eCommerce: How to Sell my Products Online

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital.

Contents

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think digital.

Introduction

As more and more consumers start shopping online many food, drink and horticulture companies are considering selling online for the first time. While it may seem like an obvious step to take, eCommerce requires some expertise and a lot of resources to get right. This document outlines some of the key principles of selling online direct to consumer, applicable to businesses of all sizes.

This guide is part of the ***Bord Bia Think Digital programme.*** This programme seeks to enhance the digital capabilities of Irish food, drink and horticulture companies whilst equipping businesses with the resources and supports needed to deliver best in class digital activation. Find resources, webinars and more on the Think Digital page. This is one of a range of ***Client Capability*** services available, find out more about our additional resources here. For further support please reach out at clientcapability@bordbia.ie.

Section 1: The Why and What?

The Advantages of Selling Online

Adding an eCommerce proposition to your business model brings a number of advantages:

- Wider customer base
- Lower overheads
- More margin control
- Ability to offer more products than may be available in retail
- Efficiencies in supply chain with ordering, payment, fulfilment
- Cost effective marketing possibilities
- The ability to fully control the buyer journey experience

The benefits can far outweigh the costs for most business, especially if you begin to scale your online sales to a level that meets your business objectives.

What do I need to consider before I start?

Before you begin to invest time and resources you need to ask, and answer, a number of questions:

- What is my motivation to sell online? Short term response or long-term strategy?
- What is the (realistic) size of the opportunity for my business?
- Given the size of the prize, what's the "opportunity cost" of going online i.e. what will not be done while I'm developing my online business?
- Do I have the resources to sell online? The staff, the IT infrastructure, the internal processes etc.
- If not, do I have the time and the budget to put them in place?
- Stock management – am I able to manage my stock inventory with a new channel? Do I prioritise online orders? What is my delivery plan? Does this fit into existing stock, raw material or supply chain operations I currently have for our 'traditional' channels?

If you can satisfactorily answer all of the above, then you should consider taking the first steps. If not, you need to seriously reassess whether or not selling online is the right move for your business today.

What are the different eCommerce Models?

There are three main models for selling to consumers:

- ***Direct to Consumer (D2C):*** This is where your own website has additional eCommerce functionality and you manage the transaction with the customer, end-to-end.
- ***Online Marketplace:*** In this instance, you can leverage a third-party platform e.g. eBay, Amazon for the purpose of selling your goods. You'll pay a commission, but they will handle parts of the transaction (such as payments). A second online report on Digital Marketplaces will be made available on the Think Digital webpage.
- ***Indirect:*** This is the online equivalent of the traditional retail model, where a retailer buys products from you and they sell them to their customers, on their own website.

For the purpose of this guide, we will be focusing on **direct to consumer** as the area we believe has the opportunity for most success among Bord Bia clients.

Why are we focusing on D2C?

In the current climate, there are a number of reasons to focus on D2C:

- It is the model that gives you as a producer/ food brand the most control and it can be implemented in a relatively short space of time.
- You will set the pricing, stock availability, manage the delivery etc.
- This will allow you to adapt to changing circumstances and demand.
- Selling direct offers you opportunity to leverage your brand and existing customer base.
- You can extend your relationship with existing customers and social media followers and build new ones.
- You can develop new customer insights and collect transactional data, which will drive further online and offline sales.

OK, I'm going to start selling direct to my end consumers, what next?

The first thing, you need is a website. Assuming you have that, you'll need to add eCommerce functionality to your website to enable customers to buy products securely from your business.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think digital.

The quickest and easiest way to do this is add an *eCommerce platform* to your existing website. This platform will be fully integrated with your existing website and will give you all the capabilities you need to start selling online.

Section 2: eCommerce Platforms

Which eCommerce platform should I implement?

There are a vast number of eCommerce solutions out there, so the trick is to find the one that best suits your needs. Some platforms can cost thousands of euro and take weeks to implement, but equally there are some that can be set up very quickly, without requiring external support.

The basic eCommerce requirements include:
- Catalogue creation & management
- Secure payment management
- Order processing
- System integration

Large eCommerce operators will require a very robust solution that will allow seamless integration into multiple systems. They will need to facilitate thousands (and in some cases millions) of daily transactions and will manage complex workflow. It is unlikely that companies with lower anticipated rate of sales will need this level of support and if you're not careful, you could end up with a solution that is very expensive, complex and not suited to your requirements.

