



**Buyer's Guide for IT and
Digital Commerce Teams:**

Selecting a B2C Commerce Platform



When the success of a digital commerce business hinges on the technology that powers it, choosing a B2C commerce platform can be a daunting task. Consumer expectations change quickly – with 73% of Americans likely to abandon a brand after a single poor customer experience. Margins are getting smaller with higher acquisition costs. And competition for consumer attention is greater than ever. With all of these things in mind, digital commerce leaders need a commerce platform that can meet their unique business requirements while being flexible enough to drive long-term success.

At its core, a commerce platform enables businesses to sell directly to consumers across various physical and digital channels for omnichannel sales and marketing. Some solutions provide the basic functionality needed to sell online with minimal supporting capabilities, while others come with a depth of functionality out of the box and intuitive business-friendly UIs.

There are several factors that determine which platform is right for a business, including company size, technical maturity, cost, number of products, and more. However, buying a commerce platform for a B2C company has grown complicated and frustrating. Each vendor uses their own jargon to define the functions within their platforms, with little to no consistency in the market.

We created this guide to help B2C commerce leaders like you navigate the complex landscape of ecommerce platforms, providing you with a structured approach to assess your business needs, understand platform options, and dive into essential features.



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Understanding Your Business Needs

A DTC brand with an ecommerce site and three brick and mortar locations will have very different business needs than a multi-brand enterprise company with thousands of SKUs and hundreds of physical stores across the globe. Understanding what your business needs to streamline operations, optimize performance and customer experience, and enhance both the non-technical and technical user experience will set you on the path to finding the right commerce platform.

Assessing your company's goals and objectives

What do you want to achieve with a new commerce platform? Here are a few examples:

- Increase revenue from digital channels
- Reduce technical costs
- Improve time to launch new experiences
- Expand into new markets and channels

Understanding your company's goals and objectives first will help you understand what you need in a commerce solution to achieve them.

Know your target audience

Have your customers expressed dissatisfaction with the shopping experience? Is your audience converting higher for buy now pay later payment types than traditional credit cards? Knowing their preferences and behaviors can help you narrow down your platform selection based on which features they offer, or extensibility to build those features.

Analyze your product catalog

How many products do you offer, and what types of products are they? Do you have complex product variants? Consider your catalog's size and complexity when evaluating platforms, as some solutions can handle complex catalog needs better than others. Here are some specific use cases to consider:

- Digital products (gift cards, eBooks, etc.)
- Physical products
- Free trial products
- Subscription products
- Bundles, collections, and product sets



Know your inventory and order management requirements

How many stores, warehouses, and distribution centers do you use to fulfill orders? Do you need real-time inventory tracking and alerts? Do you want shoppers to see real-time inventory levels on product pages or search results? Do you want shoppers to see estimated delivery date on the storefront while they're shopping? Inventory management directly impacts customer satisfaction, so it's critical to know how a new commerce solution can fulfill these requirements.

Determine your budget

When determining your budget, consider not only the initial setup costs but also ongoing maintenance, hosting (if needed), and potential customization expenses. Be realistic about what you can afford

Evaluate the Platform's Partner Network

When considering commerce platforms, examine the depth of their partner ecosystem. Check for integration support, testing, and documentation for partners. Understand how the platform manages third-party vendors and what kind of access you'll have to them.

Craft a Detailed RFP

An RFP is a formal document that outlines your business needs and requirements. Include your business use cases, data migration plan, and other relevant criteria in the RFP. Being specific in your RFP allows vendors to provide tailored responses and demos, making it easier to compare their offerings effectively.



Platform Architecture: What makes sense for your business?

A well-designed architecture provides the foundation for scalability, customization, integration, performance, security, and adaptability. This enables your business to drive growth, deliver a superior customer experience, and stay ahead in the ever-changing digital landscape.

