

State of Ecommerce Accounting

Hidden Risks, Real Signals

Peeling back the hidden layers of today's commerce stack. A guide for controllers and CFOs.

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Things Are Changing Faster Than You Think – Here's What You Probably Didn't Know

If you're leading accounting at an ecommerce brand, you've likely spent a Tuesday evening squinting at a Shopify export like it's an ancient cursed scroll, trying to figure out why your tax liability in New Jersey suddenly disappeared.

Every finance leader has squinted at a cursed Shopify export. If you haven't yet, you will.

Know what? You're not alone. Finance leaders today are botanists of a strange ecosystem, constantly cataloging, classifying, and trying to predict how fast things will grow or wilt.

In the past year, we've seen ecommerce platforms roll out unannounced changes to fulfillment logic, tax defaults, payment timing, and fee structures. The kind that directly impacts how and when numbers hit your books.

These updates don't come with release notes. Instead, they come with late nights, last-minute journal entries, and a Slack thread nobody wants to reopen.

We don't say all this to scare you, just to call out something that's catching even the most experienced teams off guard. A minor platform update rolls out and suddenly your tax collection drops off in three states. Or your revenue recognition gets pushed by a week because of a change in fulfillment timing. We've seen it happen.

Like peeling back what looks like a healthy onion layer, only to find rot underneath — hidden until it's too late.

The worst part is that these shifts usually don't get noticed until the books are closed.

Blue Onion connects to all of your systems – from orders, payments, bank accounts – to deliver three-way reconciliation and the clean financial data you've been missing. We analyze what's changing and what it means for CFOs, controllers, and finance teams who are buried in spreadsheets and manual reconciliations.

We've pulled together real data and hard lessons from hundreds of ecommerce brands so you don't have to discover these challenges the hard way.



Think of this guide as your field manual: each section peels back another layer of risk hiding in ecommerce accounting. We've compiled what's actually changing, how it affects finance and accounting, and what the best operators are doing to stay ahead of it.

Reconciliation: Almost every customer who came to Blue Onion had reconciliation issues. The question isn't whether you have reconciliation problems, it's whether you even know about them.

Finance teams typically fall into two camps: either they're not reconciling properly (creating massive compliance and audit risks) or they're spending 40–50 hours per month on manual reconciliation work that should be automated.

Why it matters: Clean, accurate data isn't just about closing the books, it's the foundation for reliable accounting, seamless workflow automation, and the ability to leverage AI tools for forecasting, anomaly detection, and strategic insights.

Staying compliant isn't enough anymore. Not when the platforms are shifting under your feet. In ecommerce finance, what you don't know can hurt you. So let's make sure you know.



Blue Onion Observation: TikTok Commerce

The rise of TikTok as a commerce platform is reshaping how products are sold, how cash flows, and how your accounting systems get confused in the process.

TikTok Shop is scaling globally after an aggressive launch in the U.S. Brands are jumping in fast, lured by the promise of high-volume, influencer-driven sales.

It's a dream for marketing. But for finance, it's a bit of a nightmare wrapped in a CSV, gift-wrapped with influencer payout math no one can explain with a straight face.

Signal to Watch: Viral sales spikes, unpredictable fees, delayed payouts.

Why This Matters for Finance Teams

TikTok's commerce model blends entertainment, affiliate marketing, and direct sales, often happening in real time. That dynamic creates unique headaches on the finance side:

Unpredictable Volume Patterns:

Unlike traditional ecommerce channels, TikTok sales are marketing-driven in an entirely different way. Marketing directors launch influencer campaigns, and sales trickle in based on how well content resonates. You might see massive spikes when an influencer's content goes viral, followed by minimal five-order days. This creates significant forecasting challenges.

Complex Fee Structures:

TikTok acts as a fulfillment provider similar to Amazon or Shopify, but with a twist, influencer payment cuts that are entirely different from other processors. These aren't standard payment processing fees, they're marketing-based revenue shares that can vary dramatically by campaign.

Cash Flow Timing Issues:

- Weekly payouts create larger transaction volumes than daily settlements
- Lag in cutoff periods causes recency problems similar to Amazon's data drift
- Settlement timing doesn't align with order timing, creating reconciliation gaps

What Controllers and Accountants Should Watch For

Reconciliation gaps:

Orders might not appear where or when they should, and the weekly payout structure compounds timing mismatches. Manual review is almost always required (and often under-resourced).

