REPLATFORMING

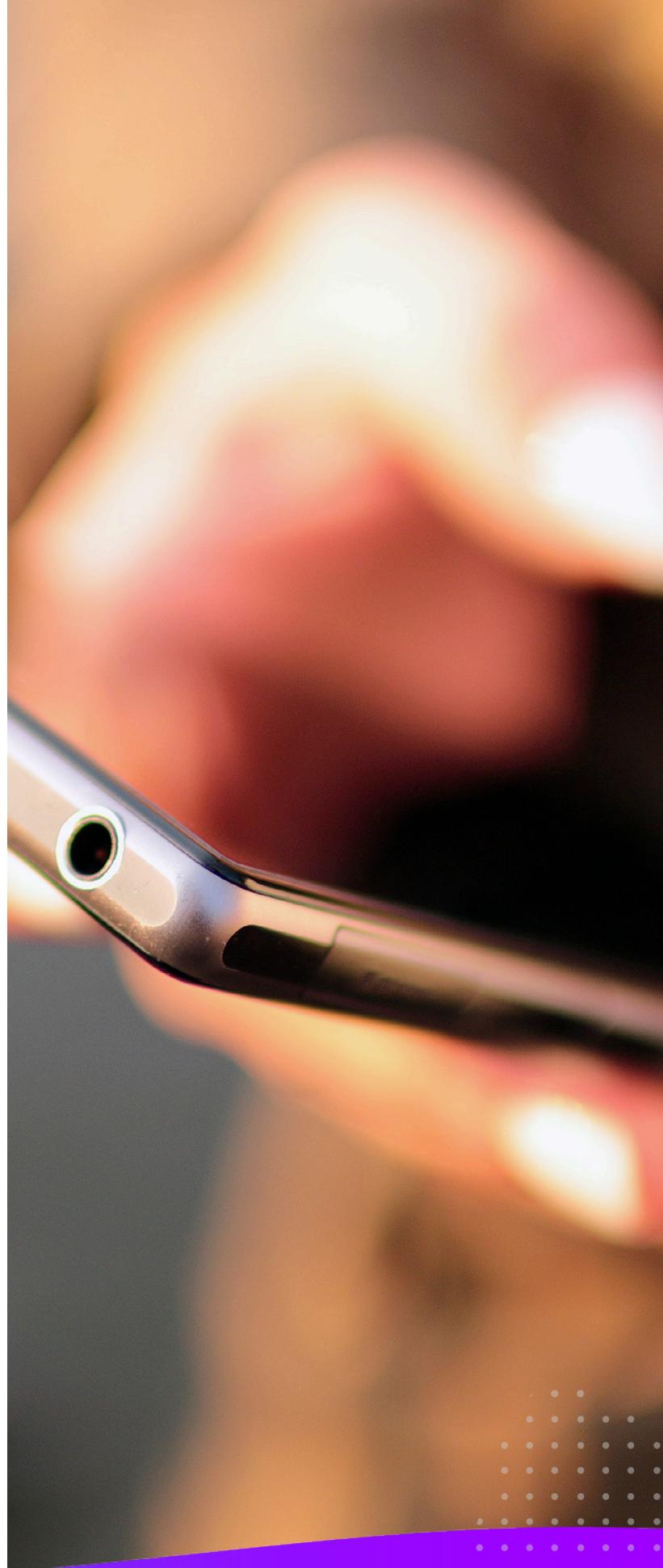Mitigating Risks and Maximizing Success

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INTRODUCTION

Replatforming is a notoriously frustrating process that every digital marketer has learned to dread. Most brands replatform every two to three years in order to stay competitive, but it is stressful on marketers' time, budgets, and patience. It requires cooperation and communication across all departments, making it a company-wide endeavor. But for all the headaches, it can also jump start a brand's ecommerce innovation.

In the long-term, replatforming increases efficiency and saves marketing teams money. Budget that was previously being spent on keeping your current platform working smoothly can be spent on producing innovative customer experiences. But in the short term, it can seem like a minefield of problems. In a report by Forrester Research, 39% of retailers saw a decrease in conversion rates immediately after replatforming . This can certainly be alarming, but only emphasizes the need for total company preparedness. When executed properly, replatforming keeps brands innovating and expanding.

In this ebook, we'll discuss:
• The top four leading motivations for brands choosing to replatform.
• Common replatforming mistakes and risks, and how to effectively manage them.
• A comprehensive replatforming checklist for marketers to make the process a little easier.

