



CUSTOMER DATA PLATFORMS: THE MARKETER'S PLAYBOOK

What CDPs actually do, whether you need one, and how to buy the right one.

FOREWORD

THE CATEGORY EVERYONE LOVES TO **DISTRUST**, AND NEEDS MORE THAN EVER

CDPs have a reputation problem. Ask ten marketers what they think of customer data platforms and at least half will mention a project that ran over budget, took a year longer than promised, or never quite delivered the 'single customer view' it was sold on. That reputation isn't entirely undeserved.

But the timing has shifted the calculus. Budgets are tighter, third-party cookies are gone, privacy rules keep narrowing what you can do with data you don't own, and every AI initiative on the roadmap is only as good as the customer data feeding it. First-party data has quietly become the most valuable asset most marketing teams have.

This playbook is a fast, honest primer on the technology built to manage it: what a CDP actually is, when it earns its keep, and how to choose one without getting sold to.

**ACQUIRE'S TAKE**

This isn't a vendor pitch. Acquire doesn't sell CDPs. We help clients decide if they need one, and if required, help implement.

AT A GLANCE

THE CDP MARKET IN FOUR NUMBERS


\$37.1B

Projected size of the global CDP market by 2030, up from \$9.7B in 2025.


31%

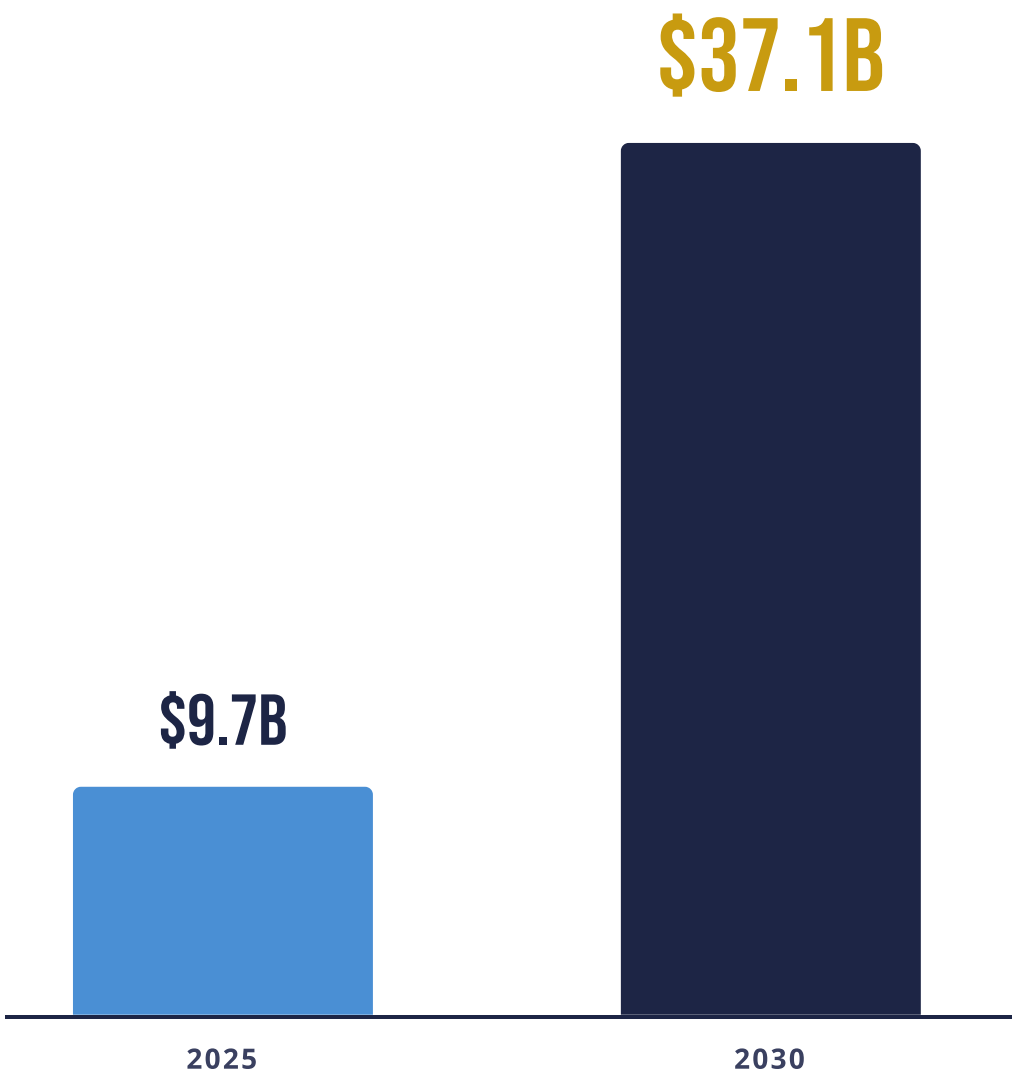
Annual growth rate (CAGR) the market is expected to sustain all the way through 2030.


