How to write an ecommerce RFP for fashion and lifestyle brands

Learn why, when and how to write a successful ecommerce RFP for the fashion and lifestyle industry.

GUIDEBOOK

When done right, an RFP can be a powerful tool to evaluate potential partners and how their platforms fit your requirements.

An ecommerce RFP (request for proposal) is a time- and money-consuming project that must be done carefully to serve its purpose. It should be carefully considered and reflect your company's needs.

As a leading headless ecommerce platform for fashion and lifestyle brands, we know what you need to look for, and we've prepared this guide to help you through the RFP process. We've used our experience and know-how to point out important fashion- and lifestyle-related questions alongside some general advice for communication with future vendors.

RFP in the fashion and lifestyle industry

Ecommerce is quickly evolving, and so are the fashion and lifestyle markets. One-size-fits-all platforms are no longer good enough for everything. Today, original brands need the power to scale quickly and express their identity as they want. The fashion industry has a lot of must-haves to cross out in terms of functionalities, marketing, agility, and design. Putting them into an RFP can cut significant time during the platform search.

In this guide we will discuss:

- Fashion and lifestyle ecommerce technology principles
- Additional software integrations
- Platform architecture and scalability
- Functional requirements fit
- Native features vs third-party add-ons
- Marketing and sales capabilities
- Order management and operations

A request for proposal creates equal opportunity for each vendor. By limiting interaction with vendors, you're basing your decisions on facts and true platform fit. With up to 200 features that are crucial for the fashion and lifestyle industry, it's easy to get distracted and overpay for something that should be an out-of-the-box solution. With headless e-commerce, there is less chance of bias or overlooking important future cooperation points of consideration.

Do you need a request for a proposal?

An RFP is a tool that you create to filter potential partners and ease your way through the platform search process. It can't be rushed, so when deciding if an RFP is something to invest in, evaluate if you have enough resources and can get a positive ROI. It is a good practice not to invest in the process when the technology that you're looking into is considered cheap. If the platforms that you're looking for cost about $40,000, you might be wasting way more money on the extensive RFP process that doesn't bring the expected result. It might be a better choice to trust independent product comparisons sites like G2.

On the other hand, investing $30,000-$40,000 in the RFP process when you're going to spend $250,000-$5,000,000 on the platform is a smart choice. It can save you a lot of time and money and help you make the best choice. You want to assess your financial threshold individually, as it can vary from brand to brand.

An RFP can also help you build an understanding and support among all the stakeholders that need to know how e-commerce is going to work in the future and why you're considering replatforming in the first place. An RFP challenges your team, your current processes and your current platform. As a completely objective process, it can lead you in the right direction, even if that includes reconsideration of the solutions you thought you were looking for — or the choice to replatform in the first place.

RFP preparations for fashion and lifestyle brands

An RFP strongly intertwines with the replatforming process. Conclusions and questions from each stage of the replatforming project should be reflected in your request for proposal.

You'll need to assess all the challenges your team brings up and reevaluate all business processes before you try to fit a new platform into the current system. Take a deeper look at all processes, software capabilities and integrations, considering how they influence your revenue, spendings and growth. You may find challenges that limit your current technology. Instead of replicating them mindlessly within the RFP, you'll have the chance to work out a new standard with your team. Challenge every process and idea before you put them back into place. Write down all the questions that come to your mind, as they will be a great backbone for your future RFP. Use a prioritization strategy to assess the importance of particular functionalities, so you will be able to reflect it in your request.

Sometimes, investing in an evaluation and changes may look like a waste of time, but it ensures that your RFP will generate the necessary answers

to reach your replatforming goals. A request for proposal shouldn't be a tool to find what solutions are available on the market — you need that understanding before you even start working on it. You are entering a partnership with the vendor over the next three to five years, and you want them to be responsible.

Here are some critical questions that you need to answer before you start the RFP process:

- What are the business goals of replatforming?
- What third-party software and integrations do you have, and how are they working out for you?
- Where do you sell, and do you want to expand in the near future (new countries and channels)?
- What are your unique needs?

Considering the detail that goes into creating an RFP and the amount of time (one to eight weeks) and resources it requires, it's no surprise that it should be treated like a separate project. You should plan it separately, giving it its own decision structures, governance and budget.

How to write an ecommerce RFP for fashion and lifestyle brands?

In your RFP, you will be focusing on setting three things: your business objectives, the goal of the project, and your expectations from respondents. You want your communication to be clear and straightforward. There is no need for embellished language or extra space for companies to advertise their platforms. One of the best options is to create an RFP as a Yes/No questionnaire.

Request for proposal introduction

In the introduction, you want to introduce your business, its needs and challenges. Build an understanding of your brand so potential partners will have the opportunity to share their experience, knowledge, and expertise to make

suggestions for the replatforming project. You need to find a balance between clearly stating the project's objectives and expectations and leaving space for applicants' input where it can be of value.

