

WordPress as an e-commerce solution - Good or bad idea?

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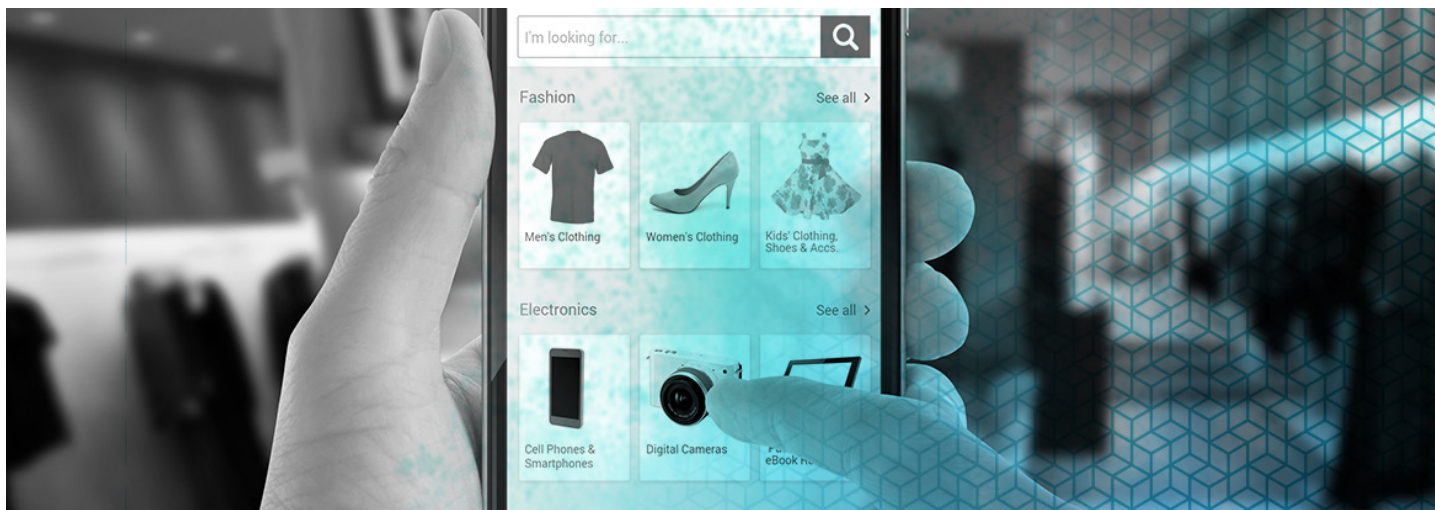
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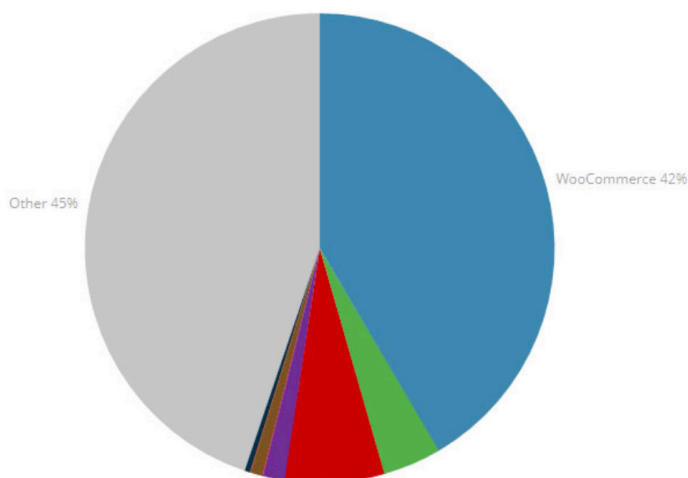
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Introduction.

E-commerce has become an integral part of the Internet economy and a billion-dollar industry. You, too, might be thinking about opening an online store.

If that is your plan, you have different ways to do so. There are several platforms out there, from [Shopify](#) over [Magento](#) to [BigCommerce](#). Another option is WordPress. Judging by the fact that WooCommerce, the leading WordPress e-commerce plugin, powers almost half of all online shops, it also seems to be a popular one.



