

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF RETAIL

# Point of view: Unified commerce for retailers

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# Our insights for unified commerce in 2025

In a fast-evolving retail landscape, success requires adaptability and strategic foresight. Financial fluctuations, new regulations, shifting consumer expectations, and rapid tech advancements all demand that retailers remain agile and resourceful. Now more than ever, businesses need to be prepared to navigate change with a clear, forward-thinking approach.

Our guide is designed to help retailers thrive in this landscape by providing a roadmap for implementing unified commerce strategies. From planning and selecting the right technology frameworks to navigating challenges and measuring success, the guide is a resource for mastering unified commerce essentials. It includes guidance on vendor selection, overcoming common hurdles, and understanding the metrics that matter.

With insights from Columbus and Infor, we have combined deep retail expertise and trend analysis to offer a comprehensive view of retail's future. Whether you're refining strategies or just starting with unified commerce, this guide equips you with actionable insights, best practices, and inspiration to drive success in 2025 and beyond.

Happy reading,



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# An introduction to unified commerce

Unified commerce is an integrated approach that brings together all retail operations and customer interactions into a single solution. This approach ensures that customer data, inventory management, order processing, and price & promotion solutions are seamlessly integrated and accessible across all channels.

We have seen an evolution from multi-channel to omnichannel in unified commerce, and just to clarify the different layers, here is a recap:

## **Multichannel:**

Retailers operate multiple sales channels independently, each with its own set of content, processes and systems.

## **Omnichannel:**

This approach focuses on providing a consistent customer experience across all channels, but the systems and data may still be siloed.

## **Unified commerce:**

The evolution from multichannel and omnichannel to unified commerce involves integrating all channels and systems into one cohesive solution, ensuring real-time data synchronization and a seamless customer experience.

## **The role of technology in unified commerce**

Unified commerce is powered by advanced technologies such as cloud computing, API's, microservices, AI, and data analytics. These technologies enable the integration of disparate systems, real-time data synchronisation, and the personalisation of customer interactions across all touchpoints.

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Unified commerce is a retail game-changer that empowers a seamless, personalised experience across every channel, ultimately boosting loyalty and revenue”

## Challenges in implementing unified commerce

Implementing unified commerce can often be hindered by legacy systems, data silos, lack of technical expertise, and resistance to change within the organization. Overcoming these barriers requires strategic planning, investment in the right technologies, and a commitment to change management.

## Key benefits of unified commerce in retail

### Seamless customer experience across all channels

Unified commerce enables retailers to deliver a consistent and frictionless shopping experience, whether customers are shopping online, in-store, or via mobile apps. This consistency builds trust and loyalty, as customers can interact with the brand seamlessly across all touchpoints.

### Real-time inventory visibility

With all inventory data integrated into a single solution, retailers can maintain real-time visibility of stock across all channels. This reduces the risk of stockouts and overstock situations, optimizes inventory levels, and ensures that customers can find the products they want, when they want them.

### Personalised shopping journeys

Unified commerce allows for the consolidation of customer data from every interaction, enabling retailers to offer highly personalized shopping experiences. By understanding customer preferences and behavior, retailers can tailor marketing efforts, product recommendations, and



promotions to individual needs, enhancing customer satisfaction and driving sales.

### Improved operational efficiency

By integrating backend systems such as ECOM, WMS, CRM, ERP, and POS, unified commerce streamlines operations and reduces redundancies. This leads to faster decision-making, reduced manual processes, and lower operational costs, ultimately improving the retailer's bottom line.

### Enhanced omnichannel capabilities

Unified commerce supports advanced omnichannel services like buy-online-pickup-in-store (bopis), ship-from-store, and endless aisle solutions. These capabilities not only improve customer convenience but also increase sales opportunities by leveraging both online and offline assets.

### Better data insights and analytics

A single, unified solution provides retailers with comprehensive analytics capabilities, allowing for more accurate forecasting, better understanding of customer behavior, and data-driven decision-making. This leads to more effective marketing strategies, optimized inventory management, and improved overall business performance.



### **Increased customer loyalty and retention**

By offering a consistent, personalized, and convenient shopping experience, unified commerce helps build stronger relationships with customers. Satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend the brand to others, and remain loyal, leading to higher customer lifetime value.

### **Scalability and flexibility**

Unified commerce solutions, particularly those that are cloud-based, offer the scalability and flexibility needed to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer demands. Retailers can easily expand into new channels, markets, or regions without the need for complex and costly system overhauls.

### **Enhanced employee productivity**

With integrated systems and real-time data, employees are better equipped to assist customers, manage inventory, and complete transactions efficiently. This empowerment leads to higher productivity, better customer service, and a more engaged workforce.

### **Cost savings and increased profitability**

The efficiencies gained through unified commerce—such as reduced stock holding, optimized supply chain operations, and streamlined processes—translate into significant cost savings. Additionally, the ability to drive higher sales through personalized experiences and seamless operations leads to increased profitability.

# Key components of unified commerce

## Centralised integration and data platform

At the core of unified commerce is a centralized integration and data platform that consolidates customer, product, and transaction data across all channels. This platform acts as the single source of truth, ensuring that every interaction—whether online or offline—is informed by the most up-to-date information. Additionally, it delivers real-time data through an event-driven architecture, enabling seamless and consistent customer experiences.

## Single view of the customer

Unified commerce provides a holistic, 360-degree view of each customer by integrating data from all touchpoints—such as in-store purchases, online browsing, mobile app interactions, and social media engagements. This single customer profile

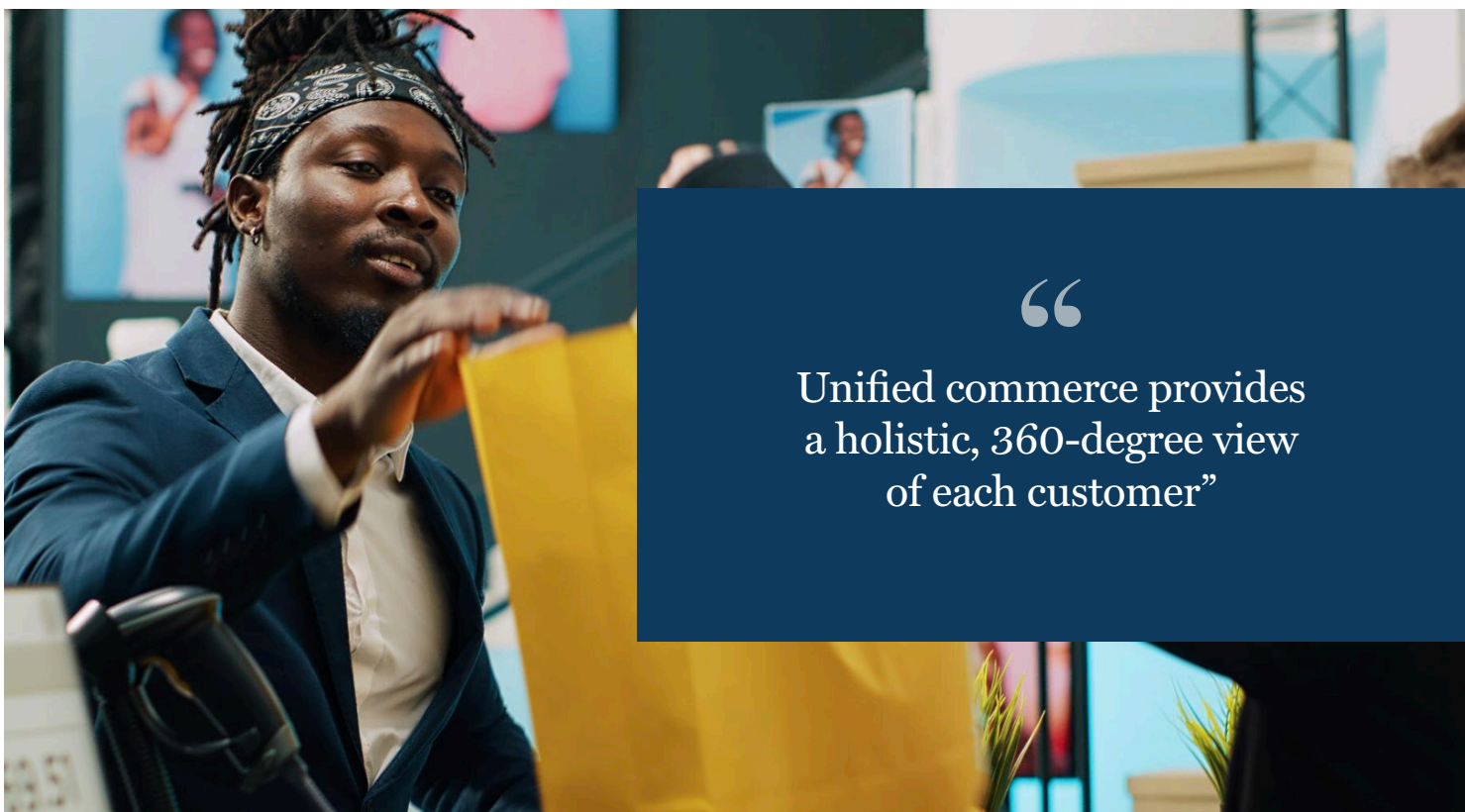
enables personalised marketing, targeted promotions, and enhanced customer service.

