

Fashion Brand *Technology* Playbook

A high-level framework for building, diagnosing, and scaling technology at the \$1M–\$10M stage — without the enterprise overhead.

FREE RESOURCE · V2026.04

Why **\$1M–\$10M** is the hardest stage for technology

Too complex for startup tools. Not large enough for enterprise software. This is the no-man's-land where most fashion brands spend years — and where the right technology decisions determine whether you scale or stall.

25%

Fashion brand return rate — nearly double the 14.5% ecommerce average. Each return costs \$15–\$25 in operational expenses.

INDUSTRY AVERAGE 2025

222%

Increase in customer acquisition cost over the past 8 years. The average ecommerce brand now loses \$29 on every new customer acquired.

DTC INDUSTRY DATA 2025

60%

Of brands have changed 3PL providers multiple times due to integration failures and delivery issues. Each switch costs 60–90 days of transition time.

GOBOLT STATE OF LOGISTICS, 2025

77%

Of scaling brands identify last-mile performance tracking as critical to their operations — yet most lack the systems to actually measure it.

GOBOLT STATE OF LOGISTICS, 2025

THE REAL COST OF BROKEN SYSTEMS

Technology failures at this stage rarely appear as line items. They show up as labor hours lost to manual reconciliation, orders that ship wrong, wholesale accounts that quietly move to a competitor, and margin that disappears into operational friction you can't easily measure.

THE TECHNOLOGY INFLECTION POINT

The brands that build compounding operational leverage between \$1M and \$10M invest in technology before the crisis forces them to — not after. Reactive technology decisions cost three to five times more than proactive ones and create organizational disruption that takes quarters, not weeks, to recover from.

8 areas that *determine* your technology health

Every fashion brand's technology operation can be measured across these 8 areas. On the next page, you'll rate each one — no math required. Just pick which description sounds most like your brand.

<p>ECOMMERCE 01</p> <h2>Your storefront & checkout</h2> <p>How your store is built, how customers move through it, and whether inventory stays accurate across all channels.</p> <p>■■■■■ HIGHEST IMPACT</p>	<p>OPERATIONS 02</p> <h2>How your business runs daily</h2> <p>Purchase orders, production calendar, SOPs, factory communication. The backbone everything else depends on.</p> <p>■■■■■ HIGH IMPACT</p>	<p>CUSTOMER DATA 03</p> <h2>What you know about buyers</h2> <p>Where your customer data lives, how well you know repeat purchase rate and lifetime value, and how you segment.</p> <p>■■■■■ HIGH IMPACT</p>	<p>MARKETING AUTO 04</p> <h2>Revenue running while you sleep</h2> <p>Email flows, SMS automation, abandoned cart recovery, attribution. The systems that convert and retain without manual work.</p> <p>■■■■■ MEDIUM IMPACT</p>
<p>INVENTORY 05</p> <h2>Stock accuracy across channels</h2> <p>Real-time inventory across DTC and wholesale, sell-through by SKU, demand forecasting, and low-stock alerts.</p> <p>■■■■■ HIGH IMPACT</p>	<p>FULFILLMENT 06</p> <h2>Orders out, returns handled</h2> <p>3PL relationship quality, processing time, order accuracy rate, returns management, and how tightly it all connects.</p> <p>■■■■■ MEDIUM IMPACT</p>	<p>ANALYTICS 07</p> <h2>Seeing what's happening</h2> <p>Live dashboards, revenue by channel, gross margin by product. The ability to see why something happened, not just that it did.</p> <p>■■■■■ LOWER IMPACT</p>	<p>INTEGRATIONS 08</p> <h2>Tools that talk to each other</h2> <p>When data changes in one system, does it update everywhere automatically? Or does someone have to move it manually?</p> <p>■■■■■ FOUNDATIONAL</p>








NEXT PAGE



Rate your brand in each area — no math, no numbers, no scores. Just read the three descriptions and circle the one that sounds most like your brand today.

Which description sounds *most like your brand?*

Circle one column for each row. That's it. Your results are at the bottom.

