Navigating the Tech-Universe

Cost efficiency in e-commerce

About valantic

valantic is one of the fastest-growing digital consulting, solutions, and software companies on the market. Over 500 blue chip customers already rely on valantic – including 33 of the 40 DAX-listed companies and a large number of international market leaders. With more than 4,300 digitalization experts, valantic is represented in 20 countries worldwide.

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Content

E-commerce decision-makers between euphoria and pragmatism

Preface

Dear Reader,

According to Lünendonk & Hossenfelder, the nationwide forecast for the overall digital experience market in 2026 is more promising than anticipated at the outset of last year. New technological trends are serving as a beacon of hope, artificial intelligence (AI) is contributing to increased efficiencies, and an economic upswing is expected to provide additional momentum. In the realm of e-commerce, we see a continued shift toward enhancing profitability that spans nearly all sectors. The delicate balance between investing in new business areas or markets and achieving the coveted ‚black figures' must be managed strategically at the corporate level.

We trust that the following pages will enrich your planning process and serve as a compass for your imminent technology-related decisions. Should you require a assistance or inspiration, our consultants and e-commerce specialists are available for an obligation-free conversation.

Happy reading, heartfelt thanks to our commerce technology partners for their invaluable insights, and warmest regards.

valantic

Dr. Philipp Hoberg
Head of Digital Business Consulting

In close collaboration with

Adobe Commerce · Emporix · salesforce · SCAYLE Commerce Engine · shopify · shopware · Spryker · VTEX

The e-commerce dilemma

Under what conditions will budget decisions be made in the coming months? Daniel Franz has been responsible for consulting and implementing B2B and B2C commerce systems across a variety of technologies at valantic for over 15 years. With his focus on innovation and sustainable business models, he is the ideal sparring partner for decision-makers looking to reorient or challenge the status quo. In this interview, he reveals the current focus within the online business.

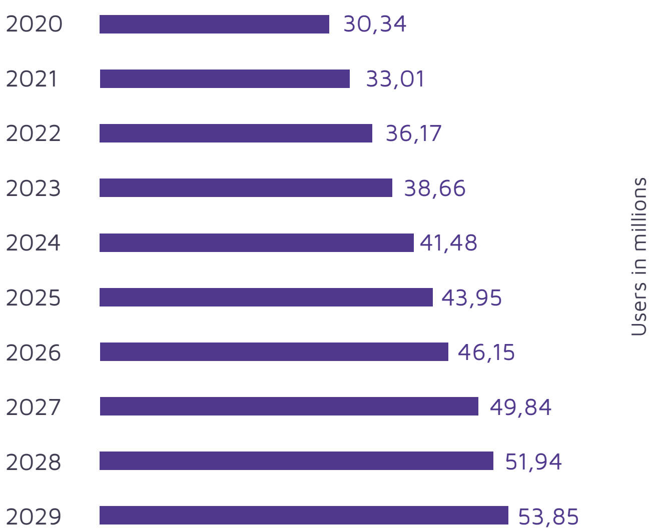
Daniel, what are the dominant challenges for e-commerce decision-makers in 2026?

E-commerce managers face a balancing act between cost pressure and the need to invest in future viability. At the same time, the strategies of many e-commerce companies geared towards exponential growth are being questioned, as only a few players are truly profitable.

While online sales are only slowly increasing, the number of users in e-business is steadily growing in both B2C and B2B. This presents future opportunities that digital commerce needs to be prepared for. In addition to rising operating costs, there is continued and growing global competition, which is putting enormous pressure on B2C players in particular. Especially from Asia, high investments and a rapid gain in market share are still being relied on. The resulting increase in customer acquisition costs is remarkable.

For B2B companies, energy and raw material prices, growingly complex supply chains and demand for faster, more efficient service are increasing the pressure to optimize their own processes.

User count in the e-commerce market in Germany from 2020 to 2029 (in millions)



Source: Statista, User count in the e-commerce market in Germany from 2020 to 2029

„Experts expect continued weak digital commerce as customers pay more attention to prices. Companies should focus on profitability – otherwise they risk danger.“

- Handelsblatt

How can companies leverage growth opportunities in online retail despite cost pressures, position themselves for the future and remain competitive?

Inactivity is not an option for companies that want to survive in the digital age. E-commerce requires a corporate-wide strategy, where technology selection is crucial for business. The right technology, when aligned with one's business model, enables cost efficiency and clearly identifies deficits and potentials to promote scaling and efficiency. Technology investments are not just a cost block, but a lever for achieving measurable business success.

How should decision-makers justify large investments in times of cost pressure?

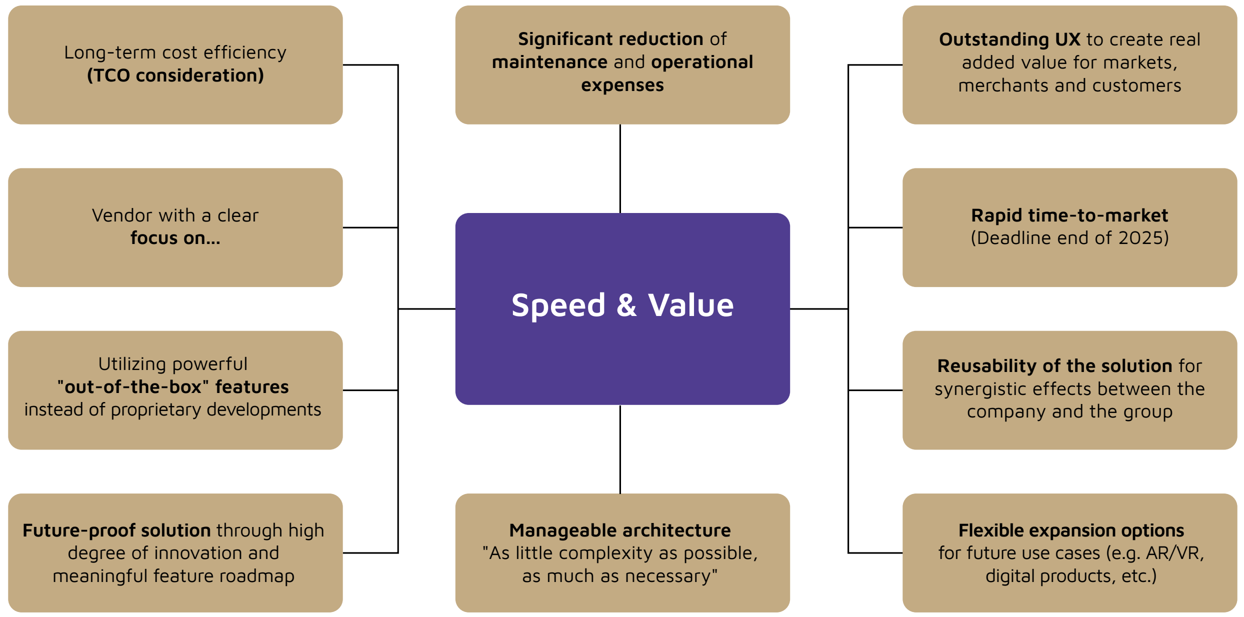
The number of participants in the IT purchasing process is constantly increasing. For e-commerce managers, this means having to build up a chain of argumentation that no longer refers to the same KPIs as just a few years ago. If companies are not operating on systems that have reached end-of-life, there needs to be an awareness throughout the entire executive team of the exact implications of a technology change and how values can be created and challenges mastered for IT, marketing, commerce and business decision-makers alike.

Topics on the agenda should relate to internal and external pressures and consider opportunity costs:

Too often, only the financial resources of the investment are considered. However, if you calculate the costs associated with inactivity, a new perspective emerges. The total cost of delay has proven to be an additional parameter that needs to be considered.

What is the initial situation most companies find themselves in before making a decision?

In a situation that is determined by uncertainty and a variety of contextual factors. This once again emphasizes the need for an integrated approach. Too narrow a focus on individual KPIs neglects the micro- and macroeconomic conditions that influence the result.



„The use and management of technology can have a significant impact on a company‵s value and growth. This includes aspects such as the use of technology to increase efficiency, optimize processes, and improve customer experience.“

- St. Gallen Business School

When it comes to specific investment decisions, companies are often faced with two scenarios: Either the budget is predetermined top-down or has to be determined bottom-up based on business requirements.

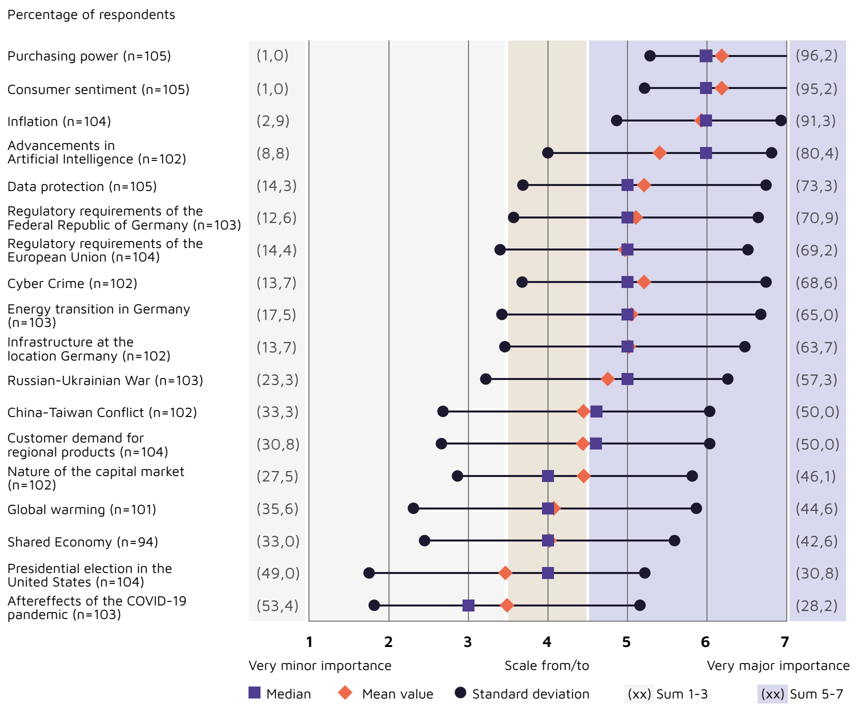
How is the necessary budget determined, or how are decisions made with predetermined budgets?

