

LATEST E-COMMERCE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The core purpose of this research paper is to describe the latest best practices undertaken in the e-commerce space to foster business growth. These practices are real life business practices adopted by the organization of any type and size to run the e-commerce business efficiently. E-commerce is solely dependent on how the organization is charting the growth plan and creating efficiencies to sustain growth. Efficiencies is created largely by the need to cut costs, maintain competitive advantage, introduce new products and services basis the market demand and meet stakeholder requirements. These business objectives can be met through the development of a smart technological infrastructure to improve organizational efficiencies and commitment to deliver on the forecasted business targets. Traditional businesses are primarily product & price centric & competing on the basis of product differentiation and innovation or cutting price. In contrast, e-commerce focuses on customers and adopts a customer centric approach. In the traditional way of doing business, companies manufactured products and customers purchased them. But now customers are active participants in the product design process; in fact, they often dictate terms to manufacturers and decide the features of products. The sales strategy of e-commerce business is highly dependent on the consumer purchase patterns & their feedback which gives the e-commerce business an insight of what the consumer actually wants in the product or the services. The impact of e-commerce is seen across the business from procurement, pricing, customer service, customer acquisition etc. E-commerce is aiding business across the international geographies by giving customers a delight full shopping experience with a wide array of products to choose from. The role of government will play a pivotal role in setting up legal frameworks for e-commerce so that while domestic and international trade are focusing to expand their horizons, basic laws such as privacy, intellectual property, prevention of fraud, consumer protection etc are have to be formed for building trust and security in the minds of the consumers to use e-commerce. An in-depth understanding of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues in E-commerce transactions is imperative as users finding loop holes to not only easily duplicate material but also mislead other users. Hence IPR laws need to be stringent in order to not allow fake material supply as accessibility to e-commerce is platform is not a privilege but rather a necessity.

KEYWORDS: *E-Commerce, Intellectual Property Rights, Smart Technological Infrastructure, Legal Frameworks, Consumer Protection.*

Introduction

E-commerce has been undergoing unprecedented revolution during covid and post covid period. Customers have now made e-commerce their daily necessity and an effective way of researching and purchasing products and services. E-commerce has given a global platform to the manufacturers,

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traders, sellers & buyers or consumers. E-commerce initiatives have to dovetail into the overall business strategy of the organization with distinct set of objectives and measurement metrics. Depth in the variety of products and services found on the e-commerce websites is transforming the entire shopping experience to be pleasurable and convenient. E-commerce through the Internet provides tremendous opportunities to increase sales, but there are rules for the achievement of this goal. Business procedures should be based on best practices that enhance the position of the organisation. As a mature sales channel, e-commerce has evolved through time and improved the reach of the market through trial and error. Several practices have been implemented, considered and discarded based on the feedback of the customer. Rapid Increase in the consumption of internet has left no choice with the organization but to digitize their operations and remain in the competitive space locally and globally. To foster e-commerce in India, Government of India has taken several initiatives since 2014 like, Make in India, Start-up India, Digital India, Innovation Fund and Skill India. All these initiatives are directly or indirectly supporting the e-commerce development in the country. New trends in e-commerce are emerging from various factors. Professionally loaded lifestyle of families do not give them enough time to venture out for their daily shopping needs. E-commerce has arrived as a boon where everything that they need to run their daily life is now available at finger tips. E-commerce driven organizations have to evolve with lightning speed else they will be obsolete. It is vital for e-commerce marketers to stay up-to-date on best practices else they will never be able to pace up with what's happening around the world and will lose competitive edge if they don't innovate from time to time. E-commerce organizations need to understand there are numerous trends that exist but not every trend will suit your business. The most experienced and successful E-Commerce organization have realised that the key determinants of success or failure are not merely web presence or low price or heavy marketing but delivering high quality of E-Service. Researching on the trends and adopting only those which suit your business environment in a timely manner is a key to future success. The Indian e-commerce market is expected to reach US\$ 64 billion by 2020 and US\$ 200 billion by 2026 as per IBEF e-commerce report. Rising internet penetration is expected to lead to growth in e-commerce. In India 100 per cent FDI is permitted in B2B e-commerce. As per new guidelines on Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in e-commerce, 100 per cent FDI under automatic route is permitted in market place model of e-commerce. E-commerce is increasingly attracting customers from Tier 2 and 3 cities, where people have limited access to brands due to low penetration of internet but have high aspirations. With the increase in awareness about the benefits of online trading, there has been a significant rise in investment in E-commerce business. Hand in hand with offline trading, many offline established businesses have setup online transaction channels. Earlier food and grocery were never thought of as items for online purchase. However, with the long working hours, and consumers opting for adaptability and convenience, there are now innumerable small and large E-commerce companies selling provisions and food items like Grofers, BigBasket, etc. There are a lot of opportunities for e-retailers in India to capitalise upon with the rapid growth in the internet penetration in India. The penetration of online retail in India's total retail market is expected to rise from 2.5 per cent in 2016 to 5 per cent by 2020 as per IBEF e-commerce report.

