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DIRECT COMMERCE

RELIABLY INFORMING THE ENTIRE DIRECT COMMERCE COMMUNITY

NEXT CHRISTMAS SALES UP BY 20 PER CENT

Next achieved a £70m uplift in its sales for the 8 weeks to December 25th and is now expected to achieve a profit of £822 million for the full year which ends later this month.

Demand was particularly high for party dresses and suits as consumers planned a more social festive period than had been possible in 2020. This and an 85 per cent uplift in full-price online sales at its Label business which stocks third party brands combined with a 30 per cent rise in the online sales of Next's own brand merchandise for the three months to 25 December more than offset the fall in-store sales of 5.4 per cent as compared with the same quarter in 2019. Materially lower levels of stock – at both Next and in the wider market – failed to dent performance and may possibly have worked in Next's favour in segments that now have fewer competitors and, as a result, a lot less discounting.

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NEXT CHRISTMAS SALES UP BY 20 PER CENT
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What a start to 2022. Inflation rising. The euphoria of the festive season fading. And finally, everyone back at work – almost everyone that is.

Over the past week as festive trading figures have poured in, I will admit to having opened many of the incoming press releases with not inconsiderable trepidation. Having 'done' most of my gift shopping back in October & November and found that a lot of my contacts had done just the same, I wondered whether there would be a last-minute surge or if the whole country had bought well ahead. I needed have worried because what we've been hearing is that most of our reader companies held their nerve, cut back on the Black Friday promotions, retained their margins and sold profitably through to Christmas Eve. It was a levelling out of trade rather than the past slow build up to an 'all hands-on deck' peak. Media coverage about delivery driver shortages probably played its part in influencing consumers to buy sooner rather than later. Then with supply chain issues having hampered many businesses, there simply wasn't the excess stock around to offload and most retailers have fared better than expected. There were the expected price reductions immediately after Christmas in the supermarkets but very much less of the fire sale feel around the high streets.

We should all congratulate ourselves on having traded through some of the most volatile times we can remember but I am mindful of Lord Wolfson's sage words as he eloquently warned of the impact of inflation on all consumers and how that could affect Next. Higher costs can be expected across the board with energy, wages, freight and merchandise rising rapidly. Omicron affecting us all to some degree and decimating certain trades. Anyone managing a commercial business through these times will need resilience, fortitude and more than a fair wind behind them, but in this sector that is pretty much part of the make-up. I'd also add that having a network of peers who are facing the same challenges is a must too. There's nothing like being able to share problems, discuss possible solutions and find the best way forward. Success in 2022 will be all about partnerships and the company we keep. That brings me neatly around to the DCA. If your business is not in membership, then I'd seriously recommend you take a look at what's on offer for businesses like yours. There is nothing like being able to hear first-hand from others in the same boat.

You'll find details at our main website https://homeofdirectcommerce.com

JRH

Hotter poised to extend its offering

Parent company of Hotter Shoes, Electra Private Equity, is to expand the mature market footwear business and take it into clothing, wellness and lifestyle products. The intention is also to rename...

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Dunelm posts record festive quarter

Dunelm which operates from 176 stores, as well as online, has advised that its full-year profit is expected to be significantly ahead of market expectations thanks to a 13 per cent YOY lift in its sales...

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Findel reveals major rebrand and ambitious expansion plans

eCommerce educational resources supplier Findel has undergone a major rebrand to enable the expansion of its current service offer for educators and provide the platform for sustainable growth...

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Studio appoints director of data

Studio.co.uk has promoted Gareth Powell to the position of director of data and has created a new division with its company. The newly structured division brings analytics, data governance, data engineering...

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Fruugo announces full year revenue increase of over 50 per cent

Fruugo has continued its strong growth momentum in Q4, achieving revenue growth of over 70 per cent against Q4 2020, with revenue generated during the six week 'Black Friday' and pre-Christmas trading...

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Travel Chapter acquired in MBO

The Travel Chapter which operates some thirty brands in holiday cottage marketing, including its flagship holidaycottages.co.uk, has been acquired in a management buy out with investment from ICG...

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Very Group enjoys strong festive sales

The Very Group has reported good levels of trading for the seven weeks to Christmas Eve. It says that revenue rose by 11.5 per cent on a two-year basis, but was 3.3 per cent down on the same period last year...

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Whistl appoints new Executive Chairman and CEO

Whistl has restructured and strengthened its senior leadership team to reflect the significant growth of the overall business in recent years and its diversification into eCommerce fulfilment. Nick...

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Amazon teams up with Barclays

Amazon customers in the UK now have access to a new, flexible payment method – Instalments by Barclays, helping them to finance purchases of £100 or more on amazon.co.uk. The reusable credit...

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Seasalt reports strong Christmas sales

Multichannel retailer Seasalt says it enjoyed record sales in its stores over the Christmas period because they are predominantly located in small towns and resorts which feel safer to consumers. In its...

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UKP Worldwide opens customs clearance hub

UKP Worldwide (UKPW), the international mail and parcel delivery specialist, and a DCA sponsor has announced the opening of a new customs clearance hub for international parcels. The External...

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Atterley appoints head growth officer

Kelly Byrne has been recruited by Atterley to drive its growth. Byrne joins from Boohoo Group where she was most recently commercial director for Nasty Gal, having previously served as head of...

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Fat Face slashes its losses

Fat Face has posted sales of £165m for the year to May 29th 2021 on which it declared a loss of £13.6m. The loss had almost halved from the previous year's loss of £26.4m. To achieve this, FatFace had closed...

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Alteri Investors backs Missguided

Alteri Investors (Alteri) has made a significant investment in Missguided Ltd, the digital fashion retail business. Alteri's investment, comprising both debt and the acquisition of 50 per cent of the...

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Hush posts banner year

Womenswear business Hush grew its sales by 23 per cent to reach £58 million for the year to 27th March 2021. eCommerce revenues accounted for some 95 per cent of total sales for the period with...

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Sage to acquire Brightpearl

The Sage Group plc (FTSE: SGE), the leader in accounting, financial, HR and payroll technology for small and mid-sized businesses, has agreed to acquire Brightpearl, a cloud-native multichannel retail management...

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Marks Electrical posts record sales

AIM listed online electricals business Marks Electrical market as reported a strong increase in its sales despite stock shortages across the supply chain. The business says that sales were up by more than...

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OnBuy offers share options to its employees

Online marketplace OnBuy is to offer its staff over £1 million in share options as a reward for their part in the strong growth of the business over the past year. The business had generated a 200 per...

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Nisbets makes first acquisition in five years

Catering equipment specialist Nisbets has acquired UK Engineers Ltd which is a national provider of catering and refrigeration services which connects independent qualified engineers with...

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Shoe Zone clocks up £30.5 million online sales

Retailer Shoe Zone achieved total sales of £119.1 million in the year to October 2nd, 2021 with a profit before tax of £9.5 million. This compares with a loss of £14.6 million for the previous year. The...

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Second store for Fairfax & Favor

Multichannel high-end fashion retailer Fairfax & Favor has opened its second store, in Stamford, Lincolnshire. The brand which is popular amongst the well-heeled country set already operates one...

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The Super Marketing Group launches Super Travel Club

The Super Marketing Group, a leading supplier of loyalty marketing and subscription solutions, is pleased to announce the launch of its travel membership product, Super Travel Club. Super Travel...

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DFS Sales Rise

DFS has reported a strong order intake for the 26 weeks to 26 December 2021 and says its post-Christmas trading has been positive to date. Gross sales, it says, were up by ten per cent compared with the same half in FY19...

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Wilko to drop stores with costly leases

Wilko has announced plans to give up stores as leases come to an end and where more favourable terms cannot be negotiated. Some fifteen stores will be affected by this stance which Wilko is keen to point out...

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New CFO for Watches of Switzerland Group

William "Bill" Floydd has joined the board of the Watches of Switzerland Group as its financial director. He will head up the finance side of the Leicestershire-headquartered business which includes the...

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Arco posts record year

Safety products specialist Arco achieved a 22 per cent uplift in its revenues for the year to June 30th. Coming in at £390 million and delivering an operating profit of £18.9 million, the business had benefited from PPE demand...

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Paddleboard business sold by Gresham House Ventures

Vian Marketing, the holding company for Red Paddle Co, Red Original and Tushingham Sails, has been sold by Gresham House Ventures (GHV) to investment company Myers Family Office...

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2022: THE YEAR OF AI SMART WALLETS, SUSTAINABLE BANKING, TILL-LESS SHOPPING, AND RETAIL BANKING INNOVATION

BY IAN JOHNSON, SVP & MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE, MARQETA

VIEW ONLINE

In the next year, we expect that we will continue to see great innovation in the payment sector – from AI-driven smart wallets to the growing adoption of till-less stores, highly-personalised services and more. This will set a new bar in terms of consumer expectations, while adding to the complexity of delivering payments services. Rising expectations will mean traditional financial services providers and fintechs will need to deliver a payment experience that is faster, more seamless, integrated and personalised than ever before. This pressure on speed and integration can present challenges for those relying solely on legacy systems, driving a need for more flexible, modern platforms.

Here are five core trends that I feel will have a major impact in the year ahead:

TILL-LESS STORES SIGNAL A NEW ERA IN PAYMENTS

In 2022, till-less stores – such as those recently trialled by Tesco and Amazon – could start to become more common. In fact, 30 per cent of consumers surveyed recently have already used one. We could see other verticals adopting this model, helping to make the payments function increasingly invisible. For instance, restaurants and bars could use this method to help reduce queues and staffing issues, allowing them to just focus on service. To support this new wave of innovation, financial services firms should make sure their payments infrastructure is flexible enough to support new technologies as demand increases.

