



The Modern Customer Journey: Converting Browsers into Buyer

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Introduction

There's no question: Mobile commerce matters.

The shopping journey of today's modern consumer has changed dramatically since the early days of retail, when channels were fewer and the journey much less complex. Consumers today have far more options for every step of the journey, from initial product research to content consumption and final purchase. Complicate these options with the distractions consumers face at every turn, and it's a wonder transactions are ever made. To be effective as a retailer, it's paramount to understand how a consumer browses and buys in today's market, and then to use data to make decisions and drive personalized experiences tailored to each and every consumer.

With the rise of fauxsumerism—the idea of consumers browsing products and engaging with brands without intent to purchase—brands are under even more pressure to find ways to make a shopper convert. Let's explore the modern shopping journey and how to make the most of today's consumers—and fauxsumers.



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Cross-channel Browsing Behaviors of the Modern “Fauxsumer”

“I love the smell of commerce in the morning!”—Brodie, Mallrats

In 1995, the movie *Mallrats* depicted the teenage world encapsulated in a shopping mall. Breakups, makeups, and even an unprovoked attack on the Easter bunny—it all happens in the mall. In 1995, that's where all the cool kids went on a Friday night.

Fast forward to 2015, 20 years later. The New York Times recently posted a [blog](#) asking teenagers if the mall is still an important part of teen culture, and inviting them to comment. Tatiana R seemed to speak for her generation:

“The mall is a great place to have fun with family and friends. Anyways, I always spend at least 30 min in each store, and I don’t buy ANYTHING. Most of the time, I just get dropped off at South Park or Carolina Place. But I really don’t like going to the mall just to spend money because stuff online has a big difference in prices, so I just shop online.”

Tatiana R, like many in her generation, still uses the mall as a form of entertainment, but not to purchase. This new “fauxsumerism” trend isn’t limited to the physical space either. According to [The Winter/Spring Cassandra report](#), one-third of millennials say browsing (online or off) is more fun than buying, and half regularly browse for items they have no intention of buying. Instead of making a purchase, desired products are pinned to a Pinterest board or added to a Wanelo wish list.

When products are added to fauxsumers’ social media network, it’s a way of expressing their own tastes and personal brand, regardless of whether they can afford the product or not. The [Cassandra report even suggests](#) that simply saving an item on social media gives the fauxsumer the same kick as actually purchasing it.



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As consumers blur the lines between entertainment and shopping, they are also blurring the lines around how they browse. In-store or online, it makes no difference to them. Smartphone—tablet—desktop—how a consumer browses is dictated by whatever's most convenient in that moment. Today's fauxsumers frankly don't care how they browse; they just want what they

want when they want it. And this means brands need to be offering up a truly integrated experience, one that transitions seamlessly from one channel to the next. According to [Accenture](#), 68 percent of millennials expect exactly that—for all intents and purposes, all channels are one in the same. Consumers don't think of channels the way that a brand might, and they certainly don't restrict their browsing habits based on what channel they're using. It would seem obvious to them that the same content would be available in every place they turn.

It is, after all, originating from a single brand.

Forrester Research agrees, and even goes so far as to declare that [mobile is not a channel](#), and “eBusiness professionals who treat mobile as just a channel will fail.” [Research from Deloitte](#) supports this, too, claiming that 50 percent of in-store sales are influenced by digital.

In today's retail landscape, brands need a new approach. How do they provide the shopping entertainment consumers desire while facilitating the transition from play to purchase? What, if any, data can they capture about this consumer to help provide a much more engaging experience? What does it take to convert?



Purchase Intent: The Journey from Fauxsumer to Consumer

"When I first moved to New York and I was totally broke, sometimes I would buy Vogue instead of dinner. I felt it fed me more." — Carrie Bradshaw, Sex and the City

For fans of Sex and the City, there's no denying the emotional connection between Carrie Bradshaw and her Manolos. And fashion. And, well, shopping in general. A typical episode of the show involved brunch, shopping, and cocktails (Cosmos of course) with the girls. It was rare to see an episode in which Carrie wasn't agonizing over a pair of shoes that she really couldn't afford (she nearly always bought them anyway).

