the connected consumer

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the e-tailing group | sponsored by ORACLE

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i. reflections from the author

There is a new customer with which every merchant must contend. Armed and empowered, they are leveraging a multitude of channels and a myriad of devices to stay "connected" to their favorite retailers. This may start with information seeking and research around a particular shopping need, but can also ultimately fuel purchasing. Customers are taking advantage of mobile devices, anywhere and everywhere, for access to the web to manage their busy lives. At the same time, there are many ways they can share among their peers from rating products and liking their favorite brands to connecting via Facebook and Twitter. So much is simply at the fingertips of today's shoppers at any given moment. This frenzy makes it more difficult than ever for retailers to position their brands to satisfy their engaged shoppers. They must ensure that consistent and compelling experiences are the cornerstone of the customer experiences they present, knowing that shoppers can and will be connecting on a 24x7 basis.

food-for-thought

This is an opportune time to try and understand what makes the connected customer tick and what retailers can do to ensure their brands are top-of-mind when these customers start and finish their browse and buy agendas.

Questions for merchant consideration include:

- Who is the connected customer?
- How do they leverage the web to inform their buying behavior?
- How are customers browsing and buying differently by category?
- Are all purchases driven by price?
- What impact are mobile and social having on customer browse and buy behavior?

ii. survey methodology and demographics

methodology

In order to accomplish this objective we went straight to the customer, conducting an online survey of 1,000 consumers. Our goal was to gather in-depth information on their behavior and sentiments regarding cross-channel shopping, connectivity means and devices along with buying behavior and predisposal to a range of behavior.

survey sample summary

It was important that survey respondents own smartphones as much of the evolving behavior centers around these devices. We also were cognizant of the role that tablets are playing and the increased revenues retailers are reaping as a result of growing consumer access. Given these device ownership requirements, the composition is somewhat wealthier and more highly educated than the average population.

1,035 consumers completed an online questionnaire in September 2011

- 52% female/48% male
- Shopped online 4 or more times in the past year
- Typically spend $500 or more online annually
- 73% own a smartphone
- 34% own a tablet device

annual income	
Under $50,000	19%
$50,001 – $75,000	20%
$75,001 – $100,000	21%
More than $100,000	35%
Prefer not to respond	5%

age	
18 – 24	5%
25 – 34	29%
35 – 44	19%
45 – 54	22%
55+	25%

highest level of education	
High school graduate	6%
Some college, but no degree	19%
College graduate	39%
Some graduate school	7%
Post-graduate degree	28%
Prefer not to respond	1%

number of children under 18 living at home	
None	61%
1	16%
2	14%
3	5%
4 or more	3%
Prefer not to respond	1%

iii. top line findings

1. INFORMATION EMPOWERMENT: Information has empowered consumers to educate themselves about what product to buy, how much to pay, and where to shop

2. CHANNEL SHIFT: Satisfaction with online shopping redirects channel behavior

3. SOCIAL STUDIES: Social has connected consumers to companies and one another where peer insights have turned consumers into advocates and authorities

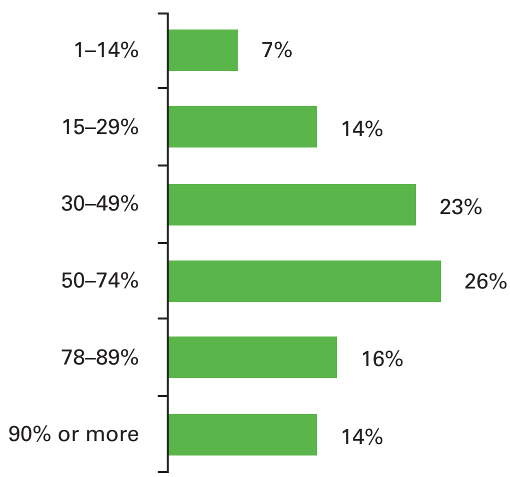
4. MOBILE MEETS SHOPPING: Mobile devices have provided unprecedented access in support of efficient shopping experiences

a. information empowerment

Information has empowered consumers to educate themselves about what product to buy, how much to pay and where to shop.

The web's role as a repository of information about anything one might wish to buy has forever altered shopper behavior. First and foremost that means consumers are taking advantage of this information to educate themselves about a product, its category and to put themselves in a position to make the right choice for one's unique needs and desires.

What percentage of your overall shopping (in a store, on the Internet, via catalog or by mobile device) involves researching products online?



Today, 56% of purchases involve researching products online 50% of the time or more. The common path that consumers take often goes through the web as these numbers clearly indicate. Whether that means hunting for the latest and greatest, learning more about a new consumer electronics product or finding out if the items one seeks are actually available at a local store, web access puts the customer in the driver's shopping seat.

Thinking about 100% of your purchases, please tell us how often your shopping falls into the following patterns when purchasing each kind of product.

Planned with no research	All the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
Discretionary purchases (i.e. apparel, accessories, furniture)	6%	19%	55%	20%
Commodity purchases (i.e. office supplies, health/beauty products, diapers)	7%	28%	45%	20%
Travel purchases (i.e. airfare, hotel, car rental)	5%	9%	24%	62%
Technology purchases (i.e. consumer electronics, computers, appliances)	4%	10%	34%	52%
Financial investments (i.e. stocks, insurance, banking)	4%	9%	21%	66%
Planned with some research	**All the time**	**Most of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Never**
Discretionary purchases (i.e. apparel, accessories, furniture)	14%	49%	35%	2%
Commodity purchases (i.e. office supplies, health/beauty products, diapers)	12%	33%	47%	8%
Travel purchases (i.e. airfare, hotel, car rental)	44%	31%	18%	7%
Technology purchases (i.e. consumer electronics, computers, appliances)	39%	37%	19%	5%
Financial investments (i.e. stocks, insurance, banking)	41%	26%	18%	15%
Impulse with no research	**All the time**	**Most of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Never**
Discretionary purchases (i.e. apparel, accessories, furniture)	4%	13%	56%	27%
Commodity purchases (i.e. office supplies, health/beauty products, diapers)	4%	16%	49%	31%
Travel purchases (i.e. airfare, hotel, car rental)	4%	8%	21%	67%
Technology purchases (i.e. consumer electronics, computers, appliances)	3%	9%	29%	59%
Financial investments (i.e. stocks, insurance, banking)	3%	8%	16%	73%
Impulse with some research	**All the time**	**Most of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Never**
Discretionary purchases (i.e. apparel, accessories, furniture)	5%	19%	59%	17%
Commodity purchases (i.e. office supplies, health/beauty products, diapers)	5%	17%	53%	25%
Travel purchases (i.e. airfare, hotel, car rental)	6%	15%	31%	48%
Technology purchases (i.e. consumer electronics, computers, appliances)	7%	17%	38%	38%
Financial investments (i.e. stocks, insurance, banking)	6%	11%	23%	60%

The shift in consumer behavior towards research is seen in varying degrees based on purchase category. Category often dictates the need for more or less planning where financial investments, technology and travel are typically planned with at least some level of research. Commodity purchases suggest a mixed bag of planning as customers are likely to be more confident in what they want to buy given its replenishment nature. Discretionary purchases include apparel, accessories and furniture and these may be the toughest to interpret as impulse buying may result from seasonal demands, store visits or a general desire to keep up with market trends. Of course the real challenge is that this behavior ebbs and flows, based on one's lifestyle, available time, cash flow and so much more. **Knowing these dynamics the importance of a robust site experience and full access via all channels will be essential to meet today's customer, who is truly a moving target.**

We thought a look at one category might be insightful and for this we have selected technology. Customers will plan for this purchasing 76% of the time combined with research, per this Dell example. Self-service will guide their research efforts where they are likely to find some of the answers on the website. **When information is not available or sites don't fully address issues of concern, enabling chat or access to customer service will ensure shopper satisfaction and hopefully conversion via one's channel of choice.**

