



How Online Retailers Build Strong Customer Relationships

In partnership with





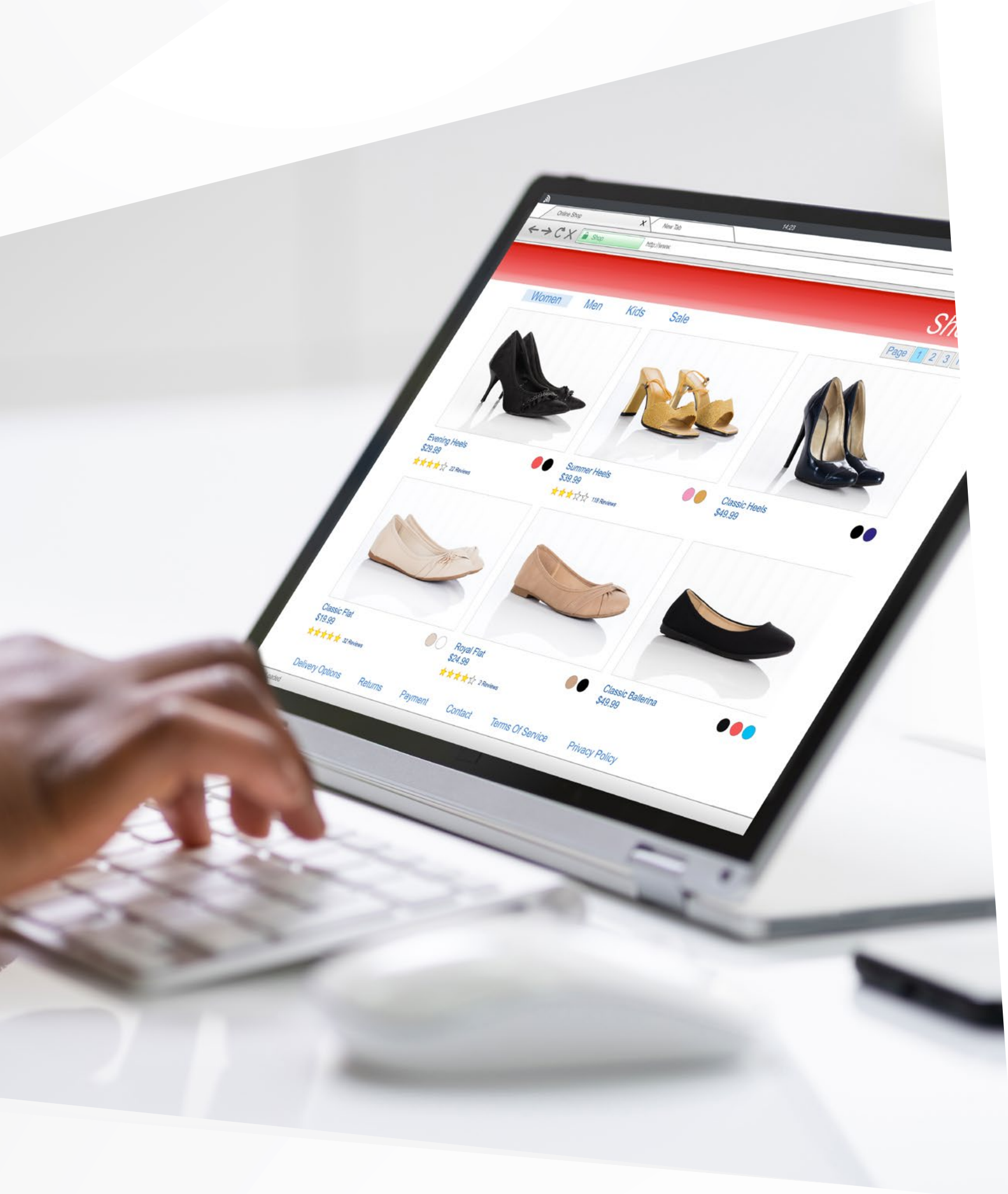
The landscape of retail is constantly changing, and many are finding that customer loyalty is becoming more difficult to guarantee. The world of E-commerce means shoppers are bombarded with an avalanche of choice for each keyword, and over time, the shopping experience becomes faceless and transactional. However, the very essence of brick-and-mortar retail is what can differentiate those less personable results from the best-known brands in each field, and lock in customer loyalty as it does so.

