The Digital Transformation (DX) Revolution:
Growth strategies for ecommerce brands & retailers

The call to digitize retail

Nowhere is the need to modernize systems and automate processes greater than in the retail industry.

The onset of the pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 highlighted the lack of visibility and redundancy in supply chains. Thanks to stay-at-home orders, consumers flocked to online shopping out of necessity. Yet stock-outs and lackluster customer communications were the order of the day at many brands and retailers— whether shopping in-store or offline.

✳ Signs your digital storefront is limiting growth:

lack of personalized marketing

limited shipping capabilities
high customer acquisition costs

low AOV

high cart abandonment rate

inability to ship internationally

fraudulent transactions

low number of repeat customers

chargebacks

errors in shipping labels
inefficient returns
high bounce rate

Direct-to-consumer (DTC) ecommerce continues to expand and seek new ways of reaching customers. This adds a growing complexity to omnichannel, all in the face of growing expectations for a frictionless customer experience.

For businesses, running an online store is hard work. Every touchpoint in the customer journey, from marketing, customer service, and checkout to inventory management and fulfillment, must be seamless. **Digitization is the answer.**

Digital transformation, also known as DX, refers to the process of a business digitizing their entire retail operation.[1] For omnichannel, everything from customer communications to managing the supply chain can benefit from digitization.

The rise of DTC ecommerce has accelerated the push to digitally transform online storefronts. The multitude of applications that integrate with Shopify and other leading ecommerce platforms— several thousand in the Shopify App Store alone—are allowing merchants to more easily expand and enhance their online storefronts through digitization.

Omnichannel goes digital

Omnichannel is a cross-channel strategy focused on giving customers seamless and integrated experiences to empower their engagement with your business, in support of a continuous customer journey.[2]

Digital transformation (DX) is how businesses use digital tools to strengthen and revolutionize how they're using their staff, their data, and their systems to create value and remain competitive.[3]

DX for online storefronts

So where in the dizzying array of choices within the Shopify ecosystem (or another ecommerce platform) should you start when creating and expanding your digital storefront and omnichannel capabilities? We've tapped into our ecommerce partners to provide you with digital solutions that future-proof your operation.
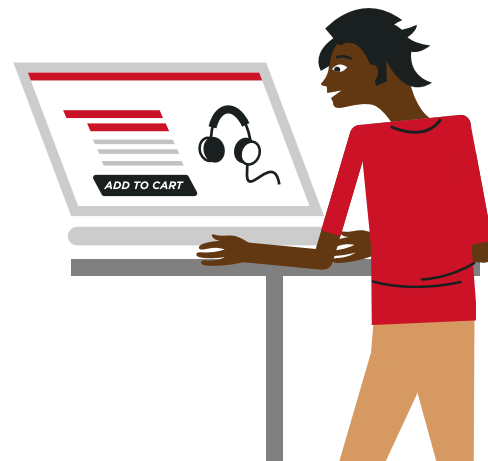
Justuno   **omnisend**   **ZONOS**   **N⦿FRAUD**   **shippo**   **Happy Returns** *by PayPal*

The pre-purchase journey

Customer touchpoints refer to key moments of connection between your business and your customers during the shopping journey. It starts when a customer first discovers your online store, right up to the moment they receive their order–and beyond.[4]

Enhancing the many touchpoints in the pre-purchase journey is one of the most important things a merchant can do. But targeting, converting and retaining customers at your digital storefront is a monumental challenge.

A number of automated marketing solutions are allowing brands and retailers to sell smarter and personalize the customer journey in the critical pre-click or pre-purchase stage, providing opportunity for customer engagement while enhancing the overall customer experience.

Casting a wider net beyond your region or country is another way to grow your customer base. Sparked by necessity during the pandemic, cross-border DTC ecommerce continues to grow, and is quickly becoming a requirement for scaling as a brand. From payment systems to duty and tax calculators, technology is enabling the automation of cross-border selling on the back end, making it easier for merchants to sell beyond the domestic market.[5]

✳ AI, machine learning, personalization, localization, and analytics are among the technologies that are combining into powerful marketing tools, allowing merchants to create highly effective campaigns that reach consumers where, when and how they shop.

