



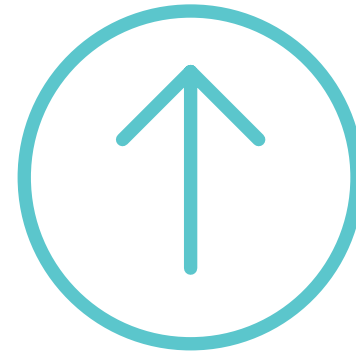
Winning Above the Glass

Can you see your
online customer
experience?



Each year shopping season is a nervy experience for consumers and brands alike. Shoppers worry that their target bargain will be sold—or worse still, the website will crash. While the first scenario is a sign of success for many retail businesses, the second is a disaster with repercussions that go far beyond the mere loss of some sales.

New Relic works with some of the largest, most innovative retail businesses around the world. In this two-part guide, we've distilled our shared experience and insights to help you win—not only avoid any website crashes—over the holiday season.



Here's how to win above the glass

In *Winning Above the Glass*, you'll learn how engineering teams can take ownership of customer experience and innovation in today's retail environment. In *Winning Below the Glass*, you'll learn how to get the most from your infrastructure and operations behind the scenes.

Experience and innovation are the baseline

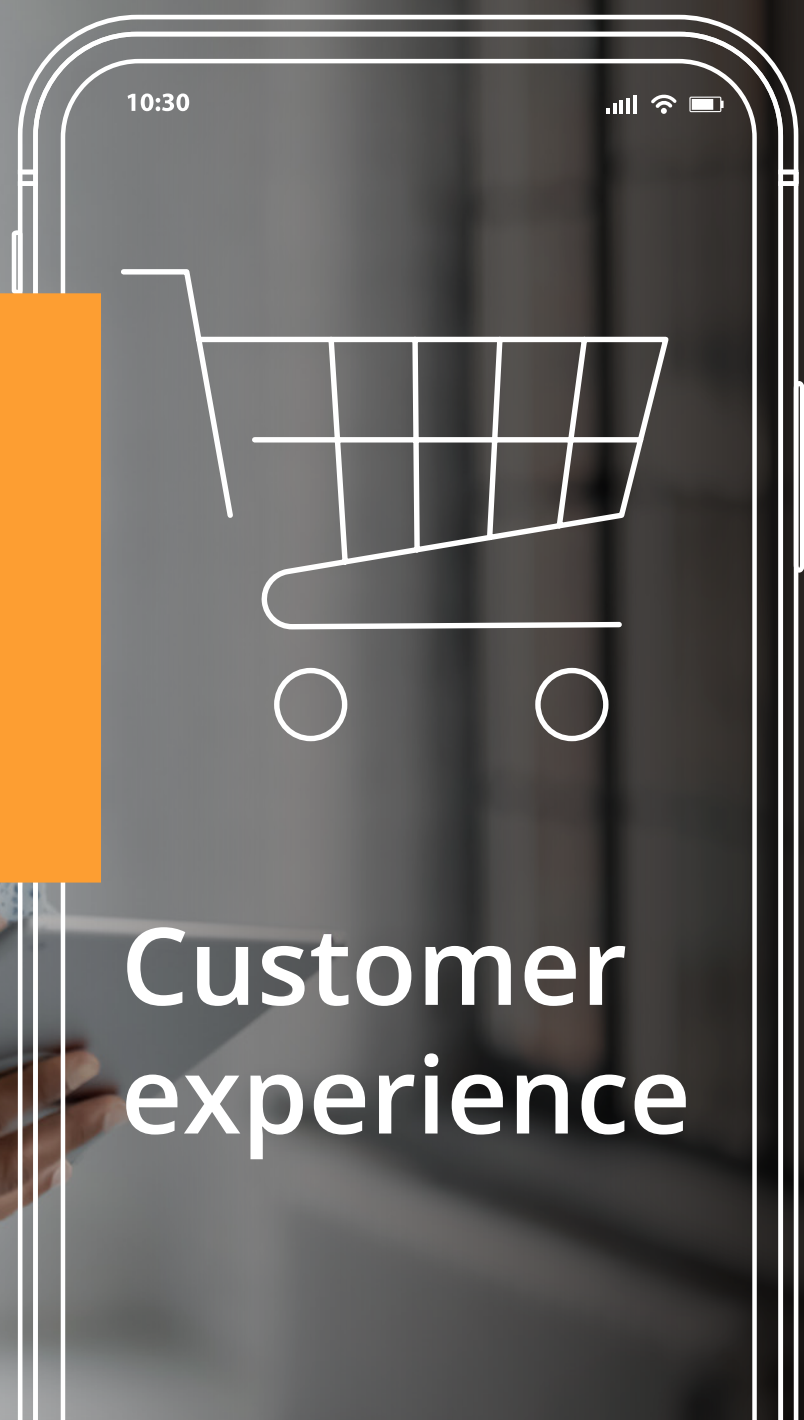
A critical portion of annual sales fall into shopping season—and e-commerce is an increasingly significant portion of it. Today's retail businesses are competing fiercely for the most valuable 2 mm of retail space in the world: their customer's phone, tablet, or laptop screens.

