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# Monetizing Insights with Experiential Commerce

Unlock Hyper-Focused Customer Engagement

**bounteous**

ACQUIA

 elasticpath

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# Introduction

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In today's hyper-connected world, consumers and buyers have unlimited access to products and services. This creates an environment in which organizations are constantly running into the risk of seeing competitors attract their prospects and customers with better offers or cleverly positioned content that disrupts their addressable market.

Another effect of the digital revolution is customers now consume information about products and services through touchpoints that offer endless opportunities for distraction. This means organizations no longer only compete with other businesses in their industry vertical, but rather with any organization that delivers any type of experience, commercial or not, available through any one of the devices that have become prevalent in our day-to-day lives.

In order to increase their ability to compete and differentiate, organizations must understand their buyers' complex journeys and unlock more opportunities for customer engagement.

## A Day in the Life of Today's Buyers

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A buyer's journey is often analyzed and described by identifying five key stages that inform the customer's relationship with the brand: **awareness, consideration, intent, purchase, and retention and advocacy.**

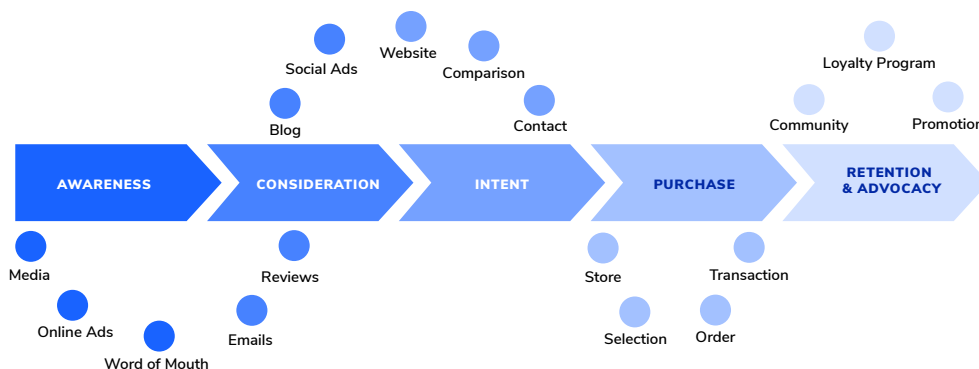
In an analog world with less opportunities for distraction, the consequentiality between these stages and their linearity were much tighter. Entering a retail location in a B2C scenario or calling a sales rep in a B2B scenario signified a considerable indication of intent to complete a transaction while also ensuring a high-touch customer engagement opportunity.

On the other hand, measuring customer engagement and customer satisfaction after purchase was much harder compared to today.

In the absence of alternative reference points, the **e-stores** that were built in the early days of digital commerce were very much conceived applying the mindset that informed analog retailing. The assumption was that customers would inevitably flock to the store and adhere to a prescriptive experience that contemplated reviewing pages and pages of catalog entries, the digital equivalent of shopping aisles.

While already delivering commerce in a digital environment, the first set of technologies that emerged to support those experiences—some of which are still in use today—were also built with limitations that reflected this analog-based concept of consumerism.

New customer engagement touchpoints and new technologies have turned the buyer's journey into a much more stratified and complex ecosystem.



### Awareness

While word of mouth and third-party recommendations still play a major role in influencing a buyer’s opinion, the number of media avenues that an organization may leverage has substantially increased. Some of these avenues hold the ability to capture demographics about their audience’s engagement, which help organizations create more targeted content to move viable prospects further in their journey.

### Consideration

Typically, these data points help organizations serve targeted emails to customers who are also proactively seeking product reviews and reading industry blogs to get more deeply acquainted with their options. At this stage, the buyer is often also influenced by ads that the brand may use to promote its goods and services.

### Intent

When a B2C or B2B buyer is first expressing intent by visiting an organization’s web or mobile site, they may still be in the process of actively comparing products (on a different tab or through a different touchpoint) or carrying out other activities. At this point there are still numerous opportunities for them to get distracted and never initiate a purchase flow.