What's in your customer retention strategy?

Take time to develop your customer retention strategies and concentrate on your active customers. Research from Bluecore Technologies indicates **70%** of a merchant's future revenue resides with already active customers. And did you know customers with a greater first-time AOV have greater lifetime value?[6]

While a stellar pre-purchase experience will land a customer, don't overlook the post-purchase phase to build customer loyalty with a flawless check-out and fulfillment experience.

Optimizing on-site conversions for merchants

As marketing messaging and consumer engagement channels expand, the need for a holistic brand experience has become essential. Omnichannel marketing is the key to creating seamless customer experiences across channels.

For brands and retailers that are considering using a conversion rate optimization (CRO) platform such as **Justuno**, here are the best practices and recommendations:

Using CRO and intelligent on-site pop-ups at your digital store not only improve conversions (whether it's lead capture or purchases), but also helps improve the customer experience with personalized, relevant messaging from the moment the customers enters the post-purchase experience.

Merchants of all sizes can use a lead capture and exit intent pop-up, which fires after a new visitor lands on the page (with a set time delay or after a percentage of the page is viewed) and asks the visitor for their email or SMS number. This is often in exchange for a discount, free gift, or other visitor benefit. These promotions are ideal for directly engaging new visitors in your brand voice and giving them something for showing up. In exchange, you get their contact information for remarketing efforts down the road. Seamless integrations between all major email service providers and SMS platforms make this process easier than ever.

With the average visitor conversion rate at around 2%-3%, the truth is the vast majority of your web visitors will arrive and leave, never to return again. Thus, acquiring contact information is crucial for building your marketing lists and conversions down the road.

Similarly, using an exit intent or cart abandoner promotion which fires only when a visitor is about to leave the page is a last chance at getting them to convert or at least give you their contact information. These promotions often include an even higher discount or an otherwise compelling reason to stick around. The beauty of these offers is that they can be set up in a matter of minutes, personalized and edited to showcase your brand voice, and meaningfully engage with your website visitors.

Other promotions include banners, slide-ins, gamification, and intelligent product recommendations. The options and creativity are nearly endless.

While intelligent product recommendations often take longer to set up, incorporating product recommendations like upsells, cross-sells, or showing off your best-selling products can make a huge difference in your bottom line.
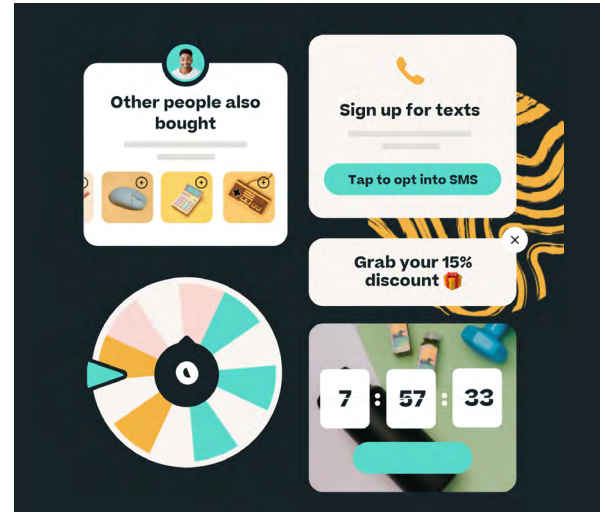
Why CRO works for merchants

Those crisp and clean website experiences that larger merchants have are within reach for smaller merchants. Think intuitive pop-ups that appear (and are easy to close) discounts and offers, and personalized product recommendations.

Merchants may shy away from CRO strategies due to perceived bandwidth and budget constraints, or may believe they don't have enough traffic to create a personalized experience for each visitor. Fortunately, intelligent and high-converting website experiences are more accessible than ever, especially as integrations between applications are easily achievable today.

