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Consumers prefer bricks-and-mortar for first-time purchases, online for repeat buys

August 17, 2018



Customers shop online, with brands and at retailers regularly, but in different contexts. Image credits: Salesforce

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When buying something for the first time, customers prefer to make purchases in-person over online by 20 percentage points.

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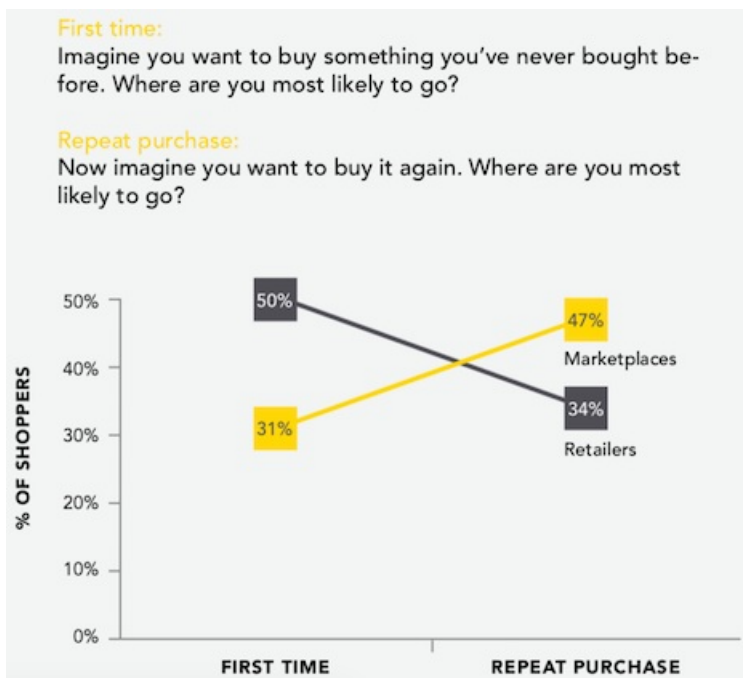
Salesforce wanted to examine the differences in customer preferences between online marketplaces such as Amazon, retailers and brand stores. What the research found was that customers like to purchase items from bricks-and-mortar retailers when buying something unfamiliar, but they prefer buying from online marketplaces when seeking something they have already bought before.

Bricks-and-mortar

The modern retail landscape is a constant push and pull between retailers, brands and online marketplaces such as Amazon.

Customers regularly use all three, but for different reasons and in different contexts. To understand more about how consumers navigate between these three, Salesforce surveyed thousands of shoppers across six countries.

What the study found was that for products that a customer has never purchased before, 50 percent go for retailers and 31 percent opt to buy via online marketplaces. However, for products that customers have already bought before, 47 percent go online and 34 percent prefer retailers.



First time vs. repeat purchases. Image credit: Salesforce

What this means is that customers prefer the ease and convenience of shopping online for things they are already acquainted with, but desire the in-person experience of examining something before purchasing if they are less familiar with it.

Other findings from the report show that mobile is more useful to customers as a research tool than for actually making purchases.

Eighty-three percent of shoppers aged 18 to 44 use their mobile devices to search for products while in-store, however only 18 percent of shoppers use their phones to actually make purchases.

Shopping habits

Luxury brands are aware of this trend and have begun tailoring both their online and in-store experiences to have the same level of personalization.

For example, Swiss watchmaker Hublot is unveiling a digital boutique that aims to make the online shopping experience more compatible with what customers would see when going into a physical store.

The Hublot Digital Boutique allows any customer the ability to discuss the intricacies of different products with Hublot sales associates in real time, just as they would if they went into the store. The digital boutique is part of a larger trend in physical retail that sees brands more closely integrating their online and offline experiences ([see story](#)).



Mobile shopping. Image credit: Salesforce

In-store mobile tools have also become quite common. For instance, British apparel and accessories label Mulberry has teamed up with Tulip Mobile to overhaul the brand's in-store experience.

Together, the two companies will focus on using mobile tools to improve the bricks-and-mortar experience for customers by supplying employees and sales associates with technological tools. Tulip will help Mulberry roll out a number of new features using these tools to streamline how customers shop and checkout ([see story](#)).

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