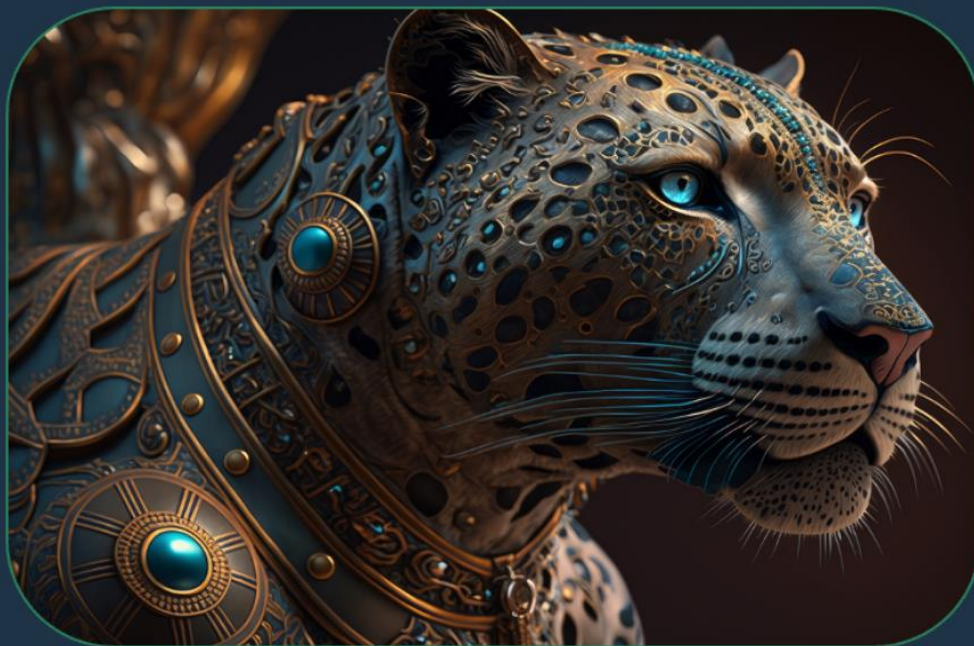




# Adobe leads the Customer Engagement Pack

By accelerating the production and delivery of exceptional omnichannel customer experiences



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## About this report

In this report, CX-Create's founder and chief IT industry analyst, Jeremy Cox, explores developments of the Adobe Experience Cloud and recent innovations exhibited at Adobe Summit in March 2023. He believes that with the latest developments, Adobe has significantly enhanced its customer engagement platform and turned its content creation and management heritage into a significant strategic advantage.

The first section of this report explores some of the common challenges in delivering a consistently positive customer experience and offers guidance on core principles that will help those embarking on CX programs. We then dive into more detail on Adobe's evolution of its customer engagement platform and why it is now leading the customer engagement pack.

CX-Create is an independent IT industry analyst and advisory firm. Its founder, Jeremy Cox, has taken a keen interest in what it takes to sustain relevance to customers (the lodestone of business success) since the mid-1980s. He draws on experience in marketing, sales, and strategy consulting at IBM throughout the 1990s, as a principal consultant in CRM transformation at KPMG Consulting, IT industry analyst at Omdia (formerly Ovum), and now at his firm, CX-Create, founded in January 2021.

Cox has evaluated in detail leading CRM and Customer Engagement Platforms for over a dozen years, and his unbiased assessments are based on the ability of the vendor to support enduring customer relevance to deliver sustainable growth.

## Highlights:

- Customer experience (CX) must be approached holistically to create the conditions for enduring customer relevance - resulting in growth
- Adobe's tagline: Growth Comes From Experiences, underlines the central purpose behind its technological developments
- Adobe builds on its traditional creative strengths to provide a competitive advantage
- CX-Create's viewpoint – Adobe Experience Cloud leverages Adobe's rich content heritage to lead the Customer Engagement Pack

## Customer experience (CX) must be approached holistically to create the conditions for enduring customer relevance - resulting in growth.