- ▶ **Flexibility:** A flexible platform allows you to cherry pick only the modules or capabilities you need versus ripping and replacing an entire solution. For example, you can start with a vendor's basic catalog capabilities and eventually replace them with a 3rd party best of breed PIM if needed in the future.
- ▶ **Scalability:** Evaluate the platform's scalability to handle increasing traffic, growing product catalogs, and adding new brands or sites around the globe. Can it efficiently scale both vertically (adding more resources to a single server) and horizontally (adding more servers) as your business expands? Additionally, check the platform's performance under heavy loads. It should deliver fast page load times, especially for product pages and during peak traffic periods like holidays and sales events.
- ▶ **Extensibility:** A solution that comes with rich out-of-the-box functionality and 100% API coverage allows you to extend the platform's attributes without significant development costs — which means you can tailor the frontend and backend to deliver those differentiating experiences and improve operational efficiency. To ensure there's no latency between the core platform and customizations, look for a vendor that monitors, scales, and hosts the extensions in a single data center.
- ▶ **Integrations:** Determine if the commerce platform can easily integrate with a variety of other systems, such as a CRM, marketing automation, or personalization engine, to ensure real-time and accurate data flow. Beware of vendors who list a broad technology ecosystem but only offer point-to-point connections rather than fully built-out orchestrations.



- ▶ **One user interface with shared data:** A single UI with a unified data model provides a single source of truth and reporting for all functions (i.e., ecommerce, order management, and subscriptions) while streamlining the day-to-day commerce operations. A single UI empowers both non-technical and technical users in a retail business to work more efficiently, service customers quicker, and use data to adapt to changing demands.
- ▶ **Microservices-Based:** Microservices are distinct commerce services that can be assembled to perform a specific commerce function. A commerce platform with microservices based architecture will make it easier for future custom development with reusability of the microservices. Look for a platform that provides access to microservices to be extended and modified without breaking the core code of the platform.
- ▶ **API-First:** API-first is an architecture approach in which APIs are built before the business functionality as opposed to building the product first and later adding API layers. API-first promotes productivity, scale, and agility; and is a key component of a “futureproofed” platform that can adapt as your business needs to integrate with new technology to support business growth. Look for an API-first vendor who prioritizes full coverage of capabilities with their APIs and has publicly available documentation.
- ▶ **Modularity:** Modular capabilities are a set of microservices packaged together to perform a certain commerce function. This architecture model greatly limits or abolishes dependencies between services, making it easier to take a phased approach to implementation and make updates or maintain the platform without the risk of breaking the entire solution. Look for a vendor who thoughtfully packages modules with the right level of granularity to balance development flexibility and agility with manageability.
- ▶ **Pre-packaged storefront:** This type of solution offers a rapid and comprehensive way to establish a high-performance omnichannel commerce storefront. Some solutions include fully featured B2C themes, an easy-to-use content management system, a lightning-fast Content Delivery Network, full access to pre-integrated commerce solutions, and hassle-free hosting, management, and monitoring services.
- ▶ **Headless With Storefront Options:** Headless architecture separates the backend commerce functions from the frontend presentation layer for agility and modern manageability. Look for a provider who supports headless deployments with pre-packaged storefronts out-of-the-box or pre-built storefront accelerators in popular programming languages like React or Vue.js.



In a recent report, Gartner noted that all digital experiences will eventually be built in a composable fashion. Monolithic platforms simply cannot keep pace with the speed of change and are becoming a liability for companies who want to be agile. Even headless systems don't offer the flexibility of composable because headless essentially gives you two monoliths – one at the frontend and one at the backend.

Composability comes with the promise of super customizable tech ecosystems to meet the unique needs of a business. However, many digital commerce leaders have come to equate composable commerce with a complex and costly web of integrations and customizations that require a team of skilled technical developers to build and maintain—causing bottlenecks for non-technical users that need to quickly update the customer experience and track its performance.

Is a composable commerce platform right for your business?

As a result, brands and retailers are seeking more streamlined composable solutions that allow for quicker launches, cost-effectiveness, and reduced technical complexities, while still meeting their business needs effectively. For example, a composable solution like Kibo enables you to implement only the capabilities you need while consolidating frontend and backend functions into a single UI.

If you're looking for a manageable, API-first composable solution, look for a platform that allows you to:

- Only use and pay for the solutions you need for better flexibility and choice, and tailor the solution as business needs evolve.
- Leverage a breadth and depth of out-of-the-box capabilities to launch customer experiences quickly.
- Launch omnichannel, multisite, and global customer experiences faster and with less dev work at a lower total cost of ownership.
- Tap into backend operations, such as order management, to improve customer experiences.



