HOW WEBROOMING KEEPS BRICK-AND-MORTAR RELEVANT

INTRODUCTION

Can e-commerce actually help brick-and-mortar retailers drive customers to the store? According to most retail experts, the answer is a resounding yes.

A study by Retail Perceptions found 88% of consumers take the time to **webroom**—research a product online before buying it in the store.[1] That wasn't always the case.

Way back in 2013, the term "showrooming" was having a moment. Showrooming is simply the act of comparison shopping in-store via smartphone and then making the purchase online. Back then it was all the rage—in 2013 it was up 400% over the previous year.[2]

Since then, webrooming has supplanted showrooming as the consumer shopping habit brick-and-mortar retailers must keep top of mind. What does this mean for retailers? How can they use it to their advantage before it takes advantage of them?

The following offers up a much closer look at webrooming and the clues it provides about what consumers really want.

WEBROOMING: SHOPPING, EVOLVED

With nearly 90% of global purchases still happening offline, it's important to note that webrooming's popularity is not a sign the in-store shopping apocalypse has come.[3] On the contrary, rather than poaching customers, in more cases shoppers browse online and then go to the store to touch and feel the product and then make the final purchase.

While some are surprised by the power of webrooming—after years of assuming shoppers would firmly shift to trying on jeans or testing smartphones in the store and then heading online for a better price— experts say webrooming is booming because consumers are not strictly looking at dollar signs.

"It is an indication of how the shopping experience has evolved for most consumers," said Accenture's Renato Scaff. "Today's shopper expects to be able to shop easily across different channels to fulfill their shopping mission."[4] And the numbers back him up: 90% of consumers expect consistent, seamless interactions across a brand's multiple channels.[5]

RETAILERS FINALLY GET THE E-COMMERCE GAME

John Talbott, Associate Director of the Center for Education and Research in Retail at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, said that webrooming and showrooming trends have finally forced brick-and-mortar retailers to learn how to properly play the e-commerce game to their benefit.

"The reality is the Internet is now as much a part of how these retailers interface with their customers as their stores," he said in a press release, pointing out that e-commerce is actually helping stores, from Best Buy and Target to Nordstrom and Sephora.[6]

Here are five ways successful brands are using their websites to keep brick-and-mortar locations relevant in the customer's buying experience:

1 **Offset shipping costs by offering in-store pick-up.** Remember, if a consumer doesn't have to pay more for a product—i.e., shipping and handling costs—they won't.

2 **Instant gratification.** This one speaks for itself. Use proximity and the get-it-now factor to your advantage.

3 **Play up the touch factor.** When it comes to how something fits, feels and even tastes, there's no replacement for the in-store experience. If your products will benefit from this type of physical consumer interaction, make it clear.

4 **Nearby product availability.** To take full advantage of the previous tips, retailers must enable webrooming to allow customers to confirm an item's in-store availability before they make the trip to your brick-and-mortar location. According to Shopify, "42% of shoppers stated checking a product's availability as a leading reason why they look online before going to a physical store."[7]

5 **Real-time returns and exchanges.** Just like the anxiousness that comes with waiting for a product to arrive at your doorstep, that same feeling is often associated with shipping a returned item back to a vendor. In-store returns and exchanges are immediate, convenient and reassuring.

WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT: AN OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCE

Webrooming is certainly proving to be a big win for retailers, and showrooming is less painful for retailers than originally thought, especially if they can take advantage of showrooming on their own e-commerce sites and driving customers in-store.

However, both webrooming and showrooming offer retailers far more: the opportunity to start working toward providing a seamless, omnichannel shopping experience that embraces the evolution of consumer shopping habits.

According to the Accenture Seamless Retail Study, 49% of consumers believe the best way retailers can improve the shopping experience is to better integrate in-store, online and mobile shopping channels. A whopping 89% of respondents said they want retailers to make it easy for them to shop for products in whatever channel is most convenient.[9]

Consumers aren't giving up the store experience—they still want to see, touch and feel products just as often as they sometimes want the convenience and low prices of online purchases. But retailers must begin to take the steps necessary to create a more integrated shopping journey that will boost long-term customer loyalty. Brick-and-mortar should serve as a showcase for e-commerce, and vice versa, with consistent in-store marketing, messaging, prices and discounts.

This is the real win behind webrooming. These trends help traditional retailers understand that in order to survive, they must embrace changing consumer habits, preferences and shopping behaviors in a shopping world that has profoundly shifted—for good.

SOURCES

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10 / Huffington Post, "Webrooming vs. Showrooming: Are You Engaging Both Types of Shoppers?"

11 / Salesforce, "The State of Marketing Leadership"

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