

Digital Insight

How to choose the best ecommerce platform for your online business

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INTRODUCTION



When starting an online business, one of the last things you may think of, but ultimately one of the most crucial things to consider, is what platform you'll be operating from.

The platform you choose is just as important as choosing the location of a bricks and mortar shop. If it doesn't have the capacity to house your stock, handle your foot-fall or fit your budget, your business isn't going to work.

KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



What payments do you accept?

In this day and age, customers will generally expect websites to accept multiple forms of payment including PayPal and all major credit cards.

How much stock do you have?

Platform capacity varies, which is worth considering when choosing the right one for you. If your platform won't be able to meet your stock requirements, you'll run into trouble!

Your budget?

It's all well and good signing up for the platform with the most bells and whistles, but if you're a small company it's unlikely you'll need all these add-ons. To ensure you aren't paying out more than necessary, make sure you consider exactly which features you need in line with your budget.

Plans for expansion?

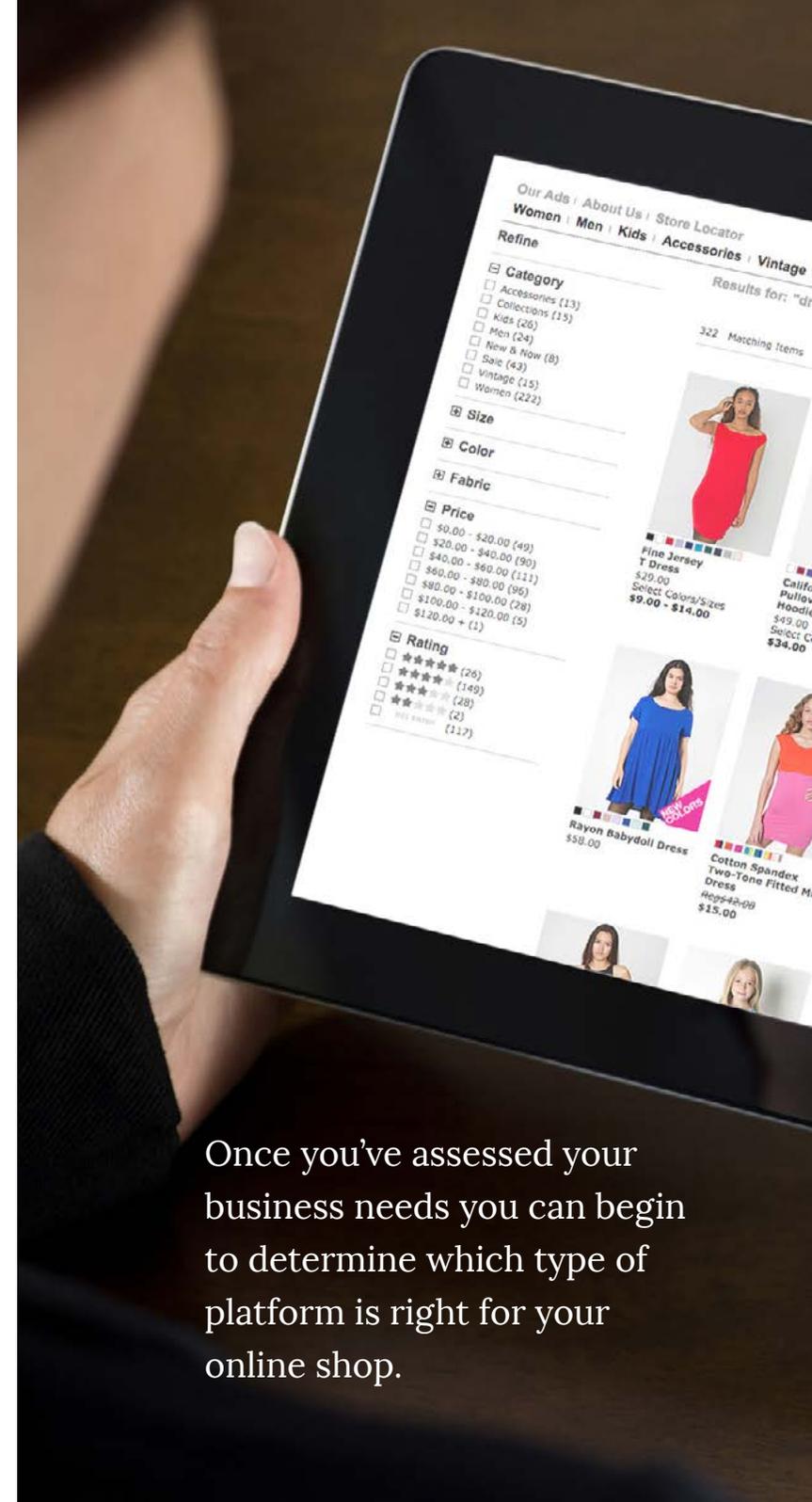
If you envisage your site growing in the future, it's important to choose a platform that can grow with you – you don't want to have to rebuild your site to keep up with your success!

