



DESIGNING CONNECTED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

For the Modern World





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Today and Every Day is Digital, Period

It wasn't that long ago that eCommerce simply meant having a website where customers could purchase. That website was the only digital channel businesses had to contend with, and for most it took a back seat to physical stores, especially when it came to developing the customer experience.

Now, we live in a world where digital is front and center. The time it's taken to get here too, has been quick. Brands must realize the digital world in which they used to operate no longer exists, and to keep up with evolving customer expectations as well as growing touchpoints and commerce channels, they need to not only plug the gaps in their online customer experiences but lay the foundations for growth. They need to design digital experiences beyond the web and for the modern world.

This is where we show you how.

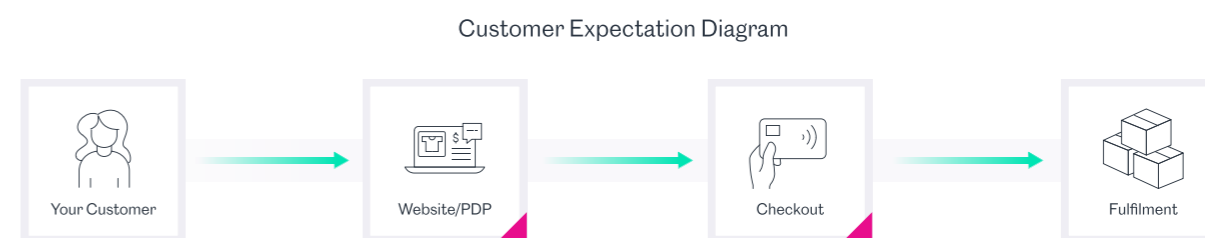
The Rise of Digital, The Warping of the Funnel

What does "online" shopping actually mean in today's digital environment?

It's a multi-touchpoint, fragmented world out there, and customers are interacting with brands anywhere they like, at any time. Additional digital channels and touchpoints are popping up regularly – there's mobile commerce, social commerce, marketplaces, and still the original eCommerce of a branded website. With the advent of the mobile phone and tablets, customers are switching between multiple devices, switching between the physical and online even, and that's before they even make a purchase. Commerce is now woven into consumer's daily online interactions with brands, influencers, and content, and they have the ability to make a purchase at almost any point along the journey.

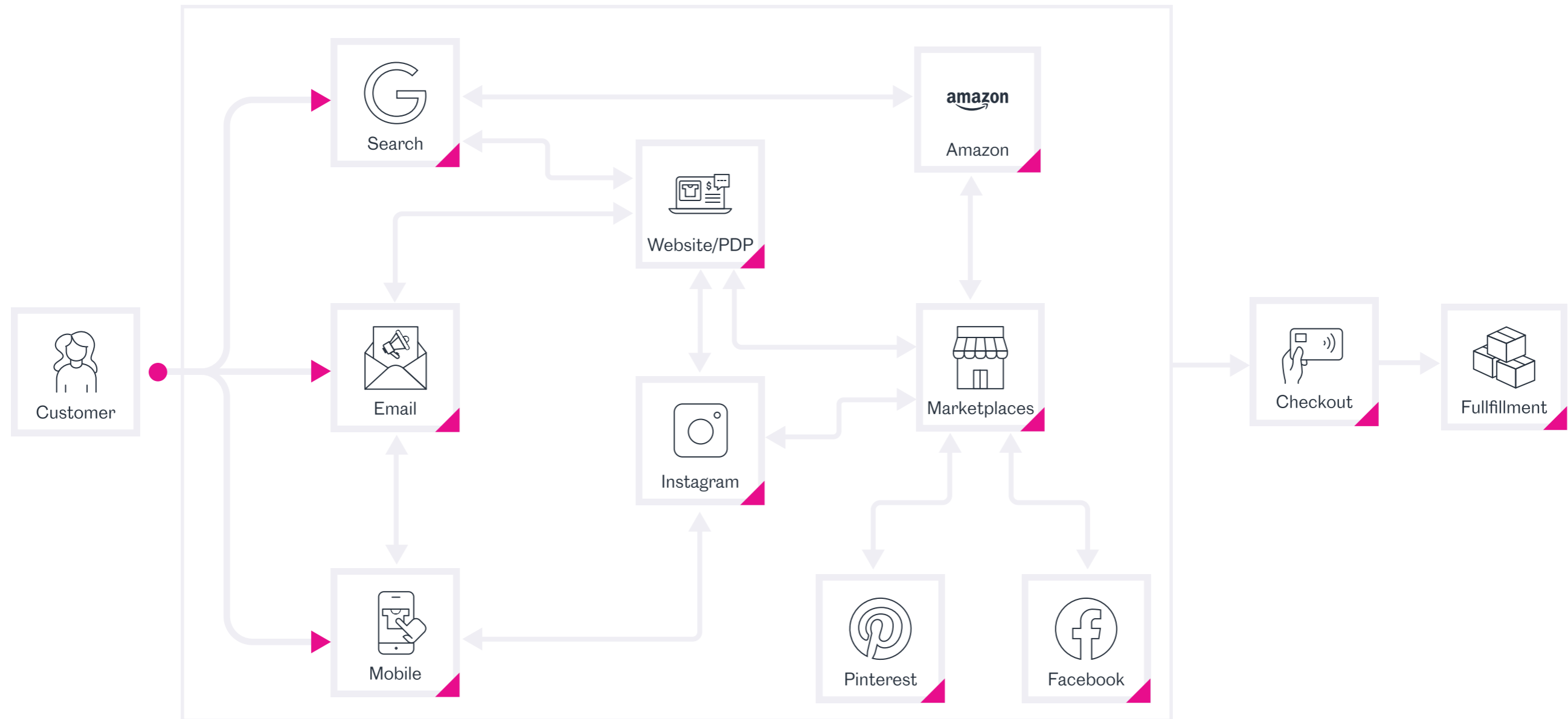
So, while we still measure success with a linear funnel, the reality of eCommerce is far more interconnected. A new customer can be introduced to a brand through a podcast, product discovery may happen in-store or through a TV commercial, and checkout may be triggered from an Instagram post. It means the way we think about eCommerce needs to change.

