Reimagining Commerce: Principles of Standout Digital Shopping Experiences

An in-depth look at the trends, tactics and technologies guiding brands and retailers in the age of experience-driven commerce

Digital commerce is reaching critical mass in 2019. While there has always been a natural uptick in how often people shop online, consumers' digital habits have started to stabilize. Twenty-six percent of online consumers currently shop online at least weekly, according to a survey of more than 4,500 global online shoppers. This is just a small increase from last year's Reimagining Commerce report, which found that 23 percent of online consumers shop online at this frequency.

So, what's next?

The plateau effect in digital commerce leaves companies with a clear mandate to improve or get left behind.

The quality and diversity of digital commerce experiences play an even greater role in the struggle to stand out and earn customer loyalty. To understand just how valuable innovative online shopping experiences are, consider today's commerce environment. Leaders like Amazon have perfected seamless transactions, leaving fewer opportunities for differentiation via investments in this area. At the same time, traditional retailers are using technology to improve the customer experience and deliver new perks through sophisticated loyalty programs, bridging the online, in-store gap.

The average shopper's path to purchase is more complex than ever, filled with a wide variety of capabilities and attractions popularized by digital-native brands. Vying for consumers' attention and wallet share will only grow more difficult as additional players enter the fray, further congesting an already crowded digital shopping ecosystem.

To get ahead, brands and retailers must implement dynamic, integrated content marketing and customer experience strategies that forge personal, emotional connections with shoppers beyond transactions. The following report offers principles to achieve standout, experience-driven commerce that converts consumers into customers and buyers into brand advocates.

Key Findings

- **Final purchases require guidance**
  Just one-in-five online consumers (20 percent) say all of their online purchases are pre-planned.

- **Seamless transactional experiences are the standard**
  Online shoppers report that the top three capabilities/features brands and retailers should support include free shipping (67 percent), shipping tracking (61 percent) and information about returns (52 percent).

- **Personalization meets privacy**
  Although 88 percent of online shoppers say it is the same or higher priority for brands and retailers to offer personalized experiences online in 2019 compared to 2018, more (93 percent) say it is the same or higher priority for companies to respect their anonymity online.

- **Digital commerce overwhelms consumers**
  Half of online shoppers (46 percent) have failed to complete a purchase online because there were too many options to choose from. One-in-10 online shoppers view an item five or more times before making an online purchase, adding to feelings of always-on commerce.

- **Ineffective content has major consequences**
  Incorrect or incomplete content on a brand's website and/or mobile app has stopped 98 percent of online shoppers from completing a purchase.

- **Social media drives engagement and purchases**
  Fifty-two percent of online shoppers who use social media have clicked on an influencer's post, and a third of those shoppers (31 percent) have made a direct purchase from the post.

- **Marketplaces are online shoppers' top destination**
  Online shoppers flock to marketplaces to start their online purchase journeys, whether they have a product in mind for purchase (46 percent) or not (39 percent).

- **Voice technology grows in popularity**
  Seventeen percent of online shoppers use voice devices to make purchases multiple times a month or more frequently, and 22 percent use the technology for research purposes in the same time frame.

Focus on the journey, not the destination

Online shoppers look to brands and retailers for guidance first, purchases second

Perhaps the most important role brands and retailers play in online shoppers' lives is serving as a source of inspiration and information. **Eighty-three percent of online shoppers intend to do something other than make a purchase when visiting a brand's website for the first time.** This behavior remains static from last year's report, where the same number of online shoppers (17 percent) said purchase was their primary motivation.

It is unlikely this trend will ever change dramatically. Shoppers will always crave reassurances they are making the right purchase decisions, and research and comparison are well-established milestones along the path to final purchase. Considering that just 20 percent of online shoppers say all of their online purchases are pre-planned, brands and retailers must get behind consumers' instinct to browse now and buy later.

Online shoppers' reluctance to purchase first creates a greater need for brands and retailers to penetrate consumers' lifestyles. Companies must develop strategies to better understand customer behaviors and preferences, and factor in big-picture information (e.g., a shopper's likes, dislikes, timely pop culture events, lifestyle trends) rather than transactional information alone (e.g., purchasing and browsing history). **Leading with relevant, educational content and experiences allows brands and retailers to build relationships with shoppers and become part of their everyday realities.** Furniture, cosmetics and apparel companies, for example, can situate themselves within larger lifestyle moments, naturally positioning products as part of customer conversations and purchasing considerations.

A growing emphasis on corporate responsibility also offers brands and retailers a powerful avenue to earn customer loyalty beyond transactions. Two-thirds of consumers (66 percent) say it is important for brands to take public stands on social and political issues. Every touchpoint represents an opportunity for companies to communicate their place in shoppers' communities and become more than just a vendor from which people buy merchandise. The issues a company stands for and lends its voice to create a positive connection in shoppers' lives, which can ultimately inspire brand loyalty and purchases.

Online shoppers' primary purpose for visiting a brand's website for the first time

Searching for a product or service 33%

Comparing prices or other variables between brands 22%

Making a purchase 17%

Looking for store information (e.g., hours, location, contact information) 11%

Finding inspiration (e.g., style or usage guidance, direction from brands and retailers) 10%

Finding a dealer/reseller (i.e., someone who sells on a marketplace like eBay, Etsy, Facebook Marketplace) 6%

Episerver's Take

Massive opportunity exists for brands and retailers that develop experience-driven commerce models centered on information and inspiration, rather than conversion. It is expected that companies think about their bottom lines as part of the overall commerce equation — it would be irresponsible if they did not. However, digital experiences must focus on more than products and a sales strategy, and should relate to consumers on personal, emotional levels. Transactions are a byproduct of great, experience-driven shopping engagements, not vice versa.

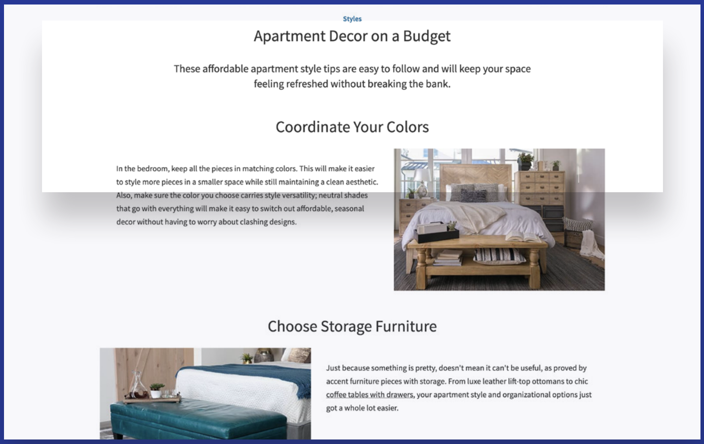
Key Takeaway

Leading with relevant, educational content and experiences allows brands and retailers to build relationships with shoppers and become part of their everyday realities.

In Real Life

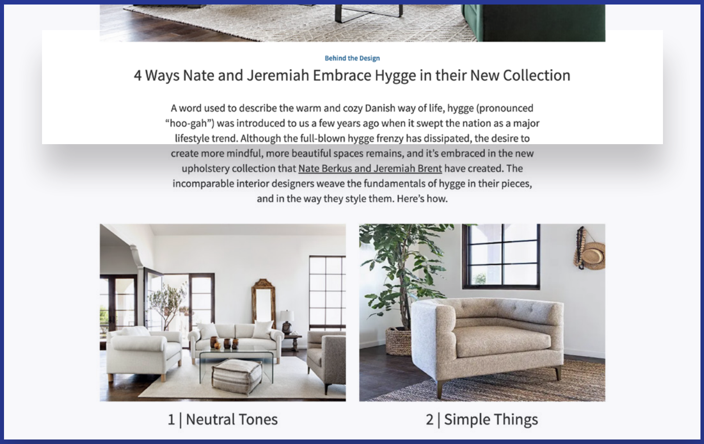
Living Spaces: Furniture company

LIVING SPACES



Creative, educational content

An entire tab dedicated to inspiration puts new ideas and advice into the hands of every shopper. Style features, decor tips, how-to articles and more teach shoppers about a diverse range of topics, from apartment decor on a budget to how to clean leather furniture. Shopping basics also walk consumers through less familiar terms and concepts.

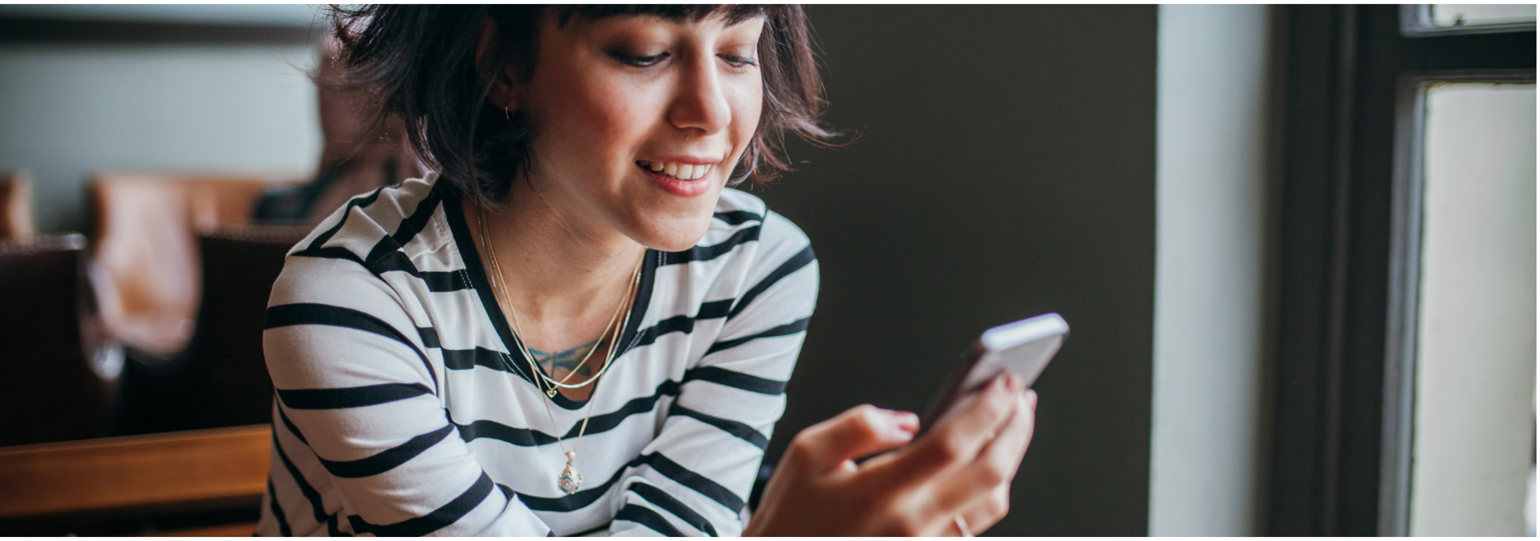


An insider's look

Behind the design columns offer shoppers a closer look at product offerings and exclusive access to celebrity designers like Joanna Gaines and Nate + Jeremiah. Customer reviews featured across the site add extra color to the shopping experience and provide an honest perspective on potential purchases.