## Integrated inventory management

An inventory management system provides control over incoming deliveries and tracks stock levels across all locations—stores, warehouses, and online—in real-time. This integration enables retailers to offer accurate stock availability information to customers, support advanced fulfillment options like buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS), and minimize the risks of stockouts and overstocking.

## Unified order management system

The Order Management System in unified commerce manages all aspects of order processing, from capture to fulfillment,



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Unified commerce provides a holistic, 360-degree view of each customer”



across all channels. Whether a customer places an online order for home delivery, purchases in-store, requests an order split or routing, or opts for curbside pickup, the OMS ensures a seamless experience by consolidating orders from multiple channels into one system.

#### **Payment solution/s**

Unified commerce integrates payment systems across all channels, enabling customers to use their preferred payment methods, whether they're shopping online, in-store, or via a mobile app.

#### **Dynamic pricing & promotions**

Dynamic pricing is an essential component of unified commerce, enabling retailers to adjust prices in real-time based on factors such as demand, competitor pricing, inventory levels, and customer profiles. Dynamic pricing allow retailers to create highly responsive pricing strategies that align with market changes. Dynamic pricing and promotional strategies require a sophisticated price engine capable of supporting real-time discounts, promotions, and campaigns across regions, customer segments, and channels.

#### **Personalisation engine**

A personalisation engine leverages the centralized data platform to deliver tailored experiences to each customer. By analysing past purchases, browsing history, and preferences, this engine can recommend products, customise marketing messages, and create dynamic content that resonates with individual shoppers.

#### **Omnichannel marketing integration**

Unified commerce connects all marketing channels—email, social media, SMS, in-app notifications—into a single, cohesive system. This integration allows retailers to execute coordinated marketing campaigns across multiple channels, track customer responses, and refine strategies based on real-time data.



### Unified POS system

The point-of-sale (POS) system in a unified commerce setup is fully integrated with other systems, providing real-time data access, customer profile updates, and inventory checks. This integration ensures that in-store transactions are seamlessly connected to online activity, enabling features like endless aisle, unified customer loyalty programs, mobile POS for conducting transactions in-store, and self-service checkouts.

### Scalable cloud infrastructure

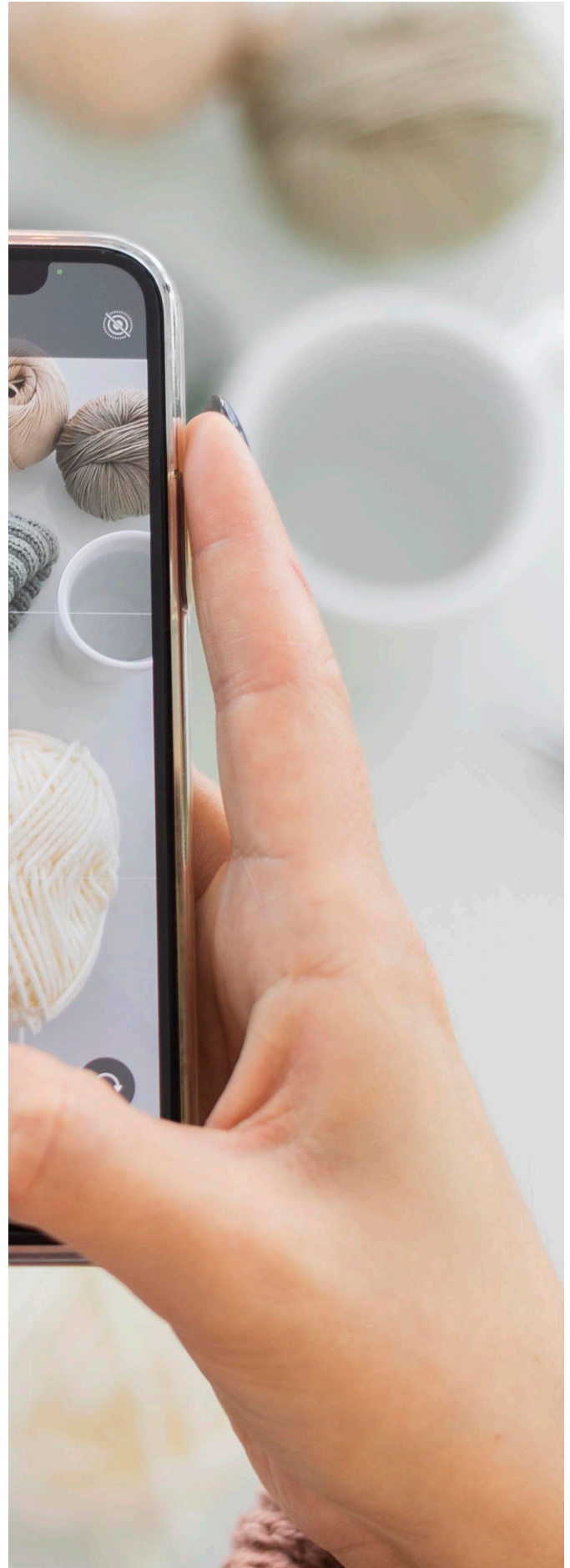
Most unified commerce solutions are built on a cloud-based infrastructure, which offers the scalability and flexibility needed to adapt to changing business needs. This infrastructure supports high availability, disaster recovery, and the ability to scale operations quickly, whether expanding to new markets or managing peak shopping periods.

### Advanced analytics and reporting

A unified commerce solution should include an advanced analytics tools that provide insights into customer behavior, sales trends, inventory levels, and overall business performance. Retailers can use these insights to make data-driven decisions, optimize operations, and improve the customer experience.

### Security and compliance layer

Given the integration of multiple systems and the handling of sensitive customer data, a robust security and compliance layer is essential in unified commerce. This component ensures that all data is protected according to industry standards and regulatory requirements, safeguarding against breaches and maintaining customer trust.





**Customer service integration**

A unified customer service solution ensures that support teams have access to complete customer profiles and order histories, enabling them to provide informed and efficient assistance. This integration supports consistent service across channels, whether through live chat, email, or in-store interactions.

**A curated set of components makes the foundation for unified commerce**

Unified commerce is built on set of basic components, each playing a critical role in delivering the seamless, personalized, and consistent shopping experiences that today's consumers demand. All together, they enable retailers to operate more efficiently, respond more quickly to market changes, and provide a superior customer experience.

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# How to create a unified commerce strategy: a step-by-step guide

As the retail landscape continues to progress, the need for a more unified commerce strategy has become evident. To stay competitive, retailers must deliver seamless, personalised experiences across all channels.

Here's a comprehensive guide to developing a unified commerce strategy that can set your business up for success.

## 1. Start with a clear vision

### Define your long-term goals:

Begin by envisioning where you want your business to be in the next 5 to 10

years. This vision should be ambitious yet achievable and should clearly address how unified commerce will help you meet your business objectives.

### Engage key stakeholders:

involve leadership from all departments. Involve IT, marketing, sales, operations, and customer service—to ensure that everyone is aligned with the vision. This alignment will be critical as you move forward.

### Visualise customer benefits:

Your vision should include not just business goals, but also the benefits to customers and internal users. How will unified commerce improve their shopping experience? Clearly outline these advantages.





## 2. Conduct an “as-is” analysis

### Assess current systems and processes:

Before you can move forward. You will need a thorough understanding of where you are now and conduct a detailed audit of your current systems, processes, touchpoints & customer journeys.

### Improve with a classic SWOT:

Identify your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the context of your existing commerce operations. This analysis will help you identify areas that need improvement or are ripe for innovation.

### Make a legacy system evaluation:

Map out your existing technology stack, by focusing on the key integrations between systems. Understanding your legacy systems’ limitations and capabilities will be crucial as you plan your unified commerce strategy.

## 3. Perform a unified commerce analysis & identify key factors

### Identify all essential capabilities:

From inventory management, order management, customer data integration, payment systems, and more. Determine which areas need enhancement or integration within your business.

### Evaluate all core functionalities:

Assess the functionalities required to support a unified commerce environment. This includes everything from real-time inventory visibility to integrated CRM and advanced analytics capabilities.

### Don't forget the customer-centric approach:

Focus on how each component will meet customer needs. For example, how will real-time inventory management improve the customer experience? How will personalised marketing increase engagement?

## 4. Build a business case

### Quantify the benefits:

Use data to quantify the expected benefits of unified commerce. This includes projected increases in sales, improvements in customer satisfaction scores, or reductions in operational costs.

### Estimate costs and resources:

Develop a detailed budget that accounts for technology investments, integration costs, staff training, and ongoing maintenance. Consider both short-term expenses and long-term savings.

### Prioritise your initiatives:

Not all aspects of unified commerce need to be implemented at once. Prioritise initiatives based on their potential impact and feasibility, creating a phased roadmap that aligns with your business goals.

## 5. Develop an implementation roadmap

### Phased approach:

Roll out your unified commerce strategy in phases, starting with the areas that will deliver the most significant benefits. This might include integrating your online and in-store inventory systems first, followed by enhancing your customer relationship management (CRM/CDP) capabilities.