2022 WILL BE THE YEAR OF BANKING INNOVATION

We could witness a burst of innovation that sees mainstream banks begin to catch up with more nimble challenger banks, taking on the disruptors at their own game. In recent years, larger retail banks have been working through several layers of governance, risk, data and technology challenges. Yet a lot of that hard work is done. We may soon see the fruits of their investments in a new wave of cutting-edge solutions. Next year, banks may start to look at the possibility of launching their own Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) solutions, and look at new products like flexible credit offerings, and more personalised services that will make payments easier, faster, and more personalised. When you consider the economies of scale that banks of this size can work to, this could be a real boost for digital payment innovation – so watch this space.

CREDIT INDUSTRY MAY UNDERGO A MAKEOVER OFFERING MORE CHOICE TO CONSUMERS

Buy Now, Pay Later has caused consumer expectations to skyrocket, offering low interest, instantly awarded credit options. In 2022, I believe

we'll see a new wave of flexible and personalised credit offerings that will let users choose how they repay credit depending on what suits them.

Beyond 2022, smart credit options may even be able to use AI to decide the most affordable way for users to pay, whether it's a loan, monthly instalments or paying off immediately via debit. We anticipate that this could drive change in how people use their revolving credit cards. In response, credit firms should re-evaluate their offerings and make sure they are launching modern, digital credit solutions that will help them to meet customer demand.

GOVERNMENT AND CONSUMERS ALIKE WILL CONTINUE THEIR CALL FOR SUSTAINABLE SPENDING

We expect that consumer pressure to act sustainably will continue to increase in the year ahead. Deloitte found three-in-five UK banking customers wanted their provider to 'do more to create a positive social and environmental impact'. Pushing this agenda further, the UK government will require financial firms to publish their net zero plans from 2023. As a result, banks and fintechs will be pushed to take more solid steps – taking stock of their products and services to assess their environmental impact and ensure that offerings are as green as possible.

Beyond this, smart wallets and recycled card programmes could help consumers to make more sustainable payment decisions. In the near future, we may even see smart wallets start to make green decisions on our behalf at the point of purchase. This type of service could be vital for attracting younger generations. Our recent study into the future of European payments found 31 per cent of 18–24-year-olds surveyed would be comfortable with AI making automated decisions on their behalf to choose the most ethical way to pay.

OPEN BANKING SET TO DISRUPT THE MARKET WITH PAYMENT INITIATION

As payments become more personalised and data-driven, open banking has a great opportunity to deliver new opportunities through payment initiation. This technology allows customers to connect to their bank directly and authorise transfers from their account, all without leaving their mobile or web environment they are buying from. Open Banking will be vital in this process, connecting customer data from multiple solutions to give users a highly integrated and customised payments experience. Open banking can also boost visibility into customer purchasing data to improve the speed and accuracy of decision-making in credit. This can give customers a fairer assessment based on spend and lenders reduced risk of delinquency when lines of credit are approved.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2022

BY PROF. STEVEN VAN BELLEGHEM

VIEW ONLINE

Businesses head into 2022 facing very different customer behaviours and expectations to those of just two years ago. The global pandemic, combined with emerging technologies have created major shifts, but also provide opportunities for brands to reimagine and reinvent the relationship with their customers.

So what are the trends in customer experience to watch out for in 2022? Here I have picked out ten that I believe could play a major role:

1. COULD YOU CREATE ARTIFICIAL SERENDIPITY?

It has always been the job of marketing to make products and services as easy as possible for customers to find. Interestingly, however, new research by the University of Sydney, University of Florida and Rutgers University showed just how important the act of 'finding' a product is in the customer experience. The report highlighted how seemingly random discoveries of products actually play a huge role in how customers enjoy shopping. Facebook research also uncovered that 63% of users enjoyed shopping more when discovering items they weren't actively looking for.

Data-driven marketing and carefully orchestrated customer experience strategies might make it feel like the days of discovering something unexpected is a thing of the past. But it is creating this type of serendipity, albeit artificially, that is driving the success of subscription box services like Birchbox and Stitchfix. We've even seen Netflix introduce a button that eliminates choice and plays a randomly selected show to help users discover something unexpected. Brands that understand how to stimulate serendipity have an opportunity to set themselves apart.

2. IS IT TIME TO SET UP YOUR BRANDED ECONOMY?

You will have probably seen the hype around NFTs in 2021, but at this stage they are still often a bit of a gimmick. However, it will soon move beyond the current collectibles phase and change the game in customer loyalty.

Some of the most interesting potential of NFTs lies in the concept of branded economies that could trigger a paradigm shift in customer loyalty. Most loyalty schemes today are out of balance, offering more benefit to the company than to the customer. With NFTs, the customer can become part of the journey – frequent flyers, for example, could have an NFT stake in a company to create a shared interest instead of opposed ones, so if the company does well, the value of the NFT will rise, creating true brand ambassadors.

3. ARE YOU LOYAL TO YOUR CUSTOMERS?

When I talk to different organisations around the world, one of the most common questions I am asked is “how can I make my customers more loyal?”. However, I actually think it is now time to turn this question on its head to say “how can my company show loyalty to its customers?”

As in the NFT example above, one trend I see happening is a move towards shared interest between brands and their customers. Companies need to reassess their loyalty systems to create a positive sum game, so when a brand does well, the company shareholders, employees and customers all benefit. There is an interesting example of how fashion retailer Shein have successfully started rewarding customers who act as true ambassadors – we’ll certainly see more of this in the coming years.

4. ARE YOU A PARTNER IN LIFE?

There is a growing trend of brands that look beyond the ‘customer journey’ to see how they can add value in the life journey of an individual. They see how their product or service could help remove negative energy or create positive energy in order to build a deeper, emotional relationship with a customer.

A Samsung smart fridge is an interesting example. Of course it can let the customer know which products are due to go out of date to help them save money and reduce food waste. But with so much data now available, it could easily start helping the customer improve their life or ethical decisions that matter to them – which products are unhealthy, or environmentally friendly?

5. DO YOU LOVE YOUR FRUSTRATED CUSTOMERS?

It is a well-known fact that people spread negative customer experiences faster than the positive ones. But did you know that only 1 in 26 customers who have a bad time will share their experiences with the company in question?

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that no complaints means no problems, but it is important to actively seek out dissatisfied customers to learn from them. A report by PwC showed that 1 in 3 of (formerly) loyal customers will leave a brand after just one bad experience, so don’t miss the chance to tap into one of your greatest sources of information.

6. DO YOU STILL SUFFER FROM DIGITAL INCONVENIENCE?

Most people will have felt the power of digital convenience during the pandemic. When we were stuck at home with nowhere to go but online, their patience for complicated or slow experiences disappeared, and this zero tolerance is here to stay.

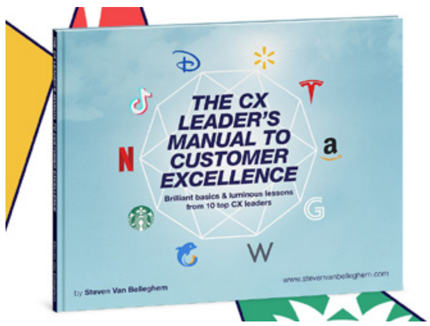
It is not always easy for a small business to compete here, but we should learn from brands like Amazon. It may look like they have reached the ultimate frictionless, invisible experience, but they continue to question every interaction with customers – you should see your own customer experience in the same way, continuously working on details in an endless pursuit of perfect convenience.

7. DO YOU UNDERSTAND NEW HABITS?

The scientific term “Hysteresis” refers to the fact that social systems tend to change permanently after an external shock, such as the pandemic. This means many changes that we initially saw as temporary, whether that is hybrid working or the boom in takeaway deliveries, are probably here to stay.

Rather than wait for customer behaviour to return to “normal”, think about how you can leverage these changes to improve your offering to win the war for customers.

Steven van Belleghem is one of the world’s leading thought-leaders, speakers and authors on customer experience. This is an extract from his latest, The CX Leader’s Manual to Customer Excellence *which be downloaded for free at www.stevenvanbelleghem.com*



IF RETAILERS AND BRANDS DON'T KEEP UP WITH TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE IN 2022, THEY WILL FALL BEHIND

BY JAMES BROOKE, CEO, AMPLIENCE

VIEW ONLINE

Amplience says that for retailers and brands to compete and stay relevant in the year ahead, eCommerce decision makers must embrace open tech ecosystems and recognise the importance of fresh, exciting, ever-evolving content.

Outlining the sharp rise in content objects that have been delivered on the Amplience CDN platform in the past year, CEO James Brooke, says: "The demand for dynamic content is exploding. In November last year during a Peak season boosted by lockdown, requests for content on our platform rose from 160 billion to 225 billion year-on-year, influencing five billion individual shopping journeys. That is a huge rise, but it's a fraction of what is to come, and brands must be ready to keep up with demand."

As we start another Peak and look towards 2022, he points out that, as well as the need for responsive content, there are four further key factors that will drive change: Brands and retailers will be assessing how they can use data to drive hyper-personalized and differentiated customer experiences at scale. The post-cookie environment means that they will need to adopt customer data platforms that allow them to access, and act on, detailed insights from the information they own about their audience. CDPs will become central to the technology stack sooner rather than later.

Open tech ecosystems are set to explode. Microservices-based, API-first, cloud-native SaaS and headless (MACH) technology is the only way that brands will be able to navigate both cross channel and cross device commerce. Legacy architecture can no longer keep up and will be abandoned in favor of modern technology stacks that embrace every form of commerce including social, and direct-to-consumer, in one seamless experience.

The customer experience will be curated through one platform. We can expect to see adoption of digital experience platforms which allow brands to manage content, not just for their websites, but for native apps and marketplaces too, via a single interface. This will deliver vastly improved workflows and will leverage automated integrations to support smarter work for eCommerce teams.

B2B eCommerce is about to step out from the shadows. After years lagging behind the B2C sector, buyers are demanding online purchasing options that are not linear, but support their needs wherever they interact, whether that's through emails, purchasing apps, tradeshow kiosks or web portals. In 2022 B2B businesses will be looking at technology that harnesses machine learning and AI and allows them to target, segment and serve the changing needs of buyers.

