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Efficient content management in the omnichannel retailing world

In today's modern marketing communication in the retail sector, it is vital to provide the multitude of channels with suitable and relevant content. The handling and management of this content presents a major challenge. Here's how it's done.

master your content

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Introduction

If retailers want to market effectively today, they face the challenge of addressing their customers with consistent messages across a wide range of print, online, and social media channels.

In order to implement this omnichannel communication efficiently, companies need powerful software environments featuring the basic functions of content management, product information management, and digital asset management.

This whitepaper provides an overview of the need for such systems, and the criteria and yardsticks that should be applied when selecting appropriate solutions.

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Change is the only constant

There was a time in retailing when addressing customers was a fairly straightforward affair. This involved a website, ads, flyers in the store, direct mailings and maybe a customer magazine. That was still regarded as customer communication "from A to B".

Those days are long past and gone. Today, customers use an almost incalculable number of information and communication channels, primarily online, but also still in print. They are constantly informing themselves about products and services, combining channels depending on their moods, mindsets and the situation. More than ever, they are a "moving target." They are more mature than ever before — and far less loyal than in the past (this is how the market research and consulting company IFH KÖLN described the modern customer relationship in its retail scenario 2030:[1] "Catch me if you can!").

To this end, they are masterfully combining ecommerce and bricks-and-mortar retail. People research online and buy from bricks-and-mortar retailers, and vice versa. The stationary retail sector, which is often thought to be dead and gone has certainly been able to hold its own. In 2020, sales in the German retail sector amounted to 577.4 billion euros,[2, 3] of which 72.8 billion were attributable to ecommerce. It follows almost invariably from this that print-based marketing communication will also continue to be required.

Stationary retailing, which was particularly severely impacted by Covid19, benefited from the high acceptance of the omnichannel service Click and Collect. According to the HDE Online Monitor 2021, 44 percent of internet users stated that they had used the service at least once in 2020. Retailers were able to generate sales of EUR 4.6 billion by way of this combination of ecommerce and brick-and-mortar stores, which corresponds to a good six percent of total online sales in 2020.[4]

Stationary retailing is playing to its traditional advantages. For 62 percent of Germans surveyed, the hands-on, haptic examination of products is an important reason for shopping in stores. Some 38 percent of the respondents stated that the experience of a personal visit to the store is also a reason for offline shopping.[5]

1 https://www.ifhkoeln.de/produkt/handelsszenario-2030/

2 https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/3979/umfrage/e-commerce-umsatz-in-deutschland-seit-1999/

3 https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/70190/umfrage/umsatz-im-deutschen-einzelhandel-zeitreihe/

4 https://einzelhandel.de/presse/aktuellemeldungen/13327-hde-online...est-wachstumsschub-fuer-click-collect-und-online-marktplaetze-aus

5 https://yougov.de/news/2021/06/14/grunde-fur-verbraucher-weltweit-fur-den-einkauf-im/

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This deficit in ecommerce is fuelling the trend toward live shopping, meaning sales via live stream on the internet. Basically, this is the digital version of teleshopping, which is also intended to offer a communal, emotional shopping experience in online retail.

The relevance of digital channels is also subject to constant change. Younger target groups, for example, can hardly be reached via Facebook anymore as they prefer channels such as Instagram or TikTok. With regard to marketing in the B2B sector, on the other hand, platforms such as XING or LinkedIn are relevant.

Time and time again, new channels are emerging that are gaining relevance for addressing customers due to their user numbers. Take, for example, the emerging hyperlocal platforms such as nebenan.de, which are building neighborhood communities and responding to the trend toward more regionality.

Moreover, during the pandemic in particular, customers are placing even greater emphasis on one-stop shopping and want to buy everything in one store wherever possible. Supermarkets in particular are expanding their product ranges in order to cater to this customer behavior. This shift, however, also increases the number of products that need to be promoted.