If it's a budget issue, you can get incredibly high-converting promotions live on your website at a low cost, bringing solid ROI.

Lastly, you can collect data from every single visitor and review their behavior in a comprehensive analytics dashboard to help understand them further. There are numerous examples of brands using highly specific, targeted and high-converting promotions despite a small overall traffic volume when compared to larger brands.

CRO platforms help merchants meet their goals, whether that's bottom-line revenue, improving lead capture, boosting AOV, or selling a greater variety of products. It's more accessible and customizable than ever before, so let CRO help your brand grow.

Personalized marketing automations drive sales
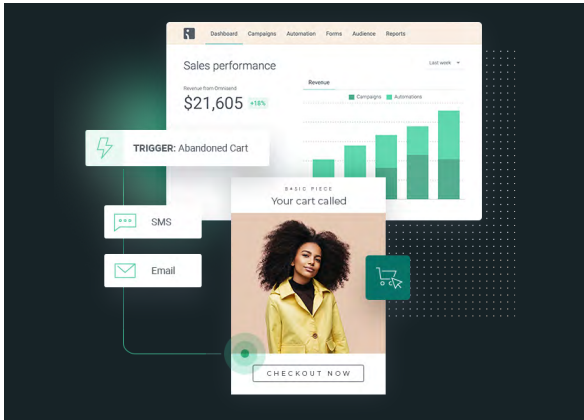
Omnichannel ecommerce marketing can be a daunting notion for merchants. Money is a barrier, running a business is stressful, and resources are stretched thin.

This is where marketing automation makes a huge impact. Platforms that automate a brand's communications, based on the customers' behaviors and preferences, save loads of time and bandwidth. More importantly, they help make consumers feel that they're receiving personalized treatment with each interaction.

Such a software app might be intimidating on the surface, especially if your company has a very small or non-existent marketing department. Luckily, many marketing automation platforms are intuitive and don't require technical expertise beyond basic computer literacy.

Island Olive Oil is a great example of a small business—with just a handful of employees—that is benefiting from marketing automation with **Omnisend**.

The brand's co-owner Angèl Foster places a premium on customer service, whether it's in person at her two locations in Hawaii, or through the online marketplace. Automated email communications help to replicate the shop's intimate boutique feel to a certain degree.

And they work. Even though seven automated emails comprise only 1.22% of Island Olive Oil's email sends, they generate **39% of marketing email revenue**. In less than eight months, automations alone—such as welcome messages, and a series to win back bigger spenders who haven't purchased in a long time—generated nearly enough sales to pay for a full year of Omnisend, their marketing platform.

For any brand that wants to emulate Island Olive Oil's success, here's how to begin:

First, choose the right vehicle. Many platforms offer a free plan, albeit with limitations. We recommend an ecommerce-tailored solution that:

- Integrates with your ecommerce platform
- Features multiple channels, which may be integrated together for an omnichannel marketing approach, to reach today's consumers:
  - Email
  - SMS
  - Web push notifications
  - Enables sophisticated segmentation for targeting
  - Includes pre-built automation workflows and the ability to create your own sequences
  - Analyzes performance with data-rich reporting
  - Provides 24/7 customer support, and one-on-one assistance with paid plans

Next: jump right in. It's easy to get distracted—and paralyzed—by all the things you want to achieve. It's best to focus on one strategy at a time.

Don't worry if your message isn't perfect. It's more important to implement your first campaign workflow to get the sales flowing.

There's no right answer regarding which automation strategy to build first. However, we recommend these three (with their stellar conversion rates) to get you going:

1. A welcome series to introduce your brand **(52.92%)**
2. An abandoned cart series to entice those who leave items in their shopping cart **(39.72%)**
3. A lapsed purchase series to attract customers who haven't purchased in a while **(19.78%)**

Lastly, experiment with SMS. Use it for stand-alone campaigns or insert them into automation workflows to pack an extra punch. Established ecommerce brands like Divatress are experiencing its value: in its first year of using SMS campaigns with Omnisend, the brand generated $123,000 in sales directly from SMS subscribers.