Market leaders in E-commerce are those who use the characteristics of brick-and-mortar shopping to become recognised above a forest of faceless search results. They engage and create rapport with customers online, their brand is recognisable, and they are known for a positive shopping experience – from browsing to delivery. They are taking the physical shopping experience, and successfully repurposing it online.

This whitepaper discusses the practical steps you can take as an online retailer to separate yourself from the competition. Ultimately, this can be simplified into two key questions:

- How do you separate yourself from competitors in your field?
- How can you ensure repeat, loyal custom?

Using this whitepaper as a guide, you can begin to audit your business in key areas. This is not a quick task – it requires an introspective look at your business, its purpose and what makes it (and you) unique to ensure business growth.



This guide can be referred to throughout your E-commerce journey, whether fledgling or experienced, to fine-tune your online store and brand to make sure they are working as hard as possible to carve your identity into a densely populated market.

This piece has been co-written with OnBuy.com to bring you industry-leading expertise and insight into the E-commerce industry.

OnBuy is an online marketplace, considered the fastest-growing in the world. It doesn't hold or sell its own stock, but instead focuses on helping sellers grow their businesses and promote their products.

This unique position allows **OnBuy** to offer sellers and buyers an improved marketplace experience. With competitive selling fees, and the security that their route to market will never compete against them, sellers can offer buyers better choice, and better prices, on a huge variety of products.

OnBuy has partnered with an array of industry-leading companies, and thanks to a unique PayPal partnership, both parties can enjoy a secure experience backed by PayPal Buyer/Seller Protection.

OnBuy.com

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

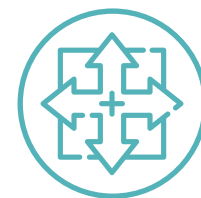
> Conclusion

The landscape of retail is constantly changing, and many are finding that customer loyalty is becoming more difficult to guarantee

The world of E-commerce means shoppers are bombarded with an avalanche of choice for each keyword, and over time, the shopping experience becomes faceless and transactional. However, the very essence of brick-and-mortar retail is what can differentiate those less personable results from the best-known brands in each field, and lock in customer loyalty as it does so.

Market leaders in E-commerce are those who use the characteristics of brick-and-mortar shopping to become recognised above a forest of faceless search results. They engage and create rapport with customers online, their brand is recognisable, and they are known for a positive shopping experience – from browsing to delivery. They are taking the physical shopping experience, and successfully repurposing it online.

This whitepaper discusses the practical steps you can take as an online retailer to separate yourself from the competition. Ultimately, this can be simplified into two key questions:



How do you separate yourself from competitors in your field?



How can you ensure repeat, loyal custom?

Using this whitepaper as a guide, you can begin to audit your business in key areas. This is not a quick task – it requires an introspective look at your business, its purpose and what makes it (and you) unique to ensure business growth.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

In brick-and-mortar retail, sustaining customer loyalty is made that much easier by the personal touches – smiles, polite and well-informed customer service, and becoming an indispensable part of the purchasing experience.

In the world of E-commerce, strategies to win over customers and sustain relationships of trust and transparency need to take precedence instead. As the world of online shopping evolves – bolstered all the more by the unpredictable events of 2020 going into 2021 and beyond – the best practices for online sellers feel like they're shifting all the time.

As collated expertise often proves, however, the key to E-commerce success is consistency – especially in a world that consumers regard as becoming increasingly inconsistent. To that end, smart online sellers of all sizes demonstrate consistency, and enjoy the benefits promised by it, in three key areas – brand identity, customer service and sustainable growth.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Brand Identity

Creating – and protecting – your brand identity

Branding, and the creation of the identity and values for which your business stands, is no longer solely the domain of marketers and PR staff. Every action that any business takes online leaves a digital fingerprint of sorts, and just like a fingerprint, anything that isn't seen to match will quickly be caught out by your customer base, and potentially your competitors.

Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm

They say you're only as good as your last mistake – an adage that's as true as it is prone to pile on the pressure. Yet with the right approach, the consistency with which you administer and sustain superb service throughout your online offering – from promotion to pricing, right through to shipment and customer support – will make every sale reinforce your values.

While it may seem easier said than done at first; creating a company handbook, or rulebook of sorts – even if you're a sole trader or a small E-commerce start-up – can be a fantastic way of adding structure and rhythm to your daily dealings. Consistency starts from the very foundations of your business model, however streamlined, complex or structured that may be.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Defining who and what you are

If you're not sure where to begin with this, loop it back to the very bedrock of what makes your online business what it is – your brand identity. What are the values, philosophies and goals of this brand? Consider how your business looks to those observing it from the outside – what do you believe they would see? Does that vision align with the ambitions you had when first going into business?

Are you a fast-moving entertainment E-commerce specialist, connecting customers with rare records and vintage vinyl? Are you a fashion specialist experienced in seeking out the avant-garde and presenting it affordably to your customer base? Are you a housewares and furniture specialist keen to position yourself as the go-to store for lifestyle and home decorating goods?

Creating a consistent brand message will make you stand apart by individuality alone, so consider this message carefully. After all, a tech guru selling mobile phone handsets and tablet computers will communicate who they are far differently than a new-age crystal seller or a kitchen appliance vendor.

Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth

With a brand identity set, successful E-commerce entrepreneurs must partner with organisations, solutions providers and services who will best accentuate it. By its very nature, selling online is a journey involving many hands to make light work – the aim is to make the space between a customer clicking 'Purchase' and the package arriving in their hands as seamless as it can be.

In today's world of online retail, those relationships can be more multifaceted than ever before. It is no longer just about which marketplaces to sell through and which couriers to utilise, although these are still critical choices. It's also about how you go about inventory management, even across multiple marketplaces; how you sustain customer service and efficient restocking throughput to satisfy demand; how well you pick, pack and send your packages – and of course, there's aftersales support to consider too.

Overwhelming? It can seem so – unless you have the ideal partners to ease the journey.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Fulfilling customer expectations

Crafting the brand identity and presentation that makes your business stand apart elevates customers' expectations of the service you're able to fulfil, which emphasises the need for winning partnerships all the more. Customers expect global shipping that is fast and affordable, together with the ability to track their order with your assistance and to receive support from you if things go wrong.

Distilled to its finest points, success in this area comes down to a three-pronged strategy – agility, transparency, and communication. If ever in doubt, remember that your role as an online retailer is to essentially replace the handling and examination of a product that a customer would otherwise undergo in person. Your role is to persuade and reassure them, essentially, in lieu of that physical, visual, tactile reinforcement.

Customers also need easily-reached customer service staff who solve the problem as soon as they're made aware of it. You can keep things light by offering discounts or partial refunds from orders that are delayed, and immediately shipping out expedited replacements if an original order goes missing. While costly in the immediate term, this can reap huge rewards and lead to plenty of goodwill down the line.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

With your business goals in mind, you need trustworthy partners and third parties to facilitate your new service standards. However, the failures of those partners can have unfortunate effects on your own business reputation, whether the third-party experiences downtime and outages, or even gets hacked – and you're wise to want to avoid this kind of complication.

Reputation plays a vital role in understanding which third-party E-commerce solutions providers are best for you. Having a game plan of which services you want to integrate, from customer service to fulfilment and inventory management, is one thing – but taking the time to research and understand which third parties offer this reliably, consistently and securely is key.

To ease the journey for those selling through marketplaces, look to those third parties with whom your marketplace has established a strong partnership. The indication of a good working relationship shows that a third party is able to grow and adapt as a marketplace does so – and in the booming online shopping world of today, that scalability and agility is going to be pivotal to bring onboard for your own business model too.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Customer Service

Internal forces – mastering matters close to home

Even the best third-party specialist in the world can't fill in all the blanks for you. While streamlining your online business is sensible, E-commerce entrepreneurs still have plenty of responsibilities and strategies to keep in mind.