In both scenarios, the examination of one‵s own business model is at the forefront. This is the only way for the management team to arrive at a well-founded assessment of the status quo and identify the possible delta to the most suitable tech stack. Based on this, the catalog of criteria can be developed, which teams can use to compare potential solutions with one another.

In addition to the content-related approach, the time horizon is crucial. The wide range of technology solutions on the market with different focuses and capacities increases the complexity, the duration of the evaluation and the conscientious examination of the initial and ongoing costs.

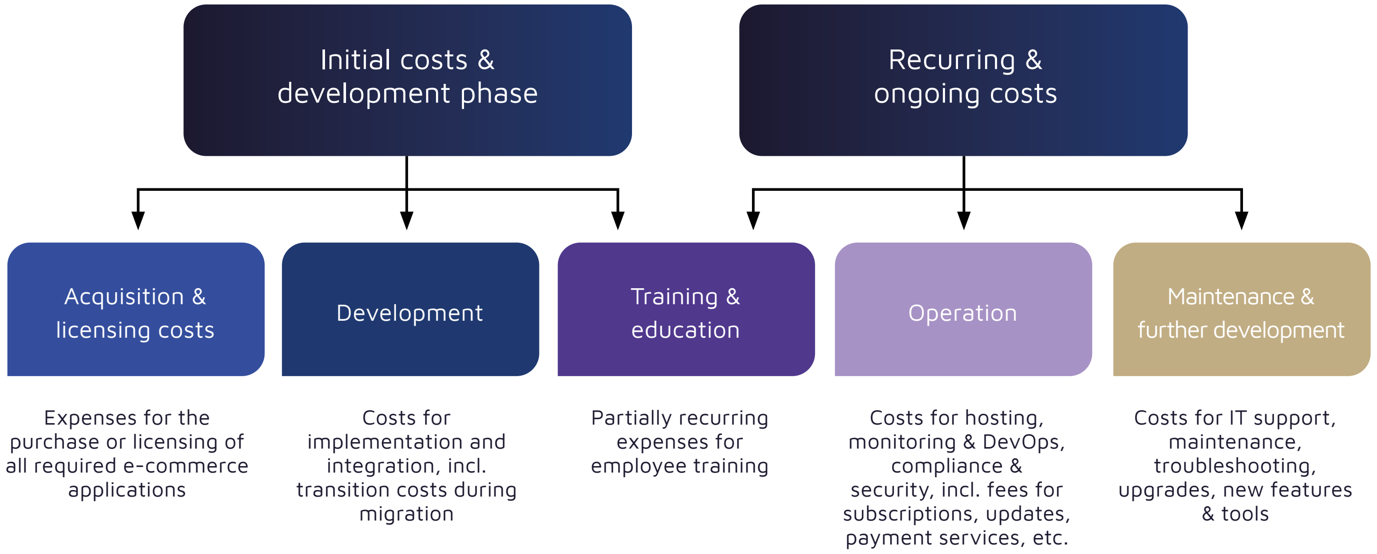
Contextual factors in e-commerce

„Please estimate the importance of the of the following contextual factors for your e-commerce company for the next coming five years.“



Source: EHI study, Trends in e-commerce 2023

The most important cost types and...



... key metrics for budget decisions

Total Costs of Delay

...refers to the costs incurred by postponing investment decisions. These include opportunity costs for missed business potentials due to technological limitations (e.g. lack of conversion and revenue), as well as costs associated with system failures, recovery and reputation damage. In comparison to the total costs of a technology change, the consideration of TCoD helps to weigh up the consequences of delayed action against the potential benefits of immediate action.

Total Costs of Ownership (TCO)

... describes all costs incurred when purchasing a product or service over its life cycle. This methodology, developed by Gartner specifically for the IT environment, includes all one-time and recurring costs associated with acquisition, operation and use of digital applications or infrastructures. The TCO is usually determined using a best-practice approach that relates to the respective area of application.

Return on Ivest (ROI)

...indicates the ratio between the capital invested or the costs of a (single) investment and its profit. This relative metric serves as a benchmark for assessing the profitability of investments. For example, the ROI can inform e-commerce managers about which technology upgrades, relaunch projects or marketing initiatives represent the most valuable allocation of resources. A higher ROI usually means more effective use of the invested capital.

Total Economic Impact

...is a concept developed by Forrester Research that allows for a comprehensive assessment of the financial impacts of an investment. In addition to costs and ROI, it includes other direct and indirect factors such as benefits, flexibility and risks. This holistic approach can help to understand the true value of an investment and can be useful for e-commerce budget decisions, e.g. when evaluating new software.

Software selection as a strategic process

Typically, the introduction of new software aims to optimize the existing solution. The system change is therefore usually accompanied by a more or less intense redesign of various topics, from the user experience (UX) to interfaces and the overall architecture. Stakeholders from various departments usually have different expectations towards the relaunch. **So how can a clear vision be developed of what the new commerce software should offer and be capable of?**

An integrated approach is the key

First and foremost, when selecting technology, an evaluation of software exclusively based on technical criteria is a common mistake. While this approach may seem obvious, it falls short.

Complex technology decisions require a selection process that is guided by a multi-dimensional approach and supported by clear evaluation criteria. The e-commerce strategy and concrete digital goals act as guidelines for the analysis. In addition, there are other technical as well as organizational and commercial or economic aspects. .

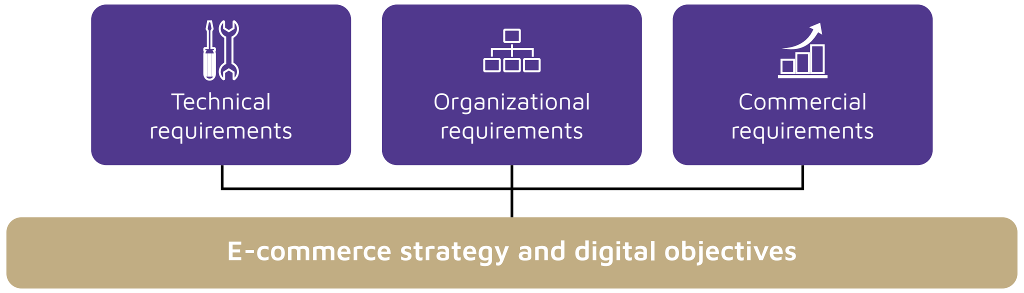
Form a small, interdisciplinary core team that drives the selection process forward and regularly shares the interim results with all stakeholders. Make sure that the core team has the necessary authority within the company.

The e-commerce strategy sets the direction

True to the motto „If you want to find the right path, you need to know the destination", the definition of clear digital and e-commerce goals plays a critical role in software selection. Therefore, a clear digital vision should be developed as a starting point. This can be described as a long-term concept that all participants can orient themselves towards. This digital vision can be broken down into short-, medium- and long-term targets, such as:

- financial targets, e.g. increasing online sales
- general growth targets, e.g. internationalization or expansion of business areas
- organizational and procedural targets, e.g. building development resources, technology ownership and increasing efficiency

In conjunction with the e-commerce strategy, these targets provide a framework that makes it easier to derive specific requirements for the new software.



1. The technical perspective

It is not uncommon for the specific requirements of a function to crystallize only during its detailed design or implementation. To prevent the requirements list from ending up as a hundred-page catalog that does not describe a valid scope, a pragmatic approach is recommended.

Involve decision-makers in the initial strategic planning, even if they are not part of the core team. This creates a valid foundation and prevents desire and reality from diverging.

The technical requirements for the future system, for example, can be captured at a top-level in the form of epics (functionalities, interfaces, technical framework parameters, usability, processes, etc.). Possible future requirements should also be part of the consideration. These can be derived from the e-commerce goals (e.g. the development of new markets and strategic business areas or the implementation of new customer interfaces). Together with existing challenges, this creates a picture of the desired solution.

Finally, the requirements that have been collected across several specialist departments should be prioritized and sorted according to relevance. When prioritizing, it helps to evaluate existing and potential requirements based on set criteria, e.g. the expected business value. For new requirements in particular, it also makes sense to compare the predicted added value with factors such as the expected internal costs for realization. Combined with the strategic guidelines, a transparent approach prevents building castles in the air. It helps to focus on the truly relevant issues to sharpen the short-, medium- and long-term scope of the project.

2. The organizational perspective

In addition to the more technically oriented requirements, relevant expectations also arise from the organizational context. It primarily concerns who will ultimately work with and further develop the platform.

Describe key use cases that must be supported by the new commerce software. Possible use cases include those related to business-relevant processes and/or current challenges. The use cases and possible solutions can be discussed later with potential software partners.

