Boost Your Ecommerce Success: Offer Customized Products



Bespoke or customized items are no longer viewed as a luxury. This is a buying trend you can get in on.

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Everyone wants to stand out from the crowd, and in the oversaturated and expanding world of ecommerce, this is difficult to achieve. Purchasers and businesses both want to show their unique personalities to gain an edge in their respective spheres, and here's one way to meet both needs: *Offer customized products.*

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Struggling to compete in a growing market.

Ecommerce has grown exponentially since 2009 and currently accounts for more than $115 million in retail sales in the United States alone. As more and more businesses enter the ecommerce marketplace, sellers must look beyond the standard loyalty-generating route to get their products the notice they deserve.

Already, sellers are combating content saturation by offering free shipping and returning-customer loyalty discounts to create and expand their customer base.

Access to data has created even more opportunities, allowing businesses to provide potential buyers and clients with customized recommendations that match their buying habits. Online video chats are another feature, offering customers advice on sizing and other product questions for an extra level of the personalization online buyers want.

All these factors support branding and customer retention, of course. But the problem is that so many *other* ecommerce sites are using these tools that they've become too commonplace to really make an impact.

Customization itself isn't new – but the market level is.

Of course the notion of customized products – as a solution to the overcrowded ecommerce market – isn't new. Customization has been around a long time, focused primarily on luxury and promotional marketing items.

Indeed, high-end retailers have always been willing to go the extra mile to attract new customers or keep current ones happy. *Want that car with a different color leather interior?*

Sure! Love the necklace but wish it had emeralds instead of diamonds? We can do that!

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So, if you wanted logo-printed tote bags or can afford to spend $12,000 to change the color scheme of your luxury automobile, you can customize your purchase. However, most customization has been available only for the low-end and high-end price points, with nothing in between.

Now that’s changing.

A shift in demand.

While many consumers see the latest fashion trends and gadgets, more and more want to express their own styles and personalities and will pay extra pay for custom items. Currently, between 25 and 30 percent of shoppers want customization options and will pay a premium price for them, according to a Bain & Co. survey of 1,000 online shoppers. These customers also said they wanted websites to offer customization options and that they wanted to develop brand loyalty in return.

The result of such customization? Customers seem willing to come back for more and seem likely to recommend the business to others.

A case study.

MaD Tungsten Rings Australia experienced this exact phenomenon. The company originally offered unique styles of tungsten-based rings, and its contemporary design was targeted to the men’s market. Over time, the company developed a significant following, and then something else happened: Requests rolled in for wedding ring sets.

From this business grew a demand for customized rings. What had started as a trickle of requests became a river of sales after MaD Tungsten added a customization option on its website.

Repeat business, both from direct sales and wholesale, grew exponentially once customization became a standard option for customers. “We already offered high-quality, unique products,” Dan Stewart, founder of MaD, told me. “Providing customization options that can truly reflect the design vision of the buyer has really helped take our business to the next level.”

A trend on the rise.

Many businesses hesitate to enter the customization market for fear that it is a fad rather than a long-term opportunity.

But, according to Jodie Fox, co-founder of Shoes of Prey, customization is the future of retail. Two factors are responsible for this shift.

First, advances in technology, like 3-D printing, computerized lathes and the ability to screen-print on tile and leather, are allowing manufacturers to quickly and inexpensively customize items. Currently, these advances are happening on a smaller scale, but the advantage is that smaller ecommerce businesses actually have the advantage over large corporations.

Second, bespoke or customized items are no longer viewed as a luxury. Being able to claim something as “mine” is an expectation that more and more buyers have. Next, the products that clients want customized have also changed.

Today’s shoppers have moved past key chains and mugs with their names on them to cutlery, tablet and laptop skins, shoe heels, shirt styles, handbags, belts and more. With this growing demand for customized items, creative and cost-

effective opportunities are opening up to those with the foresight and determination to capitalize on them.

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Bottom line.

Customized products are no longer relegated to the purview of the uber-wealthy or to kitschy tourist souvenirs. They are on the backs, wrists, shoulders, feet and heads of more and more people every day. Offering customization options for the products you already sell, or those you choose to add to your stock, can help you redefine your niche and swim to the top of the ecommerce pool.

Branding, customer loyalty and product recognition will set you apart from others. And that may lead to long-term success. So consider customization as your next strategy for competing in the crowded ecommerce market.

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