THE FUTURE OF COMMERCE SEARCH

From Intelligence to Trust and Decentralisation

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CONTENTS

INTRO

It's the perfect time to reflect on the future of Commerce Search and Discovery. The team at Empathy.co have been defining new ways to develop a future-focused product ecosystem on behalf of brands and consumers. It's the beginning of an exciting quest, and what follows is our vision for the future of Search.

Behind the scenes at Empathy.co, our mission to deliver Trustworthy, Understanding and Joyful experiences, is inspired by our three pillars: People, Technology and Data. With these strong foundations, we can focus our efforts on delivering experiences that serve the needs of brand facilitators such as merchandisers and analysts, as much as the consumers.

02

SEARCH &
PEOPLE

Customers & Merchants

Successful Searches elicit positive emotional responses, and this fact will only grow in significance as more brands join the growing movement for human-centred practices.

The key to Search success lies in understanding the nature of the emotions provoked in both **customers** as well as **merchandisers, marketers and developers** when searching for results and configuring that search.

Expression controls hint at the evolution of platforms, empowering the merchandiser to connect with the consumer more directly than they would have through standard search customisation tools such as boosts, attribute ranking and synonyms.

Both customers and merchants will find the greatest value in the following Search innovations available today:

SEARCH EXPLAINABILITY

When facing huge catalogues with multiple sorting models applied to them, such as personalisation and monetisation, it is critical that both merchants and consumers feel understood by the search tools they use. Search experience tools can now explain the relevance of search results with clarity and simplicity to achieve this goal.

EXPERIENCE CONTROLS

In addition to the sort functionality available in standard results, we can also use presentation and interface controls to drive how these results are experienced. A **no-code configuration** allows anyone to own and drive the search experience and adapt their campaigns on-the-fly without the need to develop, push or commit any code in production.

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All this will translate into enjoyable, lively and irresistible interactions with each brand's interface and ultimately drive greater brand loyalty. To achieve this, two conditions are critical:

TRUST

A genuine relationship between brands and consumers is impossible without Trust. Context awareness mechanisms are crucial to achieving this and provide excellent catalogue discoverability based on the user's context. By allowing the consumer to be involved in the mechanics of product suggestions, brands provide evidence of their commitment and respect.

TRANSPARENCY

Consumers should have the last word on what results and areas of the catalogue are presented to them. By establishing mechanisms through which they can choose what kind of journey they go on, we can learn how best to evolve those experiences. By passing legitimate control over to the consumer, making their choices visible and the logic explained, this new-found ownership will increase trust and enjoyment overall.

New Search capabilities such as **My Purchase History Search and My Discovery Wall** will elevate the consumers' position from mere consumer to controller of their brand experience. With data and event-systems at their service, brands, in turn, become companions as opposed to controllers.

Customers will be able to see, own and leverage all the data a brand has collected in order to configure their preferred way to experience each brand and its products.

MY DATA

ME

03
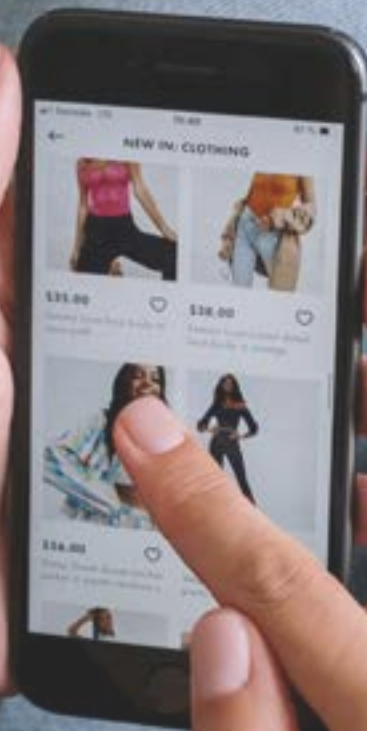
SEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

Cloud Agnostic and Decentralised

Three foundational areas here will ensure reliable and scalable search success:

AGNOSTIC & EFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Search Platforms will soon evolve and free themselves from cloud dependencies. Agnostic by design,

Empathy.co's stack optimises operations and expenditure whilst at the same time giving control to its customers over the chain of value.