How it has benefited Living Spaces

An emphasis on relevant, educational content helps Living Spaces promote experience-driven commerce strategies that go beyond transactions. By focusing on inspiration and information first, Living Spaces builds valued-based loyalty with shoppers and can guide them toward the perfect purchase when they are ready to buy.



Dive into experience-driven commerce

Seamless transactions are table stakes, and shoppers value unique digital experiences

Online shoppers have little tolerance for ineffective or clunky purchasing experiences. Consumers expect reliable sites and easy ordering and fulfillment, in large part because of the elevated transactional experiences digital commerce leaders like Amazon, Walmart and others have proven possible.

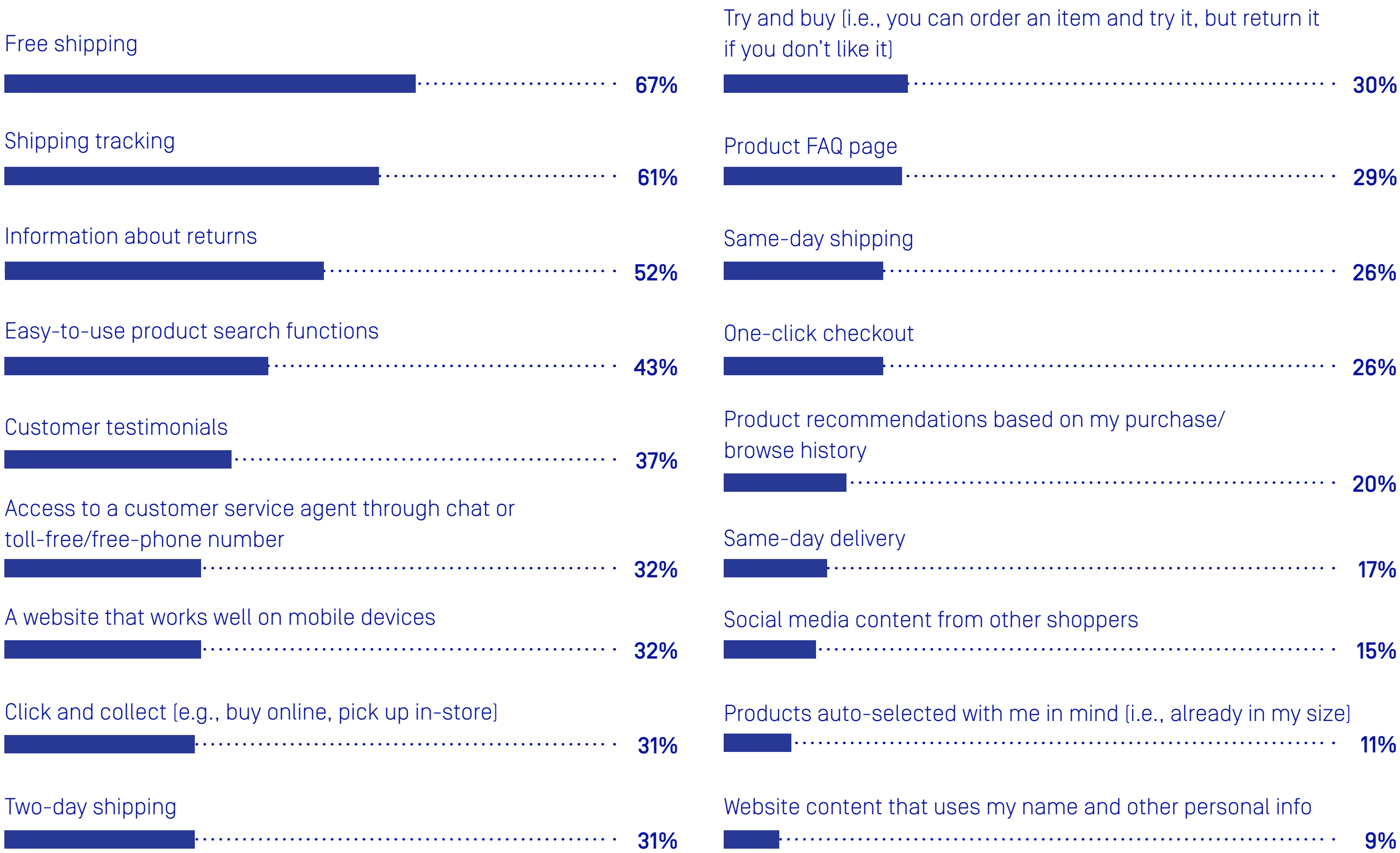
Expectations for seamless experiences were not always this high. At the advent of digital commerce, shoppers spent a great deal of money on shipping fees and waited weeks to receive an order. Marketplaces ramped up transactional expectations, which should not shock anyone who has made a recent Amazon purchase. **When shopping online, 61 percent of consumers prefer marketplaces (Amazon and others) for their price options, and over half (58 percent) for their product selections.**

Not surprisingly, free shipping, shipping tracking and information about returns are the top three capabilities/services online shoppers expect brands and retailers to offer. Online shoppers **seek out digital experiences that are on par with what is available from a physical retailer: zero fees for receiving a product, complete knowledge of when their purchase will arrive and access to no-fuss returns.** Now that there is an almost universal expectation for seamless experiences online, brands and retailers must push into experience-driven commerce territory to stand out.

There is an important distinction here. An emphasis on experience-driven commerce has not diminished the importance of factors like convenience, selection, search and price to shoppers. Rather, brands and retailers must master these capabilities to even earn shoppers' consideration, and then go beyond them to differentiate from competitors. Consumers go where they can receive the most seamless, memorable experience, not just the best price or delivery options.

"Brands and retailers must push into experience-driven commerce territory to stand out."

Capabilities/services online shoppers expect brands and retailers to offer



Episerver's Take

Online presence is not enough. Consider Murdoch's Ranch & Home Supply: While the modern mercantile could settle for just listing inventory on its website, the company instead offers features like clearly outlined fulfillment policies and intuitive search functions to create seamless, value-added customer experiences. Today's commerce environment requires a level of innovation that goes beyond digitized inventory and product catalogs, and that works across all online channels. Inspiration, service and content curation are all experience-based areas where brands and retailers can innovate to earn customer loyalty and preference — after offering seamless transactions, of course.

Bring consistent content front and center

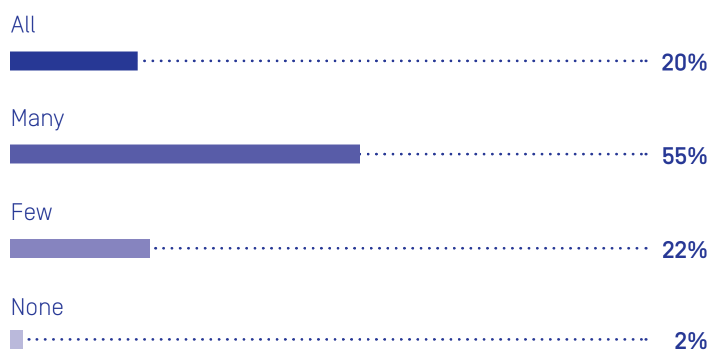
Strategic content marketing is a nurture tool, not an afterthought

With purchase rarely shoppers' primary goal, and with standards for seamless transactions so high, content represents the key differentiator for brands and retailers to earn business.

Online shoppers may turn to popular marketplaces and retail giants for perks like low prices, but they appreciate how brands and retailers can offer memorable, educational content experiences. For example, when shopping with brands and retailers via their websites, 26 percent of online consumers enjoy a company's product information most, compared to just 11 percent for Amazon.

Personalized content experiences enable brands and retailers to really shine. Just two percent of online shoppers say none of their online purchases are pre-planned, and **tailored content can help shoppers on a mission find what they are looking for and feel confident making a final purchase.** There are many content strategies companies can try out, such as user-generated posts featuring an outfit-of-the-day (#OOTD), personalized offerings based on past purchase/browsing behavior and AR/VR experiences.

The number of online purchases online shoppers say are pre-planned



"When shopping with brands and retailers via their websites, 26 percent of online consumers enjoy a company's product information most, compared to just 11 percent for Amazon."

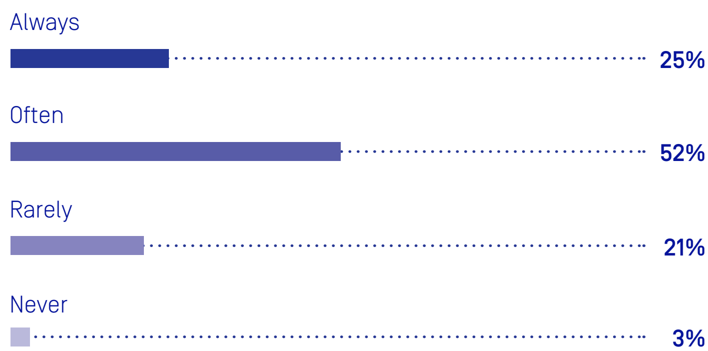
Likewise, lookbooks, video tutorials and more can support shoppers who are not so sure what they want to purchase.

