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# The Commerce Platform Evaluation Guide

**How to choose the right commerce platform for your business**

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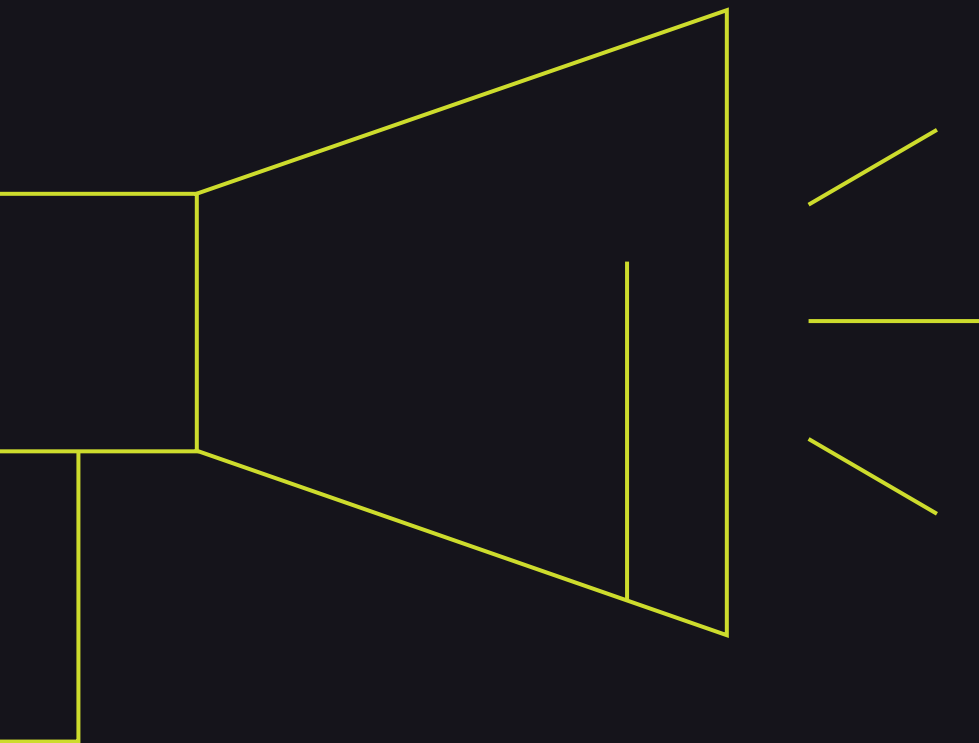
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# When it comes to selling and marketing your products, you're the expert.

And you know that making a change just because doesn't always make sense. But even though you've always used an on-premise ecommerce solution or a legacy enterprise platform, it doesn't mean you're not locked in forever.

## You need a partner, not just a vendor, to help you grow.

If you're in the market for a new commerce platform, we've compiled ~~the~~ important considerations and questions to guide your search.



# Understand the total cost of ownership

Unexpected costs to run a commerce platform quickly add up. For most commerce platforms, there's much more to total cost of ownership than just the purchase price.

Traditional on-premise commerce platforms come with all sorts of tech requirements. There's infrastructure, maintenance, and even additional costs when online traffic peaks. And don't forget all the testing that's needed to keep it running—that's an ongoing cost that gets expensive quickly. In contrast, Shopify Plus integrations are easy to manage, with no pricey middleware between the website and the back-office systems.

Companies around the world have saved time and money by migrating to Shopify Plus. Replatforming is quick, and the savings are immediate. Monthly costs go down. Development costs shrink because custom integrations are included. What used to be complicated and expensive processes, such as integrating stock systems, become simple and affordable. And because downtime is even more costly when customers expect to be able to shop anytime, the greater flexibility Shopify Plus offers—like making changes on the fly while sites stay active—is a game-changer.

After [Staples replatformed with Shopify Plus](#), for example, their commerce costs dropped by half. Staples also found the increased flexibility helped them grow: The company set all-time sales records during Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and during COVID-19, it successfully handled “Black Friday-like” sales volumes for 30 days straight, with no performance issues.

