Should You Go It Alone or Go Through a Provider?

Understanding the Integration Requirements for eBay and Amazon
EBay, Amazon and other marketplaces such as Buy.com, Newegg and Sears account for 27% of total online retail sales, and are continuing to grow. Online retailers of all sizes are recognizing the profit potential of marketplaces and the benefits of aligning with a software partner; however, these retailers often find themselves wavering between managing these integrations in-house and using an e-commerce software provider. To ensure that retailers make the most informed decision, we’ve put together this white paper to share the necessary considerations and restrictions for selling on eBay and Amazon, and educate retailers on the value of working with a partner on these channels.

Online retailers who run their own integrations need extra headcount, or additional technical staff, in order to keep up with rapidly evolving marketplaces. Constant changes at each marketplace require detailed attention from a technical support team, whether it is based in-house or not. Charging an in-house technical support team with all the responsibilities of managing a direct integration can be taxing and time inefficient, especially if the team is not dedicated to e-commerce and is a shared resource with other departments. Retailers should push for dedicated technical support to manage their e-commerce presence, or should consider the benefits of using an e-commerce software platform.

**EBAY**

Components of an Integration

Are you equipped to handle uploading and maintaining thousands of product listings?

For those retailers not satisfied with the flat-file method of listing items on marketplaces, or with the significant lag times that accompany their extensive list of products, switching to a software provider can save you time and energy. ChannelAdvisor’s technology controls listings, regulates maintenance, manages transactions and monitors reporting data, all from a central platform.

Product details such as price, quantity and condition must be mapped into the data feed in order to go live on eBay. It can be a confusing and time-consuming process for many retailers to do on their own, but a channel partner like ChannelAdvisor can handle it seamlessly. For example, ChannelAdvisor’s software has the capability to:

- Manage the quantity and advertised duration of each listing
- Apply safety stock settings to ensure the product does not oversell
- Recognize what item attributes are allowed and enable you to map those values to the correct category
- Eliminate manual mapping using an advanced, automated, item-specific matching feature
- Match items to product identifiers (Brand, MPN, UPC) to eBay’s catalog products with stock descriptions and pictures
- Offer search engine or product listing exposure for products simply by mapping to UPC
- Create and manage variation listings for those categories with size variations, color variation, flavor variation and more
- Allow payment and shipping information to be transmitted in bulk using listing templates
- Create listings from a retailer’s existing data with various mapping functionality
Are you doing everything you can to maintain your best DSR?

A retailer’s Detailed Seller Rating (DSR) is a compilation of feedback given anonymously by buyers to rate retailers, and is the only feedback score eBay uses to rate them. Along with listing completeness and quality, a positive DSR on eBay is a factor in determining Best Match, the default order for search results, making it crucial to a retailer’s long-term success. An easy way to boost DSR is to submit shipping updates within time guidelines (usually within one business day of an order), guaranteeing a 5-star rating for the Shipping Time dimension. However, this requires retailers to constantly pay attention to details such as order management.

ChannelAdvisor’s Transaction Management component allows retailers to:

- View/manage orders as frequently as desired
- Issue refunds through a single process as an extension of their accounting software
- Escalate Unpaid Items (UPIs) to Disputes at eBay automatically using timescale settings/preferences.

Have you earned your Top-Rated Seller Badge?

Being a Top-Rated Seller (TRS) on eBay means that a retailer has a history of great customer service, offers accurate item descriptions, ships items quickly and garners consistently high buyer ratings. A seller who does not perform well in these aspects will not earn the trust of all prospective buyers, receive discounts or benefit from the increased visibility that comes with a TRS badge. Though the requirements may seem daunting, there is a simple solution.

With the eBay 360 dashboard, ChannelAdvisor offers comprehensive performance metrics for both open and closed listings, detailed top-selling product reports and a tracking feature for DSR, TRS status, negative and neutral feedback. ChannelAdvisor also understands that a seller never wants to have a large number of items waiting to list and has equipped its software with an automated system for handling listing errors.
How quickly can you update your product list?

