The Great Merchant Race

Which 'Great Merchant' has the competitive advantage in these common eCommerce scenarios?

The Back-Story:

Justin, Stacy, and Tim are three hard-working merchants that each sell shoes online for a living. They've all been successful in creating great products, marketing them to their target audiences, and displaying them with quality product photos on a well-designed and eye-catching eCommerce platform. As a result, they're seeing increasing success and are noticing a large influx of orders.

However, the methods that Justin, Stacy, and Tim use after their customers hit the 'buy button' in order to process, ship, and report on their sales, happen to vary greatly. As a result, one of them is obtaining a strong competitive advantage over the others in each of the following common eCommerce scenarios.

Read along to learn which merchant is winning The Great Merchant Race…

The 'Great Merchants' themselves:

Justin is a savvy eCommerce merchant with a strong attention to detail. However, to date, he has not integrated any of the applications he uses to run his business. Instead, Justin relies on manual rekeying of order data across his disparate business applications.

Stacy is an eCommerce merchant that happens to have some experience with website design, software development and coding. As a result, she built and designed much of her website herself, and has created a custom point-to-point integration solution from her eCommerce store to her ERP that she maintains herself in-house.

Tim is a busy eCommerce merchant that strives for a hands-off approach to running his business. As a result, he has enabled a comprehensive cloud-based iPaaS (integration platform as a service) solution to flow data across all his chosen applications without the need for human intervention.

Let's see how Justin, Stacy and Tim fare in each of the following common eCommerce scenarios on their quest to win The Great Merchant Race…

Scenario A: The merchants are processing orders for a product that has just been discounted in price.

This morning, Justin logged in to the back-end of his eCommerce store and updated the pricing for one of his popular shoe products. Shortly after, a loyal customer of his visited his eCommerce store to purchase a pair of the shoes. Justin logged into his store's back-end later that night and saw the order, manually made a record of the sale in his back-office ERP, and adjusted his inventory levels accordingly. He then went into his shipping software and manually created a shipping label. Next, Justin went back to his eCommerce store to rekey the shipping and tracking details for his customer, and then entered this information back into his ERP. After all of this, Justin logged into his CRM application to manually update his returning customer's purchase history. Talk about a time-consuming process!

An error occurred with Stacy's custom point-to-point integration solution after she put one of her products on sale this morning. This is because the adjusted price of her product was not accurately reflected in her back-office ERP once the price was discounted on the eCommerce platform, since Stacy forgot to account for this product data change in her coding. Now Stacy has received an alert that there was an error processing a recently placed order, and she must go into her back-office ERP and manually adjust the price accordingly, before reprocessing the order that didn't go through.

When Tim decided to discount a pair of shoes on his eCommerce store this morning, within moments his iPaaS integration solution used its carefully coded and pre-established business rules to manipulate the data across disparate systems so that the change would be automatically adjusted in his ERP system. When an order was placed for his discounted product later that day, Tim watched on his platform's dashboard as the order flowed through his integration platform and was processed correctly in near real-time without hassle.

In Scenario A, Tim is winning The Great Merchant Race for having the most efficient order-processing method.

Scenario B: The merchants are going away on vacation and pondering how business will persist in their absence.

Justin is ready to take a much-needed vacation. While he is gone, he essentially has two options for how his business will run without him. He can either find someone he trusts to do manual data entry on his behalf and process the orders in his absence, or he can choose to forgo any profits and let business come to a halt while he is away. Justin knows that bringing his business to a standstill will be too costly for him, so he decides to hire someone that can cover the manual data entry while he is gone. While rekeying the data by hand, a typing error was made by his temporary hire, and 10 pairs of shoes accidently got shipped instead of 1. Ugh!

While Stacy goes away on vacation, she hopes that her custom point-to-point integration solution will continue to run smoothly for her business. But, while she is gone her accountant accidently hit the upgrade button on their accounting application and now her custom-built integration solution has stopped functioning properly. The error will now persist until Stacy is back from vacation and able to upgrade the integration solution. Or, she can choose to login remotely from the beach and attempt to resolve the issue, putting a damper on her relaxing vacation.

