RETAIL

Brand loyalty takes a hit from search abandonment: Google

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Search abandonment is a costly problem for ecommerce sites. Image credit: Google

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As ecommerce spending continues to climb, brands and retailers cannot overlook the costly impact of search abandonment.

Search abandonment happens when a shopper searches a retailer website but is unable to find the product they are looking for. According to new research from Google Cloud, U.S. retailers alone lose more than $300 billion a year due to search abandonment.

The new report is based on a survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Google Cloud of more than 10,000 global consumers and 200 U.S.-based website managers. Consumers hailed from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan and Mexico.

Search's high stakes
Appearing on 96 percent of retail sites, the search function is the tool used the most often on an ecommerce site, topping the navigation menu, filter feature or homepage promotions.

The quality of retailers' search results, however, can be impacted by factors such as misspellings and long tail searches.

Search abandonment costs U.S. retailers $300 billion annually. Image credit: Google

For instance, a search for "riped high rise jeans with skinny fit" can result in no relevant products even if a retailer does have ripped high-rise skinny jeans in stock leading to a negative experience for shoppers.

On average, consumers will spend 15 minutes and six clicks when searching online for a specific item. Less than half will not spend more than 20 minutes on a single product search.

Seventy-six percent of shoppers report that unsuccessful searches lead to a lost sale for the retailer site in question. Fifty-two percent typically abandon their entire online shopping cart, and 48 percent will go on to purchase the item in question through a different ecommerce site.

The financial impact of these situations goes beyond a missed conversion or sales opportunity, however.

Eighty-five percent of global online consumers and 77 percent of U.S. consumers view a brand differently after they experience search difficulties a clear blow to brand loyalty.

Retailers are aware that search abandonment is an expensive problem, with 88 percent of retail site managers admitting it is a company issue. Nine in 10 managers have shared their concerns with their organizations, but 64 percent report that their company lacks a concrete solution to address it.

These retailers are likely leaving money on the table, as 69 percent of shoppers report that a positive search experience often leads to purchasing additional items and 99 percent say they are at least somewhat likely to return to a site with a good search function.

Among U.S. consumers specifically, 90 percent believe a good search function is "very important" or "absolutely essential" and 97 percent agree their favorite retailers have sites that allow for quick, successful searches.

About three-quarters of U.S. shoppers will also avoid websites where they have experienced search difficulties and are less loyal to a brand when it is hard to find products on their site.
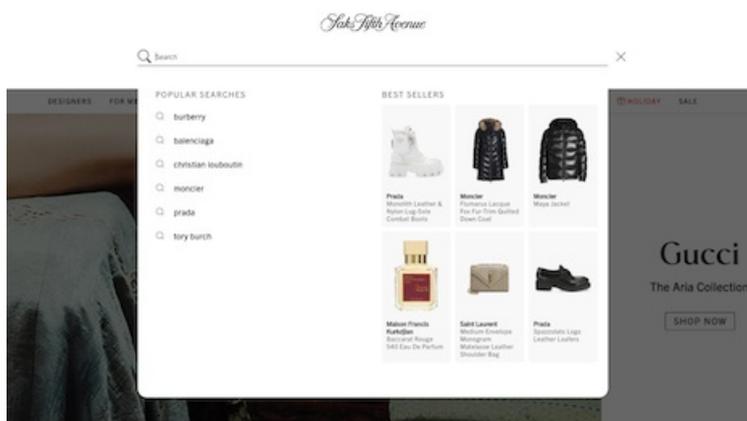
Search functions can make or break a shopper's ecommerce experience. Image credit: Saks.com

While only one in 10 consumers find what they are searching for every time they use retailers' online search functions, not all is hopeless for retailers.

More than 90 percent of respondents who averaged five online retail purchases the week before the survey had a positive search experience and believe retailers are doing enough to help them find what they need online.

Rising to expectations

According to Google, 97 percent of consumers believe an easy-to-use website is a big part of a brand's customer service.

This encompasses more than the search function, including a site's visual appeal, the ability to sort content and the ability to filter search results.

More luxury brands and retailers are revamping and improving their websites to meet higher consumer expectations.

Last fall, Saks Fifth Avenue unveiled a new site, its first comprehensive website replatforming and redesign in several years. Using Salesforce Commerce Cloud, saks.com now emphasizes fashion, convenience and personalization while ensuring flexibility for future enhancements (see story).

Similarly, U.S. fashion label Badgley Mischka improved its ecommerce performance in 2020 through a partnership with a merchandise software provider.

While the coronavirus lockdowns led to exponential increases in online sales, some luxury brands, including Badgley Mischka, did not have flexibility for sudden scaling. Searchspring worked with Badgley Mischka to revamp its ecommerce strategy, leading to improved search conversions and revenues (see story).

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