**Purchase**

Even within this environment, there are still a number of steps separating the buyer from the transaction, such as selection and order review. It is critical for organizations to craft these steps to make it as seamless as possible to complete an order, leaving less room for the competition to distract the buyer.

**Retention and Advocacy**

Because we now live in a world of digitally empowered consumers, transactions are much easier to reverse due to order cancellations or returns. Customers also have a much larger addressable audience they can influence with their opinions on their experience with the product.

Delivering excellence in “the last mile” of eCommerce is critical in order to retain those revenues. Creating programs and opportunities for engagement with existing buyers is the key to keeping the competition at bay.

As seen in the image on page 5, there are so many opportunities today for the customer journey to lose focus because the sheer number of distractions that a buyer may be subjected to is extremely multifaceted, even when their interactions only occur through a single touchpoint. The reality is that the proliferation of touchpoints places an even bigger challenge upon organizations, because this journey is often carried out in a stop-and-go, multi-session fashion: it's estimated that today nearly 50% consumers use an average of more than four touchpoints when buying an item, while 15 years ago they typically used two.<sup>1</sup>

A large graphic consisting of the number '5' in a red-to-purple gradient, a hyphen, and the number '6' in a blue-to-purple gradient.

touchpoints used  
on average while  
buying an item

<sup>1</sup> <https://v12data.com/blog/25-amazing-omnichannel-statistics-every-marketer-should-know/>

## What Is Experiential Commerce?

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Because of the competitive environment that these avenues for customer engagement have created, organizations increasingly need to direct their investments toward differentiation, based on the omnichannel customer experiences they want to offer.

This is not only crucial in order to make their products and services stand out to prospective buyers and maintain viable conversion rates, but it also helps with safeguarding and reducing attrition of the pool of buyers that are banked on to produce recurring or repeat revenue streams. Aberdeen Group estimates that organizations that are able to deliver omnichannel customer engagement strategies retain 89% of their customers, while those who are less successful at this retain as little as 33%.<sup>2</sup>

While the early e-stores were built in a less competitive environment and prescribed a more rigid customer journey with little to no variations, regardless of the types of customers that visited them, today, brands are starting to embrace an **experiential commerce** approach in order to achieve the differentiation that is needed for their businesses to thrive.

An experiential commerce approach allows organizations to:

- **Gain control over the customer experience**, so that all of the content that is served to the audience is rich, compelling, and consistent.
- **Deliver unified and highly engaging digital experiences** that reflect the customer's unique interests and behavior, thus maximizing the opportunities for conversion.

<sup>2</sup> Gautam, Nitish, 50 Important Customer Experience Statistics You Need Know, Ameyo, July 19, 2017.

- **Make products and services available for purchase from any device or channel**, in the case of both B2C and B2B buyers.
- **Deliver the right information and the right offers at the right time**, when the customer is ready to turn an emotional connection with resonating products and services into an action.
- **Make transactions as seamless as possible** by reducing the number of steps required to monetize the customer's commitment to a purchase, such as fewer "screens" in the case of a web or mobile store, fewer approval flows in the case of a B2B portal, and fewer commands for a purchase operated via a voice assistant or other IoT-based interaction.

Ultimately, crafting customer journeys that reflect and anticipate customer expectations and deliver on them will provide organizations proven return on investment. According to McKinsey and Company, maximizing satisfaction with customer journeys can **increase overall customer satisfaction** by 20%, **lift revenue** by 15%, and **lower the cost of serving customers** by as much as 20%.<sup>3</sup>

A large graphic of the number 89% with a gradient from red to blue.

customer retention for brands delivering successful omnichannel strategies

A large graphic of the number 33% with a gradient from red to blue.

