

E-Commerce Development and Entering the Path to NeXT Commerce

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Abstract

We are witnessing the e-commerce development, the evolution of digital commerce and e-commerce platform, as well of the linkage between e-commerce and logistics experience. There is no doubt about the need of a frictionless commerce. It is useful to learn from the holiday commerce predictions, and to better understand the challenges in grocery e-commerce weakened by inflation. And now it is the real time to enter the path to NeXT Commerce.

Keywords: E-commerce, Digital Commerce, E-Commerce Platform, Frictionless Commerce, NeXT Commerce

JEL Classification: D83; L81; L86; M15; M31; O32; O33

E-commerce, Digital Commerce and the Modern E-Commerce Platform

In 2008 Oxford Reference defined e-commerce (electronic commerce) as “The use of the Internet to buy and sell goods and services”, while according to Sellercentral Amazon com (2022), where Amazon sales activity is monitored by logged in sellers, e-commerce is seen as “the trading of goods and services on the internet... bustling city center or brick-and-mortar shop translated into zeroes and ones on the internet superhighway.” On the other hand, according to Gartner (2022), customers are enabled by digital commerce “to purchase goods and services

through an interactive and self-service experience,” the digital commerce including “the people, processes and technologies to execute the offering of development content, analytics, promotion, pricing, customer acquisition and retention, and customer experience at all touchpoints throughout the customer buying journey.” And as shown by Mudsa (2022), every aspect of the retail experience is touched by digital commerce as a holistic ecosystem.

In order to discover goods or services and compare their quality or prices offered by different online sellers, consumers can use an e-commerce platform (both parties will meet together on that end-to-end software application to play their roles), the online sellers taking into account various aspects, such as: which are the most popular e-commerce platforms (like Shopify, BigCommerce, Magento, WooCommerce etc.); advantages and disadvantages (see the first figure below) of selling on e-commerce websites or online marketplaces (shopping from various sources being facilitated by e-commerce sites or apps, marketplaces’ operators just showing products and enabling transactions, but not owning any inventory); main parts of an e-commerce platform are e-commerce website builders, accounting and inventory management systems, and customer service infrastructure; main key differences between marketplace and platform, as shown in the next figure below (Litcommerce, 2022).



Figure no. 1: Pros & cons regarding selling on online marketplace and e-commerce platforms

Source: Adaptation from Litcommerce, 2022. Marketplace vs eCommerce Platform [2022] – Which One is Better? Oct 2022 (Work cited)



Figure no. 2: Main key differences between platform and marketplace

Source: Adaptation from Litcommerce, 2022. Marketplace vs eCommerce Platform [2022] – Which One is Better? Oct 2022 (Work cited)

From the point of view of a successful e-commerce website (representing the main connection to digital audiences), it is worth mentioning its essential components, as follows: easy navigation, mobile optimization, checkout, customer support, shipping and return information, calls to action (McOmie, 2022).

On the other hand, in order to find the perfect solution for both individuals, and small businesses, an e-commerce and marketing expert evaluated recently the best e-commerce platforms of 2023, as shown in figure below (Nichol Smith, 2022), and recommended to take into consideration some vital features (such as: easy to use; inclusion of mobile-responsive sites; offering integrations for functionality it may not have formed an integral part of the structure, and scale as that business grows.

E-commerce Platform	Ranking	Score	Features
Shopify	1	4.5	• Completely free platform • Built-in payment processing • Easy-to-use SEO tools
Square	2	4.4	• Accept multiple payment types • Sell on person and online • Age confirmation tool
BigCommerce	3	4.3	• Highly customizable • Multichannel selling • 24/7 support
Wix	4	4.3	• 500 free premade online store templates • Improved site loading speeds • Easy-to-use built-in tools
Shopify	5	4.1	• Abandoned cart recovery on all plans • Supports multiple languages and currencies • Powerful marketing features
Squarespace	6	4.0	• Award-winning designs • Accept domains on all plans • Unlimited products
GoDaddy Online Store	7	3.9	• AI-assisted store design • Centralized marketing tools • Easy to use
WPengine	8	3.9	• Plans with multiple sites • 99.99% uptime • GoTarget add-on
Zyro	9	3.6	• AI tools for branding, design, and content creation • 20+ payment options • Order and inventory management
Bluehost	10	3.4	• Low introductory pricing • Marketplace selling • Daily backups

