

MARKETING

Brands cognizant of crucial need for hybrid ecommerce, in-person offerings: report

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For many consumers, the bricks-and-mortar experience is paramount, and some businesses feel as though they are not delivering sufficient hybrid experiences. Image credit: LVMH

By KATIE TAMOLA

As the COVID-19 pandemic urged an immense reliance on ecommerce, many brands and retailers are still trying to determine how to effectively balance online and in-person services.

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According to a study from hybrid customer experience solutions company Uberall, commissioned by Forrester, 70 percent of businesses believe they are delivering deficient hybrid consumer journeys. Further, 65 percent of businesses are not confident in their ability to track and understand consumer behavior across ecommerce and in-person touchpoints.

"Customers no longer distinguish between online and offline, and expect seamless experiences regardless of the channel used to interact with a business an expectation intensified by the pandemic," said Florian Hbner, CEO and founder of **Uberall**, in a statement.

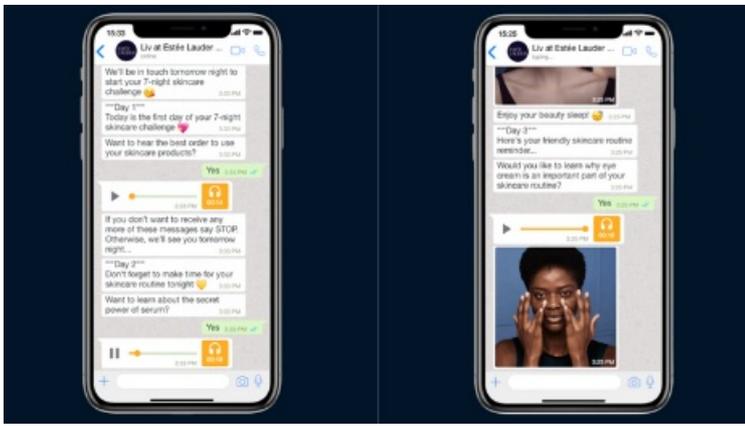
"This new study from Forrester reveals just how difficult it is for organizations to break down departmental silos and connect disparate systems to create a seamless end-to-end hybrid customer journey," he said. "Businesses that can get it right with a unified approach will reap the rewards."

Uberall polled more than 200 U.S. and European decision-makers at companies with 150 or more stores and locations.

Wanting it all

It is a tale as old as time consumers have disparate preferences as to how they spend their dollars. Some exclusively desire the in-person shopping experience, others rely solely on ecommerce, while many prefer, and are increasingly expecting, a mix of both.

Thus, brands and retailers are being called to cover all of their bases, proving they can offer it all.



The Estée Lauder chatbot on WhatsApp. Image credit: Rehab Agency

Seventy-five percent of activities related to the beginning and end of the consumer journey are managed in-house, while 25 percent are outsourced.

Many companies use a collection of standalone solutions, with 76 percent using social listening tools, 70 percent using intelligent communications solutions like chatbots and 70 percent using ratings and review management solutions.

Companies attempting to use digital means to highlight their physical locations most commonly rely on three activities, with 51 percent gravitating to local SEO management including Google Maps, 49 percent electing inventory promotion by announcing what is available at physical locations and 49 percent posting on social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put brands and retailers in a contemplative state, as 70 percent of businesses indicate that a deeper understanding of their customers is more important now than before 2020.

Customer engagement also remains imperative, with 74 percent of businesses looking to connect with customers more via social media and 72 percent looking to increase customer retention and loyalty.

As consumers continue seeking hybrid solutions for their shopping needs, businesses recognize their room to improve.

Seventy percent of respondents believe their organization's ability to provide seamless customer journeys across all digital and physical touchpoints is "average," "fair" or "poor." Seventy-two percent were "interested" or "very interested" in a platform that addresses multiple marketing and customer experience needs.

Seeking 'phygital'

Consumers want the best of both worlds, and for many, that means the "phygital" experience digital amenities in physical stores.

While 45 percent of businesses believe that digital capabilities in physical locations is one of the most challenging concepts to implement in bricks-and-mortar locations, it is becoming clear that consumers seek these features.



Sephora's latest partnership with FreedomPay is the retailer's response to an ever-changing payment landscape and consumers' increased desire for payment flexibility. Image credit: Sephora

Seventy-three percent of respondents believe digital capabilities in physical locations are more important than before the pandemic. These solutions include QR codes, self-checkout, contactless payment, among others.

Several luxury brands and retailers are implementing these kinds of digital capabilities in-store.

LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora partnered with commerce platform FreedomPay to enhance its in-store payment offerings.

The partnership welcomes FreedomPay's data-driven commerce technology platform to more than 500 Sephora stores across the Americas. With this collaboration, Sephora is expanding payment choices and mobile point-of-sale options to its consumers, fostering a frictionless in-store experience ([see story](#)).

Although uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic lingers, consumers are still looking for an array of shopping options.

Retailers and consumers continue to show resilience in the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the challenges spurred by the Omicron variant.

According to new recovery data from Placer.ai, bricks-and-mortar foot traffic in January and February saw more significant year-over-two-year declines during the Omicron wave than drop-offs associated with the Delta variant. With the future remaining unclear, luxury retailers are being called to continue fostering both their in-person and ecommerce offerings, showcasing a blend of options that can reach any consumer with any shopping preference ([see story](#)).

"As people return to in-person activities, the digital conveniences they have become accustomed to will not just disappear," said Tijs van Santen, chief customer officer at Uberall, in a statement.

"Companies that look to smartly engage with customers across the digital and real-world making it easy and enjoyable for customers to do business with them will gain consumer trust and loyalty."

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