It's now a much harder challenge for brands when looking to keep up, in looking to engage and convert customers. They're in a race to support new channels, with new tools and new teams, and in trying to do so, in trying to deliver across all these channels, the customer and brand experience can become inconsistent and disjointed. Shoppers can experience one thing on one channel and have a completely different experience or perspective of a brand on another.



Customer Journey Reality

“While we still measure success with a linear funnel, the reality of eCommerce is far more interconnected”



Say Hi to Tasha

Tasha's a digital native, socially loves a good scroll on Instagram and TikTok, and has just taken up running. Join her as she weaves through an example of the modern-day commerce experience.

On the train to work, Tasha listens to a new running podcast on her iPhone, and notices it is sponsored by Anya Finn Active.

She quickly opens Instagram and types in "Anya Finn Active," scrolling through the content on their feed. This brand is totally her style, a FOLLOW for sure. While scrolling through Anya Finn Active's IG page, Tasha sees a post with a cool pair of trainers. She taps into the post to look at the comment, "Are these good for the treadmill?" She saves the post just before she heads off into the office.

As Tasha gets to work, she opens her laptop and googles "Anya Finn Active treadmill sneakers" to try and find the shoes from that Instagram post. Google returns a few options, but not the ones she was hoping.

She whips out her mobile and re-opens Instagram to see if there's a product link. Tasha clicks the link on Instagram and heads straight to the product detail page. The Anya Finn Active site opens on her mobile phone, but Tasha is still confused as to whether it's right shoe for her. The image doesn't seem like the same one on Instagram, and she can't find any information if the shoe is good for the treadmill.

While on the Anya Finn Active site, she opens the search bar and tries a few searches "treadmill sneakers" then "indoor running shoe," but no relevant search results are shown. As a last-ditch effort, Tasha goes back to the PDP to look at reviews but can't see any info relevant to her.

Thinking Amazon will have the product and reviews, Tasha heads there.

She also checks out Facebook at the same time.