Similarly, sock maker [Bombas saved \\$108,000 in platform costs](#) with Shopify Plus. Even with data migration and replatforming costs, Bombas saw positive investment return almost immediately. Since migrating, growth has surged. The result is more innovative offerings for their customers, \$17.2 million in sales its first full year after replatforming, and 300% year-over-year growth.

## Slash ongoing costs

Shopify Plus removes entire cost structures. Software for image hosting, web servers, and security: built in. Retainer-based consulting fees, internal architects, and developers: not needed. Hosting and infrastructure, security patches and upgrades, and performance and load testing: all included in the monthly fees, which are lower than the competition. And because Shopify Plus is a true software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform, you'll always be up to date with the latest features. There's zero maintenance. You get complete customization, from storefront to back office. You'll have the features you need, and nothing you don't. And best of all: Your ecommerce platform won't ever hold your online business back.

You don't need to spend \$100,000 on a custom checkout, or \$30,000 on a custom integration. Shopify Plus is simple and transparent, and it's cheaper to sign up, operate, and use. Whether you're making small changes like adding a new product, customizations to the checkout, or new functions like a mobile app or new payment solutions, Shopify Plus helps your business be agile and stay competitive.

The value is clear: [US\\$2,000 per month](#) lets you do more for less, slash on-premise costs from your budget, and empower your capacity to make changes quickly with a small, nimble team.

### Average monthly maintenance

Shopify Plus	\$2.5k - \$5k
BigCommerce	\$5k - \$10k
Magento	\$10k - \$15k
Salesforce Commerce Cloud	\$30k - \$60k

In addition, Shopify Plus pricing is transparent and inclusive—there's no need to struggle with cryptic fee structures for each separate component.

Best of all, Shopify Plus is functional right out of the box. On top of the thousands of apps already active in our ecosystem, our engineers are constantly rolling out new features and capabilities. We're the platform built for the long term.

# Get online faster

Not long ago, in the era of on-premise commerce platforms, it often took a year to get a site up and running, with staggering costs. Even with some of the newer, more cost-effective options that have emerged since the bad old legacy days, you might still be looking at six months (or more) before getting online.

Shopify Plus gets your business online sooner. Why wait up to 12 months to get your brand online? Our accelerated onboarding will have you up and running in half the time—or less. It's a high-value solution that allows for rapid integration with the rest of your tech stack and tools.

Heinz, established in 1869, launched its first ever DTC initiative in seven days. And Lindt, a Swiss chocolate company since 1845, launched in just five. A lot goes into streamlining the migration process. When evaluating your options, look for a platform that offers ease of use, robust APIs, and the flexibility to customize your site from day one.

Working with a community of platform partners and dedicated support can also accelerate your success.

## Get the latest features, all the time

Legacy commerce platforms often look like engineering projects: just adding a new page or making the most basic changes to the customer experience requires technical expertise from developers, architects, and deployment specialists. It all takes time, and it's not cheap. Of course, in addition to the physical costs of keeping everything running, there are uncountable costs when businesses can't quickly respond to changing business needs.

Is your current commerce platform always the latest version? If not, you'll have to pay for every site upgrade. As a retailer, your money and resources are better spent elsewhere.

SaaS platforms have world-class developers building industry-leading technology. Let them worry about future-proofing your business. Reinvest your budget in retention and strategies to acquire new customers instead.

How do you measure the benefits of flexibility? When it comes to speed to market and being able to respond quickly to customer needs, Shopify Plus is the clear leader.

# Define your platform needs

You wouldn't buy a car without knowing what features you need—or which ones you can afford. And who's going to take care of the repairs and insurance?

Before you shop around for better software, you need to have those conversations internally. Understand which features and kinds of support you'll need to keep your site running smoothly. Here's what you should outline:

## The right solution for your ecommerce business

We've already described what to expect in a SaaS platform. But how do you know if it's right for you? And when should you make the move? Turn to your own engineers, designers, marketers, and support staff for the best insights.