"As we have emerged out of the pandemic, we have seen a growing urgency from Chief Data Officers and eCommerce decision makers to accelerate their digitalisation projects," commented James Brooke. "In 2022 this will pick up momentum as brands realize they must investigate and adopt modern technology that allows them to compete. They need support from experts who can specify solutions that will help them deliver data and insight-driven customer experiences, not just today, but long into the future. If they don't move forward in the year to come, they will quickly get left behind."

Q & A WITH... PAUL PATES OF GREENREGIS PART OF MR FOTHERGILL'S SEEDS

CLAIRE HART, ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTOR,
DIRECT COMMERCE MAGAZINE

VIEW ONLINE

With his interest in horticulture nurtured during his time at Flying Brands and latterly at S E Marshalls, it was a natural progression for Paul Pates to head up direct marketing at Mr Fothergill's Seeds when he joined them back in 2013. He is now MD of its new subsidiary, Greenregis, which was established in July 2021.

Q. WHAT WAS THE THINKING BEHIND SETTING UP GREENREGIS?

A. The main Mr Fothergill's business is focused on the production and supply of packet seed to home gardeners, across retail, in various export markets and direct to consumer.

However, 60 per cent of D2C sales are non-seed, with Woolmans (ornamental brand) not selling seed at all. The D2C part of the business has always operated as a stand-alone division, with separate staffing, warehousing and CRM system. Setting up Greenregis, allows us to focus on other products, channels and set-up new brands, unconnected with the core seed business. It also allows the main business to fully focus on its seed expertise.

Q. HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED BUSINESS?

A. During lockdown we saw a huge spike in seed and plant sales, as people turned to gardening in their enforced leisure time. We found younger people becoming interested too which is good to see. Being outside, gardening and growing your own really does nourish the mind as well as the body. In 2020 we saw weekly sales matching those of entire months' worth, and at one stage during April 2020 we had to turn off our website for a week, to cope with a huge influx of orders by phone and email. Packing and dispatching orders was difficult due to the need for social distancing. We operated a 3-shift pattern, enabling working 24 hours a day during the peak. We did experience some products becoming out of stock, especially hardware items, as Brexit and the Lockdown caused huge supply chain issues. In addition, our seed stocks were in high demand and that's something you can't just grow more of overnight! We have commitments with our growers to produce

CONTINUES OVERLEAF >

crops years in advance, so you can't just turn on supply to meet unprecedented demand. Many of our competitors shut down their retail operation and many Garden Centres were left in the lurch. We stayed supporting our retailers throughout.

Q. SETTING UP A NEW DIVISION DURING A PANDEMIC MUST HAVE BEEN A CHALLENGE. HOW DID YOU COPE?

A. It was clear that we needed more space, but only had a short window in which affect a move. We wanted to stay local to the main business and were lucky to find the perfect site a few miles away in Newmarket. We made a moved to our new premises in October 2021 and were fully operational by end of November, ready for our peak in January-April. The site has given us 3 times the space we had before. We mostly employ local staff, 30 are full time. During lockdown many were able to work from home as we have a cloud-based CRM system. In peak times we rank-up to around 60 staff. They undertake all the seed and hardware picking and dispatch, and we use a third-party distributor for our live plants. Our in-house customer service team is supported by a third-party call centre called Open Contact in Norwich. They handle overflow calls and customer service issues and we've worked with them successfully for six years now.

Q. TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR MARKETING MIX AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

A. We use the Abacus data pool and test a variety of cold lists successfully, across all three brands. In 2017 we undertook more house-file profiling and segmentation which enabled us to be more targeted.

We email customers 3-4 times a week. In January 2021 we launched the 'Mr Fothergill's Big Green Gardening Book' a 490-page catalogue, offering flowers, seed, veg and plants. It increased our average order value massively and provided customers with a one-stop shop. A physical catalogue is still very important to our customer base. Our customers are older with more time on their hands, they like to read and enjoy browsing the catalogues. We can also target different segments of the database more cost effectively. We regularly test different catalogues, formats and offers to increase retention and drive customer reactivation.

With help from TA Design, we relaunched our DT Brown catalogue last year. We borrowed heavily from our heritage (since 1908) to give the catalogue a nostalgic look and feel – adding lots of content, hints, tips and interesting facts. We added a special growing diary that customers can use to keep track of their sowing and harvests and even added a wipe clean, laminated cover for longevity in the potting shed! We mail during August, September and October and again from January. We then do smaller supplementary mailings in February, March and April. We try and prolong the summer season by offering larger potted products, later in the season.

Q. WHAT CRM SYSTEM DO YOU USE?

A. We use an Oracle owned system called NetSuite, which we introduced as an early adopter about 8 years ago. It is a cloud solution that delivers a real-time, 360-degree view of our customers.

Q. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR ORDERS ARE NOW ONLINE ?

A. It differs by brand but approximately 80 per cent of our orders come in online – mostly driven by offline activity. It's important to have a multi-channel approach and ensure that it's as easy as possible for customers to buy and transact.

Q. WHAT TECHNIQUES DO YOU USE TO CROSS-SELL AND UPSELL CUSTOMERS?

A. We will target customers with different offers/upsells depending on their purchase history. For example, selling potato fertiliser to people who've bought potatoes. We also add small hardware focused catalogues within our product despatches to help upsell and include postcards promoting our other brands from time to time. For Mr Fothergill's we used to send a seed catalogue to seed buyers and a plant catalogue to plant buyers, but now combine the whole range into one offering. This has seen response rates and average order values increase dramatically.

We use cold list data from Abacus, insert mini catalogues into gardening and national press, as well as undertaking a fair amount of off the page advertising. We've experimented with door drops in recent years and target online recruitment via PPC and google shopping feeds.

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER TO YOUR FELLOW DIRECT MARKETERS?

A. Always keep an eye on your numbers. The beauty of direct marketing is that it is measurable, so you need to make sure that you do measure. I am an advocate of segmentation and data analysis and modelling.

Q. WITH HINDSIGHT ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY IN YOUR ROLE AT MR FOTHERGILL'S?

A. The pandemic has forced us to quickly reshape the business to be able to cope with increased demand and customer expectation. We've always known that we'd have to grow and develop, so in hindsight I would have done this earlier and more quickly to be better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Q. WHY DO YOU VALUE YOUR MEMBERSHIP OF THE DCA?

A. Direct commerce is a fast-moving industry with a lot of shared issues, problems and opportunities irrespective of the type of product you sell. The DCA helps to support businesses (large or small) across the whole sector, by providing an opportunity to come together in congenial surroundings to share ideas, discuss best practices and help to resolve the challenges that we all face day to day.

Working as part of a wider business that has very little understanding of this industry, the DCA provides me (and my team) with great support and networking opportunities that we simply wouldn't have without them.

Q. HOW WILL THE GREENREGIS BRAND DEVELOP IN THE FUTURE EG DIVERSIFICATION?

A. The Greenregis brand itself won't be developed as it is a vehicle for a whole stable of distinct, separate brands. We will be focusing on growing our core businesses alongside launching new, standalone brands. Whilst our current plans are based around home gardening, the shared infrastructure that we've created will allow us to explore completely different product categories in the future.

As with any business, it is always a case of having the time and resources to try new things, but we do try and continue to innovate. We have a lot of things to focus on, particularly online, such as the re-launch of Mr Fothergill's website to make it more responsive and concentrating on new customer recruitment to drive database growth. We're looking to launch some new brands in 2022 – so watch this space!

As an allotment holder myself, I'm particularly proud of the growth and development of the D.T. Brown brand – it's one that I hold dear to my heart and I've really enjoyed journey that we've been on with it.

PERFECT STORM OF ACTIVITY THAT HAPPENED IN 2021 THAT BEARS MENTION

BY KEVIN HILLSTROM, MINETHATDATA, USA

VIEW ONLINE

Catalogue agencies have been pushing catalogue strategy to retail brands for the past five years, and for good reason (because their catalogue clients are finishing a transition to eCommerce, thereby using less paper). Catalogue agencies and associated vendors/consultants are on a full-scale blitz in 2021 to convince you that cataloguess are making a comeback.

Cataloguers are executing Mail/Holdout tests, and those tests are showing that 25 per cent of sales (if your customer base is 65 years old) to 75 per cent of sales (if your customer base is 35 years old) will happen if you do not mail catalogues. In other words, scientific experimentation shows that most of us seriously overestimate the true effectiveness of catalogues. There is a reason that cataloguers took 40 per cent of paper out of the mail between 2005 - 2020.

In the past year, cataloguers saw their 12-month buyer files grow by 10 per cent to 35 per cent due to a COVID-bump in buyers in the past 20 months. Paired with retailers sending more catalogues, there is a surge in demand for paper at a time when mills were closed, causing an actual paper shortage (more demand, less supply). Consequently, my clients have had circulation reduced or even outright canceled, pushing these clients toward increased digital strategy.

There are catalogue agencies, consultants, and paper folks who are telling you that this combination of factors means that catalogues are in a period of resurgence. They have talented PR folks getting articles published in reputable sources saying that catalogues are back, and that you should embrace the medium. Some are lambasting those who tell you to focus on merchandise instead of how you sell the merchandise, demanding that you embrace catalogues. You should embrace catalogues if catalogues sell a ton of merchandise. If your customers love the tactic, have at it!!

You should not embrace catalogues because consultants or paper folks tell you to. You should not embrace catalogues because agencies have smart PR people placing articles in reputable sources.

You should always execute Mail/Holdout tests. Always. If the incremental difference between Mail/Holdout groups yield a profitable outcome, go ahead and mail catalogues, because the outcome is profitable.

Do not fall for the hype ... hype from those who profit if you do what they tell you to do.

