

How to Retain Brand Trust and Value With a Digital-Only Presence

Even in a digital world, a personal touch still prevails

It has been more than a year since retailers were forced to temporarily shut their doors or put in place restrictions to limit the in-store experience. Now, as we return to some semblance of normality, it's essential that trust and brand value are retained for those operating a digital-only presence.

Retail return

As I write this, physical retail and outdoor hospitality are feeling a little more rejuvenated after welcoming customers back. My in-box and notification center are full of alerts from brands offering high-street discounts and incentives for scanning an app in-store. This is a prime example of how fast and timely brands need to be to capture their customers' attention when trends and circumstances change.

It's also a great example of how essential communication and marketing techniques are in building trust and creating brand value. While I might not be one to rush back to high-street stores so soon, I do feel reassured and excited by these messages. And nothing could be more important at a time like this.

It's a reminder that these shops are still there and are prepared to welcome customers back in. After all, if they've had time to plan and create a whole marketing campaign around the event, I can only hope their efforts toward a safe reopening have been given just as much thought and attention.

Digital tactics like those mentioned above have only ramped up during the course of the pandemic, where remote communication and at-distance offerings have been the only touch points between brands and consumers. And of course, this hasn't been without challenge.

Digital-led trust

It's human nature for us to trust and find greater value in something we can see for ourselves in person. Traditionally, brands have been able to create this through in-store experiences where customers know they can see products and services in action and are able to interact with staff and experts should there be any concerns. While digital channels do offer their own set of benefits, meeting these innate human needs is not one of them.

So, in a bid to retain consumer trust amid the uncertainty of forced closures, measures, and constantly changing restrictions, we've seen a number of effective strategies from brands. Regular push notifications and email communications just scratch the surface. These tactics are a great way to generate instant response, whether it's a brand reminder, an update on important changes, or simply an alert of a new deal in an attempt to drive website traffic.

By now, it's a known fact that personalized messages generate better results. And these forms of digital communication can certainly be personalized with little effort on the brand's part. Whether it's a mass email with a tailored first name field, or an app alert that is sent as a restriction lifts—both feel personal and as though they have been sent by a real individual who knows who you are and understands the context of a situation.

But today's customers need and expect more. These tactics have been used for years, and the sensitivity of the pandemic has called for a more human approach in terms of marketing and customer service. And that's exactly what many successful brands have been doing.

In-store online

While driving traffic to a website is important, it's the service on offer once a customer lands on a page that makes the difference when it comes to building trust and brand value, and ultimately, converting. It's all about translating the human in-store experience online.

For example, we've seen greater focus and uptake in live chat features on websites, with this now being an expected function for more than half of consumers. Through such features, customers expect to be able to talk to a real person on the side of the screen who is able to understand their queries and responsively provide a solution.

Some companies have taken this one step further, and now offer a Shop Live feature that enables customers to video call a real sales representative who can help them with their purchase. In this way, brands are able to bridge the gap between themselves and their

consumers, even in a time of social distancing. And as a result, are able to retain trust, while also adding value to their brand through the out-of-the-box and supportive offering.

Other tactics have included offering incentives that encourage repeat purchases. For example, many online retailers offer unlimited next-day delivery subscription services, whereby a one-off, higher yearly fee provides access to a year's worth of free delivery. With the delay between placing an order and it then arriving, as well as delivery fees being some of the biggest deterring factors from online purchases, the incentive has been incredibly effective in increasing loyalty. That feeling of the brand also offering you a better deal is also a great way to build trust, so even though a brand might be increasing the cost it incurs for delivery, the value of a repeating customer and their advocacy hold much more weight.

In this sense, it's all about how a brand and its offerings are perceived by customers. And another surefire way of improving brand perceptions is through pay-per-click (PPC) tactics. Anyone operating in ecommerce knows how competitive the market is. Ensuring your brand is seen above competitors is key in driving awareness and trust, as ultimately, a higher ranking and greater visibility reflect positively on a brand's trustworthiness.

Data-led insights

Clearly, there are a number of ways in which businesses can adapt and improve their offerings to encourage trust and add value. Of course, implementing all of these changes will be wasteful for budgets and not necessarily effective for every brand. Therefore, it's important that you understand your market and customers, which can prove a challenge as things continue to constantly change as they have been.

But a solution may not be too hard to find. Insight software has advanced just as fast as these markets and customer behaviors. Therefore, with the right tools on your side, you can monitor shifts in the market in real time and adjust your offerings in response.

For example, if data shows you receive more website traffic at certain times, it may be an option to increase the number of customer service staff operating the live chat function during those periods to minimize waiting times and improve customer experience.

These tools can also help you decide which channels to focus PPC efforts depending on those your customers visit most often. Using this data, you can then allocate budget accordingly, ensuring wasted spend is minimized while results are maximized. For example, during the pandemic, the figures were showing a greater uptake in use of marketplaces such as Amazon,

as well as social commerce channels, including Instagram. If businesses understood this in real time, they may have been able to optimize their performance by increasing their PPC activity and consequently, visibility and status on such platforms.

Real-time communication

Ultimately, commerce is facing a period of significant uncertainty that is having an effect on both customers and businesses alike. Regardless of whether stores are open or closed, customer behaviors and needs are constantly changing to keep up. And brands need to understand that how they communicate their messages and offerings is vital in retaining trust and brand value.

It's evident that a humanistic approach is prevailing, as that is one thing that will never change. But as digital channels take center stage, it all comes down to how a brand is able to translate its personable approach online. While there are a number of innovative methods brands are using to appear more human on online channels, using the tools and data available is key to ensuring activities help rather than hinder a business.

And in this way, not only will brands be able to retain trust and brand value, but they will be building on it, too.

+++++

Readers may please note that D. L. Shah Trust brings out two e-journals on a fortnightly basis. These are mailed to those persons or institutions who are desirous of receiving them: These two e-journals are:

- 1. Safety Info**
- 2. Quality Info**

If you or your friends or colleagues wish to receive these journals, you may send us an e-mail requesting for the same. There is no charge for these journals. Our e-mail address is:

dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in haritaneja@hotmail.com dlshahtrust@gmail.com

You can also access these journals on our website: www.dlshahtrust.org

<p>Sponsored by: D. L. Shah Trust For Applied Science, Technology, Arts & Philosophy Mumbai. email: <u>dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in</u> Ph: 022 2267 2041</p>	<p>Edited by Hari Taneja, Mumbai email: <u>dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in</u></p>
---	---