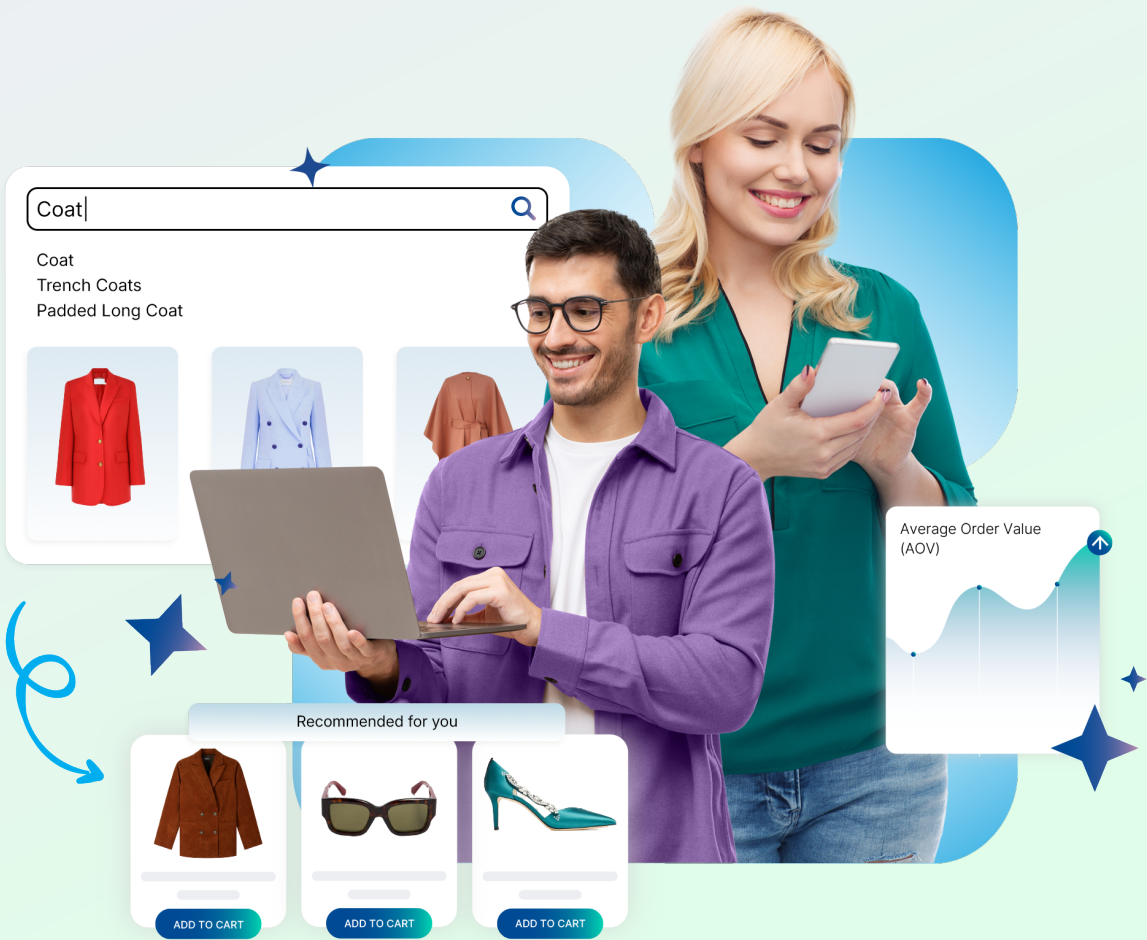


# Grow-25

Vol 4

The importance of persona/b

People are People



AIMAI

SIMPLY  
COMMERCE

mapp

SparkLayer

OPTIFI

Made

ecommpay



In today's digital world, shoppers expect more than just a convenient online experience, they expect to feel understood. As ecommerce evolves, the balance between intelligent automation and human creativity has never been more critical. The most successful product discovery experiences are built where people and AI meet, combining the empathy of human understanding with the precision of machine intelligence.

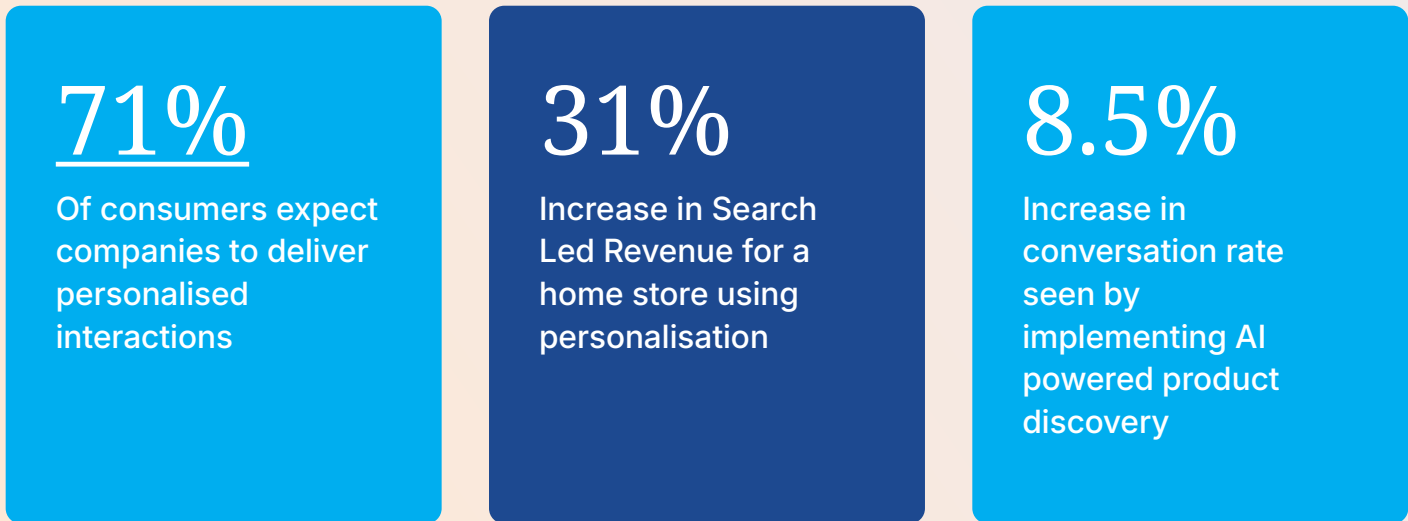
AI has transformed the way retailers deliver search, merchandising, and product recommendations. Advanced algorithms can analyse huge amounts of data in real time, uncovering shopper intent, predicting behavior, and optimising every interaction. AI ensures that each search result is fast, relevant, and personal, surfacing the right products to the right shopper at the right moment. From dynamic merchandising to automated recommendations, AI brings scalability and efficiency that no human team could achieve alone.

But technology alone isn't enough. The art of great product discovery lies in human insight, the intuition, storytelling, and brand understanding that can't be replicated by data alone. Merchandisers know when to spotlight seasonal trends, how to tell a brand's story through curated collections, and what emotional cues inspire a customer to buy. When people guide the strategy, and AI powers the execution, the result is a product discovery experience that feels deeply personal and distinctly human. Personalisation is at the heart of this partnership. AI can learn from every click, search, and purchase to continuously refine its understanding of shopper preferences. People, in turn, can use these insights to craft experiences that reflect their brand's unique identity - fine-tuning rules, adjusting displays, and ensuring the technology always serves the brand vision.