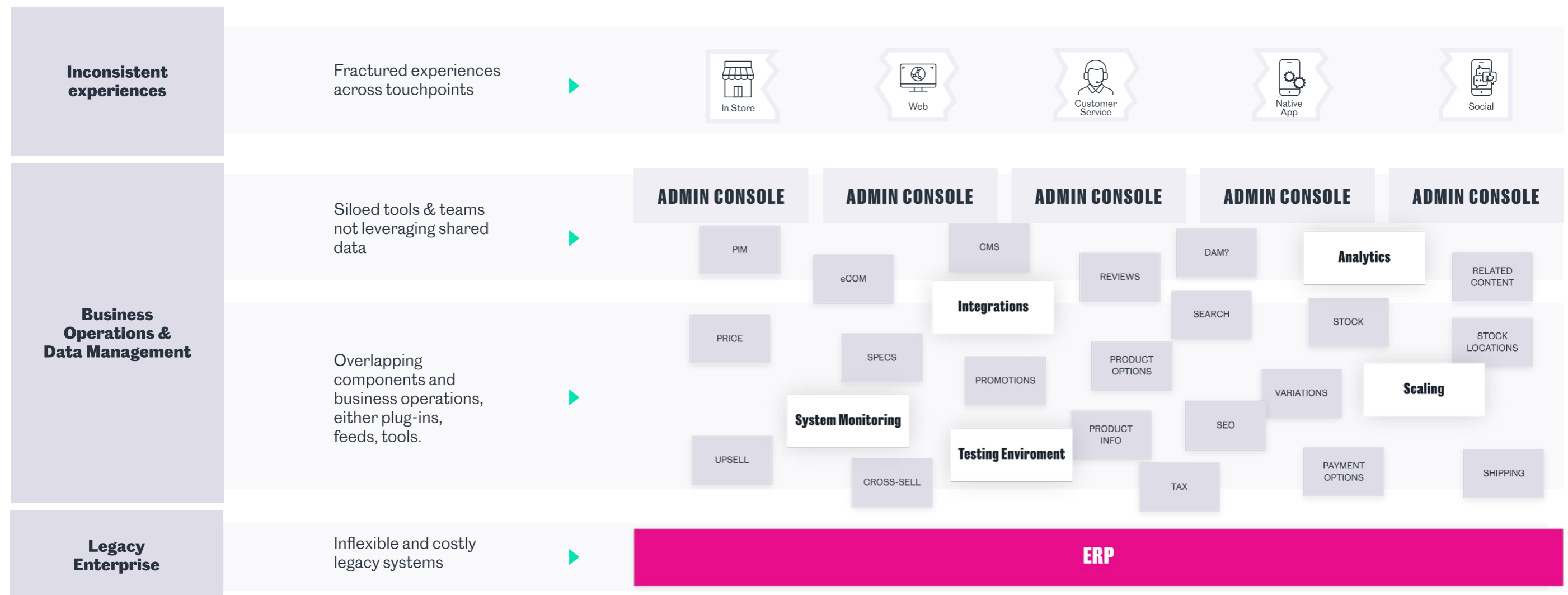
Tasha is frustrated as she can't find what she wants and leaves Anya Finn Active without purchasing.

What started out as a great experience for Tasha with curated brand content across social platforms, quickly turned into a negative sales process. She couldn't find what she wanted when she migrated to other channels, and the supporting content she wanted wasn't available either. Hence, Tasha left with no running shoes.

The Path to Customer Experience Success

Tasha's journey is just one example of an infinite number of ways customers can interact with your brand today.

Fragmented Customer Experience Foundation



The Humble Monolith Simply Won't Do

Many eCommerce architectures were modeled to support two single channels: in-store and web. Brick-and-mortar brands that adopted eCommerce purchased legacy monoliths to run and maintain a branded website, while connecting to antiquated (and often very rigid) systems like an ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) solution that underpinned everything.

The legacy monolith is a superb tool for managing a website from content, to product, to promotions; however, the cost benefit for a monolith begins to breakdown as additional eCommerce channels and digital interaction points grow. As you add more and more channels and additional experiences, what starts to happen is business operations and data management tend to blur.

As channels like social, native apps, marketplaces become the norm, new tools are added into the mix and new teams are tasked with creating content for them all. You may have one team managing the website using the legacy monolith. You may have a second team managing the native app using a mobile CMS, another managing social and affiliate feeds. You may have a fourth team managing in-store merchandizing and

product assortment and you may even have a fifth team managing email. Each team and tool have different integrations, business process, and requirements. The result is quite often different teams working to different sets of rules with no consistency across the entire experience. Little wonder then the customer is experiencing this inconsistency also.

Monolith technology simply isn't flexible enough to adapt to the growing needs of businesses today. Yes, there are plugins and feeds businesses can take advantage of to add new tools and features, but instead of developing on your own terms you're bound by the constraints and timelines of your monolith platform. Plus, these platforms involve long, costly and risky upgrade cycles that may or may not bring any direct benefit to your business but take up a lot of resource in the process. It's leaves a lot of frustration in the air.