Content marketing efforts cannot be haphazard. Brands and retailers must approach content marketing with a clear strategy for scaling and delivering experiences that are relevant to shoppers' personal needs, primary goal on a first visit and, then later, position in the buying cycle.

Consistent content experiences are especially important. Across the board for all types of product categories, online shoppers conduct research via multiple channels before making a purchase. **Regardless of where shoppers choose to engage a company, they should be able to trust the accuracy and completeness of the information they find.**

Disjointed content experiences result in major financial consequences. Consistent with findings from previous years, 98 percent of online shoppers say incorrect or incomplete content on a brand's website and/or mobile app has stopped them from completing a purchase, and a quarter (25 percent) say this always stops them. If every online shopper who has abandoned a cart because of poor content instead completed an order, brands and retailers could dramatically increase revenue. Considering that the average retail order value globally was $125.81 in 2018, brands leave an impressive amount of revenue unrealized due to ineffective digital content strategies.

How often incorrect/incomplete content on a brand's website and/or mobile app dissuades online shoppers from completing purchases



"Brands and retailers must approach content marketing with a clear strategy for scaling and delivering experiences that are relevant to shoppers' personal needs."

Episerver's Take

There is a greater need than ever for strategic top-of-funnel content marketing, as many shoppers require something other than price to buy from brands and retailers. Companies can rely on content marketing strategies to educate and nudge shoppers toward engagement or purchase. Although brands and retailers cannot completely replicate tactile in-store experiences online, robust visual and textual descriptions supplement this information-seeking process. When content is also user generated, inspirational and connected to a customer's personal life, companies can win over all types of shoppers.

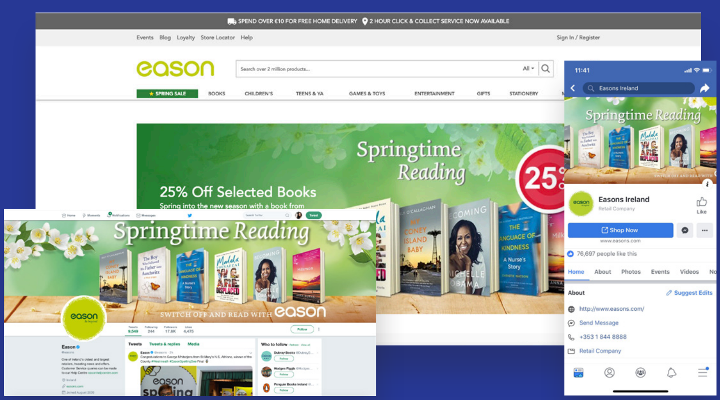
Key Takeaway

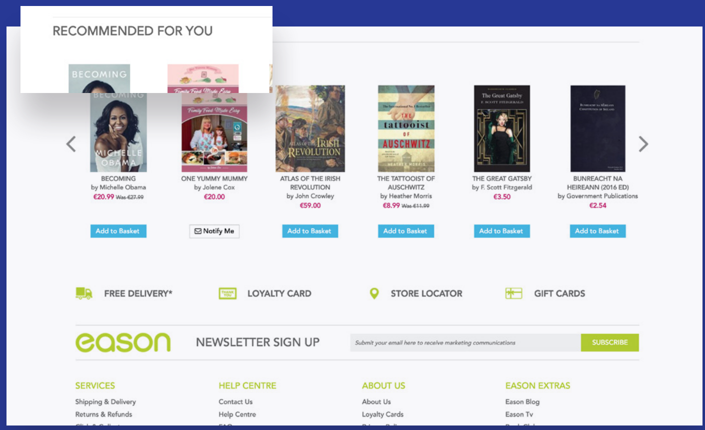
Regardless of where online shoppers choose to engage a company, they should be able to trust the accuracy and completeness of the information they find.

In Real Life

Eason: Book, magazine and newspaper retailer

eason





Consistent messaging across channels

No matter where a shopper engages, Eason's content and digital commerce experiences are always consistent. Uniform content (e.g., product categories, images, campaign promotions) guides shoppers toward final purchases across all channels, including email, social, website and more. Surprises originate from new deals and products, never content discrepancies or roadblocks.

Personalized recommendations

Eason offers personalized book recommendations based on a user's profile. This adds an extra layer of consistent content where shoppers can see that the brand uses the information they have shared previously to enhance their future experiences. Personalized recommendations also mimic interactions with sales associates, which helps bring the in-store experience online.

How it has benefited Eason

Focusing on consistent content experiences across channels means Eason can provide consumers with relevant, trustworthy information at every touchpoint. Eason improves content as it learns more about its shoppers, which ensures all interactions are up-to-date and valuable so that a lack of information never stands in the way of rich commerce experiences.

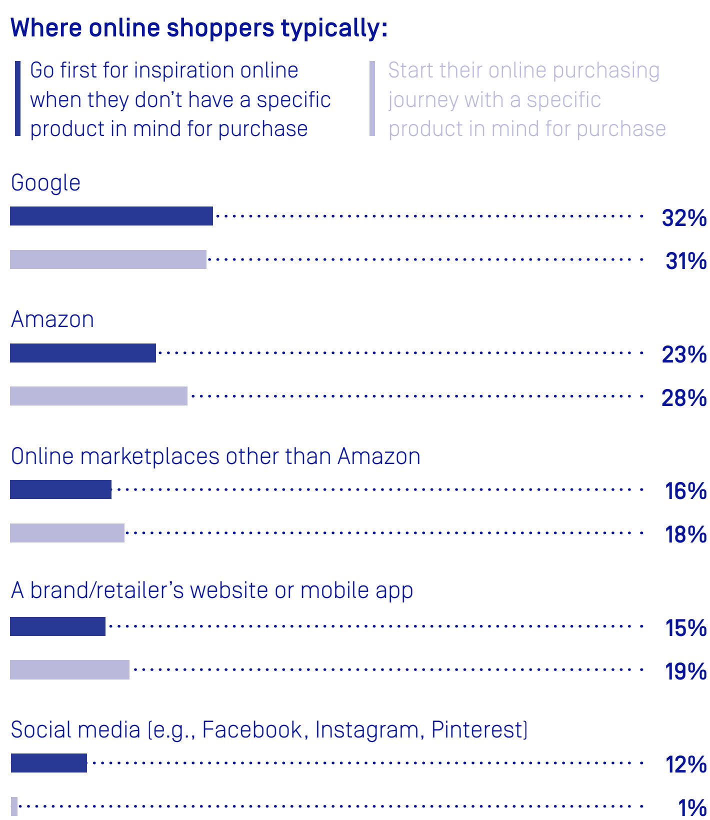
Differentiate intent versus browsing

Knowing what shoppers want helps deliver the digital experiences they deserve

A closer look at where shoppers go for various scenarios online helps brands and retailers earn more business moving forward.

Regardless of a shopper's mindset, marketplaces are the top destination. **The largest group of online shoppers with a product in mind for purchase (46 percent) start their online purchase journey at a marketplace (Amazon included)**, and marketplaces remain a popular first touchpoint for online shoppers without a product in mind for purchase (39 percent). Google is also a top destination for shoppers beginning an online purchase, whether or not they have a product in mind to buy.

Brands and retailers garner a good deal of traffic, too, but unfortunately not at the same rate as their digital-first competitors. **Just 19 percent of online shoppers with a product in mind for purchase start their journey with a brand or retailer (website or mobile app)**, and even fewer seek out brands and retailers when they do not have a product in mind for purchase.



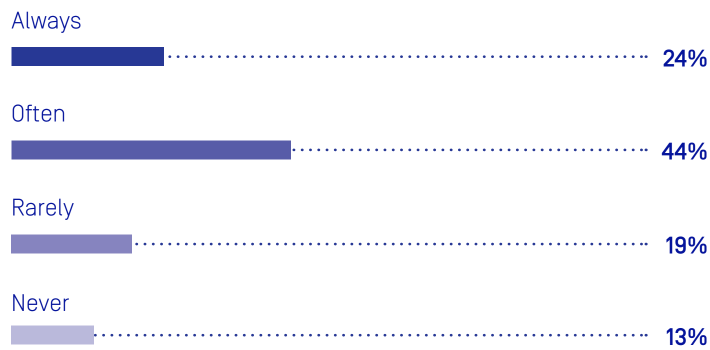
The fact that shoppers lean toward Amazon and Google when doing business online may scare brands and retailers, but companies can combat these trends.

While it is important to highlight pricing and the features shoppers go to marketplaces and search engines to find, brands and retailers are never going to inspire consumers to purchase with information on product specifications alone. These details are, of course, important to offer because shoppers love to compare. In fact, **87 percent of online shoppers compare what they find on a brand or retailer's site to Amazon, demonstrating that this is a behavior brands and retailers cannot expect to change.**

Where brands and retailers can stand out is by tailoring personal messages to each shopper. For example, companies can adopt content marketing approaches that cater to a shopper's unique state of mind based on how frequently he or she shops online. Frequent shoppers follow a less defined path to purchase, and a need to compare options leaves them more open to influence. **Eighty percent of the most frequent online shoppers (those who shop online at least weekly) often or always compare what they find on a brand or retailer's site to Amazon.** Conversely, just 60 percent of the least frequent online shoppers (those who shop online at least every three months to a year) do the same, suggesting that when these shoppers go online, they are eager to follow a predetermined plan of attack.

It can be beneficial for brands and retailers to tailor content to distinct shopper personas. For instance, more frequent online shoppers, or "receptive shoppers," are better swayed away from marketplaces with content that offers personalized product recommendations and lifestyle insights. On the other hand, the least frequent online shoppers, or "focused buyers," appreciate content that streamlines or enhances the objectives they already have in mind. This could include content that demonstrates a product's diverse use cases, or unique promotions like an exclusive in-store event or a sales offering based on the weather in a shopper's current location.

