Cross-Channel Customer Experience

UNIFYING THE BRAND AND MARKETING EXPERIENCE
By Daniela Forte, Multichannel Merchant

Marrying the brand experience across channels from offline to online is important today. Retailers should make sure they are selling where the consumers are.

But what do consumers expect?
Consumers are expecting everything from real services like free or low-cost shipping, to the ability to touch products in-store while still getting the deals later online.

Consumers, however, don’t look at a brand or retailer as a channel. It may be how they’re shopping, but they view the brands as one brand. This is why it is important to keep your brand message and experience uniform across each channel.

Social Media: Not Just a Marketing Channel

When it comes to marketing and selling to customers, social media has evolved tremendously as a channel for brands. Brands are going beyond having social media as a marketing tool; they are taking active stances to drive sales to their websites.

For accessories brand Alex and Ani, the brand thrives when it comes to selling on social media. Instagram takes the top spot as the social media platform of choice for them.

Ryan Bonifacino, chief marketing officer and SVP Digital for Alex and Ani, said when he looks at anyone interacting with the brand, it has always been important to the founder of the company that no matter how big they get as a brand, that they don’t stray away from engaging with the consumer.

For Alex and Ani, social media is a support function, it is a shared service across all channels.

“[Social media] is the extension of the customer lifetime value. With the results that we have been able to
uncover, the customer interacting with us on any social channel, they are going to last longer as customers,” said Bonifacino. “The customer lasts longer, in many cases, the customer is buying at a higher frequency, you are seeing them on the [web]site more, you have more abilities to show them relevant content.”

According to the MCM Outlook 2015 survey, social media ranked 84% as a marketing tool for retailers. This was below the ecommerce site at 89.7%. In fact, Facebook is the top social media platform (76.2%) where retailers maintain an active presence while Instagram is 28.6%. Only 26.2% said they use social media for commerce.

Retailers need to stay in front of the consumers and engaging at their level. It helps build brand awareness and creates a sense of community, engaging shoppers which will ultimately result in increased sales.

There are more than 2 billion active social media users, and social media has gone beyond a consumer education tool: it’s now an ecommerce driver. Consumers use social media for pre-purchase research, while brands use social media to introduce new products, build loyalty, and make merchandising decisions.

The Pinterest buy button allows customers to discover millions of handpicked products. According to research from Millward Brown, 93% of active Pinners said they use Pinterest to plan for purchases and 87% said they’ve purchased something because of Pinterest.

Making the Online and In-Store Connection

Retailers are finding innovative ways to connect the online experience to their in-store experience. This includes new in-store technology, including point-of-sale systems, iBeacon-enabled hardware and wearables, which have all moved toward the mainstream.

As the technology landscape matures, retailers will be able to look at their customers holistically and they will experiment with these innovations to improve the shopping experience. Combining the in-store and online data will make this a critical business requirement for brands’ personalization efforts.

Bonifacino said for Alex and Ani, the connection between online and in-store has been around customer data. The company is in year four of e-receipts, and it...
has been a natural evolution.
“Being able to have a high capture for it, it helps unify customer information,” said Bonifacino. “That is big at the transaction level, you have identifiable data. We have beacons in all of our stores, we are able to get to see if that device has had a touch point in the past.”

Bonifacino assured that the information captured is purely for analysis as it relates to the customer journey. It allows Alex and Ani to see if mobile advertising is working in a very unique way.

The Ecommerce Site

Like so many of the channels that sell to the consumer, the ultimate place you want people to land is on your ecommerce site. As a retailer, this is your chance to close the deal with the consumer and make them come back again.

Eoin Comerford, CEO of Moosejaw Mountaineering said during a video interview at IRCE 2015, content is important for their brand.

“We sell 25,000 products on our site, we can’t possibly take original content of all 25,000 products. We rely on our vendors to give us our products, so for the longest time we thought that was enough,” said Comerford.

Comerford said they do customer service surveys all the time, and when they asked consumers who went to Moosejaw Mountaineering to purchase and didn’t come back again.

