

COLUMNS

How to engage smartphone shoppers and use showrooming to your advantage

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By [Jerry Spelic](#)

Smartphones are powering commerce everywhere, but they are also creating an effect known as "showrooming." Showrooming is when shoppers visit a retail store to research a product but buy it online.

Retailers despise showrooming because they are assuming all the risk by stocking products and gaining none of the benefit of the sale, which is lost to a lower-priced, online-only seller or a competitor.

However, showrooming is not a rare or isolated event it is happening in large numbers, every day.

Thirty-one percent of smartphone shoppers have researched products while in a store and 14 percent have used them to purchase a product while in a store, according to some studies. And of those who use smartphones in-store, 59 percent have used them to find a better price.

By bringing the Internet to the store, smartphones are promoting showrooming.

But all is not lost. Retailers can use showrooming to their advantage by giving shoppers engaging, informative product content. This will help create or preserve a sale at three crucial steps in the purchase process:

Information search

Six in 10 shoppers begin their research online, before ever going to a store (Cisco, October 2011). Providing these information-seeking shoppers with engaging online or tablet-optimized interactive product content such as product demonstrations that helps them choose the correct product based on their needs will help ensure that they buy from you.

For example, a shopper is interested in buying a stand mixer and visits a retailer's site. There she finds a product demo of the mixer in which she is interested. She can view the mixer's features and benefits, view a video of it in action, see attachments that could help her use the mixer more efficiently and for more applications, and see up-close images.

If this retailer did not have such interactive and engaging content, the shopper would almost certainly need to visit a store to view the product to decide whether or not to buy it showrooming. But since the retailer offered such informative product information, showrooming was avoided and an online sale may have been created.

Evaluation of alternatives

Seventy-three percent of shoppers with smartphones prefer to use their mobile device in-store rather than ask a sales associate for help (Accenture, 2010). Wow.

Now, imagine a shopper standing in the aisle, trying to decide between several blenders. She would really rather not ask anyone for help, so she turns to her smartphone. Instead of letting the shopper find a blender elsewhere, help her

ask anyone for help, so she turns to her smartphone. Instead of telling the shopper that a blender elsewhere, help her decide.

Retailers can offer product selectors that help the in-aisle shopper choose between alternatives.

Product selectors present shoppers with a series of questions that narrow down product choices based on their answers.

Positioning a shelf-talker or aisle violator with a QR code linked to a product selector allows brands and the retailer to always be "in the aisle," helping shoppers choose the right product for their needs. Again, this can help create or preserve the sale, and generate brand loyalty at the same time.

A shopper in the aisle who is searching for product information is begging you to help her buy the product. Give her engaging and educational content to ensure that she completes the purchase, because the only things that separate one retailer from another are information and pricing.

Purchase decision

The statistics are staggering: close to 50 percent of all shoppers in the United States are using their mobile device to research and browse products; just under 60 percent use their device while shopping; and, of those mobile shoppers, 70 percent are visiting a store's site while in the store.

This is a strong indication that consumers want to interact with products, especially while they shop. Providing smartphone-optimized product content on your site will help in-aisle shoppers buy from you.

Manufacturers are increasingly putting QR codes on their product packaging or in advertising. When scanned with a mobile device, the codes link to a Web page that displays more information about the product.

Retailers should insist that their vendors provide shoppers with interactive content because in-store conversion rate for shoppers who used a retailer's own site was 20 percent higher than those who used an app or site belonging to another business (Deloitte, March 2012).

This is a great opportunity to use QR codes to direct shoppers to engaging smartphone-optimized product content such as demos and selectors.

SHOWROOMING IS a fact of life. Providing shoppers better product content than your competitors will help ensure that they will purchase from you rather than from a competitor.

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