Consistency begins with each product listing. Is it optimised, with Google Shopping-friendly imagery? Is the written content informative, or simply fluff vaguely promoting the online store that your customers are already on? Are you accidentally name-dropping one marketplace platform and then copy-paste importing that into your other marketplaces in your product descriptions, poor formatting and all? Perhaps most importantly, have you optimised for SEO, without running afoul of keyword stuffing and other bad practices?

It's vital that inventory management is precise too, to avoid customers clicking on phantom listings – products they can see, but that you don't have. The accuracy of the initial information you provide to customers, down to and including making the browsing process itself enjoyable and educational, is a huge conversion factor in getting goods added to carts and funds filling out your cash-flow.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

A lack of consistency isn't just felt in lost sales

While every E-commerce business expects to let go of a sale from time to time, becoming inconsistent in how you offer pricing, inventory, fulfilment and customer service creates a snowballing effect of mistrust and negative attention among shoppers today.

Online retailers can't simply offer mediocrity and expect to inspire success. Competition is fierce, fast and efficient, and anything less than that will leave you out of the running. Mistrust, especially, is poisonous to any online platform, denting even the largest and most well-established businesses if their online sales channels can't perform under pressure, deliver on their promises or make staff available for customer service.

Ours is a connected age, with communication more open and instantaneous now than at any time in our civilisation's history. A plucky start-up E-commerce business could fall at the first hurdle with a botched customer address or faulty shipped product; and see their reputation in tatters before they've even begun, leaving them with no means to cover their investments in inventory and infrastructure.

That makes understanding customers, and creating that winning experience that keeps them coming back, more vital than ever – even if your business is well established. The opening months of the 2020 have already proven that there is no giant too big to topple nowadays.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter

With all this talk of the customer experience and its importance to your business, it's worth breaking down the key elements that make up the psychological, emotional and logistical processes behind it.

As the world around us veers into territory that often feels impossible to predict, consumers want to enjoy their online shopping as a dependable, almost rhythmic endeavour. That means making the process smooth, enjoyable, and appealing – predictable enough for customers to keep coming back, yet pleasantly surprising enough to excite them into making it a habit. Done right, you'll have a dedicated audience of shoppers checking back with you for fresh deals, offers and product launches as time goes on and your business grows.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Trust – the beating heart of your business

Trust is championed as being crucial to making any retail venture a success, but it's especially pertinent in the world of E-commerce. While it's true that there are well-established names and platforms out there that customers are happy to fly the flag for time and time again, the growth of E-commerce has proven that customer loyalty to any one marketplace or business will quickly shift if trust is left to falter.

Part of this has to do with the availability of products. Taking the global pandemic as one example, shortages of household supplies or certain commodities saw more customers trying new marketplaces and online stores out for size than ever before in the search for their essentials. This was because, when all is said and done, customers want what they want, need what they need, and are trusting you to provide it. If you cannot, they will soon look elsewhere, however much they otherwise love your business.

Yet trust comes in all shapes and sizes, and the goal of a successful E-commerce platform or outlet is to begin building it as soon as customers' eyes level on your landing page or listing. Testimonials and positive reviews go a great way towards establishing this, as does highlighting any processes or partnerships you've undertaken to ensure secure transactions or the encryption of personal data when buyers pay for their goods.

With these essentials taken care of, trust can flow from visual appeal in the form of detailed product images that are clear and uncluttered – together with persuasive-yet-conversational written copy and a website or product page layout that's simple and intuitive to navigate.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media

As already indicated, it's never been easier for unhappy customers to air their grievances before an enormous audience – and perhaps unfairly, human nature dictates it's negative attention that's more often made public versus the positive feedback and praise for a job well done!

Nevertheless, the time may well come in which soothing an irate customer on social media might prove necessary, and this can be problematic, and even intimidating, to come to terms with. That's especially true in those times when an E-commerce business doesn't use social media to begin with.

For A-star social media complaint handling, keep three A's in mind – Apologise, Address and Affirm. Firstly, the apology – sincere and straight to the point. You're sorry the package went missing. You're sorry the order was late. You're sorry you ran out of stock so quickly. Even those issues over which you feel you have no control warrant an apology, because from a customer's perspective, you're where the buck stops as a service provider. It's not always easy to apologise for things which may not be your fault, but it is worth its weight in gold as far as immediately opening an honest, trusting conversation goes.