How often online shoppers compare what they find on a brand or retailer's website to what's available on Amazon



Episerver's Take

Rather than offering a discount to keep users from checking Amazon prices, brands and retailers must earn loyalty by presenting products in unique ways, bolstering their overall company perception and offering benefits beyond price. Shoppers crave specific value propositions and unique messaging that make emotional, personal connections, which brands and retailers are in a unique position to deliver via experience-driven commerce strategies.

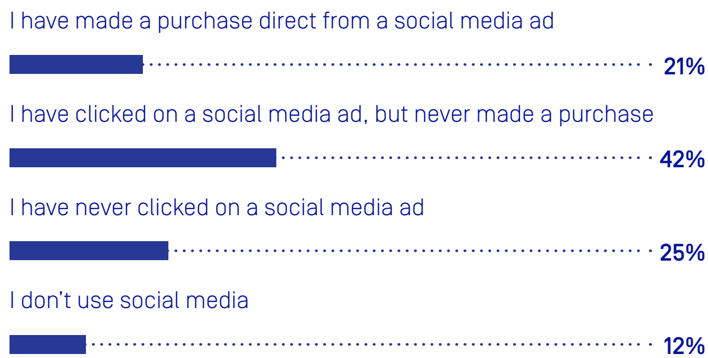
Go social, go now

Social media and influencers make a positive impact on brand-customer relationships

Social media provides a powerful channel where brands and retailers can reinforce experience-driven commerce strategies and advance powerful, personal connections with shoppers. More online shoppers (12 percent) go to social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest) than to a brand/retailer's website (11 percent) for inspiration when they do not have a specific product in mind for purchase. Shoppers' research habits underscore the importance of an omnichannel marketing approach. When used correctly — and equipped with the same excellent experiences shoppers would find elsewhere — social channels act as a positive, relationship-building extension of the overall company experience.

What's more, brands and retailers can use social interactions as purchase drivers, since engagement and conversion rates on the channel are high. Almost two-thirds of online shoppers (63 percent) have clicked on a social media ad, and 33 percent of those shoppers have gone on to make a direct purchase from the ad.

Online shoppers' relationships with social media advertisements (i.e., ads in Instagram and/or Facebook feed)



> **"Almost two-thirds of online shoppers (63 percent) have clicked on a social media ad."**

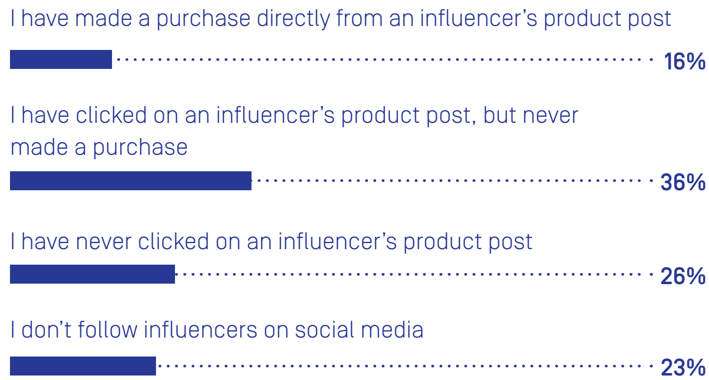
The same goes for influencer posts. The majority of online shoppers who use social media (52 percent) have clicked on an influencer's post, and a third of those shoppers (31 percent) have gone on to make a direct purchase from the post.

Younger shoppers are most swayed by social media channels, especially for research. **Twenty-one percent of online shoppers ages 37 and under turn to social media for inspiration online when they do not have a product in mind for purchase, compared to just five percent of online shoppers ages 38 and older.**

Beyond inspiration, younger consumers are also more willing to embrace social commerce. Seventy-eight percent of online shoppers ages 37 and under have clicked on a social media ad, and 34 percent of those shoppers have gone on to make a direct purchase. Comparatively, just half of online shoppers ages 38 and older (50 percent) have clicked on a social media ad, and 30 percent of those shoppers have gone on to make a direct purchase.

Although this generational divide is perhaps a result of younger shoppers making up a larger percentage of overall social media users, that does not diminish the opportunity available to brands and retailers that invest in strategic social content programs. **Companies can reach younger shoppers early via social touchpoints and build lifetime loyalty on a channel where competitors traditionally struggle.**

Online shoppers' relationships with product posts from influencers (i.e., influencer posts about a product or service in their blog and/or Instagram)



"Beyond inspiration, younger consumers are also more willing to embrace social commerce."

Episerver's Take

Social programs offer opportunities to grow relationships with shoppers via authentic interactions, to build long-term loyalty and to become a part of consumers' everyday lifestyles. Companies like Amazon lack a strong social presence, and brands and retailers that invest in social media strategies can use the channel to reach consumers before they even consider Amazon or other marketplaces. Then, companies can inspire shoppers first and play a dominant role in their research and education needs, driving traffic to branded experiences over time. Likewise, while Amazon offers an influencer program, brands and retailers' own influencer strategies can prove more effective with niche audiences.

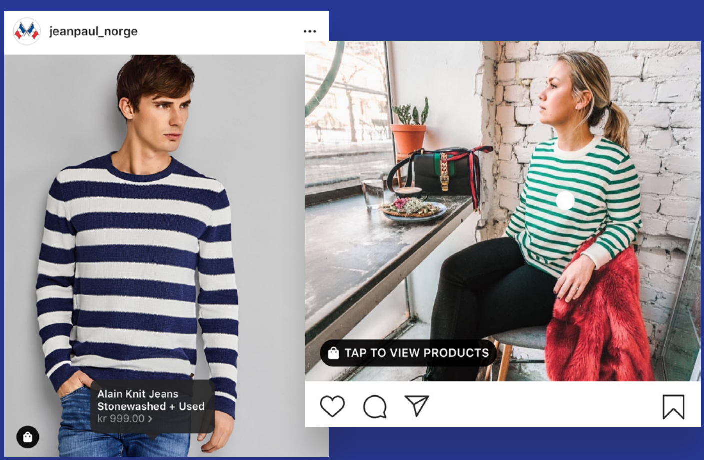
Key Takeaway

Companies can reach younger shoppers early on via social touchpoints and build lifetime loyalty on a channel where competitors traditionally struggle.

In Real Life

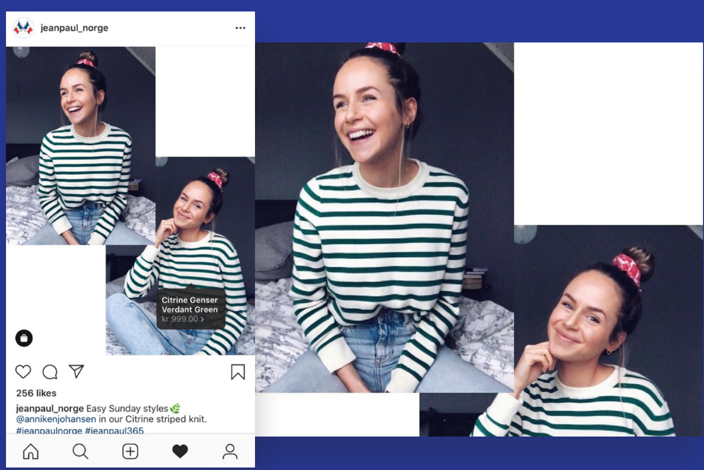
Jean Paul: Clothing company

JEAN PAUL



Shoppable moments

Jean Paul's Instagram posts include purchasing information for products featured in the pictures, such as blending user-generated content with shoppable links. This information empowers shoppers to seamlessly act on their inspiration, all without having to leave the social channel.



User-generated posts

Posts on Jean Paul's Instagram shine a spotlight on real customers (as well as influencers). User-generated content experiences offer shoppers a glimpse of what products look like in everyday life. Consumers can use #jeanpaulnorge to be featured and join the fun.

How it has benefited Jean Paul

Investments in a consistent, accessible social brand help Jean Paul pursue experience-driven commerce moments on the social channels shoppers — especially younger shoppers — love. Jean Paul uses high-quality and user-generated social content to inspire consumers and create memorable moments. Social content also helps shoppers imagine what products might look like as part of their personal lives in more authentic ways than traditional advertisements.

Keep voice investments realistic

Emerging channels like voice have a place in search, but not purchases yet

Compared to last year's report, more online shoppers are turning to voice generally for their commerce needs — researching and purchasing included. However, within the channel's growth, there is still a preference for voice research over voice purchase.

Last year, 12 percent of online shoppers used voice devices to research multiple times a month or more frequently, compared to 22 percent this year (a notable 83 percent growth in just one year). When it comes to buying via voice, just 17 percent of online shoppers make multiple voice purchases a month or more frequently, compared to 11 percent last year.

Voice purchases are growing in popularity, but the channel has yet to make a major impact for brands and retailers as a purchasing add-on. The majority of online shoppers (55 percent) report that the presence of voice purchasing does not impact which brand or retailer they will buy from. When voice does influence perception, more shoppers see the technology as a purchase deterrent than driver.

The jury is still out on whether users will ever fully embrace a purchase avenue where they can neither see nor touch products — a major roadblock for voice. Brands and retailers can develop education and content around voice's purchasing capabilities to bridge a crucial gap in the overall customer journey.

Online shoppers' sentiment toward voice-enabled devices

I am **more** likely to buy from brands and retailers that offer voice purchasing than from brands and retailers that do not 10%

I am **equally** likely to buy from brands and retailers that offer voice purchasing and from brands and retailers that do not 55%

I am **less** likely to buy from brands and retailers that offer voice purchasing than from brands and retailers that do not 35%

This onboarding process will help online shoppers resolve their voice-related hesitations long term, which are currently led by a lack of security features (43 percent). In the meantime, **companies should promote voice as a search tool and implement the technology in areas that empower excellent research experiences.**

To drum up excitement, brands and retailers should also offer voice capabilities in scenarios that have the potential to make the greatest impact. Repeat purchases are a good example of this. Voice-activated devices are a more attractive option for frequent shoppers. Seventy-four percent of the most frequent online shoppers (those who shop online at least weekly) report they are equally or more likely to buy from brands/retailers that offer voice purchasing, compared to 59 percent of the least frequent online shoppers (those who shop online at least every three months to a year).

