# The Media-First Approach

Why visual media must be a primary
consideration for e-commerce businesses

Cloudinary

Even though we make decisions every day according to a combination of facts and feelings, we often default to letting our gut instincts guide us. Refined over time through our unique experiences, our instincts help us arrive at choices based on the stories that resonate with us.

Of course, our instincts are guided and supported by the five senses: sight, smell, touch, sense, and hearing. However, those senses sometimes interact with our decision-making process in an uneven manner, meaning we retain and use the accumulated information in different—and unintended—ways.

For example, sight is a dominant sense. A whopping 90 percent of the information our brains process is visual. Yet even within this one sense, not all vision-based consumption influences our thoughts and decisions equally: the average human brain processes imagery **60,000x faster** than text, retaining 80 percent of the imagery but only 20 percent of the text.
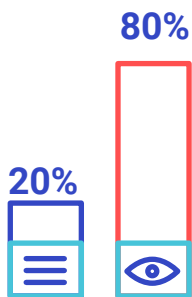
94%
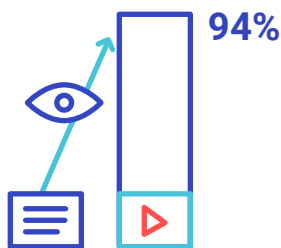
Visual content
receives on average
94% more total views
than text alone.
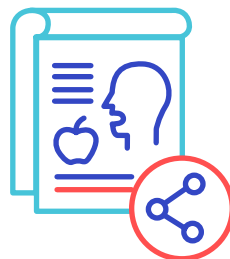
Consumers are **40x
more likely to share
visual content** with
fellow influencers on
social media.

**90% of the information
our brains process
is visual,** due to the
dominance of sight
as a human sense.

80%

20%

The average consumer
retains **80%** of what
they see, versus just
20% of what they read.

The human brain processes visual
imagery **60,000x faster than text,**
conveying your message clearly and
quickly in increasingly crowded markets.

Businesses can appeal to all five senses in physical settings but primarily to sight only online. Although that limits them in some ways, the dynamic, digital nature of e-commerce provides a major opportunity to actually bypass the constraints of physical environments and deliver even more compelling and engaging experiences.

Hence, the distinction between successful and struggling businesses often comes down to the development and execution of an exceptional visual-media strategy. To cut through the noise of the marketplace and win valuable real estate in the memories of audiences, you as e-business owners must master visual communication.In other words, adopt a media-first approach to:

Remain competitive as you expand product lines, launch channels, and integrate technologies

Align your brand with your audience's emotional and analytical preferences, which are often shaped by pop culture, e.g., videos, AR, and other media spotlighted on TikTok, Pinterest, and the like.

Become relevant, adaptable, engaging, and trusted by customers

Achieve customer-centric business goals and create immersive experiences at scale

Turn media into a primary business consideration

The coronavirus pandemic, accompanied by travel constraints, gave rise to an interesting challenge for iconic apparel brand **Levi's**: its wholesale distributors could not travel to Levi's showrooms to browse and select the assortments of merchandise they'd in turn sell through their own retail operations.

With a media-first mantra, Levi's treated that challenge as an opportunity, quickly launching a digital showroom that delivers all the immersive visual experiences of physical shopping — without any of the travel or safety concerns. With the showroom capable of offering 360-degree product views of 40,000 seasonal items as soon as they enter the Levi's catalog, wholesale distributors can buy with confidence.

The Levi's decision to set up the digital showroom did not require a business overhaul or an all-hands-on-deck maneuver. It simply aligned business goals with a customer-centric, media-first strategy for winning and retaining customers supported by each of their functional teams.

A growing trend due to the pandemic is that e-commerce stores must launch fast in response to the evolving dynamics and strategies, leading to a corresponding need for accelerated media workflows.

An effective media-first strategy involves four steps:

1. **Take advantage of technology**
2. **Master the basics**
3. **Empower teams**
4. **Upgrade and refine the process**

Take advantage of technology

A boon for e-commerce businesses, media-first technology platforms serve as a forum for managing visual media, from storage to editing to delivery across channels, users, and use cases. And while some e-commerce organizations might still try to execute a media-first strategy without a best-of-breed solution, they must, nonetheless, make it a priority to employ a media-management solution that offers the following:

Flexibility, adaptability, and scalability to accommodate business growth	**An intuitive, user-oriented UI to accelerate adoption and reduce errors**	**Automation to shorten time to market and optimize campaigns**

Only after you've adopted a media-management solution that fits that description are you ready to quickly and effectively deploy relevant, detailed, and high-value media that help achieve your business goals, as in the Levi's case.