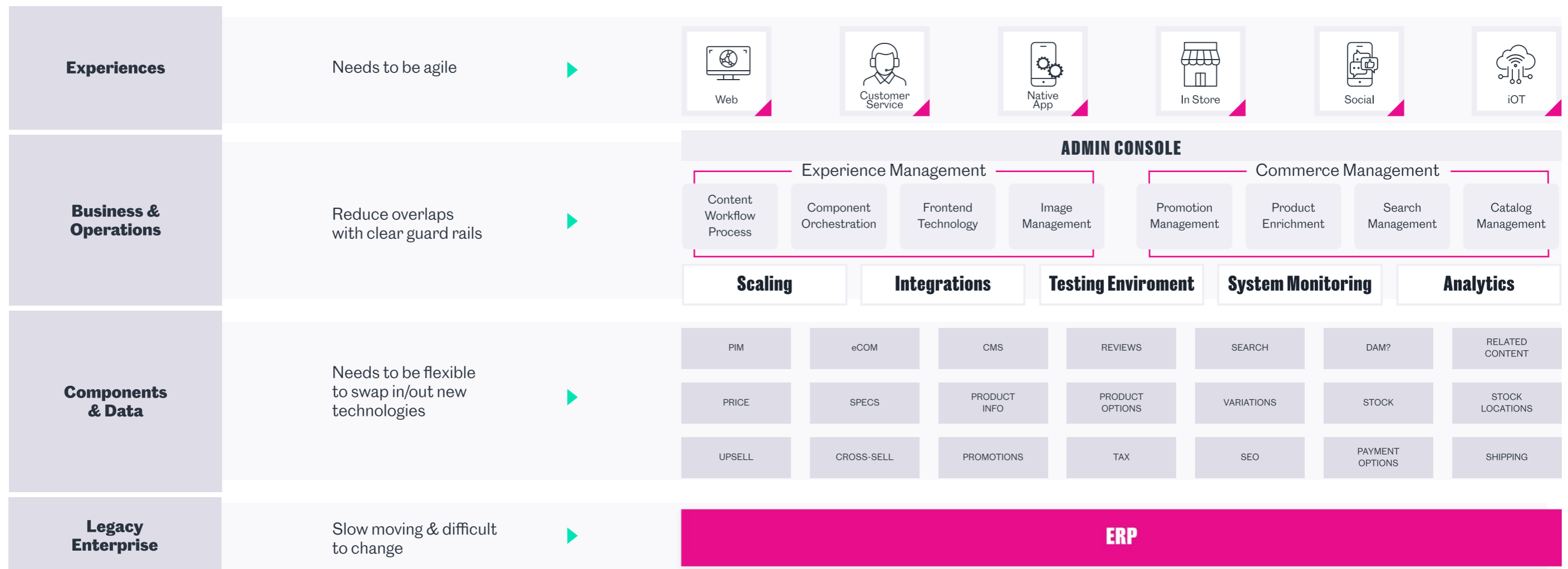
MACH TO THE RESCUE

Businesses need an architecture that is structured enough to allow customers to have those consistent experiences but flexible enough to adapt to any change in channels or touchpoints as and when they pop up.

A MACH (Microservices, API first, Cloud native, Headless) approach is a way to create the foundations for those connected experiences, given its ability to bring together any number of best-of-breed solutions. With the composable nature of a MACH architecture you can swap those solutions and components in and out, change and adapt as you go, so you're constantly able to align your technology to what you want to achieve as a business.

MACH is ultimately a flexible, scalable approach that allows continuous, iterative development compared to contemplating upgrade paths, meaning a faster time to market.

Connected Customer Experience Foundation





How to Build a Foundation for Connected Experiences

Moving to MACH and building your base on the way to having seamless customer experiences of course will take some time. The beauty of MACH as mentioned, is that it allows you to take an iterative approach so you can do it in smaller, manageable chunks. Here's some considerations to help you along the way.



ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION. Work out just how tangled your current setup is. The tangled web is likely caused by silos in teams, often each team swimming in different directions even though they're trying to achieve the same thing. If you have an enterprise business, this can seem overwhelming. Start with a single project or experience e.g. "implementing a native app" or "in-store kiosk" and determine which pieces of your legacy system need to support this new feature as a bite-sized approach to MACH.



WORK OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE. Don't focus on features and technology but instead products and capabilities that will add value for your customers and your internal business teams. This one is hard to get the business behind. Instead of designing around a requirement like "the in-store kiosk needs to allow users to search" shift the focus to "a customer should be able to search across any brand channel and the results should be contextual to the term they are searching for."



ALIGN THE ENTIRE BUSINESS BEHIND YOUR GOALS. It will require more than a technological shift for it to be successful, but an organizational one too. Think about not only the customer experience but the internal merchant experience to gain internal buy in, e.g. the merchant team should be able to create collections and category pages for the mobile kiosk with the same tool that drives categories and content for the web and mobile app.



IDENTIFY THE LOW-HANGING FRUIT THAT YOU CAN TACKLE FIRST. What is going to make the biggest impact but for low investment or that is low risk? This can take shape as a full project, like an in-store kiosk or a small iterative change to your existing stack that might improve performance or conversion.



ITERATION IS KEY. Take it bit by bit. You're may even continue to keep some systems that are hard to move until later on. When planning a MACH project, start on a small scale to avoid internal objections and increased risk. Using the examples above can help shape a business case that is easy to sell into the business. Focus on mitigating risk, while increasing iterative value.

Solving for Infinite Customer Journeys

Having the framework for building a MACH architecture is the foundation for scale, but when we look at Tasha's journey for example, how should a business shift their focus from creating features to planning for unified experiences?

If we think back to the problem with today's eCommerce architectures, they're fragmented and disconnected. So, when planning for future growth, there are many important components when looking to plug the gaps of your customer experience so that they remain consistent even with an infinite number of journeys. These are some of your key pieces to that puzzle.