This trend surfaces a useful application for voice as a driver of repeat purchases over first-time purchases. When introducing an emerging technology like voice, brands and retailers should balance new commerce experiences to delight frequent shoppers with more traditional applications (i.e., researching) to maintain relationships with less frequent shoppers.

Factors that will stop online shoppers from making more purchases via voice-enabled devices (e.g., Alexa, Google Home) in 2019

Episerver's Take

Companies like Google and Amazon have popularized voice-activated devices as technologies designed for purchasing. However, purchase is rarely the best application of voice solutions for brands and retailers interested in delivering authentic experiences and cultivating long-term shopper loyalty. Connect with shoppers when adding new, technology-driven experiences, and base future investment plans and strategies on input from target audiences, not what is popular elsewhere.

Avoid indecision?

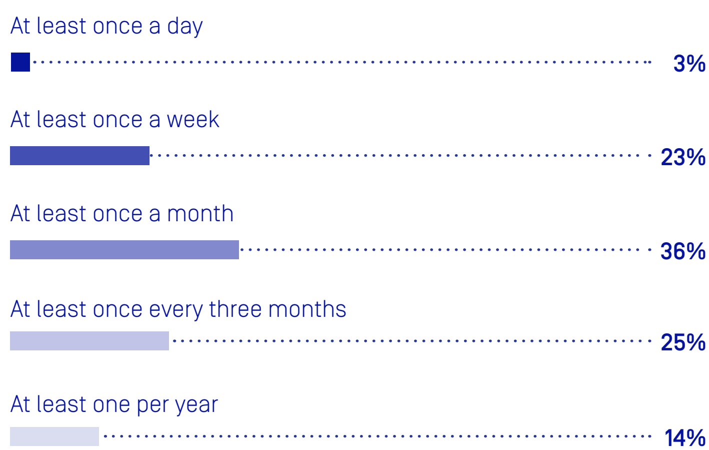
An overwhelming digital commerce world requires a smoother path to purchase

With browsing and buying constant phases of the commerce journey, it is no surprise shoppers often find themselves in a state of indecision.

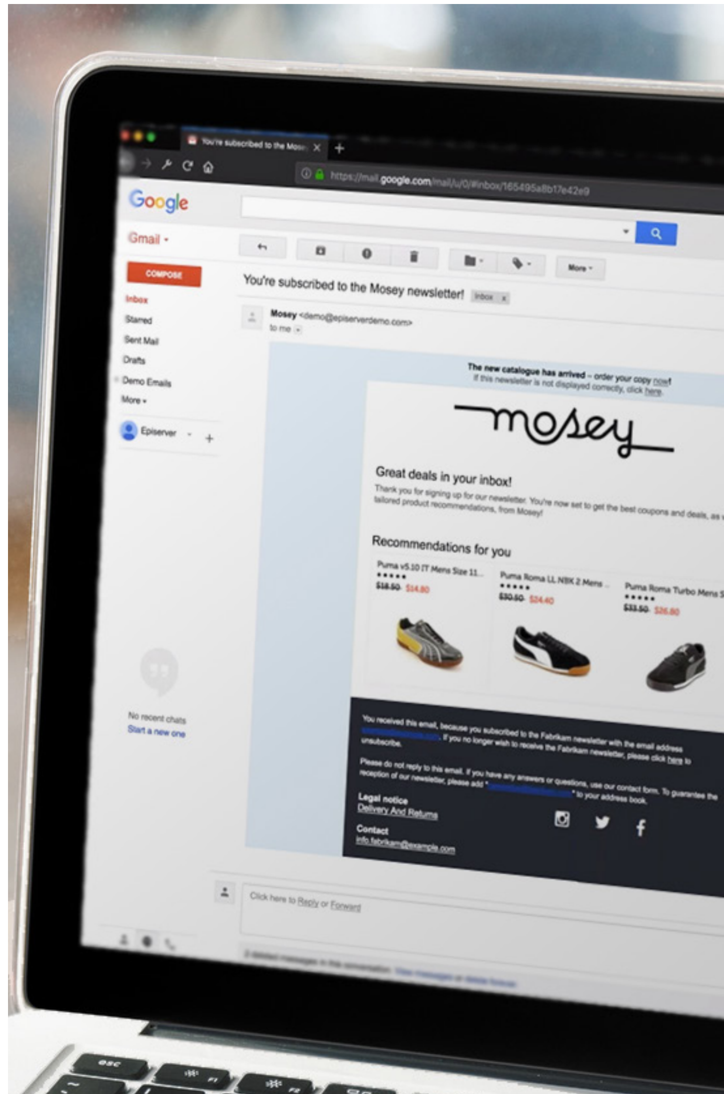
A quarter of online shoppers (26 percent) shop online at least weekly, and 62 percent shop online at least monthly. Widespread access to devices like smartphones empowers an always-on digital commerce environment. Already, one out of four online consumers (24 percent) research on their smartphones daily, and nearly half (47 percent) research multiple times per week. That is an amazing amount of access to brands and retailers, which can feel overwhelming at times.

In addition to researching at a high frequency, **shoppers feel overwhelmed by the number of options they encounter when browsing.** Half of online shoppers (46 percent) have failed to complete a purchase online because there were too many options to choose from.

How often online shoppers shop online (e.g., on desktop, mobile, smart devices)



"Shoppers feel overwhelmed by the number of options they encounter when browsing."



Brands and retailers have a responsibility — and frankly a lot to gain — when they help combat shopper indecision. **The best strategy for accomplishing this involves streamlined digital commerce experiences that enable easier access to information and faster decision making.** A multi-step commerce journey is now common. On average across a range of product types, a third of online shoppers (35 percent) look at an item three or more times before making an online purchase. One in 10 online shoppers look at an item five or more times before purchase.

To mitigate the risk of overwhelming customers online, brands and retailers must intentionally decide how and when they reach out to shoppers. For channels with high adoption rates, brands and retailers must take care to avoid inundating customers with brand communications. Ninety-five percent of online shoppers use email, for example, making it the communication channel with the highest adoption rate (compared to text/SMS, social media, phone, brand/retailer mobile apps, social messaging apps and push notifications). Email offers companies immense access to target audiences, but communications on the channel can quickly feel overwhelming or generic if not tempered. **Intentional interactions help brands and retailers break through the noise of today's digital commerce journey.**

Episerver's Take

With shoppers frequently hitting so many touchpoints prior to purchase, brands and retailers must maintain relationships with relevant, consistent content at every interaction opportunity. For example, consumers who are on a return visit may respond best to messaging that encourages them toward purchase, while companies can leverage social and email to re-engage shoppers after abandoned visits. Strategic content marketing programs help shoppers tackle the plethora of choices they encounter online, and ensure every engagement includes information shoppers desire based on factors like their personal interests or number of visits.

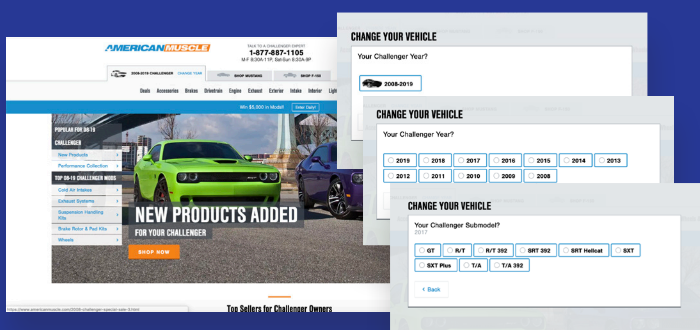
Key Takeaway

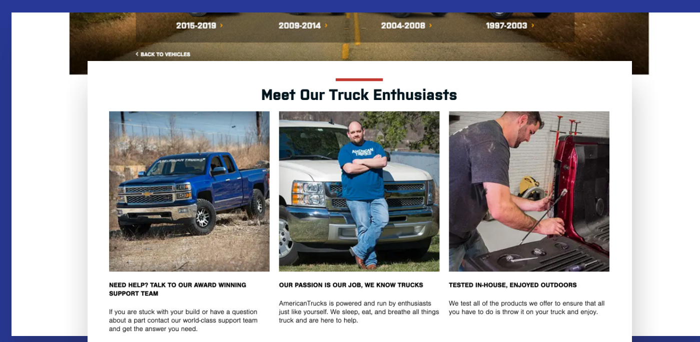
Brands and retailers have a responsibility — and frankly a lot to gain — when they help combat shopper indecision. The best strategy for accomplishing this involves streamlined digital commerce experiences that enable easier access to information and faster decision making.