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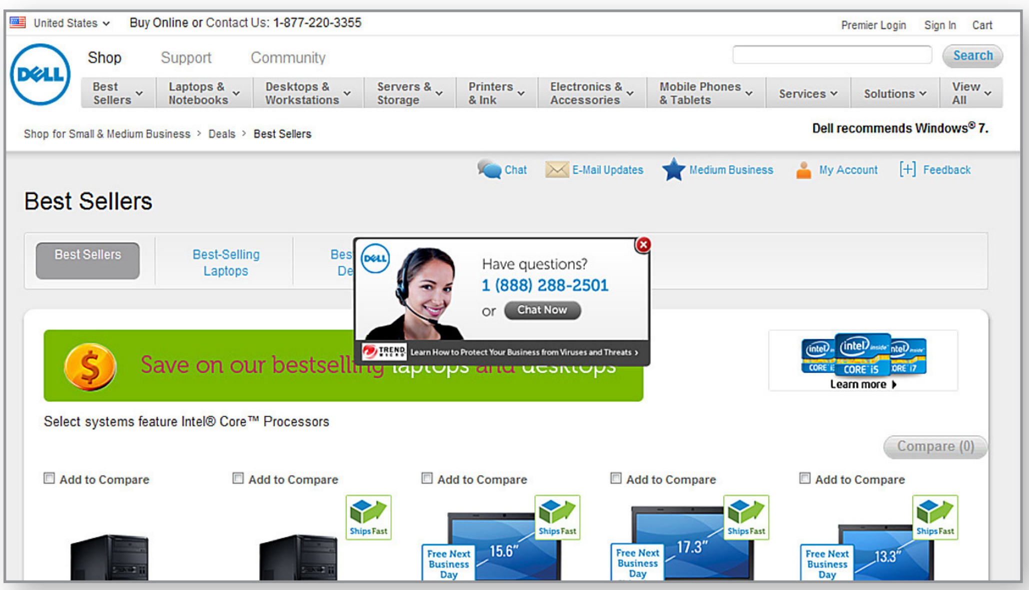
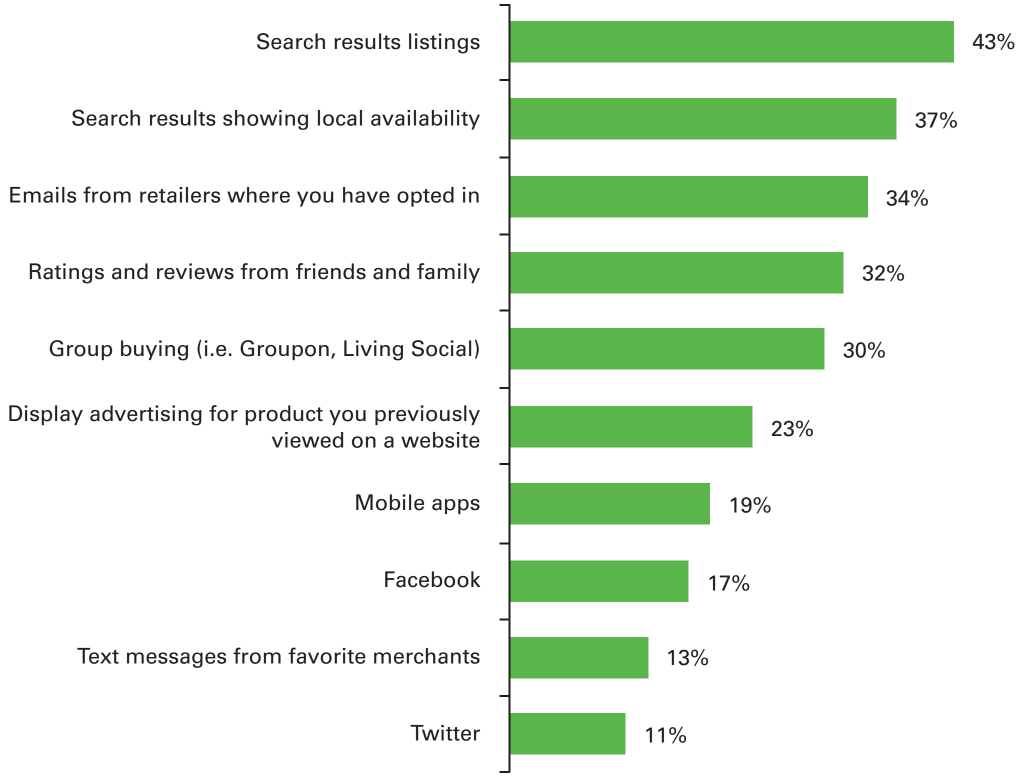


How would you describe the changing level of influence these online marketing tools or social networks are having on your shopping experiences today versus a few years ago? (Top-2 Significantly/Somewhat More Influence)



We saw little change in traditional marketing techniques from an influence perspective so have instead chosen to focus on the online marketing tools and social networks given greater movement in this area. Of course the level of influence from online tools was tremendous with search results' listings and the tie-in to local store product availability having the greatest influence on shopping experiences. Emails, as well as ratings and reviews, along with group buying were seen as influential for one-in-three shoppers surveyed. **These shifting influences must be monitored as new technologies emerge and penetrate the consumer landscape.**

When thinking about the price you are willing to pay, please rate your agreement with each of the following statements.

Shoppers are willing to do a little homework but typically have a budget in mind. This homework will often include previewing a handful of stores. Most shoppers don't have to find the lowest price but do seek to get the best perceived value for their purchases. Regarding pricing, 73% are willing to be flexible particularly given any learning that may result from research while 59% won't deviate from that starting point. Amazon serves as a defacto first stop for many consumers, providing a quick check-in point for selection and availability. **Along with logistical prowess and ability to expedite deliveries, Amazon is a formidable competitor for each and every retailer.**

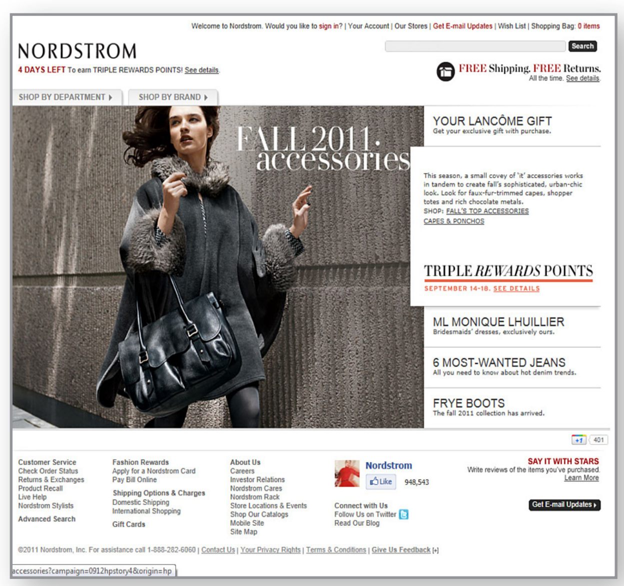
What does it take for you to pay full price for products in general? Check all that apply.

Unfortunately one in two customers rarely or never pays full price making it difficult for retailers to maintain desired margins. Retailers look to add high margin product to their assortments or at minimum showcase exclusive products that entice shoppers to consummate the sale. It is our belief that customers are very educated on the markdown cadence of their favorite retailers and once established getting the customer to pay full price is a challenge at best. Merchants must find a way to position their brand through assortment, service or cache otherwise full price purchasing may simply be a phenomenon of the past.

As the chart above indicates, there will always be exceptions including hard-to-find products and items that never go on sale. **Knowing these dynamics, appealing to time-sensitivities or stocking one's shelves with these items would be a wise approach.**

Thinking about a website's promotional features, how important are the following features when making a purchase from a website? (Top-2 Critical/Very Important)

Every day retailers must make merchandising choices and determining promotional elements for their playbook is an ongoing part of that process. The most critical dynamic for consumers (charted based on being very important to critical) continues to be free shipping (73%) where several retailers have attacked this issue head on. Following in the footsteps of L.L. Bean, Nordstrom made shipping and returns free (70%) and in both instances reshaped merchant thinking in this area. These actions reinforce customer loyalty and hold long-term brand and loyalty implications.



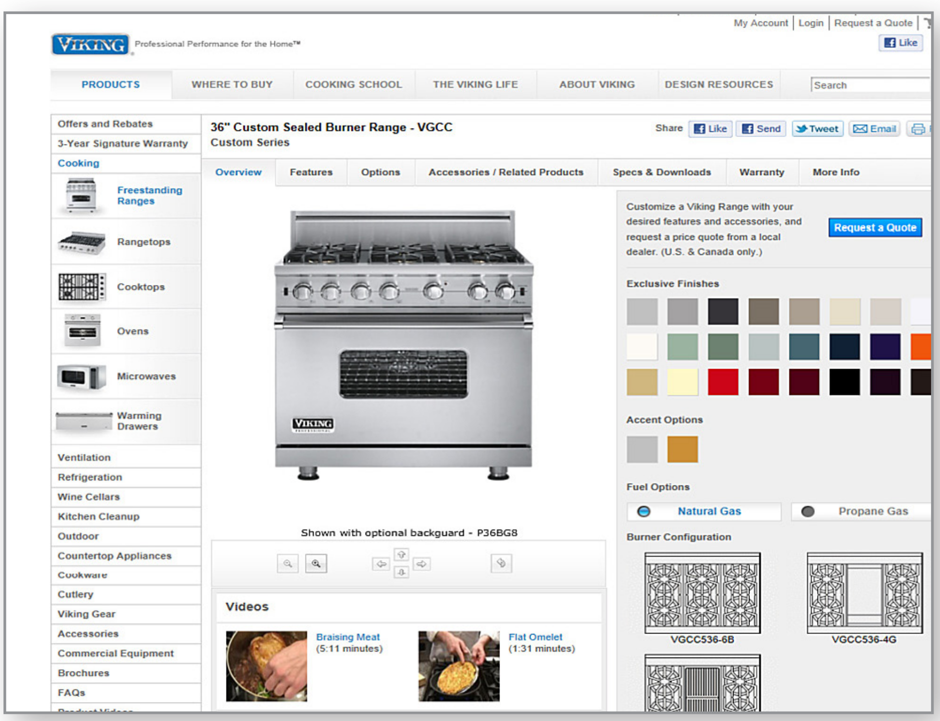
Outlets and sales sections will continue to prevail. Loyalty programs have become elevated in importance as receiving rewards resonates with consumers onsite and across social channels. **Beyond these core promotional dynamics, it is the merchant's choice which tactics are right for their brand, category mix and customer base with selective deployment driving tactical execution.**