### Set milestones & KPI's:

Establish clear milestones and key performance indicators (KPI's) to measure progress at each stage. These metrics will help you stay on track and make adjustments as needed.

### Remember to engage your team:

Communicate the plan clearly to all employees, emphasising how their roles contribute to the overall strategy. Provide training and support to ensure they can effectively use new tools and systems.

## 6. Invest in the right technology

### Unified commerce solution:

Choose vendor solutions that integrates seamlessly with your existing systems and supports the scalability required for future growth. Look for solutions that offer real-time data synchronisation, advanced analytics, and robust security features.

### Cloud infrastructure:

Leverage cloud-based solutions to ensure flexibility and scalability. Cloud infrastructure will also support real-time updates and global accessibility, crucial for a unified commerce environment.





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#### **API'S & microservices:**

Utilise API's and potentially microservices to enable seamless integration between different systems. This approach will allow you to add new functionalities or update existing ones without disrupting the entire system.

### **7. Overcome common challenges**

#### **Integration complexity:**

Address the challenges of integrating legacy systems by adopting middleware solutions or working with technology partners who specialise in unified commerce implementations.

#### **Be the breaker of organisational silos:**

Break down silos by fostering cross-departmental collaboration. Ensure that all teams are working towards the same goals and that data is shared openly across the organization.

#### **Change management:**

Implement a robust change management strategy to help employees adapt to new processes and technologies. This might include training sessions, clear communication about the benefits of unified commerce, and continuous support.

### **8. Focus on continuous improvement**

#### **Monitor performance:**

By regularly reviewing your KPI's and performance metrics to assess the effectiveness of your unified commerce strategy. Use this data to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

#### **Adapt to fluctuating market changes:**

The retail landscape is constantly evolving. Stay agile by continuously adapting your strategy to new market conditions, consumer behaviors, and technological advancements.



### **Continue to innovate and iterate:**

Unified commerce is not a one-time project, but an ongoing journey. Keep exploring new technologies, customer engagement strategies, and operational efficiencies to stay ahead of the competition.

## **9. Leverage data & analytics**

### **Customer insights:**

Use the wealth of data generated by your unified commerce solution to gain deep insights into customer behaviour. This will enable you to refine your marketing strategies, personalise customer experiences, and predict future trends.

### **Operational efficiency:**

Analyse data to identify inefficiencies in your operations and make data-driven decisions to streamline processes, reduce costs, and improve service delivery.

### **Sales & revenue growth:**

Track sales data across all channels to identify high-performing products, optimize pricing strategies, and capitalize on cross-sell and upsell opportunities.

## **10. Secure & protect customer data**

### **Data security:**

Implement robust security measures to protect customer data across all touchpoints. This includes encryption, secure access controls, and regular security audits.

### **Stay compliant with compliance:**

Ensure that your unified commerce strategy complies with all relevant data privacy regulations, such as GDPR or CCPA. This will help you avoid legal issues and maintain customer trust.

### **Transparency as a winning recipe:**

Communicate clearly with your customers about how their data is used and protected. Building trust through transparency is crucial in today's data-driven world.

### **And, remember...**

Creating a unified commerce strategy is a complex but essential undertaking for modern retailers. By following this approach, you can transform your operations, meet the demands of today's consumers, and position your business for long-term success.

Remember, the key to success lies in clear vision, careful planning, effective execution, and continuous adaptation.

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Creating a unified commerce strategy is a complex undertaking”

# Choosing the right vendors for identified capabilities

When selecting technology vendors for a unified commerce framework, retailers should adopt a structured, holistic roadmap that aligns vendor capabilities with the broader business transformation strategy. This roadmap should be based on proven methodologies and include a thorough assessment and prioritisation of vendor offerings.

By strategically aligning vendor solutions with the company's business objectives and future target models, retailers can ensure that each vendor contributes to long-term success.

The process should involve a detailed identification and evaluation of each vendor's capabilities, considering factors such as business value, dependencies, and strategic direction. Mapping these capabilities against business priorities ensures that the right vendor partnerships are established to support seamless integration and transformation initiatives.

## Evaluate vendors based on business priorities and ensure support for seamless journeys

When selecting technology vendors for a unified commerce framework, retailers should prioritise vendors that offer seamless

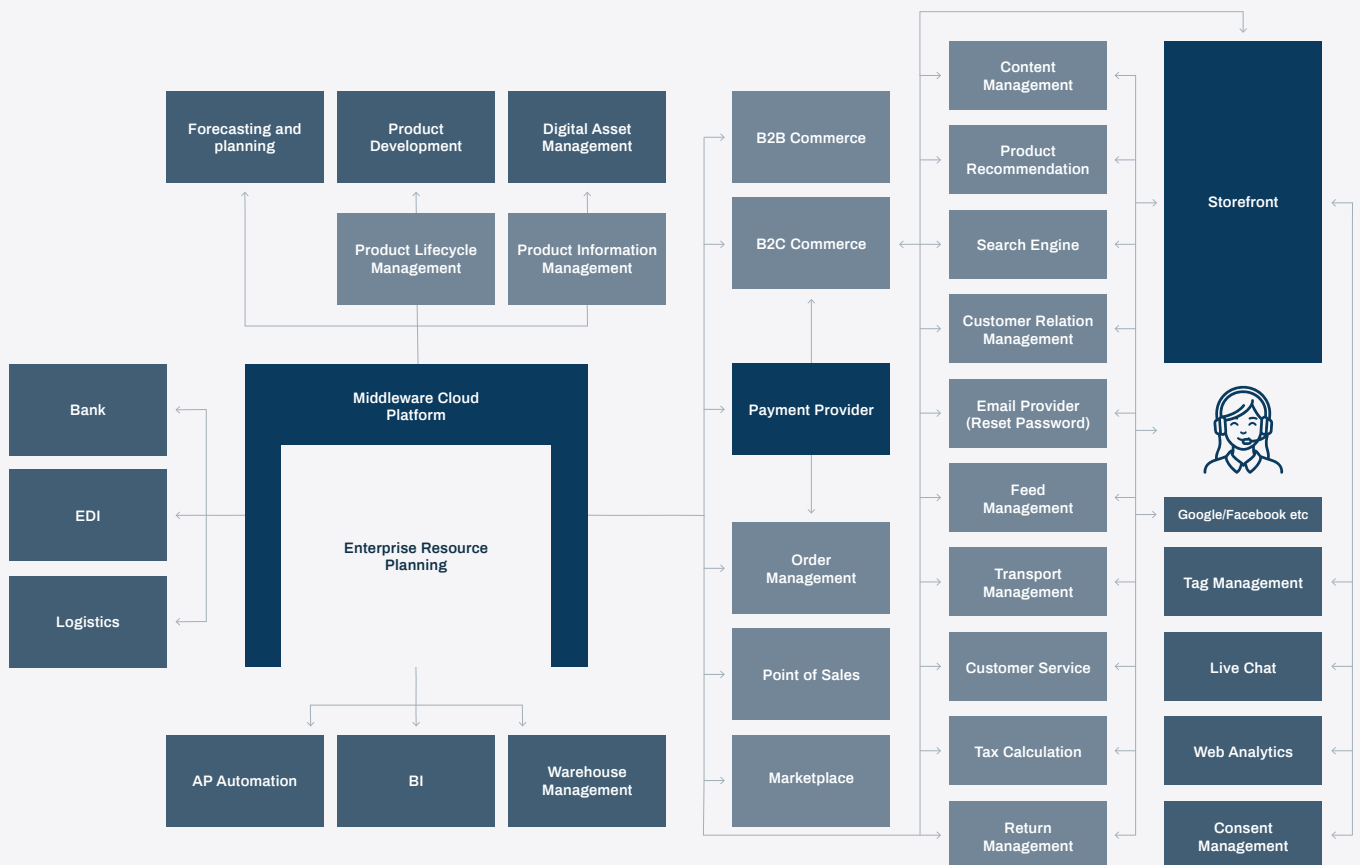


Illustration: An example of identified capabilities for a retailer.



