

Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Best Practices

1. **Multichannel customers buy more and are more loyal.** When customers can shop and interact seamlessly across all your channels, the revenues, loyalty, and lifetime value of these customers will increase – often dramatically. Your customers will convert at higher rates, return to your stores, website, and catalog more often, and spend more – 2-4x more than a single channel shopper – if you have a strategy and infrastructure to support a multichannel experience.
2. **Attract and engage customers at the earliest stages of the shopping experience.** Delight customers at every turn and build loyalty into their everyday interactions. Personalize the journey as well. Exceeding their expectations creates brand loyalty leading to increased profitability and a direct effect on your company's bottom line.
3. **There are as many channels as you think – maybe more.** It's no longer just about stores, ecommerce, and catalog. Mobile and social have rapidly ascended as revenue drivers and customer touchpoints, alongside more traditional channels. Don't assume that you will drive more revenues from your website than your mobile or social channels.
4. **Prioritize within your multichannel strategy.** If you have multiple channels, you will have different priorities and should plan your strategy and investments appropriately. Your objective should not only be to maximize your ROI based on whether you are primarily a brick-and-mortar retailer or a web retailer – but also with an eye towards where your greatest opportunities are for driving future profitable growth in terms of revenues *and* customers.
5. **Upgrade your site with new features / functionalities.** Display more product images, ensure easier search and navigation, include product reviews, and guarantee a strong integration with the back-end. This will allow customers to shop the breadth of your assortment, view updated product availability, and experience a seamless checkout process.
6. **Creating an omnichannel experience is about knowing who your customers are.** Demographics, psychographics, and sales data are important. But knowing what your customers prefer and buy – when, where, and how – is the core critical data. Analytics, testing, and careful allocations of spend across proven channels and newer options are critical.
7. **Planning for crosschannel interaction is more than operating multiple channels.** Customers may want to research or order online, and pick up in store, locate your closest store on their phone, and find out what's in stock, or see if their friends like their selections, and then order the item via Facebook. Customers are crossing channels in many directions, so enabling this experience can win incremental revenue and build loyalty. But be cautious and plan thoroughly, because the level of systems integration and operational capability needed to support all these options is high.
8. **Branded manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers can all win.** Branded manufacturers and wholesalers need to balance driving traffic to retail partners while managing channel conflict. If you're a specialty retailer and control the brand experience in all your channels – from stores to web to mobile – you have different advantages, as well as constraints. Department stores may have unique potential to regain prominence in the retail world and maximize store revenue from cross-channel traffic.
9. **Extend your offering online.** Store assortments need not be limited by the four walls. 'Extend your aisles' and leverage enterprise selling with kiosks, tablets, and special-order capabilities – whether assisted or self-serve. Inventory need not be limited by store stock or even your own DC – ship-to-store, ship-from-store, intra-store transfers, and drop shipping can increase overall company turns, as well as capture sales of goods never held in your own inventory.
10. **Break down silos.** The mandate for collaboration must flow from the top of the organization, and the cross-functional and cross-channel integration required for success needs to be developed and fostered at all levels and in all directions of the company. The right organizational structure, operational alignment, resource planning, incentives, and metrics for team members are as important to the foundation for success as marketing, merchandise, and systems are.
11. **Leverage strengths of each channel.** Each channel has its own unique advantage in creating a powerful customer experience. The web provides rich content and personalization, stores offer live customer assistance and tactile products, mobile offers convenience and guides shopping. While it is difficult to fuse all channels into a consistent offering and customer experience, know what you can achieve and leverage it to your advantage.
12. **Social Media takes work and planning.** If done well, Social Media can be much more effective than a traditional media buy and can be used as a sales tool. It's a great way to give end-users a connection to your brand and help make it unique.
13. **Many channels, one brand.** Make sure your brand message and value proposition are consistently communicated and coordinated across all your channels and touchpoints. The availability of multiple channels provides greater opportunities to reinforce your brand and create a deeper relationship with your customer.
14. **Extend your expertise.** The ability to inform, advise, and convert your customers in store or in the call center are no longer constrained by the experience and acumen of your floor staff or CSRs. Astute content management and alignment of promotional opportunities across channels, as well as use of QR codes and CRM tools, enable you to maximize the ROI of available offers, provide deep product content and realize cross-sell and up-sell opportunities.

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eCommerce Diligence™ Checklist

DTC for Brands & Manufacturers Key Questions to Ask Internally

Technology

1. Do you have the right foundations in place to unify every customer interaction across all channels?
2. Do you have seamless inventory visibility across all channels?
3. If you have multiple warehouses, can dealers see product availability by warehouse?
4. Can your current commerce platform support an additional sales channel?
5. Are you as sophisticated at monitoring mobile engagement as you are with desktop behavior?

Marketing

1. Do your promotional offers differ by channel?
2. Are you telling a compelling story through social media to distinguish your brand?
3. Does your company have a social media strategy? If yes, are you tracking your ROI?
4. Do you have digital assets that would present well on TV?
5. Are you leveraging customer information across all channels? Do you have the ability to do this?
6. What is your new market strategy? Is global commerce part of that strategy?

Content Management

1. How has your company evolved to support the brand and wholesale partners digitally?
2. How is your company supporting its wholesalers with rich and interactive product content?

Merchandising

1. Do you strategically decide which products to pitch?
2. Do you have the best and most price competitive products in your category?
3. Do you use predictive science to identify customers that have the highest probability of purchasing specific product lines?

Functionality / Customer Experience

1. What best practices can you apply from B2B to B2C and vice versa?
2. Do you know what affects your customer's buying behavior?
3. How are you improving the customer experience to build brand loyalty?
4. Does your site provide the conveniences and usability that creates loyalty?
5. How are you ensuring a consistent experience across web, mobile and other channels?

Operations

1. Will your current order fulfillment process / platform support your omnichannel strategy?
2. How can you involve your retailers in the fulfillment process?

P&L / Budgeting

1. Are you viewing your DTC sales as incremental?
2. Do you have clear business objectives?
3. Have you identified the right balance between streamlining and consolidating cost structure versus staying specialized for a given brand?

Organization

1. Is there someone at your company responsible for Omnichannel?
2. Will your entire organization support going DTC?
3. How will this affect your retailer relationships?
4. Are our employees empowered to respond to informed, smartphone enabled shoppers?
5. Are there any staffing differences between B2B2C and B2C for which you need to prepare for?

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