So why does Carrie spend \$700 on a pair of strappy sandals from Manolo when she could be getting a very similar product for a fraction of the price at DSW? Sales guru Zig Ziglar once famously said, "People don't buy for logical reasons. They buy for emotional reasons." With the rise of the fauxsumer, this emotional connection has never been more alive or more present in our everyday lives. Unfortunately for retailers, a genuine emotional connection can be difficult to achieve, and even more difficult to convert.

The real question retailers should be asking themselves is "How do I connect to my consumer on an emotional level?" not "How do I get them to purchase?" Asking for a purchase before the emotional connection has been made is much like asking a girl you just met to come home with you after she's had more than a few cosmo. Sure, sometimes it may work, but will it turn into a long lasting, meaningful relationship? Probably not.

Building a genuine relationship and developing that emotional connection is difficult, and even more difficult to tie to an ROI, but brands that are able to do it are ensuring their survival well into the future. Brands that are not... well... we all saw what happened to RadioShack.

True relationship building between a brand and a consumer has three ingredients: They drive engagement, personalize experiences, and deliver on the brand's promise. None of these are easy, but all are critical.



"People don't buy for logical reasons. They buy for emotional reasons."

— Zig Ziglar

Drive Engagement, Personalize Experiences

“The fact is, sometimes it’s really hard to walk in a single woman’s shoes. That’s why we need really special ones now and then to make the walk a little more fun.” — Carrie Bradshaw, Sex and the City

Not just on your commerce site, not just within your social media, not just through your marketing—develop rich content to engage with your consumer everywhere, and make her movements from channel to channel seamless. It would never occur to her that different teams within your brand are managing different aspects of your communications. Speak in one voice across all channels, and develop strategies that support the goals and objectives of each channel. As you do so, she’ll engage back and organically contribute to this wealth of content you’ve created, and then the ROI will come. But don’t just take my word for it:

- [Seventy percent of consumers](#) prefer getting to know a company through content rather than advertisements.
- Emotionally connected customers are [4x as likely](#) to shop with your brand first, and 50 percent are more likely to become your advocate.
- Emotionally connected customers make [12.4 in-store](#) visits per year as opposed to 6.8 visits by customers who are merely satisfied.

Personalize Experiences

When Carrie Bradshaw walks into a shoe store on 5th Ave in New York City, the sales associate knows her immediately. He remembers what she bought last time, her shoe size, and even her favorite local cocktail lounge. This type of interaction is rare online, although the data is available. Today, Carrie would bounce between the brand’s website, store, social media, and many other types of digital content before she’s ready to commit to a purchase.



For a brand to truly build that relationship, it needs to connect the dots among channels (both digital and physical) and tie together the data points to deliver relevant, contextualized experiences wherever the consumer may be. Brands need to understand:

- Who is she? What are her likes and dislikes, and how does she perceive my brand today?
- Where is she going? What is she doing with the digital experiences that I control (for example, site, social media) and experiences I don't (for example, magazine sites or competitor sites)?
- Has she purchased my brand before? In-store or online or both? Is she a member of my loyalty program? What has she considered purchasing but hasn't?

Once brands are able to understand all of this and [tie it together](#), they need a strong strategy designed to engage her further and support her purchase path. Brands that are able to crack the code on personalization are seeing anywhere from a [7.8 percent](#) increase in conversions up to a [21 percent](#) increase.

Deliver on your brand promise, everywhere

Once you have all this beautiful and engaging content, be sure to integrate it into your commerce site to support her purchase path. Once she's decided she's ready to commit to you, reassure her that she's making the right decision by reinforcing this engagement throughout her current purchase journey and into her next one. Nearly [70 percent](#) of consumers consider shopping a form of entertainment. Support this need throughout all your touchpoints, and when the fauxsumer is ready to convert, she'll think of you first.



