Quick Answer: How is Unified Commerce Different from Omnichannel Commerce?

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Many organizations have focused on offering omnichannel commerce, while unified commerce brings customer journeys into the perspective. Application leaders should understand the difference between the two concepts to plan the commerce experience for the future.

Quick Answer

How is unified commerce different from omnichannel commerce?

- Unified commerce delivers continuous experience to move customers through their journeys while omnichannel commerce focuses on consistent cross-channel experience for discrete activities.
- Unified commerce covers both direct and indirect channels while omnichannel commerce primarily focuses on direct channels.

More Detail

Unified Commerce Delivers Continuous Experience Through the Customer Journey

Omnichannel commerce focuses on consistent cross-channel experience for discrete activities. Examples of omnichannel commerce include:

- **Targeted marketing** — Customers get personalized messages via preferred channels of communication such as social, text messaging, in-app notification or email.
- **Browsing** — Customers can resume the browsing experience when switching from desktop to mobile and tablet, and have a seamless and consistent brand and content experience.
In these examples, omnichannel commerce allows customers to choose their preferred channel or touchpoint for an activity and ensures a consistent experience for that particular activity. Unified commerce offers not only a consistent cross-channel experience but also a continuous experience through customers’ journeys.

Unified commerce moves customers through and across journeys by pulling the right information for decision making and embedding call-for-action mechanisms in the journey flow.

**Unified Commerce — B2C**

Unified commerce for B2C, also referred to as unified retail commerce, provides continuous experience through the customer’s journeys. For example, customers get a promotion code via text message, go to browse products on the phone, add items to the cart and head to the store for try-on. The store associate prepares the item based on the cart content before the customer arrives, and suggests complementary products as well as the membership program with a sign-on bonus. The customer can check out from the store, taking advantage of the promotion code and membership benefits. They can also choose whether to take items from the store or have them shipped to the home.

The example above spans several stages of the buying journey including awareness, research, purchase and delivery. The integrated system pulls the right information for fast decision-making and actions, shares the online basket with the store associate and suggests best actions for cross-selling and customer retention. It includes mechanisms such as preparation for in-store try-on, staff suggestions, and flexibility in check-out and delivery options to move customers through the journey (see Figure 1).
Unified Commerce — B2B

Leading B2B organizations are connecting technology solutions that, in the past, were siloed so they can offer consistent experience across channels and throughout the customer life cycle. Here is a comparison of omnichannel and unified commerce:

- **Omnichannel commerce** — Customers can get a quote for configurable products online using self-service. Direct sales and channel partners can do the same, using the same platform. However, it lacks mechanisms to place orders from the agreed request for quotation (RFQ) to move customers to the purchase stage.
Unified commerce — Customers or sales can add items to the cart from the agreed RFQ. Customers can schedule service appointments from the equipment monitoring dashboard, and order spare parts and consumables from the same user interface. Field engineers can order parts from the maintenance app, and have those delivered by the closest channel partner. Sales can log into the customer account to view historic orders, contract status and consumption levels, review and approve/reject system-suggested product recommendations, and add those to the customer's cart.

Unified commerce provides customers with the right information as per their journey stage so they can make fast decisions. Sales also have all account information in one place so they can make the right recommendations. These call-for-actions are embedded in the journey flows so customers are moved through the journeys for buying, using and renewal (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Unified Versus Omnichannel Commerce — B2B Sample Journey
Unified Commerce Covers Both Direct and Indirect Channels

Omnichannel commerce focuses on direct channels where organizations have full control. Unified commerce works across both direct and indirect channels, and requires integrating data, insight and processes that are often controlled by third parties. For example, service agents for direct channels can carry on the conversation with a shopper, when they switch from the social network or marketplace, using a single identifier such as email or loyalty ID to see the conversation history. This requires a common repository of the interaction history, ideally more than just services but also purchases and behavior, and a correlation of customer ID across channels, such as their social media handle and email address.

Recommended by the Authors

Hype Cycle for Digital Commerce, 2021

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The Store Is Mission Control for Unified Retail Commerce

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