Return and refund chaos:

The social nature of transactions – impulse buys, one-off codes, and vague return reasons, makes clean tracking a challenge.

What's Next?

TikTok's ecosystem will mature and its reporting tools will improve, but the pace of change won't slow down. Finance teams need flexible workflows now. You'll want to start building collaboration with ops and marketing teams, and structure your systems to handle more fluid, social-first channels.



Silent Shifts Undermining Your Books

Some shifts happen so quietly you only notice them when the damage is done. This first layer peels back the silent platform updates that can unravel your close before you even realize they're there.

The ecommerce finance ecosystem is evolving, but the changes are quiet, fast, and rarely make headlines. Most finance teams find out about these shifts after they've caused headaches: unexpected tax audits, last-minute reconciliation scrambles, or suddenly ballooning fees.

Here's a pulse check on the biggest technical and financial changes happening right now, based on proprietary data from Blue Onion's customer base and continuous platform monitoring. Want to learn more about data shifts?

[Watch Blue Onion's educational webinar.](#)

Shopify: Fulfillment and Tax Defaults Are Quietly Reshaping Your Data

Shopify has changed the way orders are processed and posted to your books, altering the timing of when revenue is recorded. Meanwhile, new tax defaults have been activated for many merchants—often without notice. Although there hasn't been a major state-by-state tax drop, these quiet shifts in recording rules have caught many finance teams off guard.

What most teams don't realize:

- These changes can create timing mismatches that delay reconciliations by days or even weeks
- Many merchants are under-collecting tax in specific states, unaware that default settings have changed

Audit Shopify defaults monthly. What looks like a small setting can snowball into audit risk.



Amazon: Fees Are Rising Dramatically and Data Drift Continues

Amazon's settlement reports have long been a source of confusion, but lately it's gotten worse. We've seen significant fee increases, retroactive data corrections, and shifting rules that catch even seasoned finance teams by surprise.

[The Hidden Amazon Data Drift Problem:](#)



"Amazon's settlement reports are notoriously confusing, they blend fees, refunds, and payouts in ways that make it nearly impossible for finance teams to see what's actually been earned versus what's just been adjusted. Blue Onion helps untangle that."

Brian Webb,
VP of Customer Experience



What you need to know:

Storage and ad fees have increased dramatically for many sellers



Never assume Amazon settlement data is final. Consider it a moving target until your checks show the numbers match up consistently.

- Settlement reports continue adjusting weeks after month-end, making it impossible to close books with confidence
- Data drift issues mirror the complexity now emerging in TikTok's weekly payout structure

Buy Now, Pay Later: Mixed Fee Changes Across Providers

The BNPL landscape shows mixed results across different providers. Our research indicates that fee changes aren't broad-based increases across all BNPL providers – Affirm and Afterpay may have different fee structures, and many customers now use Shopify's white-labeled BNPL natively.

What many finance teams miss:

- BNPL shifts net/gross revenue recognition in ways that impact cash flow modeling and close timelines
- Reserves and hidden fees require manual digging to uncover
- Provider-specific fee changes aren't consistent across the industry

The ERP Integration Reality: System-Agnostic Solutions Are Winning

More ecommerce brands than you'd think are successfully scaling without following the traditional NetSuite path. The industry narrative around "moving beyond QuickBooks" misses a key point: NetSuite is increasingly seen as an expensive dinosaur, and many growing brands are finding modern, flexible alternatives.

What's often overlooked:

- Flexible, integration-friendly solutions prevent costly ERP migrations
- Direct integrations are now available across platforms
- The focus should be on solving reconciliation problems, no matter which accounting system you use

[Learn more about how the Blue Onion subledger supports ERPs](#)

Don't get distracted by the NetSuite migration narrative. System-agnostic workflows keep you nimble.



The ecommerce finance landscape isn't just evolving—it's accelerating. The best teams leave no room for surprises: they build workflows that anticipate platform shifts, monitor for anomalies, and adapt systems before issues hit the ledger. With smart integrations, they prevent costly ERP migrations while gaining the flexibility to adopt new marketplaces, channels, and apps—without any accounting headaches.