Secondly, address the issue. Indicate that you understand what the customer is complaining about, why they feel it is a poor level of service, and how frustrated they feel as a consequence. Then, thirdly, affirm how you'll fix the issue, do better, or ensure this can never happen again.

This is a public conversation, after all, so even if you don't quite manage to win back the customer, people will see that you're prepared to go the extra mile to try and sort out any less-than-stellar situation that arises when anyone trusts you for their online purchases. That level of goodwill can go further than you think.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences

Making sure that customers can navigate your E-commerce platform, category structure and product listings easily creates tremendous levels of purchasing confidence. This is the key to ensuring not only that customers purchase from you to begin with, but that they return to do so again and again for months or years to come.

Believe it or not, optimising for mobile is a key component of this checklist that even the most well-established online retailers can miss. Slow-loading mobile web pages are a big turn-off for consumers, and they'll avoid websites that load on their handheld devices with even three-second delays.

Beyond that, of course, comes secure payment handling, swift dispatch of goods and high-quality customer service – all just as vital in keeping customers committed to your cause. Everything needs to be one continuous flow from adding to basket to checking out and entering delivery details. And of course, the sooner you can get customers their package, the better!

Aligning well with integration partners or finding the marketplaces that promise the smoothest customer shipping experience can give any E-commerce business a great head-start in this regard – yet retailers and sellers still have plenty of their own legwork to put in too.

Customers trust you and your tone of voice to make their purchasing decisions, so demonstrating your deep knowledge base when it comes to your products is key. Likewise, keeping up with new developments and news in your chosen field is vital, helping you convey that information to your customers – while reinforcing your brand and category authority too.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Defining your delivery solution

Expectations around order turnaround times have only accelerated as E-commerce has evolved, and nowadays, customers expect fast and free delivery that can put even seasoned E-commerce retailers under pressure. Again, entrusting your logistics and inventory management to the right solutions provider or integrations specialist can work wonders when growing in this area.

As you can imagine, the growth of the E-commerce market in 2020 has meant that competition in logistics and fulfilment is both fast and fierce. However, it's not all a question of speed – customers have grown weary of surly delivery drivers who are feeling the pressure of stringent deadlines, to say nothing of carelessly delivered parcels or orders that get lost in warehouses during the hurried dash for fulfilment.

In other words, don't feel as though speed is the only point of emphasis you need to make when standing apart in E-commerce deliveries. Encourage your customers by explaining how you are working with solutions providers who will fulfil orders with care, and you're certain to win plenty of favour – and keep environmentally friendly logistics in mind too, as this is a growing area of interest heavy on plenty of companies' and consumers' minds, especially in younger buyers.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Sustainable Growth

Repeat business and returning customers – the domino effect of consumer confidence

What could convince a customer considering purchasing from you for the first time that your online store is worth a try? Perhaps publicising the fact that hundreds, if not thousands of others are doing so already!

Returning customers can grow exponentially, providing you offer the same high standards of service across the board consistently – there's no room for complacency. Having a smooth user interface for your shopping experience, alliances with the world's best marketplaces, partnerships with inventory and logistics specialists and a world-class customer service approach will definitely win you repeat business – yet you're wise to consider other strategies to complement the solid reputation you've established.

For example, email newsletters featuring discounts, information on product launches and exclusive deals are a fantastic way to build a community. Similarly, effective social media use, that engages with and encourages shared content and commentary from your followers, can not only help you cement your brand identity, but also help you get a feel for the nature of your customer base and what their expectations are.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

However, as already discussed, maintaining a consistent flow of goods to keep inventory well maintained, and managing that inventory effectively across each marketplace and website where you are active, is a crucial component of sustaining repeat business. Remember, the events of 2020 have underlined the fact that consumers will explore other avenues to get what they want and need if their usual trusted E-commerce providers fail, and that could eat into your goodwill and repeat business potential if mismanaged.