As these cases illustrate, consumers have come to expect personalization. The most efficient way to tailor your communications is with a marketing automation platform that allows you to easily segment your subscribers based on multiple data points. Better yet, a solution that also incorporates various marketing channels that can work together provides a strong foundation for engaging shoppers throughout the entire customer journey.

ZONOS

Thinking globally in the best of times, worst of times

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times—for ecommerce, that is. Though far from the context in which Dickens wrote the famous line, it rings true in today's evolving world of ecommerce.

Ecommerce opportunities are ever-growing with new shopping cart platforms, online marketplaces, auctions, and more. While these multichannel selling platforms provide endless possibilities for businesses to grow—best of times—they also make ecommerce a highly competitive space because of its accessibility to almost anyone—worst of times.

We don't want to scare you; rather, **Zonos** wants to help you take your business to the next level with tips on gaining a competitive edge during the current ecommerce boom.

Tip #1:
Go international

A key factor in staying competitive is expanding your potential customer base across the globe. There is a stigma around international shipping because of all the "surprise" fees involved, along with the need for HS (Harmonized System) code product classification.

Fear not, there are ways to smoothly implement international ecommerce into your business and use it competitively. Calculating, displaying, and collecting the fees involved with an international shipment at checkout can put you ahead of your competition while expanding your target market. Tools that calculate a total landed cost (duties, taxes, and fees) and auto-classify your products will all help create a smooth cross-border customer experience.

Tip #2:
Know your competition and market your strengths

Think about it: If a customer is comparing your products to those of your competitor, they want to know why they should choose yours. Are your offerings more affordable? Is the quality better? Do you offer a seamless international shopping experience that others don't? Knowing and communicating these strengths could be the difference between gaining a loyal customer— or losing them to a competitor.

The best way to promote your business' competitive strengths is by going big in your branding and marketing. Communication with your customers individually, while crucial, may not be enough to stand out in the ecommerce world. You need to spread the message through branding. When you market your business and products, you should be highlighting the features that give you a competitive edge, whether through your slogan, infographics, website, social media posts, etc. to spread the word on a large scale.

Tip #3:
Omnichannel selling

Going international and marketing your strengths is important, but branching outside of your website could increase your sales even more. Buyers will shop where most convenient, and sometimes that isn't your website. Selling on channels such as Google Shopping, Etsy, eBay, and Instagram can make your products more accessible than solely having them on your website. Providing this flexibility for buyers can help gain customers and customer loyalty, growing your business exponentially.
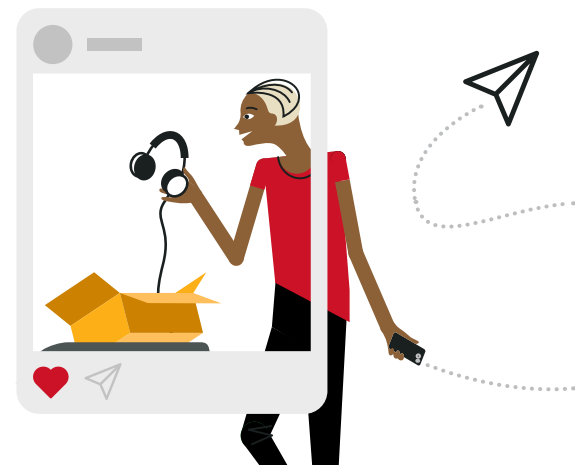
To recap

You need to have competitive products, know what makes your business or products stand out against the competition. Make it known through branding and marketing and branch out through omnichannel selling. The combination of these three tips can be the recipe for ecommerce success, making it the best of times for your online business.

The post-purchase journey

Touchpoints in the post-purchase journey include everything that happens following the consumer's purchase: the check-out process, customer communications about their order, shipping and fulfillment, returns, and more.