A holistic approach to CX is essential as operational and product development activities can impact the experience as much as front-office interactions, and sometimes more so. On-time fulfillment of orders, supply constraints, product design and packaging, usage or assembly instructions, clarity of invoices, etc., all impact the customer's emotions, creating positive feelings or, conversely, frustration or even anger if expectations are unmet. While the marketing department may be responsible for an effective CX strategy, many elements across the entire value chain are outside its direct control. So, in addition to a wide-angled holistic view of CX, whoever has the primary responsibility for CX strategy will need to collaborate with multiple teams and departments that directly or indirectly impact the resulting customer experience. And, as customer expectations continue to evolve, CX must be recalibrated continuously. CEOs must provide the backing.

CX-Create recommends six foundational principles to help with this holistic and adaptive approach, outlined in Figure 1.



Figure 1; Six principles governing effective CX - Source: CX Create

## Recognize and know your customer

Regular customers expect to be recognized. While those who sign in to access a service are superficially recognized, this recognition is merely transactional. It does not reveal the customer's context or provide any clues as to why they made contact or their experience along their journey to this point. Recognizing and knowing the customer depends on the quality of the available data. Their history, preferences, past behaviors, and current interaction journey. Without this, real personalization is impossible, or at best, lucky guesswork. A dynamic customer profile must be available at the point of interaction to trigger a relevant response or provide guidance to smooth the path to the customer's objectives. It's useless if the required data is locked away in the marketing department's customer data platform (CDP) but unavailable to a service agent trying to help the customer solve a problem. It must also be a real-time CDP drawing on interaction, product, financial, and demographic or firmographic data ingested from multiple sources.

## A channel-agnostic customer journey orientation

It's a common mistake to design customer experiences around each interaction channel that customers use. The problem with this approach is that it creates channel silos that frustrate the customer, especially if they use multiple channels throughout their various journeys. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated customers' use of digital channels, but they don't want to be forced down a digital silo. Customer journey mapping provides a baseline for how customers might be expected to engage with a firm but provides a static proxy of reality. Channel choice should be up to the customer, so experience design must take a channel-agnostic approach. Observation, Voice of the Customer (VoC) survey data, and customer journey analytics (CJA) can help inform the CX design process, but as we will see, there is more to it than that.

## Build trust

Trust is fundamental in any relationship, and hardly a week goes by without some significant data breach coming to light. Customers want to know that their data is always protected and only used as they permit. While there are a host of regional privacy and data protection regulations in force and significant penalties for non-compliance, common sense should make this an obvious necessity. However, large companies awash with customer data are especially at risk of destroying trust through data breaches. No matter the size, every business must develop disciplines and governance to protect customer data and maintain trust.

## Contextually empathetic

The pandemic added impetus to the need to be empathetic with each customer. Lockdowns generated anxieties and changes in customer behaviors and expectations. Face-to-face interactions were displaced by online, mobile, or video-conferencing. While the pandemic is generally over, many of these behaviors and expectations remain.

Active listening, understanding, and concern for the customer's well-being, intentions, and context are reinforced by cultural values. If a company is only self-interested, customers' desires may be subordinated to transactional goals, alienating them and encouraging them to find alternative suppliers.

Contextual understanding is essential for genuine empathy. In face-to-face interactions, empathy often comes naturally as we listen and gain an understanding of the customer. Scaling empathy across hundreds of thousands of daily interactions where decisions are often automated is a massive challenge. Rules-based approaches can sometimes work but risk alienating customers that don't fit a predetermined profile or segment. Artificial intelligence (AI) provides a better option through machine learning (ML) acting as a trigger to a recommendation or surfacing a timely piece of relevant content. As more becomes known about each customer, previous patterns of behavior, expressed or implied preferences, and context provide clues to the customer's needs at that moment. ML is imperfect but, over time, becomes better at predicting the most relevant action to help customers meet their interaction journey goals. However, AI has risks, primarily when bad decisions are based on embedded algorithmic bias. [\*Responsible AI – What is it, and why it's important to CX?\*](#)

### Dynamic orchestration

Today, dynamic orchestration of the customer experience is more aspirational than fact. The idea is that throughout every customer journey, online and offline, the customer experience is fluid and supported with contextually relevant information, content, or guidance as required. The static customer journey design approach to CX relies on assumptions or research to create rules to trigger what is hoped is the correct response. Dynamic orchestration depends on data fueling a network of AI and appropriate underlying process automation to trigger relevance at the right time and form and in real-time. The most advanced customer engagement platform vendors, such as Adobe, Creatio, Microsoft, Oracle, Pegasystems, Salesforce, SAP, SugarCRM, and Zoho, have been moving in this direction for several years. Their platforms use a mix of rules-based and semi-autonomous ML-based approaches. While these platforms have evolved from former CRM systems to support employees in marketing, sales, and service departments, they encompass a much broader scope. They are now hybrid systems of record and engagement. When integrated with back-office operational systems, they can deliver a unified omnichannel or channel-agnostic customer experience.

