Multi-site ecommerce and your online strategy

Why launching multiple sites should be at the heart of your ecommerce strategy

Adopting a multi-site ecommerce strategy

If you're an online retailer who is looking to grow online revenues efficiently, differentiate your brands or enter new markets then multi-site technology should be at the very centre of your ecommerce strategy. Multi-site ecommerce strategies are proven to grow online revenues, increase market share, penetration and build competitive advantage. Achieving impressive ROI for pure play online vendors, multi-channel retailers, manufacturers, wholesalers and suppliers, multi-site technology enables website owners to effectively increasing their sales whilst lowering the overall ownership cost of their ecommerce solution.

Following a multi-site strategy essentially involves setting up multiple websites, each with their own subset of products geared towards specific markets or niches.

Is multi-site ecommerce for you?

Having multiple ecommerce websites can bring significant benefits to virtually any online business. It is how a business approaches a multi-site strategy that varies, as there are often both commercial and political considerations. Below are some typical scenarios that we have come across when talking to businesses about a multi-site solution:

- Merchants looking to sell internationally through multiple sites
- Businesses who want to differentiate their brands
- Vendors who are looking to introduce new product lines or target new markets whilst protecting their existing brand
- Businesses who want to use a central platform whilst allowing multiple sites to retain their independence and anonymity.
- Online retailers with existing sites that are built in different platforms or are hosted separately
- Businesses looking to breakout specific product groups to target a particular niche
- B2C businesses looking to launch a B2B offering
- B2B businesses looking to launch a B2C offering
- Franchises looking to rollout a number of sites for members whilst retaining central control
- Groups of businesses and businesses with multiple divisions

Planning for multiple ecommerce websites

It's important for vendors to plan their offerings carefully and communicate it to the customer, thinking through each site individually. Ensuring that your site appeals to your target market is fundamental and has many contributing factors. For each market / niche website merchants should intelligently tailor SEO, branding, site design, product set and promotions to more effectively engage with their target market.

Identifying markets and niches

Whether you are looking to launch a fairly simple ecommerce site or a large e-commerce website, identifying a website's target market from the start is a very important step in business planning. Successful online businesses put a lot of effort into focusing on specific target markets. In most cases a gap in a market has usually been spotted and researched by a business to assess their suitability in filling it. Building a demographic and or psychographic profile for your target market(s) can help vendors to refine their targeting, looking at details such as: age groups, gender, interests, geographies and income.

Choosing your products

Vendors that have an ecommerce site already could look to break out suitable products, ranges or categories but are buried in their current site and struggle to be found in search engines, and then include them in a second more focused website. This still allows retailers to centrally manage their product database and simply set products to appear on the appropriate sites.

Search engine optimisation

Having multiple sites gives merchants a fantastic opportunity to really focus their SEO, allowing them to effectively target specific keywords and phrases relating to their product range. Breaking out groups of products from your existing product catalogue into a separate site can improve your search engine visibility and ranking, by essentially becoming a specialist or focused website for those products. Targeting niche markets often means that generally there is less competition, making it easier to achieve higher rankings for relevant phrases quickly.

Branding and site design

Branding and website design all form part of the overall user experience and is one of the key areas that online retailers can differentiate themselves from their competitors. Tailoring your brand identity and website design helps ensure that you stand out from the crowd, effectively engaging your target markets.

Promotions

To maximise the effectiveness of your promotions it is important to understand that different people respond to different types of promotions. The promotional strategy adopted by a retailer should be driven by what customers in that market respond to the best, although sometimes there are other considerations, for example a luxury brand may want to protect their premium pricing model and choose to not use discounting and would instead prefer to offer free gifts, samples or vouchers.

Cost effective multi-site ecommerce solutions

Staying in control of costs whilst delivering an exceptional user experience is often the challenge faced by online retailers. By selecting the right ecommerce provider and platform, vendors can achieve a scalable multi-site ecommerce solution which is cost effective whilst delivering an excellent experience to their customers.

