

Enterprise headless commerce:

A merchant's guide to ecommerce growth

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Table of contents

- Introduction** 3
- Empowering enterprise ecommerce growth** 4
- What is headless commerce?** 5
- Components of a headless build** 6
 - ✓ Commerce platforms 6
 - ✓ Hosting services 7
 - ✓ Front-end components 7
 - ✓ Custom Storefront 8
- Improve eCommerce KPIs with better webstore performance** 9
- Tech stack flexibility & optionality** 10
- Cost benefits** 13
- Mobile-first functionality** 14
- Maximum customization** 15
- Is headless commerce right for you?** 16
- How to get started with headless commerce** 17
- Envision your customer experience with headless commerce** 18
- Performance seen by Nacelle merchants** 19
- Conclusion** 20
- References** 21



Introduction

Standards for online shopping are constantly evolving. Easy checkout processes, personalized experiences, and mobile optimization are now a given. Buying behavior has changed drastically since 2020. Due to the pandemic, people are shopping online more, creating new traffic patterns, demand, and strain on webstores and supply chains.

New technology continues to set the bar higher for merchants, and customers note who's paying attention. Shoppers don't want to feel as if they're a number. Over 70% of customers say they expect companies to understand their unique needs and expectations, a Salesforce report found ^[1].

Today consumers value **transparency, two-way communication**, and their **expectation of a seamless shopping experience**. It all circles back to creating the best customer experience possible.



Headless commerce: **Empowering enterprise ecommerce growth**

Enterprise headless commerce is a system that uses a decoupled front-end and back-end to improve customer experience. This guide explores the benefits of headless commerce, how it can solve current ecommerce issues, and how to build a headless system. But before you can determine if headless is right for you, it's important to understand how it can benefit your brand.

In this guide, we'll explore **what headless commerce is, how it can solve some of the biggest challenges ecommerce brands face today, and how to move forward with your own headless build.**





What is headless commerce?

Headless commerce is an ecommerce architecture that separates the front and back-end, allowing for updates to be made to either one without affecting the other. This decoupling provides flexibility, enabling retailers to stay ahead of the curve with less risk and cost. Implemented by merchants for various reasons:

- ✓ Improved eCommerce KPIs and performance
- ✓ Mobile-first optimization that works across devices
- ✓ Maximized front-end customization
- ✓ Tech stack flexibility and optionality

Many of these benefits will be enhanced by the components of your headless tech stack and the type of storefront you choose.



