

— KEY FINDINGS FROM THE —
**2021 ECOMMERCE PLATFORMS
FOR B2B AND B2C REPORT**

An exclusive sneak peek



Compliments of

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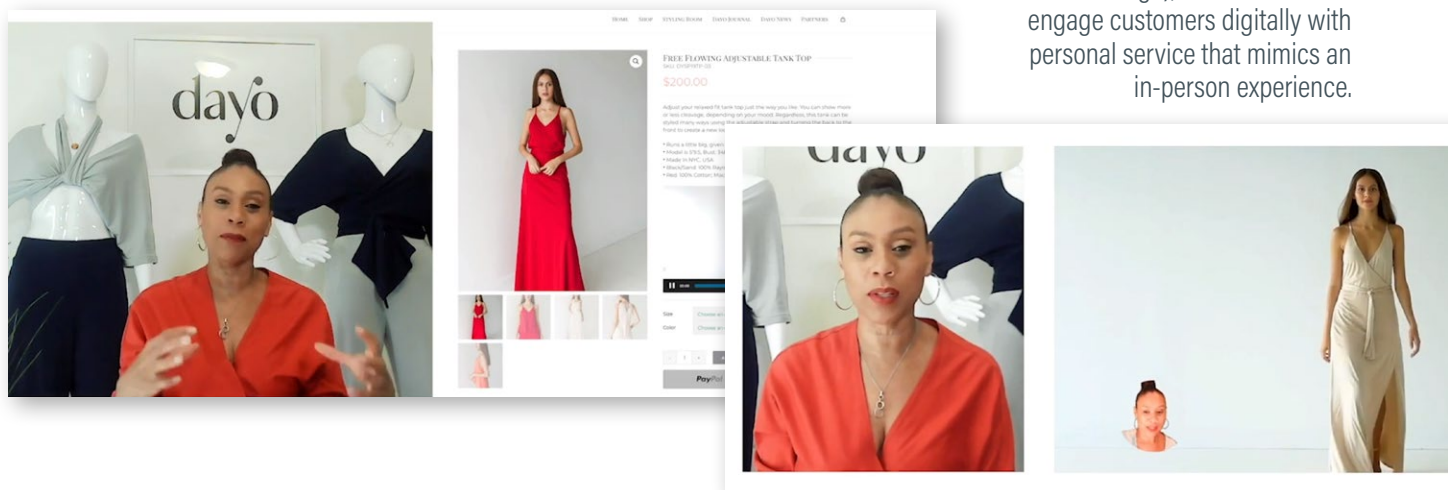
OVERVIEW

As businesses head further into 2021, still dealing intensely with the severe market disruption and the challenges brought on by 2020's onset of the coronavirus, many have one thing in common: A sharp focus on ecommerce technology as a critical component of their growth strategy.

And for many, the right ecommerce platform allows them to quickly adjust to changing markets, for example, by introducing new products and services to replace lost revenue. This report dives into how new or upgraded ecommerce technology is opening new doors for businesses.

Merchants like online jewelry retailer Blue Nile and women's loungewear brand and retailer Dayo Women drive sales through such technology applications as "virtual appointments" and the website mmhmm that help engage customers digitally with personal service that mimics an in-person experience.

Yolanda White, CEO of Dayo Women (left side of each image), uses mmhmm to engage customers digitally with personal service that mimics an in-person experience.



OVERVIEW

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The right ecommerce technology also enables companies to sell through new sales channels. For example, business-to-business (B2B) companies like Mission Linen Supply and Unilever’s FoodServiceDirect.com are using their upgraded digital commerce platforms to tap into online business-to-consumer (B2C) sales, replacing some B2B web sales knocked out by the coronavirus.

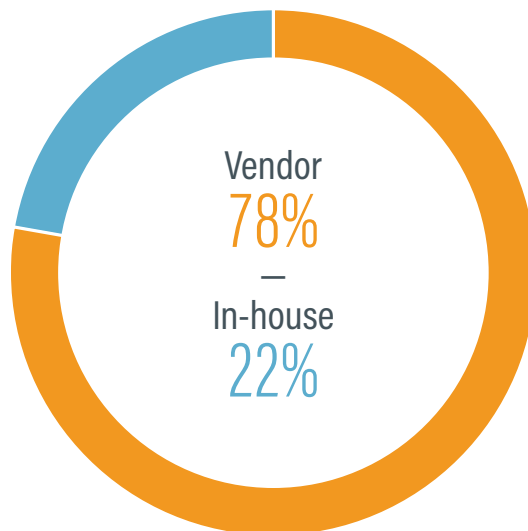
Mission Linen, having lost much of its sales during the pandemic because of restaurant closures, used its ecommerce platform and existing delivery system to sell cleaning products and other items to consumers in their homes. Selling to consumers not only buoys sales until restaurants and other businesses fully reopen, but also will remain as a new, steady stream of income for the company, Mission Linen says.

But companies have many options when choosing technology for their ecommerce platforms. Indeed, they have more options than ever before, helping them find what best suits their technology and business needs.

RETAILER INSIGHTS

MOST RETAILERS USE A VENDOR WHEN IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY

When implementing a new technology, do you typically use a vendor or try to build the technology in-house?



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 121 online retailers, August/September 2020

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COMPANIES CAN CHOOSE AMONG SEVERAL OPTIONS:



So-called **monolithic commercial platforms** are typically deployed as licensed software on a company's infrastructure and include tightly intertwined customer-facing features and back-end ecommerce engine and business operations software.



Software-as-a-service, or SaaS, technology provides platforms that companies rent from a SaaS vendor and access via web browsers. While SaaS vendors routinely deliver software updates via the internet, client companies may have less ability to customize their ecommerce sites.



Headless commerce technology with extensive use of application programming interfaces, or APIs, and microservices support highly customized customer-facing interfaces but require expertise in managing the large number of APIs.

In addition, many companies are also launching their own marketplace platforms. Vendors like Mirakl, VTEX and Arcadier specialize in helping retailers launch and sell via marketplaces that are integrated with their ecommerce sites, which can significantly expand the range of products available to customers.

Before the pandemic, many retailers, manufacturers and distributors were increasing their investments in and reliance on ecommerce technology to grow their business. The pandemic accelerated that process for many companies, and the expanding capabilities of digital commerce technology platforms are giving companies more reasons to spend money on them.

OVERVIEW

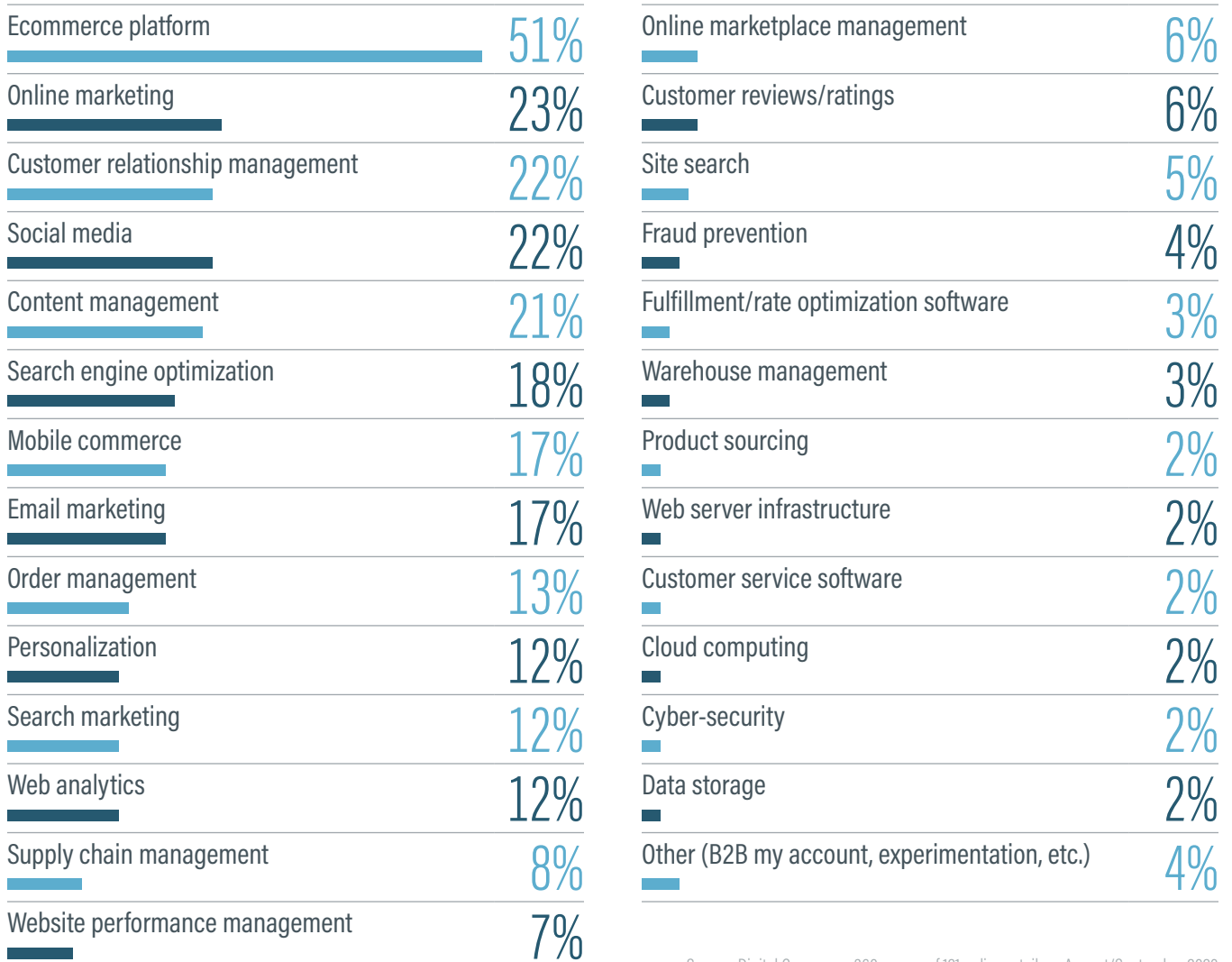
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When Digital Commerce 360 asked more than 100 retail ecommerce executives to name their technology budget priorities for this year, by far the largest percentage of respondents—51%—cited ecommerce platforms among their top three. The next two most-often cited priorities came in at a distant 23% for online marketing and 22% for customer relationship management (CRM).

