ACROSS THE TABLE

BUSINESS CONSULTING

INDUSTRY STACK 15 · ECOMMERCE COMPANY

The Ecommerce Stack

Eight systems from visitor to repeat purchase — and the one number that decides whether any of it is working.

Knowledge Article I15

AI Stack Series · acrossthetable.biz

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WHO THIS IS FOR

You sell products online. No shop floor, or not primarily. Your customer finds you through advertising, search or social, buys, waits for a parcel, and either comes back or does not.

This guide is for the owner whose revenue is growing while the profit is not, which is the most common shape of an ecommerce problem.

If you also sell in person, start with the retail stack and come back here for the fulfillment and lifecycle rows.

START WITH THE WORK, NOT WITH THE APPS

These are not twenty lists of AI apps. Each stack starts with the jobs a particular business performs, then matches AI and conventional software to those jobs. Treat it as a menu to evaluate, not a shopping list.

For this kind of business the work runs in one line, start to finish:

> **THE PATH THE WORK TAKES**
> Visitor → Purchase → Fulfillment → Support → Retention

Broken into the steps a customer actually moves through:

- Traffic
- Product
- Cart
- Purchase
- Fulfillment
- Support
- Email and SMS
- Repeat purchase

Read that line left to right. Traffic arrives, some of it buys, you ship, you support, and the business lives or dies on whether they buy again.

Here is the number that decides everything: what it costs you to acquire a customer, against what that customer is worth over their life. First-purchase profit in ecommerce is often near zero after advertising, shipping and returns. The money is in the second and third order. Every tool below is either about acquiring more efficiently or keeping people longer.

THE STACK, PIECE BY PIECE

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Every tool below is matched to one of those steps. You do not need all of them, and you should not buy all of them at once. Read the “What it is” column first and find the step where your business is losing the most time or money.

Tool	The step it covers	What it is	Price
Shopify	Commerce	Online store, checkout, inventory and payments.	Per month plus transaction fees.
Klaviyo	Lifecycle marketing	Email and SMS built around ecommerce customer data.	Per month by contacts.
Gorgias	Customer support	Support desk built around ecommerce orders.	Per month by ticket volume.
Canva / Firefly	Product marketing	Design everything else — decks, social posts, flyers, simple video — with AI help built in.	Free tier; Pro per user/month. / Credits; included in CC plans.
ChatGPT	Content and analysis	OpenAI’s general assistant — writing, analysis, research and, with Agent mode, multi-step work.	Free tier; paid plans per user/month.
QuickBooks / Xero	Accounting	The small-business accounting standard — books, invoicing, reporting.	Per month by plan.
ShipStation	Shipping	Label printing, rates and fulfillment across carriers.	Per month by volume.
Zapier / Make	Automation	Connects thousands of apps and AI models with no code.	Free tier; paid by task volume. / Free tier; paid by operations.

Where two names share a row with a slash between them, they do the same job and you pick one, not both. The description shows the first of the two.

Commerce platform, email and shipping are the working core. Support software and automation come when the volume demands them.

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What to watch out for in each one

None of these are reasons not to buy. They are the things owners tell us they wish they had known first.

- Shopify — App subscriptions add up.
- Klaviyo — Priced by profile count.
- Gorgias — Ecommerce-shaped. Poor fit for services.
- Canva — Easy to drift off-brand. Lock a brand kit.
- Firefly — Best value inside Creative Cloud.
- ChatGPT — It sounds confident when it’s wrong. Check anything that touches money, law or a customer.
- QuickBooks — Only as clean as your categorization habits.
- Xero — Fewer US-specific integrations.
- ShipStation — Per-shipment tiers.
- Zapier — Task-based pricing climbs fast once it works.
- Make — The canvas gets messy without naming discipline.

WHERE AI ACTUALLY FITS IN THIS BUSINESS

Product descriptions, recommendations, support, retention campaigns, review analysis, merchandising.

In plain terms, that means:

- Writing product descriptions at catalog scale, including the variants and the search-friendly versions.
- Suggesting what to show a customer next based on what they actually bought, not on what you want to move.
- Answering the order-status questions that make up most support volume, so people handle the real problems.
- Writing the win-back sequence for customers who bought once and vanished, which is the cheapest revenue you have.
- Reading product reviews across the catalog and telling you which complaints repeat — which is usually a product or packaging problem, not a marketing one.

Be careful with AI-generated product images of real physical goods. If the picture flatters the product in ways the product does not deliver, that is a returns problem and in some jurisdictions an advertising problem.

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WHAT TO SET UP FIRST

Do these in order. Finish one before you start the next. Most owners who try to do all of it in one month end up using none of it.

