THE B2B E-COMMERCE SOLUTION CHECKLIST:

7 Factors To Consider For A Successful Digital Buyer's Journey

Selling B2B products has never been easy, and those companies that have ventured into B2B e-Commerce have often stepped back, wondering why buyers aren't flocking to purchase on their web site.

One of the problems is that as consumers, we've become spoiled by the seamless, personalized experience we get from our favorite brands and retailers. B2C firms have invested time and money into giving consumers that hands-on relationship, no matter if they're in a brick-and-mortar store or buying from their mobile device on the beach.

Is your B2B site as efficient as the big retailers'? Consider these seven factors that will help you drive site traffic and conversions.

MAKE SEARCH SIMPLE

When it comes to search strategies, B2B companies start out with a disadvantage: their giant catalogs, which are generally filled with many more SKUs than B2C operations. The job of creating a great search experience amid thousands of products is particularly difficult, but a winning approach that focuses on simplifying search the same way the B2C world does is possible.

"What often separates the B2C and B2B worlds is personalized search," said Sachin Sharma, Director of Strategic Programs at Kibo Commerce. "We always have to be aware that B2B buyers approach their jobs with the B2C experience in mind, and they expect a highly personalized experience."

The latest search technologies can comb through large B2B catalogs. They also can be configured to allow a merchant to make searchable suggestions on the fly if it quickly sees a need that's not addressed. Some forward-thinking B2B companies are even getting closer to the goal of "no search," where the engine autocompletes based on the first few letters entered, connects it to the customer's buying pattern and displays an array of products that fit his or her needs.

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ADDRESS UNIQUE PRICING NEEDS

Pricing in B2B e-Commerce takes on a whole different layer of complexity. Your favorite consumer brand sites generally don't wrestle with issues like purchase orders, contractual/ account-specific pricing and tax differences that B2B firms face with every transaction.

"The key here is to have a scalable platform that can handle massive amounts of data, scan millions of price lists and cross-reference inventory in order to dig up the cost of a product in a split second," said Eric Rosado, Vice President of Product for Kibo Commerce.

Even the best sales rep, who knows the company's price list up and down, can't compete with an algorithm that delivers the right price to the right customer instantly while also accounting for loyalty, discounting and promotions.

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OPTIMIZE REPLENISHMENT

A key part of the seamless customer experience is the ability to "one click" an order. This is even more important in the B2B space, where time spent on the ordering process is time away from other tasks.

Because a B2B e-Commerce business will likely be filling a high percentage of repeat orders, quick-order tools like pre-built carts or widgets filled with items the buyer bought previously are a timesaver that the buyer is familiar with from the B2C world. One-click ordering also helps ensure repeat customer visits, since the buyer has to weigh the value of searching for a better price elsewhere versus convenience.

4

PROVIDE CROSS-CHANNEL DATA

Experts say we're now in the big data age, which is why a B2B e-Commerce platform that manages data across systems, providers and products is so critical to success.

"The B2B side has been a little behind the curve when it comes to data management across its channels," Sharma said, "but that's changing. Ideally you want your system to manage and analyze the data coming from e-Commerce, in-person sales, a call center, and brick-and-mortar if applicable, and match it up to the buyer so you have his or her complete history."

One challenge facing B2B firms is integrating data from older legacy systems that may not be compatible with newer platforms. A modern platform that manages millions of data points from the past and present will create the necessary 360-degree view of the customer's journey. An e-Commerce solution that can extract the necessary data from older platforms and integrate it into an easily read format is essential in today's marketplace.

5

EMBRACE A SINGLE CONSOLE

Managing separate e-Commerce sites from one dashboard used to be a dream among C-suite executives. Today, the technology makes it a reality. "For companies that serve different industries and sell through separate sites, that ability to get a 360-degree view of what's happening in sales, inventory and communication is critical," Rosado said.

Single-console management allows an operation to streamline. Smaller teams can manage multiple sites, eliminating duplicate efforts. As a result, an efficient B2B company can sell through one catalog that feeds to various industry sites and even to a B2C division, while collecting and analyzing data from the various channels.

6

SEEK ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT FLEXIBILITY

Key to B2B e-Commerce success is managing accounts effectively, both on the customer side and from the dashboard. The best solutions are highly configurable, allowing buyers to make changes to approvals and permissions within the organization, and giving them the ability to share project lists and order histories.

For an e-Commerce business, allowing that flexibility gives it more data and the ability to clearly see which teams within a customer's organization are buying. This allows a company to spot trends and make appropriate pricing and marketing decisions.

"Account management is one of those pillars that really separates how B2B e-Commerce operates," Sharma said. "In B2C management it's easier because you're generally dealing with an individual. But on the B2B side, you're dealing with teams of buyers within an organization and you've got to be on top of their needs. That's where a great B2B system really shines."

7

PERSONALIZE FOR B2B

Historically, B2B sales were about the personal touch. Good sales reps knew the names of their customers' spouses and were diligent about sending birthday cards and follow-ups asking about recent vacations.

E-Commerce may not have that level of familiarity, but modern systems are more than capable of analyzing data from previous purchases to deliver relevant product recommendations and offers tailored specifically to that buyer.

In some ways this is easier on the B2B side. A consumer site selling women's athletic wear may recognize a visitor from her previous shoe purchase and deliver content and banners based on that, but the consumer has checked in looking for tops. The B2B buyer's purchases are generally more consistent, and using the time interval and products ordered, the algorithm can better predict what they're seeking and create a deeper personalized experience.

Overall, the opportunity is there in B2B e-Commerce to increase traffic and conversions, reduce costs and help customers optimize their buying. Competition is increasing daily, and there's a need for businesses to take a deeper look at their platforms to ensure they're creating that seamless experience buyers expect.

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