Rising Wave of E-Commerce Trends that are Shaping this Industry & Creating an Immense Impact on Sales Growth

Omnichannel Selling

Follow where your customers leave their footprints. Omnichannel selling implies deploying every possible channel for your products to sell including your own web store, offline stores, marketplaces, and social media channels, reselling sites, mobile apps. The omnichannel approach attempts to give customer unified experience across all channels ensuring repeat purchases and hence customer loyalty in the long run. An omnichannel e-commerce strategy foresees that customers may start searching on one channel and move to another as a progression of their online purchasing journey. Omnichannel completes a multichannel strategy and optimizes it for today's online customers. One of the main benefits of having omnichannel e-commerce is that brands are able to provide their customers with cohesive messaging about the product they are selling on multiple channels. No matter where a customer encounters your brand, the messaging is always the same. Omnichannel e-commerce allows your company to collect and merge customer data from multiple channels. When this data is combined and put together in an understandable format it gives organizations full picture of what types of customers are interested in what kind of products and their behaviour across different channels, which channels are contributing to higher sales, what products are driving higher conversions, which channel has a higher cost of acquisition, which channel has a lower cost of acquisition and many more factors which gives

organizations the power to personalize the customer journey by creating customizable products basis the consumer feedback, purchase patterns and consumer preferences. Here's an example of creating a superior omnichannel purchase experience. If a brand has developed an ecommerce mobile app, it can trigger a push notification when an app user enters one of brands retail locations. The discount or promotion can give that person an extra incentive to buy. There's a good chance that they'll be consulting their phone anyway, so this provides the customer with even more motivation to convert. The discount or the promotion once shareable can increase footfalls to the physical store. Brands can take that one step further and give the user a personalized promotion or recommendation based on their browsing behaviour for e.g. they recently researched a specific product on brands m-commerce app. The next day, the customer walks into a retail store. The app can trigger a discount for that exact product to provide a smooth omnichannel shopping experience.

Social Commerce

Sales people, seasoned or budding marketers, established or start-up companies all want to exploit the social media channels to boost their sales. One of the primary goal of social selling is customer retention. Brands can stay connected with their customers by regularly updating content on their official social platforms pages e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Insta, LinkedIn, YouTube about their product launches, new services, company information, success stories etc. Watching the online purchase disruption Facebook launched Facebook store where businesses can easily create an online store. Social commerce is highly influenced by good quality videos and photos of the products which can give consumers a delightful and immersive experiences on their mobile, tablet or laptop. Social selling for brick-and-mortar stores is now no more an option but has become a must have business channel to buy if they want to remain competitive.