In Real Life

American Muscle: Automotive parts and accessories retailer

AMERICANMUSCLE





Hyper-personalized browsing

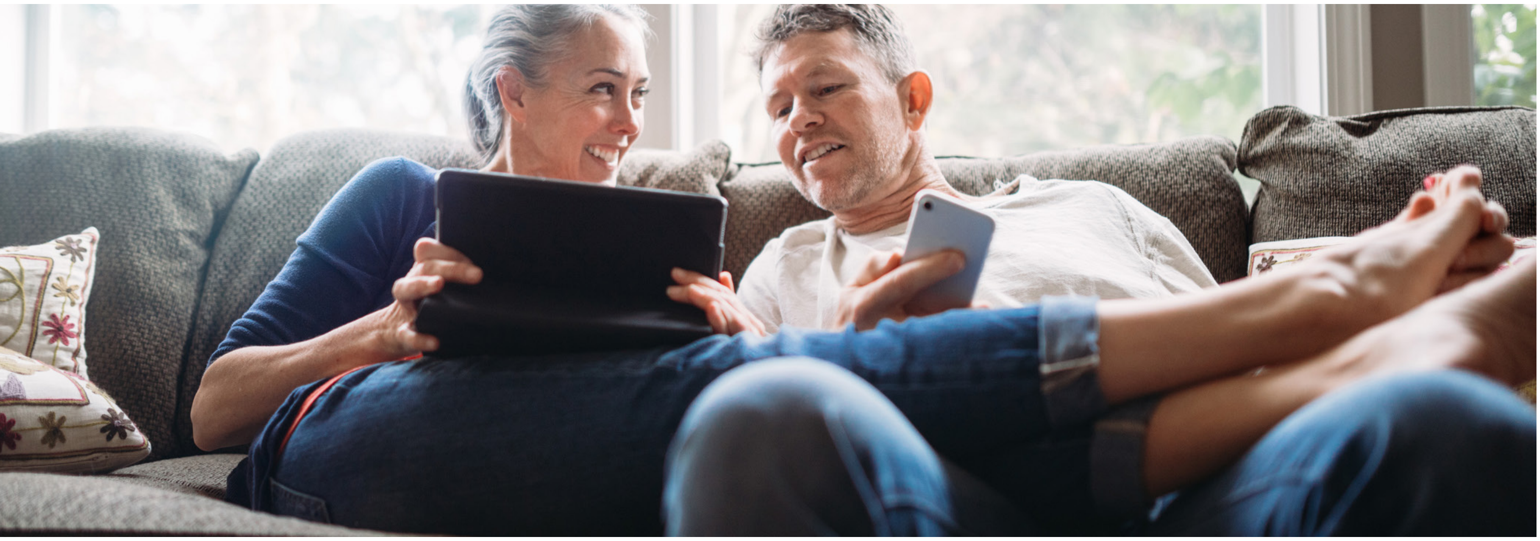
Easy-to-answer questions featured at the top of the American Muscle homepage create a custom browsing experience based on each shopper's unique car interests. Using a shopper's answers, all website content (including search functionalities) updates to include specific make and model details, from popular product categories and searches to educational articles and deals.

Access to support

American Muscle promotes contact information that connects shoppers with additional support and guidance. Again, customer service information is personalized based on the unique make and model details shoppers specify. Consumers can trust they will have access to experts who can help streamline their shopping experience based on their particular desires.

How it has benefited American Muscle

American Muscle refines every aspect of the digital commerce experience based on each shopper's unique needs — down to a specific car make, model, engine, year and color. Such high attention to personalization ensures shoppers do not feel overwhelmed when browsing through inventory and content that might otherwise be difficult to sort through online, increasing the chances of purchase.



Personalize, but with privacy in mind

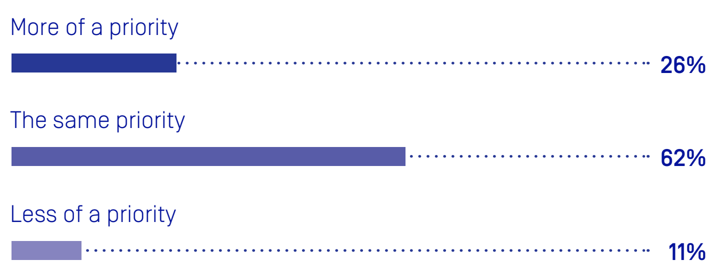
Personalization and privacy combine to build shopper loyalty and business

There is little doubt that shoppers crave personalization, and for good reason. Personalized experiences solve for a range of digital commerce roadblocks. It is no surprise that the majority of online shoppers (88 percent) say it is the same or higher priority for brands and retailers to offer personalized experiences online in 2019 compared to 2018.

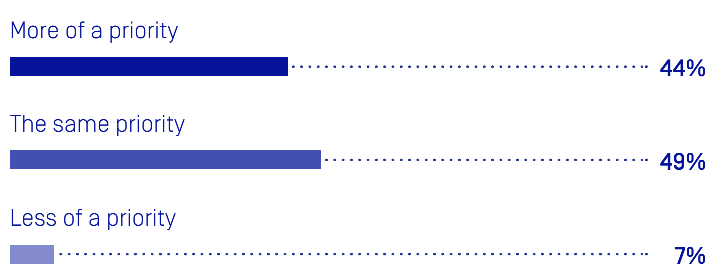
However, in an era of security breaches and growing distrust about the way companies handle personal data, anonymity and privacy play more dominant roles in shoppers' psyches and buying decisions. An even greater number of online shoppers (93 percent) say it is the same or higher priority for brands and retailers to respect their anonymity online in 2019 compared to 2018.

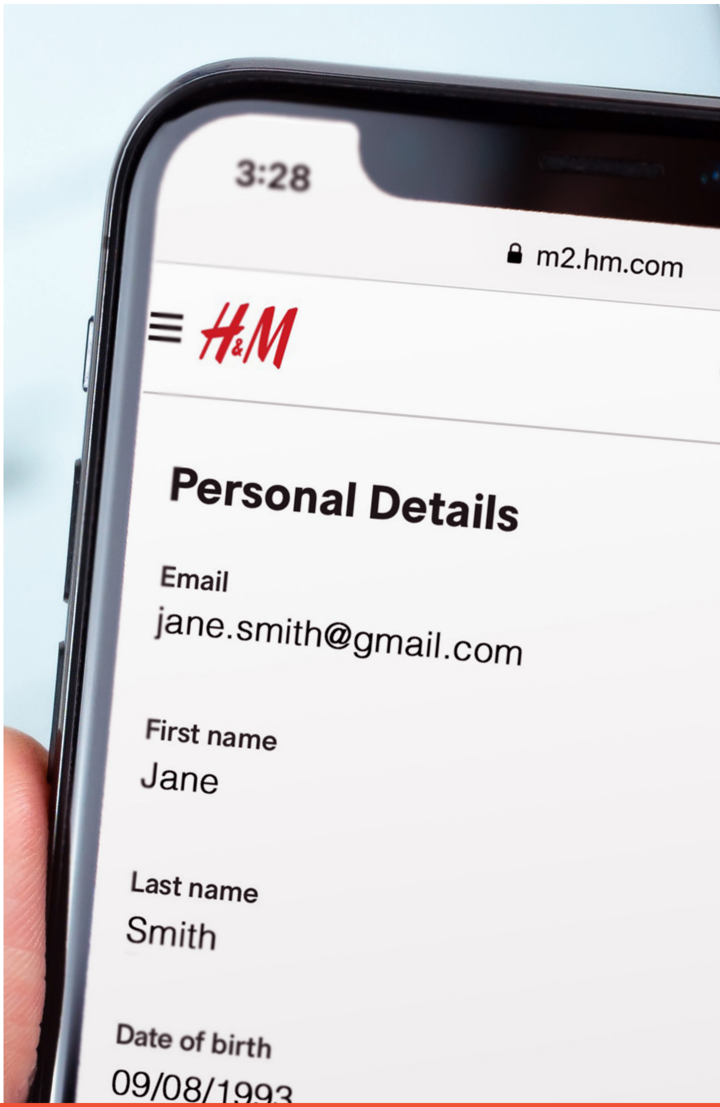
Demand for privacy has not reduced the need for personalization strategies. Rather, it has added another layer to the way brands and retailers should go about offering shoppers unique online experiences.

How much of a priority online shoppers say it is for brands and retailers to offer personalized experiences online in 2019 compared to 2018



How much of a priority online shoppers say it is for brands and retailers to respect their anonymity online in 2019 compared to 2018



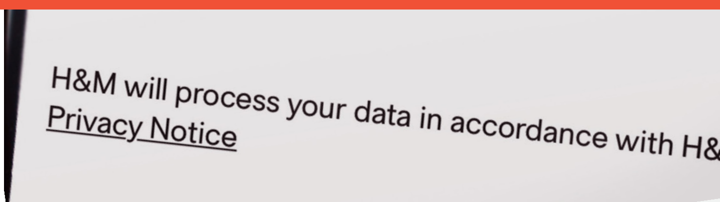


Data privacy is key to winning over consumers' hearts and minds, even when using shoppers' personal information to improve their experiences. **To deliver more tailored, personalized interactions while still respecting shoppers' desires for security, brands and retailers must inform shoppers about their privacy practices and strategies with greater transparency.** This can look like generating more content that better educates consumers on how their personal information is used and stored, as well as who has access to it. Or brands and retailers can default to opt-in experiences and never use shoppers' personal information without explicit permission, or let consumers be forgotten as is now law in the European Union.

There is also a need for brands and retailers to be more selective about when they incorporate personal information into shoppers' experiences. Not every interaction needs to be individualized, and **reserving personalized tactics for the most important communications and moments can help shoppers feel like brands and retailers are using their personal information judicially.**

Episerver's Take

Striking a balance between personalization and privacy goes a long way with online shoppers. By better educating consumers about how their data is used and stored, brands and retailers can turn their security strategies and investments into a point of differentiation. Not only does transparency build trust and loyalty with shoppers, but it also soothes privacy concerns that stand in the way of consumer receptivity to personalized experiences, an advantage that can help boost purchases over time.



Putting it all together

For brands and retailers in the age of experience-driven commerce, progress can feel like a never-ending battle. Finding digital commerce success is like Sisyphus rolling his rock up the hill — just when you make it to the top, the landscape changes and you are back at the bottom.

It does not have to be that way. While brands and retailers have plenty of new roadblocks to contend with, robust content marketing programs powered by smart technology investments allow companies to turn potential headaches into business wins.