To win a place on the screen, you have to captivate your customers. But customer delight is a complex thing to get right, consumer expectations are sophisticated and complex.

Two things to get right to convert customers:

- A flawless customer experience, with fast and stable performance across all brand platforms.
- React to customer demands and market trends by deploying new features and updates quickly and accurately.

Shopping season is a trial by fire that tests your ability to deliver on these requirements.



Customer
experience

1. Customer experience

Winning above the glass starts by looking at the experience from the point of view of the customer. Retail businesses today have to understand what customers are seeing to drive engagement, conversion, and brand affinity.

An observability strategy is invaluable to creating customer delight, and not just in terms of the traditional technical metrics you might already monitor. By focusing on data that reflects what the customer sees—order success rates or time to order, alongside more typical measurements such as mean time to recover and change/fail rates—the picture becomes three dimensional. This turns engineers into a key business enabler.

Key brand behaviour

Breaking down departmental barriers within your organisation is key to measuring your customer experience.

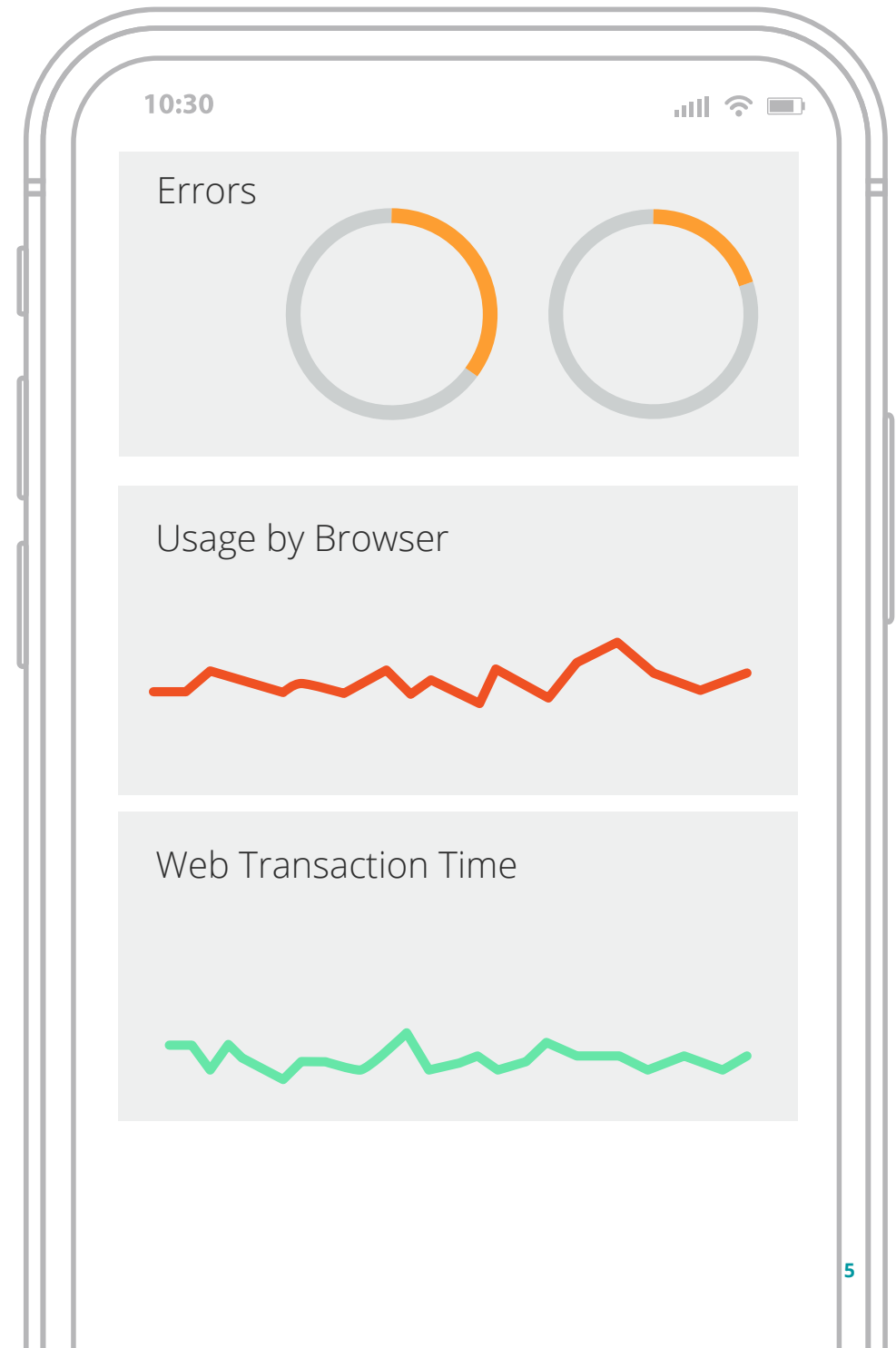
[Read the case study](#) to find out how BT Shop used New Relic across different business lines to align its monitoring and metrics to the customer journey.