comprehensive product pages perform

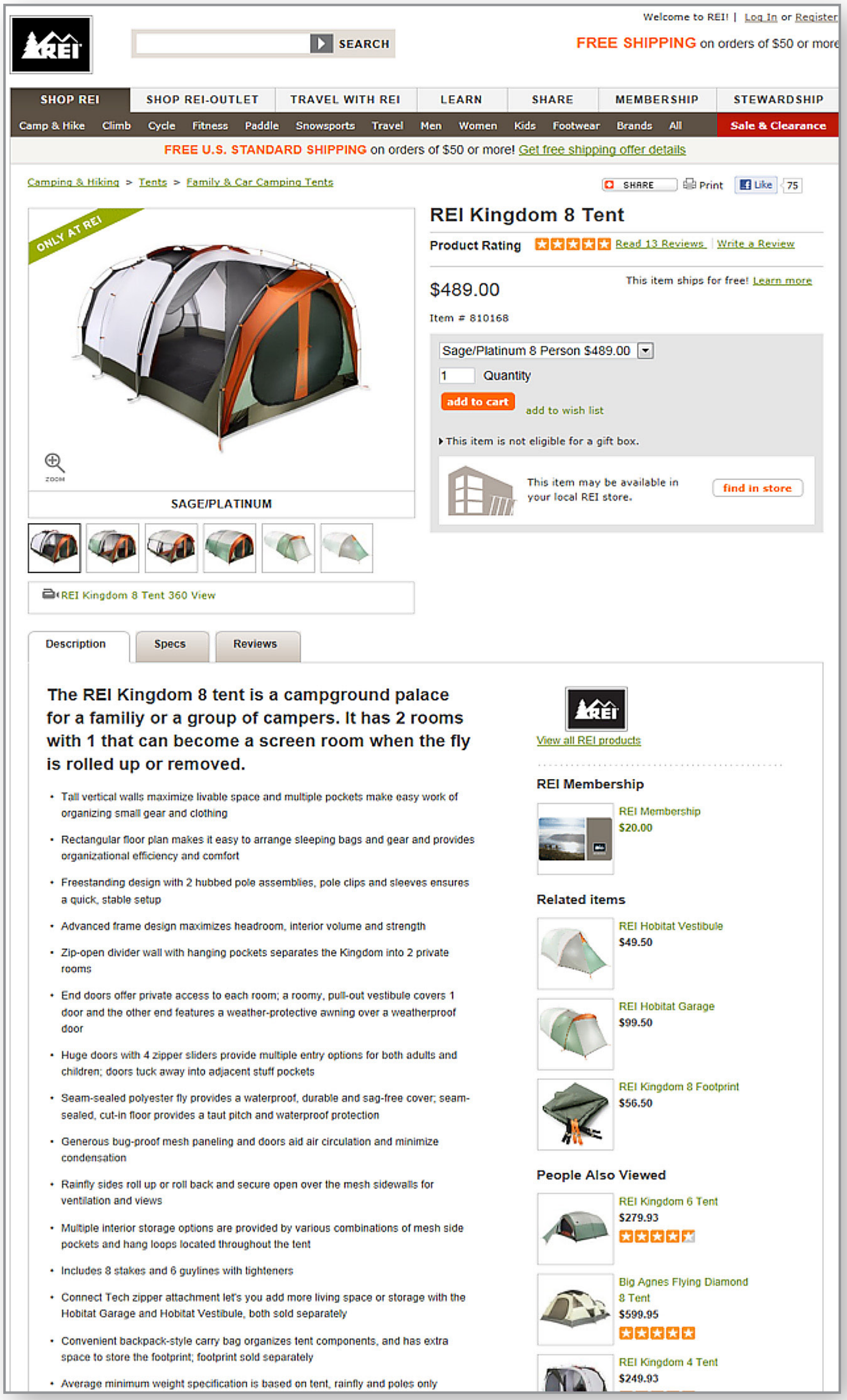
When viewing a merchant's product page online, how important is the following information when selecting and ultimately purchasing a product?
(Top-2 Critical/Very Important)

Essential (>50%)	Merchant Choice (33–49%)	Social (<33%)
Quality of the image	Product guides	Email-a-friend
Ability to see selected product in color of choice	View product on a model	Like button
Alternative views of selected item	Live help	Share button
Zoom	Product demonstrations	
Peer ratings and reviews	Video of the product in use	
Product comparisons	Product recommendations	
	Q/A	
	View product in room setting	

Thinking about the onsite experience we focused on the product and specifically the product page, where this information is exposed. Consumer insights settled in three distinct areas: **Essentials, Merchant Choice and Social.** The first example from Viking Range supports many of the essentials as well as information that is integrated based on the unique needs of the brand. They have woven together strong imagery and color change, augmenting the experience with videos, recipes and tips. The configurator is a custom tool that further assists shoppers in making choices. Links to retail partners via their quote process facilitates shopping, supporting a classic distribution model.



REI reinforces why strong product pages deliver for both onsite selling and to ready shoppers for in-store purchasing. The essentials are all present and they also do a wonderful job of showcasing related products. A tie-in to inventory bridges the cross-channel gap. Social is sprinkled throughout to position one's peers front-and-center building confidence among consumers to shop online or in-store.



When thinking about selecting the right product in any given category, how important is each of these elements? (Top-2 Critical/Very Important)

Price is the #1 driver and will always top the list of how consumers select the right product. Conveniences achieved via online shipping and logistical improvements continue to compel shoppers to buy more online. This aspect is ripe for discussion with retailers from Amazon to Zappos and office supply companies like Staples promising next day delivery, often with no shipping fees attached. Customer dynamics have shifted and considerations on whether to visit a retail store forever altered. When delivery turnaround times are almost instantaneous, shoppers gravitate to those merchants who best meet their desired delivery timelines. Of course other options including the ability to purchase online for in-store pickup, peer insights and rewards points are also important for one-in-three shoppers. The entire range of factors will come into consideration so being aware of the competitive landscape and your company's ability to execute against consumer demands will set the tone for future growth, satisfaction and retention.

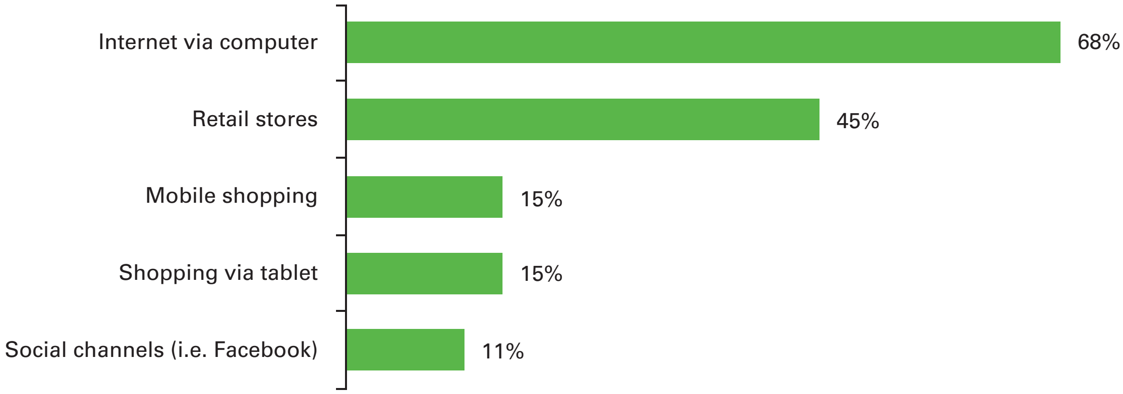
eg execution checklist

1. Ensure that your site experience is comprehensive providing shoppers with both product and category information to support customer researching
2. Monitor market pricing to ensure you are competitive meeting the needs of today's value-driven shopper
3. Review your promotional strategies particularly free shipping given its importance among cross-channel shoppers
4. Deliver a robust product page that gives customers the confidence to buy bolstered by strong product information, rich media and user-generated content
5. Evaluate your logistical strengths and weaknesses to ensure swift delivery to shoppers