For online retailers, one of the most demanding aspects of running an integration directly with a marketplace is maintaining it and making sure it is fully functional at all times. Full listing synchronization allows ChannelAdvisor to update all active listings with feed changes on demand. As a channel partner on eBay, ChannelAdvisor can automatically manage relist and withdraw capabilities as needed, and ensure accurate information.

Is your data in the correct format?

eBay is specific about what data can be provided for an item. For example, an apparel retailer’s size type classification of “B & T” would not match eBay’s pre-determined field “Big and Tall.” Instead of requiring a developer to build new code to match the fields, or worse, make a wholesale database change, you can use ChannelAdvisor’s technology to map existing information automatically to accommodate for situations such as these. If requirements on the marketplace change, a simple update within ChannelAdvisor’s system can quickly adjust your listings.

Integration Challenges

Are you prepared to prioritize updates and operations?

eBay regularly imposes API limits up to 5,000 calls per day. Retailers must determine what price changes, updates or orders they can fit into that constraint. Even retailers with tens of thousands of products must prioritize which operations they will perform in a given day and which aren’t necessary or require too much of their time and attention. Further adding to the system’s complexity are multiple data file limitations for bulk operations, which include restrictions on adding new products, relisting products and revising products. Many retailers find that these restrictions often deter an integration.

As a preferred partner on eBay, ChannelAdvisor does not have these restrictions. With ChannelAdvisor’s technology, if retailers want to add a number of new products at different times throughout the day, relist items as they come back into stock or even see their inventory in real time coming into the ChannelAdvisor software, they can do so.

Does your integration meet eBay’s compliance requirements?

Should online retailers want to exceed the 5,000 operation per day limit, they must put their direct integrations through a compliance check. eBay evaluates whether best integration practices are being followed and how much error handling the integration can process. A retailer must develop an integration that is robust enough to meet eBay’s certification standards—a tough and time-consuming assignment to spring on IT staff. Furthermore, that staff must make it a top priority to keep up to speed with significant changes to the program, whether they might be API additions or deletions or changes in requirements.

Instead of using in-house efforts to meet these extensive requirements, you can rely on ChannelAdvisor’s technology to take care of your integrations to marketplaces seamlessly. With that in mind, retailers should not worry about exceeding operational limitations as they can use ChannelAdvisor to make those changes on call.
AMAZON
Components of an Integration

Amazon is currently growing at two times the rate of e-commerce according to numbers gleaned from comScore and Amazon itself. Savvy retailers recognize the perks of being on Amazon, although it requires a significant time investment to launch.

Do you have the eight required feeds?

Amazon's listing system requires the following eight feeds in order to list items:

1. Product Feed
2. Relationship Feed
3. Product Images Feed
4. Pricing Feed
5. Inventory Feed
6. Shipping override feed
7. Order Acknowledgment Feed
8. Order Fulfillment Feed

ChannelAdvisor’s technology effectively reduces these eight feeds into three or four, depending on how the seller chooses to integrate. Generating all these different feeds is not a small task, but ChannelAdvisor has a robust integration that can easily keep up with Amazon's constant shifts without requiring changes from retailers as they grow. By consolidating the feeds, retailers are left with a feed that contains the attributes and another (sometimes two, depending on the integration) to contain the quantity. On the order side, ChannelAdvisor only needs the retailer to download orders and provide the fulfillment feed in order to map the data to Amazon. Ultimately, fewer moving parts will eliminate many failure points between a retailer and Amazon, roadblocks that only serve to slow selling progress.

Is your data properly optimized to avoid listing errors?

Product attributes on Amazon are specific down to valid values and field lengths. Keeping up with Amazon’s updates can be a challenge, meaning it is imperative for retailers to be even more meticulous about Amazon’s listing process than they would be on other marketplaces. Making a mistake means your product will list inaccurately. In some cases, it may not list at all.

Associating a product with the exact item listed on Amazon is consistently one of the biggest challenges retailers face. With so many different tags and item-type classifications, there is the potential for thousands of errors. Fortunately, ChannelAdvisor will do the work of defining and validating the product attributes for every category, transforming a retailer’s product data into the Amazon-required format. Between providing templates that cleanly outline the data and presenting the exact format suitable for Amazon, ChannelAdvisor’s technology has been proven to list retailers’ products effectively. With ChannelAdvisor, retailers can map one feed to Amazon, utilize the system’s advanced functionality and transform their data to the required values.
Integration Challenges

Are your products matching with the correct Amazon listings?