A crucial part of creating meaningful personalisation is continuous optimisation and that's where A/B testing comes in. Athos enables merchandisers to test, measure, and refine every element of the product discovery experience, from search algorithms and recommendation strategies to merchandising layouts and messaging. By running controlled experiments, brands can see exactly how different configurations impact engagement and conversions. But the real power of A/B testing lies in its ability to blend human curiosity with AI-driven insight. Data reveals what works best statistically, while merchandisers interpret why it works, identifying trends, validating creative decisions, and uncovering opportunities for deeper personalisation. This iterative process ensures every shopper interaction evolves over time, becoming smarter, more intuitive, and more aligned with the brand's vision.

We know that the future of ecommerce isn't just about smarter machines, it's about smarter collaboration between people and technology. When AI amplifies human creativity, and people guide AI with empathy and purpose, brands can deliver shopping experiences that truly connect.

## Key stats

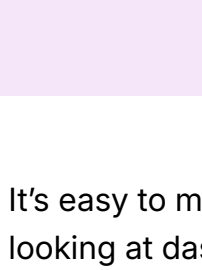


**Catherine Foot**  
Athos Commerce





# You're Testing, but Are You Optimising? Pricing needs Optimisation



**Dan Franks**

Optifi

It's easy to misread patterns in data and wrongly guess what caused them: especially when looking at dashboards, tables, or charts. Many ecommerce brands and agencies have turned to A/B testing as a tool for making more informed, evidence-based decisions. This is a commendable step toward disciplined, data-informed growth and learning. Everyone should be A/B testing, under expert guidance. As great as it is, it is not well suited to some challenges. One such challenge is identifying the most profitable prices for products, which is on a sliding scale. Pricing requires ongoing adaptation and strategic exploration, not just hypothesis testing. And A/B testing is not optimization - it's hypothesis testing.

True optimization doesn't just compare options: it searches systematically for what works the very best. For example, it doesn't just test the current price against a guessed price to see which gives the best profit. It has a mechanism for finding the very best price to give you the very best profit. Some A/B testing practitioners may object here and claim that no learnings can be made from optimization. This is correct only of a naively implemented optimization, because without careful attention it lacks the attribution from which A/B tests benefit. But when not naively implemented - using tools from causal inference of which randomization is just one - optimization can be a tool for both learning and for finding the very best prices to give profit. With 'causal' optimization you get the most learning: full visibility on the profit-price curve, all attributed to the price.

## 1. Why We Need to Optimise (and test): The Human Side of Decision-Making

Ecommerce teams - founders, marketers, merchandisers - make decisions under pressure, every day. Pricing, in particular, is often driven by cost-plus, competitor copying, or guesswork rather than strategy. It's understandable: we're human, and we're busy. We need control, clarity, and fast wins. We're drawn to what feels right, not necessarily what is best.

But this creates a significant hidden tax that limits growth, and drives down profits, not to mention return on ad spend (ROAS). Some products are priced too low, others too high, and growth is stunted. The problem is, brands often don't realise that this is such a big pain point; it's not something they think about. That's the human trap: we trust our instincts, and our instincts are limited when it comes to decisions that are complex and should be data informed.

## 2. Why A/B Testing Isn't Optimization

Optimization is about finding the best possible outcome, the highest or lowest value of what matters. Picture a landscape of hills and mountains. The real goal is the tallest peak. But A/B testing does not map that whole landscape. Its role is not to explore. It is to check whether a specific change you have reasoned about actually works.

To run a valid A/B test, you need a theory-driven hypothesis, not a random idea. For example: "\$55.75 will be more profitable because an earlier price elasticity analysis suggested demand would still hold at that higher price." (Careful here, standard elasticity calculations are confounded by item quality & desirability.) The A/B test then checks whether switching from your current price to \$55.75 produces a statistically significant difference and whether that difference is big enough to matter. To further improve, you need to re-model pricing. It's the modelling there that's doing the main brunt of the optimisation, not the A/B test. Its core value is correct attribution. If done properly, you know the result came from the price change and not something else. That is powerful because humans specialise in seeing patterns that are not real.

## 3. What Optimization Looks Like, and Why it Helps with Pricing

Optimization is not about guessing or simply comparing a few price points. It is a structured process that actively searches for the best possible price by running small-scale tests, learning from the results, and deciding the best thing to test next. Brands are always needing to move fast and make the best decisions possible, and real optimization allows both of these things to happen.

Here's how it works: it starts with an elasticity calculation based on your current product pricing. That gives a base price-profit curve and suggests what prices we should test next. Based on how each price performs, it updates its understanding of the relationship between price and profit. Importantly this typically looks at profit, not just conversion rate, because a higher conversion rate might lead to a lower profit (because margins are squeezed too much). It then uses that information to focus future tests on the price ranges most likely to perform even better. Over time, it narrows in on the price that delivers the highest profit. Once enough evidence is gathered, it sets that price as the new default.

This is different from A/B testing, which compares one or more human-defined fixed options and stops. Optimization is an active, adaptive process that uses data to learn and improve as it runs. It doesn't just tell you whether one price is better than another, it finds the pricing sweet spot.

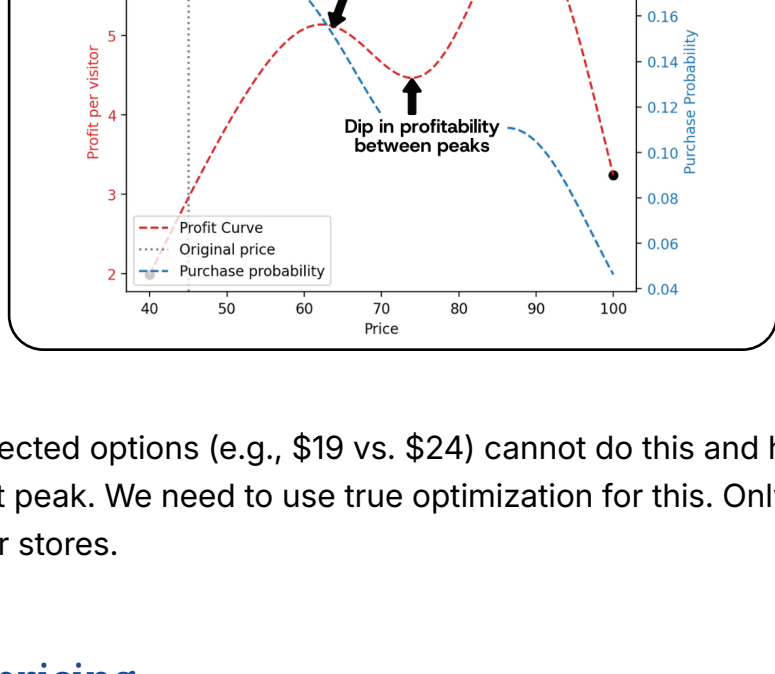
And the amount of evidence it needs is much lower than A/B testing. There are a number of reasons for this, but one is that it learns from nearby prices: if we test \$110 that tells us at least something about \$120 dollars. A/B tests typically operate as if \$110 dollars told us nothing, and you start all over again at \$120. But this more holistic learning is all part of the optimization approach.

Some readers might ask whether optimization can actually show what caused the outcome. That is, that the outcome can be attributed solely to the price. That's a strength of A/B testing - it gives you a clear answer about which version performed better, based on randomised comparison. That would be a valid concern if optimization were applied in a naive way. But it doesn't have to be. A/B testing is a subset of a broader field of 'causal inference' that goes beyond randomisation alone. When designed properly, optimization methods can also uncover attribution by using carefully structured experiments and models based on a wider set of methods of 'causal inference'. The technical details go beyond this article, but the key point is this: optimization can be both adaptive and causal. You don't have to choose between finding the best outcome and knowing why it worked. In fact, with optimization you get more information (see the price-profit curves below).

## 4. Application to Pricing

Pricing is one of the highest-impact areas for ecommerce brands, and is a perfect candidate for true optimization. It's a key driver of profit and growth, and heavily linked to return on ad spend. Yet it's often overlooked.

