Volume 10, Issue 10, October – 2025 International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology
ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

Building Custom Solutions and Integrations into Salesforce Marketing Cloud for E-Commerce

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Publication Date: 2025/11/06

Abstract: The Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) platform allows e-commerce businesses to create personalized, data-driven marketing experiences on a scale. The research investigates how SFMC addresses major e-commerce problems by utilizing its marketing automation capabilities and its third-party system integration features. The research builds upon existing knowledge by studying methods for developing custom solutions through API-based workflows, data analytics, and AI-powered personalization, as well as their security and compliance requirements. The paper demonstrates how emerging trends like augmented reality (AR) and AI-driven analytics are transforming e-commerce operations within the Salesforce ecosystem. By synthesizing established best practices with real-world business examples, this study demonstrates how customized Salesforce integration enables businesses to build scalable, efficient, and customer-focused e-commerce experiences.

Keywords: *Salesforce Marketing Cloud, E-commerce, Custom Integrations, Marketing Automation, AI in Retail, Data Analytics, API Integrations.*

How to Cite: Kishan Raj Bellala (2025) Building Custom Solutions and Integrations into Salesforce Marketing Cloud for E-Commerce. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(10), 2541-2546. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

I. INTRODUCTION

Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) operates as a top enterprise marketing automation platform during a time when consumers require highly personalized digital interactions (Jallow, 2022). The platform enables organizations to develop unified data-driven strategies that connect with customers through email, mobile, social, and web channels. E-commerce businesses require this capability because digital competition demands brands to develop seamless experiences that both grab attention and build enduring customer loyalty (Jallow, 2022). SFMC enables large-scale achievement through its combination of intelligent automation, advanced analytics, and artificial intelligence capabilities within its Einstein layer. The practical use of SFMC falls short of its potential capabilities. E-commerce businesses encounter three related obstacles when they attempt to maximize SFMC capabilities because (1) out-of-the-box features need extensive customization to match individual workflows, (2) real-time data synchronization between CRMs (e.g., Salesforce Commerce Cloud) and third-party platforms (e.g., Shopify, Magento) remains complex and fragmented, and (3) businesses struggle to implement AI-driven personalization at scale despite Einstein AI's power (Bellala, 2025; Schembari, 2020).

Our research delivers both analytical insights and practical guidelines for SFMC customization:

- The paper examines how REST/SOAP API integrations enable e-commerce platforms to optimize data flow with Salesforce Marketing Cloud.
- The paper examines how AI (Einstein) and new technologies (AR/VR) help organizations improve personalization and engagement.
- The paper explains which security best practices will help organizations meet GDPR and CCPA compliance requirements in hybrid cloud environments.

The research delivers a scalable, future-proof approach for e-commerce SFMC customization through operational integration frameworks and security guidelines. Businesses can

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

achieve maximum ROI while developing scalable, efficient, customer-centric e-commerce experiences in the competitive digital market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROBLEM DEFINITION

➢ *The E-Commerce Personalization Challenge*

E-commerce brands must create perfect digital experiences to build lasting customer loyalty, according to Jallow (2022), in the digital competitive market. Research shows that this needs advanced marketing automation, which can execute unified data-driven strategies across multiple channels. The built-in features of platforms need extensive customization to match particular workflows, which results in the integration problems described in later sections.

➢ *Gaps in Current Research*

The existing research on SFMC standard features has laid a strong foundation for understanding the integration of custom APIs and AI/AR personalization features while maintaining GDPR and CCPA data regulation compliance (Schembari, 2020). Mulpuri (2025) provides valuable insights into SFMC operations, and Ahmad (2024) highlights the importance of unified customer views. However, there remains an opportunity to explore the technical integration requirements and architectural tradeoffs, which are the primary focus of this research. Building on the positive results from AI implementation in retail shown by Thanyawatpornkul (2024), this study aims to provide detailed frameworks for SFMC implementation

III. ANALYSIS OF SFMC CAPABILITIES AND E-COMMERCE ALIGNMENT

➢ *Core Functionality Assessment*

The cloud-based digital marketing platform Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) allows organizations to create customized data-driven marketing campaigns across different channels (Bullock, 2017). Bullock's (2017) foundational work on SFMC's capabilities provides the basis for our deeper investigation into its application-specific value for e-commerce. The combination of advanced automation with analytics and artificial intelligence in SFMC allows marketers to handle contemporary customer journey complexities by delivering context-specific messages at the right moments through suitable channels.