RETAILER INSIGHTS

AN ECOMMERCE PLATFORM IS THE TOP TECH BUDGET PRIORITY

What are your top three ecommerce technology budget priorities over the next year?



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 121 online retailers, August/September 2020

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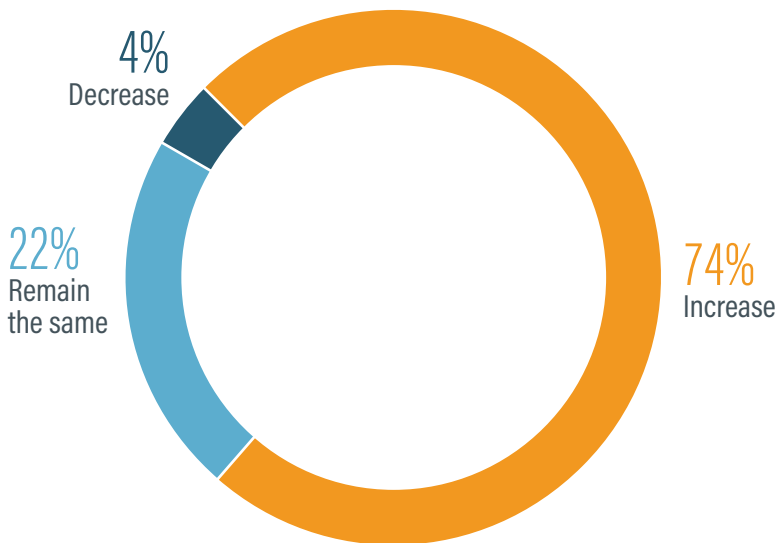
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Moreover, close to three in four companies in that survey, or 74%, said they plan to increase their spending in 2021 on ecommerce technology and services. And more than half of those that plan to increase technology spending said they expect to spend at least 15% more than they spent last year. When the survey asked respondents to name the type of ecommerce technology they were most likely to choose for a new platform, the largest percentage, 32%, chose SaaS, followed by headless commerce, at 27%. Only 13% said they preferred commercial ecommerce software hosted on their own infrastructure.

RETAILER INSIGHTS

ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES SPENDING TO INCREASE IN 2021

Will your spending on ecommerce technology and services increase, decrease or remain the same over the next year?



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 121 online retailers, August/September 2020

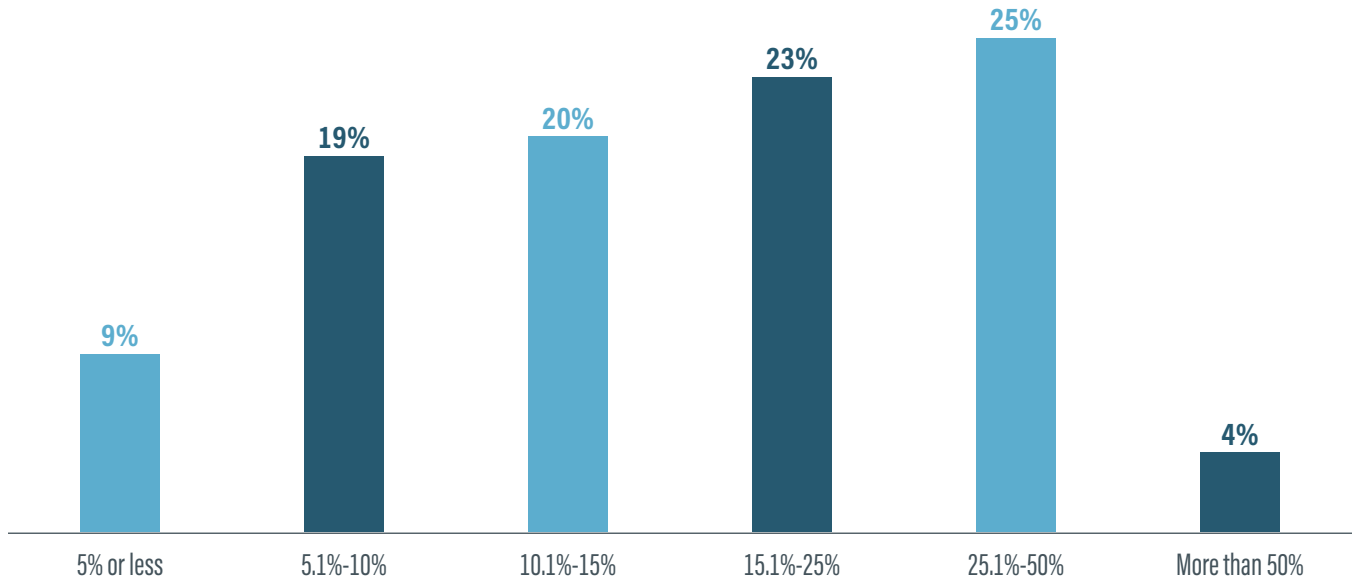
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RETAILER INSIGHTS

MOST B2C RETAILERS INCREASING THEIR TECHNOLOGY SPENDING ANTICIPATE AN INCREASE OF 15% OR MORE

How much of an increase in ecommerce technology spending do you anticipate over the next year?

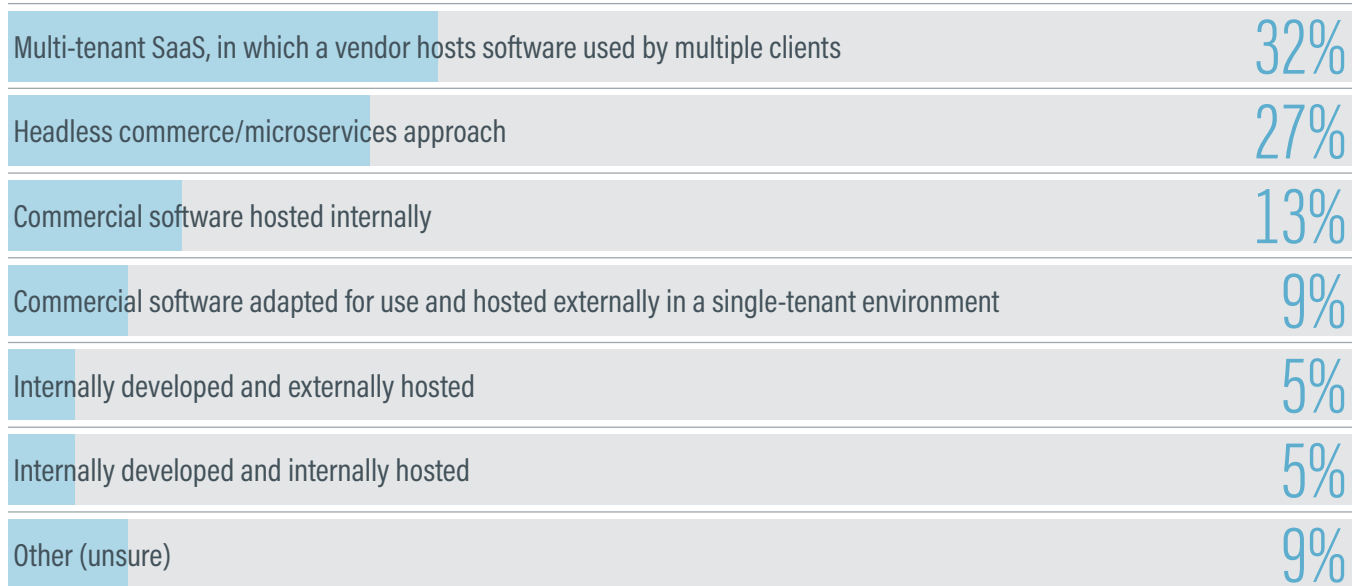


Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 121 online retailers, August/September 2020

RETAILER INSIGHTS

MULTI-TENANT SaaS AND HEADLESS COMMERCE LEAD THE LIST OF MOST LIKELY NEW PLATFORMS

What type of technology are you most likely to choose for a new platform?



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 22 online retailers, August/September 2020

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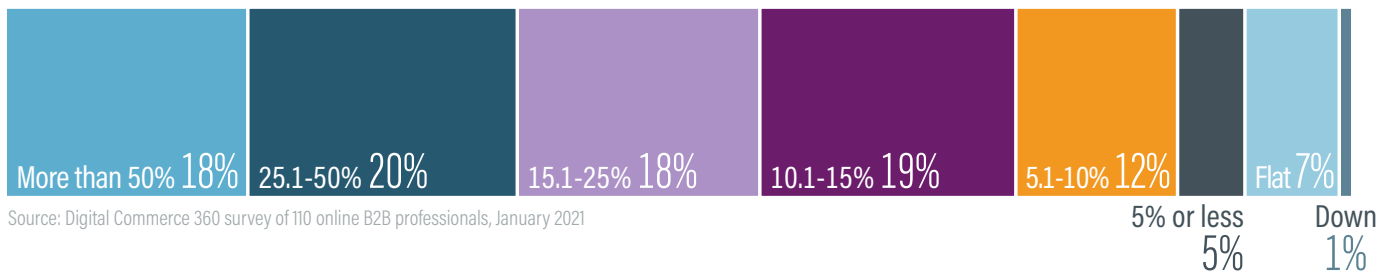
The trends are similar among B2B ecommerce players. 86% of respondents in a recent Digital Commerce 360 survey of 110 B2B ecommerce professionals said they expect online sales to accelerate this year—including nearly half projecting increases of 25% or more. That positive spin coincides with the survey’s finding that 92% of B2B professionals plan to increase their spending on ecommerce technology this year. And of those that plan to increase technology spending, more than half said they expect to spend at least 15% more than last year.

2021 still poses many challenges for businesses, but the opportunities are also rampant, especially for companies that deploy the right ecommerce technology platform that suits their business. [🔗](#)

RETAILER INSIGHTS

B2B SELLERS WILL ALSO INCREASE ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY SPENDING BY AT LEAST 15%

How much of a change in ecommerce technology spending do you anticipate in 2021 relative to 2020?