The optimization goal here is to find the pricing sweet spot: the point where profit is at its very highest. This isn't just about conversion rate, it's also about margin, and balancing the two for each product in each market. Prices can vary smoothly along a scale. So what we need is to learn the relationship curve between price and profit for each product, so that we can find the sweet-spots: the prices at which profit is highest. In the figure below, you can see an example of the relationship between price and profit. The blue line is the conversion rate and the red line is our outcome of interest: profit. We don't know what these curves look like, but they exist. The idea is to discover them because, if we do know the profitability curve, then we can find the optimal price: it's right there at the highest peak.



## 5.1 A/B testing pricing

A/B testing is therefore a poor fit for pricing. Most ecommerce stores sell many products across many markets, but even if we focus on just one product in one market, the problems should already be clear.

Pricing sits on a sliding scale, so we first have to choose which prices to test. Let's say we pick 10 price points. That already limits us, because 10 prices won't give full coverage of the range, and the best price probably isn't even in the set. But let's say we go with it.

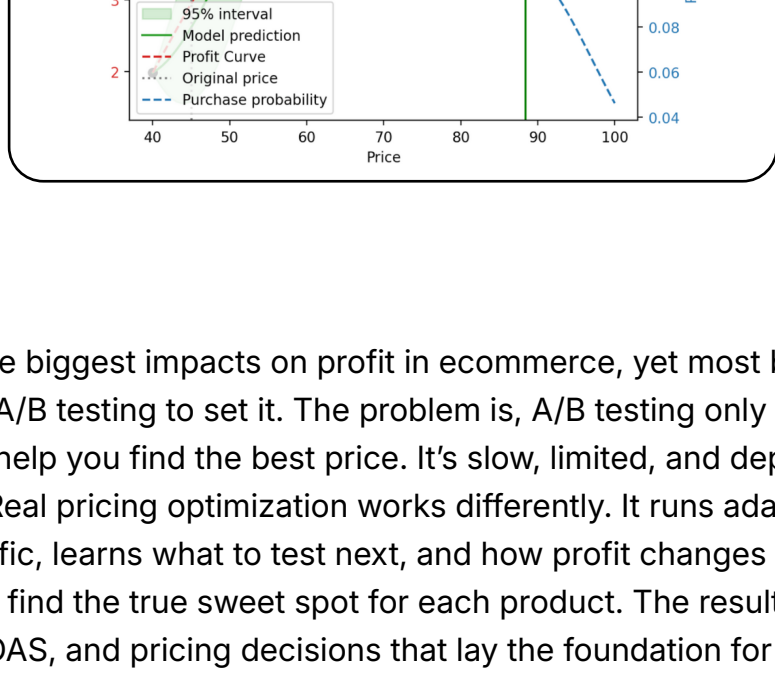
We have 10 prices to test. Now, if you don't correct for multiple comparisons (not sure what that means? then you're not doing it), with standard assumptions there's about a 40% chance you'll end up with a false win: a price that looks more profitable but is not. That can lead to confident but wrong decisions, which cost you profit. So what if you do correct for multiple comparisons? Then each test takes longer and needs even more data each time. You'll be waiting a very long time, just to finish testing those 10 prices. And after all that the most frustrating thing is this: the best price almost certainly was not any of the original 10 prices you randomly picked to test. A/B testing is great, but it is poorly suited to pricing. You need to know the best price to test next.

## 5.2 Optimising pricing

To truly optimise, experimentation needs to be adaptive: it should learn as it goes, rather than just testing one idea after another. But it still needs to show attribution, like an A/B test does, so we can be confident that the results are actually due to pricing. That's where we use 'Bayesian causal machine learning' to define price elasticity and then run adaptive experiments. Which is jargon to say we have an optimization approach that automatically finds the pricing sweet spot, while being fast yet also scientifically and statistically valid like an A/B test. We first run causal elasticity analyses on a store's current data, followed by optimal small-scale experiments.

We've already seen a version of the figure below. As a reminder, the red line shows the real - but unknown - relationship between price and profit per customer that we want to know. The black dots show the price points that the optimization algorithm has tested during the experiment. Based on those results, the green line represents what the algorithm has learned about how profit changes with price. You can see it has quickly and accurately learned the full price-profit curve and identified the optimal price, right at the peak of the green and the red line. The original price was \$45, but the algorithm discovered that \$88 delivers the highest profit. This process runs automatically for every product in your catalogue, including new products as they're added, or new markets as they're opened.

Price-profit curves can take many different shapes. The example below has appeared across several brands and shows why guessing or nudging prices up or down often misses the mark. In this case, profit drops as the price increases, until it suddenly rises again at a much higher price point. This shows how pricing is closely linked to product positioning. A well-designed optimization algorithm doesn't just settle for an incremental improvement. It learns and finds the higher profit peak.



## 6. Conclusion

Pricing has one of the biggest impacts on profit in ecommerce, yet most brands still rely on gut instinct or basic A/B testing to set it. The problem is, A/B testing only compares a few fixed options and doesn't help you find the best price. It's slow, limited, and depends on guessing which prices to try. Real pricing optimization works differently. It runs adaptive experiments on small portions of traffic, learns what to test next, and how profit changes across a range of prices. It uses this to find the true sweet spot for each product. The result is higher profit margins, stronger ROAS, and pricing decisions that lay the foundation for further growth. For brands operating at scale, this means unlocking hidden revenue across your entire catalogue.

**\$16.9** bn/year

Estimated revenue lost across Shopify ecosystem due to suboptimal pricing

**28%**

Average profit uplift with Optifi price optimization

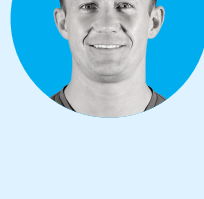
**1 in 4**

If you individually test 10 different prices using a simple A/B tool, the chance you'll pick the wrong winner





# From Talent to Teams: Human- Centric Commerce in a Product-Obsessed Era



**James Hodges**  
Simply Commerce

Over the past five years, we've watched the way digital commerce teams operate shift at speed. What once revolved around fixed-scope projects and neatly defined job titles now looks very different. Today, businesses want continuous value, not one-off deliverables. Teams aren't just shipping code, they're owning outcomes. And the people at the heart of it all? They've had to adapt fast.

## From Project to Product

The biggest shift in how delivery teams operate? The move from project-based working to product-led ownership.

This isn't just a buzzword switch. It's a wholesale redefinition of how businesses think about delivery. Instead of building against a fixed scope and disbanding post-launch, today's teams are set up to continuously evolve a specific product; whether that's a checkout journey, mobile app, or back-office tool.

Product-led teams are long-lived and cross-functional, typically including product owners, front-end and full-stack engineers, QA, DevOps, and platform engineers. They're empowered to act, not just implement. And they measure success not by deadlines or budget compliance, but by KPIs that matter: user adoption, NPS, and service resilience.

This model has unlocked faster iteration, reduced bottlenecks, and deeper accountability across delivery. With less reliance on handoffs between siloed departments, teams move quicker and with more clarity on what "good" looks like.

## Demand Shifts: Front-End and Full-Stack on the Rise

As monolithic back-end platforms give way to API-first architectures, there's been a clear and sustained shift in hiring demand: front-end and full-stack engineers are now front and centre.

Where back-end specialists once dominated the hiring landscape, today's market prioritises developers who can work across the stack, build interface-rich experiences, and integrate cleanly with modular services.

Headless commerce and composable front-end tooling have accelerated this trend. Frameworks like React and Vue sit at the heart of most digital commerce roadmaps, while newer options like Astro and Svelte continue to gain traction. Candidates who can navigate these frameworks confidently, especially when paired with an understanding of design systems and performance at scale, are in high demand.

