

# Q&A

Investing in user experience now will prepare retailers for the future of ecommerce

An executive conversation with **Brian McGovern**, partner, client services, iMedia



As more customers flocked online during COVID-19, reaching the right customers and providing the right message became retailers' No. 1 priority. Customer experience took center stage as retailers and brands scrambled to make an impression on new customers—as well as keep their existing ones—while competing with behemoths like Amazon and Walmart. To discuss how the pandemic has provided both retailers and brands with an opportunity to interact directly with their customers and provide them with a great shopping experience, Digital Commerce 360 spoke with Brian McGovern, partner, client services at iMedia.

## How has COVID-19 affected customer experience trends?

Two patterns have emerged around customer experience because of the pandemic. First, many brands that typically relied on retail or B2B to sell their products shifted their focus to sell digitally, direct-to-consumer. And many of them needed to go to market quickly to build or enhance their ecommerce presence. To do that, they needed technology—such as a cloud-based ecommerce platform, like BigCommerce—that is robust and quick to market.

Second, retailers that were already selling online doubled-down on investing in customer experience—because that's the value they are providing over the big channels like Amazon. They invested in technology that allowed them to fulfill orders as fast as possible, improve operations, and create better online content. Essentially, they focused on building a more sophisticated sales approach online.

## What have been the most significant challenges they've faced?

Quite a few brands were unprepared for the level of online growth they experienced at the start of the pandemic. So, they've struggled to keep up with demand. Staffing was difficult because of economic uncertainty, but they had a huge increase in online demand that proved steady while retail channels went dark. This is where we saw many of them invest in various technologies and strategies to help manage these challenges and create efficiencies in logistics and day to day operation.

Keeping up with customer expectations also proved challenging. Customers want frequent communication about order, inventory, and backorder status. Retailers must be able to push those messages out via text, email, and other relevant channels. Moreover, they need to reach out to customers with offers, how to's, and meaningful content. So, they need technology and strategy that can help them achieve that—because that's the value they're providing over the big box channels.

## What strategies or best practices can they implement to overcome these challenges?

There are several different strategies. Companies need to realize that the shift to digital is permanent and they will want to take a more customer-centric approach to the shopping experience they offer in a DTC setting. They should consider becoming storytellers for their brand and creating a purchase experience that they can control and customize completely.

A headless approach to ecommerce can help them do that. BigCommerce, a leading multi-tenant SAAS eCommerce platform, has APIs that let retailers and brands fully customize their ecommerce experiences. A content management system can work as the delivery engine for the customer experience while, behind the scenes, APIs are driving the commerce experience, implicitly handling must haves like security, etc. That allows brands to create a completely customized shopping experience from start to finish using a best of breed approach.

## What lesson should retailers take away from this shift in ecommerce due to the pandemic?

The growth opportunity is huge. It may take a bit of a strategy shift. It may take the realization that we may still be years away from being fully comfortable going back into stores. But digital is here to stay. That means making investments in technology and in user experience now will pay off in the long run.



# SCALE YOUR ECOMMERCE STRATEGY

**Ecommerce will make up 22% of global retail sales by 2023.**

Deliver a great user experience to set your brand and online store apart from the big box ecommerce channels. If your brand is new to ecommerce or not, if it's shifting from B2B or retail to DTC, if it's just looking to deliver a more compelling user experience – consider investing in your consumers and deliver a seamless shopping experience.

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