Platform integration?

This is key to saving you a great deal of time and money – especially if you already have a bricks and mortar store. For example, integration tools can allow you to synchronise aspects of your business like the accounting software, marketing campaigns and stock management tools you use.

Ease of use?

You may be a solo entrepreneur or have a large team, but finding a platform that is easy for your team to use on a day to day basis is key.



Once you've assessed your business needs you can begin to determine which type of platform is right for your online shop.

SELF-HOSTED OR CLOUD?

There are two different types of eCommerce platform to choose from:

Cloud-Hosted, like Shopify or Self-Hosted like Magento and WooCommerce.





SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

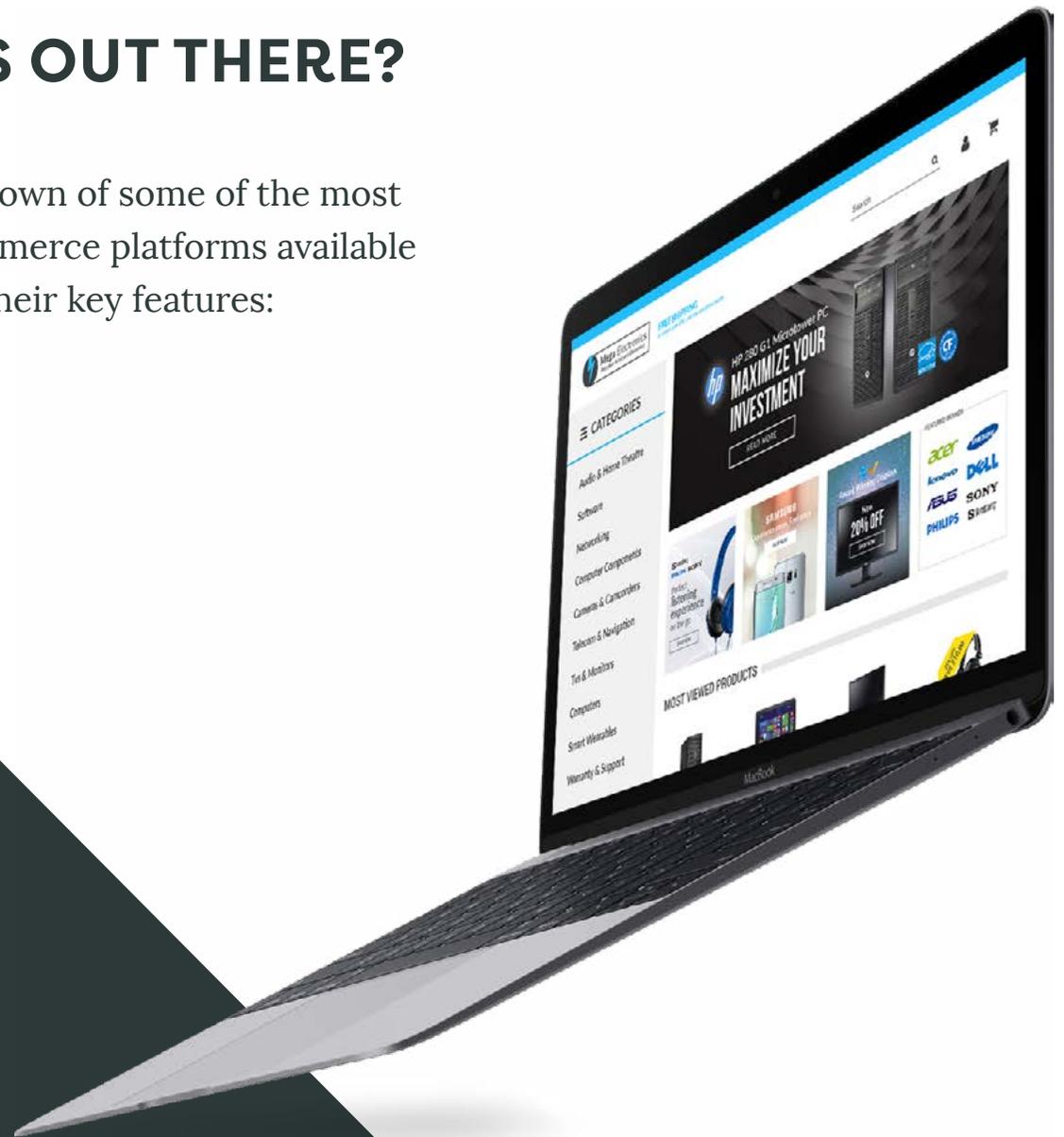
With a cloud hosted platform most of the hard work i.e. coding, design and infrastructure are already in place for you, but you're limited to work within set parameters.

