

iab. Data Clean Rooms in Commerce



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Data Clean Rooms are neutral platforms for the collaborative processing of different data sources. In these protected digital environments, two or more parties can process data within a defined scope and timeframe in compliance with data protection requirements. This opens up new opportunities for audience targeting and campaign management.

This development is particularly relevant in the retail and commerce media environment. Data Clean Rooms can help address shared questions among different market participants — such as retailers, brands, agencies, publishers, platforms, and technology providers — in a more structured way, including in areas such as audience activation, attribution, and incrementality measurement.

This IAB US paper provides a practical overview of common use cases and decision-making criteria in this area. The use cases and key questions outlined in the paper are generally applicable to the German market as well. At the same time, in the German and European context, they must always be evaluated with due consideration of the applicable legal, technical, and organizational frameworks.

The use of a Data Clean Room does not replace an independent assessment of data protection compliance. Particularly, when personal data is processed or matched, companies must assess an appropriate legal basis, purpose limitation, transparency toward data subjects, a clear allocation of roles among the parties involved, and, where applicable, additional measures such as data protection impact assessments.

The paper takes into account key considerations from a European and German perspective, particularly regarding legal classification, the need for suitable legal bases, governance questions, and technical requirements such as identity and system interoperability. These points are intentionally framed as prerequisites and assessment questions for implementation, without calling into question the fundamental value of Data Clean Rooms for retail and commerce media.

For publication in Germany, this interpretation is particularly important: Data Clean Rooms can support relevant marketing, measurement, and collaboration requirements, provided that the legal, organizational, and technical frameworks are assessed at an early stage and in relation to the specific use case.

For Germany, the question of identity- and system-interoperability is also especially important. Many relevant use cases require that data sets from different parties can be reliably matched or connected in the first place. This requires suitable identifiers, compatible data structures, and clear interfaces to existing CDPs, DSPs, retail media systems, or other Clean Room environments. A shared understanding of which data may be used for which purpose is also essential. A Data Clean Room can create a protected framework for collaboration, but it does not automatically resolve questions of consent, legal basis, data quality, identity resolution, or technical connectivity.

From the BVDW's standpoint, this paper should be understood as a useful framework for professional discussion. For application in the German market, companies should assess the use cases presented on a case-by-case basis and take data protection, governance, allocation of roles, interoperability, and operational feasibility into account at an early stage. In this way, Data Clean Rooms can make an important contribution to further developing data-driven collaboration in the retail and commerce media ecosystem in a responsible, effective, and market-oriented manner.



Common Use Cases

Introduction

Data clean rooms have become a common capability. They allow retailers, brands, agencies, publishers, and media platforms to collaborate using first-party data while maintaining privacy, security, and governance controls.

As clean room adoption [has grown](#), so has [confusion](#). Organizations often struggle to determine when a data clean room is necessary, how it differs from existing analytics and reporting tools, and which business use cases justify the investment in time, cost, and technical resources.

This framework provides practical guidance on the most common data clean room use cases by starting with the business question organizations want to answer and by distinguishing between use cases fundamentally enabled by privacy-enhancing collaboration and those where a data clean room strengthens existing workflows.

The goal is to help retailers, brands, agencies, publishers, and technology partners move beyond asking, "What is a data clean room?" and instead answer the more practical question, "When and why should an organization use a data clean room?"



What Is a Data Clean Room?

This framework uses the IAB Tech Lab [definition](#) of a data clean room as the base:

"A data clean room is a secure collaboration environment which allows two or more parties to leverage data assets for mutually agreed upon uses while guaranteeing enforcement of strict data access limitations."

Many commerce use cases require analyses at the event, individual, or identifier level rather than simply sharing aggregated reports. Data clean rooms provide a governed environment where these more granular analyses can occur without requiring participating organizations to exchange underlying datasets. Interoperability is also an important consideration when organizations seek data collaboration across multiple environments.