### Continuously adaptive

Customer behaviors, expectations and the options available to them, and the art of the possible are in an accelerating state of flux. To maintain customer relevance, any business must learn to adapt at speed. Modern cloud-based platforms can help, but ultimately adaptation requires a high degree of sensitivity to change and the ability to sense, anticipate, respond, and adapt as critical survival capabilities – see [\*The Enterprise as an Adaptive Living System\*](#). Multiple \*OODA loops connected to a central 'brain' provide the sensing capabilities, complemented by observation techniques, such as secret shopping and feedback from voice-of-the-customer/employee (VoC/VOE) mechanisms.

The six principles provide a basis for a holistic approach to CX within a broader enterprise context of [\*four integrated value disciplines\*](#) – operational excellence, customer (and employee engagement), continuous innovation, and, of growing importance, environmental and social governance (ESG). If CX is consciously placed within this broader business context, the

enterprise can sense and respond to immediate needs, anticipate change, and adapt at the right pace to remain relevant to customers.

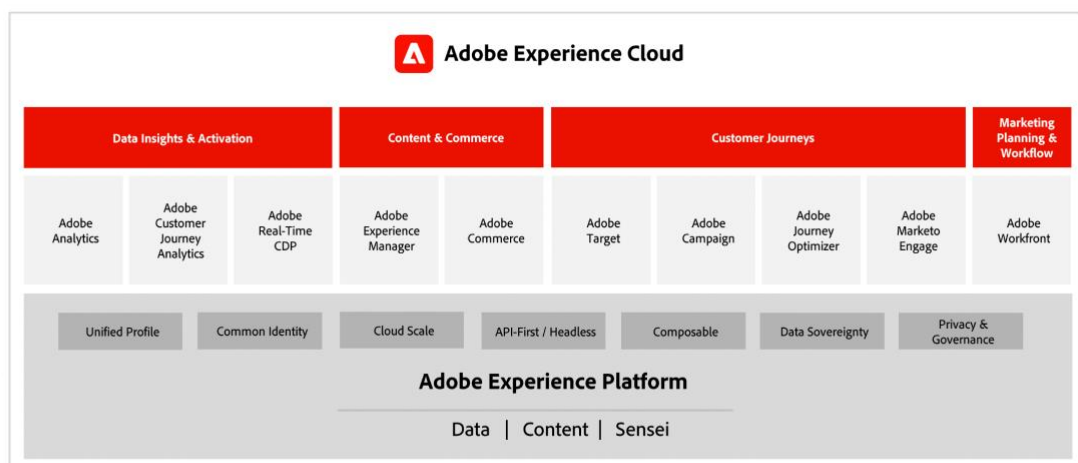
So how does Adobe Experience Cloud stack up as a strategic and significant growth engine within this broader, fluid enterprise environment? What unique advantages does Adobe have, and what should it do to reinforce them and maintain a leadership position?

## Adobe’s tagline: Growth Comes From Experiences, underlines the central purpose behind its technological developments

Adobe’s tagline points in the same direction as CX-Create’s – *Enduring Customer Relevance is the Source of Growth*. Both are focused on the promise of growth. Adobe’s growth from experiences implies that the delivered customer experience is, above all, relevant as perceived and judged by the customer. Rather than promoting Adobe Experience Cloud as another CRM platform, Adobe focuses on its fundamental purpose – to deliver contextually relevant and rewarding experiences that drive growth. CX-Create’s strapline articulates the overarching business goal, while Adobe’s articulates how - through Adobe Experience Cloud.

