

The eCommerce Marketing Atlas

# A Blueprint for Modern eCommerce Businesses



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# What is this eBook?

At its early stages, eCommerce usually meant having a single website work as a storefront. Today however, online businesses must sustain their presence on many different fronts: the website, the phone app, the smartwatch app, the display in a shopping mall, the voice activated personal assistant, and so on. This omnichannel presence is going to be an even bigger issue in the near future, as 25% of all retail sales globally are predicted to be coming from eCommerce by 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Where does this emphasis on omnichannel come from?

The answer is “experience”, that of the user/consumer. No matter what kind of a market we think of, the easiest way to make sure that the potential users find the product is by offering a positive experience. While this positivity is pretty subjective and can be defined in a million different ways, the principles are not that different when you think about it: ease of access, consistency, fast and hassle-free, flexible, personalized, and responsive. In fact, in most cases where an online business is struggling, finding the actual problem is rather easy, it is finding and applying the solution that requires effort.



**According to Gartner, 64% of consumers find customer experience more important than price!**<sup>2</sup>

This guide is meant to be used like a handbook: each chapter deals with one of the major issues concerning user experience and attempts to offer possible solutions. While it can be read from cover to cover for an all-encompassing perspective, each chapter is also written in a way so it can be read independently, in case you are interested in only a few issues.

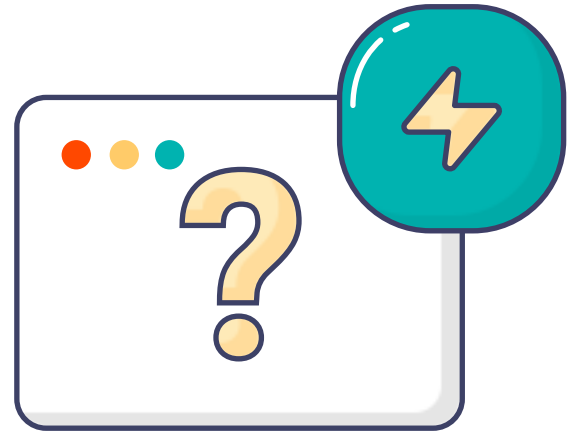
**The first three chapters (1, 2, and 3)** deal directly with “user experience” and its relevance in eCommerce. These chapters are meant to provide you with a solid understanding of eCommerce-specific marketing strategies.

**The next two chapters (4 and 5)** deal specifically with “content”, how to understand it, how to optimize it, and how to create the best possible infrastructure necessary for its maintenance.

**The last three chapters (6, 7, and 8)** are practical guides, meant to help you navigate after having everything set into place. The sixth chapter is a detailed look on SEO, and the seventh chapter offers a glimpse in the near future of eCommerce.

**The last chapter (8)** is dedicated solely to what we believe is the solution to many of the problems introduced in the earlier chapters, and also the perfect way to tackle the incoming trends mentioned in chapter 7.

# How is this eBook going to help you?



## ✓ Faster User Experience

A delay in load time of just one second can leave you with a 7% reduction in conversions.<sup>3</sup>

- The speed and responsiveness of your eCommerce storefront is directly affected by the way your content is managed. Learn how to drastically improve your users' experiences by implementing modular content blocks, optimizing your content strategies, and perfecting your team's workflow.

## ✓ Personalized Customer Journeys

33% of consumers who ended their relationship with a company, did so because their experience was not personalized enough<sup>4</sup>

- Your content is delivered through your CMS. Learn how to take advantage of fully customizable content blocks, personalized customer journeys, and recent AI developments to create deeply personalized experiences.

## ✓ True Omnichannel Presence

There is a 287% increased chance of purchase if the product is available on 3 or more channels.<sup>5</sup>

Only 29% of customers believe they receive the same quality across all channels.<sup>6</sup>

- Omnichannel is not only existing on multiple platforms, but delivering the exact same quality across platforms simultaneously. Learn how to showcase your products and deliver your personalized content on every digital touchpoint (including emerging technologies such as VR headsets) at the same time.

## ✓ Saving Resources

Automation, improved communication, centralized content hub (as opposed to silos), and more independence for content creators can substantially affect the way resources are spent.

- Learn how to save considerable amounts of time and money spent on content management by implementing automation, content re-purposing, empowering your marketers to create content independently from developers, and allowing your team to focus on more creative tasks.

## ✔ Future-proofing Your Business

Headless eCommerce and best-of-breed technologies are set to be the dominant force in the near future, with the push already in place and many businesses making the jump.<sup>7</sup>

In 2020, Gartner called best-of-breed (“composable”) solutions the way to “move forward” and “future-proof digital commerce experiences”.<sup>8</sup>

- Learn what best-of-breed solutions are, how they are different from the traditional solutions, and how they are meant to be implemented.
- Understand how headless eCommerce works, how to turn a business “headless”, and what to expect of the market in the near future.

# Experience-based and personally tailored eCommerce marketing



*What makes some marketing campaigns stand out among others? How are you supposed to factor in the potential consumers' experiences in your marketing tasks? In this chapter, we will explore types of eCommerce marketing that will aid you and your brand in designing a fundamental strategy built to last.*

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eCommerce is an ever-evolving industry that is projected to grow exponentially, even considering the (currently ongoing) market instabilities caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. More than ever, the eCommerce industry is interconnected between the different marketing practices contributing to one another, lending a hand to the way we design, structure, and appeal to different audiences and products with design, customer experience, and sales. With customers looking for new and attractive content that resonates with them, brands must look to a level of personalization that moves with the customer, throughout the different types of eCommerce marketing.

## What is eCommerce marketing?

eCommerce Marketing is the process amongst online retailers to drive awareness and grow traffic in online sales and to customers to establish loyalty. Moreover, eCommerce marketers are likely to apply traditional marketing principles such as advertisements, SEO, social media, influencer, affiliate, and referral marketing, email marketing, and/or content marketing through a multichannel or omnichannel

approach with the main goal of bringing in more visitors, site traffic, awareness and thus, more online purchases.

## eCommerce marketing strategy & planning

When looking at building your eCommerce Marketing strategy, the prerequisites point towards defining who you are as a brand from your value proposition, your goals, and objectives, and simply KPIs your brand would like to reach. Here are some points to consider when structuring your eCommerce Marketing strategy:

- **Consider your goals, objectives, and KPIs:** This can include specific metrics such as the goal to 'increase sales by x%' or 'increase conversion rate by X%' during a specific period of time or an activity
- **Define your target audience, market, and personas:** A simple way to break this down is through knowing their age group, gender demographics, geographical location, and purchasing habits/powers
- **Assess your current situation:** This step is essential to better understand the steps that need to be taken from where you are as a brand, keeping the customer and market in mind, to best reach your target goals and KPIs
- **Take time to understand your product's lifecycle:** This helps to not only understand how the product fits into your customer's journey but also the overall distribution needed for the product to determine the most appropriate pricing

## Types of eCommerce marketing

There is no rule of thumb on what is the best eCommerce marketing strategy, but rather what fits and resonates best with your brand's audience, industry, and products.

### 1. Search engine marketing

When we talk about "Search Engine Marketing" (SEM), this includes both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and paid advertising (also known as Search Engine Advertising or SEA). SEO lends to the ranking of your site in Google searches to optimize your content or a certain landing page, whereas SEM involves elements such as a pay-per-click campaign (PPC), product-search ad campaigns that may show up in Google Shopping, or display campaigns, all in which are done through paying and bidding to reach the highest ranks in search engine results.

eCommerce stores and marketers can benefit from such campaigns as it puts your storefront's landing page at the top of search results. Thus, increasing the likelihood that a customer browsing will most likely click-through and purchase something in your store.



**What is PPC? It's an advertising model where brands (or advertisers) pay a few each time one of their advertisements is clicked on. Imagine searching for a specific product on Google, and the first results you see are 'Sponsored' or 'Ad'. Through a brand's bidding for advertising placement in Google, this shows up as a way for brands to buy visits to their site through ranking first in search results rather than doing so organically.**



### 2. Email marketing

Email marketing could be considered as the diamond in the rough of eCommerce marketing. Why? It can be fully automated at the touch of your fingertips - meaning your brand can set up a drip campaign based on different points of the customer user journey to remind, communicate and build a relationship with your customer base. Email marketing is regarded as one of the top methods of communication amongst consumers, contributing to a median ROI of 122%.<sup>9</sup> Yet with every campaign launched, matters of privacy and data privacy must be kept in consideration for every eCommerce brand looking into email marketing, through a level of trust and transparency that must be upheld between brand and customer.



**A drip campaign is a method used in marketing to drive awareness and new or existing customers (usually email or newsletter subscribers) through lead nurturing in the form of emails over a period of time, or through specific trigger points within the customer user journey and marketing/sales funnel.**

Elements of email marketing coincide with the way a customer thinks and behaves as cued by the overall customer experience and journey. Some ways use email marketing along the customer journey are:



- **Post-purchase emails**

Within the customer journey, once they purchase a product from your website and have agreed in receiving emails from you, most likely in the checkout process, make sure to send a follow-up email after their product is delivered.

This allows the conversation to continue between you and your customer to inform them of their purchase, incentives, and promotions while being a prime platform to do some brand storytelling.

A post-purchase follow-up also shows your customers that you as a brand care beyond their purchase, and are interested in the impact and significance of your product in their lives, such as inviting them for feedback towards their overall experience.

- **Follow-up on abandoned shopping carts**

More often than not, customers abandon their shopping carts for numerous reasons with roughly 60 - 80% of online shopping carts being abandoned before completing a purchase.<sup>10</sup> Whether that be because of poor loading speeds and site performance, poor UX/UI design, customer service, or simply that your customer has gotten lost within the whole customer purchasing journey - a simple way to redirect your customers back to their purchasing journey is to simply email them back.

Such an email can include offering assistance throughout their journey to redirect them back towards your eCommerce store.



### 3. Content marketing

Considering that everything you put on your site is 'content', they can in some ways be used and adapted to create content that supports your brand to capture your audience's attention, and bring them to your site. For eCommerce stores, the average conversion rate of those with some sort of content marketing is nearly 6 times (2.9%) more than sites without any content marketing (0.5%).<sup>11</sup>

eCommerce content marketing consists of various types of assets, such as blogs, product guides, and details, GIFs, videos, or images - it can be anything that serves its purpose to attract your customers, and thus, drives sales. When it comes to marketing your content, your brand does not need to explicitly sell your products to your customer, but rather take the opportunity to educate, explain, and raise your brand's awareness.

For example, if your eCommerce store is selling a line of new leggings, look into writing about the different features and highlights that the product line has rather than into the leggings itself. Hand-in-hand with Google searches, individuals are more likely to search for a type of leggings that could be related to a certain activity. For example, searching "What kind of leggings are the best for running?" or "What kind of leggings are the best for yoga?" - allows you to promote the features and benefits of your product through storytelling.

#### 4. Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing, or referral marketing, is considered one of the most opportune eCommerce marketing strategies with your customers spreading the word to your brand through word-of-mouth and reviews. Most usually, affiliates or influencers to a business help sell your brand's products online for a commission, with the main goal of driving traffic to your product pages. According to 99 Firms statistics, 81% of brands use affiliate marketing whether that be through the use of social media influencers, affiliates, or traditional word-of-mouth.<sup>12</sup>

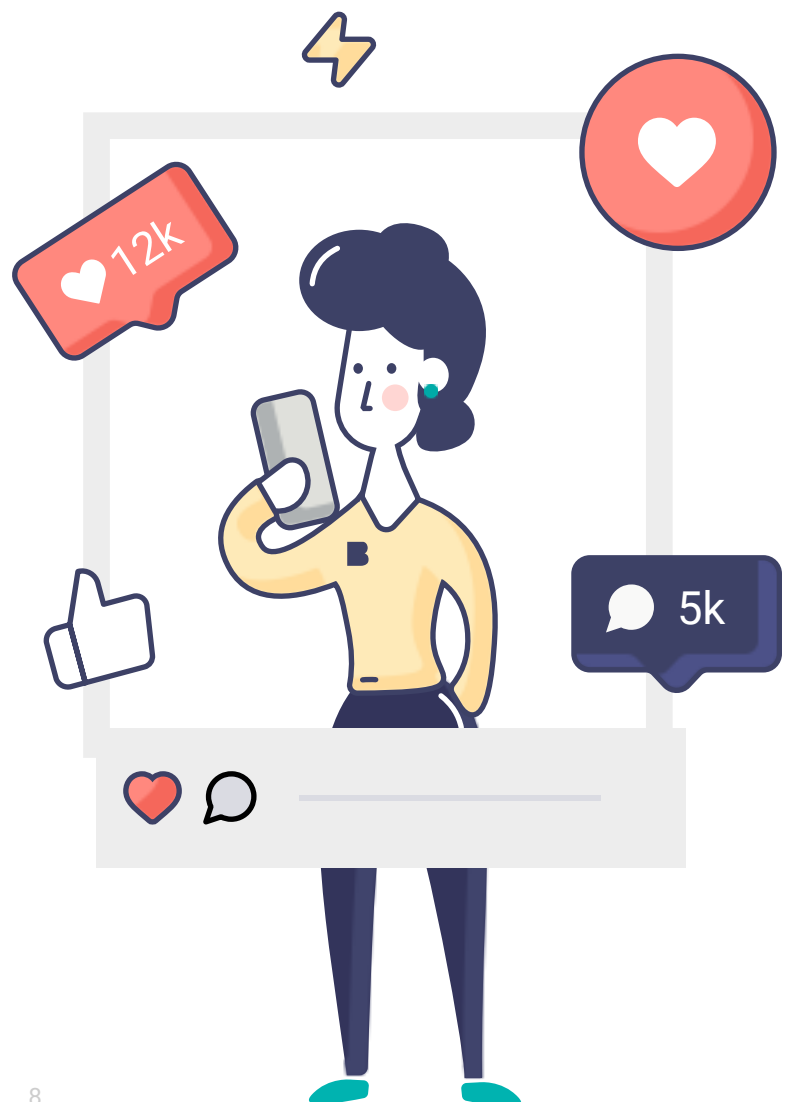
When using affiliate marketing, the customer is key in making sure that their overall experience was pleasant and therefore, is more likely to refer your brand and products to their family and friends. Not only will this leverage your customer base as 'happy customers' and boost your revenue, but also serves as an acquisition tool in bringing in new customers, while retaining your current customer base with incentives, discounts such as referral discounts or membership birthday discounts, or free shipping.