Consistent Product Information

Product information is everywhere. Social. Email. It's the bedrock for eCommerce and needs to support consistent experiences across all your channels. Poor execution leads to low conversion or more returns – neither of which are good for business. The key is to build a single source of truth for product information that includes elements to support product elevation, brand experience, and purchase information.



Tips

MOVE BEYOND JUST PRACTICAL AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

B2C buyers tend to have more of an emotional connection driving their purchases. When defining attributes and experiences of a product page, you should include three main components:

- ☑ Technical information. These elements are the core attributes of the product make-up and drive a black-and-white decision-making process. Features like length, in-seam, material, country of origin, description, are often used as search facets.
- ☑ Usage information. These elements bring the product to life, showing how to use the product or how it may look on someone else or in a different environment. Usage information enhances technical information and allows a buyer to “see” the item as it relates to them. Features like “this model is wearing a size M,” “for indoor or outdoor use,” etc.
- ☑ Emotional information. These elements carry the brand experience through and create an emotional tie to the product. Features like videos featuring the product, celebrities wearing the product, or sensory elements like scents and texture.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT EXPERIENCE, NOT JUST PRODUCT INFORMATION

Match your product data with your overall experience. Thinking back to Tasha, her first experience with a product was Instagram. But with so many ways a customer can interact with your brand, their first major interaction could be anywhere, it may be the product page. So, re-imagine the product page to mirror an interactive experience. Weave in videos, testimonials, integrate graphics and text, use icons for usage information, create engaging elements that highlight your brand vision so that a product page feels like an extension of an everyday digital interaction.

GET OUT OF EXCEL, EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

Product data comes to you in all different formats and from different suppliers. Management of the data is likely done by different teams who are using tools like spreadsheets, and these tools don't normally offer any capability to structure and manage the catalog, let alone standardize everything and let teams collaborate when creating product content or pages. Fortunately, there is technology that can help.

REFINE YOUR PROCESSES

Who is managing your product catalog? Who is setting the process that brings together studio teams dealing with photography, procurement teams dealing with suppliers, product teams, marketers? Who reviews and approves the product information, ensuring it is complete and appropriate for each channel with their different requirements? This governance and control are where many falter. Again though, there is technology you can employ that supports these processes.



THE SOLUTION: Bringing together people, process and technology, the platform you need to consider is a Product Information Management (PIM) tool. A PIM is a specialized tool that addresses the challenges in aligning everything, removing the silos of activity and silos of where your product data is sitting in the backend. It's a place to unify your data, where it's adapted for every channel but not uniform as such given each channel has different rules and considerations. A PIM also allows for better control, more collaboration across teams, ultimately meaning you can make processes more efficient and go to market quicker. What to look for in a PIM will be relevant to your business but given your business teams are likely the people using it, you need to make sure it's simple to use and simple to adopt. You also want to look to leverage features like validation, workflow management and the ability to automatically measure completeness, and where you can ensure attributes are mandatory, so you know your product description for your eCommerce site will be longer and more in-depth than your Instagram product information for example.

Supporting Search and Navigation

Search is often something businesses overlook or leave as last priority. But in fact, once you've got your strategy and product information in place, it's just the beginning and getting search right can not only help to provide frictionless experiences for customers but is also proven to increase revenue.

Search has been traditionally focused around the product, and product discovery only. Customers take to Google to search for a solution "skincare products that are good for combination skin" whereas customers take to a website to search for a product "high concentrate skin serum." Why? Because site search has never returned the results to support this, creating a pattern for end customers. With brands now creating amazing digital content like blogs, social posts, videos, and even support questions, they're losing out on the potential for continued engagement and discovery if they're just focused on the product.



Tips

BE RELEVANT

Ensuring content and data like inventory levels for example are up to date is critical – that way you can index it correctly and only show customers what is actually available and relevant.

LEVERAGE OTHER DATA POINTS

Look to other diverse information sources and bring them into one single record. It can be anything like the number of social media likes or support information, but again it ensures relevant and up-to-date content rises to the top specific to each customer.

MOVE BEYOND JUST THE TRANSACTION

Your relationship with your customers will come from more than just a transaction. Before and after purchase, when customers are not in "buying mode" you need to maintain that relationship and provide value in other ways. Implementing blogs or supporting content into your navigation or search is an example of this, as is content on social media, influencer campaigns and the like, which can help keep the customer engaged and informed in between purchases.

THINK ABOUT LANGUAGE

How you talk about your products, the language and words you use matter. Your customers may use different terms that you will need to factor into your discovery experience. This may be as simple as the word “pants” meaning one thing in the UK and another in the US. Dealing with the dynamics of one language is hard enough, and that’s before you consider localization and translation when you operate internationally. Don’t worry, leveraging AI technology can help.

PERSONALIZE YOUR OFFERING

Use your data the right way to serve personalized recommendations, answers and content that build loyalty with your customers. If you already know things about your customers, optimize the time you spend with them and show the things you know they want to see.