Amy Nichol Smith,
E-commerce and
Marketing Expert
Updated
November 17, 2022

E-commerce Platform	Best For	Pricing	Best Features
Shopify (4.5)	Best e-commerce platform	Free plan	- Completely free platform - Built-in payment processing - Easy-to-use SEO tools
Squares Online (4.4)	Best e-commerce platform for in-person and online sales	Plans starting at \$29.95 per month	- Accept multiple payment types - Sell on person and online - Age confirmation tool
BigCommerce (4.3)	Best e-commerce platform for custom online stores	Plans starting at \$29.95 per month	- Highly customizable - Multichannel selling 24/7 support
Wix (4.3)	Best e-commerce platform for beginners	Plans starting at \$27 per month	500 free premade online store templates - Improved site loading speeds - Easy-to-use built-in tools
Shopify (4.1)	Best e-commerce platform for international sellers	Plans starting at \$29 per month	- Abandoned cart recovery on all plans - Supports multiple languages and currencies - Powerful marketing features
Squarespace (4.0)	Best e-commerce platform for modern designs	Plans starting at \$27 per month	- Award-winning designs - Accept domains on all plans - Unlimited products
GoDaddy Online Store (3.9)	Best e-commerce platform for no added transaction fees	Plans starting at \$24.99 per month	- AI-assisted store design - Centralized marketing tools - Easy to use

The Best E-Commerce Platforms of 2023

WPengine (3.9)	Best e-commerce platform for online store agencies	Plans starting at \$29 per month	- Plans with multiple sites 99.99% uptime - GoTarget add-on
Zyro (3.6)	Best e-commerce platform for AI assistance	Plans starting at \$14.99 per month	- AI tools for branding, design, and content creation 20+ payment options - Order and inventory management
Bluehost (3.4)	Best e-commerce platform for long-term deals	Plans starting at \$29.95 per month	- Low introductory pricing - Marketplace selling - Daily backups

Figure no. 3: The Best E-Commerce Platforms of 2023

Source: Adaptation from Nichol Smith, A., 2022. The Best E-Commerce Platforms of 2023, Digital.com, Updated November 17, 2022 (Work cited)

According to the modern e-commerce platform Shoplazza (2022), e-commerce future will be governed by new rules, priorities, demands, expectations, and norms, and that within the context in which digital commerce has been fast helped to advance. As the accelerated online business competition made an increased number of companies to rise their digital presence across social or sales platforms with the help of the omnichannel sales strategy, Shoplazza appeared as an improved solution (by integrating Google Performance Max) to better understand better online shoppers' behavioral patterns (being essential to acquire consumers' behavioral data) from the various above-mentioned platforms while respecting consumers' privacy rules.

Thanks to deep integration not only with Google, but also with Facebook Meta, and TikTok, Shoplazza ensures omnichannel of sales across all these platforms (see also the below figure), by deep integration with Google, Facebook Meta, and TikTok. On the other hand, with regard to the necessary enterprise solutions, it is useful to know that the headless commerce service model of Shoplazza is offering highly customizable services.



Figure no. 4: Shoplazza. Omni-channel for sales

Source: Shoplazza, 2022. Transit V.001, Enterprise Newsletter September 2022, Toronto Vol.001 Proudly Powered by Story from Yorly's Beauty, Enterprise service Features, Future of Commerce #1, p. 3. (Work cited)

As can be seen from the figure 1, the online marketplaces (from sites) eBay and Etsy, are placed between Amazon and Walmart (the competition between these last two giants is well-known). Wolf (2022) showed recently how both e-commerce players' decline (Etsy and eBay being also placed between Amazon and Walmart, see the figure below regarding retail media ad spending growth, by company – ecommerce channels, US, 2022, % change) from the high levels during pandemic was attenuated by embracing their niche categories to attract an engaged user base (knowing the importance of focusing on retained customers).

