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# Shopify

VS.

# Amazon



An e-commerce  
replatforming guide

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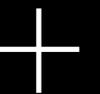
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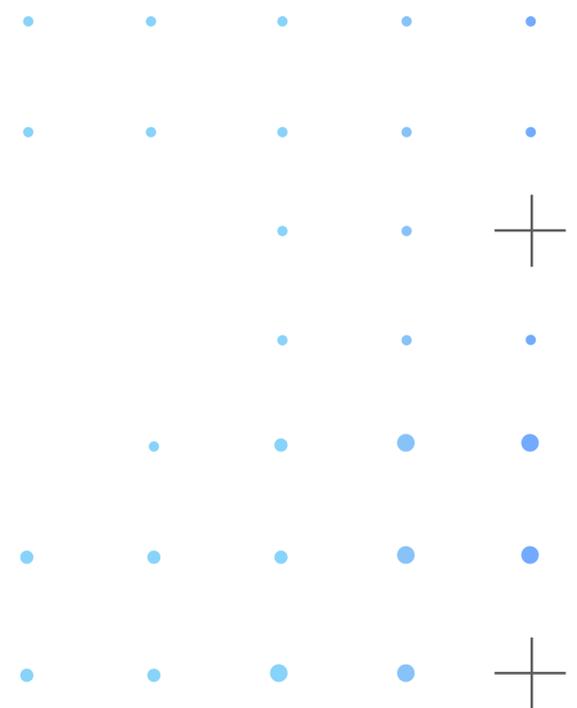
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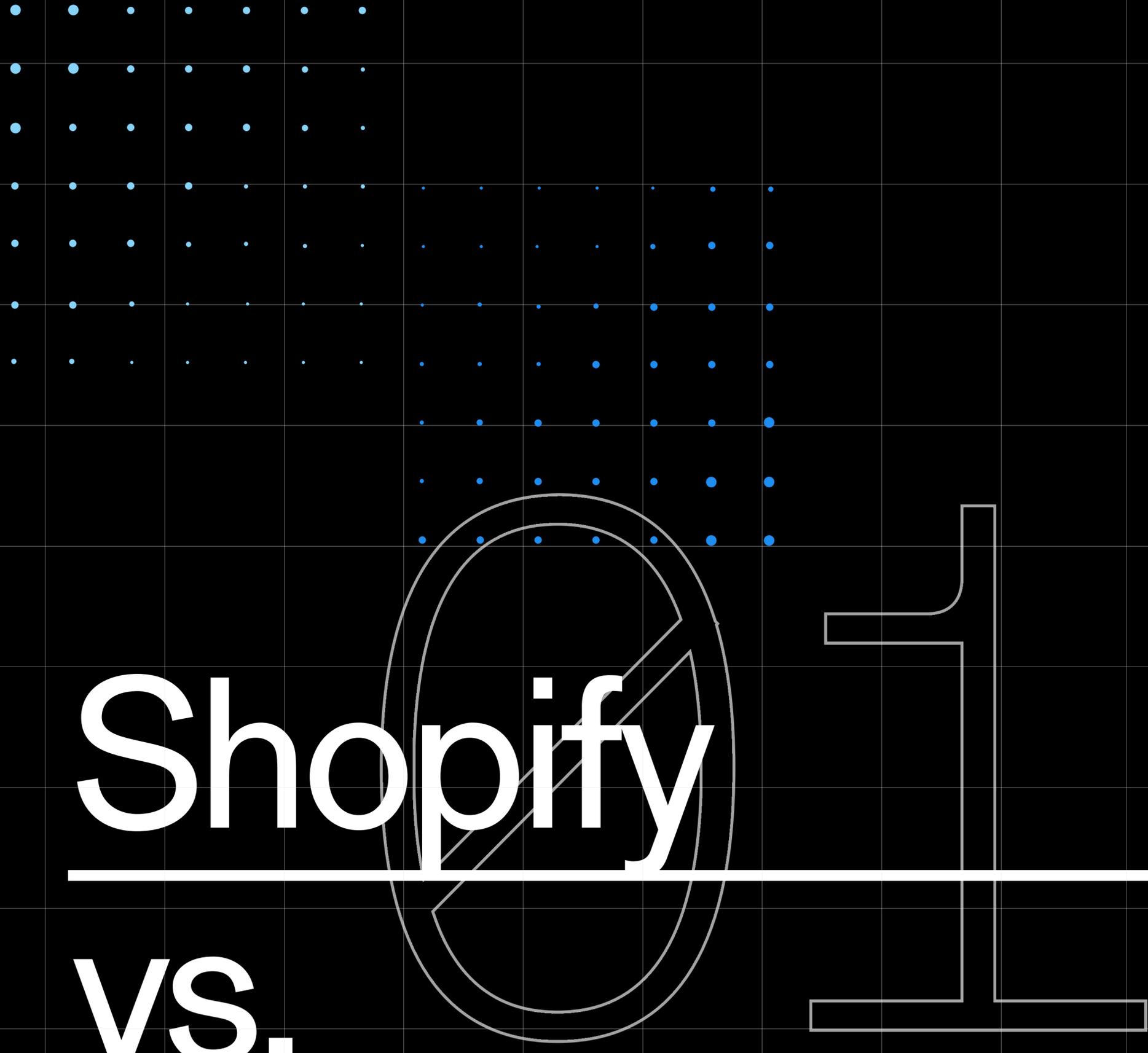
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When you started your business, you likely first thought about what you were going to sell—be it a new product or service, or an improvement upon something already on the market. From there, you likely moved into product development and started thinking about how you wanted to market and sell your offering. But how did you decide on where you'd be selling your product or service?

