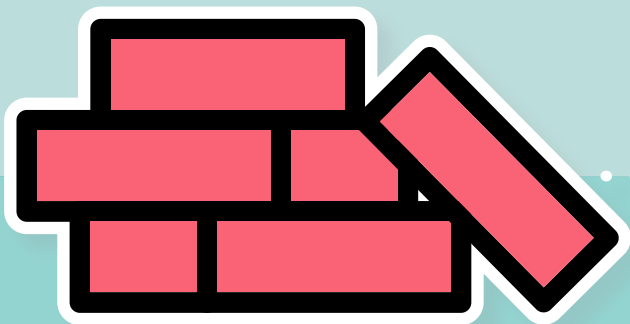




The ecommerce roadmap
from bricks to clicks:

How to start selling everywhere



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THE ECOMMERCE ROADMAP FROM BRICKS TO CLICKS:

How to Start Selling Everywhere

If you’ve been following the news about the retail industry, you may have come across the phrase “retail apocalypse.”

Numerous articles are proclaiming the death of brick and mortar retail, and many of these pieces are pointing to the continued growth of Amazon and the numerous store closures that hit the retail landscape.

But here’s the thing: *the retail apocalypse is a false narrative.*

Consider the following:

- Online commerce is growing, but the majority of sales take place offline. Ecommerce accounts for just [a little over 10% of total retail sales](#).
- The number of retail stores is growing. According to the [National Retail Federation](#), the industry sees two store openings for every company that closes a store.
- Consumers put a lot of trust in retailers with physical locations. [A survey by Google](#) found 61% of respondents would prefer to shop from retailers with a brick and mortar location than with those who only operate online.

HERE’S THE REAL STORY

Retail success isn’t an all-or-nothing battle between brick and mortar stores and ecommerce. Quite the opposite: [the International Council of Shopping Centers \(ICSC\)](#) found that physical and online channels actually complement each other, with physical retail influencing digital sales and vice versa.

When a customer spends \$100 online and then visits the retailer’s physical location, that shopper will on average, spend \$131 more. Additionally, shuttering stores can diminish a retailer’s online performance. The ICSC found that when a clothing retailer’s store closed in a market, online visits decreased by 9.5% and a homeware retailer’s web traffic dropped 16.4% after its physical location shut down.

So, stop listening to the doom and gloom of some retail headlines, and start beefing up your retail game to create a harmonious setup between your online and offline operations.

Not sure how to do that?

Vend and BigCommerce have you covered. In this joint resource, we’ll shed light on the key steps you should take to successfully set up shop online and offline. You’ll get a glimpse at what other retailers are doing to succeed in today’s landscape and you’ll hear from other retail experts who’ve shared their best advice for retail success.

Whether you’re a brick and mortar store who wants to set up your website or you’re an online retailer looking to improve your presence in the real world, you’ll find valuable insights in this resource.

Let’s get started!

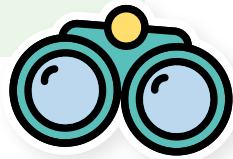
CHAPTER 1:

Setting up your brick and mortar system for online success

If you're a brick and mortar retailer who wants to expand to multiple channels, the first thing you should do is tighten up your existing systems to ensure that your physical store is set up for online success.

One of the biggest mistakes retailers can make when trying to sell everywhere, is to run their online and offline stores separately. Doing this opens up a host of issues. When you're selling and managing your products using a fragmented system, you're more prone to human errors and inaccuracies.

You can avoid all that by setting up your technologies properly and by implementing in-store processes that pave the way for a smooth shopping experience.



GETTING THE TECHNOLOGY RIGHT

Let's start with the tech side of things. If you're looking to sell online and offline efficiently, you need a point of sale system that can integrate with your online shopping cart.

You want your POS to “talk” to your ecommerce site so data smoothly flows from one system to the next. That way, when you add new customers or sell products on either platform, your database and stock levels are automatically synced.

If you already have a POS system, talk to your vendor about their ecommerce capabilities. Does your system have built-in online selling tools? Does it integrate with other shopping carts? If the answer is no to both of these questions, consider finding a POS with features that allow you to run an online and offline operation with ease.

GET YOUR TEAM UP TO SPEED

To truly get the most out of your retail management system, you need to get your staff on board. Invest time in training your employees on your new technology. Doing so improves their efficiency and enables them to provide the best customer experience possible.

Here are some best practices to implement when training your team on retail technology:

Use existing vendor resources

From working the checkout counter to tracking stock levels, your employees should know how to work every component of your retail management system to varying degrees. The simplest way to start this is by taking advantage of any training materials from your vendor. Let them sit in on live demos and give them access to the trials that your provider offers.

Plus, most solution providers offer help centers that allow users to browse different topics and type in their questions. You and your team should familiarize yourself with these resources. The more you get to know an app or piece of technology, the easier it will be for you to operate it and impart knowledge to others.

Get help from your most adaptable employees

Speaking of which, some employees may pick up on technology quickly, but others will need some extra training and time. On that note, leverage the experience of users who adapt quickly to new software. Designate those comfortable with technology as transitional training leaders who can solve low-level problems other coworkers might be having.

It's also a good idea to pair up your more tech-savvy workers with employees who need help with tech. The latter can get some hands-on experience with your tools, while the former can oversee their actions and ensure they're doing it correctly.

Specifically, look for the following capabilities:



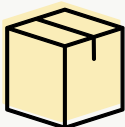
INVENTORY VISIBILITY

The solution should offer real-time inventory visibility and syncing when you sell online or offline, receive new stock, and conduct an inventory count.



ORDERS AND SALES

The orders placed in-store and online should instantly update to reflect your sales history and inventory on-hand.



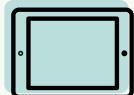
PRODUCT IMPORTS AND UPDATES

You should be able to quickly and easily import your entire product catalog on both channels to reduce any manual work and processes.



CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

Your customer records should be in sync, so you can view shopper activities and purchases across multiple channels.



CENTRALIZED PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

You need the ability to manage your catalog in one place, rather than having to update multiple records.



REPORTING

Your system should have analytics capabilities that enable you to view reports for both your online and offline storefronts.

Depending on your store, you may need additional features. For instance, if you'd like to sell on social media and online marketplaces such as Amazon, eBay, and Etsy, then you need a system to support that.



Bring in an expert if necessary

If you're running a more complex operation or if you have a big team, it may help to bring in a professional to train everyone on your POS system. Most solution providers have in-house account managers and customer success reps who can dedicate time to getting you and your team up to speed with their software.

Some vendors even have certified partners — i.e., independent consultants — who can assist with software set up, training, and maintenance. If you need extra help with wrangling your tech, reach out to your solution provider and see if they have in-house support staff who can help or if they can refer you to third-party experts.

WRAPPING UP

Brick and mortar stores who want to set up shop online need a POS and retail management system that can seamlessly connect to ecommerce platforms. Be sure to find a solution that will:

- Sync your inventory, sales, and customer data in real-time.
- Generate reports for both your online and offline storefronts.
- Allow you to sell on other digital channels — including social media and online marketplaces — if necessary.

And when you get your system up and running, get your staff up to speed through the right tech training. Tap into your vendor's resources or bring in an expert to ensure that everyone in your team knows how to work the system.

PRO TIP

If you're shopping around for a POS or retail management system, it helps to be thorough. Take advantage of any resources a vendor may offer (e.g., free trials, feature checklists, etc.) so you can get to know system. And try to get them on the phone. Online resources are great, but you'll get more value out of speaking with a real person. Vend, for example, has retail specialists who can address all your retail questions and concerns. [Get in touch with them here.](#)

Already have a solid retail management platform? If you're ready to dive into the world of online commerce, read on to the next chapter where we talk about how to build an ecommerce site that drives sales and conversions.

CHAPTER 2:

Creating a winning ecommerce site

When you enter a brick and mortar store, what makes you feel confident as a shopper?

Do your surroundings draw you in, light up your curiosity, and speak to your needs?

If you sell online, your ecommerce website IS your store. And, just like in a brick and mortar shop, your online presence needs to cater to your customer.

A bad ecommerce website design can overshadow even the greatest product in existence — just like a messy, dimly-lit store with a confusing layout will deter any buyer from buying anything. Even if the products are exceptional.

If you make your online shop welcoming, user-friendly, and [well-designed](#), you clear the way for buyers to do what they do best: *buy*.

To make sure your website checks those boxes, let's go over the most important steps for a winning ecommerce site from start-to-finish, including:

- Good design
- Mobile-friendliness
- High-quality product images
- An intuitive checkout experience
- The right ecommerce shopping cart setup

6 BASIC STEPS FOR A WELL-DESIGNED ECOMMERCE WEBSITE

When customers land on your website, you have to make a good impression to entice them to browse and purchase.

To win with shoppers, there are several key steps to understand and work into your website.

1. Choose simplicity over everything.

POP QUIZ:

What's the most common mistake online store owners make when building their ecommerce sites?

Answer: Information overload.

This is when site owners pack in as many details as possible on their site pages and product pages. They think all that information will help sell their products/services and rank those webpages in Google. Instead, the walls of text and visual clutter mislead and confuse buyers, making them less likely to purchase anything.





This example from a homewares retailer proves the point: It's cluttered, chaotic, and provides too many options. The average shopper will definitely suffer from [decision fatigue](#) when looking at this page, which ultimately may lead to a negative shopping experience.

When in doubt, choose simplicity.

- What's the most important information buyers need to know?
- How can you clarify and simplify the user experience?
- Can you split up information between a few pages vs. loading it all onto one page?



Remember that simplicity doesn't mean a lack of information. Instead, it means that you're displaying the right information, at the right time, in a succinct fashion.

2. Be mobile-friendly.

Overwhelmingly, an online shop's mobile-friendliness is a major determiner for whether they'll earn more sales.

According to Forrester's [Mobile Web Study](#) for 2018, one-third of total retail sales in the U.S. depend on people researching, browsing, and buying products on their smartphones. In other words, \$1 trillion in sales are mobile-dependent.

If you don't offer a good mobile experience to your customers, you're missing out and falling behind.

3. Tell a brand story.

Your brand story defines everything you do, so it should show up front-and-center on your ecommerce website. Let it infuse the design, branding, colors, and content.

This example from [Skullcandy](#) shows how the brand's hometown plays a true part in their product development and creativity-first philosophy.



4. Use crystal-clear product photos.

The point of your ecommerce website is connecting your customers with your product. As such, including clear, crisp, high-quality product photos is a must.

Luckily, you don't need an expensive camera set-up to get them. You can actually produce beautiful product shots with nothing more than your smartphone. (This great [guide](#) from FitSmallBusiness explains how.)

Look at these product photos from Bliss, a beauty brand. In particular, their “[Mint Chip Mania](#)” mask promises a product that “looks, feels, and smells like ice cream” — and they prove at least part of that claim with great product photos:



It DOES look like ice cream — and the product photos show that off beautifully.

Finally, your website design needs beautiful photos and images that mesh with your branding and color scheme, too. [Unsplash](#), [Pixabay](#), and [Shutterstock](#) are good sources for professional, license-free photography.

5. Pretend you're the customer.

At every juncture in the ecommerce website design process, you need to see your site through your customer's eyes:

- Is the navigation clear and easy to understand?
- Can you find what you need? (e.g. customer support, contact information, FAQ, shipping rates, information about the company)
- Do product descriptions provide the information buyers need to make wise purchases?
- Is checkout fast and easy?

