

Designing a great customer journey can help even the smallest digital offering

By [Brendon Williamson](#)

18 May 2018

From the moment they click onto an e-commerce site, customers develop a lasting impression of your brand. Creating a frictionless environment with an outstanding customer journey is helping even small, boutique offerings significantly boost their bottom line.



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The last mile is the most important

Despite what many think, we have seen that the delivery of goods and services is the make or break of an e-commerce offering.

The importance of this last mile service is clearly demonstrated by industry stalwarts like Takealot (which acquired Mr Delivery) and Yuppiechef, which put their own branded drivers on the road. The companies which have succeeded in the local market know that how fast you deliver your item or service is the last, and most indelible, impression left with a customer.

Strangely, some of the biggest, and arguably most respected, retail brands still don't have this part of the journey right. Fixed

delivery charges can leave a bitter taste with customers. Being charged R150 for the delivery of a R50 item means shoppers will simply go elsewhere to buy or, at best, wait until they have a big enough order to make the delivery charge worth their while. The irony is that many of the big brands who employ this delivery billing model are the same companies which have spent millions on improving their checkout processes in their physical stores.

A site's returns policy is also important. If there's not a quick and simple returns policy shoppers are left disillusioned and unlikely to ever use the service again, much less recommend it to their friends.

Allow reviews – customers trust other customers

As consumers, we want to know that someone else has done what we are doing and that their experience was good. Allowing reviews on your site means first-time users will see that others have successfully transacted with you and this de-risks the transaction for them.

And these reviews don't all have to be glowing. Humans are, by nature, forgiving creatures. If we see that there was a glitch in the process for someone else, but the business was willing and able to quickly resolve the problem, we know that if we run into trouble there will be friendly staff who are able to assist us.

In fact, the human element should never be underestimated. De-risking the transaction process means having someone available to help at every stage of the customer journey. Some e-commerce sites have built their reputation around excellent online service. For instance, if a customer is inactive on a page for any length of time, they should get an onscreen prompt with a sales assistant who is able to guide them through the process and even help them find the particular product they may be looking for.



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We trust what we know

The look and feel of the site can also help shoppers feel secure. Designing your site to have the same visual and experiential feel as the well-known e-commerce sites can help alleviate discomfort. Of course, companies should ensure their site is beautifully branded and clearly differentiated from their competitors, but the layout and step-by-step process can be modelled on those sites which have proven conversion rates.

The same could be said for security. While many customers are not necessarily looking for security seals, having your SSL security certificates up to date is imperative. Online banking has taught the average consumer that they should be looking for the 'https' in the URL bar as a minimum.

When it comes to payments, ensuring your customer has their preferred payment option is always a must. Having a complete bouquet of payment offerings including card, Instant EFT, and app-based payments such as Zapper and PayPal means you are far less likely to lose a customer as they are about to pay.

Make you sure you have value-adds

Buying goods and services online takes the personal touch out of the shopping experience. You miss out on the well-trained, smiling staff who can entice customers to support one store over other. Since there are so many online options to choose from when buying a product or service, adding unique value-adds can boost the first experience and lead to repeat business. Giveaways, free delivery, discounts, and coupons to share with friends all go a long way to make customers return and refer your business to their friends.

Create interactive websites

A common failing of some e-commerce stores is not updating their sites. It is important to ensure that you show that your products are selling. This could be done by having a 'top ten purchased items' section or a 'what's hot today' deals space that change regularly.

Using 360-degree images also go a long way to make customers feel confident about their purchases. More interaction can also be boosted using newer technologies like augmented and virtual realities. Experiential marketing is now making online shopping more exciting than real-world experiences and is helping companies to not only push merchandise, but build brands that excite and capture the imagination of the customer.



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You're not a number, but you are producing data

So much is being written about big data and machine learning to crunch the numbers and come up with meaningful insights into customer behaviour. While the larger companies are all using this now, even the smaller e-commerce sites can use their existing site information and analytics to look for trends. Analysing user behaviour leads to better user experience. Even small tweaks to the existing model can have a significant impact when it comes to basket or trolley abandonment and companies should be paying attention to these details.

Although it's coming off a low base, e-commerce in South Africa is growing at a phenomenal rate. Ensuring you have designed a frictionless customer journey can set your company apart in an increasingly competitive market. From design to delivery, every user touchpoint is vital.

ABOUT BRENDON WILLIAMSON

Brendon Williamson is the Managing Director at PayFast and PayGate. A veteran of the payments and e-commerce industry, Williamson has over 20 years' experience in sales, marketing, and online fraud management - with a background in online gaming and e-commerce transaction management. He has been part of the DFO Group for more than 10 years as Chief Sales Officer, Chief Marketing Officer, and most recently, Head of Commercial. Looking ahead, his goal is to take digitalisation to the next level.

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