What should be included in the RFP introduction:

- Date of creation
- Official business information
- Official contact for inquiries (email, phone, dedicated team member)
- Bidding intent confirmation deadline
- Proposals deadline
- Responses to additional questions deadline
- Final proposals deadline
- Decision announcement date
- A complete map of your current system

Request for proposal advice

Set up the standard.

RFP response formats vary, which can make the proposal comparing process more time consuming. It's best to provide details of your preferred format upfront, along with a suggested length/amount of detail. Create an Excel/Google form if you want full control of the responses. That will make it easier to compare, and you'll be able to filter data.

Create open questions.

Every platform vendor will likely try to implement their narration into their proposal. They will want to show their most unique features and show how they differentiate from other providers. You want to escape sales pitches but still ask open questions, allowing the vendor to show their experience. It's best to ask open questions around the centerpiece requirements and challenges that you can't find a solution for. Make sure to make no more than 2% of questions open-ended. They can water down the responses and elongate the process of reviewing the proposals.

Show your current platform.

Your potential partner will want to access your current solution and create
a perfectly fitted offer for you. Share your concerns about your existing platform
and the strongest points and challenges that made you choose to replatform.
As a result of showing your platform's limitations, respondents will be able
to describe their experience broadly from the start.

Provide the following information:

- Current challenges
- Technical background
- Risks that the platform is creating

Vendor overview

You're choosing a partner that will have a significant impact on your business's
future. This is the section where you can check credentials, validate success
stories and evaluate overall fit. Ask all the questions that seem important
to you − you don't have to limit yourself to technical aspects. Maybe there
is a methodology you believe in or a cooperation method you prefer.
If so, ask about it.

Questions to include in the company overview:

- How is the company structured?
- How many years of experience does the company have?
- How many employees does the company have?
- How many clients within the fashion and lifestyle industry does the
  company serve? (Provide case studies if possible)
- What is unique about your offering?
- When was the last platform's upgrade?
- How does upgrading work?
- Who are your key partners?
- Who are your key customers?
- Describe the platform's pricing. Please include all licenses and additional
  payments, and a rough evaluation of the costs for a company of similar size
  and structure to BRAND NAME.

- Describe your agency partner program.
- Describe your training program.

New platform requirements

In this section of an RFP, an easy method is to send out a list of required features, but it could confuse applicants and cut some great potential partners. What you really want to do is build an understanding of what you need, and which features are a must for you. The best way to do that is to use the prioritization that you prepared at the initial stage of creating the RFP. Make it clear which features are a must, which are necessary and which are nice to have.

Ease-of-use:

- How does the platform's setup process work?
- How much additional development is required to fit it into the fashion
- and lifestyle industry?
- How does content management work? Preferably demo this.
- What admin roles and permissions are available?
- How many users are available?
- How does the product catalog work?
- What type of WYSIWYG editors are available?
- Is there a local development environment to manage code customizations pbefore publishing?
- Which skills are required within a team to successfully run the store?
- What testing-before-launch options are available?
- What admin roles and permissions are available?
- Is CMS provided? Do we have a choice?
- Who are you integrated with? Provide a complete list of software systems and vendors.
- Do you provide Mobile Optimized Checkout?
- What other additional software do you provide? Provide a list.

Design-freedom and flexibility:

- Is your platform template based?

- If so, are templates customizable?

- What programming languages are necessary to make theme changes?

- Who's responsible for keeping themes up to date?

- How extensive is theme support?

- How much design freedom does your platform offer?

- Is the platform limited to a particular front-end agency?

- Will any third-party developers/designers be available?

- How mobile responsive are provided designs?

- Is any part of the customer journey restricted design-wise? If so, which?

- Describe your API approach.

Multi-store, internationalization, wholesale and B2B:

- What type of customer groups (for sharing of discounts, pricing, restrictions/eligibility, etc) is the platform offering?

- How do price lists work? How customizable are they?

- Do you offer tiered pricing/volume pricing as well as customer-specific adaptations?

- How advanced is discount management?

- Describe the credit limits and payment terms.

- How do customer groups and customer-level product availability work?

- Describe available purchasing roles/levels.

- How does the platform approach quotations?

- Describe shipment management features.

- Is internalization possible?

- How many storefronts are included in the initial price?

- What features are included in the out-of-the-box wholesale option?

- How do marketplace sales work on the platform?

- How does the platform's digital showroom work?

- How many languages do you offer?

- What can be localized?

Native features and plugins, and additional information :*

- What payment gateways are available?

- Is there an ability for further integrations?

- What loyalty options are available?

- Is checkout as a guest available?

- Is storing data during checkout available for customers?

- Is there a possibility to use shopping cards across different devices?

- Provide a complete list of native functionalities

- Provide a list of customer care features list (pre- and post-transaction)

- Provide the cart features list

- Describe the search and navigation options.

* Please note that all answers should include not only the availability

of the feature, but also if it's a native functionality or plugin.