So, it's clear that WordPress has got something going for itself as an e-commerce solution. However, is that due to it being the best option or simply because of the popularity of WordPress in general?

To find out, in this White Paper we will look at WordPress as an ecommerce platform. We will first glance at the current state of e-commerce in general. After that, we will examine the pros and cons of using WordPress to build your online store.

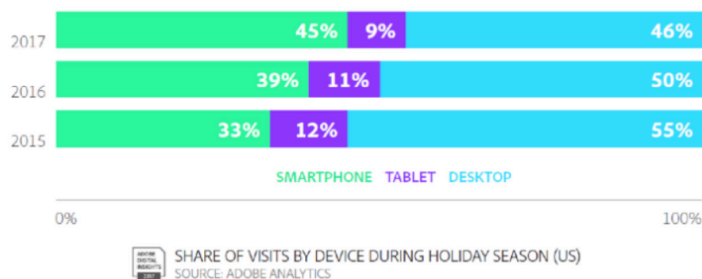
The state of e-commerce.

Before getting into whether to use WordPress for your online shop, let's look at whether e-commerce is a good idea in general and what is required of an online store today.

First of all, in 2017 in the US alone, [online sales amounted to \\$453.5 billion](#). That's an increase of 16 percent over 2016. So, people love to shop online - a lot. In fact, [96 percent of Americans](#) that possess internet access have made an online purchase in their life. A whole 80 percent in the past month.

Especially younger people like to shop on the Internet. [67 percent of Millennials](#) and 56 percent of Gen Xers prefer it to in-store purchases. For that reason, it should come as no surprise that Millennials are also [53 percent more likely](#) to have a shopping app on their mobile/tablet than other generations.

Generally, mobile shopping is an important part of e-commerce. Holiday season 2017, was the first time mobile visits to retail sites were [expected to surpass that from desktop computers](#).



While the latter still represent the majority of online purchases, that number is steadily declining. It's no wonder as [37 percent](#) of younger consumers (18-24 age group) now do most of their shopping on mobile.

How do customers find online shops? [43 percent](#), so almost half of e-commerce traffic comes from organic Google search. This means that search engine optimization is an absolute must for anyone wanting to succeed in the e-commerce sector.

Social networks are also a traffic source for online shops. In fact, [53 percent](#) of buyers state that Facebook informs their purchase decisions. The largest social network also [dominates referrals and order numbers on Shopify](#). As a consequence, your e-commerce solution better play well with Facebook, Twitter, and more.



In a nutshell, e-commerce is a growing sector with a lot of potential. However, which solution should you use to power your online store? Is it WordPress? Let's discuss some of the arguments for and against the platform.

Why you should use WordPress to power your online store.

As a first step we will talk about why WordPress is a good idea as an e-commerce solution.

All the benefits of using WordPress

WordPress in general is a great option for building any kind of website:

- **Free** - By choosing WordPress, you can start your website for free. As an open source project, the platform doesn't charge anyone for using it. Your basic expenses will be [hosting](#) and a domain, everything else is optional.
- **Mature** - WordPress is built on well-understood and tested technology like PHP, SQL and JavaScript. It has more than a decade of development behind it and has been tested on literally millions of websites.
- **Easy to use** - Ease of use is one of the main reasons for WordPress' success. Creating and managing your website with WordPress is easier than using Facebook. You can do so without any coding knowledge. On the other hand, Magento, for example, really needs you to have web development skills to make it work.
- **Secure** - There is an [expert security team](#) behind the platform that responds to every threat. They can issue security updates on a moment's notice and WordPress will be apply them automatically to keep your site safe.
- **Scalable** - The platform powers websites of all sizes, from startups and small business sites all the way to behemoths like TechCrunch and The New York Times. The list of [notable WordPress users](#) is impressive.
- **Extendable** - You can make use of the [thousands of WordPress themes](#) and [tens of thousands of plugins](#) out there, not just for e-commerce. Whatever feature you want to add to your online shop, there's probably a solution already out there.
- **Customizable** - There is nothing that you cannot change about WordPress. Whatever functionality you dream of, you can either implement it yourself or, more likely, find an existing plugin that does what you need. Same for design, nothing is off limits.
- **Well-supported** - WordPress is maintained by a community of thousands of professional developers and testers. As a consequence, it has a reliable update cycle that brings new features, enhancements and security improvements on a regular basis. The same is true for the leading e-commerce plugins.

