

Acquia



5 Strategies for Experiential Commerce

Closing the Gap Between Content and Commerce

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Meagan White is a senior manager of product marketing at Acquia, where she helps organizations digitally transform their business and customer experiences. She is passionate about helping brands maximize their digital efforts by crafting thoughtful, creative marketing strategies and campaigns that helps them connect with their audiences in new ways. Her professional experience includes the creation and management of brand, storytelling, and digital marketing strategies for several start-ups and Fortune 1000 companies across a wide range of verticals. Prior to Acquia, Meagan managed social media, content, and digital strategies for a content marketing agency. Later she joined Intralinks, a software as a service provider, where she led global social media efforts, content, and corporate communications programs.

Introduction

The game has changed for retailers and brands online. Customers are more informed than ever when making a purchase, and their journey starts well before they visit a brick-and-mortar store or online marketplace. Your customers have unlimited options at their fingertips, with vast amounts of content to help them make informed buying choices available across channels. With content guiding them to compare different products, reviews and prices, often their journey does not start with the brand.

Today's eCommerce is no longer strictly transactional. Most legacy eCommerce sites don't meet the expectations of today's consumer. The "shop button" era has come to a close. It's all about the customer experience now.

Organizations are looking to regain control of the customer experience. To successfully market their products online, brands must provide the correct blend of functionality, experience and storytelling to keep customers engaged throughout their journey. The reality is a website, product description, and targeted email campaign are no longer enough to truly engage customers. Buyers expect rich commerce experiences with valuable content, in which they can learn more and connect with brands from any device or channel. They expect to find the most relevant content and information at the right time, related to the products and solutions they're interested in to help inform purchasing decisions.

Legacy technology and traditional strategies have led to the commerce experience split into the brand experience and the shopping experience, making the consumer's journey confusing and disjointed. To remain competitive, brands need to deliver a unified and a highly engaging shopping experience known as "Experiential Commerce." Enabling experiential commerce is no small undertaking as its intention is to replicate the shopping experience consumers would expect from a brick-and-mortar store online, where they leave with an emotional allegiance to the brand and product in their hands.

In this eBook, we'll share five strategies for experiential commerce to help close the content and commerce integration gap.

To remain competitive, brands need to deliver a unified and a highly engaging shopping experience known as **"Experiential Commerce."**

Step 1: Unite Your Marketing and Merchandising Functions

Integrating great content into the commerce experience enables merchandisers and marketers to build rich experiences their buyers will love, leading to increased engagement and sales. Yet, few succeed to do so in a consistent, programmatic way.

Legacy business models and technologies are plaguing brands with commerce. In many organizations, marketing owns the brand experience while the commerce team owns the online shopping experience. Traditional strategies have led to the commerce experience split into two separate experiences for visitors (brand site + shopping site), making the consumer's journey confusing and disjointed. Marketers are focused on driving, brand awareness, web traffic, engagement, MQLs and conversions (contact forms, newsletters, content downloads, and so on) through the brand site. On the flipside, commerce teams are focused on driving average order value, repeat purchases, conversions (but from a shop only perspective), and lifetime customer value.

With differing priorities and goals comes separate technologies to execute against those goals. In most traditional business models, marketing owns in the content management system (or a few of them), the associated marketing technology, and/or the entire digital experience platform. Their goal is to attract consumers with rich content and dynamic interfaces that tell the brand story. The commerce team is goaled mostly on transactions, and is responsible for commerce management, product information management, and order management systems. Commerce teams are working with a complex and entrenched commerce infrastructure that is often limited in customizing the front-end experience. Traditional eCommerce systems excel at managing products, orders, and carts, but often lag in providing advanced content management and digital experience capabilities that are needed to create a great commerce experience for consumers.

These separate systems often limit the ability for marketers and merchandiser to create dynamic content and promotions around products or inject products into relevant content. Most organizations don't have the time or resources to integrate, develop and maintain custom connectors and environments, leaving many teams limited in their ability to quickly create engaging, experiences that tell their brand story. To the customer, this shows up as a one-dimensional, cookie cutter experience that does little to delight or inspire them.

Brands have tremendous opportunity to engage directly with consumers and influence the entire customer lifecycle, from awareness through conversion to the real end-game: brand advocacy.

Awareness

Consideration

Conversion

Growth

Advocacy

Brands need to address the need to deliver seamless customer journeys across all or parts of the customer lifecycle.

To capitalize on this new opportunity, brands need to set up their teams for success. In most cases this will require the team coming together on brand and commerce strategy, integrating siloed technologies, or maybe even 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. The purchase path, however, is no linear funnel, it's a lifecycle.