## How Adobe Experience Cloud Supports Experience-Led Growth

In his opening keynote at Adobe Summit 2023, Shantanu Narayen, Chairman, and CEO, reinforced the purpose behind the notion of experience-led growth. He also reiterated Adobe’s optimistic vision to change the world through digital experiences and unleash employee creativity by combining the content creation advantages of Adobe Creative Cloud and its family of supporting applications with Adobe Experience Cloud. It is this combination of technologies that gives Adobe a significant competitive advantage in the CX space. This has been amplified by developments announced at Summit. Before looking at those, let’s start with an overview of Adobe Experience Cloud, outlined in Figure 2.



Adobe Summit

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Figure 2: Adobe Experience Cloud - Source: Adobe

Adobe Experience Cloud architecture, marked by cloud-native, common data foundation, and streamlined connections, eliminates friction between applications. Over the last few years, Adobe has embedded major acquisitions like Magento (now Adobe Commerce), Marketo (Adobe Marketo Engage), and Workfront (Adobe Workfront) in its Experience Cloud stack. It is reinventing how these applications work together without friction through Adobe Experience Platform, the centralized hub that powers native integrations and provides a common data foundation and unified profiles that powers data-driven, real-time customer experiences in Adobe and non-Adobe applications.

Other Experience Cloud applications in the lineup powered by Experience Platform include Adobe Target for A/B testing and:1 personalization optimization, and Adobe Analytics for web analysis.

Adobe has also rolled out a set of Experience Cloud applications built natively on Adobe Experience Platform for next-gen personalized insights and engagement use cases. These applications are Adobe Journey Optimizer for managing and optimizing omnichannel campaigns, Adobe Customer Journey Analytics applications for cross-channel analysis, and Adobe Real-Time CDP, discussed in more detail below.

With API-first integrations/microservices, composable shared services, and the Experience Data Model (XDM), Adobe Experience Platform supports contextual empathy and rapid adaptation.

As an open platform, Adobe Experience Platform exposes the system's full functionality to developers/partners to integrate with any system, enabling them to connect to other enterprise systems easily. As explained in the six principles section of this report, that is essential to unify customer and product-related information and transactional data from other sources, such as ERP and logistics systems, that have a bearing on CX. The Experience Data Model (XDM) supports the standardization of customer-related data and content ingested from other systems. Sensei ML algorithms can be applied to trigger personalized experiences, recommend next-best actions or offers, and support continuous optimization and adaptations – closing the OODA loops. The low-code developer tools provide the means for invoking microservices to complete last-mile connections or adaptations in support of customer journeys.

Real-time CDPs for different business models provide the foundation for positive CX Services within Adobe Experience Platform boost customer recognition and support dynamic experience orchestration:

- **B2B, B2C and B2P CDPs** - Adobe provides Adobe Real-Time CDP for B2B, B2C, B2P (business to person), and hybrid (B2B2C) customers. When first introduced, it was optimized for B2C, and in 2021, Adobe introduced its B2B capabilities, which include account profiles as well as for individuals. This provides a firm foundation for



sophisticated and effective account-based engagement strategies that depend on accurate shared data between account, marketing, and services teams. Data can be ingested by Real-Time CDP from any source and synthesized to form real-time profiles and identities. The segmentation engine within the platform provides a basis for designing experiences that will appeal to customers or prospects with similar behavioral attributes and implied needs. Real-time behavioral, transaction, and operational data is absorbed on a massive scale, ensuring customer profiles are continually updated. As is to be expected, governance rules and data sovereignty are enforced by the platform and across the entire Adobe Experience Cloud, including the [ethical use of AI](#).

- **Adobe Journey Optimizer** – to create and deliver relevant and rewarding inbound and outbound customer experiences. Journey Optimizer feeds on real-time customer profile data and advanced ML decisioning support to trigger the most relevant content, offers, or guidance throughout each customer’s journey.
- **Adobe Customer Journey Analytics** enables experience designers to identify behavioral trends or sources of friction that might impede the experience or test CX designs to see what works best and under what conditions.

