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Leaving Money in the Shopping Cart?

How to minimize friction in the new contactless customer journeys

Prior to the global pandemic, retailers started pivoting to omnichannel, contactless journeys such as BOPIS, "buy online, pickup in store" or curbside pickup to meet consumers' need for convenience, speed and cost-effectiveness.

By starting the shopping journey on digital and completing it at a physical location allowed consumers to compare the best deals online, save delivery time and shipping costs, and then conveniently decide to return their purchase on the spot if they choose to, thus avoiding the hassle of having to deal with shipping returns. A January 2020 survey showed that 8 out of 10 US internet users expressed an interest in trying out contactless services such as curbside pickup.[1]

In the midst of a global health crisis, consumers have significantly changed their buying habits and are opting for contactless journeys to safeguard their (and their families') exposure to COVID-19. Contactless journeys help protect both consumers and employees, and allow businesses to operate in a social-distancing friendly manner.

Furthermore, with a COVID-19 recession characterized by significant job loss, consumer spending has dramatically decreased this year.[2] Today, when consumers shop, they are focusing primarily on essentials, and are deliberate in what they purchase, particularly online where they are unable to touch or examine the items in person.

Now, more than ever, retailers need to deliver a superior online shopping experience, followed by a seamless curbside pickup or delivery experience in order survive and compete in today's environment. Consumers who have a fractured experience will go elsewhere. That is why listening to customer feedback is so critical, especially during a period of tumultuous transition.

Retailers are navigating this new normal by building and scaling contactless fulfillment capabilities to handle more traffic, and subsequently a larger share of retailer revenue. They are rapidly testing and rolling out new customer journeys like curbside pickup which is why it's important to monitor customer feedback on new journeys in order to quickly isolate, identify and remediate friction in the shopping experience.
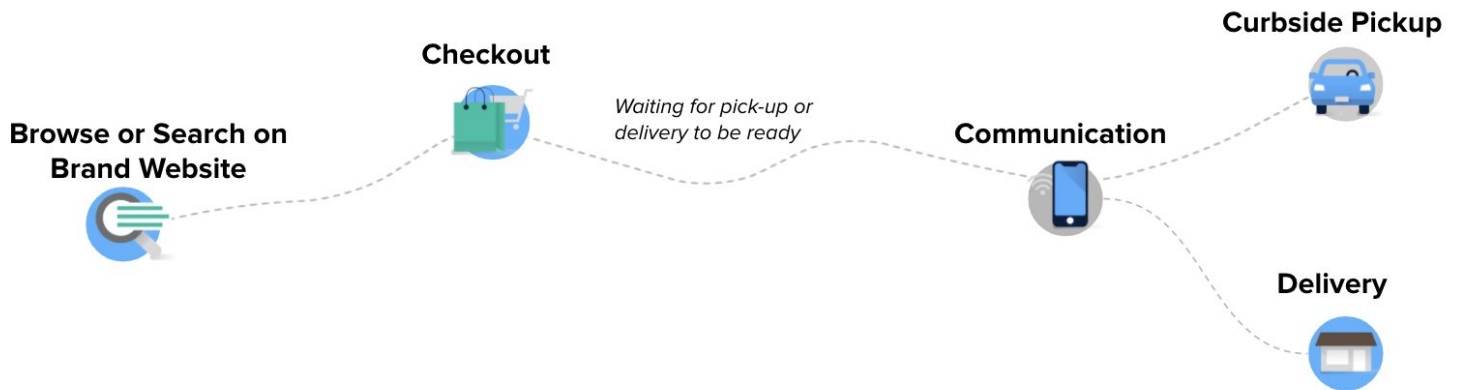
The Medallia Strategy Analytics Team (MSAT) partners with clients to identify and prioritize actionable insights from their customers' experience signals. When it comes to the contactless customer journey, valuable insights surfaced through Voice of the Customer survey data. The MSAT identified friction points across three key areas: first, when consumers are browsing or searching on the brand website for products to purchase, second when customers are checking out on the digital platform and lastly when they are waiting for communication regarding when their order will be fulfilled, either by delivery or curbside pickup.

