

# FROM SEARCH TO SALE - THE MODERN ONLINE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

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# FROM SEARCH TO SALE: THE MODERN ONLINE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Getting into the minds of customers can be challenging, but it is necessary if a business is to understand why a customer is motivated to visit and buy from their online store. Understanding the customer buyer journey makes it possible for businesses and marketers to identify what actions they can take across various touch-points to increase conversions and online sales.

Advancements in technology means that the challenges faced by marketers today are much different to the ones faced by marketers ten, five and even one year ago, and they are continuing to evolve. Mobile technology and improvements to connectivity are constantly changing consumer habits; with greater access to the internet, there has been a significant increase in the amount of business that is done online. In **November 2018**, 21.6% of all retail sales were made online – up from 6% a decade before.

Discovering where and how your customers interact with your business online is a key aspect of generating more conversions through online sales. To do this, you need to outline a typical online customer journey for people who are engaging with your business on the internet.

In this whitepaper, we'll cover:

- What a customer journey is
- A visualization of the typical online customer journey
- How technology evolves the online customer journey
- How to define and map your customer journey
- Why data is vital to establishing your customer journey.



## WHAT IS THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY?

The intentions and circumstances of each individual customer that comes into contact with your business may differ in any number of ways. Some have never heard of your brand and may be in the early research phase of their online journey; others may come online with the express intent to purchase, already well aware of exactly what they want to buy. How and where customers weave their way down the funnel to purchase is what we term the “customer journey”.

There are dozens of unique scenarios generating dozens of customer journeys. The challenge is to map out these journeys to learn more about how you can refine and improve them in order to increase online conversions and generate more revenue.

## HOW TECHNOLOGY IS EVOLVING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Advancements in technology shape the way we shop; it is now easier than ever to discover, compare and ultimately, purchase. Having an infinite knowledge space in the palm of our hands has revolutionized ecommerce and shifted the fundamentals of human shopping behavior.

Here are five significant technological trends that are shaping customer journeys in today’s ecommerce. For any business, it’s worth considering ho

your customers might be interacting with the following technology.

### 1. SMARTPHONES

Smartphones are more than just a means of communication with a screen. In many ways, they are what guides us in our everyday lives. They help us decide what to eat and where to visit and hand us the ability to find facts that settle debates with friends. The average person checks their smartphone **52 times a day**, helping us make informed everyday decisions.

No better is the power of the smartphone displayed than in online shopping. From researching a product, comparing brands and making a purchase, consumers head online in search of what they want to buy. Smartphones are fast becoming the dominant method to do so.

### What it means for the customer journey

For years, we have seen consumers move towards using mobile devices over desktop for searching online. It’s something Google has begun to recognize, evidenced by a March 2018 update that rolled out mobile-first indexing. Businesses must ensure their website is optimized to provide a user-friendly experience on mobiles if they are to keep up with the demands of the modern consumer.

Today, mobile-first user experience is a must. Google discovered that **40% of consumers** prefer to do their entire shopping journey on their smartphone. If your website is difficult to use on mobile, or there is no means to complete a purchase, customers will head elsewhere to a competitor who can offer them what you can’t.

## 2. VOICE SEARCH

By 2020, it's **predicted** that 50% of all searches made online will be performed by voice, with younger generations found to use voice assistants more often than older generations. It's likely that this is a result of growing up with technology, making speaking to artificial intelligence seem like second nature.

Currently, voice search is mainly used for short search queries such as getting directions or sending a quick message hands-free. However, advancements in technology over the past few years has made it possible to make purchases through home devices like Amazon Echo and Google Home. Consumers are able to buy a pizza, order a taxi or even replenish their groceries through a simple command. As the technology grows, you'll be able to complete more complex customer journeys using only your voice.

### What it means for the customer journey

The debate around voice search is still ongoing. Some see it as a phase that will eventually die down; others see it as the next big shift in online consumer behavior. Either way, its impact on the customer journey is something businesses need to consider.

To show the potential power of voice search, contemplate the following scenario. At home, you get a text saying your car is broken down. Using just a few simple voice commands, a user could research local garages and book an appointment. Then, they research and book a train ticket for the next day, ensuring they can still get to work.

