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# Choosing the Right **Customer Experience Management Platform**

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# Table of Contents

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>2</b>  | Executive Summary  |
| <b>3</b>  | What is a Customer Experience Management Platform?           |
| <b>5</b>  | Choose a CEM That Matches Your Customer Experience Archetype |
| <b>7</b>  | Rank Your Customer Experience Archetypes to Find a CEM       |
| <b>9</b>  | Evaluating the Top CEM platforms                             |
| <b>17</b> | Future Considerations and Next Steps                         |
| <b>18</b> | About the Author   |
| <b>19</b> | How to Work With Us  |

## Executive Summary

It's become fashionable for any customer communication software to call itself a "customer experience" management (CEM) platform. However, most of them manage only a single aspect of the customer experience (CX). More often than not, they are point solutions designed to be used by a specific department or role within the organization.

For a software to truly be a customer experience management platform, it needs to serve the needs of the customer at every stage in the journey from awareness to purchase and post-purchase. And, it needs to deliver relevant content, at the right time, on the right channel, based on the data-proven needs of the customer.

This means a company's sales, service, and marketing departments all have a stake in deploying the right customer-experience-management platform. This report is a guide to evaluating, and choosing the customer experience management platform that best suits your company's chosen customer experience approach.

We've identified four customer experience archetypes that companies can choose depending on their business objectives, customers' needs, and operating environments. The goal is to find a CEM whose strengths and unique capabilities match the CX archetype that your company prioritizes.

The guide is based on an analysis of the specific features and strengths each vendor has, rather than a ranking of who offers the most solutions in one suite. In this way, each company can leverage a CEM system that aligns with its CX strategy, rather than designing a strategy based on the tools it has available.



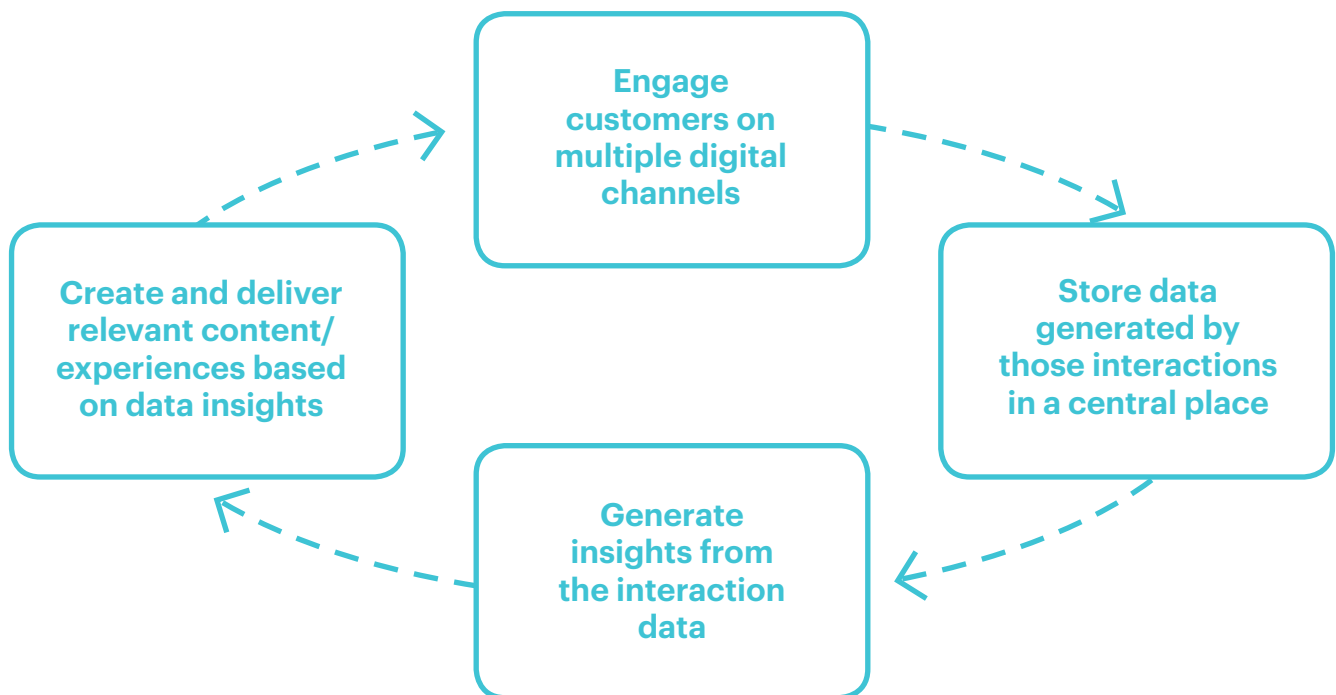


## What is a Customer Experience Management Platform?

Much like finance or sales, customer experience is now a discipline that deserves dedicated software. A customer experience management platform helps companies deliver relevant content and messages based on the needs and pain points of their different customer segments. It combines the customer engagement functions of a company's three customer-facing departments: sales, service, and marketing into a single, integrated platform. CEM platforms create a holistic view and replace the siloed approach of customer engagement where marketing stores anonymous customer interactions in an analytics platform, sales only records customers in a customer relationship management (CRM) system after a transaction, and the service call center

only records people who call in, with no history of their previous interactions with the company.