Nearly 70 percent of consumers consider shopping a form of entertainment.

Closing the Deal: What Matters Most in a Purchase Decision?

"So I buy it. The most perfect little cardigan in the world. People will call me the Girl in the Gray Cardigan. I'll be able to live in it. Really, it's an investment." — Rebecca Bloomwood, Confessions of a Shopaholic

For Rebecca Bloomwood, the path from [fauxsumer to consumer](#) was short, nonexistent even. Every item was a necessity and credit card bills were something meant for the trash can. For those of us who live in the real world, however, the decision to purchase anything typically requires much more consideration than Rebecca used.

As retailers, our mission is to eliminate as many barriers to buying as possible to create a smooth transition from consideration to purchase. Brands that have built a true relationship with their consumers will find this much easier than those who haven't, but all brands can employ strategies and tactics to remove these barriers and close the deal.

Supporting the Purchase Decision

As a consumer begins to contemplate making a purchase, brands need to do everything in their power to keep that consumer engaged and keep that product top of mind.

In theory, this should be easy on a commerce site, however brands have struggled with even the simplest of personalization strategies. Basic personalization tactics can keep relevant products and content front and center throughout a consumer's browsing experience. Although personalizing the site experience with relevant products and categories is nothing new to the world of retail, personalizing the site with relevant content is. As brands become more and more adept at content marketing, they should be using much more sophisticated personalization engines to inject that content throughout the browsing and purchase flow in a way that creates a deeper engagement with the consumer and results in that coveted conversion.



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Beyond the .com, brands should be taking those personalized experiences and presenting them to consumers throughout their digital travels via retargeting. Retargeting is hardly new to retailers, and those who do it well see a [26 percent increase in users who return to their site and complete the checkout process.](#)

Eliminating Barriers

Once the consumer clicks “add to cart,” it’s time to get out of the way. Traditionally this has meant keeping the cart and checkout flow [smooth, clean, and free of distractions](#). In this new world of retail, this must also include facilitating cross-channel buying patterns and desires.

According to Forrester’s North American Technographics Online Benchmark Survey, 95 percent of consumers started shopping online via a smartphone and then continued on a PC. As they move across devices, they expect these experiences to be integrated and seamless, with [68 percent of all millennials](#) demanding it. If they add to cart on a mobile, they may want to complete the purchase on a desktop. If they add to cart on a desktop, they may want to complete the purchase in-store. And so on and so on.

It’s inevitable that your shopper will add a product to the cart and then walk away. According to the [State of Retailing Online](#) report, 63 percent of consumers do this. Don’t think of this as cart abandonment. Think of it as another step in the journey, and continue trying to engage your consumer.

[Tesla](#) not only expects this cross-channel purchasing behavior, but it has mechanisms in place to facilitate it. Tesla understands that dropping tens of thousands of dollars on a new car is a big deal, and it expects that the majority of its consumers need help making the final purchase decision. It allows the shopper to begin customizing a new car online, but then encourages a visit to a showroom where the buyer can complete the process with a Tesla expert.

Pursuing the Next Purchase

Your efforts have paid off, and the purchase has been made! Now, you need to recognize this purchase and tie it back to all your engagement strategies. Did it happen online or in a store? What were the influential factors, and what ultimately closed the deal? Having a full understanding of all these individual pieces of data can help you to continue engaging your consumer by providing valuable content that is relevant to her.

Conclusion

The world of retail has changed and will continue to do so. As new technologies, social platforms, and even consumer behaviors emerge, brands will have to keep up, keep ahead, and pay attention to what is and isn't working for their audience. Today, mobile, personalization, and content are key ingredients in the purchase path. Tomorrow it may be wearables, drone delivery, or something not dreamed up yet. But this is why we're here, and this is what we love about the crazy world of commerce—it's always changing. Stay thirsty my friends!



LET'S TALK

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