

Measuring an ecommerce marketer's performance sounds simple: look at sales, compare them with last month and decide whether marketing worked. In practice, that can be deeply unfair. Sales are affected by stock availability, pricing, seasonality, delivery promises, reviews, competitors, website changes and the wider economy. Marketing is one part of a much larger system.

A fair approach does not excuse weak performance or hide behind complicated dashboards. It connects the marketer's work to commercial outcomes, recognises what they can and cannot control, and uses evidence to distinguish genuine growth from sales that would probably have happened anyway.

For most online retailers, that means looking beyond revenue and reported return on ad spend (ROAS). A more useful assessment includes profit per order, the quality of new customer growth, the contribution of different channels and whether marketing activity is incremental. It also takes account of the customer experience: competitive pricing, trustworthy reviews and reliable delivery can make the difference between a click and a sale.

## Why ecommerce is harder than it looks

Online retail is often presented as a straightforward equation: spend money on advertising, bring visitors to a website and collect orders. But running a profitable ecommerce business is more complicated. Margins may be tight, costs can change quickly, and the same customer can encounter a product through several channels before buying.

Competition is relentless. Customers can compare prices in seconds, check reviews on multiple sites and abandon a basket if delivery is slow or expensive. A rival's discount, a marketplace promotion or a change in search results can affect demand without any change to your own campaigns.

Even the basics can disrupt performance. A popular product may go out of stock. A website update may slow down the checkout. A delivery estimate may become less attractive than a competitor's. These are not necessarily marketing failures, but they can reduce the return from marketing activity.

This is why a fair measurement framework should consider the conditions in which the marketer is working. That does not mean treating every dip as someone else's fault. It means examining the full picture before deciding what the results say about their performance.

## Start with business outcomes, not platform metrics

Advertising platforms provide useful diagnostic data, but their numbers are not a complete account of business performance. Each platform may claim credit for a sale according to its own attribution rules. If a customer clicked a search ad, saw a social advert and later opened an email, more than one platform may report that order as a conversion.

Platform-reported ROAS can therefore be useful for managing campaigns, but it should not be treated as the definitive measure of marketing success. A fair assessment starts with the retailer's own sales and financial data, then uses platform reporting to understand activity within that broader picture.

Agree the core commercial measures before judging results. Depending on the business, these may include:

- **Net revenue:** sales after discounts, cancellations and refunds are accounted for.
- **Gross profit or contribution:** revenue less the relevant product and fulfilment costs.

- **Profit per order:** the profit remaining from an average order after agreed variable costs, such as product cost, payment fees, delivery subsidies, discounts and marketing costs.
- **Customer growth:** whether the business is gaining valuable first-time customers, not simply generating more orders from existing ones.
- **Repeat purchasing:** whether new customers return and contribute to longer-term value.

Definitions matter. If one report uses gross sales and another uses net sales, the resulting comparison will be misleading. Be clear about the time period, the costs included and how returns or cancellations are handled. The marketer should not be held accountable for a profit figure they have no reliable way to see.

## Use profit per order to make performance meaningful

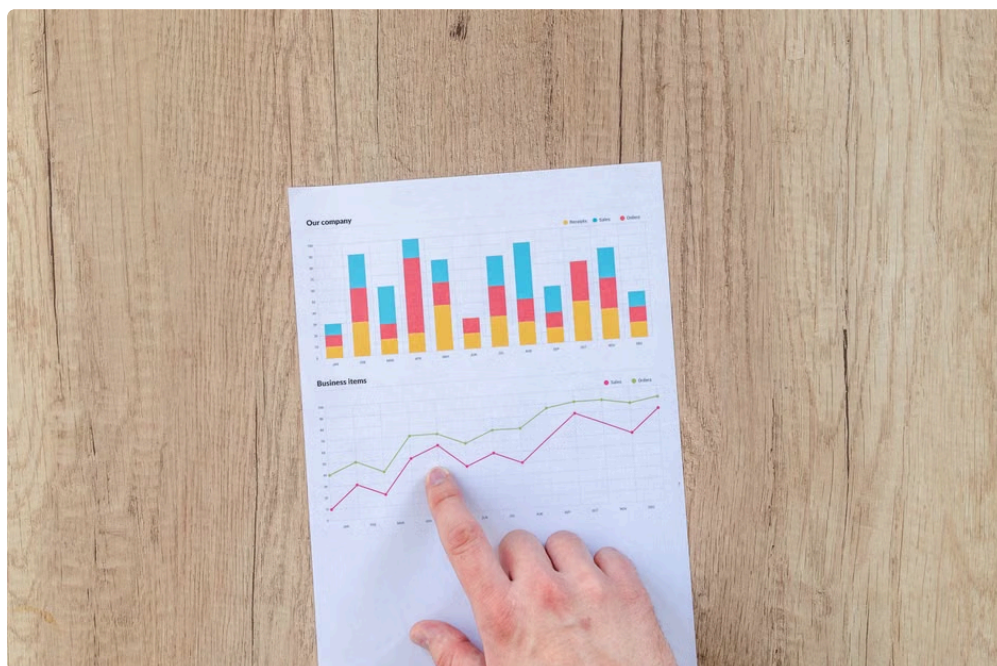
Revenue growth can look impressive while profitability gets worse. A campaign may generate a large volume of orders by promoting heavily discounted products, but the business could be left with little profit after product costs, fulfilment and advertising are taken into account.