A true CEM must be capable of delivering a seamless and personalized experience to a customer throughout each step of her or his journey. However, it's become fashionable for many vendors (especially marketing-tech vendors) to claim they offer customer experience management platforms when in fact their solutions only manage a single aspect of the customer journey.



But to really qualify as a CEM, the platform (or combination of platforms) must, at least, support more than one phase of the customer journey. It also must perform the following essential actions in a continuous loop:

CEM size and complexity depends on the type of company using it. For small B2B companies, a simple email-marketing platform can serve as a CEM because

that is where the bulk of their customer engagement occurs.

However, big-box retailers engage customers across many more channels, including websites, email, social media, and mobile devices. These retailers need a much more complex system, which performs essential actions across multiple channels and in multiple contexts. This report is a guide for how to choose the right CEM platform.

## Choose a CEM That Matches Your Customer Experience Archetype

Although all CEM platforms perform the same four essential actions, they vary by the type of customer experience they optimize. We found that most companies prioritize one out of four approaches to deliver great customer experiences. The approach is determined by their product, industry, and business goals. The key is to deploy a CEM platform best suited to deliver for the archetype a company prioritizes.

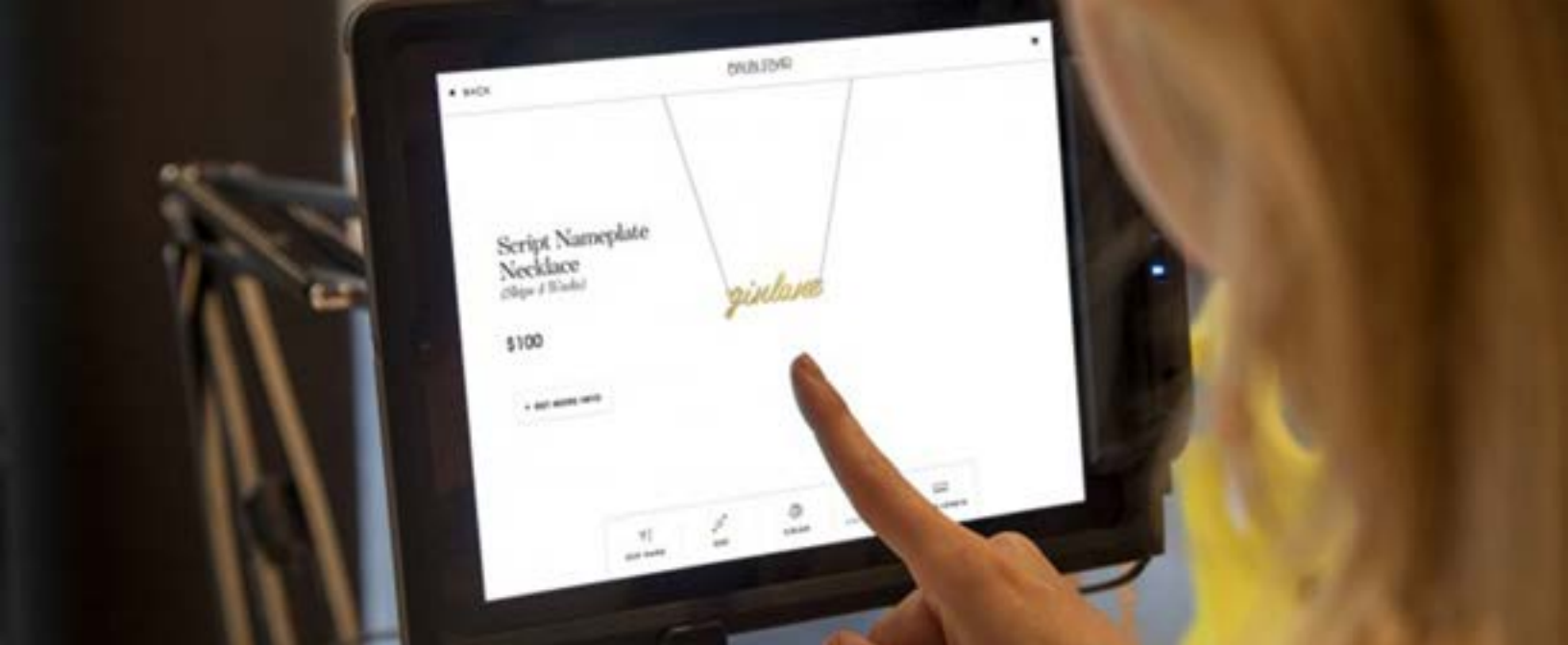
### The four CX archetypes are:

**The “Brandvertiser”** is all about establishing a presence and creating mass awareness of a brand. It relies a lot on traditional advertising and engaging content. Brand-centric companies, such as the manufacturers of Kleenex®, Red Bull®, and Coca-Cola® prioritize this approach. For them, optimizing customer experience means optimizing the brand experience. They have less control over other aspects of customer experience because retailers manage purchase experiences and their product experience hasn’t changed for many years. As a result, they win customers by entertaining them with compelling content and creating brand loyalty.

The Brandvertisers’ most necessary tools create and distribute content at a mass scale, making a CEM with strong advertising and creative-asset management features essential.

**The Inbound Optimizer** drives traffic to brand-owned channels and optimizes the experiences on them. This approach requires significant investment in website or mobile device apps because they are responsible for most of the customer engagement and experience delivery. This approach works for e-commerce firms or mobile-app-centric businesses such as Uber.