From the standpoint of customer retention, the post-purchase experience carries a lot more significance than the pre-purchase stages–but experiences far less investment.[7]

From cyberattacks like malware and phishing to bad actors using stolen credit card information, ecommerce website security is serious business. Consumers want to effortlessly start up where they left off, whether on a mobile phone, a laptop, or in a store, but merchants don't want to alienate their customers with cumbersome security practices.

Using machine learning technology, centralized fraud prevention systems are allowing fast, accurate decision-making in real-time to identify fraudulent transactions.

Shipping and fulfillment is a critical area that greatly affects the customer experience. Whether you do shipping in-house or outsource to an ecommerce fulfillment provider, a shipping platform can streamline order processing, allowing for multiple carriers and more flexibility with the shipping options consumers expect today.

Likewise, having an efficient returns program that is consumer friendly by offering self-serve options enhances the customer experience. Merchants can reduce the likelihood of returns and encourage brand loyalty by paying close attention to buying journeys and offering relevant returns information along key touchpoints.
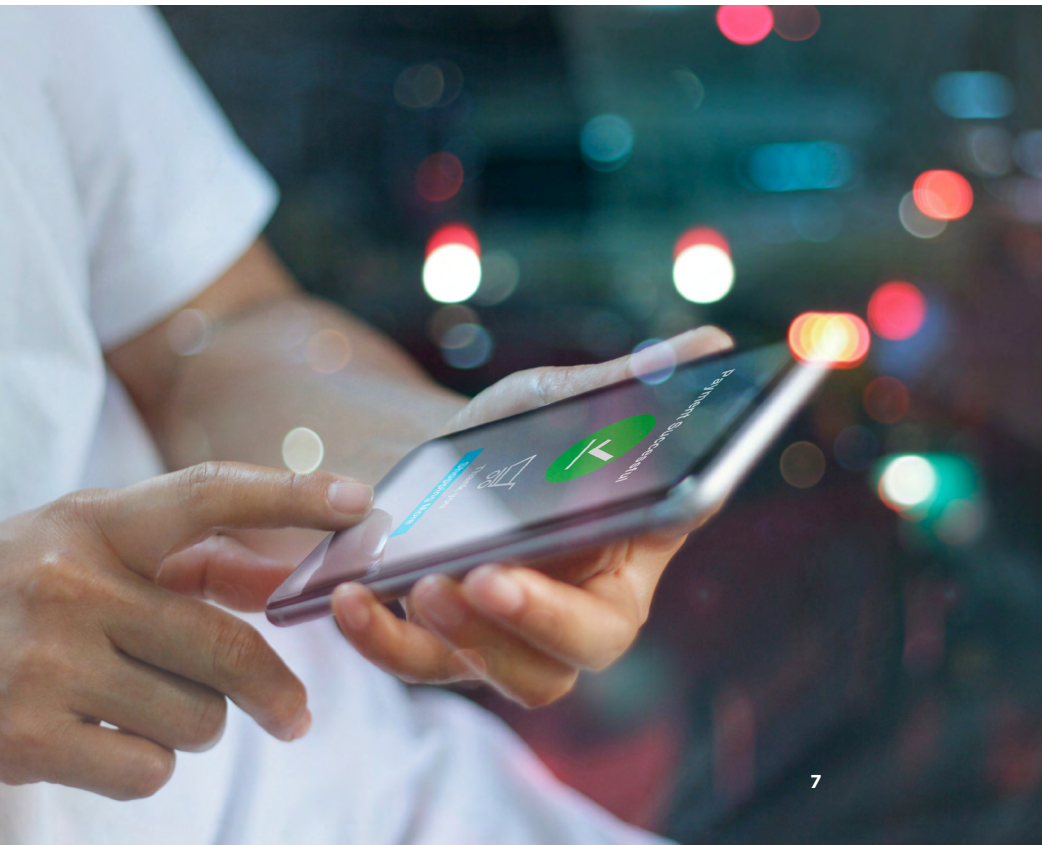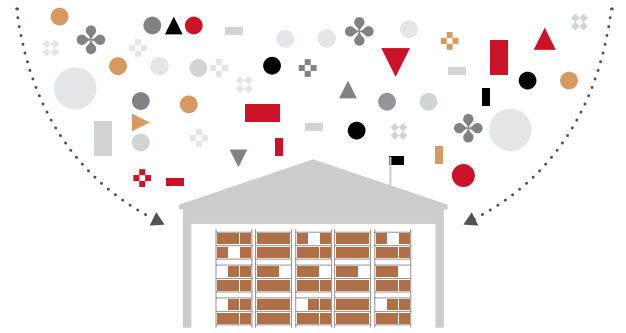
Digital transformation for online merchants to address fraud

