



Omnichannel: The Always On Shopper

Contributing Experts:

- Bill Akins of Rockfish
- Lisa Bohn of RetailSolutions
- Ryan James of Electronic Arts
- Thomas Tessmer of Integrated Insights Group

The omnichannel experience

If your colleague is in the same room with you when you think about talking to him, you'll probably just say what you have to say. If he's down the hall, you might text or IM. If you're at your computer at the time and he's on another floor, you'll probably email. If at any point during these connections you feel like you want some more direct engagement, you might call or walk over to his office.

Just so, the omnichannel shopper will be attracted to products, research them, and eventually buy in the store, on a desktop or laptop, or on a tablet or phone, ecommerce or site-to-store or an impulse buy in the checkout line, depending where she is and what's going on.

Serving the omnichannel customer is not all about ecommerce. It's about being where the customer is: on all the channels she uses.

What is omnichannel?

Just what channels are we talking about here? The omnichannel shopper doesn't make a strong distinction between brick and mortar and online experiences.

- A shopper is catching up with friends on Facebook and sees a friend's post about a book that sounds interesting.
- He finds reviews and excerpts of the book online using Google, and decides that he wants the book.
- He checks at Walmart.com to make sure that his local store carries the book.
- He texts a friend to see if she wants to go to the store with him to pick up the book.
- He buys the book with his friend, posts on his Facebook friend's wall about the purchase, and settles in to read.
- Occasionally, he looks something up on his phone if he wants more information as he's reading.

This kind of experience doesn't feel like a bunch of different connections, some online, some with a smartphone, and some in the physical world.

The lines have blurred.

90% of us now use more than one screen at a time, too – looking things up when we watch TV, sharing our experience of a great streaming video with friends, tweeting about events as we see them reported on TV or on our computers.

Some of the primary channels for CPG shoppers:

- Search engines like Google and Bing, plus less obvious ones like Pinterest and YouTube which people use to search for product reviews and information
- Social media, including major platforms like Facebook as well as niche sites
- Brand websites – still one of the most trusted sources of information for consumers
- Review sites, including Amazon
- Blogs, including expert blogs, shopping/deal blogs, and lifestyle blogs
- Videos, especially YouTube, and TV
- Ads – less trusted, but more under your company's control



What does this mean for suppliers?

First, we have to know where our customers are, what's driving their interest in products in our category, and what questions they have. How can we find that information?

- **Social listening** can give us a lot of information about which channels people use to talk about goods in our category. The shopper in our earlier example heard about a book at Facebook. Where else do people talk about books online? Twitter, Goodreads, blogs, Pinterest, and LinkedIn are also common venues for conversations about books. Conversations about dog food may take place in completely different places online. Finding the conversations is the first step toward joining in.

- **Tools like Google Trends** show what information people are looking for online and what terms they're using to search. Google Trends shows changes over time which give insights into people's level of interest and the specific questions they're asking.

- **Web analytics** tell us where people are when they are moved to click through to our brand websites. If people share links to our products at Twitter but they actually click through on Instagram, that data can help us determine how to allocate our resources.

- **Retail Link** helps us connect online mentions with offline sales. If we use Pinterest to share a recipe for chicken soup using our spice blend and we subsequently see more sales of the spice blend in the same basket with chicken, we have physical-world confirmation of the connection.

With the data in hand, suppliers can develop a strategy for marketing to, connecting with, and serving the omnichannel consumer – and boosting business.

Content is king

Someone will talk about your brand, your product, and your category on these channels. Who will it be? Ideally, it will be you. When suppliers provide the answers to consumer's questions and join their conversations, consumers not only appreciate the added value, but they also feel more connected to the brand.

We can't join the conversation by posting an ad on a social media site or making a sales pitch at a blog. The only effective way to join the conversation is to add value to that conversation.

If your primary experience with content for your consumers has been in packaging and display ads, creating content for channels other than the store shelf may require a shift in thinking.

Online content can run the gamut from "Glad you like it!" responses when a customer tweets happily about your product to elaborate multimedia productions on your website or in-person connections shared via the web. Start where your resources and current commitment level place you and work from there.



If you look at champion content marketing brands like Kraft, Proctor & Gamble, Coca-Cola, or L’Oreal, you might conclude that this is a technique for large suppliers only. In fact, the internet helps level the playing field for smaller suppliers. You can create a great infographic or a Pin-worthy recipe just as well as the bigger players.

Fortunately, you don’t have to wait until you’re ready to make a major commitment. You do have to make a commitment, though. Content marketing doesn’t show results in days or weeks. It does show cumulative results over time if you stick with it. Since it takes time to see results, it doesn’t make sense to wait.

Create a content marketing strategy

Once you’ve identified the most effective channels, think about the resources available to you and plan a strategy.