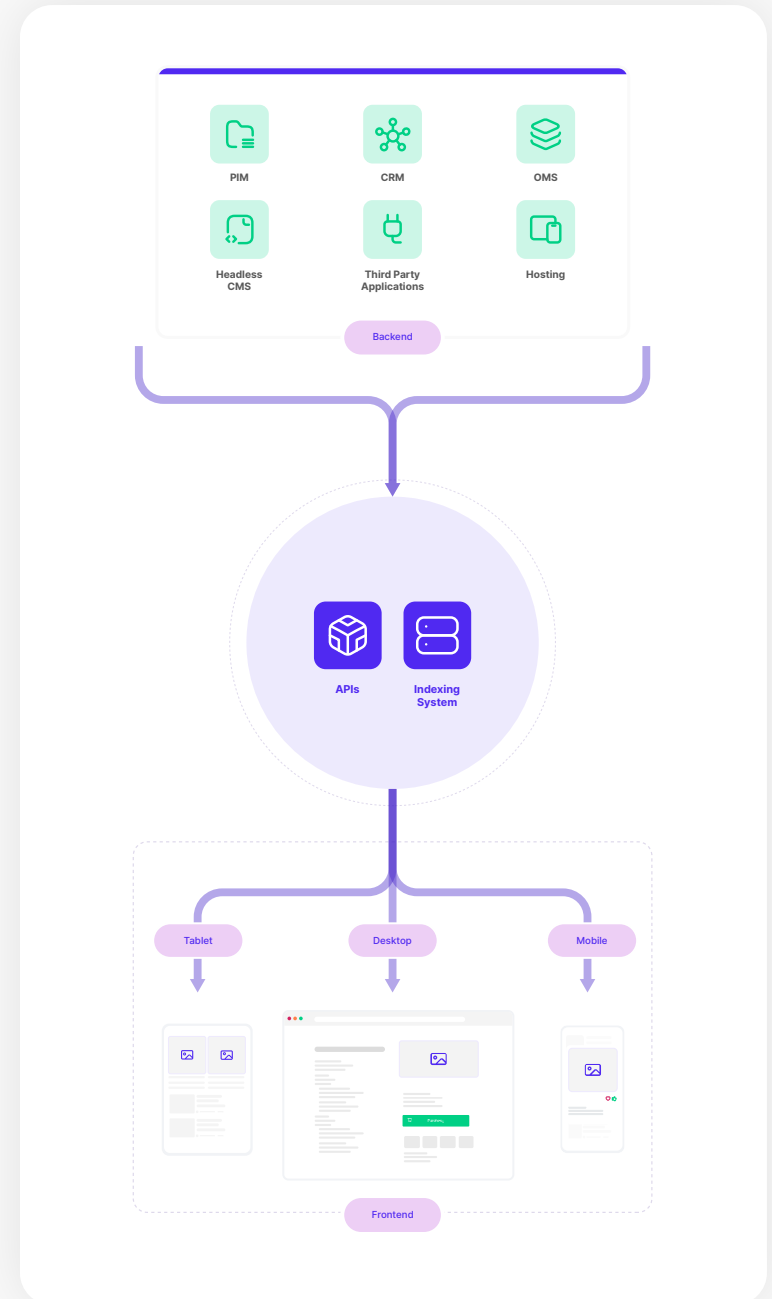


Components of a headless build

There are numerous systems that fuel the back-end and multiple output possibilities and syndications for the front-end of a headless build. These components make it successful:

1. Commerce platforms

A composable commerce platform like Nacelle, including an Order Management System (*OMS*) and Customer Relationship Management (*CRM*) system, can be used in a headless back-end. Data management, processes, and checkout functionality can be maintained by selecting a headless commerce solution while continuing to use existing technology stacks.



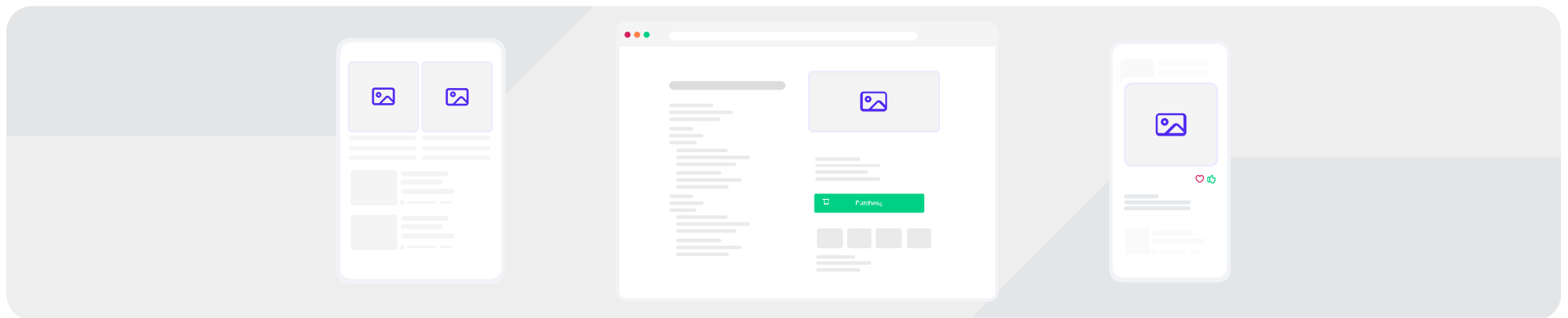
Content Management Systems (*CMS*) and Product Information Management (*PIM*) systems are also necessary for product and content management to create the desired customer experience.

2. Hosting services

Your hosting service delivers your storefront to your customers' browsers. Hosting services take your website's underlying HTML, CSS, and JavaScript files and make them available online. You likely have a slew of third-party applications that allow you to provide enhanced functionality and better shopping experiences. Those apps will feed into your headless build as well. By leveraging APIs, the headless build may even override the page load speed "slow down" effect often associated with third-party apps that use a heavy codebase.