Another way to conduct affiliate marketing to your eCommerce business is through establishing a loyalty program either through collecting points per purchase (that would lead to a certain free product, free shipping, or discount), as well as a referral program based on the same principle but through points per referral.

#### Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing could be considered a branch of affiliate marketing, yet focuses more on influencing your brand's target marketing. According to a 2019 study, 93% of surveyed marketers use influencers for their business on various social media platforms, in addition to 57% of marketers contributing influencer-generated content outperforming their own brand content.<sup>13</sup>

Influencers are key to building audience communities that like, trust, and know them, making it an opportunity for your brand to collaborate your online product and brand through the means of a recommendation or "sponsored post" through social media.



## 5. Instagram marketing

More than ever, eCommerce stores have their horizons set on social media. Most specifically, towards visual content and branding that can help spur the customers from social media platforms towards their store, and even, with certain social media platforms that already have a built-in-store feature available.

One of these platforms that recurrently performs best is Instagram, with statistics by the platform (acquired by Facebook) quoting:<sup>14</sup>

- 83% of users use Instagram to discover new products and services on the platform
- 81% of users use the platform to research products or services
- 80% use Instagram as a decision-making factor on whether to buy a product or service
- 80% of all shared-content on Instagram is shared via Instagram Stories, versus Instagram Posts making up only 20% of shared content (in German-speaking countries/DACH)<sup>15</sup>

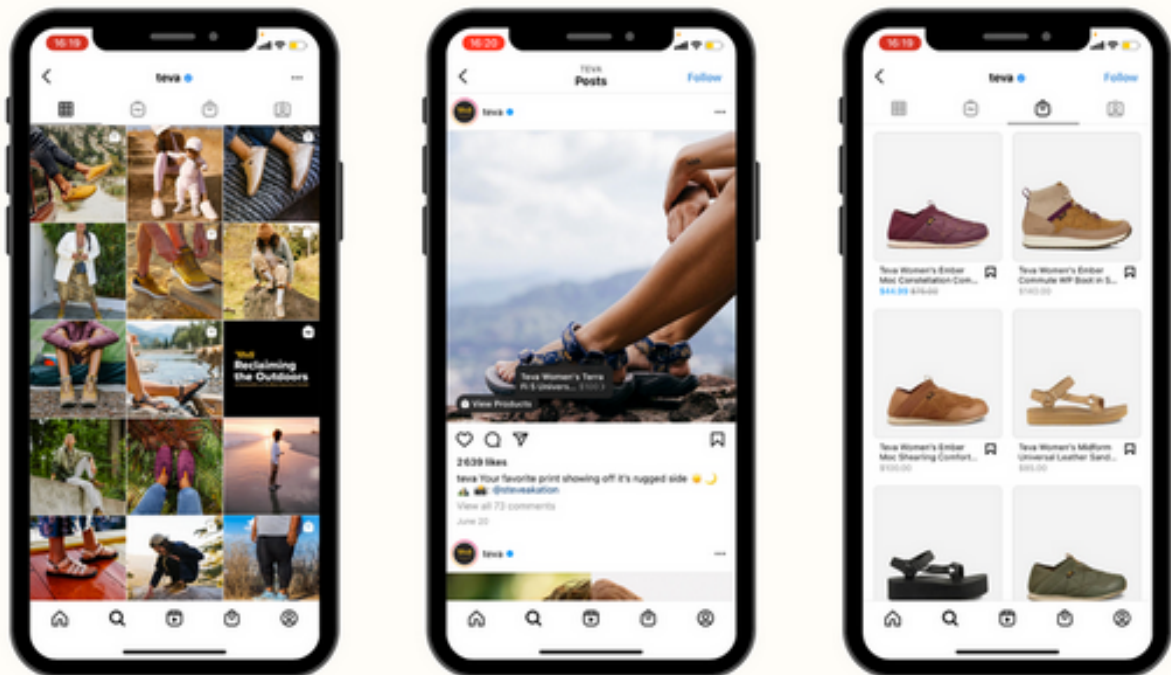
With this in mind and Instagram's Shopping feature, users can now search for a specific product from a brand as well as use product tags, add it to their in-app shopping cart, and checkout. When marketing and creating brand content through Instagram, make sure to keep these best practices as told by Omnisend<sup>16</sup> in mind:



- **Post with a consistent content schedule:** According to Sprout Social,<sup>17</sup> the best times to engage and post-retail and consumer goods are Tuesday through Friday from 11 am to 3 pm. On top of that, the ultimate best time and day to post-consumer goods on Instagram is noted to be Wednesdays at 3 pm, whereas the worst day is Sunday
- **Branding 101 - Your color scheme and theme:** From a visual standpoint, customers look for a profile that keeps a clean and clear layout to story-tell through your photo grid accordingly. One way to do that is by keeping a general color scheme/palette and theme throughout the profile.
- **Relevant hashtags:** Instagram is one of the platforms that heavily rely on the use of hashtags. Consider using hashtags relevant to your brand, your product, and the audience - the more the merrier!

- **Update your biography:** So your customers have made it to your Instagram, but how do they get from your profile to your actual store? Don't forget to put your eCommerce store's link in the bio and refer to it in your posts to make sure your potential customers know where to go
- **Engage with your customers and content creators:** If a customer comments or engages with your content, interact with them. Not only does it break down the communication barriers between brand and customer, but also acts as an opportunity to get to know your customers and find a way to personalize their experiences to your brand.

A great example of a brand that takes on the following best practices is sandal brand, [Teva](#):



## Key Takeaway

The crème de la crème of eCommerce marketing points to personalization and omnichannel tactics. It is no secret that companies that incorporate a level of personalization to their marketing, see revenue increases ranging from 6-10%.<sup>18</sup> On top of that according to this study, omnichannel personalization specifically sees an engagement lift of 4.3 times higher than the industry benchmark.<sup>19</sup>

This means that consumers are more than likely to engage with a brand's content if it is personalized to them (such towards their interests or persona type) across various channels and devices.

It is essential for marketers and sales managers alike in looking forwards and upwards as our ways of spending and consuming gradually evolve. eCommerce marketing in itself arguably will no longer be structured around short-term strategies of virality and niche marketing to generate quick sales, but rather towards a marketing strategy that will go the distance.

# Customer journeys and personalized experiences



*Have you ever looked back on how you purchased something? What made you want to buy that specific product or service? Was there research done before? Were there any pain-points?*

*These are the essential questions to ask when creating and understanding the customer journey. It's an integral part of understanding the steps and thought processes a customer may have throughout their user-experience and most commonly, their buying experience.*

Understanding your customer is vital, and in turn, helps in maintaining or increasing your customer retention, maximizing profits for your business, and adding value to both your customer and business

<sup>20</sup>  
**A 2019 Salesforce study found that:**

- In 2018, 87% percent of shoppers begin their purchasing hunt from a digital channel
- 67% of shoppers say they feel retailers don't truly know and understand them

Let's explore the customer journey, how to map it in understanding the process and experience from beginning to end.

## What is the customer journey for?

Most commonly used in eCommerce, a customer journey can simply start using personas, going through an experience of purchasing and interaction with a product or service. approach with the main goal of bringing in more visitors, site traffic, awareness and thus, more online purchases.

Get to know your different types of customers; think of the typical marketing persona made up of demographics, where they live, their income, their hobbies, and/or interests. Different customers have different journeys - for example, a millennial buyer personally would typically become aware of a product through social media, research it on a mobile phone, and then make their purchase through a desktop computer.

It is worth mentioning that there are some different frameworks and concepts that define the stages of the customer journey under different names such as the AIDA model<sup>21</sup> or the "See-Think-Do-Care Framework" as promoted by Google. For the purpose of this chapter, we will follow the journey based on customer touchpoints.

### **Using that, the customer journey can be made up of 4 distinct stages with several touchpoints along the process:**

- Awareness
- Consideration
- Decision (Buying)
- Post-Purchase Reflection

When mapping, make sure to involve your stakeholders in the process to gain different perspectives, from marketing to sales, to UX/UI and tech-development. With this, you will be able to better empathize, understand, and meet a customer's expectations before, during, and after the sales. The goal is to gain insights into common customer pain points, allowing you to better optimize and personalize the overall customer experience to your brand or business.

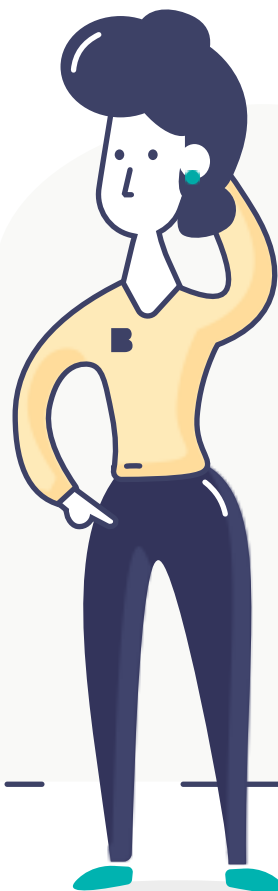
So where does it all actually start and end?

These include in-process KPIs and output KPIs as indicated from Google's KPI framework:

- In-Process KPIs: This is useful as an indicator or milestone mark in your customer journey mapping - it's good to put in the plan or map itself, however, is not ultimately what you are looking for as an outcome as a brand.
- Output KPIs: These are the most important KPIs, being the end-goal and results your brand wants to achieve.

## What are the four stages of a customer's journey?

When going through the customer journey and mapping it; some moments might last seconds, whilst others can continue for days, weeks, or months depending on each customer.





## 1. Awareness stage

Keep in mind that consumers are now gaining awareness through multiple channels (omnichannel), whether that be from social media, search engines, reviews, blogs, or ads. In your role as a brand, you must take into account the in-process KPI of your ability to reach people with your message and its view ability, as well as consequently your Share of Voice (SoV - the percentage of reach you are able to obtain compared to your competitor).

The first step, before even stepping foot into your website, begins outside. Most typically, customers start their journey visiting and searching on Google (or other search engines) and through social media. 51% of customers<sup>23</sup> say they conduct pre-purchase research via Google, whereas 54% of customers<sup>24</sup> conduct pre-purchase research through social media. This means that the first step in awareness begins from a simple search. If your website has been optimized accordingly (or purchased ads for specific search terms), it's most probable your product will appear at the top of the Google Search listing, thus, being at the front of a customer's search and awareness. The **output KPI** here is awareness - being at the top-of-mind with your customers, to think about your brand and the benefits you provide, therefore increasing your likelihood of sales.

## 2. Consideration stage

From there, hopefully, your customer has clicked through to your website! The next step involves consideration and research, such as debating your product vs. another,

considering prices, and weighing the features and benefits between you and your competitors. The in-process KPI is to consider the reach of people with some commercial content as well – i.e. a list that compiles signals you as a brand deem suited for commercial interest and intent in your brand and products. This can include anything from those visiting your website, downloading an application, or choosing to watch a video on social platforms.

The key important factors here are brand awareness, quality, usability, design, and customer service. Look to increase brand awareness in your product space; whether that be through improving customer relations, brand storytelling, reviews that solidify your brand, advertisements, or even considering the usability and design of your website geared towards a good first impression and authenticity.

Consequently, the **output KPI** as a result of the key important factors mentioned, are people gaining that commercial intent to browse and look around in your industry. The point is for potential customers to look for you rather than the competition, increasing your share in branded searches for example.

## 3. Decision (buying) stage

The customer is buying your product! Make sure to not leave the customer unattended - it's important to acknowledge their transaction and time in purchasing your product or service. Include things like an automated welcome message, keep in touch, or sign up to establish a relationship between you and your customer, while continuing on the customer journey.

Just like the 'Consideration Stage' the **in-process KPIs** is to focus on signals for your customers with commercial intent; from those who have gone through the customer journey and are ready to make a purchase or those who may have abandoned their purchase, as well as those who search key terms such as "buy [term]" etc.

Think of it as a cycle, your customers and potential leads will continually be in the loop of (re-)consideration and buying until they make the purchase itself. It is important again, to not leave the customer unattended. Design and usability additionally come into play here, with the need to ensure the customer journey from accessing your website to payment are as seamless and convenient as possible.

The ultimate **output KPI** in this stage is financial, specifically as the 'most important financial KPI'. This needs to be revised internally with your business' owners within your brand to distinguish whether it is top-line revenue growth, bottom-line profit, or the two. Whichever one it is, all efforts must go towards what is considered the most important financial KPI.

#### 4. Post-purchase reflection

Often overlooked, the post-purchasing stage, or reflection phase, is key to retaining your customer. Considered as an in-process KPI of reaching out to your existing customers, this involves maintaining customer satisfaction in continuing to solve their problems in anticipation of future issues that may arise, communicating to develop

customer loyalty, and advocate their voices, all post-purchase

If you've passed through all the phases successfully, your customers are surely becoming fans. Your customer's voices are the best marketing in advocating and influencing further purchases and sales. As a brand, you can tap in by asking them for feedback, and in return, the output KPI, provide rewards or affiliate/referral schemes (if appropriate) as a driver to improve sales and the repeat purchase rate.

#### How do I measure overall success?

As mentioned above, a key measure is looking towards that aid in setting a bar in which your brand can achieve for both your customers and business.

To summarize the KPI points from each stage, we can look to this table as an overall indicator (adapted from Google's KPI Framework):

Stages	In-Process KPIs	Output KPIs
Awareness Stage	Reach & Share of Voice (SoV)	Awareness
Consideration Stage	Reach of people showing some commercial interest	Searches of brand
Decision (Buying) Stage	Focus on signal reach for people with lots of commercial interest	Whichever financial KPI your brand owners are committed to
Post-Purchase Stage	Reach to existing customers	Repeat purchase rate

Mapping the customer journey is only the first step. Putting the journey into practice, in measuring success, is the reflection of the overall satisfaction of your customer with your brand and the overall experience you are providing. In doing so by using the phases we explored above, we unite these phases together to see the overall willingness of customers recommending your product/service to others and repurchases, using a measurement such as a [Net Promoter Score \(NPS\)](#)

**Feedback is king!** Reach out to your customers and ask about their overall experience and impressions.

### Do I need a customer journey for my business?

Yes! Mapping the customer journey helps you not only understand your customers, but also realign with your intentions, KPIs, and purpose as a brand - ultimately to align your marketing and website accordingly to provide the most seamless experience possible.

if you feel that your current eCommerce set up and marketing website is minimal, take a look at [Storyblok](#).

