



# The top ecommerce merchant mistakes and how to avoid them

Merchant Ebook





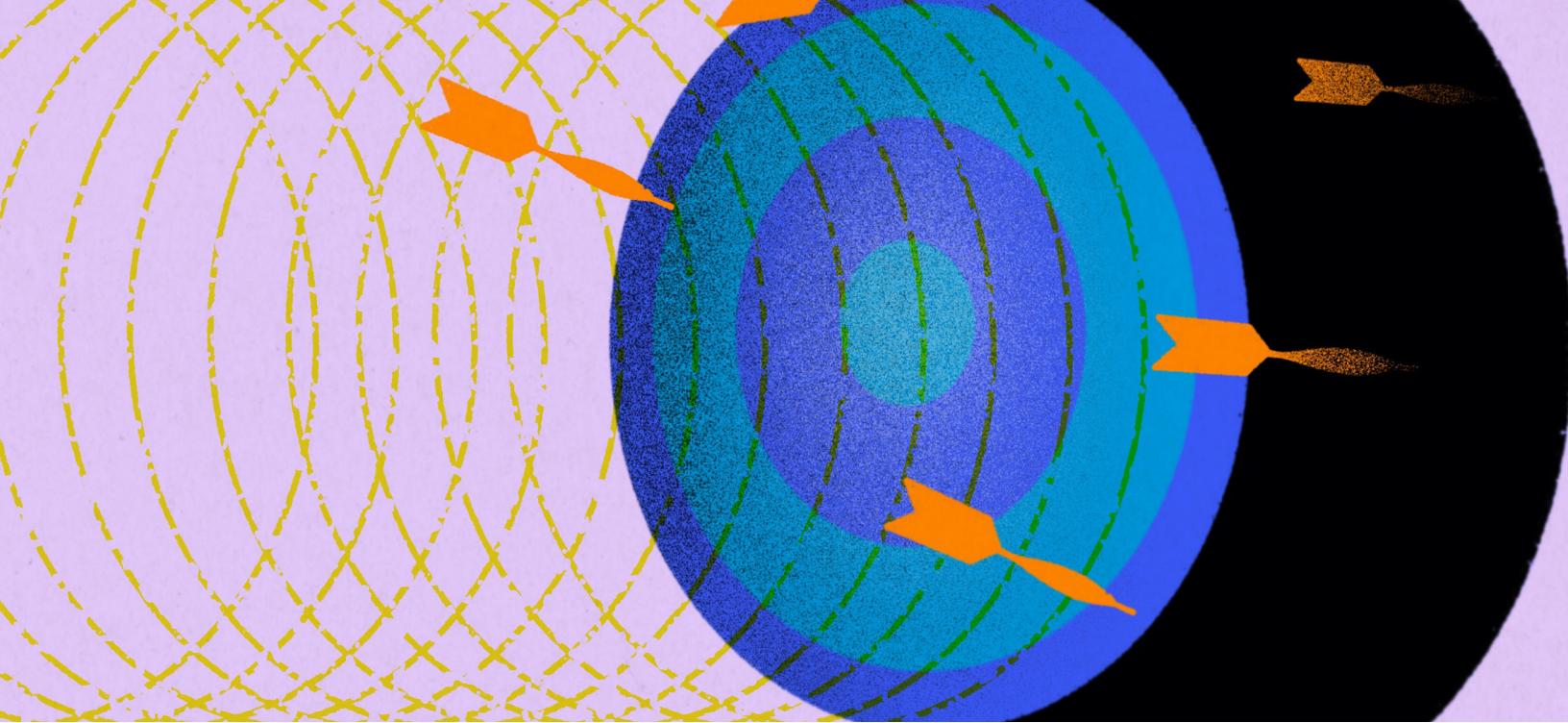
**New online stores are launching daily, and the ecommerce world is becoming hyper-competitive. It's no longer enough to have a great-looking website with basic tools and expect sales to come rolling in.**

Building a successful ecommerce business requires optimizing every touchpoint to deliver an exceptional customer experience. Over the years, we've seen merchants make the same mistakes, especially when starting their ecommerce journey. It's understandable—there's a lot to get right, and it's difficult to know where to focus.

That's why we've put together this ebook. Our seasoned ecommerce pros will share their experiences and learnings from working with hundreds of ecommerce store owners like you.

