

E-Commerce Valuations: Q3 2026

E-commerce does not trade at a multiple. It trades at a distribution, and the query that reaches this page hides two markets. Windsor Drake's 21-company listed comparable set, computed on 21 August 2026, carries a median **2.12x EV/Revenue**, an interquartile range of **1.03x to 3.23x** and a full range of **0.27x to 13.81x**. Stitch Fix sits at the bottom of that fifty-one fold spread and Shopify at the top.

What predicts position in the distribution is not the category label. It is whether the business owns its demand or rents it back every quarter. Windsor Drake calls this **The Owned Demand Premium**. Businesses whose customers return without being re-purchased clear **4.43x** gross profit; businesses that buy their traffic again clear **1.51x**. The ordering survives a change of denominator, holding at **3.05x against 1.20x** on revenue.

The competing explanation was tested and rejected. Across the 20 constituents carrying a margin denominator, the Pearson correlation between gross margin and EV/Revenue is **0.046**, while the Spearman rank correlation between EV/Revenue and EV/Gross Profit is **0.911**. The denominator moves the level materially and the ordering barely at all. Dispersion here is priced, not booked.

This report covers the listed distribution and how it was computed, the demand cohorts that explain it, the separate market in which owner-operated businesses transact, what the aggregator collapse did to small-cap pricing, the buyer universe after the largest e-commerce exit of 2026 so far, and the backdrop for a process.

What are e-commerce businesses worth in 2026?

The figures below are computed rather than licensed. Enterprise value, trailing twelve month revenue and gross margin for 21 listed constituents come from S&P Global Market Intelligence company data retrieved 19 to 21 August 2026. EV/Gross Profit is EV/Revenue divided by gross margin.

Table 1. The Listed E-Commerce Distribution, Q3 2026

Measure	Reading	Basis
Median EV/Revenue	2.12x	21 listed constituents
Interquartile range, EV/Revenue	1.03x to 3.23x	Half the set
Full range, EV/Revenue	0.27x to 13.81x	Stitch Fix to Shopify
Median EV/Gross Profit	4.40x	20 with a margin denominator
Gross margin spread	19.4% to 79.5%	Carvana to ThredUp
Rank correlation, both denominators	0.911	Spearman
Margin correlation	0.046	Pearson, against EV/Revenue

Source: Windsor Drake computation from S&P Global Market Intelligence company data, 19 to 21 August 2026.

Read the width before the level. A founder anchoring on the 2.12x midpoint negotiates from the middle of a distribution rather than a position inside it, and the buyer opposite prices the position. The margin spread of 19.4% to 79.5% is the second reason: a revenue multiple quoted without a margin beside it is not a comparable quantity.

The question reaches two audiences. The listed set describes platforms and scaled retailers. Businesses under roughly \$5 million of earnings transact on seller's discretionary earnings or EBITDA, priced by different buyers on a different metric. Applying a listed revenue multiple down-market, at any discount, is the most common error on this topic.

What separates a premium multiple from a discount?

Windsor Drake assigns each constituent to one of four demand positions by how the business obtains its next order rather than what it sells. The assignment is the firm's judgement, published with constituent counts beside every cohort so it can be argued with.

Table 2. The Owned Demand Premium: Cohort Medians, Q3 2026

Demand position	Constituents	Median EV/Gross Profit	How the next order is obtained
Demand infrastructure	5	8.05x	Sells tools to merchants who find their own
Demand venues	6	5.08x	Earns a net fee on volume it does not own
Owned-demand brands	5	4.43x	The customer returns without being re-acquired
Rented-demand retail	5	1.51x	Demand is purchased again every quarter

Source: Windsor Drake computation from S&P Global Market Intelligence company data, 19 to 21 August 2026.

Owned-demand brands clear roughly 2.9 times the gross profit multiple of rented-demand retail, and 2.5 times on revenue. Carvana sits in the rented cohort on demand structure and prices near the top of the set on gross profit at 16.68x, so both versions are published: excluding it, the cohorts separate by 3.9 and 4.1 times.

The cleanest test holds margin constant

Warby Parker clears **7.02x** gross profit on a 54.4% gross margin. Revolve Group clears **1.93x** on a 54.3% gross margin. Margin is constant to within a tenth of a point and the multiples separate by more than three and a half times. What differs is who owns the customer. Hims and Hers clears 4.54x on a 69.5% margin subscription base, FIGS 4.43x on a 68.9% replacement cycle, and at the floor Stitch Fix 0.62x and 1-800-Flowers 0.79x.

