

Retail digital marketing strategies

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Abstract

We are all shoppers in full evolution of our habits and expectations, and retailers are challenged to immediately respond and even surprise, by adequately engaging at every relevant step of the customer journey and ensuring a smart and seamless shopping experience with the help of the best operational practices and of the retail marketing innovation in the current digital landscape, using proper digital marketing strategies, including by considering both marketing's hidden treasure of CPG companies, and the entrance of Amazon into grocers' industry and its true technological battle with Walmart. There is no doubt about retailers' imperative of creating a digitally connected environment, including by seeing shoppers as "Blue Dot" consumers, empowering both employees and customers, and continuously improving retailers' capabilities associated with customer engagement and their predictive and intelligent marketing capabilities.

Keywords: Retail digital marketing strategies; Retail marketing innovation; Customer

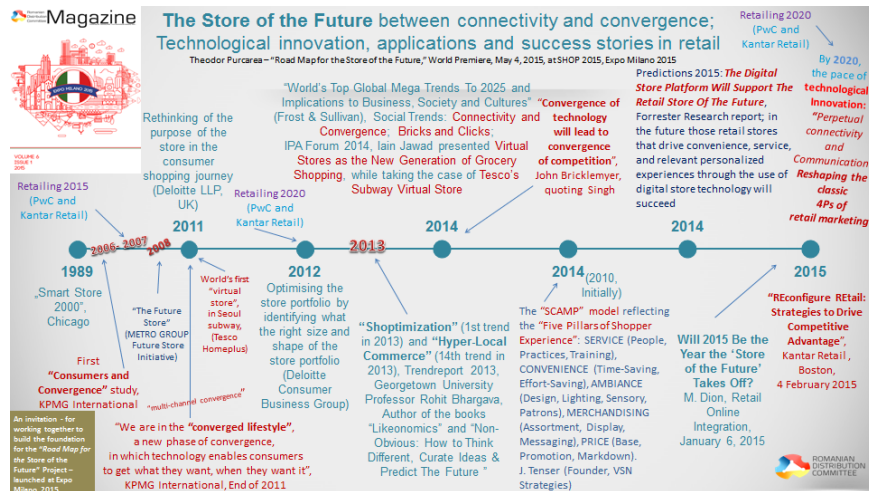
Engagement; Omni channel CX

JEL Classification: L81, L86, M31, Q55

Introduction

Twenty years ago, in Bucharest (18-19 May 1998), Romania, the works of the 24th Congress of the International Association for the Distributive Trade (AIDA Brussels) took place organized by the Romanian Distribution Committee in cooperation with AIDA. On that occasion, Louis Guelette, IBM Vice President, Distribution, shows how information technologies represent a real revolution in the management of distribution companies and their suppliers, while Jean-Jacques Van Den Heede, Vice-President ACNielsen, highlighted that distribution has entered a new era (characterized by the polarization of the markets, the emergence of new technologies, the diversification of the store concepts, a new type of relationship with consumers). In March 2015, we also remembered how Iain Jawad, Director Strategic Partnerships at Frost & Sullivan, attracted the attention in 2014 that Connectivity and Convergence, on one hand, and Bricks and Clicks, on the other hand, have been identified among the world's top global mega trends. (Purcarea, 2015)

At the beginning of May 2015, as Keynote Speaker at the opening of the "SHOP 2015" Conference, Expo Milano 2015, we argued that it's time to begin to envision the store of the future by extrapolating the actual trends in order to best serve today's Omni channel shoppers ensuring context, connectivity, content, emotional and interactive experience, within this framework launching an invitation of working together to build the foundation for the "Road Map for the Store of the Future" Project: (Purcarea, 2015)



In July 2017, the FitForCommerce Annual Report 2017 underlined: the significant pressure for retailers to both undertake greater focus on digital channels and to deliver a complete and unified shopping experience (which must be relevant, fast and convenient), connecting and mixing in-store and digital experiences, (FitForCommerce, 2017) because shoppers do not think in terms of channels; that in order to satisfy shopper's high expectations retailers need to approach the shopping experience in a strategic holistic manner, building an internal foundation as shown in the figure below: (Fit For Commerce Annual Report 2017)

FROM IDEA TO DOORSTEP: PROCESS AND TECHNOLOGIES



Figure 1: From Idea to Doorstep: Process and Technologies

Source: FitForCommerce Annual Report 2017. From Idea to Doorstep: Everything you need to know to achieve digital commerce succes.