**Read on to set yourself up for ecommerce success!**





## Mistake #1: Not defining your target audience

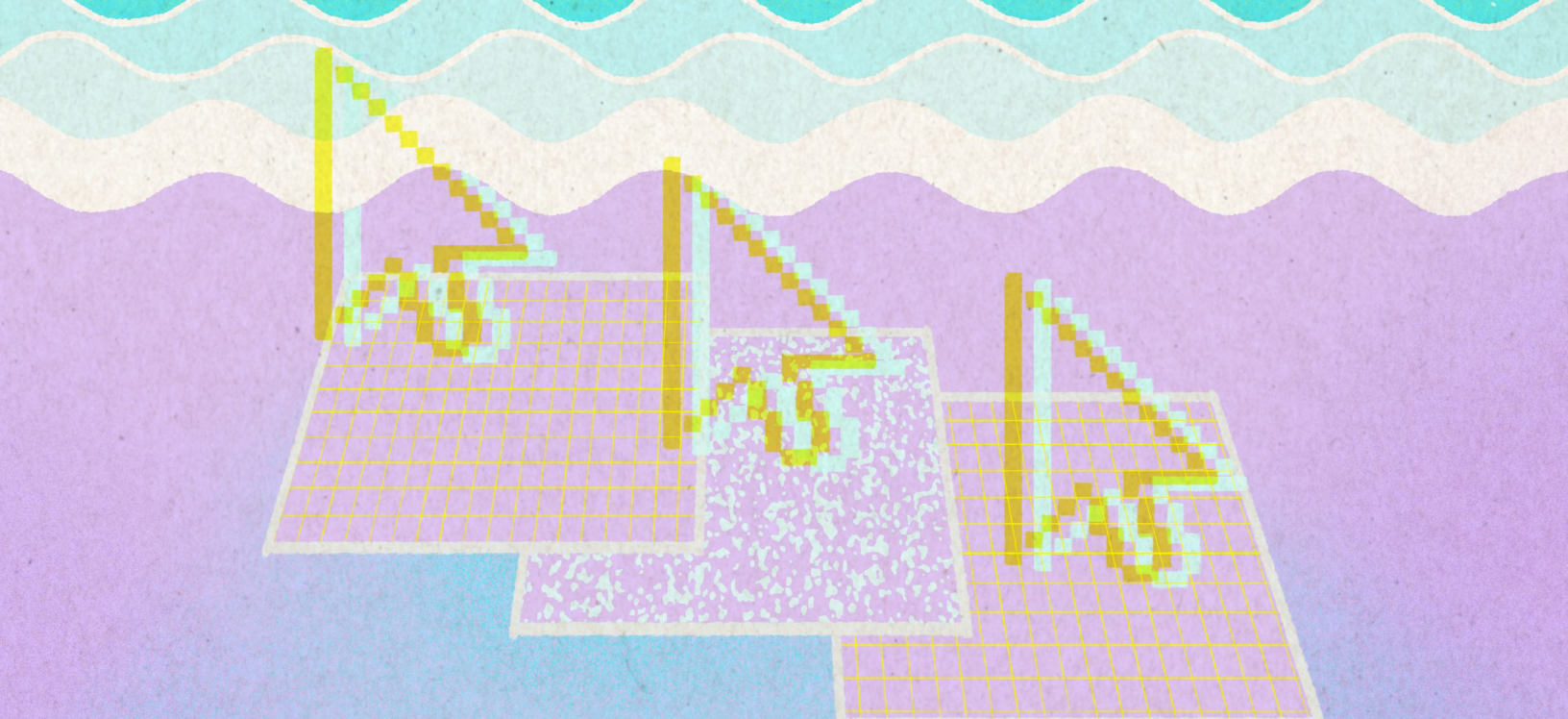
This seems obvious. You can't sell to an audience you don't understand, right? But you'd be surprised how many merchants don't know who their target audience is or what makes them tick. Many merchants think having a product offering and a place to sell is enough, but it's not.

**Dan Sheard from Velstar** explains: "Imagine trying to sell cat food to someone who doesn't have a cat! It doesn't matter how nutritious the cat food is, how competitive the price is, or how creatively you've described its benefits; that person will never buy your product."

And the data doesn't lie. About **56% of consumers** believe businesses need a deeper understanding of their needs, while 51% believe brands send too much irrelevant content.

**51% of consumers believe brands send too much irrelevant content.**

Merchants need to dive deep into customer data. Think about the problem your products solve for customers. Then, as you gather more information, you'll be able to create buying personas based on their demographics, purchasing decisions, preferred platforms, pain points, values, etc. With this information, you'll be able to create a strong marketing strategy that gets your products seen by the right people and communicates why your products differ from your competitors.



