Chapter I

Attracting and Retaining Online Buyers: Comparing B2B and B2C Customers

Eileen Bridges, Kent State University, USA
Ronald E. Goldsmith, Florida State University, USA
Charles F. Hofacker, Florida State University, USA

Abstract

This chapter addresses similarities and differences in e-commerce needs for customers in business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplaces. We discuss how and why customers are attracted to online buying in general and to a supplier in particular for each of these types of markets. We further compare the characteristics of customers who choose to buy online with those who prefer to continue with more
traditional means of purchasing, providing some possible reasons for observed differences. The customer’s online experience may influence both satisfaction and buying behavior, so we address the antecedents of the experience, including Web site design and the nature of customer involvement with the site. We note the importance of Web site efficacy (usefulness and ease of use) as well as experiential elements of online shopping in customer satisfaction and retention and make specific recommendations for marketing managers in firms offering a Web presence.

Introduction

The emergence of e-commerce as a way of doing business has created an environment in which the needs and expectations of business customers and consumers are rapidly changing and evolving. This situation presents marketing managers with the challenge of ascertaining which elements of marketspace are new and how much continuity can be retained from the past. Some marketers apparently believe that it is enough to offer a Web site, maintaining a superficial appearance that the firm is progressive, or they ignore the Web altogether, possibly making use of digital technology to support existing business plans. Others take the opposite tack, saying that everything is changing and that nothing can remain the same (e.g., Feather, 2000; Murphy, 2000). A more balanced view proposes that people are basically the same but that new technologies are changing many of the ways customers shop and buy – thus, many businesses must overhaul their operating models to create digital strategies that meet changing needs and preserve competitiveness (Downes & Mui, 1998; Wind, Mahajan & Gunther, 2002). Our position is consistent with this balanced view. We believe that while much is changing, many fundamentals remain. Thus, we suggest ways that managers can use well-grounded concepts from consumer behavior and marketing theory, adapting them to new technologies.

We begin by considering characteristics of the most innovative online buyers and how marketers might best attract these individuals to Web sites. Quite a lot has been learned in the past few years about online customer behavior. This knowledge should benefit e-marketers in their efforts to develop successful online marketing strategies. These topics are important because now that many
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