- Email Studio: The platform allows users to create and automate personalized email campaigns for distribution. Through its robust segmentation and personalization features, e-commerce brands can deliver customized content that matches individual customer preferences, purchase history, and behavioral patterns. The platform has strong segmentation capabilities, yet needs thorough data cleaning to prevent list fatigue, which affects Mailchimp less than it does Marketo and other enterprise solutions. (Mulpuri, 2025).
- Journey Builder: The visual interface of Journey Builder lets users create automated customer journeys through behavioral triggers, lifecycle stages, and events. The system helps businesses run automated reminders for abandoned carts and maintain post-purchase interactions and re-engage inactive customers. The visual journey canvas is a core strength; however, its pricing model based on engaged contacts can become cost-prohibitive for businesses with large, inactive lists compared to flat-fee models offered by some competitors (Mulpuri, 2025).
- Einstein AI: Our evaluation identifies a key constraint: The system uses machine learning models to deliver predictive analytics and personalization capabilities. Through Einstein, e-commerce businesses can obtain product recommendations together with engagement scoring, send-time optimization, and predictive content performance. The predictive capabilities of Einstein are strong, but its black-box nature can be a limitation compared to platforms that allow more custom model training for unique business needs (Mulpuri, 2025).

➢ *Strategic Platform Positioning:*

The 360-degree customer view provided by Salesforce Marketing Cloud enables e-commerce operations to deliver seamless personalized shopping experiences. The system unifies data from web, mobile, email, and in-store touchpoints and activates this data in real time to drive engagement (Ahmad, 2024). This enables online retailers such as:

- The system should send customized messages to customers through abandoned cart reminders, birthday promotions, and order confirmations based on their behavioral patterns and purchase intentions (Ahmad, 2024).
- The execution of omnichannel marketing strategies requires maintaining consistent messaging across email platforms, mobile devices, web platforms, and advertising platforms (Ahmad, 2024).
- The system should automate customer lifecycle processes, which include acquisition and onboarding as well as retention and reactivation (Ahmad, 2024).
- AI technology enables product discovery through dynamic content and intelligent product recommendation systems (Ahmad, 2024).
- The platform integrates with e-commerce platforms (e.g., Salesforce Commerce Cloud, Shopify, Magento) and external systems (e.g., ERPs, CRMs) to create seamless end-to-end commerce experiences (Ahmad, 2024).

Through Salesforce Marketing Cloud, e-commerce businesses can transition from traditional batch-based campaign marketing to real-time context-aware engagement, which enables brands to deliver relevant, timely, valuable interactions that match digital consumer expectations (Ahmad, 2024).

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

IV. ANALYSIS OF CUSTOM SOLUTIONS AND INTEGRATION TRADEOFFS

The success of Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) in e-commerce depends on third-party integrations and strategic customization (Vattam, 2022). This analysis goes beyond descriptive functionality to evaluate the critical architectural decisions and tradeoffs involved in building a connected marketing ecosystem. The selection of an integration path is a strategic choice that determines long-term costs, scalability, and operational flexibility, directly addressing the implementation challenges noted in existing literature (Jallow, 2022; Schembari, 2020).