Ask and answer these questions with stakeholders on your team:

- Do traffic spikes affect your uptime or speed of service?
- Has your platform's security failed at critical moments?
- How often do you hear or say, "We can't do that"?
- Are DIY patches and workarounds common (e.g. if we fix this, that breaks)?
- Does your team spend too much time and energy maintaining your site?
- Do you have the freedom to launch new products, projects, and experiment on your own?
- Are new features and apps regularly delayed due to in-house or agency constraints?
- Is your help desk, social media, or email dominated by questions or complaints about functionality?
- Do you wish you could manage all the complexities of your business in one place?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, look at the long-term cost to your business if you don't make a change. If all roads point to migrating to a new platform, let's review how to prepare for that next step.

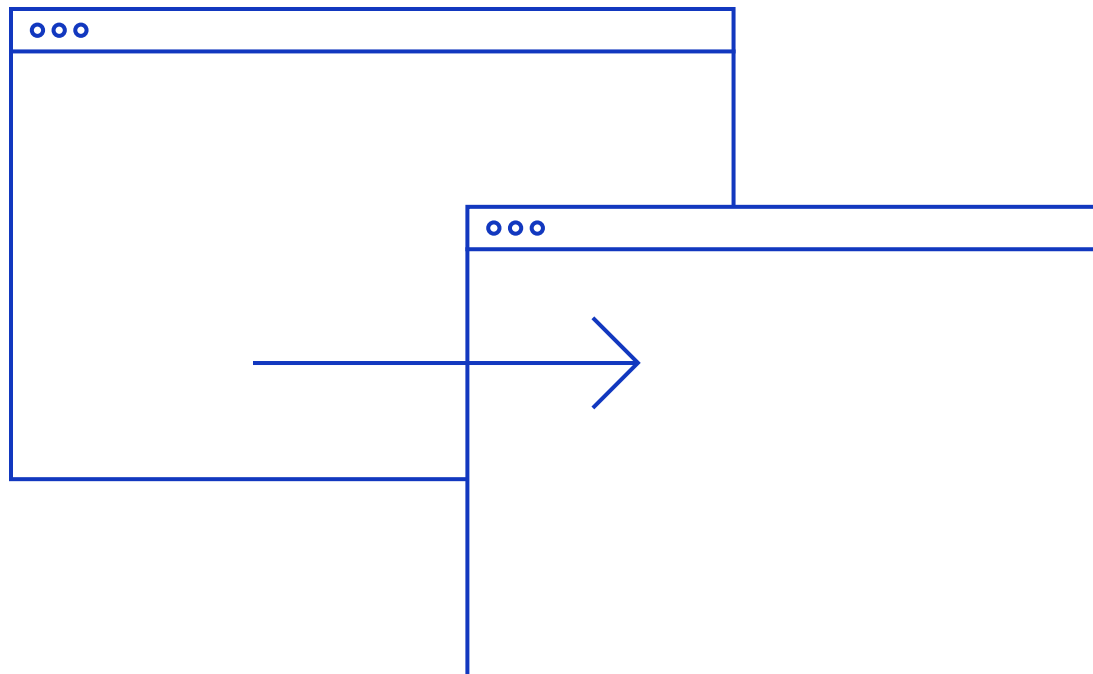
## Your migration timeline and full scope of work

When evaluating platforms, communicate your desired launch date up front. It might seem impossible to migrate your site in just three months. But with the right platform and support, it can be done.

Document the full scope of your requirements. Here's a helpful place to start:

- What's your budget?
- Who will be migrating your data?
- What are the must haves, in terms of functionality, for your site?
- What can't you do on your current platform?
- What costs you the most time?
- What could be automated to save you time and resources?
- How many products, customers, and orders need to be migrated?
- What team resources do you have to support the migration?
- What's the ideal time of year that you can get the maximum team support?

Define your platform needs





## Your required customizations and product integrations

It's helpful to map the technologies you currently use. Platform providers can then clarify which of your daily processes will drastically change or stay the same after migration.

For instance, you might need to integrate your existing enterprise resource planning software. Everyone uses ecommerce solutions differently. It's likely you've built customizations into your tool, which makes it harder to use standardized apps or connectors with a new platform.