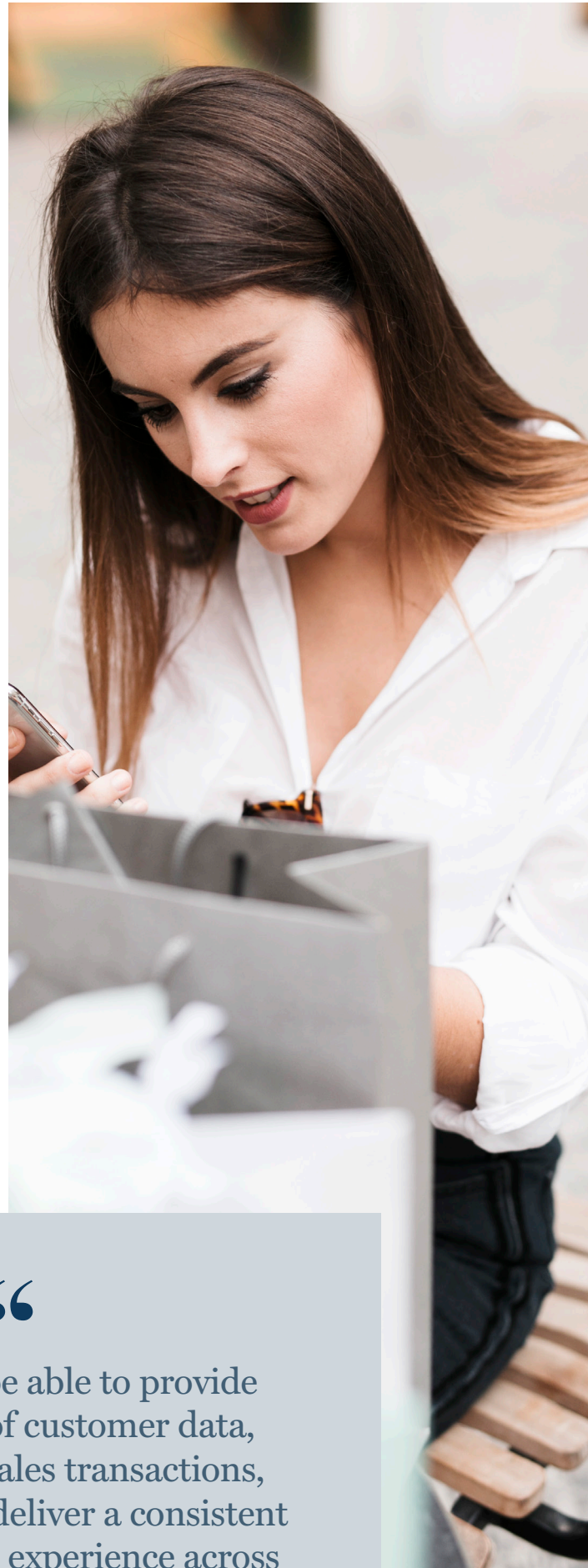
integration capabilities. This includes compatibility with key systems such as CRM/CDP, ERP, and POS, and the ability to ensure real-time data synchronisation across all platforms.

Vendors must be able to provide a unified view of customer data, inventory, and sales transactions, helping retailers deliver a consistent and personalised experience across all touchpoints. Effective integration reduces the friction of merging legacy systems, ensuring scalability and flexibility as the business evolves.

### **Choose vendors that endorse and align with a layered and composable architecture**

As unified commerce solutions increasingly rely on cloud infrastructure, selecting vendors that offer scalable, cloud-native solutions is essential. Look for vendors who align with a layered and composable architecture, enabling modular and flexible updates to individual components without disrupting the entire system.

This ensures that retailers can quickly respond to evolving business needs, add new capabilities, and handle peak loads during high-traffic periods. Such architectures also enable retailers to scale their operations seamlessly when expanding into new markets or channels.



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# Challenges in implementing unified commerce

**Implementing unified commerce can be hindered by legacy systems, data silos, lack of technical expertise, and resistance to change within the organisation.**

Overcoming these barriers requires strategic planning, investment in the right technologies, and a commitment to change management.

**Here's our strategies for overcoming integration challenges**

**Adopting a phased approach** by implementing integrations incrementally to manage complexity.

**Using middleware solutions** to leverage integration platforms to connect disparate systems.

**Investing in skilled personnel** to ensure that the team has the necessary technical expertise.

**Collaborating with partners** and working with technology partners and vendors who have experience in unified commerce implementations.

**Managing data across multiple touchpoints**

Ensuring data consistency and accuracy across all channels is a significant challenge in unified commerce. Implementing centralised data management systems and real-time synchronisation can help maintain data integrity and provide a unified view of the customer.

**Order management in a unified commerce situation**

Unified commerce requires a comprehensive approach to order management that spans all channels. Retailers must ensure that orders can be placed, tracked, and fulfilled seamlessly, regardless of where the order originates. This involves integrating inventory management, fulfillment centers, and customer communication channels into a single, coherent system.

**The role of POS (Point of Sale)**

In a unified commerce environment, the POS system must be fully integrated with online and mobile platforms. This ensures that inventory levels, pricing, promotions, and customer data are consistent across all channels. The POS system also plays



a critical role in enabling services like buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS) and providing a seamless in-store experience that complements digital interactions.

### **Synchronised goals in organisation**

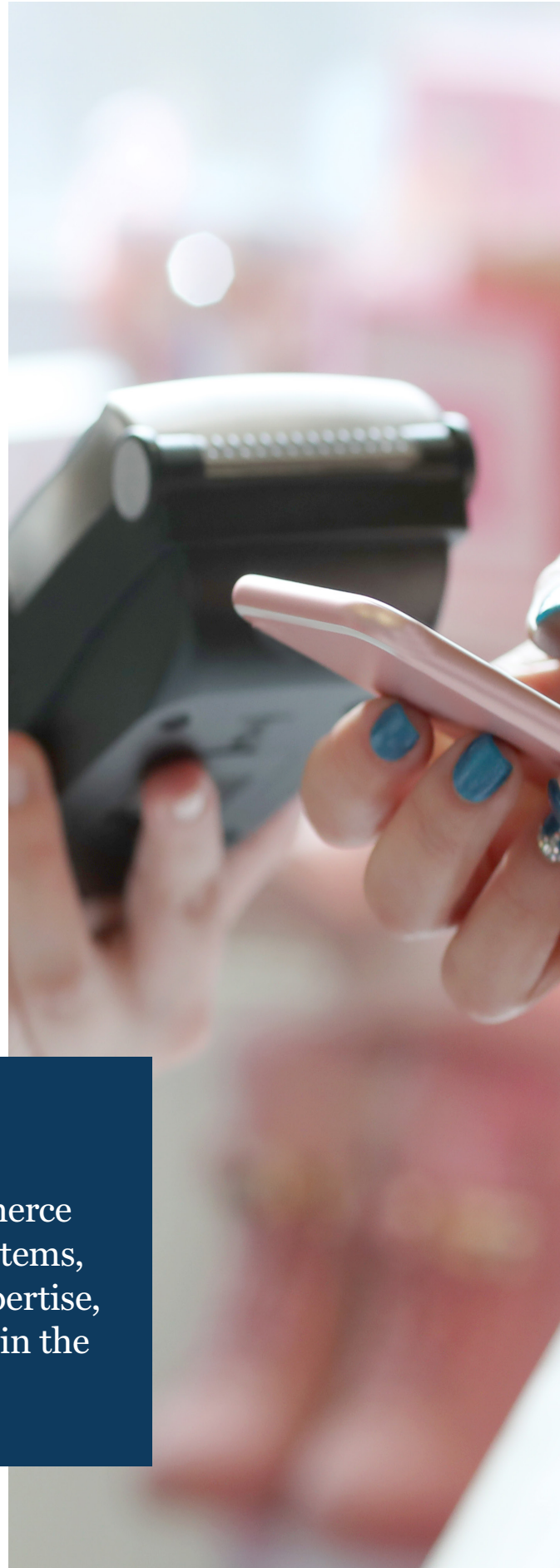
To successfully implement unified commerce, all departments within the organisation must be aligned with common goals. This requires breaking down silos between teams, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that everyone is working towards the same objectives—whether it's enhancing customer experience, streamlining operations, or driving sales growth.

### **Balancing cost with long-term benefits**

While the initial investment in unified commerce can be substantial, retailers must balance these costs with the long-term benefits of increased efficiency, higher sales, and improved customer loyalty. Developing a clear ROI model and prioritising high-impact areas can help manage costs effectively.

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# The future of unified commerce

**Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain are set to redefine the future of unified commerce. AI is transforming how retailers engage with consumers by enabling hyper-personalization. With advanced machine learning algorithms, retailers can analyse customer behaviours, preferences, and historical data to deliver highly targeted marketing campaigns, personalized product recommendations, and dynamic pricing models.**

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants are also enhancing customer service by providing real-time assistance and support across channels. The IoT is playing an increasingly vital role in creating a more connected retail ecosystem. IoT-enabled devices, such as smart shelves and RFID

tags, offer real-time inventory monitoring, ensuring that stock levels are always up-to-date across all channels.

This level of connectivity enhances the customer experience by providing accurate product availability and seamless order fulfilment options like buy-online-pick-up-in-store (BOPIS). IoT also extends to smart stores, where beacons and sensors can guide customers through personalised shopping journeys based on their preferences and location in the store.