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WHY REPLATFORM?

- Lagging Metrics
- Costly site maintenance
- Competitors are making moves
- Changing ecommerce goals

It's helpful to examine why companies are choosing to undergo the replatforming process. It's often a combination of issues, but what is true for all of them is that all other options have been exhausted. Workarounds and outsourcing are no longer viable options. Marketing, IT, and digital teams are frustrated and have hit a wall in their innovation, creativity, and effectiveness.

Historically, the four main motivators for replatforming are poor metrics, costly site maintenance, inability to compete, and changing goals. If any of these issues sound familiar, it might be time to explore other platform options.

1. Metrics are lagging
You have already invested in new content, your assets are richly visual and unique creative, and you're re-examined your email and social media marketing approaches. But conversions and engagement are still lacking, and your boss' boss is demanding answers. At this point, it's time to approach the true crux of the issue: your ecommerce platform.

2. Site maintenance is costly and frustrating
There are gaps in the system, and you have spent far too much money trying to make up for them. Perhaps your ecommerce site experiences frequent outages or bugs, and your platform takes too long to address them properly. Ultimately, your IT team is frustrated and it's costing marketing valuable conversions.
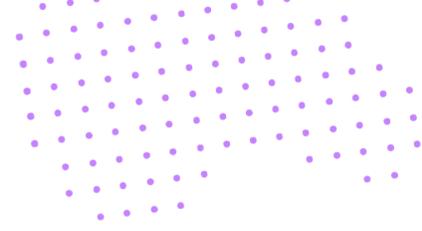
3. Competitors are making moves, and you can't keep up
When your competitors are moving to new platforms, it's time to take note. They're producing innovating customer experiences that you simply cannot replicate without hundreds of hours of coding and a huge chunk of your budget. It doesn't take long for an ecommerce site to become outdated, and it's up to digital marketers to watch the competition for replatforming.

4. Your ecommerce needs and goals have changed
Maybe your platform was a perfect fit when you onboarded almost a decade ago, but the velocity of the industry means technology is constantly changing and improving. As a result, your ecommerce platform can no longer support new initiatives like personalization or AI. The industry standard has evolved, and your platform is now limiting your innovation.

Common Replatforming Learnings

As your team begins the official replatforming process – from website redesign to data migration, and everything in between – there are four common and highly avoidable mistakes that retailers make time and time again.

Miscalculation of Costs and Timeline
One of the first steps a steering team should make when replatforming is setting a budget, but a common (and often disastrous) mistake these teams make is miscalculating these expenses. When planning for replatforming, keep in mind not only the initial up-front implementation costs, but future upkeep, maintenance, and upgrade costs as well. Don't be afraid to ask your platform account manager about unforeseen costs that their clients often face.

The same goes for planning a timeline. Forrester Research found that most replatforming projects are delayed by 4.2 months on average . It's absolutely critical to take these delays into account when planning deadlines, both to keep yourself sane and higher management confident.
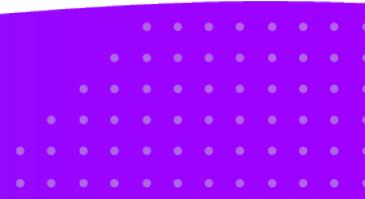
Lack of foresight
This ties in nicely with calculating future budgets. When initiating the replatforming process, keep in mind that both your company and the ecommerce platform will be growing over the next five to ten years. Consider what the platform's future plans are, and what their vision for the product is. And next, consider what your future plans are, and whether the platform can adequately support your growth. A platform may seem like a good fit now, but after five years of development on both their end and yours, you might outgrow them.
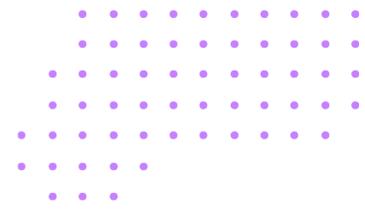
Lack of planning for interdepartmental workflow changes
Ultimately, every department of the company will be influenced by replatforming, whether directly or indirectly. Now is the time to consider how every member of the company will be affected by these changes, and whether all stakeholders can effectively work with the platform. If there will be inherent inefficiencies for certain departments, consider whether the platform is right for your company, or if there are ways to breach these gaps. Once your company has been onboarded, plan to train and test all departments on the new platform in order to identify issues early on.