## Mistake #2: Choosing the wrong ecommerce platform

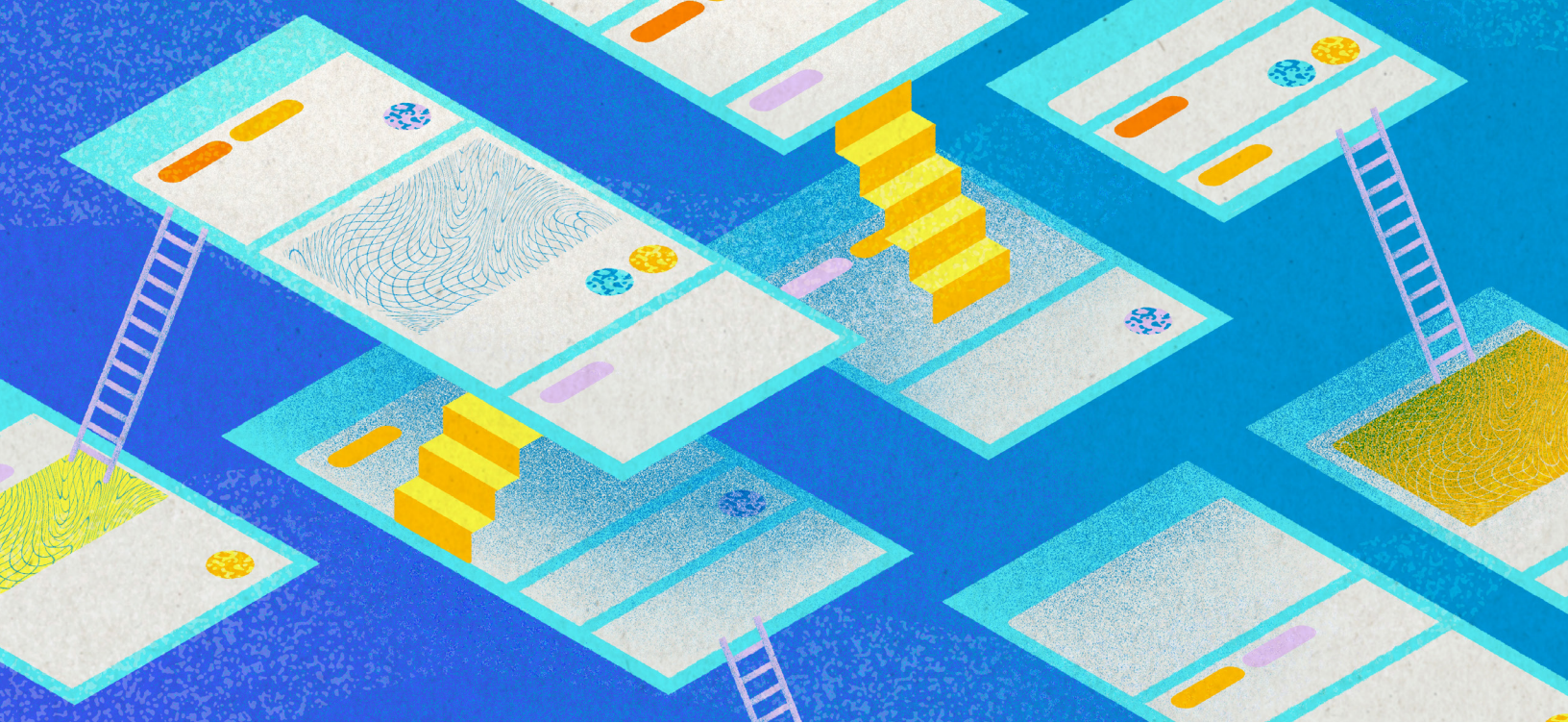
Selecting the right platform is critical, whether you're starting up a new site or looking to re-platform your existing site. Choosing the wrong platform can be costly and lead to a range of issues, including reduced traffic, security issues, poor design, and, in the worst-case scenario, your site crashing. We've lost count of the number of times merchants have come to us because their previous platform has let them down.

Jason Young from Ballistic Agency explains that the choice of platform will depend on the size and complexity of your ecommerce business: "Most successful small businesses are using one of the two leading ecommerce platforms. Shopify is popular with startups and small businesses with simple needs, and BigCommerce is popular among merchants with more complex requirements."

In our experts' experience, selecting an ecommerce platform based on its popularity isn't the best course of action. The truth is that the best ecommerce platform is the one that successfully delivers the outcomes and objectives that you've set for YOUR business. Dan Sheard from Velstar advises that because it can be a pretty daunting decision, it's vital to set enough time aside to consider the following:

- Your business goals and 3-5 year growth plan
- Your business challenges
- Your budget
- The level of customizability you require
- The tools you need to integrate with the platform
- The level of in-house control you need
- Scalability, customer support, and design





## Mistake #3: Poor UX and site navigation

Browsing and purchasing from an ecommerce store should be easy and enjoyable for the customer. User experience (UX) in ecommerce is about providing a smooth and seamless online experience, which can help increase customer satisfaction and purchase rates.

When done right, the user experience will enhance every touch point a user has with an online store. At the end of the day, a positive onsite experience will lead to return customers, and that's what all retailers want, right?!

Online shoppers intuitively expect to see certain bits of information on an ecommerce site at certain times. When the user journey is clearly laid out and easy to navigate, customers have a much more positive experience. They can access products more easily and continue through the purchase journey quickly.

In addition, be sure to provide your customers with clear and concise product details and size guides so they know exactly what they're buying. This is a key factor in building trust and loyalty amongst your customer base. It's also important to ensure any queries are answered efficiently; having features such as an easily accessible Q&A section will help with this.

"A good UX design helps users make decisions and find information without spending a lot of time looking for what they need. So, if you don't make UX a priority, you could seriously impact the effectiveness of your site."

— Sara Russell, 5874 Commerce

"The best-designed stores are those that combine form with function. What use is it having great products and all the required information if your customers can't find them in the first place? Make navigation simple and friction-free. Use a menu bar with clear product categories and a search option so customers can find what they're looking for quickly."

— Dan Sheard, Velstar





## Mistake #4: Frustrating checkout processes

Online shoppers are known for their limited attention spans! If your checkout process is too complex, there's a fair chance they'll get partway through and then just give up.