As the world witnessed a slowdown in the brick-and-mortar arena due to the global pandemic, COVID-19 has yielded an impressive uptick in DTC ecommerce. Dubbed as the "new normal," online transactions are continuing to increase as a preferred method for purchasing from apparel, electronics, toys, home and luxury goods to health and pet care items, construction materials, vehicles, and more.

The growth in DTC ecommerce translates to an exponential broadening of the playing field for opportunistic fraudsters seeking to exploit both veteran and emerging online businesses and storefronts. There's an array of ever-evolving tactics, including fraudulent returns and chargebacks, mixed cart and gift card fraud, volume bot attacks, human chat manipulations, account takeover attempts, mule rerouting and triangulation fraud, phishing, pharming, and others.

Prudent brands and retailers that maintain online sales platforms will make it their business to keep themselves educated about cyber threats, especially fraud, and employ the latest and most reputable anti-fraud software to monitor and safeguard their transactions. They will ensure their systems, hardware, and software are up to date, and use the most comprehensive and advanced solutions available to protect their enterprises. One example is the use of advanced tools for secure email encryption.

Additionally, here are some basic best practices that enable secure online transactions while providing the assurances that today's consumers are looking for:

1. Ascertaining that every e-commerce site has a valid, verifiable, and up-to-date SSL certificate.
2. Implementing a multi-factor authentication process for logins.
3. Employing a third-party payment processing system, such as PayPal or Square.
4. Using security plug-ins, such as those offered by WordPress.
5. Subscribing to an advanced software provider, such as **NoFraud**, for the conducting of real-time analysis of all online sales and patterns—flagging, blocking, and even terminating suspicious activity.
6. Taking advantage of horizontal scaling via the cloud during peak sales periods, to better foil potential cyber threats as sales flows increase.

Other steps to weigh reflect human considerations, like ensuring that employees with varying levels of security access have been appropriately vetted and are monitored, especially during holiday seasons when many businesses employ extra staff to handle increased volume. Another human consideration involves employee training on how to recognize, report, and ultimately mitigate fraud attempts—through monitoring of online sales, review of transactions, embracing secure email and social media protocols, as well as phone and online chat communications. These are essential basic steps that every online business ought to take seriously.

The cost of not doing so is sobering. A recent TransUnion credit bureau report cited a whopping **25% increase in online fraud attempts in the U.S. across industries within the first four months of 2021 alone**, compared to the last four months of 2020.[8] With increases like this, it would be understandable for a business to cast a wide, hermetic, and expansive security net around their ecommerce activities. Doing so, however, might ultimately yield too many barriers for would-be customers, resulting in an unreasonable level of "false positives" on flagged transactions, leading to an untold loss of potential sales and consumer goodwill, which will end up costing businesses many times more than fraud itself.

Striking a healthy balance between a robust security program and a thoughtful customer-centric approach makes good sense for all merchants interested in expanding and securing their sales in the increasingly sophisticated and complex ecommerce arena.

Tackling shipping challenges head on

Navigating the complexities of ecommerce shipping can be challenging but having the right tools and technologies in place enables online merchants of all sizes to streamline end-to-end fulfillment operations, stay competitive with retail giants such as Amazon, and ultimately deliver a better experience to their customers.