3. Front-end components

One of the biggest draws to headless is that it allows you to manage one front-end codebase for all devices. There's no longer a necessary codebase separation of your mobile app, desktop, etc.





4. Custom storefronts

Having the capability to tailor your shopping experience to your style and what your customers need is a distinct benefit of headless commerce. Custom storefronts are independent and can provide more customization than standard templates.

As your business grows and more people work on the website, more than just templates may be required. Without customization, you may experience a poor user experience or process sluggishness.

By customizing, you can ensure shoppers have the most compelling experiences with your content and brand, which goes beyond what a template can provide.



Improve eCommerce KPIs with better webstore performance

If page load speed, product discoverability, and overall performance across devices have been longstanding issues for you, and you've tried the quick fixes, adopting a headless commerce solution can mitigate those challenges. With headless commerce, retailers can produce the compelling customer experience expected today. The reliable, ultra-fast functionality that decreases the latency of your webstore will directly impact your eCommerce KPIs.

According to recent data, merchants who have implemented a headless commerce solution powered by Nacelle have experienced remarkable results:

20%

Increase in developer deployments

48%

Decrease in mobile load time

26.5%

Decrease in desktop load time

20%

Increase in conversion rates for influencer sales

These statistics clearly demonstrate the positive impact of adopting a headless commerce approach with Nacelle's composable solution. By leveraging the power of decoupled front-end and back-end systems, merchants can achieve exceptional performance, faster development cycles, and improved conversion rates.