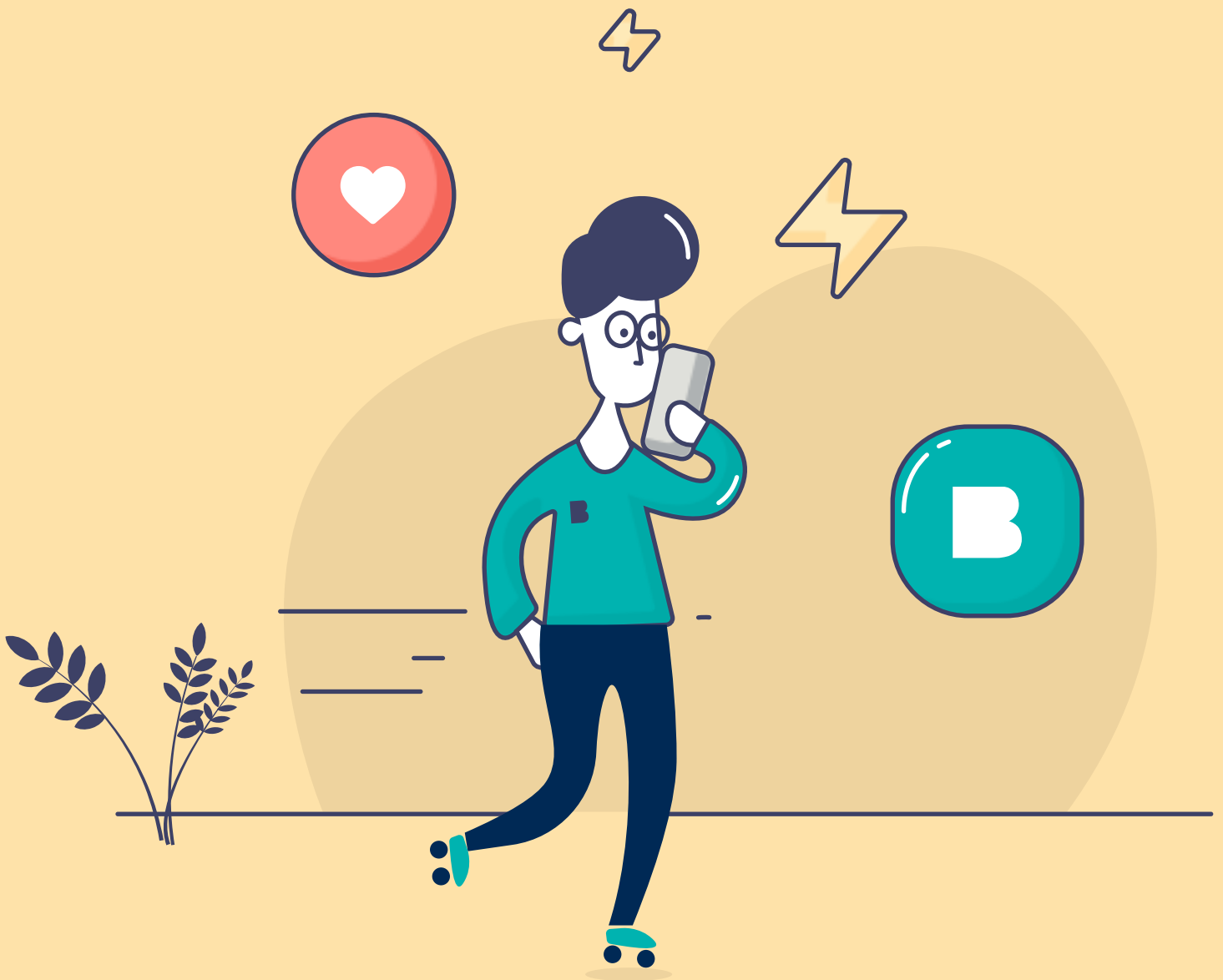
Storyblok helps you organize all your content in one place for all your digital channels, along with features alongside to best optimize your customer's eCommerce website experience.



## Key Takeaway

Take time to research and getting to know your customers to create an effective customer journey map. Only then, are you able to distinguish and identify key relationship-building points, capture attention-points, and move with your customers in creating an experience that reaps the benefits and creates value. The absolute main point is to **always place and consider your customer at the center of everything.**

# Storytelling and building a personal connection



*Everyone has a story to tell - between narrator and listener, humans love stories, they inspire us and motivate us, creating a connection to the essences and values of who we are. As consumers, those emotions and resonations can influence the way we interact and perceive a brand.*

*Such as with eCommerce, stories are everywhere, making it one of the most effective methods used by eCommerce businesses. Consumers are constantly on the move to get what they want, in the most seamless way possible, without wasting time or money. Storytelling, in the context of eCommerce, allows boosting value not only to your content but also increases brand loyalty and captivates your audience, market, and industry amongst the competition.*

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## What is eCommerce storytelling?

Storytelling in itself defines the social and cultural activity of sharing stories from one another, from the roots of bonfire anecdotes to narratives of fiction and non-fiction describing plots and characters for the means of providing entertainment, cultural preservation, education, and morals.

eCommerce storytelling focuses on the narrative of your company or brand and its products, and how you tell that "story" to your customers and audience. Telling a simple story is easy, but telling a story that sells, and considers different audiences, demographics, and your customers' tastes, takes investment. Brands can show their determination in getting to know their customers, taking the time to listen and interact with them, while understanding any

pain-points they may face during the customer journey, or in products they use. **Stories cannot be generic**, pointing to the need for personalization in your brand's narrative, where your customer is the main character, your brand or product the secondary characters, and your stage ranging from your webpage, social media platform, to email marketing.

Amongst an information overload that happens in every customer's eCommerce journey, storytelling not only shows authenticity but promotes your unique brand voice, showing that you offer more than just your product, but the time and effort behind those products and brand.

Storytelling "between the lines" - this is what you want for your eCommerce company, a story that captivates and embodies who you are as a brand, and how you want to resonate with your values and essentially, products, to your customers and audience as well. In this article, we will explore tips and tricks to incorporate into your brand's storytelling to not only make your brand more memorable but to foster customer loyalty and generate engagement to sales and conversions.

## What does it take to tell a successful story for your eCommerce brand?

eCommerce brands are faced with today's hyper-competitive landscape of capturing their audience's attention. More so, the current landscape requires more than just an eye-catching website with a smooth and seamless purchasing and checkout journey. Customers are no longer moving linearly, and are instead, interacting with

omnichannel content, seeking experiences that resonate with them.

### 1. How do your customers and audience feel using your products?

According to a study by the Harris Group,<sup>25</sup> **more than 78% of millennials would choose to spend money on a desirable experience or event rather than buying something desirable.** It is all within getting to know how your customers and audience feel and can feel about using your products, then urging them into the purchasing journey of buying your product afterward.

Storytelling in this context does not necessarily mean talking solely about the product, but by showing and communicating with your audience a task, for example, that was done before using the product, versus after having your product. It's an opportunity to hone in on using emotional language and visualization, showing the before-and-after difference and the shift to an overall positive experience.

**Remember: show, don't tell!**

The advice of 'show, don't tell' resonates with how you present yourself as a brand, and the deeper underlying stories and content you wish to tell. You don't just blatantly say what you want to say, you illustrate it in the voice and eyes of your customer, showing them the journey, the ups and downs, and the effort you've taken to get to that point.

Imagine you're a brand that sells skis - you wouldn't say you're the brand with the "world's best skis", you tell the story of learning to ski, someone using the skis the

first time up a mountain (or even the story of the skis touching snow for the first time), the sensation the skier gets going through the snow, broken bones along the way, how that skier takes care of the skis post-season, and pistes your skis have conquered.



**An example of storytelling through showing, not telling is the Thai brand Peppermint Field, in an advertisement for their nose inhaler - a story of a couple on their anniversary date as it unfolds into chaos and how a simple nose inhaler saves the day. You can [watch the video here](#).**

### 2. Positioning through values: selling the idea of what your product does in telling a good story

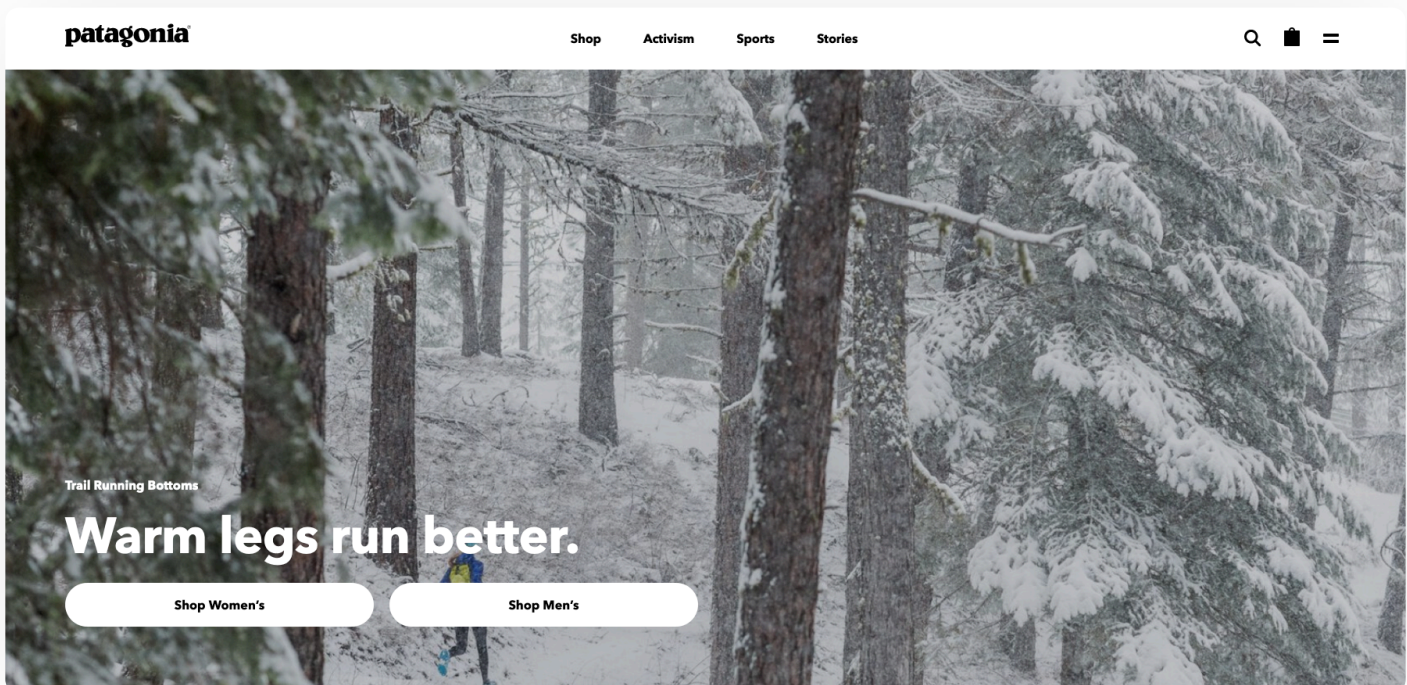
One of the most important starting points in telling a good story is to be as authentic as possible. To do so, think about what makes your brand memorable and unique, lending to building a story around the message you want to convey, with the values and emotions you want to portray to your audience (remember, show, don't tell).

An example of this is seen with outdoor apparel brand, Patagonia. Through the use of their eCommerce landing page, a designated 'Stories' area on their website and social media accounts, Patagonia focuses on stories that resonate with their brand values and audience. While most brands would cut to the chase in promoting their best-selling products, Patagonia takes the time to tell the story of their humble beginnings, and stories that resonate with their target audience of

outdoor enthusiasts and environmentally-conscious consumers.

Stories are seen with awning images of the natural world, society, and individuals who live with it, as well as the menaces it faces. This makes Patagonia a prime example of telling a good story while highlighting what their product can do - quality outdoor apparel and gear made responsibly for people and the environment, whichever natural environment you choose to venture to.

Not only that, Patagonia goes further in concreting their brand values to their customers, solving another customer concern of fast-fashion and its impact on the environment, with the company's promise and commitment to allocating 1% of sales towards the preservation and restoration of the world's natural environment.



### 3. Do your customers think and feel like you?

Another way to better understand your customers is by reaching out and communicating with them. An invitation to join your brand's conversation with user-generated content that can be shared on your website as well as prominently displayed on social media.

User-generated content can be categorized as any kind of content, such as videos, text, images, reviews, or reels, created by people

and consumers, where brands will share user-generated content through their social media accounts or website typically. According to a survey conducted by Stackla,<sup>26</sup> consumers are 2.4 times more likely to consider user-generated content as more authentic compared to content created by brands, while 80% of consumers say user-generated content highly influences their purchasing decision and journey.



**Additionally, a Nielsen study found:**<sup>27</sup>

- Online consumer reviews are regarded as the second most trusted source of brand information
- 92% of consumers trust recommendations through word-of-mouth from people they know
- 70% of eCommerce consumers trust online public/consumer opinions and content

Not only does user-generated content drive purchase intent and decisions amongst consumers, but points to the fact user-generated content promotes credibility amongst consumers while adding a factor of genuine content from consumer to brand. It creates brand desire, showcases and inspires brand loyalty amongst customers, and allows your brand to

consequently build up a content library to always have relevant material to story-tell and share while getting in touch with your consumers.

An example of this can be found from [Viva Dogs](#), a monthly subscription service of dog toys and healthy-nutrition snacks that utilizes their Instagram primarily through user-generated content, where they encourage pet owners to send images of their dogs while enjoying their product.

[How this works](#)[Our boxes](#)[We like to help](#)[Lookbook](#)[Vivacats](#)[My account](#)

### A monthly box with the best products for your dog

- ✓ No commitment. Pause or cancel anytime.
- ✓ Save, its value is higher than the price you pay.
- ✓ 10% of our profits go to shelters.

[Subscribe](#)

Try out [vivadogs](#) with next months box

#### 4. Keeping the message simple, shareable, and relevant

Every story has a message to tell - in creating a central and shareable message that resonates with your brand's values such as a call to action (CTA). A simple call to action can be used across multiple channels, giving you the benefit of projecting your voice as a brand. Make sure you hone down on the message you want to convey, making it easy to understand and to the point. Once you have this in hand, go further in interacting with your users, asking about their experiences, reactions, and feelings to the CTA and thus, how you can create a story stemming from that CTA.