➢ *Build vs. Buy Decision Framework*

A thorough cost-benefit analysis must be carried out before deciding to create custom solutions within SFMC. The framework converts the abstract challenges of customization into a systematic decision-making process as described in our literature review. The perfect alignment between custom development, business processes, and proprietary data models enables organizations to create truly differentiated customer experiences. The alignment between custom development requires substantial financial investment during initial development, ongoing maintenance expenses, and the availability of technical expertise. The research supports the risk factors that Chinta et al. (2021) found in their Salesforce project implementation study, which proves their applicability to SFMC customization. The use of pre-built AppExchange apps together with native features shortens time-to-market and lowers initial expenses while shifting maintenance duties to the vendor. The software's built-in logic requires businesses to modify their operational procedures when they select this option.

The tradeoff becomes acceptable only when the capability delivers substantial competitive benefits or directly impacts customer experience. The development of a proprietary product recommendation algorithm using first-party data stands as a valid justification because it utilizes AI capabilities described by Thanyawatpornkul (2024) while adapting them to specific data assets. The development of a basic email template editor becomes resource-inefficient because robust pre-existing solutions already exist.

➢ *Integration Architecture Tradeoffs*

- REST API vs. SOAP API: The technical capabilities of SFMC APIs, according to Vattam (2022), include the distinction between REST and SOAP APIs. Our research builds on this base to establish a critical decision-making framework for practitioners. The selection process moves past technical details to embrace fundamental design concepts. The modern lightweight REST API uses JSON for real-time high-volume microservices and mobile application interactions. The combination of WSDL formal contracts, WS-Security security features, and reliable transactional messaging in SOAP makes it more suitable for critical bulk data operations from legacy ERP or inventory systems that require absolute data integrity. The analysis demonstrates that the fundamental tradeoff exists between flexible performance and secure robustness.
- Native Connectors vs. Custom Middleware: The pre-built AppExchange connectors allow fast deployment, but they do not support customization for specific business rules or complex data transformations. This finding supports the integration challenges that Jallow (2022) noted and provides specific architectural guidance. A custom middleware solution using MuleSoft offers unparalleled flexibility and governance to orchestrate integrations across the entire martech stack. Still, it introduces significantly higher initial investment, ongoing maintenance overhead, and the need for specialized integration expertise. This dichotomy perfectly exemplifies the strategic "build vs. buy" dilemma analyzed in section 4.1. The choice between native and custom integrations involves fundamental trade-offs that impact long-term strategy, cost, and flexibility. These trade-offs are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Strategic Trade-Offs Between Native and Custom Integration Approaches in SFMC.

Criteria	Native Integrations (AppExchange, MC Connect)	Custom Middleware (APIs, MuleSoft
Implementation Speed	Rapid deployment; minimal coding	Longer development cycle; requires expert resources
Initial Cost	Lower upfront cost; predictable pricing	Significant initial investment in development and design
Long-Term Cost	Ongoing subscription/licensing fees	Lower recurring costs; higher maintenance and update expenses
Flexibility & Customization	Limited to vendor's feature set and roadmap	High degree of customization to meet unique business rules
Scalability	Scales well for standard use cases	Designed to scale with complex, enterprise-level demands
Maintenance & Support	Handled by the third-party vendor or Salesforce	Entirely owned and managed by internal IT/resources

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

Complexity of Use	Lower technical barrier; easier for marketers to use	High technical complexity requires developer involvement
Best For	Common functions (e.g., basic Shopify sync), rapid prototyping, businesses with limited tech resources	Unique processes, competitive differentiation, complex ecosystems, large enterprises

- Batch vs. Real-time Processing: The selection between batch processing and real-time data synchronization depends on the tradeoff between operational expenses and customer satisfaction. The process of non-urgent data synchronization through batch processing proves efficient for resource management. Real-time APIs become essential for transactional events such as cart abandonment, order confirmations, and real-time loyalty point updates because they ensure both message relevance and timeliness. A hybrid architecture represents the best solution because it directs resources to their most impactful points for engagement and conversion, which enables the real-time engagement goal described by Ahmad (2024) at a cost-effective level.