1. **Get the commerce platform and its data clean** Product names, variants and inventory counts. Everything downstream — ads, email, support, reporting — reads from this.
2. **Set up the lifecycle emails before anything else** Welcome, abandoned cart, post-purchase, win-back. These four flows outperform almost any campaign and they run themselves once built.
3. **Make shipping efficient** Rates, labels and tracking in one place. Shipping is a cost line and a customer-experience line at the same time, which is unusual and worth attention.
4. **Then add support** When order questions outgrow the inbox, a desk that sees the order alongside the message cuts handling time sharply.
5. **Then automate the joins** Connecting platform, email, support and accounting so nothing is retyped.

WHAT IT COSTS TO START

Ecommerce costs come in three shapes: platform fees per month, transaction fees as a percentage of every sale, and contact-based fees for marketing. The percentage one grows with you forever, so it deserves the most scrutiny.

Email and SMS pricing is based on how many contacts you store. An unengaged list is a monthly bill for people who will never buy. Suppress or remove them; it improves deliverability and lowers the invoice at once.

The costs that dwarf all software here are advertising and returns. If your tooling budget is a serious line next to those, your tooling is probably not the problem.

The price column in the table above tells you how each one charges — per user, per location, per contact, or a percentage of every sale — not what you will pay. That is deliberate. The charging model is what decides whether a tool stays affordable as you grow, and it is the part that does not change every quarter. Get the current dollar figure from the vendor’s own pricing page before you budget.

THE RULES UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT

Legal · Privacy · Data protection · Security · Compliance · Records · Audit · Risk · Human oversight — underneath every one of the twenty stacks, not an afterthought.

Email and SMS marketing require permission and a working unsubscribe. Text message rules are stricter than email and the penalties are real.

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Customer data — addresses, order history, payment tokens — is personal data with obligations that depend on where your customers live, not where you are.

Your refund, shipping and returns policies must be published and honored as written. This is where most consumer-protection complaints start.

Product claims are advertising claims. An AI-written description that promises an outcome is a claim you have to be able to support.

If you use cookies and tracking for advertising, consent requirements apply in many markets you may be selling into.

MISTAKES THAT COST THE MOST

- Chasing revenue growth without knowing acquisition cost against lifetime value.
- Running ads before the lifecycle emails exist, which is paying to fill a leaky bucket.
- Paying monthly for a large list that never opens anything.
- Letting support volume eat the founder’s day instead of building the twelve standard answers.
- Publishing AI product copy nobody checked against what the product actually does.

THE CEO DECISION

- What does a customer cost you to acquire, and what are they worth over two years?
- Which of the four core email flows do you not have running?
- What percentage of orders come from repeat customers?
- What are your top three support questions, and why are they still being answered by hand?
- What is your return rate by product, and which product is driving it?

YOUR QUICK REVIEW

- ☐ I know my acquisition cost and my lifetime value.
- ☐ Welcome, abandoned cart, post-purchase and win-back flows are live.
- ☐ My email list is cleaned and suppressed on a schedule.
- ☐ Support sees the order next to the message.
- ☐ Product copy is checked by a person before it publishes.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
Shopify	www.shopify.com	Selling products online or in person.
Klaviyo	www.klaviyo.com	Stores running segmented lifecycle campaigns.
Gorgias	www.gorgias.com	Shopify stores answering order questions.
Canva / Firefly	www.canva.com / www.adobe.com/products/firefly.html	Small teams with no designer who still need consistent-looking work.
ChatGPT	chatgpt.com	Your default thinking partner when you want one tool that does most jobs well.
QuickBooks / Xero	quickbooks.intuit.com / www.xero.com	Clean books your accountant already knows how to read.
ShipStation	www.shipstation.com	Stores shipping enough orders to feel the packing table.
Zapier / Make	zapier.com / www.make.com	Your first automations, and the widest app coverage.
Across the Table AI Assessment	acrossthetable.biz/#assessment	Fifteen minutes. Tells you which job to start with before you buy anything.
The Scaling Edge	acrossthetablebiz.substack.com	Weekly newsletter for owners without a business background.

Go deeper on the pieces

Each of these is a full guide comparing the three tools that do that job:

- Connect the tools — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/connect-the-tools/ (covers Zapier, Make)
- Manage the money — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/manage-the-money/ (covers QuickBooks, Xero)
- Ask and reason — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/ask-and-reason/ (covers ChatGPT)
- Make the deck — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/make-the-deck/ (covers Canva)

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- Answer customers — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/answer-customers/ (covers Gorgias)

CONTINUE LEARNING

The Across the Table AI Assessment takes fifteen minutes and starts from the jobs the business performs.

The guides above compare the leading tools for each job.

READ AND CONNECT WITH ACROSS THE TABLE

Across the Table website: https://acrossthetable.biz

The Scaling Edge newsletter: https://acrossthetablebiz.substack.com

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@AcrossTheTableConnie

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Questions: info@acrossthetable.biz · 480-582-4716

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