Unlocking Omni-channel With Unified Customer Identity

**okta**

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Introduction

In the current era of instant consumer gratification, business-to-consumer (B2C) brands are jostling to deliver top-notch customer experiences that span online, offline, social media, the Internet of Things (IoT), and even virtual reality (VR) interactions. In order to not just survive, but thrive, in this channel-rich environment, retail, banking, hospitality, healthcare, insurance, government, and other B2C organizations are looking for ways to increase customer engagement, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. However, their dev teams and architects must navigate through significant technical complexity to connect experiences across channels.

The buzzword du jour is omni-channel—typically defined is as a multi-channel approach to sales that aims to deliver a seamless customer shopping experience, whether they're shopping online from a desktop or mobile device, by telephone, or in a brick-and-mortar store. The idea is that company representatives (human, bot, smart device, or app) always have access to accurate, informative, and timely data about customers, so these customers can, in turn, conduct business with the brand however and whenever they want. For example, starting a transaction in a store or branch location and finishing it online.
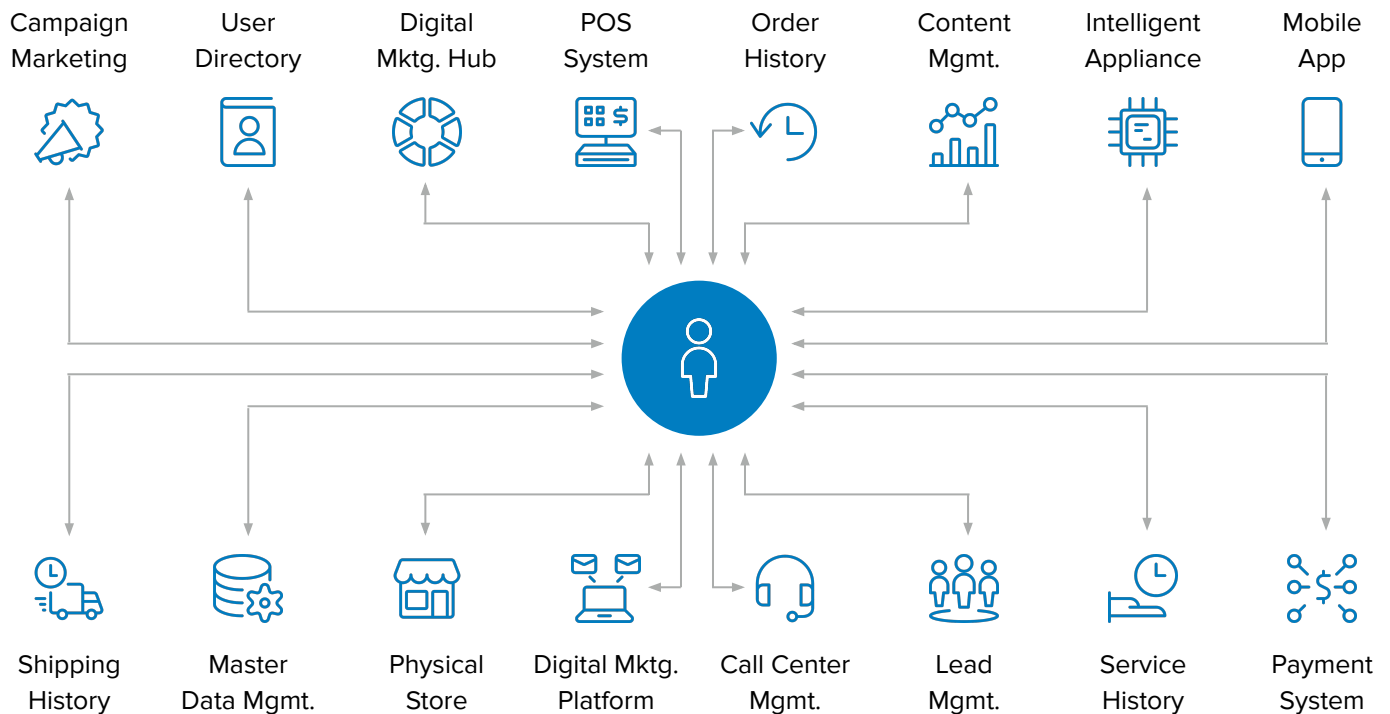
Typical Customer Data Landscape