The factors above are among the reasons why WordPress now powers more than [30 percent of the entire Internet](#).

Great e-commerce plugin choices

Using WordPress for your website is generally a good idea. However, besides that it is also particularly well suited for e-commerce sites. The WordPress sphere offers a bunch of excellent solutions to open up an online shop:

- [WooCommerce](#) - By far the most popular solution. WooCommerce allows you to sell both physical and digital products. It also has a large number of addons and compatible themes, comes with inventory management, various payment and shipping options and is well supported.
- [Easy Digital Downloads](#) - As the name suggests this plugin is made for selling digital products like ebooks and online courses. It is beginner friendly and works with almost any theme.
- [MarketPress](#) - A solution created by WPMU DEV. Comes with 15 payment gateways out of the box, allows you to build a single store or a network of shops and sell both digital and physical products.
- [Cart66](#) - This specimen is very security focused. It is PCI compliant, has a built-in CDN (content delivery network) for enhanced speed and safety, integrates with MailChimp and has "buy-now" buttons for social media and other marketing channels.
- [ExchangeWP](#) - Formerly known as iThemes Exchange, this plugin has recently come under new management. It supports all major payment gateways, has many addons that you can purchase individually or as part of packs and is great for membership sites. Unfortunately, there is no free test version.
- [MemberPress](#) - A solution to build membership websites. It allows you to sell subscription-based products and services, integrates with WooCommerce and is extendable.

Other WordPress e-commerce plugins include [Shopp](#), [WP eCommerce](#) and [eCommerce Product Catalog](#).

All of the above tap into the ease of use of the platform that houses them. That means, they enable you to create and manage your online shop without having to write code. This includes creating products, inventory management, and

configuring the shop. Most of them also work with multiple currencies and across different locations and tax rates.

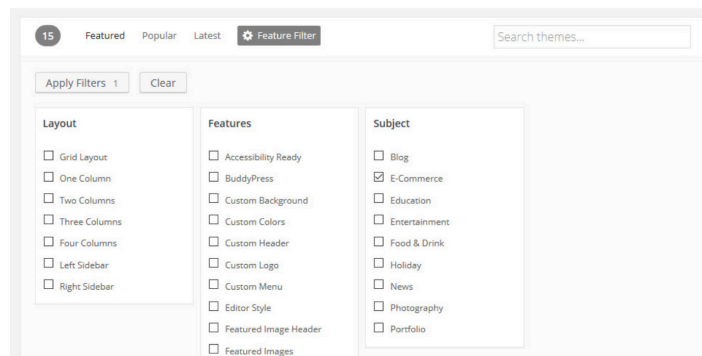
Also, like other WordPress plugins, they work with almost any website or theme. That way, you are able to integrate e-commerce capabilities into your existing site instead of having to start from scratch.

Most of these also offer a free version so you can get your feet wet. If you need more options, you can extend them with free and paid addons. More on that in a moment.

Many e-commerce themes

Aside from the plugins, WordPress also offers a lot of themes specifically made for online shops. In the WordPress theme directory, you even have a dedicated search option to find such themes.

The advantage of using an e-commerce theme is that they are made to look like a shop. So, if your goal is to create an online store, you have a template ready to go. Consequently, you are able to create a professional looking store with just a few mouse clicks.



