

BUILDING A SOLID ECOMMERCE EXPERIENCE



GREAT EXPERIENCES AREN'T BUILT BY CHANCE

Are you redesigning your eCommerce website or moving from one eCommerce platform to another? In this whitepaper we will cover areas that will improve your outcomes and enable you and your team to deliver a solid eCommerce experience. When examining what it takes to succeed, you will need awareness of more than just the appearance of your site. Consider what it takes to support your eCommerce site experience from end to end. Getting eCommerce operations to flow successfully takes time and loads of resolve, especially if you are new at creating an eCommerce business or reached the limit of what your current eCommerce platform is able to support. Personalization, speed, accuracy, relevance, and the ability to evolve are all key factors to creating a successful ecommerce website.



GATHERING CUSTOMER DATA

Retailers often assume that the perfect customer experience requires aggressively collecting customer information. And yes, you need customer data to accurately personalize the customer experience. However, customers want personalized experiences that make them feel seen and understood, not stalked. Be aware of how often you are requesting consumer information and for how much you are asking.

When gathering any type of data, let customers know why you need it and the context in which it will be used. Transparency will increase the likelihood that they will supply the information and help you perfect their customer experience.

*Make your customers
feel seen and
understood.*

GATHERING REAL TIME DATA FOR ACCURATE INVENTORY



Gathering the needed data that ties your warehouse, brick and mortar store, marketplace and online store together is crucial and should be handled in real time with set priorities. Your entire team should know which location gets priority in order fulfillment and why. There should always also be thresholds in place to enable your locations to ensure there is ample product on hand. Knowing how long it takes for products to be ordered and delivered from your distributor will dictate your estimated thresholds. For example, if we know it takes two weeks to get more of a certain SKU (stock keeping unit) delivered, and you sell approximately four a week, and the most you have ever sold in a week is six, it would be safe to hold a minimum of six at all times. So when your inventory drops to eight, please order more.

So why is this important?

Consider inventory accuracy from the customers perspective. Let's say a customer comes into your store and browses, then finds the perfect pair of jeans in the right color and perfect fit. But is unable to buy them because they ran out of time and had to go.

Later that afternoon they go to your website and find the same pair of pants, right size, right color. They then try to add it to their cart, but instead get an "out of stock" message. Now your customer is frustrated they just saw it at your store less than an hour ago and there were a couple stacks of them folded on the shelf too. They click the x button and forget the pants and your store. All could have been avoided if the accuracy of your systems were synchronized properly.

*Consider inventory
accuracy from the
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REPLENISHMENT PLAN?

The value of being able to buy an item without contact has increased. so getting it right means that you will now need to consider the competition. Getting it right means that your eCommerce site and store front are in unison. All of your locations that hold inventory should focus on accurate inventory, prioritization and smooth replenishment flow. And yes, you will need to consider the few industry juggernauts that have legions of employees and systems that give them an edge. But do not be discouraged, there are ways to streamline the process for smaller teams, here are a few tips.

Focus on accurate inventory, stock prioritization and smooth replenishment.

- Get a clear view of your supply chain across your organization.
- Prioritize creating stock replenishment rules.
- Ensure inventory is updating as close to real time as possible.
- Understand and become familiar with the factors that affect your demand forecast, such as seasonal events, new competitors, supply side issues.
- Nail down a demand forecast by communicating with your fulfillment team, customers, suppliers, and retail associates. It may take a bit of extra effort up front but is well worth it.
- Budget for mishaps and create a backup plan to handle them just in case your forecasting is off.

WHAT CLEAR VISIBILITY OF INVENTORY & REPLENISHMENT MEANS



Visibility refers to a team's ability to see what is happening and when, including everything from receiving new inventory, the movement of inventory between locations, to order fulfillment. Having a handle on demand forecasting and planning of your replenishment strategy is essential to get a clear view of inventory.