In September 2017, the Salesforce Connected Shoppers Report revealed that the technically savvy capabilities of today's customers cross the digital and physical worlds, retailers being challenged to ensure them a smart and seamless shopping experience, considering their empowerment by the cloud, social, mobile, Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence revolutions. (Salesforce, 2017) Next month, in October 2017, a White Paper of RELEX Solutions argued that the accelerated change of the customer behavior within the complexity of today's retail landscape is requiring visibility and the ability to immediately respond. (Wilson, 2017)

At the beginning of this year, on January 18, the above mentioned FitForCommerce highlighted four learnings from NRF 2018 Retail's Big Show (the U.S. retail industry's premier annual event, New York City, January 14-16, 2018): (FitForcommerce, 2018) today's importance of clienteling (including by using mobile apps for store associates), the need of using innovative technologies in addressing specific challenges, the significant role of the innovative marketing strategies (considering findings from the 2017 NRF- FitForCommerce Omnichannel Retail Index), and the XYZ of Systems Integrators and Agencies (selecting the right implementation partner to launch a retailer's new digital commerce site etc.). While more recently, in April 2018 FitForCommerce already recommended, for example, some operational best practices in the grocery industry (which is under the pressure of the Amazon Effect) to address digital commerce disruptors and succeed accordingly, including by using advanced technologies (such as: Grocery-Assisted Ordering, IoT, Grab & Go, Checkout-Free Shopping Mobile App, Mobile Loyalty Apps, In-store Location Marketing, and AI). (Yee, 2018)

Retail marketing innovation in the current digital landscape

Adequate shopping experience with instant support – within the context of offering better choice, convenience and price – represents a continuous challenge for retailers looking for better understanding customers' wants, needs, habits and emotions. (Jacobs, 2018) The CEO and founder of relationship marketing agency Jacobs & Clevenger recommended recently some tips in order to re-energize retailers' marketing strategy in the digital era (see figure below), such as: to connect with customers through shared values, and only after that to discount goods and services; to make customers feel recognized; to give customers a sense of status and exclusivity by modern loyalty programs driving engagement and retention (providing multiple consumer benefits through several touchpoints); to engage with customers at every relevant step of their journey with the help of marketing automation, and to predict people's emotional response with the help of the artificial intelligence; to optimize for mobile (phone, tablet, voice-activated) search.



Figure 2: Digital Marketing

Source: Jacobs, R. (2018). 5 Tips to Re-Energize Your Retail Marketing Strategy, My Total Retail, June 1

As shown recently by eMarketer, in order to drive consumers to their physical stores retailers use different digital marketing strategies (such as online-to-offline/O2O capabilities), seeing the complete consumer journey with the help of better location tracking and identity graphs. (King, 2018) A recent study from Blis and WBR Insights revealed that the performance of the retailers' digital strategy to guide customers to physical stores in North America is already considered to be good (28%) and adequate (32%) by the majority of the retail professionals, while 31% of the respondents saying that this needs improvement (7% considering it as being poor).

On the other hand, more and more retailers are actively involved in measuring the customer journey (better understood by fine-tuning retailers' ability to assign attribution in order to track and look at each of the online interactions with their customers and see how each touchpoint contributes to initiating conversion paths), being a well-known fact that compared with other industries retailers count on one of the most diverse mix of channels, as shown in the figure below. (Garcia, 2018) It is considered that over the next few years optimizing the customer journey across multiple touchpoints will constitute an important part of the client-side marketers' future digital plans, as revealed by a survey conducted by Econsultancy and Adobe in January 2018.

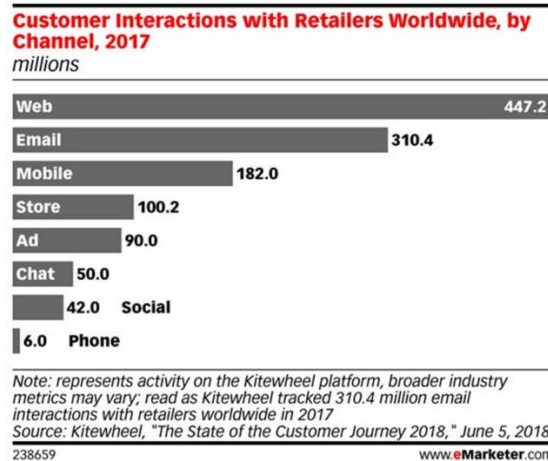


Figure 3: Customer Interactions with Retailers Worldwide, by Channel, 2017

Source: Garcia, K. (2018). Customers Are Using More Channels than Ever to Interact with Retailers, Retail eMarketer, June 7