Step 2: Break Content Silos and Disjointed Experiences


Consumers are moving back and forth from initial discovery to consideration, then directly to purchase and on it goes. The importance of meeting consumers where they are in the lifecycle and serving up content relevant to their needs as part of the customer journey is critical. The problem some brands are having is that it's challenging to deliver a cohesive experience that tells their story when you have two separate sites or experiences that aren't integrated. We see this situation all too often. The consumer sees one brand, not multiple channels; and they have choices. They'll exercise that choice with the brand that offers them the best experience across every interaction.

To do this requires a much tighter alignment between the marketing and commerce teams. The experience needs to be seamless, and so do the systems. Taking consumers down one path for discovery and a separate path for purchase frustrates consumers and decreases sales. For instance, as a consumer, if you're on a brand's site reading educational content about a particular topic, you may reach a point where you want to discover products related to the topic. From there, you may want to read to learn more about a product and then directly buy the product from the content once you're ready.

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


Scott's Provides Useful Content While Leveraging Effective Calls-to-Action

A good example of a brand that takes consumers down the right, informed purchase path is Scott's. For instance, if you're about to take on a new lawn care project for the first time, you may want to do some gardening research and look into tools. On Scott's resources page, they have articles all about lawn care best practices. In clicking to learn more about 'spreaders' you are brought to an informative page that explains what works best and how it works. To the right of the page, you'll see injected, related products in which you can easily learn more and or buy them directly.



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How it works: As you push a broadcast spreader, it



SCOTT'S® WIZZ™

Paving the way to a seamless experience requires investing in integrations and technologies that enable it. Brands should do more to bring the consumer the experience they need. The initial step is identifying which type of technology strategy is best for your firm long-term: all-in-one suite or best-of-breed content and commerce. Each has their pros and cons

Suite approach:

A corporate decision is made to choose a vendor providing a “suite”, with modules for each solution that hopefully easily integrates with each other. However, suite solutions present some challenges. They typically do not provide all of the features businesses need and they only integrate with their own modules—often leaving the commerce strategy and solution lacking the required capabilities. Suites are not always agile or flexible enough to allow teams to keep up with changing commerce business models and the technology that enables them.

Best-of-breed approach:

Each department has chosen the best solution for the task it needs to perform. A best-of-breed approach enables organizations to keep their existing technology systems and integrate with new technologies as needed to build a cohesive, digital platform. You can leverage your current eCommerce system or take a headless commerce approach. This path allows those organizations that have already invested significant time and resources in their commerce strategy and technologies to avoid a transition that would be far too long and costly.

From there you can assess the technology investment and integration approach for your eCommerce platform and web content management system.

There are a few approaches for building seamless integrations between content and commerce.

- eCommerce-led. Where the WCM system acts as a content repository and the commerce platform leads experience delivery.
- WCM-led or headless commerce. Where the commerce platform acts as a service layer to the content management system, which serves as the experience layer.
- Hybrid or side-by-side. Where tighter integration is built between systems, but they share experience delivery.

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 an agile methodology yet, it’s time to get agile. Typically best-of-breed and headless commerce strategies allow for the most flexibility in experiential commerce so brands can adapt quickly to changing market demands, including new channels, systems and integrations.

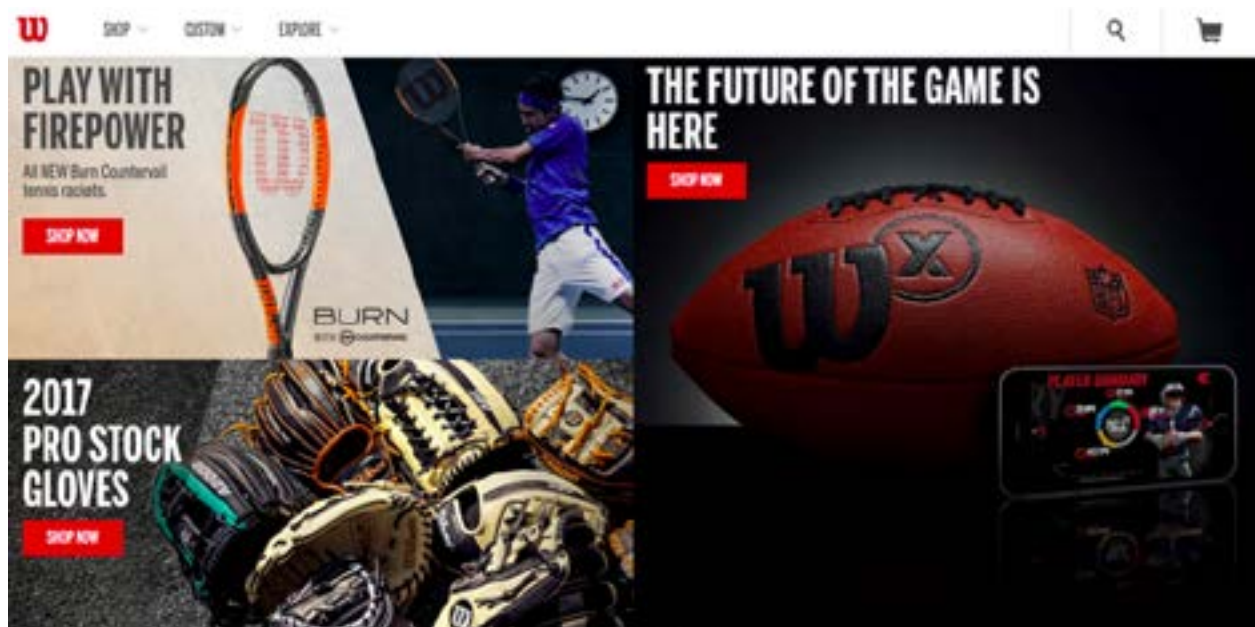
Step 3: Think and Operate Like a Publisher