Brands who provide consumers with the power to purchase without even touching a button could win big if voice search takes off.

## 3. ONLINE REVIEWS

Today, the power of "social proof", or examples of positive, real-world use of a product, is a significant consideration in the decision-making process. With so many different product options and brands to buy from, **91% of consumers** say they read reviews online before making a purchase, with 84% saying they trust reviews just as much as a personal recommendation.

### What it means for the customer journey

Incorporating customer reviews is one of the best ways to win over customers who are evaluating their options. It can also provide a handy boost to your SEO endeavors. Positive reviews act as a strong signal of trustworthiness and authority, so it pays to get a handle on them.

After purchase, prompt customers to leave a review and monitor the responses. A negative review is an opportunity to gain valuable insight that could feed into improving your online presence and customer journey.

## 4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE INFLUENCERS

We're all influenced by people we admire. One by-product of social media has been the ease at which we can access the lives of celebrities, and has created a whole new genre of online influencers. In turn, it's opened a new way for brands to get their products in front of consumers that would have previously not existed.

As potential customers decide between your product or your competitors', maximizing the channels you can reach and promote to customers could be the difference between making a sale, or not. If a social media influencer is spotted promoting your product, it could sway customers in the research phase of the journey towards your brand.

### What it means for the customer journey

Social media could soon be the catalyst for a customer journey that exists entirely outside of your website. Instagram has recently introduced in-app payments features, allowing browsers to purchase products they see embedded in posts.

This means that social media-only customer journeys are a real possibility, both now and in the future. It also elevates the importance of online influencers to even greater heights as in-app purchases become possible not just through brands, but also influencer accounts.

Industries ranging from fashion to gaming see real benefits from working with influencers to promote their products to customers in the purchasing journey. If you could cut out the need to then find that product online, they could become a more significant part of the online customer journey.

## 5. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In the years to come, artificial intelligence is going to play a big role in the evolution of the customer journey. Applied across a number of channels, it can help to gain deeper, more useful insight on customer behavior.

Artificial intelligence can already be seen to be making changes to the customer journey. First, chatbots. Conducting conversations with customers, chatbots take on the role of 24-hour customer service. Answering simple questions, offering solutions about a product, and acting as a guide to finding the product you want, chatbots help customers get the answers they need outside of usual office hours.

Secondly, personalization. Hitting the right customer at the right time with the right message is one of marketing's biggest challenges. Using AI algorithms, brands are able to build customer-tailored promotions, delivering the right message on the right device at the right time.

### What it means for the customer journey

As a means to enhance the customer's journey, AI will soon be a business' strongest weapon. Forward-thinking companies are pouring budget into creating AI-powered algorithms that can learn more about the customer and anticipate their route down the customer journey.

The data is already coming in to support its use. **27% of consumers** said they would use a chatbot to buy a basic item. As the sophistication of the technology grows, trust in chatbots when making a purchase will grow.