Looking at **profit per order** helps to expose this difference. It encourages a more useful question than “How much revenue did the campaign generate?” Ask instead: “After the costs we have agreed to include, what did each order contribute?”

The calculation will vary by retailer, so it should be defined with the finance or ecommerce team rather than assumed. For example, a business might assess contribution after product cost, payment fees, delivery subsidies, discounts and marketing spend. The important thing is to apply the same definition consistently.

Measure What it helps you understand What to watch for Revenue The value of sales generated Revenue can rise while margins fall ROAS Revenue attributed to advertising compared with ad spend Different platforms may claim credit for the same order Profit per order The commercial contribution of each order after agreed costs Results depend on consistent cost and returns data New customer growth Whether marketing is bringing in first-time buyers Acquisition can be costly or low quality if repeat value is ignored

Profit per order should not be the only target. A business may deliberately accept lower short-term contribution when acquiring a new customer, launching a product or entering a market. But that decision should be explicit, with a sensible view of repeat purchase and payback, rather than justified after the fact.



# Measure new customer growth separately

Total orders do not tell you whether the business is expanding its customer base. Existing customers may account for a large share of sales, particularly when email, loyalty activity or branded search are strong. Those channels can be valuable, but they do not automatically demonstrate that marketing is attracting new demand.

Track first-time customers separately from returning customers, using a consistent definition across analytics and order data. Then examine the cost and quality of acquisition. Useful questions include:

- How many new customers did the business acquire?
- What was the cost of acquiring them, using an agreed set of costs?
- Did they buy products with healthy margins?
- Do they return, and over what time period?
- Are acquisition results changing when discounts or promotions change?

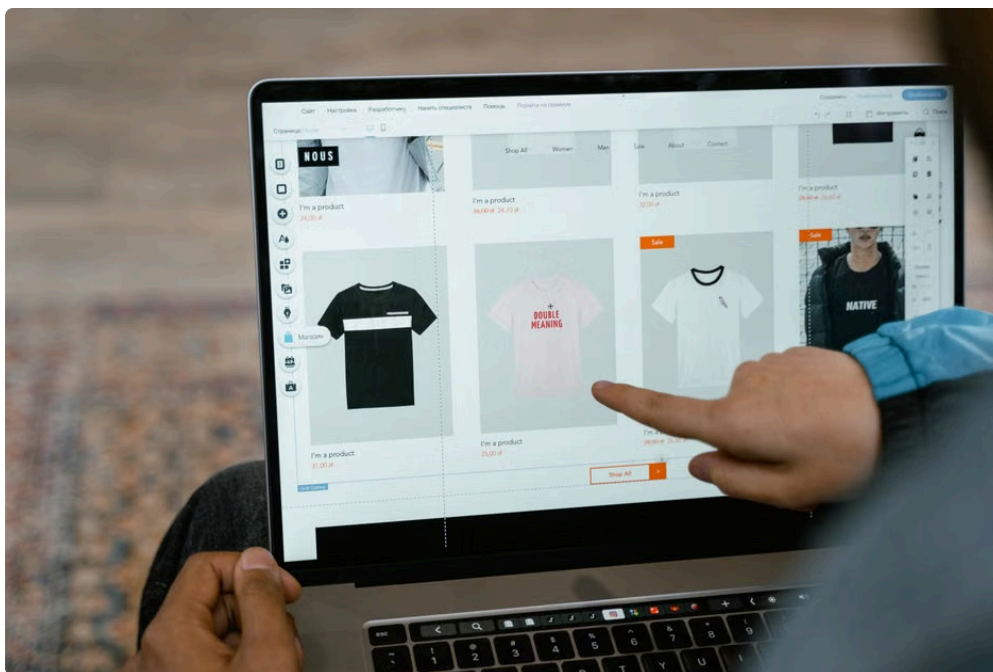
New customer growth is not automatically good growth. If customers only buy when a large discount is available, or the first order loses more than the expected future value can reasonably recover, the acquisition strategy may not be sustainable. Equally, judging a new customer campaign only on first-order profit can be too short-sighted for a business with strong repeat purchasing. Agree the relevant payback period and review actual cohort behaviour over time.

## Learn incrementality basics

Attribution asks which channel receives credit for a sale. Incrementality asks a more important question: would that sale have happened without the marketing activity?

This distinction matters because a channel can appear highly effective by capturing customers who were already likely to buy. For example, a branded search advert may receive credit for a customer who already knows the retailer and was searching for its name. That activity may still have a role, but attributed revenue alone cannot show how much additional demand it created.