Master the basics

The fundamental requirement for running an e-commerce business is that users can discover you online, browse merchandise, and make purchases. To compete and succeed, however, you must offer a slew of capabilities that come naturally to media-first organizations and that are slated to accomplish the following:

Capture the attention of the "window shoppers" and entice them to keep exploring the merchandise on display	**Deploy context-optimized images and videos in near-real time in all your channels.**

Empower teams

To keep up with the modern e-commerce landscape, you must rally your teams and decision-makers to think creatively and to identify opportunities for a more in-depth integration of visual media. Don't be deterred by perceived limits of skillset, time, or the media assets you already have on hand. Instead, focus on identifying and removing the barriers that prevent your teams from developing and optimizing customer-centric campaigns.

Remember, even in a media-first organization with a media-first culture, not everyone can or should be a media expert. So, you need to develop more efficient processes and apply technology appropriately to help non-technical teams execute more efficiently and allow technical teams to focus on other things. As long as you're dedicated to eradicating roadblocks to execution and improving processes, your teams can focus on developing and refining their campaigns and programs and delivering the results you desire.

Upgrade and refine the process

To engage with customers whose tastes and attention tend to be fleeting, your teams must collaborate efficiently and effectively. From business to marketing to creative, IT, merchandising, and customer service, no one team should be the reason why another one cannot do its job well.

So, make it possible for everyone to leverage exactly the right media asset at any time for any reason, without having to, for example, wait around for a developer to update the image formats for a campaign or for a creative to add marketing text to images for various geographical regions.

Still, managing the exploding number of digital engagement channels, each with its own unique requirements, is a huge logistical challenge. To tackle that, you must turn to technology.

Below are the specifics of several of those capabilities.

Killer product pages

A tried-and-true way of converting visitors into buyers is through high-quality image and video galleries. Why video? Studies have shown that four times as many people prefer to watch a video about a product than read about it.

Next comes the challenges of creating detailed, 4K images and videos, complete with a zooming capability, and of delivering media in the optimal format for the user's viewing context, regardless of the following:

4x

x
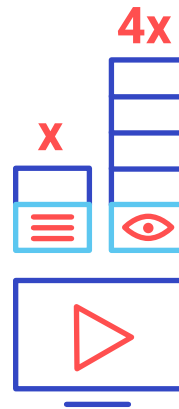
Channel	Operating system	Screen dimension	Geographic area
			(language, currency, and size charts as text overlays)
Device	Browser	Screen orientation	

To fulfill all those requirements, automation is not only the right solution, it's really the only solution. That's because automation effectively guarantees an engaging browsing experience and tremendous savings in time and effort, which your teams could devote to other areas.

Plus, the sheer volume of products in ever-growing catalogs makes manual processes unrealistic and error prone.

Real-time social media

Social media is one of the most effective promotional venues for media-first organizations to leverage because consumers are **40x** more likely to share visual content on social media than on other forums. For optimal efficiency and peace of mind, be sure to automate the customization of your visual media for the social channels, apps, devices, and browsers on which they are displayed.

User-generated content (UGC)

Besides telling your own visual story on a website, be sure to also leverage the UGC contributed by your brand's ambassadors. Customer-generated content, especially reviews accompanied by pictures and videos that showcase real-life application of the products, are an invaluable reference for shoppers. To ensure you get the most out of it:

Ensure the scalability of UGC on social channels, moderate vigilantly to filter out inappropriate material, and automate the publication process of videos that meet moderation standards.

Establish a simple internal process for access to UGC for potential use in marketing and growth initiatives.

Adopt technology and processes that simplify the incorporation of images from UGC (through social channels and the like) upon upload, organize them, and return search results quickly.

Leverage UGC media by, for example, creating a video montage of positive customer reviews.

Visual Experiences That Connect

A Look at the Power of UGC and the Tech Needed to Support It →

Peer-to-peer conversations that foster site traffic

A less commonly addressed but equally critical element for promoting brand perception and consistency through customers is microbrowser sharing and dark social. Microbrowsers—think WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, iMessage—offer miniature previews of webpages inside private, brand-absent conversations, making for a huge opportunity to drive interest in and traffic to your high-performing product pages.

For extra mileage, ensure that all product links contain clues on the content of the linked pages, including images, videos, and text specifically formatted for microbrowsers.