6. Use customizable templates.

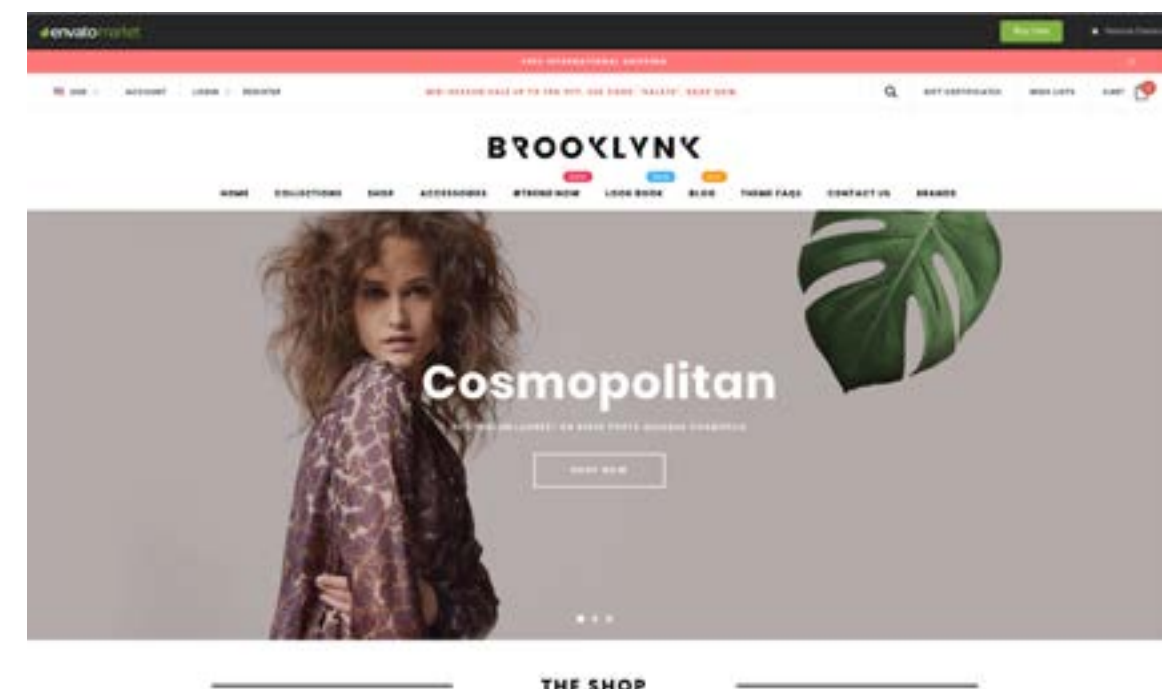
So, you're not a website designer.

With the right ecommerce platform, that's not a problem at all.

Most offer templates for your website you can customize with your own content. The result will be a professional-looking site you didn't have to hire a professional to design.

Here are some templates from top sources (this goes without saying, but all are mobile-friendly):

- If you use BigCommerce, the ultra-modern [Fortune Minimal](#) template is free and perfectly complements sleek, fresh products:
- BigCommerce's [other free templates](#) are worth a look, too.
- [Colorlib](#) offers free ecommerce templates that are flexible and will work with most providers.
- Another good source for ecommerce templates is [Envato](#). Here you'll find a marketplace full of professional designs you can buy for a flat fee.



7. Test, test, and test some more.

There's no way to know whether your website works unless you test it out with customers.

A/B testing, or split testing, pits one version of your website against another (you'll need specific tools or software to do it — check out this [list](#) from Geekflare). User data is collected on each version of your site, which you can compare and contrast once your split testing period is over.

Testing pinpoints exactly what parts of your website design help lead the customer to purchase and which don't.

This vital information may increase your conversions if you implement what you learn from testing.

For some good examples of split testing, check out the [BigCommerce blog](#).

3 TIPS FOR SETTING UP YOUR ECOMMERCE SHOPPING CART AND PAYMENTS

Next up in your ecommerce website checklist: shopping cart and payments.

Choosing the right technology will result in both a better customer experience and a better return on your investment.

Follow these tips to ensure your setup is ideal for everyone.

1. Know the difference between hosted and licensed shopping cart software.

In the world of [shopping cart technology](#) for your business, there are two general choices:

1. Software-as-a-service, and
2. On-premise software.

What you choose will depend on your type of business and your needs as an online store owner.

Choosing a SaaS platform gives you a solution that a provider hosts for you. In a SaaS scenario, the software provider is responsible for the server running the tech, upgrades, and maintenance.

This solution is perfect if you have a small product inventory, are new to ecommerce, or are taking the first tentative steps to build your online store. Having a SaaS platform is also perfect for brands that don't have developers on-hand.

On the other side of the coin, on-premise software offers slightly more flexibility and options along with higher price points, on average. These are ecommerce platforms you host on your own servers. That also means maintenance and upgrades are up to you.

2. Understand what your ecommerce shopping cart can (and can't) do.

These days, shopping carts are much more than just transaction facilitators.

They're also your point-of-sale tool, customer database, and product inventory manager. They can even increase conversions on your product pages by displaying relevant, useful information to buyers.

Here's a rundown of features to look for:



CUSTOMER PAYMENT OPTIONS

The more ways you give shoppers to purchase from your store, the more conversions you're likely to get. Check to see which payment options your shopping cart software offers.



TRANSACTION FEES

Will your provider charge a fee for each customer purchase? This can greatly impact your bottom line, so check with every provider you're considering.



GLOBAL PURCHASES

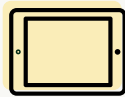
Will you be limited to sales in your country, or will your shopping cart allow global currencies?



PRODUCT INVENTORY & ORGANIZATION

Most shopping carts will keep track of your product SKUs and inventory. However, what sets apart the good from the great:

- An import feature that lets you import a product catalog from another source, like a different ecommerce platform or your POS system
- Sales reports
- Automated re-ordering for items that go out of stock
- A central product catalog that lets you edit or add products in batches



CUSTOMER DATABASE

Your shopping cart software will additionally keep track of your customer pool, including their purchase history and account information. Look for extra features like customer grouping (target loyal customers with special coupons or sales), loyalty program capabilities, and customer data importing from other sources.

3. Choose the right ecommerce provider.

The right ecommerce provider for your business depends on a lot of factors that are all unique to your situation, customers, and products.

Here are the main considerations to make:

Determine the features you need to improve operations

If you sell physical goods, you'll have different needs than a shop owner selling digital products, like ebooks or file downloads.

Additionally, if you're just starting your store, you won't need data transfer tools like somebody who is switching their established store to a new shopping cart provider.

Know what you can DIY and what you need done for you

How tech-savvy are you? How much time can you devote to setting up your payment gateway, merchant account, and servers?

If that previous sentence made you slack-jawed in confusion, you need a service where you don't have to worry about the techy bits.

Look at your storage and bandwidth needs

How many products do you have? How many product photos will you need to help customers purchase? How big is your customer database?

Your storage and bandwidth needs will determine the type of provider and plan you ultimately choose. (Some shopping carts have bandwidth limits but are cheaper; others provide unlimited bandwidth but may cost more money.)

WRAPPING UP

A winning ecommerce site needs a lot of moving parts to be successful:

- It needs a shopping cart that manages your customer and product data seamlessly.
- It needs shopping cart capabilities that suit your market.
- It needs to be well-designed and user-friendly.
- Ultimately, it has to encourage shoppers to make a purchase.



Finally, if you're selling offline, your commerce shopping site needs to integrate seamlessly with your POS system.

Not sure how to accomplish that?
Get in touch with us and we'll walk you through the process!

CHAPTER 3:

Getting your offline shop and ecommerce site to work together

At this point, you've set up your POS system and ecommerce site, and you've connected your solutions so data is synced between the two platforms. The next step is getting them to work together, so you can take the shopping experience to the next level.

In this chapter, we'll explore several ideas of how you can use your tightly-integrated system to run an (even more) awesome retail business.

NEXT-LEVEL PERSONALIZATION

Modern consumers expect retailers to tailor their shopping experiences based on their needs. The best way to do this is to use your customers' data. In addition to collecting basic demographic and contact details, pay close attention to their behaviors.

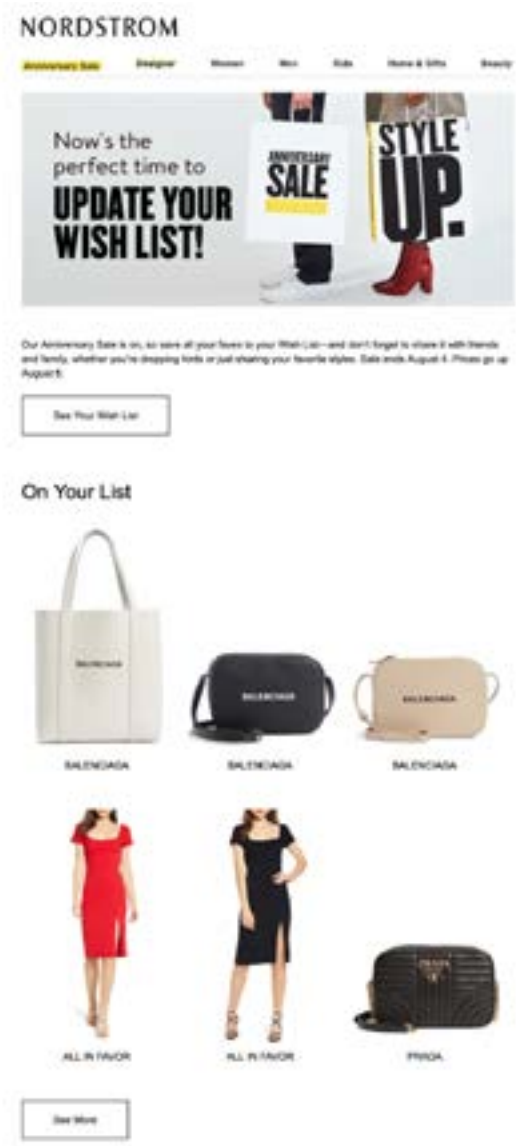
What items have they purchased in the past? How often do they visit your store or website? How much have they spent so far? The answers to these questions can inform your messaging and allow you to customize their shopper interactions.

For instance, if you know that a particular customer likes to spend money on a particular label or designer, then you can alert them when the brand's new collection hits the shelves. Or, if a VIP customer walks into your store, then your associates can tailor their approach and make recommendations based on their purchase history.

And here's the good news: if you've integrated your online and offline systems, you'll have a more complete profile of each customer because you can see what they're doing online AND offline. This will help you craft messages and experiences tailored to your shoppers, which, in turn, can build drive sales and loyalty.

The department store Nordstrom does this incredibly well. The retailer pays close attention to each customer's browsing and purchasing history — both in-store and online — and then crafts tailored messages based on items they previously bought or looked at.

Check out the email below, which contains product recommendations from the shopper's wish list.



ENDLESS AISLES

Have you ever missed out on a sale because your brick and mortar store didn't have the right color or size in-stock?

If your online and offline systems are working together, this issue will become a thing of the past thanks to endless aisles.

Endless aisles allow customers to shop your entire catalog using in-store tablets or kiosks. The products they browse aren't all available in the store, but shoppers can order the items they want and have them shipped to their doorstep.

Implementing endless aisles is easy. You can set up tablets in-store or arm your associates with devices that they can use when helping out your customers. The key is to enable shoppers to browse your entire catalog online and then complete the purchase on the spot.

Here's a great example from the Outdoor Voices store in Los Angeles, CA.



SHIP FROM STORE

Optimizing shipping speeds and costs is a game-changer for retail. Fast and free shipping are rapidly becoming table stakes for merchants, and the onus is on the retailers to figure out how to meet consumer expectations without sacrificing their profits.

Ecommerce merchants have traditionally used warehouses and distribution centers to fulfill orders but these days, it's no longer fast, cheap, or sustainable to ship from these places when they're thousands of miles away from the customer.

Enter ship from store (SFS), which is the practice of fulfilling online orders from the retailer's brick and mortar locations. When you have full inventory visibility into how much stock you have and where different products are located, you can optimize order fulfillment by shipping certain items from your stores if they're located closer to your customers.

Doing so speeds up shipping, lowers costs, and most importantly, keeps your customers happy.

WRAPPING UP

Integrating your online and offline stores is just the first step. To create the best shopping experience possible, you need to ensure that all your sales channels work together beautifully.

Already have this covered? Join us in the next chapter, where we discuss how you can engage your customers across multiple channels.

CHAPTER 4:

Engaging shoppers across multiple channels

Consumers expect shopping to be easy.

That means they want consistency — no matter where or when they interact with your brand — including channels like social media, chat, and email.

But *providing* that consistency for all of your touchpoints is another story.

How do you keep shoppers interested and coming back for more?

How do you make your communications and experiences engaging across devices and channels?

The answer is in the technology and techniques you use to reach your customers at every touchpoint.