For this archetype, the top priorities are ensuring customers have frictionless interactions and aesthetically-pleasing experiences on its owned channels, namely the website and/or mobile apps. That means the CEM employed must have top-notch tools for web/app management, digital asset management, personalization, and analytics. It also must have tight integrations with commerce and service platforms so customer experiences are consistent across sales, service, and marketing-managed activities.



**The Relationship Builder** requires delivering continuous, curated content that gives the customer value beyond the product. It builds a relationship where the brand acts as a trusted partner, not just a seller. Examples include B2B firms with long buying cycles or luxury-product makers, whose customers require more trust and information before they buy.

Relationship Builders need a CEM platform that delivers high-value content to their customers and houses it in an easily accessible way on their owned channels. Content could include research, whitepapers, community forums, or blogs. Much like the Inbound Optimizer, Relationship Builders need tools to manage content on their website, but also deliver it through channels such as email and social media. Unlike the Brandvertiser, the content isn't delivered to a mass audience but is personalized for an individual or a few people.

**The Constant Communicator** hallmark is real-time messaging that gives a customer relevant information exactly when she or he needs it. It works for companies that must reassure customers with product or service status updates, such as shipping information from Federal Express or fraud resolution from TransUnion.

CEM platforms with strengths in real-time messaging or notifications are a priority for companies of this archetype. In particular, the CEM should enable a company to reach customers on the platform they prefer for the context of those interactions. For example, private communications for resolving a case or conflict can happen by email, whereas high-level customer service can be accomplished through social media. The key is to draw from a single source of customer data so the experience isn't fragmented across different channels.

# Rank Your Customer-Experience Archetypes to Find a CEM

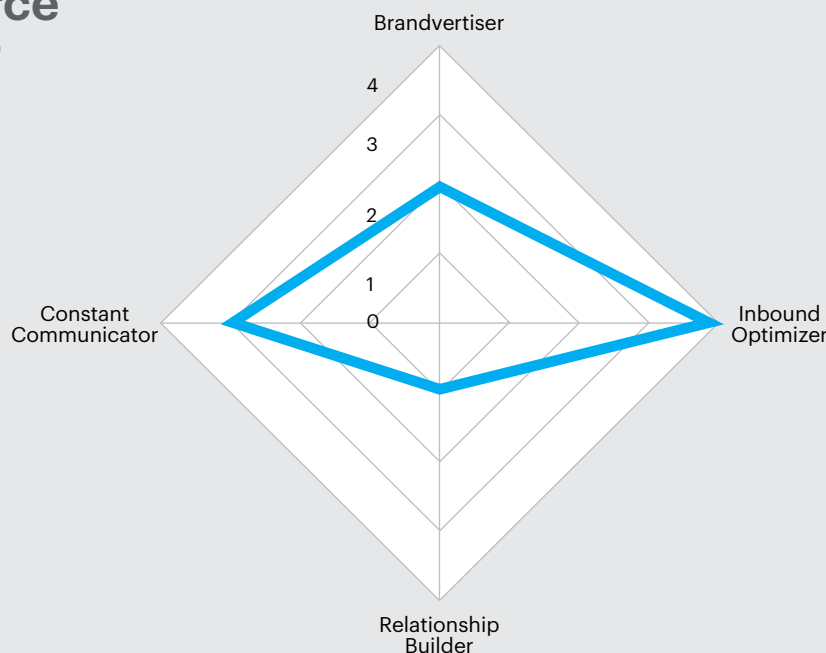
Although all CEM platforms perform the same four essential actions, they vary by the type of customer experience they optimize. We found that most companies prioritize one out of four approaches to deliver great customer experiences. The approach is determined by their

product, industry, and business goals. The key is to deploy a CEM platform best suited to deliver for the archetype a company most identifies with.

We recognize most companies embrace each of these customer experience approaches, but the degrees to which they do varies. For example, an e-commerce retailer might rank these approaches from most important to least important this way:



|   |                              |  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| <p>More Important</p> <p>Less Important</p> | <b>Inbound Optimizer</b>     | The website is the most important asset for sales and must be prioritized.   |
|   | <b>Constant Communicator</b> | After a sale, the customer wants up-to-date information about the product and when it will be delivered.             |
|   | <b>Brandvertiser</b>         | Necessary for staying relevant in consumers' minds.  |
|   | <b>Relationship Builder</b>  | Not as important to e-retailer customers because the buying cycle is brief, but still useful in maintaining loyalty. |