Fall for profit! If the mailed segment generates US$20.00 of sales and the holdout segment generates US$16.00 of sales, you got US$4.00 of incremental sales that is likely highly profitable. Vendors want you to focus on the US$20.00 of total sales, suggesting catalogues caused all of it. You should focus on the US$4.00 of sales that is real (and is profitable).US $4.00 is a really, really good outcome. It also means 80 per cent of sales are organic and will happen anyway.

Trust Mail/Holdout results. Do not trust hype.

DIRECT COMMERCE AWARDS 2022

CALL FOR YOUR ENTRY

We are now prepared to accept entries into these revered awards which are based upon results and breakthroughs achieved in 2021

- the deadline for receipt of digital entries + posted supported materials is strictly 4pm 16th May 2022.
- entries are judged by members of an independent panel of sector experts – our Judging Panel
- from the combined scores of our Judging Panel, a shortlist of the companies with the top scoring entries will be issued on 6th June 2022.
- The Awards will be presented on the evening of **16th June 2022** at Millennium Hotel, Gloucester Rd, London SW5.
- All shortlisted entrants will receive 1 complimentary ticket. Further tickets may be booked through us.

Open for entries from
4th January 2022

Closing date:
4pm 16th May 2022

Shortlist Released on
6th June 2022

DEDICATED TO THE CELEBRATION OF EXCELLENCE FOR 24 YEARS

As we all get back to 'business as usual' from the swings, roundabouts and rollercoaster rides of the pandemic, it is time for us to come together to celebrate. Time to focus on the positives and draw attention to the tremendous effort, the sheer brilliance, and the staggering staying power that has enabled sector businesses like yours to succeed in spite of everything that has been thrown at you.

We have been constantly amazed and humbled by the tremendous efforts made by your teams not least your adaptability, resilience, grit and determination to keep striving. Indeed, as we've said before, as you prepare your entry you and your team will be reminded just how much you have all achieved across the past 12 months in what have continued to be immensely challenging times.

We're talking about the way you've placed the needs of your customers at the heart of every decision, with every department pulling together and working to deliver their best in the face of truly trying circumstances. It has been a gargantuan effort and now, as life becomes a tad less fraught, we can all reconnect and take what we've learned into our onward planning. Many of our sector businesses are exceeding both revenue and EBITDA forecasts, with others steadily rebuilding, a significant number entering new niches, exploring new channels, and making acquisitions for the future. Wherever your business sits, these unique awards are tailored for the celebration of your victories.

The Direct Commerce Awards process offers an excellent opportunity for businesses of all sizes and in all niches to compete against their peers and win the hearts of our panel of expert Judges. With our past winners roll call containing some of the very best B2B and B2C direct and multichannel retail names, reaching the shortlist is a worthy achievement in itself, topped only by emerging victorious to receive a category winning trophy. Of course, to coin that much over-worked phrase, you do need to be 'in it to win it', and with a range of carefully curated categories to choose from, there is bound to be at least one in which your team's performance will eclipse all others. Choose your category (ies) and prepare to enter, you can even opt to call on the support of one of your supplier partners and have them work with you on your entry. All the guidelines for this year's contest can be found at **homeofdirectcommerce.com** along with our archive of **past winners**.

There is literally nothing to lose. All shortlisted entrants will receive 1 complimentary place at the Awards presentation dinner on 16th June 2022 at the Millennium Hotel, Gloucester Rd, South Kensington, London SW5 . Winners receive a trophy to display and commemorative photographs of the presentation and go on to enjoy great publicity via the Direct Commerce Award Winners Publication which includes selected comments from the Judges. This is shared digitally throughout the sector, in the UK and around the world.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Lifetime Achievement Award is presented following consultation with an informal group of respected sector leaders. Those nominated have made a significant contribution to the sector over a significant period of time, have developed outstanding businesses, created jobs, opportunities for partnerships, and set new standards which others aspire to.

By honouring these truly impressive individuals we seek to express the gratitude of the sector as a whole for their role in developing new markets, pursuing excellent standards, and sharing their knowledge and expertise with others.

Nigel Swabey, DCA President Emeritus presents the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award to Stuart Paver.

download full entry details from:
homeofdirectcommerce.com

CATEGORIES

CHOOSE THE CATEGORY(IES) THAT BEST FIT YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR NICHE

BEST BUSINESS TO CONSUMER PERFORMANCE

1. Baby, Children & Family
2. Active Lifestyle & Sports
3. Fashion & Accessories
4. Luxury & Prestige
5. Mature Market
6. Home & Interiors
7. Hobbies, Pastimes & In-home entertainment
8. Beauty, Health & Personal care
9. Food & Drink
10. Gifts
11. Gardening & Outdoor Leisure
12. Pet & Livestock
13. Charity

BEST BUSINESS TO BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

14. Office & General Business Supplies
15. Industrial, Technology & Warehouse Supplies
16. Facilities, Janitorial, Hygiene Services & Supplies
17. Education & Training Products
18. Professional & Scientific Supplies

CAMPAIGN, PARTNERSHIP & CHANNEL MASTERY

19. Catalogue Creative & Production
20. CRM, Attribution, Targeting & Personalisation
21. Door Drop, Direct Mail & Inserts
22. Digital, Performance & Social
23. TV & Video
24. Subscriptions & Continuity
25. Marketplace Trading
26. Fulfilment, Delivery & Logistics

DIGITAL & POSTAL ENTRIES ACCEPTED

OUTSTANDING EVOLUTION

27. Customer Experience
28. Business Transformation
29. Sustainability

ENTRY PRICES:

- DCA Members: £95 for any 2 categories then £45 per additional category
- Non Members: £95 per category then £75 per additional category

All rates quoted are subject to VAT at the prevailing rate.

Payment is required in advance of your entry and a receipted invoice will be provided.

Suppliers and their clients may collaborate to create entries for any categories.

Entries are judged on performance from the period commencing 1st January 2021 – 31st December 2021. All material, campaigns and developments used to create each entry must have been originated and deployed during this period.

Entries can be submitted digitally or via post, within the deadline stated.

OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM to be completed by all entering

Direct Commerce Awards • 32 Enterprise Avenue • Tiverton • Devon • EX16 4FP
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CATEGORY ENTERED (PLEASE TICK)

	BEST BUSINESS TO CONSUMER PERFORMANCE	
1	Baby, Children & Family	
2	Active Lifestyle & Sports	
3	Fashion & Accessories	
4	Luxury & Prestige	
5	Mature Market	
6	Home & Interiors	
7	Hobbies, Pastimes & In-home entertainment	
8	Beauty, Health & Personal care	
9	Food & Drink	
10	Gifts	
11	Gardening & Outdoor Leisure	
12	Pet & Livestock	
13	Charity	
	BEST BUSINESS TO BUSINESS PERFORMANCE	
14	Office & General Business Supplies	
15	Industrial, Technology & Warehouse Supplies	
16	Facilities, Janitorial, Hygiene Services & Supplies	
17	Education & Training Products	
18	Professional & Scientific Supplies	

	CAMPAIGN, PARTNERSHIP & CHANNEL MASTERY	
19	Catalogue Creative & Production	
20	CRM, Attribution, Targeting & Personalisation	
21	Door Drop, Direct Mail & Inserts	
22	Digital, Performance & Social	
23	TV & Video	
24	Subscriptions & Continuity	
25	Marketplace Trading	
26	Fulfilment, Delivery & Logistics	
	OUTSTANDING EVOLUTION	
27	Customer Experience	
28	Business Transformation	
29	Sustainability	

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Payment is required in advance of your entry and a receipted invoice will be provided.

Entering Company: ....

Entering Brand(s) if different: ....

My Name: .... Position: ....

Company: .... Web: ....

Address: ....

....

.... Postcode: ....

Email address: ....

Landline: .... Mobile: ....

PO Number (if applicable): ....

Date: .... Signature: ....

CALL FOR ENTRIES
CLOSING DATE
4pm 16th May 2022

How would you like to submit your entry?

By Post ☐

Digital ☐

Please await instructions before submitting your entry

Save the date

24TH MARCH 2022

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HOW CONSUMERS ARE SHAPING DELIVERY

BY BRIAN SLIJP, HEAD OF STRATEGIC ALLIANCES, SENDCLOUD

VIEW ONLINE

The number of parcels shipped worldwide grew by a whopping 27 per cent in 2020 as more than 131 billion parcels found their way to the consumer.

Retailers across all sectors in the UK reported large increases in online sales in 2020, with total online retailing values increasing by 46.1 per cent according to the Office for National Statistics – the highest annual growth experienced since 2008.

Carriers all around the country found themselves having to grapple with unprecedented record volumes, which placed an enormous strain on both delivery services and infrastructure.

Although most carriers managed to cope with the high number of parcels, it is unlikely that lower pre-Covid volumes will return. Consumers have become accustomed to shopping online with receiving parcels part of their routine.

It is time for carriers to come to terms with the challenge of transforming their networks to the reality of eCommerce logistics being their main source of income.

In attempts to deal with burgeoning parcel volumes and to become 'future proof', carriers invested massively in logistic hubs, the electrification of their fleets, and the robotisation of processes.

Everything to ensure the consumer gets his order in his hands as quickly as possible. But is this, really, what today's consumers want?

CONVENIENCE IS DRIVING THE FLEXIBILITY TREND

It doesn't seem like it. While speed is indeed important, it is only a small part of the whole delivery experience. In fact, UK consumers are becoming more patient, as research shows that they are willing to wait around 4.6 days to receive a parcel compared to 4 days one year ago.

There is, however, something else consumers want in 2021: flexibility. Consumers nowadays want to choose themselves where, when and how an order is delivered.

According to Sendcloud's eCommerce Delivery Compass, 67 per cent of UK consumers said flexibility in delivery options is important to them. Another 45 per cent even want to change the delivery time slot when a parcel is already on the road.