The more reliable, approachable, ethical and transparent a business can show itself to be, the more trust, loyalty and, ultimately, spending power that company stands to gain from its customer base over the long-term. Not only that, but as recommendations and positive word of mouth spread, there will be a clear sense of growth and progression underlining how your business expands over time, too – be that in profit margins or geographic growth.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Growth and scaling up sustainably

There's a big, and some might say painful, difference between those E-commerce businesses who grow sustainably and scale up their operations to match, versus those who explode in popularity and fizzle out like a firework ember just as fast.

Naturally, establishing the means to have the logistics, infrastructure, inventory management and overall strategic mindset to accomplish success in the long term is the goal. To this end, it comes back around to the partnerships and integrations that you recognise as promoting the most value to your brand and your business – consider the areas of shortfall or potential growth bottlenecks in your business proactively.

If you get bigger, is storage and packing going to be an issue? It's time to find a solutions provider to help with that. As you expand across different marketplaces, is your overview of what's in stock on each channel getting fuzzy and inaccurate? It's time to integrate with a software and systems specialist to solve that. Would you like to enhance your offering with faster shipment, or expand where you can deliver to include new countries and territories? It's time to connect with a logistics provider who can do just that.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

What counts is – as has been the theme of this piece – consistency. Ideally, your business will be growing, but customers won't necessarily see a difference consciously. While their expectations grow as they interact with you and your business, they'll still enjoy solid pricing, a smooth browsing and buying experience, fast-yet-ethical product delivery and strong customer service for their enquiries.

Consistency is about making all the wheels turn in the background that keep business flowing neatly, without buyers necessarily knowing that your enterprise is getting bigger. Eliminating growing pains before they manifest ensures your business needn't be disrupted, and neither your customers' shopping experiences. That said, it makes for great marketing if your growth is indeed something you want to talk about!

Understanding the demographics of your customer audience can likewise go a long way to helping you scale up in a way that doesn't alienate them, while also inventing new ways to encourage a wider and more diverse range of buyers. Get to know where your customers live, their average age and gender split, and even their level of confidence with technology, to help shape and inform how you move forward.

MENU

> Introduction

> Brand Identity

- Creating – and protecting – your brand identity
- Making sure smooth service is a continuous norm
- Defining who and what you are
- Fostering partnerships that bolster your growth
- Fulfilling customer expectations
- Identifying the best third-party providers and partnerships

> Customer Service

- Internal forces – mastering matters close to home
- A lack consistency isn't just felt in loss of sales
- The customer experience – more than just the bread and butter
- Trust – the beating heart of your business
- Soothing the soapbox – handling complaints on social media
- Creating smooth, satisfying shopping experiences
- Defining your delivery solution

> Sustainable Growth

- Repeat business and return customers – the domino effect of customer confidence
- Growth and scaling up sustainably

> Conclusion

Remember, as E-commerce as an industry has grown in recent years, it has increasingly captured as much of the older generation as the young.

Are there ways you can engender confidence in the buying experience for those less confident buyers who were forced to shop online when the brick-and-mortar shops shut in early 2020? Can you foster enough trust and demonstrate enough convenience to convert these folks more permanently? Likewise, can you demonstrate ethics and eco-friendliness to appeal to Millennials and Generation Z shoppers?

Understanding your customer base – both existing, and those whom you seek to attract – is as vital a part of scaling up your business as it is any other element of E-commerce success. After all, even with the right integrations and solution providers partnered to your cause, your business is going nowhere without buyers for your products.

Learn their desires, integrate with the means to fulfil them most expediently, and a steady ascent is yours for the taking. It will never truly be free of challenges – what business ever is? But it nevertheless stands to be a tremendous success story that's poised to capitalise on the ever-blossoming emergence of E-commerce as a dominant force and multi-trillion dollar growing market in today's retail world.

About The Access Group

The Access Group has been recognised in The Sunday Times Tech Track 100 in 2019 and is a leading provider of business software to mid-sized UK organisations. It helps more than 35,000 customers across commercial and not-for-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud platform transforms the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more. Founded in 1989, The Access Group has an enterprise valuation of over £1 billion and employs more than 2,600 staff.

www.theaccessgroup.com