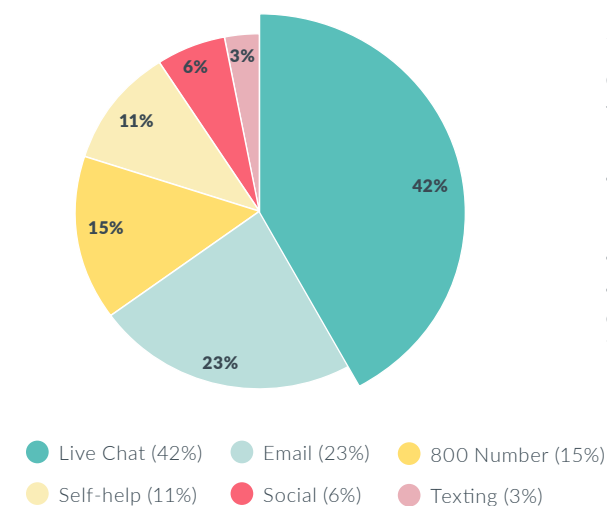
5 WAYS TO ENGAGE SHOPPERS ACROSS CHANNELS

1. Live chat and chatbots represent major chances to connect with shoppers.

One of the newest ways to connect with customers in recent years is through live chat.

Live chat is a great way to engage shoppers at various points of sale, but research has shown that people actually prefer it to other engagement channels. A [Bold360 study](#) found that **42% of frequent shoppers prefer live chat** over email, telephone, and even social media.

PREFERRED ENGAGEMENT CHANNEL



It's also worth noting that **85% of respondents said they prefer digital channels** versus speaking with brand representatives over the telephone. This is mainly because shoppers believe they will get quicker responses or solutions to their problems that way — and generations that are coming into purchasing power (like Gen Z) are becoming less and less comfortable with talking on the phone.

Particularly, **chatbots** represent a chance to anticipate shopper needs and provide 24/7 assistance. The shoppers in the Bold360 study had overwhelmingly positive feelings about chatbots: 73% said companies that use them are being proactive with their customer service.

SOURCE: *Customer Expectations and Experiences with Online Shopping* — [Bold360](#)

CONSUMERS FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT CHATBOTS



SOURCE: Customer Expectations and Experiences with Online Shopping — [Bold360](#)

Tips for using live chat and chatbots

USE CHAT AT THE RIGHT TIMES...

Right now, live chat is the only way to engage online customers while they make a purchase. When you can answer questions and provide reassurance in this communication channel, you're much more likely to make the customer feel positive about the experience.

BUT KNOW WHEN THE RIGHT TIMES ARE.

Lots of customers won't initiate a live chat, even when they need help. As such, train your customer service reps or use an automatic tool to initiate chats with customers who are lingering on a certain page, or when customers navigate to a page on which you want to increase the conversion rate.

RESPOND TO CUSTOMER-INITIATED CHATS QUICKLY.

When you're online and open for chats, and don't respond quickly, the customer may feel ignored.

Generally, online buyers are shopping the web in the first place because they appreciate the convenience and speed.

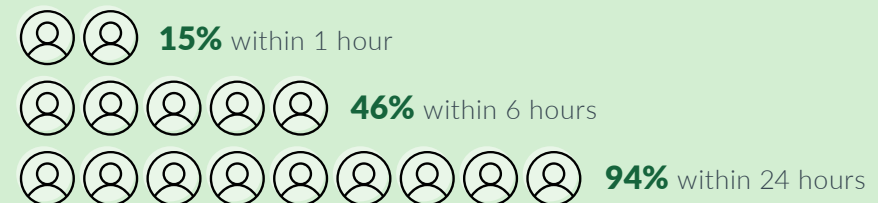
According to an Aircall study on customer expectations, [96% of shoppers](#) expect a response from live chat within 5 minutes of initiating it. That means their patience is thin already when they contact you, and won't wait long for a reply before leaving.

HOW LONG WILL ONLINE SHOPPERS WAIT FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE?



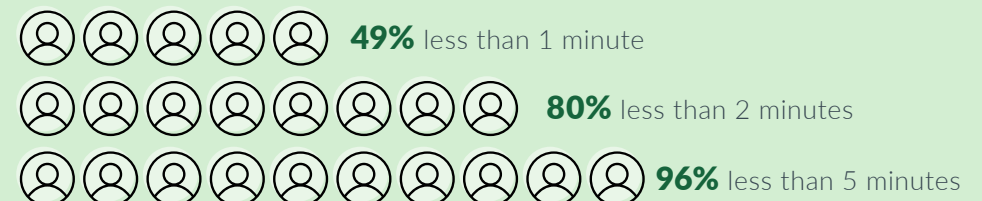
Email

HOW SOON DO YOU EXPECT A REPLY?



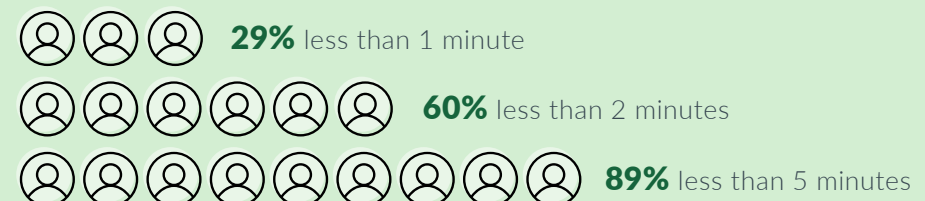
Chat

HOW LONG WILL YOU WAIT FOR A RESPONSE?



Phone

HOW LONG WILL YOU WAIT FOR A LIVE AGENT?



SOURCE: Aircall's 2019 Customer Service Experience Study — [aircall.io](#)

2. Email addresses are the keys to unlocking customer shopping data

Email has been around for a long time (this amounts to eons in the technology world, where things change at lightning speed), but it's still a major player in the customer engagement game.

In particular, gathering email addresses is an activity that links your site visitors to unique identifiers. This gives you solid, concrete data about who your actual customers are, their browsing habits, and their purchase history, all of which you can use for marketing personalization.

According to [Bob Gaito](#), a veteran marketer and the CEO of 4Cite,

“Marketers who embrace the email address to identify web site visitors and personalize their messaging — be it through email, web site, in-store, social or the mailbox at the end of the driveway — are much better poised to succeed in their multichannel personalization efforts.”

More than that, the humble email address is a direct line to your customer. When they give you that line of text, they're essentially giving you permission to connect with them in an intimate space. Needless to say, engaging them effectively through email is a great way to build loyalty and trust.

Tips for collecting email addresses in-store

Offer a discount on their purchase in exchange for their email.

One of the most powerful incentives for a customer to hand over their email address is offering a discount.

After all, who would turn down a coupon on something they want to buy right now? Offer at least 5% off to make it as enticing as possible.

Offer a discount on their next purchase.

This one not only gets the shopper's email, but it also entices them to revisit your store and make another purchase. Offer a slightly higher discount to account for the extra effort this requires of the customer.

Run a contest or giveaway.

Use a tool to run a contest through social media or on your website, or set up a display in-store showing off a cool product you're giving away. Provide a fishbowl where customers can drop their business cards. Each business card counts as an entry AND an email address added to your database.

Use a loyalty program.

Encourage shoppers to sign up for your loyalty program in-store. You'll collect a lot of valuable data in exchange for customer-appreciated perks like monthly coupons, discounts, or even purchase points they can redeem.

Tips for collecting email addresses online

Use lead magnets.

A lead magnet is a high-value piece of content you offer for download in exchange for the buyer's email address. Lead magnets pull a one-two punch: They build your authority with the lead and earn you that email.

Promote your email newsletter on your website, and make sign-up easy.

Make signing up for your email newsletter ridiculously easy all over your website. Provide opt-ins at key points (for example, at the end of a really great, informative blog post) and keep the steps to submit their email as few as possible.

Use pop-ups to offer discounts after email sign-up.

When used judiciously, pop-ups can capture emails really well. Just make sure they don't appear immediately after the page loads. Give the reader time to look around and digest everything, and more importantly, **realize that they like what they see**. Then, trigger a pop-up offering a discount if they enter their email.



3. Staying on top of emerging social networks keeps you relevant

Social media is another good place to engage with customers, but only if you have a presence on the channels your audience uses.

For instance, maintaining a Twitter account is useless if most of your ideal buyers prefer Instagram.

Emerging social networks are a toss-up: Some of them stick, but a lot more fall flat and disappear ([Vine](#), for instance, had a lifespan of 3 years before other social apps edged it out.)

The key here is the ability to pivot and adapt to the changing trends. You need to know where your customers prefer to post and interact, but you also need to be savvy enough to see and act on new social media opportunities with potential.

According to an Adweek report, the trick to staying [engaged with Gen Z](#), in particular, is to “hop around” with social media and not put all your eggs in one basket.



Without a doubt, the best way to stay ahead of the game is to embark on regular audience research, including conversations, interviews, social listening, and surveys. No audience stays static for long, and neither should your engagement game plan.

4. Instant messaging apps meet shoppers where they hang out – on their phones

So, we already know chatting with shoppers is a great way to engage with them during their buying journeys. Live chat is a great answer for engaging with customers while they browse your website – but what about the rest of the time?

To have conversations with your customers beyond the walls of your store, website, or social media, instant messaging apps are where it's at.

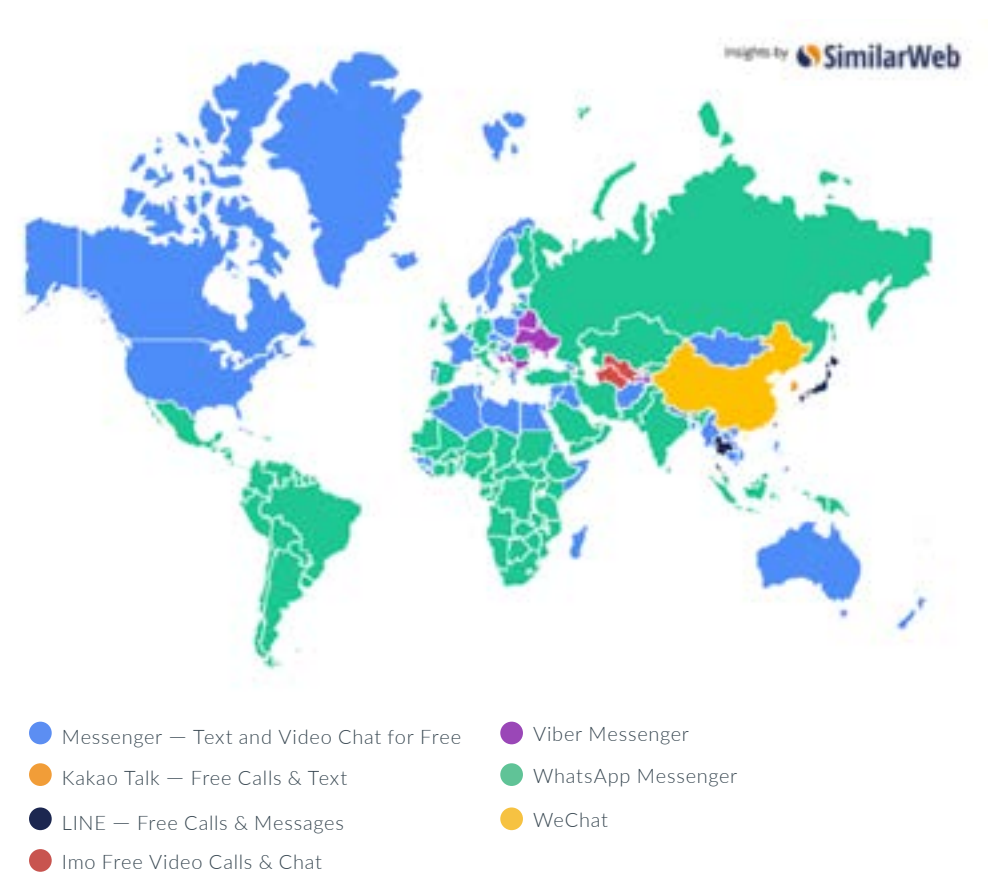
Instant messaging apps take away the expectations associated with live chat, such as instant responses, 24/7 availability, and one-and-done conversations. Instead, the basic etiquette and norms [that come with texting](#) are also applied to instant messaging between customers and businesses.

Most people are already hanging out on instant messaging apps like [WhatsApp](#), [Messenger](#), and [WeChat](#). Each of these apps has a minimum of [1 million active monthly users](#).

According to Emarketer, by 2022, [more than half of all Americans](#) will use a messaging app. This represents a fantastic opportunity to engage with them where they already hang out.