**Incrementality basics** begin with a comparison. Where practical, compare a group exposed to marketing with a similar group that was not exposed, or compare performance in matched locations or time periods. The aim is to estimate what would have happened without the activity. Results will not always be perfect: small sample sizes, seasonal changes and overlapping campaigns can make conclusions uncertain. Even so, a carefully designed test is often more informative than treating platform attribution as proof.



Not every campaign needs a complex experiment. A marketer and business owner can start by:

1. **Writing down the question.** For example, does an additional social campaign bring in profitable new customers?
2. **Choosing a suitable comparison.** This might be a holdout group, a matched region or a carefully selected test period.
3. **Agreeing the success measure in advance.** Include the relevant sales, margin and customer measures, not just clicks.
4. **Recording other changes.** Note price changes, promotions, stock issues and website updates that could affect the result.
5. **Reporting uncertainty honestly.** A small test may suggest a direction without proving a precise financial impact.

A fair review rewards good testing and learning, not only a positive result. A well-designed test that shows a campaign is not incremental can protect the business from wasting money. The marketer should be assessed on whether they made a sound decision from the evidence, not on whether every experiment confirmed the original idea.

## Recognise the role of the wider customer experience

Marketing can bring the right shopper to a product page, but the retailer still has to earn the order. Reviews and delivery are particularly important conversion drivers. Customers want confidence that a product will meet expectations, that other buyers have had a good experience and that the parcel will arrive when promised.

If reviews are sparse, negative or hard to find, conversion may suffer. If delivery is expensive, slow or unclear, customers may abandon a basket. If a product page lacks useful information, advertising can generate traffic without helping shoppers make a decision.

These factors should not become a blanket excuse for poor marketing. Instead, include them in performance discussions. If traffic is healthy but conversion falls, investigate product availability, reviews, delivery messaging, checkout performance and pricing alongside <https://smenews.digital/why-specialist-ecommerce-marketing->

[services-deliver-better-results](#) campaign changes. A marketer can often identify these issues and help prioritise fixes, even when they do not control fulfilment or site development directly.

Price transparency makes this even more important. Customers can quickly compare the same or similar products elsewhere. A retailer cannot always win by being cheapest, but it must communicate the value it offers, whether that is product quality, service, delivery, returns or expertise. Marketing should reflect a credible proposition rather than promise an advantage the customer does not experience.

## Set fair expectations and accountability

A fair performance review begins with shared expectations. Agree the business objective, the metrics, the reporting sources and the limits of the marketer's control. If the objective is profitable new customer acquisition, do not judge success solely by total revenue. If the business is running an awareness campaign, do not expect every impact to show up immediately as last-click sales.

Also separate outcomes from controllable work. A marketer may be accountable for budget management, campaign quality, testing discipline, reporting and recommendations. They can influence conversion and customer growth, but may not control stock, pricing, delivery operations, site development or the availability of accurate margin data. Those constraints should be visible in the review, not introduced only after results disappoint.

A practical scorecard can combine:

- **Commercial results:** net revenue, contribution and profit per order.
- **Growth quality:** new customer numbers, acquisition cost and repeat behaviour.
- **Marketing effectiveness:** channel performance, with attribution treated as directional evidence rather than unquestionable fact.
- **Learning and execution:** the quality of tests, budget decisions, insights and actions taken.
- **Business context:** stock, pricing, promotions, reviews, delivery and significant site changes.

Review results over an appropriate period. Weekly data can help with operational decisions, but it is often too volatile to judge a person's overall performance. Seasonality, small order volumes and delayed repeat purchases can all distort short-term comparisons. Use regular check-ins to spot problems, then assess broader outcomes over a period that fits the sales cycle.

## Make reporting accessible and useful

Good measurement depends on good communication. The marketer should explain what changed, what is likely to have caused it, how confident they are and what they recommend doing next. A report that lists hundreds of metrics without a clear decision is not a fair or useful evaluation.

Use a small number of agreed measures, keep definitions consistent and show both the result and its context. When a result is uncertain, say so. When performance is strong, explain whether the evidence points to real incremental growth, improved efficiency or simply more credit being assigned by a platform.

Sharing tools can help teams distribute useful content and reporting updates. For instance, the **AddToAny sharing widget** can make it easier for readers to share an article about ecommerce measurement. It is a distribution aid, not a measure of marketing profitability: shares should not be confused with orders, contribution or incremental customer growth.

## The fair measure is a balanced one

A fair way to measure an ecommerce marketer is to connect their work to profitable business outcomes while acknowledging the realities of online retail. Tight margins, price transparency and intense competition make revenue alone an unreliable verdict. Reviews, delivery and the wider shopping experience also influence whether marketing turns attention into orders.

Use profit per order to bring costs into the conversation. Track new customer growth separately from returning-customer sales. Learn incrementality basics so that attributed conversions are not mistaken for sales caused by marketing. And agree, in advance, which outcomes the marketer owns and which depend on the wider business.

The result is not a perfect single score. It is a more honest picture: what the marketer contributed, what the business made possible, what the evidence can support and what should happen next. That is a better basis for improving performance than rewarding the biggest dashboard number.