THE SOLUTION: You can look to a federated search platform to help you navigate your search and discovery experiences. Search tools that utilize AI models can help to automatically serve the right products and information at the right time. Automatically generated synonyms for example are available to overcome those language barriers, ensuring the right products and category pages are shown appropriate to customer search terms.

These tools can also ensure the right content is served relevant to what device your customer is on. Mobile for example, has limited space so knowing which order products should be in is vital, and this can be achieved deriving data based on such things as what customers have interacted with and their preferences.

Bridging the Gap with Experience Management

Managing and creating for all these different touchpoints can be tricky. You need to be able to pull everything together, so your business teams have a centralized way to deliver the experiences they want (ideally without a lot of coding). It’s more flexible but also more efficient.



Tips

STOP THINKING ABOUT WEB, THINK OMNICHANNEL

Traditional content management systems (CMS) were built pre iPhone and before mobile took hold, so they’re based around website experiences. The new world requires you think beyond web and create and manage content, and your data, accordingly in a more abstract way. Your data and content, your experiences, they need to support omnichannel experiences.

DELIVER ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR YOUR TEAMS

Your teams need to be able to visualize, preview and schedule the experiences they are creating across every channel. They need to see what the customer is seeing in real-time and have the confidence that what they’re scheduling is actually what will go live. Calendar-based tools as well will be essential.

FOCUS ON ASSET REUSE

To build and create consistent experiences, the first step is delivering the same content. Seems simple, but with multiple siloed teams and tools, content can easily be confined to just the one channel. Breaking down your people and processes, and by incorporating the right technology, will mean teams can collaborate on content and content requirements from the get-go. They’ll be able to easily share content across all touchpoints, and it won’t need a lot or any manual re-work either.

INTRODUCE ATOMIC DESIGN

Many brands still leverage heavily layered images and pre-defined page templates, making it difficult to repurpose assets and can bottleneck production or urgent changes. Atomic design is a principle in which pages are broken down into templates containing smaller elements that can be repurposed. A web banner may consist of 5-6 components: a background image, lead image, background text color, heading text, sub-heading, call-to-action text, and a link. With this design principle, you can move the text positioning, change copy, or update an image in the CMS without relying on a graphic designer. Not only does this alleviate production bottlenecks but it decreases the need for multiple images or assets for different breakpoints and screen sizes.

THINK BEYOND TRADITIONAL CONTENT

With new design principles and flexible headless frameworks, your end-user experience is no longer confined to the rigid templates of your monolith. So, when designing for unified experiences, think beyond the templates of traditional page layouts. With experience management solutions, you can place the management of product pages in the hands of merchants not developers, empowering them to create engaging experiences that include videos, branded content, and more.



THE SOLUTION: Controlling the experience in one easy platform is finally achievable through a Digital Experience Platform (DXP). A DXP provides a low or no code tool in which business teams can deliver the future of customer experiences. It will bring together all your data and assets like your product information, imagery etc, and enable users to integrate it all into workflows. You can control the experience and content across all your channels, and you can manage everything across all locales and languages also.

What's more, certain platforms will also allow you to break down your content into smaller atomic content modules or components so you can preview, schedule and publish by component not just by page. This type of content modeling makes it much easier to reuse content across different channels and areas of your eCommerce site, creating a lot more internal efficiencies and less duplication of work for your teams.

A DXP is the control and efficiency you've always wanted but could never achieve. It's the essential layer in your architecture when wanting to orchestrate those dynamic and personalized experiences.

Elevating Your Visual Assets

The right visual assets can play a huge role in the sales process. But with social feeds, lifestyle and product imagery, supporting PDFs on your eCommerce site, and more, at any given time you'll be having to deal with hundreds if not thousands of assets. Dealing with them all in a centralized, uniform way is paramount.

Tips

YOUR TECHNOLOGY WILL DEPEND ON YOUR USE CASE

Basic product image needs associated with your product information for example can be handled in a PIM but if you're dealing with a much broader range of assets and want more control over them then other platforms will need come into the mix.

CENTRALIZE ALL YOUR ASSETS

Having everything in one place is vital, especially when it comes to consistency when repurposing everything and integrating your assets into your workflows.

ENRICH YOUR ASSETS WITH METADATA

Assigning and tagging your assets properly means they can be utilized a lot better. Searching is made a lot easier for one.

