

Bylined Article

Retail Gets Unified, Makes Omnichannel Look Updated

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As retail technology evolves, one thing has become clear: the unified commerce model is finally replacing omnichannel strategies and setting a new standard in the industry.

Omnichannel was once the hallmark of a forward-thinking retailer. Unified commerce now builds on that foundation to deliver a seamless, data-driven experience across every customer touchpoint. Unified commerce isn't just an upgrade; it's a leap that makes the complexities of omnichannel strategies seem outdated.

Omnichannel strategies were designed to connect separate shopping channels -in-store, mobile and online – allowing customers to navigate between them. Although this was transformative, its reliance on integrating fragmented systems has shown limitations. For example, it often requires multiple platforms, each needing separate data management and connectivity. When customers move from online to in-store, their interactions are often segmented, creating inconsistencies that disrupt the seamless journey.

In contrast, unified commerce operates on a single platform where customer data, inventory, pricing, and promotions are fully synchronized. Retailers enjoy a holistic, real-time view of their operations, and customers experience consistent, personalized interactions wherever they engage with a brand. By unifying data across channels, retailers can simplify operations, reduce redundancies, and respond more effectively to customer needs.

Harnessing the Power of Real-Time Insights

Another area where unified commerce excels is enabling real-time visibility. Let's look at a customer who searches for a product online, checks in-store availability and then completes their purchase through curbside pickup. In an omnichannel setup, data updates are often delayed, which can result in stock discrepancies and lost sales. Unified commerce solves this by consolidating data into a single, always-current source. Inventory, order status, and pricing remain accurate across every platform, delivering a reliable shopping experience.

This real-time accuracy extends beyond inventory. It's easier to deliver personalized promotions and tailored recommendations. When a customer logs in online or walks into a physical store, the retailer immediately has access to their previous shopping habits, preferences, and loyalty points. This enables the retailer to present offers that resonate. This level of personalization was always challenging with omnichannel setups, where siloed data limited the ability to deliver seamless, individualized experiences.

Streamlining Operations for Greater Efficiency

On the operational side, unified commerce allows retailers to simplify and scale previously labor-intensive processes. Gone are the duplicate or manual processes needed to synchronize data between channels. All channels now pull from a central data source, automating much of this work and minimizing errors. For employees, this means less time

spent updating multiple systems and more time focusing on value-added tasks like engaging with customers.

What's more, unified commerce's centralized approach supports better inventory management and forecasting. Real-time tracking of sales and stock levels across channels means retailers can adjust supply chains and avoid overstocking – and move fast to offer sales prices on perishable goods approaching their expiry date to avoid waste. This agility is essential for staying competitive, reducing waste and meeting demand in fast-moving industries, like fashion and consumer electronics.

Building the Future of Retail

Unified commerce isn't just about enhancing customer experiences or improving operations; it's also about preparing retailers for the next wave of innovation. The retail industry is rapidly integrating AI, machine learning and predictive analytics, all of which require extensive and accurate data. Unified commerce creates a foundation for new technologies to operate effectively, allowing retailers to anticipate customer needs, optimize product offerings and dynamically adjust prices.

As these new tools evolve, the boundaries between online and offline shopping will blur even further. Retailers can shift effortlessly between channels to create highly personalized, responsive experiences. Rather than adapting omnichannel strategies, retailers are now focusing on creating a unified system capable of accommodating emerging technologies like virtual shopping assistants and AI-driven recommendations, placing them at the forefront of the next retail revolution.

As we move into 2025, unified commerce is no longer just an option for retailers looking to stay relevant—it's a necessity. Omnichannel previously required separate systems to collaborate; unified commerce integrates these channels, building a seamless, efficient ecosystem that improves customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. In this unified retail world, customers are guaranteed a consistent and engaging shopping journey, and retailers are empowered with the data, accuracy, and agility needed to lead in an increasingly competitive landscape. In short, unified commerce makes omnichannel look like yesterday's news.

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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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