Today's experience requirements revolve around content. Because brands are trying to serve multiple 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 content marketers, as well as the creative graphic design team needed to create a much higher frequency of brand-consistent imagery.

To attract new buyers and retain existing customers, brands have adapted their digital strategy to create a cohesive customer experience that tells their story, and brings together content and commerce for a more relevant, in-context interaction, while still offering great performance on the back end.

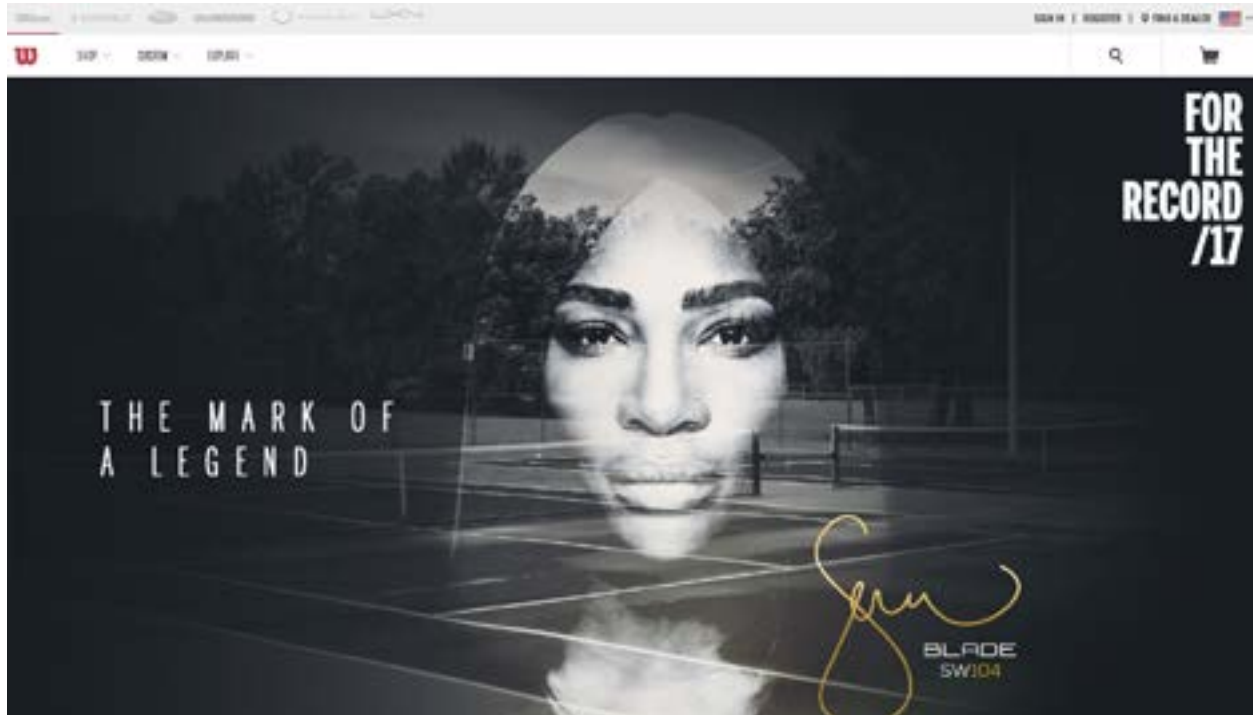
Wilson Changes the Game with Experiential Commerce

A great example of a brand that's committed to providing a highly engaging experience for its visitors by incorporating storytelling about the audience's favorite sports into product pages is [Wilson](#). You can't think of sporting goods without thinking of Wilson's brand. For more than a 100 years, Wilson has provided gear for both professional athletes and consumers. Through digital, Wilson has been able to create an engaging shopping experience for its consumers, one that's both responsive and content rich. Wilson's site marries content and commerce, with each of its brands, products, and sports having its own distinct design aesthetic.