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The challenges

Retail companies face the Herculean task of reaching their customers across all channels that are important today and will remain so in the future — the task is to accompany them during their "customer journey" with situation-specific, relevant, and consistent content. In this context, speed is the trump card in gaining competitive edge.

To achieve this, the required content must be produced, managed, combined and then printed as efficiently as possible, or issued as fully automatically as possible on the website and via social media, for example. That's easier said than done. Consider the three major hurdles that stand in the way of success:

1. Insecure workflows due to data silos

In every company, databases develop in the course of everyday work to which only individual departments or even only individual people have access. Consequently, this data is not permanently available throughout the company.

This not only impacts on the efficiency of the content production processes, but also their security, as the up-to-dateness of the data is often not clear. As a result, there is a risk that outdated or incorrect product information or prices are issued.

2. Inefficient workflows due to hierarchies

Agility is a buzzword often heard today, for example in software development. The term stands for agility and flexibility in order to be able to respond quickly to new situations and requirements, for example.

The opposite of this is the comparatively rigid waterfall principle, in which tasks are organizationally and often physically passed from A to B and on to C — an often laborious and time-consuming procedure incurring high friction losses.

By analogy, this principle of agility also applies to modern content production. Everything must be interconnected, all data must be available to everyone as a matter of principle. Automated processes increase the consistency of the workflows and thereby their efficiency and security. For sensitive data, rights and roles regulate who can access what and for what purpose. This approach results in high flexibility in content processing.

3. Outdated software solutions

The challenges of customer communication in modern omnichannel commerce cannot be mastered without appropriate software solutions. All too often, however, companies cling to aging systems that do not offer the flexibility and technical openness required today.

In many cases, programs that do not yet cooperate with each other are also on the job, meaning that files are sent by e-mail to colleagues for further processing — and data management is based on Microsoft Excel, for example.

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Finding your way through the jungle of terms

Not least due to the rapid changes in marketing communication, new technological approaches and terms are constantly emerging and developing. Content management, content marketing, omnichannel content, structured content management — it's easy to get lost in the jungle.

- **Content —** what is "content" anyway and what do we mean by it? First of all, all forms of communication media that people and target groups see "out in the field" — ads, flyers, websites, newsletters, blogs, magazines, social media posts, press releases, and much more.

Content, however, also refers to the preliminary products of these media — the texts, images, graphics, videos, audio contributions and more, which are mixed and matched into ever new means of communication.

- **Content management —** this is as often as mistakenly understood to mean the creation of content for websites. Of course, in today's omnichannel world of commerce, this is way too limited and short-sighted.

- **Omnichannel Content Management —** this is probably the most appropriate term. It most aptly describes what it's really all about: content that is suitable for the selected channels must be produced and published as efficiently as possible — nothing more and nothing less. To achieve this, the aforementioned preliminary products and the finished communication materials must be planned, maintained and managed efficiently, safely and securely.

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The core elements of a content management environment

A content management environment consists of three essential elements — the Content Management System (CMS) itself, and its suppliers PIM (Product Information Management) and DAM (Digital Asset Management).

The PIM and DAM solutions form a "single source of truth" — they centrally provide the information and materials that are used to create content in the CMS. They call for special attention and care: If data is carelessly maintained here, the efficiency and security of all downstream processes suffer. The saying in the IT world that data management is a matter for the boss comes as no surprise.

The Content Management System

The CMS is the central platform for the production, maintenance and management, as well as the publication of the most highly diverse content. Such a system should be able to control the process over the entire life cycle of the respective contents — from briefing to editing and design to production and publication via the desired channels. This includes printed flyers, brochures, flyers, the website, the online store, Facebook, Instagram, and all the other relevant digital channels.

For this purpose, it interacts with its suppliers, the PIM and the DAM system. Predefined workflows, automated processes, notifications, and tiered user rights ensure the necessary efficiency and security.

It is important to support the principle of "content first". This means that content is first created without factoring in the subsequent channel — in other words, only once. In terms of texts, the approach of "Minimal Information Units", or MIU for short, can be adhered to. Accordingly, paragraphs, for example, are designed in such a way that they can be used directly for posts on Facebook or LinkedIn, and Twitter sub-headings.