## E-commerce Retailer

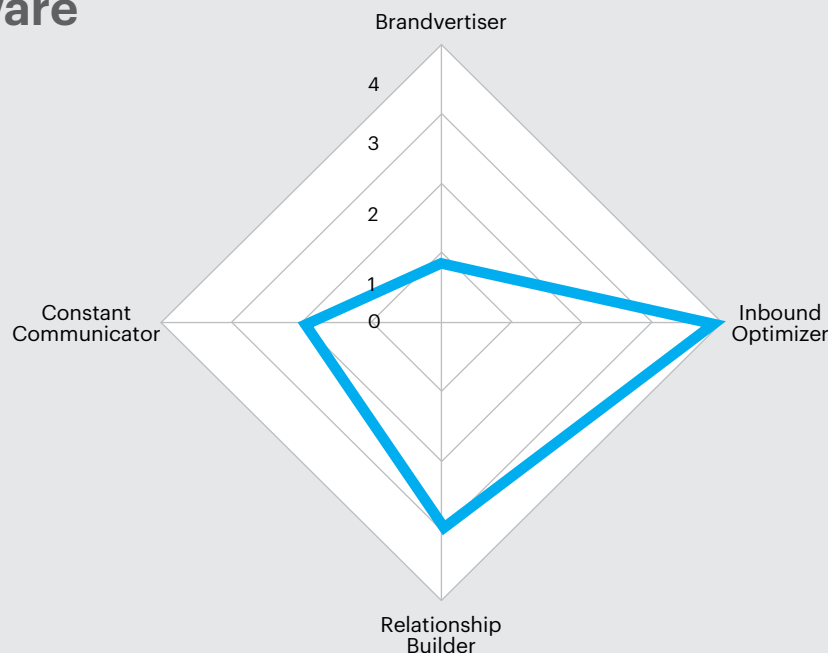




However, for a B2B software firm the ranking could be:

|   |                                     |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| <p>More Important</p>   <p>Less Important</p> | <p><b>Relationship Builder</b></p>  | <p>Buying software is a lengthy process, and it's valuable if the customer believes the vendor is a credible thought leader and partner that can help them. Relationship building through delivery of relevant, valuable content is key.</p> |
|   | <p><b>Inbound Optimizer</b></p>     | <p>Delivered content must have a home easily accessible by customers and allows their interactions to be tracked. A great website is as much a priority as content delivery.</p>   |
|   | <p><b>Constant Communicator</b></p> | <p>Once the customer has purchased or installed the product, there is a need for real-time messaging in the form of support, education, upgrade information, and troubleshooting.</p>  |
|   | <p><b>Brandvertiser</b></p>         | <p>B2B firms aren't looking for mass awareness of the brand. They need to reach a very specific audience, and would rather buy lead-generation instead of advertising.</p>   |

## B2B Software



Plotting rankings on a radar chart provides a good idea of what's most important for the customer experience of each company.

Choose a CEM platform whose strengths most closely match your company's radar chart.



## Evaluating the Top CEM platforms

Using these customer-experience archetypes, you can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each customer-experience platform vendor.

It's tempting to rate vendors based on which one offers the most applications for managing customer experience on all channels. This would be ideal if a single vendor did, in fact, provide the best-in-class solutions for all aspects of managing the customer experience, from content delivery to data insights. However, we cannot realistically expect a single vendor to offer all the best-in-class solutions needed, and more crucially, integrate them to share data and creative assets. Not only is this the equivalent of trying to place all your money on one stock, it means compromising on best-in-class quality for individual solutions. It's akin to buying a Swiss Army knife for chopping vegetables, instead of a simple chef's knife.

Instead, we recommend evaluating each vendor as a provider of a "backbone" customer-experience management platform. A backbone platform may not have all the apps you need, but it does have two or three of the most important ones for your unique customer-experience strategy. The backbone can then be integrated with the other apps you need from other vendors to create a complete stack.

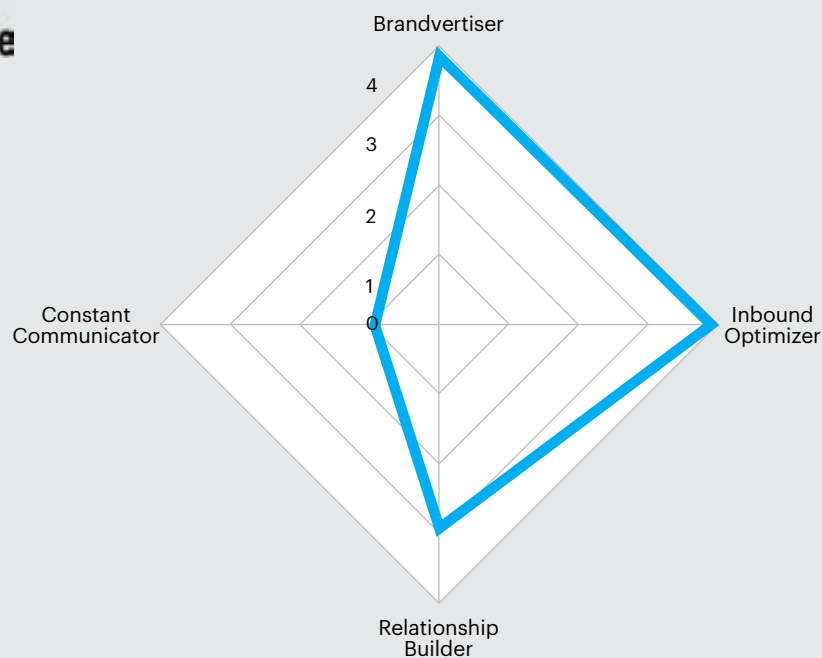
For example, if a company is prioritizing the Inbound Optimizer Archetype, it should choose a backbone platform that specializes in website/app content management and analytics. It can then add on solutions, such as social media management and email marketing from other, best-in-class vendors, instead of buying sub-par solutions from the backbone vendor.

The vendor list below is not exhaustive, but it contains those that are most vocal (and have credibility) about offering platforms to manage experiences across multiple phases of the customer journey.

