

Choosing an Ecommerce Platform for Regulated Industries



The ecommerce model is all about access. It gives business owners the ability to tap into a wider market, and shoppers the chance to get what they want quickly and easily from an online store. It sounds simple enough. But, what if you're trying to find an ecommerce platform for regulated products?

Whether you're selling high-risk products like healthcare supplements or [alcohol](#), or heavily [regulated goods like CBD](#), most ecommerce platforms aren't up for the task. Why?

Most commerce platforms are made for low-risk, direct-to-consumer (DTC) use cases: shopping for clothes, craft goods, [athletic shoes](#), and so on. While most top ecommerce platforms are great for these things, they quickly run into limitations where regulated products are concerned:

These include:

- Insufficient compliance functionality.

- Platform policies that don't accommodate regulated products.
- Inflexible tax, shipping, and payment logic.
- Hard restrictions on regulated product categories.
- Insufficient checkout customization.

Any of the above can keep you from fulfilling your business needs when selling regulated products in the ecommerce space. But, ecommerce for high-risk products isn't impossible — just look at healthcare, one of the most regulated industries around.

Despite the challenges of selling healthcare products, the worldwide healthcare ecommerce market brought in , up from \$47 billion only five years earlier.

With a little know-how, you can find the right ecommerce platform for regulated products and begin safely selling in no time, regardless of whether you're selling healthcare products, CBD, or firearms.

Core platform requirements for regulated ecommerce

Plenty of ecommerce platforms tout flashy features that make them appealing at a glance. While a flashy site builder has value, where regulated products are concerned, capabilities should be your first focus. (Then you can consider those flashy, fun features.)

Flexible checkout and purchase logic.

[Standard ecommerce checkout processes](#) are typically straightforward, prioritizing a quick customer experience. Ecommerce for regulated industries comes with more red tape, both on a federal and state level.

To ensure compliance with your industry, your ecommerce business needs flexible checkout and purchase logic that supports:

- Real-time age and identity verification before purchase completion.
- Region-based purchase restrictions, with the ability to scale to any regions you ship to.
- Product/category-specific checkout rules are a must if you sell multiple types of regulated products.
- Any legally-required disclosures or acknowledgements before final purchase.

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The ecommerce platform you choose should not only have the above capabilities, but also make it easy to modify checkout behavior without having to replatform entirely. As policies shift, you may have to update disclosures, add in additional acknowledgements before or during checkout, and so on. The right platform makes this easy, while ensuring you always have brand control.

Integration-friendly architecture.

Some ecommerce platforms won't have all the capabilities you need right out of the box, but instead have an integration-friendly architecture that makes it easy to add plugins.

Make sure you find an ecommerce platform that has easy integration with or plugins for:

- Reputable age and identity verification providers.
- Tax and compliance services.
- High-risk payment processors.
- Shipping and fulfillment partners with special handling capabilities.

Finding a platform that supports the above will not only help you stay compliant in your industry, but also help down the road. As your ecommerce store grows, your needs will grow and change too. A platform that's integration-friendly in general means you're more likely to find the additional capabilities you need down the road via plugins, rather than having to find a whole new provider.

Your platform should support integrations and customization with robust APIs and webhooks, and offer pre-built integrations, partner ecosystems with reputable companies, and the ability to easily swap tools as regulations change.

This flexibility is especially critical for sellers operating across multiple regions or jurisdictions, as requirements will frequently vary.

Payment support for high-risk and regulated categories.

When you're operating in a high-risk industry, payment processing means more than offering a number of [payment gateways](#).

Your ecommerce platform needs to ensure you're compliant, while keeping both you and your customers safe with support that meets various regulations, depending on your industry and products sold.

Some compliance requirements you may need to focus on include PCI DSS 4.0, Know Your Customer (KYC) and Know Your Business (KYB), HIPAA compliance if you're in healthcare, and

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others.