customer retention for brands that fail

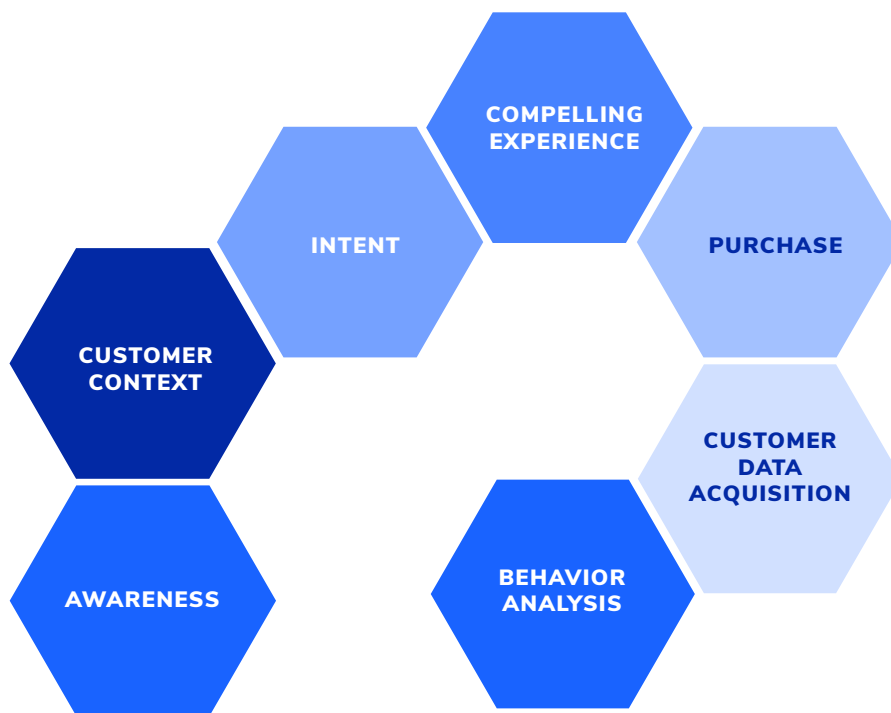
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-three-cs-of-customer-satisfaction-consistency-consistency-consistency>



## Crafting Experiential Journeys

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So what are some initial strategies that can be deployed to take advantage of an experiential commerce approach? How can you deliver content and offers that are meaningful and drive the buyers to enhance their interactions with your organization?

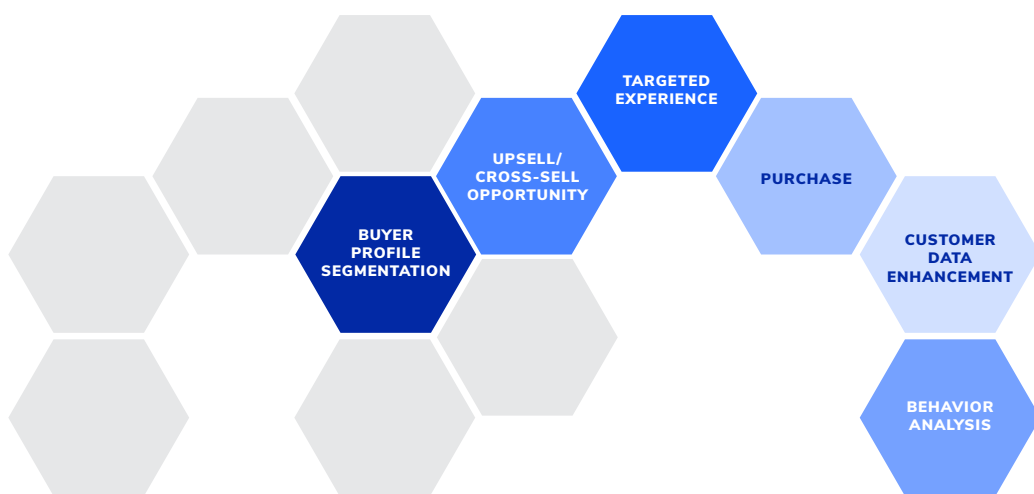


When a customer becomes aware of an organization's products and services and starts reviewing a brand, having the technological means to collect some initial data about their context is crucial to inform the experience they will be served when they show intent and visit the store or portal: **geolocation** will drive the language and currency they are exposed to and information about the path that took them to that experience will influence what content will be highlighted to them.