MOST POPULAR MESSAGING APP IN EVERY COUNTRY

(Android App Data: December 2018)



How to use instant messaging apps to engage customers

Let customers contact you via messaging app to ask questions and get more information.

In many ways, this works better than live chat because neither you nor your customer has to be on the product page to have a conversation. It can all happen on the app, and you'll both get notifications when either of you responds.

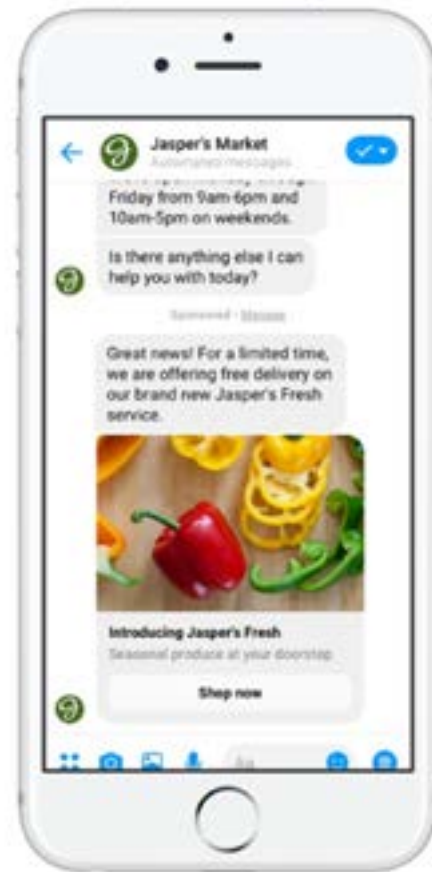
Here's an example from [Facebook Messenger](#).

Let customers opt-in for order updates via messaging app.

Send your customer updates about payment processing, shipping, and other details via instant message.

Offer customers free stickers to use in messaging apps.

A fun way to stay in your customer's mind is to offer free stickers for use on messaging apps. These shouldn't be branded, necessarily, but should be recognizable as yours based on the style, colors, and imagery.



5. Customer communications templates help you pull it all together.

If communicating live, on-the-fly, and at any time of day with customers sounds high-pressure, there's no need to worry. Chat templates, scripts, and canned responses will make it all much easier, and you can

Offering to provide a solution

May I suggest ***solution*** as an alternative?

To best meet your needs, I would recommend the following...

I feel that the best way to solve your issue would be ***solution***

Offering an escalation path

I understand how you feel — would you like to speak with a supervisor who would be able to better meet your needs?

I would need to get approval from my manager for that request... May I transfer you?

use these for live chat, DMs, and instant messaging.

Here are a few resources (for good measure, we've included some email templates, too):

- [101 Live Chat Scripts from Comm100](#) — Give the frontlines of your customer engagement a solid start with these customizable scripts for everything from general greetings to offering a solution.
- [WhatsApp Business message templates](#) — If you use WhatsApp to engage with customers, follow this guide to using their message templates.
- [Apple's Business Chat](#) — This app lets you chat with customers directly in Messages vs. through a third-party app.
- Need to respond to a customer by email? HubSpot has [15 customer service email templates](#) that may help.

WRAPPING UP

The consumer landscape is constantly changing, but one thing remains the same: Everybody wants a simple shopping experience, and they want to do it across the digital channels they're familiar with.

Ultimately, brands that are able to pivot to meet shoppers' demands are more likely to win. If you're agile enough to improve and update your engagement strategy from month to month and year to year, you'll have no problem rolling with the waves of change — and your customers will notice.

CHAPTER 5:

Tactics for driving both in-store and online traffic

At this point, your physical stores and ecommerce site are tightly connected and working like a well-oiled machine. You’ve also learned a great deal about customer engagement and you’ve set up the right systems to ensure that shoppers can get in touch with you whenever and wherever they are.

You’re taking all the right steps to improve the shopping experience. Now let’s look at the ways that you can maximize your results, by driving more traffic to your store.

INCREASING YOUR WEBSITE TRAFFIC

Let’s start with driving visits to your website. Here are some of the marketing tactics you can implement to get more people to land on your website.

SEO

Two trillion. That’s the minimum number of searches that Google handles per year. It’s a huge number and it practically guarantees that your customers are using Google on a regular basis. That’s why it’s essential to engage in SEO (search engine optimization).

Conduct keyword research

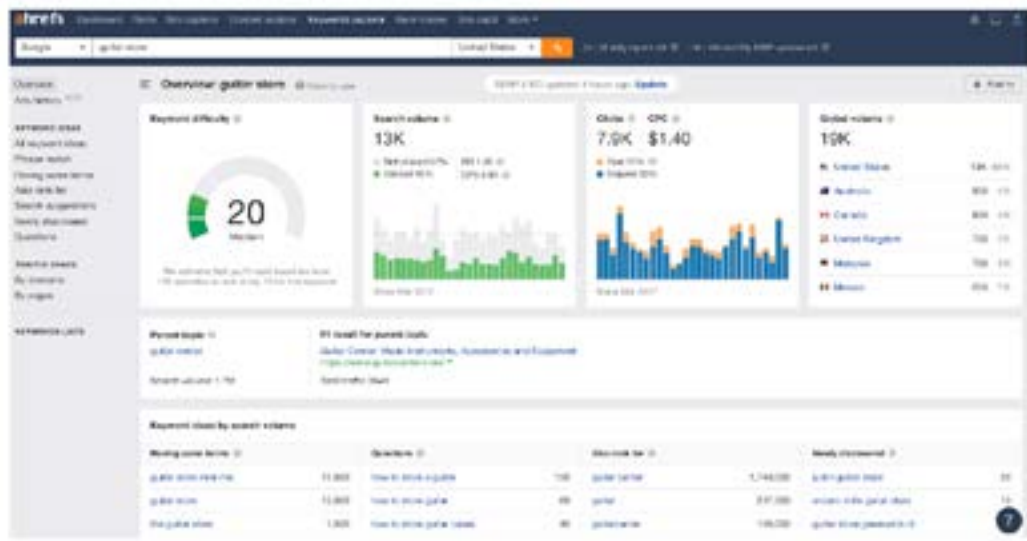
The first step to any good SEO strategy is keyword research. You need to figure out what your customers are typing into Google, so you can structure your website and create content that aligns with those words and phrases.

Use a tool such as [Google’s Keyword Planner](#) to identify opportunities that you can leverage for SEO. For instance, if you sell musical instruments, then enter your product names, categories, or attributes into the tool to see what comes up.



Keywords provided	Search volume (est.)	Competition	Top of page bid (est.)	Bottom of page bid (est.)
musical instruments	410,000	Low	\$0.34	\$0.00
musical instruments for sale	210,000	High	\$0.85	\$0.00
guitar store	27,000	Low	\$0.70	\$0.14
guitar	8,810,000	High	\$0.40	\$0.04
guitar for sale	1,240,000	High	\$0.20	\$0.21
musical instruments	1,230,000	High	\$0.34	\$0.08

If you’re looking to implement more advanced keyword research, you can use a paid tool like [Ahrefs](#), which offers more data around keyword search volume and competition.



You want your keywords to have a good amount of search volume. There’s no use optimizing your site for a particular word or phrase if there aren’t any people searching for it.

That said, most high-volume keywords are also highly competitive, which means that there are more sites trying to rank for them. The higher a keyword’s competitive score is, the harder it is to rank.

The key is to identify keywords with decent search volume and low to moderate competition. It’s a tricky task, so you need to be clever with your research and work on surfacing the right opportunities.

Incorporate keywords into your website

Once you’ve identified the right keywords, you need to work them into your website’s content. Your online store has a number of key areas that you can optimize for search. They include:

- URL structure** — Avoid structuring your URLs using numbers and letters that don’t make sense. Opt instead for search and reader-friendly URLs that contain your target keywords.
- Metadata** — Metadata includes your page titles and meta descriptions. The purpose of these tags is to tell the search engines what a page is about.
- Site content** — Weave your target keywords into your site content by naturally including them in your product descriptions, category pages, site map, FAQs, and more. Just be careful not to overstuff your site with keywords! The key is to produce content for humans, not search bots.

Build links

Already have your keywords and content in order? The next step is to build links to your site. Having relevant websites link back to yours sends positive signals to Google to rank your website higher in search results.

To that end, it's important to engage in link-building efforts such as:

Getting your brand featured in relevant websites and publications — Find every opportunity to get your brand or products featured on blogs and publications in your niche. Reach out to bloggers or influencers to see if they're interested in reviewing your products.

You could also get on the radar of industry journalists. HARO (Help a Reporter Out) and Profnet are two examples of services that connect reporters to expert sources that they can quote and include in their articles.

Both services send out publicity alerts via email, where they list queries from reporters looking for experts they can use in their articles. As a potential source, you can go through these alerts to find relevant queries. Once you see a journalist who could use your help, get in touch by responding to their query.

Business and Finance

1) Summary: Common Inland Marine Insurance Mistakes

Name: Kimberlee Leonard Fit Small Business

Category: Business and Finance

Email: quert-9og1@helppareporter.net

Media Outlet: Fit Small Business

Deadline: 7:00 PM EST — 14 August

Query:

Looking for insights from business owners and insurance experts regarding inland marine insurance.

What are the most common business that should have this coverage but don't get it?

Is it better to have a standalone policy or get inland marine as an endorsement on another policy?

What exclusions exist that business owners might think about to ask when buying inland marine insurance?

Back to Top Back to Category Index

Producing link-worthy content — Some of the best links are gained organically, which means other website just naturally link back to your content because it provides a lot of value.

So, strive to create high-quality pieces of content. Produce content that's educational, entertaining (or both!), and share with your audience.

Social media

When it comes to retail, social networks like Facebook and Instagram are playing increasingly important roles in people's shopping journeys. Industry data shows that modern consumers — particularly Gen Z shoppers ages 18-23 — find new products and brands on social platforms. According to a survey by VisSenze, 60% of Gen Z shoppers said that they frequently discover new products on social.

For this reason, investing in social media marketing is a must if you want to continuously drive traffic to your site. Here are a few ideas you could implement:

Social ads

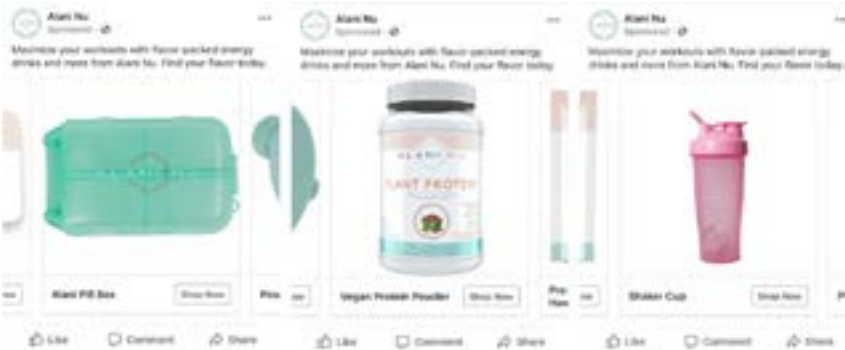
Here's the reality of social media marketing: you can't count on your content to naturally reach your audience — at least, not any more. On platforms like Facebook, organic brand reach has been steadily decreasing, which means you have to "pay to play" for people to see your posts.

You have plenty of options when it comes to social media advertising. Facebook and Instagram have a number of ad formats you can use, depending on your goals.

If you're promoting a particular offer, event, or product, then a sponsored post with a single focus is a great way to go. For example, when the home decor brand Rivet launched a pop-up store in Los Angeles, they created an event page for the pop-up and boosted it on Facebook.

On the other hand, if you're showcasing multiple items, then a carousel ad would do the trick. That's what the supplements brand Alani Nu did to promote their drinks and merchandise.

But no matter what type of campaign you decide to run, remember that the success of your ads will hinge on two things: your content and your targeting. Before implementing social ads, you need to ensure that your content resonates with your key demographics and that you're targeting your ads to the right people.