Signals You Can't Ignore

Navigating ecommerce finance today isn't just about managing spreadsheets, it's about mastering a complex tech ecosystem that touches every corner of your business.

Controllers, accountants, and finance leaders face the daunting challenge of reconciling data across multiple systems, payment processors, order management platforms, and bank accounts, each with its own quirks and blind spots. The way these systems connect, or fail to connect, directly impacts your financial reporting accuracy and month-end close efficiency.

At Blue Onion, we've spent years untangling these complexities. We understand where the pain points lie and we've analyzed data from hundreds of ecommerce brands to identify patterns, benchmarks, and hidden risks that most teams don't see coming.



We're technical experts bridging the gap between ecommerce platforms and accounting realities. This means we don't just see surface-level symptoms, but the underlying technical challenges that cause headaches for finance teams every day.

By focusing on platform-specific nuances—Shopify's shifting fulfillment flows, Amazon's data drift (when historical data updates unexpectedly), TikTok's weekly settlement complexities, and hidden payment processor fees—we show how these factors intersect, affect reconciliation, and shape your financial statements in ways you might not notice.



Watch These Signals Closely

Signal 1: Shopify Tax Defaults

Are your Shopify tax settings really compliant?

The recent Shopify tax defaults rollout is a perfect example of a system-level change that many finance teams miss until it triggers audit risk or reconciliation delays. Understanding how Shopify's fulfillment and tax flows feed into your accounting systems is critical.

Signal 2: Amazon Fee Creep

Are Amazon fees quietly creeping up?

Amazon's notorious data drift and fee increases are more than an annoyance – they are a direct threat to your margins. Most finance teams only spot these issues retroactively when settlement reports no longer reconcile, creating costly surprises.

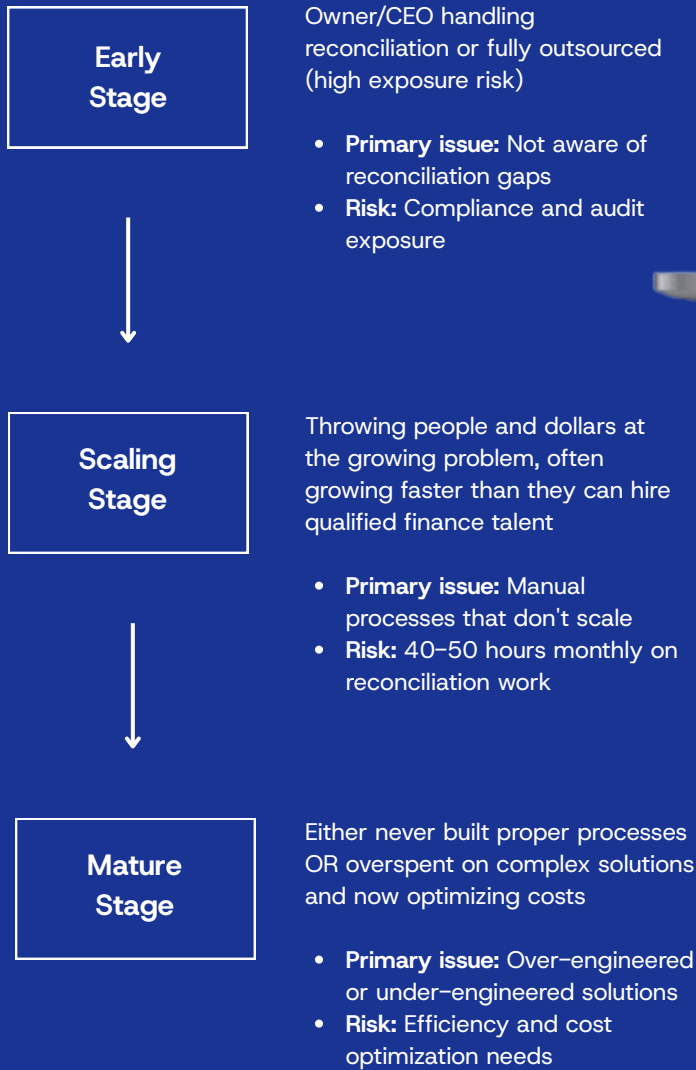
Signal 3: Refund Misclassifications

Are returns and refunds misclassified in your books?