Is revenue the right denominator for an e-commerce multiple?

The obvious explanation is that revenue multiples track gross margin, so a high-margin business mechanically screens expensive. Tested, it fails at a Pearson correlation of 0.046. ThredUp carries a 79.5% gross margin and trades at 1.20x revenue; Carvana carries 19.4% and trades at 3.23x. Margin structure determines which multiple to quote, not what the business is worth.

Table 3. Five Pairs That Isolate What the Multiple Prices, Q3 2026

Pair	EV/Revenue		EV/Gross Profit		What it isolates
Wayfair against ThredUp	1.33x	against	4.38x	against	Alike on revenue, 30.3% against 79.5% margin
	1.20x		1.51x		
Carvana against Chewy	3.23x	against	16.68x	against	19.4% margin, second dearest on gross profit
	0.76x		2.54x		
Etsy against Chewy	3.17x	against	4.44x	against	A net-fee venue against a full-goods retailer
	0.76x		2.54x		
Warby Parker against Revolve	3.82x	against	7.02x	against	Margins 54.4% and 54.3%; spread is demand ownership
	1.05x		1.93x		
Shopify against VTEX	13.81x	against	28.91x	against	Merchant volume against subscriptions
	1.70x		2.14x		

Source: Windsor Drake computation from S&P Global Market Intelligence company data, 21 August 2026.

Marketplace and retailer multiples diverge for a reason unrelated to quality. Marketplace revenue is already a net take rate on gross merchandise value; first-party retail revenue is the full value of goods sold. eBay reports \$12.0 billion at a 72.1% gross margin and Coupang \$35.5 billion at 28.4%. A buyer runs whichever denominator favours their number; a seller who has run both arrives with the comparison made.

What the infrastructure cohort is paid for

Shopify grew revenue 34% and gross merchandise value more than 30% in the second quarter of 2026 at an 18% free cash flow margin, and clears 28.91x gross profit. Global-e Online grew gross merchandise value 43.7% to \$2.089 billion and revenue 39.1% to \$299 million, lifted adjusted EBITDA margin to 20.9% from 17.9%, raised guidance to \$1.305 billion to \$1.355 billion, and clears 12.91x. Wix clears 3.18x on a 66.6% gross margin. Being infrastructure is not the premium; being infrastructure with a take rate on volume is.

What is an owner-operated e-commerce business worth?

Most searches on this topic come from owners far below listed scale, and the listed set does not price them. Below roughly \$5 million of earnings, businesses transact on a multiple of seller's discretionary earnings or

EBITDA. Owner compensation and personal expenses are normalised first, the most disputed line in a small transaction.

Windsor Drake benchmarks this market against the IBBA and M&A Source Market Pulse survey, a primary advisor survey of transactions up to \$50 million. Its Q1 2026 edition drew on 300 advisors and 203 completed transactions and reported multiples broadly consistent with prior periods, with slight increases in the \$500,000 to \$1 million and \$1 million to \$2 million bands. In Q4 2025, 72% of its 350 advisors expected 2026 to match or exceed the 2021 peak and 71% expected multiples to hold steady.

The bid that set 2021 small-cap pricing has been withdrawn

Amazon aggregators raised \$15.3 billion against a thesis of buying small marketplace businesses at a low earnings multiple and being valued as one larger business at a higher one. That spread exists only if integration is cheap. It was not: each brand carried its own supply chain and listing risk, and advertising costs do not fall with scale the way procurement does.

Table 4. The Aggregator Cycle, Peak to Unwind

Milestone	Date	Figure
Aggregator equity and debt raised, roll-up thesis	Peak of model	\$15.3 billion
Thrasio share of the total raised	2021	\$3.4 billion
Thrasio peak valuation	October 2021	\$10 billion
Benitago bankruptcy, two years after its raise	August 2023	\$325 million raised
Thrasio bankruptcy filing	February 2024	Two years from peak

Source: CB Insights, Behind the decline of a \$10B Amazon aggregator, March 2024; CNBC, 28 February 2024.

The failures clustered rather than staggered, which points to a model problem rather than execution. Expectations anchored to 2021 aggregator offers are anchored to a bid nobody is making. Small-cap buyers now underwrite normalised cash flow, platform concentration and whether demand survives the founder leaving. The Owned Demand Premium applies at every size; below scale it is measured on earnings rather than gross profit.

Who is buying e-commerce businesses?

The buyer universe has reorganised around demand ownership and the engagement layer rather than gross merchandise value. Insider One, an agentic AI engagement platform, acquired Bluecore in May 2026. PitchBook records it as the largest e-commerce exit of the first half at approximately \$1 billion, against total first-half exit value of \$3.1 billion. Terms were not disclosed.