Gathering the necessary data to understand how much business you will receive in the future is complicated for some, but if you implement a system that supplies real-time inventory data, you are off to a good start. Surprised? No automation, no worries, you just need to take an extra step.

If you don't have a system in place already, make sure your data is organized and up to date before using it for your forecasting and planning. The first step is to prioritize inventory needs. After, get your team that manages your inventory together. Include inventory managers, your sales team, and suppliers. You may even consider getting feedback from your customers.

Collect the historical information they have, then review it as a group. When you review, you should be able to uncover each team's area of responsibility and any overlaps, which can make your data collection and reporting more efficient and understandable for the entire team.

Understand how much business you should expect.

BUILDING YOUR SITES EXPERIENCE

Creating the experience that your site delivers requires more than data to better speak to your customers or even sell the right products. Taking a wholistic approach will pay dividends. Consider these items when nailing down your plan.



- **Site Speed-** There is almost no tolerance for slow-loading sites. Over three seconds is the standard for a slow site. There are handful of factors that can boost speeds.
- **Imagery-** The amount and size of your imagery will have a significant impact, but also location, for this one you will need to investigate where your site is hosted and who your CDN provider is.
- **Accessibility-** Follow WCAG and ADA guidelines to make your site accessible for all customers to shop.
- **Product Pages-** Product pages should be written concisely and use high-quality images. Stick to 3-5 bullet points highlighting the most unique and relevant features of the product and include photos of all the diverse ways the product can be used or worn.
- **Site Navigation-** Site navigation should lead customers quickly to their end destination in as few clicks as possible. Adding site search and a site map to your online store can also help customers get to their end destination quickly. If they still cannot find what they need, make sure a customer service phone number is displayed prominently on your site.
- **Return Policy-** Your return policy should have its own page on your site and be easy to find (linked in either the navigation or in the site map). It should be written clearly in simple terms, and it should also outline shipping options, how many days someone can take to make a return and include exceptions like a customer ordering an item online and returning it to the store. For more best practices on writing your return policy, check out our article [Returns: The Big Picture](#).
- **Checkout-** No matter what personalization efforts you decide to employ, you need to be sure those efforts are not adding friction to the checkout process. Allow customers to checkout as guests and limit the amount of information they need to provide at checkout. This final stage is where you can lose a significant percentage of your potential customers if you slow down their experience. Allow multiple payment options, offer free shipping if applicable and do not get in the way. If you want to collect more customer information like birthday or style preferences, do that on the order confirmation screen, in a pop-up on the site, or in the follow-up order confirmation email.
- **Mobile-** It is indisputable that customers expect mobile-responsive pages: sites should work just as effortlessly on their phones as they do on desktop. Make sure your site passes the thumb zone test and that users can still access product reviews, quick shop, and other basic site features on mobile.

PERSONALIZED NATURE AND SPEED



Having a personalized eCommerce customer experience adds value for your customers. The contemporary trends in eCommerce dictate that we need to provide a memorable, robust experience.

And according to Deloitte, 36% of consumers express interest in buying personalized products or services, with 48% saying they would be willing to wait longer to receive it.

RELEVANT CONTENT

Delivering relevant, high quality content to customers is often overlooked as a form of personalization. The fact is the basis of personalization is providing a unique, relevant experience to each customer that interacts with your site. Using cookies to target specific segments of site visitors allows you to show them personalized content.

Use high quality product images and include lifestyle photos to allow customers to envision a product as part of their own lives. Create personalized content like style guides based on earlier purchases or what is already in their cart. Display recently viewed items to capture customers who previously visited your site.

Allow customers to envision a product in their own lives.

Additionally, offering Shop by Store or allowing customers to filter their browsing by country, delivers the most relevant content to them based on location. Further personalize their experience by allowing them to view the site in different languages. For example, Canadian-based retailer Little Burgundy allows customers to browse in both English and French.

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Product recommendations can be driven by past purchases, browsing behavior, demographics (like age, ethnicity, and location) and psychographics (like interests, attitudes, and habits).