As an important factor in retail, for instance, is engaging and boosting mobile app users' lifetime value, user acquisition being considered an app marketing goal (according to a survey conducted in July 2017 by InMobi, the respondents being marketers in North America), it is important for retail marketers: to know that if a shopping app installed by the mobile user doesn't immediately convert there is still a chance to record a serious jump after 7-30 days (according to data released on June 19, 2018 by AppsFlyer); to make difference between mobile app users who install apps stimulated by ads or other incentives and those who discover an app on their own (many of these organic app installers can make a purchase within 90 days, and being considered more valuable compared with the first category, according to AppsFlyer); to understand that a retail app installation signals a greater shopping intent, a mobile retail app user knowing what he is looking for (as revealed by Criteo's Q1 2018, in North America, over 2/3 of digital transactions take place on mobile, the majority of them taking place through mobile app). (Garcia, 2018)

Another important thing to reflect on for retailers is us to differentiate true customers throughout their store visit from passers-by and staff, by identifying data anomalies and ensuring this way that retailers' ads are served to the right people at the right time, so as to better foster brand-customer relationships. (Flatley-Feldman, 2018) To achieve this they can use, for instance, Euclid algorithms which allow filtering anomalies captured with valid opt-ins, forecasting accurate shopper behavior patterns and understanding which types of visits and campaigns result in the necessary conversions, better tracking ROI this way.

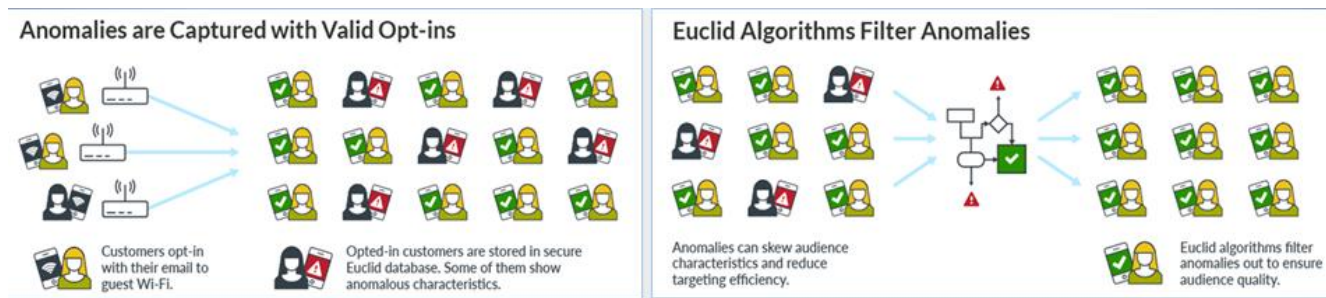


Figure 4: Anomalies are Captured with Valid Opt-ins and Euclid Algorithms Filter Anomalies

Source: Flatley-Feldman, J. (2018). *Data Anomalies: Why They're Important & What They Tell Us*, Euclid, 01 June

The CEO of Euclid Analytics highlighted also recently some useful insights from Mary Meeker's annual Internet Trends report, such as: retailers' imperative of having a way to measure the number of products which are discovered on social and then purchased in stores, discovery being digital. (Franson, 2018) It is also worth mentioning within this framework that an April 2018 Salesforce survey (when the respondents being consumers worldwide were asked about technologies actively transforming expectations of companies) showed the considerable influence of mobile apps and IoT (40% of respondents), and this within the context in which 49% of respondents considered that smartphones have already transformed these expectations. (Garcia, 2018)

What retailers need to know about both marketing's hidden treasure of CPG companies, and the entrance of Amazon into grocers' industry

Retailers already know that: today's consumers are increasingly researching and purchasing consumer packaged goods (CPG products) online (according to recent survey findings from Periscope by McKinsey reflecting the responses of consumers from the U.S., UK, France and Germany); within this online approach, CPG companies are facing the need of imitating the attractive experience relating to a visit of a consumer in a physical store. (Acosta, 2018) On the other hand, McKinsey's representatives attracted recently the attention on consumer promotions and engagement (CPE including both in-store consumer activation and out-of-store engagement efforts, as shown in the figure below) as marketing's hidden treasure of the consumer-goods companies. (Cvetanovski et al., 2018)



Figure 5: CPE tools are effective at each part of the Consumer Decision Journey

Source: Cvetanovski, B., Haas, S., Magni, M. and Wu, C. (2018). *Marketing's hidden treasure: Better CPE can unlock millions to fuel growth*, McKinsey & Company, June

Among other aspects, McKinsey's representatives underlined the importance for knowing what's coming next of the working together on in-store innovations (like mobile coupons or new shelf technology) of the leading consumer companies and digital/mobile start-ups or retailers.

