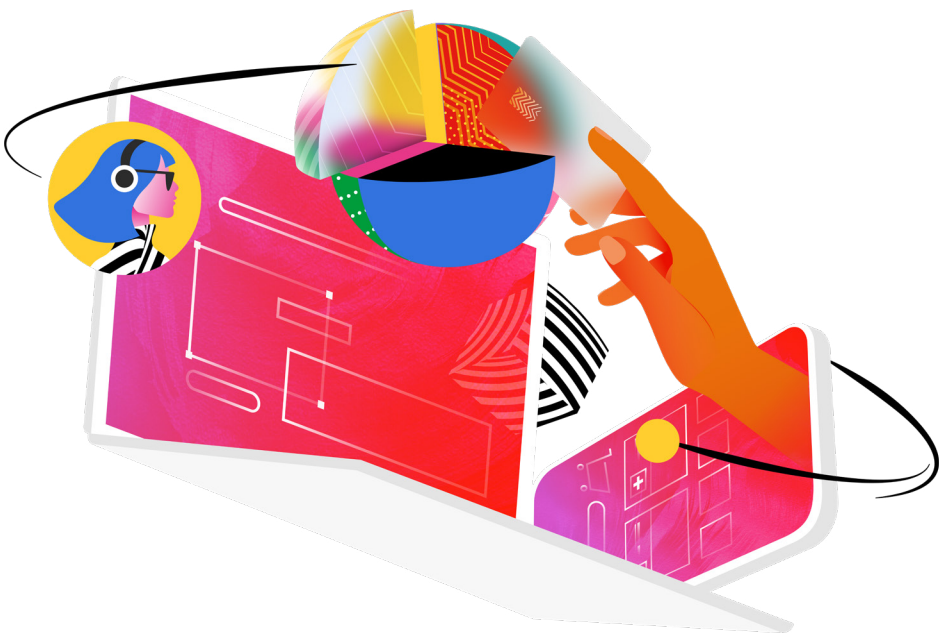# The good, the better, the best—content and commerce strategies.

Three implementation options to unify your content and commerce experiences.

There's a certain charm to discovering a quaint shop on a leisurely stroll down Main Street. You can spend some time chatting with the owners and admiring the wares of local artisans. It's an experience made even more charming because it's not the usual way of getting acquainted with a brand. Not anymore.

These days, most consumers are getting to know brands through digital channels and are using digital as a bigger part of their purchasing process. Whether you sell to other businesses, to retailers, or directly to consumers, your customer expects a digital-first relationship. Every business, even those traditionally offline, must become a digital business—or it risks becoming a dinosaur.
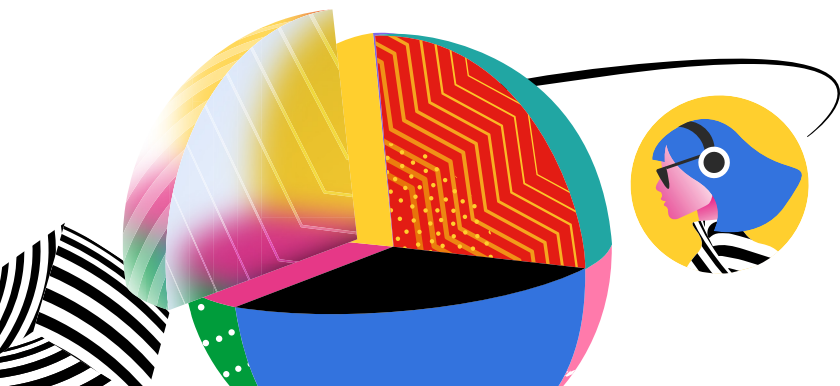
80% of B2B sales will take place in digital channels by 2025.
Source: Gartner

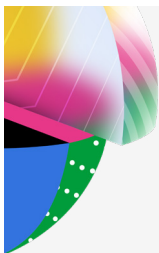**40%** of all B2C shoppers are digital-first Gen Z, with $323B in buying power.
Source: Review42

$212.90B expected in D2C ecommerce sales by the end of 2024 in the US alone.
Source: Insider Intelligence

It pays to be digitally mature.