In our own vacancy data, front-end and full-stack roles now consistently outnumber purely back-end positions. Employers want engineers who can contribute vertically - across UX, logic and API - rather than horizontally within a single layer.

## Middle Management: Thinner and Flatter

Team structure isn't just changing at the delivery layer. The middle of the org chart is getting a shake-up too.

In the last 12 months alone, major enterprises like Amazon, Tesco, and Sainsbury's have all reduced middle management layers as part of wider cost-saving and efficiency drives. Google and Microsoft have done the same, citing the need for wider spans of control and faster decision-making.

Passing responsibility to senior engineers and team leads isn't just a budget fix either. It also creates leaner delivery paths. With fewer approval gates, squads can respond more quickly to changing priorities and user feedback.

AI has played a role here, too. As teams adopt intelligent agents to triage tickets, raise PRs, or even automate reporting, the need for manual coordination and oversight declines. The middle layer is no longer the only bridge between the team and its goals.

That said, this isn't about removing leadership. It's about shifting it closer to the work, with tech leads taking on expanded roles as mentors, decision-makers, and delivery enablers.

## Salary Trends: Flat Lines and Outliers

Across the board, tech salaries have seen relative stagnation over the past two years. But within that flat trend are clear outliers - roles where demand continues to outstrip supply.

In particular, we've seen sustained growth in salaries for:

- **Platform Engineers** – now on Hays' list of top 10 tech salary increases, with a London median of £80,000.
- **Shopify Engineers** – with lead roles now regularly offered at £85,000+.
- **T-shaped Engineers** – those who can flex across the stack, adapt to different delivery environments, and contribute to product decisions.

These roles represent where the market is moving - towards adaptability, depth across tools, and closer alignment with business goals.

## Hybrid, Face Time and the Return-to-Office Debate

The WFH honeymoon is over, at least for some.

In 2025, workplace flexibility remains a hot topic, particularly among larger retail brands and eCommerce businesses.

We've seen a notable return-to-office push from names like M&S, Boots, Morrisons, Frasers Group, and Amazon. The reasoning is typically framed around culture, collaboration, and productivity.

At the same time, many smaller vendors, agencies and mid-sized businesses are holding steady with hybrid models. There's a general recognition that for certain teams, a degree of in-person interaction adds value, whether it's onboarding, whiteboarding, or culture-building.

The challenge now is consistency. While some companies are making office attendance mandatory, others are taking a softer approach, encouraging 'face time' without enforcing strict rules. Either way, the direction of travel is clear: fully remote may no longer be the default.

That raises difficult questions for employers. What about staff who live far from hubs? How do you reconcile hybrid flexibility with productivity targets? Over the next 12 months, we expect to see clearer frameworks emerge, and more employers seeking people who can adapt to a blended model of work.

## What This All Means for Talent Strategy

Whether you're scaling a product team or hiring into an existing platform squad, the signals are consistent:

- **Versatility wins** – T-shaped engineers who can flex across disciplines are outpacing single-layer specialists.
- **Product thinking is essential** – Teams need people who understand user outcomes, not just tickets.
- **Front-end fluency is non-negotiable** – With more innovation happening at the interface layer, those closest to the user are in highest demand.
- **AI isn't replacing teams, but it's redefining them** – Engineers who can work alongside agents, rather than compete with them, will have the edge.
- **Leadership is evolving** – Senior engineers with soft skills and delivery ownership are increasingly valuable in flat, fast-moving orgs.

At Simply Commerce, we see these shifts playing out in real time. Our clients are building product-led teams, hiring with more precision, and prioritising people who can adapt to changing structures and technologies.

## Final Word

The transformation of technology teams isn't coming. It's already here. What used to be managed by Gantt charts and release gates is now driven by live data, cross-functional squads, and a tighter loop between build and user.

For hiring managers, that means investing in adaptable talent. For candidates, it means staying sharp, staying curious, and embracing new delivery models.

And for those of us watching it unfold? It's a fascinating time to be in the people business.

## About Simply Commerce

*Simply Commerce is a specialist digital commerce recruitment partner, trusted by some of the most ambitious brands and consultancies across the UK and Europe. We connect highly skilled contract and permanent talent with organisations leading the way in eCommerce, digital transformation, and retail innovation. Our deep sector knowledge, agile delivery model, and human-first approach enable us to build high-performing teams that power the future of digital commerce.*

To learn more, visit [www.simply-commerce.co.uk](https://www.simply-commerce.co.uk)

## Key stats

1.2:1

CV:Interview ratio

1:1

Retained Job:  
Placement ratio



# Quietly, Everything Is Changing



**Jonathan Nichols**  
AIMAI

At AIMA, we help organisations adopt AI tools—not as shiny novelties, but as practical answers to everyday work. And in sectors like e-commerce—where speed, accuracy, and customer experience are non-negotiable—we’re seeing this shift happen in real time.

The change isn’t loud, but it’s everywhere. The frontline is getting smarter, more confident, and more self-directed. The tools aren’t clunky systems to “roll out.” They’re sharp, intuitive, and surprisingly personal. The transformation isn’t being pushed from the top. It’s rising from the ground.

This article explores the cultural and operational shift we’re seeing in businesses where AI is being used well—from smarter individuals, to faster adoption, to the rising need for alignment, and the risk of chaos without it.

We’re not making predictions. We’re describing what’s already happening—and what leaders need to do next.

## Finally—Tools That Help, Not Hinder

For years, many digital tools felt like overhead—clunky, rigid, and rarely aligned with how people actually work. Entire roles existed just to “manage the tool.”

That’s not the case anymore.

Today’s tools, especially AI-powered ones, are task-specific, context-aware, and usable straight out of the box. We’re seeing real uptake in areas like merchandising, search, campaign management, and customer service—where the job isn’t to learn software, it’s to make decisions quickly and act on them.

When tools support the natural flow of work instead of interrupting it, people adopt them without being asked. We’ve watched someone start using an AI tool mid-meeting simply because it solved something there and then.

This isn’t “digital transformation.” It’s just **good tools doing their job. And that’s exactly why it’s spreading.**

## When the Tool Works for Me, I Work for You

In the old world, tools were designed to benefit the organisation—streamlining reporting, standardising processes, or feeding back to management. Users had to accept friction for the greater good.

Now, the tools work in reverse: **the user benefits first. And that’s flipping the dynamic.**

We’ve seen people light up when a tool cuts through something tedious or gives them better output in minutes. There’s no training needed, no mandate—just usefulness. In retail or e-commerce settings, this can mean auto-generating product descriptions, summarising buyer reviews, or making pricing suggestions on the fly.

When tools deliver immediate personal value, adoption becomes natural. Business value follows—but as a by-product, not the incentive.

It’s a fundamental shift: transformation from the inside out.

## When Everyone Moves Fast—But Not Together

This level of adoption isn’t just happening in digital or innovation teams anymore. We’re seeing AI spread across departments—marketing, logistics, finance, support—and it’s happening fast.

But accessibility brings its own challenge.

Because the tools are easy—and often a bit addictive—people use them creatively, often without alignment. They automate what matters to them. That can be powerful in isolation, but chaotic in aggregate.

We’ve seen teams solving the same problem in parallel. We’ve seen customer journeys being redesigned from different angles at once. Well-meaning automation, duplicated workflows, fragmented experiences—especially dangerous in sectors like e-commerce where consistency matters.

This isn’t a technology issue. It’s a coordination one.

**Empowerment without alignment doesn’t create agility - it creates noise.** And without the right leadership posture, all that energy can start pulling the organisation apart.

## The Smartest Ideas Aren’t Coming From the Top

AI is reshaping where decisions get made.

