

How a Powerful API Drives Omnichannel Success

White Paper

Executive Summary

The retail IT systems landscape is very diverse with critical data residing all over the organization. As a result this can create a disjointed customer experience for many shoppers as they interact with different sales channels. Many legacy and disparate systems purchased over time, house critical data elements such as order, inventory, customer and product information that are necessary to keep in sync across all customer touchpoints. When these critical data types are not in sync customer satisfaction suffers resulting in attrition to the competition that is one click away.

Furthermore, with digital sales channels constantly evolving, the requirement to integrate data to enhance the customer experience becomes paramount. Customers no longer have patience and in today's technology-driven world, a powerful API (Application Programming Interface) can make all the difference.

An API is a "doorway" into an application, which can allow an integrator or developer to interact directly with a platform or application. The API can allow for information or data to be retrieved or sent to the application, and the application's behavior can be altered in a way in which the integrator or developer desires. At Freestyle Solutions, we embrace "open" so that integrators, developers and anybody who needs to adopt an integration strategy for their business can access Freestyle Solutions products.

APIs are a necessity to build a successful omnichannel ecosystem, especially when disparate systems need to be stitched together for data transfer. With powerful RESTful APIs, businesses will have full visibility into their orders, inventory, product, payment, shipping and customer information across systems and sales channels. An API layer will also allow companies to customize, integrate, and extend their OMS to make it the heart of the omnichannel machine, which is where it should be.

"Over the next ten years, 86% of surveyed retailers plan to leverage a unified commerce platform, making it the emerging standard as technology matures."

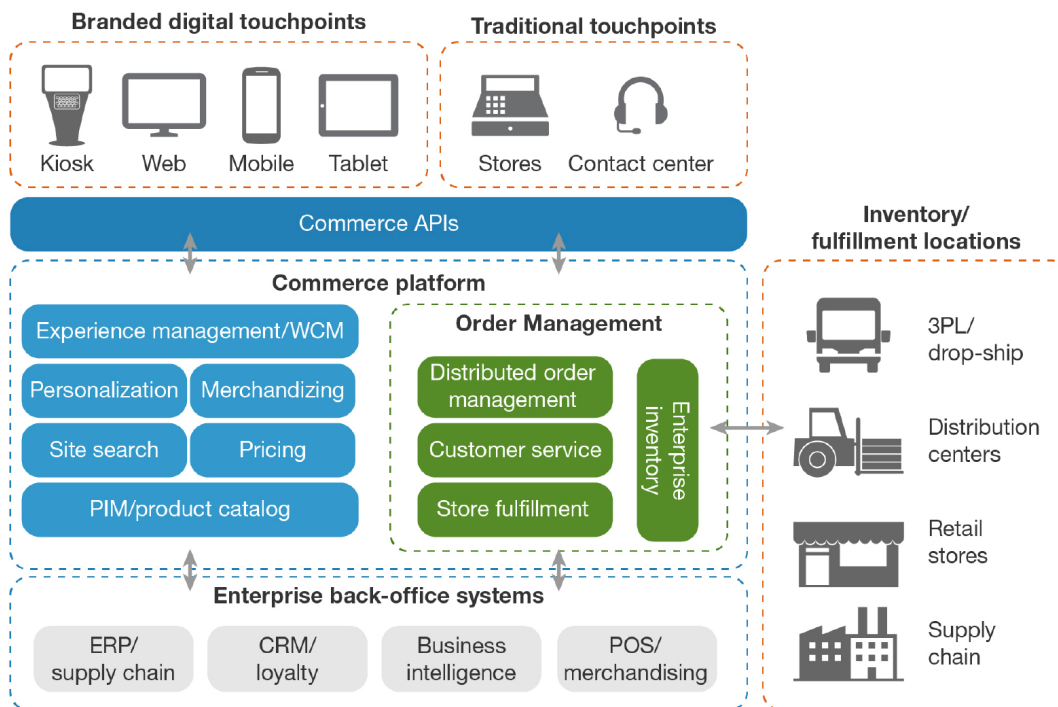
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The Importance of API Management

Best practices in API management can often get overlooked, as retailers and brands focus heavily on fulfilment, personalization, and general ecommerce strategies.