Ultimately, organizations need to ensure that the buying experience is compelling and seamless and that customers won't need to go to a separate, prescriptive environment to complete their purchase. For instance, it's now common practice in eCommerce not to ask buyers to register prior to the transaction, as that type of activity interrupts and delays their commerce journey (e.g., finding out the cost of shipping, payment options, or sales tax) and purchase completion.

**Single-page checkout** is a strategy that reduces the number of steps separating customers from making that commitment, while creating a great setting where visitors have the option to create an ID and password to simplify future interactions while they are already in the process of submitting their payment and shipping information.

Once their information is collected, the organization can leverage it for further communications, as well as perform more insightful analysis of the inflection points that took the customer to the moment of purchase.



The beauty of **experiential commerce** done right is that the first transaction ends up being much more than an end result. It truly evolves into a gateway to unlock opportunities for much deeper engagement.

Based on the first purchase, the buyer will be placed in a **customer segment** to trigger an **upsell** or **cross-sell** opportunity—basically an A/B test to validate that the initial set of assumptions on their preference is correct. Their response to the test informs an even **more targeted experience** when they re-engage with the organization for another visit or transaction. At that point, the data about this buyer will be further enhanced by the insights gathered from the second transaction and the analysis of their behavior will become much deeper and triangulated.



As one can imagine, this will allow the organization to further **define the customer segment**, which then informs the **promotions** and **offers** that will engage and ensures that the content surfaced becomes more meaningful and relevant. Leveraging systems that are capable of “listening” to the data is key to ensure no opportunities to drive revenue are being missed.

These best practices may seem quite straightforward and something that all organizations of a certain caliber are intuitively leaning toward, but not many businesses are implementing them with a high frequency across all of their online customer engagement channels and properties.

Often, they are burdened with business operations and processes, as well as older, legacy technologies that slow down their ability to truly put the customer at the center of all they do. “Liberating” the data from older, siloed systems can be quite challenging and investing in modern systems and skilled resources that are able to extract data in real time from multiple disparate systems is crucial.

The few organizations that are able to operate this way across the board are truly maximizing opportunities by putting into action a **hyper-focused customer engagement** playbook.



The customer of 2020 will be more informed and in charge of the experience they receive. They will expect companies to know their individual needs and personalize the experience. Immediate resolution will not be fast enough as customers will expect companies to proactively address their current and future needs.

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—**Customers 2020, Walker**

# The Three Pillars of Hyper-Focused Customer Engagement

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Technical debt is often a reason why both B2C and B2B organizations struggle to deliver these types of experiential strategies. The three foundational pillars needed to unlock hyper-focused customer engagement are **customer context and personalization**, **seamless monetization of multichannel experiences**, and the **combination of quantitative and qualitative analytics**.

## Customer Context and Personalization

Serving content that resonates with the buyer is necessary to ensure their engagement is not dispersed by having to seek the information that they care about the most. Eighty percent of customers say they are more likely to do business with a company if it offers personalized experiences<sup>4</sup> and as many as two-thirds of customers will share personal information with brands, but only in exchange for some kind of value.<sup>5</sup>

A **digital experience platform (DXP)** is a great way for organizations to equip themselves with the technological means to deliver value to their visitors by providing rich and meaningful content. By using this type of tool, organizations are empowered to author customer journeys and manage the digital assets that enrich customers' experience of their brand, their products, and their services. Crafting engaging content, however, is a strategy that produces results only as much as that content is personalized for the audience.

