

WHITE PAPER

How to Unlock Efficiency Through Automation in Ecommerce



shopstory 

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Executive Summary

Scaling is essential for ecommerce businesses to thrive in today's competitive market. This white paper explores the importance of scalability for small teams, detailing strategies to overcome common challenges such as resource constraints, operational bottlenecks, market competition, and repetitive tasks. Key tactics include focusing on high-impact activities, fostering cross-functional collaboration, prioritizing customer retention, outsourcing non-core functions, and leveraging advanced technology.

Scalable practices in search engine advertising, search engine optimization, social media ads, reporting, and inventory management are crucial for maintaining a competitive edge. The paper later introduces Shopstory, a workflow automation tool with AI support designed to streamline repetitive tasks, optimize marketing campaigns, and save time. Shopstory enables small teams to scale efficiently, make data-driven decisions, and enhance productivity without extensive resources.

Adopting these strategies and tools in a rapidly evolving ecommerce landscape allows small businesses to achieve sustainable growth, remain agile, and lead in their market segments.

1. Introduction

Ecommerce businesses operate in a dynamic landscape where growth is essential for survival. Scaling refers to expanding operations to accommodate increased demand and reaching new audiences or markets, all while ensuring profitability. This white paper explores the significance of scaling in ecommerce, the challenges businesses face as they grow, and how small teams can strategically scale operations. Whether you're a solopreneur or part of a lean team, this guide provides actionable insights to scale your online shop with limited resources.

Growth requires consistency, agility, and persistence, especially for small teams, and it certainly doesn't happen overnight. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital growth, driving unprecedented ecommerce expansion across industries. In 2024, ecommerce sales account for 20.1% of global retail sales, a figure set to rise with changing consumer habits ([Statista](#), 2024). But did you know that, according to the [World Bank](#) (2019), 90% of businesses worldwide consist of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs)?

That's right, and as much as online presence will soon become a necessity for growth, it certainly doesn't mean it will be easy. For example, a study revealed that retailers with the most online sales growth experienced the steepest margin declines ([McKinsey](#), 2021). Small businesses face additional challenges such as resource constraints and multitasking demands that can overwhelm even dedicated teams.

Ecommerce enables businesses to transcend physical locations and access new markets. In fact, a recent study reported that 87% of people begin their shopping experience online ([BusinessDIT](#), 2024). So if you are a small online shop or thinking of starting one, there is an advantage to beginning as an online-first business. The global ecommerce market is projected to reach \$4,117 billion USD in 2024, with an annual growth rate of 9.49% (CAGR 2024-2029), reaching \$6,478 billion USD by 2029 ([Statista](#), 2024). While it is a challenging endeavor, the potential rewards make overcoming these obstacles worthwhile.



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Challenges in Ecommerce Scalability

Scalability of solutions in ecommerce is always a big challenge. Some of the top challenges in scaling ecommerce include:

- **Resource constraints:** Small teams often have limited resources, lacking the manpower and financial muscle to scale rapidly. Balancing growth ambitions with resource limitations is a constant challenge.
- **Operational bottlenecks:** As order volumes increase, operational complexities multiply. Inventory management, order fulfillment, and customer support become intricate tasks. Small teams must find ways to streamline these processes while maintaining quality service.
- **Market competition:** Ecommerce markets are fiercely competitive. New players emerge regularly, and existing ones continuously innovate. Staying ahead requires agility, adaptability, and a keen understanding of market dynamics.
- **Repetitive tasks:** Growth brings an influx of repetitive tasks in ecommerce and marketing. Small teams must balance routine tasks with strategic decision-making.

Smart strategies can turn challenges into opportunities in B2B and B2C ecommerce. Globally, B2B ecommerce is expected to reach \$36 trillion by 2026, while B2C ecommerce is projected to hit \$5.5 trillion by 2027 ([Shopify](#), 2023). Profitable growth is key to long-term success, requiring small teams to navigate resource constraints and operational challenges strategically.

2. Scalability in Key Ecommerce Areas

Scalability is crucial for successful ecommerce ventures, enabling businesses to handle growth efficiently and adapt to changing demands. Whether it's expanding your product catalog, reaching new markets, or accommodating higher traffic, scalability ensures you stay competitive. However, as you scale, complexity increases, making streamlining processes imperative. Efficient workflows prevent bottlenecks, reduce errors, and enable sustainable growth. Without streamlined operations, growth can lead to chaos rather than success. Here, we explore scalability possibilities in key ecommerce and marketing functions:

- **Search engine advertising (SEA):** Effective SEA campaigns are critical for driving traffic and conversions. Marketers can optimize SEA through continuous keyword expansion to broaden reach, automated bid strategies, efficient budget use based on campaign performance, and campaign optimization to ensure scalability and effectiveness.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** Organic visibility is crucial for credibility. Optimizing SEO involves aligning website content with top-ranking keywords from Google Search Console, enhancing product titles and descriptions based on organic search queries, ensuring healthy URLs, and monitoring site performance to optimize structure, load times, and mobile

responsiveness. These practices build a scalable SEO framework that boosts organic traffic and credibility.