All too often, new businesses choose an e-commerce platform based on what they've heard about in the news. For many first-time founders, the first platforms that come to mind are Shopify and Amazon, and for good reason—they're everywhere. But just because Amazon and Shopify are ubiquitous in e-commerce doesn't mean they're the right choice for every business.

Let's take a look at some of the pros and cons of each and compare them against some of the other e-commerce platforms out there.





Shopify

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Amazon ↙

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The main difference between Shopify and Amazon is that Shopify is a specialized e-commerce platform while Amazon is an online marketplace. Shopify provides tools to build and brand your own online store, which can live on your website. Amazon, on the other hand, allows you to sell through its marketplace alongside other online sellers, including itself.

You can think of Amazon as a trade show or farmers' market where you rent a stall to sell your goods. Although customers might not be looking for your business in particular, they may notice your product and take interest. And with 300M active users, Amazon offers you the potential to make lots of sales.

While Amazon is like a trade show, Shopify is more like a downtown shopping district with a number of individual storefronts. Sure, some people may not be looking for your specific store, but you have more power to pull them in with the look and feel of your store. You control the advertising, window displays, and overall experience that you can offer your customers. If branding is your top priority, this may be the platform you're looking for.

There are two other factors to consider when choosing between a marketplace like Amazon or an integrated e-commerce platform like Shopify: digital marketing and customer experience.

# Digital marketing



## AMAZON

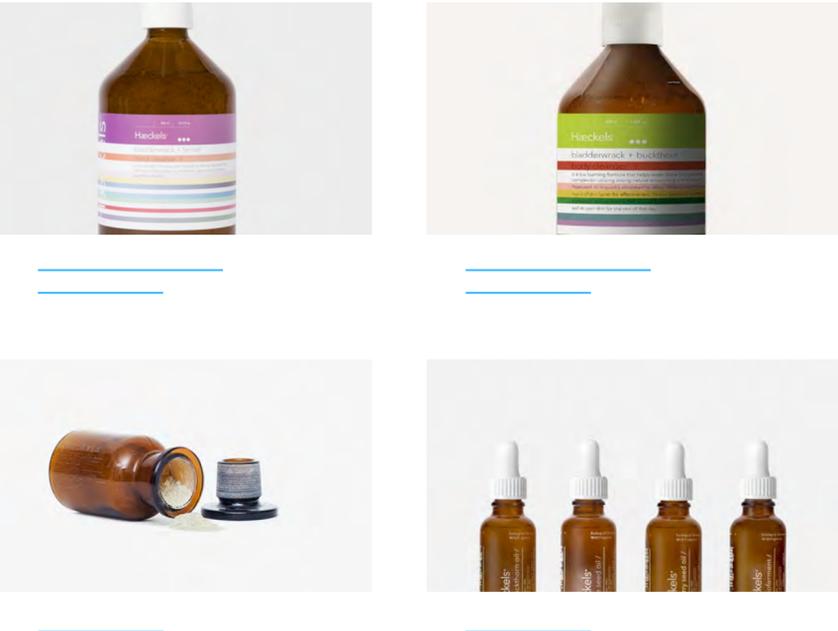
If you're completely new to digital marketing or don't want to focus your attention on your digital marketing efforts, Amazon might be your best bet. As mentioned earlier, Amazon is like a farmers' market—people are already on the app searching for products, you just need to set up your products to get discovered. As Amazon has evolved over the years, it's essentially turned into a search engine, with customers searching by keyword rather than brand.

That being said, there's still some effort involved in getting up and running on Amazon. You want your products to be named and categorized appropriately so that users are able to easily find your products. You're also in charge of getting product photography and information and ensuring it's laid out in a logical manner on your seller and product pages.