Along the way, companies can ensure they:

- Develop experiences centered on **inspiration and education**, rather than conversion
- Master seamless transactions, and then **evolve with emotional, curated experiences**
- **Reinforce engagements** with tailored, strategic top-of-funnel content marketing
- Greet shoppers with **consistent, relevant experiences** at every touchpoint
- **Grow authentic, everyday relationships** on the channels shoppers love
- Offer new technology-driven experiences with **customers at the center**
- Use **strategic, timely content interactions** to overcome digital commerce's many choices
- Invite consumers into **personalization and privacy practices**

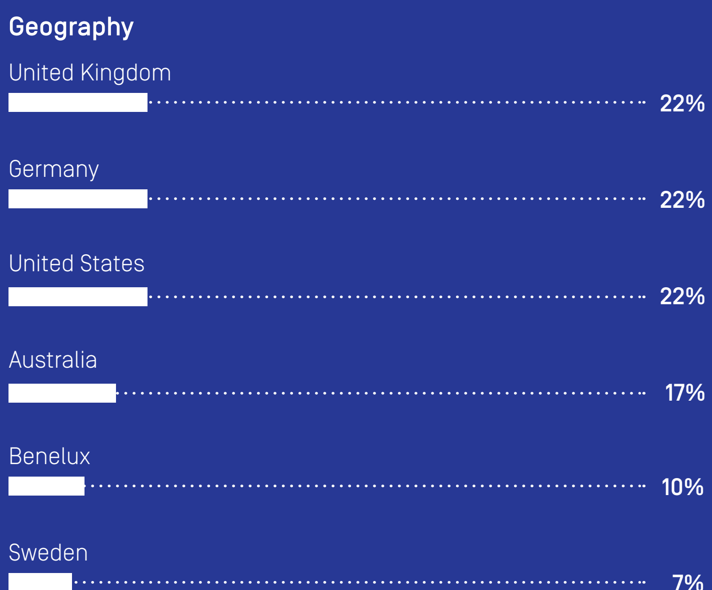
By following the principles outlined in this report, brands and retailers can develop standout experience-driven commerce that builds loyalty and ultimately drives purchases. This approach is how companies can avoid getting left behind as online shopping frequencies plateau and competition increases.

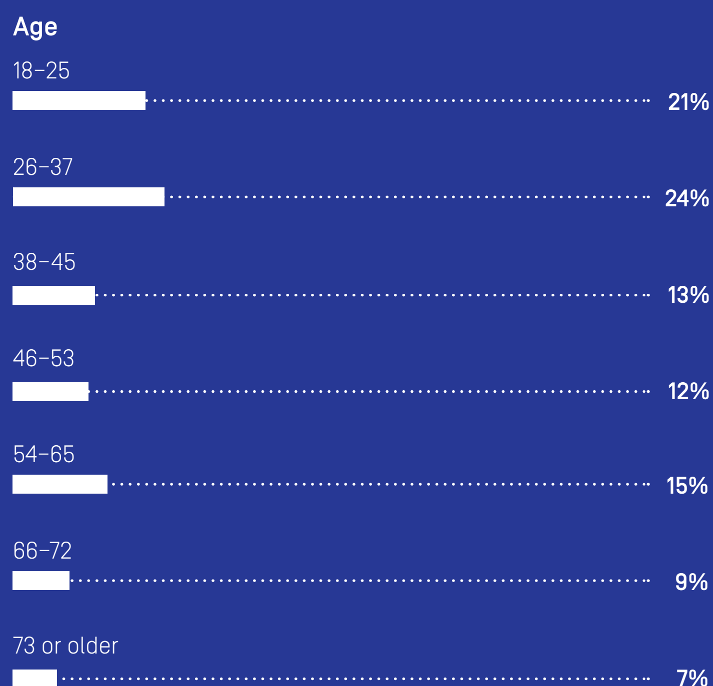
Methodology

The “Reimagining Commerce: Principles of Standout Digital Shopping Experiences” report explores the desires, behaviors and common trends of over 4,500 global online shoppers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Australia. Respondents have shopped online (e.g., via desktop, mobile, smart devices) in the past year, and the survey was conducted between December 2018 and January 2019.

The “Reimagining Commerce: Global Findings” report, referenced herein, surveyed 4,028 global consumers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway who had shopped online in the past year, and was conducted in November 2017.

Respondents from the “Reimagining Commerce: Principles of Standout Digital Shopping Experiences” report are broken down as follows:





Graphs included throughout this report may not add up to 100 percent since exact percentages were rounded to whole numbers.

United States
Marketplace shoppers

U.S. shoppers' online preferences and habits are largely defined by capabilities popularized by Amazon and other digital-first retailers. Online consumers in the U.S. already expect seamless, personalized digital commerce experiences, and anything short of excellence leaves them disappointed.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in the U.S. include:

- **Security**

  U.S. online shoppers have been quick to embrace digital shopping conveniences and the personalized experiences that come from sharing more data online. However, consumers in the U.S. are increasingly concerned about digital security.

  High-profile breaches like Cambridge Analytica have created even more anxiety around U.S. consumers' privacy. U.S. online shoppers still crave personalized experiences, and 33 percent say it is more important for brands and retailers to provide personalized experiences in 2019 than in 2018. Interest in individualization is outpaced by privacy concerns though. Half of U.S. online shoppers (50 percent) believe it is more important for brands and retailers to respect their anonymity this year compared to last year.

  U.S. shoppers' privacy reservations carry over to emerging solutions, too. Forty-nine percent of U.S. online consumers say they will not make more purchases via voice-enabled devices in 2019 because of the lack of security features.

- **Amazon-like experiences**

  U.S. online shoppers are driven by convenience and turn to Amazon for features like fast shipping and low prices, or to brands and retailers that offer similar services.

  Forty-four percent of U.S. online shoppers who already have a product in mind for purchase start their journey with Amazon. U.S. online shoppers report high expectations for hallmarks of the Amazon experience, such as free shipping (75 percent) and two-day shipping (44 percent). They also have an above-average interest in seeing products auto-selected with them in mind.

  As a component of convenient digital commerce experiences, U.S. online shoppers want to quickly find the best deal. This is a main reason why U.S. consumers start their searches with Amazon — 41 percent of U.S. online shoppers say that when shopping via Amazon, they most enjoy the marketplace's price options. Price comparison plays an important role in the path to purchase, and a third of U.S. online shoppers (34 percent) always compare products they find on a brand or retailer's site to Amazon. Similarly, a quarter of U.S. online shoppers (24 percent) list price comparison as their primary purpose when visiting a brand's site for the first time.

- **Social media**

  Social media is a popular option for U.S. consumers, and brands and retailers can build out social strategies to differentiate themselves from competitors. A third of U.S. online shoppers (34 percent) who have clicked on a social media ad have gone on to make a direct purchase. Similarly, 35 percent of U.S. online shoppers who use social media and have clicked on an influencer's post have gone on to make a direct purchase.

The popularity of digital commerce leaders like Amazon has created a clear expectation for seamless transactional experiences and low prices in the U.S. Brands and retailers must master these areas (and do their best with pricing), but cannot expect to stand out and earn business for these efforts. Online shoppers in the U.S. desire — and are accustomed to — more. Improvements in areas like security and investments in newer channels like social can earn brands and retailers a competitive edge.

United Kingdom
Focused shoppers

U.K. online shoppers share many preferences and expectations with U.S. online shoppers, with slight variations. Like their U.S. counterparts, U.K. shoppers look for new experiences and capabilities, and they feel that both personalization and privacy matter. Social media shopping and voice technologies are on the rise, although U.K. consumers still avoid making purchases via these newer channels.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in the U.K. include:

- **Efficiency**

  U.K. online shoppers make frequent online purchases, and they prefer options that help them navigate the online shopping process faster, with minimal effort or pain.

  Seventy-nine percent of U.K. online consumers say that most or all of their online purchases are pre-planned. This suggests brands and retailers can make an impact with content strategies that direct shoppers toward the information and products they are looking for. Forty-nine percent of U.K. online consumers have given up on an online purchase because they had too many choices, which again implies an openness to support and guidance.

  Brands and retailers should strive to deliver efficient commerce experiences by channel. Now that a third of online shoppers in the U.K. (34 percent) make smartphone purchases multiple times per week or more frequently, there is a greater need for streamlined mobile offerings. For example, 33 percent of U.K. online shoppers expect brands and retailers to support one-click checkout.

- **Price comparison**

  Not surprisingly, price is a top concern for U.K. shoppers. Although this can pose a challenge when companies like Amazon offer low prices, brands and retailers must embrace the idea that price comparison is the new norm. Thirty-one percent of U.K. online shoppers always compare what they find on a brand or retailer's site to Amazon, demonstrating an interest in knowing they are getting the best deals. A further 50 percent of U.K. online shoppers often compare what they find on a brand or retailer's site to Amazon.

  Brands and retailers can help simplify this process by developing seamless experiences that make it easier for shoppers to compare products, and then bolstering that information with other types of personalized, emotional content.

- **Emerging solutions**

  U.K. shoppers are generally interested in commerce experiences powered by emerging solutions. A quarter of U.K. online shoppers (24 percent) use voice devices to research multiple times a month or more frequently, compared to just 20 percent who use voice at the same rate to complete purchases.

  As in the U.S., security remains a major barrier to voice adoption — 43 percent of U.K. online shoppers report that a lack of security features will stop them from making more voice purchases in 2019. Ease of use is also a top concern with voice, which reinforces the need for efficient commerce experiences. Thirty-four percent of U.K. online shoppers find it difficult to compare different products via voice, an issue that prohibits them from making more voice purchases in the future.

  Social is another avenue where brands and retailers can stand out with U.K. online shoppers. Sixty percent of online consumers in the U.K. have clicked on a social media ad, and 31 percent of those shoppers have gone on to make a direct purchase.

U.K. online shoppers are on a mission, and brands and retailers must develop digital commerce strategies that demonstrate a commitment to making consumers' lives easier. This involves refining content to help shoppers accomplish goals like price comparison, while also streamlining the entire commerce experience so consumers feel less overwhelmed by the process and options. Brands and retailers should maintain these principles in new engagement channels like social and voice. Otherwise, U.K. online shoppers will not sustain their early interest in these types of engagements.