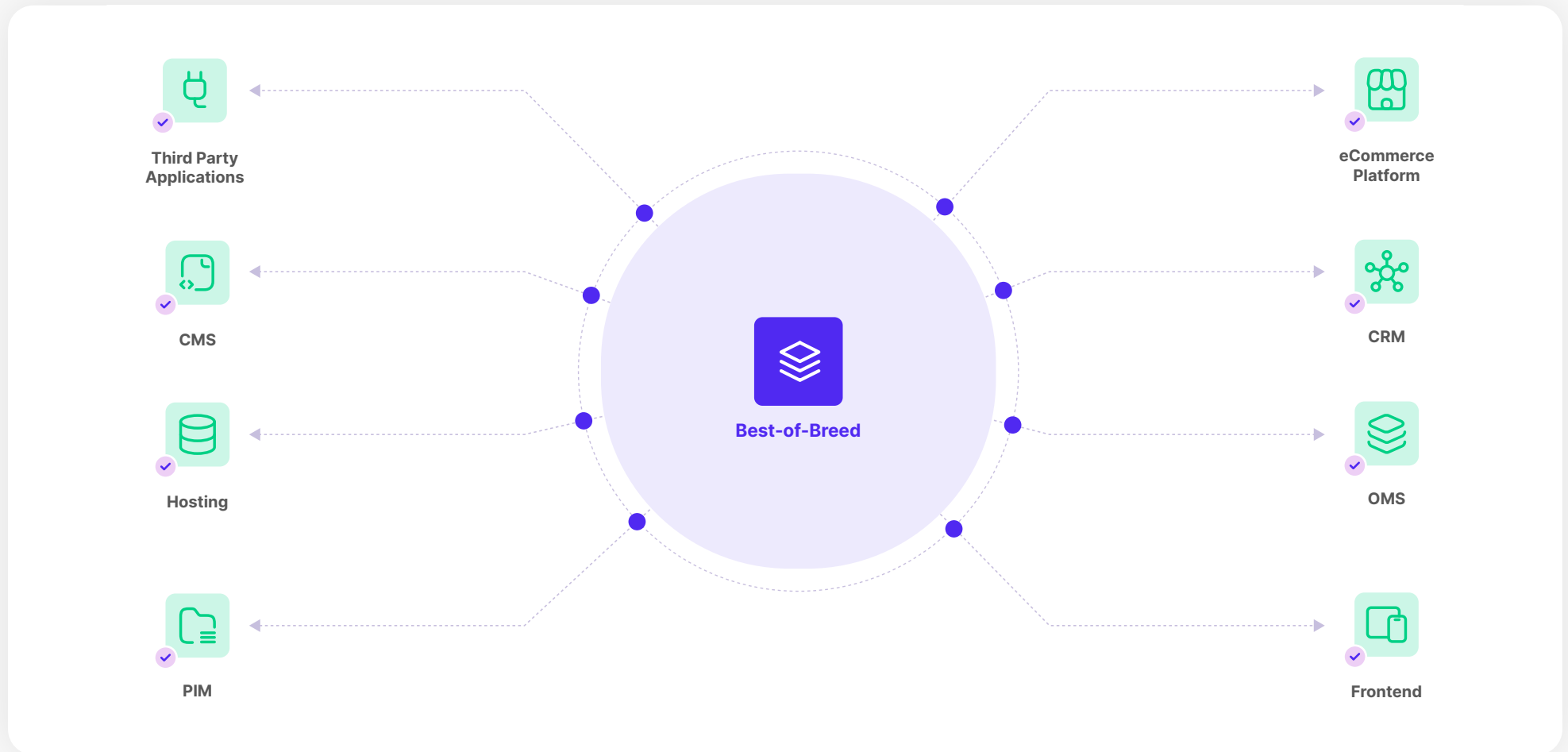


Tech stack flexibility & optionality

Flexibility and optionality in your tech stack are essential to reach your brand's potential. It's also the gateway to enabling easy scalability as your business grows. A flexible tech stack consists of several microservices that are the best-of-breed from various vendors dedicated to their respective solutions' success.

While the tools in your tech stack can often integrate nicely with each other in this scenario, code is not shared, and an issue with one will not affect the others. You can pick the best options and change your tech stack without risky overhauls and migrations. Headless commerce allows you the freedom to easily add and eliminate tools without seismic aftershocks to the rest of your operation. And as you grow, the fluidity of your tech stack allows for easy scalability.

An all-in-one package that's trying to be everything simply cannot compete with the level of excellence found in best-of-breed tools. As the name suggests, all-in-one solutions are one solution or suite of services from the same vendor. Typically, smaller organizations or merchants new to ecommerce gravitate towards these one-stop-shop bundles. However, larger companies or businesses planning to scale in the next three to five years significantly will likely be better served by a best-of-breed approach to their tech stack.





An all-in-one package, often called a 'monolith', is **trying to be everything in one solution.**



All-in-one solutions are typically preferred by **smaller organizations or new merchants in ecommerce.**



However, larger companies or businesses with plans to scale up in the future are **better served by a best-of-breed approach.**

A best-of-breed headless strategy enables your development team to use a modern workflow. This workflow includes version control, unit tests, and CI/CD pipelines.

These tools allow your team to use the best technology to build the website, customer, and shopping experiences. Deciding between an all-in-one or best-of-breed approach will ultimately shape the trajectory of your headless commerce strategy.



Cost benefits

The upfront cost of a headless commerce solution will depend on how complex your tech stack is and the maintenance required. However, a headless solution could be less expensive over time without costly data migrations or system upgrades and maintenance.

Traditional ecommerce architectures are typically on the lower end of the cost spectrum because they can be built without custom features. However, there's a high risk of technical debt that could make the cheaper, short-term solution more costly in the long run.

Even in the short term, merchants may see **cost savings with a best-of-breed approach** as they offload obsolete apps and reallocate that budget.