V. ANALYSIS OF DATA, SECURITY, AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

➢ *Data Utilization and Analytics*

Salesforce Analytics integration with big data enables e-commerce businesses to make improved decisions and develop more effective marketing strategies. Cheruku et al. 's (2023) general BI principles are concretely applied here to the SFMC analytics environment. The system allows businesses to make fast operational changes through adjustable dashboards and automated reporting and predictive analytics, which improve customer relationship management through data-driven insights.

The research by Kyaw et al. (2023) on sentiment analysis serves as the methodological foundation for the enhanced customer understanding that SFMC provides when it is appropriately set up. The work of Alojail and Bhatia (2020) on targeting demonstrates the sophisticated segmentation abilities that become possible through the integration of SFMC with multiple data sources.

➢ *Security and Compliance Considerations*

The extensive handling of personally identifiable information (PII) in Salesforce Marketing Cloud necessitates a multi-layered security approach that integrates robust technological defenses with comprehensive governance frameworks (Tangudu et al., 2024). This model provides the structure for our analysis of SFMC's security posture, which is critical for maintaining customer trust and fulfilling legal obligations in e-commerce. To minimize attack vectors, SFMC relies on strong user authentication methods. The platform implements Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) to prevent unauthorized access, enhanced further by IP allowlisting, session timeouts, and login hour restrictions (Tangudu et al., 2024). Data security is achieved through advanced encryption protocols: TLS 1.2+ for data in transit and AES-256 for data at rest, meeting industry standards for confidentiality and integrity. Tokenization is used for sensitive financial data to maintain PCI DSS compliance, a critical requirement for e-commerce platforms. These technical controls directly address the specific data protection requirements essential for the ethical AI implementation discussed by Raji et al. (2024).

The native tools of SFMC serve as essential instruments for achieving GDPR and CCPA compliance, which directly supports the research compliance objective. The platform includes three essential features:

- Consent Management: To capture and manage user preferences lawfully.
- Right-to-Be-Forgotten Workflows: To systematically erase individual data upon request.
- Data Retention Policies: To automatically purge data after a defined period.
- Data Residency Options: To store information in specific geographical jurisdictions and meet data sovereignty laws.

This proactive governance extends to continuous monitoring. SFMC provides real-time tracking of activities through its API call logging and event monitoring features, which enable fast detection of suspicious behavior. The integration of Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) systems enhances threat detection capabilities while regular security audits and penetration testing remain essential for maintaining a resilient posture. A complete strategy requires security awareness training for staff and established incident response procedures to reduce risks from human error and ensure prompt regulatory notification during a breach, which completes the application of a proper defense-in-depth strategy (Tangudu et al., 2024).

➢ *Emerging Technological Integration*

The e-commerce industry experiences a significant transformation because artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies are merging. This evaluation assesses the actual implementation and business effects of these technologies on SFMC ecosystem personalization and customer engagement beyond promotional claims. The modern personalization foundation relies on AI through SFMC's Einstein platform. The algorithms of Einstein analyze customer data to produce predictive product recommendations, optimize send times, and enable dynamic content. The future of personalization will surpass the predictive scoring capabilities of Einstein at present. AI works

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

together with AR technology to create an immersive commerce synergy that combines AI recommendation curation with AR product visualization in customers' physical environments. The AI-AR combination, according to Adawiyah et al. (2024), produces substantial user intention growth through improved recommendation usefulness, ease of use, and trustworthiness, especially in the cosmetics and furniture industries. Empirical research supports the business case for these technologies. The research conducted by Khaldy et al. (2023) and Liu et al. (2024) demonstrates how AR implements lower product return rates which serves as a strong reason to invest in this technology. The understanding of products through virtual try-ons and spatial placement in AR systems leads to improved consumer confidence which results in higher purchase satisfaction and engagement.

The current use of VR technology faces limitations because consumers face challenges accessing and affording immersive experiences which replicate physical retail spaces according to (Cheruku, 2023). Most e-commerce businesses should focus on AR and AI as their near-term strategic approach because these technologies offer more immediate and substantial impact.

