

RETAIL

Nordstrom launches chatbot to ease gifting anxiety

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Nordstrom has gifters in mind with chatbot feature

By SARAH JONES

Department store chain Nordstrom is enlisting a conversational agent to help consumers pinpoint the perfect present for everyone on their list.

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The retailer timed the release of its first chatbot for the holiday shopping season, programming a series of questions designed to build a profile of the recipient and relevant product recommendations for the gifter. With the pressure of shopping for others, which can lead some to draw a blank on what to get, this bot offers a natural path toward purchase.

"It is the gift-giving season," said Jonathan Shriftman, director of business development at **Snaps**, the mobile messaging platform that developed Nordstrom's chatbot. "There's no better time than now for retailers to engage with their customers directly via mobile messaging.

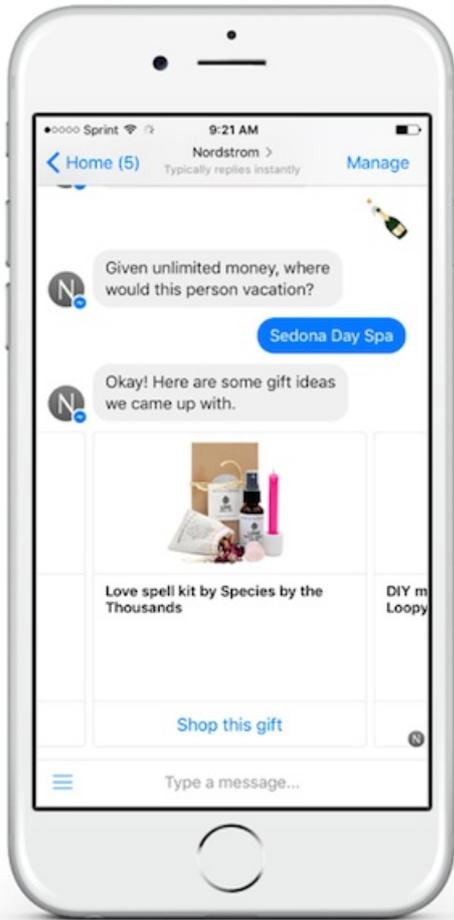
"The Nordstrom chatbot is a helpful, personalized, and timely shopping experience that is focused on finding the perfect gift for loved ones, making it an ideal fit for the holiday season."

Multiple choice

Nordstrom's chatbot works on both Facebook Messenger and Kik. After pushing a button to start the experience, the user is greeted by name based on their profile.

From here, the consumer can either choose to answer a series of questions or chat with customer care for more personalized help.

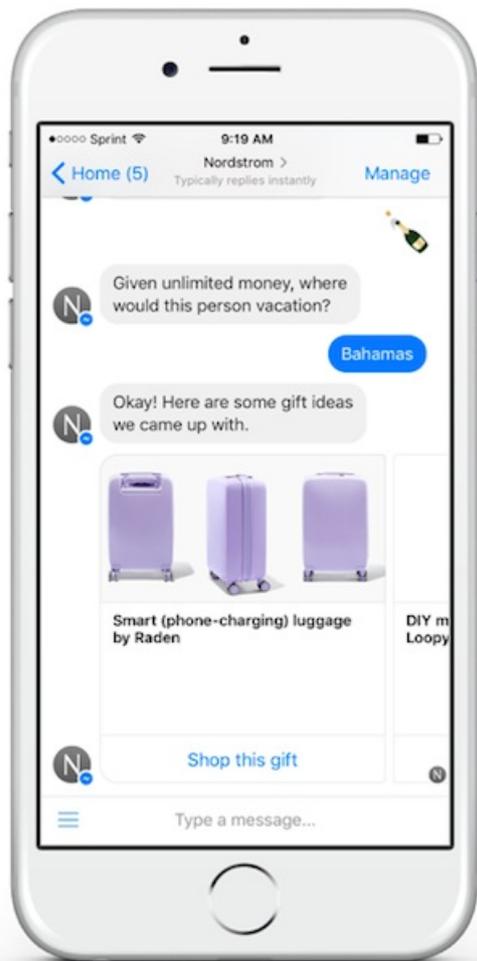
One question asks where the recipient would be found on the weekends, giving options such as at Comicon, hosting a party, making a playlist or heading out of town.



Nordstrom's chatbot

Others delve into the person's desires when going out to eat, the emoji they could be described with and where they would go on vacation if money were not an object.

At the end of the experience, the bot shares suggestions of gifts to get that individual. Each of these can be shopped via a link underneath the product.



Nordstrom's chatbot

After they have scrolled through the ideas, users are prompted to either shop all of Nordstrom's ecommerce site or select an option that shows more ideas. They can also opt to speak to customer service.

While the chatbot is not a real person, it acts as an extension of Nordstrom's customer care team. This feature allows the retailer to provide a customized consultation to many consumers at once.

"In retail, high-touch and personalized service is king," Mr. Shriftman said. "Therefore, retail chatbot experiences must be a perfect complement to the existing standards shoppers are accustomed to receiving in-store.

"In this case, the chatbot had to provide shoppers with the perfect gift recommendation based on the shopper's selections," he said. "It also had to simultaneously focus on providing excellent customer service.

"In the case a shopper had a question the bot couldn't answer, the chatbot was designed to bring in a human customer care specialist right away."

Nordstrom has made other mobile pushes this holiday season, promoting its buy online, pick-up in-store service and its app.

Chat room

While chatbots were more commonly adopted by mass brands such as Staples and Pepsi, these programs are more recently finding a place with high-end retailers.

For instance, Swiss watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre is stepping away from typical luxury watch manufacturer strategy with an innovative experience that introduces a chatbot to Facebook followers as an out-of-store associate.

Interested customers on Facebook can now interact with Jaeger-LeCoultre to find the perfect watch for them. The chatbot recommends suitable watches based on users' responses to questions, a strategy that greatly differs from traditional watch brands that usually rely on their name to carry them ([see story](#)).

Also, as one of the first beauty retailers to institute the use of chatbots, Sephora is continuing its streak with some extra features for its chatbot service aimed toward improving consumer experience both at home and in-store.

The two new features focus on different areas of the consumer experience. One will help customers book appointments with a Sephora beauty specialist and the other will give customers help with making purchasing decisions on their own ([see story](#)).

"We're experiencing a monumental shift from email to social media and now to mobile messaging," Mr. Shriftman said. "Brands who put a focus in this area are positioning themselves at the front of the pack and will see benefits of building personalized relationships with their customers, on a one-to-one level, at scale through messaging.

"A luxury brand, like Nordstrom, will use chatbots to communicate directly with customers by sending intelligent messages, such as push notifications, around specific brands or products their customers, like offering exclusive promotions/events in specific stores to chatbot users."

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