Blockchain technology offers transformative potential in enhancing supply chain transparency, traceability, and security. By creating a decentralized, immutable ledger of transactions, blockchain can help retailers verify the authenticity of products, track them from origin to sale, and ensure compliance with ethical sourcing standards. This technology also reduces the risk of fraud, particularly in areas like payment



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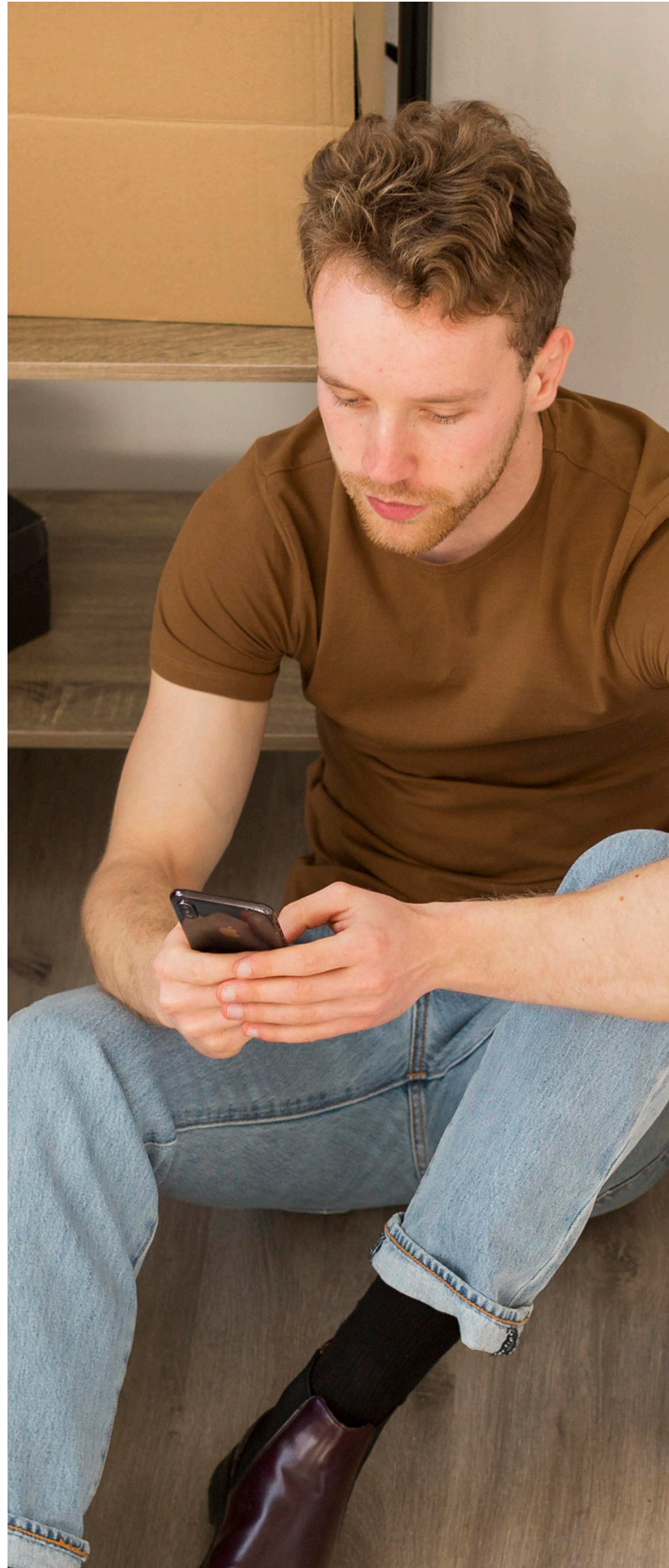
processing and contract management, where blockchain can create more secure and trustworthy systems. costs, especially in highly competitive advertising spaces, and increase average order value (AOV) through effective product recommendations.

### **The role of mobile commerce**

As mobile commerce continues to surge, unified commerce strategies must prioritise optimising for mobile shopping experiences. Retailers need to ensure that their websites are responsive and optimized for mobile devices, with intuitive navigation and seamless checkout processes. Additionally, mobile apps are increasingly becoming an essential tool in driving customer loyalty and engagement, offering features like personalised offers, loyalty program integration, and location-based notifications.

Mobile payment options, including digital wallets, contactless payments, and mobile point-of-sale (mPOS) systems, are becoming critical components of a frictionless shopping experience. Consumers expect fast, secure, and convenient payment options that integrate with their preferred devices. Retailers that fail to optimise their mobile payment systems risk alienating a large segment of their customers, particularly younger generations who prefer mobile-first experiences.

Furthermore, mobile apps play a key role in enhancing the omnichannel experience. Features such as in-app purchasing, barcode scanning for product information, and the ability to seamlessly transition between online and in-store shopping all contribute to a cohesive customer experience. As mobile commerce evolves,



retailers must continue to innovate by offering enhanced app functionality and mobile-first services to stay competitive.

## **Impact of unified commerce on supply chain management**

Unified commerce is poised to revolutionise supply chain management by breaking down silos between online and offline operations and creating a more agile, data-driven approach. One of the most significant impacts is the ability to provide real-time visibility into inventory across all channels—stores, warehouses, and online platforms. This real-time synchronisation allows for more accurate demand forecasting, ensuring the right products are available in the right locations at the right times.

Advanced order management systems (OMS) enable retailers to fulfil orders from multiple locations, optimising delivery times and minimising shipping costs. Customers now expect a variety of fulfilment options, such as BOPIS, ship-from-store, and curbside pickup, and unified commerce makes these services more efficient and reliable. By integrating supply chain management with customer-facing systems, retailers can offer flexible and transparent fulfilment options that enhance the overall shopping experience.

In addition, unified commerce enables more collaborative relationships with suppliers. By sharing real-time data on demand patterns, stock levels, and order fulfilment, retailers and suppliers can work together more effectively to reduce lead times, improve stock replenishment, and mitigate supply chain disruptions.

## **Creating new value streams with retail media**

Retail media networks are emerging as a powerful way for retailers to unlock new revenue streams by monetising their digital properties. Through retail media, retailers





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can offer advertisers access to their digital touchpoints, such as e-commerce sites, mobile apps, and in-store digital displays, creating highly targeted advertising opportunities based on customer data. With unified commerce, retailers have a consolidated view of customer behavior across all channels, enabling them to deliver more personalized and relevant ads.

This new value stream allows retailers to not only increase their profitability through advertising revenue but also enhance the customer experience by providing more relevant and timely product recommendations and promotions. The data-driven nature of retail media also enables advertisers to measure the impact of their campaigns more accurately, optimising ad spend and driving better ROI.

### Traceability, RFID & product cloud

As consumers demand more transparency around the origin and journey of the products they purchase, technologies such as RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) and product cloud solutions are becoming essential components of unified commerce. RFID technology allows for more precise tracking of products throughout the supply chain, enabling real-time visibility of stock levels, location, and movement.

With product cloud technology, retailers can store and manage vast amounts of data related to each product—its origin, manufacturing process, shipping history, and more. This enhanced level of traceability not only builds trust with consumers but also enables retailers to meet regulatory requirements and industry standards related to product safety, sustainability, and ethical sourcing.

By integrating RFID and product cloud technologies, retailers can offer more transparency and assurance to customers, providing them with detailed information about the products they purchase, and



enhancing the overall shopping experience. Unified commerce is built on these basic components, each playing a critical role in delivering the seamless, personalized, and consistent shopping experiences that today's consumers demand. All together, they enable retailers to operate more efficiently, respond more quickly to market changes, and provide a superior customer experience.

### **Preparing for future consumer expectations**

Consumer expectations are continuously evolving, and retailers must be prepared to adapt to new demands. The future of unified commerce will be shaped by the need to offer even more personalised, convenient, and flexible shopping experiences. Retailers will need to continuously innovate by integrating new technologies that allow them to anticipate and meet these expectations.

Future consumers are likely to place even greater emphasis on sustainability, ethical sourcing, and transparency. Unified commerce provides the infrastructure needed to track and communicate a product's lifecycle, enabling retailers to offer more sustainable and ethical options to their customers. Additionally, as consumers become more accustomed to instant gratification, fast delivery options, seamless returns, and real-time product availability will be critical to maintaining customer loyalty.

Retailers will also need to continue investing in AI, machine learning, and data analytics to predict future trends and behaviours, enabling more proactive and personalised engagement with customers. The ability to respond to shifts in consumer preferences quickly and efficiently will be a key differentiator in the competitive retail landscape of the future.



