

## Bylined Article

# Unified Commerce Will Redefine The Retail Experience

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**As we look toward 2025, the retail landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. Building on last year's predictions, the retail front end has indeed "broken up" and the path forward lies in a radical rethinking of how we deliver the customer experience.**

Enter unified commerce—a powerful evolution of omnichannel strategies poised to define the future of retail. In this article, I will explore why unified commerce is the cornerstone of retail's next chapter and how it addresses many challenges highlighted in previous years.

### The Shift from Omnichannel to Unified Commerce

Last year, I emphasized the need for retailers to move away from fragmented, hardcoded systems and toward a more flexible, microservices-driven architecture. This approach has indeed proven essential. However, the next step—unified commerce—goes beyond simply integrating systems. It creates a seamless, real-time connection between all customer touchpoints, be it online, in-store, or last-mile delivery.

Unified commerce enables retailers to integrate back-office data (such as inventory, customer information, pricing, and promotions) across every platform. This unified view empowers retailers to deliver a consistent and personalized customer experience. Customers will no longer encounter disjointed promotions between online and in-store purchases, nor will they be frustrated by inconsistent stock availability. Everything is connected through a common platform, allowing retailers to anticipate customer needs, personalize interactions, and optimize fulfillment across all channels.

In my conversations with industry leaders, unified commerce is no longer just a nice-to-have; it's a strategic necessity. Analyst firm Gartner has identified it as the top request from retailers. This shift makes omnichannel strategies, once cutting-edge, now seem a bit outdated. Unified commerce is the evolution retailers have been waiting for, and we'll see significant investment in this area in 2025.

### Why Unified Commerce Matters

The potential benefits of unified commerce are vast. The first is customer loyalty and satisfaction. Retailers can now use a single data source to personalize every customer interaction, from online recommendations to in-store promotions. As we predicted last year, personalizing the customer journey across all channels has become crucial. Today, retailers that fail to leverage unified commerce risk alienating their customers with inconsistent experiences.

Second, unified commerce significantly reduces operational complexity. Retailers have long struggled with managing separate inventory, CRM, and fulfillment systems. As I noted last year, many retailers were building a "Frankenstein's monster" of disjointed apps. Unified commerce allows these systems to work harmoniously, streamlining operations and reducing costs. Inventory management, for example, becomes far more efficient, as all systems can

now access the same real-time data, making stockouts and overstock issues a thing of the past.

Finally, agility is a key benefit. Retailers using unified commerce can quickly adapt to changing market demands or customer expectations. Whether launching new services like same-day delivery or adjusting pricing and promotions, unified commerce platforms allow retailers to act swiftly and decisively. Unified commerce provides the foundation for rapid innovation in a retail environment where flexibility is paramount.

## **Lessons Learned from 2024**

Reflecting on last year's predictions, we see both successes and missed opportunities. The call for microservices and API-driven architectures was spot on. Many retailers took this advice to heart and are now reaping the rewards of more flexible, scalable systems. However, one persistent challenge is the lack of integration between these systems. While microservices improved agility, they often left retailers with silos of data and inconsistent customer experiences.

Unified commerce addresses this by providing a comprehensive, connected platform. Rather than focusing solely on individual systems, it unites everything under a single umbrella, creating a unified customer journey across every touchpoint. This approach resolves many of the issues we saw in 2024, where retailers struggled to deliver a cohesive experience despite their technical investments.

Additionally, we predicted last year that e-commerce would continue to grow. Some estimates say it will potentially reach 40% of global sales by 2027. This is still on track, but the focus has shifted slightly. Today's consumers are not simply looking for online shopping options—they want a seamless blend of online and offline experiences. This is where unified commerce shines. It allows retailers to blur the lines between digital and physical, offering services like click-and-collect, in-store returns for online purchases, and real-time inventory checks across all channels.

## **Real-World Applications of Unified Commerce**

Several forward-thinking retailers are already leveraging unified commerce to transform their customer experiences. Marks & Spencer (M&S) is a prime example. Over the past year, M&S has invested heavily in repositioning its stores, not just as places to shop but as integrated hubs in their unified commerce strategy. Whether customers browse online, pick up a click-and-collect order, or make an in-store purchase, the experience is seamless and consistent.

Similarly, we see leisure brands like Gymshark embracing unified commerce by creating experiential retail spaces. These stores are not just for shopping—they are destinations that combine physical engagement with digital convenience. Customers can work out, attend events, and shop while interacting with the brand across multiple platforms.

The beauty of unified commerce is that it can support these kinds of experiences without the operational headaches of the past. With everything connected, retailers can focus on delivering value to the customer rather than wrestling with their technology.

## **Predictions for 2025 and Beyond**

As we move into 2025, I expect unified commerce to dominate retail investments. Retailers who adopt this approach will be strongly positioned to win customer loyalty, reduce operational costs, and stay agile in an unpredictable market.

However, the road ahead is not without challenges. Implementing unified commerce requires significant upfront investment in technology and training staff to use it effectively.

Moreover, retailers must maintain a balance between personalization and privacy, as consumers are increasingly concerned about how their data is used. The regulatory landscape is shifting, with new laws around data protection and sustainability becoming critical factors.

In conclusion, unified commerce is the future of retail. It builds on past innovations, such as microservices and omnichannel, but goes further by uniting all aspects of the customer experience. Retailers who invest in unified commerce in 2025 will be well-positioned to thrive in the years to come.

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Richard is responsible for bringing the best of Fujitsu's industry vision, consulting capabilities and solutions and services to its customers in the consumer industries across the world.

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