Skipping the website redesign
With a shiny new ecommerce platform humming and ready to go, it's the perfect opportunity to implement new website designs. Whether this means a full website redesign, a rebranding, or just featuring new innovative content formats, take advantage of your new ecommerce capabilities. Refreshing your website content not only gives customers more to engage with, but vastly improves SEO rankings. By reevaluating your website content at the same time as your replatforming, these two processes can be completed perfectly in sync with one another.

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Replatforming Risks

Replatforming provides an opportunity to reach long-term revenue and engagement goals, but due to the size and scope of the project, there are also inherently risks involved. One of the biggest risks of replatforming is indecision – whether by the steering committee, high level decision makers, or other company users. Indecision can cause delays in schedule, which translates directly to money wasted. In fact, indecisiveness can kill a replatforming process entirely.

Your company's SEO ranking can be at risk as well. Site traffic could be negatively affected during the migration process, whether caused by website downtime or changing URLs. Be thoughtful of how your sitemap will change during replatforming, and compensate for these changes through redirects or on-page optimization.

Though the replatforming motto is "test, test, then test again," there are some scenarios that can't be replicated before the server switch is effectively flipped. Your development team can get as close as possible to absolute certainty through sandbox testing, but there will always be unforeseen risks. For instance, payment may run smoothly during initial tests, but could stall once faced with high website traffic. Expect inefficiencies and complications, and work with development and IT to plan accordingly. Not every disaster can be prepared for, but you can certainly try.

BIGGEST RISK

One of the biggest replatforming risks is indecision – it can cause delays in schedule, which means money wasted.
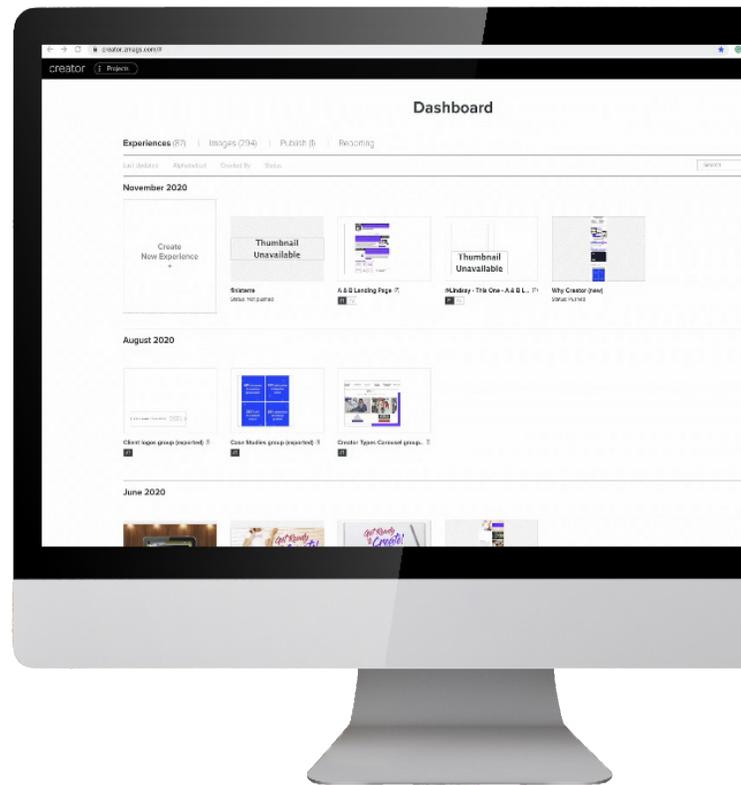
The Replatforming Checklist

To stay on top of the replatforming process from start to finish, below are five features of a successful replatforming project that every brand requires:

• A detailed RFP
A comprehensive Request For Proposal will keep all parties informed, as well as effectively communicate strategy and goals.

• An inter-departmental project committee
This will ensure all decision-makers and major stakeholders are involved.

THE CHECKLIST

• Request for proposal

• Inter-departmental project committee

• Timeline with KPI's

• Vetting of third-party vendors

• Training for all departments
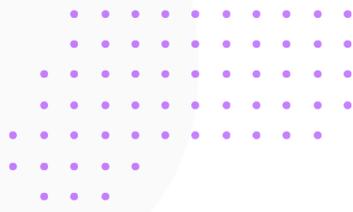
• Timeline with set KPI's
KPI's keep everyone goal-oriented. But expect to go over your allotted schedule, and plan accordingly.