Of course, your ecommerce platform should still check the usual payment support boxes, along with those unique to regulated products, balancing risk management and a user-friendly experience. This can be accomplished with support for:

- Multiple payment processors simultaneously, like credit cards and [PayPal](#).
- High-risk or regulated-category processors, financial institutions specialized in high-risk industries.
- Custom payment routing and fallback logic that ensures payments go through quickly and safely.
- Fraud and chargeback management integrations, as both fraud and chargebacks are common in certain regulated industries.

Without the above capabilities, you risk sudden account shutdowns, frozen funds, or revenue lost to fraud. On top of protecting you and your business, the above capabilities will further protect your customer data and the people behind it.

Shipping, fulfillment, and compliance controls.

Shipping and fulfillment are two major hurdles for regulated industries, each of them opening your business to compliance and supply chain missteps.

You need an ecommerce provider that can help you manage this with:

- Full control of shipping, with carrier restrictions based on product and/or destination.
- Adult signature requirements on delivery of your products.
- Partnerships with shipping specialists who offer temperature-controlled transportation.
- Advanced tracking to ensure products never get misplaced during shipping.

With the right ecommerce platform in place you can successfully and safely manage shipping and fulfillment with rule-based shipping logic. This type of automation can choose the right, compliant next course of action for shipping a product based on any regulations while streamlining workflows.

Your platform should also include clear audit trails for all shipments. This not only ensures you know where goods are, but also helps in the event of a company audit, as it helps prove your compliance.

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Regional and multi-storefront capabilities.

Most regulated products are subject to federal guidelines, from alcohol to firearms to various healthcare products. On top of this are state-specific laws, which can drastically alter what you can and can't sell.

For instance, those in alcohol ecommerce can sell and ship to California with few limitations, while Utah doesn't allow any DTC alcohol shipping.

If you're operating across multiple states, you need a platform that keeps you safe and compliant with:

- Region-based product availability that displays only what's allowed in a customer's market.
- Automatic country and state-specific pricing, tax, and compliance rules.
- Support for multiple storefronts or catalogs under a single backend.
- Geo-fencing and localized content controls that display relevant content on products a customer can legally buy in their area.

The right ecommerce platform will accomplish all of the above, making it possible for you to scale without having to duplicate your infrastructure, nor worry about compliance. And, without any of the above capabilities impeding the user experience.

Customization without sacrificing stability.

Most ecommerce platforms will advertise some degree of customizability. The best ecommerce platforms? They offer the following without ever sacrificing stability:

- [Headless or composable architecture](#) options, making it easy to tweak the user experience without drastically altering the backend.
- Easy extensibility with APIs, no core code modifications, allowing you to add or tweak existing functionality as needed.
- Enterprise-grade security and compliance standards that protect customer data and your business.
- Reliable support from the ecommerce platform, as challenges will arise and costly downtime is the last thing you want.

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The goal is to have full control of your brand, customizing your business and site as easily as one customizes a Wordpress or Wix page. But, with the stability and the security one both expects and needs in a highly regulated industry.

All this customization should be scalable, never keeping your business from growing nor outpacing your budget.

“Most ecommerce platforms weren’t built for regulated complexity. This jbecomes obvious the moment you try to scale. Compliance isn’t a feature you layer on later. It touches your data, your checkout, your operations. When the platform can’t support that natively, teams end up patching together workarounds that introduce risk instead of reducing it.”

— Al Williams, Vice President, Business to Consumer, BigCommerce

Federal regulations for digital sales of regulated products

Federal regulations are unavoidable when you’re running an ecommerce business for regulated products. While they present a challenge, you also don’t want to ignore them — failure to comply with these regulations can result in costly fines, legal repercussions, and the loss of your business.

Stay on top of the following federal regulations to ensure you’re in the clear with your regulated products. When in doubt, reach out to the appropriate agency before moving forward.

Product	Regulating party	Staying compliant
Alcohol.	Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), the FDA (for ABV. above 7%), and state agencies.	Requiring an age gate on your site, using a certified shipper, and requiring the signature of someone 21+.
Tobacco.	The FDA and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).	Requiring an age gate to prevent anyone under the age of 21 from purchasing, and staying compliant with the PACT act .
Firearms.	The Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Federal Bureau of	Requiring an age gate to prevent anyone under 18 from shopping, and shipping to a certified Federal Firearms License holding location.