Importantly, a data clean room is a technical and governance mechanism for enabling privacy-enhancing collaboration. Organizations remain responsible for ensuring that any data collaboration complies with applicable laws, contractual obligations, and organizational governance requirements. The use of a data clean room does not, by itself, establish a legal basis for processing or sharing data.

Why Do Data Clean Rooms Matter in Commerce?

Data clean rooms have become an increasingly important capability in commerce because:

- **No single organization has a complete view of the customer.** Retailers, brands, agencies, and media platforms each possess different pieces of the customer journey.
- **Commerce depends on collaboration across complementary datasets.** Retailers contribute significant purchase, basket, and shopper behavioral data; brands contribute customer, campaign, and product data; media platforms and agencies contribute ad exposure and delivery data. The combination of these datasets create a more complete understanding of performance and customer behavior.



- **Organizations cannot simply exchange raw customer data.** Privacy requirements, contractual obligations, competitive concerns, and internal governance policies prevent companies from sharing underlying datasets directly. Clean rooms enable data collaboration within a governed environment that enforces agreed-upon access controls and usage policies.
- **Commerce media measurement is inherently fragmented.** Customer interactions, media exposure, and purchase outcomes often reside across different organizations. This makes it difficult to evaluate performance holistically without cross-organizational collaboration.

Five Questions to Ask Before Pursuing a Data Clean Room

The opportunity cost of engaging in a data clean room can be high if not properly thought through and scoped. Organizations should evaluate several questions before initiating a clean room engagement:

1. **What business question are we trying to answer?** The business objectives and use cases should be clearly defined from the get-go so that organizations know what questions they are trying to answer.
2. **Does answering that question require data from multiple parties?** If only a single party's data is required, a clean room may not be necessary. A data clean room becomes more relevant when answering the question requires combining datasets owned by multiple organizations.
3. **Does the use case require privacy-enhanced collaboration on sensitive data?** If the use case requires combining granular customer, transaction, media exposure, or other commercially sensitive datasets across organizations, you should determine whether the collaboration requires a governed, compute environment or simply a privacy-safe identity match or data transfer. Identity resolution, onboarding, APIs, or other privacy-enhancing technologies may be sufficient when the objective is simply to match or transfer an audience. A data clean room is more relevant when organizations need to perform governed analysis or computation across data sets without exposing underlying records.
4. **Can existing capabilities answer this question?** Be sure to evaluate whether existing systems and platforms can answer the questions you're looking to answer. Retailer reporting dashboards, analytics and attribution platforms, reach and frequency tools, and brand measurement studies can also provide outputs you may be looking for.
5. **Can we operationalize the analysis?** Depending on the platform and use case, data clean room collaborations can require substantial investments in platform fees, data science and technical resources, and ongoing operational management. Organizations should consider both the direct and indirect costs required to prepare data, execute analyses, interpret outputs, and translate findings into business decisions.

A Decision Framework For Common Data Clean Room Use Cases

Data clean room use cases are often organized by business functions such as planning, activation, measurement, or optimization. While those categorizations can be helpful, they do not help organizations determine when a data clean room is necessary.

This framework instead organizes common commerce use cases based on the role that privacy-enhancing, cross-party collaboration plays in enabling them. The objective is to help leaders distinguish between use cases that fundamentally depend on a data clean room and those where a data clean room enhances existing workflows.



Commerce Use Cases Enabled by Data Clean Rooms

The below use cases typically leverage data clean rooms to enable privacy-enhanced collaboration across datasets owned by different parties. Depending on the use case and participating organizations, other technologies such as identity resolution, onboarding solutions, or direct platform integrations may also enable similar forms of collaboration.