**Look at Nike's 'Just Do It'** - a universal, simple, and to-the-point call to action. The 'It' could be anything – getting out of bed in the morning, taking the first step in a run, climbing the highest mountains, or crossing the roughest seas. 'Just Do It' could be turned into whatever the customer feels and needs, growing with them and instilling strength and wonder – to 'Just Do It'.

Similarly with Nike in staying relevant, getting to know your audience also requires understanding their values, culture, and behaviors - especially if you are tapping into a different audience group, market, or new geographical location, such as with the example of **Nike's Chinese New Year spot**.

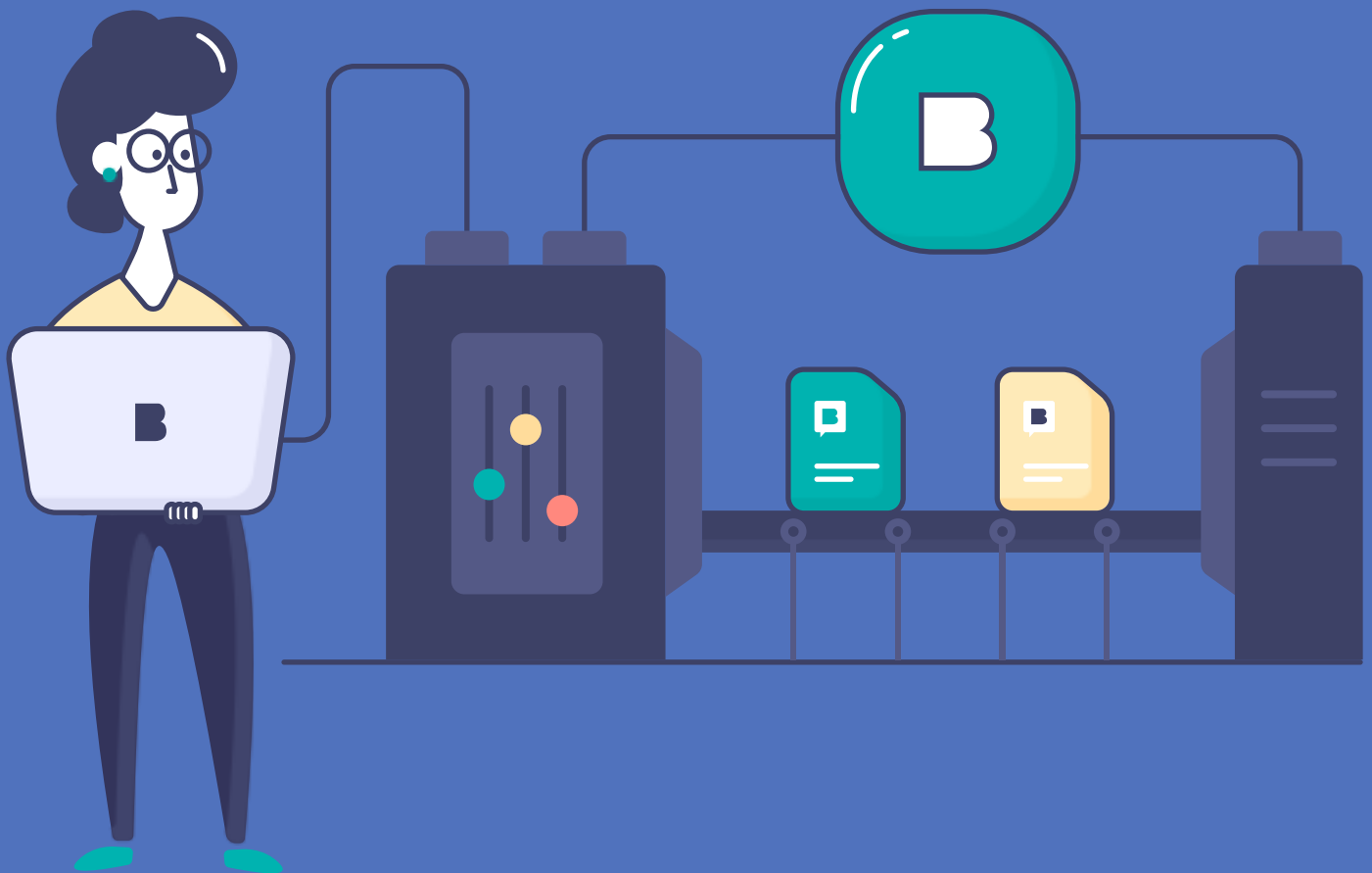


## Key Takeaway

The main goal of every brand and eCommerce business is to drive sales and revenues - yet the key to it all in telling a good story is embracing your brand, your products, and your customers for who they are. Your eCommerce business is not just selling a product, but selling the results that you can offer and the feeling that your customers will be getting from using your products and brand. In embracing the way you tell your story, through emotional connections and values, you can develop a stronger relationship with your customers, build a stronger and honest brand true to its values, drive brand loyalty, creative and captivating content, while standing out from your competitors.

Everyone has a story to tell - what's yours?

# Automating and optimizing content creation: “content lifecycle” and “intelligent content” as strategies



*The central role of content in marketing usually results in tremendous amounts of effort and resources spent to maintain a quality production flow. Many companies take a shot in automating content creation and end up with uninspired copy-pasted material, devoid of any personality.*

*How can you automate the process without sacrificing quality? How can you take advantage of the recent advancements in AI in your marketing? In this chapter, we dive deep in these issues and talk about optimizing your content production.*

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If you look at content as a product, it makes sense to see it evolve through different stages. From its inception as an idea, to its creation, publication, and maintenance, content can go through different stages of its “lifecycle”. Understanding the content lifecycle is an essential part of any endeavor that deals with content, be it a huge media corporation or an independent online shop.

### What is “content lifecycle”?

Depending on who you may ask, content lifecycle can be many things. In the most fundamental way, it simply refers to all the different stages that a piece of content goes through before it either reaches its final form, or ideally is repurposed as new content. The stages of the lifecycle can be quite different based on the nature of the content itself and that's why if you look around, you'll find [many](#), [many](#), [many](#) different interpretations. However, all of them can be re-structured in a few key categories which explain the most important stages of the content lifecycle:

## 1. Strategy and planning

The initial phase usually starts by the team leaders defining a clear strategy and a roadmap, before any form of creation takes place. This is true for both completely new content, and also for repurposing older content. A clearly defined vision is content in its conceptual stage, where its possible character, properties, and effects are conceived.

**At this point some key questions will be answered:**

- Who/What is this content going to be made for?
- What is the ideal outcome of creating this content?
- What are the challenges surrounding the process?
- How does it connect to other pieces of content and the general plan overall?

Once the vision is there, the team will move on to create a plan for its creation and eventual future. Team members will be assigned to different tasks, typically a schedule will be put up, and a workflow will be created for better progress and communication between different members/teams.

## 2. Production and creation

After a clear workflow is settled, the content creators can get to work. In an ideal case, the creators would take the specific target audience into account while working, resulting in a piece of personalized content which is what everyone is striving for nowadays. The huge impact of content creation is evident in recent statistics<sup>28</sup> which show content creation is **3 times more efficient** than outbound marketing. Additionally 56% of businesses worldwide intend to spend more on content creation.

In cases where content has even a higher significance like eCommerce platforms or media companies, a bulk of the operation may be handled by AI through what is called "Intelligent Content", which we will discuss later.

## 3. Management

In addition to the management team which oversees the process, content requires management technology. Management technology is necessary in efficiently handling content in all stages: it offers a platform to create, revise, publish, refine, and preserve content of any form.

Depending on your needs, you have a choice between the traditional (i.e. Wordpress) or the modern (think "[headless](#)" systems) approach. In short, the modern solution is suitable for cases where omnichannel publication (website, phone app, smart watch, etc), intelligent content, speed, and most importantly for the content lifecycle content repurposing, have higher degrees of importance.

## 4. Publication and maintenance

When content is created, it is published through the content management system (CMS, the management technology mentioned above) for the public. This is the first time in the content's lifecycle where it is finally observed by its target audience. If something is wrong, the content can still be edited through the CMS to fix the problem. At this point the marketing team is done with the bulk of the operation and can enjoy watching their creation find its place through time.

## 5. Preservation and repurposing

Older content must be regularly updated and maintained so it stays relevant to its viewers. Although sometimes they are completely wiped out after serving their purpose, the more common options are either to archive them for later use, updating them after proper research to fit the new goal, or recycle them (or parts of them) as brand new content. Repurposing a piece of content means getting the most possible outcome of your investment both in terms of time and resources.

Repurposing can be as simple as adding new tags to a picture or keywords to a text, or more substantial like creating a completely new piece of content by combining and changing older ones.

Whether you implement traditional or intelligent content, repurposing is vital in keeping your audience engaged, and more so in offering them a personalized experience.

## How important is an optimized content lifecycle?

Lifecycle is simply a natural and inherent part of any content and it exists whether there is any active input from the creators or not. What any enterprise dealing with content should do, is to firstly understand it thoroughly, and then optimize it so it serves their specific needs in the best way possible.

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In a 2020 survey of 249 businesses, 74% of respondents reported that they view content as a “core business strategy”, yet only 23% said that their organization is either “extremely” (1%) or “very successful” (22%) in strategically managing their content.

Perhaps most importantly, **an optimized content lifecycle can act as the perfect foundation for implementing “Intelligent Content”**

### Intelligent content: A strategy

Intelligent content is used to describe multi-purposed, adaptable, and streamlined content which has a profoundly different approach from its traditional counterpart. As a general rule, it includes moving away from tedious micro-managing that requires individual human input, into a data-driven and automated form of content creation that takes advantage of the recent advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning, while incorporating individualized human perspective.

Intelligent content is not only a type of content, but the term is often used to

describe the whole strategy that leads to the creation of a specific kind of structured content. The strategy relies on creating modular bits of content that can be used in different contexts, and can be modified easily if needed.

If you look at content the same way as basically any other product, you will notice that in many ways content is still in its “artisanal” stage. Each product is made specifically for a single case from the bottom up by an individual, and the process requires manual input in every stage. While this approach has its merits, in many cases it simply doesn't pay off.

**Just imagine if we made cars one by one, each a product of a single person. You can already see the problems:**

- Huge drain on the resources
- Inevitable inconsistencies in products
- Standards and quality control are harder to implement
- Big scale changes require immense effort
- Communications can be confusing when dealing with many creators
- In great number of outputs, uninspired copying is inevitable

So how would you go around these problems when dealing with content? Some believe that the answer is in making your content “intelligent”.

Intelligent content is made to be worked on by humans and machines at the same time. Any content can be considered intelligent or smart if it meets these criteria:

**1. Data-driven structure:** Content must be supported with metadata so it can be processed by machines. Most of us already do this to our personal content by “tagging” our photos or documents. On a bigger scale, content which is supported by metadata can be easily archived, structured, and searched. This allows the machines (and people) to quickly access and retrieve any content when necessary.

**2. Modular:** Instead of creating full-fledged and finished single pieces of content every time, smaller blocks of content are created which can be stacked on top of each other to form different finished products. These blocks can be used outside of their original context and be applied to many different situations.

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**3. Flexible:** Because of their highly structured nature (points 1 and 2), they can be easily accessed and edited later to adapt to their new contexts. Imagine the blocks of intelligent content as made of playdough instead of rigid plastic: not only you can stack them however you want, but you can also smooth out the edges and form each block individually to a different shape.

So in short, **intelligent content is highly structured** in a way that is both beneficial to humans and machines. It treats content as flexible smaller blocks tagged with metadata that can be reconfigured and reused in many different appropriate places with ease.





## What are the benefits of intelligent content?

Intelligent content can potentially affect many different aspects of a project. If implemented at the right place (take a look at the next section to see if it applies to your case) it can dramatically reduce the burden on your resources, increase the overall quality, and help you in offering a more personalized content. Some of the key benefits of intelligent content are:

- **Omnichannel publication:** The structured nature of intelligent content in addition to its flexibility, allows for a simultaneous publication of content in multiple formats on different channels.
  - **Optimized search:** The metadata embedded in the content makes it very simple to look for even the smallest fragments in different contexts based on your needs.
  - **Resource saving:** Since the bulk of the operation is carried out by AI, the need for human input is considerably reduced and content creators can instead focus on creating original material to be used by the AI. Subsequently, costs will reduce as the need for handcrafting every single element will disappear.
  - **Quality assurance and consistency:** Since repetitive tasks are done by the AI, and the same quality applies to every bit of content, there is a guaranteed consistency of tone and standards that is almost impossible when done by individuals, especially when dealing with greater amounts of content in multiple formats.
- **Personalization:** Without exception, intelligent content can deliver the preferred content of specific target audiences in a specific time frame, be it immediately or scheduled (with the help of its optimized search).
  - **Format independence:** You can have your content be adapted to any format that you would need at the time, and repurpose it in a different format later. This is optimal when you want to publish your content in multiple channels, or take parts from multiple content sources and publish the result as new content in a new format!
  - **Uninterrupted communication:** Uncluttered workflow of the content team makes communications within the team and also with other teams considerably smoother.

# Traditional Content vs. Intelligent Content

Traditional Content	Intelligent Content
Each item must be handcrafted	Streamlined production
Inevitable inconsistencies due to production methods	Consistent and unified form and substance in all channels
Requires considerable resources	Cost saving due to automation
Manual transformation of content to different channels	Automated and immediate transformation and publication of content in multiple channels
Inevitable copy-pasted content where volume is high	Flexible and reconfigurable content blocks allowing customized reusability
Personalization requires extensive individual research	Personalized and targeted content through structured data

## Who is it for?

Every project or company which is on the heavier side of content creation will definitely benefit from making the jump to intelligent content. Perhaps first and foremost are the eCommerce companies where not only a huge amount of content is created constantly and is meant to be published in multiple channels, but personalizing the content also has the utmost importance.



**Just like any other strategy, you should see if intelligent content fits your needs, expectations, and general plans.**

Different kinds of media companies (both creation and distribution) whose product is essentially content are already moving towards an intelligent approach, and so are companies which need to access and retrieve content on a regular basis such as financial firms.

The question that should be answered is how important the issue of content creation is to the company or the project. If content plays a central role, or if publication in multiple platforms is a priority, it makes sense to switch to the approach which prioritizes content quality and omnichannel delivery.

## How does it relate to content marketing?

Offering a personalized experience through content is what companies strive for. The current emphasis on storytelling and brand identity are obvious indicators of this new approach.