Tim's iPaaS vendor manages and maintains his integration solution on his behalf. While he's away on vacation, Tim can rest easy knowing that his orders are flowing through his integration platform without trouble. This means orders are arriving to his customers accurately and on-time while he continues to enjoy his vacation worry-free!

In Scenario B, Tim comes out on top in the Great Merchant race since it's business as usual while he is away from work.

Scenario C: The merchants receive an order placed on December 22nd by a customer who needs their package to arrive by December 24th, at the latest!

Oops! Justin was so busy with last-minute Holiday gift wrapping that he forgot to log in and check for new orders from his online store until December 23rd at 11 PM. Now there is no chance that this order will be processed, packaged, and delivered in time to meet his customers' needs. He crosses his fingers that he doesn't receive a negative online review which could be damaging for his business's reputation.

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Stacy was relieved that the point-to-point integration solution between her eCommerce store and ERP ensured that the order was recorded in her back-office in near-real time, but not having another integration built yet between her eCommerce store and shipping software meant that the shipping label wasn't created in time for a speedy delivery. Now her product is estimated to arrive at her customers' doorstep on December 27th which will leave them waiting. She worries if this customer will buy from her store again in the future.

An iPaaS solution ensures that ALL of Tim's business applications are integrated on one single platform. As soon as his customer placed the order on December 22nd, his ERP was updated within minutes to reflect the inventory change, a shipping label was printed via his shipping software that outlined a need for expedited 1-day shipping, his CRM was updated to reflect the recent sale, and his product was packaged and shipped out that very same day by his hardworking team of employees. The customer checked their mailbox on December 23rd and was happy to see that their shoe purchase had arrived accurately and with time to spare!

In Scenario C, Tim's out in front by being the merchant that keeps their customer the happiest and most likely to shop from them again in the future.

Scenario D: The merchants are holding a flash-sale on a popular product, contributing to higher than normal transaction volumes in a very short period of time.

A flash-sale on his most popular pair of shoes seemed like a great idea to Justin before he realized he was unable to keep up with the data entry that comes along with a fast influx of orders. As a result of order backlog and slow processing, he ended up overselling his product due to inaccurate inventory reports in his ERP and no update on his eCommerce store that he was actually out of stock. Justin was also so buried in manual data entry that he and his team were slow to package and ship out orders, leaving their customers more than a little bit frustrated.

Everything was going great when Stacy held a flash-sale on her eCommerce store. That is, until her custom integration solution stopped working because of higher than normal transaction volumes on an on-prem system not capable of supporting the large volumes. While her integration solution was down, her inventory was not being updated properly and she, too, sold more product than she actually had in stock. Her customers were disappointed when they received notice that the product had to be re-stocked before they would receive their purchase in the mail (a process that would take well over a month).

Tim's chosen iPaaS solution is hosted on-the-cloud on world-class Microsoft Azure. This means that his integration solution platform has 99.9% uptime and can dynamically adjust capacity to handle an infinite number of transactions per minute. Throughout his flash-sale, everything worked according to plan and his customers were ecstatic to purchase their shoes for a great price, and receive them in a timely-fashion. Tim was impressed with how successful the flash-sale was for his business and will definitely be offering similar promotions in the future.

In Scenario D, Tim takes the lead once again with a robust and reliable solution that can handle even the busiest of sale days.

The moral of the story: the competitive advantage obtained from using an iPaaS solution speaks for itself…

In each of the above scenarios, it is evident which merchant has the competitive advantage when it comes to selling shoes online.

Tim's process is fast, efficient, scalable, accurate, and offers reporting and data that is valuable to the future of his business. Rather than waste time and money on inefficient and inaccurate order processing, Tim can keep using the hands-off approach to his business that he enjoys, while remaining confident that his business is operating smoothly and efficiently without his intervention.

This gives him a strong advantage over his competitors, Justin and Stacy, who are constantly struggling to keep up as they are faced with order backlog, mistakes being made, overselling out of stock products, slow shipping speeds, system crashes and failures, and backlash from unhappy customers.

All of this to say that when it comes to selling shoes online, Tim is the clear winner of the Great Merchant Race!

To gain a competitive advantage over your eCommerce competitors, plan your own iPaaS solution today: www.ebridgeconnections.com/blueprint-builder.aspx

We wish you luck in your Great Merchant Race!