

How manufacturers can unleash their digital marketplace superpower

 By [Haydn Townsend](#)

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Digital marketplaces such as Amazon, Alibaba, click and collect models, and food delivery ecosystems have rapidly changed consumer behaviour, and increased the demand for convenience and immediate gratification.



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They have become an epicentre of brand exposure and experience, capturing greater consumer attention, as is evident in our recent [Accenture Interactive survey](#) where 81% of consumers who bought a name brand product on Amazon remembered the product detail page three months later, while only 28% remembered the television commercial.

Small, agile companies are enjoying great success in digital marketplaces. As digitally native businesses that can evolve on the fly, these brands are capitalising on the multitude of shoppers on these sites. However, a disruptive model like this requires manufacturers to transform from the top down in order to have the same agility to succeed.

This is uncharted territory for manufacturers. They need new capabilities to manage business performance and brand experience at the product level, and across countless marketplaces. With consumer demand heating up, agile competitors closing in and shareholder value on the line, building a strong digital marketplace strategy is not optional. It is an act of survival in this retail apocalypse.

Leap tall buildings in a single bound

The rise of digital marketplaces brings sweeping changes to how manufacturers have historically interacted with retailers and customers to distribute, promote and sell their products. This complex mix of risks, responsibilities, opportunities and challenges has a profound impact on fashion, beauty and consumer goods brands that are mired in business as usual.

The good news for manufacturers is that thriving in the world of digital marketplaces is not impossible. By focusing their transformation efforts in four critical areas, they can hold the competition at bay, give sales performance a jolt, cultivate brand loyalty, and most importantly, ignite new market growth.



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1. Operate: Manage across marketplaces

Data is the currency of success, and manufacturers need consumer intelligence from across all digital marketplaces, and the ability to act on it in an automated way at scale. This means centralising account data and publicly available data, including that of competitors. This cross-marketplace view gets overlooked but is key to maximising product performance.

To work at speed and scale, manufacturers need machine learning and artificial intelligence to power advanced rules engines that automate responses to data insight from marketing to supply chain. Managing well across marketplaces also means making significant operational changes to address the complexities of channel strategy, inventory allocation, availability and customer service in this dynamic environment.

2. Orchestrate: Extend and personalise the brand experience

Companies spend millions on transformative brand stories told through creative campaigns across traditional and social media, but that experience rarely makes its way to the marketplaces. Instead, boring product images against a soulless white background are the standard on many of these sites. This means companies are ignoring the value of their greatest differentiators and missing critical opportunities to connect with their customers around their unique brand story.

Brand experiences must be fine-tuned to target consumers and markets uniquely. New innovations such as digital twin technology, can create a single digital asset of a product that can be dynamically tailored for different regions, personas, seasons, promotions and more. This is cost-effective, allows for building an asset before a product is released, and supports changing aspects of it later to keep pace with market or customer needs.



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3. Optimise: Drive performance with experimentation

Nothing is static in a digital marketplace, and the positioning of products cannot be either. How do brands know if the right content, messaging or advertising is resonating with consumers? This requires an ongoing commitment to testing and learning. While there is the evaluation of performance from a reporting standpoint today, it is typically siloed and retroactive, coming long after major investments have been made. This approach is costly and inefficient and can be avoided with much more affordable research and experimentation upfront.

By treating every product page as its own P&L, manufacturers can hypothesize solutions based on customer insights, trends and historical data. Instead of deploying them with the hope that they will be successful, they can set up experiments to rapidly determine what will drive the optimal performance at scale. It is a quicker, more intelligent and more cost-effective path to profitability. One that is built on a foundation of facts, not opinions.

4. Originate: Discover new opportunities for growth

Digital shelves give manufacturers valuable real-time customer insights that they have never had before. They know what customers are searching for across categories and products, what they are buying, and what positive and negative feedback they are offering in ratings and reviews. The game-changer for manufacturers is in how they act on this gold mine of insight.

Based on analysis of trending categories and shelves, manufacturers can enhance existing products or develop new ones

that will satisfy an identified need among customers. They can then strategically act on these insights in different ways across different marketplaces to better forecast demand and accelerate growth. They can even evaluate acquisition targets based on current shelf performance relative to competitors.



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For many years, the dynamic between manufacturers and retailers went largely unchanged. The status quo ruled. Those days are over and manufacturers must transform to catch up to new-age retailers. Most companies have responded by managing every marketplace as a standalone channel, delivering basic content to each one, and crafting brand experiences based on gut instinct or readily available content.

Superhero players will however take a holistic approach. They will transform their organisation to manage across marketplaces with cross-functional teams, tailor content to differentiate products and brands, use data-driven experimentation and automation to optimise performance at scale, and tap into these marketplaces for insights to capitalise on new opportunities for growth. This is how manufacturers can harness their superpowers for superior performance in the next wave of brand experiences.

ABOUT HAYDN TOWNSEND

Haydn Townsend is the managing director of Accenture Interactive. He's a qualified chartered marketer who has worked across the FMCG and advertising industry, including Ogilvy Johannesburg, where he reached deputy managing director and as chief strategy officer at The Jupiter Drawing Room (TJDR). He was also CEO of sponsorship and activation company Sail Sport & Entertainment.

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