E-commerce platforms

Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to help companies with questions related to the selection of an e-commerce platform.

It is a good idea to proceed with care when selecting an e-commerce platform. A wide range of potential e-commerce platforms are available. It is therefore important to define the requirements for the e-commerce business before choosing the platform.

The purpose of this guide is to simplify the decision-making process by helping you make the final procurement decision by focusing on e-commerce platforms that are most suitable for your operations.

E-commerce objectives

When planning the selection of an e-commerce platform, it is advisable to define your business needs.

Goals

Consider the goals of the e-commerce activities and the role that e-commerce will play in your business. Will the activity part of a brick-and-mortar store or the main business activity? How much of the turnover should the online store cover?

Budget for deployment and maintenance

Estimate how much money and time can be invested in the implementation. Money can buy ready-made solutions, support and maintenance. However, increasing the competence of your own team may be profitable in the long term.

Customers

Find out what customers are buying. Also, look into what they are not buying. It is also a good idea to pay attention to customers' purchasing behaviour, such as whether they are impulse buyers, or buyers focusing on product information or quality.

Platform options

There are many platform options nowadays – how to choose the right one?

In 2023, Paytrail collected information on Finnish online retailers' experiences of e-commerce platforms. Over 600 online retailers replied to the Paytrail questionnaire. The survey report provides a good picture of the e-commerce platforms most commonly used in Finland.

The five most popular e-commerce platforms used by experienced online retailers in Finland (Paytrail 2023):

- WooCommerce 27%
- Shopify 14%
- MyCashflow 9%
- Retailer's own platform 9%
- Vilkas 6%

The most popular e-commerce platforms among e-commerce retailers starting up or considering a change of platforms when the choice of platform is still under consideration (Paytrail 2023):

- Shopify
- WooCommerce
- Retailer's own platform
- Vilkas (a Finnish platform)
- MyCashflow (a Finnish platform)
- Fingu (a Finnish platform)
- Webnode

Steps for choosing a platform

This section describes the steps for choosing a platform:

1   Defining the range of platforms.

2   Needs assessment, i.e. defining the characteristics of the online store.

3   Limiting the number of potential platforms to, for example, three. Comparing the platform options to each other in light of the needs assessment.

4   Asking for tenders from suppliers of e-commerce platforms.

5   Possible trial run of the platforms before the final decision. In most cases, platform providers offer a free trial period.

6   Purchasing a suitable service package from the selected e-commerce platform.

If you have a consultant (such as a website supplier), some of these steps can be outsourced.

1 Defining the range of platforms

When defining the range of platforms, it is a good idea to consider the following questions:

? Will the commercial services be offered only within Finland or also abroad?

Mainly offered in Finland
Finnish online shopping platforms are a good alternative.

Offered extensively abroad
It is advisable to consider platforms which are widely used internationally. Of the Finnish options, it is advisable to consider platforms that also support international activities.

? Do you want the data to remain in Finland?

If you want the data to remain in Finland, Finnish e-commerce platforms are the best option. WooCommerce solutions are also useful because WooCommerce servers are located in the EU. The data storage location must always be verified separately from the service provider.

? Is it just an online shop or also a brick-and-mortar store? Do you also want to manage cash services and inventories in the same system?

If a brick-and-mortar store is also included, Finnish e-commerce platforms are worthwhile alternatives. In addition, market leaders among foreign platforms are also good options.

? Do you want to create the online store yourself or together with the supplier?

- Do you or your organisation have sufficient technical competence for doing this yourself?
- Do you want to make changes to the visuals yourself/in a team?
- Who will handle changes to the product range?
- Will more language versions be added?
- Do you want to access support services in Finnish?

Doing it yourself

Ready-made e-commerce solutions (so-called SAAS services) are a safe option.

According to Paytrail (Paytrail 2023):
Of all respondents, "Users of the WooCommerce platform had most commonly built their online store with a technical partner. 60% of them had wanted to involve an external partner in the project."

Satisfied companies who have built an online shop without the help of a supplier:
- *Vilkas (a Finnish platform) 93 %*
- *MyCashflow (a Finnish platform) 67 %*
- *Shopify 61,5 %*
- *Retailer's own platform 57 %*
- *WooCommerce 40%*

Working with an IT supplier

It is important to consider what you will need help with:
- Do you need help with setting up the online store?
- Do you need help with producing content for the online store?
- Do you need help with improving the company's online visibility?
- Do you need help with maintaining the online store?

? Do you want to launch the online store as cheaply as possible?

The need to minimise spending will take you to open source code systems or SAAS platforms where it is possible to start at a low cost or even free of charge.

The market situation is continuously evolving as the prices of services change. The examples below describe the situation at the time of the publication of this guide.