b. channel shift

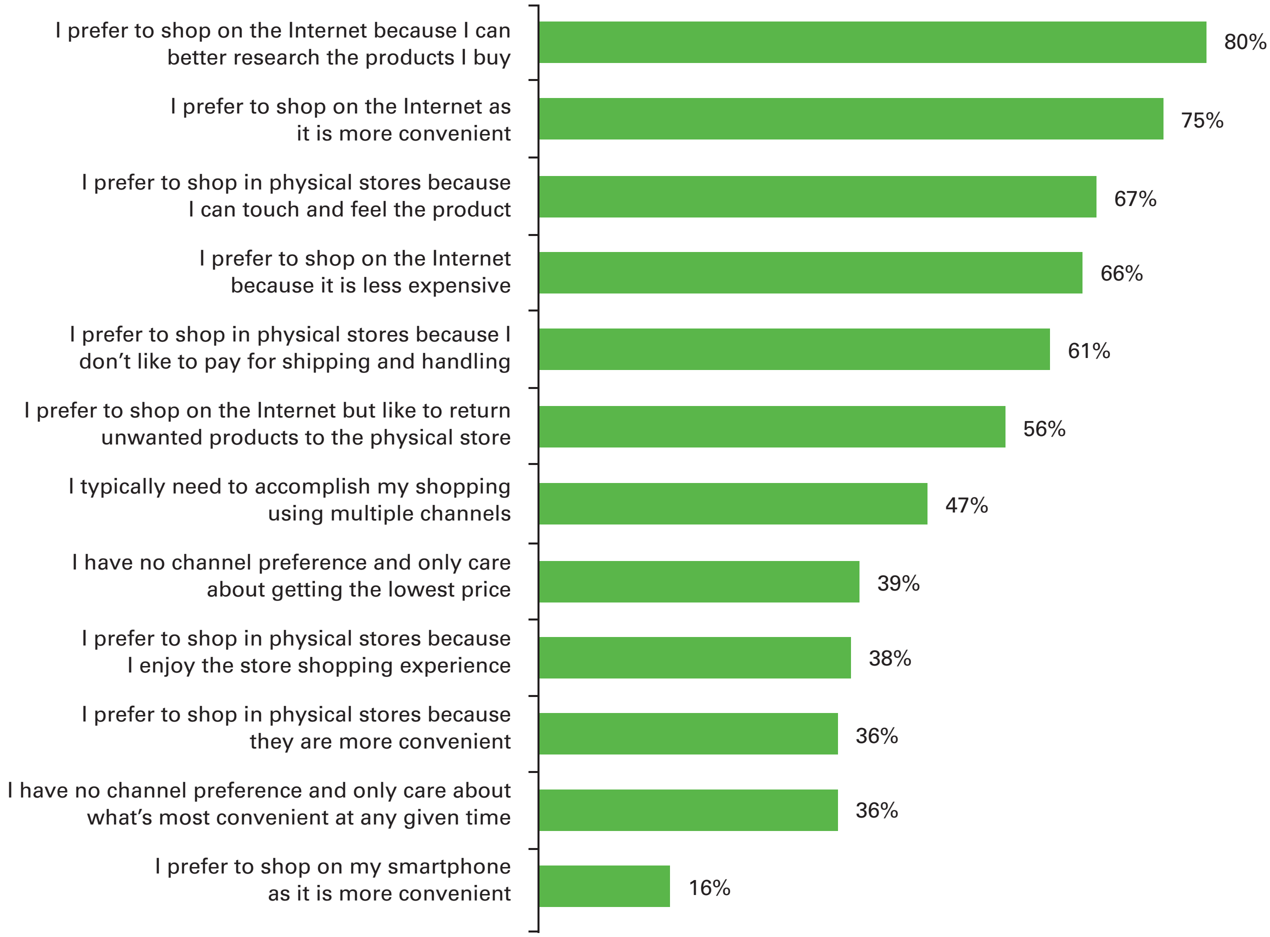
Satisfaction with online shopping redirects channel behavior

How would you describe your overall experience of shopping in each of the following channels or ways? (Top-2 Excellent/Very Good)



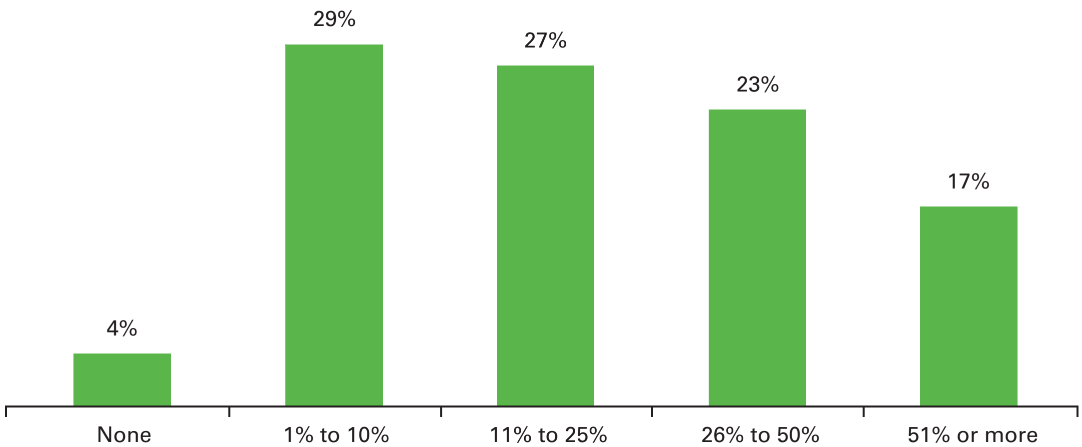
Consumer satisfaction will always be an important behavior predictor for online merchants and their cross-channel counterparts. I find it amazing that in just 15 years the satisfaction of the Internet channel was 23 points higher than retail stores. This speaks to its power on many fronts where it becomes difficult to compete with the web from a time-savings and convenience perspective, not to mention its searchabilty strength. If the Internet is able to maintain and elevate standards, we would expect satisfaction levels to continue rapid escalation. Retail is challenged given staffing issues and P&L dynamics of a brick-and-mortar footprint so overall levels of satisfaction will be more difficult to improve. Mobile devices and social channels are just emerging with limited feedback at this early date. We would, however, expect them both to attain strong scores in the near future as the convenience factors weigh heavily in the shopper’s mind.

When choosing a channel (Internet via computer, physical store, mobile device, Facebook/social channel), in which to make a purchase, please rank your agreement with each of the following statements. (Top-2 Strongly/Somewhat Agree)