2x Higher digital maturity companies have nearly 2 times higher profit margins than their lower maturity peers.
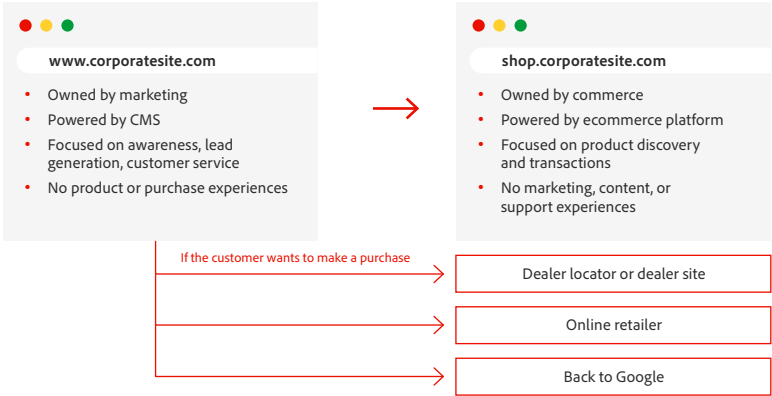Source: Deloitte

Organizations have implemented content management systems and ecommerce platforms to advance their digital maturity and meet consumer expectations. Still, customer experiences can fall short when content and commerce aren't unified.

64% of customers jump to a competitor after a subpar customer experience.
Source: Verint

When your content management system (CMS) and ecommerce platform are owned and operated by different parts of the organization and are not integrated, the customer journey is split in two. For example, your corporate website may offer rich content experiences but no purchasing options. Which means you have to push customers to a separate purchasing site or kick them out to another online or physical retailer. The customer might even get so fed up they go straight back to Google and into the welcoming experience of a competitor. Below is what the commerce experience looks like when content and commerce are owned and operated by two distinct teams.

www.corporatesite.com		shop.corporatesite.com
• Owned by marketing		• Owned by commerce
• Powered by CMS		• Powered by ecommerce platform
• Focused on awareness, lead generation, customer service		• Focused on product discovery and transactions
• No product or purchase experiences		• No marketing, content, or support experiences

If the customer wants to make a purchase

Dealer locator or dealer site

Online retailer

Back to Google

Unifying content and commerce can be confusing if you're at the beginning of your digital journey. And because the digital landscape and buyers' expectations are constantly changing, it can be challenging for companies with more advanced digital capabilities as well.

In this guide, we'll outline three ways to integrate content and commerce.

- **The good**—Implementing standalone experiences.
- **The better**—Unifying content and commerce on one domain.
- **The best**—Headless commerce embedded within a CMS.

By the end, you'll know the benefits of each approach and be able to better identify the best strategy for you.

The old way of doing things.

In the early days, it was common for companies to take an either-or approach to building their online presence. If selling online was the priority, they'd run an ecommerce platform and shape the experience around product discovery and transactions. There were no marketing, content, or support experiences to round out the customer journey. Alternatively, B2B brands invested in a content management system to showcase their product catalogs and encourage prospective buyers to fill out a form to contact sales and place orders over the phone.

Old model

Commerce only — No CMS

No commerce — CMS only
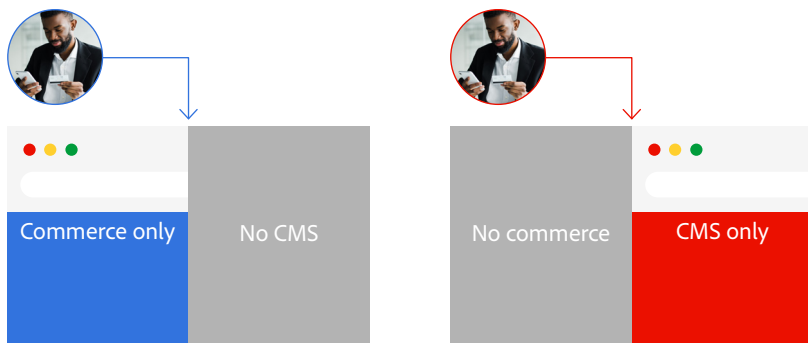
This was the old way of doing things. To meet customer needs today, companies must take a both-and approach to their digital presence by implementing a commerce platform and a CMS.