A sub-niche website can have:

- Different or same design (or mixture of)
- Different or same functionality and layout (or mixture of)
- Different or shared content e.g. images, content, promotions, products
- Be in one or more languages
- Different or same payment gateway
- Different or same tax and shipping algorithms
- Administrator access can be set system wide, specific sites and sections within

Sub-niche website requirements can be loosely categorised as one of the following:
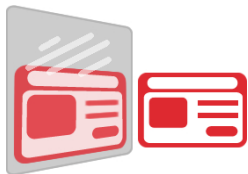
Mirror

Re-using the same templates and existing functionality with some minor stylesheet changes.
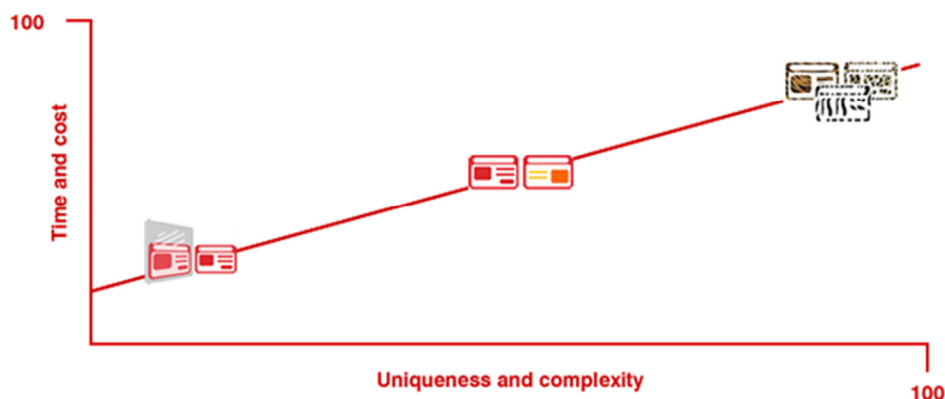

Mix

Some different templates and some tweaks to the site's functionality.

Unique

Unique set of templates giving the subsequent sites a completely different look and feel with unique functionality and rules.

Each option varies in cost of time it takes to implement. Generally speaking the more complex and unique a sub-niche website is, the larger the cost and time to implement.

Reducing your overall operation costs

If you're already managing multiple sites and they are either running through different platforms or are hosted separately, or both then centralising them to be managed from a single platform and the same hosting environment can bring significant cost savings to your business. Launching and running multiple sites from the same platform and hosting environment can vastly reduce the overall costs of your ecommerce operation.