A digital experience insights platform, ContentSquare (focused on businesses understand how and why users are interacting with their app, mobile and web sites) showed that the supermarkets and grocers already offering a digital experience must take into account the entrance of the ecommerce giant Amazon into their industry by its recent acquisition of Whole Foods, by reviewing their systems and tackle every single pain point they can identify in the customer journey in this era of digital convenience, tailoring the digital experience. Among the takeaway suggested by ContentSquare (on the basis of its study which analyzed millions of sessions and page views for supermarkets and grocers across the US, UK and France) were: to design a personalized shopping experience by data-driven understanding of user engagement; to allow customers to create and share wish lists in order to achieve an increase in return shoppers and loyalty; to combin digital shopping with physical pickup; to streamlin the digital experience for a flawless interface.

As recently shown by Retail eMarketer: Whole Foods (despite its specialization in organics) represented the entry point into the physical world of grocery retailers; according to

Brick Meets Click (that makes difference between pure-play providers which are online-only like Amazon Fresh, one hand, and in-market providers like Whole Foods as physical supermarkets offering delivery or pickup options, on the other hand), in U.S. online grocery sales will increase faster compared to in-store sales. (Garcia, 2018) It is worth remembering that at the beginning of the last year Brick Meets Click (known for being focused on how digital technology and new players are changing shopping and retail) argued that collaboration between producers, CPG brands, and retailers around digital merchandising is crucial given the evolution of shopper habits and expectations, (Brick Meets Click, 2017) while in February this year highlighted the strategic imperatives (to meet consumers' changing preferences; to find new ways to increase profit) within the accelerating pace of change in grocery distribution and marketing. (Brick Meets Click, 2018)

It is also interesting to note within this framework that when grocery shopping U.S. smartphone users, for example, use self-checkout usually or always (57% of respondents), according to a January 2018 survey by Field Agent. (Garcia, 2018) Despite this fact, CBC News announced on May 13, this year (Harris, 2018) that Walmart has abandoned its Scan & Go (mobile scan-and-go with a phone app or a mobile device provided in the Walmart store) shopping at its U.S. stores (not yet in Canada). And this while a month before, on April 19, Walmart announced the launch of a new program called "Check Out With Me", which is considered a more convenient shopping experience which saves Walmart customers time, the Walmart associate from the more than 350 stores Lawn & Garden Centers scanning their customers' items with the "Check Out With Me" mobile device, then swiping their credit cards and providing them with a printed or electronic receipt (options available). (News Walmart, 2018) It will be really interesting to look at the evolution of this true technological battle between Walmart ("Check Out With Me"), Amazon (Amazon Go stores with no lines and no checkout, customers just using the Amazon Go app and so on), Kroger (cashier less checkout service called "Scan, Bag, Go") and other competitors. (Peterson, 2018)

A survey-based research study conducted between December 2017 and March 2018 by RELEX Solutions and Elastic Solutions – "Growing and Sustaining Competitive Advantage in Grocery Retail" – revealed that 91% of responding companies (top grocery retailers in North America) which offer an online shopping channel are picking online orders in store for fulfillment, the alternative being to have dedicated fulfillment centers. This survey-based research study recognized from the very beginning that the growth of online grocery has been accelerated by Amazon and Whole Foods.

Retailers' imperative of creating a digitally connected environment, including by seeing the shopper as the "Blue Dot" consumer

A recent study from Displaydata (the leader in the design and supply of fully graphic Electronic Shelf Labels - ESLs) and Planet Retail RNG (commissioned by Displaydata) – entitled "Analogue to Automated: Retail in the Connected Age" (there were surveyed 1,000

retailers and 4,811 consumers across 10 countries) – revealed that in order to meet the high customer expectations shaped by online experiences it is imperative for retailers to create a digitally connected environment by bringing into effective action digital technologies which optimise efficiencies, deliver a better CX and value in-store. (Business Wire, 2018) According to this study shoppers want promotions sent direct to their mobile devices (33% of respondents), ESLs to show accurate, real-time prices, promotions, and detailed product information (31% of respondents), and to be identified as a loyal customer (27% of respondents), their desire for these digital services targeting a better CX.