## SHOPIFY

If you have some experience in digital marketing, or at least an interest in learning about it, an e-commerce platform like Shopify might be best for you. Because your Shopify page will be a part of your website, you're going to need to attract customers to your site in order to make sales. This can be done through organic social media posts, paid ads, email marketing, or search engine optimization, among others. Although it's more effort to set up upfront, the pay off is that you get a customized shop for your customers.

# Customer experience



## AMAZON

If you've ever used Amazon, you're likely familiar with the customer experience—easy to use, but without the personal touch of visiting a brand's website. Most sellers rely on a few images and some copy to describe their brand, almost like a brief version of the "About Us" page on their website. The issue is that many customers will only ever see one or two of your product listings and not read into your brand.



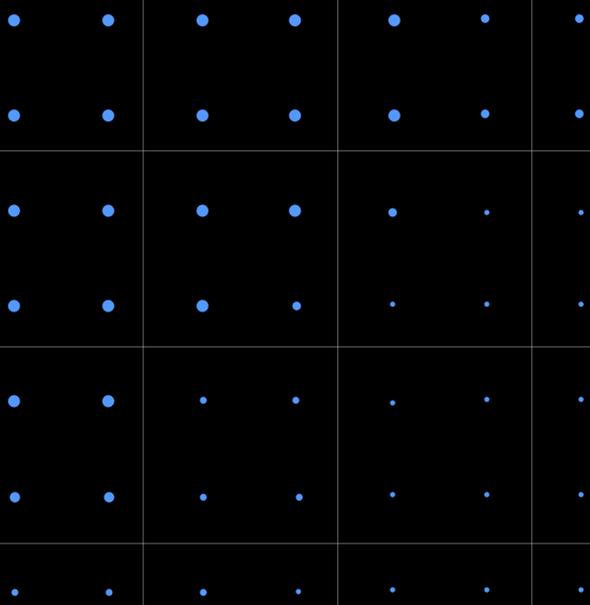
## SHOPIFY

Looking at Shopify and other e-commerce platforms, you're given much more freedom to customize the customers' shopping experience. You're given the ability to make your shop seamlessly fit in with the aesthetic and branding of your whole website. Even better is that you can keep customers on-site during the shopping experience rather than having them leave to make a purchase on Amazon. The idea of branding your shop may seem daunting, but many e-commerce platforms offer pre-built templates to help you out. If you've already got a website built, it's just a matter of carrying that look and feel over to your shop.

# The e-commerce platform landscape: Which one is right for you?

Beyond Amazon and Shopify, there are many e-commerce platforms out there with varying degrees of complexity and customization. This list is by no means exhaustive, but can be a helpful resource when comparing some of the more popular platforms out there.

E-commerce platform	Best for	Pre-built	Customizable	Third-party plugins	Analytics
Shopify & Shopify Plus	SMB & Enterprise				
Amazon	Individuals & SMB				
BigCommerce	SMB & MM				
WooCommerce	SMB on WordPress				
Salesforce Commerce Cloud	Enterprise				



# When to undertake an e-commerce replatforming ↙

Now that we've established there are many players in the market, you might be wondering what to do if you're already selling on an e-commerce platform but want to make a change. Although undertaking an e-commerce replatforming— or “data migration”—can be a messy project, it's important to weigh the pros and cons of replatforming and make a decision sooner rather than later.

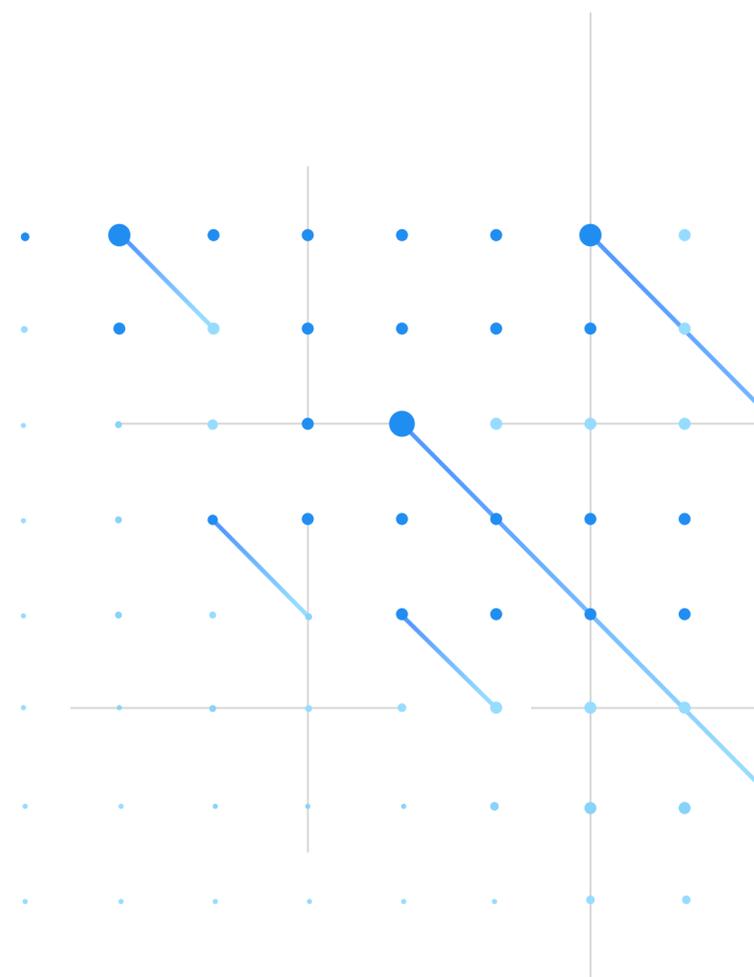
All too often, companies are reactive in a replatforming project—they realize there's a serious issue and suddenly have an urgent project on their hands. Even if you don't have an immediate e-commerce replatforming planned, it's important to consider a few key factors:

Technology

Finance

User experience

After all, the longer you wait to replatform, the larger and more complicated it can become.



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## The technology of an e-commerce replatforming

When you first implemented your current e-commerce platform, you likely had a relatively low volume of customers and just a few items—or SKUs—for sale. As your business has grown, your website has probably seen more traffic, more customers, and maybe even additional products for sale.

Some e-commerce platforms are better suited for small businesses with limited product offerings. If you've noticed site failures—things like your online shop crashing—that have coincided with your growth, this may be a sign that you're outgrowing your e-commerce platform and should start looking for something more robust.

Another common issue on the tech front is that the back end of some of these platforms might be clunky, meaning your development or engineering team isn't able to make quick updates. Keep in touch with your IT team to gather their feedback on your platform. If they say it's becoming increasingly inefficient to update and build new features, it might be time for a replatforming.

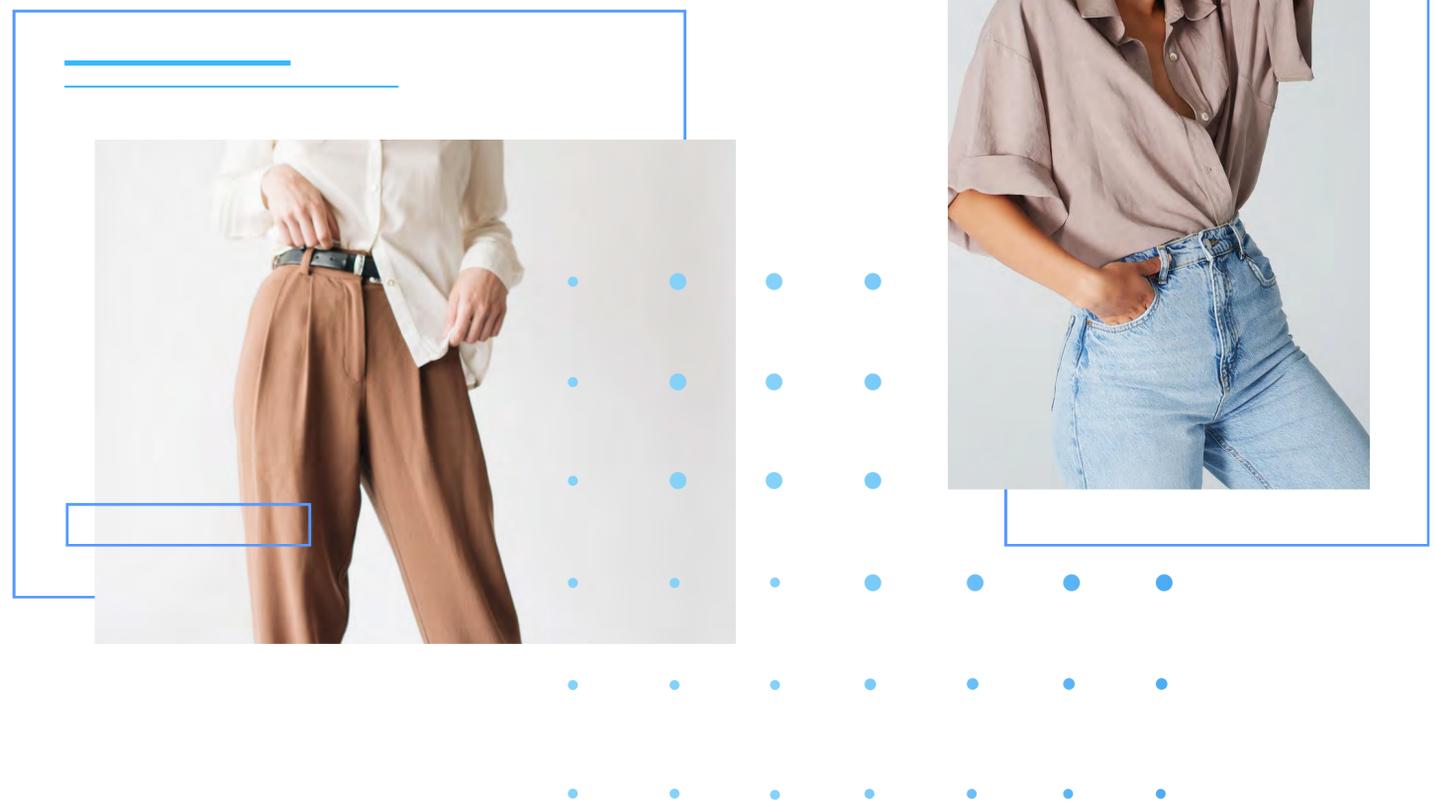
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## The finance of an e-commerce replatforming

