

RETAIL

Brands, retailers must support customer service options with digital tools

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Luxury brands rank near the top in a number of categories including live-chat and in-store technology. Image credit: Michael Kors, fall 2017

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As retail moves beyond the traditional store and ecommerce outlet, brands need to use every digital tool available to meet consumers' high standards for customer service.

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In Astound Commerce's Brand Mystery Shopping Study for 2017, the research showed that retailers are moving beyond simple call centers and other customer service options into more engaging and mobile-friendly channels such as live-chat and communicating with customers through social media. This is important given that 54 percent of consumers expect more comprehensive information and 50 percent expect better prices from a brand manufacturer Web site as opposed to a multi-brand retailer.

Customer service

In the modern mobile age, customers are savvier and more prepared for their shopping than ever.

Numerous studies have shown over the past five years that customers are doing much more research before they head to the store than ever before. After all, with all of today's digital tools at their disposal, why would they go out to the store without knowing exactly what they want first?

Customer service and providing the right tools for customers is key to helping them get as prepared and as knowledgeable as possible before they shop.

Astound Commerce concluded its annual mystery shopping report, in which the company ranked a number of brands based on their customer service options and how easy it is for customers to find what they need.

	Score	Browse the Online Store	Search for a Product	Seek Help: Self-Service	Seek Help: Ask a Question	Research a Product: Category	Make a Purchase	Connect to the Store: Omnichannel	Visit a Store
Point value	20.00	15.00	10.00	10.00	15.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	
Average Score ACSO	57.75	12.27	8.56	6.28	4.63	9.63	5.94	4.47	5.47
Stores									
The North Face	71.25	11.00	11.25	7.00	8.00	10.75	7.25	9.00	7.00
Under Armour	70.50	13.00	12.25	8.00	9.00	11.50	6.75	3.00	7.00
Apple	68.50	9.00	8.75	8.75	8.50	11.25	7.25	8.50	6.50
Tory Burch	68.00	13.75	9.75	7.75	6.50	11.25	6.50	7.00	5.50
Toms	68.00	15.00	10.25	8.50	9.50	10.75	6.50	3.00	4.50
Steve Madden	67.75	16.00	8.25	7.50	8.00	9.25	5.75	6.50	6.50
Nike	65.75	15.00	7.25	6.25	7.00	10.00	8.75	3.00	8.50
Non-Store									
Lancome*	71.56/57.25	17.00	11.50	6.75	3.00	11.00	8.00	0.00	0.00
Samsung**	68.44/54.75	11.75	10.00	5.75	10.00	10.75	5.50	1.00	0.00
Bobbi Brown*	68.44/54.75	15.75	8.25	6.00	8.00	10.75	6.00	0.00	0.00

Luxury brands performed well. Image credit: Astound Commerce

Luxury brands feature throughout the report, ranking near the top in a number of categories. For example, Michael Kors ranked near the top for brands that use technology in-store for its use of an in-store iPad to help customers navigate the brand's inventory.

Other luxury brands shined in different categories. For example, Burberry was near the top among all brands, not just luxury, for having items shipped to a store if the item is not carried at a specific location while Aveda came out on top for live-chat performance.

Digital tools

Making customer service tools available through social media is getting easier, especially as social media platforms embrace this usage and create options to help brands connect with customers easier.

Consumers are flocking to social media to have customer service queries answered, and brands and Twitter are responding by making the process more seamless.

Twitter released a bot builder in which brands such as idea sharing platform Evernote and the United Kingdom's Monarch Airlines are using to answers customer questions. Through direct messaging on Twitter, these bots will help answer these issues and direct the query to the correct department. (see story).



Free shipping is another popular tool. Image credit: Astound Commerce

Social media is now the main avenue luxury fashion brands are using to communicate with consumers for customer service, with 58 percent leveraging Facebook Messenger, according to a recent report from L2.

Traditional customer service communication platforms are tired and outdated, and consumers now expect a more modern method for reaching out to brands and retailers. Many brands are taking note and launching communication methods on mobile messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger, with 71 percent of watch and jewelry brands following suit (see story).

Astound Commerce's report shows that customer service and digital tools are at the forefront of brands and retailers' minds, and customers' standards for these tools are very high.