

How to measure and improve your digital maturity for online sales success

Is a website really a 'digital experience'? South African retailers are in a rush to capitalise on the growing volume of South African consumers opting to do their shopping online as digitisation and the disruptive impact of the pandemic shift consumer habits.



Source: www.pexels.com

According to Amrish Singh, global customer experience advisor at SAP Africa, South Africans were traditionally used to physical purchases where they can see the quality of a product or the freshness of a loaf of bread – but that has changed dramatically.

"The past few years have seen massive growth in online purchases as consumers become more comfortable to enjoy the convenience of online purchases. Where South African e-commerce has traditionally lagged behind more developed markets, a new wave of digitally-mature companies are driving e-commerce, ably supported by a rich ecosystem of fulfilment partners, forward-thinking retailers and digitally-native consumers. However, this is putting significant pressure on retailers to ensure they offer great online customer experiences at all times."



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Digital adoption driving digital maturity

According to [reports](#), e-commerce purchases in South Africa grew by 66% in 2020 to reach more than R30bn - double what it was two years prior. "Despite the relaxing of strict lockdown measures that restricted the movement of consumers to brick-and-mortar stores, online shopping continues to grow in popularity as more retailers introduce e-commerce offerings tailor-made for SA's burgeoning consumer market."

Singh, who advises companies on improving their customer experiences and digital maturity, adds that companies seeking to introduce online offerings will first need to determine their level of maturity to understand what further development is

needed to create compelling customer experiences.

"Digital maturity refers to a company's performance across hundreds of touch points in a typical digital customer journey, grouped in four main categories, namely mobile, CX, digital marketing and social media," says Singh. "As companies explore new revenue opportunities in the age of the always-connected consumer, keeping track of digital maturity will be essential to creating compelling customer experiences online."

To help companies in their efforts to develop seamless and effective online customer experiences, Singh provides tips for improving each of the four pillars of digital maturity:

Pillar 1: Mobile

In a country where smartphone penetration has crossed the 90% mark, having a mobile presence is essential to any company's digital ambitions.

"A fast, responsive and user-friendly mobile app or mobile web responsive site is a must-have for companies as it creates a powerful channel for sales and customer service while also delivering vital information, such as where to find the nearest store," explains Singh.

More digitally mature companies will also integrate other services such as WhatsApp for customer support discussions or Google Maps so customers can navigate to the nearest store directly from their device of choice.

Singh adds that companies also need to build tailored functionality into their mobile apps based on the type of business. "For example, if you are a pharmacy, does your app indicate whether there is an on-site clinic? If your business receives high volumes of customer queries, are your contact details hyperlinked so customers can reach you with a single tap?"

Pillar 2: Overall Customer Experience

Customer Experience forms an important part of the Experience Economy and has become a core tenet of successful businesses, on par with traditional metrics such as product quality and price.

Some studies suggest that consumers are 3.5 times more likely to purchase more from a brand following a positive customer experience, while brands that offer a poor customer experience can expect to lose nearly 10% of their revenue.



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Andrew Bourne 14 Apr 2022



"Great online customer experiences are essential to the success of any company's digital efforts," says Singh. "How well-designed and easy to navigate is your homepage? Can customers easily create an account profile? An easy win here is to use social logins so your customers don't have to remember yet another set of usernames and passwords."

Guided selling, which employs the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to help customers find exactly what they are looking for - sometimes before they even know they're looking for it - is also growing in popularity as the underlying technology improves.

"Having clear product images with detailed information, as well as ratings and customer reviews, further help create a compelling experience that can build trust with consumers and encourage repeat purchases. A seamless returns experience, especially for consumer goods and fashion items, is also vital, as any delay in replacing a defective product can damage the relationship with the customer and push them to your competitors."

Pillar 3: Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is an essential driver of modern commerce and has given rise to some of the world's most valuable companies. In a survey of more than 14,000 online shoppers, nearly half (48%) of consumers said they start their hunt for new products on search engines.

"Companies have to make sure they rank highly for their relevant keywords on popular search engines such as Google," says Singh. "Aspects such as which branded keywords they track for, strong calls to action, and ensuring that all ads direct to a live link - and not an unfortunate 404 page - are also vital."

Regulations such as the Protection of Personal Information Act and the European Union's GDPR add a compliance element to customer communications.

"The ability for consumers to easily opt in and opt out of communication is both a customer experience and a regulatory requirement. Digitally mature organisations will also ensure there is a pleasant and relevant rollout of content to a newly opted-in customer to deepen their interest and start building a positive relationship with the customer."

Pillar 4: Social Media

With nearly four billion social media users across all platforms worldwide, social media has become a ubiquitous part of modern digital life.

Singh says modern brands simply cannot afford to not have a strong social media presence. "At a minimum, companies should have systems and processes in place to regularly post content according to a well-thought-out social media policy, track engagement, and respond quickly and effectively to negative posts on their social pages."

For more digitally mature companies, social commerce could help drive valuable traffic and sales. "How easily are your customers directed from the social post to a product page with e-commerce capabilities? And how do you leverage content to build strong connections with a specific audience? For example, if you're a hardware supplier, do you have a YouTube channel with tutorials for how to use certain tools or how to fix common household DIY problems? And do those videos direct to other products relevant to the tutorial?"

According to Singh, companies should partner with experts that can lend a global perspective on best practices to accelerate their move to greater digital maturity.

"Our customer experience advisory team assesses more than four hundred touch points across the four pillars of digital maturity to give organisations a clear picture of their strengths and areas of improvement. This can eliminate wasted effort and more quickly push them to greater digital maturity, with all the customer satisfaction and revenue-boosting benefits that brings."

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