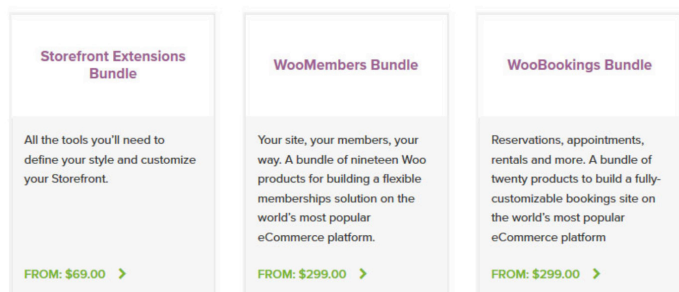
Due to the popularity of WooCommerce, many themes out there were made to be compatible with the plugin. Aside from that, makers of e-commerce plugins often offer special (and free) themes exactly for their platform. This is true for [WooCommerce](#) and [Easy Digital Downloads](#).

In addition to that, at least in the official theme directory, all new themes now need to be mobile responsive. That means, an online shop built with WordPress will automatically look good and work on phones and tablets. In times when [global mobile internet use has surpassed desktops](#) this is a must.

Awesome flexibility

Flexibility is another argument for WordPress as an e-commerce solution. With a closed system like Shopify, you need to settle on a plan and are stuck with the features of that plan. In order to unlock more, you are forced to opt for the next higher tier, which is more expensive.

With WordPress, on the other hand, you have a mix-and-match approach. WordPress e-commerce works like WordPress in general: you have a great core product that you can enhance in a way that fits your needs.



For example, you can take the e-commerce plugin of your choice and then add just the features you want, like additional payment gateways, membership features, and integrations for marketing tools. That way, you don't have to shell out money for stuff that you are never going to use but that comes hardcoded into your e-commerce solution of choice.

This approach also gives you the option to build any kind of website and then simply add e-commerce capabilities to it. Other tools, like Magento or Shopify, are for e-commerce only. While some of them have optional tools like blogging capabilities, in the end, the only thing they can build is an online shop.

Integrated marketing tools

Speaking of blogging capabilities, by using WordPress as your e-commerce solution, you also get to benefit from its excellent capacity as a marketing tool.

For one, WordPress excels at blogging. After all, it started out as a blogging platform and continues to do this part very well. The platform has everything you need to build a thriving company blog, like a comment system, post archives, taxonomies, and more. Plus, with e-commerce capabilities, you can even sell products from right inside your blog posts.

WordPress is also incredibly SEO friendly. The many SEO-optimized themes take care of the majority of [technical SEO](#) without you having to lift a finger. In addition to that, features like custom URLs let you add keywords right to page and post addresses.

In addition to that, you can choose from some [high-quality SEO plugins](#) to really take control of your on-page optimization. Some of them even offer [dedicated addons for e-commerce](#). Mobile friendly themes make sure that Google does not ignore your online shop in their upcoming mobile-first index.

Furthermore, WordPress plays well with social media. Content created with the CMS is well understood and looks good on Facebook, Twitter, and every other major social network.

The platform also integrates well with other third-party services like Google Analytics. That way, you can track your efforts and make informed decisions about where to take your marketing. The [WP REST API](#) has only opened more possibilities like that.

In short, with WordPress you get a proven, flexible system that offers many choices for creating exactly the online shop you need. It also has all the tools to market your store and the option to create any site you want around it.

Reasons why WordPress isn't the best idea for e-commerce.

Of course, there are also some things that speak against using WordPress as an e-commerce platform.

More moving parts

The power of open source projects like WordPress is that it's not all in one hand. The platform has no sole owner, therefore you are free to use it for any purpose you want, including building your own online store.

On the other hand, the same fact means that it places a lot more responsibility in your hands. From hosting over installing WordPress to choosing the right plugins and theme as well as keeping your site updated – you need to do everything yourself. When something goes wrong, it's also you who has to communicate with the right stakeholders to get things back on track. It might not always be apparent who that is.

WordPress is also not a pure e-commerce platform. Rather it's a CMS with e-commerce capabilities tacked on. On e-commerce-only platforms, you get everything out of one hand. Support comes from only one side, so do updates. Some even provide hosting. Of course, this simplifies things.

However, that doesn't mean that you are alone with WordPress. All the plugins mentioned above have excellent and dedicated support teams. If you ever run into a problem, they will help you out in no time.

