![Alumio logo]

8 reasons to have an integration solution in your IT ecosystem

Alumio White paper

8 reasons to have an integration solution in your IT ecosystem

For businesses to be successful, we genuinely believe it's vital to have a connected IT ecosystem. Everything and everyone in your digital ecosystem should connect across channels, devices and platforms. Companies with a connected infrastructure are far outpacing their competitors.

The bigger picture

This blog is for companies with digital ambition. We'll look at the reasons why you should be thinking of an integration strategy, but first, we need to address the bigger picture. To appreciate the reasons why you need an integration strategy, you need to know that IT cannot do this alone; this is a multifaceted strategy and requires input and effort from each team.

Four pillars of digital success

We have identified four main pillars that you need as an organization to help you achieve success with your digital investments.

Those pillars are:
- Vision
- Data
- Process and technology
- People
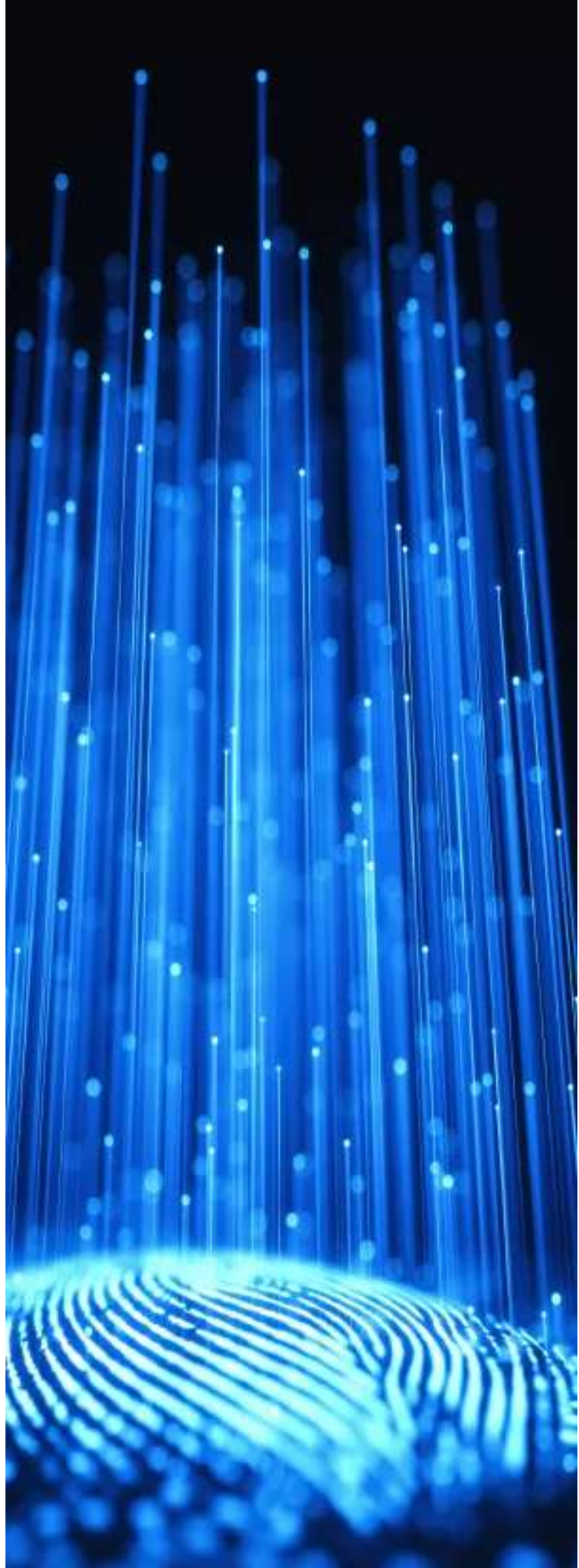
Think big

To think big, you have to be able to anticipate on-growth. Meaning, you need to have an idea of how your organization looks in *xx* years.