Influencer marketing

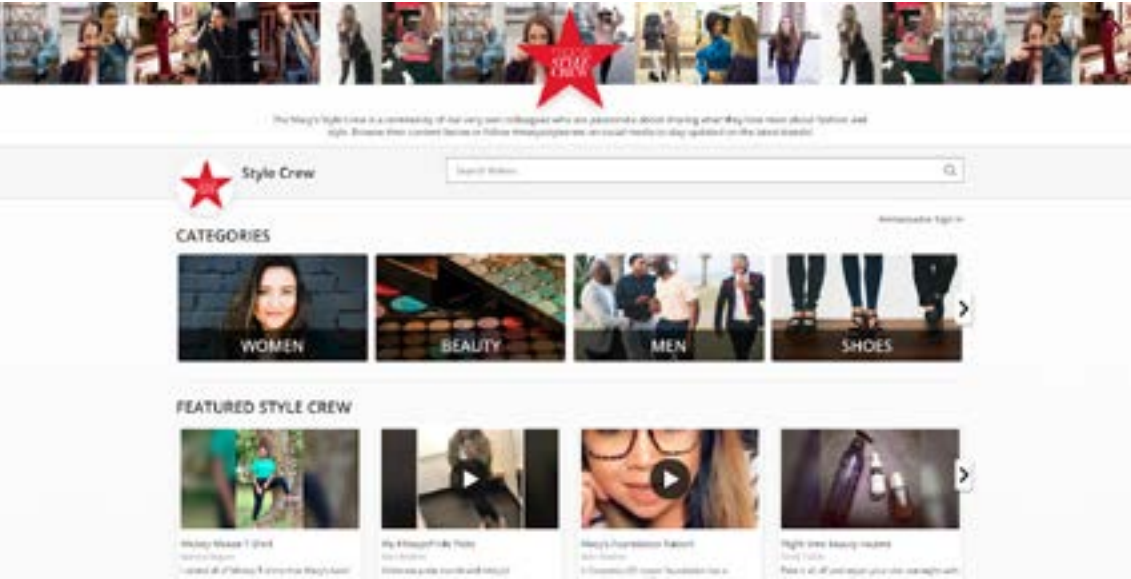
These days, a nod or endorsement from a friend or influencer carries more weight than traditional advertising. [Industry data shows](#) that 92% of consumers put more trust in influencers than traditional celebrities.

This is why it pays to have an influencer strategy. Getting key individuals to recommend or talk about your brand can drive awareness, traffic, and ultimately, sales. Check out these tips for how to succeed with influencer marketing.

Tap into your existing customers or employees — You may not have to look too far to find the key people you need. Some of your customers are likely more than happy to talk up your brand on social media.

Go through your database, find your best customers (i.e., top spenders, NPS promoters) and take a look at their social media activities. If they have an active presence and get a lot of engagement, it's worth reaching out to them.

You should also consider getting your employees on board. If you have employees who naturally love your brand, encourage them to act as brand ambassadors on social media.



Focus on microinfluencers or nanoinfluencers — In the realm of social media influencers, bigger doesn't always mean better. When looking to work with someone, it's a good idea to set your sights on microinfluencers (users with 10,000 to 50,000) or even nanoinfluencers (those with as few as 1,000 followers).

Research by Takumi found that people with 1,000 followers or fewer have an engagement rate of 9.7%, while those who have 1,000 to 4,000 followers have a 4.5% engagement rate. Meanwhile, those with more than 100,000 followers have an average engagement rate of just 1.7%.

And here's the kicker: working with smaller influencers is also more cost-effective. While users with hundreds of thousands of followers charge thousands of dollars per post, micro and nanoinfluencers are often happy to talk up your brand in exchange for free products.

So the next time you're thinking about working with an influencer, remember that having a massive following won't necessarily lead to massive results. Be smart about your influencer marketing efforts and work with individuals who can engage their audience effectively.

Sell on social media

You work hard (and spend lots of money) gaining followers and likes, but ultimately, the goal of your social media campaigns should be to drive sales. And one of the ways that you can do that is through social selling.

Consider integrating your ecommerce platform to your Facebook and Instagram account, so you can showcase your products on these social platforms.

BigCommerce, for example, has [commerce solutions for multiple social networks](#). You can add a shop section to your Facebook business page, tag products in your Instagram photos, and let users purchase your products straight from Pinterest.

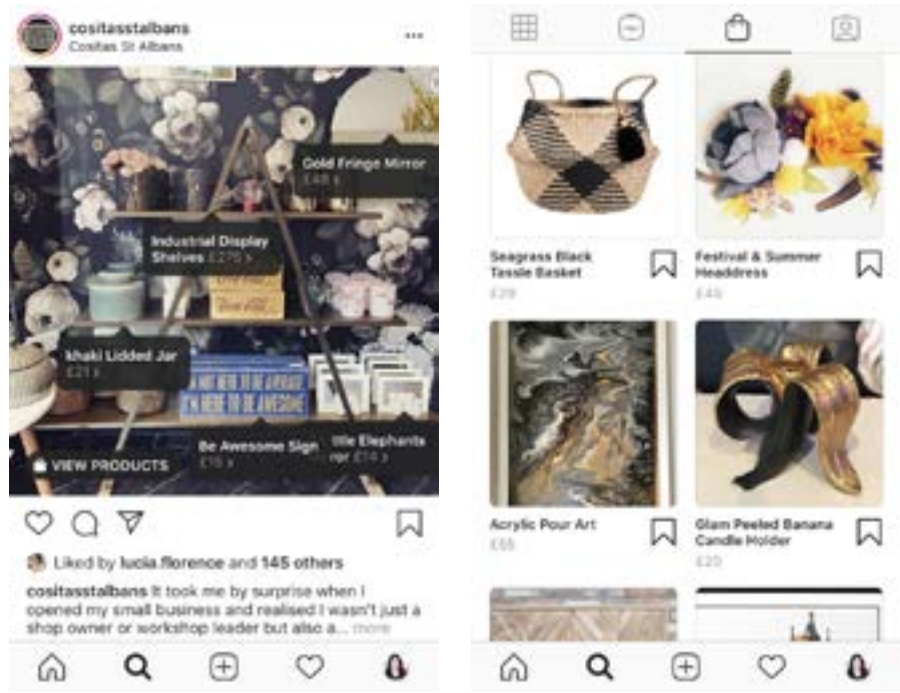
If you're active on any of these social networks, be sure to look into how you can leverage them to drive more sales.



An excellent example of Instagram marketing done right comes from Cositas, a home furnishings and giftware store in St Albans. Aside from frequently posting amazing content, Cositas has "shoppable" posts on Instagram, which enable users to quickly check out what products they have on sale.

When someone comes across an item they like on Cositas' Instagram page, they can view its product page and purchase it without leaving the app. In doing so, Cositas have opened up a new sales channel without complicating the shopping experience.

You may want to consider doing something similar in your Instagram efforts. Follow in Cositas' footsteps and serve your mobile customers better by allowing them to shop on the platforms they're already using.



INCREASING FOOT TRAFFIC IN YOUR RETAIL STORES

We've tackled how to increase traffic to your ecommerce site, now let's discuss how you can get more in-store visits. Foot traffic is one of the most critical measures when it comes to running a brick and mortar store. More traffic means more opportunities for sales and customer engagement, which in turn leads to higher revenues.

Check out these pointers for driving footfall in your location.

Keep your storefront well-maintained

A spruced up storefront can do wonders for your curb appeal. Nobody wants to walk into a store with dirty windows or peeling paint, so stay on top of these maintenance tasks.

Certain jobs, such as sweeping your storefront and cleaning your windows should be done daily, while other tasks only need to be done every few months or years. A good paint job, for instance, can last years.

Step out of your store and look at it from the outside. Evaluate the physical state of your windows, doors, and walls, and identify the things that need sprucing up. You should assign people to perform various maintenance tasks (like sweeping and glass cleaning) daily. Perhaps your employees can take turns doing different jobs, or you could hire a third-party to maintain your storefront for you.

Get listed online

Local search is a big deal. Around 46% of all Google searches are seeking local information and 97% of consumers have searched online to find a local business. If your business can't be found online – particularly through sites like Google and Yelp – you're missing out on A LOT of potential visitors.

So, set up your listings ASAP. For best results, optimize each listing by making them as detailed as possible.

Be sure to include the following information:

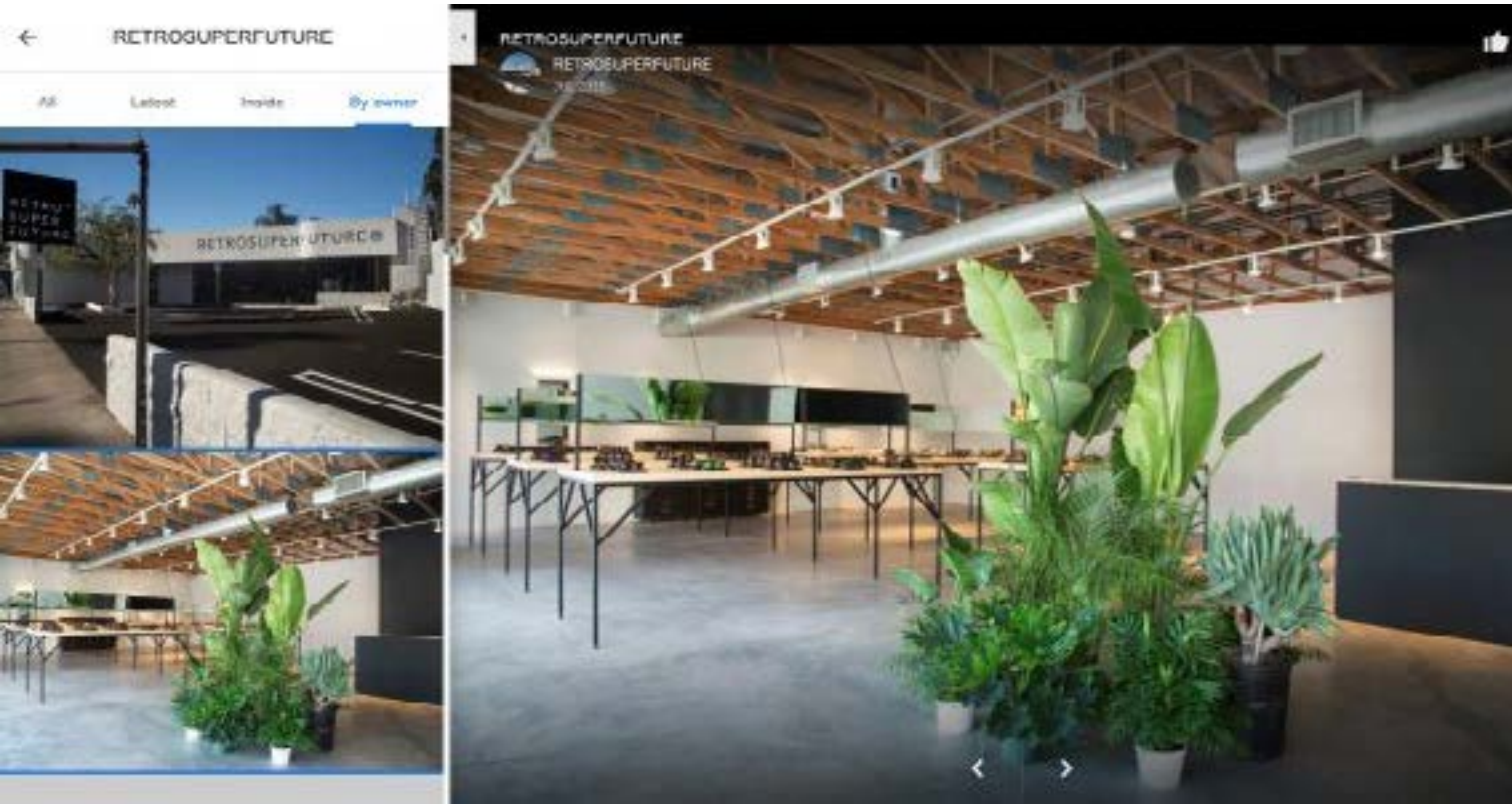
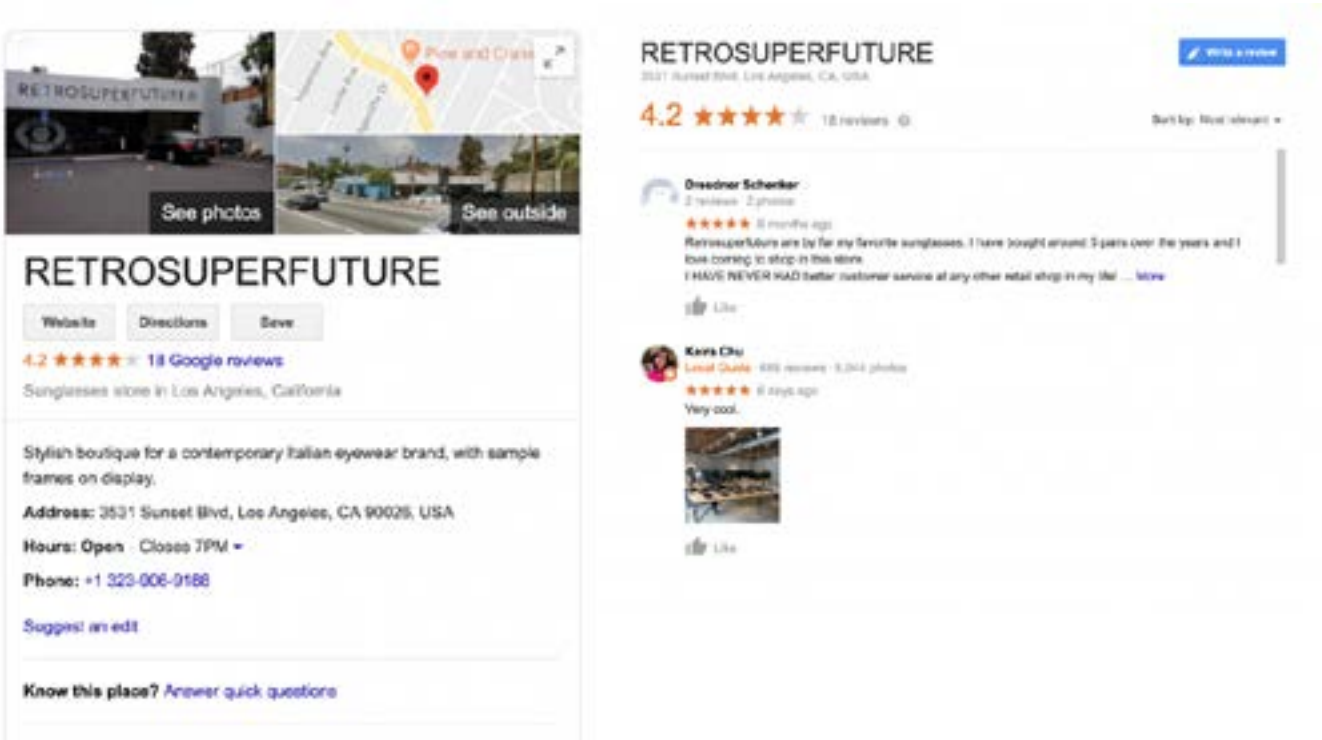
- Name, address and phone number (Important: Ensure that these details are identical to what's listed on your site and any other listings.)
- Accurate business hours
- Lots of reviews
- Lots of visual content including recent photos, and if possible, a virtual tour of your store.