## Adobe

Adobe built its Experience Cloud on the back of its premium tools for managing owned channels. With the combination of Adobe Experience Manager (CMS), Target (personalization), and Analytics, it offers an integrated set of best-in-class tools for optimizing the web or mobile experience. In addition, it has sturdy, if not top-rated,

Also Adobe Creative Cloud, the industry standard for most digital-content creators, can be integrated in a limited way with Experience Cloud. This makes Adobe a very compelling choice for companies that base their customer-engagement strategy on delivering engaging, relevant content on many different channels.



if not top-rated, solutions for email and social media listening/publishing. This makes Adobe very well suited for the Inbound Optimizer archetype, with some competency in the Relationship Builder archetype.

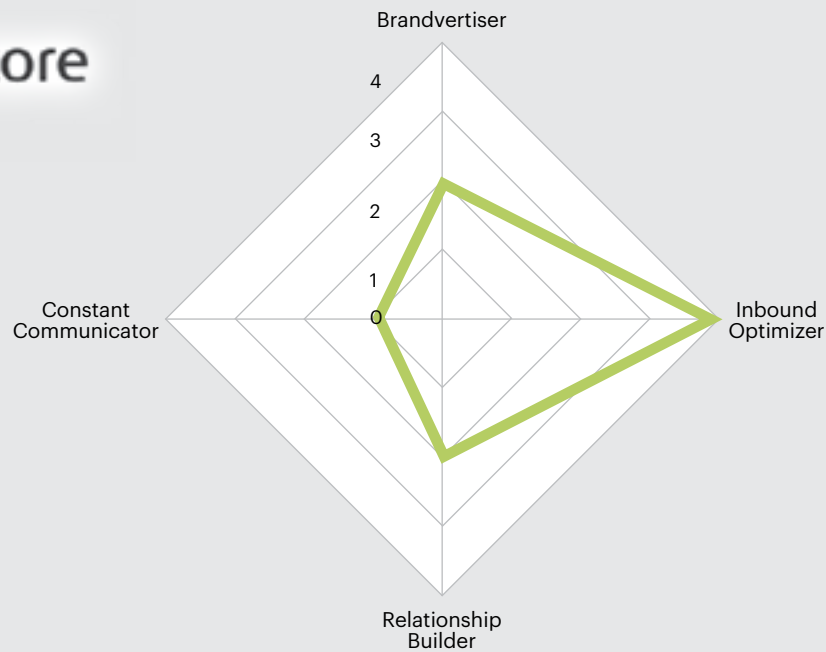
Adobe also has solid credentials for the Brandvertiser archetype. With Adobe Advertising Cloud, you can create audience segments and target them with paid content across search, display, social media, and television..

These capabilities do, however, limit Adobe to the marketing-managed end of the customer-experience spectrum. Adobe lacks a homegrown commerce platform to close the loop on the inbound optimization, and it relies on integration with Microsoft's Dynamics to provide CRM capability. This makes Adobe less suited to the one-on-one customer communications required by the Constant Communicator archetype.

## Sitecore

Much like Adobe, Sitecore's strength also lies in its owned-channel management tools. Its CMS, personalization, and web analytics tools are top of the line. It also offers an integrated commerce that gives it a slight edge over Adobe. However, Sitecore's advertising features are limited

to social media ads and its email tool, while well integrated with its CMS, is not best-in-class. This makes Sitecore a winner in the Inbound Optimizer category, but not a strong player in the other three.

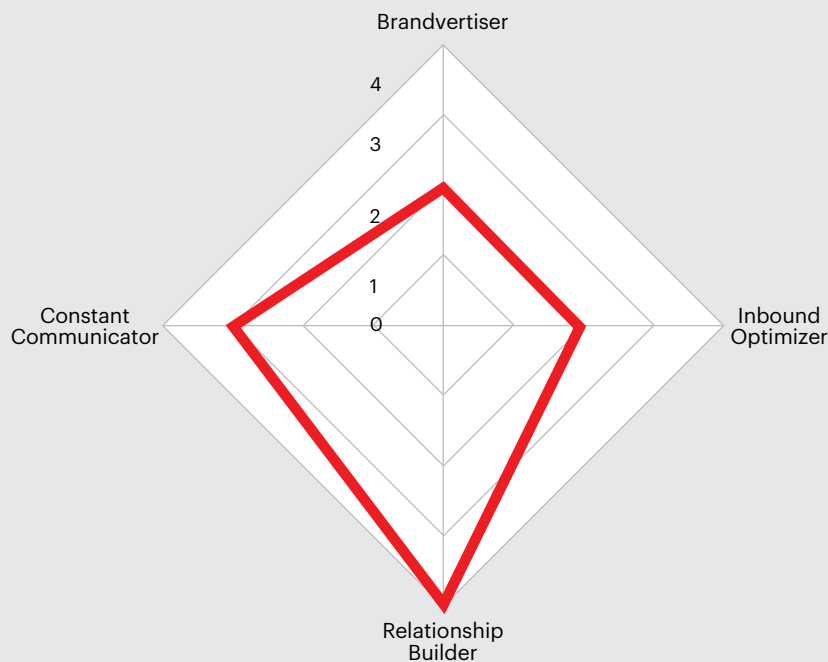




## Salesforce

Salesforce has made admirable progress in integrating functions between its three big customer-engagement suites, the Marketing Cloud, Sales Cloud, and Service Cloud. In particular, its integration between its Marketing Cloud Journey Builder and legacy CRM platform make it well suited for the Relationship Builder category. Through its Service Cloud, it powers real-time messaging on almost any channel a customer prefers, which gives it credibility in the Constant Communicator category

as well. Salesforce loses out in the Inbound Optimizer category by not having any robust content-management solutions, relying instead on external integrations. And when it comes to advertising, Salesforce is limited by a lack of customer-data segmentation tools and by only offering integration with Facebook ads.