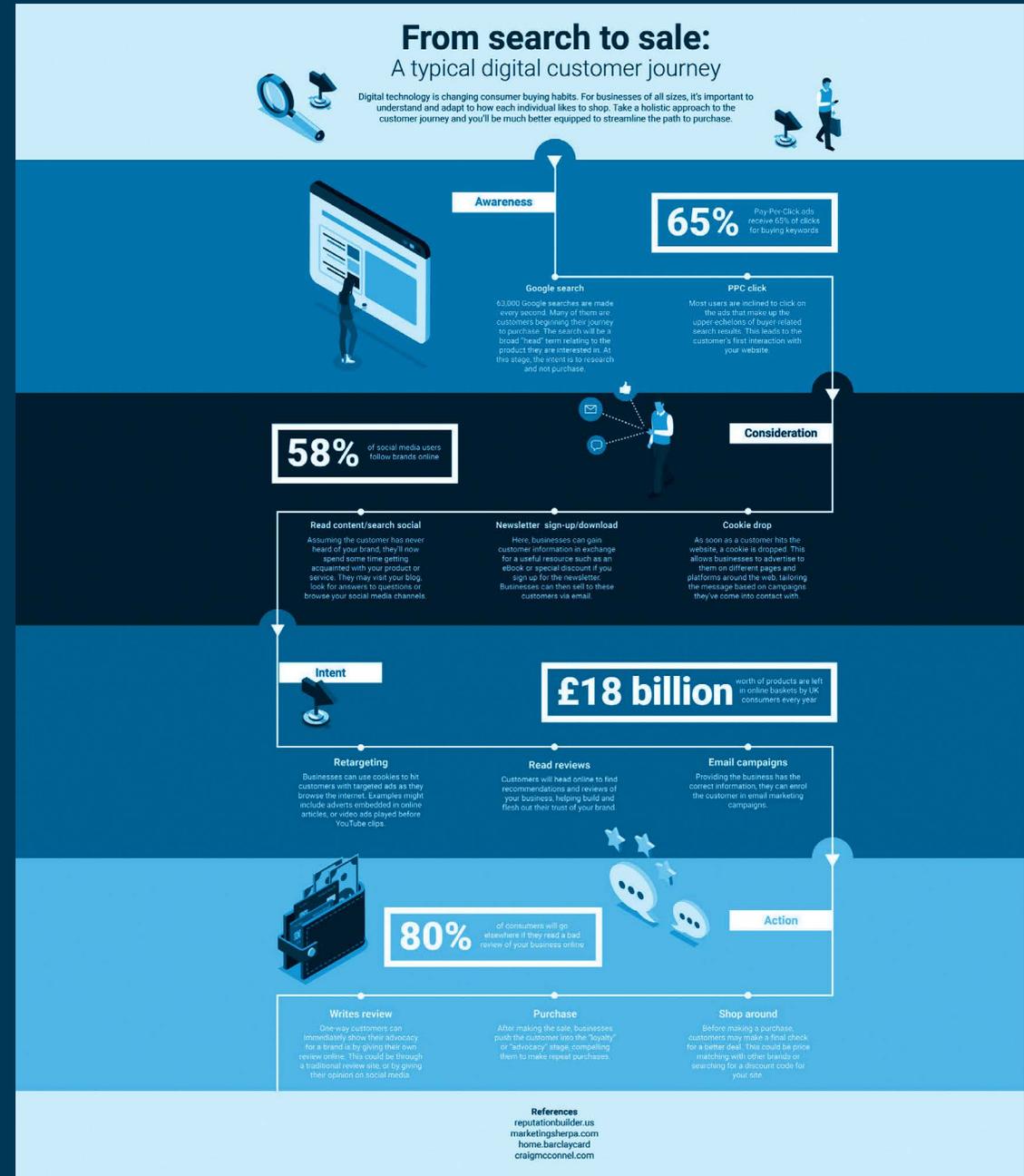




# THE TYPICAL MODERN ONLINE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Modern technology has expanded the number of touchpoints a single customer might encounter a business on their purchasing journey, many of which sit on third-party websites or platforms. It's important to get a handle on every single one of them. If one step in the customer journey isn't up to standard, it can derail the process and see customers head to your competitors.

Today, the typical online customer journey looks like this:



## HOW THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY CHANGES FOR DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES

*Depending on the available touchpoints, motivations, and industry, customer journeys can differ widely*

### MARKETPLACES

Sites like Amazon and Gumtree hold a few of the typical stages, or touchpoints, within their own websites. After the initial research phase, product searches and comparisons are made without leaving the site.

Reviews are even more powerful in marketplace journeys: sellers range from individuals selling their unwanted items to significant, global brands, and building trust is vital for lesser-known sellers who want to compete against bigger vendors. Positive reviews are the easiest way to gather consumer trust, and are also often a ranking factor marketplaces use when deciding a product's position in the listings. Again, the review process is often part of the marketplace's infrastructure, neglecting the need to look elsewhere.

### FINANCE

More than most, you can expect any finance-based purchases such as loans and mortgages to be subject to tighter scrutiny on the customer journey. Financial services are in a position of authority on what is an important but complex industry.

Given the higher risk of the product, customers tend to spend more time in the research phase, often visiting multiple sites and reviews to answer any outstanding questions and seek confirmation on a brand's trustworthiness. Customers are also more likely to reach out to the brands via online chat, in order to seek their expertise. For a business, this offers a unique opportunity to mold a customer's journey to purchase.