Whereas retailers used to determine the shipping option for consumers, consumers are increasingly taking matters into their own hands. To make a purchase, the consumer wants to be able to choose - next day, same day, green, or even nominated day delivery.

This 'flexibility trend' only seems to continue in the next few years, as millennials are setting the bar here. While only 53 per cent of boomers in the UK consider flexibility as a key element of delivery, a whopping 4 in 5 millennials (79 per cent) do.

As Generation Y's purchasing power grows, flexibility is becoming the norm rather than the expectation. As a result,

merchants are now seeing the consumer wants to freely choose and have options.

THE CUSTOMER IN CHARGE

Companies and merchants would historically have made the delivery choice for their customers, mostly based on price. Now those roles are being reversed and consumers want to choose in the checkout how a package is delivered. To achieve this, it is important to balance supply and demand - and unfortunately, that isn't as easy as it sounds.

When you place an order today, in many cases it is still the practice that it is processed as quickly as possible, handed over to the delivery guy and delivered within 24 hours. As a matter of fact, carriers are investing heavily in their capacity to remain compliant with this standard.

However, this is not in line with consumers' desire for flexible delivery. To really meet consumer demand, the delivery world needs a complete overhaul and logistic processes must be reviewed thoroughly. Rather than processing every order right away, the delivery process must be adapted to individual customer needs.

If Customer A doesn't want to receive his order for another week, this means holding stock and only shipping the parcel in a few days, while customer B may need his order right away and requires express delivery. This requires both insight in individual customer expectations as well as a mix of delivery options and carriers.

DATA OFFERS A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO CONSUMER' DEMANDS

In order to conquer the heart of the decision maker of the future - the consumer - access to data on an individual level is essential. Online stores should already identify in the checkout, how customers want to receive their order and should adapt their logistics processes accordingly.

This requires work not only from the online retailer, but certainly also from carriers who have to adapt their supply chains accordingly.

Fortunately, the first steps in this direction are gradually being taken. With shipping platforms it is becoming increasingly easy to offer a flexible checkout that does not only offer multiple carriers, but also different shipping options and time slots.

Such a 'flexible' checkout ensures the customer is in charge. At the same time, carriers are also evolving step by step. New kids on the block are leading in this respect. Companies such as Glovo and Budbee are prime examples of this, adjusting their shipping processes based on a smart algorithm that looks at customer needs.

Both carriers and merchants need to exchange data among themselves to ensure a seamless delivery experience that suits the customers' expectations in the long term. Carriers that fail to offer this risk seeing customers move away and parcel volumes reducing.

To successfully address this transformation, both retailers and carriers need to change their mindset and understand the customer is ultimately king when it comes to the delivery experience. They need to listen to their current and future customers, not just broadly, but on an individual level.

A WELCOME CHANGE: SMOOTHLY SWAPPING YOUR MARKETING PARTNER

BY PATRICK HEADLEY,
CEO, GO INSPIRE GROUP

VIEW ONLINE

Patrick Headley, CEO, Go Inspire Group, draws on his experience of transition management to offer key pointers on de-risking the process, and critical questions to ask both existing and new suppliers.

The notion of outsourcing recognises that your company lacks expertise in some areas which are not part of your core business. Outsource partners are engaged because they are experts in an important area of business operations, though they are increasingly acting as strategic partners for the companies they serve. In fact, more than 68 per cent of businesses actively use outsourcing to improve their process efficiency, reduce costs and increase profitability.

However, failing to change from an under-performing partner could do serious damage to your corporation's competitive position. In the world of marketing, for instance, organisations periodically change their outsourcing provider – to seek greater operating efficiencies or more innovative and imaginative input, for example. This is particularly true of companies that host and run marketing operations systems – analytics, customer value profiling, loyalty programmes and so on.

That being said, there is also a cost to a poorly managed change. If the transition from one partner to another is to be smooth and trouble-free, then your organisation needs to follow a rigorous protocol to avoid risk. Failing to manage the risk of transition effectively could seriously jeopardise performance, so we've highlighted a few tips and tricks to de-risking the transition process below.

STEP 1: ASSESS THE RISK OF CHANGE

Whether in the consideration phase or in the determined-to-change stage, engage early with potential new partners to find out how they would manage the transition and mitigate risk. For instance, it is worth checking if they have good references for a careful, methodical, test-learn-deploy approach which pilots the handover before rolling it out. It may also prove useful to connect the potential outsourcing partner with your IT colleagues for them to assess their knowledge and methods. Finally, you may wish to ask if they are willing to share the risk of transition within the payment agreement.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT PROVIDER'S OPERATIONS

Reasonable demands for transparency can be made as a form of "due diligence" with the existing supplier. It is reasonable to ask for a clear exposition of how intellectual property is shared and protected in your engagement – this should help understand how much of the data, profiles, analyses, insights, performance figures and deployment methods actually belong to you. You'll want to understand how you could extract your own IP from their systems if the relationship were to end.

Resistance to these enquiries should raise suspicions as any confident partner will be willing to demonstrate transparency around how they operate and support your business without

undermining their own in-depth expertise. Whether or not you decide to go ahead and change your outsourcing partner, this will act as a valuable exercise, giving you greater insight into your marketing operations and control over processes.

STEP 3: SCOPING THE ROOM FOR A NEW PARTNER

Once you've assessed the risk of transitioning and have gained a clearer understanding of your current operations, you may feel ready to get out there and search for a new partner. The same advice stands here – we're looking for total transparency around capabilities, systems, protocols, methods and metrics and we're staying clear of any hint of wizardry.

Finding the right 'fit'

On a human level, you'll need to find out if a potential partner is the right 'fit' for your business. This is a personal assessment of their company culture and team spirit in relation to your own. If you're looking for a truly bespoke service – which is more likely to make your brand stand out and make your customers see your individual value – it may be useful to find out how much of the service you will be receiving is "cookie cutter" and how much will be tailored to your company's needs.

Facilitating a smooth transition

Another key point of consideration will be assessing the extent to which a potential partner is willing to honour the past by respecting the incumbent and their work – or whether they are determined to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Any change involves risk, but sudden and major change is most risky so a well-managed transition should be gradual. If the prospective partner favours a wholesale change, they should be able to demonstrate how implementation will be smoothed and what the hard commercial benefits will be. You may even wish to include a SWOT analysis of the current service provision as part of the tender process to help differentiate between change for the sake of targeted benefits and change for the sake of change.

From a customer perspective, small shifts in communication style can have a huge impact – even if it's simply removing or adding a salutation – and has the potential to undermine the loyalty of some high-value and high-loyalty groups. Likewise, increasing cross-sell offers too drastically can be overwhelming for customers.

Accommodating a hybrid approach

Finally, an ideal marketing partner will be willing to work collaboratively with in-house teams and recognise the expertise and capabilities of your own people. If an outsourcer is confident enough of their quality, they should have no problem with only delivering outsource provision where it adds value. This hybrid approach may require more effort since there may be a cross-over of reporting lines and performance targets, but ultimately it will be beneficial in that it helps retain corporate memory around skills and processes.

WHY MARKETERS NEED TO THINK 'HUMAN TO HUMAN' RATHER THAN 'BRAND TO CONSUMER'

BY NEELAM KHARAY, CHIEF OF STAFF, GTM, ACOUSTIC

VIEW ONLINE

2020 & 2021: the years where digital kept us connected – not just internationally, but at regional and even very local levels. For many businesses, digital was the saviour, ensuring business could continue – even grow.

Yet, while it may have initially seemed important for retailers to digitise their brand strategy, ploughing efforts into everything from social media to website tools, so the brand would translate in a completely digital world, the fact is that people have realised more than ever the value of human interaction. How easy has it been, therefore, to remain truly connected to the people your brand speaks to?

A brand is not just what you do through your marketing tactics. It's a feeling it stirs, an experience it creates, and a story it tells. While there are many amazing things brands can do in the digital world, to be a real success, brands need the human element to sit at the heart of their digital brand strategy.

THE NEW MARKETING PLAYBOOK

It's safe to say that 2020 was a year like no other, and 2021 certainly has not reverted back to the 'old normal'. In fact, the age of COVID-19 has upended the marketing playbook, challenging conceived truths and redefining the rules. Whilst digital strategies were accelerated across all industries during the start of the pandemic as a matter of business survival, customer expectations have changed. Forget the slick digital journey and the ability to deliver exactly what a consumer wants, when they want it – that is now a given. Instead, customers expect their relationship to matter to you; and they expect your brand to stand for great values they can resonate with.

While delivering on these experiences requires organisations to place technology and data at the core of their marketing delivery, to sharpen their decision-making and drive greater relevance in their customer interactions to build stronger, more relevant connections, they also require something more. They require the ability to engender trust – and that, in itself demands authenticity, integrity, and humanity.

So how do brands become human?

BUILDING HUMAN ENGAGEMENT

We must remember that our target consumers are not just defined by demographics or psychographics — they're defined by their intent, and by countless other indiscernible or unquantifiable factors. In essence, our prospective customers — just like us — are more than what meets the eye. Brands must ensure they're both representative, and fully aware and understanding, of the most important issues and key drivers influencing all consumers' behaviours.

By building teams that are as diverse as your customers, and by 'stepping into the shoes' of your customers as often as possible, brands can help account for their many perspectives and needs, bringing a more authentic voice to all marketing communications and content.

Indeed, authenticity is critical when it comes to forming connections between brands and consumers. With 86 per cent of consumers reporting that authenticity is a deciding factor when determining which brands to support, the more authentic you are in your communications, the greater the sense of transparency and trust you will engender with them, which will lead to loyalty.

C-SUITE AGENDA

During the pandemic, marketing was elevated within the C-suite as the voice of the consumer. Without understanding the zeitgeist of the marketplace, in good times and bad, the C-suite cannot adjust to the threats and opportunities at hand and successfully navigate the future.