The financial aspect of your e-commerce platform has two main aspects: maintenance and the cost of the platform itself. Maintenance ties in with the inefficiencies we just touched on—if your IT team is spending too much time and effort on simply maintaining your online shop, you might have an issue.

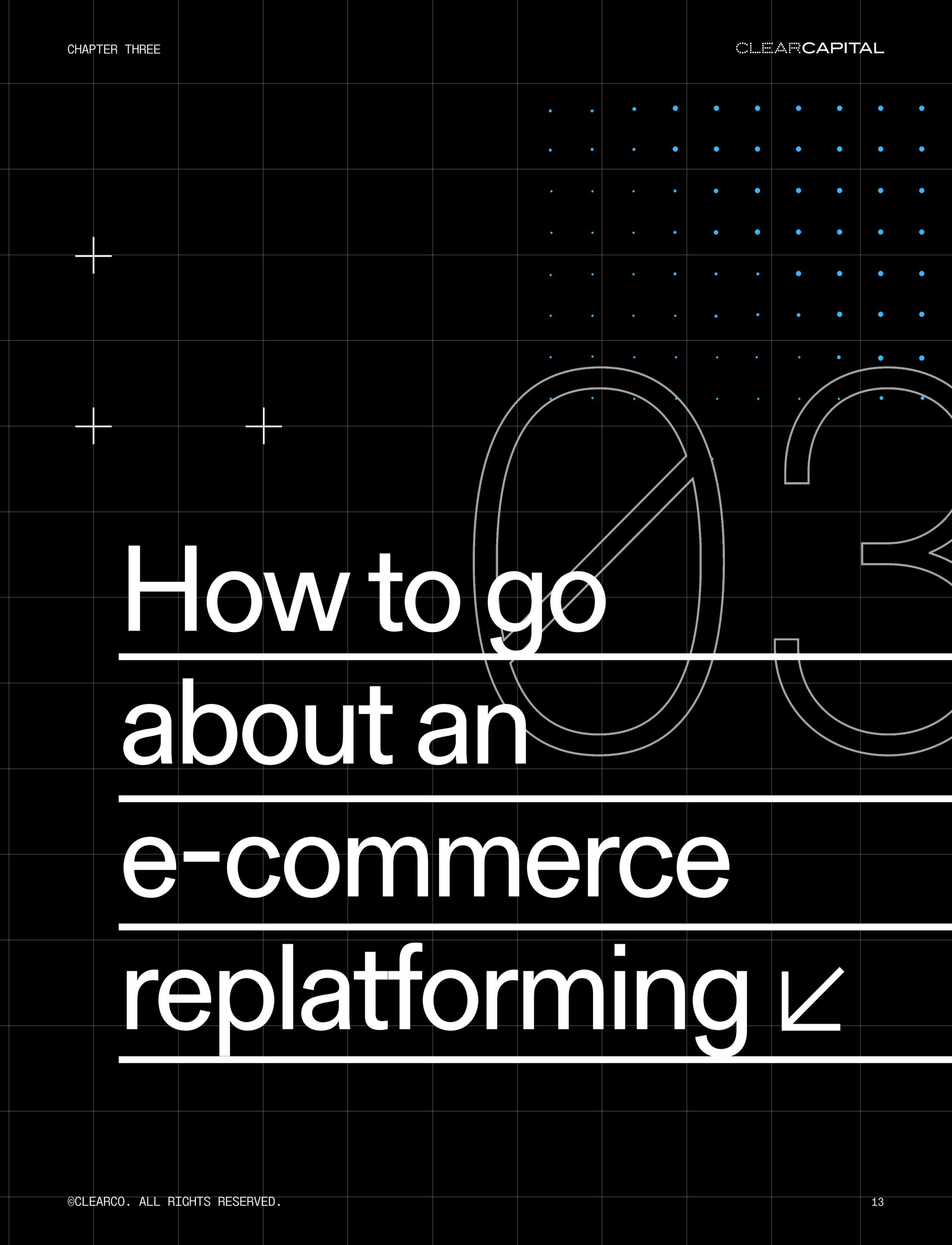
Many e-commerce platforms operate on a SaaS model, meaning you pay a recurring fee to host your shop on their platform. While this isn't an issue in and of itself, some platforms will increase their fees over time as they add new features while others might increase their fees based on traffic to your shop. If your fees have been steadily rising since implementing your platform, you may want to evaluate some alternatives to see what makes the best financial sense for your business.