PRODUCTS & DATA

Offering the best consumer experience and precise cataloguing is a must for commerce Search and Discovery nowadays. Data Science models are getting stronger every day, so data feedback loops are getting shorter. Search Platforms continue to drive for real-time contextual relevance (moving from index to query time only). The testing possibilities grow as existing event-data pools can be used to run online and offline tests that reduce the risk of product variations and help predict negative impact.
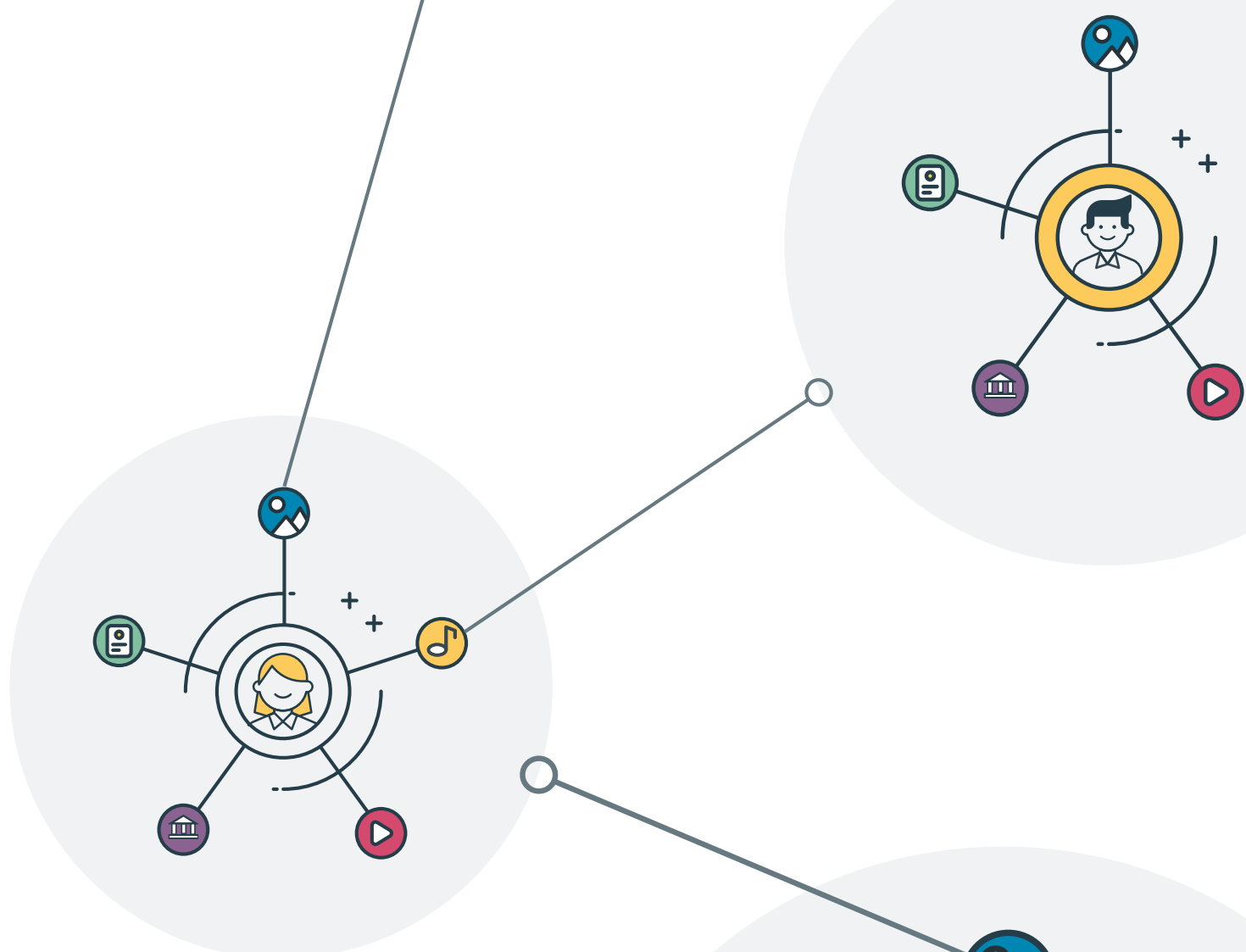
DECENTRALISATION

As data profiling progresses from privacy wiring (First-Party Data, Compliance) to consumer-owned event-data sets, Search Technology moves from Centralised to Decentralised architectures. We can see evidence of this in local-first profiling and within My Account and My Purchase History Search experiences, where collections serve each Customer ID (and relevance solved within).

04
DATA

From volume to interpretation

There are several ways to pursue an enhanced customer journey through the collection and use of customer data that moves away from centralised pools of value to a new interpretation that puts its purpose at the direct service of each customer and the creativity of brands:

FIRST-PARTY DATA

Our aim has always been to navigate the sensitive field of personal data in such a way that customers can make informed, conscious choices to share their tastes and preferences with brands. We want to hear from our customers and build their Trust.