One of the most effective ways to increase average order value is to make product recommendations based on what is in the customer's cart already. When you browse in a physical store, you may walk in looking for a specific item, but something else will catch your eye and you will end up buying more items you did not plan to buy (Target run anyone?) According to Segment, 40% of US consumers bought something more expensive because their experience was personalized.



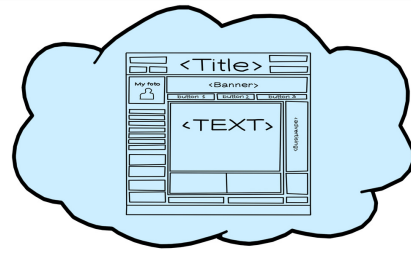
49% of shoppers bought a product they did not intend on buying after receiving a personalized recommendation. Upselling and cross-selling techniques on your site enable product discovery without physically browsing a store. You can also recommend products based on seasonality (rain boots on the East Coast in April or thick socks during the winter) or suggest items a customer may like using a callout such as 'Customers also purchased....' The more personalized the recommendation, the more likely the customer is to add the item to their cart.

49% of shoppers bought a product they did not intend on buying after receiving a personalized recommendation.

A/B TESTING AND USER TESTING

A/B testing involves trying out two different versions of your site to see which one performs better. The differences between the two can be as simple as a different placement of the 'Add to Cart' buttons or may involve showing two completely different homepages to different consumers based on their segment. The secret to perfecting your site's conversion rate is to test everything.

User testing such as using heat maps for tracking how customers interact with your site can tell you what changes to make. Sometimes something as simple as changing the color of a button or moving the cart logo on your site can have a dramatic impact on your bottom line.



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HOLIDAYS AND BIRTHDAYS



On a customer's birthday, sending a personalized email with a discount code is an effective way to encourage a purchase. Birthdays are also an excellent time to use direct mail. For example, sending a handwritten note with a coupon or promo code is an individualized touch that a customer is far more likely to hold on to, and it further strengthens their relationship with the brand.

CAPTURE CUSTOMERS BEFORE THEY LEAVE

When a customer shows signs of leaving your site, it is called exit intent. Google Tag Manager supplies a solution to track exit intent and allows you to display pop-ups that could keep visitors on your site.

A discount for signing up for a newsletter that appears in a pop-up when a customer is about to leave your site can increase conversions and prevent them from leaving.

Increase conversions.

Capturing feedback on why a customer may want to leave your site ('Didn't find what you were looking for? Talk to a Customer Service Agent through our live chat system') is also an effective way to help customers find what they were looking for.

Peltz Shoes promotes their mailing list with a pop-up that offers customers a coupon for signing up. This encourages them to make a purchase and re-engage with the brand later through the newsletter.



WIN BACK CUSTOMERS



Optimizing your site and your checkout process will help reduce your exit rate.

Despite your best efforts, some customers will still decide to leave your site without making a purchase. Win back those customers with abandoned cart emails, retargeting ads, or even by sending a discount through email or direct mail. Customers leave for a variety of reasons; if they are not converting, your prices could be too high for them and they could be waiting for a sale or discount, checkout could have been too tedious or slow, or customers may simply get distracted and move on to something else.

Optimizing your site and your checkout process will help reduce your exit rate and focusing on winning back lost customers with personalized content will help boost your sales. Personalizing the eCommerce customer experience is crucial to growing your business. Schedule a consultation with Virid for a site audit and a report full of insights to help you perfect your brand's growth.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Are you facing inventory frustrations with a data inconsistencies?
Or maybe your customers are often abandoning their cart before checkout? Let us know!

The most experienced ecommerce site developers.

We have been involved in ecommerce since its infancy. Since then we have helped clients including Barney's New York, Journeys, Liz Claiborne, Tory Burch, and Johnston & Murphy.

Our experience is your strength. We have the technical expertise of a software company and the results-oriented support of a professional service group with over 20 years of experience in ecommerce.

Find out more at www.virid.com