The asset was not a store, brand or logistics network. Bluecore is a retail personalisation and customer data platform, last valued privately at \$1 billion in 2021, and Bloomberg reported the deal as positioning ahead of a planned Insider One listing. The buyer paid for the layer that lets a retailer act on its own first-party data, the capability separating the 4.43x cohort from the 1.51x cohort.

Table 5. Named E-Commerce Transactions and Rounds, 2026

Acquirer or investor	Target	Date	Terms
Insider One	Bluecore	May 2026	Approximately \$1 billion; terms not disclosed
Venture investors	Sierra	May 2026	\$950 million at a \$15 billion valuation
Meta	CRED	June 2026	\$900 million for roughly 20%
Stripe	AI gateway business	August 2026	Acquisition; terms not disclosed

Source: PitchBook Q2 2026 E-Commerce VC First Look, 14 July 2026; Bloomberg, 13 May 2026; company announcements.

Four buyer types now compete for the same assets. Strategic platforms including Shopify, Amazon and the large marketplaces buy capability that raises merchant attach. Engagement and martech consolidators are assembling the customer data layer ahead of their own listings. Payments incumbents have converged with the commerce buyer list, so an asset carrying payment volume has two buyer universes competing for it. Sponsors underwrite cash flow and owner independence.

Venture capital is concentrating on the agent layer. Median e-commerce round size ran \$10.9 million year to date against a \$39.5 million average, and North America took 60.6% of first-half dealmaking, a record share. Sierra raised \$950 million at a \$15 billion valuation in May 2026. Rank a buyer list by appetite for a demand position, not by who sells the same category.

What does the 2026 backdrop mean for a sale?

The channel is reaccelerating and the capital environment is supportive without being permissive. US retail e-commerce reached \$340.2 billion in the second quarter of 2026, seasonally adjusted, 17.1% of total retail against 16.3% a year earlier, growing 12.2% year on year within 0.9 percentage points. That is roughly twice the growth rate of total retail.

Table 6. The Channel and Capital Backdrop, Q3 2026

Indicator	Reading	Source and date
US retail e-commerce, Q2 2026, seasonally adjusted	\$340.2 billion	Census Bureau, Aug 2026
E-commerce share of US retail	17.1%, from 16.3%	Census Bureau, Aug 2026
Year on year channel growth	12.2%, plus or minus 0.9%	Census Bureau, Aug 2026
Global 2025 deal value	\$4.9 trillion, up 40%	Bain, Jan 2026
M&A as a share of global GDP	4.2%, from 3.2%	Bain, Jan 2026
Dealmakers expecting flat or higher 2026 activity	Over 80%	Deloitte, Jan 2026
Federal funds target range	3.50% to 3.75%, held 9 to 3	Federal Reserve, 29 Jul 2026
H1 2026 e-commerce exit value	\$3.1 billion	PitchBook, July 2026

Source: US Census Bureau; Bain and Company; Deloitte; Federal Reserve; PitchBook, 2026.

Megadeals defined 2025: the top 20 US transactions absorbed roughly a third of total value, while capital allocation to M&A hit a 30-year low as a share of corporate uses. Deloitte found those expecting a somewhat higher 2026 up 17 points and those expecting significantly higher down 16, and places the opportunity in the midmarket.

Rates are on hold with a hawkish tilt. The Federal Open Market Committee held the target range at 3.50% to 3.75% on 29 July 2026 on a 9 to 3 vote, with Hammack, Kashkari and Logan each preferring a 25 basis point increase and inflation above the 2% objective. Plan against a flat to higher rate path.

Where do e-commerce multiples go from here?

Windsor Drake's base case holds the listed median at **2.2x EV/Revenue** through the end of 2027, on rates holding in range and dispersion by demand position persisting. The bull case reaches **2.9x** if the Federal Reserve resumes cutting, AI commerce infrastructure pulls platform multiples with it, and channel growth holds above 10%. The bear case reaches **1.5x** if the dissenting hawks prevail and acquisition costs rise again.

The asymmetry inside those paths matters more than the midpoint. In each, compression falls first and hardest on rented-demand retail, the cohort most exposed to rising acquisition cost and least protected by a repeat customer. Owned-demand assets carry the premium into all three. Position determines outcome considerably more than timing, which is why the premium is worth building toward rather than waiting for.