EXPLICIT DATA COLLECTION

requires that data be gathered implicitly. Its goal is to establish a transition of data ownership from brand to customer. With portability or deletion options available to share data intentionally, personalisation is enhanced, while relationships are enriched.

DERIVATIVE DATA

The focus is no longer on the data we collect but instead on how we use data. **Going beyond common KPIs** and measurement standards, we understand customers' product perceptions and learn how the Search and Discovery experience makes them feel. We can no longer focus on attribution metrics alone; there is a world of customer feelings to perceive and measure.

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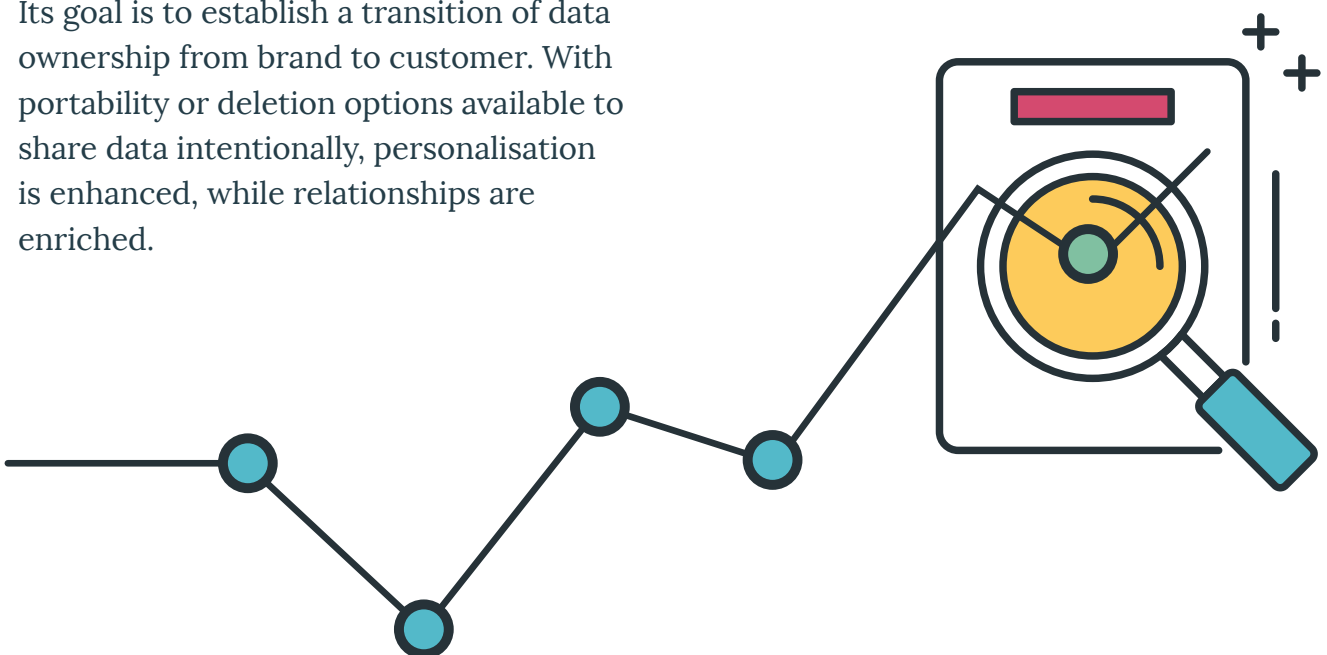
PROFILE PODS

When it comes to 1:1 user context, a decentralised approach to event data unlocks a whole world of sophistication while nurturing customer trust by handing over control to them.