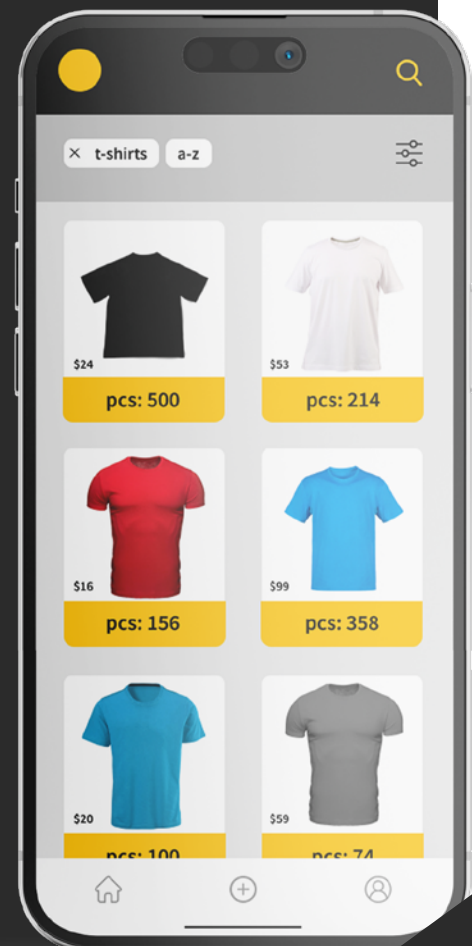
Essential B2C Commerce Functions to Evaluate

We outlined the top B2C ecommerce platform functions and capabilities to look for when evaluating vendors. For each function, we provided the top features to look for to ensure it can meet your company's requirements.

Product Catalog Management

The product catalog manages detailed product information, such as specifications, pricing, and availability. It also supports functions like site search, to improve product discovery. A company's requirements for a product catalog depend on their number of SKUs, product complexity, and number of sites and geos the catalog will span. When evaluating a product catalog for a B2C company, there are several important factors to consider.

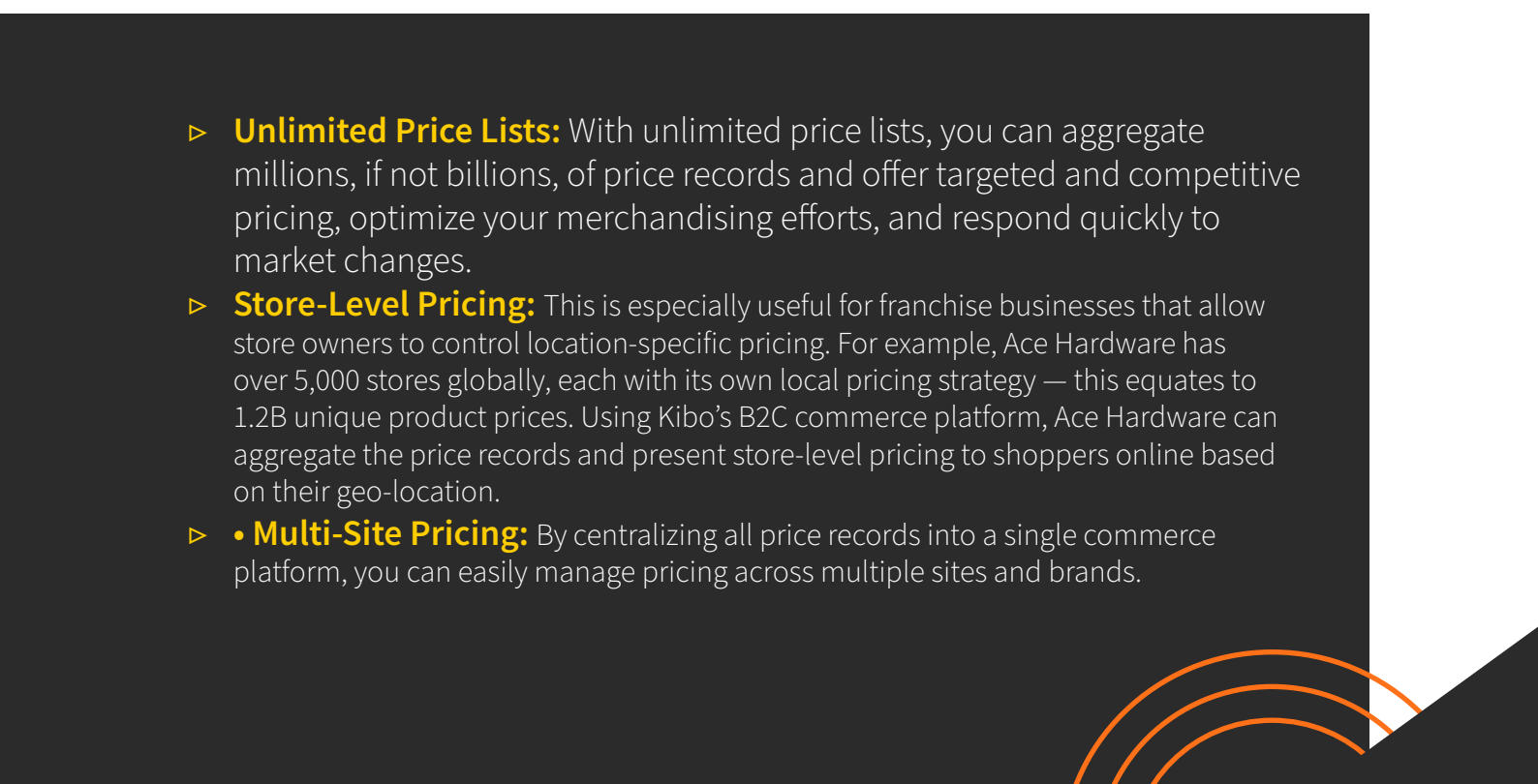
- ▶ **Comprehensive and Accurate Information:** The product catalog should provide detailed and accurate information about each product, including sizing, features, pricing, availability, and any relevant how-to information.
- ▶ **Rich Media and Visual Content:** High-quality product images, videos, and other visual assets play a crucial role in B2C purchase decisions. A good product catalog should include visually appealing and informative media that effectively showcases the products from different angles, highlights key features, and demonstrates their practical applications. Rich visual content helps shoppers make decisions quicker and significantly reduces costs associated with returns due to receiving items "not as pictured."
- ▶ **Integration and Real-time Updates:** Seamless integration with other systems, such as inventory management and pricing databases, is essential for maintaining accurate and up-to-date information.