Likewise as access to the internet on multiple devices is becoming more common than ever, the need for simultaneous publication of content in different platforms is turning from a novelty to a necessity.

**Intelligent content can be implemented to facilitate both of these needs.** Through precise and consistent structuring of data, coupled with an automated publication process, it can deliver highly personalized content to specific target groups. Its independence from format and modular nature encourages omnichannel publication with considerably less effort compared to the traditional approach.

## Making the move to intelligent content

If you believe that intelligent content is the way forward for you, then you should start by redefining your content strategy. There are many ways to do so, but a couple of central issues are shared between them:

- **Organization:** A new strategy requires adjustments in your current vision. These adjustments include contextual issues such as defining new goals and changing priorities, but also include administrative changes in your marketing and content team. As your team would be relieved of many time consuming tasks, their talents should be reoriented towards more creative avenues.

- **Technology:** Intelligent content is not a technology on its own, but a strategy. In order to be able to implement the new strategy, you probably have to change to the appropriate technology when it comes to your content management system. The consensus is that a headless CMS is the way to go, due to its compatibility with modular content and omnichannel publication, plus its independence from presentational formats. This is why it makes sense to optimize the content lifecycle and implement intelligent content at the same time.
  - **(re-)Structure:** After making the appropriate changes in your organization and technology, the content itself must be structured intelligently, supplemented with metadata. Additionally, your team's structure may also change depending on your new content roadmap.
- The result will be an efficiently streamlined content creation process, which not only prioritizes personalization and omnichannel publication, but does so while being considerably more convenient.



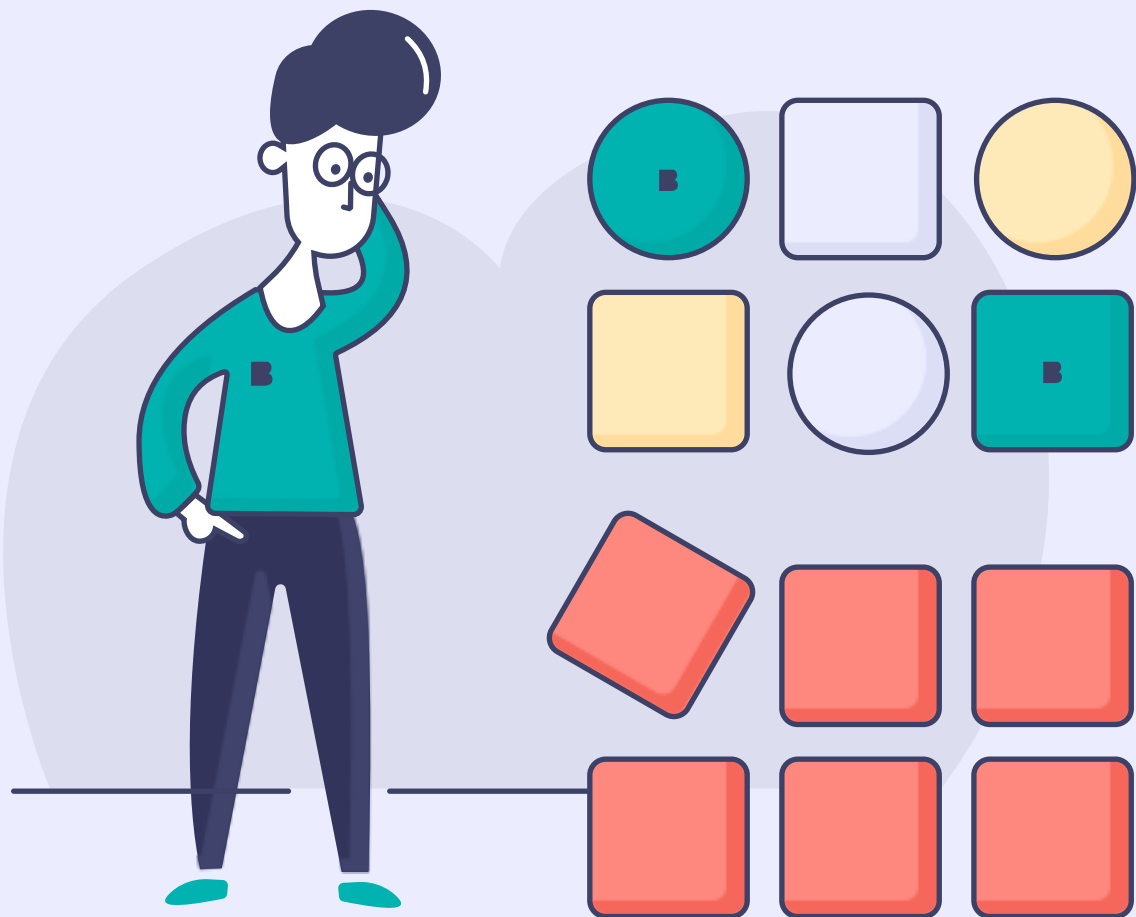
Some headless systems like [Storyblok](#) offer completely free trials, where you can get some hands-on experience and see if it is the right choice for your business.

## Key Takeaway

The importance of content in eCommerce marketing is not a secret to anyone, yet many companies still struggle with proper content strategies. Usually the problem is in maintaining original quality content production in the long-term. Many businesses fall into the trap of un-inspired copy-pasted material.

By understanding the content lifecycle, and implementing intelligent content as a central strategy, you can automate a considerable portion of the content production task and reuse older content in a proper way. These strategies complement each other perfectly and are relatively easy to put into place. Once in order, they can drastically reduce the workload on your content creators, allowing them to spend their time on more creative tasks, while the mundane and repetitive parts of the job are taken care of by AI.

# Setting up your technology: The crucial crossroad



*Is a complete all-in-one eCommerce platform that comes as a whole package the solution for your eCommerce business, or should you look for a best-of-breed solution where you choose each individual tool?*

*Many marketers are faced with this question and are not sure what the correct answer for their company is. In this chapter, you can find a thorough examination of both solutions and get a closer look at their implications in eCommerce.*

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As “content” grows to be the central theme of eCommerce discussions, the questions of its creation, distribution, and engagement subsequently take new priorities. To be more precise, many marketers are asking the question “how to display our product where it’s easily found by our audience?” and “how to make sure our products’ presentation is tailored to our brand’s story?”

Today eCommerce means a strong presence in different platforms, as the consumers’ preference for shopping on different devices grows exponentially. According to Business Insider, **mobile shopping was responsible for 23% of all eCommerce sales in 2018, a number that they predict will rise to 45% by 2024.**<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the growing popularity of voice-activated assistants, AR/VR applications, and IoT indicate an even stronger shift away from the traditional website-exclusive eCommerce.

Likewise the issue of personalization and customization of customer experiences is central in implementing digital strategies. This is not surprising, as 91% of consumers

say they are more likely to shop from brands that offer them personal recommendations. Perhaps this is why 79% of digital marketers in retail are investing in personalization tools.<sup>31</sup><sup>32</sup>

eCommerce companies usually settle on one of the two main options in managing their business (including all issues related to content); some choose a single package of tools known as **all-in-one** suites, and others prefer to pick and choose each tool based on their needs, a system built upon the **best-of-breed** principles.

### What is an all-in-one suite?

Before jumping into the specifics of eCommerce, let’s consider the overall philosophy behind an all-in-one strategy. Imagine owning a swiss army knife; you have one device which provides you with a knife, a corkscrew, a screwdriver, a nail file, a pair of scissors, and maybe even a tiny saw. This is the all-in-one in its simplest form, a kit that provides multiple tools that can help you in completely different situations. If you want to slice an apple, you can use the knife, while the same package also provides you with a file for your fingernails!

In the case of eCommerce, an all-in-one eCommerce software suite aims to provide you with all the tools you need to run an online business; this includes content creation and management, payment processing, shipping, customer service, SEO, personalization, marketing, inventory management, creating websites and landing pages, invoicing, and much more.

These suites come as fixed packages from a single vendor and consist of many different products (depending on the vendor). When you acquire a suite, you are paying for the full package and every tool that is included in there. After all, that's the selling point: have everything that you need in one pack.

### Can you already see the problem?

Have you ever seen a chef using a swiss army knife to dice vegetables? How about a carpenter using it to file a piece of furniture he is making? Or a tailor using its tiny scissors to cut a piece of cloth?

This is the key problem with an all-in-one approach. While you have a wide ranging set of tools at your disposal, none of them work as well as they should. If you are dealing with a small issue like filing your nails or peeling an apple, a swiss army knife is perfect. However, take any case that requires a bit more effort and the tools start to show their shortcomings.

The second obvious problem is that at one point, you are forced to make some sacrifices. There are swiss army knives with different tools, some come with a saw and others with a small hook, some have a fork while others have a scalpel. While there are different packages to choose from, you cannot create your own set with the exact tools that you need. You will probably end up with some tools that you never use, and missing a couple that you would love to have.

An all-in-one eCommerce suite decides what your needs are and offers you a package, instead of you specifically picking up the individual tools that you need.

This results in having technologies that are barely of any use to you, and missing out on others that you know are going to help your business. What is even worse is that you are forced to pay the licensing fees for every single tool in the suite, no matter if you are using them or not!

You can already see how this approach can severely restrain your flexibility. Before going on with a detailed explanation of all the limitations, let's briefly look at the other approach.





## What is a best-of-breed solution?

As the name suggests, this approach encourages you to choose the best tool for each need individually. Instead of ending up with a package of pre-set tools, you can make your own package with only the tools that you need. Instead of ending up with a tiny knife, a small file, a corkscrew, and a single-head screwdriver, you can pick up a chef's knife and a chopping board if you are a cook, multiple screwdrivers and a plier if you are fixing something, or a corkscrew and a glass if you are about to enjoy a bottle of wine.

Instead of a single vendor offering all the tools, you can be sure that each tool is made by a group of specialists who are extremely focused on the product that they are providing. Subsequently, each product has been thoroughly examined and is the result of expertise experience.

Naturally, this also means that there is going to be more communication involved in this approach, as you are faced with different vendors instead of one.

In the eCommerce realm, a **best-of-breed solution means - for example - separating your content management from your eCommerce platform**. Companies who use this approach, believe that creating, updating, and managing your content should be kept separated from your payment processing and shopping cart management. Their argument is that issues relating to personalized customer journeys, omnichannel presence, and marketing in general are vastly different than issues related to the eCommerce platform, such as shopping cart and payment processing.

Since different issues require different strategies, fans of best-of-breed argue that technologies and tools for each case should be separated. Likewise, since they require different fields of expertise, they believe the providers should come from specialized backgrounds for each case.



# What are the key differences between the two?

Because of the fundamental difference in strategy, implementing these two approaches can result in completely different experiences. While each case should be examined individually, some aspects tend to be applicable to most cases. Let's look at these differences in more detail.



## Architecture and integration

It may be hard to adapt with your current system architecture, as the suites tend to be complex and not flexible. Since all tools come in as a package, integrating new tools and technologies depends on the provider. Sometimes the newer tools are offered quickly, other times they are completely ignored.



Due to its separated nature, you can choose each technology so that it would fit with your current architecture. Since each technology is independent and acquired individually, you can choose which ones to implement at any moment. You have complete freedom over your technology stack.

## Costs and licensing

The costs can be high as licensing applies to everything in the package no matter if the tools are used or not.



Optimized costs based on utilization, thanks to the flexibility in building your own stack. The user will only pay for the tools that they need and for as long as they need them. If at one point one of the tools becomes obsolete, it can be immediately removed from the stack, avoiding extra costs.

### Onboarding and adapting

The complex suite has to be put into place all at once, meaning it can take months for a new suite to be implemented. Adapting to the new suite can be even lengthier, as your teams usually have to go through a steep learning curve just to be able to do their old tasks with a new system.



Since your stack is optimized for your specific needs, there are fewer tools that need to be implemented. Due to the compact and specialized nature of each tool, the onboarding process only takes a short time. Since you are free to choose your technologies, you can choose those that are compatible with your team's previous experience and reduce the initial learning phase significantly.

### Updates and security

As the suite is provided by one vendor, updates come in huge sizes and usually affect the whole system. Because of this, even smaller fixes for a minor bug may take a while to be offered by the provider. Likewise, as the whole suite is connected, a security flaw in one part has the potential to affect the entire system. Slow rate of new updates can only worsen the problem.



As each tool is offered by an individual expert provider, updates come regular and in small sizes. As each technology is regularly updated with small batches, it is easy to stay ahead of the curve and quickly respond to newer trends. While regular updates for every technology reduces the overall security risk, if a problem shows up somewhere in the stack, it will not affect other parts of the system. Isolated issues have much lower risks and are easier to control.

## What does this mean for eCommerce?

The table above is a general comparison between the two approaches, however in the case of eCommerce, there are more obvious differences that directly impact a business. The questions of customer journeys, omnichannel marketing, and SEO are all related to the capabilities of your content management system (CMS). While a suite includes a CMS as part of the package, a best-of-breed approach allows you to choose a CMS that is specifically made to address the issues of eCommerce.

In any business where content is an integral building block, or in businesses where the rate of content creation is high, the way content is created, managed, distributed, and maintained are all vital to the company's success. If your products are to stand out in a highly competitive market, they should be customized and personalized enough, so they can be always in the reach of your target audience. Likewise, as consumers continue to move to different devices, from phones to voice-activated assistants and smart watches, your CMS should be able to deliver the same quality of content across all devices and platforms.

It is therefore necessary for such businesses to adopt a modern eCommerce CMS, instead of settling for a CMS that is maintained by the same company that processes the payments.

A best-of-breed CMS can outrun an all-in-one suite with CMS capabilities in some of the crucial areas:

### 1. Delivering highly customizable and personalized content

An independent eCommerce CMS will give your marketing and development teams unlimited customization options. Each component in your storefront can be unique to your own brand. The suite systems usually fall short in this regard, as they come with a series of pre-built themes and templates that only support minor customization. It's not easy to create a personalized journey, when the user interface looks generic and similar to other competitors.

Furthermore, since best-of-breed CMS solutions take advantage of application APIs, the front-end work can be done independently from the back-end, meaning your marketers can quickly respond to demands (product recommendations, launching new lines, etc.) without having to wait for developers.

Some systems like Storyblok also take advantage of modular content blocks. These blocks can be reused in different situations, either as they are or edited to any necessary extent. Content blocks also open up the possibility to automate a portion of your content creation process through using intelligent content.