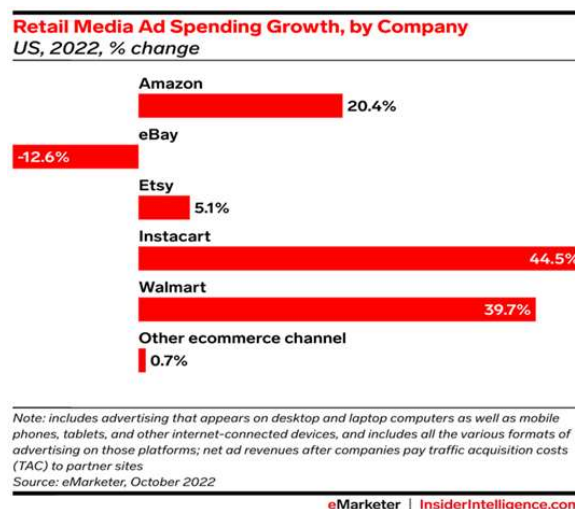


Figure no. 5: Retail Media Ad Spending Growth, by Company. US, 2022, % change

Source: Wolff, R., 2022. Etsy and eBay escape the worst of the ecommerce downturn, but Wayfair and Peloton aren't so lucky, Insider Intelligence, Nov 4, 2022 (Work cited)

On the other hand, as can be seen from the figure 3, Shopify was recently evaluated as one of best e-commerce platforms of 2023. Also recently, CB Insights (a, 2022) analyzed Shopify's growth strategy (Shopify being considered an e-commerce infrastructure leader continuing to invest in solutions necessary for its 1.8M merchants' growth), and identified e-commerce infrastructure as one this company's strategic priorities (together with marketing and personalization tools, new sales channels, and shipping and fulfillment enablement), as shown in the figure below.



Figure no. 6: Shopify's Strategy Map

Source: CB Insights a, 2022. Analyzing Shopify's growth strategy: How the e-commerce platform is expanding its merchants' reach and speeding up delivery, Research, November 10, 2022 (Work cited)

E-Commerce and Logistics Experience

As underlined above, Shopify is considered an e-commerce infrastructure leader. Within this framework, it is also worth remembering that in order to expand fast and easy fulfillment Shopify created an E2E logistics platform by buying (what represents its biggest acquisition up until the present time) in May 2022 the e-commerce fulfillment company Deliverr (Cabrey, 2022). By this acquisition made by (the provider of essential internet infrastructure for commerce) Shopify Inc. (NYSE, TSX: SHOP), added to its Shopify Fulfillment Network (SFN) the so-called "Deliverr's world-class software, talent, data, and scale", so as to offer merchants significant benefits for their logistics needs (multichannel inventory management; greater alignment between inventory supply and demand; more flexible, independent logistics services; shop promise – this service offering U.S. consumers trusted both two-day, and next-day delivery options) based on a trusted one-stop shop (Shopify, 2022).

Coming back to the above-mentioned online marketplace (from site) eBay, allow us to made reference to the recent analysis of eBay's growth strategy made by CB Insights (b, 2022), that revealed shipment & fulfillment enablement as being one of eBay's strategic priorities (together with: authentication services, category specialist marketplaces, and payment & financing).

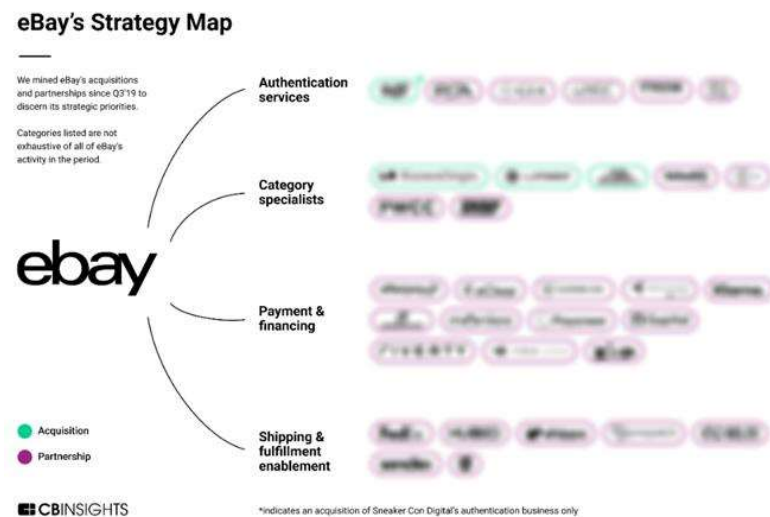


Figure no. 7: eBay's Strategy Map

Source: CB Insights b, 2022. Analyzing eBay's growth strategy: How the company is prioritizing category specialization & luxury authentication, Research, December 6, 2022 (Work cited)