55%

Share of CDP vendors now offering built-in data clean rooms, up from 43% just two years ago.


31.7%

Expected growth rate of 'Delivery CDPs': the fastest-growing CDP category, built to activate data, not just store it.



Source: MarketsandMarkets, Customer Data Platform Market Report, 2025.

THE MARKET

THIS ISN'T HYPE. IT'S A CATEGORY **RESETTING ITS FLOOR**

At this pace, the category will be roughly four times its current size before the decade is out. That growth isn't coming from novelty. It's coming from necessity.

As third-party identifiers disappear and AI tools demand cleaner, richer customer data to work with, the platforms built to unify and govern that data have moved from 'nice to have' to core infrastructure.

Growth is not evenly spread, though: platforms built to activate data in real time, not just store it, are growing fastest, and that split matters when you're choosing what to buy.

THREE FORCES **RESHAPING CDPS**



PRIVACY HAS TEETH NOW

As regulation tightens and third-party cookies disappear, first-party data is the only reliable asset marketers have left. 'Clean rooms' (shared spaces where brands can compare notes on audiences without ever handing over the underlying customer list) have gone from experimental to expected.



REAL TIME MEANS REAL TIME NOW

Buyers have grown sceptical of vague 'real-time' claims. The bar has shifted from 'can this platform unify our data' to 'can it act on that data fast enough to matter in the moment.'



AI RUNS ON CLEAN DATA

Every generative or agentic AI initiative is only as good as the customer data behind it. CDPs have become the unglamorous foundation that makes AI-driven personalisation actually work.

FOUR FLAVOURS, ONE CATEGORY NAME

The industry lumps every platform under 'CDP,' but they didn't all start life doing the same job. Knowing which flavour you're evaluating saves you from comparing apples to spreadsheets.

01



DATA CDPS

Collect, unify and store customer data into segments you can export elsewhere. Many started life as website tagging or on-site analytics tools before adding this layer.

02



ANALYTICS CDPS

Everything a Data CDP does, plus modelling, prediction and journey mapping built in.

03



CAMPAIGN CDPS

Focused on one-to-one treatments and orchestrating campaigns across channels, not just building segments.

04



DELIVERY CDPS **FASTEST-GROWING**

Built to actually send the message (email, app, web, CRM) and now the fastest-growing type in the category.

THE NEWEST CDPS DON'T WANT TO HOLD YOUR DATA AT ALL

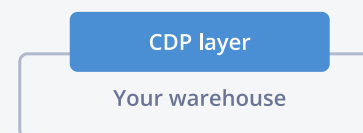
A growing share of vendors now build directly on top of your existing cloud data warehouse (think Snowflake or Databricks) instead of storing a separate copy of your customer data. This is the 'composable' or 'warehouse-native' model, and it changes the buying conversation.

TRADITIONAL CDP



- Holds its own copy of customer data in a proprietary database
- Faster to stand up standalone, but creates a second source of truth
- Vendor controls the identity graph and matching logic

COMPOSABLE / WAREHOUSE-NATIVE CDP



- Works directly inside your existing warehouse or data lake
- Reduces duplication and simplifies governance and audit
- Often relies on your warehouse's own logic rather than a proprietary graph

ACQUIRE'S TAKE

Composable CDPs are growing faster in adoption, but still account for under 5% of category employment. This is a real shift, not yet the mainstream default.