Many companies already have their own development teams or plan to establish them in the near future. The competencies and skills of the developers should be considered when evaluating potential software alternatives, as well as the team size. If these factors are overlooked, there is a risk that the commerce software will not fit the organization and will encounter low internal acceptance. Under such conditions, relaunch projects can quickly become a tightrope walk. Special consideration should also be given to the needs of all other participants who deal with the new software in their daily business.

3. The commercial or economic perspective

Document all steps and insights gathered during the selection process. This makes it easier to build a logical and understandable argument chain when preparing for decision-making meetings.

The conclusion of the requirements analysis is the definition or specification of the commercial and economic framework conditions. This primarily concerns the question of financial guidelines that are suitable for limiting the potential scope of possibilities from the outset. These criteria include, for example, the maximum amount of one-time and/or annual license fees and development and maintenance costs. It is not uncommon for discussions held in advance about targets and defined budget caps to reveal interesting contradictions.

powwow

„For our transformation project, we at powwow opted for a large integrative development team. When selecting a new commerce software, the most important thing for us were aspects such as strategic, commercial, functional and technical fit, as well as the skill set of the developers. Combined with our goal of creating full commitment to the project among the developers, it was crucial to involve all developers in the entire selection process right from the start and to always ensure transparency.."

Meike Purwin

former project manager at powwow GmbH

From analysis **to decision**

The integrated consideration of the various perspectives creates a valid basis for deriving a shortlist of requirements. These should be challenged with potential providers and further input should be gathered for the preparation of the decision. This step should also include a preliminary rough calculation of the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) for each software solution. This provides valuable assistance in comparing and evaluating several alternatives.

Obvious costs like license fees are just one side of the coin. Costs for the development and operation of the solution, which should be calculated over a period of at least five years, must also be taken into account. Only a comprehensive TCO analysis makes it possible to compare and evaluate several software solutions on the basis of economic criteria.

To ensure that the selection process does not end up being a gut decision, the evaluation of potential systems should be just as structured as the setup of requirements.

To include various stakeholders in the decision, it is advisable to develop a catalog with evaluation criteria for all perspectives. This allows to determine the strategic, technical, organizational and commercial fit of the software solutions objectively. The perspectives and defined criteria are weighed by their relevance from the project team`s point of view. Subsequently, each team member conducts an individual evaluation of the software systems under consideration. The results are summarized into an overall score for each commerce software.

At the end of this analysis step, there is a comprehensible, reliable basis for the upcoming software decision.

Assessing the statements and technical solutions from providers is often not straightforward. Ensure that at least one team member has in-depth technical-architectural knowledge and relevant experience to evaluate and classify the different approaches.

Plan the selection process with milestones and a fixed timeline. Extending the selection process does not necessarily mean that the outcome will be better. Be aware that there will be no solution that satisfies all participants 100 percent.

Between industry challenges and budget planning

All images AI generated

What works for one might be completely wrong for another.

To select the right technology for your online business, not only in theory but also in practice, one perspective must not be missing from the decision-making process: a look at the specific requirements of your industry.

If you want to build measurable long-term business value while keeping operating costs low, you need the expertise of well-positioned partners who understand and can categorize the challenges of your market environment.

valantic supports companies with a deep understanding of industry developments and a holistic view of business, experience, and technology processes in their digital and e-commerce projects.

Technology as a driver of revenue and efficiency

For e-commerce managers, the central challenge is to view technologies not just as a cost factor but as a strategic tool to increase revenue while keeping TCO as low as possible.

Both in the B2B and B2C environments, disruptive trends and innovations are emerging that open new doors for online business but also require modernizations or expansions of existing digital infrastructure:

The integration of **omnichannel** strategies and **seamless customer experiences** are just as much cornerstones of future e-commerce success as responsiveness to changed market demands and target groups, along with the associated adaptability of technologies and business models. This path is accompanied using **artificial intelligence** and solutions for **central data management**, which enable efficient analysis of real-time data and the automation of relevant processes – whether in marketing and service, or in direct online and offline sales.

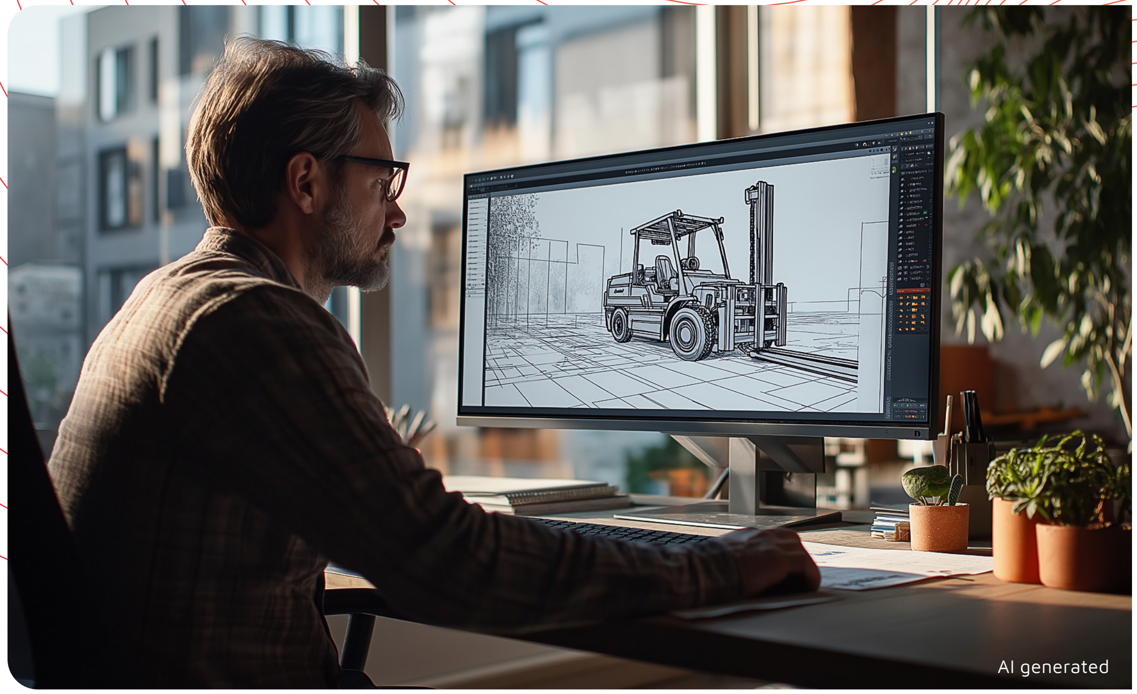
Personalized customer communication with individual content and offers represents the minimum to meet the future expectations of customers. In this context, new sales and marketing channels also play an important role in addressing target groups cost-effectively and directly. Integrating these into existing e-commerce processes becomes indispensable.

Eight industries in focus of leading players in the e-commerce landscape

In the following pages, our technology partners address specific challenges as well as forward-looking trends and potentials for online commerce in eight key industries: from **fashion** to **automotive**, from **beauty commerce** to the **food industry** and **wholesale**, from **sports & lifestyle** to **plant & mechanical engineering** to **manufacturing**.

With their years of accumulated experience, leading software providers demonstrate proven solutions for different industry sectors and offer practical recommendations that provide both **quick wins** and **long-term measurable impact** on the presented metrics. Always with the goal of keeping operating costs low, simultaneously optimizing digital shopping experiences and increasing revenues, the industry insights and analyses serve as a starting point for budget and investment decisions.

Discover with us how e-commerce decision-makers are equipping their systems and strategies for the future, increasing the efficiency of their processes through technological innovations and keeping their TCO low.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Adobe Commerce

E-commerce as a sustainable sales pillar in mechanical engineering

„The mechanical and plant engineering sector is currently facing numerous challenges that are constantly changing due to technological developments, market requirements and global dynamics. In almost every customer situation, we must place these challenges in the context of digitization. With our customers, we often lay the foundation for entering this topic with Adobe Commerce. Through various commerce initiatives, customer relationships are being reestablished. We help companies stay competitive, realize new revenue streams, and exploit growth potential."

Volker John, Senior GTM Lead Adobe Commerce

E-commerce is a comparatively new sales and communication channel for the mechanical and plant engineering sector, especially in the B2B area, which holds potential. However, there are several challenges that companies must overcome to successfully participate in digital commerce:

Complexity of products

Highly specialized, complex products are difficult to standardize and represent digitally, which complicates online sales. To meet customer needs, detailed product information and personalized offers are crucial.

High expectations for customer service

Like traditional sales, B2B customers expect a high level of consultation and service online. This requires real-time support, expert knowledge and comprehensive after-sales services.

Trust and security

Especially in the digital world, building trust between companies and customers is important. Payment security and data protection are two central factors for this.

Customer loyalty and cost efficiency with Adobe Commerce

Alongside these challenges, digital solutions and online services for machine and plant manufacturers open many new opportunities to strengthen customer loyalty, make processes more efficient and thus keep costs low.

Adobe Commerce specializes in these use cases and provides an e-commerce solution that recognizes, understands and is tailored to the specific requirements of the industry.

Companies in the plant and mechanical engineering sector should consider the following use cases when making investment decisions:

1. Service & customer portals

Customer portals are an efficient way to reduce needed resources and costs of support. Customers have direct access to orders, maintenance schedules, invoices and technical documentation via a central platform, maintain an overview via a dashboard to manage their machines and plants more easily, can quickly view maintenance tasks, and pre-order spare parts.