Sara Russell from 5874 Commerce recommends that merchants simplify and streamline the process as much as possible. "Keep it concise while providing all the possible options for delivery and payment," she says. To prevent high cart abandonment rates and the unnecessary loss of valuable sales, Sara also recommends you ensure your checkout:

- Is optimized for mobile
- Offers multiple payment methods
- Uses an autofill feature
- Allows for guest checkout

**Keep your checkout concise while providing all the possible options for delivery and payment.**

You might have the greatest or most unique products and an aggressive marketing strategy that successfully draws customers to your website, but if your checkout process isn't fit-for-purpose (think complicated or takes too long), all that hard work could get undone at the final hurdle.





## Mistake #5: Neglecting the post-purchase experience

Some merchants are so focused on getting the customer to check out that they forget what happens post-purchase (which, ironically!) can lead to lost sales.

**Dan Sheard from Velstar** believes there are a few critical areas that you should NEVER overlook when it comes to the post-purchase experience:

- Thank you page
- Order confirmation
- Real-time order tracking and updates
- Fast delivery
- A memorable unboxing experience
- Product care tips (if applicable to your product)
- Straightforward return, refund, and exchange policies
- Following up and asking for feedback
- Nurturing the relationship with personalized marketing campaigns, including discounts and offers





## Mistake #6: Overusing apps

We've all heard the phrase, "There's an app for that." However, when building a high-performing and responsive ecommerce store, sometimes less is more!

Now, let's be clear—places like the Shopify App Store are fantastic resources where you'll find a plethora of incredible apps. However, as **Greg Barre from We Make Websites** explains, things can go awry if you try to use an app for functionality that could otherwise be integrated via code: "Having too many apps can slow your site down, and we all know how important site speed is for the end user, SEO, and conversion rates. Relying on code rather than apps also saves you from any monthly app fees."

“Site speed is almost always top priority.” - Dustin Floer, Sleepless Media

**Dustin Floer from Sleepless Media** shares an example to illustrate this point: “Many merchants feature a slider on their homepage hero banner to showcase imagery and headlines. Sliders are great and can really draw a customer in, but here's a little secret: Slider apps add a lot of bloat, sometimes 100+ lines of code. All those lines of code are called upon when a customer arrives at your site. A custom solution slider adds just a fraction of that and can be built specifically for your site to make you stand out.”

“Don't avoid apps altogether; there are a ton of incredible apps and even better teams behind them. But it's important to be particular about what you do and don't use an app for. Stick to essential apps that either help improve customer experience or streamline your business operations, such as live chat apps or inventory management tools.”- Dustin Floer, Sleepless Media





## Mistake #7: Underestimating the importance of content

Content is king... and it deserves your attention!

Sara Russell from 5874 Commerce explains why: “Content encompasses everything your business puts out online to stimulate interest in your brand. The goal is to generate a customer base by creating valuable and relevant content that pushes them to convert.” You might be thinking, “Sure, we already do that; we post photos of our products and talk about our services.”

Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but that isn’t content marketing. Content marketing isn’t a sales pitch. Content marketing is what people want to see. By providing your audience with valuable content, you build trust and loyalty and increase your engagement.

**86% of consumers say brand authenticity is a deciding factor in what brands they support.**

A word of caution, however. When it comes to imagery and other visuals, you need to *keep it real*. Research indicates that **86% of consumers** say brand authenticity is a deciding factor in what brands they support and buy from. So, it’s best to strike a balance between making your products look as good as they can and retaining authenticity. The last thing you want is for customers to return their goods because the product they received looked different from what they saw on your website.

“Content marketing isn’t a sales pitch. Content marketing is what people want to see.” - Sara Russell, 5874 Commerce





## Mistake #8: Failing to give email and SMS marketing the attention they deserve

As digital communication channels have become more sophisticated and diversified (i.e., webinars, video campaigns, and social media posts), the question many merchants ask is, “Do ‘older’ communication methods still have a place in my ecommerce marketing strategy?” The short answer is *yes*.

Email and SMS marketing involve sending messages that communicate time-sensitive offers, updates, and alerts to people who have consented to receive these messages from your business. Let’s look at some **email numbers** first:

- 77% of marketers have seen an increase in email engagement over the last 12 months.
- Smartphone users prefer to receive brand communications via email.

We encourage our clients to own their customer data and manage it themselves. Look for a platform that offers you customer segmentation, enhanced analytics, and powerful automation called *flows*. Whatever product you choose, make sure it integrates with your ecommerce website.

Then there’s SMS. Here’s why you shouldn’t ignore this channel:

- 91% of consumers would opt-in for text messages from brands.
- 34% of people read their messages within five minutes of receiving them.
- 58% of consumers believe that SMS is the most effective method of brand communication.

If you’re already using email software, you might already have built-in SMS features.





## Mistake #9: Inefficient customer service workflows

Ecommerce giants like Amazon and Apple are leaders in customer service. The customer service revolution they've created has forever influenced your shoppers, too—so take a leaf out of their book!