## The user experience of an e-commerce replatforming



It's no secret that user experience (UX) is a key factor in driving conversions and making sure your website users are able to navigate your site without issue. If your UX or marketing team is noticing users drop off as they arrive at your online shop, there may be an issue with your e-commerce platform. This, in and of itself, is reason enough to consider an e-commerce replatforming, but there are a couple other factors to consider as well.

Aside from issues with conversion, your UX team might run into issues with your online shop if there's limited—or no—ability to personalize the shopping experience for each user. Without even realizing it, the online shops you visit are often personalized based on your previous actions on a website, like purchases and searches. You want an e-commerce platform with functions like personalizing suggested products based on a user's past purchases and changing the currency based on their country. Everyone loves when a website makes it easy for them to find the products they've previously visited, searched for, or otherwise interacted with.



# How to go about an e-commerce replatforming ↙

When evaluating e-commerce platforms, there are a few different options out there, like a homegrown system vs. a SaaS or Cloud-based solution.

To keep it simple, we're not going to cover homegrown systems in this guide. But we will say this: if you start out evaluating SaaS or Cloud solutions and nothing's meeting your expectations, we'd recommend considering a homegrown e-commerce solution.

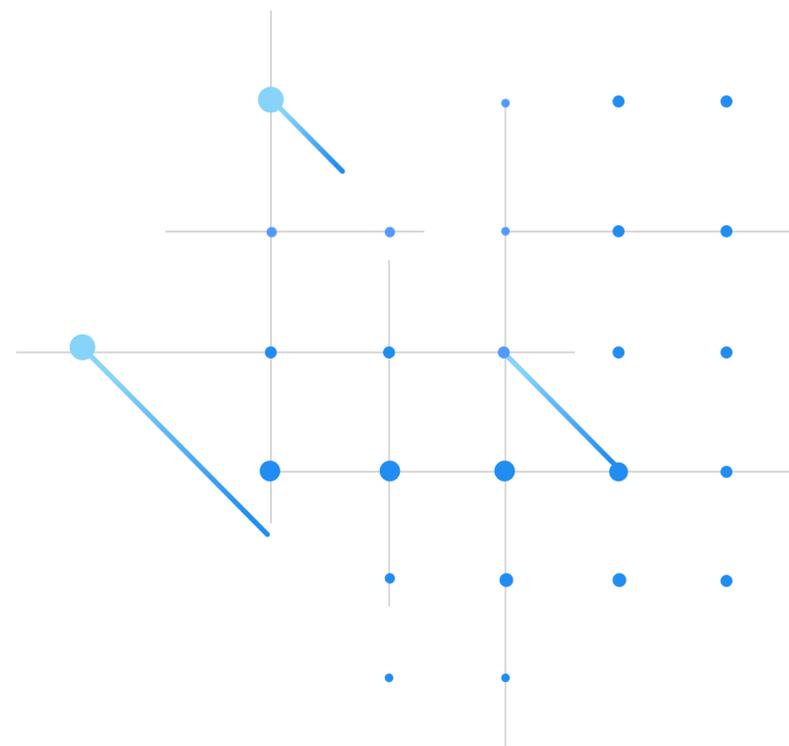
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## Loop in stakeholders

The first step is to determine which stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation process. As we've touched upon, your e-commerce platform has implications for your finance team, your technology team, and even your sales and marketing teams.

This doesn't mean you should invite everyone along for the ride, but rather pick a select few members of your team to cover your bases. A marketing manager will have different considerations than a CFO or IT director, so it will be valuable to have a few different perspectives.



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## Determine your budget

Now that you've got all the right parties involved, set a budget for both the platform implementation and any recurring fees. Depending on the systems you've evaluating, it may be worth also considering how much internal maintenance you may need your IT team to carry out.