## 2. Maintaining a true omnichannel presence

Perhaps the greatest strengths of the best-of-breed content strategy is its platform independence. Since in these systems the front-end and the back-end are separated (learn more here), **the same content** can be simultaneously published on any device/platform, from websites and apps to personal assistants and VR headsets. This means a considerable reduction in effort and costs, as each content has to be created only once, and used everywhere!

## 3. Integrating the newest technologies

A best-of-breed approach means you have complete freedom over incorporating any new technology immediately. Since each tool functions independently, you can choose to integrate whatever tool your company may need at the moment. In stark contrast, an all-in-one approach puts the control in the vendor's hands. Since all tools are offered in a package, it is up to the provider to choose a new technology to be incorporated in the pack. Even in best case scenarios, you have to wait for extended periods of time for the vendor to offer the new technology. Of course in many cases, you won't even get the perfect tool for your business, as your choices are limited by the vendor's options.

In a rapidly expanding realm like eCommerce, a swift integration of the newest technologies is even more important than usual, as they help companies stay ahead of the curve in a globally competitive market.

## 4. SEO

One of the biggest factors in showing up at the top of the search results, is having a fast responsive website. The separation of the two ends in a best-of-breed CMS solution also means any traffic on the front-end would not affect the back-end (and vice versa).

Alongside speed, security is a major deciding factor when it comes to ranking higher in the search results. The same separation also contributes to lower security concerns, as a problem in one end would not affect the other end. Additionally, the existence of a central content hub instead of multiple content silos for each device, makes it much easier to monitor the data structure for any potential threats.

## Key Takeaway

Choosing the right approach always comes down to your own preferences and the specific demands of your business. While there are major benefits in choosing a best-of-breed solution, there may be some cases where an all-in-one suite would be a better choice. For example, if communicating with multiple vendors is an issue, an all-in-one suite means having a single vendor relationship.

When it comes to content management for eCommerce however, there are specific demands that a generic suite usually is unable to address. As omnichannel and personalization continue to dominate the eCommerce scene, best-of-breed solutions solidify their position as the preferred method. These solutions inherently make omnichannel and personalization tasks easier, due to their architecture and philosophy.

# SEO and conversions: Creating exposure and maintaining relevance



*You've chosen the best eCommerce solution, migrated to a proper CMS, designed your website, set up customer service points, launched, and promoted your online store to the world. Congratulations! So what's next?*

*There is always room to improve, measure, and test. Why not revisit the development steps again? Take a few steps back to understand the process: reassess the design and usability of your website, site performance, and visibility.*

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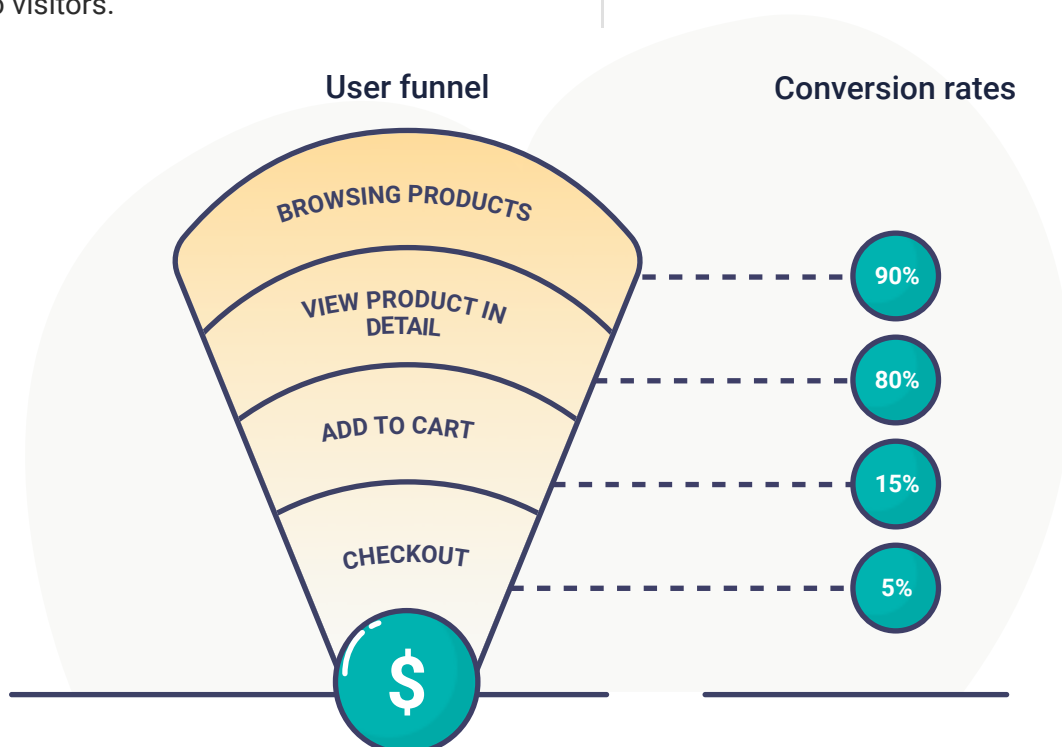
## What are conversions?

**Conversions** are a key metric that every eCommerce website needs to take into consideration. Think about your customer and KPIs - whether they may have saved an item to purchase later on their profile, add an item to their wishlist, shopping cart and ultimately making a purchase. These are typical conversions that take place on an eCommerce site.

An easy way to measure your eCommerce online conversion rate is to divide conversions into visitors.

For example, during a set period, you have 1000 visitors visiting your website, and 100 conversions (or purchases). Dividing your 100 conversions with the 1000 visitors during that set time, your conversion rate is 1%. Typically, eCommerce stores have a conversion rate of 1 - 2%, with your baseline goal needing to be more than 2%.<sup>33</sup>

But - conversions don't just happen automatically. Optimize it. As an eCommerce store, you need to identify your business goals to then align the conversion points such as going through the conversion funnel. In a way, it's measuring success and improving the overall shopping experience to drive KPI points (such as sales) throughout the overall customer journey, or simply, what is called conversion rate optimization (CRO). This can be done on customer touchpoints such as the store's landing page, product pages, shopping cart page, and essentially any of the touchpoints in the customer journey of the overall shopping experience.





The possibilities are endless in transforming your digital customer experience and journey with the evidence to prove the shift from in-store to digital is happening. A recent 2020 survey conducted by Alvarez & Marshall, discovered an average of 44% of European consumers are buying online for the first time as a result of the closures of non-essential retail (in-store shops) due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and are thus, experiencing and encountering new customer journeys.<sup>34</sup>

We've so far covered the essentials and roots of finding the conversions. Let's dive deeper into understanding three main elements that intersect between your customer's interactions, your eCommerce website/store, and the overall experience to drive your sales and site performance.

### Site performance: The need for speed

Page loading times are one of the make-or-break aspects when it comes to site performance, a deal-breaker for your customers, and an underlying factor when it comes to search engine rankings - consider it a holy trinity of speed: the expectation, search engine results, and sales.

#### The expectation

It's become an expectation, and a given. Without speed, no matter which website or browser a user is on will always expect fast loading times and instantaneous website reactions. In fact, a Google study on industry benchmarks cites that half of visitors are likely to completely abandon a

website if it takes more than 3 seconds to load.<sup>35</sup> By having speed as a common expectation, customers are likely to see speed as a means of trust, stability, and maintenance in a website's performance. Customers are always on the move, and thus, your brand should always be on the move with them through omnichannel marketing, making speed in delivering your content an essential factor to drive conversions.

#### Search engine results

In 2018, Google updated its search algorithm to include page speed as a major ranking factor, with slow sites being less likely to rank highly in search results.<sup>36</sup> Thus, this results in a potential loss of traffic and consequently, customers. But fear not, this does not mean just because your site takes longer to load than average that your website will not appear on search results. Google's release of the 'speed-update' explicitly said that the algorithm downranks only extremely slow pages, whereas fast pages will reap the benefits.

#### Sales

A 2018 YouGov/Eggplant survey found that 73% of customers are more likely to completely abandon a slow-loading website and consequently move to a competitor site.<sup>37</sup> This is detrimental to the fact a 2017 Akamai study found that with a 1-second delay in a page's response, can result in a 7% reduction in conversions.<sup>38</sup> This leads to the [following example by Sean Work](#), that if your site is making \$100,000 in sales per day, a 1-second page delay can result in up to \$2.5 million in lost sales a year.

## SEO & CRO: A marriage

When you use the two together, they in turn increase both traffic and conversions (the best of both worlds), but not all SEO and CRO unions always work out. Imagine a site filled with SEO-hungry keywords and content, made unreadable to a user simply trying to find what they are looking for. The site turns into just SEO-bluff used to drive traffic without keeping in mind user experience and usability. Like all good marriages, *"it takes two to tango"*.

In SEO, the higher you rank on Google Search Results, the more likely you drive traffic, build brand awareness towards your site, and therefore increase your ROI; whereas in CRO, the idea is to continuously test and adapt your landing page to turn visitor traffic into purchases, with a step towards customer loyalty. Some best practices to consider when enhancing the SEO and CRO to your eCommerce site are:

### 1. Security & link authority

First and foremost, security is what makes your website trustable to a search engine.

#### This can be easily done through:

- Including a robots.txt file that tells search engine bots your site information, where it can and cannot look
- Creating a sitemap that lists all your pages
- Having HTTPS instead of HTTP through installing an SSL certificate on your website indicates a secure and trustworthy site, with benefits in SEO and higher rankings

There are two kinds of links to use within your website, inbound links, and internal links.

- With inbound links, what we also call backlinks or external links, are HTML hyperlinks that connect and point one website to another. Backlinks act to a certain degree like reputation, see it like votes - the more backlinks (votes) a website has of yours, the more popular and important you are.
- By constructing internal links (URLs) on your site a certain way, such as by categorizing them by product categories, with time, establishes a degree of trust and quality with search engines. With a high amount of internal links leading to a specific page on your site, allows the search engine to know that the page is important. Mobile & Page-loading times

## 2. Mobile & page-loading times

Consider decreasing the size of your images and cleaning up the HTML and Javascript on your site. Just remember the three trinitities of speed that affect the overall SEO and CRO union as described in the previous section: the expectation of speed, the effect on search engine results, and sales. Additionally, ensure that your page speed matches your mobile-site as well.

By having a mobile-site, reaps the benefits in SEO and rankings. With Google's mobile-first index, mobile-optimized sites are pulled up first rather than ones geared only towards a desktop format. User experience contributes to this factor, where your content needs to be adaptable to mobile.

## 3. Optimize your searches

When optimizing your searches, use keywords into your headline and title, making it more evident for Google bots to look first and determine relevant content. This is done by using header tags in order to show hierarchy within the content. For example:

- Heading 1 (h1) is where the title goes
- Heading 2 and 3 (h2 and h3) are then subheads

Additionally, search engine crawlers look through a site's metatags to determine its relevance. By using **metatags**, that are snippets of text describing a page's content, its source code, or HTML (therefore not actually visible on the page itself and exists at the head of the page), are only visible to search engines.

This helps the search engine to understand what the page is about using relevant keywords, and can help with SEO

## 4. Create more relevant content and experiences

Search engines love unique content, and what better way than to grow organically through content such as creating blog articles with distribution making it optimized. A study found that content with around 2,000 words generally ranked higher on overall Google Search Results. Make sure to make the content shareable as well, whether that be a product page, blog article, or through social media - sharing allows an opportunity in converting potential readers (clicks) to website visitors to eventually sales.

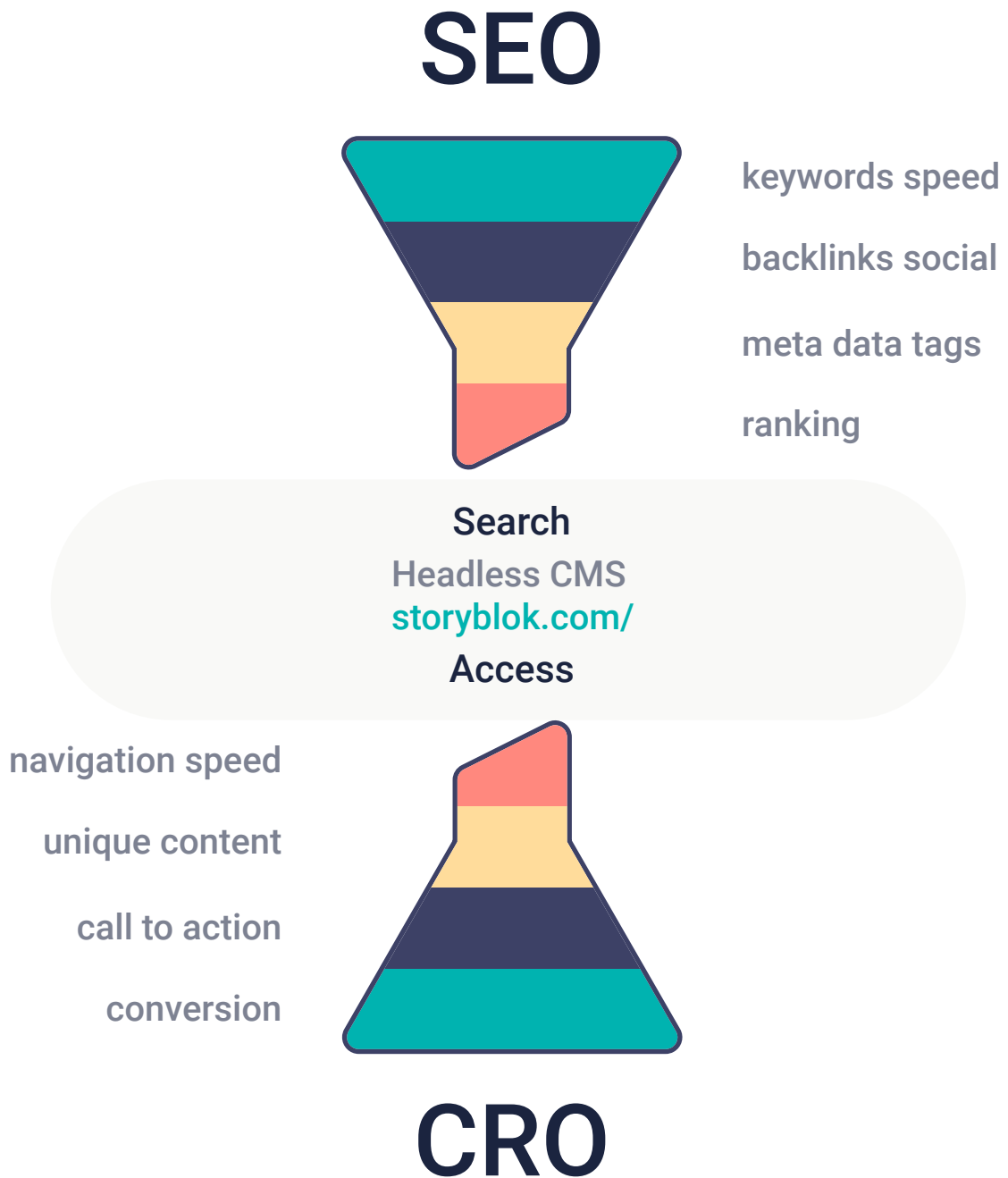
By making relevant content that is easily-accessible and configured on your site (through the use of user experience design), can lead to an increase in click-through-rates and time on site, thus leading to fewer bounce rates. This makes search engines understand the quality and content match your site has to a specific search.

