



# The case for Customer Engagement:

Engaged customers are  
happy (and loyal) ones.

Through our ongoing series of whitepapers, we at Smith have examined the overall importance of Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) and also looked closer at customer acquisition strategies, the first of three pillars in increasing CLV. In our previous paper, we discussed how it is vital for companies to learn everything they can about their customers and use that information to improve their efforts to attract new, valuable ones.

In this, the third whitepaper in our Customer Lifetime Value series, we explore the second of these pillars: customer engagement.

We will examine the most effective methods to keep your customers engaged, particularly through methods that make your company's eCommerce platform more simple, personal and welcoming, grow your relationship with your customers and ultimately improve your organization's overall CLV.

Customer engagement (CE) is all about building relationships—not just connections, but also relationships—with the people to whom your company sells its products. It's the process where you nurture the connection between you and your customers—both new and existing—to keep them genuinely engaged with your company. Customer engagement is best accomplished through valuable and relevant content, products, and services which, if done well, ultimately results in your customers continuing to move along the sales funnel.

Engaged customers are happy customers, and happy customers are loyal ones.

When reviewing your customer data, there are two metrics to use to judge your CE efforts: Conversion Rate and Average Order Value.

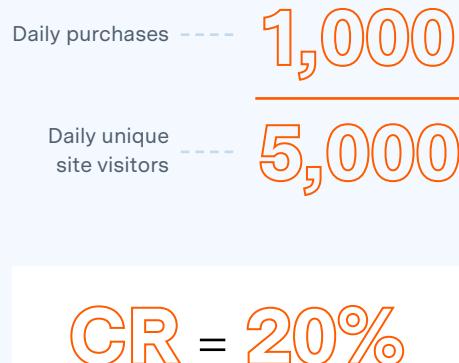
Conversion Rate (CR) measures the percentage of unique visitors to your company's website that ultimately make a purchase. You can drill down for more specificity in conversion rates by measuring against certain steps of the sales funnel, such as "Add to Cart" or "Checkout"]

Conversion Rate helps you assess the performance of your eCommerce channel and track purchasing decisions for customers at any stage of the buying process. This way, you can identify where engagement is breaking down, which will allow you to investigate and address those problem areas.

Average Order Value (AOV) is the average dollar amount spent each time someone makes a purchase from your company's eCommerce site.

Again, you can use more advanced or nuanced measurements—such as revenue per visitor, average basket size or units per transaction—that can give you even more detailed AOV information.

## Conversion Rate (CR)



## Average Order Value (AOV)



## Effective customer engagement strategies

There are many strategies you can employ to improve your customer engagement.

Let's explore each to see how they can be used to help your organization.

### Three primary areas:

- Personalization
- Omnichannel commerce
- Intelligent search

### Four secondary areas:

- Guided selling
- Content and community
- Self-service
- Syndication and marketplaces



## Personalization

Emotion is a big part of the sales process. Each customer is a human being with needs—both business and personal—and making customers feel comfortable is a vital piece of any commerce experience.

One way to engage your customers and fuel that feeling of comfort is to provide a customized experience that's relevant to them personally—that reflects their unique tastes, behaviors, goals and previous transactions. An eCommerce experience can be personalized in three ways:

- Collaborative filtering
- Cohort analysis
- Next best action

### Collaborative filtering

It isn't always possible to provide 100 percent personalized experiences to every individual customer, so an important step is to group customers together into segments with similar characteristics and personas. You could segment by age, income, industry, type of trade conducted, etc., and then apply broad personalization rules to all customers within that segment.

This segmentation is a type of collaborative filtering, which is a way to automatically make predictions about the interests of one user based on the information you collect about the preferences of many other users. The data works together (i.e. “collaborates”) to create filters through which you provide information to targeted customers.



It's a simple premise—people of similar tastes (or backgrounds, or in similar areas of interest) will like or want the same things. For example, if Customer A and B have similar tastes then it's generally safe to assume that if Customer A buys a product, Customer B will also be interested in that product if it's presented to them.

Collaborative filtering automates the large-scale process of putting that information in front of the right customers, matching segments of similar interests together.



There are two ways to apply this type of filtering: user-based or item-based.

In item-based filtering, you match users with items based on what they have previously purchased, viewed, or searched for.

In user-based filtering, you present products drawn from a user's interests—through aforementioned searches and views—and through deeper insight data like item ratings and reviews, which are then compared to similar users. Users are served items that match the interests, likes and preferences of similar users in their segment, broadening the potential product pool.