The good—standalone experiences.

A good implementation strategy includes both a CMS and an ecommerce platform that serve two different purposes and provide two different experiences.

Good
Commerce and CMS Silos

Commerce platform	CMS

The corporate site exists for the marketing side of the business and is powered by the CMS. It's filled with rich content that establishes relationships with customers and attracts new buyers. There may be some product experiences—but to see pricing information or to purchase, customers are shuttled to the store, which operates on a separate domain or subdomain as a completely distinct experience.

The commerce site, powered by the ecommerce platform, exists for transactional purposes. For B2C companies, it operates as an online store with product pages, product navigation, search, and checkout. For B2B organizations, the commerce site functions as a self-service buying portal for distributors to order repeat purchases, get support, and manage their overall experience. Users likely notice when they've "switched" from one experience to another.

There are definite advantages to standalone experiences, in particular a speedy time to market and low technical debt, but the customer journey takes a hit because the platforms aren't integrated.

Weighing the pros and cons of standalone experiences.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Ecommerce teams can quickly launch new sites for new markets (for example, new currencies or languages) without integrating with the corporate marketing website. • Corporate marketing and content management teams can focus on the marketing and sales journeys that drive the business forward. • There's low technical debt because the front-end websites and back-end applications do not need to be integrated.	• Content experiences and marketing are not integrated with commerce functionality. The user bounces to a separate domain, which interrupts the customer journey and can lead to drop-off and abandoned journeys. • The rich content and assets developed and deployed in the CMS are difficult to leverage in the ecommerce experience. • The product data, pricing, and ability to purchase in the ecommerce platform are hidden from the corporate website where most traffic goes.
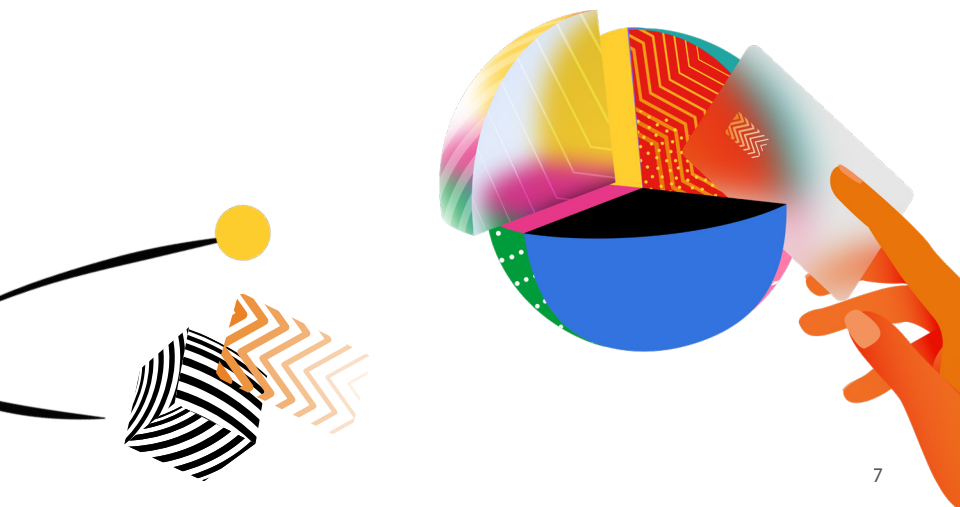
The better—united experiences on one domain.

A better implementation strategy unifies a content management system and ecommerce platform for one connected experience.