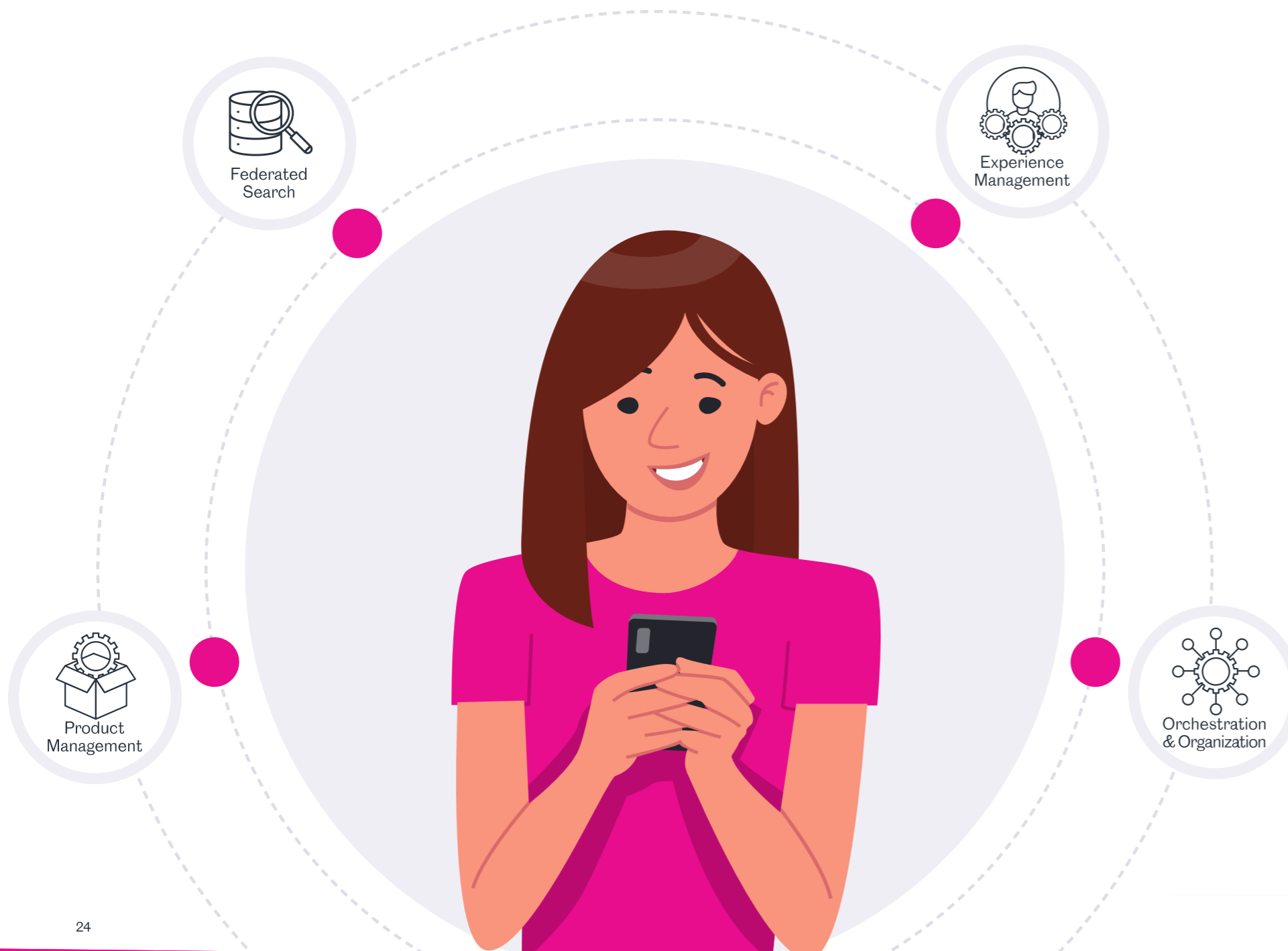


THE SOLUTION: Here we can introduce a digital asset manager (DAM) to be that one stop shop for all your visual and supporting assets. A DAM can take care of a wide range of assets and use cases from video and imagery used within your product information to supporting documents, as well as managing imagery for product catalogs, perhaps press kits or your advertising materials, everything. It can also provide a range of collaboration tools that mean your teams no longer have work across different platforms or in silos. A good DAM will allow for easy editing and manipulation of images, and more governance can be applied too. For example, no longer will you have to manually edit and upload image variants so they fit across different devices. With the right feature set like focal point technology, you can set the part of the image that always needs to be displayed and the DAM will ensure the image is served perfectly each time. As well, DAM tooling can help by automatically serving the right image type relevant to different browsers. It's just a few ways you can ensure your assets are easily optimized.

Overall, it all means a lot less rework of assets and a lot better performance of your channels, which your customers, internal teams and Google will thank you for. (Google loves good site performance and optimization!)

Let's Welcome Back Tasha

By applying the elements we've talked about to Tasha's experience, we can see how product management, federated search, experience management and the right orchestration and organization can plug the gaps in her original journey.