## Adobe builds on its traditional creative strengths to provide a competitive advantage

Adobe is not the only vendor supporting customer channel-agnostic experiences, but it has two distinct advantages enabling it to move ahead of competitors:

- **Adobe Workfront** - providing work management and collaborative support for product and marketing teams to accelerate the creation and production of effective content.
- **Adobe Creative Cloud and Adobe Document Cloud** – provide the tools to create and deliver impactful content. According to [Adobe Fast Facts](#), 90% of creative professionals use Adobe products, notably Photoshop and Illustrator. Adobe Stock includes over 320 million images and creative assets to give creative professionals (and amateurs) graphic inspiration. PDF, which Adobe offers through Adobe Acrobat, is also the default for most online documents. By bringing Adobe Creative Cloud and Experience Cloud closer together, Adobe is building on its content strengths, and these have been augmented by Workfront and AI developments, notably, Adobe [Firefly](#), its generative AI content creator, and [Adobe Substance 3D](#) designer for rapid creation of 3D assets for Adobe Commerce or other e-commerce platforms.

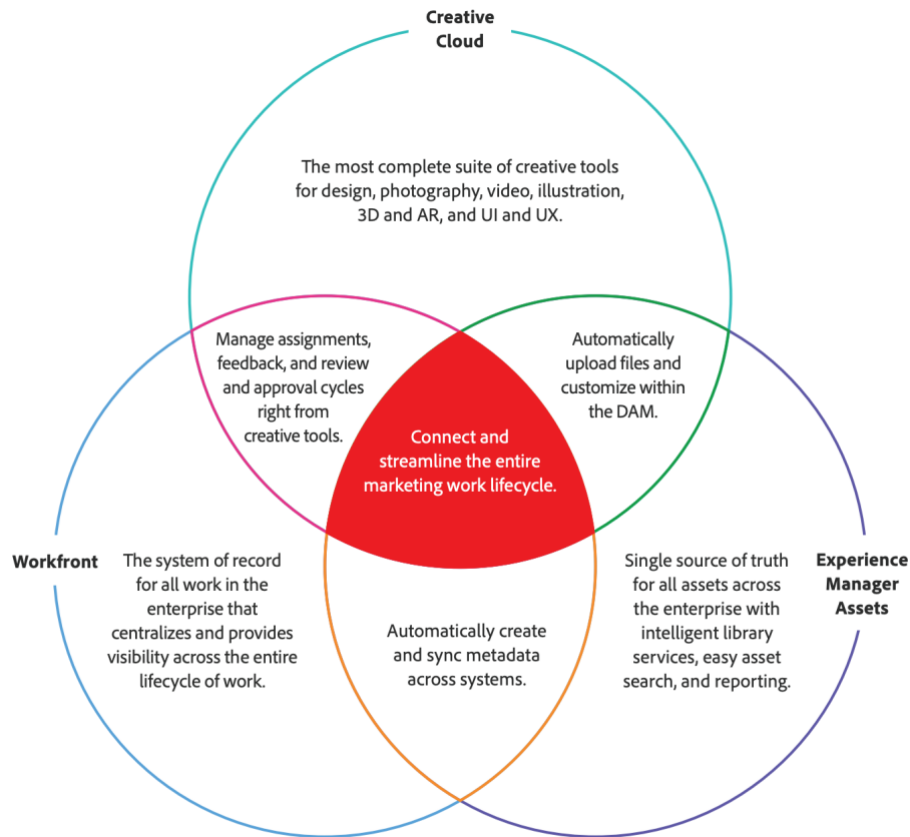
## Adobe turns the content supply chain into a CX advantage through streamlined workflows and unrivaled content creativity applications

At Adobe Summit 2023, the vendor unveiled its [content supply chain solution](#), combining Workfront, Creative Cloud (including Frame.io), and Experience Manager Assets, outlined in Figure 3. This combination provides workflows that span:

- **Campaign planning**, including budgeting, resource management, targets, segments, and timing.
- **Production** – covering design, asset creation, review and approvals process, asset variations, and automation.
- **Delivery** – including distribution and measurement of campaigns rights management and personalization rules and triggers.

Of particular interest is how Adobe supports product and marketing teams and eliminates manual efforts or complicated approval processes. According to Adobe, early users have halved the time to map project-level information to content, reduced the time to upload and deliver tagged content by half, and streamlined the entire process, enabling teams to handle up to three times the volume of content. The complete visibility of campaigns, schedules, costs, and returns on marketing investments and content assets eliminates bottlenecks. It provides a transparent environment where lessons can be learned, improving subsequent campaign performance.