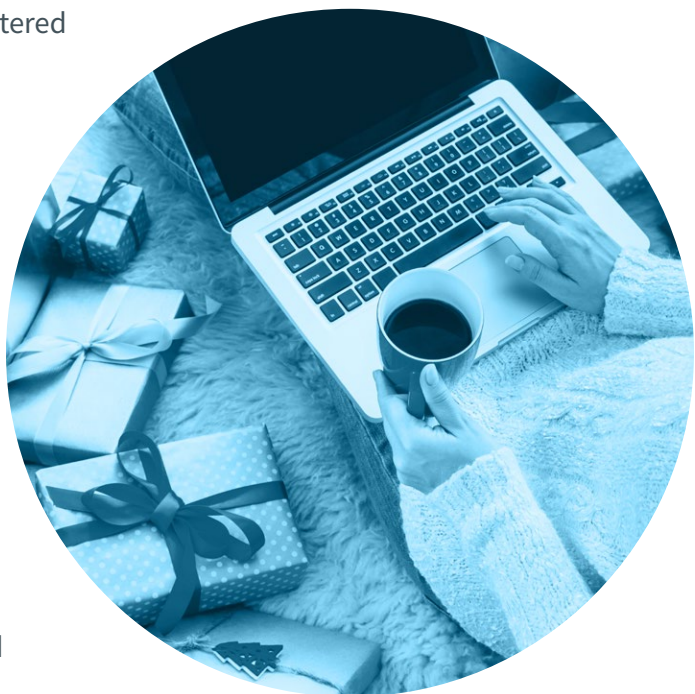


HOW COMMERCE PLATFORMS PROGRESSED IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

2020 redefined retail. And much of the changes centered around the way consumers shopped. With the coronavirus, online shopping went even more viral as even the most staunch store shoppers swapped strolling aisles with navigating ecommerce sites.

That was a boon for online retail. Consider: Digital sales during the all-important holiday season of November and December rose 45.2%—more than triple the year-over-year rate for the 2019 season, according to Digital Commerce 360 estimates. More than \$1 in \$4 spent on retail purchases during the period came from online orders—an astounding jump in digital penetration.

Retailers needed to adapt their ecommerce platforms and websites to keep up with the rapid rate of ecommerce and omnichannel adoption—and fast. And then there was marketing to consider. Merchants needed to step back and adjust the messaging on their sites to account for the current state of the world. To adapt to the changes the pandemic brought to ecommerce, retailers added virtual appointments, changed site content, migrated to headless software that enables them to be more agile, and added fulfillment options. 📦



Digital sales
in November-
December 2020
increased
45.2%
over the
2019 season.

GETTING CREATIVE WITH CONTENT

Some retailers modified their site content in response to the pandemic. For example, Dr. Dabber, which sells vaporizers and related accessories, changed its marketing and images to better reflect the current climate.

“COVID-19 has forced virtually everyone in the ecommerce space to adapt,” says Chloe Zubka, marketing manager at Dr. Dabber. “It was vital that we remained mindful of the current climate when it came to what kind of content we were using in our marketing materials.”

In November, the retailer launched a new portable vaporizer, and the pandemic forced Dr. Dabber to be cautious about the phrasing and images it used to promote it.

“Surrounding the launch of a new, portable product during a pandemic required us to get much more creative with our content,” Zubka says. “Rather than focusing on group shots and party scenes, as we normally would, we decided to take a more outdoor-focused, lifestyle approach with photography and videography. This content was then used in various places on our website, including hero banners and blog posts, and additionally in our newsletters in social media.”



Due to the pandemic, Dr. Dabber avoided group shots and party scenes in its marketing materials for a November 2020 vaporizer launch.

HOW COMMERCE PLATFORMS PROGRESSED IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS FOR B2B AND B2C • 2021 EDITION

Meanwhile, Drinks.com—which provides wine ecommerce technology platforms for retailers such as Boxed Wholesale, The Kroger Co. and Thrive Market, and is the parent company for online retailers Wine Insiders and Martha Stewart Wine Co.—partnered with food and hospitality personalities to create new wine collections and content for its ecommerce sites.

During the pandemic, Drinks.com worked with Iron Chef celebrity Geoffrey Zakarian and Michelin-starred Chef Ludo Lefebvre to create curated wine collections for Wine Insiders—including companion food pairings, recipes and video content, CEO Zac Brandenburg says. “While these programs are still in their infancy and take time to grow, we have received strong initial interest,” Brandenburg says. For example, more than 630 attendees participated in a virtual wine tasting with Martha Stewart to promote the latest wines in her collection, yielding orders for more than 5,000 bottles, he says. 🍷

WINE INSIDERS

Wine Gifts & Sets Discover Celebrity Partners Club Get \$25!

Ship to: CA

FREE, fast shipping* on orders with 6+ bottles! Restrictions apply.

FOR WINE INSIDERS

Celebrated Iron Chef, restaurateur, and author Geoffrey Zakarian shares his culinary expertise—and excellent taste—as Wine Insiders' newest Celebrity Partner. Discover a collection designed to accompany meals and be enjoyed around the table.

SHOP THE COLLECTION

Geoffrey Zakarian

CELEBRITY CHEF

A Letter from Chef Zakarian

While most people know me as the Iron Chef they've seen on TV or in one of my restaurants, I'm also passionate about life around the dinner table at home with friends and family. I'm inspired to share my recipes and tips with people to help home cooks and entertainers create memorable experiences.

My passion for food extends to every dish I create, and I believe designing a great meal always includes selecting a great bottle of wine. I love gatherings, from cocktail hour to big celebrations. What you choose to serve in the glass can be authentic, tasty, and fun, but most importantly—it does not need to be expensive.

When I discovered Wine Insiders, I realized we share a vision for enjoying great wine without spending a fortune. They find real winemakers making award-winning wine and deliver them to your door. I'm thrilled to partner with Wine Insiders. This collection expresses this vision—quality wines at the best value to pair to foods you want to cook and enjoy yourself.

Cheers,
Geoffrey Zakarian

“My passion for food extends to every dish I create, and I believe designing a great meal always includes selecting a great bottle of wine.”

Drinks.com focused on creating compelling content for its ecommerce sites during the pandemic, including a collaboration with Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian for Wine Insiders.



The right technology can keep ecommerce businesses safe from fraud

An executive conversation with **Andrew Humber**, vice president of marketing, Webscale

Ecommerce security is essential to any online business. But as technology becomes more sophisticated, so do fraudsters. Each year, more cybercrime occurs than it did the previous year, and ecommerce companies are scrambling to fight back while still running profitable businesses. To discuss the importance of cybersecurity, as well as best practices around ensuring your ecommerce storefront is primed for growth in all areas, Digital Commerce 360 spoke with Andrew Humber, vice president of marketing at Webscale, a cloud hosting and management company.

What are the biggest challenges ecommerce businesses face regarding their websites?

Security is probably the biggest challenge, yet for many, it's still an afterthought. With Magecart, credit card fraud, carding and ransomware attacks all increasing in volume, it's critical that your infrastructure partner has the necessary expertise.

Availability is also a challenge. Ecommerce businesses are prone to sudden surges in visitor traffic. Yet many hosting providers and off-the-shelf commerce clouds place arbitrary limits on the number of scaling events per month, or demand advance notice to scale at all. The reality of an "always-on" storefront is possible only with real-time, unlimited predictive auto-scaling. And with a global customer base, using an array of devices to access your storefront and its hundreds of images, optimizing the customer experience is critical.

And lastly, they struggle with support. Slow or no responses to urgent support tickets are the No. 1 reason merchants drop their hosting provider. Finding a technology partner with the domain expertise, 15-minute critical response SLAs, and 24/7 coverage is essential.

Webscale recently released its 2021 Global Ecommerce Security Report. What are the key findings?

It's one of the widest security-focused surveys ever conducted in ecommerce. More than 1,500 ecommerce professionals shared their 2020 security report card—what gaps they identified and where they plan to focus and invest in 2021. The 2020 holiday season saw large increases in just about every attack type compared to the previous year: bad bots (32% more than 2019), distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks (38% more than 2019), credit card skimming (43% more than 2019), credit card fraud (65% more than 2019), and Magecart attacks (81% more than 2019), to name a few. The good news is that many merchants acknowledge this and have plans to invest in several critical areas this year.

How can merchants strengthen their security posture?

Many merchants entrust their storefront's security to rudimentary web application firewalls, leaving the backend vulnerable. A true 360-degree approach ensures robust protection against attacks—from the frontend through web traffic, malicious code inserted into the backend or browsers executing scripts stealing sensitive information. While there is a well-publicized shortage of cybersecurity professionals globally, excellent providers, such as Webscale, can offer this expertise.

Finally, many ecommerce merchants are looking to adopt headless strategies when it comes to their choice of platform. What should retailers be considering?

Headless approaches to ecommerce infrastructure allow merchants to exercise more creative freedom in the user experience they deliver to their customers, without being confined to the restrictions of the backend. Hosting providers need to simplify headless hosting infrastructure, and provide complete visibility into infrastructure, whatever the platform. So, find the right partners, both developer and infrastructure provider, and be wary of headless-first technology players that require a "rip and replace" of existing infrastructure, as you can be throwing away your already substantial investments in ERP and CRM systems.



WEBSCALE

Independent, fast-growing retailer?



World-class global brand?

Webscale provides enterprise-grade hosting, security, and management for any ecommerce platform, in any public cloud, for merchants of all sizes.

Why Webscale?

- Predictive auto-scaling for seamless availability
- Industry's most complete security stack
- Architected for headless, PWA, mobile and more
- Automation and DevOps protocols across workflows
- 24x7x365 support from an award-winning team

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**The Global Ecommerce
Security Report**

**20
21**

A SAVVY WAY TO SPEED UP SHIPPING

Every e-retailer in business during the pandemic knows the toll the virus and subsequent surge in ecommerce has taken on shipping and delivery speeds. To help shoppers get products more quickly, coffee subscriptions retailer Bean Box Inc. altered its site to provide faster shipping options for a minimal fee to its customers. “We’ve hedged against longer transit times with some carriers, by incentivizing customers to choose expedited two-day shipping options, for which we partially defray the cost,” says Matthew Berk, CEO.