Mobile Commerce

M-commerce can be categorized by function as either mobile shopping, mobile banking or mobile payments. Mobile commerce can collect insightful consumer data from the moment the consumer lands on the online store, browses various pages, and then makes a purchase. This are all predictive data to gauge the consumer purchase patterns and market at the right place and at the right time. Brands are now making it a business priority to deliver to their customers a mobile first experience. Brands have a made a practice to create a separate pricing strategy for Mobile platforms knowing the consumer purchase patterns which signal instantaneous purchase. One click ordering on mobile platforms have change the paradigm of convenience shopping. Mobile apps now have a feature to store customer information mandatory for payments. When customer come to make payments they don't need to enter all the information necessary every time, they just need to save the information and at one click in the next purchase the payment is done. Luxury of shopping at your own convenience is vital in the land of user experience. Making interactions easy, quick, and as intuitive as possible is imperative if brands wish to turn mobile traffic into repeat purchases. A one seemingly important way where brands can deliver such a immersive shopping experience to consumers is through voice search - the act of speaking to a search engine to perform search actions on mobile devices. Voice search and voice capabilities in mobile devices will likely become a norm as developers strive to improve them, allowing consumers to intuitively search for items, select their preference of brand, colour, size, fit etc. add to the basket, and purchase seamlessly.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

AI simply means software which understands repetitive human habits. AI and machine learning are technologies without which e-commerce companies survival is extremely difficult. Machine learning is mostly used in search and product recommendations. Recommendations are automated basis the match of customer's preferences about brands or colour, gender, budget, and many other factors. In product search, machine learning can allow displaying much more relevant results, also based on a consumer's profile. Machine learning enabling visual search is creating a consumer delight. Unlike the search engines which require a user to type specific keywords to deliver expected results, for visual search all the user has to do is take a image of the product the user is searching for and leave the rest to the image recognition engine that matches input information with the product database and selects the closest matches. Today's consumers don't want to get treated as one of many customers. They prefer a highly personalized customer service. Personalised attention keeps a customer loyal to your brand. If you can't provide that, they'll find a competitor who can. machine learning, is the only way to deliver high-level personalization online. Algorithms analyse customer browsing and purchase patterns and tailor

information and product recommendations basis those patterns. At times customers need help in making any kind of purchase or refund or tracking etc. AI enabled bots serve this purpose efficiently. One of the most profound applications of AI is its ability to see into the future. With access to a variety of structured and unstructured data sources like social engagement rate, sales data, leads, lead dispositions, traffic patterns, search patterns etc, it is possible to create detailed psychographic profiles of known customers to spot emerging trends.

By predicting customer behaviour, brands can cut back on unwanted advertising and optimize marketing efforts to target the correct consumer profile leading to increased revenue and higher profit margins.

Predictive behaviour modelling can be used to make predictions on sales related process:

- Predicting if a user will make a purchase in a specific product category in real time.
- Predicting if a user will return and what purchases they will make at certain times.
- Prediction of customer lifetime value.
- Forecasting customer dropouts.
- Demand forecasting for specific product categories.
- Forecasting number of product returns.
- Forecasting cart abandon rates.

Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality the Game Changers in E-Commerce

AR & VR are transforming shopping experiences on e-commerce platforms, either it could be mobile apps or websites. An online furniture store can use augmented reality to showcase what a product would look like in a customer's home. This makes it possible for people to choose a colour and see if an item will actually fit in the desired space. Lenskart an eyewear retailer is creating a major disruption in its shopping experience by providing virtual '3D Try On' service in their online stores where customers can try out its full range of glasses virtually using augmented reality (AR) to gauge what suits their style. Using AR technology, consumers can create a 3D mesh of their face within 5 seconds and try on as many as 10,000 designs. The '3D Try On' service enables Lenskart customers to imagine themselves wearing the glasses in person. The technology makes online shopping for glasses a lot more "real" and fun, providing a more seamless try-on and shopping experience for the consumers on their e-commerce store as if they were trying the glasses inside the offline store. AR & VR are now making online shopping experiences at par with offline shopping experiences where consumers not only shop for products online through real-life interfaces, but also try products virtually. Despite the capabilities that AR and VR offer to the e-commerce industry, not many e-commerce companies have adopted these technologies either due to lack of guidance or lack of management's commitment or understanding the impact of this innovative technologies. While the technology is still new, it makes sense for brick-and- mortar stores to make the most of this transformative technology and offer unmatched experiences to customers while trying to outperform the competition.

