E B O O K

WHICH PLATFORM IS THE BEST?

VTEX, Adobe Commerce, Salesforce Commerce Cloud and Shopify: a decision framework to choose based on your business model, not the demo.

STRATEGY · SOLUTION · DATA · AI · COMMERCE

I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE WRONG QUESTION.

One of the most frequent questions in digital projects is: *which is the best ecommerce platform?* The answer is **it depends**. It is not an evasive answer: it is the only responsible one. A platform can be excellent for one company and a bad decision for another.

The outcome depends on a set of variables that are unique to each organization:

Business model	Size	Countries	Channels
Catalog	Integrations	Team capability	Budget
Promo complexity	Customization	Expected speed	Tech strategy

> **SELECTION SHOULD NOT START WITH A DEMO. IT SHOULD START WITH A DIAGNOSIS.**

The difference matters. A demo shows what the platform does well; a diagnosis reveals what your operation needs to do every day. When the process starts with the demo, the conversation revolves around flashy features and postpones what truly defines success: integrations, processes, team capability and total cost over several years.

This ebook proposes a ten-chapter journey: first the business diagnosis and the total cost of ownership; then a balanced read of four platforms common in the region; and finally comparison criteria, frequent causes of failure, a weighted decision framework and a staged selection process.

CHAPTER 01

START WITH THE BUSINESS.

Before looking at technology, describe the operation precisely. Four dimensions concentrate most of the later decisions: business model, catalog, operations and integrations. If these four aren't documented, any platform comparison will be a comparison of opinions.

BUSINESS MODEL

B2C · B2B · D2C · marketplace · franchises · distributors · subscriptions · omnichannel · international sales · combined models.

CATALOG

Product and variant counts · attribute complexity · configurables · bundles · subscriptions · personalization · per-customer catalogs · segment pricing · restrictions.

OPERATIONS

Inventory · distribution centers · stores · click and collect · ship from store · returns · split orders · delivery promises · fulfillment rules · post-sale service.

INTEGRATIONS

ERP · CRM · OMS · WMS · PIM · marketing automation · payments · fraud · taxes · logistics · marketplaces · data warehouse · customer service.

Of the four, integrations are the most underestimated. List them one by one, noting data direction, frequency, volume and which system is the master. That inventory usually explains much of the effort difference between two platforms that looked equivalent in the demo.

CHAPTER 02

TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP.

Comparing licenses alone is a mistake. The real cost of a platform is spread across implementation, operation and evolution — and most of it appears **after** launch.

ENTRY

- License
- Revenue share
- Setup
- Implementation
- Design
- Migration

OPERATION

- Infrastructure
- Apps
- Support
- Maintenance
- QA
- Security

EVOLUTION

- Development
- Integrations
- Upgrades
- Internal team
- Partners
- New capabilities

A platform with a lower license may require greater investment in apps or customization. A platform with a higher initial cost may reduce certain future efforts. That is why **the analysis must span several years**, not the first contract.

> **Rule of thumb:** project the cost over 36 months including evolution. A 12-month comparison almost always favors the wrong option.

CHAPTER 03

VTEX.

Usually considered by organizations seeking commerce, omnichannel, marketplace and regional operation capabilities within an integrated ecosystem.

POSSIBLE STRENGTHS

Enterprise commerce focus · omnichannel capabilities · order management · marketplace functionality · multi-site operation · extensible architecture · strong ecosystem presence in Latin America · support for complex models.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

Need for specialized expertise · dependence on correct architecture · learning curve · implementation and evolution costs · complexity risk without standards · need for partners with real platform knowledge.

IT MAY BE A FIT WHEN

The operation coordinates multiple channels.

A marketplace is required.

The company operates regionally.

An enterprise structure is required.

There are omnichannel use cases.

Multiple sellers are managed.

There are significant integration needs.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Do we need marketplace capabilities?
- How complex is our omnichannel operation?
- Which OMS capabilities will we use?
- What experience does our team or partner have?
- How will we manage evolution?
- What is the expected total cost?

CHAPTER 04

ADOBE COMMERCE.

Usually evaluated when the company requires a high level of flexibility, customization and control over complex experiences or processes.

POSSIBLE STRENGTHS

Flexibility · customization · broad ecosystem · support for complex models · B2C and B2B functionality · control over architecture and development · integration with the Adobe ecosystem · community and extensions.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

Higher technical demands · complex implementations · rigorous maintenance · dependence on development quality · hosting, support and evolution costs · risk of over-customization.

IT MAY BE A FIT WHEN

Highly personalized experiences are needed.

Technical control is needed.

The B2B model has advanced requirements.

There are complex commercial rules.

In-house development capability exists.

Architectural flexibility is sought.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Do we really need this level of customization?
- Can we maintain the solution?
- How will we avoid unnecessary customizations?
- What will the upgrade strategy be?
- Who will govern the architecture?
- What will be standard and what will be custom?

CHAPTER 05

SALESFORCE COMMERCE CLOUD.

Usually considered by enterprise companies already using the Salesforce ecosystem or seeking a platform oriented to global operations and connected experiences.

POSSIBLE STRENGTHS

Salesforce ecosystem · potential integration with CRM, marketing and service · enterprise capabilities · multi-site operation · commercial tools · global scalability · experience and merchandising management.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

Costs · specialized knowledge · ecosystem dependence · implementation complexity · coordination across Salesforce products · less autonomy without an experienced team.