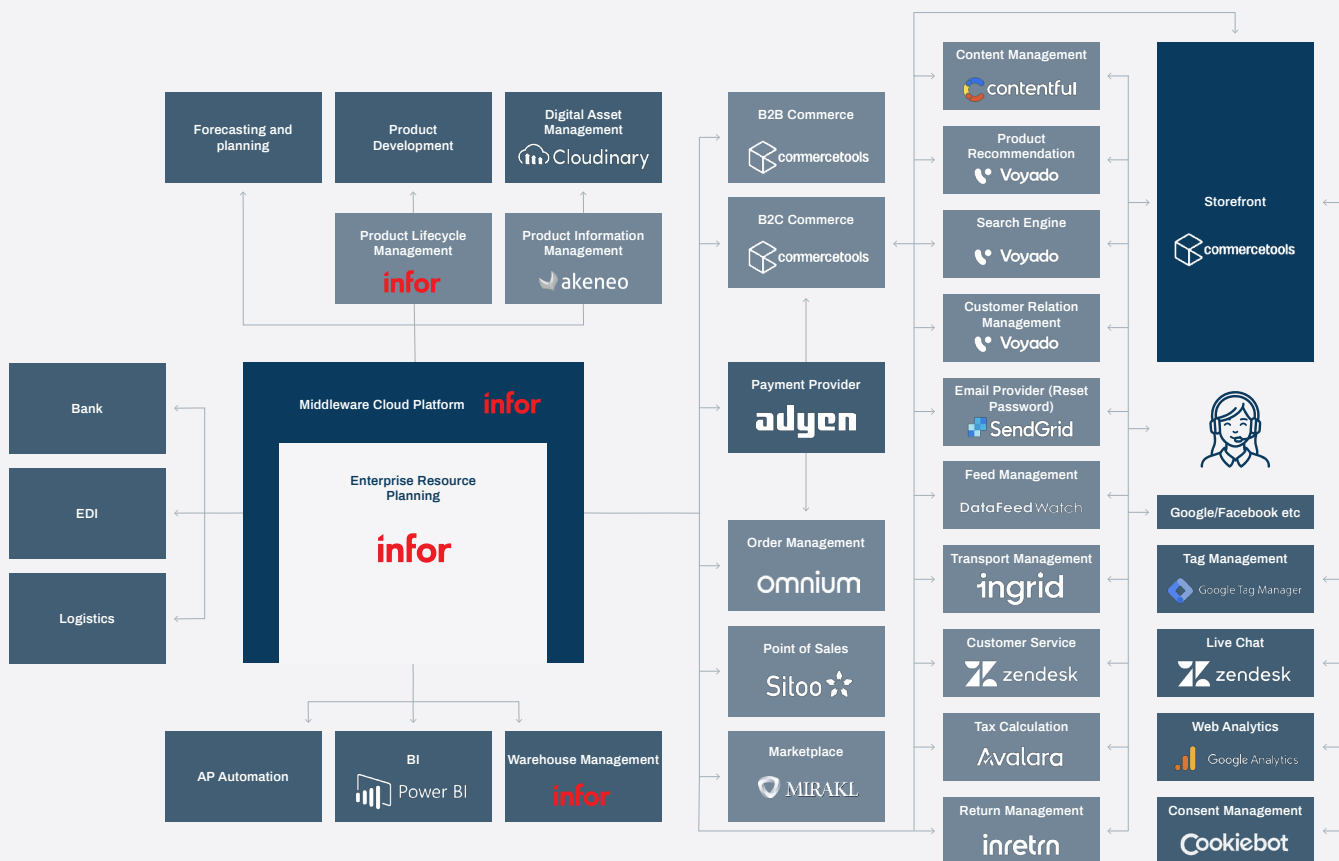
# Future-proofing unified commerce architecture for retailers

In today's rapidly evolving retail landscape, future-proofing a unified commerce architecture demands adaptability, scalability, and resilience. For enterprises and large retailers, building a robust architecture ensures seamless integration across all channels—online, mobile, in-store, and beyond.

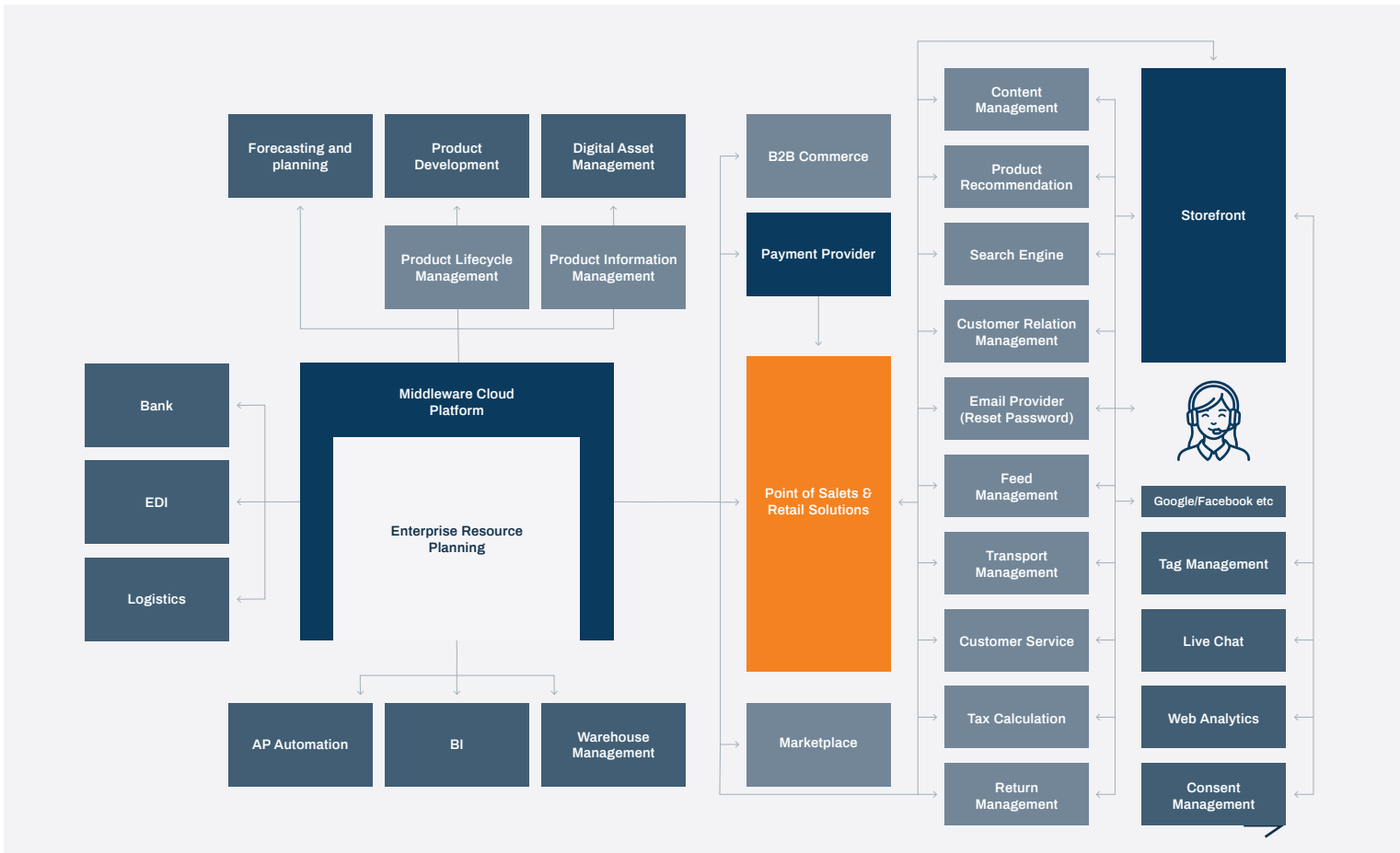
Determining where each functionality resides is crucial for operational efficiency and a unified customer experience. The POS is essential for in-store transactions, while commerce platforms manage online sales. The OMS oversees order fulfillment across channels, and ERP serves as the “source of truth” for financial data, inventory management, and overarching

business processes. As these solutions evolve, the architecture must remain flexible to accommodate shifting dynamics while delivering a consistent and superior customer experience.

A retail solution typically integrates multiple capabilities delivered by different systems within a cohesive architecture. The number and type of solutions depend on the retailer's size, strategy, region, and ambitions. Below is a framework reflecting how platforms can align and shape a unified commerce architecture.



**Illustration:** An example of possible capabilities and mapped vendors for retailers.



**Illustration:** Example with a POS & Retail solution focus in the architecture.

### The changing roles of core systems in unified commerce

Retailers are exploring alternative approaches to managing the “cart” functionality in omnichannel commerce, driven by the increasing demand for seamless shopping experiences across all channels. As consumer expectations evolve, retailers seek to minimize friction in the customer journey by integrating cart functionality across multiple touchpoints. Additionally, technological advancements, such as AI-driven personalization and real-time inventory synchronization, are enabling businesses to optimize how and where the cart is managed, ensuring a consistent and engaging shopping experience. Traditionally handled by the commerce platform, the cart is now increasingly supported by Point of Sale (POS) systems and, in some cases,

Order Management Systems (OMS). At the same time, commerce platforms are adopting POS functionalities. This evolution raises a pivotal question: Is a different tech setup for the cart better suited for omnichannel operations?

For example, a POS-led approach enhances the in-store experience by centralizing the cart at the point of purchase, enabling seamless checkout and real-time access to inventory. Conversely, an OMS-led approach ensures consistency across online and offline channels, maintaining a unified cart experience regardless of where the shopping journey begins or ends. Exploring these options addresses common omnichannel challenges, such as inconsistent pricing, fragmented inventory visibility, and siloed customer data while supporting a seamless customer journey.

**POS-led approach: Enhancing the in-store experience**

Managing the cart through the POS system focuses on optimizing the in-store experience. With real-time inventory updates and quick access to promotions and loyalty programs, POS-led systems streamline the checkout process and improve customer satisfaction at physical locations. This approach also integrates with other systems, ensuring inventory visibility and pricing consistency across all channels.