Critically, this type of filtering relies on collecting sufficient first-party data on your customers' interests and preferences. This data can be collected at several points within the journey, from account creation and registration to surveys and customer reviews collected post-purchase—just to name a few.

The more data you can gather about customers' interests, likes, dislikes, purchasing habits and

demographics—particularly via willing disclosures—the better you will be able to target them with personalized recommendations and offerings.

This process may seem intimidating, but there are plenty of great recommendation systems out there that use collaborative filtering algorithms and machine learning to enable exactly this type of personalization. There is no need to build your own solution (unless you really want to).

Powerful as it is, collaborative filtering also has some limitations. It is only able to create recommendations based on similar tastes within customer segments, which may fall short if robust internal data or segmentation doesn't exist.

### **Understanding cohort analysis**

Cohort analysis lets you go deeper and be more dynamic by grouping your customers based on behaviors rather than just by their personas or tastes. And combining cohort analysis with effective collaborative filtering can result in incredibly powerful personalization for your customers.

Reviewing your customers' activity and behavior seems like a basic measurement and analytic method, but cohort analysis specifically groups users over periods of time, allowing you to compare specific marketing campaigns more easily versus trying to parse information from all users of similar segments.

Let's say your company recently ran a promotional email campaign for a discount on green shoes. Some customers clicked on the email but didn't purchase, some took part in the promotion and bought green shoes, while others didn't engage with the promotion at all.

Using this data, you can create a "Green Shoes cohort" and group all the users who clicked on the email together to analyze their behavior. You can drill down even further to find differences between users who clicked but didn't buy, who filled a cart but didn't complete the purchase, and who completed the full purchase process.

This data can show you the characteristics of each different type of customer in your cohort, and based on this information, you could decide to retarget customers who were engaged but didn't convert, monitoring them over time to see who does eventually convert, or who becomes a repeat customer, or who only engages when targeted with a different promotion.

These cohort and segmenting methods are fantastic ways to learn more about your customers and thereby create customized strategies to engage, convert and retain them.

This goes a long way to helping optimize your CLV as well. The insights that influence customer behavior can

be leveraged to inform your ongoing customer acquisition strategy, or even uncover any lingering negative issues in your digital channels.

### **NBA is a slam-dunk**

If you want to dive even farther and employ more sophisticated analysis and execution to your personalization efforts, you could employ machine learning tools to implement Next Best Action (NBA) marketing on your eCommerce channel.

NBA is a real-time, automated process that uses the research and data that you've gathered on your customers, as well as behavioral data that the machine learning program gathers, to analyze a customer's active session on your company's website and instantaneously determine what potential actions to feed them based on the most likely choice to lead them to a purchase.

It is a form of predictive analytics that seeks to understand a customer's behavior and then offer them choices that appeal to them not only based on their persona or segment, but also based on what they are searching for in the present moment.

It isn't enough to know what personalized offerings to present to a customer, it's about knowing exactly when to offer them.

Admittedly, NBA is an advanced-level personalization technique that requires data and technology, and an investment in leveraging both to their fullest extent. That said, it can also be a highly rewarding process that makes customers more likely to purchase, while creating more loyal customers and a more positive purchasing experience when they do.

## Omnichannel commerce

“Omnichannel commerce” feels like a mouthful, but what is it really?

At its core, omnichannel commerce is when a company engages and transacts with customers through many different touchpoints and formats. It demonstrates flexibility and accessibility.

“Omnichannel” itself is a word that needs some unpacking. It can mean a lot of things, depending on how a company approaches it.

It can be a basic retail strategy. It can be a half-understood buzzword. It can be a panacea that solves all of a company’s problems. It can be a money pit. It can even be all four of those things in one.

It is also, to quote [McKinsey](#), “a requirement for survival.” Commerce takes place across a wide range of different channels in today’s technological climate—if your company isn’t equipped to perform across multiple platforms, you are setting yourself up for failure.

The key differentiator of omnichannel is right there in the name: “omni” means “of all things,” and to truly achieve omni-experiences, your company needs to move beyond simply maintaining a multichannel presence or having a consistent look-and-feel across different platforms.

True omnichannel experiences are seamless across all channels—online on both the web and mobile devices, in-person, and via telephone—where data is shared between all sides of your organization, not living in silos.