<sup>4</sup> <https://us.epsilon.com/pressroom/new-epsilon-research-indicates-80-of-consumers-are-more-likely-to-make-a-purchase-when-brands-offer-personalized-experiences>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.accenture.com/t20180219t081429z\\_w\\_us-en/acnmedia/pdf-71/accenture-global-dd-gcpr-hyper-relevance-pov-v12.pdf#zoom=50](https://www.accenture.com/t20180219t081429z_w_us-en/acnmedia/pdf-71/accenture-global-dd-gcpr-hyper-relevance-pov-v12.pdf#zoom=50)

A **personalization solution** is critical in a digital experience platform and is the key to empowering marketing teams to deliver personalized content at scale—even for the largest enterprises that serve an ever-growing number of bespoke **customer segments**—with no coding required. The best personalization solutions in the market leverage **content syndication** to create content once and publish it anywhere and **profile data management** to track a visitor's location, frequency of visits, referrer, and onsite behavior, in order to build a unified profile across all of the sites that comprise the brand experience.

Taking advantage of these insights, a marketer can then create personalized experiences for discrete segments with the ultimate goal of shortening the sales cycles.

### **Seamless Monetization of Multichannel Experiences**

Making commerce available to the B2C and B2B buyer at any point of their journey and on any of the touchpoints they may be using is paramount to delivering *experiential* customer engagement.

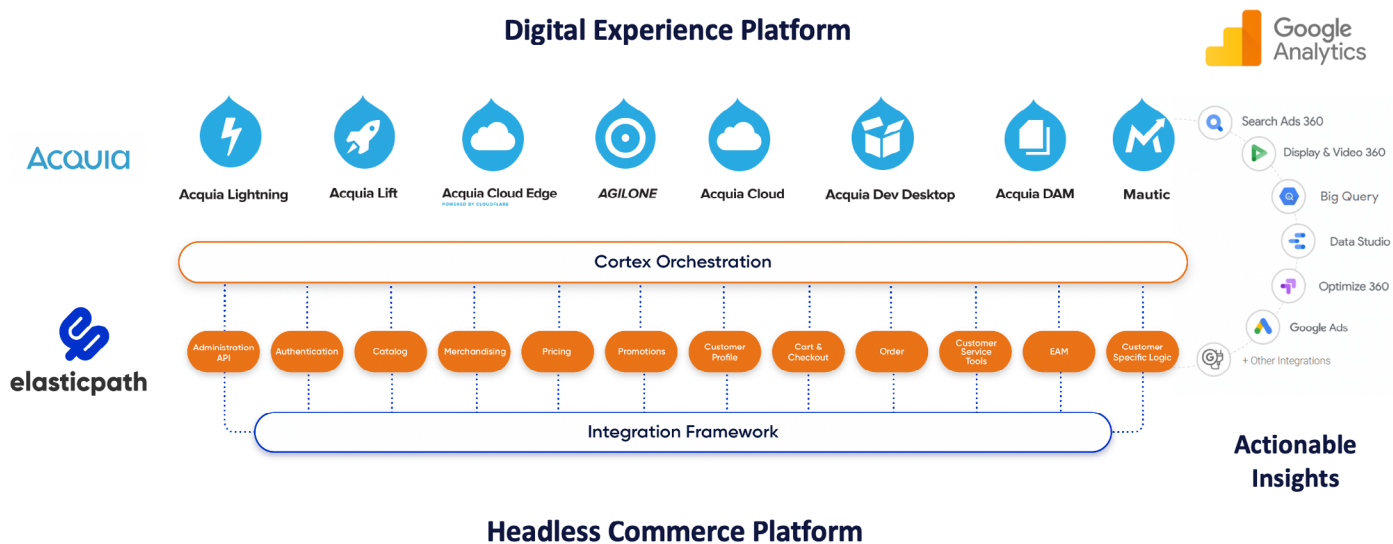
However, it's not as easy as it sounds. The reality is that a lot of the commerce systems out there were built in the early days of online retailing, when e-stores were offering quite prescriptive experiences. While these systems evolved over time, they still carry the burden of their legacy.