For example, the following systems can be adopted at an affordable cost:

WooCommerce woocommerce.com

- Makes it possible to build an online shop at low costs.
- The need for extensions and add-ons increases costs.
- The largest in Finland and the world.
- Wordpress plugin.

WixeCommerce www.wix.com

- A constantly evolving platform on the rise in the market.
- Affordable and easy to use.

Zyro Website Builder zyro.com

- Affordable and easy to use.

Ecwid www.ecwid.com

- Free when a maximum of 10 products are sold.
- Does not offer free customer service.

2 Needs assessment or defining the features of the online store

Defining the desired features is an important step in the process of choosing a platform. The questions below help you determine the features you will need.

Tip: Take advantage of the checklist in the Paytrail purchasing guide when recording the features of the online store. You will find a link to the purchasing guide at the end of this guide.

?

- In how many languages should the online store function?
- How do you want to manage product information and inventory balances?
- Who will the products in the online store be sold to?
- What kind of products will be available in the store?
- How many products will be for sale?
- What information needs to be saved in the online store?
- What information/reports should be sent from the online store, to whom and when?
- What information systems should the online shop be compatible with?
- How do you want to implement the payment and delivery of products?

3 Limiting the number of potential platforms

Tip: Take advantage of the checklist in the Paytrail purchasing guide and select three platforms for a more detailed inspection.

For example, the following questions help you in choosing a platform:

- Is it possible to create a professional-looking online store with the software?
- Is the e-commerce software easy to use?
- What payment methods can be used with the e-commerce platform in question?
- How much will it cost to deploy the platform?
- How high are the transaction fees charged by the platform?

4-6 Approaching the selection decision

4 Ask the suppliers of the e-commerce platform for an offer or further information in relation to the needs assessment conducted earlier.

5 Possible testing of the platforms independently, before making the final decision. SAAS platforms usually offer a free trial period, in which case you can experiment with and test the online store. Selection decision.

6 Purchasing a suitable service package from the selected e-commerce platform.

If you have a consultant (such as a website supplier), some of these steps can be outsourced.

If you have selected an e-commerce platform, but the aim is to commission a supplier to complete the set-up work, you have now carried out the preparatory work for inviting tenders from suppliers.

Selecting the supplier

In this section, we provide tips for selecting the supplier for the online store in situations when an external supplier implements the webshop.

1 Defining the range of platforms, determining the characteristics, and limiting the range of platforms.

2 Comparing potential platforms. By comparing the platforms to each other, you can get a good idea of which platform would best meet the desired characteristics.

3 Mapping the potential suppliers for the selected platforms. Supplier references help in selecting the supplier.

4 Creating a call for tenders to meet the characteristics you need and want. The notes you have created will be useful when preparing the call for tender.

5 Receiving and reviewing offers. Comparing offers.

6 Decision on the supplier. Special attention should be paid to the schedule, quality and cost perspective.

Domestic e-commerce operators

MyCashFlow
www.mycashflow.fi
Cash services, thus also suitable for brick-and-mortar stores. Considered easy to use. Suitable for small or medium-sized companies trading products mainly within Finland.

Vilkas
www.vilkas.fi
A large platform in Finland. Generally regarded as easy to use. Suitable if you do not have a brick-and-mortar store. Provides a solution for pharmacies.

Clover shop
www.clovershop.com
A Finnish platform in operation for a long time.

Finqu
www.finqu.fi
Cash system, inventory management.
Suitable, for example, for brick-and-mortar stores operating in Finland and expanding online.

Flowvy
www.flowvy.com
Finnish software that includes the ERP system, cash register system and an online store in one package. An alternative to owners of brick-and-mortar stores.

Holvi
www.holvi.com
Holvi's online store is best suited for selling digital products, such as courses and e-books, and services. Limited editing possibilities.

Kotisivukone
www.kotisivukone.fi
Small online stores that primarily sell within Finland. Limited editing possibilities. Advantages include ease of use, longevity and comprehensive customer service in Finnish.

Foreign e-commerce operators

WooCommerce
woocommerce.com
Largest in Finland and internationally, WordPress plugin. Free in basic use, requires a WordPress server. If your homepages were created with WordPress, this is a very good option. You can create a versatile and tailor-made online store. Good support in Finnish.

Shopify
www.shopify.com
A significant platform in Finland. Considered easy to use. You can create a versatile online shop. Good Finnish-language support in the app, service instructions in English.

Adobe Commerce
business.adobe.com/products/magento/magento-commerce.html
Large online stores, not optimised for small and medium-sized businesses.

Wix Ecommerce
www.Wix.com
A constantly evolving platform on the rise in the market. Perceived as easy to use.

Zyro Website Builder
zyro.com
An easy-to-use, affordable and evolving e-commerce platform.

Ecwid
www.ecwid.com
Free when a maximum of 10 products are sold. Does not offer free customer service.

Webnode
www.webnode.com
A platform that has recently grown popular in Finland.