Your prospective platform rep should help you scope out the integration work. Doing so up front will solidify processes where you might have issues during migration.

It's also an excellent time to re-evaluate your entire tech stack. Identify where customizations can be a challenge or where new solutions might exist.

Speak with platform partners that have already built similar app integrations. Alternatively, discuss how you might develop it yourself. These steps will help you understand many of your migration costs.

## Your team size and project stakeholders

We've all heard the phrase, "Too many cooks in the kitchen." The larger your ecommerce team, the more complicated it will be to migrate.

Identify all stakeholders to avoid misunderstandings about platform capabilities. Your sales contact should answer all of your team's questions up front. Involving these stakeholders in the final decision will save you time later on.

# Ask these essential questions

**Is your platform fast and reliable?**

Will the platform stay up during high-volume shopping days? Request their uptime score and page-load speeds, and compare it to other commerce platforms.

**What level of security and compliance do you guarantee?**

Ideally, you're looking for Level 1 PCI DSS compliance. If the platform manages security automatically, you're in good hands.

**Does your platform integrate with my tech stack?**

The best platforms are tech agnostic. Ask what solutions they recommend to support your technical requirements.

**Who can help me with my integrations when I migrate?**

If they can't support you, do they have partners who can?  
Get a quote on what it will cost you.

**What platform capabilities differentiate your solution in the market?**

Know what's possible when customizing the platform for your needs.  
Understand what products they offer to help you customize.

**How long is your migration process, and how does it work?**

If it takes longer than 10 months, ask other platforms for an estimate.  
Make sure you'll have support throughout the process.

**What can I expect during the migration?**

Get them to explain all of the steps and key milestones. Ask whether you'll have an internal launch expert to guide you.

□ **How will I be supported from start to finish?**

A launch expert should support you every step of the way. Ask if you'll get dedicated support afterward.

□ **How will migrating to your platform affect my SEO rankings?**

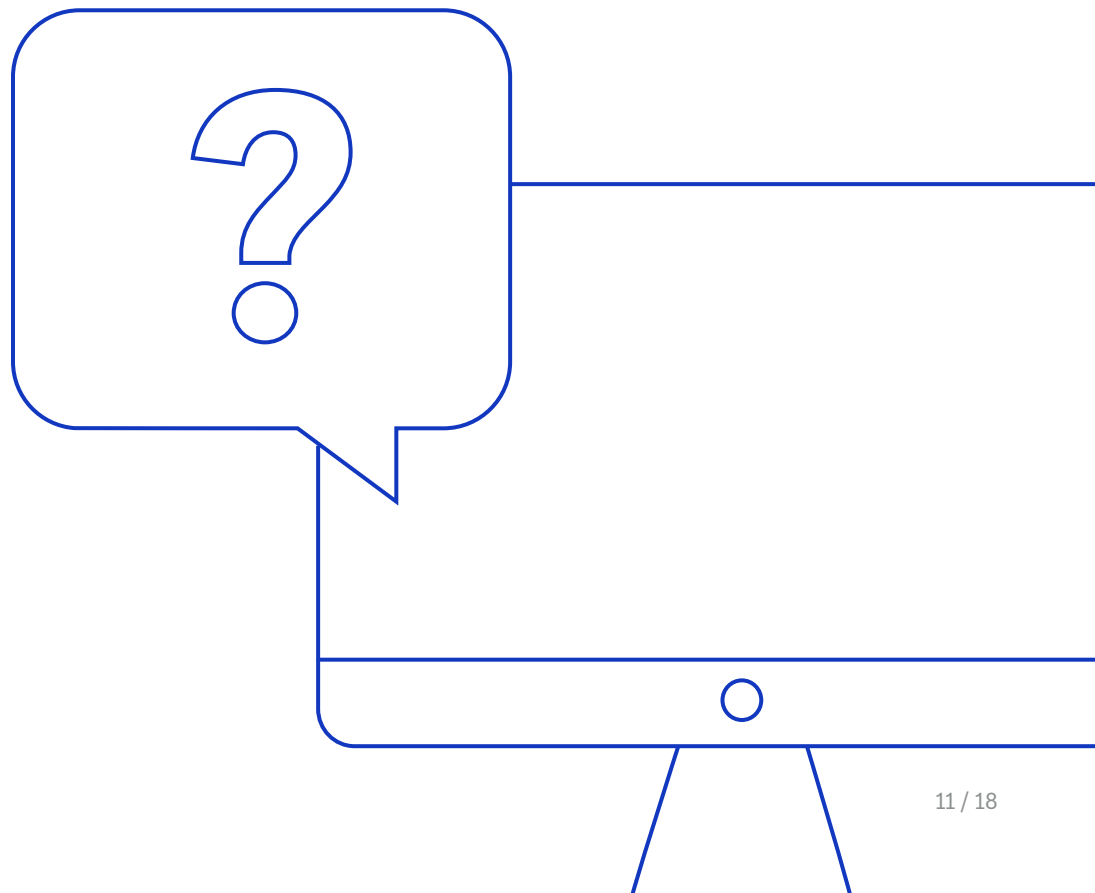
The right answer is: It shouldn't in the long term. Request to have someone on their team advise on best practices.

