Focusing on Your Customer across the Digital Shopping Journey

Abstract

As retailers embrace omni-channel strategies, they face new challenges while trying to provide a consistent shopping experience across channels. One approach is to focus on the critical phases of the digital shopping journey, and identify specific areas within each phase where they can deliver optimal customer experiences.

Mapping the Digital Shopping Journey

Broadly speaking, the digital shopping pathway can be divided into four phases.

The Four Phases of the Retail Journey

Phase#1: Discovery

Whether a shopper is on the digital property of a retailer, researching products on a search engine, or using popular shopping or social apps—it is important for a retailer, not only to ensure the customer will easily find their products, but also to provide a smooth path to purchase.

Off-site Discovery

Search engine optimization, social, and affiliate distribution are all key areas for off-site discovery. When strong SEO strategies, enhanced product information, and deep linking techniques are properly implemented—customers will be brought directly to sections of the retailer's site that are relevant and helpful, leading to a great shopping experience.

On-Site Discovery

Digital customers today demand robust product content as they research and purchase products. In addition to traditional product details like price, size, and color—customers are also searching for Ratings & Reviews, FAQs, and what is available in a store local to them. Exposing more searchable information to the customer during on-site discovery is one effective way of enhancing the customer experience.

Today's retailers need to expose rich product information to customers on their sites and apps.

Phase#2: Product Selection

Online shopping decisions are shaped by three key drivers—product information, price, and convenience.

Product Information

There are three types of product information that, when presented well, can significantly impact conversion—rich product content, user generated content, and comparative content.

A retailer's product Information may come from multiple internal and external systems. Omni-channel retailers need a solid Production Information Management (PIM) system in place in order to consolidate, enrich, and syndicate this information out to their various selling channels.

Price

While e-commerce teams do not have control over the actual prices being charged to customers, it is critical that they update accurate pricing information across all customer touchpoints.

In an omni-channel world, online merchants and e-commerce teams need automated mechanisms to cross-check and analyze the product catalog for discrepancies in pricing and promotions across all selling channels.

Convenience

Retail e-commerce teams need to optimize convenience during the product selection process from both a front-end, as well as, a post-purchase mindset.

From a front-end perspective, there are obvious design components that can make the shopping experience more convenient:

- An accessible site compatible across devices
- Reduced number of clicks taken to add a product to cart
- Reduced number of pages to checkout
- Customized guest checkout systems, shopping lists, etc.
- Smart caching and content delivery solutions

Post-purchase elements are just as important when it comes to influencing product selection, as shoppers ask themselves:

- Is the product returnable?
- Is it exchangeable?

Different selling channels will have different content requirements for the end user. Delivering consistent brand and product content across these channels is key to optimizing customer experience.

Customer-centricity during the product selection process means that front-end design and functionality need to be combined with post-purchase experiences.

Leading online retailers are integrating these calls to action in the search results page, within the creative elements or hero spots, and in email campaigns.

- Does it come with a warranty?
- Can I get it delivered today?
- Will shipping be free?
- Can I pick it up at a local store?

Phase#3: Purchase

There are two key steps in the purchase process that are important to the overall customer experience—the process of adding an item to the shopping cart, and the checkout process itself.

Add to Cart

E-commerce teams have realized there are areas during Discovery and Product Selection where it makes sense to offer an 'add to cart' or 'buy now' option to make it easy for customers to proceed towards a purchase completion.

Retailers must also develop multi-device order completion capabilities to offer a great customer experience. For instance, a customer receives an interesting promotional email, but is unwilling to complete the transaction over the phone due to the device's limited screen size. This customer should be able to add the item to their cart with one click from the email, and then return to the retailer's site from their tablet or desktop at a later time to complete the purchase.

Checkout

E-commerce teams are aware that reducing the number of pages or 'clicks' to checkout is vital. Additionally, shoppers don't want to enter too much information at the start of the checkout process. Offering a 'guest checkout' where shoppers do not have to enter all their personal data before checking out has become a best practice. Also, things like 'one-page' checkout and the use of 'auto-fill', 'auto-correct' and zip-code lookup functionality are becoming common ways to improve customer experience during checkout.

In general, a great shopping experience includes:

- Not being forced to register for anything
- Assurance that the data customer provide will be secure and not compromised
- A good understanding of the checkout process and what is necessary for completion

Another effective UX strategy is to offer shoppers a status view during the checkout process. For instance, listing the steps completed or displaying a status bar with the stages of the checkout process.

Positive post purchase experiences delivered by retailers can convert one-time purchasers into loyal customers.

Negative post-sale experiences by a customer can have significant impact on a retailer's brand equity.

- Knowing exactly what they are purchasing with updated pricing and fees displayed
- A fast and error-free site performance experience

Phase#4: Post Purchase

Even with the best front-end experience and solid pricing incentives, if customer expectations are not met on the fulfillment and service aspects of an order, the relationship with the customer can be at risk. Customer centricity does not end once the shopper has completed the checkout process.

E-commerce teams can focus on four key areas to optimize the post purchase customer experience:

- Multiple Customer Communication Channels
- Empowered Customer Service Representatives (CSRs)
- Robust Online Self Service
- Personalized Follow-up Contact

Conclusion: Embracing Customer Centricity

Retailers must realize that offering a consistent customer experience goes far beyond front-end strategies. Through all four phases of the customer journey, many interactions come into play with regard to customer experience. Whatever the customer touch point, successful e-commerce teams will need to collaborate with business and IT groups to develop a customer-centric mindset. This will ensure superior customer experiences across the entire shopping journey.

About The Author

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