## What are the benefits of omnichannel commerce?

### Omnichannel campaigns

- Result in a 2.5x higher purchase rate and a 3.5x higher engagement rate than single-channel campaigns
- Retain 90% more customers than single-channel campaigns
- Achieve 13% higher AOV than single-channel campaigns

### Omnichannel customers

- Spend 4% more on every shopping occasion
- Spend 10% more online than single-channel customers
- Spend 9% more in-store than single-channel customers
- Logged 23% more return trips to a retailer within six months and are more likely to recommend a brand to friends and family

Sources: HBR and Retail Dive

Customers need to be able to transition from one channel to another without any drop-off in experience quality or need to reset and begin their purchasing process again. No more repeating information to a new contact in a different department or filling in the same data in a web form that they provided already.

### Why is this so important?

Because customers are coming to expect it.

Harvard Business Review says that 73 percent of all customers explore multiple channels during their purchase journey.

[The State of Commerce Experience 2021](#) found that 44 percent of B2C buyers and 58 percent of B2B buyers always or often research a product online before going into a physical store. And even when in-store, they will still go online to continue their research.

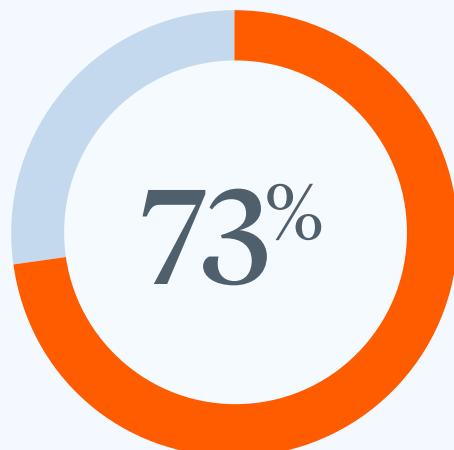
Being truly omnichannel means that your company has a complete, 360-degree view of your customer across all interaction points, with complete product and inventory data that is consistent and accessible no matter the channel. It also means that a customer's profile travels with them no matter where they are—online, in a physical store, or on the phone.

Many companies say, and even believe, that they are omnichannel because they operate online and offline marketplaces.

But if your platforms are not integrated behind the scenes, and if both your customers and employees aren't able to participate in one frictionless experience, where a customer can begin by filling a cart online or setting up an order in the store, for example, and have

that same order—and the customer's complete profile—instantly accessible by a call center support employee, that's not omnichannel. That's operating multiple separate lines of business, and it doesn't guarantee the type of robust ecosystem and experience that omnichannel provides. This puts sales and customer satisfaction at risk.

The Covid-19 pandemic obviously upended how we do business in many ways. But the pandemic didn't initiate the shift to omnichannel—it merely accelerated it. Companies want to make sure they aren't overly reliant on a single channel. And customers buying behaviors shifted as all customers—B2B and B2C—became even more comfortable shopping online.



of all customers explore multiple channels during their purchase journey.

According to **Harvard Business Review**

## Enabling omnichannel—the five pillars:

Being truly omnichannel is engaging your customers where they are at any given moment and letting them move seamlessly across touchpoints as they make their way through their shopping journey. It's about giving them clarity and simplicity in every channel they engage with. If you can deliver on these five pillars, your eCommerce experience will be ready for the future.



### Provide a consistent and contextual user experience

- Across all channels, customers must feel like their experience is seamless and smooth
- Context is key—the experience must relate to what the customer is trying to do or where they are
  - I.e. experience shifts if they are at home browsing vs. on-premises looking for where a product is located
- Consistently presenting a brand's look, feel and voice is simply a starting point, not a destination
- If customers don't have access to the same data across channels, they won't be satisfied



### Centralize sales and customer data

- Customer profile data shared across all channels is vital to having a 360-degree view of your customer at all points
- These shared, universal profiles allow customers to jump from one channel to another effortlessly, with no gaps or repeating information
- Centralized data allows customers to purchase, receive and return products on any channel, enhancing the overall user experience
- From a sales perspective, this also allows for more accurate sales attribution so the performance of each channel can be more effectively tracked and analyzed



### **Utilize omnichannel inventory and order management**

- BAFARA: Buy anywhere, fulfill anywhere, return/replace anywhere is a key capability that greatly enhances customer experience
- Robust ordering, fulfillment and exchange capabilities not only makes customers happy, but when data is shared across departments it also often makes the shipping and returns process faster and more cost-effective for the business as well