## 5. A "Call To Action" (CTA)

Normally putting a CTA at the top of your page makes sense but in the purchasing journey, not quite. A page should be like a storytelling opportunity, your chance to show and tell about your product, giving customers also the chance to think about the project and consider its features before purchasing. This is why you should put your CTA at the bottom of your page, and content at the top.

Bring your customers on a storytelling journey, convince them, and allow them the space to breathe and consider before clicking-through.

An easy way to view this is through this infographic of an SEO/CRO funnel:



## UX/UI: First impressions

What is a website without design? A customer's first impression and interaction involve the interface and usability of your website from the beginning to the end of their digital customer journey, with 94% of first impressions being design-related.<sup>40</sup> Simply, your eCommerce site is where customers have the opportunity to gain brand awareness and exposure - learning about your brand.

For an eCommerce website to generate its sales effectively, it needs to have a thought-through user experience (UX) design in place, turning touchpoints into conversions. The goal for a brand is to make customer interaction with its brand and website as smoothly as possible, while satisfying the needs of the customer - making UX design an important investment in your eCommerce website.

### What is UX/UI (User Experience/User Interface)?

**UX** is the overall interaction and experience a user has with a product or service, taking into consideration each step of the user journey, how the user feels, and the feasibility of accomplishing each task during the experience.

**UI** on the other hand is the overall look and feel of the design, presentation, and interactivity with the product or service.

Think of it as 'love at first sight' - your website's design can become a catalyst or deal breaker to win over your customer's hearts. This points to the fact that 88% of online consumers are less likely to return to a website if it has bad user experience

and 32% of customers willing to walk away from a brand they love after just one bad user experience on the brand's website.<sup>41</sup>

### What are some things to consider when optimizing your site's UX design?

#### Make navigation simple

Consider swapping out your drop-down menu for a menu bar, or streamline entirely your drop-down menu. You can't necessarily make sales if your customers can't find what they are looking for - so why not make it visible and seamless into your site? Your site's navigation menu is usually the first place customers look to find what they want or need. Keeping in mind, when (re-)designing your navigation, depends on how users currently interact with your site and organize information as well as the nature of your products and how you intend to present them.



A great example of integrating design into navigation is [Apple's menu bar](#). Check out Storyblok-built examples with [Dear Sam](#), [Raleigh UK](#), [Asket](#), and [Aubade](#).



## Pages that capture and convert

When creating and structuring your landing and product page usability for your target audience, make sure to design yours smartly. This means supporting search queries with the product name or model (SKU) number, grammar corrections, suggestion return results if a product is not available for example, and doing justice visually through high-definition photographs or videos of your products and brand through storytelling.

Additionally, omnichannel personalization resonates with the way you display products to visitors, based on their purchasing history, preferences, or browsing behaviors and habits. From there, you can analyze the way a customer interacts with your website, thus making product recommendations that best suit their preferences. Suggestions based on browsing habits and purchasing history are also an opportunity to offer product recommendations while a customer browses to up-sell and cross-sell. For return customers, consider having a personalized features section, voice search, personalized email newsletter, or a personalized landing page.

## Follow the sales funnel

A sales funnel, or purchasing funnel, are stages that move the customer throughout various touchpoints and interactions that they have with your site, products, and overall persuasion of the benefits to make a purchase. These include:

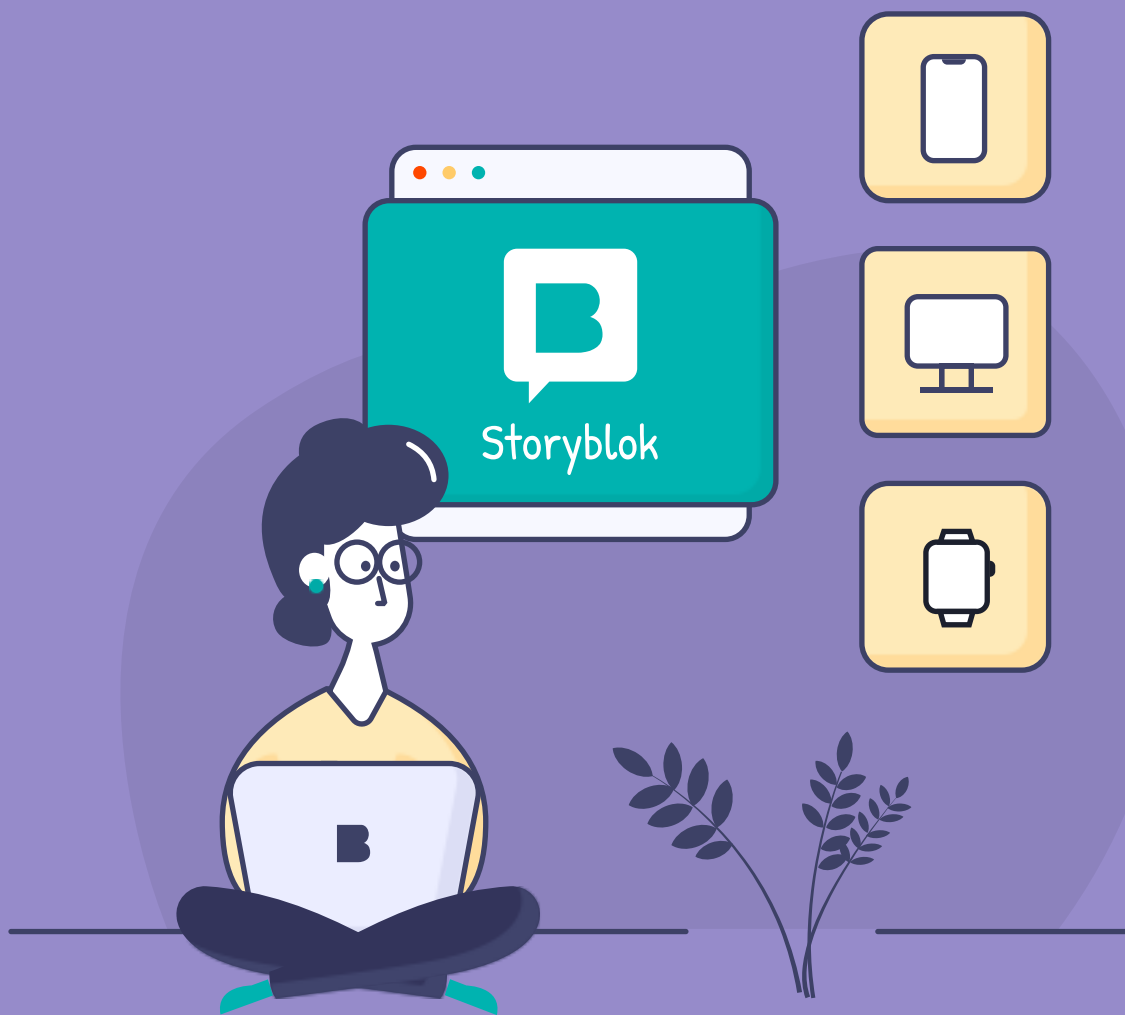
- **Introduction (Awareness)** - Where the customer gathers information about the brand, products, and benefits, learning that it exists on the market.
- **Education (Interest)** - More information is unraveled and provided to the customer about the features and benefits the product and brand can provide.
- **Evaluation (Analysis)** - This is the stage where the customer matches your brand versus a competitor's, seeing which one suits their needs, usually done through each brand's USPs (Unique Selling Point).
- **Decision (Engagement)** - The customer gathers the information conducted during their research and reaches a decision-making point. This is the point to engage with the customer with additional benefits to win them over, offers, and eye-catching CTAs.
- **Purchase** - The purchase is conducted where the customer passes through adding the product to their shopping cart, pay, and await their purchase.
- **Retention (Repeating the experience)** - During this stage, the customer has the opportunity to interact with customer service, leave feedback or reviews, subscribe to your newsletter, and conduct a repeat purchase.

In the context of UX-design, the sales funnel can be represented throughout the website interface, landing page, mobile site, and move with the customer outside onto social media, through email marketing, and even in-store.

## Key Takeaway

A lot goes into launching a budding and successful eCommerce website amongst [over 20 million commerce sites](#) that currently exist "out there". No matter what product it is your brand is selling, surely the main and one key goal is to sell (more). People who search for products through eCommerce websites typically know what they are looking for and in turn, expect a high-performing and user-friendly site suited to their needs. The steps to achieve this are straight-forward, with the idea behind pointing to conversions and thus, to site performance.

# Looking ahead: eCommerce marketing in the near future





*The market share of eCommerce was steadily rising in the past few years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic pushed more people towards online services. Most of the speculations concerning eCommerce in 2021 come from statistics produced before the pandemic and its consequences on consumer habits and the market itself. Here, we have tried to look at the incoming trends in accordance with the new realities facing eCommerce. Most of the ideas discussed here are already rising in popularity, either globally or in specific markets.*

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## **eCommerce post COVID-19: The new market is already here**

We all know how the pandemic has pushed so many consumers to look for products and services online. In one of our marketing stand-ups before Christmas, we were all discussing how each one of us was planning to buy presents for our friends and families. The answers were as diverse as they could be: from buying a product on a well-known platform like Amazon, to supporting small businesses by visiting independent eCommerce stores, to wine subscriptions and everything in between.

As we now know, the pandemic did not go away in a few weeks or even a couple of months. By now, the consumers are completely adapting to the consequences. According to a new study,<sup>42</sup> almost 40% of consumers believe that they are more comfortable with digital technology today when compared to pre-pandemic times. Arlington Research recently claimed that 44% of consumers have tried new brands since the pandemic hit.<sup>43</sup>

Based on pre-pandemic numbers, eCommerce was supposed to take \$4927 billion of the worldwide retail sales in 2021. By now, we can be sure that the actual number is going to be considerably higher than what previously thought. While many brick-and-mortar businesses have suffered in the past months, many online businesses are struggling to keep up with the orders. The current shift to eCommerce seems to be a profound one, and not tied to any specific country, class, or market. For example, UN's Conference on Trade and Development<sup>44</sup> pointed out that while the pandemic has greatly decreased the purchasing power of consumers in developing countries, online purchasing has increased by 6%-10% across most product categories. The recurring theme in current studies seems to be that regardless of the absolute monetary changes in the market, there is a global shift towards eCommerce.

However, this shift also has consequences in the way eCommerce functions. The new market will undoubtedly bring new trends with itself, which will have long-lasting effects on most online businesses. Let's look at some of these trends:

### **1. Shopping through voice-commands will rise**

The use of voice-activated assistants were already on the rise pre-pandemic. In a study from 2019, Loup Ventures predicted that by 2025 a total of 75% of U.S. households will have some form of smart speakers, which would be responsible for around \$30 billion revenue in the U.S. only.<sup>45</sup>

We still do not have reliable numbers for the post-pandemic voice commerce, however it is clear that it will grow larger than before. This growth is not only due to the overall preference in eCommerce compared to traditional commerce, but also the demographic shift among consumers. Younger consumers, and especially those with college degrees, are believed to make 14% of their purchases through voice-commands.<sup>46</sup>

Gone are the days when voice-assistance was a novelty to report the weather or make a phone call. All technology giants are investing heavily on voice-assistants. Google Assistant, Amazon's Alexa, and Apple's Siri have become competent virtual assistants that are capable of conducting complicated processes, with an ever-growing level of accuracy in speech recognition. All these companies are also pushing for equal levels of quality in different languages.

## 2. Visual commerce will become more popular

Visual commerce is an all-encompassing term that describes any form of visual interaction between a consumer and a brand's product. While almost all online shops have at least one 2d visual depicting the product, it seems that in the near future we will see more sophisticated digital showrooms. Gartner puts visual commerce at the top of its "10 hot trends"<sup>47</sup> impacting the future of digital commerce. The first step forward for most companies is to change the static picture into a configurable 2d or 3d model. Visual configuration allows a flexible

representation of the product based on the features and options that the user chooses. These tools are already implemented in many online businesses, including most clothing and accessories shops. In the post-pandemic market, another Gartner report notes that "Visual configuration software vendors have reported a significant uptick in business because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Manufacturers are investing in visual configuration to enable them to sell their more complex offerings online or remotely."<sup>48</sup>



**Silhouette** is an eyewear company that has successfully implemented visual configuration capabilities. Customers can change the features and control the 3d models of the products. They chose **Storyblok** as their CMS.

< Back to overview



Explore in 360°

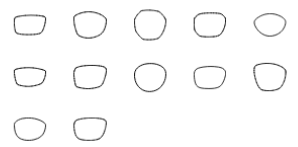


Virtual Try-On

Select colour



Lens shape



Visual configuration capabilities can bring fundamental changes to digital commerce. The most obvious one is of course the increase in personalization on the customers' side. However, perhaps the even more important impact is in the subsequent reduction of costs. As visual configuration becomes more advanced, the need for direct sales goes down. Companies would be able to change to a self-service approach for their complex products, if they can offer a reliable visual configuration tool. Likewise, the need for physical showrooms and samples may disappear, as visual configuration can represent each and every option, without the need to leave the house.