• Proper vetting of third party vendors
Be sure to include contingency plan during the platform transition time. Are all your vendors platform agnostic?

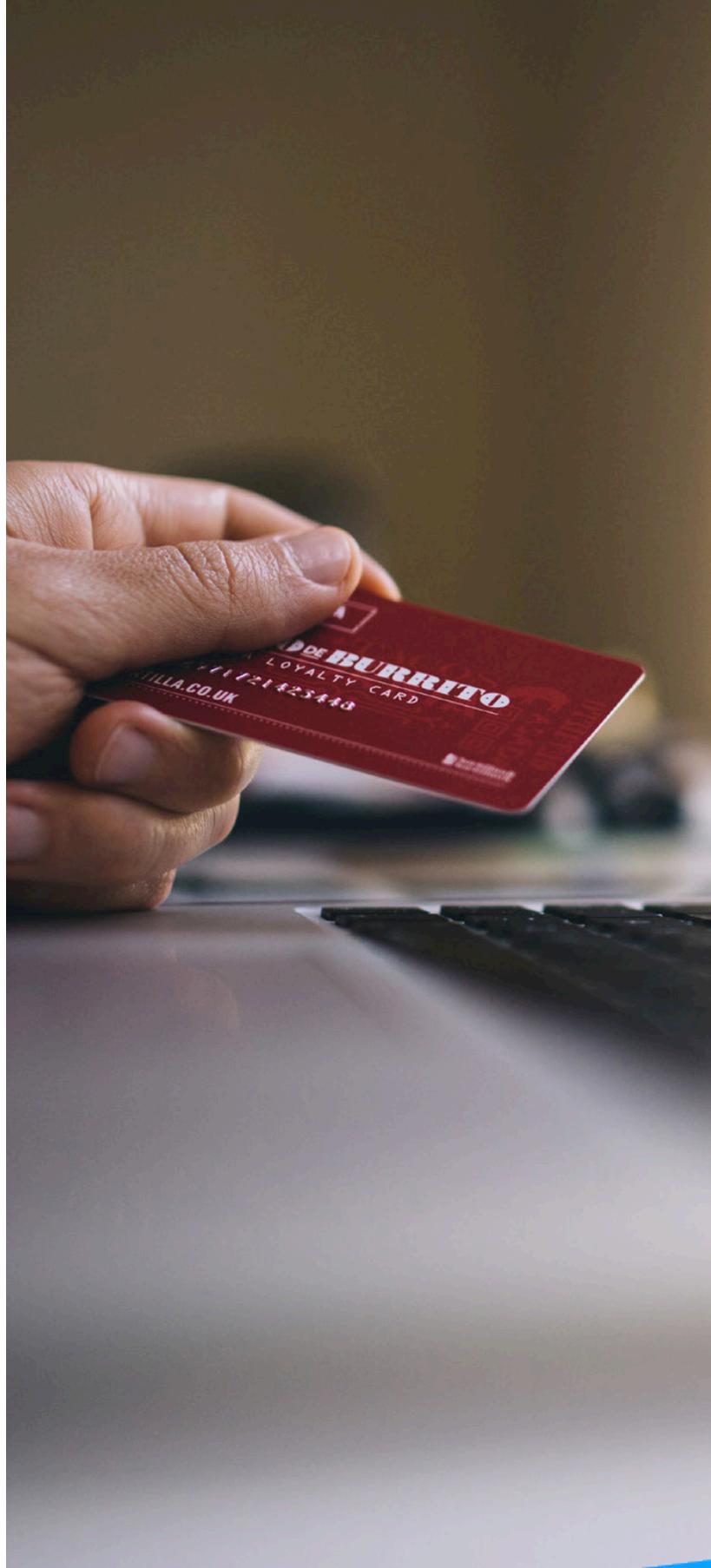**• Adequate training for all departments**
Replatforming affects every department, so be sure every team member is prepared

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CONCLUSION

Replatforming can be a costly, time consuming process. It involves every department, and requires cooperation across the company. But when implemented in a smart, strategic, and well-planned process, it can transform a brand's ecommerce presence. No company can truly grow while stymied by their technology, especially in an industry that is evolving at the speed of light. Replatforming should be viewed as an opportunity to create and innovate, and establish your brand as a leader in the ecommerce landscape.

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