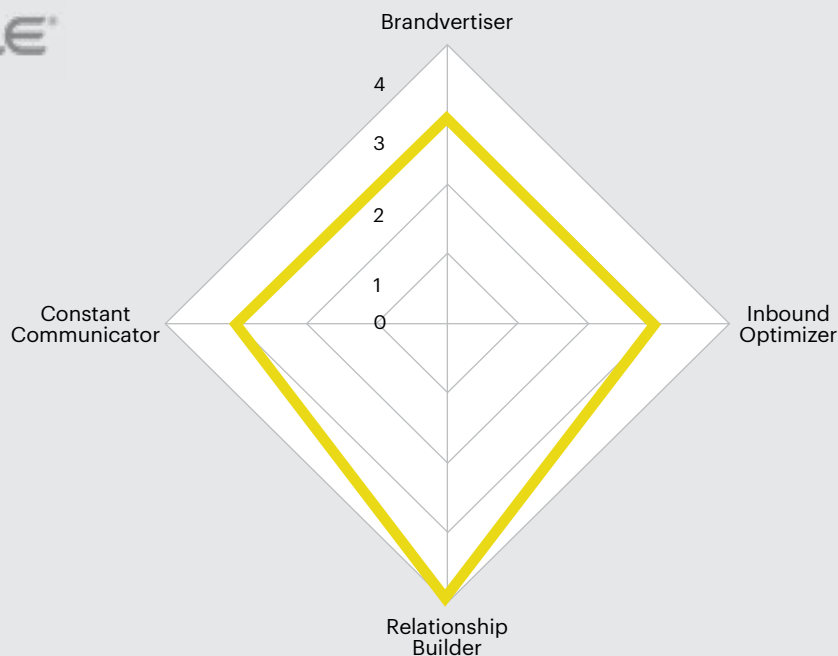
## Oracle

At first glance, Oracle has all the necessary tools to excel in all four CX categories. It boasts best-in-class products for email/marketing automation with Eloqua (B2B) and Responsys (B2C), a high-quality data management platform to power customer-data segmentation in advertising (OracleData Cloud/Bluekai) and competent content management tools for web and mobile devices. In addition, its powerful commerce offering combined with its Configure, Price and Quote module make Oracle an end-to-end solution for managing the inbound customer experience.

While this assembly of tools gives Oracle a lot of credibility across all four CX

categories, it's definitely stronger for the Relationship Builder and Brandvertiser categories. For Inbound Optimizer, Oracle loses points by not having a native web/mobile analytics feature. And for Constant Communicator, its offering isn't as compelling because it's still building out integrations between messaging functions within Service Cloud and the outbound contact present in other modules, such as Commerce and Marketing. Nevertheless, Oracle's product roadmap and bundling of its many different modules under the Experience Cloud moniker make it one of the most complete CEM offerings available.

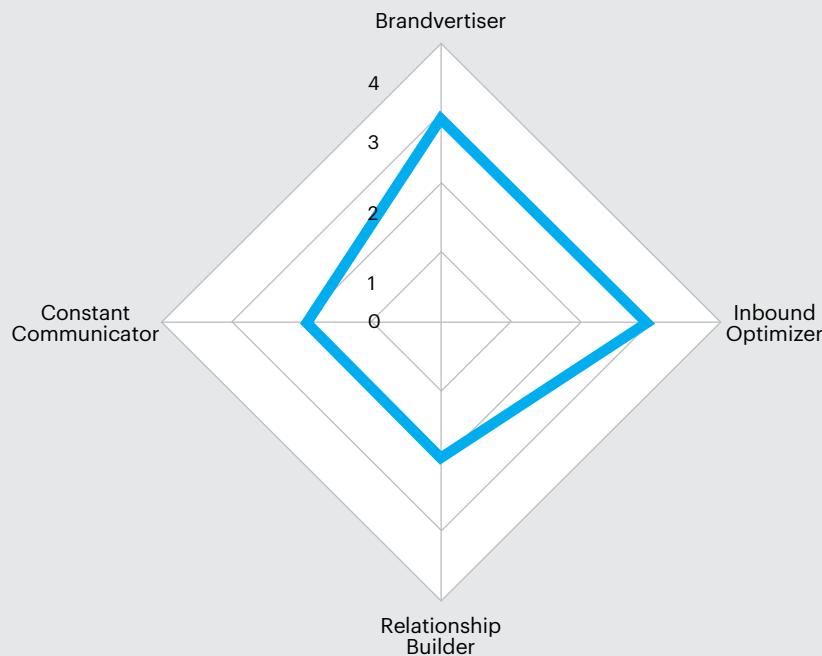
ORACLE



## IBM

IBM's solutions for customer experience are bundled under a collective Digital Commerce offering, which includes commerce, marketing, and content-management solutions. It also offers Tealeaf, a platform that analyzes user behavior on mobile websites and apps. This helps IBM play in the Inbound Optimizer space. However, it is restricted in how much it can deliver for the other three archetypes. It lacks a dedicated service platform, and isn't strong in

the type of CRM-powered salesforce automation that would give it strength in the Constant Communicator or Relationship Builder archetypes. IBM does have an artificial intelligence-powered advertising platform that acts on data from The Weather Company (a recent acquisition), but it isn't really connected to the rest of its marketing and sales suites.



