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The 2020 Guide to Digital Commerce

If you're in the business of selling goods, the answer to whether or not you should have an ecommerce presence is simple. **Yes, you should.**

If you want access to the 31 percent of consumers worldwide who buy something online at least once a week,[1] your business must have an ecommerce angle.

However, when it comes to attracting, converting, pleasing, and retaining customers (both online and off-line), the sands are constantly shifting. Continued success requires creativity, innovation, and nimble technology, as well as desirable products and exemplary customer service.

The opportunities are only getting bigger, as ecommerce sales are projected to reach $4.9 trillion in global sales in 2021. [2]

To claim your share of this $4.9 trillion, you need to adopt a holistic approach to commerce—one that starts and ends with the customer.

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Part 2: Sustain the Connection to Your Customers

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Get Started

PART 1: Focus on the "E" in Ecommerce.
Experience, Expectations, Everywhere.

In today's retail environment, customers expect nothing less than a seamless shopping experience, regardless of whether they're standing in the middle of a big box retailer or clicking "buy now" on a mobile device from the comfort of their couch.

It's a need. Many of them know no other way. And if it doesn't happen, they'll tell the world with a surly website review or social media post.

Which leaves you, the commerce professional, tiptoeing along a number of fine lines. From the depth/breadth of your product line to post-purchase marketing, from the mobile dexterity of your digital presence to the comprehensiveness of the platform supporting it all, you're constantly testing, weighing, and executing on all sorts of initiatives.

Meanwhile, your customers just want it done.

They've become around-the-clock shoppers, eager to find something that catches their eye as they take a break at their desk, skim social media while waiting for a friend at the coffee shop, or pass time on the road.

Once they arrive at your digital doorstep, they expect your business to be:

- Responsive to every query

- Always open for business

- Know them, especially if you have an existing relationship

For them, it's personal. For you to make that happen, you need the right technology.

Questions to Ask:

- How have you optimized your responsiveness?

- Can consumers on smart devices easily find your business and its products and services?

- If you operate both online and physical locations, how do they complement and support each other?

- How have your customer support efforts evolved?

High Standards for Responsiveness

Today's consumer is not that different from the shopper of the past who would bail on a retailer if they weren't engaged within five minutes of the tinkling bell that announced their arrival.

The customer landscape, however, has changed considerably. Modern concepts around rapid response times and frictionless transactions must also allow for smartphone shoppers (who have surpassed PC- and tablet-using consumers[3]), and the emergence of smart personal assistants. Such devices (think Amazon Alexa and Google Home) are projected to occupy a spot in 55 percent of U.S. homes and generate $40 billion worth of online purchases by 2022.[4]

Back at the office, 61 percent of B2B customers head online to start the buying process, including 51 percent who explore social media sites as a first step.[5]

Regardless of their method of access, top-notch customer service remains a must as such efforts contribute to buying decisions for about two-thirds of consumers.[6]

Given your customers' sensitivities, customer-focused efforts should be rooted in a deep understanding of the customer experience.

Questions to Ask:

- How does your online presence shift to reflect unique datapoints when a customer makes a return visit?

- How connected the user experience between online and brick-and-mortar worlds?

- Are able to collect all data points from every customer touchpoint and derive actionable insights from that data?

- How do you address customer concerns over privacy and security?

[3] PWC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2019, https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/consumer-markets/consumer-insights-survey/2019/report.pdf
[4] OC&C Strategy Consultants via USA Today, https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/02/28/alexa-need-everything-voice-shopping-becomes-common-sales-through-amazons-alexa-others-could-reach-4/367426002/
[5] Accenture, "On the Verge: B2B Digital Commerce is at an Inflection Point," https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-78/accenture-verge-b2b-digital-commerce.pdf#zoom=50
[6] International Council of Shopping Centers via Chain Store Age, https://www.chainstoreage.com/store-spaces/survey-good-customer-service-is-money-for-retailers/

Retailing in a 24/7 World

Your customers are no longer constrained by the clock or geographic boundaries. In fact, 64 percent of online shoppers view the ability to shop anytime day or night as a major factor in their decision to head online,[7] while 57 percent of online consumers worldwide buy from retailers based in another country.[8]

Accessibility is invaluable, but with it comes increasing demands on service. In response, conversational commerce is rising fast, with automated chatbots (via pop-up dialogue boxes or text exchanges) often serving as contact No. 1 for an entire population of inquisitive customers.