Start small

Once the long-term goal and strategy are defined, you are then in a position to determine which software needs to be in place. Start with simple tools that have a significant impact. These quick wins will help your organization and kick-start your digital strategy.

Grow smart

Starting small enables you to realize success sooner, but it doesn't stop there. Now it's time to grow. The *build-measure-learn* cycle is pretty straightforward and works across all four pillars.

People will become more skilled and scale with your organization. You will make better choices about your technology and how it integrated across the organization, resulting in better quality data.
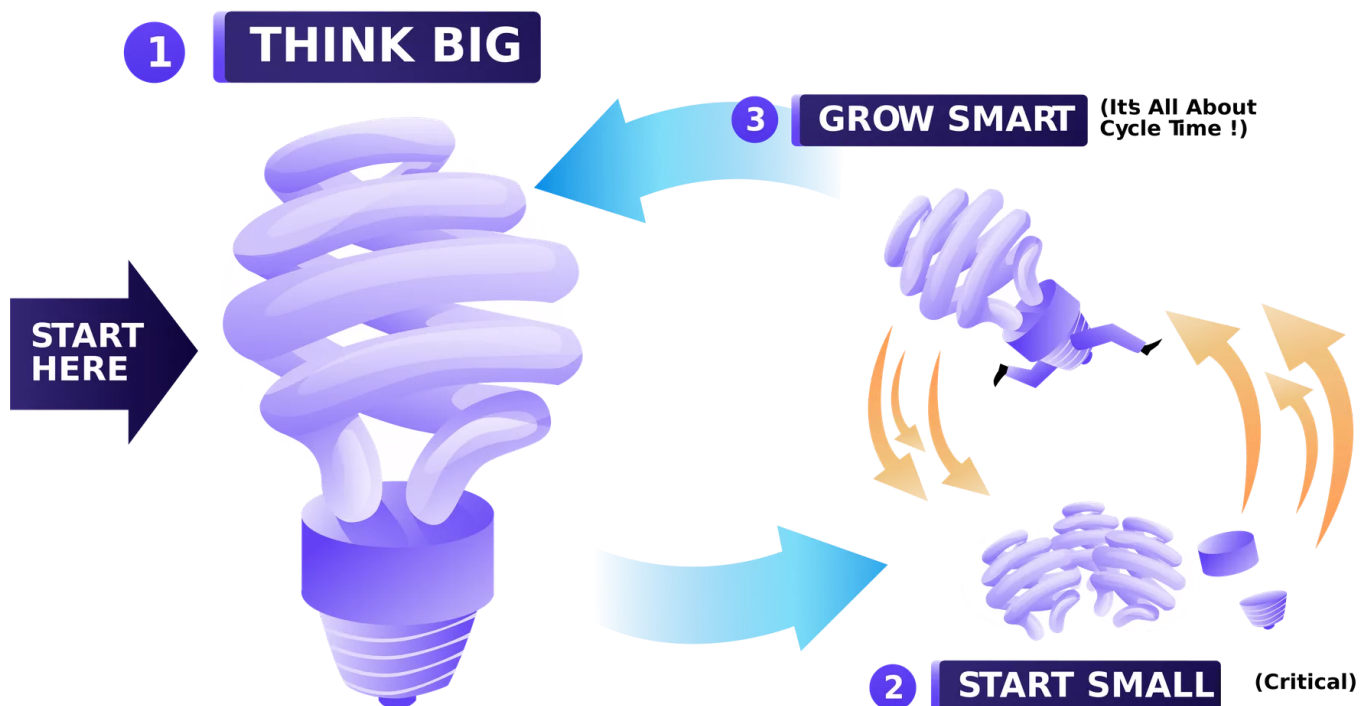
Successful companies need to have a digital strategy

90% of studies show specific and challenging big goals led to organizations achieving higher performance than those setting no, or easy goals. To be able to understand why you should have an integration strategy, you need to understand that being a successful digital thinking company has four main pillars that helps you achieve success with your digital investments.

