

# THE ELUSIVE “CONNECTED BRAND EXPERIENCE”

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The 2018 retail conference circuit brings together retail experts and the many partners that serve the industry to focus on trends, issues, ideas, and the opportunities that will define the next advances in our industry. In the multiple conferences and conversations, industry members are still discussing the same challenges they have been talking about for the past several years: customer experience, personalization, authenticity, and how to succeed by creating “seamless retail experiences.”

At one recent conference, the last phrase was offered as a replacement for “omnichannel” in our lexicon, and perhaps it’s an improvement on that term. But new phrasing can’t disguise the fact that, no matter what we call it, the challenge of creating a connected brand experience across all customer touchpoints remains.

In a recent research study focusing on consumer and retailer perceptions, Manhattan Associates found that while 77 percent of consumers indicated they wanted a seamless brand experience across channels, only 20 percent of retailers were investing in reducing channel friction this year. At what point do we stop the discussions and take action?

Rather than invent new phrases for the same old problems, shouldn’t we focus on innovation? What if we create

and implement solutions that bring together data from multiple sources into an intuitive toolset that provides actionable insights that enable the “seamless” experiences the retail industry is chasing?

As a consumer, I click, blog, review, tweet, research, and post, sometimes all while shopping within the confines of a physical store. I expect that the brands I know and love will also know and love me. I expect to interact with that brand online with the same sort of experience I receive in the store. Is this omnichannel? Yes. Seamless? Yes. A new idea? No, not really.

Until now, although retailers clearly understood the type of data they wanted to unite, there was no practical and affordable way to do so. Data was “landlocked” in many separate operational systems, further siloed by “online” and “physical store” divisions. To gain a unified view, retailers had to string together multiple legacy tools that were never designed to be connected, and were certainly not updated in real time, let alone visible to the associates who were tasked with providing exceptional customer experiences.

This made it nearly impossible to serve up customer data in an actionable format to the associates I’m depending on to provide me with a positive brand experience. It’s the opposite of frictionless when my phone pushes a notification about a flash sale while I’m standing

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in the store, but it’s only available online, so the associate standing next to me can’t help me. Similarly, when I reach out to the contact center about an issue with my order, I expect that the associate on the other end of the phone, or chat, is going to know what’s wrong and, more importantly, be able to fix it.

#### Solutions in the cloud

We are past the days where the point-of-sale system can get away with acting as a glorified calculator at the front of the store. It is now a component of the seamlessly interconnected technology that store associates need to have a 360-

degree customer view. At Manhattan Associates, we have created the only solution in the market that, through cloud-native microservices architecture, helps our clients fully link their many sales channels. With a view of enterprise inventory and a 360-degree view of customer order history, we enable our clients to deliver on their omnichannel promises, profitably.

This means that if our clients are ready to replace their legacy order management suite today, they can do so. They can then easily turn on point-of-sale or customer service capabilities at the same time, or in the future, whenever they are ready for those solutions.

This solution does so by itself being “omni” – our Manhattan Active™ Omni suite is a single app that unites data from multiple legacy systems like order management, point of sale, customer service, and so on.

It brings together data showing how consumers engage, what they buy, when they buy it, how they discuss the brand, as well as how our clients have served those individuals in the past.

So, if you’re ready to spend a bit less time coming up with new terms for old problems and are ready to jump into action instead, let’s talk. It is possible to implement solutions that can deliver a “modern, seamless, connected, unified, omnichannel brand experience” – the language is yours to choose.

