

COLUMNS

Why emotion is key to ecommerce

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Simon Bell is founder of Diligent Commerce

By **Simon Bell**

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Forget about page layout and load times. There are more human ways to enhance ecommerce.

Picture the last time you made an online purchase.

Not a boring, practical one, such as a multipack of travel adaptors from Amazon, but that just-got-to-have-it impulse buy which felt a bit naughty and indulgent. That long-researched purchase you have been anticipating for months. That specific, personalized birthday gift you know your recipient is going to treasure.

What do all of these buying experiences have in common? They make us feel things. And those emotions, from anticipation to gratification, generally feel pretty good.

We are an acquisitive race, us humans. The things we buy are more than mere objects and services. They are things that help us to express ourselves, to connect with each other, to define who we are and to help us get a bit closer to our daydreams. It stands to reason, then, that shopping is an emotional experience too.

Forget cookie-cutter commerce

So why does ecommerce continue to ignore the emotionality of shopping?

Ask almost any digital marketer what they are doing to increase things such as conversion rate and time spent on site and they will reel off a list of very dry approaches: improving site speed, streamlining the checkout process, split testing different calls to action.

The truth is, while these practical tweaks might make a visitor marginally less likely to leave a Web site, they still do not give them a good reason to stay. They do not offer an emotional draw.

This is one reason why many ecommerce Web sites look virtually indistinguishable today and why online conversion rates remain in the doldrums compared to bricks-and-mortar sales.

With so many bland, functional cookie-cutter Web sites out there, the only real distinguishing factor between one retailer and another boils down to price. And if price is the only differentiator, why should not every buyer simply head to Amazon?

It is time to add emotional optimization into the mix.

Be more "System One"

Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman, a renowned behavioral scientist, once explained that we humans "think that we're much more rational than we are." We broadly believe that we use the rational and logical aspect of our brains to make choices. This is the part of the brain that Mr. Kahneman calls System Two.

While we may think this is the part we use to make informed choices, in fact, it is System One that is usually in play. This system of thought is larger and faster than System Two, basing its decisions on feelings, not facts.

System One does not really care about pop-ups or page load times. It cares about how a Web site makes you feel. Does it make you feel part of something? Does it pique your curiosity? Does it capture your aspirations? Does it speak to who you are?

Feeling fashion

This highly emotional aspect of ecommerce has been starved for too long.

Brands that can cook up Web sites full of emotional content stand to seriously capitalize on a more human approach to ecommerce, particularly fashion.

Fashion is an industry that knows exactly how emotional its products are and thousands of successful brands already know how to use this to their advantage.

Self-expression, beauty, self-confidence, creativity, sex appeal, romance all of this and more is tied up in fashion.

The emotion is already present in the product and in much of the marketing surrounding brands, but it is markedly absent from Web sites.

So what do brands need to do to imbue ecommerce with more emotion? It is not as abstract or as difficult as you might think.

Make a move

Encourage users to interact with your site more by making your Web site interact more with them.

Ensuring that transitions and animations are pleasingly smooth will pique your visitors' interest and make them feel like they are receiving a high-quality experience with a twist.

A picture paints a thousand words

Words and products on a page are all very well, but more context-focused imagery, photography, video and other media will capture attention and imagination for more potent outreach.

As human beings ourselves, we tend to react more strongly to images of other humans. Remember, content is king, but context is queen.

Weave a yarn

You cannot get much more emotional than a spellbinding story.

Do not tuck away your branding, user-generated content or inspirational imagery and videos. Plant them front and center, interweave them with products to make your brand more inspirational.

STRIKE THAT PERFECT balance between content and commerce to create an engaging customer journey.

Simon Bell is founder of [Diligent Commerce](#), London. Reach him at simon@diligentcommerce.com.