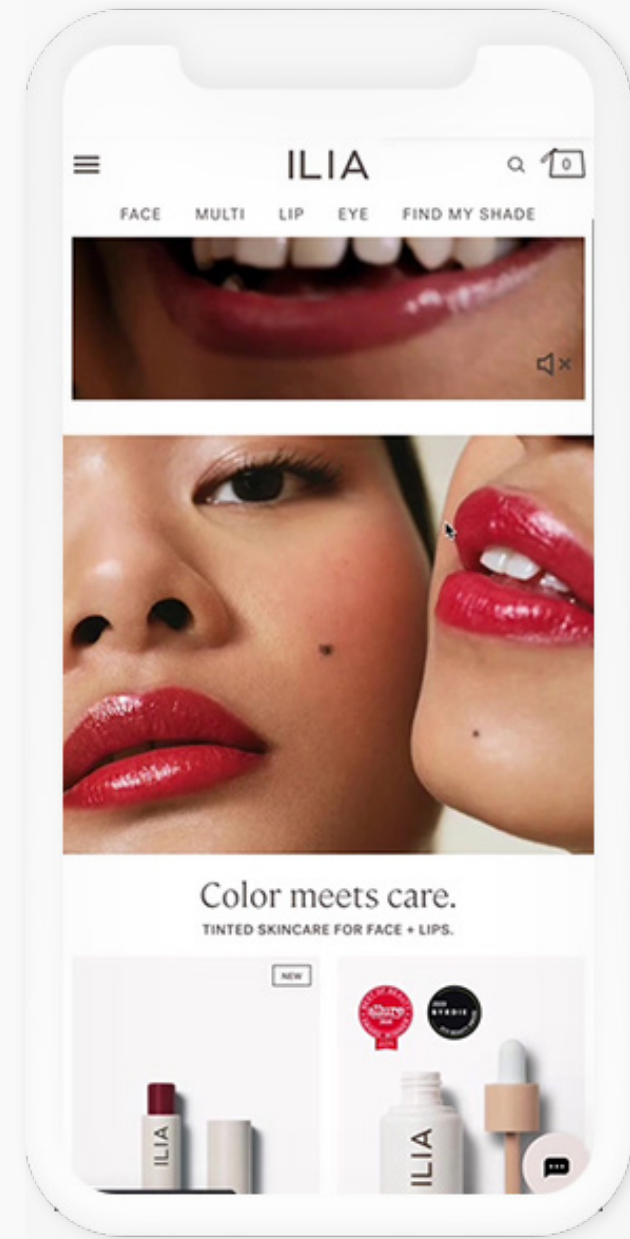


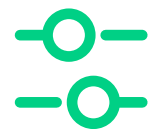
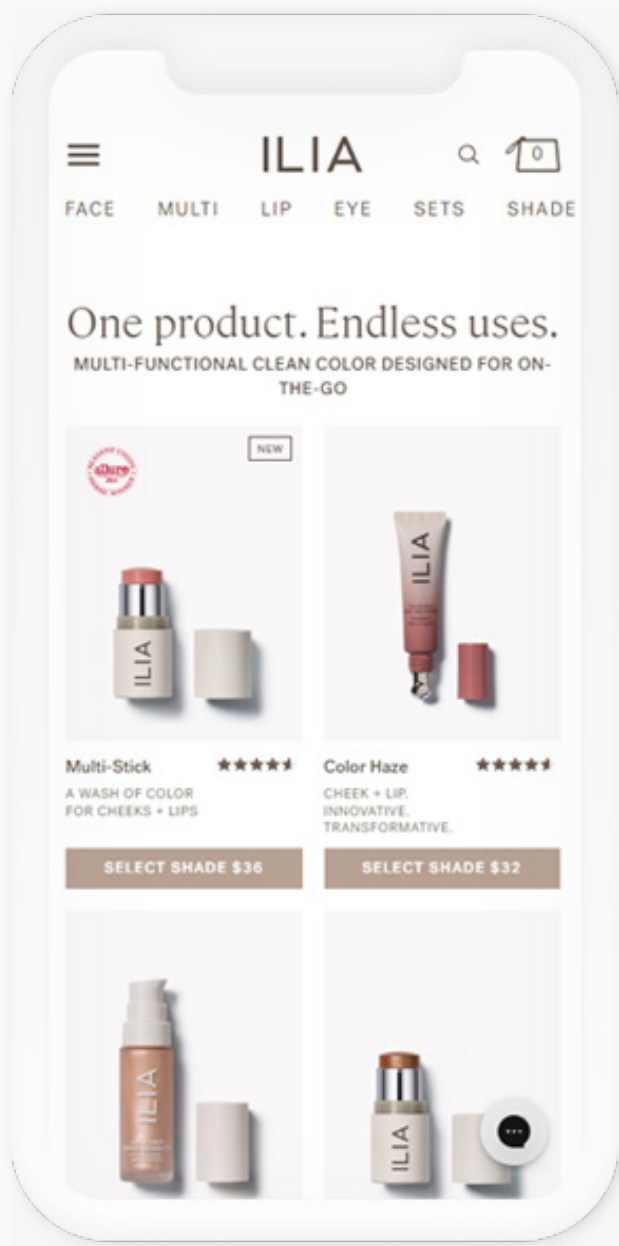
Mobile-first functionality

Mobile has quickly become a leading channel in ecommerce. In July 2020, mobile accounted for more than half of global website traffic.