DIMENSION	 NOT THERE YET Broken or missing	 PARTIALLY DONE Basic, with gaps	 WORKING WELL Configured, running		
01 Ecommerce	No real platform, or Shopify is live but never properly set up. No idea what my conversion rate is.	Shopify is running. Products are organized. Some things are tracked but not consistently reviewed.	Configured, tested checkout, real-time inventory sync. CVR and AOV reviewed weekly with clear targets.		
02 Operations	Everything lives in my head or email threads. If I took two weeks off, things would break.	Spreadsheets and shared Drive. Some things are documented but not organized or consistently followed.	Core SOPs documented, production calendar live, team can run day-to-day without me in the room.		
03 Customer Data	Customer data is scattered. I don't know my repeat purchase rate or customer lifetime value.	Shopify and Klaviyo are connected. I can pull basic reports but rarely do, and segments are simple.	Single data hub. Repeat rate and LTV tracked monthly. Segments based on purchase behavior are active.		
04 Marketing Auto	We send manual newsletters when we remember. No automated flows running at all.	One or two flows live — maybe abandoned cart or a welcome series — but most email is still manual.	Welcome, abandoned cart, post-purchase, and win-back all running. Attribution connected to revenue.		
05 Inventory	Manual counts or gut feeling. I've oversold or had wrong inventory numbers shown to customers.	Shopify tracks inventory but it doesn't connect to wholesale. I reconcile manually at least once a week.	Dedicated IMS, real-time sync across all channels. Sell-through tracked by SKU. Low-stock alerts automated.		
06 Fulfillment	Packing manually, or using a 3PL that requires manual order exports. Returns handled case-by-case.	3PL connected with some automation. Processing time is 2–3 days. Returns have a basic process but no portal.	Integrated 3PL with SLA monitoring. Next-day processing standard. Returns portal feeds back to inventory.		
07 Analytics	I check the Shopify revenue dashboard occasionally. No GA4 or structured reporting. Flying blind.	GA4 installed but not fully set up. I pull reports manually when something feels off — not on a schedule.	Live dashboard reviewed weekly. Revenue by channel, margin by product. Team acts on data, not guesswork.		
08 Integrations	Every order requires manual entry in multiple systems. I find out integrations broke when customers complain.	About half the tools talk to each other. Some manual steps still required. No monitoring for when things break.	Core data flows automated. Monitoring in place. When something breaks, I know before a customer does.		
<p>MOSTLY  RED</p> <p>CRITICAL or DEVELOPING</p> <p>Technology is costing you money daily. Stop buying new tools. Fix the foundation first — start with your reddest row.</p>		<p>MIX OF  + </p> <p>DEVELOPING or FUNCTIONAL</p> <p>Infrastructure exists but gaps are costing you. Focus on your red rows first, then close the yellow gaps one at a time.</p>		<p>MOSTLY  GREEN</p> <p>OPTIMIZED or BEST-IN-CLASS</p> <p>Technology supports your growth. Your opportunity is in the remaining yellow rows and scaling what already works well.</p>	

Want a professional read on your results — with benchmarks against brands at your revenue stage?

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Which type of brand *are you?*

Your business model determines your technology priorities. Identify your archetype — then focus on the tools and integrations that matter most for your specific revenue model.

ARCHETYPE 01

DTC

The DTC-First Brand

80%+ of revenue from your own website. Direct consumer relationship. Strong social and paid acquisition focus. B2C fulfillment only.

SHOPIFY FOCUS

KLAVIYO CRITICAL

3PL B2C

ATTRIBUTION

TOP PRIORITY

Marketing automation and customer retention. With CAC at historic highs, your LTV and repeat purchase rate determine whether you're building a business or buying revenue.

ARCHETYPE 02

WHL

The Wholesale-Primary Brand

60%+ of revenue from retail accounts. B2B ordering process. Seasonal line sheets. Delivery-window fulfillment with compliance requirements.

NUORDER / BRANDBOOM

ERP CRITICAL

B2B 3PL

EDI COMPLIANCE

TOP PRIORITY

Digital wholesale platform and sell-through data. Only 60% of brands use sell-through to inform buying decisions — the 40% that don't accumulate dead stock season after season.

ARCHETYPE 03

HYB

The Hybrid Brand

Meaningful revenue in both DTC and wholesale. Running two fundamentally different fulfillment models from one shared inventory pool.

SHOPIFY PLUS

IMS CRITICAL

SHARED INVENTORY

DUAL 3PL

TOP PRIORITY

Single inventory source of truth. Without it, you will oversell the same units to multiple channels. This is the most common operational failure in hybrid brands — and entirely preventable.