"Most people overestimate what they can do in one year and underestimate what they can do in 10 years."

Bill Gates

Pillar I: Vision

How is the company going to be managed? What are the objectives and goals? What strategies do you need to consider to achieve digital success?

A significant role of the management team is to have a clear picture of all four pillars. It's crucial to understand where you are today in each pillar, and this forms part of your strategy to progress forward. But without a vision, you won't know which direction to set off in.

Use simple, clear language when writing your vision; *everyone must understand it.* As we've mentioned, *think big.* It might seem more achievable and safer to set a smaller short-term goal, but everyone loves an organization that knows where they want to be and it's going to take a big, juicy, audacious plan to get there!

A big goal inspires employees and stimulates progression and the urge to improve. SMART objectives are there to help you set achievable deliverables along the way, but the goal... needs to be big.

Pillars of digital success

Pillar II: Data

Data is the key for most things today, and that stands true when looking at digital maturity. Successful organizations who are future-thinking and hyper-learning build themselves on robust, reliable data—hence the term data-driven.

Too often, we see data stored in a siloed manner. It needs to be available in a smart way, where it can be accessible for all levels of the organization, creating a seamless experience across channels, devices, marketplaces and more.

To be ready for machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI), and truly become a digital-first company, data from all customer touchpoints, sources, software, channels, and departments needs to be easily accessible.

Pillar III: Process and technology

Having the right tools for the job is true of any trade. Why should software be any different? It shouldn't!

A clear view of how data and software are being used will avoid things happening in a silo from each other, leading to inefficient processes. To be ready for the world of APIs, you'll need this level of visibility. APIs will allow you to be flexible, scalable and secure. Smart algorithms, analytics and AI models will help your organization adopt more effective processes and will enable you to make intelligent decisions based on real-time data. Making the right choices about technology will mean you'll have an ecosystem that will grow with you and avoid costly implementations. Install for growth now, and it will save you time, money and a headache further down the line.
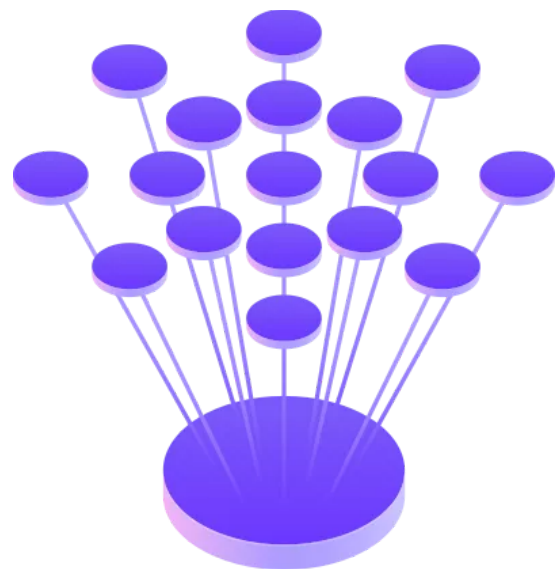
Pillar IV. People

Knowledge, experience and culture are what people bring. Data-driven organizations require partnerships and people who understand digital. The landscape is continually changing, and people need to be aware of the shift. They need to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

1 Why an iPaaS: Be connected

A digital-first organization should be able to deliver all its services and operations digitally. The current situation for many organizations is their software is only partly connected for some critical data sets, for example, ecommerce (if there is an ecommerce solution in place), but certainly not all areas of the business.

The customer doesn't care that you use multiple pieces of software for different activities online. They want a short and seamless journey. With a coherent ecosystem, you will have a complete customer view.

For example
You may have some, or all of the following methods for a customer to contact you:

- ticketing system
- chatbot
- sales system
- webshop
- WhatsApp
- SMS
- social
- email

And, of course, you have physical stores and the telephone—*remember that?*Information gathered by any of these means needs to be first, recorded, and secondly accessible across all systems and teams; this means it can be reported on and attributed to ROI. Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can use this data to personalize the customer experience.