Bean Box set up logic at checkout so that the site displays expedited shipping options only for certain orders based on a combination of an order’s parcel size, contents and shipping address.

The retailer covers the bulk of the expedited shipping fees and charges a flat rate of \$2.99 for guaranteed two-day shipping. “There’s a slight margin impact, but we’re careful about which items can be shipped this way,” Berk says. “We’re seeing strong uptake on the offer, which results in fewer customer service calls related to carrier transit times or delays.”

The screenshot shows the checkout page for a coffee subscription. The 'Recipient' section includes the name 'Brad Berk', address '4 Sandpiper Road, Westport, CT 06880', and a 'Unit C' dropdown. A 'Checkout Summary' table shows a product total of \$68.00, a discount of \$0.00, a subtotal of \$68.00, and shipping of \$0.00, for a total of \$68.00. The 'Delivery Dates' section is highlighted with an orange box and shows three options: 'Feb 15-17 (standard shipping)' for free, 'Feb 16 (FedEx 2-Day)' for \$2.99 (with a red strikethrough of \$5.99), and 'Feb 15 (FedEx 1-Day)' for \$35.00. The 'Payment' section shows an amount due of \$68.00, with a saved Amex card and available credits. A 'Purchase' button is at the bottom.

Delivery Dates

Coffee Tasting Gift - All Roasts - Whole Bean - 3 Months
Brad Berk in Westport, CT 06880

<input checked="" type="radio"/> Feb 15-17 (standard shipping)	Free
<input type="radio"/> Feb 16 (FedEx 2-Day)	\$5.99 \$2.99
<input type="radio"/> Feb 15 (FedEx 1-Day)	\$35.00

The retailer used in-house staff to modify its site to offer the feature. It set up logic at checkout so that the site displays the expedited option only for certain orders based on a combination of an order's parcel size, contents and shipping address. The Bean Box site then quickly routes those specific parcels through FedEx Corp. for delivery. "The custom logic begins at checkout, where we already support multiple types of shipping and fees for multiple bundles of products," Berk says

Several retailers have also beefed up their virtual capabilities as stores and live events shut down and along with them the in-person connection of a store associate handpicking or directing shoppers to items they may like.

Jeweler Blue Nile Inc. launched an updated version of its virtual appointment services over the long Black Friday weekend last year. Between a third to half of Blue Nile's sales take place over the phone, but to make the journey more personalized, Blue Nile designed studios and converted some of its existing headquarters in Seattle into virtual showroom spaces, says Charlie Severn, chief marketing officer.

"Think of a Home Shopping Network setup with different camera angles and showing our personal jeweler and the jewelry," Severn says. The goal is to make shopping for jewelry feel like an in-person experience and let consumers see inventory that they might otherwise have to go to a store to see, he says. "We feel this is a game-changer for us."

Blue Nile's diamond jewelry consultants are equipped to connect with customers virtually, share screens, co-browse the site, and provide ring-building and buying guidance, Severn says.

To use the service, a shopper books a virtual showroom appointment via BlueNile.com. During his appointment,

'We've hedged against longer transit times with some carriers, by incentivizing customers to choose expedited two-day shipping options, for which we partially defray the cost.'

—Matthew Berk,
CEO, Bean Box

HOW COMMERCE PLATFORMS PROGRESSED IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

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the shopper connects with a diamond expert located in a showroom designed specifically for virtual appointments. The diamond expert learns a little more about what the shopper is looking for and then shares on camera real pieces of jewelry, including diamonds, located in the virtual showroom.

When the shopper expresses interest in a piece, the diamond expert picks up the item and moves it to a display table to provide the customer with a close-up, high-definition view of the jewelry under professional lighting. If the shopper wants to move forward with his purchase, the diamond expert will build the ring or other jewelry item with him via a shared screen over Zoom, Severn says.

Blue Nile has been “pretty much booked solid” with the appointments since the service launched, a spokeswoman says. The retailer has conducted 478 appointments since the feature launched just ahead of Black Friday in November 2020. And Blue Nile experts conduct eight to 10 appointments per day on average, the retailer says. [↗](#)

1-800-242-2728 | Stores | Virtual Appointment Sign In | Wish List | English, USD | Español

BLUE NILE Free Shipping, Free Returns | Search

DIAMONDS ENGAGEMENT RINGS WEDDING RINGS JEWELRY GIFTS EDUCATION

Jewelry Stores > Schedule a Virtual Appointment

Virtual Appointment

When you meet with your personal jeweler in a virtual showroom it will feel very similar to an in-person experience with multiple cameras highlighting the jewelry from many angles—it's very fun and interactive!

We're excited to help you celebrate your special moment. Simply sign up for an appointment and we'll send you a confirmation connecting you to this exciting new way to explore diamonds and jewelry with a Blue Nile expert.

The Virtual Experience

- 1-on-1 Consultation with a Diamond Expert
- Meet Anytime, Anywhere at Your Convenience
- Get Up Close Views of Diamond and Jewelry Options

Book An Appointment

Schedule

Select the day and time for your appointment

February 2021							Friday February 26, 2021	
SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA	AM	PM
31	1	2	3	4	5	6	5:30 am	12:15 pm
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	6:15 am	2:15 pm
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	8:00 am	3:15 pm
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	8:45 am	4:45 pm
28	1	2	3	4	5	6	10:45 am	6:00 pm
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	6:45 pm	

View weekly schedule. All times are in PST (GMT-08:00). click to change.

Appointment booking by [retailer](#)

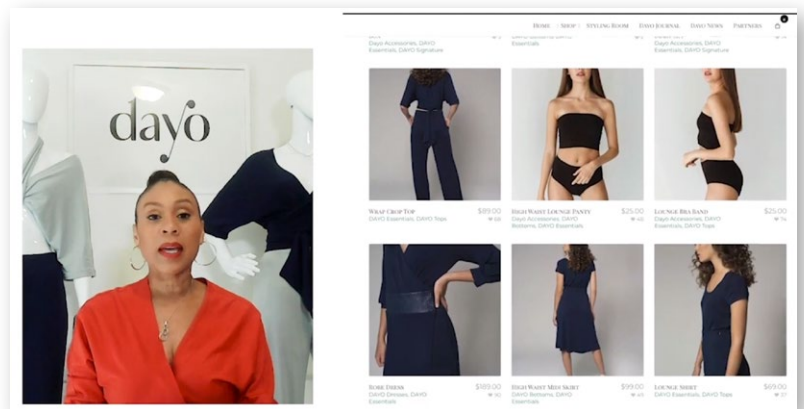
TECHNOLOGY TAKES IN-PERSON SHOPPING VIRTUAL

The virus also created opportunities for retailers to think outside the box as in-person events were put on hold. During fall months, cities like New York, Paris and London typically play host to fashion weeks where high-end brands showcase their wares on the catwalk. In 2020, however, COVID-19 halted those gatherings and designers had to adapt. For many, that meant the launch of virtual runways and styling appointments.

Designer Yolanda White, co-founder and CEO of women's loungewear brand and ecommerce site Dayo Women, for example, began using a video app called mmhmm. White uses mmhmm for styling consultations with her clients and to enrich the shopping experience with virtual styling appointments. White says she wanted to bring Dayo to life during the pandemic to replicate the in-person styling experience and wanted her face and style integrated into the visuals.

To use the feature, White connects with clients via a Zoom call along with the mmhmm app. Mmhmm adds an interactive component to Zoom by allowing her to: manipulate the models and styles on the screen, move herself and make herself smaller on the screen in real time, upload slides to show a variety of different looks (this can't be done in Zoom) and more.

Using mmhmm makes a static Zoom call more interactive, White says. Dayo's average sales for each appointment while using mmhmm are between \$200 and \$300, and the company has had



Dayo Women uses the mmhmm app with Zoom to upload slides to show a variety of different looks during virtual styling consultations.

between 25 and 50 virtual appointments using the technology. On average, White uses mmhmm about once a week.

In October, mmhmm raised \$31 million from backers including Sequoia Capital, Instagram co-founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and Goldman Sachs. Mmhmm costs \$9.99 a month or \$99.99 a year.

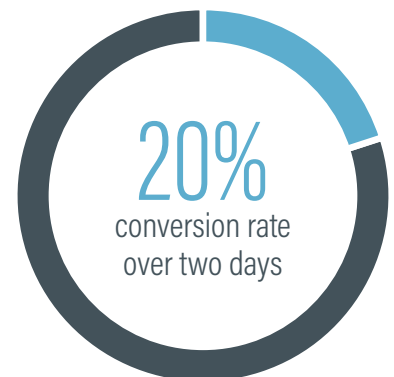
Online luxury apparel retailer Olivela also adjusted its ecommerce platform at the beginning of the pandemic, so that customers would feel more engaged, says Stacey Boyd, founder and CEO. The retailer added new virtual services for shoppers such as 15-minute one-on-one appointments with Olivela buyers, virtual styling services and virtual events.

Olivela sent consumers who signed up for the sessions through Instagram a brief questionnaire asking about their skin type and product preferences. Experts then picked products for each participant and hosted a live virtual consultation with each consumer, describing the products and offering advice, Boyd says. Participants received a follow-up email that included the links to the products highlighted during their virtual session. The virtual sessions were a huge driver for new customers, Boyd says.

80% of consumers who signed up for a session had never purchased from the retailer before. The sessions also generated a 20% conversion rate over two days, Boyd says. [🔗](#)

Olivela added 15-minute one-on-one appointments during the pandemic.

Results included:



HEADLESS TECHNOLOGY HELPS RETAILERS PIVOT

Meanwhile, many store-based merchants found themselves caught in a bind when coronavirus hit and their legacy, monolithic ecommerce platforms weren't flexible enough to enable them to quickly add omnichannel capabilities such as in-store pickup, curbside, returns of online orders in stores and digital receipts. Retail software vendor Toshiba Inc. recently introduced software designed to help these retailers.