ARCHETYPE 04

MB

The Multi-Brand Operator

Operating two or more distinct fashion brands, each with its own P&L and customer base, from shared operational infrastructure.

SHOPIFY PLUS EXPANSION

SHARED ERP

CONSOLIDATED OPS

BRAND SEPARATION

TOP PRIORITY

Back-end consolidation. Brand separation at the storefront level, shared infrastructure at the operational level. Shopify Plus expansion stores + one shared IMS handle both requirements.

\$1M

\$3M

\$5M

\$10M

Most brands evolve through archetypes as they grow. DTC brands add wholesale. Wholesale brands launch DTC. Single brands acquire or launch adjacent labels. **Each transition creates a new set of technology requirements** — which is why the framework in Chapter 02 is stage-specific, not one-size-fits-all.

The 6 ways brands *destroy value* through technology decisions

These are not edge cases. They are the default outcome for brands that grow without intentional technology strategy. Identify which ones are active in your business right now.

01

Buying Enterprise Software Too Early

Implementing NetSuite or SAP at \$2M–\$4M. Enterprise ERPs require dedicated IT staff and \$50,000–\$200,000 implementation budgets. At \$3M, you don't have either. The typical outcome: implementation runs 3–6 months over timeline and costs 2–3× the original estimate.

FIX → Buy Cin7 or AIMS360 at \$3M. NetSuite is a \$10M+ decision.

02

No Inventory Source of Truth

Inventory tracked in Shopify, the wholesale portal, and a spreadsheet simultaneously — and none of them agree. This is how overselling happens. A customer buys the last unit on your DTC site while that same unit is committed to a wholesale delivery window. Someone makes a call they don't want to make.

FIX → One IMS as source of truth. All channels pull from it.

03

Choosing Vendors on Price Alone

The cheapest 3PL is rarely the lowest total cost. Total cost includes subscription, implementation, training, ongoing management, and the cost of failures. A vendor charging 30% more that implements correctly is often dramatically cheaper than one charging 30% less that requires constant management.

FIX → Evaluate total cost of ownership, not just the monthly rate.

04

Building Custom When Off-the-Shelf Works

Spending \$40,000 on a custom inventory system that replicates what Cin7 does for \$400/month. Dev agencies have an incentive to build — it's more profitable than pointing you to SaaS. Before commissioning any custom development, spend two weeks researching whether the functionality already exists.

FIX → Research the market before every custom build. 80% coverage at \$400/mo beats 100% at \$40,000.

05

No 3PL SLAs or Performance Monitoring

Many brands start with a 3PL adequate at 500 orders/month and continue at 5,000 without ever formalizing performance expectations. Problems accumulate gradually — slightly longer processing times, slightly higher error rates — until there's a crisis during peak season. 60% of brands have changed 3PLs multiple times.

FIX → Written SLAs: 99.5% accuracy, 24-hour processing. Review monthly.

06

Letting Your Agency Own Your Access

Brands that don't have admin access to their own Shopify store, GA4 property, or marketing platform because the agency that built it retained ownership. When that relationship ends, accessing or migrating your own systems becomes a legal and logistical nightmare.

FIX → You are the primary administrator on every account. Non-negotiable.



These six are the ones most likely to be active in your business right now at the \$1M–\$10M stage. Recognize any of them? That's where to start.

The right tools for *your stage*

Platform decisions at the wrong stage are expensive. Shopify Plus at \$500K is wasteful. Shopify Standard at \$5M is a bottleneck. Here is the framework for matching your tools to your current revenue and complexity.

ECOMMERCE PLATFORM		HIGHEST PRIORITY	
UNDER \$1M	Shopify Basic or Standard \$39–\$105/mo. All you need at this stage. Don't over-invest here yet.	UNDER \$1M DTC ONLY	Shopify Native Inventory Adequate for DTC-only under 100 SKUs. Free. Don't add complexity you don't need.
\$1M–\$3M	Shopify Standard or Advanced \$105–\$399/mo. Advanced unlocks custom reports and lower transaction fees.	\$1M–\$4M	Cin7 Core or Fishbowl \$350–\$1,000/mo. Matrix SKU support, basic B2B, multi-location. Designed for this stage.
\$3M–\$10M	Shopify Plus From \$2,300/mo. Unlocks checkout scripts, B2B native, 20× API limits, and Shopify Flow automation. The trigger is capabilities, not just volume.	\$2M–\$10M FASHION	AIMS360 Built for apparel. Matrix SKUs, landed cost, EDI, native NuOrder + Brandboom + Faire integration. The fashion-specific choice.

