



HEADLESS COMMERCE:

Transforming the Travel Experience

Why Powerful Digital Experiences Are Your Ticket to Beating the Competition





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Ready to transform your approach to digital content and create seamless, connected customer experiences? Get in touch with our specialist in-house team.

INTRODUCTION:

When Travel Hit Turbulence

Travel wasn't the only industry to be impacted during and after the pandemic, but arguably it suffered worse than most. It also recovered faster than most, creating a whole new set of challenges and opportunities which we'll explore more in this eBook.

Where the retail sector could reinvent itself as 'digital-first' through new services like eCommerce, curbside pickup or repurposing physical stores as socially-distanced distribution centers, the travel sector, by nature, relies on physical footfall. As the pandemic gradually ended and people could once again get out and see the world, the travel industry experienced an enormous spike in demand, with spend at an all-time high.

In the first quarter of 2022, all markets – Europe more so than others – were nearing pre-pandemic levels of flying capacity and demand. In one particular success story, Ryanair carried more passengers in March 2022 than pre-pandemic, demonstrating not only recovery, but surge in the number of passengers travelling abroad. Investec's Aviation Market Snapshot Q1 2022 predicted that load factors in Europe would return to 90% by June 2022, and we know from a [market analysis conducted by the International Air Transport Association](#) that global passenger load factor was fully restored to 2019 levels in May 2023.

You'd have only had to look at the news last summer to see queues of people at airports (especially with airport staff shortages, [as reported on by Airport Technology](#)),

packed cruise ships and beaches all over the world crowded with tourists. Travel has bounced back.

However, travel as we know it, has changed.

Whether a result of two years of lockdowns or a natural progression to a more digitally connected world, consumers now seek more meaningful and personalized experiences when they travel. Concepts like 'bleisure', for example, where business travelers tag leisure trips onto their agenda, are growing in popularity. According to [research by Hilton Honors Platinum Visa](#), 52% of the UK workforce is travelling more now on business than they did five years ago, and with 82% citing that their personal relationships are being affected by their business travel, there's a growing demand to do more than just work on these trips. One in three UK employees are now inviting partners and families along, so they can extend their trip and enjoy some quality time together.

Consumers are also becoming more informed and empowered. With the seemingly infinite amount of content and information travelers have at their fingertips, it's easier than ever for them to do their

own research online, without having to rely on a travel agent to do it for them.

These are just some of the things that are making the travel industry much more competitive. And to make matters worse, a lot of skilled talent drained from the workforce during the Covid-19 crisis, with many organizations still struggling to backfill roles. According to [an analysis by the World Travel & Tourism Council](#), one in 18 jobs remained vacant in the first half of 2022, with an estimated 321,000 unfilled positions in that timeframe.

In short: business is booming, but so are the challenges.

To address these industry shifts, overcome the challenges they've presented and succeed in the digital-first era, travel brands need to

adapt to changing consumer behavior and exceed their customers' expectations when it comes to travel experiences. How? By taking a leaf from retailers' books when it comes to digital content, customer journeys and eCommerce experiences.

Culture and process will be at the heart of adopting that new approach, but it's technology that will ultimately make it possible.

In this guide, we're going to explore what those technological changes look like, why they're going to give travel brands a competitive advantage in the current market and how you can achieve success with these new approaches.





From Change Comes Opportunity

Before we can understand *how* to overcome the current challenges in the travel industry (and make the most of the many opportunities, too), we first have to fully understand what's happening in the sector right now and *why*.

With travel and tourism staff shortages and some of the world's major flag carriers and national airlines needing huge injections of capital to stay afloat back in March 2020, what does this mean for the future of travel? And more specifically, what does this mean for your customer experience?

Evolving Expectations

In short: it means you need to do more with less. But that's not all.

While travel firms have suffered the consequences of the pandemic and other factors internally these past few years, that time has also seen a significant change in customer behavior and expectations. The way we interact with brands and buy things online has fundamentally changed. And so have the expectations consumers have when it comes to the quality of those digital experiences.