Self-hosted platforms give you massive scope for customisation and complete control over your site, however they do require more work and expertise to set up.

A great analogy is that they are like buses and cars - buses are a cheaper option that will get you most of the way but only run at certain times and to limited destinations. Cars allow you to go wherever you want, whenever you want to, but you're the one filling the tank and doing the driving.

WHAT'S OUT THERE?

Here's a rundown of some of the most popular eCommerce platforms available and their key features:



Magento is a self-hosted eCommerce platform. With lots of scope for customisation and massive growth potential it is currently one of the world's most popular eCommerce platforms.

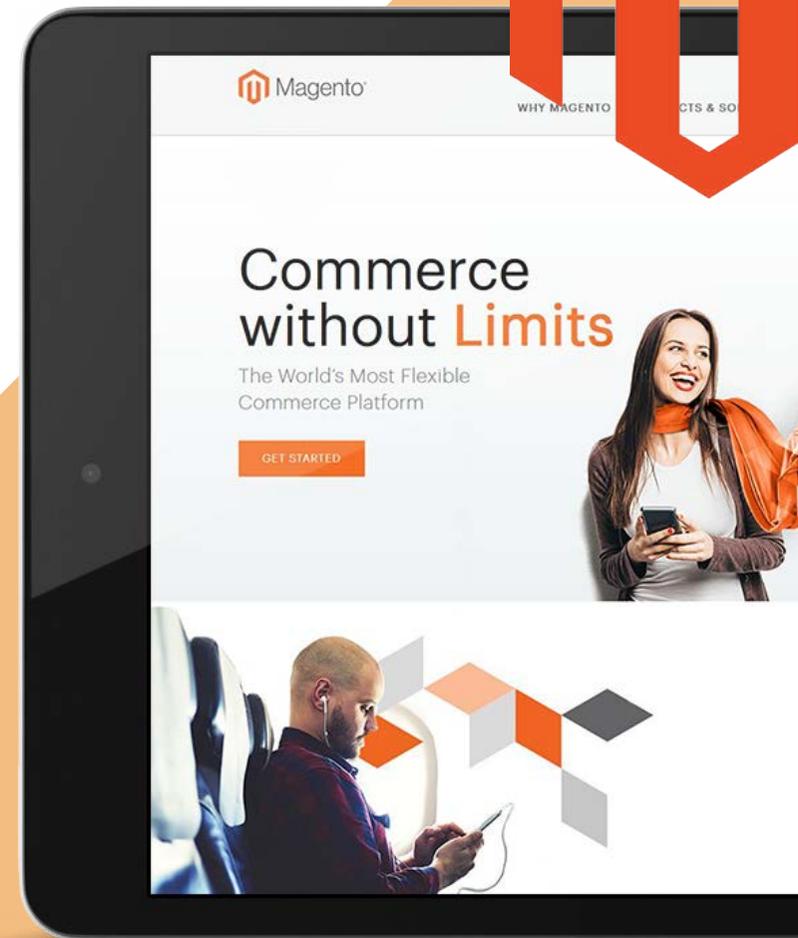
Key features include:

- > A mobile and tablet friendly responsive structure (available on iPhone, iPad, Android, with pre-integrated mobile HTML5)
- > Completely customisable design
- > Content management system integration
- > Advanced SEO capabilities and marketing automation with the ability to segment customers, use targeted promotions and merchandise
- > Detailed, customised intelligence reports can be created with ease
- > Automated email marketing reminders
- > User friendly frontend and backend, also allowing for complete stock management

Magento has a very professional look and has lots of in-built support covering all the information and guidance you need to run your ideal store. Magento is also an excellent platform for shops who anticipate a lot of traffic via mobile phones or tablets due to its responsive structure. It also has unlimited scalability so can grow alongside your business.

However, Magento requires a degree of technical expertise so it is advisable to enlist expert help when setting up your store on this platform. Price plans run from free to thousands of pounds per year, depending on your business needs.

MAGENTO



SHOPIFY



Shopify is one of the most popular cloud-hosted eCommerce sites as it is very straightforward to set up and allows you to start running your business quickly.

It also offers free hosting, making it perfect for eCommerce stores who are on a tight budget.

Key features:

- › Mobile friendly
- › Offers over 100 professional themes with the ability to be customised
- › Allows for integration with most CMS platforms and use of your own domain name
- › Marketing and SEO optimised
- › Built-in Analytics for reporting

Shopify is probably the simplest way of launching an operational online store and is very do-able for everyone. Another perk is that it has easy to use social links, meaning that you can share and promote your brand across your social media channels from within the platform. It's friendly design and simplistic templates are perfect for first timers or smaller businesses.

However, if you are looking for something more personalised to your brand, with larger functionality, Shopify may be limited.