One off build costs
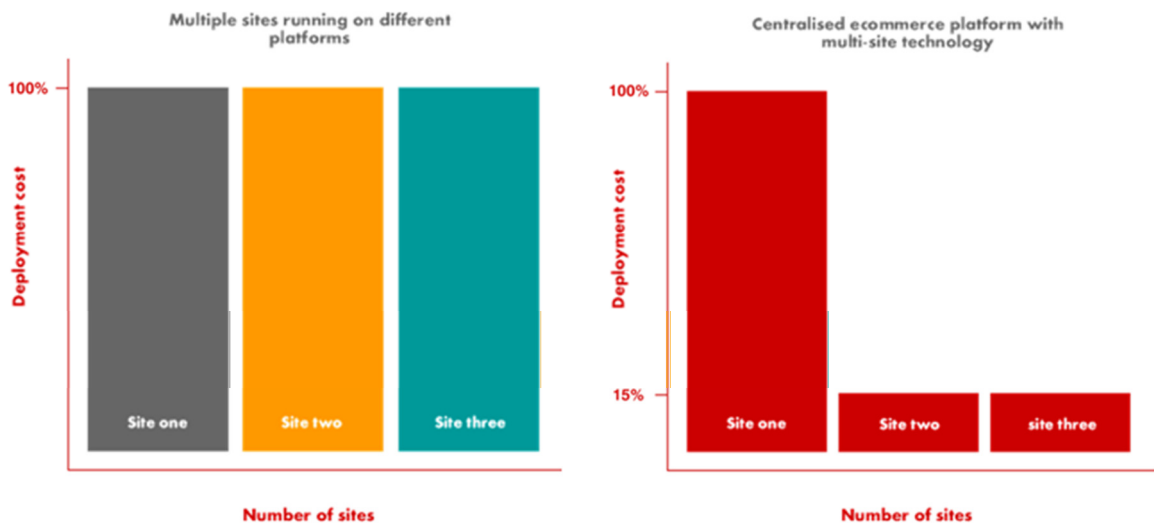
Ongoing hosting costs
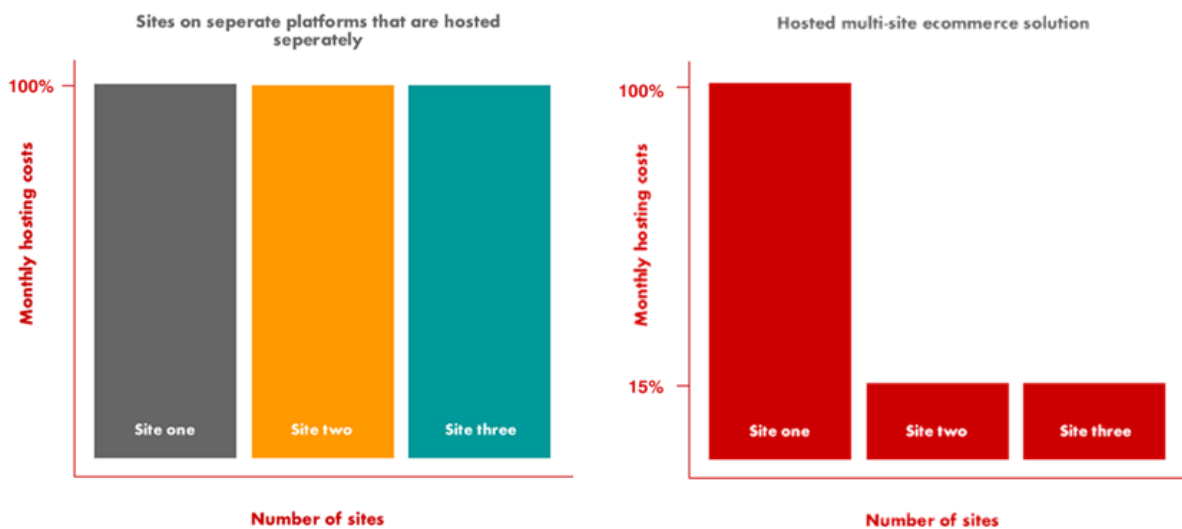
Conclusion

Creating multiple sites focused on a specific market is an excellent way of acquiring new customers, increasing sales, your market reach and penetration, and developing a significant advantage over your rivals. For retailers looking to implement a multi-site solution it is important to note that not all ecommerce platforms can support multiple sites in the same way, and some that claim to do so, support that requirement with varying degrees of success. Ecommerce platforms that have been built from the ground up with running multiple sites in mind offer merchants looking at a multi-site solution the greatest amount of flexibility. More flexibility means more options for the vendor and ultimately a better solution that has longevity. Merchants need to ensure that they're supported and empowered by both platform and provider to drive their business forward, following their online strategy and achieving their goals.

Examples of Red's multi-site / international clients

maxinutrition

Bowers & Wilkins

UK

www.maximuscle.com

www.maxitone.com

www.maxifuel.com

International (GEOIP Auto Redirect)

www.maximuscle.gr

www.maximuscle.it

www.maximuscle.pt

www.maximuscle.es

www.maximuscle.ie

www.maximuscle.se

www.maximuscle.eu

www.maximuscle.nl

www.maximuscle.de

www.maximuscle.fi

UK

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

International (GEOIP Detection)

www.bowers-wilkins.com

www.bowers-wilkins.es

www.bowers-wilkins.de

www.bowers-wilkins.fr

www.bowers-wilkins.cn

www.bowers-wilkins.jp

www.bowers-wilkins.ru