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- ▶ **Visual Merchandising:** Merchandising plays a crucial role in engaging customers, optimizing sales, and driving business growth. By strategically curating and presenting products in a compelling manner, merchandising enhances the overall user experience and influences purchasing decisions.
 - ▶ **Scaling With Volume and Multiple Sites:** As your product catalog grows, ensure that the platform can scale without causing performance issues. Find out the maximum number of products, categories, and attributes it can support. If your catalogs span multiple sites or brands, make sure you don't have to duplicate catalogs for each site and have flexibility to reuse data with site or location specific pricing.

Omnichannel Pricing

Omnichannel pricing ensures that the prices of products or services remain consistent across various sales channels, such as websites, mobile apps, brick-and-mortar stores, and social media platforms, while using the same product data without duplication and managing various feeds. However, omnichannel pricing can also be useful when you have different prices based on a shopper's location or you have multiple sites and brands.

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- ▶ **Unlimited Price Lists:** With unlimited price lists, you can aggregate millions, if not billions, of price records and offer targeted and competitive pricing, optimize your merchandising efforts, and respond quickly to market changes.
 - ▶ **Store-Level Pricing:** This is especially useful for franchise businesses that allow store owners to control location-specific pricing. For example, Ace Hardware has over 5,000 stores globally, each with its own local pricing strategy — this equates to 1.2B unique product prices. Using Kibo's B2C commerce platform, Ace Hardware can aggregate the price records and present store-level pricing to shoppers online based on their geo-location.
 - ▶ **Multi-Site Pricing:** By centralizing all price records into a single commerce platform, you can easily manage pricing across multiple sites and brands.
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Promotions Management

Promotion management engines allow B2C companies to create and execute a variety of promotional campaigns such as discounts, coupons, flash sales, and loyalty programs. These promotions can attract more customers, encourage repeat purchases, and ultimately increase sales and revenue.

Omnichannel Promotions: If you sell across channels, you'll need a platform that has the capability to create promotions that are consistent and synchronized across various sales channels, including your website, mobile app, brick-and-mortar stores, social media, and any other digital touchpoints.

Downstream Data for Promotion Proration: Complex promotions like BOGO and percentage off categories can ramp up sales, but need consistent management on the back end when it comes to reporting and returns prorations at the item and order levels. Make sure your storefront can pass promotion information accurately downstream, so customer servicing tools and reporting maintain integrity.

Flexibility and Customization:

The promotion engine should allow you to create a wide range of promotions, including discounts, coupons, tiered promotions, bundle deals, and loyalty programs. It should also provide flexibility in terms of targeting specific customer segments or order conditions.