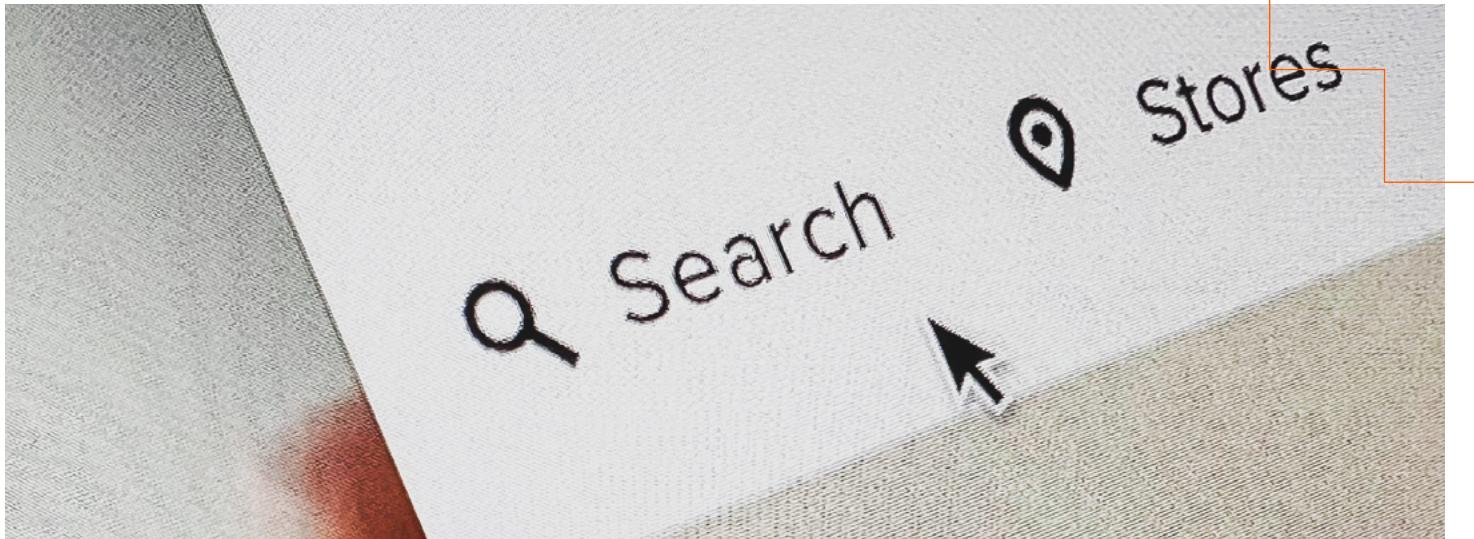
### **Establish customer-centric, channel-agnostic organizational structure and KPIs**

- Organize departments or data based on the customer journey, not in terms of job function
- Build a holistic view of your customer's profile, behavior and intent
- KPIs that are measured and aggregated across all of your channels can be used by all teams in your organization to make better business decisions based on accurate and universal data on sales, marketing, merchandising, pricing, operations, tech, customer engagement, customer acquisition, and customer retention



### **Centralize product data**

- Employ a centralized Product Information Management system, especially if you have a large volume of product data from numerous internal and external databases
- Analyze the completeness of your product data and, if necessary, enrich your data based on what your customers find most relevant
- Incomplete or inconsistent product information will limit conversions and negatively impact the overall customer experience



## Intelligent search

When looking to engage your customers at a higher level with your eCommerce platform, it's important to strive for replicating the feeling of a great in-person sales experience.

The ultimate goal should be for your technology to emulate your absolute best sales reps. The ones who not only know your products, your customers, and their needs, but can also anticipate what customers want, even if they don't know themselves.

A salesperson who can read between the lines of a customer's query, or their uncertain exploration of a topic, and laser in exactly on what the customer didn't even know what they were looking for is priceless.

Thankfully, with machine learning and natural language processing, you can now create that kind of intelligent sales assistance for online shoppers just as effectively as if they were on the sales floor with your best rep.

Traditional searches on eCommerce break down a query into keywords and then looks for those keywords in indexed data sources to find a match. It then shows the results to the user, usually ordered by relevance. Many sites also use auto-filling search suggestions that populate as a user types.

While this type of search is somewhat beneficial and functional at a basic level, these sorts of traditional tools feature two major limitations:

- They don't consider the context within which a user is searching.
- They don't consider the intent of the search.

For example, a traditional site search would be completely lost if a user tried to search for a product by asking a question like "How do I hang a curtain rod on drywall?" In a regular site search, that query would be limited to finding matches to keywords, such as "curtain rod" or

“drywall”—it would not be able to dynamically parse the question being asked and direct the customer to relevant products such as drywall anchors or toggle bolts.