Audience Overlap Analysis

What it is	Audience overlap analysis measures the overlap between a brand's 1st party customer base and a retailer's shopper population. Brands use this to understand how many of their customers are already shoppers at a given retailer and to better understand the characteristics of that shared audience.
How a DCR enables this use case	Audience overlap requires matching customer records owned by different organizations. A clean room enables this matching without requiring either party to expose its underlying customer file to the other.
Typical outputs	• Audience overlap size • Match rates • Audience composition • Retailer penetration among brand customers • Shared customer profiles • Retailer specific insights on the brand 1st party dataset (like basket purchasing info)

Data Enrichment

What it is	Data enrichment helps brands better understand their customers by combining CRM data with retailer behavioral data, transaction, or demographic information.
How a DCR enables this use case	Data enrichment requires connecting customer records across organizations to generate insights about a brand's known customers. A clean room enables this matching while ensuring that neither party gains access to the other's raw data.
Typical outputs	• Category affinity analysis • Purchase frequency analysis • Basket composition analysis • Customer profiles • Customer value indicators • Competitive purchasing behavior



Bring Your Own Data (BYOD) Targeting

What it is	BYOD targeting allows brands to activate their own customer audiences within retailer media environments by matching a brand-provided audience against the retailer's identity graph.
How a DCR enables this use case	The brand's audience must be matched against retailer identities without either party exposing underlying customer records. A clean room provides the environment required to perform that match and enable activation.
Typical outputs	• Activation-ready audience • Match rate • Audience reach estimate

Suppression and Exclusion

What it is	Suppression and exclusion allow brands to remove specific customer groups from campaigns, such as existing purchasers, loyalty members, recent buyers, or other audiences that should not receive particular messaging or advertising.
How a DCR enables this use case	Suppression requires matching a brand's exclusion audience against a retailer's targetable audience pool. A clean room enables that matching without requiring either party to share underlying customer records.
Typical outputs	• Suppression audiences • Exclusion segments • Suppression match rate

Retailer Audience Activation

What it is	Retailer audience activation allows retailer-defined shopper audiences to be activated across external media environments such as social platforms, DSPs, CTV, and the open web.
How a DCR enables this use case	Retailer audience activation requires retailer audience data to be matched against the identity space of an external media platform without exposing either party's underlying customer records. A data clean room enables this privacy-enhancing audience matching while allowing activation to occur within the external platform.
Typical outputs	• Matched activation audiences • Audience reach estimates • Activation-ready audiences • Audience activation reports



Commerce Use Cases Enhanced by Data Clean Rooms

These use cases can often be performed using existing measurement, analytics, or reporting tools when required data resides within a single environment. A data clean room extends these use cases across organizations by enabling privacy-enhancing collaboration on sensitive data while maintaining appropriate governance and controls.

While data clean rooms enable privacy-enhancing collaboration across organizations, they can also introduce operational complexity. That should be a key consideration when exploring if a data clean room can add additional value to the below use cases.

Attribution & Outcome Measurement	
What it is	Attribution connects advertising exposure to purchase outcomes, helping brands and retailers understand which media investments contributed to sales.
When a DCR creates additional value	A DCR creates additional value when purchase outcomes and ad exposure reside with different organizations such as, retailer purchase data matched to social media or CTV exposures, or offsite retail media measurement. When both exposure and purchase data exist within a retailer's owned environment, attribution can often be performed without a DCR.
Typical outputs	• Attributed sales • Conversion rates • Return on ad spend (ROAS) • Cross-channel attribution analysis • Customer purchase pathways • Closed-loop measurement inputs

Incrementality Measurement	
What it is	Incrementality measures the causal impact of advertising by comparing outcomes for an exposed population against an appropriate control or holdout group. Depending on the experimental design, this comparison can occur at the user, household, store, geographic, or market level.
When a DCR creates additional value	A DCR creates additional value when experiment design, exposure data, and purchase outcomes live across various organizations. For example, offsite retail media measurement, social platform lift studies, CTV incrementality studies, multi-retailer performance or endemic / non-endemic spend data provided by payment solutions. When both exposure and purchase data are available within a retailer's owned media environment, a DCR is unnecessary for incrementality.