IT MAY BE A FIT WHEN

Salesforce is already strategic.

Multiple brands or regions are operated.

A global solution is needed.

Commerce, CRM and marketing must connect.

Enterprise budget and capability exist.

Solid technology governance exists.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- What concrete value will we get from the ecosystem?
- Which integrations will really be native?
- How will data be managed?
- Which teams will be responsible?
- What will the total cost be?
- What additional capabilities will we need to contract?

CHAPTER 06

SHOPIFY.

Usually stands out for its implementation speed, ease of use, ecosystem and ability to simplify many commerce operations.

POSSIBLE STRENGTHS

Time to market · admin experience · app ecosystem · lower initial complexity · wide availability of talent and partners · growth from simple models to larger operations · lower technical burden.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

App dependence · cumulative ecosystem costs · limits on very specific customizations · complexity when adding too many solutions · enterprise integrations to analyze · restrictions for highly particular models.

IT MAY BE A FIT WHEN

Speed is the priority.

Business-team autonomy matters.

There is a need to launch quickly.

The business model is relatively standard.

Reducing technical complexity is a goal.

Working within conventions is acceptable.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- How many apps will we need?
- What will they cost combined?
- Which processes require customization?
- How will we solve complex integrations?
- What limitations could appear at scale?
- How much of the model can adapt to the standard?

CHAPTER 07

COMPARISON CRITERIA.

01 **Fit with the business model**
The platform must support the processes that create differentiation, not only the standard ones.

02 **Time to market**
Implementation time · complexity · talent availability · dependencies · migration.

03 **Flexibility**
Not all flexibility is positive: it also increases costs, maintenance, risk, technical dependence and time.

04 **Team autonomy**
Can marketing operate without development? Can commercial create promotions? Can content update pages? Can operations resolve incidents?

05 **Scalability**
Traffic · orders · countries · brands · currencies · languages · channels · catalog · integrations.

06 **Ecosystem**
Partners · developers · apps · documentation · support · community · available talent.

07 **Security and compliance**
Roles · permissions · auditing · data protection · certifications · corporate requirements · regulations.

CHAPTER 08

WHY IMPLEMENTATIONS FAIL.

Most projects that miss expectations don't fail because of the platform chosen. They fail because of decisions made around it.

LACK OF DEFINITION

The project starts before requirements and priorities are settled.

COPYING THE OLD SITE

The same logic is migrated without questioning processes.

OVER-CUSTOMIZATION

The standard is modified to replicate practices that could be changed.

UNDERESTIMATED INTEGRATIONS

ERP, inventory, orders, prices and customers require more work than expected.

LACK OF OWNERSHIP

Technology, ecommerce and business have no clear responsibilities.

NO ROADMAP

Everything is attempted during launch.

FEATURES OVER ADOPTION

A technically complete solution can fail if the team doesn't know how to operate it.

CHAPTER 09

DECISION FRAMEWORK.

Assign a weight to each criterion, then score every platform. **The weighting matters more than the score**: it is where the company's strategy is expressed.

CRITERION	WEIGHT	SCORE	TOTAL
Fit with the business model			
Customer experience			
Operations			
Integrations			
Time to market			
Total cost			
Flexibility			
Autonomy			
Scalability			
Ecosystem			
Security			
Internal capability			

A company focused on **speed** may weight time to market higher.

A complex **B2B operation** may prioritize commercial rules and catalogs.

An **omnichannel** company may prioritize orders and inventory.

CHAPTER 10

HOW TO ORGANIZE THE SELECTION PROCESS.

01 DIAGNOSIS

- Interviews
- Processes
- Systems
- Pain points
- Objectives
- Constraints

02 DEFINITION

- Requirements
- Priorities
- Use cases
- Criteria
- Budget
- Timeline

03 EVALUATION

- Shortlist
- Demos
- Scenarios
- References
- Technical eval.
- Commercial eval.

04 VALIDATION

- Proof of concept
- Architecture
- Integrations
- Plan
- Risks
- Costs

05 DECISION

- Scorecard
- Recommendation
- Negotiation
- Partner
- Roadmap

THE FINAL ANSWER

Is VTEX the best?
It can be, for an operation that values omnichannel, marketplace and integrated capabilities.

Is Adobe Commerce the best?
It can be, for a company that needs flexibility, control and advanced customization.

Is Salesforce Commerce Cloud the best?
It can be, for an enterprise organization integrated with the Salesforce ecosystem.

Is Shopify the best?
It can be, for a business that prioritizes speed, simplicity and autonomy.

> **WHICH PLATFORM IS THE BEST? NONE. OR, MORE PRECISELY: THE ONE THAT BEST FITS YOUR BUSINESS MODEL.**

C O N C L U S I O N

The platform is a strategic decision, but it does not guarantee results on its own. Success depends on the combination of strategy, processes, people, design, technology, integrations, data, operations and evolution.

A GOOD SELECTION DOES NOT LOOK FOR THE PLATFORM WITH THE MOST FEATURES: IT LOOKS FOR THE ONE THAT CREATES THE MOST VALUE AT A REASONABLE COMPLEXITY.

WWW.BALLOON-GROUP.COM · INFO@BALLOON-GROUP.COM