2. Online configurators

Online configurators can streamline sales and ordering processes by allowing customers to configure machines, systems and components according to their specific requirements and ultimately order the exact solution they need. A configurator, as integrated by the machine and industrial builder Feld in its webshop, enables individual product design in different shapes, materials and types of cuts. 3D views and product illustrations give an accurate idea of the result, which can prevent returns and improve customer satisfaction.

3. Spare parts & accessories shops

LIEBHERR demonstrates how customers can quickly find the components and accessories they need for their machines and order them directly online. The system is linked to all relevant data of the machines and enables customers to identify the required spare part using an exploded view of each machine. This prevents long searches and cumbersome communication with the manufacturer, allows for faster maintenance work and can minimize downtime

4. Predictive maintenance

Through the integration of IoT sensors and AI-powered data analysis, manufacturers can offer predictive maintenance services. Customers receive real-time information about their machines, are informed early about problems, can proactively implement maintenance or book corresponding services online. With such offers, for example, a globally active machine and plant manufacturer in the field of water treatment increases the reliability and operating time of its machines and minimizes downtime.

5. Knowledge base & self-service tools

Companies that integrate self-service tools receive fewer direct support inquiries. A central knowledge base gives customers access to instructions and manuals, video tutorials, technical documentation or frequently asked questions (FAQs). This allows customers to seek solutions themselves and fix minor problems independently without having to contact support.

Adobe Commerce

With the goal in sight, keeping an eye on ROI

The digitization of retail channels and the introduction of new online services offer various opportunities to improve customer loyalty, speed up ordering as well as maintenance processes and ultimately reduce costs. Especially in an industry characterized by specific and often complex requirements, the possibilities of the mentioned use cases are strong arguments in investment and digitization discussions. The ROI should also be considered in this context.

Adobe Commerce brings the right toolkit for building and professionalizing e-commerce. Its high integration capability and industry-tailored standard functionalities allow for a smooth project, make adjustments largely unnecessary, and ensure data-driven optimization and automation.

Commerce drives business results

Every Euro counts. Personalization helps you maximise ROI by ensuring that each customer experienca is engaging, impactful, and is driving towards conversion.

Cost efficiency in wholesale

Deeply rooted cost drivers embedded in existing structures and processes prevent many wholesalers from developing their full potential and allocating resources where they could be utilized best. A clear view of these drivers and their elimination can be the key to increasing efficiency while acting future-proof.

Main cost drivers in the industry

1. Inefficient workflows

Manual processes involve significant time expenditure for employees and carry a high risk of human error (e.g. incorrect stocks, wrong orders) as well as inefficient communication.

2. Outdated systems

Monolithic legacy technologies are cumbersome, difficult to integrate and the cause of high maintenance costs. Moreover, they do not offer enough flexibility to respond quickly to changes in the market or within the organization itself.

3. High operating costs due to lack of flexibility

Outdated systems usually require rigid, individually coded processes. This so-called „custom code trap" demands costly manual interventions for adjusting everyday operations such as registering new customers or managing returns. The limited adaptability leads to increasing costs, as processes cannot be optimized and automated flexibly.

4. Lack of transparency in inventory management and fulfillment

Stock shortages or overstocks cause high costs. Delayed deliveries impair customer satisfaction. There is great potential here to both reduce costs and increase operational efficiency.

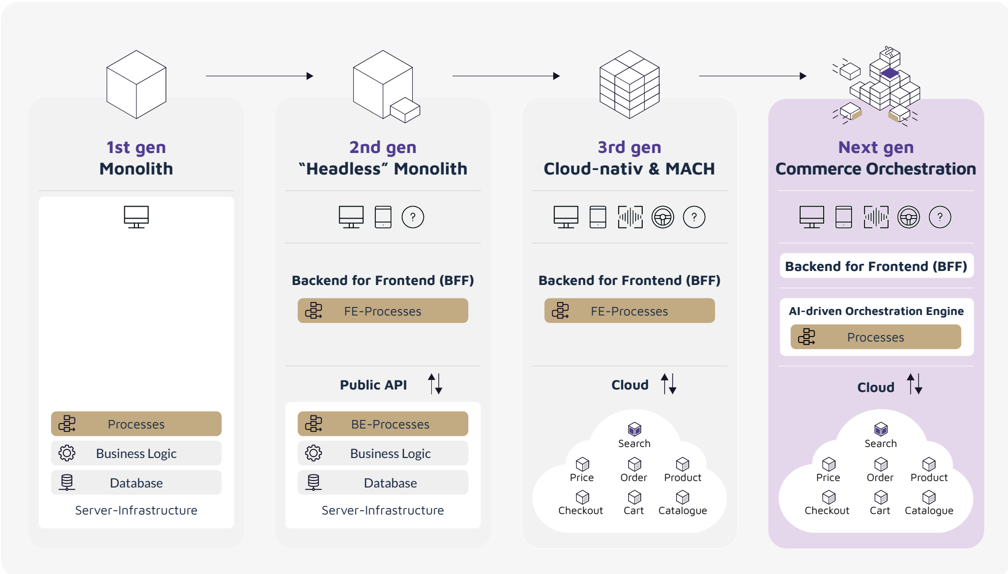
„To survive in this challenging environment, a clear strategy is needed: automation, modernization of systems and thoughtful cost control. Only then can the foundations for long-term success be laid."

Frank Schoutissen, Chief Growth Officer, EMPORIX

No compromises: A new concept for wholesale

Many companies are faced with the dilemma of either heavily customizing their systems or settling for the limitations of outdated legacy systems. But this no-win compromise is no longer necessary.

The unique APT technology (AI & process tier) offers maximum flexibility for innovation at significantly lower operating costs. It frees processes from the „custom code trap" of conventional Composable Commerce platforms and integrates them into a specially developed no-code layer, opening limitless customization possibilities. At Emporix, APT is part of the Next-Gen Commerce Orchestration Platform.



Best practice: ROI and scalability through Commerce Orchestration

ACR, a leading provider of disposable items, introduced a new self-service portal for its B2B customers within three months using the Emporix Commerce Orchestration Platform, providing access to contracts, product availability, delivery status and invoices. By automating central processes (e.g. returns), ACR reduced operational steps by 70 %, accelerated processes by 80 % and increased the scalability of sales. The flexible architecture not only minimizes manual effort but also lays the foundation for future growth and secures a tangible competitive advantage.

Quo vadis, wholesale 2025?

„The coming years will be decisive for wholesale, particularly regarding cost efficiency. Automation and digitization will continue to be at the forefront as companies prepare for an increasingly demanding market and, above all, increasingly demanding customers."

Frank Schoutissen, Chief Growth Officer, EMPORIX

The automation of business processes will be a key factor for cost efficiency in 2025. Companies that automate their processes can not only reduce operating costs but also improve the speed and precision of their operations, thereby responding faster to market changes while simultaneously minimizing error rates.

The market is constantly evolving. Companies must be flexible enough to respond to new trends and requirements, most notably increasing expectations for sustainable solutions, personalizing the shopping experience and the growing importance of omnichannel strategies. Companies that rely on modular and scalable commerce platforms are better equipped to adapt quickly and cost-effectively to these developments.

Commerce Orchestration plays a crucial role here: It allows companies to combine the benefits of Composable Commerce with maximum flexibility without falling into the customization trap.

Practical tips for immediate implementation

The successful increase of cost efficiency begins with clear, actionable measures. Decision-makers in wholesale can already initiate steps today that will bring significant savings and efficiency gains in the long run.

1. Identify inefficient processes

Conduct a detailed analysis of your workflows and identify manual processes that take up too much time. Often the biggest cost drivers are hidden in everyday tasks such as inventory management, invoice verification or order processing.

2. Make data-driven decisions

An often-underestimated method of reducing costs is the analysis of existing data. Companies can use existing data sources to identify trends that enable more efficient resource allocation. For example, analyzing order patterns could lead to optimized warehousing strategies without immediately introducing new software.

3. Migrate gradually

An immediate comprehensive system change can disrupt operations. Instead, implement new solutions in stages, starting with areas where cost efficiency needs to be improved most urgently. A modular approach provides the necessary flexibility to continuously increase efficiency while being prepared for future requirements.

Cost drivers in the automotive industry

Customer retention, hyper-personalization, and digital sales channels pose significant challenges in the automotive sector across B2B, B2C and D2C. The demand for cost-efficient solutions is particularly high, as numerous communication channels must be covered in wholesale, retail, and direct-to-customer processes, from push notifications, WhatsApp and SMS to print media. The automotive industry can only overcome these challenges through data-driven approaches, flexible CRM systems and automation.

Innovative technologies for a quick return on investment

The effective use of technologies such as AI and smart agents enables cost-efficient fulfillment of growing expectations for personalized, cross-channel communication. Industries are increasingly relying on scalable, automated systems and data-driven personalization to control operational costs while meeting the demands of modern customer retention and omnichannel communication.

„Early consideration of trends and customer requirements in the automotive industry will keep downstream costs and the operating costs of an e-commerce platform low. Salesforce has specialized in these core disciplines and, among others, has built a wealth of experience with customers like Mercedes-Benz, Ford and Bentley, enabling efficient processes."