- **Social media advertising:** Ads on social channels are essential for a comprehensive advertising mix. Incremental adjustments, such as increasing the daily budget when performance exceeds expectations or pausing underperforming ads automatically, enhance efficiency.
- **Reporting:** Streamlining data collection and creating consolidated reports saves time and improves accuracy, enabling data-driven decision-making. For instance, automating campaign reports allows teams to focus on strategy rather than manually gather data.
- **Inventory management:** As order volumes increase, efficient inventory management becomes crucial. Systems that notify you of low stock, missing product feed data, or synchronize shop systems (e.g., Shopify to Google Shopping) prevent stockouts and ensure product visibility. Optimized inventory management systems support scalability by keeping operations smooth and responsive to demand fluctuations.

And many more areas, of course, beyond marketing. Streamlining repetitive tasks and optimizing processes is essential to prevent ad budget waste and support business growth. This can be achieved through organized teams with clear strategies and leveraging AI, technology, and marketing tools. These resources enhance efficiency, allowing businesses to focus on strategic initiatives rather than mundane tasks. More insights on leveraging technology for optimization will be discussed later in this white paper.

3. Lean Teams vs. Big Teams

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) play a significant role in local economies and job creation. They typically have fewer than 250 employees and account for up to 90% of businesses globally and over 50% of employment worldwide ([World Bank](#), 2019). Moreover, SMBs contribute to more than 50% of the GDP in most countries and emerging economies ([ILO](#), 2014).

While big teams may have more resources, lean teams excel in innovation and adaptability, leveraging their nimbleness as a secret weapon. Let's delve into a few of their advantages below.

Faster decision-making

With fewer layers of hierarchy, lean teams can pivot swiftly and make critical decisions without getting bogged down by red tape and bureaucracy. Imagine a small ecommerce startup adjusting its product offerings based on real-time market feedback – no lengthy approval processes, no endless meetings. The ability to act decisively gives lean teams a competitive edge.

Reduced overhead costs

Lean structures mean lower expenses. Small teams operate efficiently, minimizing unnecessary costs. In a lean team, everyone wears multiple hats – this agility not only saves money but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability.

Increased flexibility

Agility is arguably the biggest advantage of lean teams. When times are tough, smaller teams can mobilize quicker and pivot swiftly. Whether it's a sudden trend, a competitor's move, or a global crisis, lean teams adapt. Picture a small ecommerce boutique transitioning from selling scarves to face masks during the pandemic – or a perfume store pivoting to hand sanitizers when the opportunity arises. Their size allows them to experiment, iterate, and respond promptly.

Agile innovation

Lean teams thrive on creativity and innovation. Their smaller size allows for a more collaborative environment where ideas can be shared and developed quickly. This fosters an innovative spirit as team members are encouraged to think outside the box and contribute to problem-solving. The close-knit nature of lean teams means new ideas can be tested and implemented without the delays often found in larger organizations.

Take, for example, Shopify. They began with a lean team of just three individuals, allowing rapid iterations that resulted in a user-friendly platform now empowering over a million businesses worldwide. In contrast, larger teams like Amazon struggle to change direction due to their sheer size. Another example is Etsy, whose marketplace success stems from its lean approach. Etsy's small team culture fosters creativity, personalized customer experiences, and rapid feature development. These agile underdogs prove that when it comes to impact, size isn't everything.

Lean teams offer obvious advantages ranging from agility and speed, collaboration and innovation, to reduced delays. Lean teams thrive on creativity, adaptability, and efficient decision-making, proving that impact isn't solely determined by team size.



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working days are lost on average per year, per employee, on tasks, that could be automated instead ([Clockify](#), 2021).

4. Strategies for Small Teams to Scale

The rapid expansion of ecommerce has transformed the retail landscape, with global sales reaching \$5.8 trillion in 2023 and projected to exceed \$8 trillion by 2027 ([Statista](#), 2024). This growth presents both opportunities and challenges for small ecommerce teams aiming to scale effectively. How can these nimble teams achieve sustainable growth without compromising quality or efficiency? Let's dive into five practical strategies below.