□ **What happens when I need to upgrade the tech on my site?**

Your SaaS platform should always be updating the tech, so you can focus on your business. You shouldn't have to pay your platform extra or manually install new versions every time, say, Apple Pay or PayPal updates its software.

If the platform rep answers those questions favorably, you're in good shape. The next step is knowing what you'll need to migrate.

Ask these essential questions



# Plan for a smooth migration

Beyond the nuts and bolts, look out for some of these stand-out elements during your migration:

## A proprietary data migration solution

Replatforming can seem overwhelming. But it can also be painless if you have the right tools. A proprietary data migration solution simplifies the process of switching platforms. It should allow you to launch faster—with no unexpected or out-of-scope work on your end.

Ask your platform provider if they have a data migration tool that offers:

- The ability to import customers, products, orders, and metafields
- Support for importing data through an in-house tool that is faster than traditional upload methods, like CSV files
- Support for large file sizes (up to 250MB)
- The ability to delete data in bulk
- Support for importing shipping and transaction lines
- A clear understanding of how data is mapped from one platform to another

These features will free up your team to focus on tasks that increase your return on investment.

## An open API

A platform with a robust, open API lets you:

- Build whatever you need on top of the platform
- Easily integrate the tools you already use

Once you've built a custom app, use APIs to import product, customer, and order information.

The order in which you import data is crucial. Here's what we recommend when doing it yourself:

1. Import products first since they're ordered by customers and, therefore, need to precede them
2. Import customers as a logical next step
3. Finish by importing orders, which will have both products and customers tied to them

Using the API, you can then associate your product and customer IDs to a historical record. A special transactions API is helpful when you want to import orders and keep a record of, say, how much a customer actually paid.

You should execute the code or script you wrote on your private app server. In turn, this executes against the private app you created on your platform. Your script will then map your product data from your source data to the platform endpoints. The process is the same for each product, customer, and order entity you migrate.

When migrating data, you'll also want to:

1. **Ensure customers don't receive notifications when importing historical orders**  
During import, some platforms send old order confirmations. Don't bombard your users with emails—make sure your new platform can turn this off beforehand.
2. **Include a delta migration**  
After your initial migration, there will be orders, customers, and potentially products that have been added to your store between the time of the first import and the time of launch. You need this final step to import all the data on your new platform.

Once you know how you'll migrate your data, look for ways to enhance your new platform experience.

# Ecommerce automation tools

Use ecommerce automation tools—baked into your new platform—as a competitive advantage. They’ll help you scale faster on autopilot.

Here are two ways businesses are saving time and re-allocating resources with ecommerce automation:

## Sales campaign planning and execution

These automation tools help you schedule and launch sales and new products. They act as a command center to load all assets for the sale in advance. When the campaign is over, the sale is rolled back automatically. Your employees will thank you for saving them precious time and sleep.