Influencers will Drive Sales

Online influencers have real audience following and drive tangible influence to make their followers purchase a product which they recommend. Brands build their reputation through trustworthy recommendations from credible influencers which makes their followers sample a new brand. Finding the relevant influencer in the defined business category for e.g. fashion with the right profile of followers that follow him that the brand wants to target is the key to brands marketing campaign success. It is extremely important the audience insights of the follower base and discover if it matches to the target audience of the brand. To get the best results from the influencer marketing campaign, set business goals early on. Is the brand looking to build brand awareness among a new audience, drive sales, or launch a new product? Brands how to formulate a performance measurement framework in co-ordination with the influencer to measure the success of the activity. If a brand is running a campaign with multiple influencers it is imperative to use a influencer management platform to be able to easily track the desired metrics and report back on the success of the campaign. Instead of extracting data manually from social platforms, use a well-established influencer management platform like Qoruz to measure and track the campaign performance over time.

Personalization is the Shaping the Future

Personalization has a deep impact on customer relationships. Today's evolved and tech-savvy customers need special attention so that they remain loyal and become returning customers. Poor product recommendation can be a turn off and customers may avoid visiting some online stores. Chat bots act as a personal concierge to assist the customer in many ways during their shopping cycle. E-commerce websites have realized the importance of personal attention and hence are establishing one on one communication lines via email, sms & what's app by providing the right information at the right time. If a customer has abandoned the cart a personalized email or sms or what's app message is sent as a reminder to complete the transaction. Through personal interactions with the customer brands have a high chance to increase their conversion rate, create referral traffic and bring new customers who are not e-shopping savvy. With contextual information relayed to the customer, there is a high chance of them immersing in shopping and buying more items per session for e.g. a customer who is looking to buy a laptop from the website can easily be cross sold to purchase accessories such as the laptop bag, a mouse etc.. At a stage of nearly completing the sale, if the system displays a few product recommendations the chances of brands being able to sell more products, in the same transaction can rise significantly. E-commerce personalization helps build a long-term relationship with customers through customized landing pages based on their keyword search, targeted ads, and curated email messaging, which helps customers find specific content that appeals to their needs. This positions the businesses to be customer centric rather than business-centric. This benefits businesses by enhancing customer satisfaction and the lifetime value associated with each customer.

Video Marketing

When customers come online to shop they prefer to see what they are buying since they cannot touch and feel the product. Brands may have invested in high-quality product images, written excellent descriptions, and even gathered positive reviews of their products however nothing tells the story like an engaging video. Videos are a potential tool for product demonstrations. The most impactful type of video content are story-based videos. These videos don't just describe the product, they create a narrative around it that the potential customer will have a recall. Nike shoe ads don't just describe the features and benefits of the shoe they show someone playing sports, enjoying their life, and connecting with friends, all while wearing Nike shoes. With that approach, the enjoyment on the model's face is all users need to see to be convinced that Nike products will improve their social life. Videos are a great mechanism to drive quality traffic to e-commerce website, mobile apps or any other online or offline channel involved in driving sales. Length of the videos play a crucial role in converting viewers into customers. Mobile is the apt format to consume video content as it complements the screen size. Video content needs a powerful distribution strategy to ensure it reaches out to the right target audience. This is possible when the video is inserted into the brand's social media channels, and incorporated into email campaigns, on the affiliate websites, brand's website, brand's mobile apps. Brands can do a blog post and embed the video to generate even more organic traffic. Videos can be used in retargeting campaigns in the scenario where static ads are not able to drive expected conversions. Videos are now just not limited to brand engagement but are powerful content pegs to drive sales and qualified leads. Videos these days need not be conventional there are new video formats such as live video streaming features on Facebook and Instagram. Short-form video content platforms are changing the paradigm of video marketing. Short-form video delivers meaningful brand messages in a timely manner which creates a lasting impression and influences an intent to consider and eventually make a purchase. Short form videos are highly shareable and contagious to consumption.