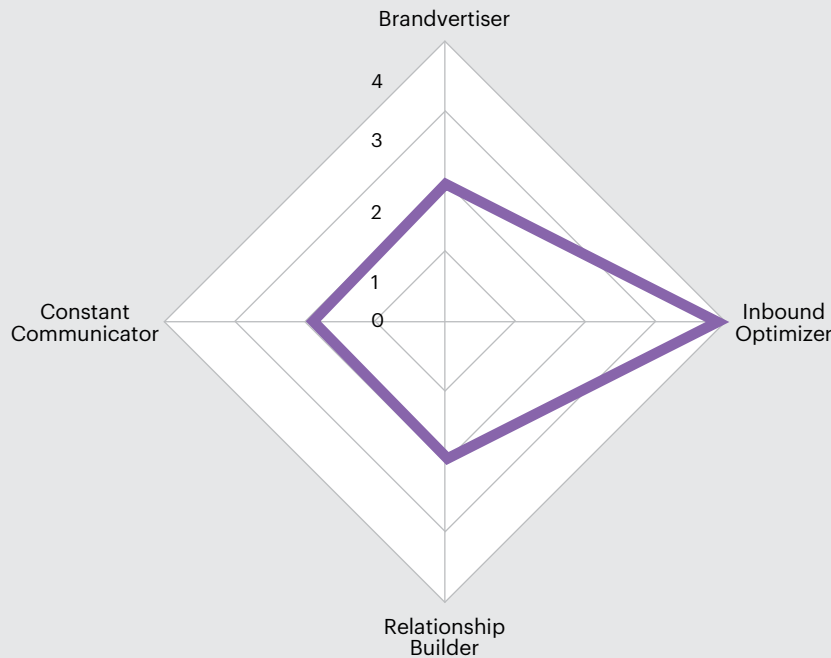
## SAP

SAP's customer-experience-management offering has always been engineered with a focus on e-commerce. The SAP Hybris Customer Experience platform offers web content management and range of personalization tools for creative assets as well as products recommendations. This platform is integrated with SAP Commerce and SAP Merchandising, making it one of the strongest players in the Inbound Optimizer space, specifically for e-retailers.

However, SAP is much stronger on the commerce side of things, rather than managing web experience, for which it

isn't regarded as best-of-breed (compared with Sitecore and Adobe). And while it has made admirable progress in its customer data management platform, it's still very commerce centric, with less value for sales and service.

This makes SAP very much an Inbound specialist, and any capabilities it has in the Brandvertiser, Relationship Builder, and Constant Communicator archetypes are within the commerce realm.



