Is webrooming the new showrooming? What retailers need to know

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Following a recent article on 'showrooming' by Debbie Oates I thought it would be interesting to take another look at the gap between online and offline retail, but from a slightly different angle. I feel it would be useful to consider another school of thought in the industry, one that says 'webrooming' is more of an issue than 'showrooming'.

As explained by Debbie retailers have long feared showrooming – by which we mean shoppers looking at products in-store but buying elsewhere, often online – thereby creating a disjointed and unattributable customer journey. However, there is an argument that the opposite is in fact happening. Enter, 'webrooming' – where shoppers research items online and then purchase in store.

Customers prefer to purchase in store because they relish immediacy. Don't you? Why wait for days (or weeks) for something to arrive when you can go and buy it now? Of course there are issues concerning price and offers but if, after research, a customer feels there is little difference between the online and the offline, an in-store purchase is an attractive prospect. It can save time as most of the browsing can be done from the comfort of your own home (perhaps on a mobile device) or at a desk at work. No shipping/postal fees. What's not to like? As long as any price difference doesn't exceed the money saved on delivery it may work out cheaper to buy in store – especially big and bulky items.

Being able to see what you're buying in the flesh. Ok so this is a contributory factor to the showrooming effect however, being able to see it as you buy it does provide some satisfaction. Personal relationship with staff. When buying an item in-store a customer can ask any last minute questions and get assurances from a member of staff. For many people this personal relationship is more satisfactory than anything an online store can provide.

Knowing what the process is for returning. Similar to the above, buying something from a store means a customer knows how and where to return an item should they change their mind. They know where the store is and can clarify with a staff member any warrantees or time periods that apply. The data says more people are webrooming than showrooming

Webrooming

Do customers prefer to browse online and then purchase in store? According to payment technology company, Merchant Warehouse, 69 per cent of the UK population who own smartphones in the 18-36 age group have webroomed, compared to 50 per cent who have showroomed. Among the older 37-48-year-old category, the results are 71 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. However it's not a case of showrooming versus webrooming (neither is it showrooming OR webrooming) rather, these two phenomenon are two sides of the same coin and the same solutions apply to both. As explained by Debbie the main issue is the gap in the customer journey and retailers must work to remove friction across touch points so that the customer experience is seamless.

Good analytics and an understanding of your customers will help inform how they interact with your brand across thejourney rather than a siloed, channel-specific view of each individual. How retailers should cater for webrooming. In short, retailers need to run programmes that expand consumers' access to information online, while retaining some control over the customer journey by

emphasising offline stores as the customer's potential final destination – based on the benefits of offline shopping that I highlighted earlier.

However – obstacles shouldn't be put in the way to stop or make it difficult for web visitors to purchase online. The power lies with the customer – you're just trying to make it easier for them. Remove all the Silos – siloed processes and departments are anathema to creating seamless customer experiences. Operations, Marketing, Sales and Service should be considered one team in order to work towards a single goal – a joined up seamless customer experience.

In line with this, every channel and touch point needs to be measured and optimised with insights being fed back into the overall planning and strategy. Retailers need to leverage every ounce of customer data to understand behaviour and improve customer experiences.

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Link:
http://www.theretailbulletin.com/news/is_webrooming_the_new_showrooming_what_retailers_need_to_know_19-05-15/