As well, traditional search algorithms rely heavily on metadata and well-structured data sources, and are hugely labor-intensive. They require countless hours of manual work focused on tuning search results, analyzing search inputs and updating product attributes, keywords and metadata to improve results.

This is where intelligent search comes to the rescue.

### **Going beyond basic keywords**

Relating it back to our sales floor analogy, if someone went into a hardware store and approached an employee with the question about curtain rods, that employee would immediately know to interpret the meaning of the question and point the shopper in the right direction. Recognizing the difference between searching by keywords and asking for a solution to a problem is one of the major advantages to intelligent search compared to traditional search.

Intelligent search algorithms leverage machine learning to go beyond keywords. They can utilize past purchase history, current browsing behavior (including what a user has in their cart), click rates, customer ratings, search trends, product inventory and real-time product associations to interpret customer search inputs and then rank and display results. They can also leverage natural language recognition and analysis to better understand the context of a query and generate better search results.

Another big difference is static versus dynamic search technology. As mentioned earlier, traditional search programs can't adapt without time-consuming (and



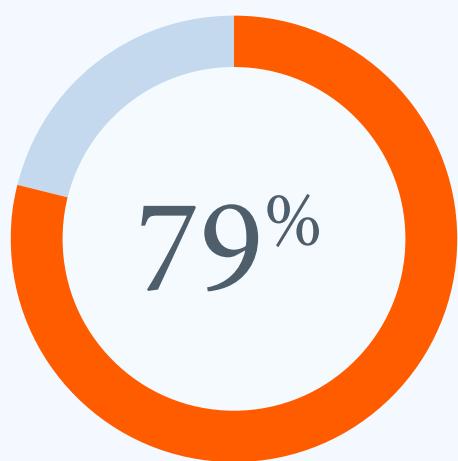
costly) human intervention. Intelligent search, on the other hand, is always learning and growing based on the actual, real-world usage of customers and visitors to your site.

Intelligent search can identify and begin to adapt when a previously high-ranking product is consistently overlooked by searchers. It can automatically analyze customer behavior and if, for example, many searchers for a similar term end up straying from the anticipated path and all end up making the same purchase (that wasn't previously surfaced in search results), it can then begin providing that same purchase to new searchers.

Intelligent search learns and evolves every single time a user makes a search on your site and builds its own adaptive database with every purchase made.

### More than an index

Search is an incredibly important contributor to eCommerce revenue. According to CLX.com, 30% of visitors to company websites use site search, and these searchers account for up to 14% of all revenue. Optimizing on-site search to improve accuracy results in up to a 43% increase in sales conversion.



of users report experiencing problems with search and navigation when shopping online.

According to **Bloomreach**

[Bloomreach found that 79% of users](#) report experiencing problems with search and navigation when shopping online. These issues directly lead to customer frustration, negative experiences and, ultimately, the loss of a sale. If another website can help a customer find what they're looking for faster, then that's where they'll go.

With traditional search, limited to keywords and manual assignments of those keywords to product metadata, customers could feel that they were being funneled towards a cherry-picked handful of predetermined results.

As technology has evolved, and online commerce becomes increasingly dominant, customers are also demanding more control over their experiences. They want to find exactly the right product for their needs—not what a data analyst has decided they need.

In today's customer-driven commerce environment, site search must do more than simply display results based on simplistic keywords. It must be a dynamic, responsive tool that understands the words a customer is using and the context in which they are using them.

Your search function must be more than a "Find" command executed across your product database. It needs to understand what a customer needs, cross-reference those needs against the situation in which a customer is searching, and then provide options that align with all those factors. Users need to feel empowered by your search function, not as though they are simply consulting the index at the back of a catalogue.

It is this sense of empowerment and improved service that intelligent search can bring to life for a company looking for an upgrade to their search functionality and, ultimately, greater customer engagement.

## Business benefits of intelligent search

Customers enjoy intelligent search capabilities, but companies benefit too—here are five ways:

1

### Get better data

Intelligent search collects more robust data on product associations, categories and effectiveness. Data from purchases guided by intelligent search creates stronger links between customer needs and your solutions.

2

### Integrate better tech

Enhance your eCommerce with capabilities such as visual and voice-based search. These new and exciting ways to engage with your products help customers convert queries into sales.