**Headless commerce** is a phrase often used to refer to an approach in which the transactional properties to capture an order—such as catalog, shopping cart or promotions—are decoupled from the presentation of the content to the end user. While a lot of systems, including some of the more dated ones, can be used in a headless fashion through a series of APIs that connect to different content authoring and presentation tools, the true potential of headless commerce is unlocked when a system is purpose-built for

API-led consumption. A system that is purpose-built to surface transactional capabilities in an orchestrated fashion allows organizations to easily embed commerce business logic and commerce actions across the entire ecosystem of potential user interactions.

Some of the commerce systems that deliver APIs still require a high level of effort in terms of stitching connections between services and writing the business logic that governs the integration with each specific client application each time. A commerce platform with an enterprise-grade orchestrated API layer is capable of zooming into the system, retrieving the data, and suggesting the next available set of commerce actions.

Through this type of behavior, it provides consistent business logic through any interaction that can be monetized: experiences delivered by multiple touchpoints, experiences pertinent to multiple localized stores, or experiences particular to multiple brands or business units.



A solution that combines best-in-class experience management (Acquia), commerce (Elastic Path), and analytics (Google) offerings to fulfill the three pillars of hyper-focused customer engagement.

## Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Analytics

Combining an analytics suite with a digital experience management tool that orchestrates the content offered by the brand is a powerful strategy that ensures the organization is measuring the data touching all parts of the customer journey. A **content-based attribution model** empowers organizations to unearth the real moments that matter for each persona and to further refine *customer segments* based on journey insights.

Ultimately, the combination of quantitative and qualitative analytics requires **discipline** and needs to be supported by experiments to find the combinations that work best for different personas. It thus allows organizations to leverage the highest value moments that create an immediate and differentiated advantage.

In this insight-driven type of approach, an API-based commerce system capable of supporting any touchpoint or experience is critical in monetizing those highest value moments, so that investment is directed toward the organizational areas that hold the potential to generate the greatest return on investment.



## Conclusion

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In order to remain competitive in a hyper-connected world, both B2C and B2B organizations need to deliver hyper-focused customer engagement and ensure that end users are offered deep and rich experiences and can easily transact at any point of their journey.

An experiential commerce approach allows organizations to deliver the omnichannel strategies that can help them realize value and retain more customers. Three key tenets of this approach are the personalization of the customer experience for different user segments, the monetization of user interactions carried out on any touchpoint used by the brand to engage with customers, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative analytics to gain insights on user behaviors.

From a technological standpoint, these levels of differentiation are supported respectively by a digital experience platform capable of delivering personalized content at scale, a headless commerce platform with an enterprise-grade orchestrated API layer, and analytics leveraged in the context of a program crafted by specialists around a content-based attribution model to maximize conversion opportunities delivered at the highest value moments of the customer journey.

## About Acquia

Acquia is the open source digital experience company. We provide the world's most ambitious brands with technology that allows them to embrace innovation and create customer moments that matter. At Acquia, we believe in the power of community—giving our customers the freedom to build tomorrow on their terms.

<https://www.acquia.com/about-us/contact>

**ACQUIA**

## About Bounteous

Bounteous is one of the fastest growing digital agencies in North America. We create big-picture digital solutions that help leading companies deliver transformational brand experiences. A strategic Elastic Path partner and a preferred Acquia partner, we bring experiential commerce to life for leading organizations, combining our expertise in digital experience management, headless commerce and quantitative and qualitative analytics.

<https://www.bounteous.com/contact>

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## About Elastic Path

As the pioneer of headless commerce, Elastic Path has helped hundreds of organizations around the globe manage the staggering complexity of multiple products, services, stores, geographies, channels, suppliers, and distributors on a single, orchestrated API-led platform. We deliver enterprise-grade transactional capabilities to both B2C and B2B organizations, allowing them to monetize industry-defining customer experiences.

<https://www.elasticpath.com/company/contact-us>

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