the full data set including all the data from remote sources like the PIM, ERP, or CRM.
- **Continuous import** is done on a regular basis, such as every day or every hour. The main purpose is to sync the data with remote data sources and keep it up to date. It's best to only import changed data, to prevent duplicate data.

Performance Testing

Performance testing is a critical development activity. The goal is to ensure that the application is quick enough for comfortable use but does not consume excessive memory and central processing unit (CPU) time on the server level.

Blackfire is a very effective tool for performance optimization. It profiles user time, input/output time, CPU time, memory used, and other metrics that are extremely useful in uncovering bottlenecks and tracking optimization progress. Blackfire also provides a convenient timeline that calculates how long it takes for every piece of code to be executed and displays this information in an easy to use format.

Developers may implement their own checks, add other metrics, and check them on a regular basis using Continuous Integration. This way they ensure proper performance during the whole development phase.

Load Testing

Load testing ensures that the application works properly with the expected amount of data. The best practice is to predict a rough amount of data that will be used during one year and multiply it by two. An extra buffer can be used to give confidence in the expected behavior under a heavy load.

Getting Ready for Release

Even if you scrupulously follow all development best practices, you shouldn't just launch headlong into your release. There are a few things you need to do to get ready. Just as taking the time to create an extensive 301 redirect map protects from SEO loss, taking the time to make sure your new site is ready to launch protects against problems with implementation.

Stabilization

During the stabilization phase, the development team is ensuring that all the requested features work properly together and perform exactly as they should. This is the phase that usually spawns many issues and bugs to be fixed. But, that's a good thing. It's better to identify these now than suffer a failure at launch time. As fixes are made, use automated tests and continuous integration testing to ensure that the fixes that are made don't cause problems with functionality. This testing should be performed on the staging server which is a copy of the production server. That way you know the application will work the exact same once it goes live.

Stress Testing

Stress testing is another important testing activity to complete before going live. This testing ensures that the website will perform properly if many customers use it simultaneously. Stress testing and load testing are crucial to confirm proper application behavior under load. This testing should be performed in the staging environment and imitate the situation where a large number of customers use the application simultaneously. Automation tools like JMeter or Gatling help writing and executing these scenarios.

Deployment to Production

At this point in the development cycle, your website is ready to be moved to the production environment. All data should be up to date with any test data from the staging environment cleaned up or removed. New user passwords should be issued, and the site readiness shared with a few people.

Making a Soft Launch

Another crucial element in a successful replatforming launch is committing the resources to a soft launch. Before you take the new site live, give credentials to a select group of people and ask them to take the site for a spin.

Restaurants don't open without a soft launch to make sure all the kinks are ironed out before welcoming the public, websites should follow suit. A soft launch serves two purposes. By getting feedback from a small number of customers, you have the benefit of a focus group to provide valuable insights on the user experience to the website administrator or project manager. These insights let you know if customers are moving through the site as expected, if there are any friction points, and adjust as necessary to improve the user experience. A soft launch is the best way to discover and correct unexpected issues before the official release. During the soft launch, the new site shouldn't be readily available to all users. You can use basic HTTP authentication to grant access to only the users and customers in your focus group. This will also prevent search bots from crawling the site before you are ready.

Blast Off!

Once you've addressed any issues identified through the soft launch, you're ready to bring the site live. It's an exciting time. Make sure your marketing and sales have developed a communication plan to let customers and leads know about the new site. If you've added new content, products, or functionalities be sure to call attention to these changes in your announcements.

If your prior site required login credentials, let existing site users and customers know if their credentials migrated to the new site or if they need to create new user IDs and passwords.

Now it's time to sit back and wait. It can take up to 48 hours for the DNS to be updated worldwide. As crazy as it seems, you may have a customer looking at your site live on their phone before you see it live on your laptop. That's because their phone may be using a different DNS than your ISP. Once the site has propagated, keep track of the production server load for the first few days. If you missed any performance issues in the development and testing phases, you can catch them now.

Post Migration Monitoring

Now that the new site is up and running, it's not quite time to sit back and relax. You need to carefully monitor the site. Remember those pre-migration benchmarks you captured? In the first days and weeks after moving to the new platform, you will want to compare those benchmarks against current performance.

You need to keep a close eye on your Google Search Console. Watch for indexing issues and errors. This includes those horrible 404 errors that indicate a redirect was missed or even worse, a generic 500 error that doesn't tell you much except the server encountered an unexpected condition that prevented it from fulfilling the request.