One of the new 'rules' of post-COVID marketing is, therefore, C-level engagement. In order to be authentic in your communications as a marketer, you need a deep understanding of who your brand is: what its values are; what its tone and voice are; who its key customers are – all of which are of paramount importance to other functional leaders.

From there, you can craft authentic communications that accurately reflect your brand personality while uncovering the pain points of your target audience. Everything from style to word choice to the visual elements you include are part of what gives a brand personality, and should be carefully crafted and honed in order to connect with your target customer(s). Moreover, developing a personality that responds to how customers are feeling and acting in the moment, and is authentically reflective of that across every touchpoint a customer has with your brand, is key to developing trust.

Consider, for example, how a company like Bombas has made improving the lives of people facing housing insecurity a key element of its brand ethos and product strategy, or how Old Navy has made all clothing styles accessible to people of all shapes and sizes with no change in price. During the pandemic, the British Heart Foundation also demonstrated empathy by offering COVID-secure collection of donations normally dropped off at collection points, for those who perhaps didn't want to, or couldn't, leave their homes. These are brand personalities with an authentic vision and a clarity of purpose behind them to which consumers can align their own values.

Ultimately, becoming 'more human' starts with being human and therefore having a point of view; a tone; a look and feel. In essence, in today's climate, marketers need to think 'human-to-human' instead of 'brand-to-consumer'.

DOES THE CONSUMER WANT LIFE LESSONS FROM YOU?

VIEW ONLINE

BY BILL LAPIERRE, DATAMANN USA

A few years back, I cited what I thought was an excellent example of "courageous creative" when Athleta featured on their cover a 98-year-old yoga instructor named Tao Porchon-Lynch. At the time, I received an email from a catalogue vendor asking why I had not also drawn attention to Athleta's use of a plus-size model in that same catalogue. I responded that it would be "touching the third rail of blogging" for a male to comment on the physical appearance of any female model, especially calling attention to the model's size. What might be plus-size to one person is potentially not to someone else.

Over the ten years of writing this blog, I have avoided many subjects. I have remained apolitical. I acknowledge that I've written some things that were controversial within the catalogue industry, but never ventured into political or social commentary. The owners of Datamann have permitted me a wide berth of topics on which to write, but there's an understated rule that I won't write anything that is going to alienate half our audience. I have avoided – at least intentionally – touching that third rail.

I bring this up because in reviewing comments from readers at the end of last year, I found this one that I received last spring and had set aside for 'future thought'. A member of a Creative department wrote to offer this:

"A trend I'm seeing is to cut product selling copy from catalogues, because 'nobody reads anymore', [and] then to fill that space back up with non-selling copy about 'what we believe' and 'WOW do we love the planet' and the like. Much like your president's letter examples, but restated by today's branding teams in pithy fonts. Looking for life lessons from a brand where one buys socks and tees is like looking for a genuine Rolex at the Dollar Store. It's just not there."

There is a lesson here for many of you. Here's how the evolution usually plays out: You think very highly of your company, which you see as being a "lifestyle brand". Moreover, you earnestly believe that your customers think the same – that they want to live the "XYZ brand" lifestyle – whatever that is. And whatever it is can be found in your catalogue, or on the "About Us" tab on your website.

You think so highly of your "brand" that you start to think it is imbued with qualities that make you, your employees, and by extension, your customers, much better people. But you can't leave it to chance that your customers will recognize those qualities. So you start calling them out.

You're subtle at first. But as time goes on, you keep adding a little more "spice" to your copy. You devote a whole page to how your company is donating money to stop some issue or support some cause. Pretty soon, you start getting angry letters/emails from customers

saying they will never buy from you again because of your stance on what you think – nay, what you believe – that all your customers should support.

As you see it, if they are your customers, then they want to live your company's lifestyle, which includes taking a stand against double-stuffed Oreos. If they don't understand that, then you turn up the volume because there is obviously a communications problem.

And suddenly you find yourself struggling to retain customers. Worse, you find that your company is the subject of a boycott. Think I'm over-reacting? A spice catalogue in Wisconsin (Penzeys), that took a very vocal anti-Trump stance from 2016 to 2019, spawned a Facebook page (Goodbye Penzeys) supported by customers that are boycotting the company (although it has not been updated since March). Interestingly, the Penzeys website today has NO mention of any political messages.

There are examples of companies on both the left and the right where this has occurred – neither side has a monopoly on virtuousness.

We live in a contentious time and it will only get worse. You may feel it is your personal responsibility to speak up and speak out, to let the world know where your company stands. But do your customers care? Probably not. Certainly not enough to incrementally increase their spending with you because they support your cause as well. Oh sure, they may place extra one order to show their "solidarity" with your brand and "the cause". But how many "My Pillows" do you really need?

All you are likely to do is piss off a bunch of customers who were happy to buy your products before you decided to insult them by taking a stand on an issue that has nothing to do with the products you sell.

In my opinion, your job is to sell stuff. Don't do anything to jeopardise that. Don't be tempted to offer even the slightest messaging that could negatively position your company. Remember, those that are egging you on, telling you how important it is to take a stand, have no skin in the game regarding your company's financial future. They don't care what happens to you down the road.

If you want to take a stance, do it apart from your company. If you want to be passionate about a cause and give it tons of support, fine – but on your own time. Or, if you want to show that your company has a charitable side, support some benign cause like the Red Cross, or The American Cancer Society.

Finally, here is my best advice – give that support below the radar. If you know anything about fundraising, you know that those who give the most are usually those who seek the least recognition.

Remember, it's just a catalogue. Companies use them to sell stuff. It's not a vehicle to solve the world's problems. Your customers are not looking for life lessons from you – they just need some new socks.

RETAILERS BLINDSIDED BY THE HIDDEN COSTS OF eCOMMERCE

BY ANDREW GORECKI, CO-FOUNDER AND MD, RETAIL DIRECTIONS

VIEW ONLINE

Many retailers have experienced online sales booms during the pandemic as customers flocked online, denied the ability to shop in stores during lockdowns.

Brands and retailers for whom eCommerce was either just a minor side-line or a strategy still in the planning, had to move fast to transform their businesses into true omnichannel connected retail enterprises.

Driven by the pandemic, the changes in consumer buying behaviour meant that orders flooded in, and retailers could congratulate themselves on their online success. Some now believe that the upsurge might be permanent.

But will it? Retailers must now ask themselves two key questions:

Is the change in customer behaviour and the sales mix structural or cyclical? In other words, when retail begins to normalise, will customers re-engage with brick-and-mortar stores?

Irrespective of whether the online sales volume will stay high or revert to pre-pandemic levels, how much net profit does the business really make from online sales?

Achieving a clear understanding of the above isn't easy. The speed with which retailers had to accelerate their online strategies - as they sought to make up for lost sales and capture the extended eCommerce audience - meant there was little time for planning and analysis.

Online turnover and gross profit were the most common measures of success, and these looked good, encouraging further expansion online. Retailers have also been dealing with a literally captive audience, which both distorted consumer behaviour and their buying patterns.

With over a year of experience in this new, strange environment, some retailers are finally beginning to properly examine their omnichannel processes and numbers. For others that full cost/benefit and process analysis has still to come.

IDENTIFYING HIDDEN COSTS THROUGH ANALYSIS

Once such analysis starts, several patterns emerge. The most obvious one relates to the visibility of real cost. When operating brick-and-mortar stores, retailers know quite precisely what they are doing. They are dealing with a clean-cut cost structure, years of understanding around margins and net profit and how best to optimise business operations.

For eCommerce, true costs need in-depth analysis and retailers newer to the channel don't always have a clear-cut model to assess the real, net profitability. If the customer behaviour change we have witnessed do turn out to be structural – i.e., permanent – then it's even more important that retailers have a full understanding of the true cost of doing business in all channels. If not, they won't be able to make informed decisions and could put their futures at risk.

There can be many hidden costs related to online business that retailers must be aware of. For instance, when physical stores get replenished, the warehouse cost is usually included in the cost of goods (applied as an oncost for the retail outlet), but when picked individually to fulfil a customer order, the warehousing cost of an item goes up substantially and often may not attributed directly to the orders.

Similarly, online returns - which can be as high as 40 per cnet of online sales - can also pose further challenges for the retailer. Meanwhile, unlike brick-and-mortar stores, where staff can engage directly with customers, online requires a separate customer care team - yet another cost to consider.

And of course, there are the external costs of delivery too, where retailers have seen delays and increasing costs due to the pressure that transport and delivery providers have faced during the pandemic.

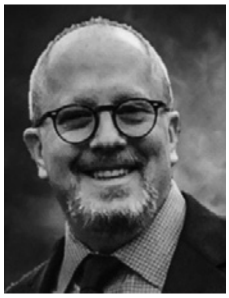
WHY IT'S TIME TO CHECK THE NUMBERS

While speed of response and agility have been heralded over the last 18 months, the pandemic denied retailers the opportunity for careful planning, which meant that some retailers went into eCommerce without really thinking it through. This means that as long as they operate this part of their business with limited understanding, the hidden costs will continue to surface and bite, driving down margins and profits as a result.

Given that by now most retailers have settled into a new 'normal', it's essential that they take the time to look more closely at their businesses, fully examine their real costs across all channels and ensure everything is accounted for – particularly online.

Only once they have done that can they pat themselves on the back and say that they made eCommerce a success, both during the pandemic and after.

ENSURING CONSUMER TRUST IN THE ERA OF 'THE INFLUENCER'



VIEW ONLINE

BY BILL TAYLOR, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, OPSEC SECURITY

Despite what the name would suggest, it would appear that influencers are in fact proving to have a meagre influence on consumers' purchasing decisions. The latest OpSec Security Consumer Barometer, which explores the factors that influence consumer trust, found that only 6 per cent of customers globally are swayed by influencers or celebrity endorsements when choosing which retail channel to use when making a purchase.

This is despite influencer marketing continuing to dominate across both online and – increasingly – offline channels, with big budgets often behind brand and influencer partnerships. So, what are the factors driving this fall from grace? When influencers fail to influence, brands can gain valuable insights into consumers and what inspires their trust.