Plus, as media buying on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram encourages more mobile traffic, this channel is only getting bigger. Undoubtedly, all the solutions in your tech stack should be optimized for mobile.

Build the experiences you want **without the risk of having to replatform**





Maximum customization

For merchants to be successful, they need to be able to tell their brand and product stories and have it resonate with their audience. An alignment of beliefs, values, and products will ultimately garner lifetime customers and brand loyalists. Be it a message or product, customization is a crucial part of this equation.

Headless commerce is prime for building customization opportunities through custom storefronts and the flexibility for your team to update your front-end without requiring developer assistance on the back-end. This is especially prevalent with your CMS. Third-party CMS solutions exist to make management and operation intuitive for most, not just code-savvy individuals.

In addition to curating your store in a way that perfectly displays your catalog, an accessible CMS supports automation and scheduled publishings. Gone are the days of inconvenient manual updates for events such as sales that start at midnight.



Is headless commerce right for you?

Although headless commerce is flexible and accessible on any device, it's not necessarily the right solution for every brand. When deciding if headless is right for you, consider the following questions:

✓ **Does your storefront struggle with high volumes of traffic or slow page load speeds?**

✓ **Are you striving to be mobile-first?**

✓ **Are you focused on keeping your costs down?**

✓ **Have you outgrown your existing tech stack's long-term capabilities?**

✓ **Are you working on optimizing for conversions?**

✓ **Do you want to be able to manage content without a developer?**



We went headless with Nacelle to better serve our customers with a fast, modern PWA and to empower our development team through adopting a modern tech stack. We believe that the flexibility to swap out platforms and choose what tools would bring the best customer experience for our brand is important, and the Nacelle platform allows us to do that.

Albert Chong
VP of Digital, ILIA Beauty



How to get started with headless commerce

If you have decided that going headless is the right solution for your brand, the next step is deciding how to approach your build. There are a few key considerations at this phase, including choosing between a “build or buy” approach and assessing your development resources to decide if they have the capacity to handle implementation and maintenance.