Google's Index Coverage Report is particularly important to monitor if you have a large site with 500 or more pages. Google will tell you the index status of all pages that Google attempted to crawl on your site, grouped by status and reason. Pages with errors will tell you the specific type of error and these should be corrected first. Warnings indicate that a page was indexed but has issues that must be addressed. Give these second priority. You'll also get a list of pages that weren't indexed, and you should verify that these pages were intentionally given a noindex tag.

Continue to use your Moz, Screaming Frog, or Ahrefs tools to continually check the status of your backlinks. If you missed a redirect, you can always reach out to the link donor and ask them to update the link. That will preserve the little extra SEO juice you get from the backlink. DrLinkCheck can also help you identify broken links so you can fix them promptly.

B2B eCommerce Replatforming Success Stories

As scary as replatforming may be, many companies do it with great success on a regular basis. They achieve positive results because they plan thoroughly, carefully select their solution provider and partners, execute, test, audit, and monitor the entire process. There's quite a bit to be learned by studying how they approached the replatforming process. Here's just a few examples.

SaltWorks

SaltWorks is known as a technological leader in the production and packing of sea salt. Their challenge was to move to a platform that reflected their leadership in the industry and served two very different core customer bases.

Their wholesale customers who are purchasing in bulk for manufacturing and food service and their retail customers who are purchasing gourmet salts for personal use.

Their legacy platform (Magento 1) was littered with workarounds and extensions necessary to meet the very different needs of their customers. Not only was their legacy site costly to maintain, it simply wasn't meeting their needs or their customer's expectations.

After reviewing their options, they selected a new platform that allowed both B2B and B2C customers to see the same basic product information. However, B2B customers were provided separate pricing and checkout workflows. B2C customers received the typical retail eCommerce experience they expected while B2B customers see contract pricing and have many more shipping options. On top of that with a help of the integration of their new eCommerce platform with Amazon, Saltworks customers got the option to order B2C items from their Amazon accounts.

Both B2B and B2C customers benefit from more robust product information, including downloadable PDFs for products. **Check the full case study here.**

Petra Industries

Petra Industries wholesales consumer electronics products and offers over 15,000 products to retailers, e-tailers, and manufacturers.

Their legacy system was Magento 1, a B2C platform extensively customized to serve B2B. Despite the customizations, the website still didn't serve customers well and instead of fueling company growth it actually inhibited it.

Because of the large number of SKUs handled, integration with their existing PIM was a crucial factor in platform selection. They needed a better way to onboard new customer accounts, streamline the order management and fulfillment systems, and get better data about their customers to hone their marketing campaigns.

Because they carefully reviewed their requirements, they knew that integration would be key to replatforming success. They selected a platform that came out-of-the-box with the PIM integration they needed and had a rich API ecosystem that provided integration with their ERP and AI Search solutions. The new platform allowed for the free and frictionless flow of data.

The result was a website that provided new customers a multi-step registration process that includes credit approval. Existing customers can now upload orders through CSV files or use quick order forms or traditional cart checkout workflows. In addition, customers now have access to multiple logins, levels of authority, and order approval workflows. Instead of a B2C platform modified for B2B, they had a solution built for B2B. **Check the full case study here.**

Why Replatform to OroCommerce?

There are many eCommerce platforms on the market today, but only one platform was built with the needs of B2B eCommerce in mind. That's OroCommerce. With OroCommerce you get:

An open source solution to get up and running quickly. That's because its robust architecture, powerful workflow engine, and modular design are built with the fastest time to ROI in mind.

Freedom to deploy to the **OroCloud environment with advanced monitoring and 24/7/365 support**, to any other major public or private cloud, or a hosting provider of your choice or even your own IT department.

A rapidly growing ecosystem filled with **can-do attitude partners** and 24/7 support with the Enterprise Edition.

An out-of-the-box solution that can handle any eCommerce scenario. From B2B, B2C, B2B2C, to supporting marketplaces you have the option for traditional or headless architecture. OroCommerce is ready to do business the way you do business.

Full marketing and sales support from the CRM module that comes standard (or built-in) along with integrations for all major email marketing platforms and more.

Feeling inspired? Contact OroCommerce to experience for yourself how replatforming to a solution built for B2B can boost your business's bottom line.

Contact OroCommerce