Images are created as a basic variant in high quality and stored in the DAM system (see point 5.3). From this base image, variants are generated during delivery, for example on the website or in social media, according to the technical specifications of the target channel.

While not available in all systems, integrated functions for marketing planning, including the planning of content and the management of deadlines for entire campaigns are very helpful. This means that in this area, too, confusing and difficult-to-maintain Excel files are a thing of the past and everything runs under a uniform interface.

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The Product Information Management system

The management of product information is a challenging task in marketing communications. This involves information about manufacturers, specifications, variants, compatibility with other products, while lastly, prices are also not chiselled in stone, but are subject to frequent change.

These matters become even more complex when the information has to be provided in several languages, for different regions and according to local legal regulations.

A PIM system manages all relevant product information and links it to product groups, families and variants as well as to media such as images, videos, descriptions, and manuals.

Integrated functions for validating data, for example with regard to completeness and versioning, minimize erroneous data records and thereby ensure efficiency and security. Speaking of efficiency — options for the mass processing of product data and process-related automation are very helpful, especially within the context of the high data volumes usually involved.

A modern PIM system also enables the transfer of "legacy data", which has often existed for many years, into the world of modern multichannel marketing.

The Digital Asset Management system

Such a DAM solution is used to manage the "digital assets", a company's digital files— which consist mainly of images, videos, audio files, but also layouts, PDFs, texts and much more. Especially in retailing, enormous amounts of product images are generated. Just stop and think of the many different product variants, different products for different countries, product sets as well as, especially in fashion and lifestyle, images in different moods. All these images have to be managed in a version and legally compliant manner.

These images, however, are often scattered over different PCs or servers in the company. In many cases, it is not clear which is the latest version, while even more frequently the copyrights, licensing, and model or property rights are not known.

As a result, teams spend a lot of time tracking down and unearthing the right files. Various studies have attempted to quantify the time wasted in searching for files. Invariably they come to different conclusions — sometimes it is three weeks per year and employee, sometimes a value of a good 6.5 percent of working time is stated. Regardless of which survey you choose to believe, the waste of time is enormous.

In addition, there is a risk that rights may be infringed through the unknowingly incorrect use of content, which can lead to high costs and/or penalties. The risk of being "discovered" should not be underestimated. There are photo and picture agencies, for example, that deploy software capable of detecting unlawfully used visual material.

A powerful DAM system manages files of any format, stores the associated metadata along with rights information, and logs versioning as well as the use of the asset in question in the various communication channels and tools.

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Open for integration

State of the art software solutions must be able to keep pace with rapid change in all areas of the economy. In the past, programs were often developed into all-encompassing, all-purpose solutions. These programs were not only difficult to use but were often self-contained.

Today, applications that are focused on a specific purpose are in demand. Thanks to their technological openness, they can be flexibly integrated with other specialized solutions. This approach provides two major advantages:

• **Focus on the core competence**
Developers are able to focus on their core competencies. Plain and simple, this means that the digital asset management expert will hardly have extensively dealt with CRM or search engine optimization in order to develop corresponding functions.

• **Smooth integration into existing environments**
The openness also ensures that the new content platform can be integrated with the company's existing solutions — whether this is the ERP system, the CRM solution or applications for content translation or ad booking and management.