Listing items on Amazon requires more detail than listing on eBay and on other marketplaces, as evidenced by the attribute data requirements. On this complex marketplace, a retailer faces the challenge of matching their products to the correct listings in the Amazon catalog. ChannelAdvisor is keenly aware of the details that can separate accomplished online retailers from ones who have yet to reach their potential, and provides tangible performance metrics in order to display errors and even highlight where adjustments are necessary.

With ChannelAdvisor’s system, a retailer can easily match their products to the appropriate products in the Amazon catalog. The technology can also override Multiple Match Errors with a functionality to auto-suggest item-type values. Amazon maintains a single listing for a product, which retailers need to either match or create a listing unique enough to indicate a different product entirely, or else risk a listing error. The Multi-Match feature helps sellers match their products by showing images of the actual products that Amazon wants to match them with, allowing retailers to easily select the appropriate products and avoid costly listing errors.

Do you know what it takes to attain Featured Merchant Status?

ChannelAdvisor’s Amazon 360 dashboard provides access to order information, shipping information and refund details. Surfacing all the information retailers need in one interface allows retailers to focus on improving seller reputation and becoming more successful on this important marketplace. A sure way for a retailer to improve ROI and win the Buy Box more often is to achieve Featured Merchant Status. Much like eBay’s DSR, Featured Merchant Status is contingent upon a retailer’s selling history, Order Defect Rate (ODR) and excellent customer experience. More than 90% of ChannelAdvisor’s third-party retailers on Amazon have gained Featured Merchant Status and are eligible to win the Buy Box² using this feature.
ChannelAdvisor’s technology also includes a Categorizer feature that collects and submits inventory information for Amazon to suggest the Item Type that determines the appropriate placement in the catalog. A retailer can accept, edit or reject the suggestions and save the information for that product to then send along with other important product details upon listing. Over the life of an e-commerce business, there is the potential for thousands upon thousands of these necessary mappings.

An important aspect of selling on marketplaces is the ability to measure discernible improvements. It is not enough to haphazardly list inventory and hope that it will spark your online business—the competition is way too fierce not to know where you stand.

Can your in-house solution reprice products and juggle inventory across multiple marketplaces?

Online retailers running direct integrations have to pay close attention to the status of all inventory across many different channels. As their e-commerce reach spreads to more marketplaces, and in turn, more buyers, it becomes increasingly difficult to ensure accuracy.

ChannelAdvisor’s technology constantly monitors a retailer’s product information and makes changes as necessary, a function that those retailers would otherwise have to build on their own. Furthermore, this technology addresses quantity management and competitive pricing in these innovative ways:

**Quantity Management**
- Allows a retailer to advertise any quantity on each marketplace, including setting aside a safety stock or buffer to avoid overselling
- Uses the Inventory Juggler to list products on multiple marketplaces, effectively boosting product visibility

**Competitive Pricing**
- Offers a Repricer to automatically keep retailers competitive within pre-set price margins
- Uses dynamic rules to help retailers compete for the Buy Box and automatically makes adjustments when Amazon makes changes
WHY CHANNELADVISOR?

While using an in-house team might seem like an inexpensive strategy up front, ChannelAdvisor’s technology can help you simplify and consolidate your processes from top to bottom, saving you time and making your business more efficient. With the selling power behind rapidly-growing online marketplaces, it’s important to establish yourself as a trusted seller first and then focus on realizing your profit potential.

ChannelAdvisor has taken the time to design these sophisticated tools to help retailers get things listed. If retailers choose to build an integration themselves, they must account for all the minor details in order for it to have excellent functionality. An integration is more than just the feeds and data – it is also the tools that help get products listed correctly and resolve errors.

To find out more, please contact: marketing@channeladvisor.com or call 866.264.8594.

1 Public reports from eBay, Amazon, Google, Shopping.com and ChannelAdvisor estimates based on our transactional data.