This is easier said than done in most large organizations, which struggle with system sprawl behind the scenes. Many businesses have good reasons why disjointed customer relationship management (CRM) and marketing apps exist for each division, geography, or product line (especially if they've undergone mergers and acquisitions over time). They also support several external-facing channels through which customers can choose to interact with the brand directly, such as mobile loyalty apps, e-commerce sites, and customer support chatbots. However this approach means the customer experience across channels is fragmented, frustrating, and oftentimes insecure. Developers try to overcome these challenges with custom solutions that are difficult to build and maintain. These solutions often times pull key staff away from more important projects for weeks or even months at a time.

Meanwhile, the needs of sales and marketing teams become increasingly complex in order to meet rising customer expectations. They require unified customer profiles that consolidate each user's interests, transaction history, privacy settings, permissions, preferences, and consent across all of these systems; and they need the right processes to tap into this valuable insight at the right times. For example, the email marketing platform should know that a customer just changed their contact preferences to "no emails" in the mobile app, and a content management platform might reference a person's browsing patterns at the company's retail store in order to dynamically display relevant product deals the next time that user visits the website. However, without an always up-to-date picture of every customer, B2C sales, marketing, and service teams can't deliver the frictionless, personalized, instantaneous customer experience (CX) that consumers demand.

The current state of customer experience management

Smart businesses never stop fine-tuning their CRM and customer experience management (CXM) strategies to meet the needs of today's consumers. To be clear, it's not just about upgrading sales automation software. Gartner [defines CRM](#) as "a business strategy that optimizes revenue and profitability while promoting customer satisfaction and loyalty." Unfortunately, many companies find their CRM practice hindered by the difficulties of collecting and managing authoritative profile data, tying disparate user data stores together, and delivering secure (yet frictionless) experiences through customer-facing channels.

When your IT stack feels like a jumble of spaghetti-like integrations, these are very tough challenges to solve—despite the increasing pressure coming from the business to provide underlying tech that drives a truly differentiated CX. To help optimize customer engagement, loyalty, and sales, you need to break through dozens or hundreds of siloed systems and make sense of all your customer data.

A look at common approaches for unifying customer data

Given the prevalence of this issue at most B2C organizations, several common techniques for consolidating data about consumer interactions and relationships have emerged. This table summarizes some popular approaches:

Customer relationship management (CRM) system of record	Companies may attempt to fully consolidate all customer data into a single system of record, however, this is rarely practical because different platforms have various requirements for latency and depth of customer data
Master data management (MDM)	By pooling data from several systems into one location, MDMs help internal applications more easily access customer insights from across the IT ecosystem, i.e. for advanced market segmentation
Digital marketing hubs (DMHs)	DMHs gather de-identified data from both internal and external sources (e.g., web browsing activity), so marketers can build segments for personalization or online advertising
Data management platforms (DMPs)	DMPs gather de-identified data from both internal and external sources (e.g., web browsing activity), so marketers can build segments for personalization or online advertising
Customer data platforms (CDPs)	These marketing systems help unify data across channels, with a goal of optimizing communications targeting and timing

Even as enterprises invest in various data consolidation efforts to support their omni-channel initiatives, there are additional technical barriers they must overcome before realizing their goals. For instance, these systems don't capture first-party identity context directly from the consumer. Instead, much of the data is collected by sales and marketing folks, cookies, or third-party systems that are not 100% authoritative, and the data quickly becomes stale or inaccurate.

So, how can you better manage the information your customers offer up themselves—about not just their interests, but their preferences and consent—and bring that together with everything else you know about them?

Unleashing the power of CIAM

Thankfully, there's a commercial solution available that can facilitate the flow of data surrounding a consumer's identity, while protecting their sensitive information and making it easier for them to interact with your brand. Not only do customer identity and access management (CIAM) systems secure access to your consumer apps, they're an increasingly vital tool for consolidating customer profiles that power an omni-channel CX.