Better
United experiences

Commerce platform	CMS platform
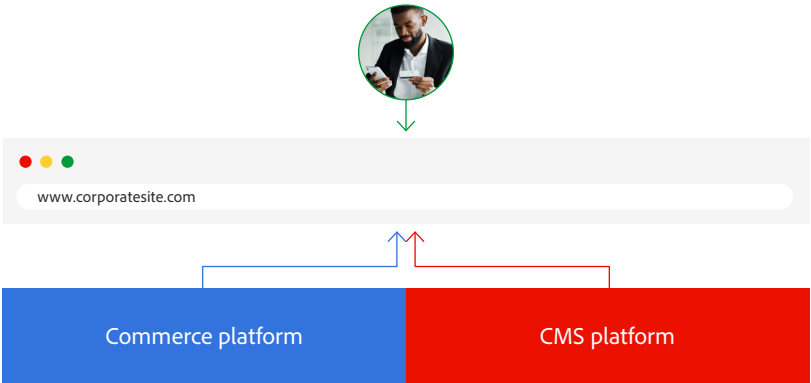
With this approach, a company still uses two different systems (a CMS and an ecommerce platform) but delivers a single customer experience, or front end. The CMS does the heavy content lifting on the home page, category pages, and landing pages, and the ecommerce platform powers product search, product detail pages, cart, checkout, and account management pages. Because the experience is consistent and connected, shoppers aren't even aware that separate systems are powering the experience. There's the same header, footer, and overall design framework. They don't even have to wait for a separate window to load. This implementation option fixes the broken journeys of standalone experiences and doesn't necessitate significant integration.

**Weighing the pros and cons of two platforms on one domain.**

Advantages	Disadvantages
• A more seamless, consistent experience leads to higher conversion rates when compared to standalone experiences. • Running two separate platforms gives marketing and ecommerce teams more autonomy, although it does require some coordination between customer experience and design teams on the front end. • Overall, running a separate commerce platform and CMS on one domain keeps technical debt lower than fully integrating the two platforms.	• Although the shopping experience is seamless, content and commerce teams cannot easily share assets between their respective systems, which can lead to inefficient publishing and merchandising workflows. • Users must log in to the CMS to manage pages and assets, and then log in to the commerce platform to manage other parts of the experience. This can slow an organization down and affect campaign and merchandising performance.

The best—headless commerce embedded within a CMS.

The best implementation strategy is to embed headless commerce into your CMS. But before we dive into why it's the best, let's first define headless commerce.

Best
Headless

www.corporatesite.com

CMS platform

Commerce functionality
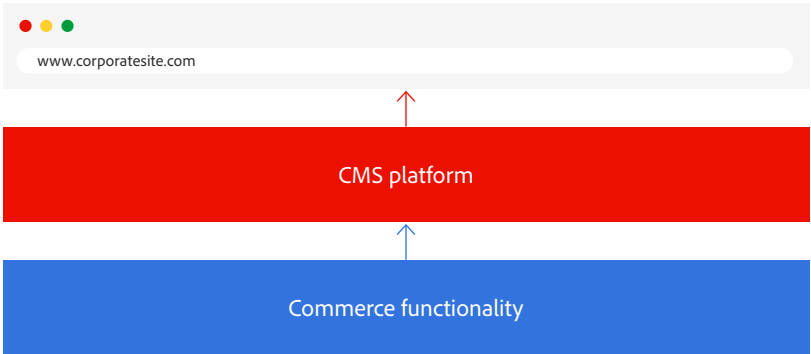
Headless ecommerce platforms have decoupled their front-end presentation layer from the application back end that manages **orders**, **product data**, **promotions**, and **other business logic**. With the front end detached from the core application, you can embed commerce functionality into an existing CMS website without having to build a separate commerce website. A headless ecommerce platform uses front-end application programming interfaces (APIs) to deliver the experience inside the CMS. These APIs can also be used to turn every touchpoint—mobile apps, in-store kiosks, service apps, field sales apps, and more—into a commerce-enabled experience.

