

COLUMNS

How fashion needs to deliver in digital commerce

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Project September is live. If you want to use it, you have two options. In the first option, you can select a photo of an item or a look from either your Instagram or photos on your phone, tag it with product details, upload it and hope that someone will click on one or the several green dots you used for tagging.

In that event, you will earn 66 percent sales commission. In the second option, you can click on a green dot in someone else's photo yourself, and be promptly taken outside the application to the product page on the partnering brand mobile Web site, where you can complete your purchase.

This entire process sounds offputtingly non-intuitive. The number of steps involved in the purchase and the sheer volume of the effort asked from the user is dwarfed only by the question whether this is how people really buy fashion.

Ante social

Rather than thinking about how to merge inspiration with transaction and social with commerce at individual destinations, companies should start from the customer decision journey.

Marketers should ask what is the role of social, content, service, conversation or personalization in the way today's shoppers make decisions, and how it helps them make those decisions easily and confidently.

Heavy editorial may sound like a good idea until we discover that it hinders customers' progress along their purchase path. Social may be en vogue, but it is only en pointe if we know its business value.

Most shoppers get inspiration from Instagram, Snapchat, blogs or the like and then just Google the item they want to buy. Their decision journey is a combination of low-intent browsing to high-intent search, which are not necessarily simultaneous.

For example, while shoppers spend a lot of time on their phones, this time does not translate into money for retailers from mobile purchases, according to comScore. This time-money gap is today as big as 44 percent.

Social and distributed commerce tries to close this gap.

Net set

Net-a-Porter launched The NetSet last year to much fanfare. Pinterest unveiled its buyable pins only to discover that

shoppers were trying to return items purchased on the platform to Pinterest, rather than sending them to the retailer.

The "Shop now" button on Instagram allows brands to prompt a purchase in-app, but the purchase process is clunky and multistep and invariably ends up on a brand's mobile site.

MORE INTERESTING than criticizing these early attempts is to understand what the customer wants.

If the fastest-growing retail startups offer any clue, seamlessness and immediacy top the list, marked by delightful browsing and quick and convenient purchase.

People love to shop, even if they are not buying.

Browsing does not necessarily lead to purchase it is also about leisure time, research and inspiration.

The winner in the digital commerce game is going to be the one who delivers on all of these by successfully employing technology to build and sustain the most direct and personal relationship with its customers.

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