**Title**

Product Drop

**Start Date**

Tue, Jul 18 9 : 00 AM

**Product Release**

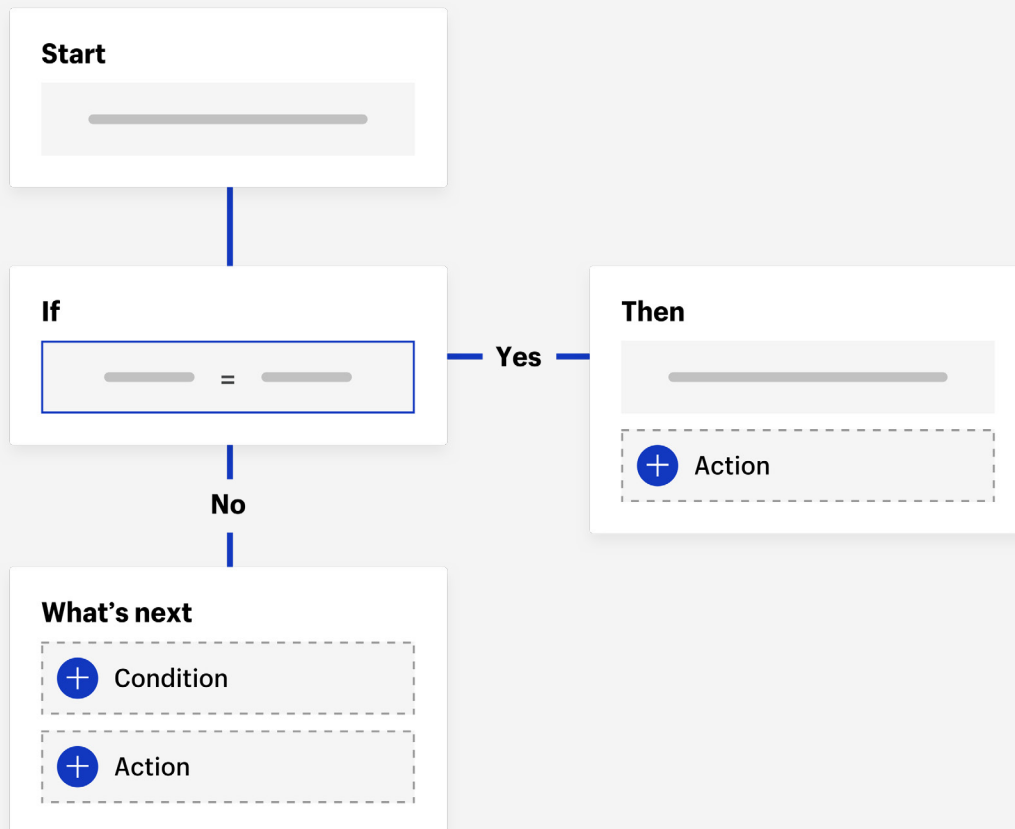
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Plan for a smooth migration

## Back-end workflows

Back-end workflow automations free you to focus on other priorities. You don't need coding knowledge to automate repetitive, manual, or time-consuming tasks. You can simplify processes using “trigger, condition, action” formulas to create custom workflows. These formulas are interpreted, stored, and executed automatically by your platform.

Templated workflows take the guesswork out of doing it yourself. They can also be a significant time and resource saver. Ask your platform provider if they offer a library of templates to use with your store.