Today, there's simply no excuse for sub-par customer service. Customers don't want to wait a day to hear back from you. In fact, **49% of customers** say they'd like to receive a response within less than a minute while using chat support. If they're using email, they'll be a little more patient, with 48% saying they'd wait up to 6 hours and 94% saying they'd expect a response within 24 hours.

**49% of customers say they'd like to receive a response within less than a minute while using chat support.**

Choose an integrated and data-driven customer service platform to help you get organized and revolutionize how YOU interact with your customers and make it easy for you to answer when they have questions or problems with an order.

“Today, there's simply no excuse for sub-par customer service.” -Jason Young, Ballistic Agency



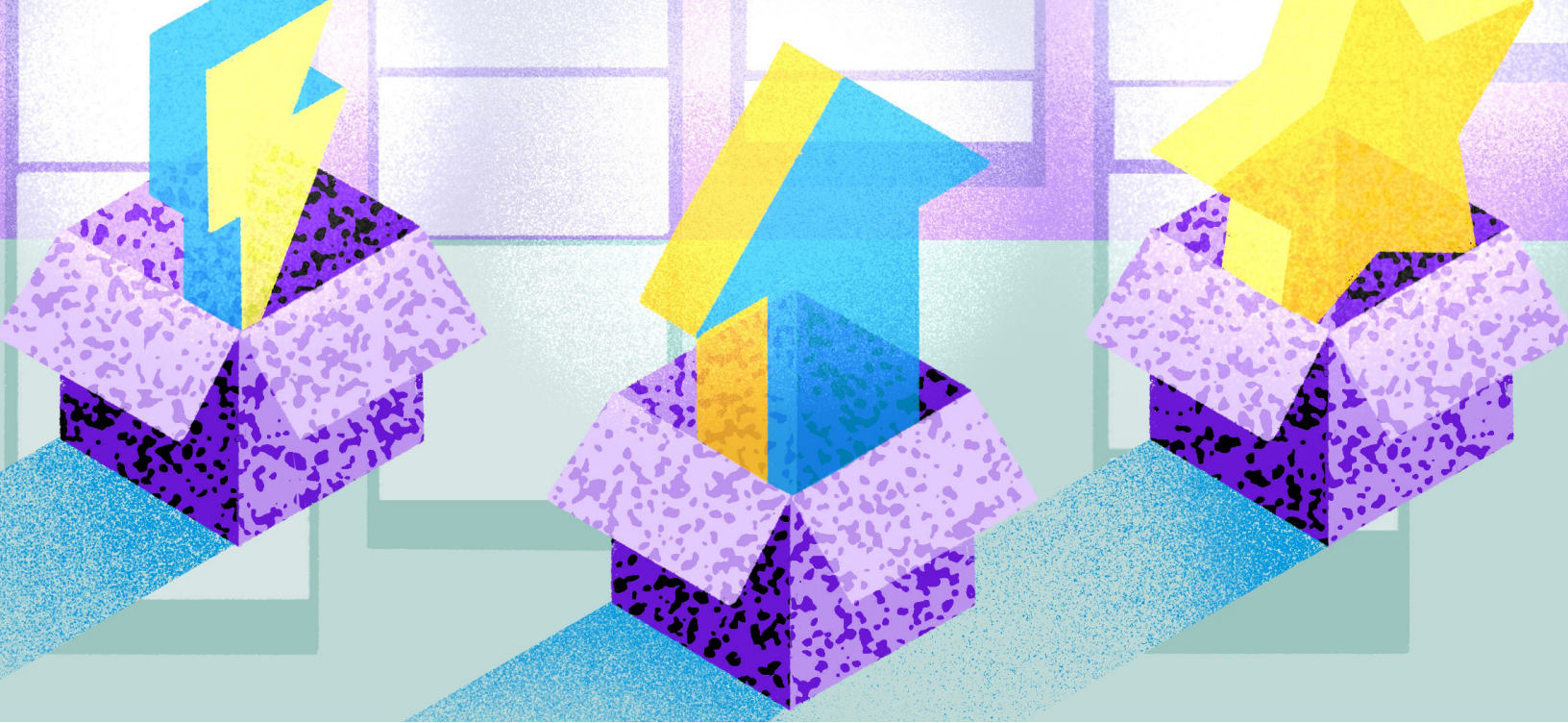
## Mistake #10: Forgetting about SEO

The cheapest way to drive sustainable growth is to generate organic traffic through SEO and a content marketing strategy.

**Dan Sheard from Velstar** cautions merchants *NEVER* to consider content optimization as an afterthought: “Every single page of content on your website is an opportunity to boost your brand’s visibility and drive more traffic!”

Whether you’re doing it in-house or working with an SEO agency, you need to invest in the content you display on your site, ensuring it’s SEO-friendly. This means doing keyword research, competitor research, backlink building, and crafting copy that converts.





## Mistake #11: Costly or slow shipping

The pressure of managing, picking, packing, shipping, and tracking orders across multiple selling channels keeps many merchants awake at night.