CIAM is an identity service that connects customer experiences across apps (for example, through authentication, registration, progressive profiling, authorization, etc.) to deliver seamless and secure experiences in real-time. CIAM can enrich customer facing channels, including online, in store, and call centers with reliable user verification, preference management, real-time risk analysis, as well as top-notch availability, reliability, and scale (requirements that don't usually come into play for CRM software). Unlike the internal-facing customer data platforms mentioned above, which were primarily built to aggregate batch user activity data, CIAM solutions were built from the ground-up with quality customer experience as a requirement.

By complementing your CRM or commerce system of record, which tracks what a consumer did, with a modern CIAM platform that knows who the consumer is, you'll gain a connective tissue for all digital components, data sources, and channels that touch customers. This removes blockers to that ever-elusive single source of truth, since modern CIAM can provide a unique identifier for joining user attributes across systems and ensuring that permissions for sharing data are properly scoped—enabling services to share relevant data on a need-to-know basis.
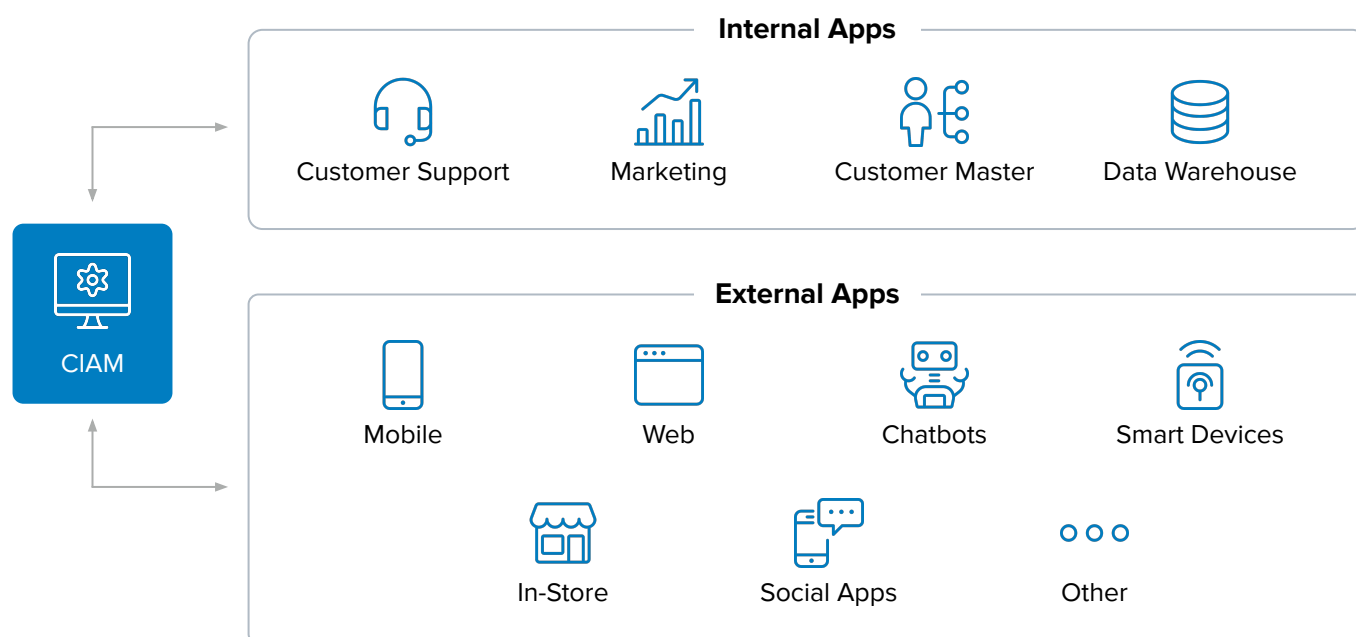
Examples of CIAM Integration Points with Internal and External Customer Data Systems

Together, CIAM and CRM systems solve several common challenges that stymie B2C companies, through key benefits such as:

Improved data protection and frictionless security

Consumer trust in online experiences is eroding. Realizing lifetime value is threatened by fraud and account based threats such as account takeover. First and foremost, CIAM delivers the secure access every CX system needs. CIAM allows you to adopt authentication best practices that mitigate data breaches and build trust with your consumers.

