NEW SALES IN RETAIL AND DISTRIBUTION: IT'S ALL ABOUT CONVENIENCE

All companies tend to brag about their customer-centric approach, but the recent COVID-19 crisis has made it very clear that most of them were not really on the ball. Price-focused policies, location, recurrent price campaigns, customer loyalty programmes – all miss the same key strategy focus customers are avid for: CONVENIENCE.

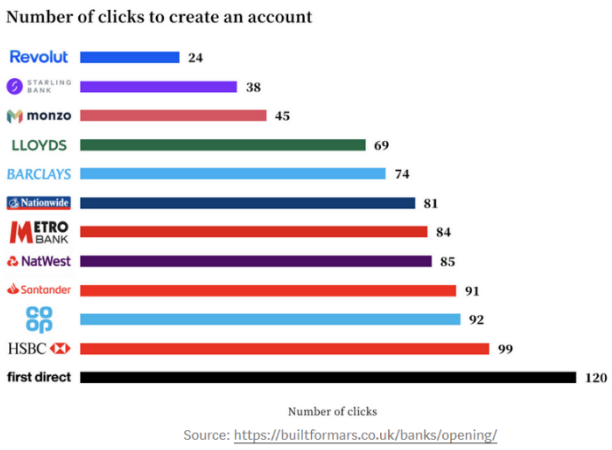
CONVENIENCE is the core driver for the [not so] new consumer demographics and now a must-do-or-fail for every business, even for some large retail players that have failed to see the gap.

Convenience must be prioritised at every step: from finding the most adequate channel (from the customer's perspective) in an easy way, registering, ordering, order fulfilment, invoicing, delivery and aftersales service.

It seems a lot easier than it really is. Let's break it down a little.

Find the most adequate channel: How easy is it for customers to find you and what is their experience like when they do? Do you have the adequate digital channels? Are they "smart" enough to automatically adjust to each customer's profile? In B2B, do they adapt to the user's role and the company they work for? Are digital channels and their offering in tune with your brick and mortar premises? Is your offer optimised for mobile devices? This means not only having a responsive site (the most basic requirement of all), but also having a PWA [progressive web application] or equivalent tool in place. Downplay any of these factors and you will probably miss the opportunity to persuade a prospective customer to even consider knocking at your door.

Registering: Have you designed your onboarding procedures? Regardless of whether it is a B2B or B2C, all customers demand a hassle-free onboarding experience. In the example below, see how experiences differ when trying to open an account in a regulated industry such as banking.



Source: https://builtformars.co.uk/banks/opening/

Review and rethink the experience with your customers – are you still insisting that customers fill in and print forms and then send the documents to you by post? How easy it is to register

remotely? How optimised is the whole process? Again, if you overburden the customer, you will probably end up with no customer at all.

Ordering: This is probably the part that you feel your company has mastered. But has it really? How easy is it for customers to find the products they need? How do your metrics on unfilled orders behave? What algorithm do you have in place to suggest alternatives and how are customers reacting to these alternatives? For unfilled or pending orders, how do you let customers trace them? For professional customers, this step is even more critical, as committed availability may have an important impact on their businesses.

Remember – Amazon dash buttons, that allowed customers to quickly reorder popular household items with a press are already obsolete [they were launched in 2015] and have been discontinued, as devices and appliances are getting smarter and can be set up to do the ordering by themselves. In B2B retail, POSs are sometimes ERPs that manage customers' purchases and inventory and are the perfect gateway to be tapped by retailers – have you considered that path?

Invoicing: This is the easy part. Generating invoices and payment orders, defining adequate credit levels and proposing automated and diverse payment methods on the fly should not be tricky anymore. If this is not the case, you should urgently review your procedures and redesign the processes.

Delivery: Delivery is pure logistics – nothing can be more damaging than failing delivery schedules, order fulfilment or, even worse, delivering the wrong articles. Take an in-depth look at your core delivery KPIs and review performance – poor delivery performance is guaranteed to cost you customers.

Customer care and aftersales service: In the midst of all these processes, customer care and aftersales service are often not paid the attention they deserve. Intelligent bots are becoming more popular, but your company must effectively set up the support for remote purchases and orders and blend the processes with the physical retail chain. Implementing convenient customer care procedures that focus on customers' needs is again more challenging that it seems. One large DIY retailer implemented a customer loyalty scheme with vouchers but did not make it clear to customers what vouchers they were entitled to. Additionally, store staff had to manually insert the voucher ID (that they had to get from another system) in their POS.

All of the above topics require your company's attention. Set up the best and most adequate strategy to address these issues, implement the right processes and design an appropriate management system to monitor performance. The recent impact of COVID-19 has only accelerated the need for mass digital transformation in B2B retail. The sales process is changing and, if you have not already done so, you must now approach this new era and implement the changes as if your company's life depends on it. As might well be the case!