The main things to consider when you're selecting a platform include:

How many products will I be selling?
- Most producers will have a basic product offering of less than 100 SKUs. If you already know what it is you want to offer, it's simply choosing a right layout and options for your new site.

How many transactions do I expect to handle per day?
- Realistically, until you have your business really up-and-running, most business do far less than 100 transactions per week.

What do I need it to integrate with? E.g. website, logistic software etc.
- Don't try to do everything in one go. Get the basics in place first, start processing the first orders and payments and then see what else needs to be added. It is often easier to add to existing processes than to get everything right on paper before you start.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital.

How much can I spend?

- You should include all costing into a pricing model, as you would with any retailer or customer negotiations, to set expectations and objectives for this channel.

What about a Hosted eCommerce Platform?

For most companies starting out, the volume of orders will be relatively low and easy to manage. This being the case, you're probably best to look for a **"Hosted eCommerce Platform"**. This solution will give all the basic functionality that you need, with limited IT costs or effort. These tend to be an all-in-one solution.

The market leaders in the hosted eCommerce Platform space are:
- Shopify www.shopify.com/
- Woo Commerce www.woocommerce.com/
- Big Commerce www.bigcommerce.com/

As the name suggests, your provider will "host" your eCommerce functionality (in much the same way that Wordpress might host your website). With hosted solutions, your application is hosted remotely (in the Cloud), rather than on your own servers. This substantially reduces costs and effort to maintain, making hosted solutions the ideal option for SMEs or companies starting out. They also come with a range of easy-to-implement functions designed to make it straightforward for small companies to get started and scale as required. To put it simply, hosted platforms lower the technical barriers for entry into eCommerce for many companies, with the cons of limiting personalisation of self-hosting.
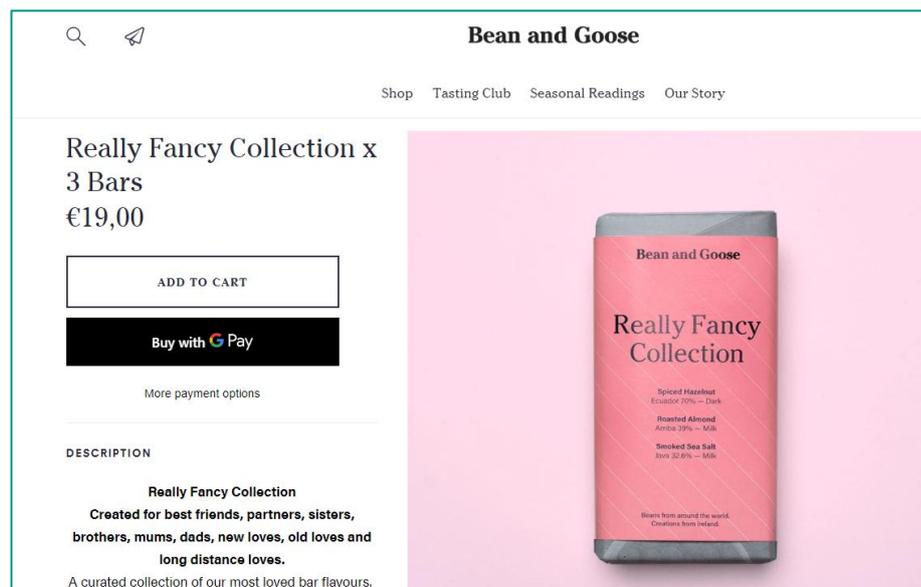
Bean and Goose - Shopify-powered platform

For larger companies, with IT and web development teams in place, "**Self-Hosting eCommerce software**" gives you the basic code needed to build and develop your own system. It can give a level of flexibility and personalisation that some companies require but it does need the internal knowledge base, time and resources to implement.

How will I integrate with my current website?

Hosted eCommerce platforms have been specifically designed for easy integration with websites. Today, for the reasons mentioned above, a lot of small business have a hosted WordPress website. If you have one, check that the platforms you're shortlisting have "*Wordpress Plugins*". This means that they are designed to integrate with your existing site, significantly reducing your effort to get set up.

If you have another type of website (you can check with your agency or IT if you don't know), you can also check for plugins to your site. For instance, Shopify has an app store, where you can download plugins to allow easy integration with most sites.

In the same way that these platforms are designed to easily integrate with your frontend (i.e. your website), they also have a range of extensions and APIs to allow you to connect with your backend e.g. CRMs, warehouses, logistics etc.