By adding an engaged touch to frequently asked questions and an iterative approach, based on AI and machine learning and supported by the ability to connect with a live person within hours, conversational commerce offers individualized responsiveness 24/7.

The universe has only become more customer-centric in recent years, and undoubtedly your customers are caught up in the wave, too.

It's All About Them

In a society dominated by personal interactions delivered directly into our purse, pocket, or palm, the default is the individual. Which means you, as a brand, must integrate yourself to every customer, prospect, and past customer.

Ecommerce platforms have evolved to the point where the first step of personalization—developing an adaptable front-end experience—is a no longer a differentiator. Through testing and leveraging user data, your site should put its best face forward whenever a visitor swings by.
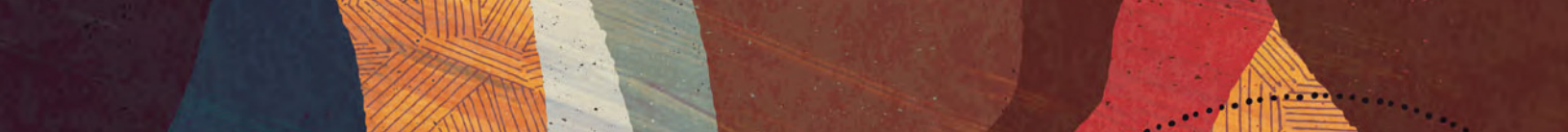
Questions to Ask:

- Where do your middle-of-the-night (your time) customers find support?

- How have you integrated mobile-oriented marketing efforts to catch customers' eyes on a device that consumes 3.5 hours of their day?[9]

- How do your payment options strike the right blend of convenience, privacy, and security?

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[7] NPR-Marist Poll, http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us180423_NPR/NPR_Marist%20Poll_Tables%20of%20Questions_May%202018.pdf#page=2
[8] Nielsen, https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-releases/2016/new-technology-offers-consumers-worldwide-greater-access-to-borderless-shopping/
[9] eMarketer, "Mobile Time Spent 2018, https://www.emarketer.com/content/mobile-time-spent-2018

Need proof? As many as 68 percent of consumers acknowledge that personalized experiences are important[10] and 73 percent of B2B company executives see considerably greater expectations for personalization among their customers.[11]

Where demands around personalization keep rising is on the engagement side of customer experience (CX). Marketing efforts include dynamic emails, landing pages, site experiences, and special offers that target increasingly savvy shoppers who value the tailored interactions.

Yet personalization is a double-edged sword as more than half of consumers are concerned about how much retailers know about them and are uncomfortable with how much information retailers collect.[12]

Meanwhile, Back at the Store

Consumer realities don't stop once the internet is removed, especially if you count a brick-and-mortar presence among your customer experience assets.

Considering that offline transactions accounted for a bit more than 85 percent of all retail sales in 2018,[13] and 85 percent of consumers globally prefer engaging in both online and physical environments,[14] maintaining an omnichannel strategy is crucial.

Omnichannel is increasingly valuable to the 37 percent of consumers who check prices while standing in a store, to the 30 percent who admit they look up product insights in the store as well.[15]

Questions to Ask:

- How digital-friendly is your brick-and-mortar location?

- How do your systems pull together online insights, point-of-sale information, and in-store data points?

- Is your retailing strategy omni-functional enough to fulfill the business's omnichannel demands?

[10] Oracle, https://www.oracle.com/a/ocom/docs/dc/em/onesize-doesnt-fitall-cxresearch-report.pdf?elqTrackId=258379d7ff3f4236ad3018bc41faf38f&elqaid=83815&elqat=2
[11] Accenture, "On the Verge: B2B Digital Commerce is at an Inflection Point," https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-78/accenture-verge-b2b-digital-commerce.pdf#zoom=50
[12] Forrester, "The State of Retail Online 2019," slide 10. https://www.slideshare.net/NationalRetailFederation/the-state-of-retail-online-2019
[13] Internet Retailer, https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/article/us-ecommerce-sales/
[14] Chief Marketing Officer Council/Pitney Bowes, https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releaxses/brands-challenged-to-give-millennials-and-gen-z-consumers-what-they-really-want-experiences-across-both-digital-and-physical-channels-300890681.html
[15] Forrester, "The State of Retail Online 2019," slide 14. https://www.slideshare.net/NationalRetailFederation/the-state-of-retail-online-2019

PART 2: Sustain the Connection to Your Customers

Countless ecommerce initiatives are successful because of technology. Ironically, its evolution has also eased the burden on brands' IT resources.