In a 2023 Travel Trends Report by Hopper, just under half of surveyed customers said they plan to use social media when booking a trip, for everything from finding destination inspiration to sourcing exclusive deals and discount codes.

A study conducted by Oracle Hospitality in partnership with Skift revealed that 73% of travelers want to use their mobile device to manage their hotel experience, including checking in and out, ordering food, paying, and more.

"The consumerization of IT has passed the inflection point, and it's not going back to normal. There's a new baseline to satisfy a guest."

Scott Strikland, Executive Vice President and CIO, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts

Travel brands, therefore, need to evolve the end-to-end experience they're offering consumers. They can no longer rely on a rebound in traveler numbers to achieve success with the same digital strategy they were executing in 2019.

“The speed of the adoption of technology, sources of technological innovation (payments, contactless technology, delivery, etc.), and attitudes toward data-sharing are creating a new era for the hospitality and travel industry in which companies will have to evolve and adapt.”

- 2023 Deloitte Hospitality Outlook



“ Whether it’s more tailored products, greater digital parity with analog services, or faster turnaround, customer expectations of what great customer experience (CX) looks like have shifted significantly. Covid-19 only accelerated these trends, leaving the travel ecosystem in a game of catch-up.”

McKinsey & Company

The Road (and Air and Sea) Ahead

Despite the seemingly grave outlook we touched on earlier in this guide, the future is beginning to look a whole lot brighter for travel brands. The airport transport industry is predicted to deliver a profit of \$4.7 billion at the end of 2023, a huge improvement on the near \$7 billion loss last year, according to a [report by the International Air Transport Association](#).

[Data from IATA](#) suggests a growing recovery for airlines across Europe, with many approaching pre-pandemic levels of capacity and demand. EasyJet, IAG and Lufthansa all planned to fly at, or near, their pre-pandemic European capacity peak during the summer of 2022.

Cruise passenger levels are also expected to hit 2019 levels by the end of 2023, creating a much-needed boost to the travel and tourism sector across the world.

While US airlines are facing greater long-term challenges with staffing levels compared to other regions, by the end of 2022, US airlines were reporting a recovery in demand of 70-80% of pre-pandemic levels, according to [research by the Federal Aviation Administration](#).

And consumers’ willingness and desire to travel has significantly increased, with [49% of Americans](#) planning to travel more in 2023 than they did in 2022. In the US, [bookings for cruises increased by 283%](#), air travel by 116% and hotels and resorts by 61% in January 2023, compared to last year. It was a similar picture in EMEA, with bookings for cruises and air travel surging, and a 168% increase in bookings for hotels and resorts year on year.

With the post-pandemic recovery in full swing, there are many opportunities for brands to take advantage of, and the ones that adopt the right strategy now (underpinned by the right technology) will do extremely well in the coming months and years.

But what do those opportunities look like? What do they mean for brands like yours? And, most importantly, how can you make the most of them?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Demand for travel is booming, but staff shortages and changing customer expectations are putting brands under more and more pressure to adapt the way they deliver digital experiences.
- It’s no longer enough to simply do what you did in 2019 – consumers want seamless, connected experiences between physical and digital touchpoints that offer flexibility and convenience.
- There are huge opportunities for brands who can get those experiences right, which means making the right strategic and technological decisions now.

The Art of Selling Experiences

We know that consumers expect a compelling digital experience, but how can you evolve your content strategy to meet their expectations?

One crucial part of creating that experience lies in the content you serve your customers (and potential customers) at each stage of their buying journey. In each of those connected moments, you have the opportunity to create more value for the customer and therefore more revenue for your business. With the right approach, travel brands can connect with customers on a deeper level, engaging interest, emotion, memories, presence and so much more. The buyer, in some circumstances, is buying an experience that will change their lives.

The digital experience can no longer be about selling the flights or the boat ride or the train ticket. It's about all the enhancements you can offer at the right time, in the right moment, with multiple chances to make additional revenue once the consumer is on that (literal and metaphorical) journey. In many ways, travel is just like retail. The difference, of course, lies in the level of complexity.