When you are shortlisting your eCommerce platform, have a list of the backend systems requiring integration to hand and search for the applicable extensions and APIs. If they are not available "out of the box" you will need to pay a third party to manage the integration so where possible, select a platform that already has them. There is an additional cost associated with the extensions, something which you'll also need to consider.

The alternatives to a hosted eCommerce platform are solutions offered by providers like:
- Magento This is the choice of enterprise companies, especially ones running SAP
- Drupal: An open source platform, which is highly scalable but you'll need a developer to get this up–and-running
- Opencart: Like Drupal it is open source, so there are no/low license costs, but implementation & development costs will be higher than a hosted solution.

It is unlikely that any food, drink of horticulture brand starting up eCommerce will need to invest in these types of solutions. If you feel you need to, make sure that have the right integration partner, otherwise you could end up with a large bill and unsatisfactory solution.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital.

Section 3: In-House or Agency?

I don't have the in-house expertise to even get started, who can help?

There are a lot of agencies in Ireland and abroad who can help you to build your eCommerce presence. Your current web or marketing agency may have eCommerce capabilities or they may be able to recommend someone. If not, you can find agencies advertising their services through normal online channels such as Google.

What should I look for in an agency?

Some agencies will specialise in eCommerce while others will be a "one stop shop" offering a range of digital and other marketing services. There are no hard and fast rules as to which is better, but in all cases, ask for the information below.

The first thing is case studies and reference customers, particularly in food or other related areas. This will help you to quickly establish their credentials.

When you are discussing the price, ask about "Fixed v Flexible" pricing. If you go down the "Fixed" route, you'll need to have a very clear agreement as to what will be delivered and when. If you don't get this right, you may end up with a website that doesn't offer you all that you expected and you could face a higher–than-anticipated bill as they add on the costs of extras which you had assumed where covered. Flexible pricing generally offers a basic build at a fixed price and then you'll pay extra for additional work after go-live. Both ways have their advantages, but you need to work closely with your agency to get the best results.

Once the site goes live, you'll need to agree on ongoing managed services and support. Generally speaking, it won't be enough for the agency to just build the website - you'll most likely want them to help you to manage it in the future, so see what services they offer here. We recommend talking to/ getting quotes from at least three agencies before you sign a contract with anyone.

What information do I need to provide to the agency?

Start with an overview of the business: what products do you sell and where. Then talk about the background to your business and who you want to sell to. You should also reference your high level eCommerce objectives, in terms of products, reach, volume and timelines.

Design requirements will be important and if you have branding documents, you should share those. They also need to know about your current website & integrations required e.g. EPOS, logistics etc.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital

Finally, mention the types of support you will need in future and any additional services required e.g. XML feeds for Google etc.

What questions should I ask the agency?

What's included in the price?
It's important to establish this up front as there may be additional hosting costs, software license fees, plug-in costs and charges for additional services like payment management implementation.

What they need from you?
This will probably include product content (text, photos etc.) and also site content e.g. "About Us", "Contact Us" etc. but there may be other requirements from them and they may want you to have payment processing in place.

Will they support the site after go live?
In most cases they will and you will have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with them. It's important to know what's covered in this as you may be charged extra for things you assumed were covered. You should have access to the Content Management System (CMS). This is important as it will allow you to make basic changes to your website e.g. add products and update the home page without having to contact the agency, who may charge you for making simple changes. You'll also need to know the cost (normally a "day rate") of them making bigger changes e.g. adding a new section to the site, adding a new payment method etc.

Once the website is live, can they help in other areas?

Some agencies will only build your website but most will offer additional services or will recommend a partner. The services they typically offer include:

- Manage Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
- Manage Google AdWords
- Write content/ blogs
- Post to Social Media
- Manage advertising spend
- Data analysis including Google Analytics
- Email Marketing

You may have the capabilities to manage all or some of the above but if not, a good agency can save you a lot of time and effort and may remove the requirement to hire additional staff.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital

Section 4: Website Security

How do I know my eCommerce website is secure?

All of the eCommerce platforms are **Payment Card Industry (PCI)** compliant, meaning they meet all of the requirements to keep payment information and business data safe. This includes:

- Protecting cardholder data
- Maintaining a vulnerability management program
- Implementing strong access control measures
- Regularly monitoring and testing networks
- Maintaining an information security policy

You, as the store owner, have the ultimate responsibility to maintain PCI compliance, but as it is such a fundamental part of their business, it is something that the providers are always on top of. Of course, your original website that you are looking to add eCommerce functionality to must be secure.