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	Investigation (FBI), and state agencies.	
Cannabis/hemp/CBD.	Food and Drug Administration (FDA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and state agencies.	Require an age gate to prevent anyone under 18 from shopping for CBD and hemp (21+ for cannabis), following hemp vs. marijuana classifications, and following state laws for selling and shipping.
Pharmaceuticals.	The FDA, DEA, and state pharmacy boards in some cases.	Clearly label products, use evidence-based claims, and register with the DEA if you're selling controlled substances.
Supplements.	The FDA	Clearly label products, use evidence-based claims, and avoid misleading consumers.

Ecommerce laws for selling regulated products

Beyond federal and state laws, there are also laws specific to ecommerce businesses. These laws exist to ensure you're protecting customers, preventing underage purchasing, and being honest.

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

Passed in 1998, COPPA exists to protect children under the age of 13 from having their data or personal information unlawfully collected. This specifically applies to businesses who cater to an audience under the age of 13, and collect data on visitors.

Because most ecommerce businesses collect visitor information for marketing and targeting purposes, it's important you do your part to avoid any compliance issues with COPPA.

Staying compliant with COPPA

Typically, regulated products aren't going to target this audience, and are intended for adults. To ensure you don't run into any COPPA challenges, add an age gate to filter out underage audiences.

Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS).

The PCI-DSS applies to every ecommerce business regardless of their products, as these global standards exist to protect the credit card data of consumers during any transactions.

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Fortunately, many SaaS ecommerce platforms can take some of the PCI-DSS burden off, and reputable payment processors can help reduce security threats.

Staying compliant with PCI-DSS

First, the right ecommerce platform can help with some of PCI-DSS, like script integrity and authorization and safekeeping credit card data on their end.

The bulk of , however, falls on you. As the merchant, there are a number of ways you drive this compliance:

- **Securing your site:** A proper, secure site is paramount to PCI-DSS and preventing a data breach. This means choosing a reputable host, using a secure theme, and avoiding plugins that haven't been properly vetted.
- **Using trusted payment gateways:** A reputable, PCI-compliant payment gateway will ensure a customer transaction is secure on the frontend, before it reaches the payment processor on the backend.
- **Practicing good data hygiene:** Track and keep only the customer data you need to operate and market. Implement a reputable customer relationship management (CRM) platform to help you safely manage it, too.
- **Update your site regularly:** Always ensure your site and any plugins are up-to-date, as updates often close security loopholes. (If you're using a cloud-based ecommerce platform, they often handle updates on their end!)

There's no cure-all for PCI-DSS compliance. Be vigilant, never keep customer data you don't need, and always ensure any employees logging into your systems are trained on how to handle information and payments.

Truth in Advertising Laws.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has a series of truth in advertising laws. Together, these laws boil down to: be honest with your messaging and marketing, never withholding information or lying to customers.

More specifically, you should:

- Use clear language that doesn't intentionally mislead customers.
- Reinforce any claims with studies and data.
- Be truthful with any customer testimonials, not altering words.

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- Make sure any disclosures on your site are easy to understand, using no misleading language.

It sounds simple, but honesty is the best policy. Especially in business. You're already operating an ecommerce store in a regulated industry, you don't need to mislead others and create additional hurdles for your business.

Lastly, keep in mind you're also subject to general [online business laws](#) and [ecommerce compliance standards](#).

Legal risks for digital commerce of regulated products

It should come as little surprise that failure to adhere to any regulations or laws can carry severe penalties.

Compliance fees and penalties

Failing to meet any of the previously mentioned compliance frameworks can result in any number of penalties. These penalties can vary, depending on the compliance, the severity of the violation, and whether you've had previous violations.

For instance, failure to follow the truth in advertising laws can result in anything from a warning and having to change your messaging, to a fee of up to that you allow a deceptive ad to run.