From a content perspective, retailers might have thousands of products and millions of images. But ultimately, they just need to show a consumer the right content at the right time, orchestrating those critical moments to maximize conversions and sales. Travel brands, however, are dealing with multiple different elements that make up the

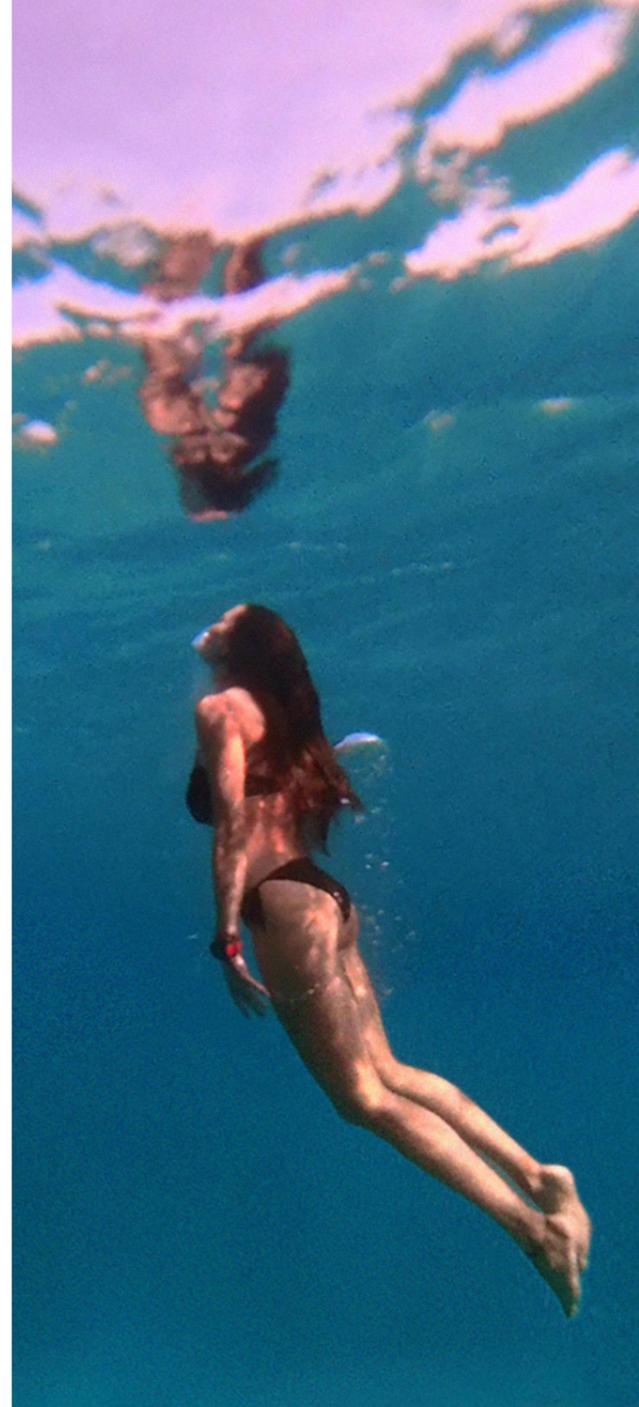
overall travel experience, from research and booking, to car hire, hotels, insurance, add-ons and more. This makes it a much more complex experience to manage.

The real value for travel brands lies in bringing all those elements together in order to make it a quick, easy and seamless buying journey for any customer. Many of the leading brands have already realized this, of course. And easyJet's [recent partnership with dnata](#) is evidence of that.

According to the press release announcing the move, "dnata will work closely with easyJet and leading technology providers to deliver a modern, technology-led program with customers front and center."

The key word to note in the above quote is 'technology' (it's so important, they say it twice!). You can have the vision and all the ambition in the world, but the thing that will make or break these improved end-to-end customer experiences is the technology that underpins them. And that fact only becomes clearer when you look at the demographics driving the current boom.





Which Demographics Matter Most?

According to the [2022 Deloitte travel outlook](#), younger and wealthier travelers are leading the charge when it comes to the resurgence in demand.

