

Building online brand confidence is vital

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The festive season is fast approaching and, with the constant evolution of online retail with new technologies servicing on a daily basis, the retail industry needs the right online strategy. Brands need the right technology in place to adapt to customer online shopping behaviour. By removing uncertainties, retailers are taking the first step to building a successful long-term relationship with shoppers.



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The range of devices that consumers use to search and shop are increasing, compounding the challenge at hand. Consumers spend more time on a wider range of devices and expect a seamless, consistent experience across all devices and for this experience to be consistent both online and offline.

For brands that fail to invest in the technology platforms and offer a poor or inconsistent online experience to their customers, there is no hiding place. Investing in the right technology is paramount.

Drives business innovation and success

Technology has become critical to business performance, driving innovation and delivery of services or products to customers across the organisation. Therefore, the role of the CIO has been evolving for some years now. IT is no longer viewed as a cost centre, making commodity-based purchases. Instead, the CIO - in many companies - is a core member of the board advising on innovation and future strategy. However, there are clear pressure points within any retail organisation that the CIO must contend with.

Those concerned with online sales, e-marketing and online customer acquisition want to see development of websites and mobile applications that are intuitive and cutting edge. They are primarily concerned with delivering marketing and acquisition strategies, which drive users to the website or applications that in turn convert to sales. Those individuals

concerned with performance, reliability of services and customer retention know that sometimes there are compromises that need to be made.

For retail CIOs and IT decision makers, the challenge lies in understanding where to invest budget and being able to strike a balance between investing in customer facing applications and solutions and investing in back office technology that ensures a seamless customer experience.

E-retailers are in fact sitting on a potential shopping time bomb. If investment in sales and promotion technology outweighs back room IT, customer satisfaction will drop and with it revenues.

Retailers need to prioritise commercially the management of their customer demand, particularly during times of peak traffic, where sales are driven by promotions and other incentives. Attempts to harness greater volume of sales are likely to back fire if websites are ill equipped to handle the fluctuations in customer demand.

'Browse to buy gap'

Online retail innovation paves the way for a more seamless approach to the consumer experience across all available shopping channels, whether this is via mobile internet devices, computers, bricks-and-mortar, television, and catalogues for example. The opportunity for retailers to exploit these additional channels is only beginning to be explored.

The shopping behaviour of consumers is therefore changing because of the growth in connected device ownership. Rather than relying on one or even two devices, consumers in practice use an array of devices and channels to conduct their online shopping. Shoppers may, for example, browse particular goods on their tablet, make the purchase on their laptop but choose to return the product in store.

However, whilst access to a broad range of devices allows customers to have greater freedom, not all shoppers wish to convert their interest into purchases on particular devices. This 'browse-to-buy gap' is greatest with tablets, with only one in three device owners, making purchases on this device. Both laptops and desktop computers have a smaller gap between browse and purchase habits among owners of each device.

The result of this is that retailers need to understand implicitly how their customers engage with their brand across multiple devices so that they can manage their IT investment in the areas that have greatest impact on their revenues. Consumers expect a consistent experience across all online formats and devices. Moreover, as their expectations of how a brand should perform grow, their frustration is heightened when they fail to receive the level of customer experience they expect. Performance issues such as websites freezing, slow loading pages and website unavailability rank amongst the biggest complaints consumers have when shopping online. These are all avoidable if the appropriate procedures, processes and technology procurement are in place.

No time for complacency

Brands cannot afford to be complacent about slow or poor website performance when consumers have high expectations of an online shopping experience and are empowered to take their valuable shopping money elsewhere.

Regardless of whether customers are communicating with a brand through their mobile, desktop or face-to-face, there is an expectation for a consistent and seamless experience. While omni-channel provides a greater opportunity to increase sales, it also creates many challenges for retailers.

Building confidence in an online brand is vital and by removing the uncertainties that come with online shopping, retailers are taking the first step to building a successful long-term relationship with shoppers.

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