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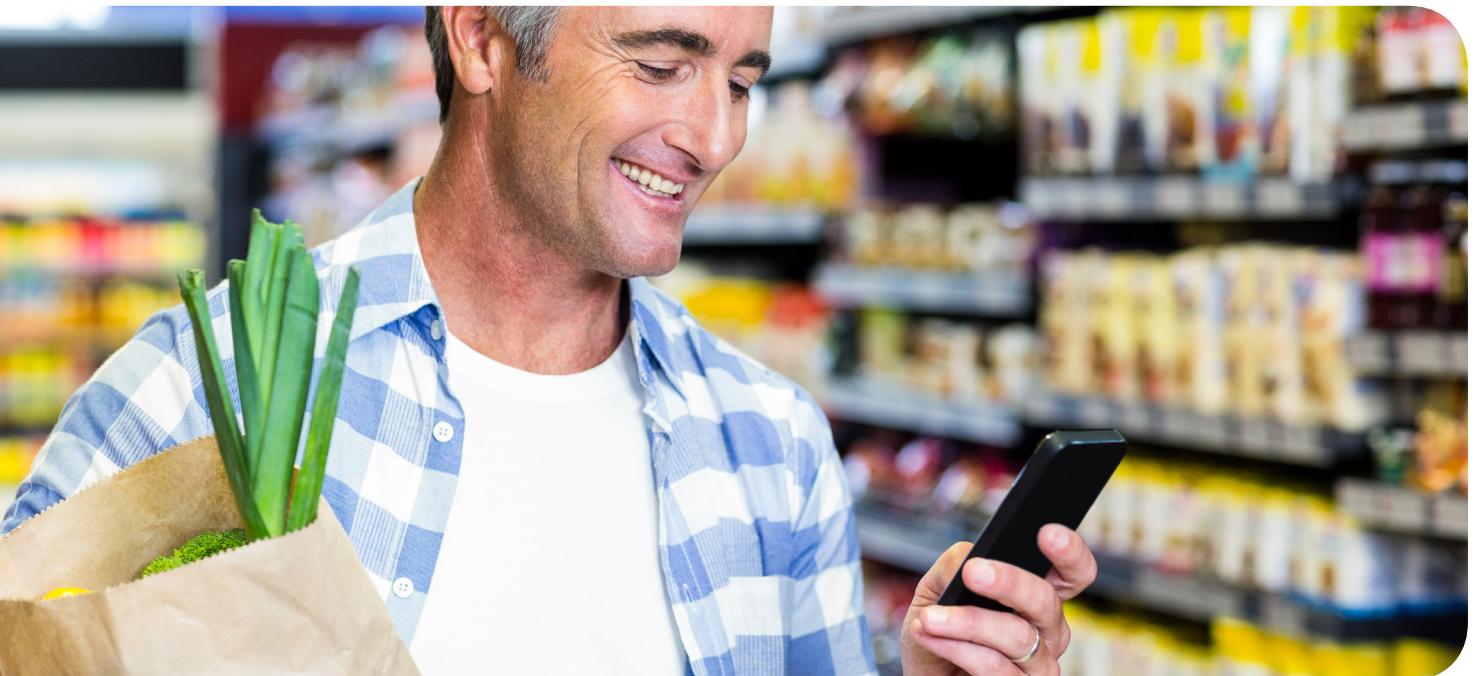
Conclusion

Retailers are increasingly realizing that modern customer communication via a large number of different channels calls for enormous amounts of content — and that they cannot cope with the situation by way of conventional programs. Software systems for omnichannel and channel-independent content management are the solution here.

These should also come with special functions for managing product information and media files. Technological openness for integration with other specialized applications is another important requirement in this context.

This creates a software environment from which the entire range of content tasks can be executed efficiently and securely.
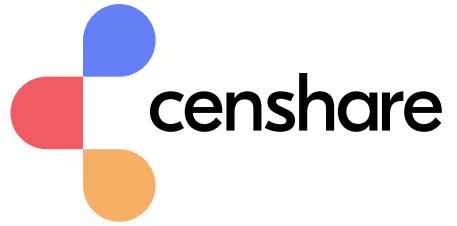
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About censhare

Our proven omnichannel content platform lets you master your content in any language, locally or globally, to provide a consistent omnichannel customer experience.

Clients like Allianz, Lands' End, Dyson, Christie's and hundreds more rely on censhare to deliver brand-accurate, up-to-date content, and make the most of every opportunity to reach the right customer at the right time.

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