45% of 18-34-year-olds surveyed said they currently had travel plans vs. only 36% of those over 55, while higher-income travelers are “coming back at a much faster pace than those in lower income brackets.” And the difference on that latter point is clear: 53% of those earning over \$100,000 plan to travel vs. only 32% of those earning less than \$50,000. And 30% of those higher income travelers are spending more than they did before the pandemic.

Clearly, there are opportunities here. And those opportunities lie in getting your digital

experience right from the very first moment a potential traveler starts their research. Millennial and Gen Z audiences are typically digitally native and therefore expect your online content to be easy to find, consume and digest.

If this demographic is a key focus for your business, the best results will come from investing in capabilities that help you meet your customers across multiple digital channels and touchpoints. If you don't, you're likely to lose customers to other travel brands offering a more connected digital experience.

Or, even worse: it's a race to the bottom on price.

Curating your own brand experiences and creating ecosystems of partnerships you can resell as ancillaries will ensure the right offers are always within the swipe of an app. Every touchpoint therefore becomes relevant and contextual to their preferences, location and purchasing history. By doing so, you turn the sometimes complex and non-intuitive process of researching and booking a holiday into an easy, personalized and enjoyable experience. And what could be easier, and more satisfying, than booking a holiday through a company that already knows exactly the kind of holiday you love to take.

From a technology perspective, a [recent Accenture report](#) explored how NFTs can play an exciting role in evolving travel loyalty programs beyond offering the same-old discounts with features like first access to new products, surprise gifts and exclusive in-person events.

Ultimately, the brands that manage to create those differentiated experiences will be successful in the current travel boom. But success relies on putting the right technologies and approaches in place. So, how do you go about doing that? And what do those technologies and approaches look like?

In the next chapter, we'll answer these questions and more.

Personalization Is More Important Than Ever

Whoever your target demographic is, one thing is becoming increasingly important when it comes to meeting consumers' expectations online: personalization.

75% of consumers are more likely to buy from brands that offer personalized digital experiences, according to a [study by Yieldify](#).

And in [another study by Salesforce](#), 97% of marketers reported an improvement in business results due to personalization.

For travel marketers, this presents a huge opportunity. Analyzing intent-based data focused on individual traits and preferences will allow travel brands to establish their relevance

to consumers and increase their chance of converting and attaining customer loyalty — from the moment they begin researching their holiday through to booking, pre-departure, at the airport, and all the way through their time away until they get home.

For example, if you know that a customer has a preference for active holidays, you can recommend top sporting destinations — best surfing spots, best golfing breaks, or cycling routes. If you know they have a bigger budget, you can recommend add-ons such as speedy boarding, flight upgrades and lounge passes, to elevate their airport experience and increase revenue per passenger.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Travel brands can increase revenue per visitor by taking inspiration from retailers, serving relevant content and offers at each step of the research, buying and post-purchase process.
- Younger and wealthier consumers are the two leading demographics driving the current travel boom.
- Personalization is critically important and will be a key factor in driving long-term customer loyalty in travel, but it relies on the use of the right technology and data to create new digital experiences.

How to Evolve Your Content Strategy to Meet Demand

We've talked about the current landscape in the travel sector, the challenges that travel brands are facing and how forward-thinking brands are overcoming them. But, how do you make it all possible? The answer can be found in your underlying infrastructure: the technology that enables your digital content and eCommerce experience. Traditional monolithic platforms weren't built to support you in evolving and adapting your experiences at the current rate of customer behavior change. Nor will they allow you to embrace a composable commerce approach (we'll talk more about this in a moment), which brings together all the different tools and integrations you need in one place – a custom component selection tailored specifically to your business needs – and allows them to work together seamlessly.