AUTHENTICITY IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Consumer trust is hard earned and easily lost. It needs to be nurtured and developed over time - just like in any relationship. OpSec's annual Consumer Barometer sheds important light on the consumer-brand relationship and customers' perceptions of the widening array of physical and online retail channels available to them.

The poll of 2,500 consumers globally found that an overwhelming 91 per cent value the integrity and authenticity of a brand over anything else when evaluating who they shop with. It may not be an entire coincidence, then, that the same percentage – 91 per cent - of respondents have concerns about buying goods from social channels. As influencers and social media often go hand-in-hand, consumer scepticism of one is bound to bleed into the other.

This overwhelming uncertainty could in part be attributed to the negative shopping experiences consumers are having when using social channels. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the counterfeit products unwittingly purchased by consumers were bought from social media ads, second only to counterfeit purchases from online marketplaces (26 per cent). Unsurprisingly, the study found that links in social media posts are the least trusted method of purchasing goods – a stark point for marketing managers reviewing their influencer budgets for the year ahead, with "link to buy in my Stories!" the crux of many an influencer/ brand partnership. Almost half (49 per cent) of consumers deem these channels untrustworthy, while only 38% place their trust in social media ads.

If consumers are demanding integrity and authenticity, brands should not rely on influencer marketing alone to engage their valuable customer base. Distrust of influencers' motives for recommending particular brands or products is driving consumers to do their own due diligence on where to shop.

FAKE VIEWS: FRAUDULENT CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS

Even if the face behind a product is instantly recognisable, all may not be as it seems. Recently, big name celebrities, such as Robbie Williams, Bear Grylls and Holly Willoughby, have taken steps to fight against online advertising scams. Their faces and names have been superimposed onto fraudulent adverts, often in a highly sophisticated and convincing manner.

When high-profile cases like these make the news, consumers begin to question the legitimacy of celebrity endorsements in general. This presents new challenges for brands, as the so-called influencer seal of approval can actively turn consumers off an advertising campaign.

The study found that even among the 'digital generation' of 18-24-year-olds, influencers and celebrity endorsements only make their mark on 12 per cent of consumers, with the percentage sharply declining further with age. Concerns about Instagram and TikTok influencers promoting fake brands – unwittingly or otherwise – could also be driving young consumers to switch off on influencer marketing.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE THE TRUE INFLUENCERS

Shoppers are significantly more likely to trust their peers, family, and friends for advice when making a purchasing decision. In addition, well-known department stores retain the highest levels of trust (90 per cent) among consumers, followed closely by brand stores (87 per cent) and a brand owner's website (83 per cent). This highlights the crucial role familiarity and trust play in building and strengthening consumer-brand relationships.

71 per cent of consumers rate customer reviews as an effective trust signal, while 72 per cent have confidence in endorsements from family and friends. At a time when many brands are turning to online influencers to add sparkle to their marketing campaigns, these figures suggest their efforts would be better invested in more authentic and credible consumer experiences and ensuring that genuine customer reviews are easily available for consumers to find. This could entail partnering with an expert third-party in the consumer review space to offer an additional mark of integrity to reviews.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

When it comes to building consumer trust, brands need to look beyond the quality and price of their products as drivers for this. The report found that almost four in five consumers (79 per cent) are more likely to shop with a brand that shares their personal beliefs. Shoppers are implicitly expecting the brands they favour to align with their own core values.

What are these values? 87 per cent of consumers base purchasing decisions on a brand's treatment of its employees, while nearly a fifth (18 per cent) believe that demonstrating a transparent and ethical supply chain is the most effective way for brands to build trust. To maintain this consumer trust, brands must find ways to demonstrate that they are serious about their social corporate responsibility and sustainability practices. A crucial element of this will be in open and transparent communications about supply chains and processes, with today's savvy shopper no longer always taken in by blatant 'green-washing'.

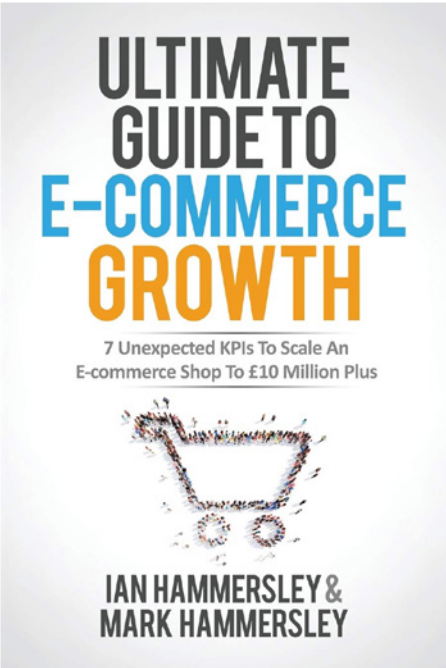
It's clear that while influencers still have a place in the marketing landscape, consumer trust and loyalty is now shaped by more fundamental factors. Brands must be proactive in ensuring customers have a strong personal awareness of their official channels. This is especially true for social media: brands need to take responsibility for making it a safer channel for consumers to use.

Building consumer trust takes time and dedication. Enlisting the services of a brand protection partner is the first step to ensuring authentic brand experiences for customers. The right fully integrated, end-to-end solution will safeguard a brand's reputation and revenue by providing robust protection from the threat of counterfeiting.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SCALABLE eCOMMERCE PART 9

BY IAN & MARK HAMMERSLEY

VIEW ONLINE



TRAFFIC GROWTH

You cannot get around the fact that sites that consistently grow do increase their traffic over time. However, growing traffic can be expensive. First, you'll need to increase other KPIs like 'add-to-basket rate' and 'lifetime customer value.' Then you'll be able to afford to pay more for traffic than you could previously. This opens up traffic resources to you and allows you to scale. If your other KPIs are not in shape, then you simply cannot afford the costs of the traffic as your costs per acquisition will be too prohibitive.

Quite simply the competitor that can pay the most for the customer wins. To do this you need to have the highest converting store with the highest average order value. If you can pay more than your competitors for the same customer and still make the same amount of profit, then you are ultimately going to win the race.

One way to increase traffic is to increase SEO traffic. We know we said SEO was dead earlier, but it was only dead in its previous form—done well with a good content marketing strategy and great e-commerce structural SEO and you can still get good natural traffic from Google . However, an e-commerce setup implemented badly can be very slow and slow sites hurt SEO.

SPEED AND SEO

How your website operates can definitely affect your bottom line. For one of our clients, an increase in speed of 25% led to a 10% increase in conversion, or about £1 million additional revenue each year. Speed offers a great increase on investment. It took a few weeks of planning and coding, but the result was well worth it.

Speed tests, like YSlow or Google Page Speed, can help you keep track of the loading speed of your site, but some are better than others. Google Analytics, for instance, can test the speed of your website, but may not provide you with an accurate answer every time. This is because Analytics often confuses tracking code on your website and page load times. So, if you're trying everything possible to speed up your website, but Google is still saying that it's running slow, it may not be true. Google Analytics may simply not see the load times.

E-commerce SEO is a continual process, but there are two important things you need to consider when it comes to e-commerce and SEO:

You need the basic structure set up properly, which many sites have not, and, if you're migrating from one platform to another platform, the most important thing is to do so carefully and get expert advice if possible.

It's vital to figure out if you have any bad practices in place on your current website before moving everything over so you're not just repeating mistakes and continuing bad SEO. Often, we find developers change site URLs from one site to the new site just to make it easier for themselves, when this can cause a lot of issues. Sites should be built with a growth-first approach, rather than a development team first approach.

PAID TRAFFIC

Traffic growth is all about paid traffic. To make paid traffic work you need to be able to pay for the traffic and then make a profit after all costs are taken into consideration.

It's a numbers game and as you scale you will need to keep tweaking your optimisations to keep the profit window open. Fundamentally this is the industry of advertising.

If you have not read Scientific Advertising by Claude Hopkins, it's my pleasure to introduce you to this book. Written in 1923 you'd wonder what relevance it has today for e-commerce but given the man's genius for marketing its learnings are evergreen.

Here is what David Ogilvy said of the book: 'Nobody should be allowed to have anything to do with advertising until he has read this book seven times. It changed the course of my life.'

Here are some key points that we can apply to our online stores that we can use to help scale our advertising spend profitably.

FAMILIARITY

If people are familiar with your brand, product and service before they decide they need xyz product they will more likely buy from you. Today brand awareness does not mean carpet bombing TV with generic adverts to hit everyone; instead, we can create a very specific audience and be totally focused on that audience. You need your store to be famous, but only with a tight subset of people. This is very possible with Facebook, Twitter, Google and LinkedIn.

So, the hard work comes down to really building up that audience list that you need to target knowing they are right in your sweet spot.

RUN THE NUMBERS

If Claude Hopkins found that he could send out 1000 coupons and get $5000 back, he would then send out 10,000 coupons and see if he could get $50,000 back. He would keep going until he couldn't find any more people to send coupons too. He went BIG and fast. With our e-commerce stores, as we have talked about before, we seem to have an internal thermostat that stops us spending more. We mentally tell ourselves 'we are not the type of business that spends £50K a month on Facebook' even though we would get a good return. If the numbers work, go big or go home.

PEOPLE LIKE CERTAINTY

Claude had early success with a restorative cure by making the pharmacist sign the guarantee about the product rather than the guarantee just being mentioned on the bottle. Guarantees are good but only if people trust the person offering the guarantee. With e-commerce we need to tie the guarantee back to a visible, real person that people trust. Making a guarantee from a faceless brand is much less powerful. Build some rapport with the store brand and a person who works there and then offer a personal guarantee.

PERSONALISATION

Personalisation might be the latest buzz word in e-commerce but back in 1929 Claude Hopkins already understood it. Selling life insurance to businessmen, a message was sent with the offer of a free book: 'Your name will be printed in gilt on each book'—the personalisation of the book with their name was novel at the time and it sold well.