Failure to verify a consumer's age

When you're selling a regulated product, like alcohol or firearms, the last thing you want is for your products to wind up with someone underage.

Adding an age gate to your site can help, as can working with reputable shippers that require an adult's signature. Failing to do so and having your products get in the wrong hands can result in anything from a misdemeanor to fines in the thousands.

Breaching cross-border legislation

Again, many states have various laws around different regulated products. If you're only operating in your state and limiting purchases to your area, then you only have to worry about your state. The moment you open things up to customers in other states, you need to know their laws.

Failure to safely practice cross-border sales can result in various fines, again, depending on the severity, the state, and whether it's your first offense.

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Six best practices for selling regulated products online

Ecommerce for regulated products can feel like a huge undertaking. While there's a lot to it, a strategic approach can help you stress less about compliance, and focus more on delivering a great customer experience.

1. Research federal and state laws.

One of the first steps you should take before launching your business is understanding state and federal laws for your industry. If you're unsure where to start, check your state government website and find the appropriate agency. From there, they typically have the latest resources and legislation, and further resources.

Also, don't let your knowledge get rusty. Regularly check for any legislative changes, whether federal or state. Laws can and will change, and your business needs to change with them.

2. Implement age verification.

Age verification is a must when you're operating in a regulated industry. If you're selling alcohol, make sure visitors confirm that they're 21. For other products, this can vary from 18 to 21. Again, check state and federal laws and ensure you have your verification limit at the right threshold.

3. Partner with legal advisors.

It's always a good idea to have a lawyer in your corner when running a business, doubly so when you're selling high risk products.

If you can afford to have a lawyer on retainer, highly consider it. If nothing else, build a quality relationship with a reputable lawyer in your area and don't hesitate to reach out when you have questions about compliance or legality.

4. Secure proper licensing.

Depending on your space, licensing requirements can vary. For instance, an online firearms store needs a Type 01 Federal Firearms License (FFL). If you're selling CBD or hemp products, your state may require specific hemp licenses. Alcohol ecommerce stores require specific liquor licenses for their area, and so on.

If you're unsure about licensing, this is where a legal advisor can be a huge help. If you don't have one, begin your search with your state's government site.

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5. Maintain clear policies.

Your policies need to be as clear and honest as your disclosures and advertising. The types of policies you have on your site can vary, but typically you'll want to maintain:

- A shipping policy.
- A .
- A tracking and cookies policy.
- [Return policy](#).
- Refund policy.

This is another area where a legal advisor can help out. Otherwise, don't hesitate to look up boilerplate templates and customize them.

6. Use a cloud-based ecommerce platform.

Self-hosted and open-source ecommerce platforms can come with a sense of freedom, with the entire platform living on your own servers and devices. In some cases these platforms can even be free. While these types of platforms can have their perks, they also put the burden of security and compliance entirely on your shoulders.

A cloud-based ecommerce platform, like BigCommerce, will often handle the website and platform update process. This means less stress about security updates for your site, less stress about whether plugins are trustworthy, and less risk of a costly legal matter.

As an added bonus, these types of platforms often come with a host of features that can help with search engine optimization (SEO), CRM, and omnichannel marketing efforts.

BigCommerce customers in regulated industries

Thousands of ecommerce businesses are powered by BigCommerce, including numerous operating in regulated industries.

These businesses stand not only as a testament to the capabilities of the BigCommerce platform, but also as proof that ecommerce businesses can and do find success — even in regulated industries.

WNC CBD.

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Case Study: [WNC CBD](#)

WNC CBD, a hemp company operating out of Asheville, North Carolina, has prioritized compliant operations since their founding in 2019. With DTC and wholesale distribution to dispensaries in 48 states, this compliance was paying off.

Until May 2023, when Shopify pulled the rug out from underneath them and deplatformed their store.

With Shopify's new 1% THC threshold ruling in place, WNC CBD needed a new platform. And fast.