Toshiba's Global Commerce Solutions unit, which has been working in the store retail technology space since 1970 and works with such merchants as Hugo Boss, CVS Caremark Corp., Walgreens Boots Alliance and The Kroger Co., in January launched a new commerce software called Elera (derived from acc-elera-te) that is designed to help merchants circumvent their monolithic ecommerce platforms and add new features without having to replatform. The commerce software is based on a microservices or headless architecture. Mainly for retailers with stores, it aims to help bridge the divide between physical stores and ecommerce.

Monolithic ecommerce platforms—also often called legacy platforms—are typically older ecommerce platforms where the front-end and back-end systems are tightly intertwined. To add a new feature or customize these systems, such as adding BOPIS, a retailer must manipulate the underlying codebase. This work can be expensive, time-consuming and make the platform more complex and fragile over time.

When retailers begin manipulating code, it can become a slippery slope, impacting other areas of a platform. Because all the parts of a monolithic platform are connected, if one part goes awry, it can create a domino effect. Constantly customizing a monolithic platform can impact things like site speed, the way pages are displayed and produce other unintended consequences.

“Legacy systems make it painful to do multichannel and omnichannel,” says Yevgeni Tsirulnik, vice president of digital platform innovation for Toshiba’s Global Commerce Solutions division. “Those retailers that hadn’t already embarked on this journey, couldn’t pivot quickly [when COVID hit],” he says. That was a boon for companies like Instacart, which many retailers used to implement BOPIS and same-day delivery quickly, he says.

Using microservices in Elera, Toshiba says, enables retailers to roll out new services within days, then independently test, improve, update, and scale them, or even scrap them, without disrupting or replacing legacy systems.

Microservices are individual components or independent software services that can be swapped out with ease to help keep a business current, more agile and able to deploy faster. A microservice can be any application or feature, such as a curbside pickup application. It will use an application programming interface (API) as a calling card of sorts to connect with and pull data from a separate application, such as a consumer’s online order history in a legacy ecommerce platform. Each microservice has its own API. The API sits in front of the microservice and is the bridge for communication between applications. This microservices approach typically enables businesses to be more agile and constantly iterate to better serve shoppers.

Elera comes with 30 pre-packaged microservices and 400 APIs that can connect to any legacy, monolithic ecommerce platform, Toshiba says. That can help retailers do things like quickly begin accepting returns of online orders in stores, better predict inventory needs, adjust pricing based on insights across the store and web, and offer curbside pickup, all without touching the legacy ecommerce platform codebase. It also can help retailers

‘Legacy systems make it painful to do multichannel and omnichannel.’

—Yevgeni Tsirulnik, vice president of digital platform innovation, Toshiba’s Global Commerce Solutions division

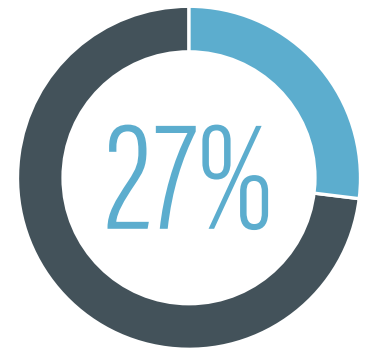
connect shopper behavior across stores and the web to help merchants personalize the shopping experience across channels.

Retailers are recognizing the benefits of a microservices approach. In fact, 27% of retailers looking to implement new ecommerce platforms say they are most strongly considering a microservices-based platform, the second-most popular answer behind software-as-a-service, according to a Digital Commerce 360 survey of 121 retailers conducted in August and September 2020.

Being agile enough to adapt to changing consumer preferences can pay off. For example, curbside and in-store pickup orders grew 115% year over year in November, according to Adobe Analytics. Adobe also said retailers who offer these services see 25% of orders fulfilled via those options compared with 15% a year earlier. Additionally, merchants offering these alternative delivery methods are experiencing 32% higher conversion rates.

Elera also helps retailers get better insights into shoppers in stores. Stores can connect Elera to Internet of Things sensors and computer-vision cameras to collect data and implement technologies such as motion-tracking systems to determine the store setup that will drive the most sales.

Toshiba won't name any retailers using Elera but says several high-volume grocery and general merchandise stores have implemented it. Tsurulnik says one retailer has already used Elera to cut down on self-checkout scams. With COVID-19, more consumers have been using self-checkout to avoid human interaction. For one retailer, that led to shoppers scamming the system, Tsurulnik says. For example, a shopper might place a pound of filet mignon on a scale but enter the pricing code for bananas. Using Elera, the retailer implemented a microservice—a camera that could detect what was on the scale—so that shoppers were charged for the correct product. [➔](#)



27% of retailers looking to implement new ecommerce platforms are most strongly considering a microservices-based platform

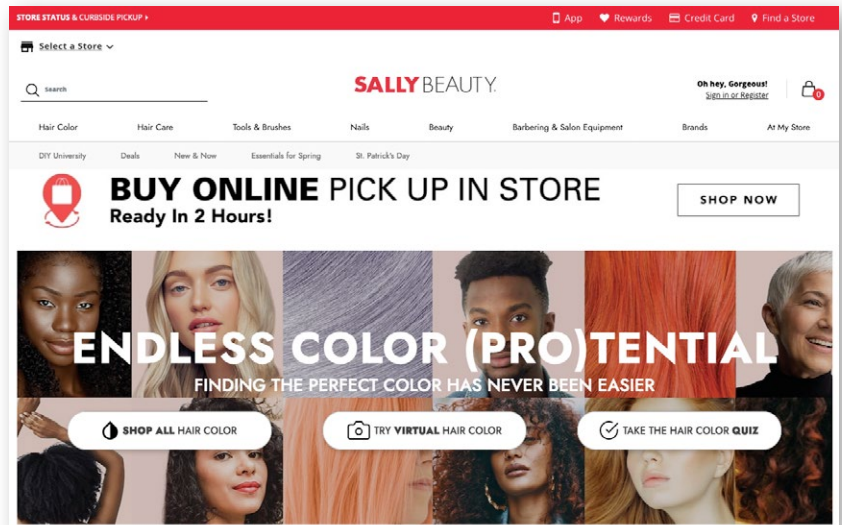
FAST-TRACKING OMNICHANNEL

Ecommerce platform provider Salesforce.com Inc., meanwhile, says several of its retailer clients quickly pivoted during the pandemic, adding new omnichannel features to their ecommerce platforms.

Retailer Build-a-Bear, which is known for its stores where children can create their own stuffed animals, worked with Salesforce to reconfigure its ecommerce platform and operations during the pandemic to offer ship-from-store and buy online, pick up in store, the vendor says. The reconfiguration enabled the retailer to use its more than 200 stores as distribution centers, with store employees fulfilling online orders. It also sped up delivery times as Build-a-Bear shipped products from stores closest to the shopper. These changes helped the merchant increase online sales by nearly 300% in Q2 2020 compared with a year earlier.

Meanwhile, as beauty salons closed, at-home hair-coloring quickly gained popularity. And that led online sales to surge during the pandemic at Salesforce customer Sally Beauty Holdings.

To keep up with demand, the merchant added several omnichannel features between May and October 2020, including curbside pickup, ship-from-store, BOPIS and same-day delivery for its Cosmo Prof division of professional salon products. The changes helped the retailer generate a 278% increase in ecommerce sales in Q3 2020 compared with a year earlier.



As at-home hair-coloring gained popularity during the pandemic, Sally Beauty added omnichannel features, including BOPIS.

HOW COMMERCE PLATFORMS PROGRESSED IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS FOR B2B AND B2C · 2021 EDITION

26% of consumers used curbside pickup for non-grocery items during the pandemic as of August, according to a Digital Commerce 360 and Bizrate Insights survey of 1,141 consumers.

That survey also finds:

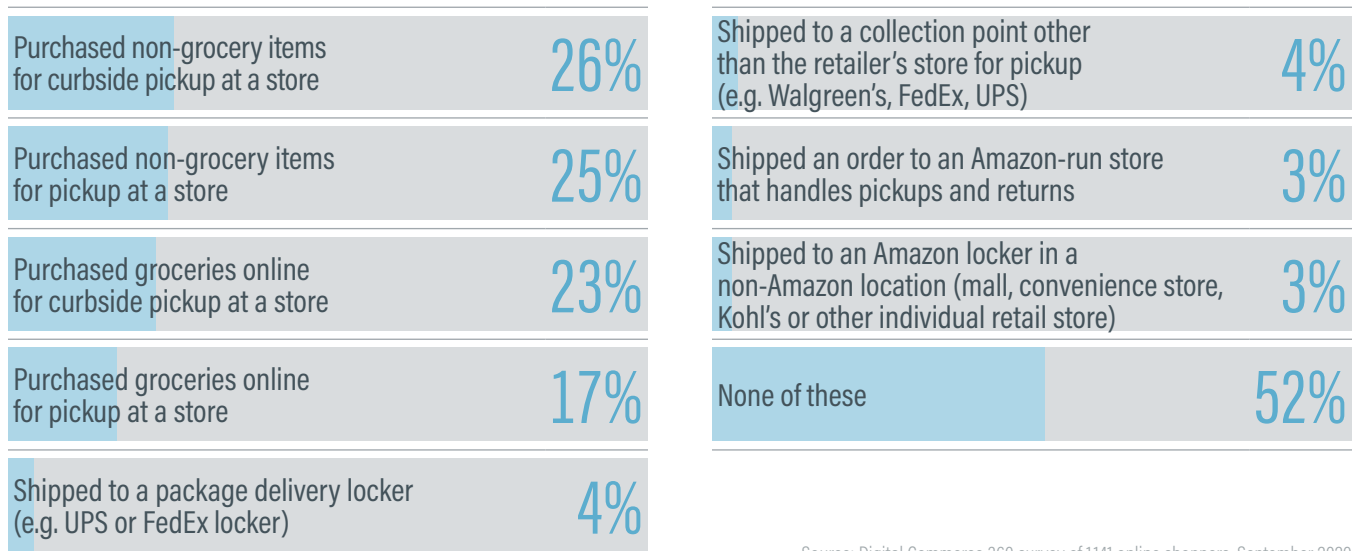
- ▶ 24% had used curbside multiple times since COVID-19.
- ▶ 20% planned to use curbside more for the remainder of 2020.
- ▶ 17% tried curbside for the first time.
- ▶ 14% said they plan to use curbside after shopping in stores returns to normal.

