11 Ways to Optimize for Ecommerce

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Since March, the hosts of Robinhood's "Snacks Daily" podcast have been covering what they've dubbed the "corona economy." Recent topics include Wayfair, Peloton, Docusign, Lululemon and (of course) Zoom. See anything interesting on this list? All of the companies succeeding in our post-COVID-19 world are either:

1. Selling SaaS or technology to make digital-based life easier
2. B2C companies that had strong ecommerce strategies before COVID-19 or have successfully pivoted their ecommerce strategies

In June alone, American consumers spent $73.2 billion online, up 76 percent year over year and more than the average holiday. New customers made as much as 75 percent of online purchases between March and June — shoppers who become returning and loyal customers.

Ecommerce sales, and especially mobile sales, followed an upward trajectory over the past few years, but the pandemic's uncertainty and lockdown restrictions accelerated internet purchasing.

It's easy, albeit naïve, to think all those sales are up for grabs, going to whatever brand can get to them first. People across all age groups are embracing ecommerce, but to build trust, loyalty and sales, ecommerce stores must take their

digital marketing and personalization seriously. Here’s how.

11 tips for optimizing ecommerce

Your goal shouldn’t be to replicate the in-store shopping experience. Instead, put yourself into the minds of your customers and create an experience that answers their questions, eases their concerns and makes them feel 100 percent confident in their purchase decisions.

84 percent of customers say the experience a brand provides is as important as the brand’s product or service. 84 percent also want brands to treat them like human beings — not as another conversion metric in a spreadsheet.

Merging technology with human-centric content can help you create the experience customers expect.

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For example, Burn Right Products, a seller of outdoor burning technology, more than doubled their online traffic, increased sales volume by 550 percent and boosted overall revenue by 490 percent after optimizing their website experience and creating an omnichannel marketing strategy.

Here are tips for optimizing your customers’ online shopping experience.

1. Maximize your ecommerce distribution channels

Of course, an optimized presence on Amazon is vital for any ecommerce operation, but with so much competition (especially against Amazon), stores should prioritize other channels.

Pinterest now features a photo search for products and has partnered with search engines. Pinners can also use text search to find products. It wouldn’t be surprising to see

Pinterest release a dedicated in-app shopping feature soon.

Instagram recently unveiled Instagram Shop, where users can browse by brand or collection. Google Shopping is another smart first line of offense for ecommerce to optimize along with eBay, Etsy, and Walmart Marketplace (which integrates with Shopify for third-party sellers). And Facebook's shopping features will no doubt become vital as Facebook Pay takes off.

Technology makes it easy to integrate ecommerce website listings with various marketplaces, so there's no reason not to optimize everywhere possible.

2. Use live chat and integrate with messenger platforms

Live chats are valuable ecommerce tools on so many levels. First, you can interact with customers in real-time. However, many chat tools also leverage AI and machine learning to serve common responses based on keywords.

Customers can even complete their entire purchase through the chat with actionable carousels and buttons. Your analytics aren't lost either. Most tools provide metrics so marketers can analyze live chat data for valuable insights.

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Most importantly, these tools integrate across all messenger apps to create an omnichannel experience for customers. A shopper can start a conversation through Facebook messenger, continue on Whatsapp and seamlessly finish the interaction on your website.

3. Optimize the experience for mobile

shoppers

As of June 2020, 90 percent of consumers between the ages of 25 and 35 said they preferred shopping on their phones. 59 percent of all consumers favor mobile shopping overall.

Ecommerce stores should look for ways to optimize customers' mobile shopping experiences across multiple touchpoints.

More customers are downloading shopping apps than ever before. Create dedicated apps and optimize their presence on popular marketplace apps as well.

It's essential to look beyond pure mobile conversions, too. More shoppers are opening their devices while inside stores to locate items or discounts. And customers now expect to be able to buy online and pick up curbside.

4. Make sure your off-page channels are accessible

Ecommerce brands should always stay on top of their high-volume off-site channels. Customers expect instant accessibility everywhere they go online.

That's why it's so important to integrate all communication channels into one convenient location for replying and collecting data. Twitter, for example, is often the first place customers go to vent about bad experiences.

