



# VIEWPOINT

**Develop a Customer Experience  
Management Strategy for the  
Holiday Shopping Season  
and Beyond**

By Geoff Galat



## **VIEWPOINT: Develop a Customer Experience Management Strategy for the Holiday Shopping Season and Beyond** By Geoff Galat

For retailers, this holiday season is unlike any other. If the recent back-to-school season is any indicator, as it often is, holiday shoppers are willing to spend more for the first time in three years. According to a recent National Retail Federation report, nearly two-thirds of retailers expect online sales to grow 15 percent or more this holiday season. This begs the question: what about that remaining one-third of retailers, the ones who have lower expectations for the holiday season? What's keeping them from taking better advantage of the holiday-induced shopping surge?

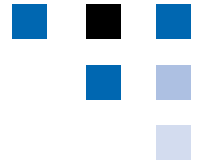
While in-store shopping is still a viable channel, the online channel is increasingly becoming a more convenient option for holiday shoppers looking to avoid the hassle of long lines and crowds. It's so easy today to purchase desired goods and services online, and with the advent of discount sites like eBates.com and Groupon, flash sale sites like Gilt Groupe and the ability to comparison shop with just a few clicks on Bluefly.com, it's no wonder more people are going online to cross items off their holiday shopping lists.

In fact, a recent Harris Interactive study commissioned by Tealeaf found that two in three online adults have conducted an online shopping transaction in the past year. And the more customers shop online, the savvier they become. In today's online shopping environment, consumers expect nothing but the best from retailers, and if they don't get it, they're off to the social media echo chamber to voice their opinions. When consumers encounter a less-than-favorable online experience, retailers suffer in many ways. Customer frustration effects a massive impact on e-commerce revenue—from damaging brand reputation to simply pushing customers to competitive sites. According to the Harris data, if online shoppers were to encounter a problem while attempting to conduct an online transaction, 32 percent would abandon the transaction entirely, and even more significantly, 27 percent would turn to a direct competitor.

### **MANAGING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TO DRIVE REVENUE AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

So how do retailers prevent online customers from clicking straight into the eager arms of competitors? The best thing retailers can do this season is to develop a customer experience management strategy. Customer Experience Management (CEM) is the practice of improving customer interactions with—and, therefore, perceptions of—a company. Simply put, positive customer experiences result in increased share of wallet and repeat business.

Of course, devising a cohesive CEM strategy is easier said than done, but every retailer has both the ability and ample motive to create an action plan for improving the online customer experience and proactively identifying site issues. Start by asking some of the following questions:



- Are certain site performance issues recurring over and over in a given period? If the answer is yes, this is an early warning of a customer struggle zone you should be paying more attention to. Even a seemingly small issue can have a huge impact, and the increased site traffic during the holidays and other high-volume periods can magnify the problem.
- Are you able to visualize customers' web sessions, both past and present, in real-time? Avoiding a potentially frustrated or angry customer—who can voice damaging sentiments about your brand through social media—is largely dependent on how quickly you can resolve issues. If your call center agent can easily pull up a customer web session to identify an error promptly, chances are that customer will be much more forgiving than one who tries in vain to explain the situation to an unwitting call center employee.
- Lastly, have you made the online customer experience a top priority? If recent survey data is any indication, not every retailer stands to profit this holiday season, and the retailers that do not have adequate customer experience strategies will be the ones missing out. This year and every year, the retailers most likely to see favorable returns are those who prioritize customer experience issues based on business impact.

From a retail perspective, we're finally back in a position to capitalize on online holiday shopping sales. Whether retailers stand to profit or experience a loss this season depends largely on their ability to create a comprehensive customer experience management strategy—a long-term goal that should be at the forefront of every retailers' to-do list and will ensure a year of many happy returns.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



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