Be it BOPIS, curbside or pure web shopping, the shift to ecommerce during the pandemic has been astounding. Salesforce, which offers commerce, customer service and marketing cloud-based software for retailers, says that trickled down into customer service inquiries via retailers' websites.

CONSUMER INSIGHTS

1-IN-4 TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CURBSIDE PICKUPS FOR GROCERY AND NON-ESSENTIALS

Which of the following shipping scenarios have you experienced online since COVID-19 began?



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 1,141 online shoppers, September 2020

HOW COMMERCE PLATFORMS PROGRESSED IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

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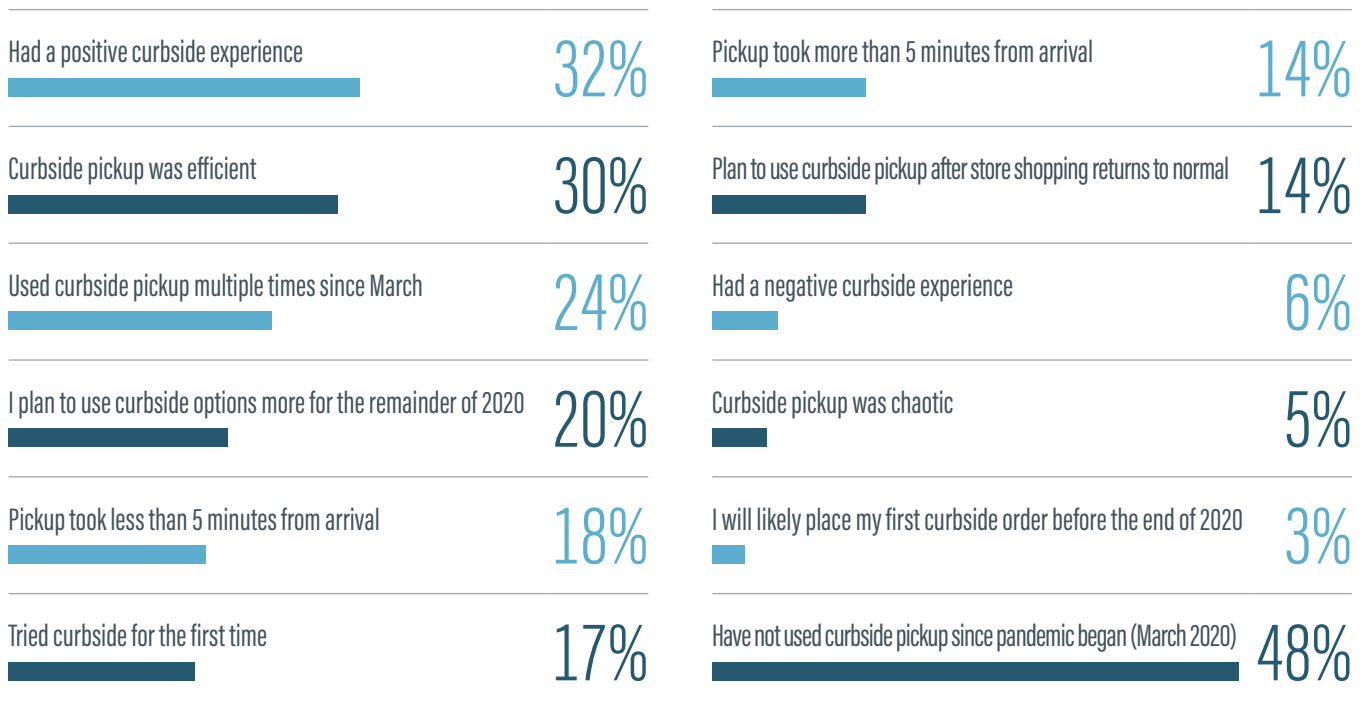
Salesforce clients yielded 2.83 million customer service chatbot sessions on their web platforms during Cyber Week 2020 (Nov. 24-Nov. 30), up more than 400% compared with 2019. Chatbot session volume peaked on Cyber Monday at 560,000 sessions in a single day for Salesforce customers. Seven Top 1000 retailers use Salesforce for customer service, 66 for their ecommerce platform and 40 use the vendor's marketing automation platform.

COVID-19 has sparked creativity among retailers and the way they approach their ecommerce platforms. From fulfillment options to content to taking once-live events virtual, retailers had to change, and many changed their ecommerce platforms for the better, implementing features and functionalities that will likely last long after the virus. 🚗

CONSUMER INSIGHTS

CURBSIDE PICKUP SEES STRONG FREQUENCY AND GENERALLY POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Please select any retail store curbside pickup experiences you may have had since the pandemic began in March 2020



Source: Digital Commerce 360 survey of 1,141 online shoppers, September 2020

A PANDEMIC STRATEGY: ECOMMERCE TECH FOR B2B AND B2C

2020 and the coronavirus pandemic brought sudden and formidable challenges for B2B companies. But it also ushered in new opportunities. Companies with the right ecommerce platforms and strategies entered 2021 in a prime position to grow as more businesses transitioned to shop online rather than through in-person sales representatives.

Consider Mission Linen Supply. Launched in 1930, the company's core business is supplying and laundering tablecloths for restaurants.

But it began expanding its horizons a few years ago, a strategy that really took off in 2020 as it faced the pandemic and grew new business with the help of its new ecommerce technology platform.

"We've always been an industrial laundry company, and our business model has been a rental model," says Dave Pattison, chief information officer and vice president of information technology.

"A restaurant needs tablecloths; we buy the tablecloths, rent them to customers and clean them. That's our core business."

Santa Barbara, California-based Mission Linen relies in large part on its field sales force to land new customers and process their orders, and it fulfills the orders with its own fleet of delivery vans.

But in recent years, president and CEO John Ross has pushed for ways to grow a direct-to-consumer sales channel. The idea was to build a new digital commerce platform for both businesses and consumers and leverage the company's existing delivery network for order fulfillment.

The company, Pattison says, had a ready business model: “We’re driving a truck to your business maybe once or three times a week—what else can we bring on that truck to sell you?” The next step, he says, was to build a digital commerce platform that would connect with customers, suppliers and its own delivery drivers.

These plans all accelerated early last year when the coronavirus pandemic knocked out much of Mission Linen’s core business of serving restaurants and hotels. The company has since launched its first B2B and business-to-consumer ecommerce sites on a headless commerce platform, forging what it expects will be new long-term revenue streams, selling products ranging from groceries and household cleaners to pet supplies and personal protective equipment.

Mission Linen’s experience may be unique, but its strategy is not unlike that of other B2B companies in the past year that have launched or upgraded ecommerce platforms to help weather the pandemic storm.

FoodServiceDirect Inc., a web-only food service of Unilever Food Solutions, migrated from an old legacy platform in 2018 to a new B2B ecommerce site on Magento Commerce technology from Adobe Inc. One of the main benefits of the new technology was its ability to handle retail as well as FoodServiceDirect’s traditional B2B online sales, says Adeel Murtaza, head of ecommerce technology for FoodServiceDirect.com.

Retail sales soon started to grow, but the move to the new ecommerce platform really paid off in 2020 when FoodServiceDirect’s sales to restaurants and corporate cafeterias sharply tapered off. A few months after the pandemic took hold in March 2020, FoodServiceDirect’s direct-to-consumer ecommerce sales grew to 45% of its total sales, helping to replace lost B2B business, Murtaza says.



‘We’re driving a truck to your business maybe once or three times a week—what else can we bring on that truck to sell you?’

—Dave Pattison, chief information officer and vice president of information technology, Mission Linen Supply

A PANDEMIC STRATEGY: ECOMMERCE TECH FOR B2B AND B2C

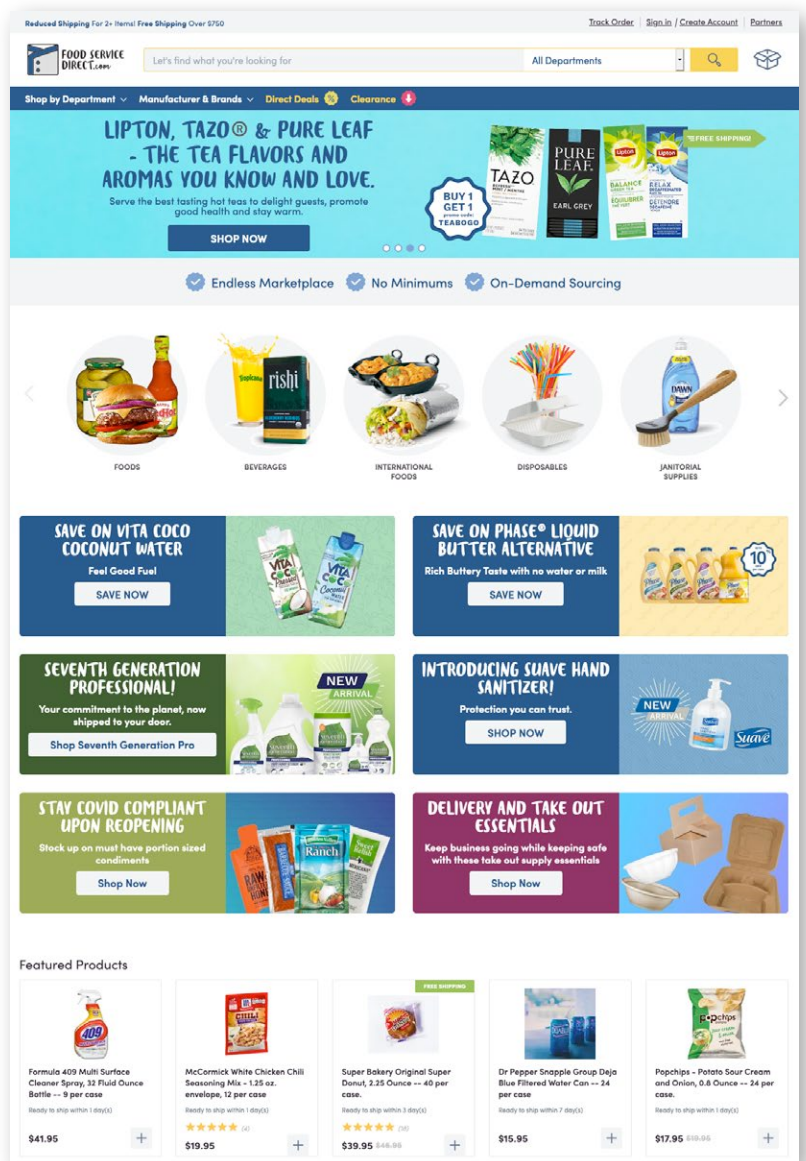
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One reason for selecting the API-supported Magento Commerce platform, he says, is that it can easily connect to FoodServiceDirect.com's dotdigital omnichannel marketing automation platform. Integrating its marketing and ecommerce platforms allows FoodServiceDirect to track responses to marketing promotions and gather behavioral information about its customers that can be used to personalize its websites.