Your plan should include at least these elements:

- The business goal you want to achieve
- The main message or messages you want to convey through your content
- The search strategy you plan to use to connect with consumers
- A calendar including the channels you want to use to convey your message, either showing regular posting or campaigns over the next 90 days
- Who will be responsible for creating the content – in-house creative or partners
- Preparatory steps required, such as samples to be sent to reviewers
- The conversion points you anticipate and any related promotions
- How you will measure results
- How you will define success

Your content marketing strategy should include these overall strategies:

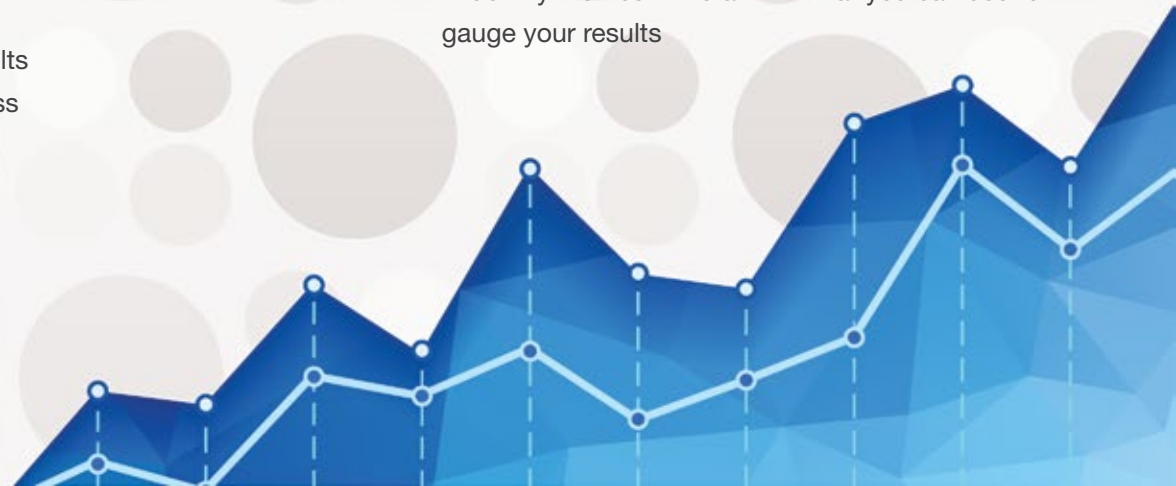
- Increase convenience of accessing information, buying products, returning or repurchasing, and reaching customer service.
- Personalize communication through targeted messages, segmented content, and customized recommendations.
- Encourage two-way conversations by making communication easy and by responding to consumer comments.
- Make it local, by connecting in-store and community experiences with online and marketing messages.

Decide on tactics. Some options:

- Create a blog at your brand website.
- Reach out to bloggers in your target market and ask for reviews.
- Use social media to curate existing relevant content.
- Create informational and instructional videos.
- Create videos showing products in use.
- Hold Google hangouts, webinars, Twitter parties, and the like.
- Create apps that share information.
- Make tools for trying on products, producing shopping lists, and other activities.
- Share articles on other websites than your own.

Set up tools to collect data which will allow you to measure your results. Some actions you may need to take:

- Configure web analytics to measure your goals
- Seek out social listening tools
- Identify metrics in Retail Link that you can use to gauge your results



Identify internal resources or third party strategic partners

Once you have a great calendar showing all the content you plan to create, you'll need to decide who has the responsibility for producing and implementing it.



About half of B2C companies that use content marketing as a strategy choose to partner with third parties for some or all of the work involved. You may need writers, designers, web strategists, or companies that can help you identify and work with analytics.

Whether you plan to keep all the work in-house or bring on outside experts, you should make certain that you have a realistic match between the calendar you've created and the number of hours or amount of funds you've committed. Companies that use content marketing effectively are very positive about the ROI, but claims that social media marketing is free have skewed some companies' expectations about the resources required.

Get specific

You now have a specific plan. Perhaps you know that you want to reach customers and collect their phone numbers and permission to text them with coupons, and that you plan to do this by creating videos and sharing them on three social media sites.

Or you might have decided to blog daily at your brand website, be active at Instagram and Pinterest, and prepare a Trend Report to offer readers next quarter, with a desired outcome of increased brand awareness and share of conversation.

Now you have to produce the content.

There is no single method for planning your content, but there are a number of good starting points:

- **Create personas.** Describe your ideal customer in detail and get to know him or her so well that you can easily say, "I think Jennifer would really like this," or "This would solve a problem Justin is facing."
- **Check your company archives.** What are the questions people ask? You'll have found some through social listening and Google Trends, too, and you can just work your way through the pile of questions, answering them all.
- **Go seasonal.** People look for certain kinds of content seasonally. Your cleaning supplies can be ready for spring cleaning, coping with summer sports stains, and getting the house ready for holiday visitors.

Monitor and adjust

Since you have goals identified and means to measure progress, you'll be ahead of most companies that try content marketing. A recent survey found that only 39% of companies begin with a documented strategy.

Watch your progress and make certain that your results are on target. When you see that a tactic works well, consider increasing your use of that tactic. If another tactic doesn't get results, reduce the resources you're committing to that tactic.

Make sure to give your plans enough time to succeed. Changing tactics too frequently keeps you from seeing the real results of your efforts.

The empowered consumer

The days of CPG companies selling to retailers who sold to consumers are past. Today's empowered consumer has more information and more options. The most successful brands will be those that embrace the change and support the new, empowered consumer.



609 SW 8th Street, Suite 520
Bentonville, AR 72712
Phone: (479) 715-6700
www.8thandwalton.com