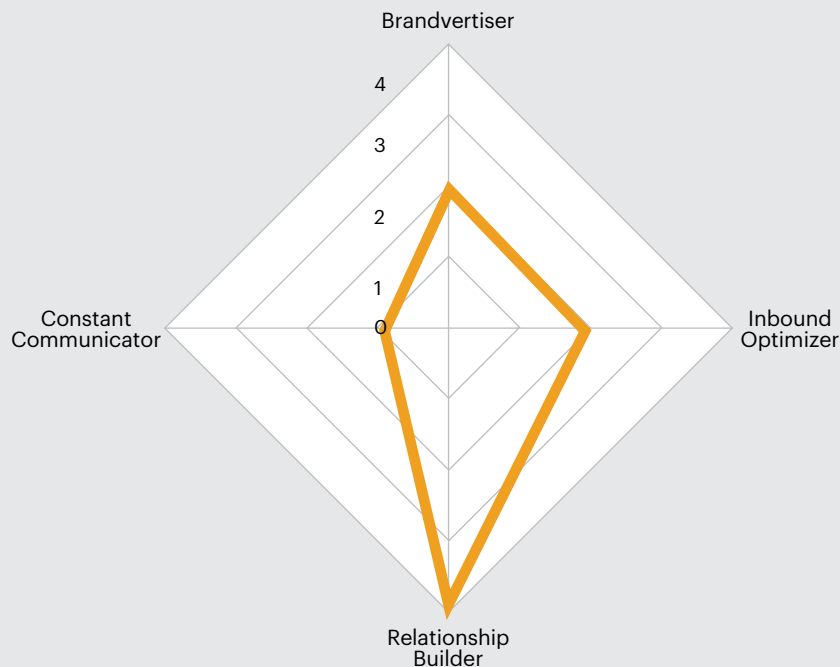


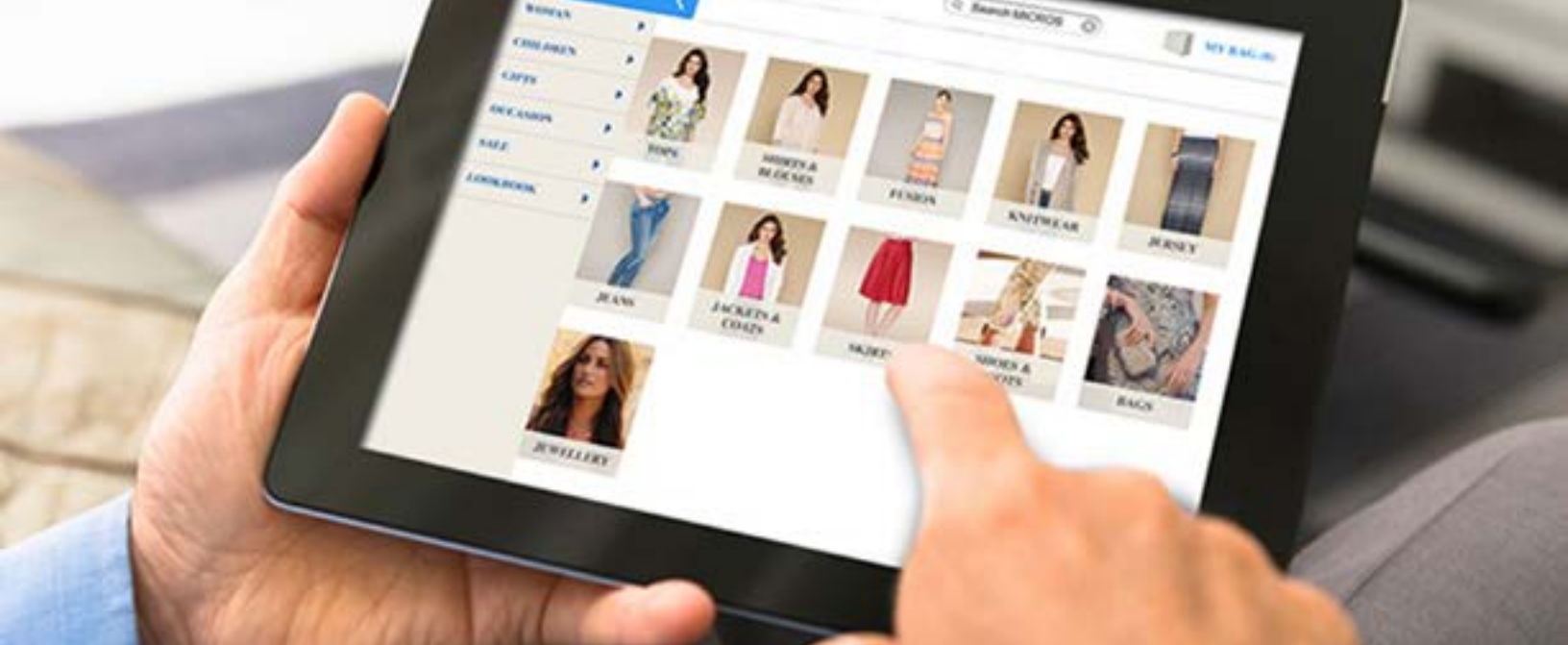
## SAS

SAS has invested in creating a powerful, data-management platform that can ingest and visualize data from multiple sources, including organic search, email, social media, and web page analytics. This makes it a great tool for segmenting customers, identifying their needs, and testing content across many different channels. SAS is particularly strong on the data side of the CEM platform, although its email module has been singled out for praise on the content-delivery side.

While the technology is well placed to manage the entire spectrum of customer experience, SAS is limited by its focus on marketing. The value its CEM platform

delivers is all about delivering personalized, relevant content to the customer on the right channel, at the right time, but within the context of building brand awareness and a relationship that leads to a sales conversion. This makes SAS strong player in the Relationship Builder archetype, with moderate ability in the Brandvertiser and Inbound Optimizer categories, mostly on the strength of its data platform. It's lack of service and commerce oriented solutions make it a non-player in the Constant Communicator category.





## Future Considerations and Next Steps

Before choosing a CX approach, a company needs to consider the views of all the departments and roles that play a part in customer experience. Most of these vendors have a marketing-focused approach to CX, but it's important to include the needs of sales, service, and even product teams. And above all, it's absolutely crucial to choose the archetype based on the needs of the customer. One archetype always will be more important to your company's specific customer, and your first step always should be to use data to identify it.

There are a few ways a company can do this. They can either have a dedicated CX department that holistically serves the customer journey and assigns tasks to different departments accordingly. But if this is not possible, all the CX-related departments can form a working group that shares goals, pain points,

and data to ensure that everyone agrees on which CX approach is the best. This working group can have ownership of at least the data management component of the CEM, if not the content delivery.

Another thing to consider is the advent of the Internet of Things (IoT), which enables a lot of companies to monitor product usage as part of the customer experience. Product usage analytics are especially crucial for a company that is a Constant Communicator. However, the current crop of CEM vendors has very limited capabilities for integrating IoT data with their other customer-data platforms, because it is difficult to standardize that data on another platform. If connecting product-usage analytics with messaging platforms is a priority for your company, these vendors do have solutions in their roadmap, but currently they may not be suitable as CEM choices.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Omar Akhtar, Industry Analyst

As an analyst for Altimeter, Omar publishes research that helps companies thrive on digital disruption. His areas of focus include content strategy, customer experience and marketing technology. These research reports include industry benchmarks, maturity models, guides for developing strategies, and frameworks for evaluating people, processes and tools.

As a consultant, Omar has advised leading brands on how to choose marketing technology, build digital systems for customer experience, and create digital content strategy. He has also worked with MarTech companies on product evaluation and competitive analysis.

Omar holds a masters degree in journalism from Columbia University and was formerly the editor-in-chief of the digital marketing blog The Hub Comms. He was also a writer for Direct Marketing News, PRWeek, Fortune Magazine and The Brooklyn Ink.

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