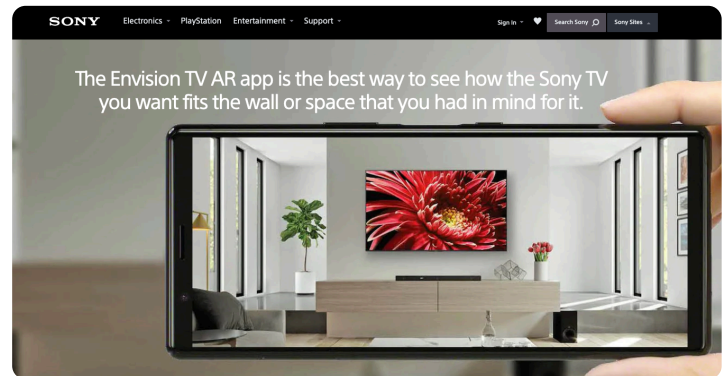
### 3. AR/VR will play a bigger role in eCommerce

Both of the previous points directly connect to AR/VR technologies. There is a clear indication that the AR technology is growing rapidly, as its market is projected to be valued over \$18 billion by 2023.<sup>49</sup> While currently seen as more of a novelty than a necessary option, AR and VR capabilities can perfectly enhance customer experiences, as 63% of consumers believe it would transform their shopping experience.<sup>50</sup>

The potential for these technologies in commerce is truly incredible: from "trying on" makeup and preview placement of furniture in your house, to simply taking part in live commerce.



**Ikea is already using AR to offer its customers a better shopping experience, by virtually trying out every piece of furniture they like, in their own houses. A similar experience is offered by Sony for its customers to see how their TVs look like in their living rooms.**



Currently many businesses are taking advantage of live streaming services to showcase their products and interact with their customers in real time. Gartner also predicts that with the growing popularity of eCommerce, live streaming, and AR/VR technologies in addition to the consequences of the pandemic, we should expect enhanced virtual "live commerce" to be gaining popularity in the near future.<sup>51</sup>

### 4. Hyper-personalization and comfort take center stage

Personalization and convenience go hand in hand, and the resulting experience on the customers' side is what matters the most. These issues are nothing new and everyone seems to be aware of their importance. So instead of the usually

discussed points, here we are only going to mention the cases specific to recent times, and specifically 2021.

As each and every market is flooded with similar products with similar prices, the value of personalization and optimized customer journeys become more apparent. While the usual personalized product recommendations and special offers are still extremely important, many companies are now using AI extensively to offer so-called hyper-personalized experiences. For example, recent advancements in AI has

drastically improved chat-bots' abilities in offering personalized experiences.

With the growing popularity of cross-border commerce, the issues of localization and internationalization become even more crucial. It shouldn't matter where the company is based, if the products are to be shipped to different countries, it is absolutely necessary to be able to redirect the potential customers to their local language.

Consumers also expect flexible payment and shipping methods. In the past few years the possibilities for payment processing have been steadily increasing. Lacking any option will certainly result in reduced sales. The emerging social payments like **Twitter Buy** and **Facebook Payments** are indications of the growing diversity in payment methods.

## 5. Marketing automation

As the needs for unique and personalized content grows, so do the demands for proper marketing tasks. Marketing automation is the necessary tool for answering these growing demands.

No matter how great a marketing team is, if there are simply too many tasks, there is going to be an unavoidable drop in quality. Automating parts of the content's lifecycle can ensure the marketing team has enough time for more creativity-driven tasks, instead of spending their time on repetitive ones.

In 2021, marketing automation goes well beyond the standard scheduled social media posts and email campaigns. By implementing the modern principles of intelligent content (look at chapter "Automating and Optimizing Content Creation" for more information), companies can seamlessly automate a bulk of the content creation and management processes, while at the same time ensuring the same high quality of personalization in each and every case.

## 6. API-first commerce to take a bigger share

Gartner puts this among their "[Top 10 Trends in Digital Commerce](#)" and adds that API-based (same as API-first) eCommerce is set out to out-weigh the traditional monolithic counterpart in the coming years. This is not surprising, as API-first commerce is inherently more omnichannel-friendly. With the extreme popularity of mobile commerce and IoT, omnichannel presence has become the center of attention across all online businesses. By separating the back-end and the front-end of the operation, API-first commerce ensures simultaneous publication of highly personalized content on every device.

## 7. Subscription model to rise in popularity

Subscription commerce is not limited to movies and TV series anymore. Everything from razors, socks, drinks, and video games are now sold based on subscription plans. The recurring sales can help companies get a more accurate prediction of their revenue. Without a doubt, the most important element in the popularity of subscription models is the issue of value. This sense of value highly depends on a successful personalization strategy that is able to offer the right package to the right consumer.

The market for subscription commerce is already big, but is predicted to be growing rather rapidly in the coming years. Gartner reports that by 2023, 75% of companies selling direct to consumers will offer subscription services.<sup>52</sup> Since the initial COVID-19 outbreak, the demand for subscription plans has spiked dramatically, especially in the case of food and beverages.<sup>53</sup>

## 8. As omnichannel stays a top priority, mobile commerce will dominate the scene

With the growing connectivity of different devices to the internet, and the current demand for online commerce, consumers feel more comfortable making purchases on different smart devices. While many devices have a considerable share in the market, phones are the absolute favorite choice for many. Pre-pandemic numbers suggest that by the end of 2021 mobile devices are expected to make around 73% of the total eCommerce sales.<sup>54</sup> The actual number is again most probably going to be higher than the old estimates.

## Key Takeaway

Online businesses which are trying to strengthen their presence in 2021 must adapt to the demands of the new market by implementing a series of already-growing approaches. It is true that eCommerce is projected to grow exponentially, however its highly competitive nature also means a less forgiving attitude towards businesses that fail to evolve in time. While omnichannel and personalization continue to be central, voice and visual commerce, AI and AR/VR capabilities, and automation are proving to be almost as important in the coming year.

# Future-proofing your business: The case for headless eCommerce



As eCommerce continues its exponential growth, it also faces bigger challenges. In order to stay relevant in a hyper-competitive market, some businesses are moving away from the traditional model to what many call "headless eCommerce"

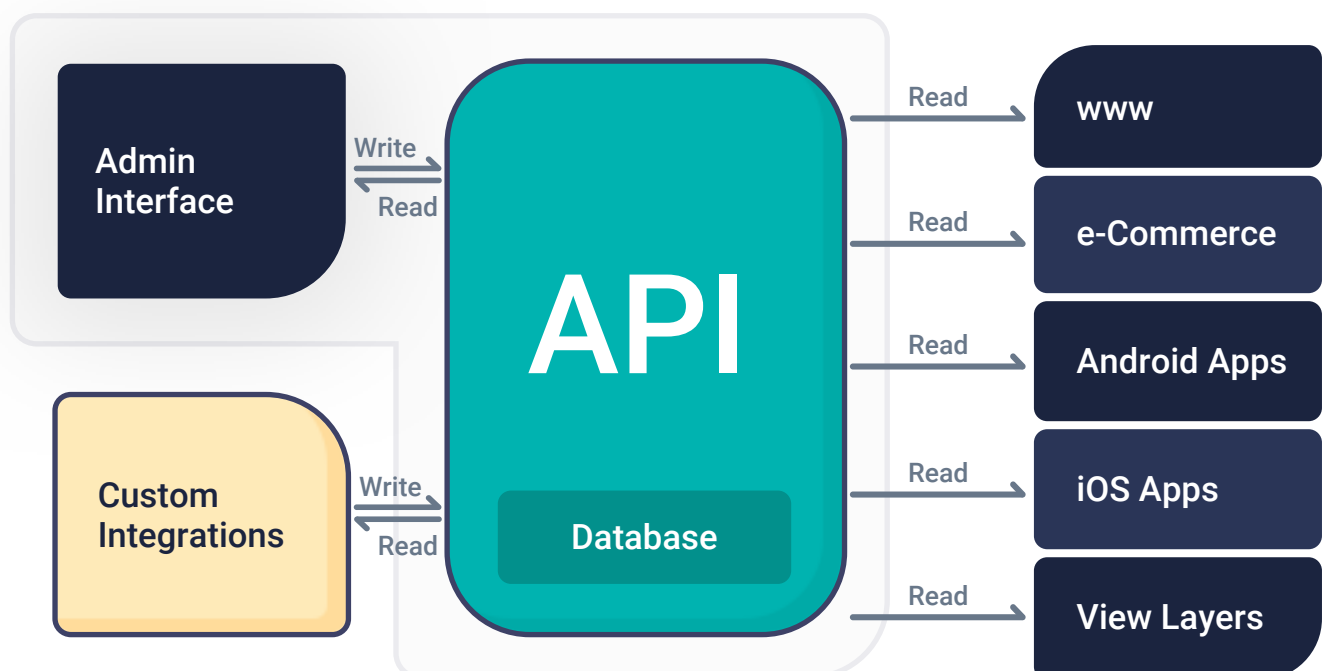
## What does "headless eCommerce" mean?

In a nutshell, it means **an online business where the front-end and the back-end are separated**. In headless commerce, the presentational layer of the operation (the "head") is handled independently from the content itself (back-end, the "body").

In this approach, the data (products, blogs, etc.) is created only once in the back-end, which then can be delivered to any number of front-ends (websites, apps, IoT, etc.) through application programming interfaces (APIs).

The opposite is the traditional monolithic commerce, where the front-end and the back-end are locked together. Generally speaking, this means the presentational layer (front-end) usually has limited customization capabilities, as it is tied to the back-end. Additionally, since the two ends are coupled, content must be created separately for different devices. So if a product is going to be showcased in a website, a mobile app, and a screen somewhere in a shopping mall, then it must be created multiple times to fit each platform. This usually results in multiple content silos which can slow down the operations.

## Headless CMS





## How does headless eCommerce work?

Headless eCommerce gets rid of the content silos and concentrates everything in a single content hub, also known as a headless content management system (CMS). Headless architecture is built with the growing popularity of IoT in mind, and prioritizes delivering content to all platforms simultaneously.

The greatest advantage of headless commerce, is its ability to create the content once, and use it everywhere.

Another important aspect of headless commerce, is the separation of the CMS and the eCommerce platform.

Traditional eCommerce solutions like WooCommerce or Magento are based on a monolithic architecture and handle the front-end as well as the back-end. But a growing number of eCommerce providers like BigCommerce or Shopify also offer a headless option with access to the store's data via their API.

This separation is thought to be necessary by headless advocates, as a CMS and an eCommerce platform have completely different goals, each requiring their own unique area of expertise. Some traditional eCommerce businesses lack this separation.



**eCommerce platform and CMS carry out different parts of the task:**

**eCommerce platform:**

**An online platform that offers companies the requirements of running a store, including the shopping cart, inventory, payment, and shipping management. Bigcommerce and Shopware are ecommerce platforms.**

**CMS:**

**A system that allows users to create, customize, modify, publish, and manage all digital content (text, image, video, audio, etc.) in any form. Storyblok and Wordpress are CMSs.**

# Headless eCommerce vs. traditional eCommerce CMS

Traditional commerce CMS

Headless commerce CMS

## Omnichannel

Multiple content silos for each platform



Central content hub for all platforms

## Customization

Limited customization of pre-defined front-ends



Complete control over the presentation of the content

## Customer journeys

Pre-made themes for the storefront with some personalization capabilities



A unique front-end made from scratch for a specific brand experience

## Speed to market

New front-end touchpoints require changes in the back-end



Quickly create new front-end touchpoints without any change in the back-end

## Page performance

Interconnected traffic between the two ends



Isolated traffic on each end

## Security

Minor threats can affect the whole system due to the link between the two ends



Threats are isolated and cannot affect the whole system

### Costs

Services sold as a whole package, containing all tools regardless of usage



Services are sold separately. Users only pay for what they need and make their own stack of tools

### Development

Development language is based on the service provider's choice



Developers can choose their language, as the front-end is completely independent

### Onboarding

May including steep learning curve for creators, as all tools are fixed and come in a package



Creators can choose the tools they are familiar with, reducing the onboarding time

## Who benefits from a headless strategy?

Headless commerce is an answer to the demands of the modern market, especially concerning omnichannel and personalized experiences. While traditional commerce is perfectly capable of answering the needs of a small online shop with a single website, problems start to show up as the business grows in size or expands to new platforms.

### Generally speaking, a headless commerce is specifically beneficial for:

- Businesses with a larger catalogue of products
- Companies trying to establish their presence on different devices
- Businesses with a high rate of content output
- Cases where the competitiveness of the market requires highly personalized customer experiences
- Check out Raleigh, Dear Sam, and Asket to see some examples of headless commerce.
- In great number of outputs, uninspired copying is inevitable

## Going headless

Transitioning to headless is not as complicated as it may seem like. As headless eCommerce is built upon agile principles, changes can take place relatively quickly, without any incoming steep learning curve for your team.

Transforming your current business to one driven by modern headless features can start at different places, but the most fundamental change comes from the heart of your operations, **the content infrastructure**. By implementing a headless CMS you can immediately observe how your multiple content silos transform into a central hub and your content gets published with consistent quality across different platforms. The coming change in customer experience and your team's capabilities will be almost immediate, and will open the doors for you to further move away from monolithic practices.

Storyblok takes the capabilities of a headless CMS even further by creating a content management system built specially with the issues of eCommerce in mind. It gives your developers the flexibility they need to build reliable and fast websites, while at the same time giving content creators with no coding skills the ability to edit content independently of the developers.

Traditional eCommerce solutions like WooCommerce or Magento are based on a monolithic architecture and handle the front-end as well as the back-end. But a growing number of eCommerce providers

like BigCommerce or Shopify also offer a headless option with access to the store's data via their API.



**A headless CMS can drastically change your loading times. For example, Storyblok has helped UPC Business reduce their website's loading times by 81%. Additionally, the process only required 3 developers! Read more about it [here](#).**

As an eCommerce CMS, Storyblok targets all the key criteria of a successful customer experience. Modular content blocks and seamless integration of any new technology means your content can be customized to any level you may wish. Customized blocks of content can be then reused and reshaped to form new pieces of content. Furthermore, Storyblok's emphasis on speed results in drastically lower loading times on your customer's side. When it comes to personalization, Storyblok goes the extra step by offering you completely free internationalization capabilities.

Some systems such as [Storyblok](#), offer a completely free trial of their service where you or someone in your company can get to experience the product hands-on.

You can also visit the main [eCommerce hub](#) to gain access to other free resources.



## Key Takeaway

A headless approach powered by APIs can help eCommerce businesses with many of their current problems, while potentially saving resources and costs. Headless eCommerce helps offering a greater level of flexibility and customization to your content creators, making it easier to create personalized content. Take advantage of the free trials that some headless CMSs such as [Storyblok](https://www.storyblok.com) offer, to get a better understanding of how headless systems work.

# Endnotes

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