Multiple sales channels and payment methods make returns and refund classification a common pain point. Misclassification inflates revenue or hides liabilities, complicating close processes and tax filings.

Growth Stages in the Wild

Not all ecommerce finance teams face these challenges the same way. Rather than getting distracted by revenue definitions, it's more useful to focus on the types of problems that emerge as companies grow:



Most teams overestimate how "mature" their reconciliation really is.

Understanding where your company fits can help prioritize which challenges to tackle first—and when to start planning system transitions.

Customer Validation



Knowledge is Your First Line of Defense

Finance teams don't have to figure this out alone. Blue Onion serves as a repository of deep technical knowledge, translating complex platform and accounting interactions into actionable insights.

We help you connect the dots between multiple systems, reconcile data discrepancies before they snowball, and understand the financial impacts of platform changes before they surprise you.

In a shifting ecosystem, Blue Onion translates hidden signals into strategies and keeps your reporting as clean as a pressed herbarium sheet.



Practices from the Field

In ecommerce finance, the hardest problems rarely have simple fixes. The best teams document it, classify it, and build repeatable practices to keep chaos from spreading. This layer peels back the methods controllers and CFOs are using to catch issues early, reduce manual work, and keep their financials accurate amid constant change.

"Blue Onion caught that we were having duplicate customer deposits on a lot of our items in NetSuite. I can go in every day and if there's a variance I can click in there to investigate and it'll actually show me on an unreconciled payments tab that there are duplicate transactions for those different items that match the items that need to be reconciled."

Sydney Dobies,
Accountant at Supergoop!

Supergoop!



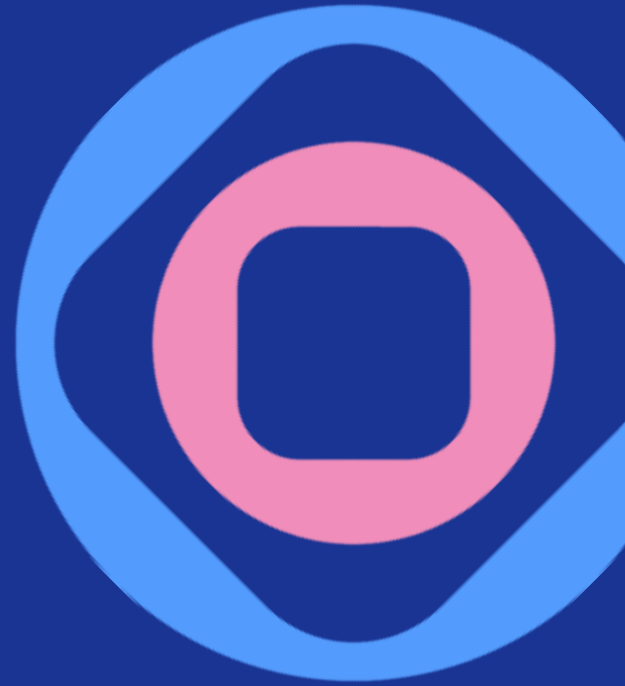
You're not expected to be a software engineer or API expert but you do need reliable ways to spot problems before they snowball and workflows that make reconciliation manageable.

Here's what we see working for finance teams who consistently get it right.

Catch Data Drift Before Close

Data drift, where reports and data feeds change retroactively or unexpectedly, is one of the biggest hidden risks. It shows up in Amazon settlement reports adjusting weeks after month-end, Shopify order captures shifting post-sale, or TikTok's weekly payouts creating timing mismatches.

[Watch Webinar](#)



How top teams handle it:

- Set up daily or weekly monitoring routines focused on key metrics and transaction volumes
- Use anomaly detection to flag unusual variances early, instead of waiting for the month-end close scramble
- Maintain communication loops between finance, operations, and platform teams to investigate and resolve discrepancies quickly

This proactive approach cuts down last-minute journal entries and audit flags.