## Level 1 PCI DSS compliance

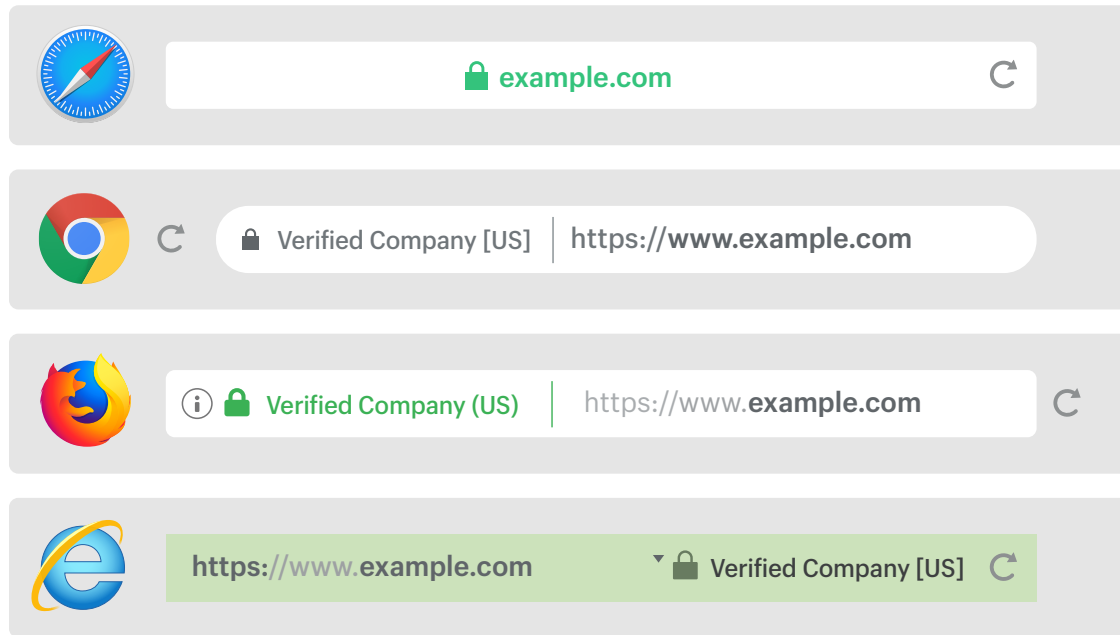
The highest level of PCI compliance verifies security standards for businesses handling online payments. It also provides guidelines on how software is managed, deployed, and hosted for customer data security.

You can deploy PCI-compliant storefronts with an on-premise ecommerce solution. But as a vendor, you're responsible for the upkeep. That can take your focus away from your business.

Look for a platform that hosts and protects your site using Level 1 PCI DSS compliance. Ideally, this service should come out of the box. Your new SaaS platform should also handle all compliance assessments and risk management. It's their job to ensure your site is secure.

The best platforms cover the entire shopping experience, from storefront to admin. Customer credit card, payment, and other sensitive information in operational data stores should be encrypted both in transit and at rest.

As an added level of trust and security, ask for a free extended validation secure sockets layer (EV SSL). They appear in the URL window of all major browsers as a lock, or "Secure" message. It's the highest level of SSL certification you can get on the web.



Extended Validation SSL Certificate, also known as EV SSL certificates, in the URL window of major browsers



## Tech stack product integration

A good platform partner can help with your build or tech stack integrations. They should also introduce you to a partner before the contract is signed. That way, you'll know what your overall migration price will be.

The partner's quote itself should include dates and milestones for:

- Data migration
- Product integrations and solutions
- Front-end design
- Installing recommended partner apps
- Back-end development
- SEO ranking maintenance
- Quality assurance testing
- Pre- and post-launch training

Partners are a great resource because they've already been vetted. They've also handled many new site launches. You can trust they will quote you accurately on services and support.

## Ongoing support

Work with your platform's launch expert for the week after launch. Your launch expert will ensure your ecommerce store is running smoothly. You should also be introduced to contacts who will provide long-term support.

Some additional resources to ask about include:

- Online product education courses and webinars
- Online platform user communities
- 24/7 priority technical support

Once you've gathered all this information, there's one more thing to do.

# Look to the future

Finally, map everything out before you make a commitment. This strategy includes defining key migration checkpoints to achieve success.

Ask to have an introductory call with all your team stakeholders and your launch expert for the platform. They'll help set those checkpoints with you and guide the process moving forward.

Also, ask about any pre-, mid-, and post-launch checklists that will help you prepare. These lists should include tips for how to handle your SEO rankings each step of the way.

Make sure the platform addresses your concerns ahead of time. Their answers will provide insight into whether they'll be a true partner and not just another vendor. You'll also avoid any gaps after the contract is signed.

**Still have questions about evaluating a new commerce platform?  
Talk to a Shopify Plus migration expert about your business requirements.**

Let's talk

Look to the future