Key takeaways for founders

1. The composite is the wrong anchor

A single e-commerce multiple describes a distribution running 0.27x to 13.81x. Buyers price the position inside it, not the midpoint. Bring the comparable set and the demand classification, not the headline figure.

2. Demand ownership is the largest single lever on price

Owned-demand brands clear 4.43x gross profit against 1.51x for rented-demand retail, and 3.05x against 1.20x on revenue. A split surviving both denominators is structural, and it is the variable that came through the 2021 cycle intact.

3. Compute both denominators before a buyer does

Rank order is largely preserved across denominators at a Spearman correlation of 0.911, but the level moves materially. Carvana screens mid-pack on revenue and second dearest on gross profit. A seller who has run both is not surprised by either.

4. Margin structure changes the metric, not the value

Gross margin and EV/Revenue are effectively uncorrelated at a Pearson correlation of 0.046. Separate marketplace take-rate revenue from first-party revenue in reporting so the comparison a buyer runs is the right one.

5. Build the buyer list around demand position, not product category

The largest e-commerce exit of the first half of 2026 was an engagement platform buying a customer data layer, not a retailer buying a retailer. Rank acquirers by appetite for the position and understand each buyer's own multiple, which constrains what they can pay.

6. The evidence takes longer to assemble than the process takes to run

Cohort repeat-purchase tables that start at first order, eight quarters of acquisition cost by channel, contribution margin after acquisition cost, and the share of orders from owned channels are the lines a buyer diligences hardest. They take twelve to eighteen months to build, which is the real determinant of when a process can begin.

Sources

- [US Census Bureau. Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales. Q2 2026](#)
- [Federal Reserve. FOMC statement. 29 July 2026](#)
- [S&P Global Market Intelligence. company data. Aug 2026](#)
- [Bain and Company. Looking Ahead to 2026. Jan 2026](#)

- [Deloitte, 2026 M&A Trends Pulse Survey, Jan 2026](#)
- [PitchBook, Q2 2026 E-Commerce VC First Look, 14 Jul 2026](#)
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- [IBBA and M&A Source, Market Pulse, Q1 2026 and Q4 2025](#)
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- [CNBC, Thrasio files for bankruptcy, 28 February 2024](#)
- [Shopify Inc., Q2 2026 results, Aug 2026](#)
- [Global-e Online Ltd., Q2 2026 results, Aug 2026](#)
- [Amazon.com, Inc., Q2 2026 results, Jul 2026](#)
- [US Securities and Exchange Commission, constituent filings](#)

Methodology Note

Framework. The Owned Demand Premium is a Windsor Drake framework. Each constituent is assigned to demand infrastructure, demand venues, owned-demand brands or rented-demand retail by how the business obtains its next order rather than what it sells, with counts published beside every cohort. Carvana sits in the rented cohort on demand structure and prices near the top of the set on gross profit, so cohort medians are published including it, at 2.9 and 2.5 times, and excluding it, at 3.9 and 4.1 times.

The comparable set. Twenty-one listed constituents: Shopify, Global-E, Wix, VTEX, Commerce.com, Amazon, eBay, Etsy, MercadoLibre, PDD Holdings, Coupang, Hims and Hers, FIGS, Warby Parker, Chewy, Revolve Group, Carvana, Wayfair, ThredUp, Stitch Fix and 1-800-Flowers. Enterprise value, trailing twelve month revenue, gross margin and EV/Revenue are from S&P Global Market Intelligence company data retrieved 19 to 21 August 2026, trailing periods ending on each company's most recently reported quarter. Commerce.com is in the revenue set and outside the gross-profit statistics, where a comparable gross margin was not available.

How the figures were computed. EV/Gross Profit is EV/Revenue divided by gross margin. Medians and quartiles are computed on the full set as of 21 August 2026, and the Pearson and Spearman correlations across the 20 constituents carrying a margin denominator. No multiple here is licensed from a valuation vendor.

Derived estimates. The outlook scenarios of 2.9x, 2.2x and 1.5x are Windsor Drake's forward view and labelled as such wherever they appear. The level they run from is computed from market data on the date stated. No other figure here is estimated or interpolated.

Source standard, synthesis and attribution. Every figure carries a named institution and a date, attributed at the point of use and listed above. The owner-operated market is benchmarked against the IBBA and M&A Source Market Pulse advisor survey of transactions up to \$50 million. Buyer identity and transaction structure draw on the Windsor Drake Exit Index, 507 sourced transactions across 26 sub-sectors, each carrying a source

URL and a confidence grade. Under 4% of transactions in this sector carry a public multiple, so the comparable set a seller constructs is the benchmark that frames the negotiation.