Rule-Based

Promotions: Look for a platform that supports rule-based promotions, where you can define conditions that trigger the promotion, such as minimum order value, specific products in the cart, or customer demographics.

Analytics and reporting:

Ensure that you can track the performance of each promotion, including conversion rates, revenue impact, and ROI



Cart & Checkout

A smooth and user-friendly checkout process fosters trust and confidence among customers. When shoppers have a positive experience during checkout, they are more likely to return for another purchase. When reviewing the cart & checkout function of a commerce platform, look for the below key features.

- **Omnichannel Transparency:** During the shopping and checkout experience, customers now expect transparency into inventory levels at store locations, accurate shipment time for ship to home, and products with low inventory. When selecting a storefront vendor, ensure they have the ability to expose critical backend information to customers.

- **Consistent or universal shopping cart:** A consistent or universal shopping cart across channels refers to the seamless and unified shopping experience that customers can enjoy when they interact with a retailer across various platforms and touchpoints, such as an online store, mobile app, or social media.



- **User-Friendly Cart Interface:** The cart should be easy for customers to use. It should allow them to easily add, remove, and update items, as well as view the contents of their cart at any time during their shopping session.

- **Multiple Payment Options:** Support a variety of payment methods, including credit/debit cards, digital wallets (e.g., PayPal, Apple Pay), and alternative payment methods like buy now, pay later services.

- **Compliance and Security:** Confirm that the platform complies with relevant regulations, including GDPR for customer data protection and PCI DSS, and that it has robust security measures in place to safeguard customer information.

- **Tax Calculation:** Automate the calculation of taxes based on the customer's location and the products being purchased. This helps ensure compliance with tax regulations.



- ▷ **Promo Codes and Discounts:** Allow customers to apply promo codes, discounts, and gift cards during checkout. This can incentivize purchases and increase customer loyalty.
- ▷ **Abandoned Cart Recovery:** Implement automated emails or notifications to remind customers about items left in their carts and encourage them to complete their purchase.
- ▷ **Product Recommendations:** Offer related or recommended products during the checkout process to upsell and cross-sell, increasing the average order value.
- ▷ **Multiple Language and Currency Support:** If your company serves international customers, support multiple languages and currencies to cater to a global audience.

Site Search

Site search is a critical component in the path to purchase — in fact, Forrester found that 43% of users on retail websites go directly to the search bar. When customers can easily locate products they want, they are more likely to make a purchase. On the other hand, if they struggle to find items, they may leave the site without completing a transaction. When comparing vendors, look for these key site search features that will impact conversions and add convenience to the purchase process.

- **Accurate results:** The search results should be relevant to the keywords entered by the shopper and provide the most relevant product options available.
- **Filter options:** Filtering results based on product category, price, color, size, brand, etc. ensures the shopper finds a product that best matches their needs.
- **Educational content:** Customers will use the search function for more than finding a product. It can be useful to include educational content, such as how-to videos or informational articles, that will help the shopper make an informed decision.
- **Leverage inventory and fulfillment data:** Consider how you can tie in inventory and fulfillment data to search results. With a seamless integration between the ecommerce platform and order management system, you can present relevant inventory data in search results to help customers make informed decisions. For example, you could show local inventory availability based on the individual's chosen store location or allow customers to filter results based on fulfillment options (i.e., curbside pick-up or ship from store).



Customer Management and Service Tools

Providing excellent customer service is crucial for keeping customers satisfied. When consumers have positive interactions with your brand through customer service, they are more likely to become repeat customers and recommend your products or services to others. Conversely, 73% of shoppers are likely to abandon a brand after one poor customer service experience. When it comes to customer service and management tools, there are a few key features to look for.

- **Track and manage orders:** Customer service representatives should have the ability to track and manage customer orders and returns, and make any modifications as needed by the shopper.
- **Cart takeover:** The cart takeover feature enables customer service representatives to take over an online cart and make changes with an offline order so that the cart has the shopper's desired products and product configurations.
- **User-friendly interface:** An intuitive admin interface for managing customer service interactions is essential for your support team's efficiency and quick onboarding for new employees.
- **CRM integration:** Integration with your CRM can help you manage customer data effectively and personalize interactions based on customer history and preferences.
- **Return and refund management:** An easy-to-use system for managing returns and refunds is crucial for customer satisfaction. Ensure the platform has features for processing returns, issuing refunds, and tracking return status.
- **Self-service features:** Features like knowledge bases, FAQs, order tracking, and self-managed returns can help shoppers find the answers they need quickly and reduce the number of customer service interactions.

