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5 Strategies

For Closing the Content and
Commerce Integration Gap

By Jess Landiorio, Acquia

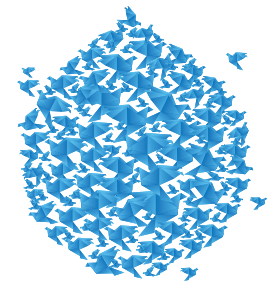


5 Strategies

For Closing the Content and Commerce Integration Gap

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Introduction

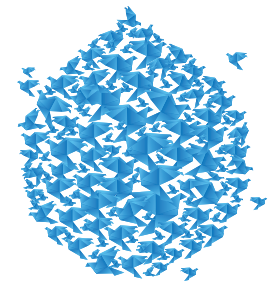
The game has changed for retailers and brands online. Consumers can forge their own unique discovery path through innumerable digital sites and platforms, with limitless options for finding product information and reviews on sites that offer lower price points. And often, that path does not start with the brand. In the midst of this digital disruption, organizations are looking to regain control of the brand discovery experience.

However, legacy commerce sites don't meet the expectations of today's consumer. The "shop button" era has come to a close. Old technology and older thinking have led to the commerce experience split into a variety of digital silos, making the consumer's journey confusing and disjointed. To remain competitive, brands need to deliver unified and engaging content, commerce, and social experiences at the pace of the web.

Enabling this is not a small undertaking. This ebook outlines five strategies for closing the content and commerce integration gap.



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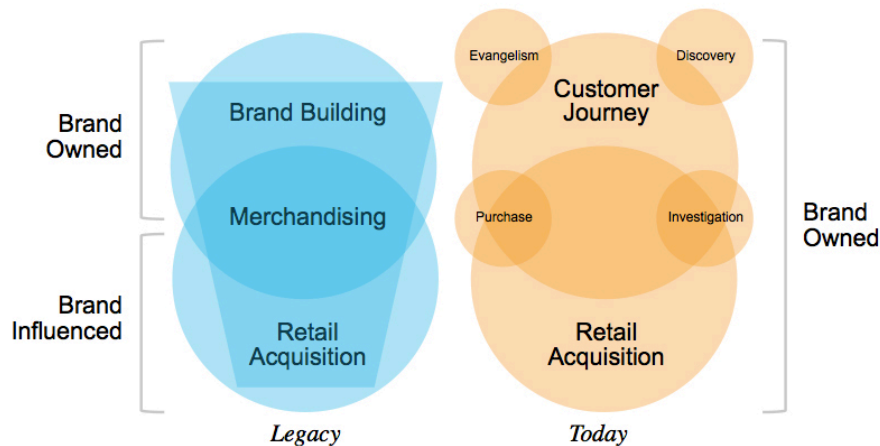
Reorganizing Your Marketing and Merchandising Functions

Legacy business models are plaguing brands and retailers. Historically, the brand owned product information, and the website was essentially an online marketing brochure. Efforts were primarily directed toward enabling the retailer to sell. The retailer owned everything from acquisition to customer relationship management.

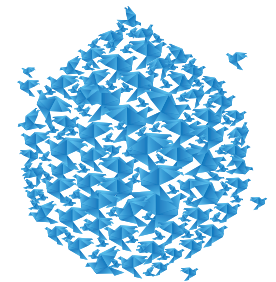
Brands influenced this model, but didn't have visibility to understand how customers selected their products, and couldn't engage consumers directly to obtain feedback.

Today, this is no longer the case. Brands have tremendous opportunity to engage directly with consumers and influence the entire lifecycle, from discovery to consideration to purchase to the real end-game: brand evangelism.

Digital Disruption Is Changing the Game



To capitalize on this new opportunity, brands need to set up their teams for success, which in most cases will require a reorganization. Historically there were lines of delineation between the person managing the website, the brand marketers who were trying to fill the top of the funnel, and the merchandisers who were tasked with conversion and relationship management.

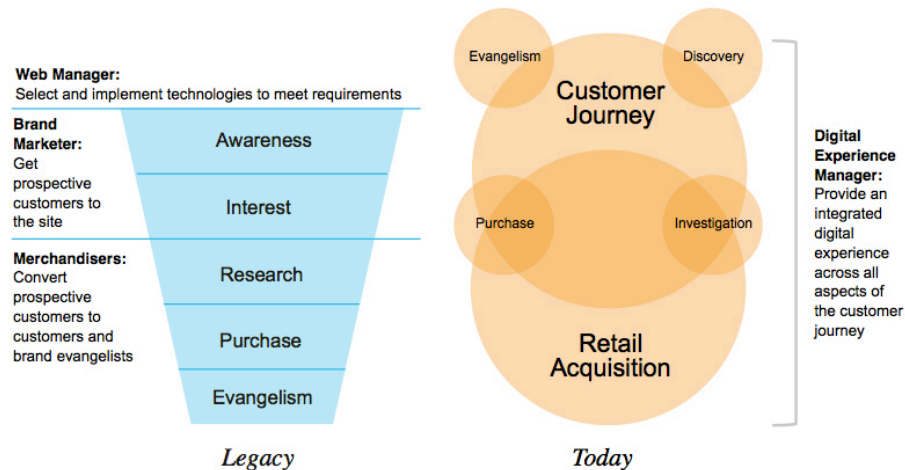


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The purchase path, however, is no longer a linear funnel, it's a lifecycle.

