

PART 1 Merge your physical and digital brands

The pandemic made the importance of eCommerce crystal clear, forcing brands to evolve online shopping from what was previously a clunky transaction to an experience that kept consumers coming back for more – getting customers to prioritise brand over product.

Booktopia's CMO, Steffen Daleng believes COVID accelerated what was going to happen anyway: "We've always known we'd see this shift. But when stores started to close down and people didn't have any other way of getting their products, that really accelerated new generations getting more comfortable with buying online."

While this is good news for eCommerce, Mark Baartse, former Showpo CMO, who is now consulting as an outsourced CMO, points out the sudden pivot online has also resulted in skyrocketing consumer expectations: "Customers are getting

increasingly demanding. That means CX needs more tools and better training."

Daleng says greater consumer expectations require brands to have a different conversation with their customers. "Brands have to really listen to and understand their customers. It's about not just talking to your customers but asking them the right questions. You might have to ask them online, in an email, in a phone call or in a survey. You need to figure out what matters to them, where the pain points are and how you can help."

Paul Waddy, CEO at The Horse, and #2 Top 50 people in eCommerce 2021,

agrees: "I believe in going back to basics. It's OK to ask your customers what they want from you. What's their perception of your value? Are you cheap, expensive or well-priced? Are you competitive? If they don't shop from you, where do they shop?" He points out that data comes in all forms. "I'd even encourage smaller retailers to start with the good old-fashioned survey – the most basic form of collecting data."

Now restrictions are easing, the world of retail encompasses a blend of both physical and digital and a far more complex customer journey. Darren Gunton, GM Marketing at Total Tools,



Australia's largest trade tool supplier, says brands come unstuck when they forget that physical and digital are irrelevant distinctions to the customer.

"It's just one customer who's interacting with you in different ways. I think a lot of businesses get held up on: 'I've got a department over here, and it looks after this. And the department over here looks after that.' But, for the customer, it's all one environment – and they don't care where they shop, how they find information or the rules around those things. They just want a great shopping experience through their mobile app."

Gunton says Total Tools listens to its customers through every physical and digital channel. "We have a net promoter score survey that goes out after every purchase. We have listening environments within the store from our staff collecting feedback and sending it back, but we also listen during the online shopping environment – and we get feedback through social. That all forms part of our understanding of the customer: understanding what stage of the journey they're at and what they're looking for at each stage of the journey. We also examine their behaviour around each purchasing decision. What are the influencing factors? What's guiding their behaviour? So we can understand and better tailor each moment of the shopping experience."

Like many brands, Total Tools has invested considerable time and effort into figuring out how much of its online activity is influenced by in-store purchases – and vice versa.

"We measure it both ways," says Gunton. "We use things like Google Analytics to measure online and offline. Who's going online, researching and then going into store purchasing? And, likewise, who's visiting our stores and

then going online and purchasing? Sometimes, they're actually in our store environment while they're shopping on their phone! They've come in to compare prices and check out the products, but they're buying through our app."

He recalls it was hard to convince his board that this was the case. "They were like, 'But all these are separate environments'. And we had to point out: 'No, they're not. It's just one connected stream'."

"Which brings me back to my original point: you need to look at physical and digital as a single journey. You need to understand how your customers traverse both environments and where they are interacting across them."

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