Australia
Discerning shoppers

Although once considered behind the times in online shopping, Australia has quickly caught up to other geographies in terms of digital commerce. Australian consumers are developing a stronger taste for online shopping, and brands and retailers can earn their business by addressing needs specific to this part of the world.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in Australia include:

- **Increased online activity**

  Australian consumers are now frequent online shoppers, and greater access to the internet and commerce-enabled devices driving this trend. Eighty-five percent of Australians now have internet access, and there are 19.4 million mobile phone users in the country.

  With the rise of m-commerce in Australia, online consumers have started to shop online more often. Fifty-eight percent of online shoppers in Australia shop online at least monthly, and smartphones edge out desktop and laptops when completing weekly and daily purchases. Forty-three percent of Australian online shoppers use smartphones to complete a purchase at least multiple times a month, compared to 41 percent for laptops and 36 percent for desktop. Just 14 percent of online shoppers in Australia have made a purchase via voice.

- **Localization**

  Australian online shoppers prefer companies that streamline their commerce experiences and are receptive to their country's uniqueness. Three-fourths of Australian online consumers (73 percent) expect free shipping when working with a brand or retailer, and 70 percent expect shipping tracking. Over half of Australian online consumers (55 percent) also expect information about returns.

  It is noteworthy that 97 percent of consumers who shop online in Australia have failed to complete a purchase because content was incorrect or incomplete on a brand's website or mobile app. Half of Australian online shoppers (50 percent) have also abandoned an online purchase due to an excess of options. This is likely exacerbated by localization issues. Many brands and retailers reach out to Australian shoppers with products that are incorrect for the geography's season, or with content that fails to incorporate Australia's unique vernacular.

- **Straightforward transactions**

  As digital commerce matures in Australia, shoppers have grown more discerning. A study published by the Journal of Consumer Behaviour found that for Australian shoppers (for whom online grocery is growing rapidly), "online shopping, in the grocery context at least, seems to primarily reflect a desire for time efficiency on the part of the shopper." It is unsurprising 22 percent of Australian online shoppers say all their online purchases are pre-planned, higher than the average.

  Efficiency does not mean Amazon to Australian consumers, as it does in many other countries. Just 10 percent of Australian online shoppers always compare what they find on brand or retailers' sites to Amazon. Likewise, when Australian online shoppers have a purchase in mind, 41 percent initiate their shopping journey on Google, while just five percent begin with Amazon.

Australian online shoppers are more open to the idea of online shopping. Now, they are interested in taking their business to brands and retailers that understand their specific, geography-driven needs. Due to the country's location and rising digital commerce landscape, companies that build out content marketing programs with Australian shoppers in mind have a great opportunity to impress consumers and earn their long-term loyalty.

Germany

Traditional shoppers

Online shoppers in Germany find themselves in a unique digital commerce environment. As a country, Germany benefits from above-average privacy standards, which informs how shoppers approach their online interactions with companies.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in Germany include:

- **Traditional interactions**

  Traditional channels like email perform well with German consumers, while newer outreach strategies have yet to find a permanent home. For example, 94 percent of German online shoppers can be reached via email, whereas 15 percent of online consumers in Germany do not use social media.

  High security standards have created a stigma around adopting new commerce channels like voice-activated technologies. Forty-one percent of German online shoppers will not purchase more via voice in 2019 due to a lack of security features. As a result, just eight percent of German online shoppers are more likely to buy from brands and retailers that offer voice purchasing options over companies that do not.

  Tactics on new channels have also failed to make a major impact so far. Influencers play less of a role than in other countries — just a quarter of German online shoppers (25 percent) who use social media and have clicked on an influencer's post have gone on to make a direct purchase. Interestingly, 48 percent of German online shoppers care about customer testimonials, indicating a preference for traditional experiences even in the form of recommendations from peers.

- **Privacy and security**

  Historically, Germany has enforced stricter privacy rules than the rest of the world, and much of current GDPR legislation was based on existing German law. German shoppers expect privacy when interacting with companies online, and the impacts of updates like GDPR simply add another layer of protection to their already comprehensive data legislation. Even recent measures like a crackdown on how companies such as Facebook gather users' personal data contribute to the air of strong security.

  As a result, German shoppers expect privacy, and they seek out and respect trust online. German online shoppers value brands and retailers that engineer more personal experiences, and desire additional information before making purchases (e.g., customer testimonials, product information). Just 38 percent of German online consumers say it is a greater priority for brands and retailers to respect their anonymity online this year than last year, likely because of the already high privacy standards in this country. In terms of seeking out more information, a third of German online shoppers (31 percent) say they enjoy brand and retail sites most for their product information.

When it comes to Germany, brands and retailers must make privacy and security top priorities. Online shoppers are not willing to go back on current privacy standards, nor do legislative measures even allow for companies to get away with subpar performance. Once security measures are in place, brands and retailers should focus on providing the types of traditional experiences German online shoppers are interested in most. Then, companies can spend time and resources refining those experiences rather than rushing to add new ones.

Sweden
Honest shoppers

Swedish online shoppers have no qualms about asking brands and retailers for help. To come to the rescue, companies should guide Swedish consumers through the online shopping process with personalized content experiences. Strategic interactions help shoppers avoid feeling overwhelmed by the boundarylessness of modern digital commerce.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in Sweden include:

- **Overwhelming experiences**

  Online shoppers in Sweden are particularly honest about how intimidating digital commerce research can be. Fifty-seven percent of Swedish online consumers admit they have failed to complete an online purchase because there were too many options. Likewise, a quarter of Swedish online shoppers (26 percent) say there are too many brands and retailers to choose from online.

- **Informative experiences**

  As a reaction to a digital commerce overload, Swedish shoppers appreciate brands and retailers that offer a personalized customer journey and make decision making more straightforward. Swedish shoppers want to explore all of their options online, but they are also receptive to marketing. Online shoppers in Sweden are open to brands and retailers that simplify the digital chaos.

  In the search for information, Swedish online shoppers turn to Google. Forty-four percent of online Swedish shoppers with a product in mind for purchase start their journeys on Google, and nearly the same number (43 percent) do so when they do not have a product in mind for purchase. Online consumers in Sweden are also likely to include Google as a channel for research prior to making an online purchase, across a range of product categories.

  Preferences for Google could be a contributing factor behind why Swedish online shoppers so often feel overwhelmed by digital commerce. Brands and retailers should enhance their personalization efforts and create memorable digital experiences to be top of mind when Swedish online shoppers go looking for products, and to help streamline interactions.

Impressing Swedish online shoppers does not mean offering them the latest and greatest in terms of digital commerce. Rather, consumers who shop online in Sweden gravitate toward streamlined shopping experiences that prioritize order and efficiency over flash. Brands and retailers interested in this region should focus on elements of the digital commerce journey that limit moments where shoppers can become overwhelmed, and increase opportunities to guide, educate and inform consumers.

Benelux

On-the-rise shoppers

Although Benelux shoppers were former digital commerce laggards, they are quickly catching up with other regions. Do not underestimate online Benelux shoppers' willingness to embrace digital commerce. As a region, Benelux is becoming more sophisticated when it comes to shopping experiences, and digital commerce is a mainstay. Brands and retailers can begin to introduce new digital commerce experiences to Benelux consumers, but should first and foremost invest in baseline performance upgrades.

Key areas to improve digital commerce performance in Benelux include:

- **Consistent commerce options**

  Online shoppers in Benelux have jumped on the digital commerce bandwagon, and they are developing online routines. Fifty-seven percent of Benelux online consumers shop online at least once a month, and 21 percent at least once per week. As online shopping increases in this area, 71 percent of Benelux online shoppers report they are satisfied with the current number of online brands and retailers they have to choose from.

- **Follow-the-leader mentality**

  An increase in shopping innovations in neighboring countries is rubbing off on Benelux shoppers. It is only a matter of time before more diverse digital commerce trends flourish in this region, and brands and retailers should look for ways to incorporate new channels and devices into existing experiences.

  Some areas to watch include conveniences in delivery and fulfillment, as well as new devices that empower streamlined commerce experiences. For example, 28 percent of Benelux online shoppers expect same-day shipping. Although just 29 percent of online consumers in Benelux already use voice-activated devices to make purchases at least once a year, shoppers indicate they will be more amenable to using the technology moving forward. Sixty-two percent of Benelux online shoppers are equally or more likely to shop with brands and retailers that offer voice purchasing compared to competitors that do not.

- **Choice and convenience**

  As new trends gain ground, choice and convenience will remain the most important factors for Benelux consumers. This was previously found to be true by Comscore. A third of online shoppers in Benelux (32 percent) enjoy product selection most when shopping via a brand or retailer's website, and two-thirds of Benelux online shoppers (66 percent) expect free shipping. Almost half of online consumers in Benelux (47 percent) expect shipping tracking when working with brands and retailers, yet another example of the conveniences shoppers in the region now feel are table stakes.

  When online Benelux shoppers have a product in mind for purchase, 39 percent begin the process with Google. Consumers in Benelux want to explore all their options and make choices armed with ample information. However, when it comes to making purchases, online Benelux shoppers are less open to newer commerce options. This is both for security and ease of use. Thirty-five percent of Benelux online shoppers say security concerns will stop them from making more purchases via voice in 2019. They also cite difficulty searching for (29 percent) and comparing products (29 percent) as top barriers to increased voice purchases.

As digital commerce gains footing in Benelux, brands and retailers will need to roll out new experiences and capabilities over time to keep online shoppers in this region interested. But for now, companies should focus their efforts on establishing a sound foundation for seamless digital commerce experiences. Core tenants like choice and convenience set the tone for how well brands and retailers perform in Benelux, and can help earn trust and loyalty so that online shoppers are more open to trying new capabilities in the future.

About Episerver

Episerver empowers digital leaders to easily create standout experiences for customers — everywhere they engage, and always with measurable business results. The Episerver Digital Experience Cloud™ unifies digital content, commerce and marketing in one platform, including omnichannel solutions for smart personalization and intelligent campaigns. Founded in 1994, Episerver has offices in the US, UK, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain, South Africa, Singapore, Vietnam and the UAE.

For more information, visit Episerver.com.