A Customer’s Path To A Purchase Decision

Small business CEOs have a difficult time to discern what really will “trip the trigger” for a customer to make the decision to purchase in today’s marketing scene. Thanks to digital media and e-commerce, the path to purchase most consumers take today is a winding one. It may start on mobile and shift to the desktop, start on the desktop and shift to brick-and-mortar stores—or make just about any conceivable combination of digital and traditional stops along the way. This makes it very difficult for a CEO to make marketing decisions and to design a marketing plan with appropriate strategies that will yield the best ROI (return on investment).

This mix of consumer behavior is complex and leaves room for digital channels to affect the consumer experience in many ways. I have studied recent research on this topic to be able to assist CEOs in their planning. Among this data, I found eMarketer to be quite helpful because they recently published a “Roundup” of articles, insights and interviews to help CEOs understand what shoppers are looking for, what their pain points are, and how marketers are reacting.

As I mentioned, the path to purchasing takes many turns. Early on in the consumer experience, for example, when shoppers are doing research, a lightning-fast mobile website with plenty of product information is important. But that’s also a pain point: Many retailers still don’t have mobile-optimized sites, and product information is not always accurate. According to August 2015 research from Shotfarm, that can be a major turnoff for digital shoppers.

Further down the purchase funnel, an easy checkout process—preferably with a seamless shopping cart experience across devices—is key. For shoppers who make their decisions in stores, kiosks and other digital technology continue to play a role. And post-purchase, shoppers give feedback about their experiences or become loyal brand advocates across a variety of online and offline channels.

And marketers know that it is a priority to make these experiences good. According to US marketing managers surveyed in December 2015 by Black Ink ROI, having a customer-centric focus was their No. 1 priority for 2016.

But actually measuring how good the customer experience is may be tough. According to January 2016 polling by the CMO Council and Microsoft, just 10% of US marketers are able to measure the customer experience “extremely well”; another 24% said they could do so “moderately well.”
Data could help. Research from Forbes Insights and SAS found that most execs around the world say data analytics has a major positive impact on their customers’ experience. The same survey found the most essential sources of data for this purpose were customer databases (70%), digital channels like websites and apps (58%), CRM systems (57%) and point-of-sale systems (57%).

But, make sure that your data is accurate! Shotfarm did a study last August where they asked shoppers about their likelihood that they would buy from a Brand again after an experience with inaccurate product information. Nearly 9 out of 10 said that it would be unlikely that they would return.

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