Holger Beckers, Head of Digital Manufacturing & Automotive, Salesforce

These approaches ensure cost-efficient communication across all channels:

- B2B (wholesale): Automated communication platforms and self-service B2B portals reduce effort and enable targeted customer outreach.
- B2C (retail): Personalized, AI-powered messages and omnichannel strategies increase efficiency and optimize customer retention.
- D2C (direct-to-consumer): Through dynamic segmentation and the use of external communication service providers, direct, cost-efficient outreach is enabled, which strengthens customer loyalty while remaining cost-effective.

Benefits of innovative solutions over traditional methods

Scalability: The use of AI and automated systems allows handling large volumes of customer interactions without manual intervention.

Real-time personalization: AI-driven personalization and dynamic segmentation enable precise customer targeting, thus increasing the efficiency of communication.

Cross-channel integration: Central management of all communication channels leads to consistent customer experiences and lowers the costs of redundant systems.

These approaches help companies work more efficiently, increase customer retention through more relevant content and strategically optimize marketing efforts.

Salesforce's internal Customer Success Metrics indicate a marketing ROI increase of up to 30 % and a 33 % efficiency increase in marketing analytics and reporting. Moreover, companies report up to 26 % lower customer acquisition costs, a 31 % increase in customer retention and a 29 % optimization of advertising spend.

Which developments are going to shape the automotive industry?

In the automotive industry, agent systems and data cloud platforms are emerging as key drivers for the future. Agent systems enable cost-effective, automated customer communication, particularly offering potential for hyper-personalization in the B2C and D2C sectors. Meanwhile, data cloud solutions provide a flexible way to store and analyze large data sets in real-time, enhancing efficiency and personalization in customer communication. By combining both systems, companies can ensure cross-channel, personalized outreach that maximizes customer value while minimizing operating costs.

„To prepare customers for these developments, Salesforce offers comprehensive support for the implementation and use of these technologies. These measures ensure that customers can fully exploit the benefits of agent systems and data cloud platforms and are optimally positioned for future-oriented, cost-efficient customer retention."

Sven Stieldorf, Sr. Strategic Account Executive Digital Automotive, Salesforce

Tips for immediate implementation

To achieve immediate effects on cost efficiency using Salesforce agent systems and data cloud, decision-makers in B2B, B2C and D2C should focus on the following key factors:

1. Provide proactive customer support

Identify common customer inquiries and implement automated notifications for frequent concerns via WhatsApp, push notifications or SMS. Automate support interactions, e.g. through chatbots or digital assistants. This proactive customer service reduces response times and service costs.

How Salesforce prepares automotive industry for future challenges: :

- System Integration: Experts assist in the implementation and integration of agent systems and data cloud platforms into existing IT infrastructures.
- Data-driven decision making: Employees are empowered to use the new analysis and personalization features to enhance customer retention and cost efficiency.
- Adaptation to legal requirements: Direct contacts help comply with data protection and security guidelines, always ensuring data security in the cloud and during customer communication.

2. Automate marketing and sales processes

Consolidate customer data from all channels and data sources to create a 360-degree customer view. A unified data architecture enables real-time analyses for quick adjustments to customer preferences and the automation of marketing campaigns, reducing marketing costs and enabling precise targeting.

3. Offer hyper-personalized omnichannel communication

Create personalized customer profiles that include purchase history, interests and past interactions. Implementing Salesforce agent systems and data cloud tailors every interaction across all channels to the current needs of customers.

4. Use data analytics to optimize cost efficiency

Implement dashboards for real-time analysis of customer interactions to respond quickly to trends, refine marketing strategies and strategically align sales channels to the most profitable segments. This reduces media wastage, allows for more precise resource allocation and optimizes costs.

AI generated

SCAYLE
COMMERCE ENGINE

Sport & lifestyle performance that optimizes costs and revenue

Limited edition drops, product customization, irregular peak times – the sport and lifestyle sector presents unique challenges in retail. Key shopping events are typically seasonal or event-driven, such as when a major sports team announces a new star player. This makes long-term and effective budget and resource planning challenging. The key here is to quickly build momentum based on the season or event. If you don`t sell, you lose.

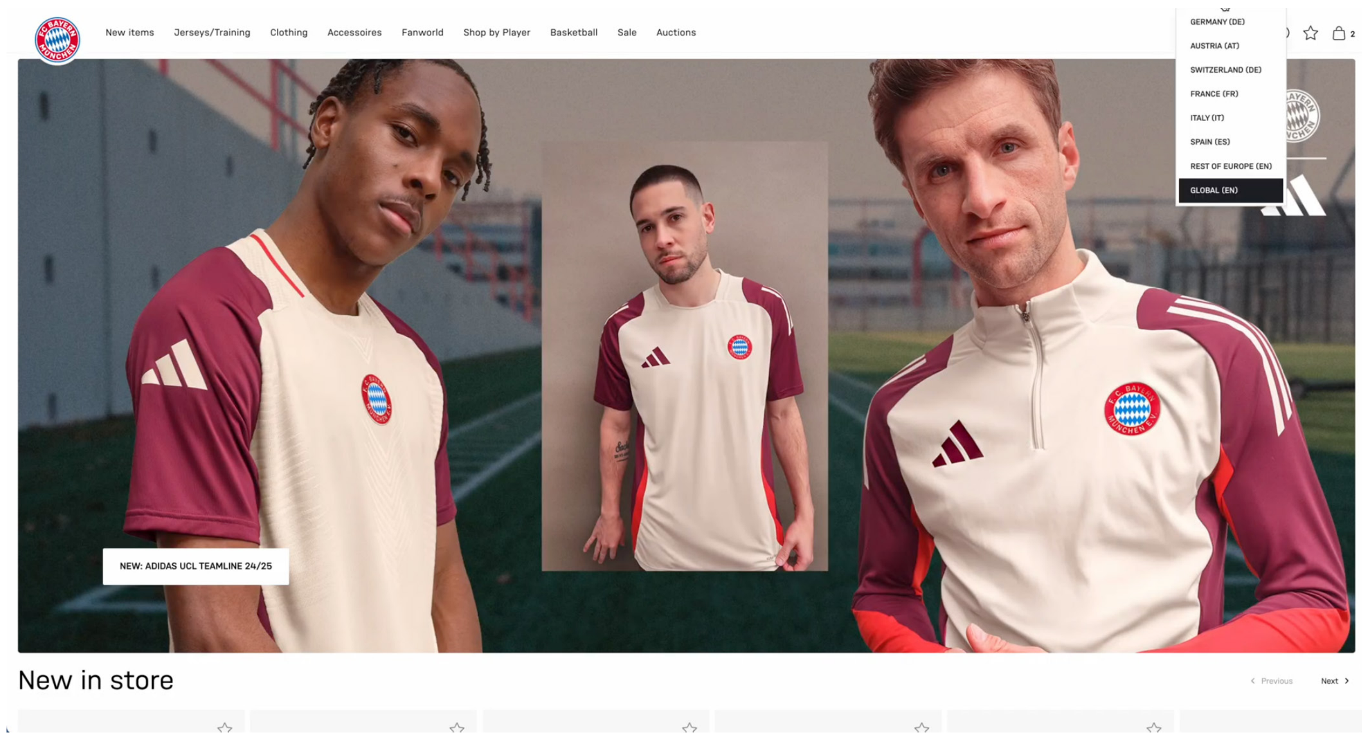
Scalability and stability that pays off

This was also true for the globally popular football giant FC Bayern Munich. In terms of jersey and merchandise sales, the club has been at the top of the world rankings for some time. However, when the team proved successful in the 2020 Champions League final, the merchandise demand that followed the cup victory nearly brought the club`s online store to its knees.

„Right after the game, our website went down for 30 minutes," recalls Stefan Benzinger, Head of eCommerce at FC Bayern Munich. „ We should have capitalized on that momentum, but the online store collapsed." A fatal failure, where damages in the sport and lifestyle industry can quickly reach six figures – both through lost sales and the costs of fixing the problem. After all, these types of key events are among the highest revenue-generating of the entire year.

In many ways, this was the catalyst that ultimately united SCAYLE and the historic football club. „From that point on, it was clear to us that we had to find a new system," says Benzinger.

FC Bayern Munich found in SCAYLE not only an ultra-scalable platform that can process up to 12,000 orders per minute but also an innovation partner with which it optimized its customer experience and operational efficiency in less than twelve months – significantly increasing the profitability of its e-commerce channel.