1:1 CONTEXTUALISATION

gives way to local-first, cloud-based approaches that preserve individual user data ownership. Profile PODs act as storage pods that can be owned, administered and controlled by each user, turning individuals into Controllers and brands into Processors.
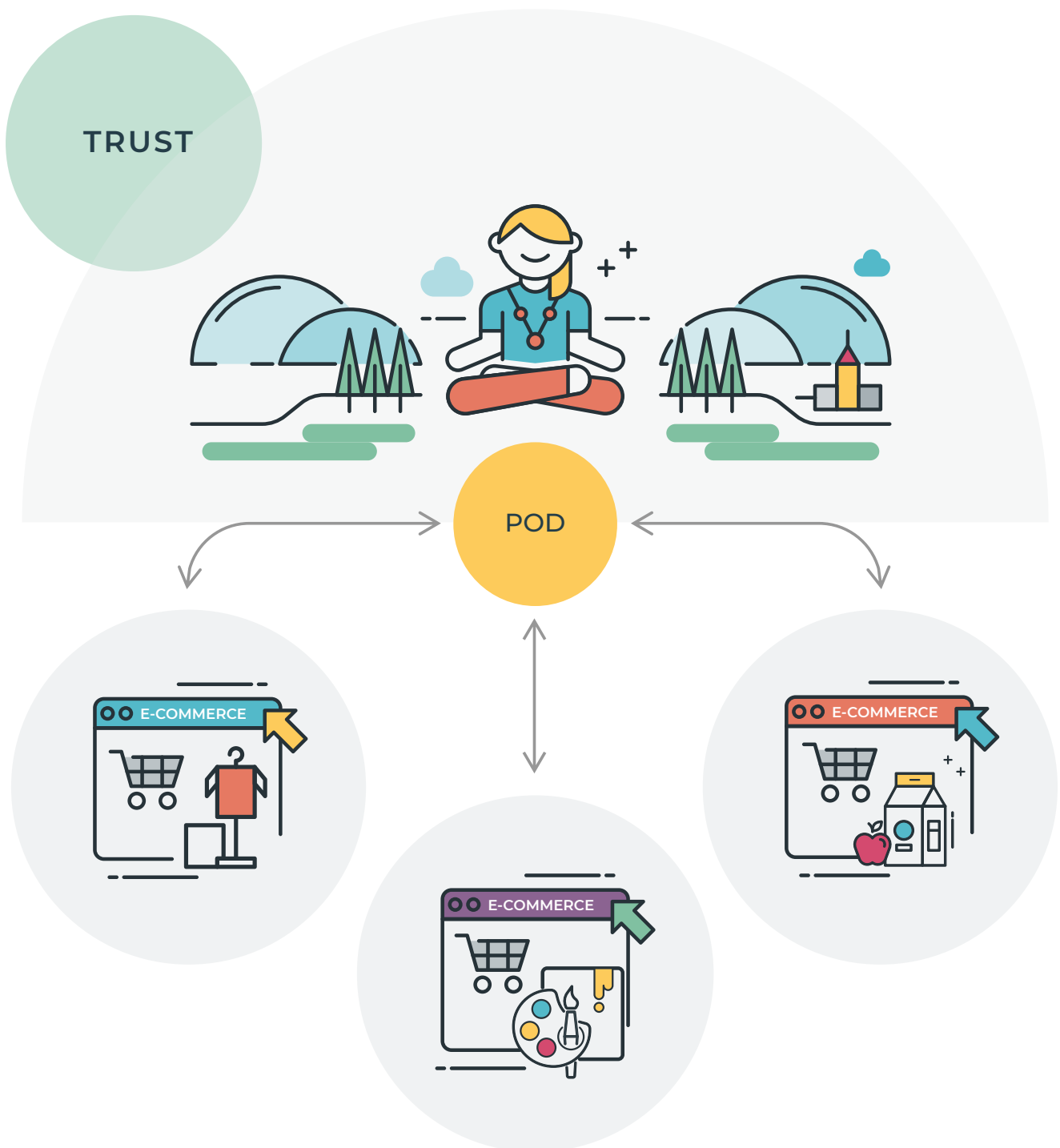
CONCLUSIONS

Every shopping experience can entertain, enable a rich discovery of ideas, and build a deep **connection with a brand based on Trust.** Trust can only grow when a genuine commitment to returning data control to the consumer is made. Through convenient, transparent and practical experiences, the consumer's overall confidence in sharing data will grow, as they decide what appropriate and useful for them to share.

Powerful **technology and data science models** evoke trust by maintaining transparency with consumers on why results appear as they do. For example, using functions such as real-time suggestions based on categories like product affinities, promotions, or weather patterns consumers can view the logic clearly and judge its relevance to them.

Decentralisation elevates individuals and puts "surveillance" at their service by analysing their actions solely to serve their interests: a platform open for business, but on each consumer's terms. VRM Principles are reflective of this dynamic.

To trigger an emotional response requires more than relevant results. That's why we are intensely focussed on providing platforms that enable everyone to control their shopping experience, with the added insight of how that experience makes the consumer feel. Delighting merchandisers, marketers and developers is of equal importance to customer happiness at Empathy.co, and we do this by creating simple, insightful and beautiful tools that configure search results and understand shopper intent. The most incredible win from all of this is that brands can show their commitment to growing trust, understanding and enjoyment in each and every customer, and we know this effort is instantly rewarded.

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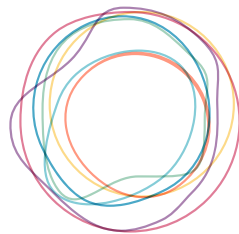
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