One peer recommendation and a few conversations later, WNC CBD had migrated to BigCommerce. Two weeks later, the site was fully operational and serving their customers.

The rapid pivot turned out to be a blessing in disguise. With the transition from manual operations to providing customers with a self-service portal coupled with more accurate and transparent shipping through ShipperHQ, WNC CBD realized:

- 19.47% YoY growth in DTC revenue
- 200+ new accounts after adding B2B support
- 50% time savings for the CEO and sales team

“We’re a high-risk brand, and unfortunately, Shopify was not willing to continue with us as a cannabis brand.”

— Sav Jack, Technical Operations Manager, WNC CBD

Erskine Dental.

[Case study: Erskine Dental](#)

Staying compliant in a regulated industry isn't just a matter of in-house operations. It's also a matter of ensuring regulated buyers have secure, compliant channels to navigate. Nobody illustrates this better than Erskine Dental.

Erskine Dental supplies clinical products to dental professionals, an audience that's regulated almost as much as the company selling to them. Erskine Dental also operates Piksters, a consumer-facing brand available online and in-stores throughout Australia. With two disparate audience groups and no standalone B2B site, Erskine Dental needed a platform that could deliver compliance, cater to both groups, and unify backend operations.

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After joining BigCommerce, Erskine Dental was able to launch two separate sites, one for B2B and one for B2C, enabling them to deliver tailored, compliant experiences.

Now, Erskine plans on expanding into the U.S., U.K, and Canada, supporting both their professional audience and their everyday consumers. Something they couldn't have dreamed of years ago.

From February 2023 to October 2025, BigCommerce helped Erskine Dental:

- Grow site visits 10%
- Drive conversion rates 11.5%
- Increase revenue 51%
- Boost orders 40%
- Bolster customer count 35%
- Up average order value 9%

“We’ve got a dedicated partner to build the international business, and we’re really excited about the direction we’re going in with BigCommerce.”

-Lisa Daley, Ecommerce Marketing and Product Manager, Erskine Dental

The final word

If you're selling in a high risk, regulated market, you're going to have more complexity than someone operating a clothing store or the like. This complexity doesn't have to stand in your way and deter you, though.

BigCommerce offers a comprehensive ecommerce platform that's secure, scalable, and backed by a vast library of partnerships and plugins. And, we're no strangers to helping those in regulated, delicate industries.

From [Moore Brothers Wine Company](#) to [MitoQ](#), an antioxidant supplement company, BigCommerce has helped countless companies navigate red tape and find success — and we can help you too.

“Friction in regulated ecommerce usually isn't a customer problem. It's an internal one. It shows up when your platform can't translate regulatory requirements into clean, consistent buying experiences. The brands that solve this aren't simplifying the rules. They're building systems that can handle them.”

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— Al Williams, Vice President, Business to Consumer, BigCommerce

[Schedule a demo today](#) and take the risk out of ecommerce for high risk products.

FAQs about ecommerce for regulated products

Can regulations change after I've launched my ecommerce site?

Yes, regulations can change after the launch of an ecommerce site. Regulations frequently change on a federal and state level, so it's important to stay up-to-date with the latest in your industry.

How do state and federal regulations impact ecommerce differently?

Federal regulations for a particular industry apply to the country as a whole, but state-level regulations can further impact what you can and can't do within an industry. For example, direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales of alcohol online are legal on a federal level, but certain states, like Utah, don't allow it at all.

Who is responsible for compliance — the merchant or the ecommerce platform?

Compliance can fall on both the merchant and the ecommerce platform, but the merchant typically carries more responsibility. For example, the merchant has to uphold Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) on their end, protecting customer data. Meanwhile, the ecommerce platform has to ensure any of their servers are following security standards.

Can I sell regulated products on marketplaces?

As long as you're compliant with a platform's specific policies, you can often sell regulated products on marketplaces like Amazon. Ebay will also allow the sale of regulated products, but you need to receive certification from the platform. Meanwhile, marketplaces on social media, like the Facebook marketplace, don't allow the sale of regulated products, like alcohol.

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