"We have been able to create multiple customer journeys, which is something we could not do previously," Murtaza says. "We are doing a lot of A/B testing to figure out which products each customer segment is looking for."

FoodServiceDirect.com has also integrated its customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning (ERP) and product management systems into Magento Commerce, enabling the company to build an ecommerce ecosystem designed to better engage and serve both B2B and B2C customers, Murtaza adds.

About 70% of FoodServiceDirect.com's customers come to the company's websites via mobile devices, Murtaza says, making mobile another top priority. 📱



The move to a new ecommerce platform paid off for FoodServiceDirect in 2020 as direct-to-consumer sales increased to 45% of total sales due to the pandemic.

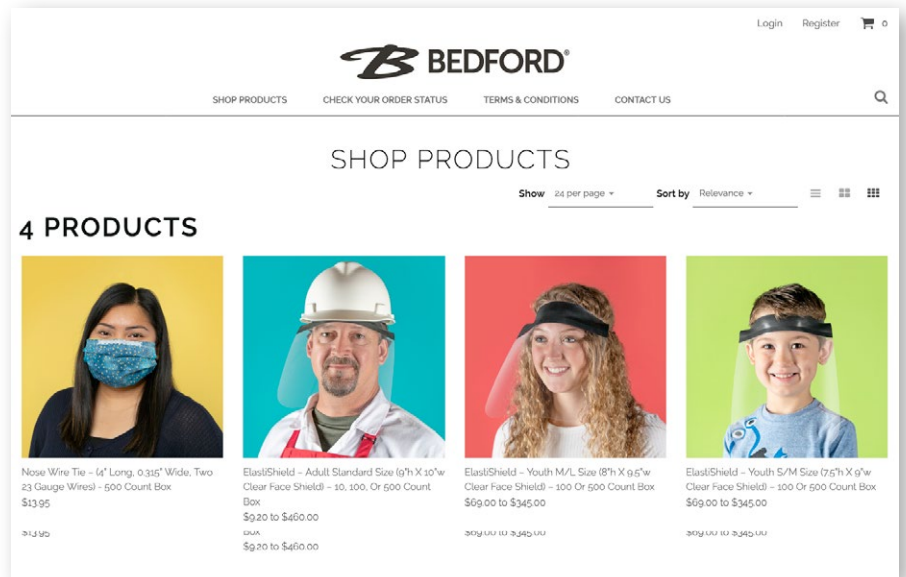
A MANUFACTURER'S SUDDEN DIVE INTO ECOMMERCE

In some cases, B2B companies deployed ecommerce technology for the first time during the pandemic—surprising themselves with what they could do online.

For Bedford Industries, a manufacturer of products like plastic-coated twist-ties and other bendable components used to secure commercial packages, ecommerce was just a distant goal at the start of 2020. For near-term technology upgrades, it was more concerned about replacing its legacy ERP system. As for ecommerce, it was not sure how many of its B2B customers were even interested in ordering online. “We weren’t sure what percentage of our customers would use it,” says president Jay Milbrandt.

When the pandemic hit, Bedford quickly realized it had an opportunity to help battle the coronavirus and grow sales by pivoting some of its production operations to make face mask components and face shields.

But as demand quickly grew for its new line of personal protection equipment (PPE), Bedford’s customer support staff became overwhelmed with orders placed via phone from its traditional customers like large hospitals as well as newcomers like nursing homes, grocery stores, small medical offices and meat-processing plants.



Bedford launched its PPE site in one week.

“As calls for PPE poured in, we realized we had to change our mindset when it came to how we interacted with customers, and that meant setting up an e-store right away,” Milbrandt says. “We knew that if we waited months to build out an ecommerce site, we’d miss the window of opportunity for demand.”

Bedford decided to deploy its first ecommerce site on the SuiteCommerce platform from Oracle NetSuite, a unit of Oracle Corp. NetSuite was already starting to deploy Bedford’s new ERP system, which Bedford figured would help to smooth integration between its back-end ERP software and its new customer-facing ecommerce site.

Bedford worked with NetSuite’s ERP and SuiteCommerce teams to launch within a week’s time a streamlined ecommerce site for taking orders of just three offerings: a 500-count box of face mask nose wires, a 100-count of face shields, and a 500-count box of face shields.

It then realized that it was receiving orders from individual consumers as well as businesses, including people who were ordering its nose wires to make face masks for their family, friends, schools and other community organizations.

The experience put Bedford on a new track to plan on the SuiteCommerce platform offering a more comprehensive direct-to-consumer ecommerce site that was also integrated with a separate B2B portal, where business customers could view contract pricing, receive invoices, check past orders and complete payments. 🛒



“We knew that if we waited months to build out an ecommerce site, we’d miss the window of opportunity for demand.”

—Jay Milbrandt, president, Bedford Industries

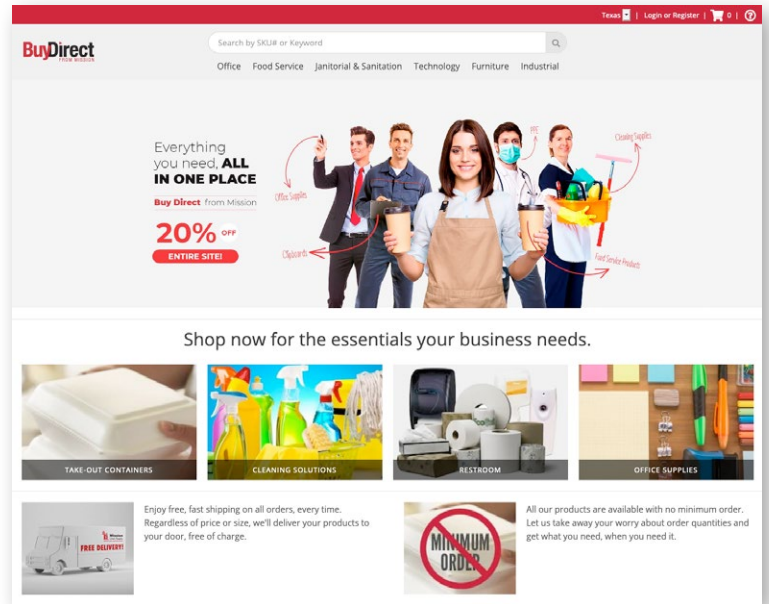
MISSION LINEN SUPPLY'S ECOMMERCE MISSION

At Mission Linen Supply, the company started working about two years ago with headless commerce technology from commercetools, which provides a commerce engine designed with APIs to connect with any customer-facing front end. Mission Linen's first project: a mobile sales application on its drivers' tablets to let them place orders for customers who want to make additional purchases when they receive a delivery of products they had ordered through sales reps.

Mission Linen was planning to also use commercetools to eventually launch a B2B ecommerce site to provide customers an online self-service ordering option. When the pandemic hit early last year, however, it pushed ahead that plan and launched a B2B site in May.

"We had started down that path before COVID, but it accelerated during the pandemic, and we launched the B2B site five to six weeks after the pandemic hit," Pattison says. "It was in direct response to COVID."

As the pandemic quickly knocked out much of Mission Linen's regular business of providing tablecloths and other products to restaurants and hotels, the company realized it was also seeing a surge in new direct-to-customer sales of COVID-19 masks, hand sanitizer and cleaning products. The new B2B ecommerce site, at BuyDirect.MissionLinen.com, helped to build a base with such customers.



Mission Linen accelerated its plans to build a B2B ecommerce site in response to the pandemic.

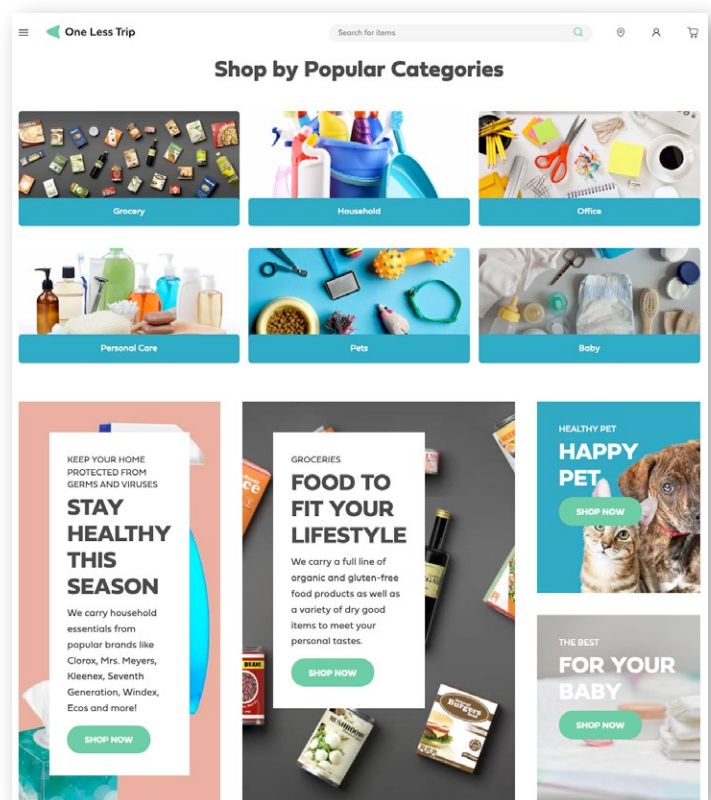
Mission Linen had also been planning to eventually launch a business-to-consumer ecommerce site in the future, but decided to fast-track it and went live with that site in December 2020 at OneLessTrip.com. The B2C site offers product categories ranging from groceries to office supplies and products for pets and babies.