The strategic implementation of these technologies creates a competitive advantage that goes beyond being a tactical move. E-commerce businesses that implement AI-driven AR experiences successfully will maintain modern consumer loyalty through personalized interactive shopping experiences which go beyond conventional e-commerce. The research conducted by Ntumba et al. (2023) and Lampropoulos (2025) shows that experiential innovation stands as a vital differentiator in digital retail according to their findings. SFMC users need to prepare for an upcoming future where personalization extends beyond offer selection to include product experience before purchase.

VI. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The following actionable recommendations emerge from our analytical framework for e-commerce businesses that use SFMC or plan to use it:

- Develop an Integration-First Architecture Plan: The launch of any campaign requires businesses to develop an Integration-First Architecture Plan which defines data flow mapping and selects proper technology for each integration point. The company should allocate real-time APIs for revenue-critical interactions such as cart abandonment and post-purchase upsells but use batch processing for less urgent data synchronization including nightly catalog updates. The combination of these two approaches enables businesses to achieve both cost efficiency and superior customer experiences.
- Apply a Rigorous "Competitive Advantage" Test to Custom Development: A formal governance process should be established to evaluate custom development proposals through a "Competitive Advantage" test which requires new developments to demonstrate either unique experience differentiation or proprietary data asset utilization that off-the-shelf tools cannot access. All other functionalities should be fulfilled by pre-built AppExchange apps or native features.
- Implement Security and Compliance Governance from Day One: Security and compliance governance needs to be implemented right from the first day of operation: Security should not be treated as an afterthought. Every project should have the multi-layered security model (Tangudu et al., 2024) embedded in the initial design phase so that consent management, data encryption and access controls are configured before go-live. Security by design is a non-negotiable requirement for maintaining trust and GDPR/CCPA compliance.
- Adopt a Phased Technology Adoption Roadmap: A Phased Technology Adoption Roadmap should be adopted: Do not attempt to implement AI, AR and VR at the same time. Start by maturing Einstein AI capabilities for recommendation and segmentation because this provides the foundational data layer. After mastering AR features such as virtual try-ons in a specific product category to demonstrate ROI (e.g., reduced returns as shown by Khaldy et al., 2023) before scaling more complex, immersive experiences.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research shows Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) offers a strong enterprise-grade system for developing individualized data-based e-commerce experiences that scale effectively. The core implementation challenges of deep ecosystem integration and scalability exist inextricably with the principal strength of the platform. The research results present a critical framework to tackle SFMC implementation challenges that fill a recognized research gap according to Schembari (2020). The main argument of this research demonstrates that organizations need to make strategic decisions about SFMC implementation through data-driven choices. The process lacks standardized solutions for every organization. Our examination exposed that the native connector versus custom middleware decision creates a trade-off between current operational speed and future adaptability, as well as REST versus SOAP API decisions. Companies must use a rigorous assessment to determine whether a capability creates a defensive market position through unique data assets or if it represents a standard business function. The security and compliance investigation shows that data protection should not be considered a secondary concern. Protecting PII demands an inception-based security structure that combines encryption and MFA with governance systems for consent and data residency to satisfy GDPR and CCPA requirements and achieve ethical AI implementation (Raji et al., 2024). The convergence of AI-driven personalization and immersive AR experiences will create new customer engagement opportunities and reduce

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25oct1477

operational costs like returns, according to (Cheruku, 2023), (Tangudu et al., 2024), and Adawiyah et al. (2024). The selection of SFMC depends on strategic considerations rather than pure technological factors. Large enterprises integrated with Salesforce gain the most advantage from this single data source, while it remains justifiable. Mid-market businesses should consider alternatives like HubSpot because their needs exceed the complexity level, thus making HubSpot a more cost-effective solution. The study presents an adaptable framework for customizing SFMC that meets future requirements in e-commerce applications. The practical integration framework together with security guidelines and strategic recommendations from this research enable organizations to tackle platform complexities and create scalable, efficient customer-centric e-commerce experiences for digital retail's next generation.

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