Tasha's New Journey:

- Tasha is back on Instagram. She sees a pair of trainers, and when she taps on the image, she sees it links to a product.
- She clicks through to see the product information on the product detail page. Tasha has confidence that it's the right product as the imagery and product details are consistent with the social channels.
- By Anya Finn Active leveraging a DAM and centralized PIM, Tasha now can see additional purchase details. In the features and benefits she can easily see that the sneakers she wants are a good fit for treadmill running, and there's information and tooling around sizing and fit. And with a experience management platform Anya Finn Active has been able to easily repurpose these elements across other locations on the site.
- Still wanting a bit more information around fit (just in case), Tasha searches for a fit guide. As she's typing in fit guide, articles are returning up thanks to the federated search platform, as well as videos from YouTube and Vimeo, customer support FAQs, and more.
- Clicking on the fit guide, she goes to the content page and at the bottom, integrated, contextual product content has been displayed letting Tasha see the products she's interested in, and additional recommendations based on her buying behavior so far.
- Tasha has found everything she needs and the path to conversion is simple.
- Tasha buys and loves her new sneakers and is now a fan of Anya Finn Active.

Remember this is just one example. You can support any number of experiences using the right technology and processes.

Deliver the Unimaginable

Creating a connected experience across all channels will take time, but the right technology will allow you to start to plug your current gaps as well as build out the experiences of tomorrow. You don't just want to give your customers the expected, but delight them, give them an experience they'll remember and that's unique to them.

As mentioned, adopting a MACH approach can be a great first step. And there's plenty of vendors and system integrators out there that can help from the very get go, before you even think about what tools you may need. If you want to discuss elevating your customer experiences, or what a move to MACH could look like for your business, then get in touch with the expert teams at Ampliance, Akeneo, Algolia and EPAM.



ABOUT AMPLIANCE

Ampliance powers digital-first brands and retailers with the freedom to do more. Our low-code CMS, DAM and Digital Experience Management platform allows more than 350 of the world's leading brand teams to manage content, not code. The result is a rapid ROI for our clients who are delivering data and insight-driven customer experiences that drive deeper, more valuable customer relationships. For more information on the Ampliance platform, including Dynamic Content and Dynamic Media, please visit: www.ampliance.com



ABOUT AKENEO

Akeneo is a global leader in Product Experience Management (PXM) solutions that help merchants deliver a compelling customer experience across sales channels, including eCommerce, mobile, print, marketplaces and physical points of sale. Akeneo's open source-based enterprise PIM, and product data intelligence solutions dramatically improve product data quality and accuracy while simplifying and accelerating product catalog management. For more information: www.akeneo.com



ABOUT ALGOLIA

Algolia provides an API platform for Dynamic Experiences that enables organizations to predict intent and deliver results. Algolia achieves this with an API-first approach that allows developers and business teams to surface relevant content when wanted – satisfying the demand for instant gratification – and building and optimizing online experiences that enhance online engagement, increase conversion rates, and enrich lifetime value to generate profitable growth. More than 10,000 companies including Under Armour, Lacoste, Birchbox, Stripe, Slack, Medium, and Zendesk rely on Algolia to manage over 1.5 trillion search queries a year. Algolia is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Paris, London, Tokyo, New York, and Atlanta. To learn more, visit www.algolia.com



ABOUT EPAM

Since 1993, EPAM Systems, Inc. (NYSE: EPAM) has leveraged its software engineering expertise to become a leading global product development, digital platform engineering, and top digital and product design agency. Through its 'Engineering DNA' and innovative strategy, consulting, and design capabilities, EPAM works in collaboration with its customers to deliver next-gen solutions that turn complex business challenges into real business outcomes. EPAM's global teams serve customers in more than 35 countries across North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. As a recognized market leader in multiple categories among top global independent research agencies, EPAM was one of only four technology companies to appear on Forbes 25 Fastest Growing Public Tech Companies list every year of publication since 2013 and ranked as the top IT services company on Fortune's 100 Fastest-Growing Companies list in 2019 and 2020. Learn more at www.epam.com.

Amplience powers digital-first brands and retailers with the freedom to do more. Our low-code CMS, DAM and Digital Experience Management platform allows more than 350 of the world's leading brand teams to manage content, not code. The result is a rapid ROI for our clients who are delivering data and insight-driven customer experiences that drive deeper, more valuable customer relationships. Amplience supports the industry's transition to Microservice, API-first, Cloud and Headless (MACH) technologies, is MACH certified and an executive member of the MACH Alliance.

Named a Strong Performer, Amplience was recognized by Forrester in The Forrester Wave™: Agile Content Management Systems (CMSes), Q1 2021 report with the highest possible scores attained in the criteria of decoupled delivery, deployment and system performance, components, and marketplaces.

Powering customer experiences for the world's most innovative brands, Amplience's customers include Ulta Beauty, Coach, GAP, Crate & Barrel, Harry Rosen and Missguided.

Experience
FREEDOM



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