When you get customer experience right, it's a win for the customers and brand. Hallmarks of success typically include:

- A clear understanding of how your technology decisions impact the customer—including small but important details within their buying journey.
- Faster time to market due to clarity on what is needed and how your tech stack can be best managed to deliver this change.
- The ability to scale according to customer trends. Meaning that if you're running key applications with a cloud partner, you can scale up quickly and cost effectively.
- Greater customer satisfaction across all touchpoints and throughout the purchase process, leading to reduced churn.

All of the above ultimately help drive positive sentiment and support the acquisition of new customers from competitors.

The flip side to this positive, customer-centric experience is getting caught focusing on metrics and behaviours that don't have a meaningful impact on the customer. Legacy processes and systems make this all too frequent.





Look out for these warning signs

Most businesses have legacy technologies that define the boundaries of what an engineering team can do, see, iterate, and resolve. This can negatively impact customer delight. Equally dangerous is the business as usual “we’ve always done it that way” mindset that relies on a slower moving, non-digital era.

If you’re wondering whether your business has slipped into less-than-desirable practices, here are the keys signs to look out for:

- Hearing about support issues from customers; if you’re not aware of the problem until customers start reporting it, chances are you can’t see your brand in the way your audiences do.
- Your own team isn’t clear about how key customer journeys are performing, meaning feature refinement and development is difficult, and issue resolution is compromised.
- The team can’t measure the impact of software changes, meaning outages or issues come as a surprise.
- No accountability, or blame culture, when issues occur, leading to negative behaviours including hiding problems.
- Unable to turn operational data into insights. That data becomes accumulated and data management becomes a problem in its own right.

How to win

Seeing through the eyes of your customer is the golden ticket when it comes to retail excellence today. That visibility is key in the face of traffic spikes, new pages, promotions via your app, increased advertising about your offering—and all the things that come with shopping season.

Observability is just as important for engineering teams that provide the technical wizardry behind the scenes, as it is for sales and brand marketers that want direct customer engagement. Visibility helps refine spend in marketing campaigns and maximises the value of investments with key cloud partners. Most importantly, the use of telemetry data—bringing together disparate and previously isolated sources—allows you to understand how change impacts customer experience.

Retail organisations that adopt this observability strategy can enjoy a raft of positive behaviours and processes that deliver meaningful improvements in commercial behaviours.