For many online merchants that are growing their businesses, learning to run a seamless and successful shipping operation is fraught with difficulty. Workflow roadblocks and inefficient processes not only threaten end-to-end fulfillment and your customer's experience; they can also end up costing an arm and a leg. In fact, a recent **Shippo** survey found **58% of ecommerce merchants see the cost of shipping as the biggest challenge for their business**.

Rising consumer demand and expectations, combined with the logistical headaches caused by the 2021 supply chain crisis, has made digital transformation is necessary for streamlining processes, eliminating human error and efficiently scaling your ecommerce business.

So where do you begin when considering new solutions and automations to integrate into your ecommerce fulfillment workflow and tech stack? Luckily, there are a number of actions you can implement quickly to optimize your shipping operations:

Compare carriers and service-levels in one place to save on shipping costs

The carrier ecosystem is vast, and it can be challenging to determine which options will best meet your and your customers' needs while also preserving your bottom line. Solutions that let you access and compare rates across a vast network of carriers gives you real-time visibility across the entire ecosystem. By comparing carriers and rates in one place, you can quickly identify the most cost-effective and consumer-friendly options for all your ecommerce shipments.

Automate manual processes to eliminate human error and expedite shipping operations.

Not only do manual repeatable processes slow down operations, they also leave room for costly mistakes. Identify where you can implement process automations to speed up operations with more reliability. One potential solution can be found in shipping automation rules, which auto-apply your most used carrier and service-level preferences as defaults or "if-then" rules, helping you print labels and get packages out the door 50% faster.

Integrate ecommerce workflows for a more seamless end-to-end experience.

By integrating touchpoints across your ecommerce experience, you'll ensure end-to-end operations are fully connected and running smoothly, from order and inventory management to fulfillment and returns. For example, by connecting your ecommerce store and order information with a robust shipping solution, you'll streamline your fulfillment process to get orders out the door and delivered to your customers faster.

If you're looking to digitally transform your ecommerce business, a good first step is to map out your ideal end-to-end workflow, and then evaluate which technologies will make that workflow more seamless and efficient. By investing in solutions such as Shippo that help you save on shipping costs, speed up fulfillment operations, and scale alongside your business, you can spend less time worrying about shipping challenges, and more time focusing on building and growing into the future.

Happy Returns
by PayPal

Adopting the right returns strategy for seamless omnichannel ecommerce

McKinsey & Company has called omnichannel "the path to value" for retailers. But McKinsey warns, "retailers can invest in the wrong thing, and quickly fall into a downward spiral that can destroy value."[9]

Consumers want seamless ecommerce solutions that work across all channels. A key element—especially for retailers and DTC brands in apparel, footwear, and accessories—is to give consumers a simple and efficient way to handle returns and exchanges.

A better customer experience

Your shoppers have high expectations—and you will put your business at risk if you underperform. Research from global payments service Klarna found 83% of online shoppers admit to getting frustrated with retailers that have an inefficient returns process while 84% will reject those that deliver a poor returns experience.[10]

Unfortunately, dealing with returns and exchanges can be a costly and time-consuming challenge for merchants. Pain points include:

Managing costs—Shoppers expect free returns, but can you afford it? Shipping and handling costs keep rising. Returns-related calls to your service center can also add up, especially if your team is spending a significant amount of time manually generating return labels or answering questions like "where's my refund?"

Initiating refunds—Shoppers want their money back immediately. Refunding at the time of carrier scan keeps your customers happy, but you don't really know what's coming back. Waiting until warehouse inspection leads to frustration, increases customer service contacts and ultimately, impacts shopper retention.

Processing returns—Merchants often overlook the importance of reverse logistics. Mail returns can be complicated and time consuming for your 3PL, and lack of visibility into the status of each return leaves your operations and service teams in the dark.

Put yourself in your customer's shoes

When you purchase an item online that's the wrong size or color or that you're simply not happy with, you want to exchange or return it immediately with minimal effort. Giving your shoppers a fast, efficient path for returns and exchanges enhances the customer experience and nurtures brand loyalty. That's why more leading retailers are choosing to outsource to a returns software and reverse logistics platform and expert such as **Happy Returns by PayPal**.