HOW WE GOT HERE

A SHORT HISTORY OF A FAST-MOVING CATEGORY



WHAT A CDP ACTUALLY DOES

THE BASELINE, BEFORE YOU COMPARE ANYTHING ELSE

Regardless of type or vendor, every genuine CDP should clear this bar:

- ✓ Lets marketing self-serve, without needing IT for every basic task
- ✓ Collects, cleans and unifies customer data into one profile, stored natively or directly in your data cloud
- ✓ Connects to outside systems on a vendor-neutral basis, in real time or near real time
- ✓ Handles both structured data (transactions, forms) and unstructured data (support tickets, reviews)
- ✓ Builds in consent handling and governance controls, not bolted on afterwards
- ✓ Offers a warehouse-native or hybrid deployment option, not just a proprietary database

ONCE THE BASICS ARE COVERED, THIS IS WHERE VENDORS ACTUALLY DIFFER



IDENTITY RESOLUTION

How well the platform stitches together scattered signals (emails, devices, purchases) into one accurate person. The best now blend deterministic matching with machine learning.



CONNECTOR QUALITY

Anyone can claim 'pre-built integrations.' What matters is latency, how deeply activation is built into the platform's own architecture, and whether it's a real sync or a data dump.



USABILITY

As martech stacks get more complex, the platforms winning are the ones that hide that complexity from marketers: natural-language segment building, not SQL.



AI DEPTH

The gap is widening between vendors offering genuine predictive/generative capability built on your data, and those bolting on an AI feature for the marketing page.

WHAT YOU ACTUALLY GET **FOR THE INVESTMENT**



FEWER SILOS

Marketing, service and data teams finally work from the same customer picture.



CLEANER ACTIVATION

One governed access layer for every downstream channel, wherever the data physically lives.



SHARPER IDENTITY

AI-assisted matching means fewer duplicate or fragmented profiles.



FASTER INTEGRATION

Pre-built connectors and low-code tooling cut the manual plumbing work.



TIME BACK FOR THE TEAM

Automation of manual data cleanup frees marketers for actual strategy and creative.



AI-READY BY DEFAULT

Every generative or predictive initiative inherits better data to work from.

WHAT IT'LL COST YOU

THE INVOICE IS RARELY JUST ONE LINE

ADD-ON MODULES

AI, clean rooms, advanced analytics; priced separately

USAGE-BASED FEES

Tied to events, profiles or compute

BASE PLATFORM SUBSCRIPTION

Core data unification and segmentation

\$50K-\$250K

Typical average annual deal size range reported by enterprise CDP vendors, before add-ons and usage fees.

Most CDP contracts blend three things: a base subscription covering core data unification and segmentation; usage-based fees tied to events, profiles or compute; and add-on modules (advanced analytics, real-time decisioning, clean rooms, generative AI) priced separately. That combination makes budgeting harder, especially for teams with seasonal traffic spikes. Ask any shortlisted vendor to model your actual, not average, usage before you sign.

DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED ONE?

A FIVE-MINUTE GUT CHECK BEFORE YOU TAKE A SINGLE VENDOR CALL

The more of these you answer 'yes' to, the stronger your case:

ACQUIRE'S TAKE

Mostly ticks? Your case for a CDP is solid. Only one or two? The fix is probably better data hygiene, not a new platform purchase.

- ☐ We don't have one reliable, trusted system of record for customer profiles
- ☐ Our customer data is scattered across teams and tools in ways that block activation or analysis
- ☐ We regularly lose time to manual data cleanup, deduplication or formatting fixes
- ☐ We've identified specific cross-channel use cases our current tools genuinely can't support
- ☐ We have a clear hypothesis for how better data would cut cost, lift revenue or speed up campaigns
- ☐ Marketing, IT, analytics and service all agree our current data gaps need solving
- ☐ We know which systems must connect to a CDP on day one to make it worthwhile

FOUR STEPS, IN THIS ORDER: DON'T SKIP TO DEMOS



THE QUESTIONS THAT ACTUALLY SEPARATE VENDORS

DATA & IDENTITY

- How exactly does identity resolution work: deterministic, probabilistic, or both?
- How is offline, unstructured and structured data ingested?
- How does the platform flag integration failures or data anomalies?

ORCHESTRATION

- Can it run multi-step journeys across channels, not just single sends?
- Can it trigger real-time actions in outside systems?

GOVERNANCE

- Which privacy regulations does it natively support?
- Is consent management built in, or does it rely on a separate tool?

COMMERCIALS

- What actually drives the price: profiles, events, API calls, seats, add-ons?
- How much, and under what terms, does renewal pricing typically increase?

17 VENDORS, ONE PAGE: FOR WHEN YOU NEED TO BUILD A LONGLIST FAST

This isn't exhaustive and it isn't a ranking. It's a starting map. Use it to build your own shortlist, then go deep on the three or four that fit your stack.