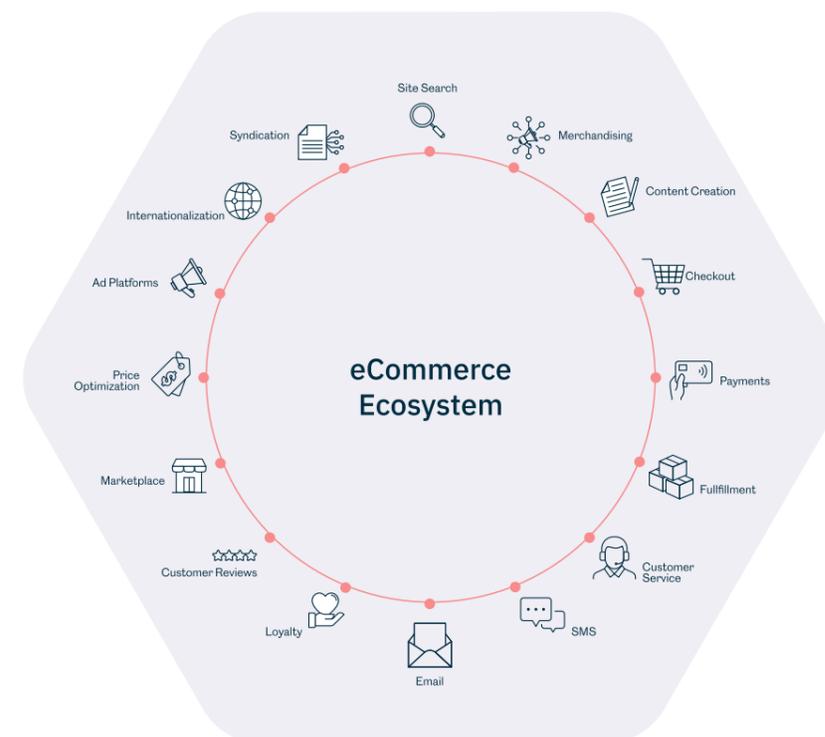
With the rise of headless architecture – where the presentation layer, i.e. your web pages and apps for example, are detached from the backend functionality – you can break away from that slow, expensive and inflexible infrastructure and create experiences the way retailers do, using APIs (application programming interfaces) to control each part of the experience individually, without having to get stuck into the backend and rely on developers.

For travel brands, this is an opportunity to create experiences in the same way that retailers do, providing a super-responsive, super-fast, carefully curated experience from end-to-end, using real customer data. So, as customers move through the purchasing journey, you can present the best offer or outcome at the relevant stage and point of engagement. The result is a consistently brilliant brand experience

through the entire customer journey, whether it's on mobile apps, your website, the seatback screen in-flight or anywhere else. Everything is connected. Everything works together. And customer satisfaction and conversions increase as a result. But what exactly is headless? And what does composable commerce mean?