- **Prioritization:** Small teams should focus on high-impact tasks linked to revenue and customer satisfaction. Project management is crucial; delay, outsource, or delegate non-core activities to maintain efficiency. Regularly evaluate and optimize business processes to ensure the team remains agile and responsive.
- **Cross-functional collaboration:** Breaking down departmental silos promotes growth. Encouraging collaboration between marketing, sales, operations, and other areas fosters shared knowledge and resources. This cooperation leads to fresh perspectives, synergies, and growth opportunities, such as marketing insights enhancing inventory management or operational efficiency improving customer service.
- **Customer retention:** Acquiring new customers is essential, but retaining existing ones is even more important (and cost-effective). Small teams can maximize their impact by focusing on customer retention. A great product, personalized customer service, and value-added loyalty programs build lasting relationships. These loyal customers not only provide steady revenue but also serve as brand advocates.
- **Outsourcing:** Outsource non-core functions, like customer support or web development, to focus on core competencies, such as product development and strategic planning. This frees up time and expertise for more impactful activities.
- **Leveraging technology:** Adopt technology and automation tools to streamline repetitive tasks, enhancing efficiency and accuracy. Select technology that aligns with the team's specific needs and growth trajectory.

These strategies will ensure small teams navigate the complexities of ecommerce with a clearer vision, scale efficiently, and stay agile. By focusing on core strengths and leveraging technology, they can thrive in the evolving ecommerce landscape. Next, let's explore how marketing automation plays a role in driving ecommerce success.

5. Leveraging Marketing Automation

Marketing automation is a powerful – often underestimated – tool for online shops today, particularly for smaller teams. As an ecommerce business owner, you're well aware of the intricate tasks involved in managing your online shop. From inventory updates to marketing campaigns, the repetitive weekly tasks are never-ending. By automating such tasks, teams can free up valuable time, reduce errors, and focus on strategic activities. In fact, the market value for workflow automation

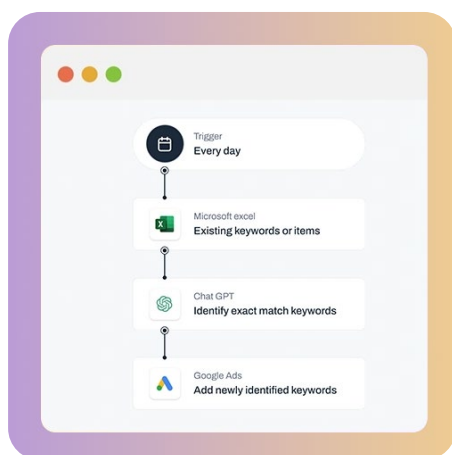
is expected to reach \$18.45 billion in 2025, with 59% of users reporting positive ROI ([Gitnux](#), 2024). Among those who have started using automation tools, approximately 75% of companies report that workflow automation gives them a strong competitive advantage in the market ([Gitnux](#), 2024).

Three such tools are Zapier, Make and Shopstory. All of them offer a wide range of unique automation features. Zapier connects over 6,000 apps, automating tasks such as data transfer and single-step tasks between tools. Make is able to help you building more complex automations, but isn't always the easiest to use. Shopstory, designed specifically for ecommerce and marketing in mind, goes beyond simple data transfers. It allows online shops to automate and optimize various areas based on predefined rules and without the need of programming skills to automate your tasks. You can check our [comparison between Zapier, Make and Shopstory](#) to help you choose the tool that's right for your needs.

Key Features of Shopstory

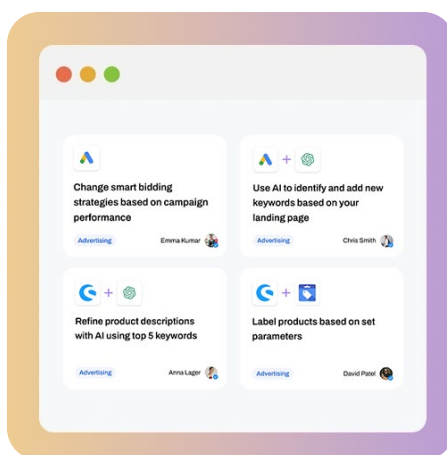
Shopstory is a versatile, cloud-based software with AI-features, that allows ecommerce business owners and marketers to easily create and launch powerful automations in the form of flows - without requiring a single line of code. Here's what the software includes:

Build Flows



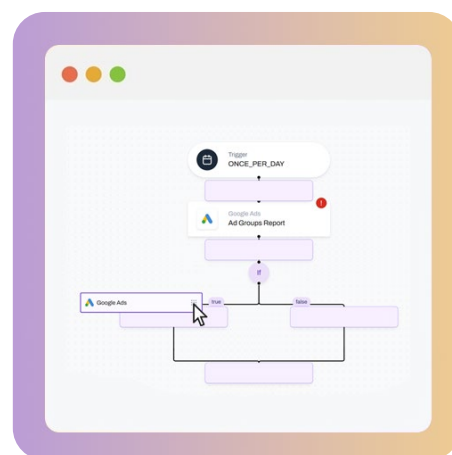
Did you know? The automations built in our software are called „Flows“.