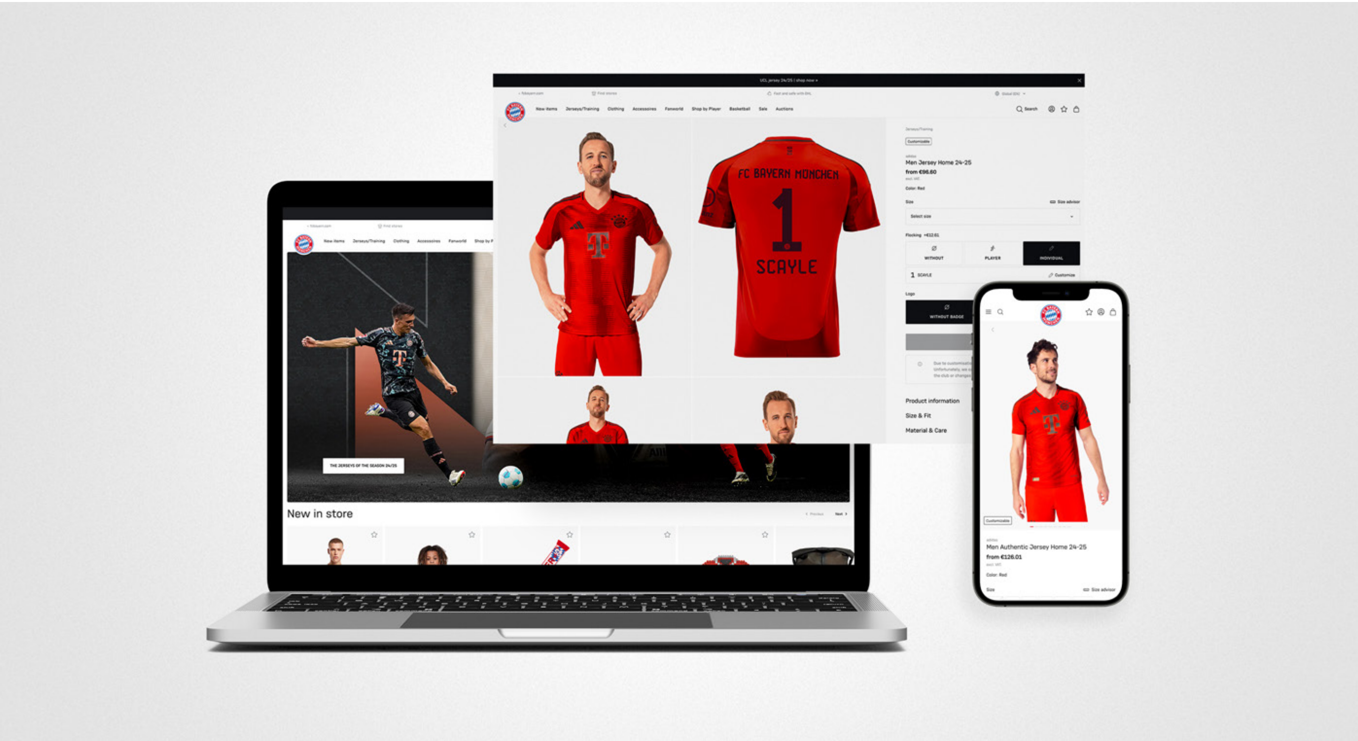


Thanks to lightning-fast APIs and an AWS-supported infrastructure, the club now records a 99 % uptime – even when traffic skyrockets, such as when football star Harry Kane officially joined the squad. On that day alone, 10,000 shirts went through the club`s digital checkout.

Efficiency through individualization

Whether it's about custom sports equipment or personalized jerseys, individualization plays a significant role in the sport and lifestyle industry. Retailers who can address the needs of their customers with individual product specifications have a clear advantage, especially online.

For FC Bayern Munich, SCAYLE built a jersey configurator seamlessly integrated into its online store. This allows fans to print their shirts with their name and any jersey number, review the final look directly on screen and feel even closer to their favorite players.



Online personalization also reduces the pressure on floor staff in stores, as customers can order their goods online in advance, have them delivered to their homes or even pick them up on-site. This eases both resource and inventory planning for retailers, which immediately positively affects cost planning.

For FC Bayern Munich, this has proved more than true. In less than a year with SCAYLE, the club reported:

- 38 % increase in online sales
- 15.4 % increase in average order value
- 20 % improvement in conversion rate
- 99.9 % uptime

Similarly impressive forecasts are in store for Manchester United: the club is expected to achieve an additional annual revenue of up to 30 million pounds (approximately 36 million euros) with SCAYLE from 2025.

SCAYLE COMMERCE ENGINE

Composable commerce that optimizes TCO

Individual business needs like those in the sports and lifestyle sector demand tailor-made e-commerce solutions. Microservices architectures offer a lot of flexibility through third-party and custom integrations but can turn out to be extremely complex and costly in the long run – especially for enterprise brands. This is mainly due to the plethora of different third-party integrations and associated administrative and licensing costs, e.g. for product catalogs, order processing, checkout, payments, content management and customer service.

The German lifestyle brand Kapten & Son found itself in this exact situation. With the existing structure, the IT team struggled to seamlessly connect all the functions in their system, creating implementation blockers, delays and instability at the core of the platform – as well as an endless search for errors. This was also reflected in the brand's cost efficiency.

With SCAYLE's headless and Composable Commerce platform, Kapten & Son could choose from out-of-the-box modules that are customizable and united through a single user interface. To complement the system, Kapten & Son integrated Actindo's OMS, which seamlessly slotted into the stack through fast APIs.

With the modular architecture, brands have an agile, feature-rich system that flexibly adapts to their needs – with out-of-the-box, third-party, and custom integrations – and thus can reduce the TCO by up to 30 %.

Challenges in beauty commerce

The situation in the beauty industry is complex. On the surface, there has been massive growth. In fact, BeautyMatter reported that sales figures for the beauty industry reached 522 billion euros worldwide in 2023, representing a growth of 9.3 %, surpassing the previous year's growth of 6.8 %. For 2024, Statista predicts that the beauty industry will generate revenues of 601 billion euros, representing growth of 13.5 % over the previous year.

The „Shopify EU State of Commerce" report shows that only 22 % of consumers in Europe are optimistic about the economy, which has led them to tighten their budgets.

„When consumers spend money, they're looking for both quality and value – and that has changed the question of loyalty for beauty brands. We've found that over half of consumers have bought another brand because it offered a better price or value."

Linda Hoffmann, Head of Partnerships DACH, Shopify

How beauty brands can secure advantages

1. Seamless online and offline shopping experiences

In a competitive market, every brand is vying for the buyer's attention – through experiences that need to be extended in-store and online seamlessly. Nearly a third (29 %) of shoppers prefer to shop online, while 33 % prefer shopping in-store. Notably, 67 % of shoppers want an integrated experience across both channels. Some brands are already adjusting. Nearly a third (31 %) are trying to improve the customer experience by integrating online and offline purchases.

Shopify POS: Unify your in-store and online sales

Unified commerce

Consolidate sales, customer and inventory data with one back office for in-store and online sales.

Exceptional experiences

Create seamless omnichannel experiences for customers and employees with real-time insights and fully integrated Shopify hardware.

Unmatched innovation

Implement new commerce functionalities with continuous product updates and improvements that offer a flexible shopping experience.

2. Promote loyalty & brand commitment

Shoppers have a strong interest in connecting with brands, whether in a store or online. However, they are also less receptive to traditional loyalty tactics such as loyalty points programs. Loyalty must be reframed around other factors, such as community building and personal connections. Incentives like free shipping and promotions, early access to sales and exclusive invitations to experiences, product launches, ambassador programs and in-store events pave the way for good customer relationships.

3. Customer-centric purchase options

Nearly half of all shoppers (47 %) say they expect tech-optimized shopping experiences. However, before beauty brands dive into these investments, they need to ensure that they actually improve the shopping experience and only add the features that satisfy their customers. The key areas are those that deal with convenience and simplicity, including self-service checkouts (52 %), mobile apps (45 %) and one-click checkouts (32 %). Brands can easily add these offerings with Shopify Checkout and allow shoppers to check out with just one click thanks to Shop Pay.

4. Cost-efficient transformation strategy

While a high-converting checkout brings in more revenue, it is another important strategy for brands to reduce platform, operational and implementation costs.

„Shopify offers the lowest overall operating costs, which are up to 36 % lower than the competition. Through product investments aimed at reducing complexity, brands that switch to Shopify experience lower expenses for platform fees, setup and implementation and ongoing operational and support costs. They also benefit from lower losses due to missed sales."

Linda Hoffmann, Head of Partnerships DACH, Shopify

5. AI & automation for efficient customer service

More and more brands are finding useful ways to serve their customers more effectively using AI. Of the companies that have invested in AI this year or plan to do so, 53 % want to build better customer support, while 34 % plan to use it for in-store automations like self-service checkouts.

Enhanced shopping experiences in-store and online are only half the equation. Another task is to guide consumers to the most relevant products. One of the most effective methods is to use product recommendations.

Anyone who wants to be successful with the strategies presented first needs a unified platform. Shopify allows to keep pace with changing buyer expectations without having to deal with complex middleware or integrations.

E-commerce „Skinspiration" with Shopify

When Dermalogica, the market leader for skincare essentials, migrated to Shopify, they felt burdened by the development complexity and associated costs of their previous solution. On Shopify, Dermalogica expanded the three pillars of its business – products, treatments, and education area, which they call „Skinspiration." By integrating the Shopify app Retention X, products that buyers add to their cart are analyzed and offers and recommendations are created to bring customers back.

One month after migrating to Shopify, Dermalogica saw:

- 119 % revenue increase
- 45 % increase in conversion rate
- 44 % improvement in page speed
- 43 % increase in unique visitors
- 14 % decrease in bounce rate
- 12 % increase in average order value (AOV)

Budget decisions in the food industry

Industry-specific challenges

1. High delivery costs & challenges due to shelf life

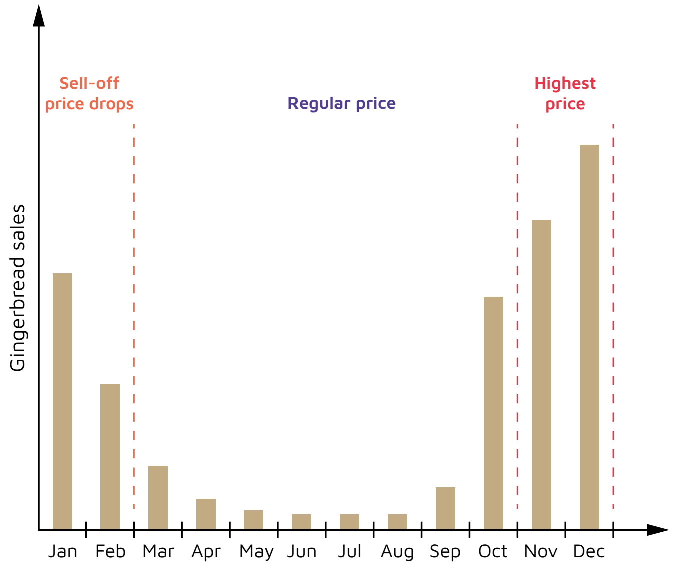
The food industry often requires specialized delivery methods as perishable goods need to be transported under certain conditions (e.g. refrigerated or frozen shipments). This leads to higher logistics costs compared to other industries. Moreover, rapid delivery times are crucial to ensure the quality and freshness of the products.