In the next few sections, you will learn about our observations on the common reasons for each friction point throughout the customer's journey and our perspective on ways to address some of these challenges.

[1] https://www.emarketer.com/content/consumers-continue-to-be-enticed-by-click-and-collect
[2] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-economy-coronavirus-sinks-u-s-consumer-spending-savings-hit-record-high-idUSKBN2352CI

Browsing/ Searching on Brand's Website

Let's start at the beginning - customers begin their journey with browsing or searching on the website. This means your company's marketing efforts have paid off by driving traffic to your online retail space, your digital equivalent of a brick and mortar store.

At this step of the journey, our research indicates the friction point consumers face is the ability to seamlessly and easily access content across any of the digital platforms. They feel frustrated by not being able to use a device or browser of their preference to access the site.

Consumers can grow increasingly impatient with slow load times, or pages not being responsive to their filter selection. Slow site speeds or poor site performance is one of the top feedback topics that we see impacting retailers' key metrics negatively.

Inadequate site performance can create an inhospitable shopping experience, and doesn't instill confidence in consumers to share their payment card details when they are faced with the prospect of the site timing out on them!

How can retailers address this pain point?

First, retailers should investigate if there is a particular issue that is resulting in poor site performance. Brands can use feedback related to poor site experience to uncover common errors or mentions of reasons as to why the site is slow (e.g., number of cookies) and then compare that feedback to IT monitoring or web analytics information to investigate and identify root causes of slow site loading times or poor performance.

If there are no obvious reasons for site slowdown, the brands can reevaluate their digital site design. While retail sites often host a large volume of photos and videos on various pages, e.g., category pages, product details pages, consumers may have poor Internet or wifi connections that cannot load such high bandwidth content. Brands should strive to balance digital content design with site performance optimization such that consumers can both access the website and find helpful and relevant visual content.

> "
> Site won't load; I just see a spinning circle. This has happened to me every time I try to shop on your site, so much so that I don't shop here anymore. I tried closing and changing browsers, still face the same problem!!
>
> **Poor Site Performance Customer Feedback**

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The next point of friction we observe in the browse or search phase within the digital journey is related to merchandise searchability and availability.

Consumers struggle to navigate through extensive catalogs to find exactly what they are looking for and proactively recommend adding specific filters. This would allow them to narrow down their search and therefore be more time efficient. Even when they are able to find the item they want to purchase, they are disappointed to later learn that the item is unavailable for curbside pickup.

Our team has observed that availability is a major pain point that has only been further exacerbated for many retailers since the start of the pandemic. While the panic buying started with necessities such as hand sanitizer and toilet paper, the out-of-stock trend spread to other categories such as workout equipment as more and more people adjusted to being at home more frequently.[3]

> "
> I would like to be able to filter by price.
>
> **Merchandise Findability**
>
> Why would you put items for sale when they are not available? Why can't they be filtered out?
>
> **Availability Customer Feedback**

Consumers proactively suggest adding filters that allow them to only browse available items so that they don't spend time reviewing items that they can't get right now.

During these difficult times caused by the pandemic, while customers may be frustrated by out-of-stock items, they can also be understanding if these expectations are set upfront, and they are less forgiving if they feel that they have just wasted their time selecting items that ultimately aren't available to them at the moment.

How can retailers address this pain point?

While the ideal state would be to enable consumers to filter by available inventory for curbside pickup or delivery, there are a number of steps to take to improve the experience.

First, brands can provide an estimate of when the item will be available again, or encourage consumers to sign up for 'back in stock' emails that will notify them once the item they are looking for is available. They can also offer a 'wishlist' feature so that consumers can save items to come back later or offer 'you may also like' options to consumers whose first choice is not currently available.

Checkout

The next area of friction we see is related to the checkout experience. At this point in the journey, consumers have found what they are looking for and simply want to complete the transaction. Here, at times, consumers are faced with an unpleasant surprise in that they see one price on the product site and then see a higher price as soon as they add it to their cart.