Flow Library



Not sure where to start? Our Flow Library is full of ready to use flows, built by experts.

Drag & Drop Flow Builder



Want to start building on your own? Build flows with ease through drag & drop.

Shopstory's core features ensure that, in order for you to automate your most tedious and repetitive tasks, you will never need a single line of code, programmatic skills anymore. Sounds great already? There's even more. How do they say? Wait until the end and continue reading!

AI Assistant



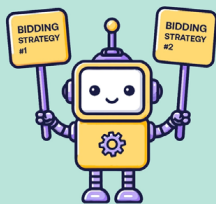
You may have noticed him already. We still have to give him a proper name, but our latest innovation is our AI Assistant. He highlights a groundbreaking way to interact with Shopstory in natural language. Whenever you're stuck, or feeling lazy, while using the drag & drop flow builder or tired of looking up flows in our flow library, you can also summon our AI Assistant at any time and let him do the magic for you.

Think of our AI Assistant as your personal helper in Shopstory. He answers your questions, understands your challenges, suggests existing flows to automate your tasks or starts building flows from scratch.

Examples of what you can automate using Shopstory

Enough talking – let's move from theory to practice and see automation in action. Below are examples of automation flows that Shopstory supports in various areas, including SEA, SEO, social ads, reporting, and ecommerce.

Autopilot for bidding strategies in Google Ads



Optimize bid strategies for search campaigns based on pre-set thresholds, adapting to best performance.

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Generate new product descriptions



Generate new product descriptions with ChatGPT, based on your top search query data.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Pause ad sets based on performance



Pause underperforming ad sets using criteria to reallocate the budget & enhance campaign effects.

[LEARN MORE](#)

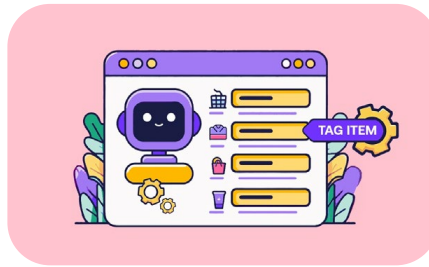
Top 100 item ranking & availability



Rank your top 100 products based on conversions in the past 365 days & track click activity of the past week.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Labelizer: Categorize your products by performance



Check if there is empty product data within your feed, which could negatively impact your visibility.

[LEARN MORE](#)

How to run an ecommerce business in 2024



Explore our guide that outlines 12 strategies for achieving ecommerce success in 2024.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Investing in marketing workflow automation is worthwhile: 61% of businesses see a return on investment within six months, while those using marketing automation report an 80% increase in lead quality ([Oracle](#), 2022). Beyond the numbers, consider employee well-being: 65% of knowledge workers experience less stress at work when manual tasks are automated ([Zapier](#), 2021). By integrating Shopstory's automation flows, your teams can achieve similar results, driving growth, improving lead quality, and fostering a more productive, less stressful work environment.

6. Conclusion

Achieving scalable growth in ecommerce is a complex but rewarding endeavor. For small teams, this means turning constraints into strengths, leveraging agility, and focusing on high-impact tasks. Automation tools play a pivotal role, enabling teams to automate repetitive tasks, optimize campaigns, and make data-driven decisions. In return, small teams enhance productivity, stay competitive, and drive sustainable, and most importantly, scalable growth.

With the right approach and tools, teams can scale faster than ever, schedule actions based on real-time data, and refine marketing campaigns using industry best practices. Shopstory empowers everyone on the team to eliminate repetitive work and make time for things that matter - without requiring a single line of code from the user.

Want to **know more**
about our software?

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software is about?

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shopstory

Shopstory (www.shopstory.ai) was founded in September 2020 in Vienna, Austria by the two co-founders Sebastian Schwelle (CEO) and Robert Böhm (CFO), and operated under the name boomerank until 2022. Its mission is to make ecommerce more accessible and fair. Shopstory has created the next-gen no-code automation platform for ecommerce and marketing that delivers even more value to online shops and marketers. Shopstory is operating in more than seven countries.



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