Delight shoppers—Automate your returns with a flexible, consumer-friendly and merchant-branded returns portal that removes the friction of online returns for your customers. Top it off with immediately initiated refunds when shoppers bring their items to one of 3,800+ Return Bar locations nationwide.

Save money—Cut your shipping costs by an average of 20% compared to mailed returns, thanks to aggregated shipping (many returns from many merchants in the same shipment) from Return Bar locations.

Retain revenue—Intelligent, one-click exchanges based on return reason and available inventory help you keep more of your sales revenue.

Boost sustainability—Beyond the reduced waste achieved by aggregating multiple returns into one shipment versus individually shipping each return, Happy Returns replaces cardboard boxes with reusable totes, helping customers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 120k lbs for every million returns.[11]

With global ecommerce continuing to rise dramatically and the costs and complexity of returns only increasing, it's critical for retailers and DTC brands to identify the right returns and exchanges solution to drive your business success. A positive return process can be the make-or-break between a one-time shopper and a repeat purchaser.

Revolutionizing omnichannel with digitization
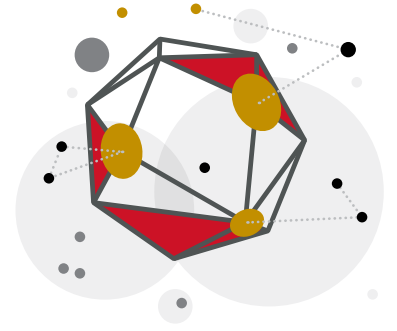
What it takes to run, scale and grow your DTC ecommerce business has been upended by the pandemic and accelerated technological growth. Now, the rush is on to more fully digitize the consumer's purchase journey, across channels, online or in store. By digitizing more aspects of the customer journey, smaller brands and retailers have great potential to level the playing field against their larger counterparts.

Merchants can move beyond the basic functions of their existing ecommerce store such as SEO, catalog management, order management and check-out by implementing affordable ecommerce applications that enhance their ability to scale and grow as they add new ecommerce features.

Marketing applications allow merchants to have greater control over the customer journey by personalizing it, providing a rich online customer experience and supporting customer loyalty. Digital solutions are enabling even startup online merchants to more fully automate shipping processes across multiple carriers and offer international sales on a more seamless basis.

The protection of personal and financial information requires constant vigilance by merchants, beyond the security and data protection measures offered by major ecommerce platforms. At checkout, advanced fraud prevention systems are enabling merchants to automatically identify fraudulent transactions. And when a customer has a return or exchange, it's critical to offer a frictionless returns experience driven by automation and customer communications.

Digitization liberates brands and retailers to think strategically about making the best use of the data they acquire to improve the customer experience and develop loyal customers. Over time, the more data these applications capture, and more ways to connect and transfer data between platforms are possible, the more intelligent they become to enable more features.

Pro tips for IT planning

The technology market for ecommerce and omnichannel is evolving fast. From the big-picture perspective, ecommerce platforms are moving toward enabling all conversion channels that funnel through one digital environment. When considering tech investments, here are tips from Ryder's Sippin' & Shippin' podcast:[12]

- Stay flexible to make better use of future technologies. Look at where you want to be in 3 years.

- Don't plan too far out: plan investments up to 6 months in advance to take advantage of new, affordable technologies as they develop.

About Ryder System, Inc.

Ryder System, Inc. (NYSE: R) is a leading logistics and transportation company. It provides supply chain, dedicated transportation, and fleet management solutions, including warehousing and distribution, e-commerce fulfillment, last-mile delivery, managed transportation, professional drivers, freight brokerage, leasing, maintenance, commercial truck rental, and used vehicle sales to some of the world's most-recognized brands. Ryder provides services throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Ryder is regularly recognized for its industry-leading practices in third-party logistics, technology-driven innovations, commercial vehicle maintenance, environmental stewardship, corporate social responsibility, world-class safety, and security programs.

ryder.com

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