1 Why an iPaaS: Be connected

To become completely digital, you may need more solutions. As we discussed earlier, intelligent choices upfront make it easier to scale—and it doesn't all need to be installed at the same time. Grow smart, remember? With defined priorities, it may take a few years to get things in place, and there's a lot to consider:
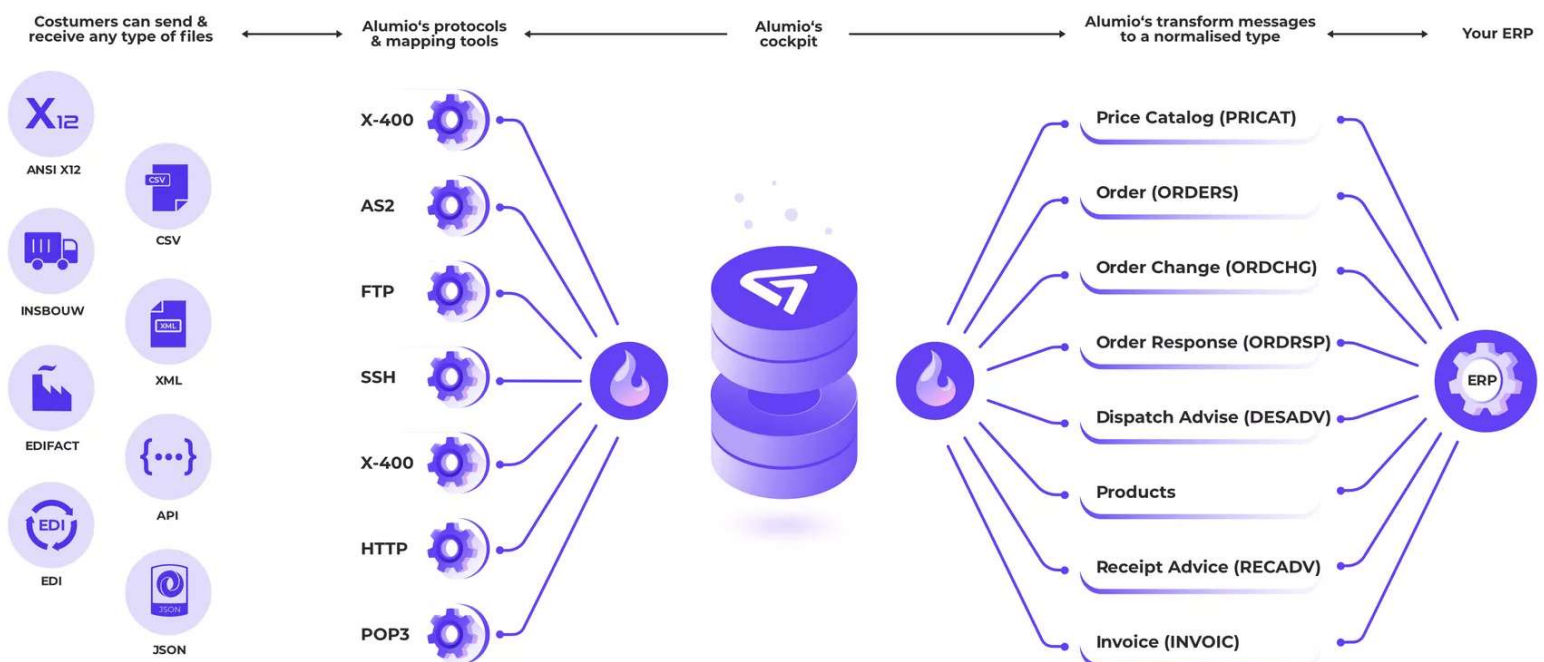
- Marketing automation
- Account-based marketing
- Personalization
- Data management platform (DMP)
- CRM
- Conversational solutions (voice and chat)
- Smart payment
- Paid advertising

These are just a few of current technologies on the market. With advancements in ML and AI, these cloud-based tools and more will become more of a necessity than a nice-to-have. And yes, they all need connecting correctly as not to cause fragmentation of data.