It's essential to get shipping and fulfillment right. The **average shopping cart abandonment rate** is about 70%. That's a depressing statistic when you consider how much potential revenue was left in those abandoned carts. According to **Jason Young from Ballistic Agency**, the **main reasons** for shopping cart abandonment are shipping-related issues such as high fees, long delivery times, or limited delivery options.

**The average shopping cart abandonment rate is about 70%.**

“Get organized and streamline your fulfillment process with a shipping app so you can provide an outstanding customer experience” - Jason Young, Ballistic Agency



## Mistake #12: No incentivizes for shoppers

The most profitable merchants increase customer lifetime value by constantly incentivizing their customers. Incentivization drives customer engagement and repeat purchases while creating fans of your brand.

Says **Jason Young from Ballistic Agency**: “Picture this: A new customer visits your website, browses around a bit, and buys a small, single item. They check out, leave, and are pretty happy with their experience. Maybe they’ll come back and buy again, but maybe they won’t.

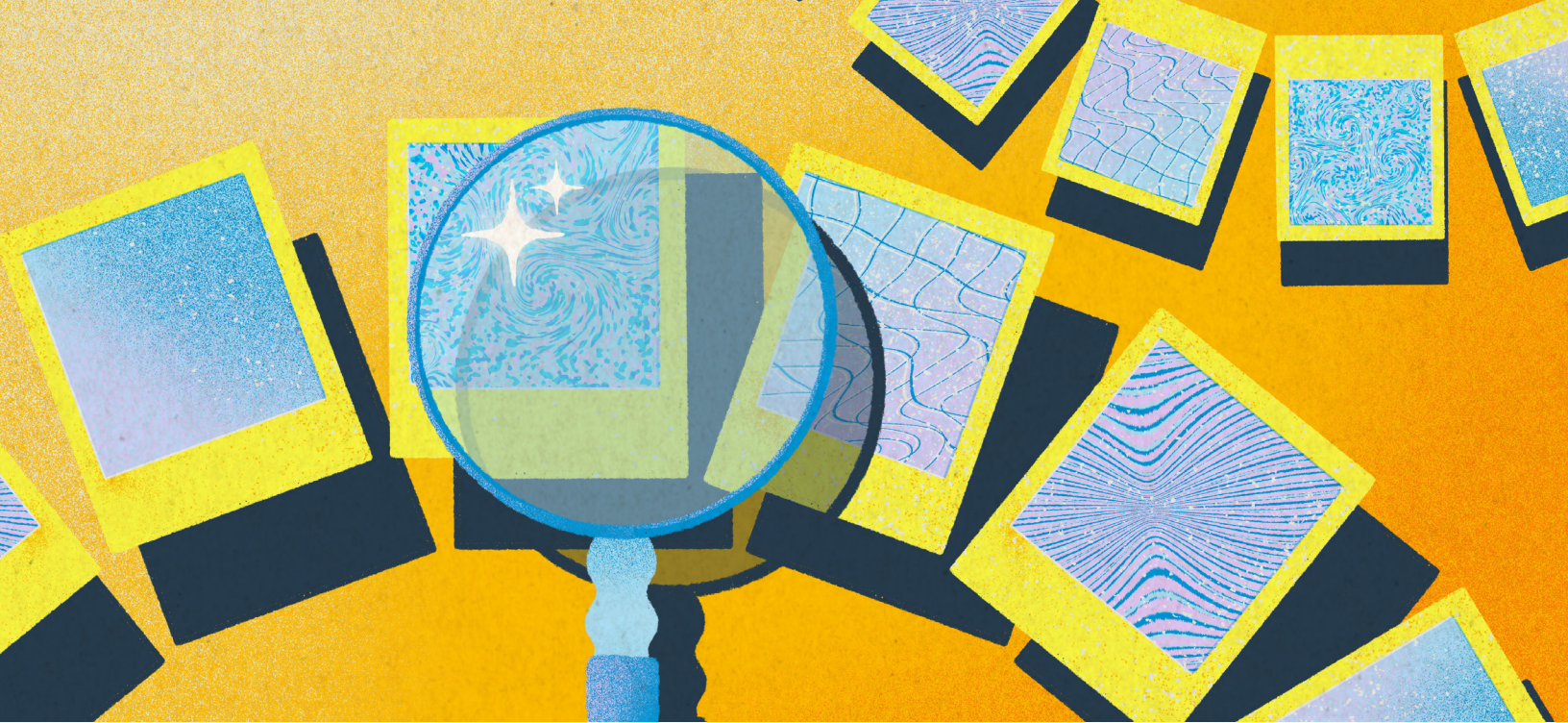
Whether you’re doing it in-house or working with an SEO agency, you need to invest in the content you display on your site, ensuring it’s SEO-friendly. This means doing keyword research, competitor research, backlink building, and crafting copy that converts.

“Now, what if you surprised this new customer with a discount during that initial visit to your site? First, you’re helping to remove any barriers to their initial product purchase, and second, you’re establishing loyalty from day one! With such a strategy, you’re in a strong position to win a new brand advocate.”

“The most profitable merchants increase customer lifetime value by constantly incentivizing their customers.”