It takes a bit of extra time, but doing this will make your listing more attractive and, as a result, drive more traffic to your location and website.

Need an example of what a great listing looks like? Check out this one from RETROSUPERFUTURE, an eyewear store in Los Angeles. In addition to having complete contact details, the retailer has uploaded multiple photos that showcase RETROSUPERFUTURE's storefront, interiors, and products.

Not only that, but the store has several positive reviews on Google, making the listing even more attractive.

Try to get your Google profile (and other listings) to this level. Set up your Google My Business listing and beef it up by adding lots of information, uploading high-quality photos, and encouraging user reviews.





Go beyond selling products

Physical products are your bread and butter, and they should certainly be a focus in your business. That being said, you need to remember that consumers today can order physical products from just about anywhere, thanks to online and mobile commerce. For this reason, your store needs to go beyond just selling physical products and also deliver experiences that people won't get online or on their phone.

What type of experiences should people have in your store? That depends on your business. The right experience will depend on your store and target audience. But here are some low-hanging fruit that can give your store more zing:

Serve food and drink

You don't have to set up an on-site cafe, but you could start serving finger food and drinks. The apparel store William B, for example, serves champagne on the weekends.

Offer services

If it makes sense for your business, offer in-store services that make your customers' lives easier. If you're a jewelry retailer, perhaps you can offer jewelry cleaning and repairs. Sell apparel? Maybe you can make room for basic alterations.

Should you charge for these services? That depends on your business model, products, and margins. In some cases, it might make sense to make certain services complimentary. Most jewelers, for example, offer free jewelry cleaning. In other instances, it's better to charge a fee or require a purchase. At Sephora, for instance, you can get a full makeover by purchasing \$50 worth of products.

Make it a social experience

Brick and mortar shopping, in many ways, is a social activity. People head down to retail stores with friends and family because it's fun to shop with their loved ones. In some cases, shoppers choose to visit physical stores because they want to interact with real people and have back and forth conversations about products.

With that in mind, it's a good idea to make socialization a bigger part of your brick and mortar experience.

There are a number of ways to do this:

Get your associates to socialize with customers — Encourage your staff to socialize with your customers. Have them go beyond the typical "Can I help you?" Spiel and teach them to interface with your customers in more meaningful ways.

How? Start with having a strong greeting when people walk in. Consider the following openers:

- Small talk (e.g., "Are you enjoying your afternoon?" or "Where are you off to for the rest of the day?")
- Familiarity (e.g., "What brings you to see us again?" or "Coming in for another... [insert previous purchase]")
- Commonality (e.g., "Are you enjoying all the sun we've been having?" or "Wow, how are you navigating that traffic?")

Hold classes or events — Another way to inject more socialization in your store is to run functions that bring people together. Events such as classes, fashion shows or the occasional in-store party can help drive more foot traffic.

Encourage social shares and location tagging — Are you encouraging your customers to share their in-store experiences on Facebook or Instagram? If not, you could be missing out traffic and sales opportunities.

Create social sharing opportunities within your store to get people to talk you up on social media. An easy way to do this is to display a branded hashtag and your store's Instagram handle in certain parts of your shop.

Many apparel retailers like to do this in their fitting rooms, but there are plenty of other opportunities. Vroman's bookstore in Pasadena, CA for instance, has stickers in its restroom mirrors which display the hashtag #lookinggood along with @vromansbookstore, the store's Instagram username.



WRAPPING UP

Retail technology and initiatives are great, but they won't mean much unless you have a steady stream of shoppers visiting your stores. That's why you need to make traffic a key metric in your retail efforts.

Hopefully the tips in this chapter gave some ideas on how you can attract more visitors to your website and store.

CHAPTER 6:

Top retail experts reveal their #1 tip for retailers who want to succeed on all channels

We've covered A LOT so far. You learned why it's important to integrate your online and offline stores — and how to do it right. We also shared some practical tips and examples to help you communicate better with your customers, drive traffic, and increase sales.

But now it's time to hear from other players in the retail industry. For this chapter, we caught up with several experts and influencers and asked them to share their top tip for succeeding on all retail channels check out what they have to say!

My tip is to train in-store staff to think of your customers holistically. Brick and mortar is a crucial touchpoint and many who walk into your store will have already heard about your brand through a friend or an ad or coveted it on socials.

Your staff need to be highly trained and informed about not just the products you sell but your brand and what it stands for. Customers today buy into a larger message and they care about a brand's mission, point of view and level of customer care.

While the average attention span online is seconds, in-store you have a real opportunity to build a human connection in a deeper way. You can create visual speed bumps with design, but that is best complemented with engaged and personable staffers that are extensions to your brand's voice. They should have tools at their fingertips to access customer profiles, access to product information and the ability to seamlessly locate inventory to fulfill orders. Stores that are customer-centric in focus help brands build longer-lasting relationships.



— MELISSA GONZALEZ, CHIEF POP-UP ARCHITECT™, [THE LIONESQUE GROUP](#)

My #1 tip for retailers who want to succeed on all channels is to treat each non-store channel as if opening and operating a new physical location. Specifically, emphasize the strategic retail operations of each – whether online, through an intermediary, or other non-store venue like a pop-up – above using each additional sales channel to simply mitigate the risks associated with owning inventory for a physical retail store.

Doing so gets you closer to core customers by channel and keeps you from extending brick and mortar marketing efforts in unnecessary or ineffective directions. What are the resources you need to make customers by channel happy and do you have any resource gaps that need to be filled before doing so? Consider time, money, technology, and knowledge.

Rather than treat non-store channels like an extended marketing effort, treat each channel as a business unit through strategic retail management appropriate for the channel to succeed. This means getting as good at running an online store or executing pop-up shops as you are at running your brick and mortar location(s). Then allocate time, money, technology, and knowledge accordingly.



— CHRIS GUILLOT, FOUNDER OF [MERCHANT METHOD](#)

Today's retailers are more fluid. They're not just standing behind the counter anymore. They're going online, trying pop-up shops, mixing in some wholesale to like-minded stores and making the most of their space with consignment sales. They're courageous, and achieving so much personal growth, which is inspiring to see.

But all those moving parts are making it harder for them to get a big-picture view of how the business is doing. Shop owners often know the store's daily sales numbers or their social traffic but they're losing sight of the bigger picture including costs by channel and overall profitability. And if they have a budget, it goes out the window after a few months because they can't see how they're tracking against it.

That lack of clarity can compromise their confidence. It can be unnerving to fly in the dark like that. But with so much to manage day after day, who really has enough left in the tank to do all the math?

So we encourage retailers to outsource that sort of thing – either to a bookkeeper, a business partner, or to a tool (online bookkeeping systems can provide running reports on financial performance). It's critical stuff to know and the confidence and clarity it provides can be very empowering to the business owner.



— BYRON MCLEAN, [XERO](#) INDUSTRY MANAGER



Regardless of what you call it, omnichannel or unified commerce, today's retailer must exist online and offline holistically. This goes way beyond merely having a functioning website. New retail requires the highest level of product and service offerings across all touchpoints.

Product

Online, besides providing an extended offering of what's in store and beyond, you must provide the customer with product, brand, and customer satisfaction information that supports choice making and begins the path to purchase. More and more this also includes sustainability markers, particularly if the brand looks to Gen Y and Gen Z customers. This valuable information should also be accessible in store equally, for smartphone toting customers and tablet toting personnel.

Service

By 2020, customer care will replace both product and price, as the number one means of product differentiation. Today's consumer wants to engage easily with the retailer on and offline, and they expect an immediate and personal response. Direct messaging is replacing e-mail as the most efficient and effective means of meeting customer's expectations.

Social Selling

Just as visual merchandising takes goods from prose to poetry, social media requires that your store become instagrammable, to enable customers becoming active influences, and brand advocates. Constantly changing in-store stories are essential in bringing customers back. Effectively influencing your store's social media embodiment, requires having key social-media marketers on staff or on retainer. Occasional tweets and posts no longer make it; devotion to dynamic sharing and two-way conversations, along with creating and posting events, and unexpected surprises have become table stakes.



— SANFORD STEIN, CID, RDI, NSA, FOUNDER, [RETAIL SPEAK](#)

Make it as attractive as possible for your customers to give you their information. It's increasingly important for you to be able to contact your customers so you can tie all your marketing efforts together and establish an in-depth understanding of your growth. One simple way to do this is to create cohesive in-store and online retention marketing strategy; using an app like [Marsello](#) that encourages your customers to shop with you on all channels is a simple tool to help you master your retention marketing.

Give your customers a reason to share their information with you that also benefits them — offer them rewards simply for joining your loyalty program; let them know they'd be the first to hear about new products. Furthermore, if customers expect email updates from you, they will be increasingly more likely to engage — be clear about what you will use their information for and give them a reason to look forward to it. It's essential that your customers feel appreciated and not like they're added to a big database where they'll be forgotten.

When it comes to a loyalty program, give your customers the flexibility to decide where they will spend their points by creating an in-store and online loyalty program. By collecting customer information during that first purchase, you can help to encourage them to shop with you again and again. A loyalty increase of 7% can boost lifetime profits per customer by as much as 85% — give customers a reason to come back with an exceptional shopping experience in that first instance and you're doing most of the hard work for yourself.