Consumers are moving back and forth from discovery to consideration, back to discovery, then directly to purchase—and on it goes. The importance of finding consumers where they are in the cycle and serving up content relevant to their needs is paramount. To do this requires much tighter alignment and the addition of new roles. If you don't have a Digital Experience Manager yet, you need one. This role can drive consistency across web, brand, and merchandising teams. Of course, consistency across teams won't matter if separate systems are used for digital marketing of the brand and for product content. The experience needs to be seamless, and so do the systems.

Reorganizing for Success



Hire Like You're a Publisher

Today's experience requirements revolve around content. In a recent article on DigiDay, Rachel Tipograph, Gap's director of global digital and social media, said it best: "Content is the currency within our social web." Because brands are trying to serve a myriad of personas with different needs, the creation of many types of content to fuel those experiences requires a new investment. The investment should be both in content producers and curators, as well as the creative graphic design team needed to create a much higher frequency of brand-consistent imagery.

Using content as a commerce catalyst requires retailers and brands to think and operate like publishers. "Syndication" wasn't a word that applied to ecommerce, and now it should be used daily. Brands need to think about designing their own content, but also syndicating content from other sources their target customer loves. There is also the opportunity for brands to syndicate their content out through their retail channel partners—own the store within the store for their brand. In a recent Forrester Research report, *The ROI of Agile Commerce*, analyst Martin Gill said, "Farfetch's vision is to blend fashion content from the likes of investor Condé Nast's publications with a curated ecommerce experience that reaches into a chain of boutique stores with mobile, location-aware services, in-store pickup, and other digitally enhanced physical retail experiences."

Delivering curated content experiences to prospective customers will be a significant competitive advantage.



Over the last two years, the Gap has developed a digital content strategy it calls "lo-fi," building content specifically designed for mobile social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vine. For example, here's an Instagram image of a man and his iced coffee. The content reads, "Weekends were made for iced coffee and casual gingham."

Gap's content can be created far in advance or in real time to respond to culture, weather or whatever is buzzing. Tipograph said that lo-fi content receives 70 percent higher engagement than traditional advertising content across its social channels. This Instagram photo, for example, has almost 3,400 likes.

"The Internet requires every brand...to become a publisher. Content is the currency within our social web," Rachel Tipograph, Gap director of global digital and social media.

Source: <http://digiday.com/brands/sociomantic-retailers-as-publishers/>



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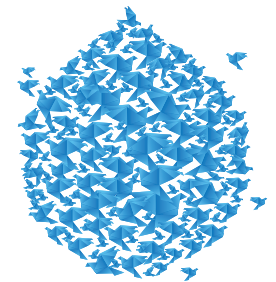
Invest in Technologies that Break Content Silos and Disjointed Experiences

The shop button is hurting brands. Taking consumers down one path for discovery and a separate path for purchase frustrates consumers and decreases sales. Here are two examples of disjointed experiences:

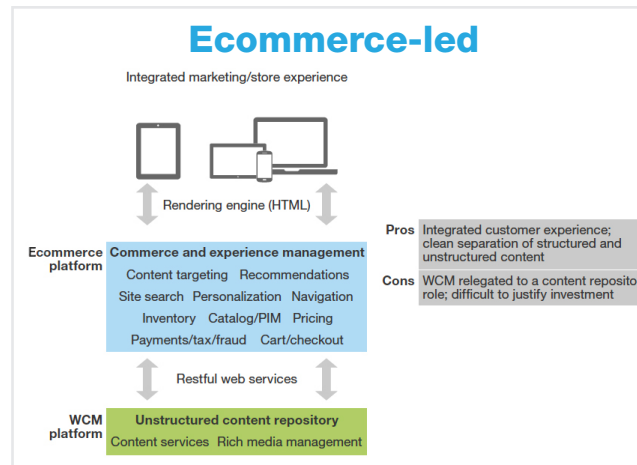
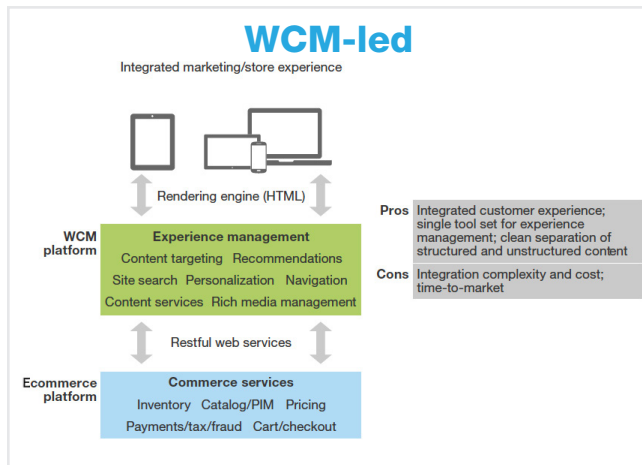
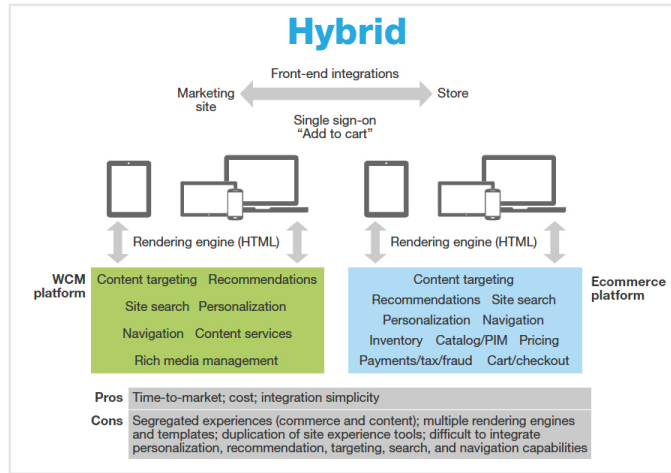
- **Olay.** A leading P&G owned beauty brand produces excellent content to help educate potential customers about skincare topics. Unfortunately, while you navigate information about skincare issues, you can't directly buy the products that combat them. Take a [look for yourself](#).
- **Apple.** Apple's site is built for Apple fanatics. Its main experience is all about commerce. Although if you happen to diverge from that path to learn about the new iPhone 5S, you can easily find yourself on [this page](#), which tells you how great everyone thinks it is. If you make it to the bottom of that page, you can click "Buy an iPhone 5S." But that only brings you [here](#), which is actually the product page. Now, you have to search to find where you can buy a phone! Instead, what Apple should have done is bring you right [here](#).