- Jason Young, Ballistic Agency





## Mistake #13: Not inviting product reviews and feedback

Most shoppers enjoy comparing products and scanning through reviews before making a purchase, so product review articles and product comparisons are essential elements of a sound ecommerce strategy.

To make it easy to get the “social seal of approval” from your customers, consider using a Shopify app like [Product Reviews Addon](#) that allows you to send out automated messages to key customers.

And if customers share your products on social media, reach out to them and invite them to write a review on your website and add their photos.





## Mistake #14: Ignoring your competition

If you suspect you're losing ground to your competitors, it might not be because they're outperforming you on price or quality. They could be more effective at making their sites user-friendly and visually appealing.

There's no shame in scouring competitors' product pages, blogs, and social media presence to understand their formula for success. You can use what you learn as inspiration for honing your strategy to replicate their results while remaining true to your brand.





## Mistake #15: Not testing updates in staging

You know that feeling when the blood drains from your face and your heart beats out of your chest? You don't want that, especially when it's the result of a mistake with your store. You can avoid these situations by making changes in a staging environment rather than directly on your live store.

This is something a client of ours learned the hard way. **Finn Radford from Vixxr** explains what can go wrong: "One of our clients wanted to bulk-enable products in their store. They downloaded a third-party app to change multiple product availability channels at once and configured the app with a simple rule: If the product inventory wasn't zero, enable it on the live store.

"They forgot to account for the fact that their older products (many thousands dating back to 2014) were set to 'inventory not tracked!' After running this tool overnight, they awoke to find that thousands of old and out-of-stock products had been made available on the live website. Even worse was that there was no way to quickly remove these products, as simply reversing the rule would have removed products they wanted to show on the site that were set to "don't track inventory." This was a real problem, especially when they started receiving orders for products they hadn't had in stock for years."

The moral of the story? Test any updates or changes on a staging environment first. This brings us to our final mistake...

|"Test any updates or changes on a staging environment first." - Finn Radford, Vixxr





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## Mistake #16: Not having a third-party backup solution

Many merchants forget how much data goes into their online store. Product information includes images, titles, descriptions, metadata, categories, brands, inventory, and more. And customers aren't just lists of names and email and billing addresses; they have order histories and favorites connected to them.

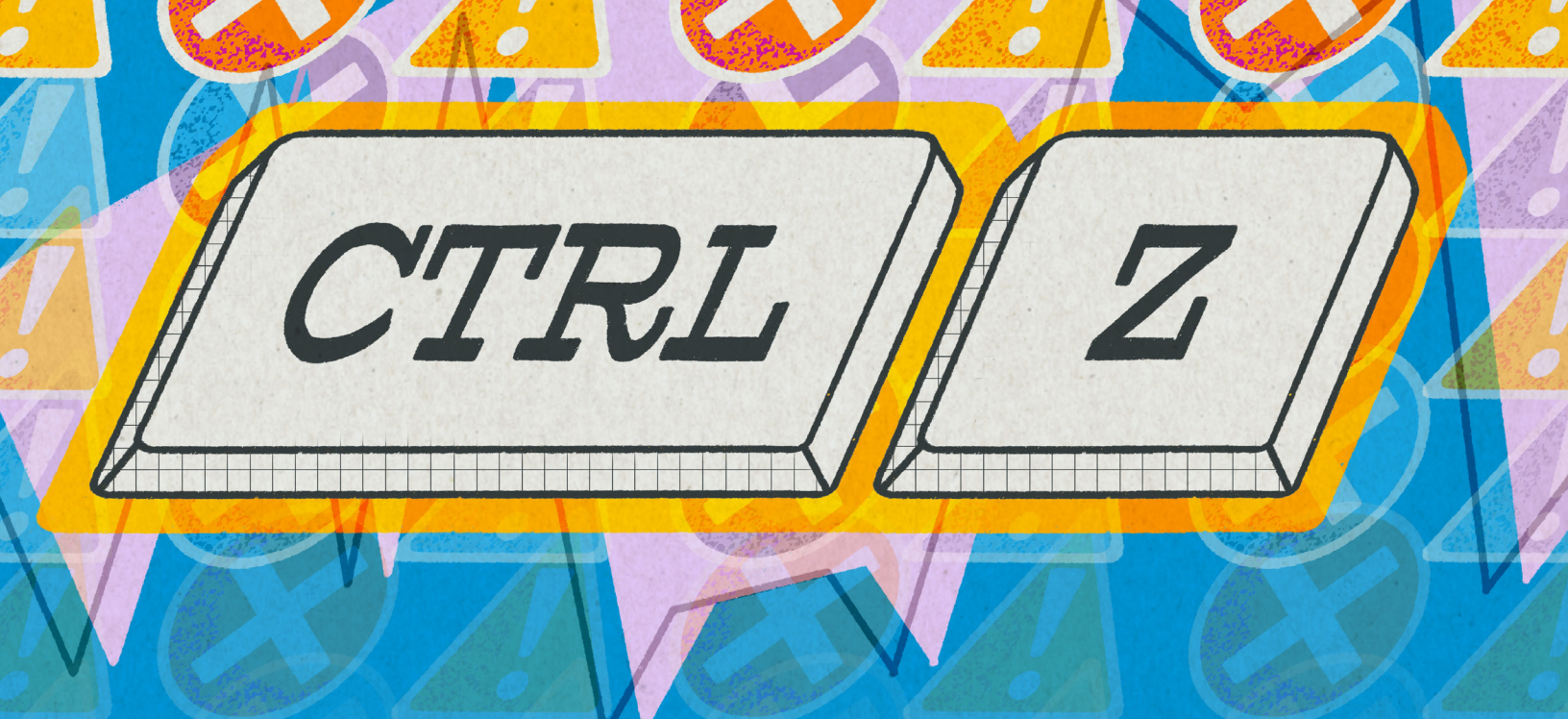
Most merchants don't think too much about all this data... until it's gone. Unfortunately, many are under the misconception that their SaaS provider will be able to restore their data if it's accidentally or maliciously deleted or unavailable due to a service outage or, even worse, a cyberattack. Third-party applications can sometimes go wrong and **corrupt information**.

