# Dark days for e-Commerce

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**Dan Matthews**, *Technical Architect at Episerver, has been announced as one of the speakers at the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Conference 2018 to be held at Vodaworld on 8 Feb. He shares his insights on* **eCommerce and Inbound Marketing**.

Scientists have made a material so utterly and totally black that a human eye cannot understand what it is seeing. The substance, called 'Vantablack', absorbs over 99.9% of light. Yet on 24th November 2017, many E-Commerce vendors felt even darker than that. For them, it wasn't so much Black Friday as Vantablack Friday. On the day they should have smashed sales targets, they missed them by a mile. But why? Apparently, there was no problem with demand. There were plenty of consumers out there who wanted to buy stuff. The problem was closer to home — their own websites which ended up buckling under the weight. Big South African vendor sites such as Takealot and many others simply crashed with the traffic — with varying degrees of gracefulness. In many cases, the sites were inaccessible for much of the day.

Why did this happen? Why didn't E-Commerce vendors predict this? After all, it's not like Black Friday was a surprise. These vendors had been preparing discounts and doing marketing about it for weeks previously — months even. They proudly announced how ready they were. The problem wasn't with the marketing vision of those E-Commerce vendors. They knew what they wanted to sell and how to market it. They were

ready. No, the problem was much more to do with their technical vision. Or, more specifically, two psychological blocks that we in South Africa suffer from when it comes to selling via digital channels.

Firstly, we want to do it all ourselves. We think that our own situation is so unique in South Africa that no-one else could possibly do E-Commerce like us, and so we want to build our own E-Commerce platforms. Or, sometimes, get an open source or other inferior platform not based on Enterprise standards and then try and 'make it work' for us. Problem is, it doesn't work. Not well, anyway. We throw huge sums of money towards building or customising these platforms, but then when the crunch comes, they don't stand up to scrutiny. And that costs us money. Lots of money. Trying to do things our own way might have seemed cheaper and more ideal at the start, but it was false economy.

Secondly, we're scared of The Cloud. Really, we are. We pretend not to be, and we boast about how we put our personal documents on Google Drive because we're so Cloud-comfy, but as soon as it comes to hosting E-Commerce and other digital channels, we retreat back into the comfort of server rooms and local hosting. Is this wise? We will never be able to invest the kind of money in our server rooms and local hosting that has been invested into the Cloud. Microsoft and Amazon have hugely capable, scalable and secure resources available to use which, in real cost of ownership, can be far preferable to our DIY approach. Especially when you consider those tens of thousands of customers we lost simply because we couldn't scale when we needed to.

So where to from here? It's time for us in South Africa to shake off our preconceptions. E-Commerce here is no

different to anywhere. Yes, we have certain regulatory constraints and logistical concerns here, but nothing that should prevent us from purchasing a best-of-breed Enterprise level digital platform that takes us 90% of the way. There's nothing new under the sun, and we'd do well to take advantage of what's out there. And then we must realise that the world, and the Cloud, is not out to get us. They are there to enable us to scale and control costs.

Let's make our next platform decision (or replatform decision) our last. Let's select a world beating digital platform for all our content, commerce and digital marketing needs. Let's run it in the Cloud. And let's leave last year to be our one and only Vantablack Friday.