

MARKETING

Digital offerings, transparency necessary for success: Bazaarvoice

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Ecommerce recorded a 30 percent year-over-year growth in 2020. . Image credit: Rupixen.com

By KATIE TAMOLA

Ecommerce continues to gain momentum after rapid acceleration caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, so brands must continue to focus on their digital offerings to succeed in the future.

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Speaking at the [Bazaarvoice Retail Summit 2021](#), Sucharita Kodali, vice president and principal analyst at [Forrester](#), analyzed trends that permeated the retail industry during the pandemic, from marketplace surges to consumer interest in ESG policies, as well as crucial points brands and retailers must consider for the future. As the retail sphere prepares the future, digital excellence is of the utmost importance for brands, as consumers continue to demand both excellent customer experiences and transparency in sustainability practices.

"If you do not excel in every way digitally, you will likely die as a brand," Ms. Kodali said.

"Brands now have an ability to connect with their consumers in ways that they never had before," she said. "In the past, brands didn't own their destiny because they had to be in physical stores and physical stores were the only way to connect with consumers."

What will remain important

As evidenced throughout the pandemic, ecommerce thrived, recording a 30 percent year-over-year growth in 2020. Ecommerce giant Amazon specifically saw a 39 percent year-over-year growth, while ecommerce company Shopify saw an 86 percent year-over-year increase in 2020, respectively.

The pandemic also saw a fueled focus on ESG policies, including gender balance, sustainability, ethics and more.

According to Forrester research, in 2019, only 14 percent of companies said they felt being required to invest in socially responsible products in the next two years, while that number grew to 26 percent in 2020.

"ESG is absolutely more important than ever," Ms. Kodali said. "ESG has been more on the radar of businesses overall."

Although many consumers migrated to ecommerce during the pandemic, experts point out the reality that as always,

there is no single path to a sale. Shopping means varying depending on the shopper as well as the kind of purchase. Brands need to work to have their offerings in a consumer's line of vision, whether it's in-store or online. Advertising presence should be everywhere.

"Every brand across every category needs a diversified marketing portfolio," Ms. Kodali said. "Because if you if you don't have that, you're missing out on the opportunity to reach shoppers either at the point of discovery or the point that they are supplementing their research.

"There is the importance of also having a comprehensive offline marketing strategy as well."

Looking towards the future, brands are being urged to seize control of their destinies, fostering their presences on digital marketplaces like Amazon as well as encouraging shoppers to buy products from them directly.



Brands have a myriad of digital platforms to tap in highlighting their offerings. Image credit: Bazaarvoice

Forrester also highlights the possibility of the digital marketing duopoly primarily of Google and Facebook breaking. This is due to the emergence of new tactics and digital presences, from social media platforms like Snapchat and Clubhouse to websites like Wirecutter.

The digital landscape will continue housing infinite brands and retailers, urging them to continue producing what consumers are asking for including positive experiences and transparency when it comes to ethical and sustainable practices.

Brands must be excellent

Consumers are seeking excellence in their purchase journeys, which is manifesting in several forms. More shoppers are becoming increasingly concerned with sustainability and accountability practices from the places they shop.

In the Forrester Analytics Consumer Technographics Retail Topic Insights 2 Survey 2020, 74 percent of UK adults under the age of 35 and 66 percent of UK online adults over the age of 35 said that it was important to them that companies operate on a socially responsible level.

In the same survey, 73 percent of US online adults under the age of 35 and 61 percent of US adults over the age of 35 also said it was important to them that companies operate on a socially responsible level.

As the world continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are still actively looking to brands for transparent and comprehensive sustainability practices.

Although consumers are nuanced in how much sustainable materials and practices will affect their likelihood to purchase a product, the latest edition of the EY Future Consumer Index suggests that 43 percent of global consumers want to buy more from organizations that benefit society, even if their products or services cost more. EY's CEO Imperative Series is addressing techniques brands can utilize in response to evolving consumer expectations regarding sustainability, including embracing sustainability as a value creator, authenticity and more ([see story](#)).

As consumers search for transparency regarding brands' ethical practices, they are also still requiring what they've always sought: exceptional customer experiences. This category carries a wide breadth, and can include anything from functioning websites, pick up options, tracking abilities, and resources like reviews.

Top 3 things that shoppers need from eCommerce sites

% of respondents in each market who say the feature is important to them

US	UK	France	China	India	Australia
Delivery status tracking (68%)	Delivery status tracking (59%)	Delivery status tracking (72%)	Ratings and reviews (82%)	Delivery status tracking (86%)	Delivery status tracking (67%)
Ratings and reviews (66%)	Ratings and reviews (57%)	Product filters (60%)	Delivery status tracking (80%)	Ratings and reviews (86%)	Product filters (61%)
Product filters (60%)	Product filters (57%)	Ratings and reviews (54%)	Alternative digital payments (77%)	Alternative digital payments (83%)	Scroll from category pages for more detail (60%)

Source: Forrester Analytics Consumer Technographics Retail Recontact Survey, 2021

Consumers expect to be able to track shipments and to see reviews. Image credit: Bazaarvoice

In a Forrester Analytics Consumer Technographics retail Recontact Survey 2021, 68 percent of US shoppers and 59 percent of UK shoppers said delivery status tracking was the most important feature to them from ecommerce sites, respectively. The second most important feature for both groups was ratings and reviews, with 66 percent of US shoppers and 57 percent of UK shoppers indicating that feature, respectively.

Earlier this year, Online retailer Farfetch saw its gross merchandise value exceed \$3 billion, noting in its financial results for the full year ended Dec. 31 2020.

Last year, more than 1,350 Farfetch marketplace sellers sold products, from more than 3,500 brands. Consumers also enjoyed new customer experience features including shipment tracking, virtual try-ons and style advisor services ([see story](#)).

"Consumers want their expectations moderated, if you're going to ship it to me in five days, just telling me so I can be aware of that and have that mental picture," Ms. Kodali said. "Digital excellence will just be table stakes."

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