A recently released whitepaper by Reuters Events in cooperation with DHL (2022) confirmed the crucial importance of customers' logistics experience in relation to the successful obtainment of customers' conversion, satisfaction and retention, the final touch point for customers within the context of the e-commerce acceleration being logistics (which has been seen traditionally as a cost-center in a business). Within this framework were highlighted significant aspects, such as: CX improvement depends on a strong logistics process (entirely, from customer purchase to the return that is a real challenge); the obtainment of positive impacts not only on customer service and profitability, but also on sustainability involves greater delivery flexibility; continuous improvement of both the delivery experience, and capacity utilization presupposes to increase collaborative partnerships during many years; in empowering consumers, optimizing warehouse space, and reducing emissions a key role will be played by technology; there is no doubt that to both improve CX, and to encourage customers to buy a higher-end version of an originally intended to purchase product returns (if executed correctly) returns can be seen as a true opportunity (before making any strategic shifts must be understood the returns data); for better demand planning (with real-time data), sustainability, and customer service it is essential to have a great collaboration.

Frictionless commerce, holiday commerce predictions, and challenges in grocery e-commerce weakened by inflation

As a leader in frictionless commerce (understood as a full transformation of the entire commerce ecosystem, every transaction being digitally assisted – see the first figure below), Pivotree (2022) pledged for supporting a frictionless experience for holiday shoppers (see the next figure below), by: focusing on a marketplace strategy, offering various fulfillment options (mainly BOPIS), and providing a consistent CX for all those moving (easily) between channels (in-store, online, and mobile shopping).



Figure no. 8: Pivotree Frictionless Commerce

Source: Pivotree a, 2022. Commerce. Frictionless (Work cited)



Figure no. 9: 2022 Holiday Commerce Predictions and Challenges in 2022

Source: Pivotree b, 2022. The Ultimate 2022 Holiday Prep Guide [pdf] eGuide, July 25, 2022, p. 2 (Work cited)

Let's recall the words of McKenzie (2018) while approaching the topic of frictionless shopping 2.0 (to win in this landscape involving investments not only in technology and data-driven insights, but also in big-picture thinking): *"When the concept was first embraced by retailers, "frictionless" meant ease and less hassle — quite literally, a "lack of friction." But as innovations such as mobile wallets, digital receipts, free and fast shipping, and one-click purchasing emerged and began to reshape the consumer shopping experience, the definition began to be reshaped as well. Today, a frictionless experience means more than just less hassle. It means greater speed, personalization, and wow experiences. And it means anticipating — not just meeting — consumers' needs."* Allow us to also remember within this framework some of the ideas expressed on the social publishing platform Medium (2016) regarding the frictionless commerce that: *"blends the full spectrum of monetization environments, including in-store, in-app, in-game, smartphones, smart TVs, and wearables. In addition, the expanding world of the Internet of Things (IoT) means that the devices themselves can communicate machine-to-machine (M2M), which opens up a further stream of commerce, with cars and trucks ordering their own replacement parts or booking their service appointments."*

As shown by Pershke (2021), nearly all of us interact currently with smart retail using smart technologies, the deployment of computing and storage resources where we are located in our customer journey knowing significant developments. Within the context of e-commerce development, the functionality of an e-commerce solution is determined by the technology stack (SCAND a, 2022). There is an obvious pressure on today's grocery retailers to adopt personalization strategies considering the key brand differentiators (product, price, and especially experience taken as a whole), valorizing e-commerce's technology stack (Den Boer, 2022). Confronted with various difficulties (such as: online success threatened by low margins, consumers' habits and continuing obstacles keeping them from online shopping, and missed opportunities because of insufficient data), grocery e-commerce needs (in the opinion of Den Boer) to find the necessary solutions (such as: using personalization and improving CX to increase profitability, increasing loyalty by giving more control to their customers, and implementing the right personalization by correctly collecting and interpreting data – data activation depending on the right technology stack). And this should be also seen broadly as part of the continuous developments including the Internet of Things (IoT) the Internet of Behavior (IoB), and going beyond obtaining customer data and moving to detailed analysis of customer behavior so as to create individually tailored services (SCAND b, 2022).

Reflecting on the prospects for grocery e-commerce in the US, Coresight Research CEO and Founder (Weinswig, 2022) highlighted inflationary pressures affecting the grocery e-commerce market (both price-sensitive shoppers looking now actively for promotions and discounts, and retailers seeking to drive online sales by offering exclusive online deals based on effective loyalty programs) in the short term. In her opinion, a key advantage for e-commerce players versus stores is represented by the currently used (by retailers, including Amazon) one-stop pages for deals.