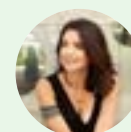


— SOPHIE MACDONALD, CONTENT MARKETING MANAGER, [MARSELLO](#)

My #1 tip for retailers who want to succeed on all channels? Realize that it's not just your branding that needs to be consistent, but the customer experience, as well. Make sure that the customer experience on all channels is in keeping with the brand image you want to put out into the world.

After all, there's nothing worse than a brand that's friendly and welcoming on social media, but aloof or disinterested in-store; or a brand that has a great online catalog, but outsources customer service calls to an untrained overseas provider.

We talk a lot about how to build relationships in the retail world, and consistent customer service is essential to your ability to build (and maintain) the relationships that create a successful omnichannel business."



— JASMINE GLASHEEN, WRITER & RETAIL INFLUENCER, [JASMINE GLASHEEN & ASSOCIATES](#)



My #1 tip for brick and mortar retailers who want to succeed on all channels?

It's a fact that today, the very boundary — the definition of what it means to be a retailer — is in a constant state of flux. This creates great opportunities for traditional brick and mortar retailers to reinvent themselves in ways that perhaps just a few years ago seemed unattainable.

But this transformation can bring with it many challenges, possibly the most significant of which is that the organization can often be apt to behave like you and I; subconsciously repelling any 'foreign' being as if it were in some way a bad thing. If this can be overcome then the possibilities are boundless, and that is largely because retailers hold so much data, it's just that until recently either they haven't known how to use it effectively or been able to.

Because with data comes knowledge and with knowledge comes ability. The ability to reach customers in ways never before imagined. Personalization on steroids if you will. This will usher in a new era of retail where retailers know our needs before we realize them ourselves. The era of hyper-relevance is just around the corner and brick and mortar retailers must focus on this if they are to survive.



— ANDREW BUSBY FOUNDER & CEO, [RETAIL REFLECTIONS](#)

If you want to succeed in all channels you have to execute brilliantly on each. Having BOPIS means nothing if a customer has to wait while someone "finds it" or has to stand in line more than a minute or two.

A website without transparency means shoppers don't know what is in stock. But if you offer that transparency, you have to have many systems in place to make sure it is accurate. That also goes for the store. An associate can't just say "we're out", they have to look in the fitting rooms, on the mannequins, everywhere else in store first. And finally, the store is the golden egg. You have to create a remarkable experience and then train to deliver it every time. You don't have the luxury of an off day as shoppers' patience is gone.



— BOB PHIBBS, CEO OF THE [RETAIL DOCTOR](#) BASED IN NEW YORK

Your store better be worth the trip. The focus used to be on improving the product, and while that is still true, today it's critically important to improve the in-store experience. Shoppers tend to check you out online before visiting the store, so what they see on your slick website and intriguing Instagram better deliver the same experience on the sales floor.

Consistently good customer service, knowledgeable store associates, curated product, fun events, and an easy-to-shop, well-signed sales floor all contribute to that experience. It's easy to fake it online, but it's impossible to fake it once the shopper walks in your front door. Have fun, be original, and be real every place consumers come in contact with your brand.



— RICH KIZER AND GEORGANNE BENDER, CONSUMER ANTHROPOLOGISTS, [KIZER & BENDER SPEAKING!](#)

Brick and mortar retailers need to recognize that the path to purchase for consumers is not always a straight road. There are many distractions — yet opportunities, as well — that retailers should both be aware of and react to in order to keep consumers on track to their brick and mortar stores.

Among them include how customers truly shop and begin their purchase journeys. From visiting online review sites such as Yelp or Facebook review pages to browsing social media using hashtags to help explore where they may want to shop or buy, there are multiple variations in the path to purchase.

Because of this, it's critical brick and mortar merchants are active online among the various marketing touch points that help to highlight their stores. Other factors to consider include getting involved in local community events that welcome pop up store experiences so you can occasionally expand your store walls, partnering with like-minded yet non-competitive businesses to gain more visibility through strategic events and marketing initiatives as well as incorporating collective, strong store branding that engages your customers and keeps your retail business top of mind.

Remember, the path to purchase is not usually a straight road. Consider the many variables that influence consumer decisions along the way.



— NICOLE REYHLE, FOUNDER, [RETAIL MINDED](#)



CHAPTER 7:

The return to brick and mortar

The digitally-native vertical brand strategy (or DNVBs, for short) emerged in 2017 as a viable channel strategy for new ecommerce brands.

They work on a unique business model that includes:

- Selling exclusively online at first — and then potentially branching into brick and mortar
- A deep investment in branding and community
- Total control of their product from the production line to arrival at the customer’s door

As with any new type of “retail revolution” — this strategy raises a lot of questions.

Why are these types of brands gaining popularity?

And now, why are these online-only brands moving to the brick and mortar scene — a bold move in a world that is increasingly going digital-only?

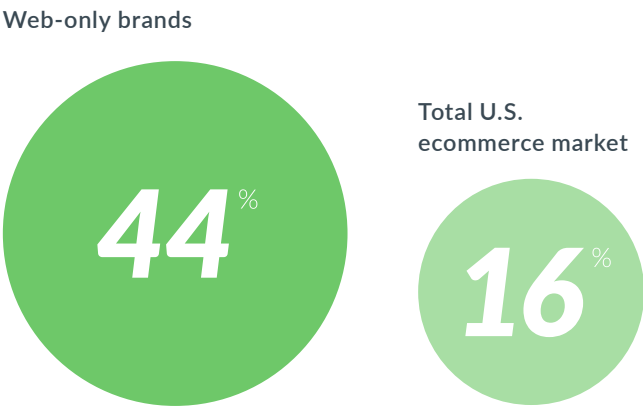
Why is this happening? More importantly, why is it working so well?

Let’s take a look at the reasons. Then, we’ll dive into some examples of majorly successful DNVBs that are hopping into the brick and mortar world.

WEB-ONLY BRANDS GROW NEARLY THREE TIMES FASTER THAN U.S. ECOMMERCE

Sales growth in 2017, year-over-year.

As a whole, the 75 retailers Internet Retailer tracked generated a collective \$8.0 billion in online sales in 2017, Internet Retailer estimates — a 44.4% increase compared with \$5.6 billion the year before (numbers are rounded). That means these DNVBs are already capturing nearly 2% of the total U.S. ecommerce market, and are growing nearly three times as fast as the average ecommerce retailer.



SOURCE: Internet Retailer estimate and U.S. [Department of Commerce](#)

WHY DNVBS ARE MOVING FROM DIGITAL TO BRICK AND MORTAR (AND BACK AGAIN)

DNVBs are seeing mega growth in the ecommerce market.

In fact, web-only businesses grew [three times as fast](#) as regular ecommerce businesses during 2017.

These brands are taking their digital success to physical stores for a few big reasons:

Gen Z is setting the trend.

According to multiple studies, Gen Z is more likely to visit a brick and mortar store during their buying journey than Millennials.

A Fluent Commerce study found that [73% of Gen Z shoppers](#) have no problem driving to a physical store to shop. Nearly 50% said they prefer **both** shopping online and in-store.

Another study of nearly 500,000 shoppers across the U.S. found that Gen Z is more likely to visit a physical store like Walmart and **less** likely to visit Walmart.com than Millennials.

According to Glenn Geller via [Marketing Insider](#), Gen Z doesn’t see online shopping and brick and mortar stores as competing against each other:

“To Gen Z, retail and ecommerce shopping isn’t an ‘us vs. them’ scenario; rather, the two complement each other and accentuate the shopping experience.”

Finally, research from a partnership between the National Retail Federation and IBM found that a whopping [98% of Gen Zers](#) make their purchases in brick and mortar stores.

When you look at the trends and data, suddenly the idea of brands moving to physical stores from digital-only presences doesn’t seem so strange. They’re merely following where the Gen Z wind is blowing — after all, this group holds the future of retail in their hands — along with a ton of purchasing power as they age.

HOW GEN ZERS PREFER TO MAKE PURCHASES

Question: How do you typically make purchases?

98% of Gen Zers make their purchases in brick and mortar stores.

This may be due in part to the age of younger Gen Zers and lack of access to credit cards.

☒ Most of the time ☐ Some of the time

SOURCE: [nrf.com/GenZ](#)

Shopping in a store



Using a web browser



Using an app



Calling by phone



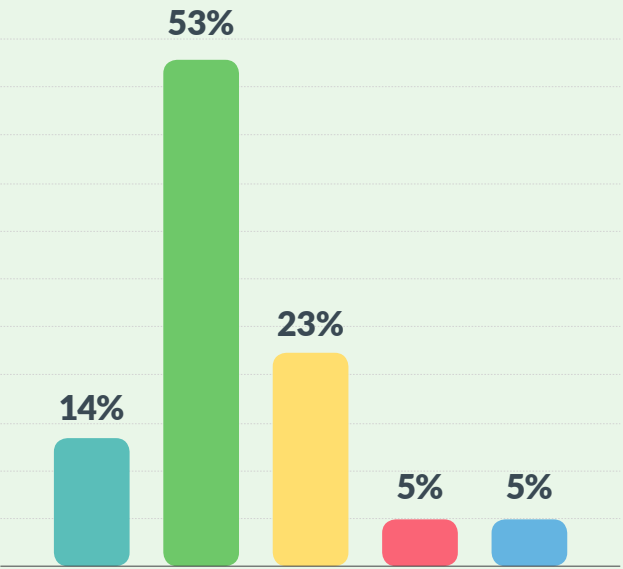
Fluent Commerce’s research

Sydney, NSW Australia based retail technology company Fluent Commerce surveyed 5,000 Americans between the ages of 14 to 54.

HOW FAR WILL YOU TRAVEL TO PICK UP AN ITEM YOU'VE BOUGHT?

Shoppers aged between 14 and 24 are willing to travel to collect their packages with 53% saying they will travel up to 30 minutes and 23% willing to travel up to an hour.

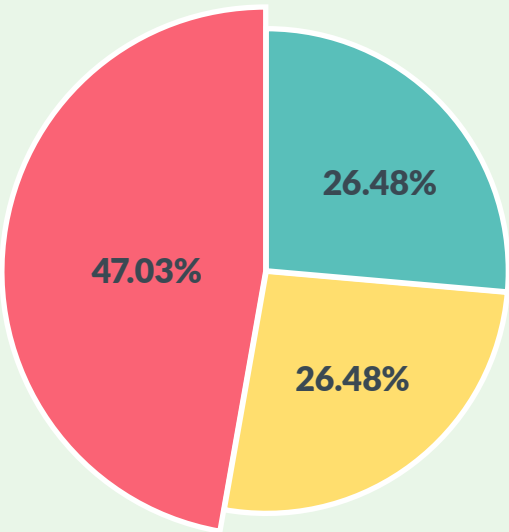
- <10 minutes 14%
- <30 minutes 53%
- <60 minutes 23%
- 60> minutes 5%
- No travel 5%