Structuring Returns and Refunds for Clear Reporting

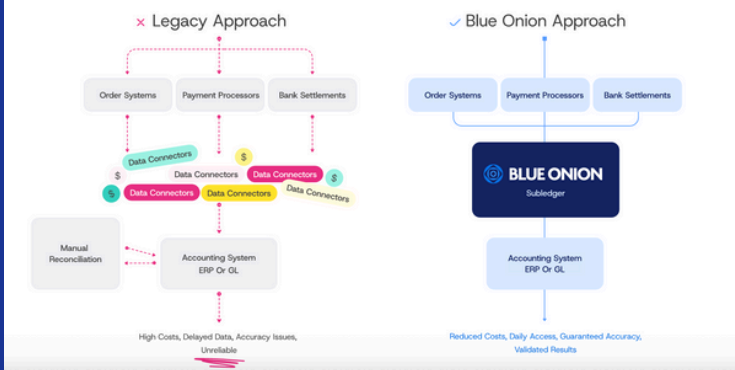
Returns can wreak havoc on clean financials, especially when processed across multiple sales channels and payment methods.

Best practices include:

- Creating standardized return codes and classifications that map clearly to your accounting system
- Regular audits of return rates and refund classifications to catch misreported liabilities or revenue
- Cross-team collaboration with customer service and fulfillment to ensure data accuracy upstream

Returns are like mislabeled specimens in the field: one wrong tag and the whole data set becomes unreliable.

Financial Close Is Broken



Framework for Problem-Solving

When you hit issues, ask:

- **What to check:** Where are discrepancies showing up? Which systems are involved?
- **How top teams approach it:** Establish root cause analysis, document workflows, automate data checks, and loop in cross-functional stakeholders.

The Guide at Your Side

We surface the data signals behind the chaos and help finance teams build frameworks for accuracy and efficiency without needing to become software developers or data scientists themselves.

Our role is to translate complex platform behavior into actionable insights that keep your financials clean, your audits smooth, and your sanity intact.

Map the Processor Ecosystem

Many brands juggle several payment providers to maximize reach and flexibility. But this often introduces inconsistent fee structures, reserves, and chargeback timing that complicate cash flow forecasting.

What successful teams do:

- Consolidate fee data across processors in a central dashboard or reporting system for easy comparison
- Benchmark fees regularly against industry norms to identify anomalies
- Establish clear processes for reconciling reserves and chargebacks as part of daily or weekly workflows

This discipline ensures payment processor complexity doesn't become a black hole for your finance team.

Build Workflows That Outlast Systems

Whether you're on QuickBooks, NetSuite, Xero, or a homegrown system, the key is building processes that work regardless of your underlying accounting platform.

Smart teams focus on:

- Direct integrations that prevent expensive ERP migrations
- Workflows that translate platform complexity into clean accounting entries
- Solutions that grow with their business without forcing major system overhauls



From Surviving to Thriving

Peel back this final layer and what emerges isn't survival, but resilience. Compliance is only the baseline. Thriving means building systems that see around corners and hold steady when the ground shifts.

Controllers and CFOs who thrive spot signals early. They put systems in place that surface risks before they spread, keep reporting clean, and free themselves to focus on strategy instead of firefighting.



Why "Staying Ahead" Matters

Platform updates, fee changes, and data shifts won't slow down — but your ability to adapt can improve dramatically.

Finance teams that lean into continuous monitoring and proactive insight turn volatility into opportunity:

- Spot unexpected fee increases before they erode margins
- Detect compliance gaps before audits strike
- Accelerate month-end closes with clean, reconciled books

Blue Onion's Role: Your Ongoing Signal Monitor and Translator

We live at the intersection of ecommerce platforms and accounting realities.

We track what's changing behind the scenes — from Shopify's hidden tax shifts to Amazon's evolving fee structures to TikTok's emerging settlement complexities — and analyze what it means for your business.

We deliver insights that make complex technical changes understandable and actionable, so your team doesn't have to become software engineers or data detectives overnight. Our CPA team brings deep accounting expertise to ensure technical solutions align with proper financial reporting standards.

How You Can Stay Ahead Today

- Build cross-functional collaboration between finance, operations, and platform teams — share insights early and often
- For updates on finance news, trends and the latest in AI

[Subscribe to Lyndsey Bunting's monthly newsletter](#)

In ecommerce finance, the biggest risk is missing the signal. Teams that thrive stay curious, anticipate challenges, and build frameworks that turn complexity into clarity.