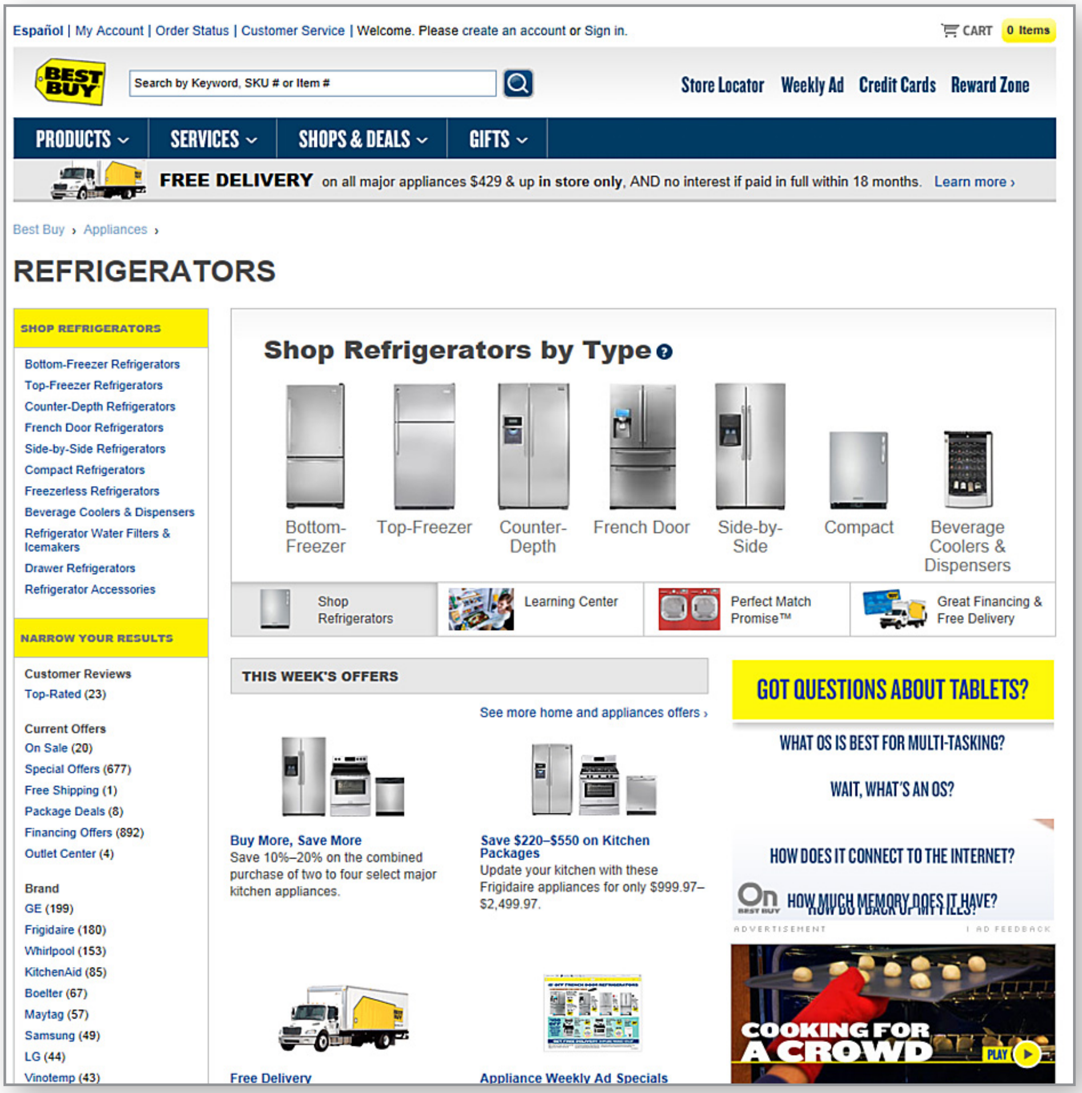
The web's research strength once again shines through as the most agreed upon sentiment. Coupled with convenience, they provide the perfect reasons to gravitate to the Internet. From a price point-of-view, there is also a belief that the Internet is less expensive (66%) though the dreaded shipping and handling charges (66%) rear once again. From a physical store perspective, touch and feel of the product is still paramount as a confidence-builder prior to buying (67%). Shoppers understand that it will often require multiple channels to accomplish their shopping (47%) plus the convenience of buying online but returning to a local store has strong appeal (56%).

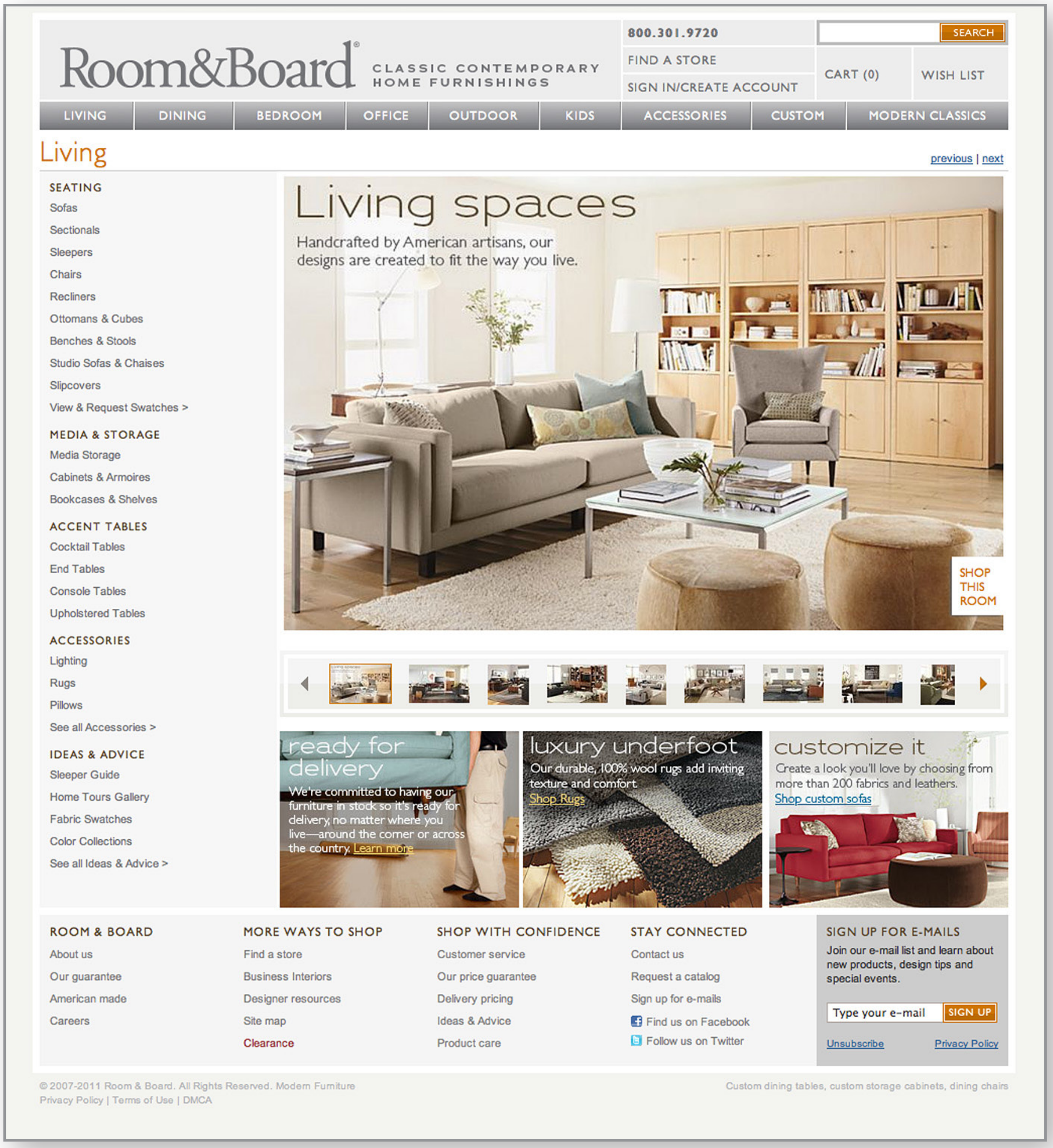
What percent of your total shopping purchases will be at Amazon?



Amazon's dominance continues and is likely to see further growth. In just sixteen years since the site launched, 40% of surveyed shoppers report making 26% or more of all their shopping purchases through Amazon. **Merchants must be vigilant and mindful of the efforts they must put in place to garner a greater share of wallet from today's cross-channel customers.**

Beyond replenishment, shoppers spend time online previewing product. Such activities include learning about categories of products such as refrigerators in this Best Buy example. Retailers should provide comprehensive content, along with interactive features that assist in product selection complete with search tools to efficiently find the right product. With so many customers landing on product pages, it is an opportune time to reinforce your branding and value proposition as can be seen from the reinforcement of their Store Pickup Plus program.





In categories like home and furniture significant browsing across channels is the likely consumer play. It is important for shoppers to get a sense of the assortment, after which they can pursue an in-store or online path to purchase. Room&Board offers a visual presentation of living spaces with a slide show that allows visitors to explore a range of furniture options. From ready-for-delivery to custom choices, this web experience certainly readies the shopper for all their home designer needs.