An API should be secure, following "best practices" by creating token based security that only allows for authorized access. In the chart below from Forrester, you can clearly see how vital a powerful and secure API is, especially for order management that is handling order, customer, product, inventory, and payment information. In a best practice omnichannel implementation order management is at the center of it all, and as a result, requires a strong integration platform that is fast, reliable and secure. When the omnichannel concept was developed, the solution involved an API strategy.





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Without a strong and secure API, there is more room for error throughout the order management process, including customer service efforts, store fulfillment, enterprise inventory, and more. Furthermore, enterprise back-office systems are left at risk without a significant API holding each piece together. That said, not all APIs are created equal.

Freestyle RESTful API

A RESTful API is a lighter, yet more efficient, alternative to Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) or Web Service Definition Language (WSDL). RESTful APIs are focused on accessing named resources through a single consistent interface. A RESTful API does not require expensive tools to interact with the web service, and is a faster solution than SOAP and WSDL, as there is no extensive processing required.

With an Event Driven RESTful API, an integrator can have access to the business resources of the system. This access enables integrators to make easy use of the resources for customers, products, orders, inventory, pricing, returns, refunds, and more.

With a modern Freestyle RESTful API, retailers and brands can:

- Connect all mission critical applications to produce a unified system utilizing technical and retail services, as well as a centralized management within the platform
- Gain access to a rich selection of services, allowing rapid introduction of future applications to consumers, all of which can be integrated into existing technology environments

- Extend functionality by allowing retailers to write code to the API for adding new features and protecting the Freestyle OMS application and maintaining automatic upgradability

Freestyle Omnichannel Management System (O.M.S.) Offers RESTful APIs

With the Freestyle O.M.S. Event Driven RESTful API, an integrator can have access to the business resources of Freestyle O.M.S.

By using the API and its Event Driven features, you can integrate directly with any system in your organization and have a seamless auto-updated integration. For example, if you have a Warehouse Management System (WMS), you can develop integration to retrieve order information from Freestyle O.M.S. and update your WMS automatically when order information changes. When an order is received within the Freestyle O.M.S., an “order received” event, which can be subscribed to will fire and notify your WMS to update the order is received and/or a status changed. With “Events” and the Freestyle O.M.S. API, you can create a seamless integration that is always communicating to your systems in near real-time.

Examples of Integrations using the Freestyle O.M.S. Event Driven API

Below are some examples of how the Freestyle O.M.S. Event Driven API could be used to create a real-time integration.

- Shopping Carts and Ecommerce Platforms
- Warehouse Management Systems (WMS)
- Point of Sale Systems (POS)
- ERP/Supply Chain Systems

RESTful APIs in Freestyle O.M.S.

- Orders
- Inventory
- Customer
- Products
- Shipping
- Promotions
- Pricing
- RMA
- Payments
- Financials



Recapping the Benefits of a Strong API

An API provides high-level business-based transaction functions to interface with major areas of an OMS, including order, customer, stock, and inventory.

To efficiently manage an omnichannel sales strategy, below is a checklist of systems also necessary within an OMS.

- Ecommerce platform for product and order information
- ERP for product, inventory, warehouse management, and financials
- Payment for authorization, settlement, fraud, and taxCRM for customer data

Adding a strong API that is associated with an omnichannel customer experience makes the process much simpler. An OMS assists with customer management and tighter integrations, including the API, but also streamlines the processes that support the entire supply chain and the systems that support it.

Putting technology to work to capture, integrate, and utilize data across the entire operation will help you understand and respond to consumer demands. Immediate access to data across the entire operation helps retailers streamline business operations, take control of the business, and gain a competitive edge.