The uncomfortable truth is that most SaaS platforms operate under the **Shared Responsibility Model**, which means merchants' store data belongs to them, and it's their responsibility to back it up.

The full impact of data loss won't always be immediately apparent. Sadly, the true **cost of downtime** will hit days and weeks later as the affected merchant discovers more and more things that were lost when their store went down. To minimize loss, merchants need to know as soon as an error occurs because the longer it takes to catch an issue, the more significant their losses can become.

Manual backup is one means for merchants to back up their data. Shopify and BigCommerce let you export most of your data to a CSV file; however, this doesn't capture all your store's data and is not an easy process. In most cases, lost data, whether it's a theme or a Page Section, will take time and money to rebuild. Some losses will be unrecoverable in the form of lost business—most online store visitors won't return after experiencing checkout issues.





For these reasons, more merchants are investing in a reliable, automated third-party backup solution to ensure they never have to endure such a nightmarish scenario. The best third-party backup platforms, like **Rewind Backups**, perform automated backups on your behalf, and it's entirely possible to restore your store to a specific point in time.

“To minimize loss, merchants need to know as soon as an error occurs because the longer it takes to catch an issue, the more significant their losses can become.” - Alison Piel, Rewind

What's more, third-party backups not only mitigate the effects of downtime but can also increase development speed and take the risk out of store experimentation and testing. Testing on your live store increases the chance of errors creeping in. If website visitors catch errors first (like typos, out-of-date information, or a broken checkout), it could lead to a negative brand experience and even bad reviews.

**Protection Suite** is Rewind's total security and assurance solution for Shopify stores. Through four tools – Backups, Staging, Alerts, and Monitor—the Protection Suite enables you to detect, prevent, and recover from unwanted changes on your live store.

“Catch mistakes, threats, and disruptions before they become lost sales – and recover lost data in just a few clicks. By shortening the time from issue to recovery, you can stay online longer and turn more traffic into checkouts.”  
- Alison Piel, Rewind





## Finn Radford from Vixxr shares lessons from an avoidable data loss disaster

“Most of us prefer to try things out first, and if we can’t work them out, we quickly give up and try something else. This is especially true with apps. Rarely will we take the time to use the apps’ training videos and resources before jumping in. This is dangerous. Here’s why:

A client of ours wanted to do a bulk update of product descriptions. They have **hundreds of products** and believed that manually clicking into each product to update and save the description would be inefficient. So, they downloaded an app that allowed them to export all of their products and associated descriptions, make changes, and import them back into Shopify.

However, one key instruction when reimporting the sheet was to specify the command. The choices are replace, merge, or delete. If unspecified, the default was set to replace. Usually, this wouldn’t be an issue, except the client had exported their products and descriptions and deleted the description of any products they didn’t want to update. When they imported their amended sheet, the blank descriptions replaced the descriptions of hundreds of products!

In a panic (as this had been actioned directly on their live site), they tried to reimport their original file, but they’d already saved over it and couldn’t retrieve the original version. They didn’t have a third-party backup, but if they did, it would have been a simple click to restore things to normality.

Unfortunately, they had to work with app developers to restore their descriptions, which took three-and-a-half days.”





## Get ahead of the game

The world of ecommerce, although increasingly competitive, is a lot of fun and hugely rewarding. But as we've explored, making mistakes can be costly. "It pays to choose your partners wisely and learn from others' mistakes so as not to make your own," concludes Greg Barre from We Make Websites.

Regardless of where you are on your ecommerce journey—just starting out or an established brand looking for ways to drive more traffic – the tips we've shared in this ebook can help ensure you sidestep the most common pitfalls and barriers to growth that many brands have experienced.

"It pays to choose your partners wisely and learn from others' mistakes so as not to make your own,"

- Greg Barre, We Make Websites

## Get in touch

Start a free trial of Rewind Backups for Shopify, Rewind Backups for BigCommerce, or Protection Suite for Shopify today. Reach out to [sales@rewind.com](mailto:sales@rewind.com) for more information.

Schedule a demo