Instead of relying on an in-house IT team to provide the data needed to implement initiatives, marketing and CX professionals mold and shape campaigns and tactics via user-friendly platforms. Meanwhile, hardware needs are fulfilled via remote, centralized resources.

This agility is invaluable. On the front end, those who are closest to the customer can endlessly innovate to track the shifting preferences of the marketplace. On the back end, IT budgets and brainpower can be more constructively deployed.

Today, to validate and enhance your ties to your customers, you need technology that can:

- Complement human savvy with machine smarts

- Tap deep and wide IT infrastructure

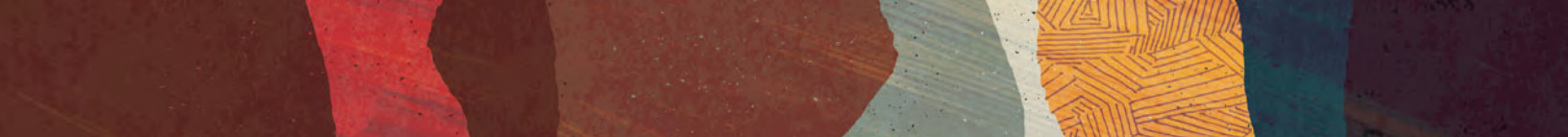- Optimize data-driven communications

Ultimately, as your business rolls along technology's leading edge, your customers benefit as much as you do.

Use AI and ML to Understand Your Customers

Your handle on the marketplace plays a fundamental role in your short-term and long-term business operations and planning.

Questions to Ask:

- How have you optimized your responsiveness?

- Can consumers on smart devices easily find your business, products, and services?

- If you operate online and through physical locations, how do they complement each other?

- How have your customer support efforts evolved?

While observations, research, and, even, hunches can serve your business well, cold hard data is an invaluable asset, including:

- First-, second-, and third-party customer data generated by your company, a partner, or an independent resource
- Behavioral tendencies from searches or social media
- Historical and database knowledge
- Location-based and GPS data
- Marketing analytics
- Transactional data
- Weather and geographic data

Gathering data, however, is only a part of the narrative. Effectively translating and converting the collection of disparate data points into actionable intelligence relies heavily upon:

AI—the superpowered thinking and data analysis processes that mimic human intelligence and enhance day-to-day insights

Machine learning (ML)—the data-driven engines behind AI's ability to constantly iterate and improve based on what's flowing through the system

Data science—the expertise behind defining, analyzing, and extracting the value from overwhelming volumes of data

Circling back to your customer, AI can improve their experience immensely, delivering enhanced personalization, customer service, and communications, all through a myriad of channels.

Plus, AI expands your ability to gauge, predict, and anticipate customer behaviors, bolstering A/B testing and other experimental marketing efforts built around theories, messaging, and tactics with data collected from every customer touchpoint.

According to recent research, 55.6 percent of direct-to-consumer brands and 41.1 percent of traditional brands are increasing their investment in chatbots and other iterations of AI.[16]

[16] Oracle and Commerce Next, https://go.oracle.com/LP=83058

Questions to Ask:

- How robust are your data sources?

- How can you maximize the data you currently collect?

- Where are the gaps in your data resources?

- What analytical technology and advanced thinking do you employ to synthesize the data into actionable intelligence?

Neutralize Obstacles with the Cloud

Reams of data require trillions of bytes of storage. Analyzing that data requires incredibly deep and responsive processing capabilities. Channeling intelligence through your web presence, social media feeds, and transactional infrastructure demands even more technological firepower.

But you're a seller. Not an IT shop.

Removing the required oversight, maintenance, upgrades, and security of the technology used by your business is a significant benefit of employing cloud services.

Perhaps just as importantly, the cloud's centralized resources:

- Deliver reliable network speed
- All but guarantees 100% uptime
- Rapidly deploys new resources to scale up as growth "happens"
- Deftly handles multiple data sources
- Streamline your business user's interaction with IT
- Support seamless functionality updates
- Shore up your security promises to customers

All the while, cloud lightens the tech footprint on your end of the equation, especially with software-as-a-service (SaaS) offerings uniquely designed for the retail industry.

Even the nimblest SaaS platforms benefit from the boost provided by:

Oracle Cloud Platform as a Service (PaaS), which helps developers rapidly build and deploy rich applications—or extend Oracle Cloud SaaS applications—using an enterprise-grade cloud platform.

Oracle Data as a Service (DaaS), which aggregates, analyzes, and activates cross-consumer data into one unified solution to provide deeper customer knowledge.