5. Think two steps ahead of customers

Pinterest pointed out that advertisers are operating two steps behind customers right now. The reactive nature of marketing analytics and trends makes it a huge challenge to stay ahead.

According to Pinterest, June customers were operating in phases of optimism/escapism or rebound/rebuild. Brands, however, were still focusing on pandemic topics in the triage

or empathy phases.

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Ecommerce stores should explore new routes for connecting with audiences, like Reddit and relevant Facebook groups, to watch trends unfold as they're happening and adapt in real-time.

6. Provide radical transparency

Ecommerce customers don't expect perfection. They know the effects of the pandemic will linger across shipping and logistics for quite some time. Most shoppers are workers themselves and understand that other workers are human.

They do, however, demand and deserve transparency – radical transparency.

Accurate shipping trackers are vital. Make sure customers can access them everywhere they go, whether by email, your website or Facebook messenger.

It's also crucial for brands to incorporate technology to identify each shopper's location and inform them of additional shipping costs and fees. Accurate and transparent shipping costs can prevent most cases of cart abandonment.

7. Rethink web design for usability

The days of web design to impress designers are long gone (not that it was ever a smart strategy). Already a growing trend, ecommerce stores will undoubtedly prioritize hiring expert UX analysts and designers to create frictionless customer experiences.

On-site smart searches with dynamic auto-complete features, top sellers and trending items are almost mandatory now. A product search should never turn up empty; AI and machine

learning tools should help shoppers find relevant or exciting products no matter what they searched.

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Comprehensive filtering and categorizations are both essential to help shoppers find what they need quickly. You can find this user-first shopping design across most apparel sites like Adidas’s.

Adidas also displays their reviews beautifully with a sliding scale for fit, length, comfort and quality; recommendation percentage; and user-generated photos. This review style crowdsources the answers to any possible question a shopper might have, removing the uncertainty and distrust of ecommerce.

8. Stay on top of niche content

Brands that blog earn more indexed pages in Google search results. However, Google’s BERT algorithm updates focusing on natural language are changing content marketing.

Expect to see niche content centered around long-tail queries on your favorite ecommerce sites. Brands won’t fight for broad keywords like “Persian rug” anymore. Instead, they’ll focus on specific questions among their target audience to capitalize on voice search.

Furthermore, millions of Americans are out of work, caring for sick family members, dealing with illness themselves or otherwise facing drastically different material conditions than they did a year ago. Ecommerce brands will hone their customer personas and adapt their content for context.

Pivoting is in the future for many established ecommerce stores.

9. Dabble in augmented reality

Just a year ago, augmented reality and virtual reality were features reserved for giants like GE or Airbus. As with most consumer ecommerce trends, Amazon drove augmented reality into mainstream expectations.

Augmented reality will soon be a standard feature of a successful ecommerce user experience. Customers can now see furniture and other items in their homes virtually on Amazon and other major retailers' websites.

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With online sales growing across all industries, augmented reality features become necessary for building confidence and trust.

More ecommerce brands are also allowing customers to pay for their orders after receiving them. Apparel, pricey fitness equipment and high-end purchases are all ripe for this strategy. Companies like Stitch Fix and Casper already offer this type of payment model.

10. Partner with brick-and-mortar stores

Customer location analytics provide powerful insights for ecommerce brands to expand their presence with physical stores without opening storefronts of their own.

Expect to see popular ecommerce stores partnering with brick-and-mortar shops in areas where their largest customer bases live. Amazon Lockers supply a glimpse into one possibility. However, you might also see more wholesaler relationships or niche ecommerce vending machines.

11. Set up a subscription-based strategy

For any ecommerce brand selling consumables, there's no reason

not to set up a subscription option to encourage customer loyalty.

Likewise, smart ecommerce stores could launch subsidiary brands where they'll sell niche monthly subscription boxes akin to Birchbox with products they already have on hand. They can capitalize on the subscription box trend but limit their risk when the market becomes saturated.

Build a sustainable ecommerce strategy to move forward

It's tempting to focus on the pandemic-driven surge in ecommerce, but that's not sustainable. Ecommerce stores should instead draw lessons from this surge to better understand their customers and create a personalized experience.

Yes, ecommerce sales should grow steadily, but so are the number of competitors. Continuously learning about your dynamic audience and incorporating technology at the right touchpoints are the keys to success.

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