**OMS-led approach: Creating a unified customer journey**

In an OMS-led setup, the cart becomes a synchronized element across every touchpoint, whether online or in-store. This ensures customers can start their shopping journey in one channel and finish in another without losing their cart or preferences. An OMS also excels at managing omnichannel complexities, such as buy-online-pick-up-in-store (BOPIS), by centralizing order data

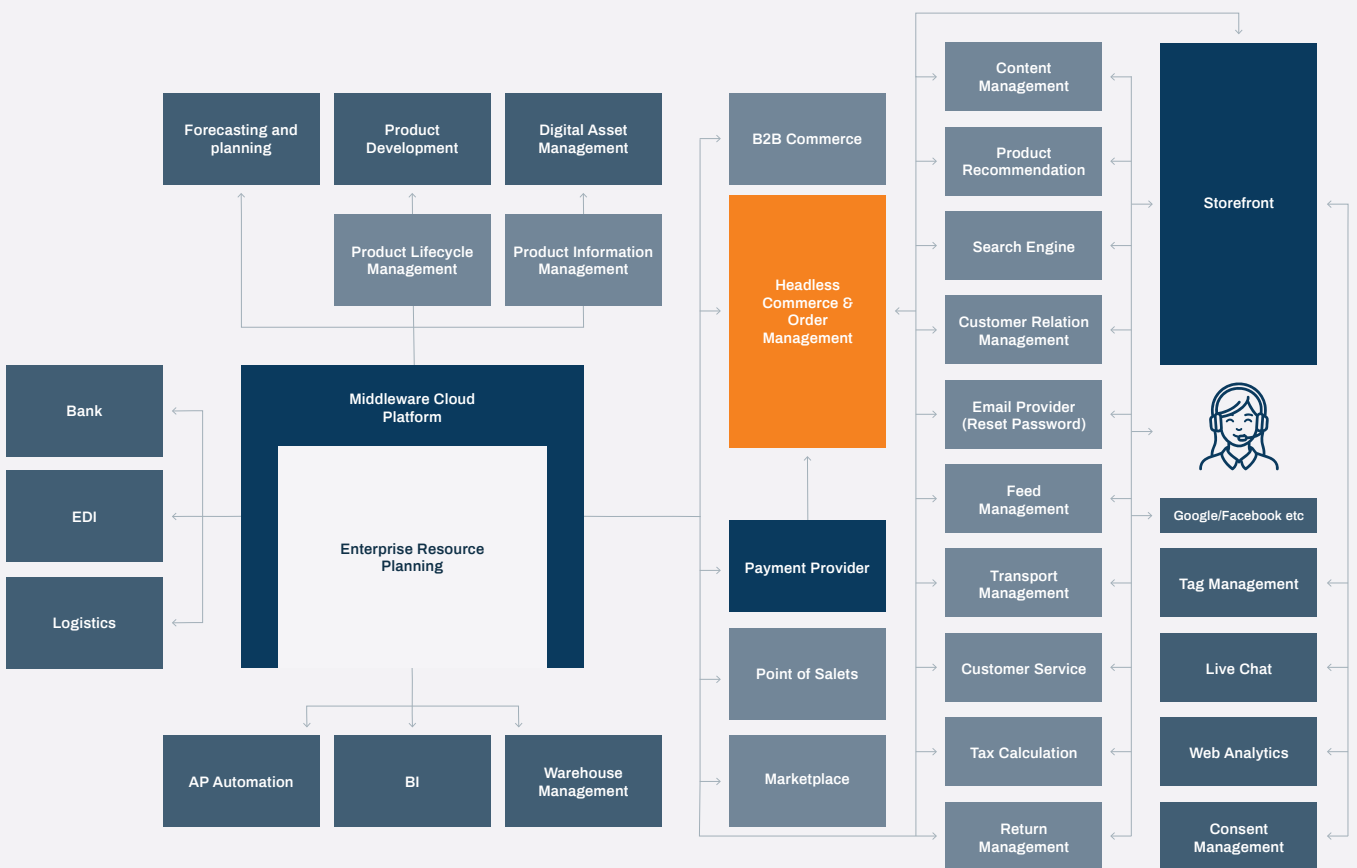
and creating efficient workflows.

**Commerce-led approach: Streamlining the digital core**

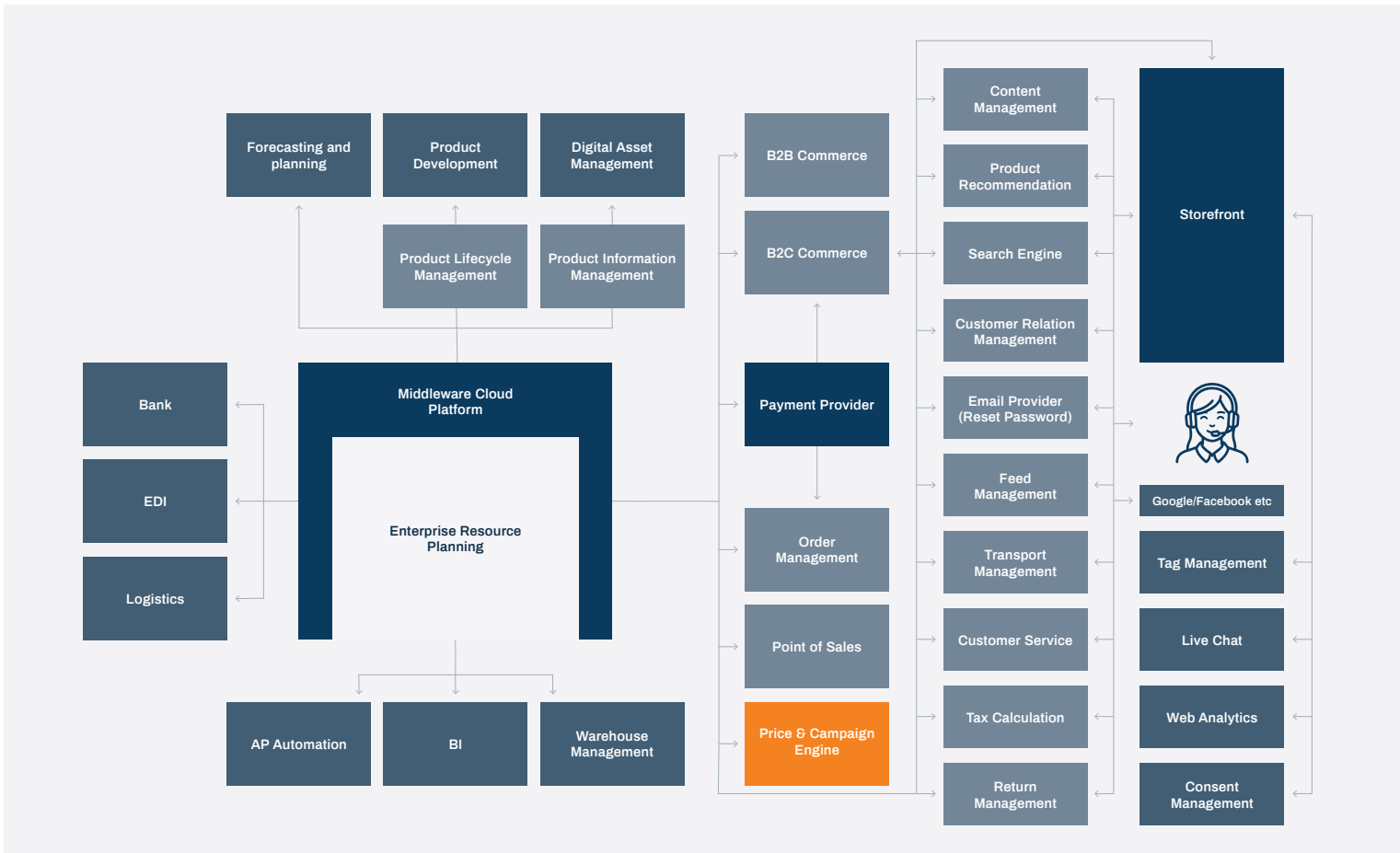
A commerce-led approach retains the cart within the commerce platform, ensuring a robust and centralized foundation for online and mobile channels. This setup excels in handling digital-first shopping experiences, enabling advanced capabilities such as personalized recommendations, seamless checkout processes, and enhanced scalability for peak online demand. By integrating with POS and OMS systems, a commerce-led solution extends its reach to omnichannel operations while maintaining its strength in driving rich digital experiences.

**Handling price promotions and campaigns in an omnichannel setup**

Effective pricing and promotions in an omnichannel setup ensure consistency and maximize sales. Retailers must



**Illustration:** Example with a combined Commerce and OMS solution focus in the architecture.



**Illustration:** Example with a Price & Campaign in the architecture.

synchronize promotional pricing across online and offline channels to prevent confusion. A centralized pricing engine integrated with POS, commerce platforms, and OMS ensures consistency, while AI-driven adjustments optimize pricing in real time based on demand, competition, and inventory levels. Personalization enables retailers to offer targeted promotions based on customer data, while seamless cross-channel promotion tracking ensures offers are visible and redeemable across all sales touchpoints. Additionally, performance analytics help track campaign effectiveness, refine strategies, and optimize budgets to maximize returns.

**Unified platforms for seamless commerce**

The challenge lies in allocating system responsibilities effectively. ERP systems manage core functions like inventory,

while POS and OMS handle transactional capabilities. A retail solution that includes POS, OMS, and commerce in one platform simplifies these responsibilities. With one platform owning the order lifecycle, retailers gain synchronized data and consistent customer touchpoints across all channels.