WooCommerce is a very popular option for eCommerce owners, especially those who are already familiar with Wordpress or have a Wordpress site they wish to start selling from.

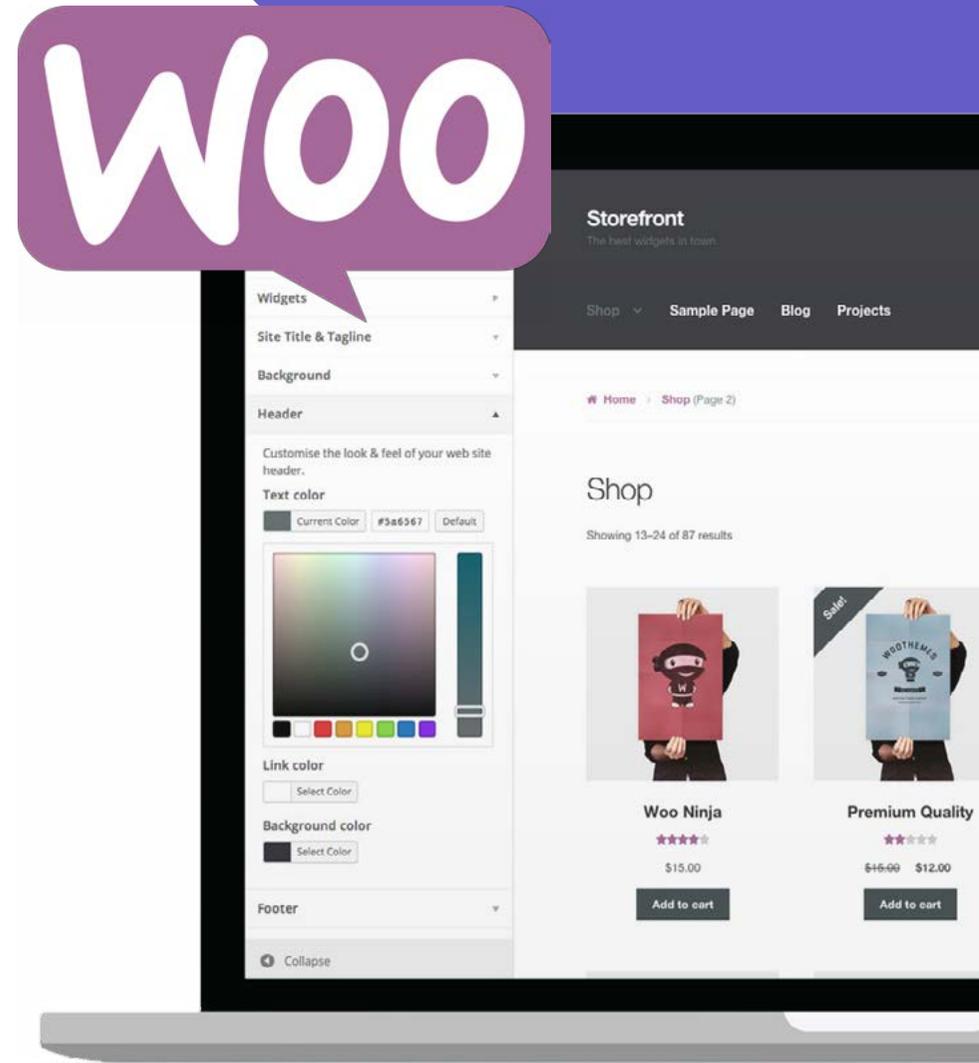
Key Features:

- > Mobile friendly options
- > Uses easily customised templates/themes
- > Integrates only with Wordpress sites as a plugin and can be operated from the wp-admin of your site
- > Marketing and SEO optimised
- > Reporting on incoming sales, reviews, inventory levels and general store performance
- > Bundled with payment gateways
- > Options to offer free shipping or flat rate shipping
- > Configure tax settings with tax classes and local tax rates

WooCommerce is a free plugin and very straightforward to set up by downloading it and adding products from your WordPress dashboard. The hosting for the site however is an additional cost.

Equipped with user reviews and rating, WooCommerce allows your customers to easily vote on their purchases and it produces nicely organised reports so you can closely monitor your sites performance. An excellent option for seasoned WordPress users as it serves as a seamless add on to any WordPress site.

WOOCOMMERCE



WHICH SITE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

It's not a decision you should enter into lightly and it's key you fully understand your business needs before making a decision on which platform to use.

We strongly advise that you consult with an ecommerce expert who can assess your business needs and recommend the right platform. Similarly, with the setup of your site we highly recommend enlisting a strong development team.

After all, you wouldn't try to build your high-street store yourself!



To speak to a member of the Web Bureau team today about your eCommerce strategy, call us on 028 9073 1190 or email info@thewebbureau.com.



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