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To serve customers across all touchpoints and retain them in today’s highly competitive markets obviously requires fast time-to-market; however, agility in SaaS commerce platforms is often achieved by reducing the commerce capabilities to their most basic functions, forcing companies to make tradeoffs between time-to-market and flexibility.

The capabilities of early generations of SaaS commerce platforms supported the needs of mostly smaller stores, and thus adoption was initially more prevalent among small or growing businesses. That is now changing. In view of the dramatic growth of cloud computing and the expanded capabilities in SaaS commerce platforms, retailers and B2C vendors of all sizes are now assessing or actively using cloud e-commerce software for either their full site platform or specific initiatives (e.g. microsites or new geographies). Forrester’s predictions that SaaS e-commerce platform spending will grow from 44 percent of companies’ e-commerce spend in 2013 to 66 percent by 2019 validates this trend.

While the cloud offers the promise of greater flexibility and agility, once you start to dig deeper, even what appear to be nimble cloud-based commerce solutions will often fall short of many companies’ needs. Typical vendors require companies to compromise—forcing a choice between the flexibility and scalability of customizable solutions that require heavy development resources to support, or the speed and simplicity of inflexible template solutions that aren’t tailored to their specific customer requirements. And making this compromise often inhibits growth in the long run.

But what if companies didn’t have to make the choice? What if they could get the best of both worlds?

With a powerful, modern cloud commerce solution, e-commerce sites don’t need to sacrifice functionality, customization, or site experience to gain agility. They provide businesses with true flexibility—granting the ability to customize their platforms as they wish, create the ideal customer experience, and scale effortlessly as their business grows.
Almost every team in every business wants to be more agile, but when commerce becomes faster, more flexible, and empowered with greater functionality, the effects are felt throughout the entire business. In addition, commerce is unique in that it is a key customer-experience application with a highly measurable revenue upside. When traffic, conversion rates, and average order value are affected, the results are measurable and tie directly to top-line revenue.

Agile commerce has the ability to aid operations in some significant ways, including:

**Becoming more reactive to market and economic changes**

When changes happen, businesses need to react quickly. As customer demands, buying habits, purchasing power, and tastes evolve, your commerce platform needs to be right there with them—meeting these new expectations as soon as they appear.

**Seizing new opportunities before your competitors**

When new opportunities emerge, the first businesses to seize them often reap the greatest rewards. With a shorter time-to-market, powered by an agile commerce platform, consumer brands can jump on board with new trends as soon as they appear on their radar.

**Accelerating moves into new markets**

Planning any kind of business expansion can take a long time. But when you have complete control of your commerce platform, adding new lines, creating new sites, and extending your offering to new demographics can be done in hours and days instead of weeks and months.

**Defending your market position against disruptive new competitors**

In e-commerce, agile new competitors are constantly emerging and encroaching on the core markets of existing brands. The nimble use their agility and flexibility to stay current as their shoppers’ tastes, styles, and preferences rapidly evolve and change. When market shifts occur, you not only want to defend against them; you also want to take full advantage and leapfrog ahead of your competitors. To do this, you need to be able to adapt quickly and be the first to capitalize on new trends and opportunities.
The Technology Driving Powerful, Agile Commerce

The days of making painful trade-offs between flexibility, speed, power, and functionality are over. A sophisticated cloud commerce platform will provide everything that consumer brands need to boost agility, while scaling with their business as it grows.

When it comes to choosing and deploying a powerful cloud platform, brands are on the hunt for a specific set of capabilities. Here are four key considerations to keep in mind when evaluating SaaS commerce solutions:

1. The ability to quickly launch a premier commerce experience.

First off, consumer brands need to be able to launch quickly. Prebuilt templates and widgets can help dramatically decrease time-to-market, whether building a brand-new commerce site or a standalone microsite.

And it’s not enough to just be fast—online stores also have to be great. It is important that the site for your differentiated brand is up quickly and has all of the features consumers look for in a premier online store (such as guided search and faceted navigation and multiple payment options).

It is also important to have a site that follows responsive design principles so that it automatically displays correctly across desktops, tablets, and mobile devices.

2. Simple tools to easily manage the storefront.

An easy-to-use interface tailored for the business user enables sites to remain agile post-launch. When evaluating potential vendors, ask how ongoing changes can be made in the storefront. How much can Marketing do to manage and modify the storefront, and how often will you need IT resources to support your business goals?

Things like automatically uploading and assigning product images, drag-and-drop tools, and the ability to make manual edits to images within the storefront editor will keep the storefront fresh and relevant. Quickly editing and updating catalog data through mass import and export ensures that changes can be made quickly and efficiently.

And what about promotions? These should be easily created by the business user and should include features such as coupon codes, automatic discounts, and automatic start/stop dates.
Don’t make trade-offs today that will inhibit your growth tomorrow. Find a solution that strikes the right balance between “quick & easy” and “flexible & scalable” to give you what you need to stay ahead of the competition and deliver superior customer experiences.

At Oracle, cloud is what we do. If you have questions, or if you’d like to find out more about your options for agile, powerful commerce in the cloud, visit our website today:

oracle.com/commerce