3

### Save time and resources

Intelligent search eliminates time commitment for employees to manually edit product and marketing metadata.

4

### Personalization is easier

Create real-time, automated, and highly personalized marketing experiences by leveraging data collected by tools like intelligent search. Serve relevant promotions to site visitors based on current trends and data related to their searches.

5

### Equip your entire team

Emerging connections from intelligent search can be leveraged across service teams to provide better solutions to customers, or in merchandising, forecasting, and training for sales staff.

Applying intelligent search also provides improved self-service capabilities. Customers can search knowledge databases and product guides themselves to find answers to their questions rather than relying on document metadata and keyword matches to find the specific answer to a complex problem.

## Guided selling

We all need a little help sometimes. Econsultancy found that 83% of shoppers said they needed some form of support while shopping online. Guided selling is about doing everything you can to help your customers find the right thing as quickly and easily as possible.

To do this, you need to understand four things about your customer:

- Their intent
- Their needs and wants
- Their preferences
- Their constraints

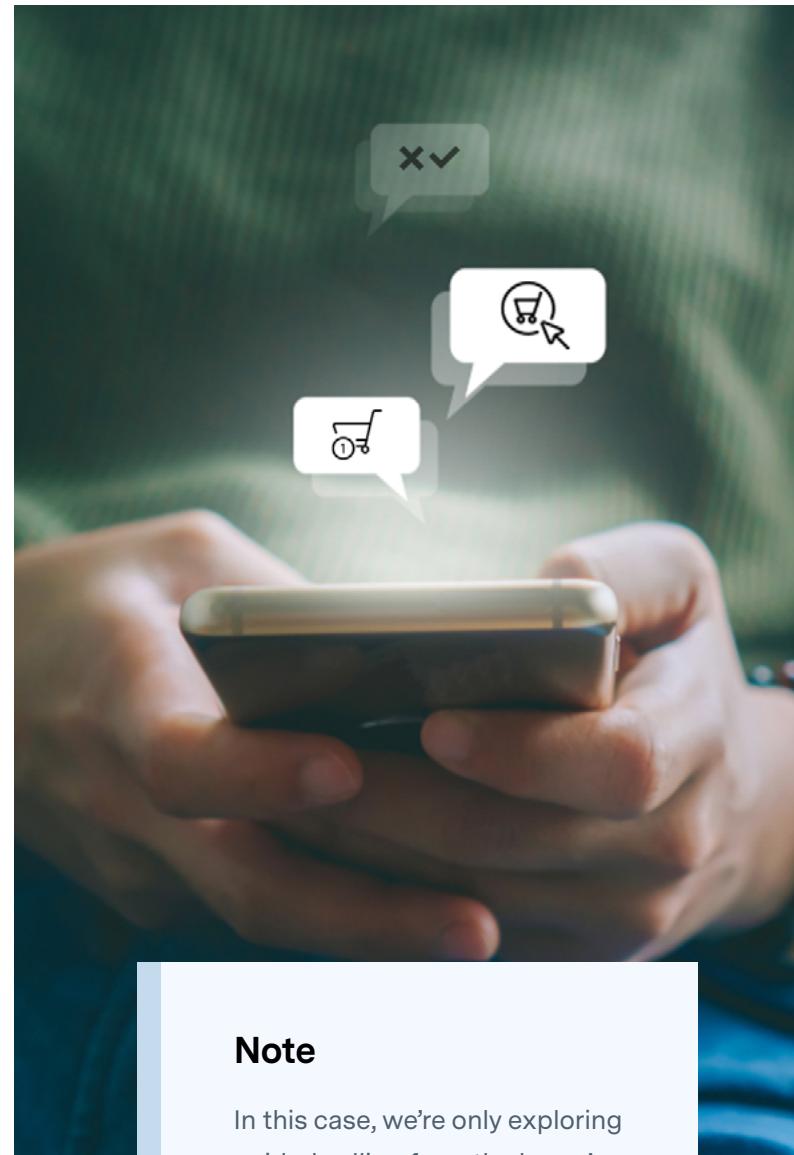
Knowing this information will let you surface the right products at the right time. It's taking personalization and going one step further.

Once again, let's take a look at the difference between shopping online and shopping in-store.

When a customer walks into a store, what's the first thing a sales associate will normally ask?

“How can I help you today?”

This is really the best question to get right at the root of the customer's needs and goals. And from a B2B perspective, when a buyer initially engages with a vendor, that first interaction focuses on the customer's needs and how the company's offerings can meet those needs.