This type of experience can no longer be considered acceptable. But paving the way to a seamless integrated experience requires investing in technologies that enable it. Forrester Research recently published a report "Content And Commerce: The Odd Couple Or The Power Couple?" discussing that the technology investment decision comes down to your commerce platform and web content management systems. Forrester's Peter Sheldon and Stephen Powers outline three approaches for building seamless integration between content and commerce:

- **Hybrid.** Where tighter integration is built between systems, but they share experience delivery.
- **WCM-led.** Where the commerce platform acts as a service layer to the web content management (WCM) technology, which owns experience delivery.
- **Commerce-platform led.** Where the WCM system acts as a content repository and the commerce platform leads experience delivery.



Each approach has its own pros and cons, which are outlined in these graphics:



Adopt Agile Development Methodologies

Although providing a truly integrated content and commerce experience primarily starts with the team and technology structures, the end result is all about just-in-time delivery of those experiences. Time-to-market is critical, and for teams that haven't adopted Agile yet, it's time to get agile—agile in your development processes and agile in your response to changing markets. Agility is a significant factor in integration, being able to quickly adapt to changing market demands, new channels, and social vehicles through new systems and data integrations. Open source technology is designed for flexibility, agility, and extensibility, as well as meeting today's speed-of-delivery requirements.

Comparing Agile Versus Waterfall Development Methodologies

Agile Versus Traditional Waterfall

Metric	Waterfall	Agile
Planning scale	Long-term	Short-term
Distance between customer and developer	Long	Short
Time between specification and implementation	Long	Short
Time to discover problems	Long	Short
Project schedule risk	High	Low
Ability to respond quickly to change	Low	High

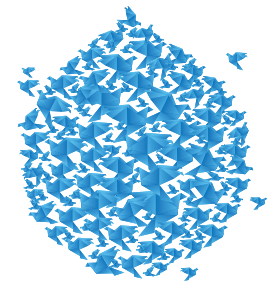


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Let Your Brand Advocates Tell the World

Your shiny new integrated experience is ready to roll. The next challenge is how to roll it out. You start by immersing your brand advocates in the new experience. This requires that social communities and strategies are in place. For instance, if Sephora did a site redesign with a new integrated content and commerce pitch, it should give the Sephora bloggers a sneak peak and then let them do their thing. Burberry's "Art of the Trench" advocates would also be perfect for a new Burberry experience. Timex is a great example of a site using Drupal to create an integrated content, commerce, and social experience. Timex launched an integrated IRONMAN "I'm a runner" campaign, which combines product content, running tips, and a social venue for networking and storytelling, effectively deploying its social army to communicate its brand experience.

Timex Provides an Integrated Content, Commerce, and Community Experience



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Conclusion

Today's consumer is a well traveled digital shopper who researches, conducts price comparisons, checks official reviews and the advice of friends—and does this all online.

A brand's site must be able to anticipate the questions and concerns of the consumer, provide access to great content, and create opportunities to make a purchase at any moment in the buyer's journey. One false note or a one-way route off the site before the sale has been made, may mean the consumer will never return. And today, it's not only about the sale—it's about the ongoing consumer experience, building social engagement, and converting the consumer into a brand advocate.

While digital technology has disrupted the old, safe, and comfortable path for the consumer shopping experience, it's also provided powerful tools to create a great digital commerce experience. By employing these five strategies, brands can deliver a unified content, commerce, and social experience to once again regain control of the brand discovery experience.

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