> *80% of hacking-related breaches are caused by compromised, weak, and reused passwords, and 29% of all breaches use stolen credentials.*
>
> — *2019 Verizon data breach report*

Meanwhile, a recent Harris Poll found data privacy to be the most pressing social issue on the minds of Americans (above healthcare, supporting veterans, and job creation).

Leading-edge CIAM solutions are built on identity standards such as OAuth 2.0, OIDC, and SAML. They should come with security features like strong authentication, machine learning driven risk analysis, adaptive multi-factor authentication, and API security. Each of these capabilities helps to protect sensitive customer data that resides in your digital commerce, loyalty, and mobile apps. It also enables a modern, branded, unified login experience that builds consumer trust protecting brand loyalty and customer lifetime value.

Unified customer view across silos

When you have customer information stored in several siloed systems (many of which were probably built on legacy architectures that make them difficult to integrate with), a CIAM identity solution creates a lightweight, flexible layer. Centralized CIAM brings all your customer identities into one spot, making it easier to connect profiles and data across disparate systems for a single, unified view.

Not only can CIAM support fragmented CRM applications, it can also link external-facing customer interaction channels, adding verified information directly from the customer (i.e. their preferred contact methods) into a unified view. Such views unlock sophisticated engagement capabilities (ex: recommendation engines or customized bundle offerings) that improve conversion rates.

Single point for seamless access and profile management

CIAM benefits more than just your business users. It also enhances the customer experience by creating a great first impression via a single, low friction, and branded user registration and login across all of your online and mobile applications.

It gives customers a user-friendly interface with pre-built social authentication and progressive profiling that encourages them to provide first-party information about themselves and their preferences, which helps drive adoption and reduce abandonment. Since accurate customer data is a key lynchpin of any CX initiative, it's hugely valuable to provide one place where people can update their own profile, which CIAM then automatically shares with relevant downstream systems.

Consent management and regulatory compliance

GDPR, California Consumer Privacy Act, and the numerous other privacy regulations coming down the pipe require companies to know exactly where and how to delete consumer data upon request—regardless of which channel the request comes in through. However, most CRM systems don't yet support granular consent management use cases. CIAM is well-positioned to lift this burden, since it prioritizes first-party declared profile data, and includes a simple user interface where customers can give or retract consent to store their information. If needed, CIAM integrates efficiently with advanced consent management tools to more deeply support all requirements for GDPR compliance.

Common identity layer for differentiated experiences

Each of the advantages listed above come together to help companies build world-class omni-channel customer experiences. That's because a good CX hinges on knowing who your consumer is, no matter which channel they choose to engage through. CIAM's unified identity data unlocks personalized experiences and makes it easier to support seamless interactions, both online and via call centers or even brick-and-mortar stores. CIAM also frees up development resources for more value-added work, which speeds time-to-market and innovation.

For example, CIAM gives your team a common set of identity management capabilities so they can more quickly roll out new experiences, such as deeper integration with customer things or AI-driven transactions. Commercial CIAM solutions support modern standards and APIs, so developers no longer have to worry about building time-consuming features like user registration, social logins, or profile management. By providing a fabric that knits every aspect of your customer experience together—including various microservices components and APIs—CIAM greatly increases developer efficiency.

How Okta's industry-leading CIAM solution can help

As the leading independent provider of identity for the enterprise, Okta offers pre-built integrations to marketing and sales technologies—supporting future-proof, vendor-neutral CRM strategies. Our customer identity service provides centralized management and internet-scale security, with a frictionless experience for external users. With developer-friendly resources like code samples, documentation and how-to guides, SDKs, and APIs—developers can use Okta to apply robust identity services to any app they build, modernize, or integrate throughout the customer stack.