### Note

In this case, we're only exploring guided selling from the buyer's perspective, not the seller's. A separate branch of guided selling strategies focuses on helping salespeople determine which products to sell, to whom and for how much. Look for a future piece on the topic from Smith.

Online shopping experiences—both B2B and B2C—are still very static and product-centric. They aren't as focused on the process of digging down to explore a customer's needs. For the most part, shoppers are left to navigate to the right product on their own. This means that if your product taxonomy is not well structured, or your products are not well ordered, your customer will likely move on, and the sale will be lost.

Guided selling is a way to create a simulacrum of that exploratory in-person experience online. There are a few ways to do it:

### Leverage Live Chat and Chatbots

- Many sites have integrated these into their eCommerce platforms. Through interacting with a live sales rep, or chatting with an automated chatbot, you can guide shoppers to the right products based on the conversation.
- These tools can either be self-initiated by the customer or presented as an option if a shopper is getting few (or no) product results from their searches.
- It's important that when considering a chatbot you give careful thought to how you design a customer experience that is focused on meeting their needs as efficiently and naturally as possible. As stated earlier in this paper, the goal is that the experience mimics that of interacting with your best sales rep—an experience that's friendly, helpful, and feels as frictionless as possible.

### Utilize a questionnaire or product creation tool

- Sometimes the simplest concepts are the most effective. When it comes to guided selling, one of the strongest ways to mimic a great in-person experience is to ask clarifying questions to understand the shopper's goals and narrow down the range of products displayed in search results.
- [Asics shoe finder](#) is a great example—six simple questions based on a shopper's gender, intended running terrain and frequency of use help narrow down results to show the best product recommendations for every individual.

### Design for intent instead of product

- Rethink how your products are categorized and presented to users, focusing on use cases and product experience rather than basic categories.
- Organize the taxonomy and user flows of your site accordingly.
- For B2B, this means focusing on solution-based selling and displaying products to meet the shopper's goals and needs.

Be sure to carry this philosophy beyond the search and discovery phase of your customer's journey. For example, when a customer goes to view a product page from your guided search results, highlight the relevant information and attributes upfront rather than make the shopper review the product information to be sure the product meets their needs.

Lastly, be sure to consider the emotional aspects of guided selling—how a customer feels during this process is vital.



## Self-service

While the idea of self-service has been central to many of our elements discussed so far—intelligent search and guided selling—it is also important to consider on its own.

Giving your customers agency to find not only products but also related product support and service information—without relying on your employees to guide them or provide direct assistance—can be hugely beneficial. If a customer feels empowered to discover information for themselves, they are more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment and connection to the product in question.

Even if they are dealing with a problem or if something breaks—as all things tend to—the fact that the customer feels connected enough to your product and confident enough in their ability to address the problem is a net positive for all parties.

Self-service capabilities can run the spectrum from robust FAQs and support documentation, to effective search and purchasing tools, to instructional videos and help requests.

Offering customers the opportunity to solve problems or initiate service requests on their own also obviates the need for additional points of contact for staff. According to McKinsey, 75% of customers expect service “now”—that is, within five minutes of making contact. That isn’t always possible for either high volume businesses or businesses with limited resources, so providing automated chatbots, in-depth support documentation and FAQs can create that added buffer to reduce demand on your staff while still helping customers feel like they are being taken care of.

## Content and community

Even in today's ever-growing online world, we all still value the feeling of belonging to a group where we are not only comfortable in our surroundings, but also where we can trust the expertise of those around us. To help your customers feel that way about you and your company, you need to do two things:

- Use content to demonstrate your capabilities and qualifications in the arena in which you operate
- Build community to show customers that they are not alone in placing their trust in you

Cost is not the only factor people consider when buying products. If it were, there would simply be a never-ending

race to the bottom until the cheapest product won every time. Customers also consider the quality of the products they buy, the opinions and values of others who buy the same products, whether they identify in some way with the brand or business they are buying from, and the business practices and philosophies of the companies they engage with.

To help communicate and reinforce all these ideas—and to build a community of loyal buyers—your company needs to generate relevant and effective content that speaks to your target customer.

Remember, the ultimate goal of all of these efforts is to improve customer engagement with an eye to increasing your CLV. If you can create a content stream and community that customers value, they will interact with your company more and also become increasingly loyal to your brand.

Creating effective content will also strengthen your company's reputation as an authority with your customers. You will also be more likely to rank higher in search engine results as people engage more with your content.