Oracle Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), which enables businesses to run any workload in an enterprise-grade cloud managed, hosted, and supported by Oracle.

Questions to Ask:

- What's the current state of your IT infrastructure, databases and software?

- Has an insistence on keeping tech assets in-house evolved into something completely unwieldy?

- How could the business benefit from remote IT resources?

- Where could the cloud streamline your tech needs?

Communicate Well in This Data-Driven Environment

Customers don't respond to dry facts. They act on feelings, emotions, urges, and whims.

Therefore, the return on your business's tech investment hinges upon your ability to convert relevant, concrete data into messages that resonate, delivered via channels that touch your customers.

The hazard of missing the boat? Aggravating the 71 percent who appreciate ad content that's tailored to their interests[17].

And running the risk of getting lost in the electronic sea through which they're constantly wading—the one[18] in which:

- 73% of adults use YouTube
- 69% of adults use Facebook
- 37% of adults use Instagram
- 28% of adults use Pinterest
- 27% of adults use LinkedIn
- 24% of adults use Snapchat
- 22% of adults use Twitter

That's in addition to the 281 billion emails that zipped across the globe[19] in 2018.

In spite of all this, consumers' wish lists are relatively short. They want you to:
1. Deliver meaningful offers via email, text, and social media
2. Publish easily consumable and valuable content
3. Generate videos that entertain and educate—not sell
4. Allow for authentic peer reviews

Admittedly, consistent quality can be challenging. As can delivery. Especially at the value and frequency that keeps your brand relevant and important, yet not overly-persistent and annoying.

The analytical and predictive nature of AI-enabled commerce platforms can sharpen your marketing, communication, and sales efforts. By tapping broad datasets, including those reflective of historical behaviors, you may uncover previously undiscovered patterns and trends that may be beneficial to your business.

Questions to Ask:

- How do you connect with your customers?

- How personalized are customer touchpoints?

- What data sources and analysis drives those connections?

- Where else could you gather customer insights?

- How do you pull it all together to craft strategies that will reach and appeal to your customers?

[17] Adlucent, https://www.adlucent.com/blog/2016/71-o-consumers-preer-personalized-ads
[18] Pew Research, https://www.pewresearch.org/act-tank/2019/04/10/share-o-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-acebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/
[19] The Radicati Group via Statista, https://www.statista.com/statistics/456500/daily-number-o-e-mails-worldwide/

Objectively Discern the Way Forward

Why did you expand into ecommerce? What prompted your decision to serve the ever-evolving, frequently fickle consumer?

Regardless of your path, you are operating in and era where technology is an essential element of the retail equation. Therefore, your vision for the future must include cloud-based solutions that leverage emerging technologies. If you don't, you'll likely find yourself bogged down by:

- Cumbersome and complicated legacy platforms with many manual stop-gap solutions
- Drawn-out processes for improvements and enhancements
- Limited flexibility and expandability in legacy systems

Fortunately, today's approaches are designed to streamline IT, foster integration, and simplify administration while providing the level of personalization that the marketplace expects. Meanwhile, your merchandising budgets and resources can be reallocated to support:

- Growth initiatives
- Responsive promotional efforts
- Product mix analysis

With your IT operations streamlined, your IT staff can better focus on enhancing performance. The AI-enhanced, data-driven, cloud-based software:

- Aligns the inputs and outputs between marketing, sales, social media, and customer service
- Simplifies responsive design, search engine optimization, promotions, and language support
- Virtually automates updates
- Allows for seamless integrations

Which leaves you with a simplified, yet immensely scalable, IT footprint fueling a stronger, broader impact. It's a win-win-win.

PART 3: Identify What a Modern Commerce Cloud Can Do for You

Selling and consuming through digital touchpoints began with selling simple products online to consumers. Fast forward many years to today's novel brand experiences that meet customers in their unique context with real-time, personalized augmented content, leveraging IoT, and voice options, which allows the customer able to buy and sell anywhere, anytime.

A unified commerce cloud solution like Oracle CX Commerce puts control in the hands of commerce professionals, lets them innovate quickly, deliver connected, personalized experiences, and drive customer engagement, sales, and loyalty across a variety of channels.