Frontline teams—those closest to customers, products, and operations—now have tools that give them real-time insight, recommendations, and optimisation options. Whether it’s a service rep using AI to resolve issues faster, or a junior marketer generating 10 campaign ideas in a morning, we’re seeing strategic thinking emerge from the edge.

This doesn’t remove the need for leadership—but it does shift how value is created.

We used to assume intelligence lived at the centre, and execution lived at the edge. **Now the edges are producing their own intelligence—and doing it fast.** In industries like e-commerce, where reaction time is everything, this decentralised thinking is a competitive advantage.

But only if leadership recognises the shift—and responds accordingly.

## Leadership's New Job: Keep the Smart Stuff Connected

Leadership still matters—arguably more than ever. But the way alignment happens is changing.

In the past, structure enforced clarity. Now, the burden is on leaders to create shared understanding in a much more dynamic, two-way environment.

Teams are moving fast. They’re making smart decisions locally. And they expect to be trusted to do so. But without clarity of context and direction, even smart decisions can diverge.

We’ve seen organisations thrive when leaders stay close to where intelligence is forming—not to override it, but to connect it. To keep feedback loops open. To join the dots between smart efforts happening in different corners of the business.

This isn’t about loosening control. **It’s about shifting from command to cohesion.**

## A Smarter Workforce Doesn’t Mean a Wiser One

AI tools are raising the baseline of capability. Fast.

We’ve seen first-hand how people who adopt early become more decisive, more effective, and more creative. The uplift is real—and it sticks, even if the tools stay the same. In e-commerce, this might mean sharper promotional decisions, more personalised content, or faster experimentation on live campaigns.

But while intelligence is rising at the individual level, wisdom still depends on the group.

We’ve seen rooms full of capable, well-equipped people talking past each other—each using tools brilliantly, but working from different assumptions. Shared understanding gets lost in the speed.

That’s the tension. Smarter people don’t automatically make for wiser teams.

To avoid fragmentation, organisations still need space for reflection, alignment, and shared sense-making. AI doesn’t do that for you. **That’s still cultural—and it’s still human.**

## This Isn’t About Technology Anymore—It’s About Culture

This moment isn’t just about tools—it’s about culture.

People are more capable, more motivated, and more self-directed. In fast-paced environments like e-commerce, that’s a huge asset. But it also means the structure and leadership around them need to adapt—quickly.

**The risk isn’t resistance anymore. It’s divergence.**

And the opportunity isn’t just efficiency—it’s cohesion.

Organisations that acknowledge this shift, and act with intention, will thrive. Those that ignore it may end up with pockets of brilliance, but a fractured whole.

The next phase won’t be defined by what the tools can do. It’ll be defined by how well we align the people using them.

## Key stats

78%

Of Leaders say culture and leadership, not technology, determine AI success.

4x Faster

Employees using AI make faster, better decisions often independently.

1 in 3

Organisations report duplication or risk from uncoordinated AI use.





# MADE Worldwide provides Cost Reduction Strategies for SME Retailers



Chris Wiggins

MADE Worldwide

Unsurprisingly the world is focused on Sales, but it's often much, much harder to achieve a 10% increase in your sales than a 10% reduction in the cost of ALL your sales. And, if you reduce your costs, that benefit will apply to both your existing sales volumes AND your future increased sales volumes. We therefore passionately believe in building solid Cost Reduction foundations and we hope what follows gives you some food for thought!

## Unlock Hidden Profits.

We use our extensive experience across Supply Chain, Procurement & Merchandising to investigate existing operations and deploy better strategic solutions to deliver savings and efficiency gains.

## Plan in. Cost out.

We provide the foundations for sustainable success.

## The Multiplying Effect

Our client, Brand “M” are content creators and a global retail brand of premium licensed products.

Their business challenge was that their product sourcing and manufacturing and associated operational costs were too high to deliver competitive margins to grow the retail business through Wholesale and Franchise channels.

MADE reimagined and rebuilt their processes and methodologies from product development to stock efficiency.

As of January 2025, the landed costs on products have reduced by as much as 60%, net margin has increased by over 15%, new retail outlets have opened in major international markets and new B2B partnerships have been established with leading global entertainment brands.

Brand “M” is now well set up for and experiencing strong sales growth which is now **underpinned by reduced costs, embedded efficiencies and sustainable practices.**

We take pride from the proof of our philosophy that the gains have been multiplied by extracting improvement throughout the operational spectrum of the business. The sum is greater than the parts.

## Made

### Case study

To examine a real-world example of the strategy in action, we'll look at Brand “M's” top selling product by volume, the Lenticular Postcard range.

Prior to 2024 annual sales reached approximately 150,000 units across 15 sku's. The Postcards were purchased from a UK based Publishing company, specialising in cards and other stationery. The price of £0.56 per unit was based on a committed volume of 150,000, called off as required.

MADE's strategy combined the following steps:

- Retail is detail - we conducted a full 360 review of the product & channel performance.
- Reengineered the design and specification of the Product for greater cost optimisation.
- Investigated the incumbent supplier, uncovering that the Postcards were sourced from suppliers under a print management model, not manufactured in house.
- Globally sourced, benchmarked and tendered for the future supply of the Postcards.
- Decoupled the sourcing of Envelopes, Lenticular Stickers and Card Printing and Fulfilment to separated specialist suppliers
- Ultimately appointed and contracted 3 new Printers, 1 Lenticular Sticker and 1 Envelope supplier in China \*(suppliers that MADE has previously audited and worked with for many years).
- Optimised order volumes and cycles aligned to improved forecasting.

These actions delivered a cost reduction of 53% to £0.26 based on a UK Landed Cost comparison. Furthermore, the MOQ was reduced from 150,000 to just 10,000!!!

This significant cost reduction enabled successful sales of the product into wholesale channels of 450,00, generating £553,000 additional revenue and £414,000 additional net margin in 2024. In 2025 the sales volumes are continuing to grow.

The Table below summaries the overall commercial position:

|                      |                            | BEFORE   | AFTER    | VAR      |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| OWN CHANNEL          | RRP                        | £2.95    | £2.95    |          |
|                      | SUPPLIER COST              | £0.56    | £0.26    | -£0.30   |
|                      | ROYALTY (12% NET REV)      | £0.30    | £0.30    |          |
|                      | COST PRICE                 | £0.86    | £0.56    |          |
|                      | MARGIN PER UNIT            | £1.60    | £1.90    |          |
|                      | MARGIN                     | 65.2%    | 77.4%    | 12.2%    |
|                      | VOLUME                     | 150000   | 150000   |          |
|                      | NET REV                    | £368,750 | £368,750 |          |
| WHOLESALE/ FRANCHISE | W/SALE PRICE (50% NET MGN) | £1.23    | £1.23    |          |
|                      | ROYALTY (12%)              | £0.15    | £0.15    |          |
|                      | COST PRICE                 | £0.71    | £0.41    |          |
|                      | MARGIN PER UNIT            | £0.52    | £0.82    |          |
|                      | MARGIN                     | 42.4%    | 66.8%    |          |
|                      | W/SALE VOL                 | 0        | 450000   |          |
|                      | W/SALE REV                 | £0.00    | £553,125 |          |
|                      | TOTAL NET REV              | £368,750 | £921,875 | £553,125 |
|                      | TOTAL MARGIN               | £240,500 | £655,250 | £414,750 |
|                      | BLENDED MARGIN %           | 65.2%    | 71.1%    | 5.9%     |

### Advantages

The advantages of this outcome are several-fold and far exceed the headline grabbing sales and margin benefits:

- Direct control of production with specialist suppliers and contingency supply options secured on roster
- Improved quality and motion of the feature lenticular element, using a higher resolution lens
- Product development of new Lenticular products - not possible under the old regime
- Metallic Gold envelope perfectly pantone matched to Gold elements of Postcard design
- Lower MOQ allows for a more flexible, tactical and commercially beneficial order cycle
- Priced in such a way that orders can be a mixture of up to 48 versions, at varying quantities (not possible before)
- Minimal set up costs for introducing new designs as part of range refresh planning - and the ability to offer commissioned “exclusive designs” to Wholesalers at no extra cost (extremely popular)!
- Ensured product compliance in terms of correct inks, FSC materials, reduced plastics - essential to comply with multinational wholesalers
- Fulfilment of B2B orders direct from China rather than via UK (old model), leading to vastly reduced lead times

**The picture we are hoping to paint here is that Cost Reduction and Optimisation is best delivered from a holistic, planned approach. In doing so this enables many incremental gains to build towards a substantial overall Cost Reduction, which in turn empowers Sales and enables more strategic Planning, which fuels increased volumes and thus greater buying power which ultimately reduces costs further! We call this phenomenon the Multiplying Effect.**

To put this another way, had we only targeted the low-hanging fruit of improved buying, there were potentially small gains to be made, we'd estimate up to 10% savings. That would have delivered a welcome boost to the margin position but would not have achieved the strategic requirement of delivering a Product capable of offering Wholesale Partners a compelling commercial opportunity at a highly competitive price point. This was the key objective since this has unlocked an initial 3x increase in volume of sales which is now driving the improved buying power and the optimised forecasting and ordering as well as range optimisation and new design “collections” to be introduced. It's the definition of a win-win.

Despite delivering many successes like this, we still find, from our perspective, that most SME Retailers consistently underestimate and undervalue the Cost Reduction opportunities available to them, such is the world's obsession with Sales, Sales and more Sales!!!

### Key stats

30 Years

Retail experience of each partner you can tap into

72 Hours

How quickly we can identify where there are smart savings in your business

8-12x

Typical ROI our clients see in year 1 (and no further costs in year 2!)





# The Why Behind The Buy: Why Agentic Search Is Changing Fashion Forever



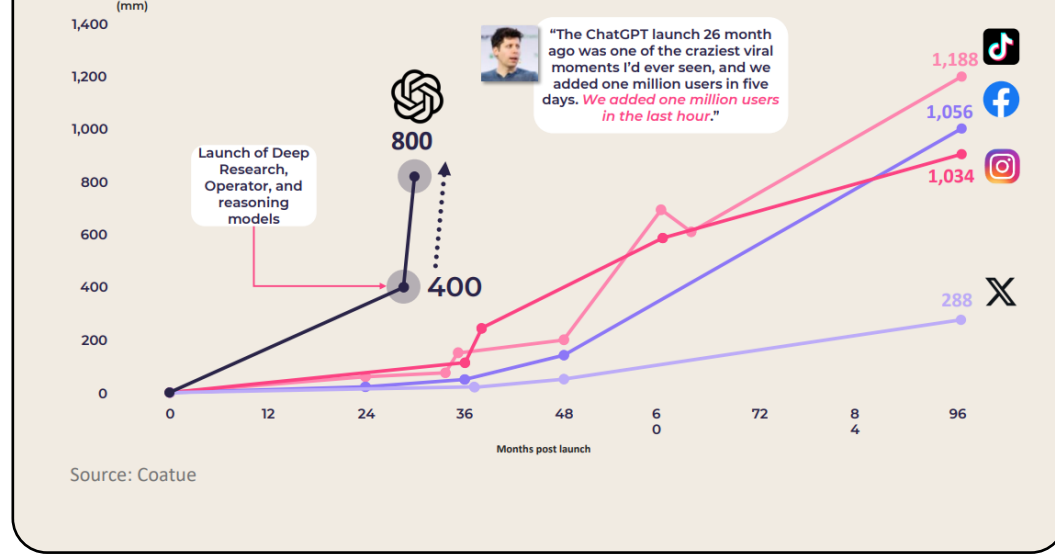
**Josh Beale**  
Mapp Digital

*“Fashion is not just about products, it is about people, their intent, their missions, and their moments.”*

Over the past decade, fashion has reinvented itself repeatedly. Fast fashion transformed the speed of supply chains. Marketplaces reshaped consumer choice. Social commerce blurred the line between inspiration and transaction.

But the most profound change is happening right now. Consumers are no longer simply browsing or scrolling, they are directing. They are telling technology exactly what they want, in their own words, and expecting it to deliver.

This is the phenomenal rise of agentic search. Over 800M active weekly users are now using ChatGPT. This is faster growth than user adoption on any technology phenomena over the last 20 years, including social networks.



## The Human at the Centre

Commerce has always been human. Developers, merchandisers, and marketers work tirelessly to bring products to life online. Consumers, in turn, shop with intent, emotion, and context.

Yet the balance is shifting. Look at how a shopper now engages with Zara, ASOS or Zalando. They do not want to scroll through hundreds of blazers. They want to ask: *“Show me something I can wear to the office that also works for after-work drinks.”*

This shift from browsing to mission-led discovery is redefining the relationship between humans and machines in fashion.

## Beyond Browsing: Product Data Meets Intent

Fashion is never just about a garment. A “blue shirt” is not just fabric, it is “the shirt that works for a wedding in Italy” or “the shirt that makes me confident in a job interview.”

Traditional ecommerce has been built around catalogues. But today, that catalogue must be enriched with layered product data: fit, fabric composition, sustainability credentials, styling potential, and occasion.

The real breakthrough comes when this data is connected to real-time consumer intent and history:

- What is the shopper looking for right now?
- What have they bought before?
- What have they returned previously, and why?
- What other brands have they shopped and purchased with previously?

This is where fashion-specific artificial intelligence comes into its own. Unlike other industries, fashion suffers from persistently high return rates. Online apparel returns across Europe average between 30 and 40 per cent. A dress may be sent back not because of poor quality, but because the sizing runs small, the colour differs from the online photo, or the cut does not suit the shopper’s body shape. Each return contains a story, a data point about how human expectations met reality and fell short.

By using product metadata, real-time intent signals, and returns intelligence, agentic search does not simply match shoppers to products. It matches them to the right products for them, at the right time, with the greatest chance of satisfaction.

## Where Fashion Falls Short Today

The truth is most digital fashion experiences do not speak fluent customer. The disconnect is clear:

- **AI, SEO and SEM:** Shoppers are not searching “blue V-neck knit.” They are asking for “something fresh for a spring wedding.” Yet most search engines and ad strategies are still built around product-centric keywords.
- **Landing Experience:** Consumers arrive speaking in moods, missions, and style cues. Landing pages answer with static grids and uninspired layouts. The spark of discovery dies.
- **Search and Merch:** Even when shoppers find your site, search engines often cannot deliver. Built for SKUs and rigid categories, they miss the nuance of “I want a jacket that works for both my commute and a night out.”
- **Recommendations:** Product suggestions are mechanical, based on “bought this, viewed that.” They fail to understand intent, style, or the reasons behind previous returns. The journey stalls.
- **Post-purchase and Loyalty:** Retailers still talk in RFM segments: “frequent shopper,” “lapsed buyer.” Consumers think in experiences: “festival season,” “back-to-office wardrobe,” “power dressing.” No wonder emails go unopened.

These gaps show why fashion is ripe for an agentic model. Shoppers are speaking in human missions; most systems are still answering in SKU logic.

## Why This Matters for Fashion Leaders

*“When a consumer shares intent, they are handing you trust. Brands cannot afford to waste it.”*

When a shopper says, “I need a sustainable dress under £200 that suits my body shape,” they are offering both data and trust. They are signalling their mission. If you fail to deliver, you do not just lose the sale, you lose credibility.

