The Headless Commerce Playbook for Business Leaders

The complete guide to all facets of a headless strategy: the front-end, commerce, content, and implementation.

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Traditionally, ecommerce software was built as a single, integrated application, often referred to as a monolith. It was inherently rigid and created with a fixed set of rules, from creating a new product discount to changing the font size in the front-end. Headless commerce refers to a modern commerce architecture in which the front-end is decoupled and connected seamlessly to the back-end via APIs (Application Program Interfaces).

This guide brings together experts from different realms of the headless commerce world to provide a comprehensive playbook for business leaders that covers all the facets of a headless strategy: decoupled front-ends, API-driven commerce systems, headless content, and the implementation of a modern commerce architecture. Before we dive into each section, here's a quick overview of why all business leaders should be moving towards headless commerce.

Five Business Benefits of Headless Commerce

If your strategy revolves around growing your brand and staying relevant for digital consumers, consider these five benefits for embracing headless commerce.

1. Customization: When using a headless solution, you're not tied to monolithic software that prescribes how a front-end should be structured. This freedom means you don't have to stick to a specific templating system or train your employees to follow exact rules laid out by a software vendor. Instead, you have full control of what happens on the front-end, and can follow your UX design principles to shape your brand's identity without having to adhere to a templated layout that makes your sites and apps look and feel like everybody else's.

What You Gain

- Brand recognition
- Higher conversion rates and increased LTV

2. Freedom to experiment: In a headless environment, you can do user experience (UX) experiments without the risk of jeopardizing the whole ecosystem. You can A/B test specific parts of your website, or try to build an Alexa skill, without affecting the back-end operations if you run into errors. In contrast, a traditional commerce architecture would force you to modify front-end and back-end code simultaneously – sometimes requiring a shutdown of the entire application for maintenance.

What You Gain

- Learn faster (faster feedback on new ideas, promotions, or programs)
- Less dependence on IT/ development

3. Speed and agility: You can implement new UX changes faster since you don't have to redeploy a back-end system when working in a decoupled environment. Development becomes much more efficient when teams can work in parallel and UX changes can be made without having to test all the core back-end logic.

What You Gain

- Faster time to value
- Efficiency

4. Scaling: In a decoupled environment, the front-end and back-end can be scaled independently so that even if the front-end receives a lot of traffic, this doesn't affect the back-end.

What You Gain

- Freedom to push seasonal, flash or trend-seizing promotions
- Efficient software maintenance

5. Easily add new touchpoints: In a headless scenario, multiple front-ends can connect to one API and underlying system. In other words, if you want to add social channels, kiosks, mobile apps, or in-car marketplace shopping, you can do so easily and quickly. Now you won't have to build a business case for a new back-end every time you want to add a new front-end.

What You Gain

- Ability to launch new touch points ahead of competitors
- Loyal fans who perceive your brand as relevant to their lifestyles

Headless commerce promises these five business benefits, but deploying a complete headless solution includes many moving parts. Let's dive into each piece of the solution – the front-end, commerce, and content – as well as implementation considerations.