The Okta Identity Cloud includes:

- **Authentication** — Embed secure login and single sign-on for custom and third-party applications with passwordless optionality

- **User Management** — Store first person, authoritative user profile data and unique identifiers for identity resolution, which makes access management more straightforward and secure

- **Authorization** — Control which apps and APIs your users have access to using attribute-based policies enforced through SAML and OAuth protocols

- **Adaptive Multi-Factor Authentication** — Ensure extra protection via policies based on a person's profile, resource, and risk score, while offering a range of verification factors to support different users' needs

- **Lifecycle Management** — Automate the provisioning and deprovisioning of customer accounts in various systems at once, such as a loyalty application or support community

- **Access Gateway** — Unified, seamless, and secure login experiences across on-prem and cloud applications

- **Dynamic Scale** — Infrastructure to support the massive traffic spikes and performance testing requirements for the world's largest sites and apps

- **Integration Network** — Easily adopt the latest apps, centralize user management, and automate access workflows across cloud, on-prem, and mobile applications.

By choosing Okta to meet your CIAM needs, you'll gain groundbreaking functionality that supports all kinds of unique security requirements and channel complexity, so you can focus on enriching and enhancing your end-to-end CX.

MGM turns to identity management as the cornerstone of an inspiring guest experience

After successfully rolling out Okta's modern identity and access management to its 62,000-strong workforce, MGM Resorts recently decided to extend this success to its loyalty and rewards program, M life. The program provides individualized service to millions of patrons every day, starting from the moment they walk through the doors. They use CIAM to centralize identity and connect the various experiences M life customers enjoy. Additionally, CIAM helps the company better scale to meet user demands, protect sensitive patron data, and keep loyalty points secure.

> *"Everything we do is about delivering a personalized experience, and the cornerstone of that is identity management. We need to make sure we understand who each person is and know the data we have about them is right, because that creates a more inspiring experience for the people who come and visit our properties. Pretty much all day used to be consumed with potential security threats, but Okta gives us the ability to manage identity well for millions."*
>
> *— 2019 Verizon data breach report*

Conclusion

With the rising pressures of digital competition, B2C developers should focus on disruptive solutions rather than identity plumbing and compliance. But without unifying fragmented customer data, it's impossible to deliver engaging, memorable, and unique experiences that will keep consumers coming back to your brand again and again. Traditional approaches to compiling information in CRM software, data warehouses, marketing hubs, or other databases simply aren't enough to solve this problem on their own. This is especially true given today's intensifying threat environment, in which earning and maintaining customer trust is paramount.

Customer identity and access management solutions help organizations overcome all three of these obstacles to creating optimal customer experiences. CIAM helps brands meet their customers' constantly growing expectations by:

1. Bringing together and augmenting siloed customer information, systems, and strategies across sales, service, marketing, and commerce for more accurate profile data

2. Supporting omni-channel customer experiences through a consistent interface for user registration, login, and preference management

3. Keeping customer data safe from bad actors, which can save a company millions by avoiding costly data breaches

These are all crucial enablers for digital transformation that have a real impact on your business in the form of increased sales, reduced customer churn, cost-effective privacy compliance, and improved developer efficiency. For more information about how Okta ensures secure, seamless customer experiences, visit https://www.okta.com/solutions/secure-seamless-customer-experience.

About Okta

Okta is the modern access solution for all your critical resources from cloud to ground, including apps, infrastructure, and APIs. A cloud-based platform to unify identity and access management across your workforce, partners, and customers, we help your business securely move to the cloud. With deep integrations to over 6,000 apps, the Okta Identity Cloud enables simple and secure access from any device. Thousands of customers, including Experian, 20th Century Fox, LinkedIn, Flex, News Corp, Dish Networks and Adobe trust Okta to work faster, boost revenue, and stay secure. Okta helps customers fulfill their missions faster by making it safe and easy to use the technologies they need to do their most significant work. For more information, visit us at www.okta.com or follow us on www.okta.com/blog.