This is not just a point of friction, but can be perceived as a bait and switch tactic or deceptive advertising, and could turn the consumer off from shopping on the brand's website.

Another point of friction in this phase is related to applying promotion codes and reward points. When customers have difficulty applying a coupon, using a promo code or redeeming reward points to complete their purchase and once again they feel cheated.

Lastly, even after consumers checkout, they might receive a notification telling them that their order was canceled, without any real information as to why. This can create frustration, especially after the consumer spent time and effort to find what they were searching for and completed the purchase. Naturally, they are looking forward to receiving their item.

This type of poor experience can drive consumers to go elsewhere instead of replacing the order on the current site.

> "
> "I placed several orders after getting promo emails about your sales. Every single one of my orders has been cancelled. This never happened before.
>
> **Receiving Cancellation After Completing an Order Customer Feedback**

How can retailers address this pain point?

Brands can leverage the Medallia platform, including our web analytics integrations and our AI capabilities to not only identify on real time which pages and product categories are creating this type of issues but also alert the right people to help resolve them.

When it comes to promo codes, brands can mitigate this unpleasant experience by providing clear explanations regarding which specific items qualify for promo codes. If a consumer enters an invalid coupon, communicate not just that the code is invalid, but also explain why the code is not applicable for the items the consumer is looking to purchase.

While addressing longer-term inventory management issues that may be causing these types of cancellations, it can ease consumer's frustration by providing a 'back-in-stock' notification when the cancelled item is available again, or offering a 'you may also like' option to re-engage consumers and minimize friction.

Communication

Once an order is placed and customers are waiting for their curbside pickup or delivery notification, the primary point of friction pertains to communication. Without effectively communicating status updates, consumers feel left hanging and uneasy about their order.

When consumers receive their delivery they may feel confused as to why part of their order arrived but the other part didn't. In some cases, such as grocery retailers, customers are surprised to find out that items are not available until the day of delivery, or that substitutions were made to their order.

Customers prefer upfront communication about which items are available and which are not, especially when they are waiting at the location for their order.

To avoid a gap in communication, providing customers with clear, proactive communication on when they will receive all the items they ordered. Retailers should provide a means for customers to track an order status from order received to fulfillment completed in the communication channel of their choice, e.g., text or email.

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Turning Friction into Actionable Insights

The points of friction described above, come from the Voice of Customer and are only the first step in identifying actionable insights to ensure your customers have a positive, seamless experience.

Each business needs to juxtapose customer feedback against its own internal operations and processes, i.e., how is the site user experience designed, how is fulfillment managed once an order is placed for curbside pickup at a particular location, and what notifications and updates are provided to the customer once an order is placed.

Doing so will allow brands to trace where—in their customer experience—are behind-the-scenes systems or processes breaking and causing a poor experience.

The Medallia Strategy Analytics Team (MSAT) can work closely with your company's Customer Experience or analytics team to surface the friction points in your contactless customer journeys and also help you identify what's the action your customers are asking you to take.

For example, if clients are struggling with feedback related to pricing discrepancies, the MSAT can help the clients trace which website pages customers are leaving this feedback on, in order to remediate the issue.

As a critical next step, start by putting yourself in your customer's shoes and empathize with the experiences they are having throughout their journey. It's important to provide a seamless experience from the beginning when they are browsing or searching to the purchasing process to receiving adequate communication regarding when their item will arrive or be available for pickup.

Seeing yourself as your customers do, recreating their whole journey experience across multiple signals, will be pivotal when turning friction into strategic insights that could propel your company in the right direction, one that allows you to thrive in the "new normal".

About Medallia Strategy Analytics

The Medallia Strategy Analytics Team provides consulting, analytics and data science services to accelerate customers' Experience Management maturity and time-to-value. For more information, please reach out to msat@medallia.com. You can also schedule Meet Expert on Demand meetings with members of our experts; Roshni Goel, Director & Retail SME or Veronica Andrade, Head of MSAT.