It is also important to note the latest GDPR and personal information regulations when you are managing customer information.

Burren Smokehouse - great content, copy writing and visual impact

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital.

Section 5: Adding Products to my Online Shop

How do I add my products to my online shop?

Adding products to your eCommerce store is one of the basic functionalities and again, all eCommerce sites are designed to handle it. It is generally done in one of two ways:

Manually
- You enter the content into the system through a user interface.
- This is generally quite simple and uses "drop and drag" functionality.
- It's suited to business that have a limited range of products (1-20).

Bulk Import
- If you have a lot of individual SKUs, it may be easier to upload them as a .csv file (a type of excel file).
- All platforms provide this type of functionality.
- Uploading a .csv file is very straightforward. Those of you using tools like MailChimp for bulk emails are probably familiar with it. All of the platforms offer easy to follow tutorials, such as the instructions like this from Shopify.

No matter how many products you have, give as much product information as possible:
- Photos significantly increase conversion.
- Add multiple product shots (with & without packing), serving suggestions etc. where available.
- Can you make a short video about the product?

When creating content for your product catalogue, keep a few things in mind:
- What basic information will people need to find and identify the product they want?
  - ➢ Use clear product names, not codes or serial numbers
  - ➢ Be consistent

- Do you have product variations?
  - ➢ Different sizes
  - ➢ Different flavours
  - ➢ Different packaging etc.

- If so, how do you manage them?
  - ➢ Do you have one main product and then make the different sizes available via a dropdown?
  - ➢ Do you have a separate main product for all variants?

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think
digital.

- Do you need an ingredient list, including sources?
- What about allergens?
- Do you have recipes or serving suggestions?
- Add Shipping & Storage information
- Have you considered "bundles"?
- You may be in a position to offer "multi-buys" or recommendations of products that are complimentary and frequently bought together. This will help to increase basket size and can spread the shipping costs across a range of products.
- When you create a "bundle", create it as a separate SKU as this will help shipping management, but it needs to be carefully managed with your other stock and warehousing processes.
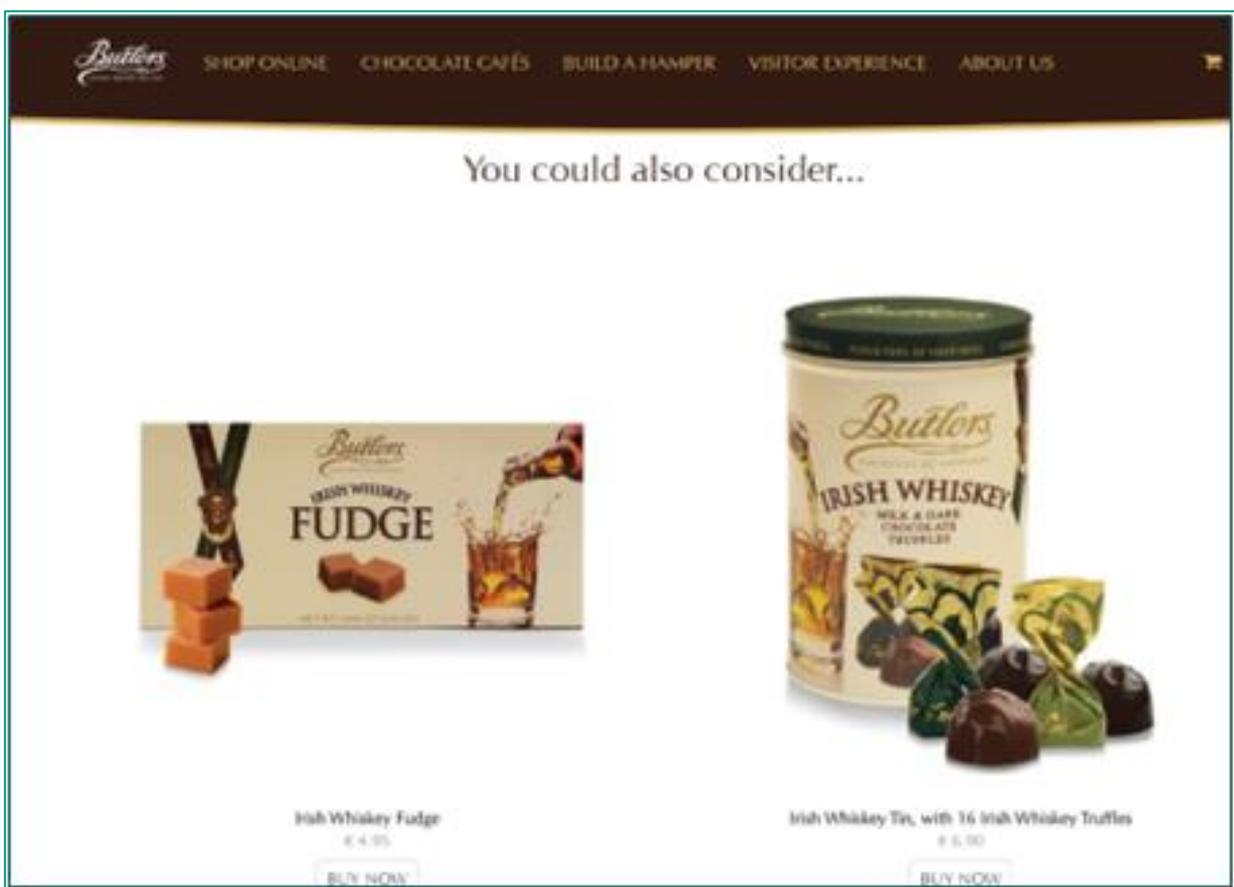
Butlers.ie bundling