The company is not breaking out figures for online orders, but ecommerce sales are “rapidly growing,” Pattison says. He adds that drivers’ use of the tablets embedded with the new online sales application has led to a significant increase in extra orders placed at customer delivery locations.

Pattison says Mission Linen has relied on the headless commerce architecture—and what it describes as the ease of building on it—to roll out each step of its B2B and B2C online technology strategy.

When the pandemic hit, Mission Linen and its six-person IT team benefitted from already having completed some work on the commercetools technology for the tablet sales application. Becoming familiar with using its APIs to build microservices and connect software applications helped it more quickly and easily launch the B2B site and, in turn, the B2C site, Pattison says. The drivers’ tablet app and the B2B and B2C ecommerce sites are all built on the same version of commercetools software.

To make the online, direct-to-customer system work, Pattison’s team built order management connections from the company’s ecommerce platform to its suppliers’ ERP systems—including



The pandemic prompted Mission Linen to fast-track its business-to-consumer ecommerce site OneLessTrip.com

cleaning products, office supplies and restaurant take-out containers for its B2B customers; and grocery, household, office, pet and baby products for consumers.

As suppliers receive orders, they ship them in either individual or batched orders to Mission Linen’s warehouses for nearly immediate delivery to customers. The setup saves Mission the cost of holding inventory for extended periods while providing expedited order fulfillment, Pattison says.

The headless commerce architecture, he adds, enabled Mission Linen to connect its ecommerce engine to multiple points—the driver’s tablet-based sales applications, the B2B and B2C websites and its suppliers’ ERP systems.

“For us, the headless approach really helped out,” he says. By comparison, a more traditional ecommerce platform would likely have required more modification of the ecommerce engine with the customer-facing interfaces and back-end business operating software, requiring more time and expense to customize Mission’s platform, he says.

Going forward, Mission Linen is considering deploying additional sites on the commercetools technology. Mission Linen currently operates a legacy ecommerce platform that offers customized ecommerce sites for corporate customers, such as large hospitals, where buyers can purchase products like medical scrubs and lab coats embroidered with their name and their organization’s logo.

“We’d eventually like to migrate all of those online stores into commercetools,” Pattison says, adding that the headless architecture would provide more flexibility in building more customized sites for customers. “It gives us the flexibility to help us respond to customer needs.” 🚚



‘For us, the headless approach really helped out.’

—Dave Pattison,
chief information officer
and vice president of
information technology,
Mission Linen Supply

PLATFORM TRENDS ADOBE IS USING TO CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS

PETER SHELDON

Senior director of commerce strategy

ADOBE



HEADLESS IS NOW MAINSTREAM

Historically, the front and the back end of commerce platforms were intrinsically tied at the hip. Headless commerce creates a very clean separation between the user experience on the front end and the day-to-day business management processes on the back end. This

empowers merchants to embrace new channels and use emerging front-end technologies without being hamstrung by any artificial constraints or guardrails on what they can and can't do. Effectively, it future-proofs their investment in the underlying platform technology.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING IN RETAIL

Consumer expectations have changed. A recent survey from marketing agency Epsilon suggests that 80% of respondents are "more likely to do business with a company if it offers personalized experiences." We call these hyper-personalized experiences "self-driving sites." In the future, there won't be an army of

merchandisers creating new product pages, offers, recommendations and hero banners. Instead, the site will run on autopilot, constantly creating and testing millions of different versions of the site experience against each other to learn what creates the most engaging experiences and best conversion rates.

VISUAL CONFIGURATION

The global pandemic has changed the mindset of what can be bought online. Many consumers no longer see value in visiting a showroom or dealership for high-consideration purchases such as a new kitchen, furniture, or even automobiles and other recreational vehicles. Visual configuration that relies on 3-D modeling and augmented reality

experiences allows consumers to experience all the different permutations of style, color, fabrics and features in a completely digital world. Commerce platforms must adapt and offer native support for selling complex, configurable products including the ability to visualize products in 3-D and "try" the product via augmented reality.

CONCLUSION

COVID has transformed the world—from the way people work, entertain themselves, eat and gather (or not)—nearly every aspect of consumers' daily lives has been impacted by the pandemic.

And retail was not spared.

The shift to online shopping over the past year was shockingly swift and intense. Even the most faithful store shoppers were forced to move from strolling store aisles to scrolling websites to make purchases as stores across the globe shuttered.

That was a massive boon to ecommerce. Consider: Consumers spent \$861.12 billion online with U.S. merchants in 2020, up an incredible 44.0% year over year, according to Digital Commerce 360 estimates. That's the highest annual U.S. ecommerce growth in at least two decades. It's also nearly triple the 15.1% jump in 2019.

Online's share of total retail sales has steadily been on the rise—with ecommerce penetration hitting 21.3% in 2020, Digital Commerce 360 estimates. That's up from 15.8% in 2019 and 14.3%



CONCLUSION

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in 2018. The more than five-percentage point gain in ecommerce penetration is by far the biggest year-over-year jump for U.S. retail sales ever recorded. No other year has even reached a two percentage-point gain in digital penetration.

But change, even good change, often requires adaptation, and businesses needed to adjust their ecommerce operations to handle this sudden surge in people and businesses wanting to shop with them online. Ecommerce platforms played a starring role in these adjustments.

Many retailers, finding themselves handcuffed by their legacy, monolithic platforms and not able to quickly implement much needed features such as virtual appointments, curbside, BOPIS, shipping and fulfillment adjustments, return offerings and more, quickly began realizing the benefits of headless commerce-based platforms.

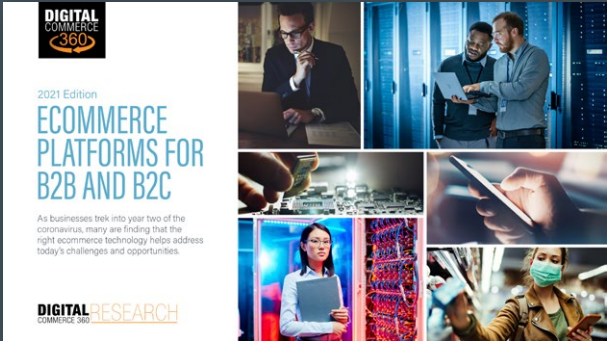
Meanwhile, with sales agents moving from working in the field to working in the home, B2B players quickly realized they needed to get serious about selling online—and doing it well. This led to more investments in ecommerce platforms by B2B players. And many players, while ramping up their B2B investments, began to see the value, cost and time savings in operating a single B2B2C platform that serves both consumers and businesses.

It's been work for retailers and B2B sellers to adjust their platforms to adapt to the abrupt changes they faced this year. And many have just begun the journey. The good news is there are technologies and vendors that can help businesses meet today's ecommerce demands. Retailers and B2B sellers, many included in this report, are adapting their platforms and approaches to selling online, setting an example and paving the way for other merchants. Many that implemented changes are enjoying the fruits of their labor now with increased web sales. And those that follow suit stand to gain as well. 🚀



This *Key Findings of the 2021 Ecommerce Platforms for B2B and B2C* report includes the overview and key featured articles published directly from the full research report.

Learn more about the full report Purchase \$399



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paul Demery is editor of Digital Commerce 360 | B2B. Prior to DC360B2B, he was managing editor of Internet Retailer magazine. In earlier work, he was editor-in-chief/associate publisher of Electronic Commerce World magazine, which covered business-to-business applications of internet technology in multiple industries; he also covered various industries for other magazines and newspapers.



Paul Demery
Editor, B2B
paul@digitalcommerce360.com
312-362-9534

Katie Evans is chief technology editor at Digital Commerce 360, where she leads tech-related coverage, strategy, writing and reporting for the Digital Commerce 360 website, magazine and reports, including the Leading Vendors to the Top 1000 and the Guide to Ecommerce Platforms. She also researches and writes custom content for Digital Commerce 360 clients. Katie is a frequent speaker and moderator at industry events.



Katie Evans
Chief Technology Editor
katie@digitalcommerce360.com
312-572-6260

DIGITAL COMMERCE 360 RESEARCH

FAREEHA ALI

Research & Editorial Director
fareeha@digitalcommerce360.com
312-946-2048

LAURA BERRIGAN

Project Manager, Research
laura@digitalcommerce360.com
312-572-6261

TABITHA CASSIDY

Content Manager & Analyst, Research
tabitha@digitalcommerce360.com
312-572-6252

LAUREN FREEDMAN

Senior Consumer Insights Analyst
lfreedman@digitalcommerce360.com
312-572-7004

JONATHAN LOVE

Associate Data Analyst
jon@digitalcommerce360.com
312-362-0069

BRENDAN REILLY

Research Analyst
brendan@digitalcommerce360.com
312-362-0076

JAMES RISLEY

Research Analyst
jrisley@digitalcommerce360.com
312-572-7005

JILL SUCHOMEL

Data Assistant
jill@digitalcommerce360.com
312-362-0273

JESSICA YOUNG

Senior Research Analyst
jessica@digitalcommerce360.com
312-362-0104

ABOUT DIGITAL COMMERCE 360 RESEARCH

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The team tracks hundreds of metrics on thousands of online retail companies around the world, including such sought-after data points as web sales and traffic, conversion rates, average order value and key technology partners used to power their ecommerce businesses. We sell this data in its raw format in our multiple online databases, and we dig deeply into these numbers to help inform our 30+ exclusive analysis reports we publish each year on key ecommerce topics, including online marketplaces, cross-border ecommerce and omnichannel retailing. In-depth, data-focused reports are also available on key categories of online retail like apparel, housewares, food and luxury. We also have a robust custom research department, which provides tailored research products—in-depth reports, exclusive surveys, raw data pulls and other products—for top retail companies, consultants, financial analysts and technology companies.

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