In eCommerce, what is More Important, Integration or an Exceptional Customer Experience

I have been selling integrated eCommerce into the Sage 300 channel for about 17 years now. Moreover, through all that time I truly believed that integration was the most important aspect of eCommerce and that without deep integration you only had part of a solution, not a whole solution. Both companies I have worked for in the eCommerce space were small, with between 12 and 55 employees. They both had very deep integration to their targeted Sage ERPs, and they both had decent web store features. However, they both lacked the market size and staff to compete with the big guys; Shopify, Magento and Woocommerce.

Lately, watching the rise of Shopify and Woocommerce, I have been having a bit of a crisis of faith. Is Integration really all that important? Obviously, it is important, and for many reasons. But, is it the most important aspect of an eCommerce offering. I am beginning to think not. I am beginning to believe that it is the Customer Experience and the feature set a site delivers that drives sales, not integration. I don't think your customers, for the most part, care about integration. They care about excellent user experience, features that allow them to get in, find what they want and check out quickly and accurately. They care about things like on-time delivery, loyalty points, and great payment options. I doubt that they think for one second "I hope this site is integrated."

The Gartner Group says that forty percent of B2B customers want more integration. In a 2016 PayPal survey, they found that that only seventeen percent of Canadian companies have web stores, and only about ten percent of those have integrated web stores. Using these numbers, it means that only about two percent of Canadian companies have integrated web stores and only forty percent of the B2B buyers at those stores want more integration. Which means that sixty percent are satisfied with what they have and seeing as, for most, that means that they have no integration; then to me, it seems obvious that these customers are looking for something else from a web store…something that they deem more important than integration.

As I began to question my beliefs, I looked more closely at what was happening in the industry. Shopify Magento and Woocommerce own the industry. The companies I had worked for had about 200 customers each. According to [BuiltWith](#), there are 1,345,361 customers using Shopify, Magento has 654,802, and as of February 2018, 2,341,106 sites use Woocommerce. Most of these sites would be non-integrated or partially integrated. So, what is the appeal? I believe that the appeal is the huge development communities that have sprung up around these platforms, Communities that deliver every feature imaginable. That, plus the sheer size of thei client bases, which gives them the ability to distill market trends from hundreds of thousands, even millions, of clients not just one or two hundred. This market analysis gives their Product Management teams the data they need to know what users want, and they already have the development community to ensure it gets built. When you have a team of 4 to 15 developers; you cannot possibly compete with a company like Magento that claims 300,000 certified developers worldwide. It simply isn't possible.

So, what is the solution? The small deeply integrated web stores serve a purpose; they make it easier for the store owner to manage orders and they deliver some excellent customer portal features to end-users. The ability to have orders flow into the accounting system also make it easier to grow the

business without adding tons of staff. The question is; does that drive sales? Or, more importantly, does that drive more sales than a feature-rich eCommerce site with hundreds of add-ons that helps create an excellent user experience? In my opinion, it is the latter that is critical. Customers don't buy because they can see their history, they buy because the site is easy to navigate and has the features they want and need. However, it would be nice to be able to achieve both goals - a site that is easy for the site owner to manage without re-keying and one that has features that make it easy for registered users to self-manage their account and quickly and easily place orders based on order history. All while using an industry leading, feature-rich web store.

The question then becomes; is that a feasible reality? Can a store owner have a solution with good two-way integration to their ERP and a web store with a vast array of features that create an excellent user experience for their customers? The answer is yes. Today, several companies have created products that offer integration with most major accounting packages and ERPs as well as to Shopify, Magento, and other popular eCommerce web stores. Therefore, adding one of these integration Plug-ins to a Shopify, Magento or Woocommerce installation, gives you everything you need to run a modern, integrated eCommerce business; one that reduces costs and allows you to grow due to eliminated re-keying of orders but that has a modern ever-advancing web store to help increase sales. Will the integration be as good as the integration built into a purpose-built, integrated eCommerce solution; likely not. Will the customer experience be better with the likes of Shopify, WooCommerce or Magento? In my experience, most definitely. Does the benefit of excellent customer experience outweigh the benefits of a purpose-built, integrated web store with limited development capabilities? I believe that it does and it seems that several million store owners agree.

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