

Decoding eCommerce choices:

A comparative analysis of commercetools vs. Shopify

When it comes to eCommerce platforms, the contrast between commercetools and Shopify becomes evident as commercetools champions a composable commerce approach, emphasizing user flexibility and tailored solutions over Shopify's all-in-one suite.

Composable commerce allows businesses to select and integrate individual components tailored to their specific requirements. This adaptability ensures that users aren't confined to a pre-packaged solution but can craft an eCommerce ecosystem that precisely aligns with their unique needs and evolving business strategies.

This distinction is further clarified in the below chart, which delineates specific features, allowing users to make informed decisions based on their unique business needs.

	commercetools	Shopify
Overview	Highly functional and scalable composable commerce platform for current and future B2B and B2C use cases. Specifically developed for enterprise and upper-mid market businesses that place a premium on agility, flexibility and cost optimization.	Consumer eCommerce platform that is focused on individuals and small businesses; now trying to appeal to enterprise use cases.
Frontend	Web development framework, hosting platform and business user tooling to build storefronts — business users can build storefronts without depending on developers.	Hydrogen Oxygen: Web development framework with a hosting platform but without business user tooling. Business users have to rely on developers to change anything on the storefront.
Checkout	Highly customizable and seamless checkout experience, adaptable to various business models such as B2B, B2C, and D2C. Enables commerce anywhere and leverages a library of 300+ APIs for tailored solutions.	Proprietary checkout system, which operates on a distinct domain in the context of a headless website. However, this configuration may present challenges for cross-domain tracking and analytics integration.
B2B functionality	Tried and tested. With robust roadmap items, commercetools was ranked as a Leader in the 2022 Forrester Wave™: B2B Commerce Solutions (Shopify was not included in the evaluation).	Absence of critical functionalities like configurable approval workflows, line-item level RFQ and account/user-specific spending limits. Also lacks an order-based pricing model, which is essential for many B2B enterprises.
Extensibility	Encourages best-of-breed enabling the integration of specialized components that can be added, swapped and replaced whenever needed.	Limits clients to native features or third-party apps that are Shopify-exclusive or optimized, resulting in vendor lock-in.
Customizability	Language-agnostic. Can easily create or customize functionality that looks and works like a native part of the platform via extensible APIs, features as flexible building blocks.	Restricted mostly to features and functions defined by Shopify. Very limited third-party apps that are Shopify-exclusive (vendor lock-in). Cannot be easily extended with its own custom functionality.

Scalability	No limits — customers can grow exponentially without worrying about any limitations or downtimes.	Once a business crosses \$50 million GMV, the complexity of use cases increases, then Shopify is no longer a good fit.
Onboarding	Broad use of open standards and being programming language-agnostic lets any developer work easily with the platform. Easy onboarding within days and simplified workflow thanks to the separation of frontends and backends.	Bias toward Javascript SDK restricts the freedom to develop an optimized solution using best-of-breed products. Relatively light onboarding but must follow workflow and functionality defined by Shopify.
Vendor lock-in	Best-of-breed concept gives you freedom to use the best available components for different parts of your business ecosystem and easily integrate commercetools into the big picture.	High lock-in factor as Shopify is the center of its ecosystem; developments and integrations are compatible only with the Shopify platform.
Infrastructure	High availability, very scalable cloud-native infrastructure that works within Google Cloud, AWS and Microsoft Azure.	Uses Google Cloud, but customers are tied down to Shopify's hosted solution and ecosystem.
Time to market	MVP can be ready within weeks thanks to the Accelerator program . Flexibility for setting up according to your own business needs.	Projects can be created within weeks due to bare customizability and predefined, linear deployment path — poor for enterprises which are complex and require true customizability.
Licensing	On-demand based pricing, pay-as-you-grow. Affordable licensing, paid over time. Upgrades and maintenance are included — no hidden costs. Costs are OPEX.	Custom pricing for businesses with variable charges based on sales/order volume. Costs are OPEX.
TCO/ROI	Low TCO and high ROI as development is made easy and more productive with modern practices, open standards and vast resources of information.	Low TCO but also low ROI. Oversimplified, limited customizability and high ecosystem/platform lock-in. Likely that enterprises will outgrow the platform quickly.
Running cost	Relatively higher, but pay for only what is being used. Difficult to isolate given commercetools' best-of-breed approach and involvement with internal development team.	Very low running cost. Initial setup can be \$50-\$100k but running costs after that can be as low as \$5k a month. For revenue above \$800k, Shopify charges 0.25% of GMV. Costs increase when Shopify customers pursue a headless frontend due to incremental third-party app subscriptions and lack of tooling. Also apps/extensions need to be installed for each storefront and customers are charged per storefront
Barrier to entry	Moderate to high barrier to entry. Requires a digitally mature tech organization with a motivation to move to MACH®.	Very low development and budget barrier. Easy and fast to set up and get live.