Be connected on digital messages & EDI
Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) is the computer-to-computer exchange of business documents in a standard electronic format between business partners.

An iPaaS takes the complexity out of doing EDI or import digital orders (and messaging) by allowing you to easily map the files and transform them to messages which can be imported to you ERP. Be connected... Be in control!

Costumers can send & receive any type of files | Alumio's protocols & mapping tools | Alumio's cockpit | Alumio's transform messages to a normalised type | Your ERP

ANSI X12 · CSV · INSBOUW · XML · EDIFACT · API · EDI · JSON

X-400 · AS2 · FTP · SSH · X-400 · HTTP · POP3

Price Catalog (PRICAT) · Order (ORDERS) · Order Change (ORDCHG) · Order Response (ORDRSP) · Dispatch Advise (DESADV) · Products · Receipt Advice (RECADV) · Invoice (INVOIC)

ERP

#2 Benefit from Machine learning and Artificial Intelligence

Proven results by McKinsey's research:
McKinsey followed a selection of major retailers already using and experimenting with AI in the following areas:

- Products and prices – Predict prices (B2C and B2B), trends, up sell related products, personalize promotions and pricing
- Warehouse and stock – ML and AI modeling to help optimize stock levels, purchases and purchase prices
- Planning – Demand forecasting
- Returns: – How returns are handled
- R&D – Automatize test processes, speed-up R&D and predict outcomes
- Customers – Automatize customer segments and profiling interest

The results:

"Companies who are using ML and AI to run their business are 35% more successful."

Source: McKinsey

AI requires a significant amount of data to be effective, especially from different parts of the customer journey.

- Pricing
- Delivery satisfaction
- RMA & Returns
- Support tickets
- Financial data
- Weather
- Customer satisfaction
- Speed of service/delivery
- Contact sales/physical store
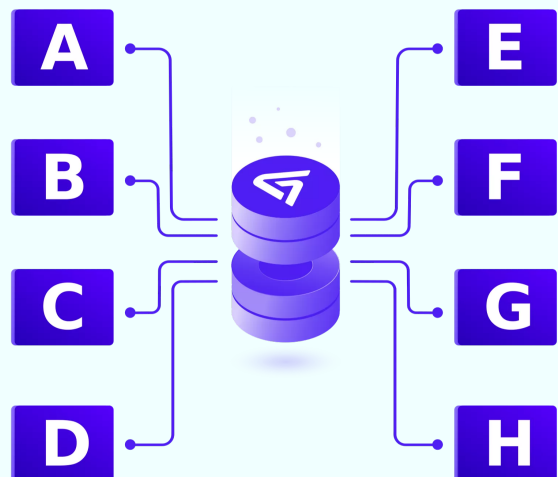
Source: McKinsey*
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#3 It's an API world

Be ready for it! Traditional businesses are moving online. Not to replace the brick and mortar, but to compliment it and make it more efficient. The connectivity we've discussed throughout this blog is reached through APIs.

Marketplaces and channels are growing, and you need to consider which are right for your business:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Amazon
- Bol
- eBay
- and so on

All of these have an API you can connect to, to trade or communicate through. But not with outdated, legacy systems. To grow smart and be ready for the future, you need to think beyond merely having an Amazon store. Connect all of your products, services, real-time price updates and stock information. Online processes increase efficiencies:

- Order management
- Returns
- Issue management
- Tracking
- Warranty
- Payments and credits
- How-to wizards

So, IT needs to be ready for APIs.

The API world will bring new questions—questions about experience. As your organization's API will be serving services to your employees, customers and partners, it's crucial to plan first! Answering these questions will help make decisions about structure and connectivity:

- How can we deliver a seamless experience for all touchpoints?
- How compelling is the customer experience?
- How easy is the experience for our employees?

