

RETAIL

How storytelling elevates ecommerce experiences for online shoppers

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The Shinola flagship store in Detroit. Image credit: Shinola

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Storytelling cannot be overlooked as a crucial element of seamless omnichannel experiences.

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During a [CommerceNext](#) webinar on April 20, retail executives discussed how storytelling can enhance the customer experience and boost customer engagement. Investing in customer service and data also helps retailers ensure they are best serving their shoppers.

"We view ourselves as a brand first and more of a product company second," said Joel Layton, vice president of ecommerce, marketing and digital at [Shinola](#), Detroit.

"The more storytelling that we can do, the better to create that engagement at the end of the day, it is all about customer engagement and try to replicate the factors that we see in-store, where associates look and feel and touch and converse with the guests."

The conversation was moderated by Veronika Sonsev, cofounder at CommerceNext, New York.

Seamless storytelling

When evaluating omnichannel strategies, retailers should keep in mind that not all customers have the same journey. This is why retailers should optimize the ecommerce experience for various customer journeys.

For women's clothing retailer Boston Proper, this means ensuring its site experience is reflective of its mail catalog.



The Boston Proper ecommerce site echoes the print catalog. Image credit: Boston Proper

"We do lots of shooting on location and really romanticizing the product in that way," said Liesel Walsh, senior vice president of customer experience at **Boston Proper**, Boca Raton, Florida.

"Then as we think about the website experience, it becomes first that story that echoes the stories in the catalog and the product stories," she said. "We land [the shopper] into those into those [site] environments we do a ton of email and storytelling in email and, that's really an important part of our customer experience so landing her in the right part of the [site] gives her the opportunity to see the products in a different way."

Each referral channel poses its own challenges, Ms. Walsh explained. For instance, Boston Proper has experimented with redirecting shoppers from Facebook advertisements to the product page they clicked through or landing them on a category page that offers more context to the brand.

Real-time data can help retailers measure the success of their efforts, explained Nick Kaplan, chief growth and innovation officer at Saadia Group, New York.

"We're looking through a bevy of site metrics to sort of tie it all together to understand where opportunities are," Mr. Kaplan said. "Our omni customer is more valuable than single channel customers."



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Shinola has launched an online blog focusing on storytelling and its values.

For instance, analytics help evaluate the success of Shinola's digital storytelling efforts. The luxury goods retailer has been investing in content creation, including blog posts and videos.

Covering the bases

Customer support is also closely intertwined with the ecommerce experience, and social media channels have become de facto customer service platforms.

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. 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, social media and other channels ([see story](#)).

For luxury brands in particular, the level of service is so high offline that online experiences often fall short for consumers. Meanwhile, sales associates can assist in-store visitors by sharing first-hand about the craftsmanship behind luxury goods all while gaining valuable insights into shoppers.

Thus, empowering sales associates and support staff is key for true omnichannel experiences ([see story](#)).

"We're real believers in the omnichannel experience," Shinola's Mr. Layton said.

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