The same goes for WordPress itself. There are active [support forums](#), lots of [documentation](#) and [informative blogs](#) out there. Overall, WordPress has a bigger support team than a single enterprise could ever put together. Plus, if all else fails, there are many affordable developers that you can hire.

WordPress is a popular target for hackers

Because of the sheer volume of WordPress websites in existence, the platform has become a favorite target for hackers and other unsavory individuals. WordPress site owners have to deal with brute force attacks, spam and other nuisances.

For that reason, if you are running an online shop (or, in fact, any site that handles sensitive information) you need to be extra careful with security. The first step for that is to use a quality host that takes this kind of thing seriously. That means you get things like HTTPS, vulnerability scans and regular backups.

In addition to that, you need to invest in safe logins, keep your site up to date, use a security plugin, and learn about [WordPress security](#) in general. However, when you follow basic best practices, you should have no problem keeping your site safe.

Relatively hardware hungry

Because WordPress is operating with a bunch of technical debt to ensure backwards compatibility, it can be more demanding on hardware than other platforms.

That also means, if your e-commerce site becomes popular and needs to handle huge numbers of visitors and customers, this can be taxing on servers and slow down your site. However, again, a lot of this is in your hands. There are plenty of things you can do to ensure reliable performance even at higher demand.

Here, too, a good host is the first step. It should offer caching, run the latest version of PHP, offer good hardware with SSD

hard drives and lots of memory as well as other measures to make your site respond swiftly.

After that, you need to make sure you give your site a chance to be fast. That means, going easy on the number of plugins you use, making sure to [optimize images](#) and performing regular maintenance tasks. Our [spring cleaning tips](#) are a good first step in this direction. However, there are more things you can do to [speed up your WordPress website](#).

To sum up, WordPress offers some challenges when used as an e-commerce platform. It offers more moving parts than a single-stakeholder solution, need extra attention in the area of security and can be demanding on server hardware. However, users have a lot of control in addressing these issues.

WordPress for E-commerce – Wrapping Up

Online shopping and e-commerce are an area that continues to grow. Those eager to get in on the action can choose from different options and platforms to create their own store. WordPress is one of them.

A lot speaks for using WordPress to power your e-commerce venture. First of all, you get to use a mature, flexible, and highly extendable open source platform that can be adjusted to your wishes. It also comes with a solid e-commerce infrastructure like highly specialized plugins and themes to quickly set up online store.

Aside from that, the platform is flexible enough to not only build an online shop with all necessary features but can also power any site you want to build around it. The list of advantages is rounded off with excellent marketing tools that are part of WordPress.

On the other hand, a system where not everything comes from one vendor means more moving parts and more personal responsibility. This is especially true in the area of security since the platform's success has made it a popular target. Finally, scalability can become an issue if your shop goes into the tens of thousands of products.

Overall, WordPress is absolutely recommendable for creating an online store. Only if you are moving towards the enterprise sector in size, you need to plan ahead and lay down the necessary infrastructure.

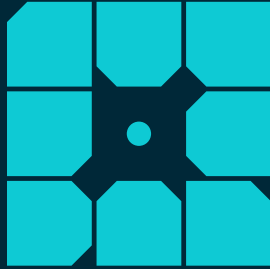
About the author.



Nick Schäferhoff

Nick Schäferhoff is an entrepreneur, online marketer, and professional blogger from Germany. He found WordPress when he needed a website for his first business and instantly fell in love. When not building websites, creating content or helping his clients improve their online bus....

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About WP Engine.

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts are trusted by over 70,000 companies across 130 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland, and Brisbane, Australia.

www.wpengine.com



About Torque

Torque is a news site featuring all things WordPress. We are dedicated to informing new and advanced WordPress professionals, users, and enthusiasts about the industry. Torque focuses primarily on WordPress News, Business, and Development, but also covers topics relating to open source and breakthrough technology. Torque made its debut in July 2013, at WordCamp San Francisco, and has since produced valuable content that reflects the evolution of WordPress, both as a platform and a community. Torque is a WP Engine publication, though maintains complete editorial independence. torquemag.io