This unified setup eliminates common issues such as data silos, inconsistent pricing across channels, and inefficient order management. By ensuring synchronized inventory, real-time data sharing, and a seamless checkout experience, retailers can enhance operational efficiency and support a seamless customer journey. By combining the strengths of POS-led, OMS-led, and commerce-led approaches, retailers can tailor their systems to meet specific needs while building the foundation for unified commerce success.



## Future-proof your unified commerce operations

Whether you choose a POS-led, OMS-led, or commerce-led approach—or a combination of all three—defining the boundaries between your systems is critical. A well-integrated platform ensures smooth operations, boosts sales, and creates a cohesive experience for your customers.

By leveraging a solution that integrates POS, commerce, and OMS functionalities, you prepare your business to thrive in an evolving retail landscape while delivering the seamless customer journey that modern shoppers demand.

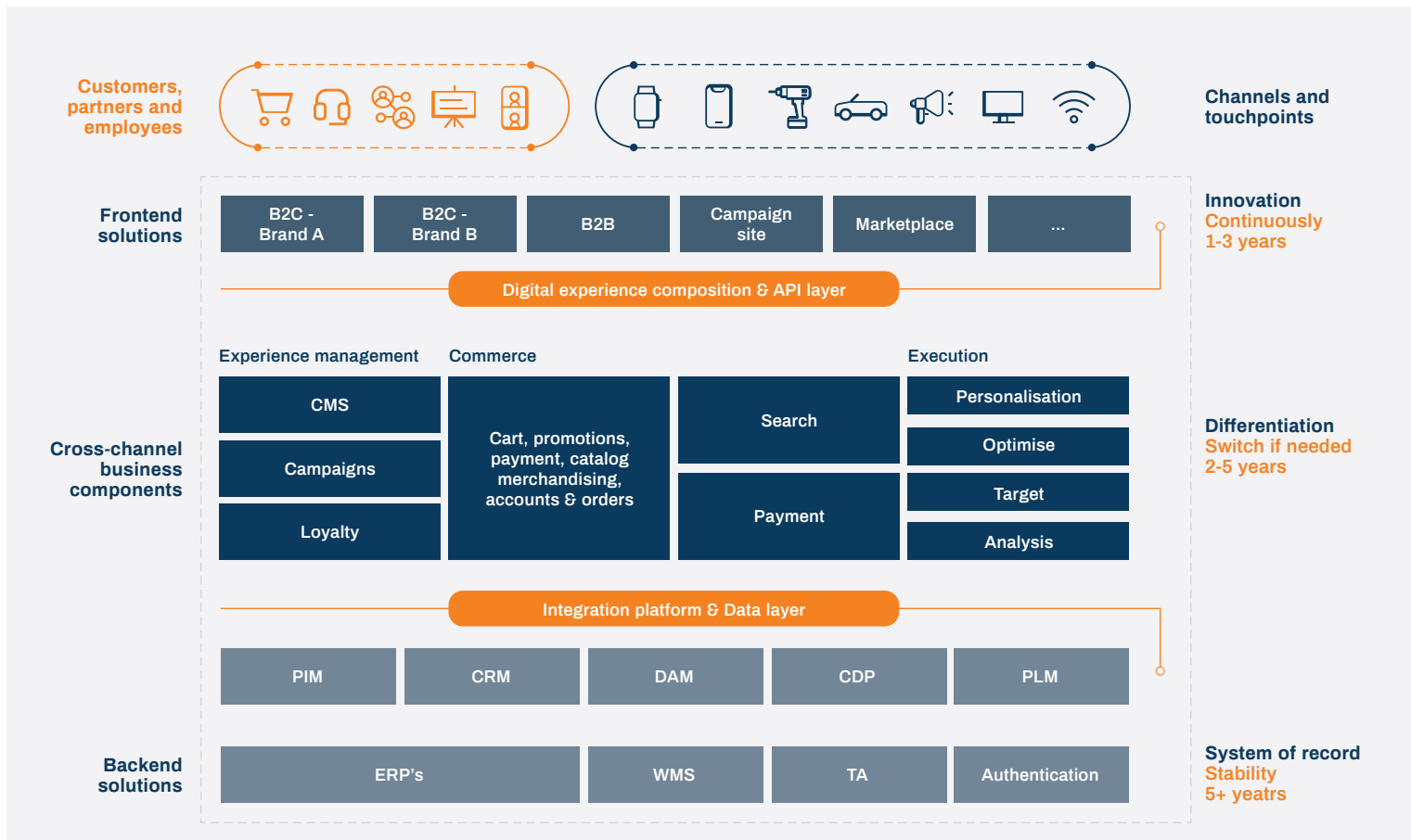
## The role of ERP

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems remain the backbone of retail operations, becoming more composable to align with diverse strategies. For instance, a global fashion retailer might implement a composable ERP system that seamlessly integrates with its OMS, CRM, and PLM platforms. This setup allows real-time inventory updates across all sales channels, improves demand forecasting with AI-driven insights, and automates compliance tracking for different regional regulations. Such an approach enhances agility and supports rapid adaptation to market changes.

Advanced ERP solutions are designed to fit industry-specific processes, being cloud based, enabling “innovation by standardization” through backend process optimization using tools like process mining, hyper-automation, and AI. These innovations create a strong foundation for unified commerce, enabling scalability and integration across other systems.

## Designing a unified commerce architecture

Building a future-proof unified commerce architecture requires a layered, composable strategy to optimize unified commerce capabilities and total cost of ownership



**Illustration:** Layered and composable architecture

(TCO). This architecture includes three distinct layers:

### Frontend solutions

Frontend solutions manage diverse customer and partner interactions across B2C, B2B, wholesaler, and M2M channels. They enhance engagement through tailored portals and seamless experiences across web, mobile, and physical devices.

### Cross-channel business components

This middle layer underpins scalable digital commerce and experience management. Decoupling frontend solutions from business components enables rapid iteration, integration of new touchpoints, and delivery of unified experiences across channels.

### Backend solutions

Backend solutions act as the system of record, integrating enterprise-grade systems like PIM, CRM, ERP, and WMS through a robust integration platform.

## Integration approach

To address modern e-commerce demands, a two-layered integration strategy ensures modularity, flexibility, and scalability:

### Digital experience composition & API layer

This layer connects frontend solutions with business components, providing API-first capabilities for seamless integration and experience management.

### Integration platform & data layer

The foundational layer consolidates backend systems, ensuring efficient data management and accessibility while harmonizing enterprise-grade solutions.

## Conclusion

Future-proofing retail means more than choosing technology—it's about agility, scalability, and a seamless customer experience. Adaptable ecosystems help retailers stay competitive.

# Metrics and KPI's for unified commerce success

## **Customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics**

Measure customer satisfaction through net promoter scores (NPS), customer feedback, and repeat purchase rates. High levels of satisfaction and loyalty indicate successful unified commerce implementation.

## **Sales and conversion rate analysis**

Track sales growth, conversion rates, average order value, and basket size across all channels. These metrics help assess the effectiveness of unified commerce in driving revenue.

## **Operational efficiency and cost reduction**

Evaluate metrics such as order processing time, inventory turnover, and operational costs. Improved efficiency and cost savings are key indicators of successful unified commerce operations.

## **Measuring the ROI of unified commerce**

Calculate the return on investment by comparing the costs of implementation and ongoing operations with the financial benefits, such as increased sales, reduced costs, and improved customer retention.



# Conclusion

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Unified commerce offers a comprehensive solution for modern retailers seeking to enhance customer experiences, drive operational efficiency, and increase sales. By integrating all retail channels and backend systems, unified commerce creates a seamless and personalised shopping journey.

Adopting unified commerce is not just a technological upgrade but a strategic imperative. It enables retailers to stay competitive in a dynamic market, respond swiftly to consumer demands, and leverage data-driven insights for continuous improvement.

## Do your homework! Where are you and where to go?

Before embarking on the unified commerce journey, retailers must conduct a thorough assessment of their current state, including their technological capabilities, organizational readiness, and customer experience gaps. Understanding where you are now is critical to defining where you need to go. This involves setting realistic goals, developing a clear roadmap, and identifying the resources required to achieve those goals.

## Final recommendations for retailers:

- Develop a clear unified commerce strategy aligned with business goals.
- Invest in the right technologies and skilled personnel.
- Prioritise customer experience and data integrity.
- Adopt a phased implementation approach to manage complexity.
- Continuously monitor and optimise based on performance metrics and evolving market trends.



[Read more](#)



## About Columbus

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Columbus is a global IT services and consulting company with more than 2,000 employees serving 5,000+ customers worldwide. Columbus helps ambitious companies transform, maximize and futureproof their business digitally.

We are specialised within the industries retail, distribution, food and manufacturing. We offer a comprehensive solution portfolio with deep industry knowledge, extensive technology expertise and profound customer insight. Columbus has offices and partners all over the world and we can deliver our solutions and services locally – on a global scale.

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Infor is a global leader in business cloud software solutions for companies in specific industry markets. The company develops comprehensive industry suites in the cloud, prioritizing user experience, utilizing data science, and ensuring seamless integration with existing systems.

With more than 65,000 organizations worldwide, Infor is trusted to help navigate market disruptions and drive digital transformation across businesses.

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