Introducing Headless and Composable Commerce

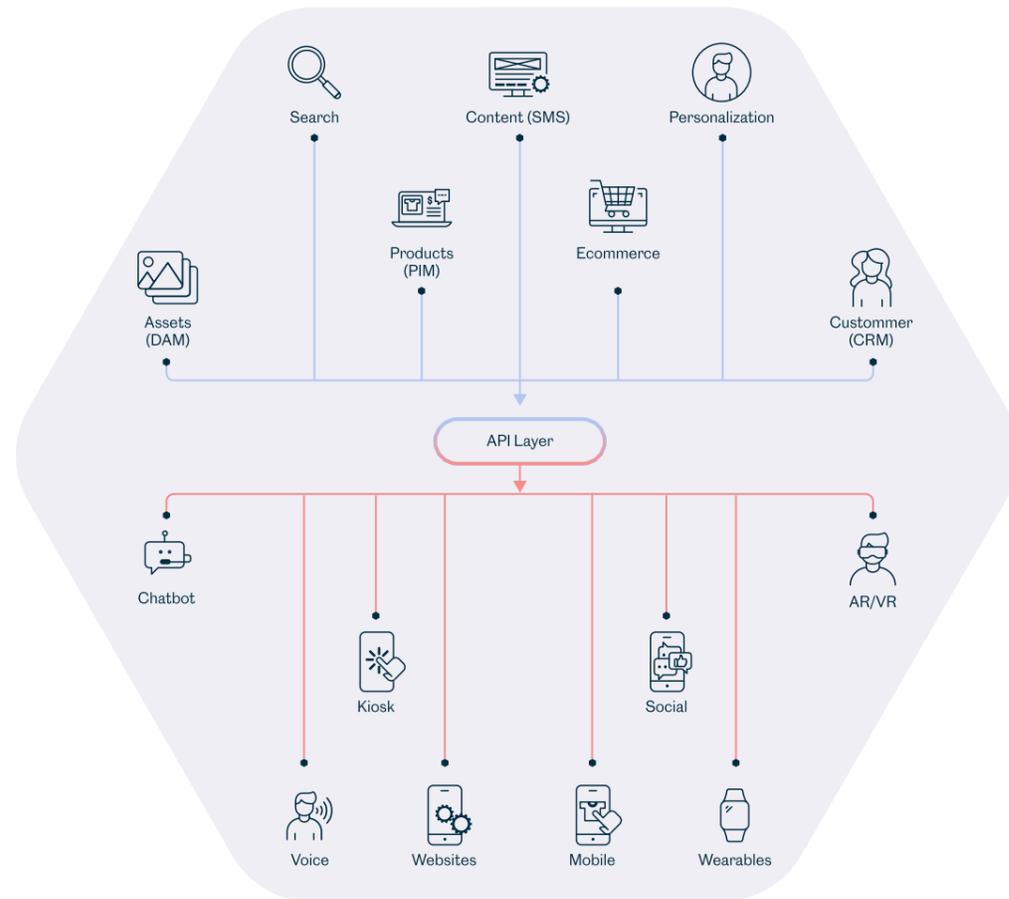
Unlike the all-in-one monolithic content platforms, a composable commerce approach is about bringing together best-of-breed components to create a tailored technology stack, all working as one to suit your specific needs. Rather than relying on a single vendor to provide a standard functionality, you can instead choose your own commerce experience services, such as checkout or search. All of these services exist as part of the eCommerce ecosystem, each functioning in a specific role in the customer journey.



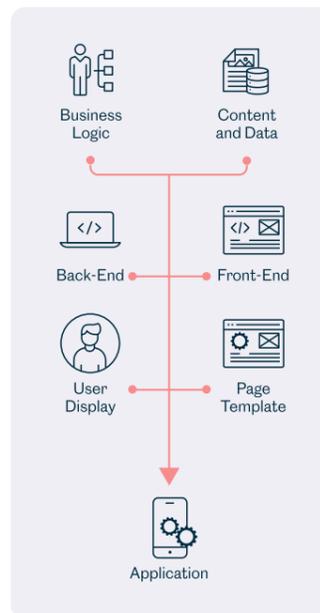
THE BENEFITS

- **Adapt and scale, fast:** with a modular architecture, each component of the composable commerce experience is deployed and managed independently, including shopping cart technology, customer relationship management and analytics. You can swap components in and out as your business needs change and you can take advantage of new experiential technology – without affecting the rest of your architecture.
- **Reduce your time-to-market:** create and launch new eCommerce solutions to improve your customer experience using out-of-the-box integrations and prebuilt components that plug seamlessly into your existing tech stack.
- **Define your own personalized customer experiences:** using prebuilt data solutions, you can obtain commerce data – a combination of customer and product data – to achieve personalization at scale, enabling you to tailor messaging and experiences to your customer, wherever they're shopping from.
- **Improve your teams' productivity:** launch new content faster, test and learn, iterate, and see value quickly. Composable commerce empowers business users with speed and agility, removing development bottlenecks and reducing release times.