This requires a fundamental rethink of product enrichment. It is no longer enough to tag by size, colour, and price. Instead, the catalogue must reflect:

- Past return reasons such as “runs small”, “sheer fabric” or “doesn’t suit body shape”
- Customer missions, whether “summer party dress” or “work-appropriate midi”.
- Personal context, including location, seasonality, and lifestyle.

Done well, this transforms the economics of fashion retail. Brands reduce costly returns, increase satisfaction, and turn intent into loyalty. Reducing returns even by 10 per cent can significantly improve margins and free up inventory for other shoppers.

## Machines and Humans: Better Together

There is a persistent myth that artificial intelligence will replace human roles. In fashion, the opposite is true.

- Machines excel at scale: tagging millions of products, analysing purchase and return histories, and surfacing intent-driven matches instantly.
- Humans excel at creativity: building aspiration, curating looks, and telling the brand story.

Agentic tools free teams from repetitive, error-prone work such as categorising returns or tagging product features. Instead, humans can focus on brand storytelling, inspiration, and service.

## Shifts in Buying Psychology

Consumers now expect speed, relevance, and transparency.

- **71 per cent of shoppers** report feeling overwhelmed by product choice (Deloitte, 2024).
- **73 per cent of consumers** say they expect brands to understand their unique needs and contexts (Gartner, 2023).

Agentic search solves both. By using returns data, fit feedback, and purchase history, brands reduce decision fatigue and cut down the risk of disappointment.

Imagine being told: “We have suggested this because it suits your body shape, matches your budget, and avoids the styles you previously returned.” That is not simply personalisation, it is reassurance.

## The Quick Wins

For fashion brands, the path forward is clear:

1. **Reframe product data:** Tag items beyond SKUs with fit, occasion, and mission-driven metadata.
2. **Integrate returns intelligence:** Use reasons for past returns as a guide to future relevance.
3. **Experiment with conversational interfaces:** Let customers shop in natural language, describing occasions or moods.
4. **Empower teams:** Equip merchandisers and marketers with artificial intelligence-powered insights, but keep humans in charge of empathy and style.
5. **Measure mission completion:** Track not just clicks, but whether the consumer’s intent was met and if the product stayed out of the returns pile.

## Closing Thought

*“Fashion has always been about confidence, expression, and identity. Agentic search, powered by intent, history, and returns data, finally gives consumers the tools to find that faster, and gives brands the opportunity to deliver with empathy at scale.”*

*The “why behind the buy” has always been human. Technology is finally catching up. Brands that embrace agentic search powered by fashion-specific AI will not only drive higher conversions, but also personalise in real time to reduce returns, increase advocacy, and build lasting customer loyalty.*

## References

1. Mapp Blog: [The Why Behind the Buy – Interview with Sarah McVittie](#)
2. Sarah McVittie LinkedIn post: [Customer-centric intent mission](#)
3. Mapp Fashion case study: [LK Bennett increased revenue by 20 per cent with hyper-personalisation](#)

Examples referenced: Zalando, H&M, Zara, ASOS, LK Bennett

## Key stats

**71%**

Of shoppers report feeling overwhelmed by product choice

**73%**

Of consumers say they expect brands to understand their unique needs and contexts





# This time, it's personal: Why putting people first is the future of B2B eCommerce



**Lucy Vinestock**  
SparkLayer

Most people operating within eCommerce are aware of the differences between B2C and B2B - but what about the similarities? As the line between B2C and B2B merges and expectations shift, we're sharing 5 essential learnings for all wholesalers - focusing on the person behind the purchase.

## 1. Embrace B2C behaviours

B2B customers might not make impulse purchases like retail shoppers, but their expectations are evolving regardless. Many wholesale buyers now want the same ease, speed, and flexibility they get when shopping as consumers. No more waiting for spreadsheets to be manually processed or trying to align with a store's opening hours to place orders!

As a wholesale brand, start by understanding how buyers in your sector place orders and then add in B2C-style functionality to match the demand. B2B tends to be about steady, repeat purchasing rather than one-off splurges, so aligning with those rhythms is key.

Offering multiple ways to buy (whether bulk ordering or quick-reorder features) can make the experience feel effortless.

## 2. Market your B2B store

In B2C, branding and advertising are key drivers of impulse purchases, increasing brand awareness, and, more recently, driving all-important loyal social media followers. In B2B, decision-makers tend to be more routine-driven - they want reliability and efficiency over flashy design.

Procurement managers and wholesale buyers are often working to a deadline and will return to platforms that make ordering quick, consistent, and frustration-free. Loyalty plays a major role within wholesale, as buyers don't have the time (or incentive) to regularly search for new websites or suppliers unless they really have to.

That doesn't mean marketing doesn't matter - just that the emphasis shifts. Communication, transparency, and ongoing engagement go further than aesthetic flourishes. A well-timed update, reminder, or re-engagement message can be far more powerful than a polished campaign - especially when you're launching on a new platform! For example, [SNURK saw significant levels of re-engagement](#) when communicating their replatforming with inactive accounts.

## 3. Optimise onboarding

Onboarding isn't just a box-ticking exercise - it's one of the strongest drivers of long-term adoption, particularly within B2B. When customers feel supported from the first click, they're more likely to make your platform their default way of buying.

For most buyers, straightforward guides and clear instructions will work wonders - especially when paired with encouraging emails, check-ins, and how-to support. For larger, enterprise, or VIP customers, consider tailored onboarding strategies.

This could mean training sessions, dedicated account managers, or even white-glove support. Making the first order easy (and celebrating early wins) helps turn hesitation into habit. Whether you're replatforming or driving early-stage adoption, keep it personal and remember there's an individual buyer beyond the business.

## 4. Customise pricing

Pricing is where B2B really diverges from consumer retail. While B2C products often have a fixed price, wholesale pricing is fluid, shaped by order volume, customer type, and negotiated terms.

You'll likely serve a mix of smaller retailers, online resellers, and larger accounts. Each group may require different pricing to reflect their buying power and margins. Showing the right price to the right customer not only protects profitability but also builds trust and loyalty.

Much as B2C buyers appreciate personalisation, your B2B customers feel the same way. Use a B2B eCommerce platform (like [SparkLayer](#)) to establish product and price rules for different types of customers. By catering directly to each customer group, you're appealing to the person doing the buying, not just the business account.

## 5. Incentivise loyalty

Getting a buyer to change suppliers can be a challenge, especially in competitive markets. This is where incentives play a crucial role. As any B2C customer knows, a gentle nudge in the form of a discount or freebie can be enough to get you over the line - the same approach can be applied to B2B buyers.

Introductory discounts, loyalty programmes, or perks for first-time online orders can help lower barriers and encourage customers to take that initial leap. Remember to tailor your incentives so that each wholesale buyer is getting something that's relevant and valuable to them.

Once they've experienced the ease and reliability of ordering from you, buyers are far more likely to stick around - meaning those early-stage incentives pay off long-term!

## Final thoughts

Ultimately, the future of B2B isn't just about platforms and processes: it's about people. By borrowing from B2C behaviours, focusing on onboarding, and tailoring pricing and loyalty strategies, wholesalers can create experiences that feel personal, seamless, and built for long-term success.

## Company bio

[SparkLayer](#) is a B2B eCommerce platform powering wholesale growth for over 2,500 brands. Packed with features to improve B2B for businesses and buyers alike, and trusted by much-loved brands including Living Proof, teapigs, nkuku, and Cubitts, SparkLayer is rapidly becoming the go-to for B2B eCommerce.

## Key stats

139%

Revenue growth for  
Specialised Welding

400%

AOV increase for  
Nature's Path

75%

Less manual work for  
Gentec



# People power the digital world – accessibility is the revolution that supports them all



**Dylan Fernandez**

Ecommpay

Let's be honest, digital accessibility has long been treated as a side note in business strategy, especially in payments. Tacked on late, underfunded, and misunderstood. But if we're serious about inclusion, mental health, and real, sustainable growth, that has to change.