We can use personalisation to match the product to the consumer. We can show the consumer their name embroidered on the suit inside pocket on the product page. We know their name, we know the product they are

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looking at and the technology is there to visualise the product with their name. Suddenly the product becomes much more personal to them.

HOW TO RAISE THIS KPI—TRAFFIC GROWTH

This KPI is constrained by all the other KPIs given that average order value, add to basket and basket to order percentage dictate how much traffic you can buy profitably. Of course if you could get traffic for free then your mission would be complete but most of the time you can't. The above said, there is still a lot you can do to increase traffic

Firstly SEO:

- A good content strategy is essential for SEO traffic. Start by answering the questions that people ask on Google surrounding your product. You can find what questions people have in the search query history of your AdWords account. Another good place is to look at the query report in Google Webmaster Tools, as this shows the search queries you appeared on but didn't actually get clicks. Use the filter to look for why, what, when, how, and you are bound to come up with a few gems.
- Use a tool like AHREFs to find the most popular and shared content in your niche; use this to get ideas for content.
- Find the top bloggers in your market who rank well for search terms you would like to do well on. Then scan their site with Screaming Frog to find their external links; spot the kind of content these influencers like to link to. Then create content they are more likely to link to on their site.
- Also scan the top bloggers' external links to find content that has been removed, recreate the resource on your own site and then notify the blogger; they might link to you instead.
- Create glossaries of terms used in your niche so that people find it on your site and share it.
- Scan the site with Screaming Frog to check for:
    - Broken internal links.
    - Excessive internal redirects to fix.
    - Pages missing H1 and H2 titles.
    - Pages missing titles.
    - Images missing alt tags.
    - Issues with your robots file.
    - Googlebot loops from incorrect internal links.
- Make your site load as per Google Analytics under four seconds on average. Google likes fast sites.
- Use AHREFS to find your top content. These are your 'power pages'; use these pages to link to other pages that you want to rank better. Pick pages that you want to move up that are at the bottom page one on the search results.
- Pay particular attention to the title tag on the home page and the use of keywords on the main page titles of your site. A tweak here can usually do wonders.

ADWORDS

AdWords is one of the biggest areas to grow traffic and a good AdWords and Google Shopping strategy is a must. We are only going to mention a few things here as there is a whole other book we have written just on this subject.

- Make sure there are no errors or warnings in the Google Merchant centre for your feed. Even warnings affect the amount of clicks you get considerably.
- Use all the ad extensions available to allow Google's artificial intelligence to build an advert that works well. Price extensions, review extensions, callouts, sitelinks—the whole bundle.
- Pay particular attention to search queries every day and go through each one. Yes, it's a lot of work but it will give you an edge over the set and forget competition.
- Optimise your product feed; most merchants don't and it's a competitive advantage.
- Get a Google rep as they can opt you into betas and other experiments that can prove very lucrative. They can also see dashboard stats on your account that you cannot see.
- Try split testing with the different bidding models. Google's AWE is getting better each month—you probably won't be able to beat the machine soon.
- Pull off your competitors' keywords and best ads; don't start writing yours from scratch, stand on the shoulders of giants.
- Look at the best campaigns for your products in other countries—USA, Australia, UK, etc. Look for great advertising copy that you can

use in your own adverts.
- Use AdWords scripting to check everything from landing pages, site links, price extensions to anomalies in the account.
- Make sure your agency reports weekly on your results, not monthly. Monthly is too late if something is wrong.
- Use a tool to take a screenshot of the first page of Google on your biggest search terms to watch how the offers change over time.
- Use a tool to take a screenshot of your competitors' home pages so you can see when their offers go live and which offers they repeat and don't repeat.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Again, this is a subject larger than this book but let's talk about the bare essentials that work well for e-commerce on social media, with a focus on Facebook.

- Facebook remarketing is a must-do activity but don't just do this as a tick-in-the-box strategy. First look at how long your sales cycle is—from one day for car parts to a couple of weeks for men's clothes. This sales cycle length will dictate how compressed your remarketing stack needs to be. If your sales cycle is one week then your Facebook remarketing stack could look like this:

» Day 1—remarket to people with audiences focusing on a) product viewers, b) add to baskets, and c) checkout abandoners—one day after the visit. Remarket to these audiences with a social proof campaign. To set up a social proof campaign create a post on your Facebook page which asks recent buyers to comment on their experience on the brand. Get good comments on this thread by retargeting recent buyers. You can edit and delete any negative comments. Then once you have a decent swarm of user-generated love for the brand in terms of comments, use this post to remarket to the a, b, and c audiences of new visitor traffic above. This will serve to show social proof for the brand.

» Day 2—use dynamic remarketing to show the product they looked at on the site, preferably with a favourable review of the product from a recent buyer underneath.

» Day 3—if they have not bought try a special offer here with a time pressure element.

» Day 4—use a message campaign to ask for any questions they have about buying the product they were looking for. Make it easy for them to reach out and start a conversation and buy.

- Facebook marketing to cold traffic. Upload your recent buyers to Facebook and then recreate a lookalike audience. Make sure you use the advanced setup where it splits the lookalike list into 1%, 2% and 3%–5% lists. You can set up campaigns for each % audience and test the ROI. Try catalogue ads with an offer. See which of the lookalike audiences gives you the best ROI. If you don't have many sales let Facebook optimise for a custom conversion that focuses on add-to baskets.

The main power that social media has is to add social proof to your brand. So you want to be thinking about how you can focus social proof into a certain set of posts and then how you can leverage this social proof to show new visitors that there is a buzz associated with your brand. Often we see the social proof is there but spread too thinly across all social activity and therefore quick glances from new visitors leave them unconvinced.

EMAIL

A lot more traffic can be driven from automated marketing surrounding visitor behaviour on the store. Here are some of the emails we use that have driven increasing sales.

- Abandoned cart emails—pretty standard these days, but the mistake people make is not split testing these emails. Also, if the customer is an existing customer tying these in with reward points can work well.
- Abandoned basket email—these are less well used as you need something to tie the session of the user to the email address as the email won't have been typed in yet at the basket stage.
- Abandoned product emails.
- Abandoned category emails.
- Abandoned home page emails.

To increase the email addresses that these behavioural emails can capture you need to:

- Encrypt the

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email address of the user in the newsletter click through URLs so the website can tie an email to a browser session.
- Use personalised banners and overlays on the site to capture emails addressing in return for offer coupons. You only want to do this for users that you don't yet have an email for.

We have automated the above emails and email capture with our Bright Owl and ScentTrail systems.

Another general rule for email is send more email as people who unsubscribe are generally those that don't ever buy anyway. Also, when a buyer has just bought they are in a honeymoon period with brand and will accept a higher volume of emails than someone who has bought more than six months ago.

AFFILIATE MARKETING

Having worked with Affiliate Window for many years it amazes me how many people totally mess this channel up. Done badly this can end up clipping the ticket on orders that would have happened anyway. Done correctly and you can have a legion of commission-only salesmen promoting your brand. Here are our quick tips on getting this channel right.

- Only pay out commission on new customer orders, or at the very least pay more commission for customer recruitment.
- Don't pay commission on coupon codes that have not specifically been given to affiliates as affiliate codes.
- Watch your stats, make sure that your validation rate and other stats are better than your competitors' on the platform; you want to be the obvious choice to promote for the big affiliates.
- Work with an experienced affiliate manager (yes, like us) who has relationships with all the top affiliate sites. It takes years to get to know who is who in these companies and to befriend them at networking events. What's more, we can ring them up and talk to them about 10 brands at once. They don't have time to talk to individual brands unless they are a High Street name. A good affiliate manager will also know how to get you placed on sites like MoneySavingExpert and Hot UK Deals.
- Bug Affiliate Window more; left alone, they will do nothing for the override and fee, and it's a lot about 'he who shouts loudest' that gets attention.
- Make sure your product feed works and is error free.
- Keep your banners updated and regularly send useful information to your top affiliates.
- Cut back on affiliates that send a lot of traffic but no or few sales. For example, competition sites will send a lot of traffic but no sales. These will affect your affiliate conversion rate, making your program look poor.

RECAP: TRAFFIC GROWTH

To increase the amount of traffic to your online store, you need to be able to pay more for a customer than your competitor can. This means making sure all of your KPIs, especially lifetime customer value and add to basket, are improved so your traffic resources are available and you are able to increase your traffic numbers.

KPI: Traffic Growth—Put it to use:

- Increase traffic with SEO. With a great marketing strategy and e-commerce structural SEO, you can achieve natural traffic through Google.
- Make sure the e-commerce structure is correct or it can lead to bad SEO.
- The way your website operates affects revenue and traffic growth. Slow sites kill traffic.
- Use Google Page Speed or YSlow for page speed times. Google Analytics tends to get confused.

Answer the following:

- How well are your other KPIs performing? Can you afford to move your attention to this KPI or do you need to spend more time on the add-to-basket KPI or LTCV KPI first?
- Is your e-commerce site implemented correctly? If you can't answer this question, or you can't say yes for certain, get the help of a professional. A poor structure leads to poor results.
- How often do you test the speed of your website? What speed tests do you use? What is your average load time?

don't miss the next issue... BASKET-TO- ORDER RATE

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27
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Masterful performances

Music experts agree that it takes 10,000 hours of hard practice, coupled with natural aptitude, to make a world-class violinist. And if you were paying for tickets to a Beethoven concerto, that's who you'd want to hear.

Perceptive marketers take a similar attitude to their catalogue designers. They prefer the agency whose Creative Director has over 70,000 hours of specialist experience, has a multi-award-winning team, and an unrivalled portfolio of performance.

Call us – the results will be music to your ears!

TA Design breathed new life into our brand, with fresh thinking and great design work. Sales are already way up on last year.

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