EMAIL + MARKETING		FASTEST ROI	
ALL STAGES	Klaviyo Free up to 250 contacts, then scales with list size. Built for ecommerce. Abandoned cart flows generate \$3.65 revenue per recipient. Nothing else comes close.	ALL STAGES MINIMUM	GA4 — Properly Configured Free. Key phrase: properly configured. Most brands have GA4 installed with no goals or events set up. That's not analytics — it's a tracking script.
\$3M+	Add SMS (Postscript or Attentive) Layer SMS flows on top of Klaviyo for high-intent moments. Abandoned cart + welcome series SMS significantly lift flow conversion.	\$2M–\$5M	Google Looker Studio Free. Connects to Shopify and GA4. Build a live dashboard that answers weekly leadership questions without a manual spreadsheet.
\$4M+ WHOLESALE	HubSpot Free or Notion CRM For wholesale account relationship management. Klaviyo handles DTC CRM; wholesale accounts need their own CRM layer.	\$5M+ PAID ACQUISITION	Triple Whale or Northbeam \$300–\$700/mo. Solves multi-touch attribution across Meta, TikTok, and Google. Earns back its cost quickly for brands with significant ad spend.

ANALYTICS + ATTRIBUTION		OFTEN NEGLECTED	
ALL STAGES MINIMUM	GA4 — Properly Configured Free. Key phrase: properly configured. Most brands have GA4 installed with no goals or events set up. That's not analytics — it's a tracking script.	\$2M–\$5M	Google Looker Studio Free. Connects to Shopify and GA4. Build a live dashboard that answers weekly leadership questions without a manual spreadsheet.
\$5M+ PAID ACQUISITION	Triple Whale or Northbeam \$300–\$700/mo. Solves multi-touch attribution across Meta, TikTok, and Google. Earns back its cost quickly for brands with significant ad spend.		

|| *The right tool for the wrong stage is the wrong tool. A \$200/month IMS that works perfectly at \$2M may break completely at \$5M if you haven't asked what you'll need in 18 months.*

What does a *well-configured* stack actually cost?

Technology spend is one of the least-discussed numbers in fashion brand operations. Most brands have no idea if what they're paying is appropriate for their stage. These benchmarks give you a reference point.

\$1M BRAND · SURVIVAL STACK \$200 – \$400 / MO

\$30 avg

Shopify Standard (\$105) · Klaviyo free tier · QuickBooks (\$30) · Canva Pro (\$13) · GA4 (free)

\$3M BRAND · GROWTH STACK \$1,300 – \$2,100 / MO

\$1,700 avg

Shopify Advanced (\$399) · Klaviyo (\$300) · Cin7 (\$475) · Brandboom (\$200) · QuickBooks + A2X (\$90)

\$5M BRAND · INFRASTRUCTURE STACK \$4,050 – \$6,100 / MO

\$5,075 avg

Shopify Plus (\$2,300) · Klaviyo (\$475) · AIMS360 (\$850) · Loop (\$200) · Triple Whale (\$400)

\$10M BRAND · OPERATIONS STACK \$8,000 – \$16,000 / MO

\$12,000 avg · ≈1-2% of revenue

Same tools as \$5M · Deeper configuration · More integrations · Team seats · Additional analytics depth

Important: These figures are subscription costs only — 3PL fulfillment costs are excluded as they scale directly with order volume (typically 10–15% of gross sales). At \$3M with 2,000 monthly orders, 3PL cost alone can run \$4,000–\$12,000/month.

WHAT THIS TELLS YOU

Technology at \$1M costs roughly as much as a daily coffee. By \$5M, it costs as much as a senior hire — and should be delivering equivalent leverage.

At \$10M, \$12,000/month in technology represents roughly **1–2% of revenue**. Efficient fashion brands with optimized stacks typically land at the lower end of this range.

DO THIS FIRST

Add up every technology subscription your brand currently pays for. Include tools no one actively uses. Most brands at this stage discover 2–3 redundant or abandoned subscriptions when they do this exercise for the first time.