Accessibility isn't a tick-box exercise. It's a commercial opportunity, a cultural shift, and, frankly, a moral imperative.

Forward-thinking organisations are now reframing accessibility as a business growth lever. One that unlocks new markets, builds loyalty, and lays the foundation for meaningful partnerships. When investment is made in access for everyone, everyone wins.

Just look at Tesco. In partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), they reworked their online grocery platform to be more accessible, improving screen reader support, simplifying navigation, and using clearer language. The result? A 350% increase in online sales and a more inclusive experience for all customers. That's not just good design; that's good business.

But it starts with something deeper – the willingness to listen.

## If you're not listening, you're not innovating

There's something powerful about simply being heard. In business, as in life, the best partnerships whether a transactional or a collaborative approach start with a conversation, one where everyone gets a chance to speak, and more importantly, to be listened to.

Accessibility, when done properly, is an act of listening. Listening to frustration. To friction. To people who are too often overlooked by default design choices.

Embedding accessibility into every stage of digital development, from rebrands and UX overhauls to technology builds and client engagement, should be the norm. It's not about looking good in a case study, it's about showing up for people in every context.

Another strong example: Legal & General overhauled their website to prioritise accessibility. With clearer text, better navigation, and improved support for disabled users, they didn't just improve usability – they saw a 25–50% increase in site visits, 75% faster page loads, and meaningful cost savings. Accessibility improved their brand trust and reduced maintenance costs. Listening pays off.

## Diversity isn't a slogan. It's a spec.

Let's stop putting diversity on stage while excluding it from the design process. Most digital experiences are still built for a narrow spectrum of users, typically sighted, able-bodied, neurotypical.

That means millions are locked out of seamless e-commerce, purely because design hasn't considered their needs. In the UK alone, the spending power of disabled households, the so-called Purple Pound, is estimated at £274 billion. Globally, it exceeds £1.5 trillion.

This isn't a niche issue. It's a glaring missed opportunity.

Through our Ecommpay for Good initiative, merchants can bring accessibility into focus – through accessible colour palettes, readable typefaces, and payment pages that support screen readers, keyboard navigation, and voice control. Because real inclusion lives in the details.

And often, those details are easy wins. One of the simplest changes merchants can make (without any extra tech) is replacing generic link text like “Click here” or “Read more” with something more descriptive, such as “View our accessibility guide” or “See pricing details.” This helps everyone, especially those using screen readers, understand where a link will take them. Small change, big impact.

The more organisations and the people within them understand their customers' challenges and aspirations, the better we can support each other and create something genuinely valuable.

## Accessibility isn't a feature. It's a discipline.

One of the biggest misconceptions? That accessibility is something you add just before launch. In reality, it's a continuous loop of testing, adapting, and improving.

When redesigning our website, accessibility wasn't an afterthought, it was step one. We followed WCAG 2.2 AA standards, audited with both automated tools and real users, and partnered with the Digital Accessibility Centre for independent validation.

We're applying that same rigour to our payment pages, mobile SDKs, and client tools, and making it easier for merchants to do the same. Our Guide to Digital Accessibility gives practical, actionable advice, with measurable results, inclusive design can boost traffic by up to 24%.

So yes, it's the right thing to do. But it's also good business.

## Mental health starts with digital dignity

Let's widen the lens. If we're talking about mental health in the workplace, we also need to talk about the stress caused by poor digital experiences.

For neurodivergent users, cluttered interfaces and confusing flows can be overwhelming. For people with visual impairments, poor contrast and generic link text create dead ends. For anyone dealing with anxiety or fatigue, a broken checkout isn't just frustrating, it's exhausting.

Designing for accessibility means designing for dignity. It means acknowledging that people arrive at your product in all kinds of states, and that respect begins with usability.

To truly allow people to be people, we have to pass the mic, giving everyone the space to share their perspective, and making a genuine effort to listen.

## The “average user” is a myth

There's no such thing as a typical customer anymore. So why do so many user journeys still assume one?

Modern payments need to reflect real-world complexity. That means building for edge cases, which are often more common than we think. It means rejecting one-size-fits-all and embracing flexibility.

Partnerships are as personal as they are commercial. And if the motivation is purely transactional, with a veneer of fake personal interest, the foundations will crack. Real, lasting partnerships are built on a willingness to listen more than we talk, especially at the start.

We work with initiatives like Project Nemo to champion accessibility in FinTech, and support the European Women in Payments Network to drive diverse leadership. Because inclusion isn't just about who can click a button, it's about who gets heard in the room.

## Accessibility and ESG, two sides of the same coin

Only 5% of payments companies currently list ESG as a top priority. That's not just disappointing, it's a huge opportunity for differentiation.

We believe accessibility, sustainability, and ethics shouldn't be separate conversations. That's why we bring the same attention to detail to our physical footprint, like working with B Corp-certified Pie Factory on zero-waste event stands, as we do to our digital products.

Merchants are watching. So are customers. Our research shows 61% of e-commerce businesses would choose a payments partner based on ESG credentials. This is the new competitive edge.

## Inclusion isn't a constraint. It's a catalyst.

Too often, accessibility is framed as a limitation. But in our experience, it drives better questions, deeper thinking, and more resilient technology.

Mental well-being is just as important. In a fast-paced industry, it's easy to overlook the human side. But when we support each other, admit we don't have all the answers, and make space for honest conversations, we build trust and resilience.

By listening first, asking questions, and valuing every voice, we lay the groundwork for partnerships that are not just commercially successful, but meaningful and enduring.

At Ecommpay, we're not here to speak for everyone. We're here to pass the mic, make space, and listen. Because accessibility isn't just how we grow, it's how we grow up.

## About The Author

*Dylan Fernandez is Commercial Partnership Manager at Ecommpay, where he's known for championing authentic relationships and a people-first approach in the world of e-commerce. Dylan's work goes beyond commercial targets—he's passionate about accessibility, inclusion, and making sure every voice is heard, both in business and in tech. Whether he's sharing practical strategies for agencies, sparking conversations about mental health, or highlighting the value of listening in partnerships, Dylan brings a fresh, honest perspective to the industry. He believes that real growth happens when we put people at the heart of what we do.*

## About Ecommpay

*Ecommpay is a global payments provider and direct acquirer, helping businesses grow through smart, scalable payment solutions. From acquiring and alternative payment methods to fraud prevention and recurring billing, we offer everything merchants need via a single platform, contract, and integration.*

## Inclusive payments for a digital world

*Great payments aren't just fast and secure, they're inclusive. Through our Ecommpay for Good initiative, we champion accessibility and ESG in payments, designing for everyone, not just the average user. Our payment pages work with screen readers, voice navigation, and keyboard input. We focus on visual clarity, cognitive ease, and seamless mobile UX, enabling merchants to serve a broader audience and unlock untapped growth.*

*The opportunity is vast: the global spending power of disabled consumers exceeds \$1.9 trillion. In the UK, the “Purple Pound” is worth £274 billion annually. Accessible websites can see up to 24% more traffic, proving that inclusive design drives both impact and revenue.*

## Driving meaningful change

*Accessibility is embedded in our platform, and we partner with organisations like the Digital Accessibility Centre and Project Nemo to elevate standards across the industry. We also align inclusion with sustainability, from carbon-neutral infrastructure to zero-waste events with B-Corp-certified partners.*

*At Ecommpay, we help businesses build payment experiences that reflect the real world: diverse, digital, and human. Because when payments work for everyone, everyone wins.*

## Key stats

**Only 5%**

Of payments companies currently list ESG as a top priority