Headless Approach

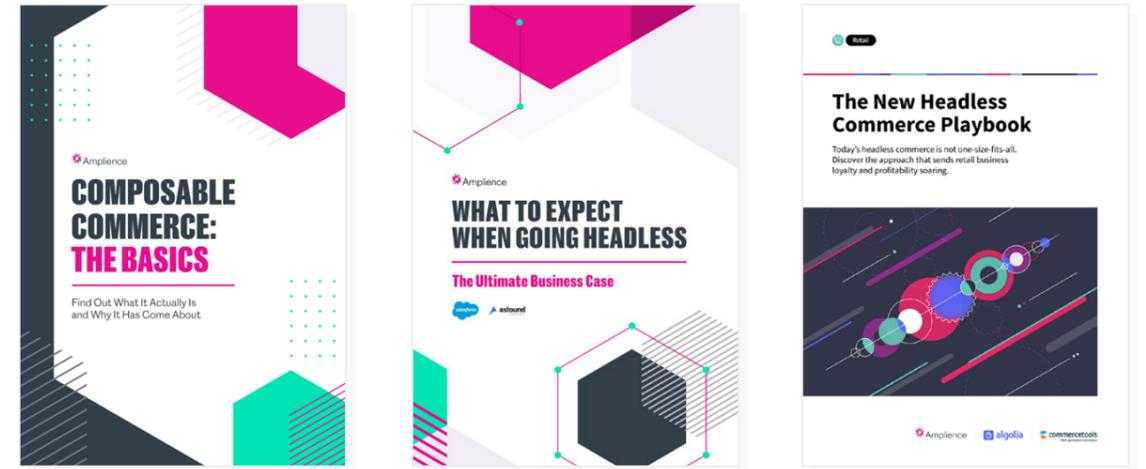


Monolith Approach



Get Your Head Around Headless

To learn more about headless and composable commerce, take a look at these handy guides.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Traditional monolithic platforms weren't built to support you in evolving and adapting digital experiences at speed – for that you need a composable approach, enabled by headless technology.
- The composable approach allows you to bring best-of-breed components and technologies together in one place, all working as one to suit your specific needs.
- This allows you to create experiences like a retailer does: changing and scaling much faster, personalizing content more effectively and launching campaigns quicker to capitalize on new opportunities.

Real-World Examples of Headless Success

MULTIBILLION DOLLAR UK DEPARTMENT STORE

- Moved from monolith to headless
- 8x more deployments per year
- Boosted revenue faster
- No longer had change freezes during holiday periods



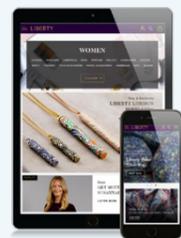
NATURA & CO

- Moved to Salesforce for flexible and scalable headless commerce
- Built an API-led live shopping app in three weeks
- 100% increase in conversion rate during live shopping event



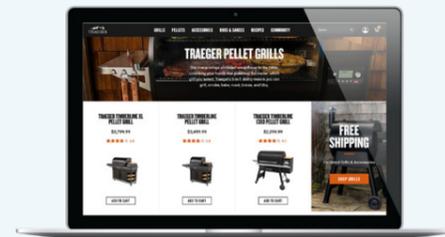
LIBERTY LONDON

- Integrated Ampliance Headless CMS with Salesforce Commerce Cloud 66% reduction in content production time
- Asset management streamlining led to major boost in SEO and mobile traffic
- Acceleration of conversion growth especially in overseas markets



TRAEGER GRILLS

- Moved to headless for commerce experiences
- Site loads 2x faster
- Site conversion increase
- Daily web releases instead of quarterly





Time For Take Off

If you've got this far, you're probably more than a little curious about how we can help you transform your content strategy and create compelling travel experiences that convert.

So, why not head over to amplience.com and **book a demo**.



Before you Jet Off...

You can always find the latest big ideas and new solutions from Amplience on our social media channels, so give us a follow on LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (or whatever it's called now).



Amplience is a commerce experience platform that takes the heavy lifting out of digital content, giving your technical and marketing teams the freedom to create digital experiences without limits. The platform's MACH Alliance-certified architecture delivers maximum speed, agility and scalability.

More than 400 of the world's leading brands use Amplience, including Crate & Barrel, Traeger Grills, Ulta Beauty, Coach, OTTO Group, GAP, Currys, Argos and The Very Group.

Amplience has 200 global employees and has raised \$180 million from investors, including Farview Equity Partners, Sixth Street and Octopus Ventures.

www.amplience.com



Rid the world of bad shopping experiences

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