Instead of conclusions: *The imperative of entering the path to NeXT Commerce*

It is worth showing that on November 28, 2022 Capgemini (the worldwide known Group) announced the valuable collaboration with one of Romania's largest retail chain providers, Carrefour (seen as having a clear digital strategy). The improvement of CX both in-store, and online is the final objective of the project allowing Carrefour to deploy the solution advanced by Capgemini (based on a 3-year contract), by designing, operating, securing, and monetizing APIs (handled by a simple-to-use API management platform, to benefit both its supplier ecosystem, and CX), as well as further developing, maintaining and supporting these APIs.

In our opinion, this can be considered an interesting move in the context of McKinsey's E-commerce Global Initiative, NeXT Commerce (Arora et al., 2020): "*A successful transition to the next horizon of digital commerce requires companies to get real about being customer first and make some hard choices.*" McKinsey's representatives underlined the imperative of ensuring the proper level of online and offline engagement by putting at the organization's center the digitally driven commerce and meeting customers' ever-rising expectations by orchestrating experiences, this being called the next horizon of value NeXT commerce. Within this context, while pledging for focusing on the three Cs (customer, customer, customer), it was given an illustrative B2C example with regard to NeXT commerce versus e-commerce experience for a running enthusiast, as shown in figure below:

Illustrative B2C example: NeXT commerce versus e-commerce experience for a running enthusiast



Figure no. 10: NeXT commerce versus e-commerce experience for a running enthusiast

Source: Arora, A., Longo, R., Plotkin, C.L., Sivaeva, T. and Wang, K.W., 2022. *Becoming indispensable: Moving past e-commerce to NeXT commerce*. [pdf] McKinsey's E-commerce Global Initiative, NeXT Commerce, November 2022, p. 5 (Work cited)

Within this framework, McKinsey's representatives highlighted this real need of putting the customer first, profitability being placed in NeXT commerce as a core capability based on knowledge of what companies' customers value and where companies are distinctive, one hand and the operational efficiency (being well-known that among e-commerce's highest costs is the above-mentioned logistics which is erode margins rapidly), on the other hand. And among other aspects it was revealed the need of having clear incentives oriented to customer for each function in a company's business.

According to Walters (2022): *“Customer first means the organization puts the customer at the center of organizational decision-making instead of organizing around products... means seeking ways to consistently and proactively deliver a positive customer experience by designing and delivering with the customer in mind. A customer-first mindset is closely related to purpose-driven thinking.”* As shown by the leading marketplace for legal services UpCounsel (2022): *“Final consumer definition is the description of the characteristics of an end user of a finished product or service... An end user or final consumer is the final point in a distribution chain... In terms of marketing, customers and final consumers alike make up a “decision-making unit” (DMU). A DMU can comprise from a few people to thousands of people.”*

And putting the customer first... allow us to end by making reference to the words of:

- Professor Ryan Calo (2014): *“In 1999, Jon Hanson and Douglas Kysar coined the term “market manipulation” to describe how companies exploit the cognitive limitations of consumers... Today’s companies fastidiously study consumers and, increasingly, personalize every aspect of the consumer experience. Furthermore, rather than waiting for the consumer to approach the marketplace, companies can reach consumers anytime and anywhere. The result of these and related trends is that firms can not only take advantage of a general understanding of cognitive limitations, but can uncover, and even trigger, consumer frailty at an individual level... The truth is that society is only beginning to understand how vast asymmetries of information coupled with the unilateral power to design the legal and visual terms of the transaction could alter the consumer landscape. Three phenomena, all intimately related to data, threaten to dramatically accelerate data-informed marketing, and hence the potential for market manipulation. The first phenomenon is the “mass production of bias” through big data; the second, the possibility of far greater consumer intelligence through “disclosure ratcheting”; and the third, the move from ends-based to means-based ad targeting and interface design. Together, these phenomena begin to leverage the full potential of consumer mediation in ways that consumers and regulators can scarcely ignore...”*;

- David Mitby (2020), Google's Director, Product Management, App Ads: *“We believe there are three key ways to put consumers at the core of your strategy: help people quickly get what they want, deliver relevant information and make it easy for your customers to take action.”*

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