

Zalando

Connected Retail – From pilot to an expanded sales pillar in Europe

Business Development · Platform Strategy · Omnichannel · Retail Integration · Transformation · KAM



AT A GLANCE

Client:
Zalando

Project:
Connected Retail (CR) —
pillar 4 of the marketplace

My role: Interim Business
Development Lead

Project period:
04/2020–04/2021

Addressable market:
16,000 brick-and-mortar
retailers in Europe

Roll-out:
13 European countries

Orders:
increased by a factor of 11

Mandate: commercialization and
scaling

01 THE SITUATION

Zalando had built its marketplace business on three sales pillars: Wholesale, Brand Shops and the Partner Program. CR was to be added as the fourth pillar. The pandemic-driven store closures turned the strategic initiative into an urgent project.

02 THE CHALLENGE

CR shifts order fulfillment from the central warehouse into brick-and-mortar retail: the inventory is sold through the platform and shipped directly from the store — white label. The store contributes its available goods, mirrored into the system in real time from its inventory management, and the store staff handle fulfillment. Zalando contributes the brand, the customers, and the platform. This way, a B2B partner delivers Zalando's B2C promise: real-time availability, packaging in Zalando's own box, returns via the platform — across thousands of stores, in 13 countries, without a single Zalando employee on site.

03 THE APPROACH

- **Business model brought to market readiness:**
guided CR from the strategic decision to a model a retailer can use without project effort — the prerequisite for thousands of scalable connections.
- **Departments committed to one roadmap:**
coordinated IT, marketing, and management along a shared plan and created the basis for cross-functional implementation.
- **Roll-out owned:**
introduced the CR app, integrated the retailers' inventory management systems, and rolled out CR across Europe.
- **Sales steered:**
led the team professionally and developed key accounts strategically together.

04 THE RESULT

- ✓ **Expansion:**
from 8 to 13 countries and from 2,400 to nearly 7,000 active stores within one year.
- ✓ **Orders:**
increased by a factor of 11.
- ✓ **Cyber Week / Black Friday:**
CR generated roughly 30% of Zalando's total GMV.
- ✓ **To this day:**
CR is firmly anchored in the Zalando group and strengthens Zalando as a marketplace.

FROM CASE TO YOUR BUSINESS

New business models, expansion, and internationalization rarely fail because of the idea. They fail because strategy, organization, and sales are not consistently aligned toward a shared goal and carried through to implementation. And what belongs together often drifts apart as growth accelerates — the directives from executive management, the departments within the company, and the customers in the market. This is the responsibility Schwadtke Projects now takes on for mid-sized companies: connecting strategic business development with operational execution and driving transformations through to measurable business results.

ZALANDO IN SHORT

- 01 Strategic course set**
Building a fourth sales pillar alongside Wholesale, Brand Shops, and the Partner Program — the pandemic turned the strategic initiative into an operational must.
- 02 Business model to market readiness**
Scalable connection created for retailers without project effort.
- 03 Organization aligned**
IT, marketing, and management coordinated cross-functionally and the basis established.
- 04 Roll-out steered**
CR app introduced and retailer inventory management systems connected.
- 05 Europe-wide execution**
CR rolled out in 13 European countries, roughly 16,000 retailers addressed.
- 06 Interests united**
Interests of retailers, Zalando, and the capital market successfully brought together.
- 07 Sustainably established**
CR remains an integral part of Zalando's business model to this day.

Endorsement

Patrick combines strategic thinking with exceptional execution. He operates with assurance at the executive level, quickly earns the trust of relevant stakeholders, and uses his solid network deliberately to build new customer relationships and win strategically important key accounts. The collaboration was professional throughout, based on partnership, and consistently focused on sustainable results.

Michael Lorenz, Commercial Lead, Zalando Partner Program / CR