The entire experience is powered by the CMS, while embedded headless commerce powers the commerce functionality on any page and any channel. You can do more than just give customers a traditional product page. You can build immersive content experiences into the buying journey with all the rich content and assets in your CMS. For example, a consumer brand might launch a virtual experience and include opportunities to buy various products throughout the event. That's just what Sazerac did when consumers were stuck at home during the pandemic.

Learn how Sazerac did it >>
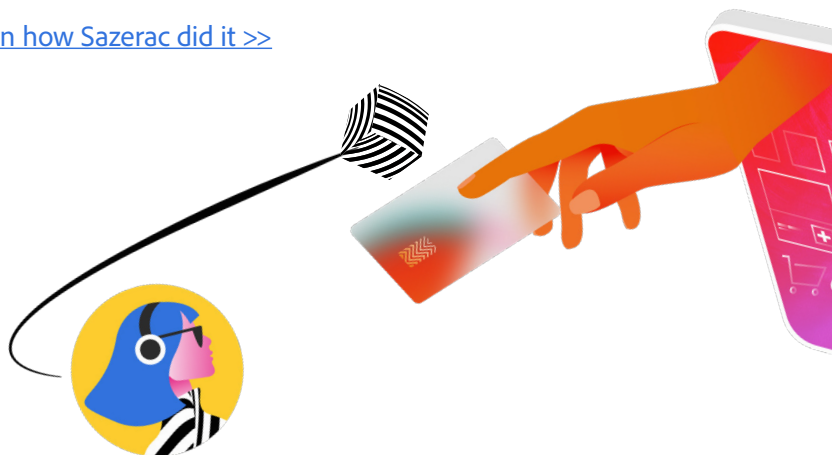
Going headless gives businesses that sell B2B and B2C a distinct advantage. While it can be more expensive and time-consuming to implement headless, once the legwork is complete, you can launch a single website and tailor the full commerce experience to the individual buyer persona. Pentair, for example, consolidated 35 different websites into one global website that can deliver personalized, multichannel experiences to both businesses and consumers.

[Learn how Pentair did it >>](#)

Weighing the pros and cons of headless commerce.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Headless makes it possible to add purchasing capabilities to every touchpoint, including touchpoints beyond your CMS or ecommerce platform.	• Unifying user experience and design teams requires a mature development partner or internal IT organization that's up to the latest standards on front-end development.
• Every experience you launch—from browser, to mobile app, to kiosk—connects to a single set of APIs, so there's technical standardization.	• Integrating various systems using headless APIs can cost more to implement than using the default "coupled" storefronts native to most CMS or ecommerce platforms.
• With headless ecommerce platforms, you can adopt modern front-end technologies such as Vue, Angular, or React. You can also change these technologies over time without having to replace your entire system.	• Headless commerce creates technical debt because whichever front end, or "head," you put on it will need to be maintained and upgraded independent of your ecommerce platform.
• If you have a CMS in place already, you can continue to use it, along with existing design components.	• Some headless platforms don't let you stage and preview content when you want to publish a change.
	• Not every headless platform integrates with other platforms and applications, which can impede the smooth customer experience you're after.
	•
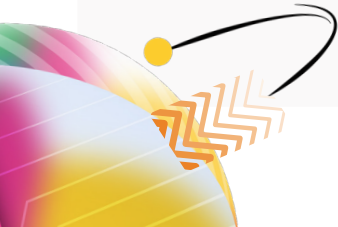
When is "good" good enough?

Headless commerce unifies the customer journey significantly more than the other two implementation strategies, but it comes at a cost. Going headless right off the bat might not actually be the best option given where your organization is today.