Powerful examples you can also adopt include:

- Give your whole organisation access to relevant customer experience metrics—ensuring you can use real data to realign your priorities between business units and the engineering teams that make their strategies possible. Creating dashboards that provide common insights, but with different layers of technical detail, ensures everyone can play their part in the same discussion.
- Respond faster to customer experience issues by providing engineering teams with a single point of truth for key issues. By organising data sources and rationalising alerts, engineers gain the metrics needed to uncover and preempt problems in real-time.
- Use customer experience data to influence and prioritise your market penetration strategy. By removing silos and aligning multiple business units—including R&D, marketing, sales, and engineering—you can focus on offering features or formats that better suit new audiences. And you can bring these to market faster and on a wider range of platforms.

Key metrics to consider

Dashboards help retail businesses take advantage of data to improve customer experience. Here are some key metrics to track:

Customer-based metrics: conversion rate, retention, abandonment, average order value, lifetime customer value, returning customer rate, customer attrition, customer satisfaction score, net promoter score

Technical metrics: crash rate, error rate, success rate, bounce rates, site speed



2

Innovation

2. Innovation

Innovating as a brand relies not just on the creativity of your product and marketing teams, but on the ability of your business to deliver brilliant ideas to that precious screen real estate. You'll need to experiment with new capabilities from an informed position and then deliver the successful capabilities quickly and reliably.

This innovation mindset is not a nice-to-have but a key part of an evolving retail strategy. It will help deliver on critical outcomes in a highly competitive landscape, such as:

- Higher conversion rates within key target audiences and demographics through relevant and personalised services.
- Increased revenue thanks to higher basket values resulting from improved buyer journeys.
- Greater market share due to improved convenience and engagement features.
- The ability to target new market opportunities resulting from faster deployments and more dynamic feature sets.

Key brand behaviour

Making the association between innovation and customer value helps many of the world's leading retail brands improve their digital strategy. New Relic works with leading retailers such as FARFETCH and M&S to implement microservices strategies that bring new features to market sooner, including measures of success that allow for continual improvement.

M&S, thanks to its agile strategy, has enabled quicker time to market with each iteration, and faster resolution of any issues it identifies.



Look out for these warning signs

Innovation can mean different things to different businesses. But businesses that don't innovate have common problems: the inability to provide the business case to make key changes to customer-facing assets or limitations in actually delivering such updates.

Here are some of the business challenges that innovation can help solve:

- It takes too long to get new features to market, so you miss a first-mover advantage or concede ground to competition who capture customer interest before you.
- You're unable to keep up with market demands—be that a technical capability or an experiential factor—which leads to negative brand association, increased customer churn, or reduced basket size.
- Your business is hamstrung by manual, slow processes that prevent key changes from reaching your target audience in time.
- You're dependent on legacy technology. You cannot gain sufficient visibility and it's hard to maintain, limiting your feature capabilities.
- You cannot attract and retain top talent within your engineering teams, so a culture of innovation is constantly stifled.

How to win

Allow your engineering and business teams to work closely together. Let them make data-driven decisions to innovate faster. Encourage accelerated deployments with meticulous monitoring of performance based on customer-centric metrics.

By integrating customer, business, and operational data, engineering teams can innovate faster and experiment to drive competitive advantages. Marketing teams can then fulfil their creative vision, and sales teams move faster to reach key commercial targets. In a digital-first sector, technical capability has to be enabled for the rest to succeed.

Retail businesses can achieve this by committing to some core principles within operating procedures

- Underpin your innovation strategy with data-driven business cases and align your business and engineering teams on the insights.

- Use real-time customer behaviour insights as part of a continual planning process, so that you don't just rely on moments in time and constantly seek opportunities to improve customer experience.
- Improving your development lifecycle velocity ensures that you can stay competitive. As the business determines its commercial strategy, there is no corresponding lag in the technical deployment.
- Nurture a better understanding and communication of releases within the business, so that a campaign cycle for marketing and a sprint cycle for engineering, for example, gain equivalent respect and investment.
- Retire technical debt by committing to cross-business alignment. Enable engineering teams to work at a greater pace to make each release a stepping stone and not an endpoint.

Key metrics to consider

When innovation is part of the engineering strategy, you will see marked business and technical success, including:

Business performance metrics:

team performance, deployment rate, deployment quality, time to market

Technical metrics: failed builds, build success rate, failed deployments, build speed

Shopping season is not an easy time in retail. But it should be rewarding. With observability, businesses can see and react to key changes in customer-facing assets. Observability enhances issue resolution so that problems are preempted, and innovations become attuned to customers and go to market sooner. When the pressure is on during shopping season observability helps you win above the glass.