Envision your customer experience with headless commerce

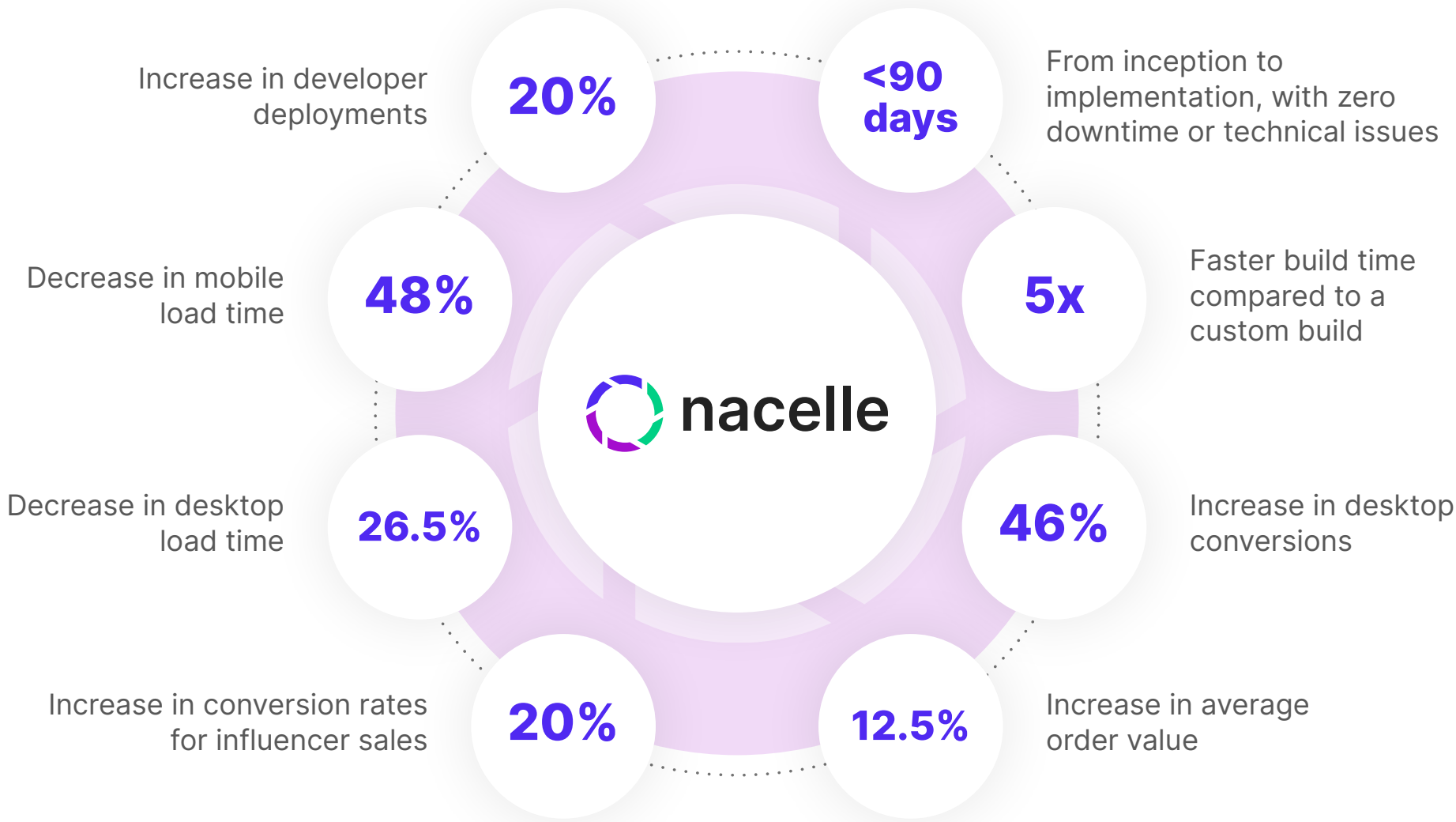
Customers shop in ways we never thought possible, even just a few years ago. Now more than ever, it's imperative that retailers stay on top of user experience trends. Ecommerce merchants that prioritize the customer experience will see a significant return on investment (*ROI*).

The headless architecture is an excellent solution for retailers who are not only looking to increase their conversions but also want to stay (*or become*) agile for whatever the future of retail holds. As technology for ecommerce continues to evolve and new sales channels develop, the right headless commerce solution can keep up with changes in technology and customer demands.

Adopting a headless commerce platform is more straightforward than it seems. A solution like Nacelle makes going headless easier and far less time-consuming and risky.

Because Nacelle works with your tech stack—instead of requiring app and software changes—**you can quickly get the headless experience and keep the tried and true tools you currently use.**

At a glance:
Performance seen by Nacelle merchants



These statistics highlight the outstanding performance improvements that Nacelle merchants have experienced across various key metrics, including developer deployments, load times, conversions, and average order value. By leveraging Nacelle's headless commerce solution, merchants can optimize their ecommerce operations, deliver exceptional customer experiences, and drive significant business growth.



Conclusion

In today's rapidly evolving ecommerce landscape, adopting a headless commerce solution can be a game-changer for merchants. By leveraging the benefits of decoupled front-end and back-end systems, such as improved ecommerce KPIs, enhanced mobile-first functionality, maximum customization, tech stack flexibility, scalability, and cost benefits, you can deliver exceptional customer experiences and drive business growth.

When considering a headless commerce platform, it's essential to choose a reliable and trusted provider like Nacelle. With Nacelle's headless commerce solution, merchants have witnessed significant improvements across key metrics. By embracing headless commerce, you can future-proof your ecommerce business, provide seamless and personalized experiences to your customers, and thrive in the ever-changing digital landscape.

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Ready to see Nacelle in action?
Contact us today



Nacelle is a composable commerce platform provider that allows brands and retailers to syndicate commerce and content data to multiple heads, endpoints and channels by transforming, storing and reindexing data in real-time. With Nacelle, companies can future-proof their business by composing the commerce stack they want — giving them the agility needed to build unique and dynamic shopping experiences, while optimizing business operations for growth. For more information, go to nacelle.com