Typical outputs	• Incremental sales • Incremental buyers • Incremental return on ad spend (iROAS) • Cost per incremental buyer • Incrementality lift metrics
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Reach and Frequency Measurement

What it is	Reach and frequency measurement evaluates how many unique consumers were exposed to advertising and how often they were reached.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances the analysis when audience duplication must be measured across multiple retailers or media platforms. A clean room can also help establish and enforce a frequency cap across multiple retailers or media platforms. The accuracy of cross-platform deduplication depends on the participating parties' ability to resolve audiences through common identifiers or interoperable identity frameworks. Reach and frequency within a single media environment does not necessitate a clean room collaboration.
Typical outputs	• Deduplicated reach • Frequency distribution • Incremental reach • Cross-channel reach analysis • Recommended frequency thresholds

Customer Journey Analysis

What it is	Customer journey analysis examines the sequence of interactions that occur before and after a purchase, helping brands understand how different touchpoints influence consumer behavior.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances the analysis when journeys span multiple organizations, requiring media exposures, customer interactions, and purchase outcomes to be connected. Customer journey analysis using a single organization's data does not necessitate a clean room collaboration.



Typical outputs	• Purchase pathways • Time-to-purchase analysis • Multi-touch interaction sequences • Optimal touchpoint sequence • Repeat purchase analysis • Journey visualization
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Consumer & Category Analytics

What it is	Consumer and category insights examine shopper behavior, purchasing habits, basket composition, category dynamics, and competitive purchasing patterns.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances the analysis when brands want to compare retailer shopper behavior against their own customer populations or proprietary datasets. Many consumer and category insights can be generated from retailer analytics platforms alone.
Typical outputs	• Basket analysis • Category penetration • Purchase frequency • Brand switching analysis • Share of wallet

Audience Discovery

What it is	Audience discovery identifies new audiences that may represent attractive opportunities for future marketing efforts.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances audience discovery when brands want to compare existing customer characteristics against broader retailer audiences to uncover new growth opportunities. Retailers can often provide audience recommendations using their own shopper data or external data providers e.g. payment solutions can provide non-endemic audiences.
Typical outputs	• High-index audience segments • Opportunity audiences • Audience expansion opportunities (endemic to non-endemic) • Prospecting audiences



Customer Segmentation

What it is	Customer segmentation creates actionable audience groups based on customer value, purchase behavior, category engagement, or loyalty characteristics.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances segmentation when brands want to combine their own customer data with retailer behavioral data to create richer and more actionable audience definitions. Customer segmentation can be performed using retailer-owned data alone, and many consumer brands in CPG may not have their own customer data to segment.
Typical outputs	• Loyal customer segments • Lapsed customer segments • High-value customer segments • Competitive switcher segments • New-to-brand customer segments

Lookalike Audience Modeling

What it is	Lookalike audience modeling identifies prospective shoppers who share characteristics with a brand's existing customers or highest-value audiences.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances the process when a brand contributes a seed audience that must be matched against retailer data to build a more customized model. Lookalike audiences can often be created using retailer-owned shopper data alone.
Typical outputs	• Lookalike audiences • Modeled prospect audiences • Audience expansion models



Media Mix & Channel Analysis

What it is	Media mix and channel analysis evaluates the relative contribution of different channels and tactics to business outcomes.
When a DCR creates additional value	A clean room enhances the analysis when exposure, spend, and outcome data must be combined across multiple organizations to provide a more comprehensive view of performance. Media mix analysis can be conducted using a single organization's data or aggregate reporting sources.
Typical outputs	• Channel contribution analysis • Cross-channel performance analysis • Budget allocation recommendations • Channel effectiveness analysis

Conclusion

Data clean rooms are becoming more common in the commerce data ecosystem, but adoption alone will not make collaboration easier. Organizations must weigh the value of each use case against the implementation costs and complexity while managing a fragmented landscape of clean room providers, identity solutions, and partner requirements.

Interoperability will become a larger challenge going forward as brands partner across more retailers, media platforms, and technology providers. Better integration across clean rooms, identity frameworks, and other data usage best practices can reduce costs and operational friction while making privacy-enhancing collaboration easier to scale.

The next phase of clean room adoption should focus not only on broader use cases, but also on reducing the cost and complexity of collaboration. An industry focus of interoperability and efficiency will better support scaled data collaboration across the evolving commerce landscape.





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