Performance, scalability and stability impact on SEO and conversion:

- Describe your platform's SEO approach.

- How do you support redirects?

- Are SEO-Friendly URLs generated automatically?

- Can URLs be customized in full?

- Which tags do you support?

- Do you have Google AMP integration?

- How does the platform's architecture protect it from performance

  degradation?

- How do you ensure the stability of mobile performance?

- How to scale your product? Does it require additional development?

- How do you approach season-related overloads?

- How many API calls do you support?

- Do you have disaster recovery processes in place?

- How do you address malicious code risks?

Support:

- Describe your onboarding processes for new clients.

- Describe the estimated timeline for implementation.

- Do you provide training?

- Do you provide a knowledge base?

- Do you have actual user documentation for the entire platform?

- Describe your support system, including pricing.

- Describe your Customer Success Plan.

Cost-of-ownership:

- Describe platform hosting.

- Provide uptime records.

- How much backend development will be required?

- Describe the frontend situation.

- Is dedicated design possible or required?

- Provide a complete list of native functionalities.

- Are there any additional fees associated with specific types of transactions, payment gateways, shipping locations, etc.?

Analytics and reporting:

- What does a dashboard with business-critical metrics look like? Provide visualization.

- Does your platform have built-in analytics and reporting? If so, how advanced?

- Is Google Analytics integrated?

- Does your platform offer Google Tag Manager integration?

- Does your platform offer:

    - Internal historical data imports?

    - External data imports?

    - Previous seasons' targets and performance gap analysis?

    - Sales trend analysis? (historical and current)

- How far can your analysis be broken down?

    - Brand level

    - Line level

    - Product group level

    - Style level

    - Size level

    - Color level

    - Distribution channel level

    - Distributor level

    - Sales point level

    - Market level

    - Localizations level

    - Fully customizable

- Describe a reporting system.

Bundling, promotions and upselling features questions to include:*

- Describe bundling possibilities.
- Describe available marketing rules.
- How much development time does marketing require (estimate)?
- Describe the cart-level marketing possibilities.
- Does your platform offer category-based marketing promotion?
- How do you address shipping promotions?
- How customizable are promotions, campaigns and bundles? Please describe further.
- How advanced of marketing scheduling does your platform allow?
- What are available upselling options?
- Describe the flexibility of pricing, including multi-tier pricing.
- Which segmentation options do you provide? Please list.
- Describe the loyalty programs available.
- How do you approach discount codes, cards and vouchers?
- Are you integrated with Google Custom Reviews?
- What Google Custom Reviews-related features do you offer?
- How do you approach customer communication?
- How do you approach transaction-related communication?
- Provide the list of marketing field brands your platform supports/is integrated with (mailing services, etc.)
- How do you approach preorders? Please describe.
- Describe the breadcrumbs system.
- Which A/B testing features does your platform support?

* Please note that all the answers should include not only the availability of the feature, but also if it's a native functionality or plugin.

Security questions to include:

- Describe the platform's security certificates, approach and compliance.
- Describe the platform's security features.
- Describe security roles and the features provided for them.
- Describe the customer data safety approach.
- Do you have annual or regular security audits?
- Provide legal documentation related to the platform's security.

Suitability for fashion and lifestyle products questions to include:*

- Do you provide a built-in product information management (PIM)?
- Do you provide a built-in inventory management system (IMS)?
- Provide a list of PIM vendors your platform is integrated with.
- Provide a list of IMS vendors your platform is integrated with.
- How do you approach SKU-level images with image switching on variation selection?
- How many variations do you allow?
- How many images can be assigned to a single product?
- Provide images and video rules (size, length etc.).
- Does your platform provide an image zoom feature?
- Does your platform allow product videos on product pages?
- Provide a demo of the product options management system, including the control panel and private sales management system.
- Does your platform offer custom product attributes features?
- How do you approach related items? Please describe.
- Describe your navigation system.
- Describe your customer segmentation system.
- Describe customer journey flexibility and features.

* Please note that all the answers should include not only the availability of the feature, but also if it's a native functionality or plugin.

Omnichannel capabilities questions to include:

- Which social media marketplaces does your platform support? Provide a list of all integrations.
- Which third-party marketplaces does your platform support? Provide a list of all integrations.
- Describe the integration with Meta Universe.
- Describe the integrations with other selling channels (Pinterest, LinkedIn, local platforms).
- Does your platform support Open Graph Tags?
- Does your platform support Google Shopping?
- Provide a man of omnichannel capabilities and integrations.
- How do you approach redirections across channels, marketplaces and the online store?

Request for proposal instructions

Write down your requirements. Don't be afraid to set down the rules.
The clearer you communicate, the higher quality responses will be delivered
to your company. If you have a list of RFP requirements, write them down
in the last paragraph. Be direct.

What should be included in the RFP instructions:

- Response accuracy requirements
- Reminder of RFP structure and format requirements
- Nonconforming responses rules
- Other rules