Subscription models for recurring orders help to optimize delivery frequency and reduce shipping costs. Another strategy is to offer click-and-collect solutions where customers pick up their orders at a store or collection point – both are possible with Shopware.

2. Seasonal fluctuations & demand

Demand for food varies greatly with the seasons, requiring businesses to quickly adapt their resources and inventory levels. Companies often use short-term discounts or deals to stimulate demand during slower periods and efficiently reduce stock levels.

Shopware not only supports through the possibility of using multiple warehouse locations and omnichannel strategies but also helps with promotion management. With the no-code automation tools Rule- and Flow Builder, price and discount rules can be flexibly defined. These rules can also be planned in advance to be best prepared for different demand periods.



Artificial intelligence and machine learning for efficient inventory management

Some companies already use AI-powered systems to optimize inventory and predict demand fluctuations. These systems analyze historical data, seasonal trends and external factors such as weather or public holidays to order the right amount of products and avoid overstock or shortages.

Shopware offers API integrations with various AI tools that allow businesses to implement intelligent inventory forecasts and automatic reordering.

What developments will shape the food industry in 2025?

The food industry is one of the fastest-growing online retail categories. The total market volume is expected to rise to 613.7 billion US dollars by 2027 (Statista, Food eCommerce: Market Data & Analysis).

1. Sustainability becomes increasingly important

Customers are shopping online more frequently as it allows them to plan their purchases more deliberately and reduce food waste. Subscription models enable more reliable revenue forecasts, facilitate the sale of local products and make cross-selling, such as through matching recipe ideas, more relevant – especially as people's health consciousness rises.

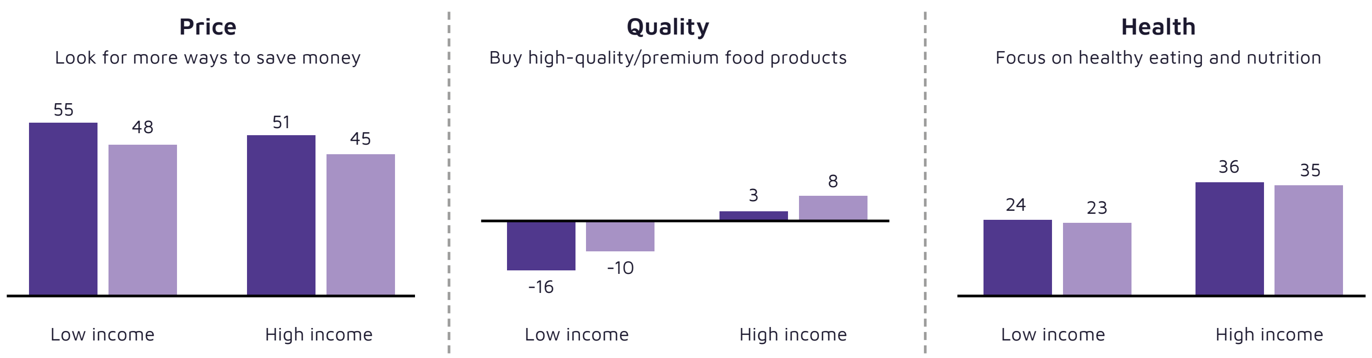
2. Price pressure remains a decisive factor

Companies can quickly respond to market developments with discount promotions and limited offers to reduce overstock or stimulate demand during quieter periods. Surveys among consumers show that price sensitivity has decreased slightly when shopping for groceries since 2023 (McKinsey, State of grocery retail 2024).

Consumer intent to save money has declined but stays high, with increased interest in quality and stable interest in health

Net intent of consumers, 2024 vs. 2023, EU

2023 2024



To meet the increasing interest in product quality and the growing health consciousness, it is advisable not only to highlight these topics on content pages but also to address them specifically in the product features.

An excellent example of this is Koro. On the product detail pages, Koro not only integrates comprehensive information about the products but also offers matching blog posts, recipes and FAQs. This provides customers with direct added value and an optimal user experience tailored to their interests and needs.

Practical tips for immediate implementation

1. Use more storytelling

To differentiate yourself from discounters and the pressure of brick-and-mortar retailers, you should create a unique value proposition that goes beyond the mere online delivery of groceries. Focus on aspects that cannot be offered offline. You don't necessarily need a large content team – sometimes 3D elements are sufficient, as implemented by the provider CoffeeB, for example.

2. Integrate sustainability notes on product detail pages

Information on saved CO_2 emissions, the country of origin of the product, shelf life and detailed information on packaging provide consumers with comprehensive transparency. Such information not only helps to get a clear picture of the respective product but also conveys the ethical values and sustainable commitment of the company.

3. Opt for a solution that unites B2C and B2B on one platform

Especially in the food industry, where both end customers and business customers are often served, Shopware offers significant advantages. With a single solution, you can target your B2C customers with high-quality product presentations and personalized offers, while providing B2B customers with special features such as customer-specific pricing, quantity discounts and efficient ordering processes. This integrated solution creates a consistent shopping experience for all customer groups, reduces administrative efforts and increases the efficiency in your sales – and helps to keep budgets lean for 2025.

Cost-reduction success strategies in manufacturing

Industry-specific challenges

In the rapidly evolving landscape of Industry 5.0, industrial manufacturers face significant challenges.

Technological innovations are increasing at a breakneck pace, making keeping up with industry trends and adopting new technologies taxing and costly. Customer expectations continue to soar as they increasingly expect fully digital experiences, with 62 % of B2B industrial manufacturing customers preferring to order digitally. However, meeting these rising expectations requires ongoing investment in technology and customer service, especially as only 13 % of industrial services organizations say they can offer digital solutions with their current capabilities. Moreover, complex products are not easy to sell via digital commerce, requiring offline consultation, configuration and negotiations, adding to industry inefficiencies and high cost of sales.

Looking to optimize costs across the board, manufacturers are having to rethink their existing digital commerce approach in search of more opportunities to deliver value, increase share of wallet, and efficiently integrate cost-effective, customer-centric experiences into the buying journey. Here, we share our top approaches for manufacturers to effectively utilize their e-commerce budgets in 2025.

Improving cost efficiency in manufacturing

Manufacturers still operating with outdated legacy systems not designed for modern digital commerce struggle to meet the rising expectations of digitally savvy customers. Although burdened by manual processes that lead to inefficiencies and unsustainable administrative costs, they feel overwhelmed by the complexity and cost of transitioning to advanced digital platforms – exacerbated by long buying processes and extensive, inconsistent product catalogs across multiple channels.

Despite these challenges, digital transformation is the key to cost-efficiency in manufacturing today. And in this volatile landscape, manufacturers looking to cut sales costs must embrace innovative solutions that digitize their current processes as quickly and efficiently as possible. This goes beyond adopting new technologies – it requires rethinking business models to prioritize flexibility, scalability and speed.

Here are three approaches that prioritize these elements and can help manufacturers improve cost-efficiency today:

1. Composable tech-stack

One key to mastering shifting industry dynamics is working with composable commerce technology with unmatched extensibility, which enables businesses to build digital platforms with modular components that can be easily customized, reconfigured and integrated with existing systems. This allows for faster innovation, helping companies swiftly respond to evolving customer and market demands and enhancing overall agility and efficiency through automation – crucial for producing new value with as little risk and cost as possible.

2. Centralized CX platforms

Another critical approach to cutting sales costs is centralizing the end-to-end buying journey into one platform, enabling companies to seamlessly capitalize on new opportunities to monetize digital services and aftersales.

Dynamic self-service solutions, like a digital self-service portal, centralize customer transaction and product data into a single interface, improving cost-efficiency, enhancing customer satisfaction, and driving profitable growth.

3. Marketplace models

The marketplace model, which serves as a hub where vendors, technology providers, and manufacturers connect and transact, provides manufacturers with a streamlined, cost-effective way to expand their offerings. By enabling a broader assortment of aftersales parts and services and reducing the complexity of sourcing them, companies can quickly adapt to shifting market conditions, reducing time-to-market and driving innovation.

Moreover, Forrester found that businesses that launched a marketplace experienced remarkable growth, including a 44 % increase in customers, a 42 % boost in revenue and a 36 % rise in average order value (AOV).

Cost efficiency in practice

Jungheinrich, a heavy machinery and materials handling company, struggled with their extensive portfolio, which was challenging to manage and navigate. The complexity of the shop, which featured more than 800,000 spare parts across more than 2,000 product categories, led to a fragmented digital commerce experience across multiple front-ends with high maintenance and total cost of ownership.