Headless unifies the customer journey, at a cost.			
	Good Standalone	**Better** Unified experience	**Best** Headless commerce
Unify the customer journey	✗	✓	✓
Embed commerce in other apps	✗	✗	✓
Fastest time to market	✓	✓	✗
Low technical debt	✓	✓	✗
Content staging and preview tools are preserved	✓	✓	✗

When it comes to getting to market, headless is the slowest option and requires more coordination between design and technical teams to set up new commerce experiences. You're potentially sacrificing faster time to market and low technical debt for a unified customer journey and the ability to embed commerce into other touchpoints. Your company might be better served with a platform that can stand up a storefront on a separate domain quickly, with less coordination between teams.

Be prepared. With headless, you must own your front-end technology, and that requires an internal IT organization or a mature development partner. This is why many companies wanting the highest ROI for the fastest speed and lowest tech debt start with standalone experiences, move to a unified domain with separate content and commerce platforms, and then advance to headless last. You'll need to review your specific goals to see if the benefit of better customer journeys is worth the trade-off of slower speed and heavier maintenance.

Let's explore some real-world examples.

Discover how brands like Rite Aid, Helly Hansen, and Sealed Air transformed the shopping experience by integrating content and commerce.

Our webinar *The Good, The Better, The Best: Content + Commerce Strategies* showcases six real-world examples of B2B and B2C organizations putting these three strategies to work, including what the websites look like and the experiences shoppers have on each.

[Watch the webinar >>](#)

## Adobe doesn't play favorites.

We understand that every company's maturity levels and needs are different, which is why we design our solutions to grow with you and provide services for good, better, and best implementation strategies with Adobe Experience Manager and Adobe Commerce.

Experience Manager combines digital asset management and content management into a unified solution for delivering timely, relevant, and personal experiences. It helps you source, adapt, automate, and deliver one-on-one digital experiences across

web, IoT, and more—at any scale—powered by the latest artificial intelligence. As a cloud service, Experience Manager is always on and up to date so you can make the most of your content and stay ahead of rising customer expectations.

Adobe Commerce is the world's leading digital commerce solution for merchants and brands. With Adobe Commerce, you can build engaging shopping experiences for every type of customer—from B2B and B2C to B2B2C. It's built for enterprise on a scalable, open-source platform with unparalleled security, premium performance, and low total cost of ownership. Businesses of all sizes can use it to reach customers wherever they are, across devices and marketplaces. It's more than a flexible shopping cart system. It's the building block for business growth.

[Learn more](#) about how they work together to help you implement good, better, and best content and commerce integrations.
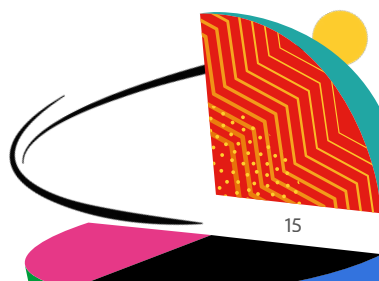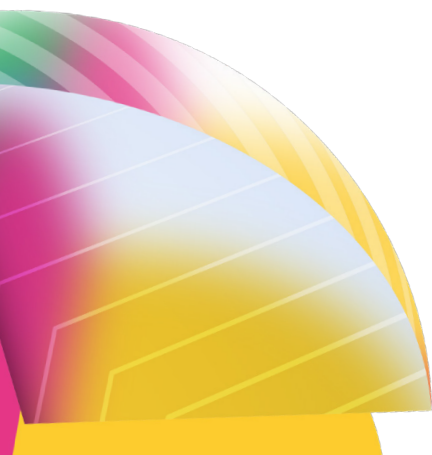
Sources

Andrew Lipsman, "Established Brands Will Drive the Vast Majority of D2C Ecommerce Sales," Insider Intelligence, May 3, 2022.

Deyan Georgiev, "Gen Z Statistics—What We Know About the New Generation," Review42, August 5, 2022.

Ragu Gurumurthy, Rich Nanda, David Schatsky, "Putting Digital at the Heart of Strategy," Deloitte, April 22, 2021.

"Sales Transformation: The Future of Sales," Gartner, January 2022.

"The 2022 State of Digital Customer Experience Report," Verint, June 10, 2022.