SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ecommerce is red hot with business opportunities: Forrester

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Retailers can get ahead by integrating new digital solutions. Image credit: Forrester

By NORA HOWE

The COVID-19 pandemic continues accelerating how businesses integrate commerce technology, especially in an increasingly palpable digital climate.

There is a widening gap between companies that adopt digital commerce readily and those which remain hinged on traditional methods. In its Frictionless Future of Commerce report, Forrester suggests that an isolated, all-in-one-style commerce platform is out and individualized "best for me" solutions are in.

Acting now
More than a third of global retail and wholesale purchase influencers indicate that improving the experience of their customers is a high or critical priority.

To provide customers with personalized, relevant experiences, retailers and brands acknowledge they must leverage the customer data and content around which experience solutions congregate.

Among leading "big vendor" commerce platforms, Forrester found that Adobe is the only one to lead with its experience offering, adding commerce and other pieces after.

Seventy-eight percent of U.S. adults online want websites to indicate product availability in stores, and 83 percent want to see the estimated date and time of arrival on websites which require bringing inventory, lead time and other customer data into the front end.

Digital businesses increasingly expect their commerce solutions to follow the FIRE method: flexible, inexpensive, rapid to deploy and update; easy to administer.
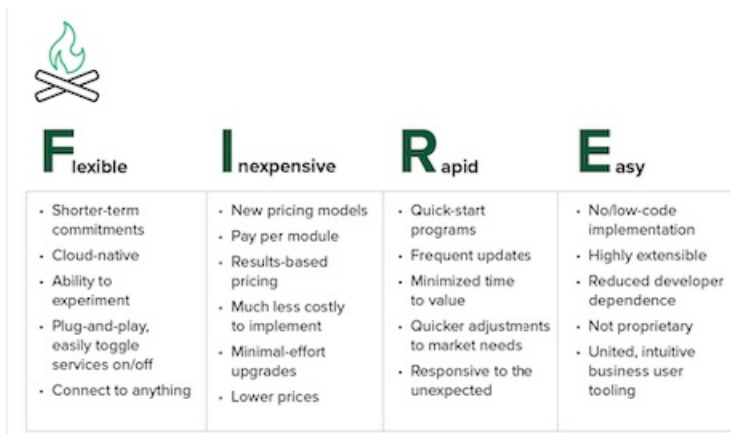
The FIRE approach to ecommerce. Image credit: Forrester

In terms of flexibility, many retailers offer plug-ins, but the market now holds vendors' app stores to a new bar for nearly instantaneous click-and-configure implementation of applications.

Cloud-native tech allows businesses to experiment with new functions just long enough to test them, without having to commit to certain processes.

Additionally, new pricing models with pay-by-component rate sheets are more common. Retailers increasingly ask Forrester for assistance in evaluating their pricing models to ensure they are competitive enough.

A number of commerce solutions have introduced ways to shorten the time-to-value for new customers. While these programs may offer simplified versions, they allow businesses to launch digital properties in less time sometimes weeks compared to months.

In regards to easy administration, Forrester finds that low-code platforms let business users configure, map and execute functions internally, potentially eliminating the need for developers entirely.

The same technology that allows app developers to deliver custom apps up to 10 times faster now enables non-coder website managers to roll out new layouts independently with little or no coding.

Prioritizing change
In implementing these solutions where experience is of paramount concern, Forrester recommends prioritizing a front-end tech revolution.
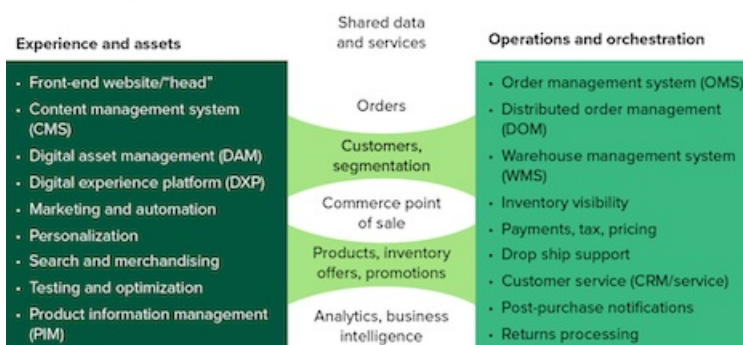
Brands and retailers must align their tech processes and solutions to new cores of operation. Image credit: Forrester

Due to the high number of vendors involved in omnichannel models, businesses should identify which end of their tech stack could benefit the most from change and focus there, as opposed to attempting to evolve the entire ecosystem at once.

Media conglomerate Hearst announced the launch of a new integrated ecommerce marketplace, The Tower, which will be carried out by Ken Downing, the newly appointed chief brand officer of Hearst Luxury Collection.

Each brand store will live within its own brand URL with a distinct point-of-view and design, but shoppers will be able to navigate between brands. The newly launched ecommerce destination will be the shoppable home of Hearst's four luxury brands, merging content, commerce and community to create a unique shopping experience (see story).

Businesses should prioritize a back-end tech revolution if they have more complex needs surrounding operational

processes. This will be most beneficial for brands selling into both online and physical channels and fulfilling from stores, warehouses and third-party suppliers.

If simplicity is the priority, businesses should opt for a new kind of all-in-one solution.

Forrester suggests all-in-one solutions are the best choice for businesses whose top priorities include ease of management, partner consolidation and basic coverage of the functional areas of the commerce ecosystem.

Speaking at a session at the *Vogue Business* and Google virtual summit "The Way Forward" in November 2021, retail and technology experts discussed how improvements in data capabilities will continue to improve ecommerce. While shoppers do not think in channels, bridging the gap between in-store and online experiences is as essential as ever for luxury players (see story).