They recognized the need to upgrade their current digital commerce experience and system to cut costs and meet the growing demands of their B2B customers, choosing to partner with Spryker to consolidate their e-commerce activities into one platform. By integrating with their existing IT stack, the modular approach and headless platform gave them the agility to launch quickly with one central backend to operate multiple business models and locations globally –increasing their sales efficiency at scale.

Spryker

> „The digital transformation of the sales organization is an essential part of our e-commerce strategy. The scalable e-commerce platform is the foundation to meet future business requirements."

Nikolaus Meixner, Head of E-Business, Jungheinrich AG

Taking on industry 5.0

From the rise of generative AI and electrification to additive manufacturing, industrial companies can expect continued technological disruption over the years to come. To succeed in Industry 5.0 and beyond, manufacturers must optimize costs, drive revenue, enhance customer experiences and embrace cutting-edge technology to respond quickly to market volatility and leapfrog the competition in the race to capture market share.

Those who incorporate cost-effective approaches such as composable, digital self-service and marketplace into their buying journey in 2025 will be well-positioned to lead the industry into its next phase of growth and transformation.

State of Fashion

The fashion industry faces many – partly new – challenges and opportunities in the digital world. The fierce competition and rising customer expectations for seamless shopping experiences, quick returns and personalized communication force retailers to maintain accurate inventory management and a seamless omnichannel experience. They can no longer be satisfied with a platform that offers „just enough" of what they need.

The growing presence of marketplaces alone has given customers more alternatives than ever to purchase their desired it-piece. At the same time, new trends and increasing sales through live and concierge shopping are prompting fashion retailers to supplement their technology portfolios to integrate these sales channels into their own platforms.

Shoppers are looking for stores that represent the „very best" rather than the „absolute minimum" – and this should be the exact mindset of brands.

Collaborative commerce: Every store is a marketplace

VTEX's architecture allows retailers to become marketplaces and participate in other marketplaces, partly without any development effort or additional third-party software.

VTEX Marketplace: Shop environment hosted on the VTEX platform that enables the handling of product sales, checkout and payment.

External Marketplace: Showcase shop hosted on external platforms outside of VTEX that enables the handling of product sales, checkout and payment.

VTEX Seller: Shop hosted on the VTEX platform, which owns the products and usually serves the purpose of handling orders to consumers.

External Seller: Shop hosted on a different platform or currently not hosted on any platform, which owns the products and usually serves the purpose of handling orders to consumers.

Collaborative commerce simplifies processes, reduces complexity, avoids recurring development effort and reduces TCO by up to 75 % compared to best-of-breed solutions.

„AI Returns" and the omnichannel experience

The trade research institute EHI estimates the proportion of returns in the fashion industry to be up to 50 %. In e-commerce, this number is between 6 to 10 %. It is economically and ecologically necessary to reduce this value. With trends like live and concierge shopping, ways are already emerging to ensure exactly that. However, even if this rate could be halved at a stroke, fashion retailers would still incur sensitive costs for monitoring and handling, as well as complex customer communication and inventory management. To simultaneously meet the demand to be present on numerous sales channels and offer a seamless omnichannel experience, retailers need a fully integrated order management system (OMS).

That's why VTEX is continuously developing its OMS – including the AI tool **AI Returns,** which helps retailers make better decisions when handling returns:

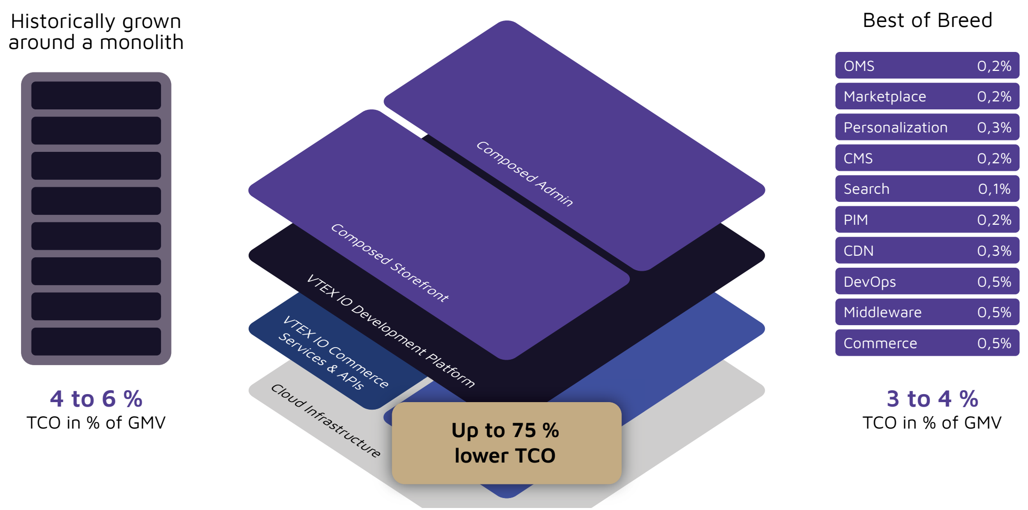
- Automate processes for faster resale of products
- Reduce errors with AI-supported inspection
- Faster handling for efficient inventory management
- Improved customer communication

„If a product has disappointed the customer, the exchange shouldn't be slow and frustrating as well. With AI Returns, the return does not become a further burden: Customers can register their return themselves, upload photos and receive a decision on the further process in seconds. This makes the process easier for the customer and relieves the retailer's customer service."

Christian Schreiber, Country Manager Germany, VTEX

Retailers are more than ever required to examine the preferences and touchpoints with their target group and ensure their compatibility. Those who discover a use case here can effortlessly integrate it into their existing e-commerce landscape, whether from the start or on the run. VTEX calls this **Pragmatic Composability**: an e-commerce landscape tailored to the business model that guarantees cost efficiency by mapping only the exact cases that a company wants to represent today and in the future.

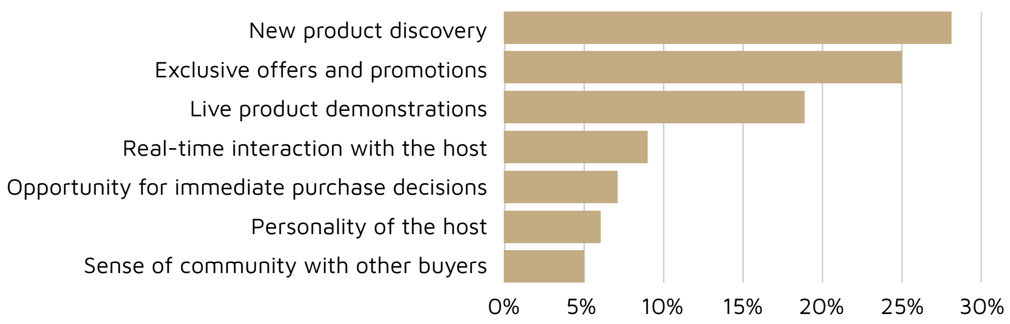
Cost-effective business scaling with Pragmatic Composability



The rise of live shopping and video commerce

Live shopping has long been an integral part of commerce, with the Home Shopping Network and QVC significantly shaping this trend as early as 1977. This concept is being revived in the digital age. Fueled by platforms like Alibaba's Taobao Live, live shopping already accounts for 20 % of the e-commerce market and 10 % of the total retail sales in China. In Europe, 70 % of consumers meanwhile express interest in the shoppertainment format.

Key aspects of live shopping



Understanding the impact of live shopping and video commerce begins with the golden equation of e-commerce: **Revenue = traffic x conversion rate x AOV**.

„The fashion brand PatBO, by Patricia Bonaldi, saw a 300 % increase in its commerce revenue after a single live shopping session. During the livestream directly from New York Fashion Week 2024, the average order value increased by 79 %, and the number of orders increased by 125 %, compared to ordinary Saturdays."

Christian Schreiber, Country Manager Germany, VTEX

Live shopping increases traffic through captivating experiences that attract and retain customers. More generally, video commerce allows brands to enhance their online presence and customer journey across various channels, including product pages, social media and email campaigns.

VTEX equips companies for this development with an implementation time into existing systems of only 30 days, including a resilient forecast of the return on investment. The platform already offers a solution for the described requirements in the fashion industry as standard and makes it easy to develop new business models or test additional best-of-breed solutions. Thus, brands keep their TCO low, gear up for trends and offer a seamless, modern customer experience from their own hands.

Achieve profitability in e-commerce with valantic

Over 2,000 successful digitization projects in the last five years have shown that valantic's experts understand their customers' challenges in detail, can classify market developments and handle trends in digital commerce. Over 500 blue chip customers and international market leaders already trust valantic.

What our customers say

DAIMLER TRUCK

Ingo Mölbert

Head of Parts Business (Direct Sales, eCommerce & Market Support), Daimler Truck AG

„valantic challenged our technology preference at the right time from a performance and cost perspective. We were able to objectify necessary investments and had clear, numbers-based arguments for discussions with our most important stakeholders."

WACKER

Thorsten Rahf

IT Process Manager Sales & Marketing, Wacker Chemie AG

„With valantic we have found an implementation partner that we can rely on for our digital commerce topics. We always have the right experts on our side both when designing our IT system landscape and when expanding it. A perfect match for the consistent implementation of a digitalized customer experience for WACKER customers."

Are you still searching for the right levers to turn technologies into real value drivers for your online business, to objectify budgets, and to keep your TCO low in the long term?

We look forward to a non-binding exchange.

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