While content does not govern the entire customer experience, it plays a vital part in its delivery—a significant advantage to those embracing Adobe Experience and Creative Clouds.



**FIGURE 3: STREAMLINING THE ENTIRE MARKETING WORK LIFECYCLE - SOURCE: ADOBE**

Firefly generative AI emancipates creativity even in the hands of non-professionals. Generative AI is an extension of natural language processing (NLP), where algorithms are trained on massive datasets so that users can use everyday language to generate images, videos, music, or art – a boon for content creators. While generative AI is a cause of concern for many, especially when data sources are inaccurate, Adobe Firefly is designed to be commercially safe. The first models of Firefly are trained on Adobe Stock, openly licensed content, and public domain content where the copyright has expired, which mitigates against unintended or deliberate bias. Currently, in Beta, Adobe has an open invitation for creators to test Firefly and provide feedback so that Adobe can work together with its community to remediate any ethical concerns and continue improving the model. The initial phase will limit output to images, photographs, graphics, and text. Adobe is also driving open industry standards for transparency and content attribution through the Content Authenticity Initiative (CAI) and is empowering creators with more choice and control over their work by enabling them to attach ‘do not train’ tags to assets. Adobe is also working towards industry adoption to help prevent the use of works with “Do Not Train” credentials from being used as part of a dataset. The advantages of Firefly, even in its beta version, include using abstract terms and seeing them converted into compelling images. The image on the front of this report is one such asset. The author searched ‘leading the pack.’ The result was the striking image of a bejeweled jaguar. Not bad for a

complete amateur and vastly more eye-catching than many of the more cliched content assets. Future Firefly models will include 3D images and the ability to provide brand controls.

## CX-Create's viewpoint – Adobe Experience Cloud leads the customer engagement pack

Adobe Experience Cloud has several distinct advantages over other competing customer engagement platforms:

1. A total focus on the customer experience rather than CRM. Adobe aims to enable companies and brands to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Other vendors are less explicit.
2. Adobe's content creation heritage via Creative Cloud gives it a deeper understanding of the art of creativity. It has brought these advantages from Creative Cloud to Experience Cloud through Workfront and Adobe Express via integrations with AEM. Thus supporting the complete content creation and delivery supply chain, as announced at Adobe Summit 2023.
3. Adobe Sensei has long had the ability to help accelerate content production. Still, Firefly promises to expand and accelerate content production and put creativity in the hands of non-professionals, deepening the pool of contributors within the enterprise.
4. Adobe Real-Time CDP is optimized for particular business models – B2B and B2C or a combination of B2B2C.
5. Adobe Customer Journey Analytics helps companies understand how customers interact online and offline across different channels and devices and provides insights based on real-time interaction traffic. This data allows companies to refine the experience and identify inhibitors that negatively impact the customer experience. It also offers digital fuel for Adobe Sensei to fine-tune the experience at the individual customer level. Over time brands become less constrained by rules-based approaches (educated guesswork) and increasingly deliver positive experiences dynamically.

While Adobe Experience Cloud can ingest data from any enterprise system to provide real-time omnichannel experiences, the vendor tends to focus on its strengths, understandably in support of marketing. CX-Create recommends that Adobe broadens its appeal to other members of the C-Suite beyond marketing. Experience-led growth is a powerful message, but case stories of companies that have broken down barriers between operations and customer engagement should be explored. Of particular interest are those that are not just marketing and selling to customers but adapting their entire value chain based on customer signals, leading to above-average levels of growth. One of the best sessions at the Summit that started to explore this was the discussion between [Brian Glover \(Adobe\) and Karen Robins, Global CMO of EY](#). It would, however, be good to hear from pioneering CEOs who could speak to the broader enterprise story.

## Appendix

### Further reading

From CX-Create:

[\*Responsible AI – What is it, and why it's important to CX?\*](#)

[\*The Enterprise as an Adaptive Living System.\*](#)

[Four integrated value disciplines](#)

From Adobe:

[Adobe's Commitment to AI Ethics](#)

[Fast facts](#)

[Meet Adobe Firefly](#)

[Content Supply Chain](#)