Section 6: Making Sales

My shop is ready, how do I get traffic?

Getting traffic to your online shop is the same as getting it to your website. The only real difference is that you are looking to "convert" your traffic to sales. Many people visiting your site will be looking for information, not to buy - especially if you've only just started selling online. Bringing people to your website can be expensive and conversion rates can be as low as .05%, so don't be too downhearted if you initially see lower-than- expected traffic to the eCommerce part of your site and low conversion rates.

It is important to understand your consumer user journey, how they interact with your site and the information needs and requirements that they may have. Really drill down into what consumers are looking for when purchasing into a category, looking for information or prompts to get them interested in your product. For more information on this – check out Consumer Journey module in the Digital Marketing Framework here.

1. **Organic Traffic**
   Organic traffic is the best, if you can get it. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is still key, so correct tagging on all product pages is essential and again your eCommerce platform can help with this. The more product information the better for SEO. For more information on SEO see this Google guide and this Bord Bia webinar on the topic.

2. **Paid Search/ Google Ads**
   Even with good SEO, you'll probably need to pay for traffic through Google AdWords, Display network etc. This is the same as for your website, but you need to be very selective in the key words you use as the traffic you get may be expensive and may not convert. This Google Guide will help you get started.

   Grow your business with Google Ads. The most important aspect is to understand what exactly your potential customer are searching for and making sure that your products are aligned with their searches and needs.

   Keep on top of this with Google Analytics and use "Goal Setting" to measure your ROI. Goal setting is a simple KPI which will help you to keep track of who is actually buying from your website. You can get lots of help from Google on how to use Analytics and the Goal Setting functionality. You can also consult the Bord Bia webinar on this topic.

3. **Social Media**
   Social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, can be an excellent way to get traffic to your website, especially when you already have a strong social media presence.

   Facebook Ads can be an alternative to Google Ads and it's worth testing both to see which works best for you.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think digital.

There are also a range of **plug-ins** available through your eCommerce platform which will allow you to sell directly through Facebook and Instagram. Conversion through these plug-ins tends to be lower but it can be worth trying out.

For more information on how best to utilise Facebook and Instagram check out this Bord Bia webinar masterclass

I've made a sale! How do I manage payment?

In Ireland, unlike other markets where "cash on delivery" and cheques are still used, all payments will be by credit/debit card. The most popular payment methods for small business are **Pay Pal (**https://paypal.com/) **and Stripe (**https://stripe.com/)**.** Both are easy to implement through your eCommerce platform. The fees on Stripe are a little lower, but you'll have to wait longer to get your money.

Fees Comparison
- Stripe: 1.4% (of the order value) + €0.25 per transaction
- PayPal 3.4% (of the order value) + €0.35 per transaction

If you have a larger volume of transactions, the cost can be lower if you go through a "payment gateway" like Elavon, Anything over 350 transactions per month will start to bring you into the scope of these payment gateways. Prices vary and can be seen on application as they are not generally shown on the company websites.