Customer Reviews

E-commerce sales in today's times is highly dependent on customer reviews. Before the online customer makes a purchase the first action he takes is to go to the product reviews section to have a virtual feeling of the other customer's sentiments since the online customer can't physically experience the products. Organizations that exist solely in the e-commerce space are surviving on the oxygen from the customer reviews. Brands have to put a huge effort to listen to the customer reviews and then provide personal attention to each review. Customer review management manually is impossible and ineffective. Technology has provided a solution in the form of social listening tools like locobuzz, sprout social, Konnect insights etc. which capture maximum customer reviews in a platform with deep categorization through crawling techniques and allow customer service agents to service the customer in real time as soon as a negative or a positive review or an enquiry is registered on the brand's social handles. Brands who do not

have the culture of being customer centric and as a result may not deploy social listening tools to respond to customer reviews or complaint may lose out on sales and experience a dip in the conversion rates. Social proof refers to the psychological phenomenon in which people make judgments and decisions based on the collective actions of others. In this case, reading positive reviews from other people who made similar purchases drives confidence that buying a well-reviewed item is a good choice. Online reviews act as a catalyst when it comes to gauging a quality of a product. Reading reviews that reveal good quality of products is making the customer feel that he is making a safe buy.

Conclusion

Creating the perfect on-site customer experience is the ultimate goal of every e-commerce driven organization. Organizations should ensure browsing on their site is smooth and intuitive, relaxing, finding information easily and loading the pages instantaneously and making the visitors journey to conversion a delightful experience. Organizations should make it a practice to provide visitors with a feeling of an immersive experience while they are browsing the online store just like when they visit the physical flagship store, but with all the comfort and convenience that online shopping has to offer. In this research paper I've made a sincere attempt to share those top trends in e-commerce that are implemented in real life by the e-commerce driven organization and these practices will soon become standard for most e-commerce businesses that want to create a unique positioning from their competitors. The paper is based on secondary data & professional experience acquired in e-commerce. The various contextual e-articles, researches papers, relevant e-journals, e-commerce websites have been studied. E-commerce companies are now understanding the impact of AI engines and embracing this technology to give consumers a personalized shopping experience. Performance measurement framework is the heart of any e-commerce business. E-commerce organizations must have a realistic performance measurement framework set to measure the growth of e-commerce business. Unrealistic performance expectations derails the entire present and forward looking business strategy. The above mentioned e-commerce trends are the ones driving growth for the e-commerce sector. However, does that mean that you need to jump on the bandwagon of every trend?. Not every trend is the right fit for every business. While some may provide a huge value-add, others might not be a appropriate fit to serve the business objectives or might be too costly to implement for your business to maintain a reasonable ROI. Understanding what trends will make investment sense for the organization will often depend upon the company's business planning, go to market strategy, audience profile, funding, competition analysis, market demand and need and many more factors. Business research will guide the organizations to make informed decisions on what makes sense to move forward with. Acquiring constant knowledge on current & future trends reports, not only for the e-commerce industry, but for organizations product verticals, will help organizations stay ahead of the curve. Corona virus put the whole world to a standstill, however the only survivor that emerged as a saviour was e-commerce. E-commerce remained the only sector which not only survived but also propelled the growth in the trying times for humanity. The world has understood the power of e-commerce during the pandemic time and I can safely say that every business must have started thinking how to embark the rising wave of e-commerce to safeguard themselves in the event of a natural calamity.

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