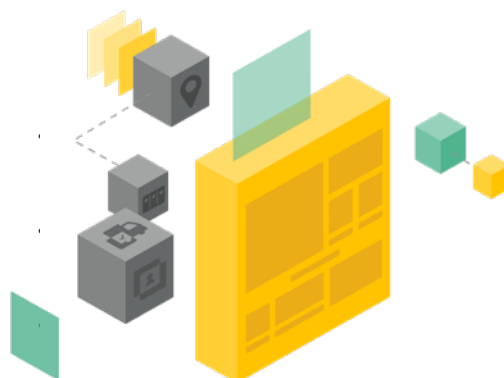


Leverage Backend Systems to Drive Better Frontend Experiences

Fulfillment plays a pivotal role in shaping the customer experience, particularly in the world of instant gratification and multi-channel shopping. According to Harvard Business Review, 73% of consumers prefer shopping across multiple channels. And another recent study found that 80% of shoppers prefer to ship with retailers who show delivery dates at checkout.

Consumers are placing greater importance on transparent and accurate delivery experiences, which requires, seamless integration between commerce platforms and order management systems. When evaluating commerce platforms, look for a solution that seamlessly leverages backend operations to drive better frontend experiences.

- **Real-Time Delivery Information:** Seek out a commerce platform that integrates seamlessly and in real-time with inventory management systems and carrier network status to provide accurate cost estimates and delivery timeframes.
- **Cross-Channel Inventory Visibility:** This enables the ability to allocate, segment, track, view, update, and balance inventory by product location, status, and more to manage real-time demand and place orders. You can also present physical store inventory on your digital storefront.
- **Intelligent Order Sourcing and Orchestration:** Sources and routes inventory from any supply chain location based on pre-defined business logic or custom extend attributes.
- **Order Fulfillment:** Helps improve fulfillment with picklists, wave-picking, and custom fulfillment flows, such as handling perishable or fragile stock.
- **Analytics and Reporting:** Ask if the platform can provide insights into order volume, customer behavior, and sales trends. Bonus points if the platform can proactively provide alerts into trends that can help with operational efficiency – like notifying teams of locations with excess inventory or inventory shortages in certain locations so fulfillment strategy can shift.



Subscription Business Model Support

For the 51% of global business and technology professionals in Forrester's Priorities 2022 Survey who say that changing their business model is a high priority or the many businesses prioritizing product launches, finding a commerce platform that supports a subscription business model could be key.

Ideally, you want a solution with customer-centric tools that empower non-technical users to effortlessly design complex pricing and discount models, serve customers, and update delivery frequency options — eliminating the need for developer intervention.

Here's what to look for:

- **Subscription Billing Flexibility:** The ability to set up different billing intervals (monthly, quarterly, annually) and support for tiered pricing, discounts, and promotions. This flexibility is crucial for accommodating various customer preferences and pricing strategies.
- **Customer Self-Service:** Providing customers with an easy-to-use online portal to manage their subscriptions, update payment methods, and make changes to their subscription plans. Self-service options improve the customer experience and reduce support overhead.
- **Integration Capabilities:** Seamless integration with other business systems such as inventory management, CRM, and marketing automation tools. Integration capabilities allow for a holistic view of customer data and enhance operational efficiency.
- **Unified UI:** Unify subscriptions management with other business in one UI for inventory, orders, customers, promotions, products and more.



Conclusion

Selecting the right B2C commerce platform is a crucial decision that can significantly impact the success of your online business. This buyer's guide has provided valuable insights into the key factors to consider when evaluating and choosing a platform that aligns with your specific needs and goals. Whether it's scalability, customization, integration capabilities, or user-friendliness, understanding your priorities and conducting thorough research will ultimately lead you to a platform that empowers your business to thrive in the current competitive landscape. By making a well-informed decision, you can pave the way for growth, customer satisfaction, and long-term success.

About Kibo

Kibo Commerce is a composable commerce platform for retailers, manufacturers, distributors, and wholesalers who want to simplify the complexity in their businesses and deliver modern customer experiences. We are the only modular commerce platform supporting experiences that span Order Management, eCommerce, and Subscriptions. Companies like Zwilling, Ace Hardware, and Coastal Construction trust Kibo to bring simplicity and sophistication to commerce operations and exceed customer expectations.

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