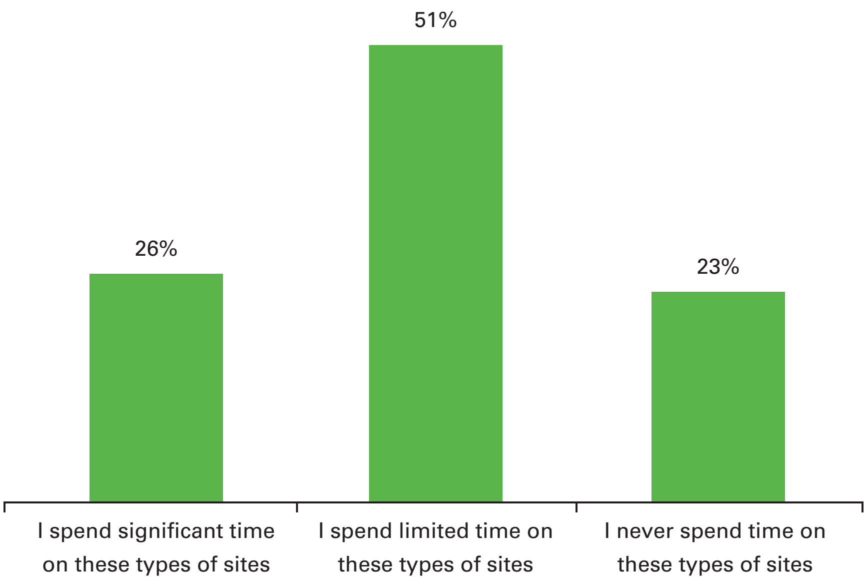
eg execution checklist

1. When evaluating tactics to enhance your online experience, ask yourself if they are more convenient for shoppers and if they save them time
2. Explore your strengths and weaknesses continuing to refine your value proposition

c. social studies

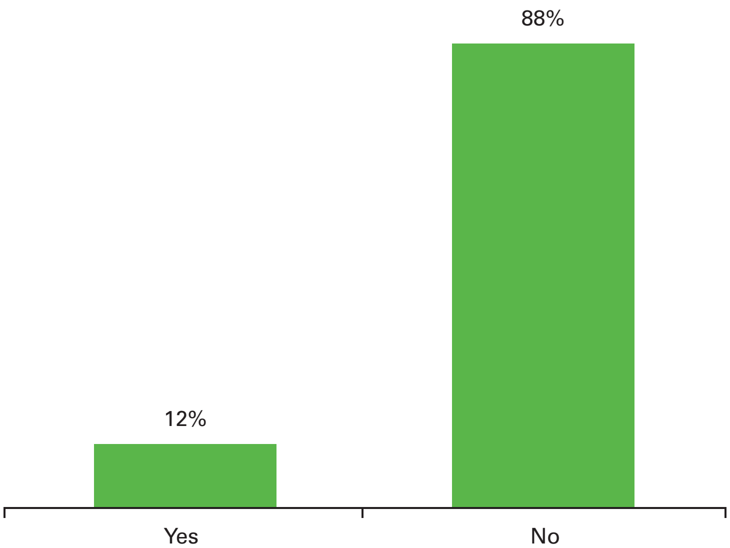
Social media has connected consumers to companies and one another with peer insights turning consumers into advocates and authorities

How would you describe your use of social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)?



The social dynamics' trend curve sees significant time commitment by one-in-four shoppers with rising interest by 51% of shoppers boding well for future selling efforts. Retailers must embrace the social channel as Chico's puts forth a calendar interface in their Facebook experience. **Such a focus connects the channels while addressing evolving consumer behavior.**

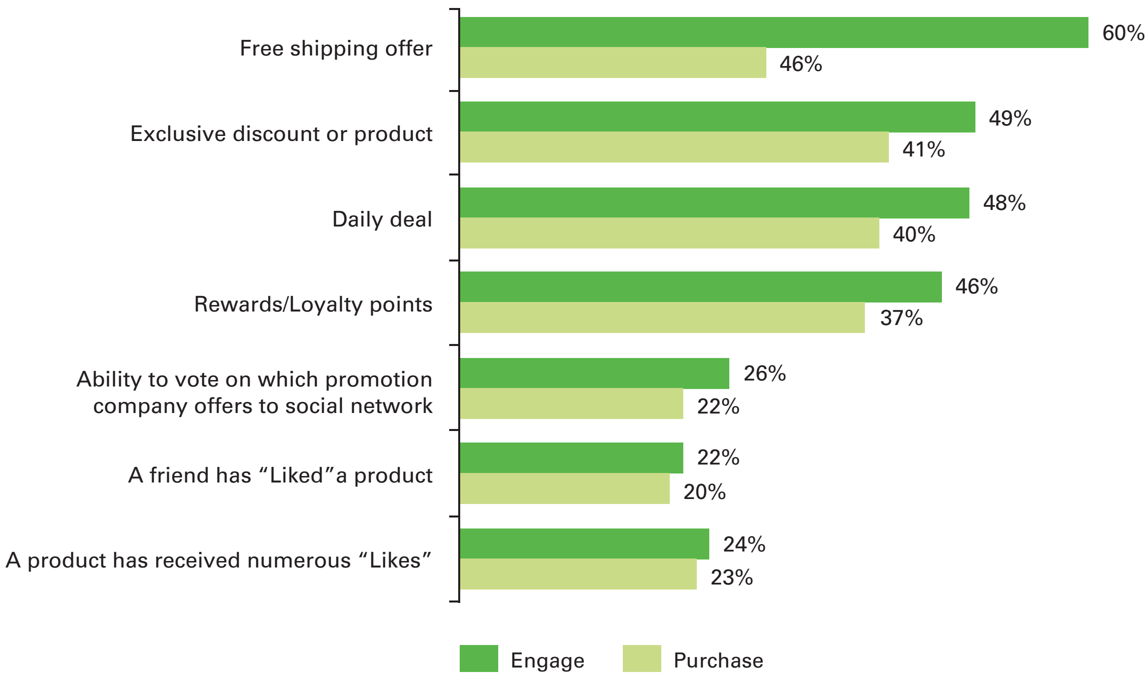
Have you made a purchase from a social networking site within the past 12 months?



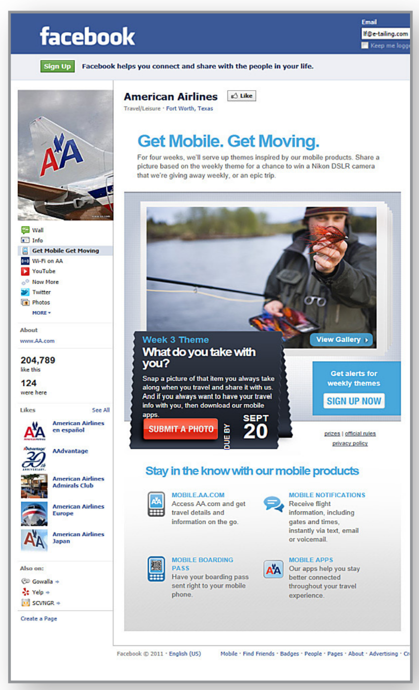
Purchasing via social networking is starting to make inroads yet only 12% of those surveyed indicated having made a purchase from a social networking site within the past 12 months. Regardless of these early adopters, one must conclude that today it is still in its infancy. The volume of customers seeking to connect through social means makes it inevitable that purchasing will follow suit. An awareness of its importance to your customer base should direct your efforts. Consideration of the following Facebook statistics sheds light on the scope of the opportunity:

- More than 750 million active users
- 50% of active users log on to Facebook in any given day
- Average user has 130 friends
- People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook

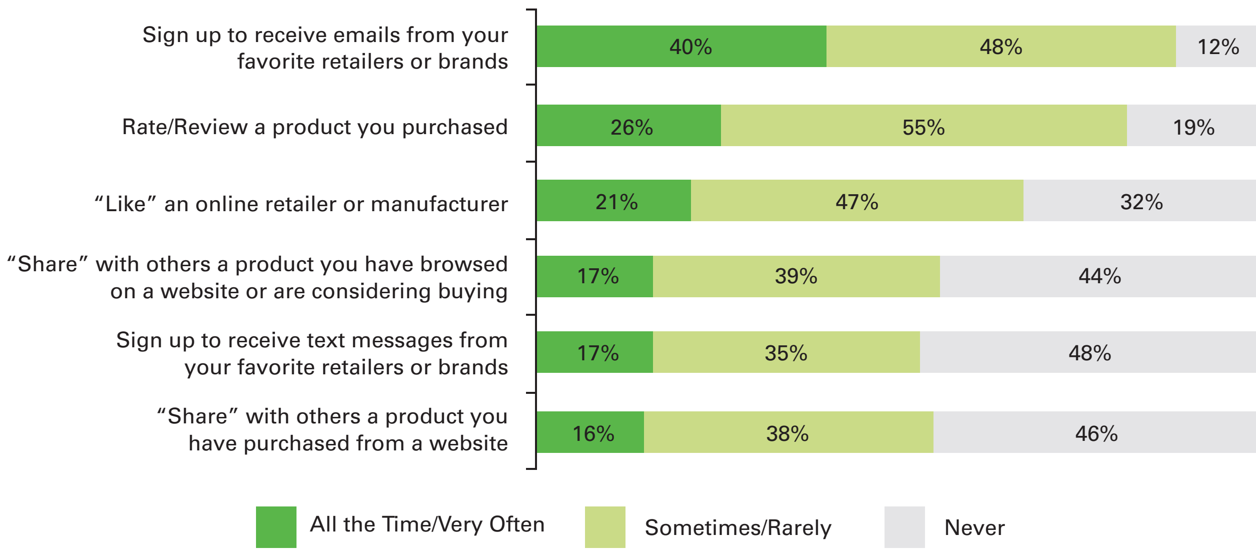
What has/would influence you to engage with a retailer/brand manufacturer or make a purchase on a social networking site (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)?