SCALE REFERENCE

- \$1M stage
- \$3M stage
- \$5M stage
- \$10M stage

Building your *12-month* technology roadmap

A roadmap is not a wish list. It is a sequenced, prioritized plan for how your technology capabilities will improve over the next twelve months — with explicit trade-offs and a commitment to what you are *not* doing each quarter.

Q1 — MONTHS 1-3 Establish the Foundation	Q2 — MONTHS 4-6 Activate the Revenue Engine	Q3 — MONTHS 7-9 Upgrade Fulfillment + Data	Q4 — MONTHS 10-12 Scale and Plan Forward
<p>Start with your two lowest-scoring dimensions from the self-assessment. Fix the breaks before adding complexity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement or audit your primary ecommerce platform configuration <small>ECOMMERCE DIMENSION</small> ● Establish a single inventory source of truth across all channels <small>INVENTORY DIMENSION</small> ● Document your current stack (every tool, what it does, what breaks if it stops) <small>OPERATIONS DIMENSION</small> ● Conduct a technology cost audit — list every subscription and its active usage <small>ALL DIMENSIONS</small> 	<p>With the foundation stable, focus on the highest-ROI technology investments — the ones that directly recover revenue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build core Klaviyo flows: welcome series + abandoned cart (3-touch minimum) <small>MARKETING DIMENSION · FASTEST ROI</small> ● Configure GA4 properly — goals, events, Shopify integration, UTM tracking <small>ANALYTICS DIMENSION</small> ● Build post-purchase email sequence (review request + cross-sell) <small>MARKETING + CUSTOMER DATA</small> ● Automate the Shopify → accounting sync (A2X or equivalent) <small>INTEGRATIONS DIMENSION</small> 	<p>With revenue automation running, focus on operational reliability and data visibility — the infrastructure for sustained growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluate 3PL performance against SLAs — upgrade if not meeting targets <small>FULFILLMENT DIMENSION</small> ● Implement automated returns portal feeding back into inventory <small>FULFILLMENT + INVENTORY</small> ● Build Looker Studio dashboard — revenue by channel, margin by SKU <small>ANALYTICS DIMENSION</small> ● Audit 3PL integration — confirm orders flow without manual intervention <small>INTEGRATIONS DIMENSION</small> 	<p>Consolidate gains, address remaining gaps, and build next year's roadmap with the data you've gathered over three quarters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish weekly KPI review cadence with live dashboard — not manual reports <small>ANALYTICS + OPERATIONS</small> ● Re-run the self-assessment from page 03 — measure progress against Q1 baseline <small>ALL DIMENSIONS</small> ● Evaluate platform upgrades needed for next growth stage (Shopify Plus, AIMS360, etc.) <small>ECOMMERCE + INVENTORY</small> ● Build Year 2 technology roadmap with Q1 priorities clearly defined <small>STRATEGIC PLANNING</small>

FRAMEWORK RULE

For each quarter: define what you're doing, who owns it, and what success looks like. Then define what you're explicitly NOT doing. Scope creep — adding initiatives mid-quarter — is the primary cause of technology project overruns.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

A brand starting at 4.2 (DEVELOPING) following this framework typically reaches 6.5–7.0 (FUNCTIONAL to OPTIMIZED) within 12 months. That's the equivalent of eliminating 2–3 significant operational failures and recovering measurable revenue.

Ready to fix your *specific* stack?

This guide gives you the framework. Applying it to your brand — with the context of your specific tools, your team, your revenue, and your growth trajectory — is where the real work happens.

Every engagement starts with a Discovery Call. No pitch deck. No boilerplate recommendations. Just an honest conversation about where your brand is and what the most important next move is.

[BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL
→]

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ABOUT BRIAN BRUNSON

Former professional athlete and collegiate coach turned fashion operator. Co-founded a clothing brand. Purchased and operated a manufacturing factory. Acquired multiple fashion brands across categories. Secured North American rights to an international sportswear brand. Managed production across five countries simultaneously. Now helping brands at \$1M–\$10M build the operational infrastructure to compete at the next level.

SERVICES MENU

Brand Readiness Score	\$500
Tech Brand Audit	\$1,500
Tech Stack Rescue	\$3,500
The Brand Sprint	\$5,000
3-Month Retainer	\$4,500/mo
Fractional CTO	\$6–8K/mo

FREE FIRST STEP

Every engagement starts with a 20-minute Discovery Call at no charge. Book directly at brianbrunson.com.