The new [www.wilson.com](#) built with Drupal and Magento on the Acquia Cloud

Their strategy enables their teams to better incorporate storytelling about their favorite sports into product pages. While consumers come to Wilson.com to purchase products, they also come to the site for information about sporting equipment, as well as their favorite athletes and teams. [Wilson has improved revenue by 10 percent](#) on site and by 44 percent on mobile.



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 often. Brands need to think about designing content for their owned digital properties, but also syndicating content to channels that attract their target customers’ attention: social media channels, advertising platforms or through channel partners. Social commerce should be a consideration as part of your broader commerce strategy. Shopping

in its nature is social, and the power of online word of mouth and user generated content will not be ignored by brands. “71 percent of consumers are likely to buy an item based on social media referrals,” according to [HubSpot](#). Since social media is where lifestyle context or conversations happen, brands will focus even more on making product placements as relevant and in-context as possible. Delivering curated content experiences that are personalized across channels to prospective customers will be a significant competitive advantage.

Using content as a commerce catalyst requires retailers and brands to think and operate like publishers.

An outcome of thinking like a publisher will be an increased focus on also prioritizing customer service, especially social customer service. This means being responsive, starting dialogue, and turning dissatisfied social followers into advocates. Even if you can't solve an issue on the spot, having the technology and resource to instantly reply to a customer online can [increase customer advocacy around 20 percent](#).

Step 4: Move Toward Omnichannel Commerce

Once you've mastered the foundational requirements of experiential commerce, you're ready to move toward omnichannel personalization. According to findings from the [Aberdeen Group](#), companies with the strongest omnichannel strategies will retain an average of 89% of their customers, as compared to 33% for companies with weak omnichannel strategies.

Companies with the strongest omnichannel customer engagement strategies retain an average of 89% of their customers, as compared to 33% for companies with weak omnichannel strategies. (Aberdeen Group)

To reach the point of omnichannel commerce, you must connect disparate martech and commerce tech and analytics, much like you connected your disparate teams. In fact, breaking down your team silos can lead to the breakdown of data siloes as well. Allow all of your tools to work in unison so you'll have a holistic view of your customer. Then, personalized commerce experiences backed by data can be built and delivered to customers based on where they are in their customer journey.



[Vodafone](#) is a great example of a brand that's focused on delivering a fully immersive omnichannel experience for their buyers. This goes beyond web through to push-based interactions and smart digital displays in their retail stores to grab customer attention and support product selection.

Most eCommerce systems lag in providing intuitive personalization capabilities beyond basic product recommendations based on what was previously viewed, purchased or added to a cart. To make personalization work at scale across all of your personas, personalization and journey orchestration solutions are often needed. This new tech is part of the great digital experience platform and lets you plan for personalized journeys that are both digital and nondigital, from in-store digital signage to web, email, or even social. Rich content and experiences that tell your brand story can be personalized at the right place and time for your customers to better engage them and get them to convert.

Step 5: Adopt a Customer Journey Mindset

Customer experience is the new competitive battleground for brands looking to differentiate amongst competitors. A connected experience that's personalized to the buyer across touchpoints feels cohesive and relevant. And, it can help a browser turn into a buyer if you can remove friction, or get them over the hump that's preventing them from buying.

For example, if they keep coming back to your site, can you trigger a 10 percent discount offer after the third time they bounce?

Or, do you have the ability to insert a relevant ad into your prospect's Facebook feed at just the right moment? You should be able to do this and much more, automatically, to move the customer along their buying journey.

Leveraging customer journeys can lead to increases in customer satisfaction and revenue by 20 percent and 15 percent, respectively, says [McKinsey & Company](#).

As mentioned above, customer journey tech can help. Brands need to take control of the customer journey by combining previously siloed systems and data, and harnessing the power of [orchestrated, personalized customer journeys across all touchpoints](#).

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(McKinsey & Company)

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 online and in-store. Experience-driven commerce will soon become the norm, not the exception, because it drives more engagement and sales.

By now you've learned five strategies for experiential commerce to help close the gap between content and commerce silos. These include uniting your marketing and merchandising functions, breaking down content silos, thinking and operating like a publisher, moving toward omnichannel commerce, and adopting a customer journey mindset.

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. Today, it's not only about the sale—it's about the ongoing consumer experience, building 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 activating these experiential commerce strategies, brands can once again regain control of the experience.

To learn about how Acquia can help you deliver experiential commerce strategy, please visit acquia.com/commerce.

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