Deals and rewards motivate shoppers and should be a consideration in the tactics one deploys. Just as promotional elements such as free shipping top the list of desired online tactics, the same can be seen in social networks. Additional free shipping offers (60%), exclusives/discounts on product (49%), daily deals (48%) and rewards (46%) resonate with the consumer. These two examples from AutoZone featuring a Free Gas Sweepstakes and American Airlines' picture contest, set them on an engagement path to connect to their customers.



How often do you participate in each of the following activities?



Email signup dominates current shopper participation with retailers serving as the consumers' entrée into social. Inroads have also followed with ratings and reviews (81%); newer social tools such as sharing and liking see more limited traction. In the same way that shoppers were trained to sign up for these emails and lured to rate and review products, they have begun to embrace newer social tools. Here, liking a retailer (68%), and sharing (56%) have seen early and active participation. Over time these opportunities for consumers to express themselves should continue to flourish as can be seen by the recent addition of want and own buttons where each of these actions further describes a relationship the customer may have with things further refining the social graph.

eg execution checklist

1. Test social media strategies to understand its growing role for your business
2. Leverage social media learning to explore customer engagement where ROI is seen as a secondary concern
3. Test a myriad of Facebook strategies including offers and reward points monitoring its impact on consumer behavior
4. Encourage customers to get involved with your brand where reviewing, sharing and liking are part of their participation

d. mobile meets shopping

Mobile devices have provided unprecedented access in support of efficient shopping experiences. Smartphones are "convenience" drivers for browsing and researching products. Diverse business projections exemplify that significance and merit merchants' attention.

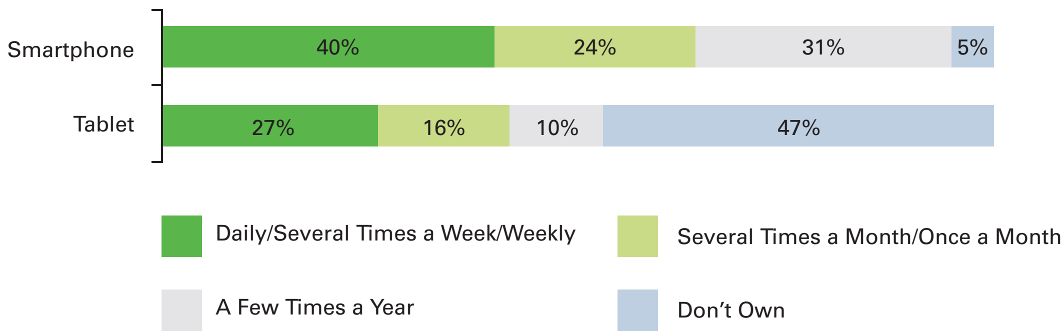
- By 2013 more mobile phones will be shipped globally than desktop and laptop computers combined (Mobile Internet Retailer Summit)
- US mobile shopping sales volume will reach $9 billion in 2011 compared to $2.4 billion in 2010 and $1.2 billion in 2009 (InMobi)
- PayPal's mobile transaction volume has grown from $24 million in 2008 to $140 million in 2009 to $750 million in 2010. It is projected to top $2 billion this year and to reach $7.5 billion in 2013 (Mobile Commerce Daily)

The customer is leading the charge when it comes to mobile, making it imperative that we understand how they desire to use these devices, supported by the following facts:

- 30-40% of Americans are accessing the mobile web on a monthly basis (InMobi)
- mCommerce sales will hit $31 billion in 2016 (Forrester Research)
- In 2015, shoppers around the world are expected to spend about $119 billion on goods and services purchased via mobile phones; representing about 8% of the total ecommerce market (ABI Research)

It is important to remember that we are still in the early days of mobile with unprecedented adoption projected over time. Just as ecommerce has become ingrained into our culture, so too will mobile shopping transform consumer buying behavior.

How frequently do you browse or research products and services using your mobile devices (smartphone or tablet)?



Initially shoppers tend to browse and research when embracing new technologies. Smartphones see strong interest in this area with 40% of surveyed shoppers browsing via their mobile device daily to weekly while tablet browsing is slightly less though respectable at 27%. Usage is likely a factor of more limited researching (24% via phone/16% via mobile). In time these tools will become workhorses for the shoppers that they service.

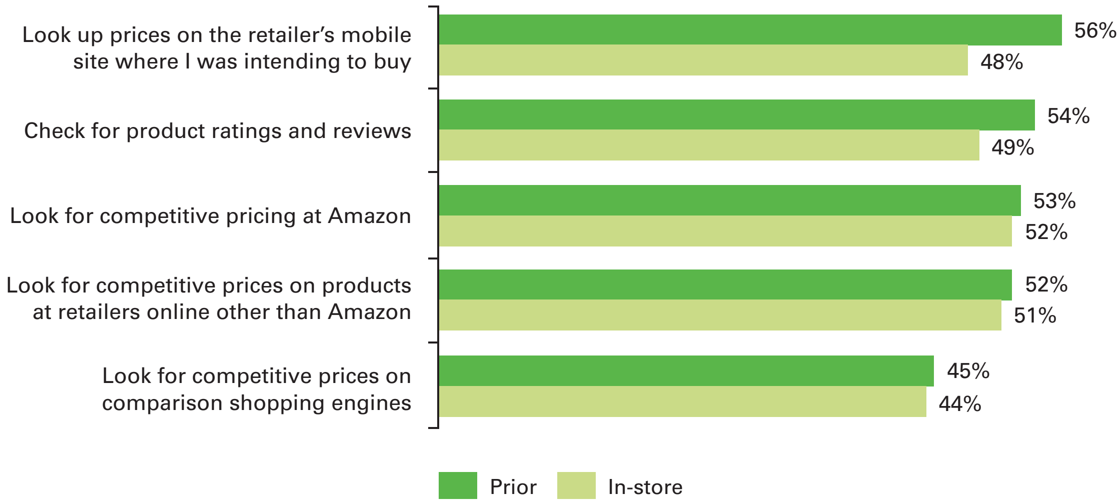
Please indicate your agreement with the following statemetns regarding browsing or buying products via your smartphone.

Smartphones are the conduit to cross-channel purchasing which is already a force to be reckoned with and at a minimum can serve as a way to access coupons and offers. While purchasing may ultimately take place within the four walls of a physical store, the ability to present a coupon via phone rather than a printout of the offer is a win-win proposition for shoppers and merchants.

It is essential for retailers to create emails that are mobile friendly as 30% of consumers strongly agree with the statement that they like to use their mobile devices to preview emails from their favorite retailers.

These are just a few of the ways consumers connect and inform their buying behavior with many more certain to be forthcoming.

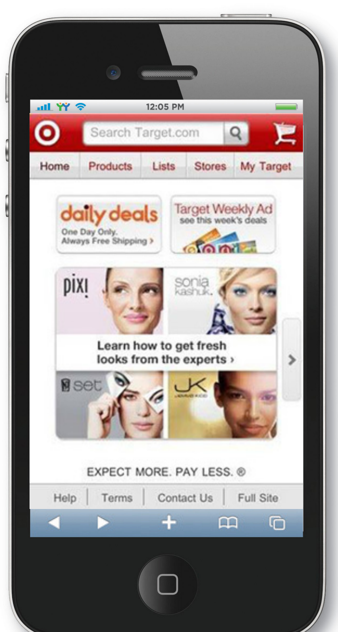
Prior to or while visiting physical retail stores, how likely are you to partake in the following behavior with your smartphone? (Top-3 Frequently/Often/Sometimes)



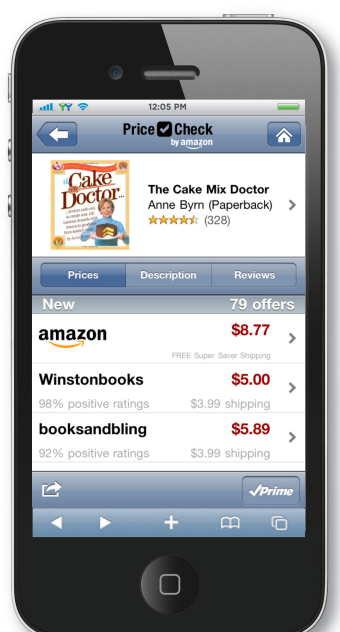
Phones are ideal for both previewing prior to making a store visit and for use during shopping trips. Smart retailers deliver easy access via "find a store" capability as seen in the Macy's example. Sales and specials will always attract today's value conscious consumer and see strong interest (55%). At the same time, price sensitive shoppers will extend their comparison online behavior via their smartphones where shoppers can access competitive pricing through both retailers and comparison shopping engines. **The bottom-line is the more merchants make available in terms of functionality, the more consumers will choose tactics that best serve their shifting needs.**