The answer to these questions will give you more data. But this new data will allow you to deliver better, smarter ways to engage with your customers.

Physical storefronts changed when digital became more interactive, ecommerce took the lead, and web-based experiences became rich with new media. As APIs are fast becoming the most important interface for businesses, they are changing too. The current landscape is showing that organizations will have their own APIs, and business is done through the API. But the next chapter will involve new business models and innovations launched through APIs.

For example, look at Uber; a large part of Uber's underlying technology is not created by them—but instead called from APIs.

#4 Become agile

Why would you need to create an environment where the interchangeability of software is required? To understand this, we need to take a more in-depth look at the four pillars.

As we mentioned earlier, IT cannot do this alone. For success, you need people with the right skills and the correct data in place—all led by a management team with a clear future-proof vision. Each of the four pillars is integrated and connected. If you do not have the right people and data in place, you will not benefit from enterprise-level tools. Start with a suitable solution for your current and next stage requirements. However, when you to get you to the next level, with the right tools in place, it's easy to upgrade and take the step to more expensive enterprise solutions. This agile approach allows you to avoid unnecessary substantial software costs while starting on your journey.

Historically, one of the problems with replacing legacy software, or implementing new is connecting them all. Connecting to large scale ERP systems, such as SAP ECC or Microsoft, is still not easy.

The more recent your technology, the easier it will be to swap-out or add to. Outdated, convoluted connections between bespoke systems make it very difficult to create continuity and standardize data across the organization. With modern platforms, an iPaaS solution can manage critical connections; this way, adding a new ML or AI platform is easy and secure. As is, swapping out an existing system for its replacement. This all means, you only need to replace one integration, as the iPaaS is managing data and integrations.

Compliance and organize a secure (connected) data ecosystem

#5 Compliance

With more integrations required, the increased risk of data loss and ultimately, privacy means companies are focusing more and more on security. They must adhere to new privacy laws and regulations and security guidelines. Compliance is about proving how you track and manage data, and this is extremely difficult to do with complex integrations and no tools to help.

An iPaaS enables you to be able to execute GDPR in the following GDPR business requests:

- Enhancing existing individual rights
- A right to erasure and the right to be forgotten
- The right to receive personal data
- Be able to implement GDPR user interfaces
- The rights to notice, access, rectification and to object
- Remove data from (external) sources

An iPaaS helps you to be compliant with Privacy Legislation like:
- SOC2
- GDPR
- CCPA
- FERPA
- HIPAA

#6 Organize a secure connected ecosystem

For any iPaaS, SaaS application or cloud service, security is crucial. Safety at Alumio a top priority.

We have included security on all facets of Alumio; network and infrastructure levels, application and platform layers and at a data level. This three-pronged security approach ensures that your data is never shown to unauthorized parties, remains a safe throughput between applications, and that you have access to your data anytime, anywhere wherever you want.

#7 Be scalable

Being aware of the importance of how integration, API connectivity, data and AI, play a significant part in today's landscape makes it easier to make decisions about moving forward and upscaling.

Performance is essential for integrations.

This concerns performance of active integrations. Do these overheat? Are they limited by CPU power, memory, or network bandwidth? Or are fully scalable?

Performance is also vital for scaling up integration processes, setting up workflows and rolling out additional integrations; with or without relationships to existing integrations.