When determining a budget, you'll want to have your finance team heavily involved, and be sure to forecast your sales growth for the next 3-5 years. Be conservative with your growth estimates to ensure you don't miss the mark and end up paying more than you're comfortable down the road.



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## Evaluate different platforms

In this step, it can be helpful to involve some more junior members of your team so they can gather information and present you with a brief on what's on the market. To start, cast a wide net and include as many platforms as you can—don't just go for the few big brands you've heard of.

It can also be of value to reach out to the other founders in your network and ask what they're using and how it works for them. You can even visit your competitors' e-commerce sites and do some sleuthing to figure out what platform they're using. You'll sometimes see that the URL on their e-commerce pages contains the name of the platform, or recognize the data collection forms on their checkout pages look similar to ones you're familiar with.

Once you've compiled a list of potential options, start weeding options out based on their features, functionalities, and even the third-party integrations available out of the box



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## Consider features and integrations

Have each member of your evaluation team list which features are a must have, a nice to have, or not necessary. Having unlimited features can be great, but it can also mean spending more money on unnecessary features that you may never take advantage of.

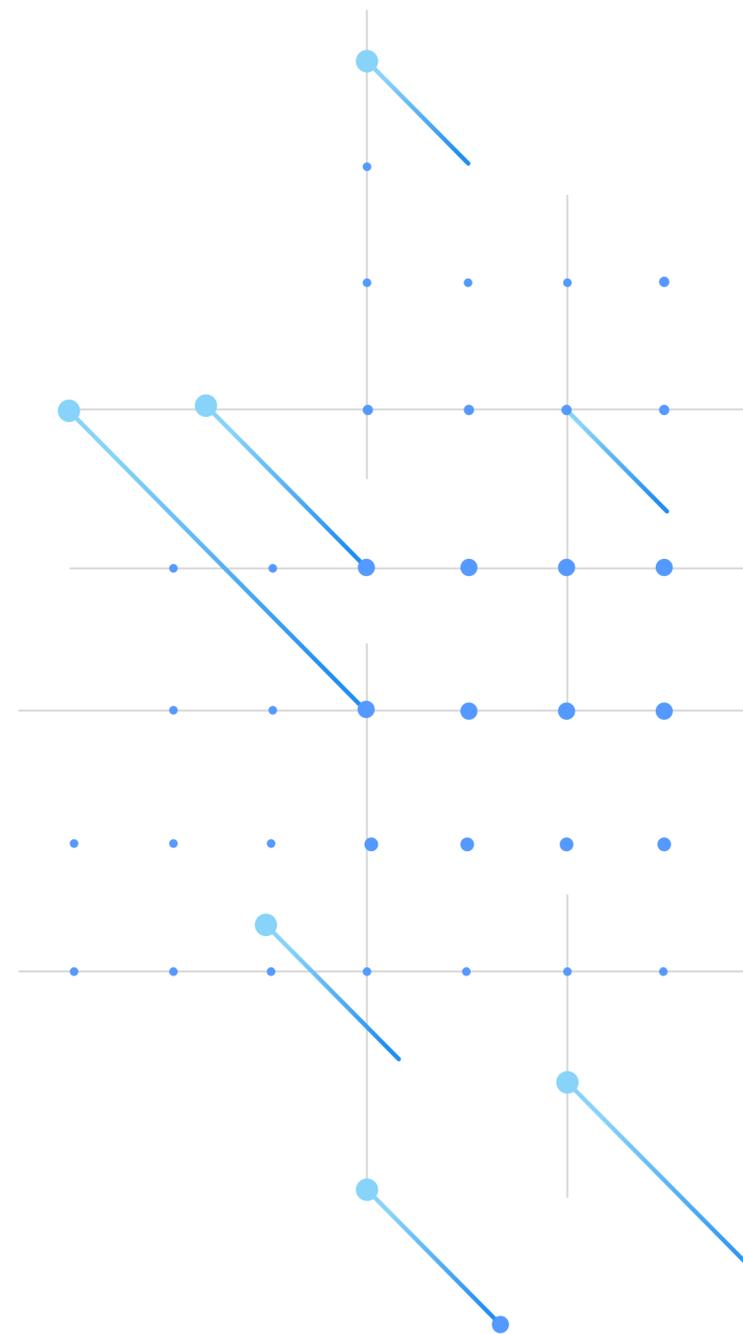
Third-party integrations are also crucial when choosing a SaaS or Cloud-based platform. Have the team make a list of all the software solutions you're already using at the company, then drill down to see which you need to interface with your e-commerce platform. For example, you might want to ensure your email marketing software can speak to your e-commerce platform for things like post-purchase or abandoned cart emails.