### To create relevant and effective content, you need to know:

- Who your customers are
- Why they buy from you
- What will get them engaged

Strong content can be simple or it can be more involved. It can begin with a robust FAQ page that meaningfully addresses concerns with your products, or by creating customized, detailed information on product pages.

You could also create content that complements your products—i.e.: if you're a grocer, offer recipes that are directly related to the food items your customer is viewing or has in their cart; if you sell equipment, provide installation videos, self-maintenance guides or support tips; if you're in B2B, offer solution-oriented content or relevant industry content.

Remember to always be driving the engagement created by these pieces to your digital channels by syndicating appropriately to external sites (such as trade websites) or to social media. This syndication allows for greater discovery of your material by a wider audience.

But how do you create effective content? No matter what your field, the [Content Marketing Institutes created a piece with 13 great tips](#), such as:

- Use power words: language has real impact, don't mince words if you want to grab attention.
- Give (almost) everything away in first paragraphs: attention spans are short and growing shorter—don't keep readers waiting.
- Use visuals: if you can say it with graphics instead of words, do it.
- Use questions to guide readers: drive curiosity by framing your articles as questions to be explored.
- Write for fifth graders: use simple language and clear arguments—don't exclude readers with complex language.

By creating this kind of engaging content, you will increase the trust your customers have in you and build a community of like-minded people. You may even be able to create or leverage an online community of customers, either on your own site or an external one.

Leader Network says that 49% of communities generate revenue, and Commbox found that highly engaged customers contribute almost one quarter of a firm's revenue.

Human beings value connection, and by building up your status as a trusted partner and creating communities where your customers can engage and support each other, you can bolster that feeling of connection and create more valuable and engaged customers.



Highly engaged customers contribute almost **one quarter** of a firm's revenue.

According to **Commbox**

## Syndication and marketplaces

To continue the theme of using your expertise to engage and influence customers, syndication and marketplaces are also an important way to extend your reach.

It isn't enough to sit back and wait for people to come to you—even great content pieces and desirable products need to be shared to multiple places to have the best chances of drawing in and engaging customers.

Syndication comes in two forms: inbound and outbound.

### Inbound

Inbound syndication is when you bring in content and products from outside partners to your website or eCommerce platform. It could be reposting industry news or thought leadership articles on your own company blog or it could include selling complementary products from partner companies on your site.

This type of content sharing enriches your own offering by leveraging outside expertise and aids in building stronger partnerships across your industry and beyond. Customers highly value one-stop shopping experiences, and inbound product syndication is a great way to provide one.

Inbound content syndication can come in many forms as well and is often a cost-effective way to broaden your appeal and provide added value to your customers.

### Outbound

Outbound syndication is when you share your own content or products on external sites to reach your target audience beyond your own digital channels.

That might mean exploring partnerships where other companies post your internal thought leadership pieces on their websites in a knowledge-sharing relationship.

Or it might mean working with trade or industry publications to author content on their sites on topics of broader interest to your target audience.

These reciprocal arrangements often lead to greater opportunities for both parties to expand their influence and add value for their customers. Don't hesitate to explore them when building out your content marketing plan.

### Marketplaces

The concept is simple: be where your customers already are.

Virtually no companies—particularly B2C companies—operate only out of a single website or eCommerce platform. Amazon, eBay, Etsy—these large, general-interest platforms have become ubiquitous over the past two decades, and smart businesses build and maintain a presence on them, offering customers multiple channels to purchase their products.

Marketplaces and syndication go hand-in-hand. In order to sell your products on these sites, you need to export and syndicate your product catalogue—including as much keyword and metadata as possible—to your external partner.

Extending your reach helps to generate brand awareness by leveraging syndication to engage with customers—even customers who wouldn't know to seek out your company in the first place.

Content and product syndication also helps with your company's search engine optimization (SEO). By inserting backlinks into the syndicated content, you generate additional traffic to your site and increase your SEO score and ranking.

## **Engaging customers for future success**

**By utilizing the strategies we've explored, you will be able to engage with your customers, build loyalty and increase their overall CLV more effectively.**

**If you've enjoyed this piece, stay tuned to our blog and LinkedIn channel for the launch of the next whitepaper in our CLV series, which will dive deeper into customer retention tactics.**

**At Smith, we're always excited to help our clients elevate their eCommerce experiences. Contact us today to learn more or to see how we can help you.**

**[rob.miller@smithcommerce.com](mailto:rob.miller@smithcommerce.com)**