*Acquire

VENDOR	MODEL	BEST FIT FOR	STANDOUT STRENGTH	PRICING SIGNAL
Adobe (Real-Time CDP)	Enterprise suite	Large omnichannel enterprises already on Adobe Experience Platform	Deep B2C/B2B/B2P profiles + agentic AI orchestration	Quote-based, enterprise multi-year
Amperity	Standalone / AI-native	Consumer brands (travel, retail, sports) needing trusted identity	Patented ML identity resolution at scale	Enterprise, quote-based
Bloomreach	Integrated commerce suite	Ecommerce & retail wanting personalization in one platform	No-code journey builder + built-in commerce search	Annual contract, usage-tiered
BlueConic	Standalone	Mid-market B2C wanting fast, marketer-led activation	Agentic "next-best-action" decisioning	Quote-based
Blueshift	Standalone / engagement platform	B2C teams wanting AI content + engagement in one tool	Generative AI campaign & asset creation	From ~\$1,250/mo, tiered
Optimove	Standalone / campaign CDP	Retention & loyalty-led consumer brands	Self-optimising AI agents for lifecycle marketing	Quote-based
Redpoint Global	Composable	Enterprises prioritising data quality & identity over storage	Tunable, no-code identity resolution	Quote-based, no annual lock-in
Salesforce (Data Cloud)	Integrated (CRM-native)	Organisations running Salesforce as their CRM backbone	Native grounding for Einstein & Agentforce AI	Consumption-based credits
SAP (Customer Data Platform)	Integrated (ERP-native)	Regulated, data-heavy industries already on SAP	Tight CX + ERP integration via Joule AI	Quote-based, enterprise
SAS (Customer Intelligence 360)	Integrated / hybrid composable	Enterprises wanting decisioning without full cloud migration	Reinforcement-learning next-best-offer engine	\$50K-\$250K average deal
Simon AI	Composable (Snowflake-native)	Snowflake shops wanting agentic marketing execution	AI agents that plan and run campaigns autonomously	Quote-based
Tealium (Customer Data Hub)	Standalone / vendor-neutral	Teams wanting a neutral data layer across a complex stack	1,300+ connectors + real-time visitor stitching	Quote-based
Treasure Data	Enterprise standalone	Global 2000s needing batch + real-time in one profile	Persona-specific UIs for marketing, IT & data science	Profile + compute based
Twilio (Segment)	Standalone / developer-friendly	Product-led and B2B/B2C businesses of any size	Open, API-first data collection and governance	Usage-based, self-serve to enterprise
Zeotap	AI-native, composable	Brands needing better paid-media match rates	ID graph built for walled-garden addressability	Annual, custom-scoped
Zeta Global	Integrated AI marketing cloud	Enterprises wanting data + activation from one vendor	Proprietary identity graph (2.4bn+ global identifiers)	Quote-based

Pricing signals are directional, gathered from public vendor materials and disclosures. Always confirm current pricing directly with the vendor.

SKIP THE RFP FOR A SECOND: **HERE'S A SHORTCUT**

Already deep in Salesforce?

Start with Data Cloud. It's built to ground your existing CRM in Einstein and Agentforce.



Live in Snowflake and want AI agents doing the campaign work?

Look at Simon AI's composable, warehouse-native model.



Running a large omnichannel enterprise on Adobe?

Adobe Real-Time CDP is the natural extension of your existing stack.



Retention and loyalty are the whole game?

Optimove's self-optimising lifecycle engine is built for exactly that.



Want a neutral data layer that doesn't lock you in?

Tealium or Twilio Segment prioritise openness over ecosystem lock-in.



Paid media match rates are the pain point?

Zeotap is purpose-built for walled-garden addressability.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

THE PLATFORM MATTERS LESS THAN **THE DISCIPLINE AROUND IT**

A CDP won't fix bad data hygiene, unclear ownership, or a marketing team without a real use case. It also won't hold you back if you've done that groundwork. The organisations getting genuine value from these platforms in 2026 aren't the ones with the biggest budget. They're the ones who matched the architecture to an actual, validated need. That's the conversation worth having before any vendor call.



Acquire Digital is a Dubai-based digital marketing agency helping brands across the Middle East turn data, media and creative into growth. We don't sell martech. We help you choose, connect and get value from it.

Thinking about a CDP for your business?
Let's talk before you talk to a vendor.

Get in touch ↗