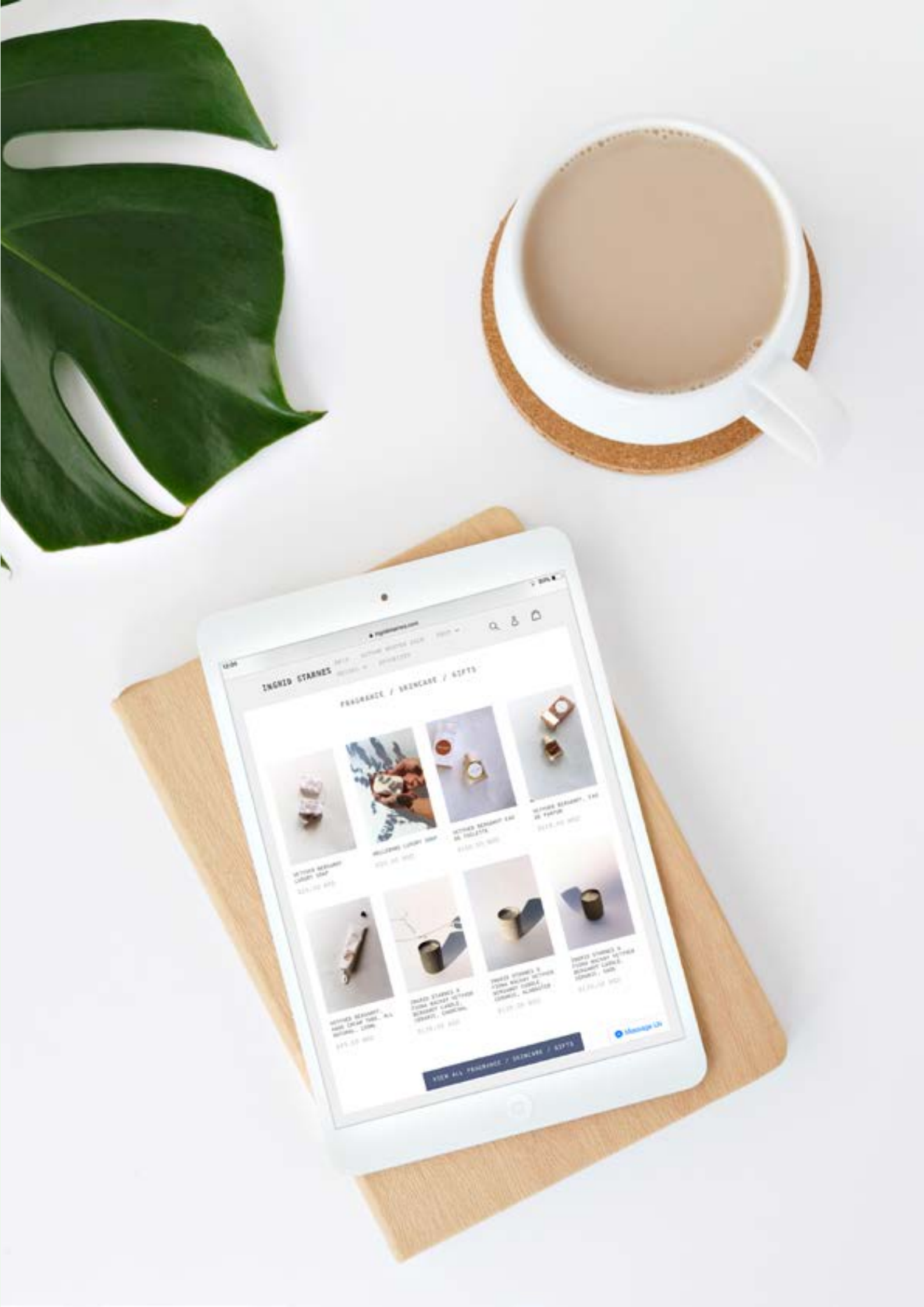
DO YOU PREFER SHOPPING ONLINE OR IN A STORE?

Following the research, Fluent Commerce CEO, Graham Jackson, comments: *“Generation Z shoppers remain a mystery to many retailers. Yet, it is estimated they will make up 40% of consumers by 2020 so it is essential that retailers gain a better understanding of these emerging shoppers.”*

- Online 26.48%
- In store 26.48%
- Both 47.03%



SOURCE: [Fluent Commerce](#)





DNVB brick and mortar stores mainly function as showrooms and experiences.

Overwhelmingly, DNVBs that make the move to physical stores are aiming to provide an *experience* for their customers while showing off the physical qualities of their products.

Since many Gen Zers enjoy shopping in store for the social and communal aspects, smart DNVBs are jumping on the trend.

An example from an [Accenture study](#) showcases how this generation uses technology to make shopping both a physical and digital event:

- They engage with sales associates
- They comparison shop on their smartphones while in store
- They text or interact with friends and family on social media to get opinions and to make purchase decisions
- They post pictures and videos of their experience

DNVBs that focus on creating an authentic, branded experience in store are leaning on this knowledge of Gen Zers.

In the end, these physical stores don't necessarily exist to earn more sales, but rather to offer experiences that build on their digital presence.

5 EXAMPLES OF DNVBS GOING BRICK AND MORTAR

A vast array of digitally-native vertical brands have made the move to physical store locations. Here are some examples of the most successful:

1. Brilliant Earth

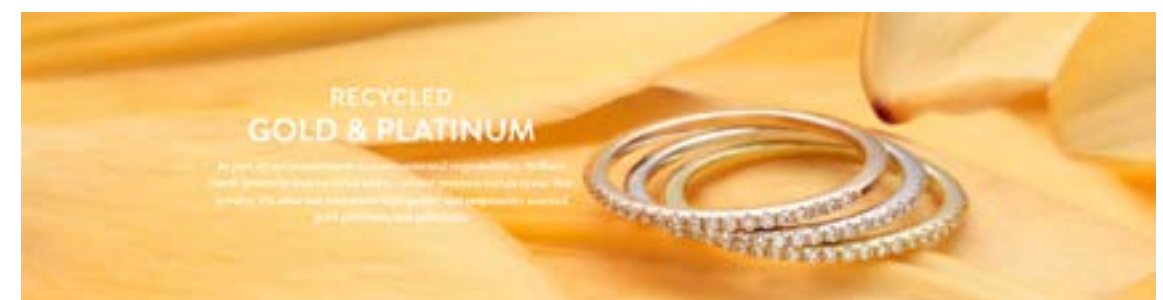
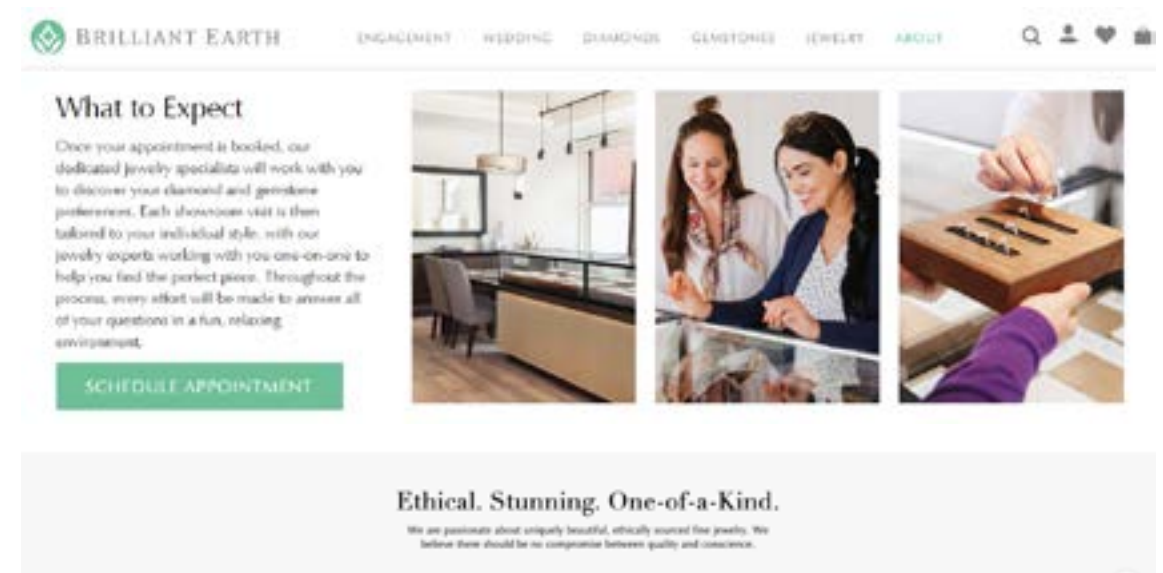
[Brilliant Earth](#) is a conscious jewelry company specializing in ethically sourced diamonds and conflict-free jewelry.

The brand was digital-only, then they opened [seven showrooms](#) across the country in cities like San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Denver.

According to James Risely of Digital Commerce 360,

“The new stores allow customers to see and feel Brilliant Earth's products before buying them, and they highlight the company's mission.”

Customers may spend up to an hour in a Brilliant Earth showroom, which includes meeting with a jeweler, viewing products up close, and learning about their ethical sourcing. These deeply engaging sessions with customers amount to sales driven to the website — not to the physical store.



2. Glossier.

A cult favorite makeup brand since 2014, [Glossier](#) has been dominating through their online-only presence.

That is, until recently. In 2018, the brand opened an L.A. storefront on exclusive Melrose Place and a [permanent flagship store](#) in New York City's trendy SoHo (the space used to be Glossier's showroom, which was opened in 2017).

According to Business Insider: ***"The space is designed to be a social space where customers can test makeup and hang out while shopping."*** In other words, it's meant to be an experience.

Case in point: Inside the L.A. store, there is a "selfie canyon" (known to fans as "Glossier Canyon").

According to the makeup brand, it's ***"an immersive, custom designed room inspired by Arizona's Antelope Canyon."***

Along with that, employees wear blush pink jumpsuits and products are displayed on tables with mirrors throughout each space. At the New York store, there is even a room with sinks and mirrors so shoppers can wash off what they applied and go back for more.

Meanwhile, Glossier has no plans for additional stores (though pop-ups have appeared in Boston and in London). That means fans visit the existing stores as destinations. They're not dropping by to pick up their favorite mascara, they're lingering, trying products, socializing, and taking photos to post on social media — a huge difference.



Visit a Casper Sleep Shop

Your one-stop shop for all things sleep.



3. Casper.

In 2014, [Casper](#) emerged as a mattress company you'd never seen before.

Branding themselves as a "sleep company" versus a mattress company off the bat differentiated them from their competitors. The other major differentiator was, of course, their product.

Casper was maybe the first of the "bed-in-a-box" brands to make a splash. Once their digital presence was proven, in 2018 they opened a [physical, permanent store](#) in New York City after successful experimentation with pop-up shops and a partnership with Target.

Overall, the store focuses on providing a unique experience to shoppers (no surprise there).

Six mini "homes" populate the store. Each features installations designed to encourage shoppers to test out Casper's mattresses and other products. Want to take a more serious test drive? Pay \$25 and enjoy a 45 minute nap on a mattress.

The success of this venture has encouraged the brand to go even bigger: They plan to open 200 stores in the U.S. by 2021.



4. Allbirds.

Allbirds is an eco-conscious shoe store with products made from natural fibers, like merino wool and eucalyptus tree fiber, and recycled elements, like the recycled bottles they use to make the laces.

Like the other brands on this list, Allbirds began with an all-digital presence but now has expanded into a series of pop-up shops and [six permanent stores](#) around the world, including San Francisco and London.



Better Things In a Better Way

It starts with better materials, continues with better design, and carries through to better factories and shipping methods. Because we think our planet deserves better. Less waste and pollution. More thoughtfulness and accountability. That sounds better, doesn't it?

LEARN ABOUT OUR MATERIALS



Source: [WSJ](#)

5. Harry's

Harry's mission is to sell a better shave at an affordable price. According to the brand, their razors, shaving products, and kits are designed to provide [a great experience](#) with quality materials at a lower price tag than similar products on the market.

Harry's exemplifies the average DNVB – they own their own factory, ship their own products, and sell them through their website. They also have a socially-conscious side, [donating profits](#) to promote better men's health care.

They made the move to brick and mortar when they signed up for partnerships with Target, Walmart, and [Boots stores](#) in the U.K. The Target displays of Harry's products, in particular, feature bold imagery, fun design, and unique kits you can't find anywhere else.

WRAPPING UP

Brick and mortar can't be ignored in the future of shopping. The most successful digitally-native vertical brands that invest in physical stores use them as opportunities to give customers unique experiences.

That means interactions with products, visual and sensory experiences, and feasts for the eyes in terms of design and displays.

Gen Z is driving this trend, but the older crowd isn't left out. Better, more unique shopping experiences will encourage people into stores and web traffic to the foundation of these ventures: the brand's digital presences online.



Conclusion

If you made it this far, then congratulations! You now have a solid understanding of what it takes to successfully sell everywhere.

So, what's next?

Action, that's what. Now that you know the importance of selling on all channels, it's time to evaluate your existing retail business and map out how to take it to the next level.

The right course of action will vary, depending on the retailer. For some businesses, the right move is to find a new retail management system. For others, it's figuring how to integrate their brick and mortar store with ecommerce.

Whatever the case, we're here to help. [Vend and BigCommerce](#) will give you everything you need to power your retail business online and in-store.

With these two solutions, you can remove the complexity from selling in-store and online. Easily manage sales, customers, products, and inventory from one place, while Vend and BigCommerce stay perfectly in sync. You can even sell on your favorite social media and marketplaces. Choose to display online inventory from one or multiple store locations, and boost your bottom line with insights into what's really making you money across your channels.

If you're ready to sell everywhere and stay competitive in the years to come, now is the time to get your online and offline stores working together. Let Vend and BigCommerce help you do just that.

[Check out Vend + BigCommerce today and discover a better way to sell across your channels.](#)