The 4th Annual Retail Innovation Conference hosted by Retail TouchPoints took place on April 30-May 2 in New York City, U.S. and had as theme “Embracing Retail Disruption”, the opening keynote – “Your Future Shopper: The Step Change Has Arrived” – being delivered by the well-known Shopper Behaviouralist Ken Hughes, who underlined the need of better understanding the set of values (based on new consumers’ growing up as true digital natives) which is motivating the current and future consumers, making easy to see the key values shaping Gen Z: freedom (of choosing brands and retailers in the omnichannel world, a retail experience setting consumer free); the “Weconomy” (retailers facing redefining the ultimate consumer in the sharing economy and culture); flexibility (retailers being challenged to do the right thing for these customers by adapting accordingly to their evolutionary needs); desire for instant gratification (retailers acting on immediately delivering on their promise); expectancy (retailers’ imperative of hitting the heart of the matter the initial time, every time); phygital (within the confluence of physical and digital, retailers need to offer the same CX regardless of what touchpoint might be); customization (retailers need to treat customers as persons, not like transactions); authenticity (retailers also need to offer the real thing so as to make customers see the relevance of the offered CX). (Blair, 2018) The final recommendation made by this Shopper Behaviouralist was to always remember that everything in today’s retail is about the shopper as the “Blue Dot” consumer (the cause to the retail revolution, being in the center of the big world, the smartphone map apps creating automatically a “you are here” Blue Dot) to be effectively reached. (Retail TouchPoints, 2016)

On the occasion of the same above mentioned Retail Innovation Conference Walmart CIO Clay Johnson argued that retail leaders have to understand the technology as a way to empower both employees and customers, integrating the innovation team across the entire retail company, continuing searching for innovation outside the retail company and retail industry; (Wassel, B. (2018) beyond the educational sessions, there were showcased different solutions for some of the retail industry’s persistently concerns, such as: AT&T mobile solutions in the digital transformations taking place in retail stores; the Bluecore retail marketing platform designed to help retailers personalize campaigns via email, e-Commerce sites, Google, online display ads and Facebook; the Evergage platform designed to provide retail customers with a 1-to-1 personalized experience; the Shopgate platform allowing retailers to build customized native mobile app experiences etc. (Retail TouchPoints, 2018)

The 2018 eTail West and WBR Insights Benchmark Report (based on survey responses from 100 retail industry leaders) on “Improving Customer Engagement with Predictive and Cognitive Capabilities” revealed that: 80% of retailers opted out for strategic imperatives which are customer-centric (acquisition, retention, and satisfaction); there is no confidence in retailers’ customer engagement strategies, retailers claiming the need of improving their capabilities associated with customer engagement; retailers’ predictive and intelligent marketing capabilities are far behind the already widely implemented customer engagement solutions; in the current everchanging digital retail environment retailers must make great efforts to understand consumer behavior and develop strategies which improve their position, focusing towards digital aspects and developing cognitive maturity to address changes in the marketplace so as to optimize processes on a continuous basis, while connecting operations, marketing, and physical stores and capitalizing on advanced technologies and disruptive relevant market trends. (Sentient Ascend, 2018)

Conclusions

In the previous issues of our journal we showed that retailers are forced to faster adopt digital strategies and optimize their supply chain within their Omni channel business, listening and pro-actively adapting to their customers’ expectations, recognizing the need for an enhanced Omni channel CX by defining accordingly their digital supply chain vision, creating a single customer view across channels and devices, giving more attention to the entire shopper journey and preventing friction in this journey, considering the newest solutions while looking at their customers’ preferences and shopping habits, having a customer-centric approach and innovating accordingly. This involves gaining and strengthening the retailer’s organizational commitment, guiding operations and future strategies through the application of analytics on data science and translating customer insights into business operations, improving stores’ value proposition and merchandising, making distinction between the initial consideration and the final consideration, and gaining competitive advantage and increasing CLV from the ongoing customer relationship-building provided by assistants in conversations beyond engagement or interactions, and never neglecting the powerful link between emotion and CX and loyalty.

As a continuing business activity a clearly defined retailers’ digital marketing strategy involves a so-called specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, time-related framework, on the basis of a digital marketing plan (with regard to the digital channel strategy for each main proposition), of data and insights translated into action, of effective content at various stages of the customer journey while considering customers’ preferred communications channel, all retail marketing communications (traditional and digital) being well integrated, and all the above mentioned aspects being harmonized with the general retail business objectives.

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