What about managing VAT?
There are settings on your platform which will painlessly allow you to manage your VAT and any other taxes.

My customer has paid, what next?

Once you get an order, the work has only begun and needs to be managed end-to-end. The main steps are as follows and they will be covered briefly as they will be different for all businesses and will require further work once you go live. As with almost all other topics in this area, your eCommerce platform has been designed to manage all of these, so there are lots of useful tools to help.

- **Order acceptance:** First check that the stock ordered is available or when it will be. Then the customer will need to be sent an order confirmation with details of when the order will be delivered. Please be aware that customers have a lot more rights when buying online, so don't get caught out.

- **Pick & Pack:** What processes will you need to pick and pack the orders? Will you need additional resources? How will you manage the stock for online orders vs other orders, manage labelling and packing sheets etc.

- **Delivery:** In almost all cases, this will outsourced to a third party. This reduces your control, so managing your delivery partner is crucial. Have clear agreements on how and when customers will be contacted, especially if your products are perishable. Also ensure that you have suitable packaging to preserve the goods and assume that there will be delays.

- **Returns:** Online customers have greater rights to "change their mind" and return goods. While this is less likely to happen with food products it may, so you need to have a process in place to allow returns and refunds. What is more likely is that there are issues with the order e.g. wrong goods sent, damaged etc. so you'll need a process to manage "reverse logistics".

- **EPOS:** It is likely that you'll need to have integration with your EPOS in order to manage transactions and integrate your online operations with your other business. Again, there are tools to integrate your eCommerce platform with your EPOS.

- **Stock Management:** Very similar to EPOS, integration tools are available with your eCommerce platform, but it is important to set company principles and expectations.

- *CRM & Post-Purchase***:** It is much easier to sell more to existing customer than get a new one, so managing the post-purchase experience through CRM tools is crucial. Your eCommerce platform will have integration tools to support this.

My eCommerce sales are through the roof, what next?

Hopefully you'll all have great success selling online, so scaling will be the next challenge. Most of your issues will be related to getting the right human resources and partners in place. Distribution and logistics will most likely be your biggest challenge, so don't underestimate the value of the relationship with your distribution partner. eCommerce can be very labour intensive; you'll need people to manage and process all of the orders. Even a basic hosted solution should be scalable to support your first 12-18 months of growth. As things expand, you may need external support to scale up your software solution and improve system integration and there are many companies who'll be happy to help you with that.

Analytics and understanding of what worked well is very important if you have a demonstrable success in eCommerce to date. Can you answer questions such as:

- What were the bestsellers?
- What price point worked/ didn't work?
- Where did my site traffic come from?
- Where did I make most margin?
- How did this affect my other channels?
- What did I invest?
- How did this deliver against my objectives?

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think digital

Don't underestimate the ability to test, constantly monitor, edit and change as you go through this process. It's an iterative process that you can really optimise with the likes of A/B testing, integrated analytics and company focus.

Conclusion

Are there supports available & can I get free tools?

The biggest decision you'll need to make is the platform to use. There are lots of guides out there to help you make the right choice. Once you've decided on the platform, their sites have deep reservoirs of information. Start there and then keep searching online for answers. eCommerce is so well established now that it is highly unlikely that you're the first person to be confronted with a particular problem.

eCommerce Platform Comparison
- www.ecommerceceo.com/ecommerce-platforms/
- www.codeinwp.com/blog/best-ecommerce-platform/
- https://tinuiti.com/blog/ecommerce/ecommerce-platforms-2/
- www.digitalinformationworld.com/2020/01/infographic-top-ecommerce-platforms.html

eCommerce Platforms
- www.Shopify.com
- www.Woocommerce.com
- www.Bigcommerce.com
- www.wix.com/features/main
- www.magento.com
- www.opencart.com

Additional Think Digital Resources

Click on any of the below guidebooks to find out more:

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
April, 2022

Introduction to Email Marketing
April, 2022

Website Project Fundamentals
April, 2022

PPC & Display Marketing
April, 2022

Facebook & Instagram: Beginner
April, 2022

Contact our Think Digital experts on the Client Capability Team here

---

This guide has been produced in conjunction with **Graham Merriman**, managing director of **Carrickane Consulting**

Carrickane Consulting is a Dublin based consultancy focused on supporting businesses to develop their online sales.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

think digital