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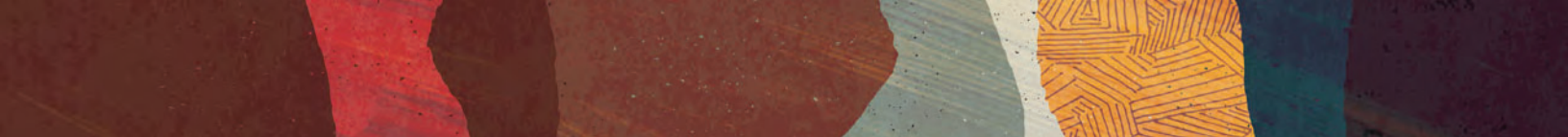
The Oracle CX Commerce Advantage

Oracle CX Commerce includes a rich set of out-of-the-box applications encompassing administration, customer support, and web storefront capabilities. Backed by a set of RESTful APIs, each of the applications allows the integration of CX Commerce features into other applications and channels.

Your New Storefront

The heart of the shopping experience is the extensible and customizable storefront application included within CX Commerce. The default storefront provides an extensive set of features for online shoppers, including:

- Product browsing and discovery
- Advanced product search including guided search
- Promotions and discounts
- Personalized content and offers
- Personalized product recommendations based on advanced AI technologies
- Multiple payment methods including loyalty points and split payments
- Multiple ship-to destinations including buy online pick up in-store

- Sharable wish lists
- User profile management
- Business account management (B2B)
- Account-specific catalogs and pricing (B2B)
- Order approval and spending limits (B2B)
- Scheduled recurring orders (B2B)
- Support for 40+ languages and 60+ currencies

With the customizable and extensible CX Commerce storefront, designers can create page layouts, branding, and content using the drag-and-drop Design Studio (in the Oracle CX Commerce administration tool) to define the shopper experience.

Custom widgets allow you to extend your shopper experience to include features like advanced product configuration, advanced visualization techniques like augmented reality, new payment schemes, 3rd party content and product reviews, and chatbot capabilities.

Your New Admin Tools

The CX Commerce administration tool consolidates all site management features into a single, easy-to-use, web-based interface. The administration interface provides tools for both site developers and merchants to:

- Create and manage sites and site settings
- Create and manage multiple sites within a single CX Commerce instance
- Create and manage shipping and payment methods
- Create and manage customer-facing email templates
- Enable and configure integrations to Oracle and 3rd party applications
- Design page layouts for multiple form factors using dozens of customizable and extensible built-in components plus custom widgets
- Extend and customize built-in widgets

- Manage catalogs, pricing, promotions, and media
- Manage search engine rules and configuration
- Define audiences for personalization and create personalized content and offers
- Create A/B tests to determine the most effective content and offers
- Create and view reports on site performance and sales
- Configure and manage extensions and webhooks to extend your business logic

Extensibility and Integration

As an API-first platform, all of the capabilities of CX Commerce are exposed through publicly documented RESTful APIs -- not only for storefront functionality but also for administration and customer service features.

Every single feature in CX Commerce is available through the API, from site creation and management to the entire complement of storefront features to customer service capabilities like order and account management. Because CX Commerce includes feature-rich, industry-leading applications built on top of these APIs, users can be confident that the APIs themselves provide a complete set of capabilities that are designed to work together from the start.

With CX Commerce APIs, users can incorporate storefront, administration, and customer service functionality into any application or channel. The APIs are backward compatible by design, ensuring that applications and integrations created today will continue to work as CX Commerce evolves.

For example, one option is to begin with the bundled CX Commerce storefront application to support online shoppers but use APIs in a headless architecture for a native mobile application featuring mobile-specific capabilities such as geofencing and augmented reality.

Regardless of how users design the main storefront experience, CX Commerce storefront APIs allow fully headless integration of product discovery, order capture, and order management into novel channels like chatbots and smart home devices.

Users can even integrate reporting APIs into a voice channel to support queries like, "How much revenue did the site generate yesterday?" Because all administrative capabilities are available through the API, users can monitor and control their commerce environment wherever it makes sense for the business.

The combination of webhooks, business logic extensions, and a feature-rich, integrated set of cloud-native APIs offers unprecedented choice and flexibility, allowing users to leverage CX Commerce in the way that makes the most sense for their unique business needs.

Get Started.

Your customers' needs, desires, and expectations are ever-evolving. Brands that understand how to exceed customers' expectations have the unique opportunity to get ahead of the competition and earn trust, loyalty, and a larger share of the market—if they take the right measures.

Discover more about how brands are becoming masters of personalization, omnichannel optimization, and instant gratification to over-deliver and surpass their customers' expectations—and find how you, too, can do the same.

For more resources, check out **go.oracle.com/unforgettablecommerce**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE >>

Or, if you're ready for a demo, request one today.

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