

DIFFICULT TO BE DIFFERENT – CAN WE CHANGE EVEN IF WE WANT TO?



One of the subjects often addressed in conference papers, or in worthy articles is the topic of customer loyalty. How important it is to gain and how easy it is to lose. The premise being that customers are perhaps less loyal and indeed more promiscuous online than they may be in the physical retail environment. The rationale being that the internet is a world without borders where people are free to choose when, where and how to shop.

Whilst it is true that consumers don't have to physically move to enter a thousand stores whilst sitting, mobile or tablet in hand, they do need to mentally adjust to the wealth of options out there. How easy is it to be different, to make a decision you've never made before? If it was so easy, why do so many of us still use the bank we joined when leaving school, ignoring the financial inducements on offer and the bad press 'our' bank may have received? How many of us still use the same energy supplier, take the same route home every day, visit the same coffee vendor in the morning, always read the same paper? Are we really programmed to be able to be different, to turn left instead of right, to say yes instead of no?

As a father of two young children it's obvious that we aren't born with a closed mind. Decision wise the variety and colour of choices we make in early life is simply staggering. Everything is a new experience and brings new delights and in some cases new disappointments. It is what defines us as the people we are. We are a reflection of the decisions we make.

How does this relate back to online retailing you may well be asking? Simply this; if people find it difficult to make different decisions then how do retailers selling online ultimately get people to visit their site instead of one of the repertoire of sites we all have bookmarked as our favourites?

The value in getting people to 'switch' or to be added to that repertoire of oft-visited sites cannot be under-estimated. The lifetime value of a customer is immense to any retailer and engaging them with the retail proposition becomes ever more important. With the retail landscape likely to contract even further (both online and offline) it's critical to create a relationship with potential customers.

The first step, is to use the wealth of data available. Looking at who is online, where they're visiting, where they are going to and arriving from (in terms of other sites). Look for the patterns that are there and use this information to reflect their needs in the design of the website and the approach taken to attracting new customers. Many retailers are successful in gaining new shoppers and if you have an offer you believe may be attractive to them, it is paramount that you meet whatever needs they may have. If you're a clicks and mortar retailer, ensure your Omni-channel experience is truly customer centric and if you're a pure-player investigate how you can bring the brand and the product into the physical world; pop-up shops, collection points, event sponsorship.

Whilst it's difficult to be different, it's not impossible. Given a good enough reason, shoppers will try a new site and once there (as long as they've been not only satisfied but delighted), they will return. It will then be another retailers job to try to get them to be different once again.

Source: Andres Phipps
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