RETAIL

Omnichannel strategies must apply to customer support: report

April 13, 2022

Shoppers want the same level of customer service across channels. Image credit: Nuance

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Consumer loyalty is easier to lose than it is to gain, so brands and retailers need to ensure even minor interactions deliver quality customer experience.

According to a new report from AI solution provider Nuance, consistency in service level and brand experience are crucial for unified interactions between retailers and consumers. Making customer data more centralized and interconnected can also help businesses offer more personalized services.

Omnichannel customer care

With retail among the industries seeing record rates of turnover in recent months exacerbating existing staffing shortages due to COVID-19 absences companies need to empower their associates and customer service agents.

Retailers should go to the source and get direct input from their frontline employees on whether they feel supported or are missing anything from their workflows. This information can be applied to new tools, such as AI, to help boost efficiency in assisting shoppers.
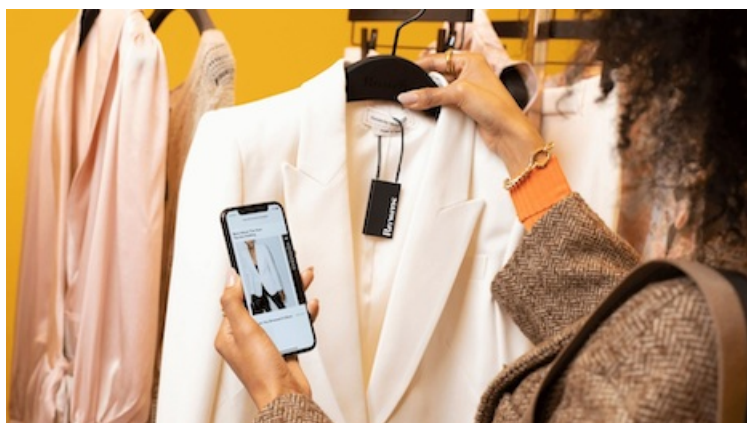
Digital services can help brands personalize in-store and ecommerce experiences. Image credit: Farfetch

With growing consumer adoption and awareness of omnichannel engagements, shoppers are coming to expect consistent customer service across physical stores, ecommerce sites, mobile apps, over the phone and other channels.

As a result, support agents are expected to have any relevant information regardless of the communication method. Companies should consider how personalized support is, how thorough an FAQ is, how accessible live agents are and ease of use across channels.

To help their employees, retailers must make consistent investments across all channels to bolster any touchpoints where a customer might request help. Similarly, brand voice should be present in interactions across channels.

Retailers are also increasingly on the defense against fraud but must be mindful of how implementing strong authentication processes can add friction to shoppers' transactions.

Businesses can start by evaluating existing authentication models, considering whether customers need a PIN or password to access support and average handle time, or duration, for support calls.

Implementing digital biometric authentication, such as voice or face recognition, can allow for quick customer identification without needing knowledge-based authentication methods, such as security questions.

Centralizing customer data and connecting channels can also help brands and retailers focus on hyper-personalization. Repurposing data so a virtual assistant can greet a customer by name and a relevant prompt can make an interaction more effective.

Digital tools and tactics like that can help companies combine upselling opportunities seen in in-person interactions with the convenience of ecommerce. There are many ways to link digital and physical experiences such as a text message notifying a shopper an in-demand piece is available locally for tailored and personalized interactions.

Shoppers want more flexible fulfillment options. Image courtesy of Moet Hennessy

Once a sale is made, pain points such as delivery, pickup and returns can actually be opportunities for brands and retailers to nurture customer relationships.

Some businesses falter, however, by not being communicative or flexible enough to meet consumers' needs. Brands and retailers should keep shoppers updated on major fulfillment milestones and consider to what extent they can accommodate changes to delivery and pickup for instance, changing a delivery to an in-store pickup after an order is shipped.

Service meets social shopping
Finally, brands and retailers should view the growth of social commerce as an extension of ecommerce including integrating customer touchpoints on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

From Meta's Facebook and Instagram to emerging players such as TikTok and Pinterest, social commerce is becoming more accessible to consumers. For now, most social purchases are made on the retailer's owned product page which is essential for new customer acquisition and driving repeat purchases (see story).

According to new research from Accenture, the $492 billion social commerce industry is expected to grow to $1.2 trillion by 2025. With such dramatic growth, especially during the time of continued COVID-19 restrictions, retailers and brands have ample opportunity to position themselves in front of shoppers to ensure increased revenue (see story).

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