Alumio is developed for:

- Performance for unlimited scalability
- Business process design
- Setting up combined data flows to multiple connections
- The future of ML and AI

To make sure Alumio software can always be scaled to meet performance requirements, we offer a variety of Alumio configurations.
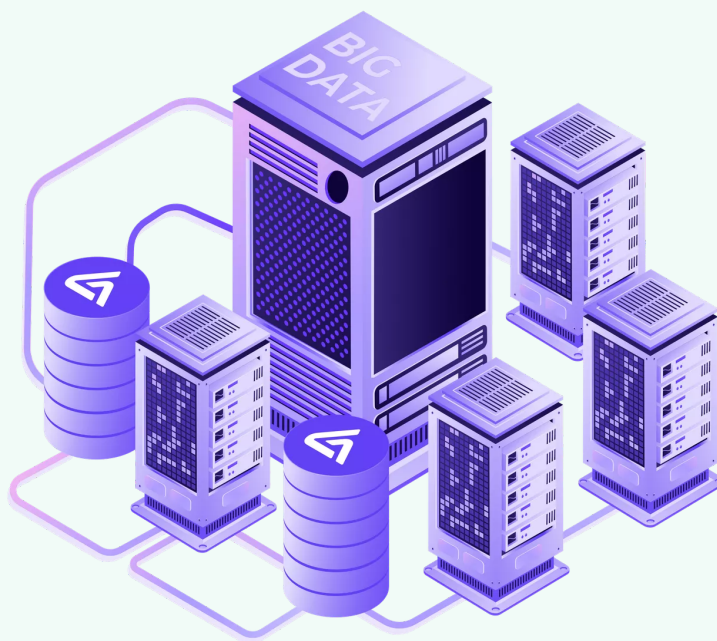
#8 Prove digital return on ad spend (ROAS)

To be more successful, we need to know more about our customer and the touch points along their journey. We need to be able to track engagement and measure the impact of every action, as well as, have the ability to attribute it to marketing activities and spend.

Understanding the customer journey is super important. Knowing what the customer is doing, what questions they're asking, their likes and dislikes, all build up a complete profile of behavior. This profile will enable you to correlate actions with outcomes and highlight any gaps or wasted effort in the journey. Therefore, being able to measure the correct information, we can calculate the ROAS and determine the effect it's having on the total lifetime value of the customer.

When it comes to IT infrastructure, in days past, this

information would be fragmented across multiple systems; for example:

- Your ticketing system would manage customer issues
- Sales platform for quotes
- Advertising and retargeting handled by channel
- Google , Facebook
- Youtube
- Transport and logistics would have a dedicated system
- Invoice and payment details looked after by an ERP
- Email correspondence
- And the list goes on