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Over the holiday season, Belk launched its Santa Baby Sweepstakes, which generated the greatest number of email and mobile opt-ins among other Belk sweepstakes in 2013 and 2014.

Belk partnered with Helloworld, a provider of rich engagement solutions, to offer a multichannel incentive program accessible across digital and mobile channels for the sweepstakes.

Jon Pollack, executive vice president of marketing, sales promotion and ecommerce for Belk, said the sweepstakes exceeded its expectations.

“In a relatively short promotional period, the sweepstakes absolutely exceeded our expectations and goals for driving traffic during the holiday season,” said Pollack.

Belk saw 233,500 total registrations and 1.1 million entries stemming from various activities across its microsite. The campaign generated over 1.6 million personalized eCards.

During the sweepstakes, consumers were able to play festive games and earn bonus sweepstakes entries by sharing the site across social channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as watching the Santa Baby television spot and following Belk on Instagram and Twitter.

Pollack said Belk has ongoing sweepstakes at various phases throughout the year. He said the company has found that promotional tactic to be a key driver in obtaining opt-ins and building long-term loyalty. “They’ll continue to be part of our overall strategy for the foreseeable future,” Pollack said.

He said one key challenge with sweepstakes for any retailer is finding new and creative ways to stand out in the holiday season, a period more cluttered than usual with advertising and promotions.

“We’re very pleased with the results and look forward to looking for innovative ways to spread our brand message,” Pollack said.

From the back-to-school period to the holiday season and other points during the year, he said, Belk looks for key opportunities to insert its brand into customers’ lifestyles and develop a marketing approach that resonates with its target audience.
test with the appropriate size of buttons and positions.

“What is the ideal checkout page for desktop, the combination of A/B testing tools as well as analytics,” said Bonifacino. “Those two working in tandem is one of our power strategic advantages; being able to shop the site, shop the collections and get inspired to see how people are wearing the product, tons of validation and inspiration.”

According to the MCM Outlook 2015 survey, 69.8% of retailers said ratings and reviews are the type of user generated content they use on their website, while 43.4% said integrating “share this” “Facebook” or “Tweet this” is what they use.

How to Conquer Mobile as a Channel

This year, the topic on everyone’s minds has been mobile devices, particularly the smartphone. Retailers know it is becoming increasingly necessary to sell on this channel, but how? Or better yet, how effective should you be when it comes to selling on mobile?

The answer: very effective. Consumers, especially the millennial generation, are on their smartphones and mobile devices 24/7. So how do you make it work for your business?

There are higher expectations from consumers as advances in mobile technology become more prevalent. Customers are expecting a one-click “Amazon-like” payment and a super-personalized mobile experience. Offer your customers a personalized, frictionless mobile experience that will promise bigger business results, turning mobile browsers into mobile buyers.

Today, retailers will want to capture the consumer’s attention when they are shopping, especially when they are showrooming—examining products in-store with the mind to buy online. Retailers are implementing mobile geo-targeting and geo-fencing, which has become increasingly popular to reach customers where they are.

According to the MCM Outlook 2015 survey, 36% of retailers said mobile commerce is the channel they market to their customers. On a scale of 1 to 10, retailers said they value mobile as an ecommerce strategy as 5.9.

Your Email Program — Making It Work for Your Brand

Email has come a long way and only continues evolve as a channel. Retailers are finding different ways to not only grab the consumer’s attention, but keep them as loyal customers.

Today, it is important to get personalized with your email message and integrate past purchase and browsing history, creating a more a targeted and personalized email experience.

Retailers want to make sure that they capture customers at each touch point, from the beginning of the subscriber journey to the point when the sale is made. If you send an email and there is no reaction from the customer, you may want to be able to trigger a reminder email.

Bonifacino said when it comes to their email program, they have a highly engaged user base, their customers love consuming content weekly through email.

According to the MCM Outlook 2015 survey, retailers said email is primarily used for promotions and marketing (91.1%), transactional emails are 82.2% while trigger emails are 66.7%.