70% look up store information

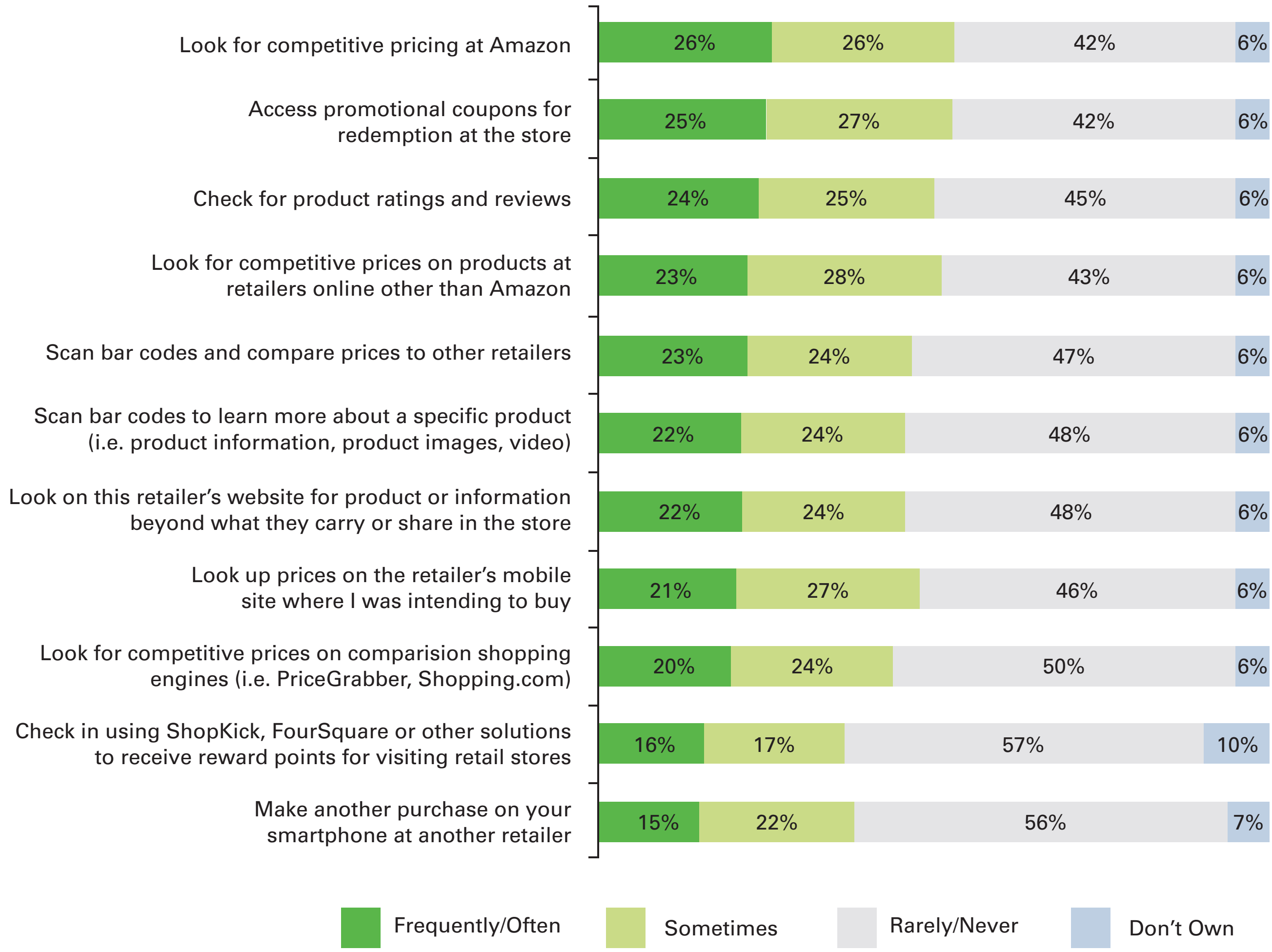
56% check for sales/specials



53% check for competitive pricing on Amazon

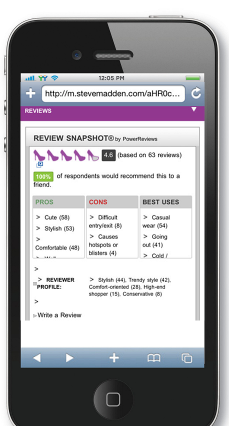


While visiting physical retail stores, how likely are you to partake in the following behavior with your smartphone?



In-store usage also involves information gathering, tapping into marketing and extended information provided by QR codes or localized efforts. Once shoppers visit the store their behavior shifts as decision-making processes accelerate. **Information gathering is important from checking peer ratings/reviews to taking advantage of barcodes that introduce product videos and enhanced information for product education.**

49% access product ratings/reviews

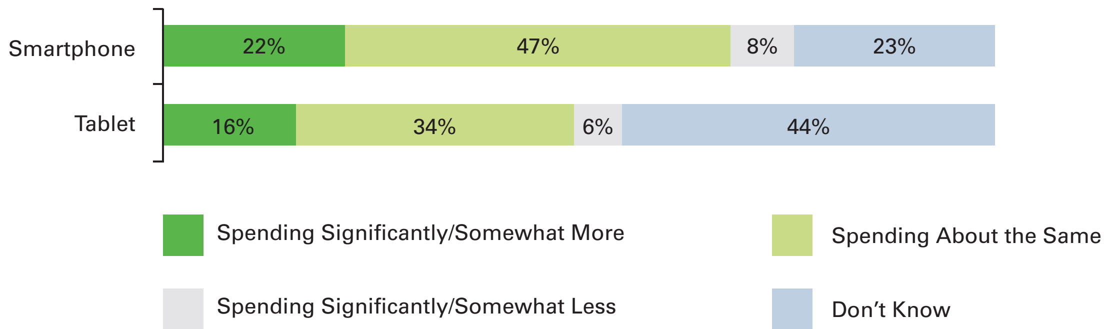


47% take advantage of barcodes during in-store visits

33% check in using ShopKick, FourSquare or other solutions to receive reward points on visiting retail stores

Stay Tuned...

Do you expect to spend more or less via the following mobile devices (smartphone or tablet) in the coming year?



Although smartphones may have limitations, increased purchasing is expected on all mobile devices in the coming year. Continued improvements to technology will provide customers exciting ways to take advantage of mobile for a myriad of activities. Our research indicated that 22% of smartphone owners and 16% of tablet owners project spending somewhat or significantly more time with these devices.

eg execution checklist

1. Establish an mcommerce strategy in place to reach your "on the go" shoppers
2. Create an mcommerce experience that is suitable for the device putting your best foot forward from a branding and selling point-of-view
3. Explore the role apps can play for your business and if they should be part of your mobile strategy
4. Ensure your emails are readable via mobile devices

iv: reflections on what's next for shoppers

This exhaustive effort has led us to reflect on what is next for shoppers and our sentiments focus on **more, more, more.** Accessibility and the ability to educate oneself prior to and during shopping visits to retail stores will have profound impact. Cross-channel dynamics will continue to shift as mobile wields new influence over the consumer. With younger customers growing up and disposable incomes following suit, early learned behavior, particularly in the social arena will be forever entrenched. Knowing these scenarios we present one reflection from each of our four connected customer conclusions with the caveat that in the end technology innovation and the consumer will make the choices that best suit their shopping and lifestyle scenarios.

1. Make information both accessible and powerful to inform consumers about what product to buy, how much to pay and where to shop
2. Monitor shopping behavior across channels as conveniences will be core to cross-channel satisfaction
3. Embrace social media to take advantage of connected consumers
4. Enable access via mobile devices as shoppers look for efficiency options

v. about the companies

a. about the e-tailing group

the e-tailing group is a niche e-commerce consultancy that helps merchants deliver the right customer experience on their websites and across all of their channels while adeptly assisting technology companies to create and execute go-to-market strategies that simultaneously educate the retail community and deliver cost-effective thought leadership and lead generation. For more background about our research or for additional information on the e-tailing group, inc. please contact Lauren Freedman via email at LF@e-tailing.com, by phone to 773-975-7280 or visit the e-tailing group website www.e-tailing.com

b. about oracle

Oracle (NASDAQ: ORCL) is the world's most complete, open, and integrated business software and hardware systems company. With more than 370,000 customers—including 100 of the Fortune 100—in more than 145 countries around the globe, Oracle is the only vendor able to offer a complete technology stack in which every layer is engineered to work together as a single system. Oracle's industry-leading products give customers unmatched benefits including unbreakable security, high availability, scalability, energy efficiency, powerful performance, and low total cost of ownership. For more information, visit oracle.com.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