The State of Visual Media
2020 REPORT

NOTE
To learn more about microbrowsers and the ways in which to better analyze your social-referral traffic, check out **Cloudinary's 2020 State of Visual Media Report →**

Brand control in third-party marketplaces and on partner platforms

Most e-businesses also share and source content to and from partners or marketplaces, such as Amazon, Shopify, and Walmart. In doing so, you must protect your brand's authenticity and help partners leverage your assets for various scenarios. Granting partners access to the optimal version of the appropriate media assets in your library spells convenience and protects those assets from unwarranted manipulation that might decimate their intended purpose and effect.

Streamline, simplify, and optimize

Unless you deploy a best-of-breed media-management platform, it's critical that you deploy all the foundational requirements for e-commerce media described above by layering AI into your media-management solution. AI can independently and intelligently manage and optimize a limitless library of assets for all use cases and user context, delivering interactive experiences with no human involvement.

Following are the tasks AI performs through automation, simplifying and enhancing the entire storage-to-delivery process:

Tag assets for storage, organization, and access.

Convert raw photos to web-ready images.

Dynamically crop and scale images based on their content so that you can generate responsive layouts, change colors, and apply other visual effects for all viewing devices and screen sizes.

Determine the images' optimal point of focus, such as faces, moving objects, and other key subjects, for smart cropping and reframing, keeping the primary subjects in focus regardless of screen orientation or viewing channel.

Establish a simple internal process for access to UGC for potential use in marketing and growth initiatives.

Future-proof your business

With AI, you can move fast and execute on countless otherwise complex and time-consuming **media capabilities** that have delivered remarkable results for early adopters. Below are a few examples of those capabilities.

Personalization

A 2018 **research study** revealed that 80 percent of shoppers are more likely to buy from a company that offers personalized experiences even in the face of higher prices. And as its access to data rapidly expands, personalized content is trending to be more and more granular.

AI-supported media platforms make it easy to deploy context-aware marketing campaigns that spotlight shopper location, purchase and browsing history, and social-media activities, which enable the automation of identification and delivery of context-aware images and videos. Personalization can easily become an achievable priority by taking advantage of AI's versatility, speed, and simplicity in the implementation of your plan.

Real-time customization

Real-time customization means that visitors can update the media assets on e-commerce sites on the fly to find out how various colors, designs, functionalities, and add-ons affect the look of the product. The statistics below explain why such a capability is fast becoming more of a must-have than a nice-to-have:

Seventy-seven percent of shoppers would pay more for a brand that offers real-time customization.

Seventy-four percent of shoppers feel "frustrated" if they cannot change product colors and the like in real time on e-commerce sites.

Brands that offer **real-time customization** stand to boost their profits by up to 15 percent.

360-degree product views

By replicating the depth of review that shoppers can take in store, 360-degree product views raise shoppers' confidence level about the product. In addition, such a feature lengthens visits and boosts shopper **conversion rates** by up to 30 percent. Just as important, those sales tend to be more successful: they can **lower return rates** by as much as 50 percent.

Augmented reality and virtual-reality experiences

As immersive applications of 360-video, augmented reality, and virtual reality deliver live, shoppable video experiences. By adding interactive product data to digital content or integrating it into the real world, you render products as part of the scenery. Shoppers can then not only explore products in full detail, but also click a link to go to the page on which to make purchases while still engrossed in the physical or digital environment around them.

Recognize the Importance of Automated and AI-Based Media Platforms

As the conduit through which our brains are wired to engage with and retain information, visual media are eye catching and action inspiring. They simultaneously engender excitement about and confidence in your products on the part of the visitors. In retrospect, it's no wonder that visual media have become a primary driving force for successful e-businesses.

As more opportunities for engaging with and promoting products to shoppers arise, you must respond with agility, especially by connecting with shoppers through visual media. A media platform that handles the grunt work of managing media through automation and AI is paramount, period.

YOUR PRODUCT

To learn more about the media first approach and more, read **Cloudinary's Guide to Building the Ultimate E-commerce Website →**

About Cloudinary

Cloudinary's mission is to empower companies to deliver visual experiences that inspire and connect by unleashing the full potential of their media. With more than 40 billion assets under management and 6,500 customers worldwide, Cloudinary is the industry standard for developers, creators and marketers looking to upload, store, transform, manage, and deliver images and videos online. As a result, leading brands like Atlassian, Bleacher Report, Grubhub, Hinge, Lyft, NBC, Mediavine, Peloton, Petco and Under Armour are seeing significant business value in using Cloudinary, including faster time to market, higher user satisfaction and increased engagement and conversions.

For more information, visit **www.cloudinary.com**