Planning the organization of this data and how systems talk to each other will help you manage this and get a complete 360 customer view.
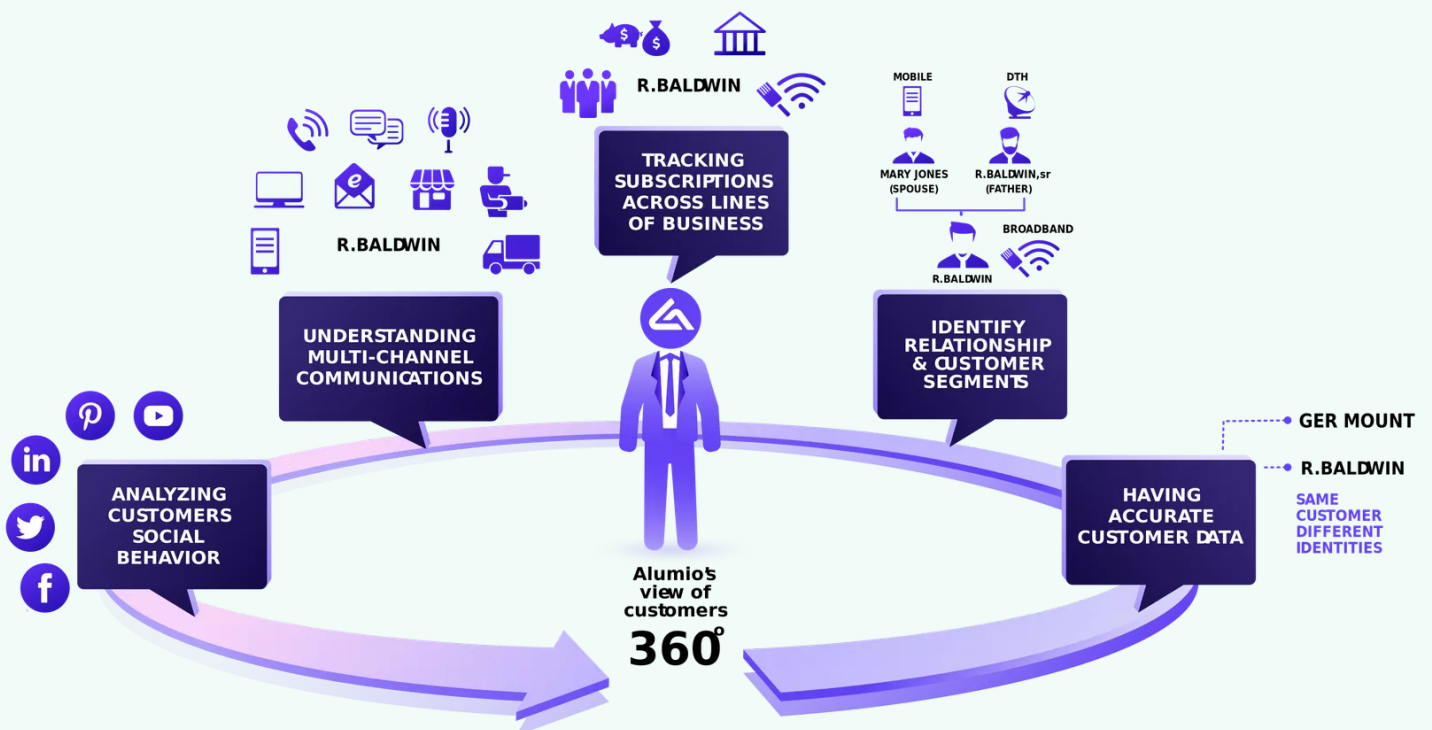
About Us

Alumio offers an integration platform and solution for the eCommerce market based off of the new wave of iPaaS integrated software solutions. Alumio is designed to provide today's businesses with the ability to integrate their processes simply, with a scalable solution that can be used to grow as you grow.

With more than 10 years of experience in creating integrated software solutions, we've developed Alumio as a long-term solution for your business. Along with our clients in industries like eCommerce, retail, manufacturing, finance, and wholesale we help businesses achieve their full potential.

Our Story

Our humble beginnings go back as far as twenty years ago when we were a digital agency that specialized in making integrated solutions between ERP systems and digital software. While we worked with eCommerce clients, we also needed to integrate with (e)POS systems, warehouse systems, and PIM systems.

In our early years, we made integrated solutions using custom code. However, we knew just how challenging this was going to be moving forward. We didn't have a viable way to monitor our custom code, which often left our clients calling us with issues. While our support team would do everything they could to solve the issue, they simply didn't have enough knowledge with the custom code that our solutions were built around.

For that very reason, we moved to embrace the new standard of integrated solutions in iPaaS integrations. Today, our clients no longer have to deal with the back and forth between our support staff and their IT team, they no longer have to worry about fine tuning their code, they no longer have to worry about hiccups in their integrations – instead, they can finally reap the benefits of a scalable, affordable, and flexible integrated software solution designed for modern businesses and modern technology.

The integrated platform for digital commerce & AI

Alumio ends the pains of data silo's which stop business to grow, as well as the pain of hand-crafted code by several partners, teams and developers. Alumio created a scalable, high performing and above all secure and save and compliance environment to handle your data integrations.

Alumio is designed to be 'The best solution for data integration', when it comes to create fast connection between ERP systems, the new digital software applications and to Machine Learning/ AI solutions.

Alumio will improve business processes, accelerate decision-making, and drive better business outcomes.

The Alumio integration platform, delivered as private cloud solution, is a central place for all integrations, so companies are able to use data, accelerates process flow across applications, databases, data warehouses, big data streams, and AI solutions.

All-in-One Integration Solution for Digital Commerce

alumio®