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## Send out RFPs and get demos

Now that you've narrowed down your options, send out a request for proposal (RFP) to your finalists. Some SaaS and Cloud offerings can be somewhat secretive of the costs associated with implementation and maintenance, so this is a great chance to gather this information. Reinforce all of your must-haves and nice-to-haves when it comes to functionality, and see who ticks most of your boxes.

Once you've got a short list of finalists who've responded to your RFP, it's time to sit in on demos for your top picks. Ensure that the key stakeholders are able to attend the demos so they can ask the right questions and gather any final pieces of information.



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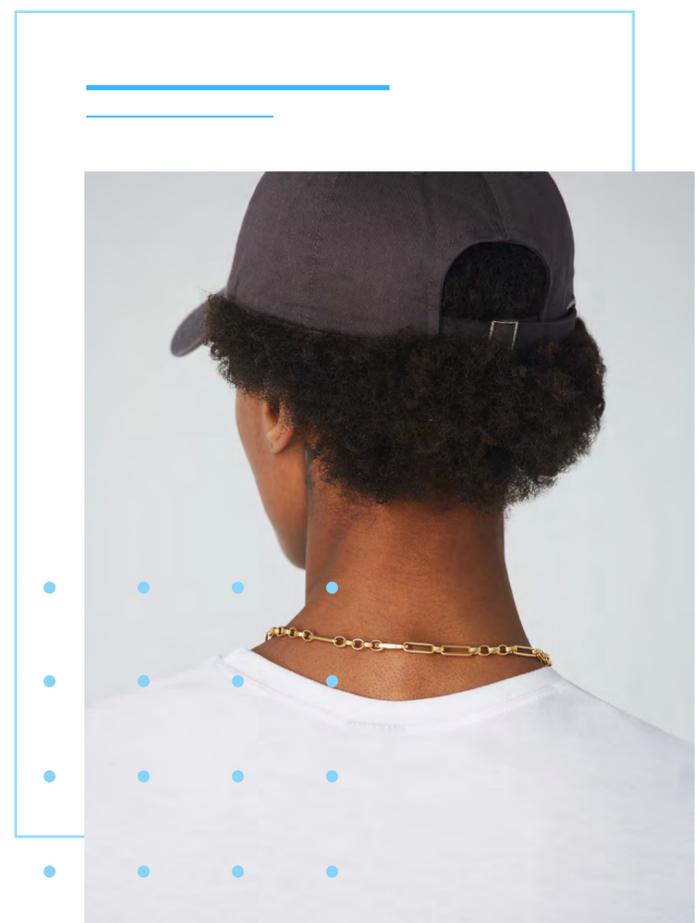
## Make your choice

Now that you've gathered all the information that you need, sit down with the key stakeholders and have everyone identify their preferred vendor. Ideally, you've weeded out the vast majority of vendors through the previous steps and are only looking at the top 2-3. That being said, if you still have a large number of vendors in the running, focus on which ones you can cut from the list first. From there, weigh the pros and cons of the top couple options: look at functionality, pricing, integrations, etc.

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## Start migrating data

Data migration can be a daunting process, because every company gathers data slightly differently, meaning there are many intricacies to consider. For many companies, it makes sense to contract an agency that specializes in data migration. It's important to also ensure your data science team is involved in this process, even if you use a third-party vendor to help.



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## Test your site

The final step before going live is testing out your site and how your e-commerce site sits within your greater website. Make sure all of your links are working properly, run test orders to ensure data is captured correctly and all the appropriate communications go out to the customer post-purchase. You'll also want to make sure that your online shop integrates seamlessly with your main web pages from a branding and flow perspective.

You'll also want to ensure you test the flow and overall UX on different devices. Best practice is to make sure your website and shop are mobile-first, but you'll also want to ensure the experience is optimized for desktop. After all, you want to capture all sales, regardless of which device they come from.

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## Go live and optimize

Now that you've gone through the full evaluation and implementation process, it's time to push your new online shop live and keep an eye on the results that come in. Hopefully you've been gathering metrics previous to your e-commerce replatforming in order to compare site performance from pre- and post-implementation.

Although we'd love to say that the work stops here, the reality is that you'll want to closely monitor your shop's performance over the first couple months. No implementation is perfect, so be prepared to make tweaks to your shop and site as time goes on. It's likely that you'll find some issues soon after replatforming, and that's okay. What matters is that you constantly improve the experience on-site and start running A/B tests to make sure your shopping experience is optimized.



# Final thoughts

Going through an e-commerce replatforming is a large undertaking, which can make it feel overwhelming, especially just as you begin the process. Looking at the whole replatforming process step-by-step will help keep you on track and able to tackle the project bit by bit.

Whether you've already identified issues with your current e-commerce site or are proactively looking into what's out there, one thing's for sure: the best time to undergo a replatforming is yesterday. The second best time? Today.

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