

The following guest article has been written for InternetRetailing by Steve Borges, Co-founder, Biglight. Biglight is an experience design agency that combines the power of UX, creative, content, personalisation and optimisation to create remarkable customer experiences for some of the world's biggest brands and retailers. Biglight's clients include brands such as Nike, The North Face, Timberland and VANS and retailers including ASDA, Aarum, Halfords and Mothercare.



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Converting mobile traffic

Steve Borges, Co-founder at experience design agency Biglight, wonders if we've overlooked some fundamentals with the rise of m-commerce and uncovers some new behaviours and forgotten truths.

MANY OF this year's burning questions in online retail fall out of the rapid rise of mobile. One problem revolves around shoppers' increasing tendency to land on Product Listings Pages (PLPs) and Product Details Pages (PDPs), by-passing brand and campaign content designed to engage and convert.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the solution lies not in what has changed, but what has stayed the same. That is, while customer behaviour is changing dramatically, the real fundamentals – customer needs and responses – haven't really changed at all.

All the same the first step is to understand the challenge. What is changing? What is driving behaviour change and what does that tell us about specific challenges we face?

There are three big trends at play:

1. The relentless shift to mobile: Mobile is now the preferred device for browsing and opening email. It accounts for 50-80% of traffic, but conversion is 40-50% lower than desktop.
2. Changing patterns of engagement: This shift is changing the way shoppers engage and browse – one consequence being the tendency to land on PLPs and PDPs.
3. More complex user journeys. Users are increasingly likely to make multiple visits across different devices and channels as part of their purchase journey.

What can we learn from retail fundamentals as we seek to respond to these challenges? The lessons break down across three main themes: make the first impressions count; do the basics brilliantly; remember retail theatre.

MAKE THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

Presenting relevant content on arrival is crucial to in store merchandising and product placement. With reduced screen real-estate and shorter attention spans it's even more important online – especially for mobile users.

The key is to avoid screen clutter, wherever users land on your site. Simple personalisation techniques are a starting point – use the clues shoppers give about the purpose of their visit to simplify the experience.

Start by ensuring content reflects the route users take to get to your site – whether from a paid search ad, a link from an email or another marketing channel. This can be as simple as creating landing pages, PLPs or triggered searches that reflect the products or categories mentioned in the AdWords copy, or email, but it extends to more dynamic treatments and landing page optimisation, facilitated by multivariate testing and personalisation tools.

Equally, ensure the experience of a returning visitor reflects their previous browsing behaviour. Not just by retaining their recently viewed products and basket contents, but drawing on their browsing history to inform the banners and merchandising they see on the site.

DO THE BASICS BRILLIANTLY

In-store most retailers are great at making it easy for shoppers to find what they're looking for – clear signposting of departments and easy store navigation are givens – and that has some clear implications for ecommerce in general.

The need for a well optimised menu treatment and a simple taxonomy that reflects user needs and powerful on-site search functionality, is obvious. For mobile these implications are even more pronounced and the only way to get it right is through continuous testing and optimisation.

This is important for users landing anywhere on the site, but for those landing directly on PLPs, I'd argue there are a few additional considerations:

- Easy access to the filters (aka faceted navigation) is critical.
- The choice of filters provided, the order in which they are laid out and the interaction design are all important as well. Your filters should reflect how your users actually shop

and be simple to find, apply and remove.

■ Present the option to ‘filter by’ as a persistent or ‘sticky’ element. This has a material impact on filter usage and subsequent adds to basket, particularly on mobile.

This might all sound straightforward, but never assume: Experimentation and testing is the only way to get this right.

REMEMBER RETAIL THEATRE

Offline, the shop window is the way to attract customers into the store. It tells relevant stories in a highly visual way, turning passing trade into footfall.

Online though, users are bypassing the traditional online shop windows – home, landing and blog pages – to engage immediately with PLPs and PDPs. So how is it possible to engage and inspire? The answer, again, is in those in-store fundamentals – specifically, retail theatre.

For retail theatre, think Morrison’s bakery, with its appealing designs, uniformed staff and compelling product stories. Everything about the execution is geared to creating interest and a sense of expertise and authenticity to drive engagement and sales.

The online equivalent is engaging creative, combined with relevant content and stories that support the brand, range, style or product – and the good news is it’s proven to make a difference. Users who engage with relevant content during their journey are 20% more likely to convert and spend up to 20% more than users who don’t.

The key is to present engaging and relevant content during the most common customer journeys. Where this content makes a difference varies from retailer to retailer, but it’s sometimes the PLP, but it’s almost always the PDP. The content to use depends on the product type and customer mission, so this is another fruitful area for testing.

A note of caution though. Whilst content has to be visible and relevant to the products it is supporting, it must also be of the right scale and weight if it is to engage without overwhelming. That means bite-sized or ‘snackable’ content.


In the end it is crucial to see mobile as one element of the omnichannel world. Remember that more than 80% of sales still happen in store and that mobile has a huge role to play in influencing offline purchases.

Mobile is going to play a significant role in closing the loop between in store and online, helping with some of the things that



Is retail theatre the answer to mobile engagement?

offline retail does badly – such as recognising returning visitors and presenting the back story to every product.

In the longer term, these channels will all support each other, enabling joined up, rich experiences. Meanwhile, let’s not allow the pace of change to distract us from the retail fundamentals that are as true now as they’ve ever been. 

GETTING PRACTICAL

Steve Borges shares 7 tips to help you convert more mobile traffic and engage customers on PLPs and PDPs.

In store wisdom is that by presenting too many products at similar price points encourages “customer dithering”. Online, we forget this at our peril – and this is creating new best practices for driving engagement, and therefore conversion, on PLPs and PDPs:

1. On PLPs overlay SEO-style copy with beautifully designed banners. It’s an effective way of putting engaging visual merchandising in front of users, without distracting them.
2. Optimise the merchandise sort order, using recently added, best sellers and most popular, labels to simplify the journey and avoid ‘dithering’.
3. Use metrics like impressions and clicks to measure the performance of products presented on the PLP and use that insight to work out what should be at the top of listings.
4. Test PDPs to make sure basics like the format, size, quality and quantity of product images are always right.
5. Test the layout of selection and buying functions, the treatment of swatches and the hierarchy of product buying and delivery options.
6. Less is more, break up big blocks of text with bullet points or introduce imagery to describe key features.
7. Use social validation as a powerful purchase motivator, through ratings and reviews and tools that facilitate user-generated-content, such as Olapic.