Challenges of shopping online

Gone are the days of travelling vast distances to find a specific product and no more standing in long queues to pay. Online shopping has certainly changed the way we shop, but it doesn't come without its own challenges. This is according to Bluegrass Digital managing director Nick Durrant.

Consumers make split-second decisions about whether to stay on a website or leave. Finding out that shipping was too expensive or not finding exactly what they were looking for are the top two reasons they'll abandon a brand's site or mobile app without making a purchase. This is according to a study from Episerver, the company transforming digital experiences.

Here are a few 'must-haves' and challenges that customers still have to face while shopping online.

Inaccurate Information

Shoppers are more willing to visit new websites in search of the perfect gift. However, inaccurate or incomplete content dissuades shoppers from completing online purchases. Also, since there is no context in which to trust the company, any element of a web page that seems "off" will send them packing.

Compelling content

Most shoppers leave without buying because there wasn't enough information about the product to determine it was right for them. Content needs to be prioritised by retailers, they need to deliver material that is relevant to who the shopper is, where they came from, why they are there and how they have behaved on-site before.

Device friendly

Most online shoppers consider a website that works well on their mobile devices a must-have feature. Retailers desperately need to get their mobile strategy right, there is a huge need for a mobile friendly or responsively designed website.

Fast & Free Shipping

Many commerce companies think fast and free shipping cuts too much into their profit margins. The fact is, however, that the number one reason for abandoned purchases is that shipping was too expensive. Consumers will dump their purchases if retailers don't reduce shipping costs and speed up shipping.

Guides

Many consumers consider guides a must-have website feature. When content meets commerce, shoppers feel as if they are being delivered an experience and don't need to turn to social networks like Pinterest to know which paint colours complement the other, which shoes would look best with the shirt they are viewing or how an apparel item might fit their body type. Brands that develop guides (whether it's for sizing or for suggestions on how to pair products] are offering an experience consumers won't soon forget.

"Shop the Look" guides, for example, offer editorial-like experiences with ecommerce functionality. With evidence suggesting that holiday shoppers buy as much for themselves as they do others, retailers can quickly develop guides that both complement gift giving and self-

giving. The guides can be in the form of product pairings on a product page, a navigation option on a website that leads to product search results and/or an email campaign with selected items.

Images

Regardless of device, consumers count images (products in use and products not in use) as the most important type of content when purchasing a product on a brand's website or mobile app. Providing multiple image types (lifestyle, still) and views is a sure-fire way to increase conversions and reduce returns since expectations are met.

Knowledgeable Agents

Whether it is a bot or a person, consumers want quick and accurate answers to their inquiries. Often this means enabling employees and systems with complete visibility into an organisation so a customer can get anything they need from the touchpoint they are asking it on.

Location

As the saying goes, location is everything. When it comes to using location for website experience, consumers have a few expectations and preferences such as shopping in their own language and seeing localised imagery and products. At the very least, retailers need to ensure store information is correct on their website.

Digitally mature companies should also use a shopper's location to deliver relevant promotions and pages to them as they browse a site and make their intent known. On their next visit, the site should remember them and the local elements presented to them before.

On-Site Search

Second only to free shipping, most consumers indicate that easy-to-use product search function is the most important feature on an ecommerce website. Retailers that invest in site search are the ones that will have conversion success. If nothing else, they need to make sure that searches ending in "no results" have suggested content instead whether it is complementary products or a gift guide, which can help extend the customer journey versus abruptly ending it.

Quick Site

A fast website is a must-have feature for ecommerce sites. A site that requires visitors to wait while it loads doesn't invoke a lot of trust for shoppers. Image optimisation and code minification are two ways to very quickly speed up a site while using skeleton screens is another. Skeleton screens show the user that the site is loading by displaying the website's outline similar to how Facebook loads when there is a delay.

Personalisation

Retailers that personalise customers' online experiences win in the form of more first-time conversions as well as repeat purchases. True personalisation requires several scenarios to make it work successfully (i.e., an ecommerce platform that can pull in customer data and surface it through a CMS), but last-minute personal touches can be made such as displaying a "Welcome Back" banner to returning visitors and immediately surfacing the products they viewed last time.

Returns Info

Brands shouldn't take it personally but shoppers don't trust retailers they've never done business with before. As they look for the perfect gift, they are also looking for reasons not to buy. Ambiguous or missing information will frustrate most shoppers who think returns information is a must have feature of an ecommerce website and for consumers who look at the returns info when visiting a site for the first time. Savvy retailers display trust indicators like "Free Returns" in prominent places on their site.

Shipment Tracking

Shipment tracking is a must-have element on ecommerce websites, consumers want to know where their shipment is at any point in time.

Website Security

The media is full of stories about data breaches and other security incidents, so it is no wonder that website security is top of mind with consumers. Using software that automatically mitigates hacking attempts can give businesses the reassurance they need to conduct business safely. Shoppers also want to feel secure about a company's data collection processes.

To provide more personal info, consumers demand greater transparency into how their information will be used to benefit them, how it will be stored and secured and who has access to the information.

Third-Party Payment Providers

Integrations with third-party payment providers are crucial for generating conversions. Retailers need to splash these partnerships across relevant pages to ensure consumers know there will be no friction when getting to the payment step. With this high level of intent, retailers need to move out of shoppers' way and let them check out with their preferred payment method.