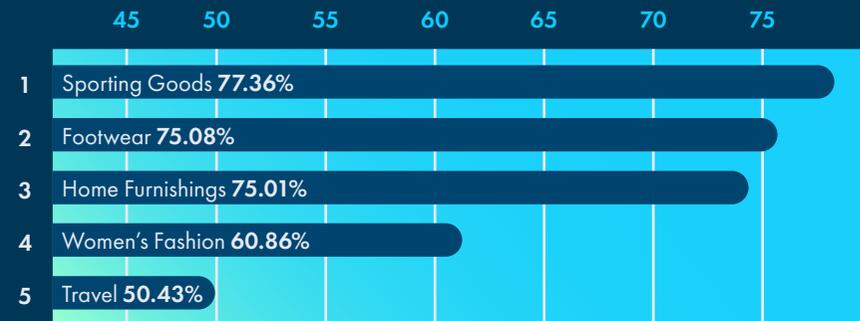
### TRAVEL

Holiday shoppers are the most indecisive of them all. [Using our own analysis](#), we found that just 50% of travel customers make a purchase on the same day in which they first visited the product page. This is significantly lower than the overall average of 68% compared with four other B2C industries.

In fact, consumers browse travel websites weeks before they are ready to make a purchase, which makes marketing activity like retargeting and email campaigns of vital importance to travel companies. Presenting prospects with the right message at the exact time they are ready to book helps to move them further down the funnel.

#### Industry Averages

% of customers that make same day purchases.



Average 67.89%

## B2B

The B2B customer journey can be more complex than the B2C journey. There are often different decision makers involved in the buying process, and the decision makers may spend more time in the awareness and consideration stages.

Likewise, decision makers may request information from multiple websites during the intent phase so that they can gather more information before moving into the action phase.

B2B marketers will need to account for the extra steps in the B2B customer journey in their paid media strategy.



## HOW TO DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMER JOURNEY

To get a greater idea of a businesses customers, you'll need to undergo customer journey mapping. Despite the different paths customers take depending on the product or service they are purchasing, the principles of what business' need to know are the same.

### CUSTOMER PERSONAS

Who exactly are your customers? How old are they? What are their motivations and goals? How much money do they earn?

To get a greater understanding of the demographics of a typical buyer, you can develop customer personas. These are fictional representations that describe a variety of personality traits and situational circumstances of your customers. Aside from answering the questions above, you should include:

- **Family setup (married, children, etc,)**
- **Educational background**
- **Hobbies and interests**

It's important that you don't rely on opinions or assumptions when building your personas. Use real, data- driven insights to develop a clearer picture. Combine qualitative data (customer opinion and feedback) with quantitative data (web analytics, CRM data, customer surveys). Consider customer personas to be a humanization of company data.

Once you have identified exactly who your customer us, you'll be better equipped at influencing them on the purchasing journey.

### TOUCHPOINTS

Depending on a customer's persona, they will be more or less likely to use certain touchpoints (a place where a brand will come into contact with a customer) on their journey.

Draw up a list of all the places your customers come into contact with your brand. Here are a few examples that apply to most businesses:

- **Social media**
- **Review sites**
- **Website**
- **YouTube ads**
- **Email**

Once you've built an exhaustive list, you can assign them to different personas and stages of the customer journey.

## MAPPING

Combine the two elements above and start drawing up your customer journey map. Put yourself in the shoes of each of your customer personas and guide yourself through the funnel. Include:

- What emotions the customer is feeling at each stage
- Their goals at this phase of the customer journey
- The questions they need answering
- The touchpoints they are likely to use

Take this as an example of how to visualize the customer journey map.

### Example customer journey map

	RESEARCH	COMPARE	EVALUATE	PURCHASE	POST-PURCHASE
EMOTIONS	Curious Enthusiastic Questioning	Subjective Indecisive Hesitant	Focused Expectant Hopeful	Excited Optimistic Eager	Satisfied Content Accomplished
GOALS	Develop Knowledge about exactly what it is I want and what exists in the market	Research competitors and consider their USPs. Find most suitable product for me	Make a decision on a company that can meet my needs the best. Consider any product within that company.	Make a purchase	Evaluate purchase and consider future relationship with that brand. Offer feedback to business
QUESTIONS	What am I in the market for? How much will it cost? How does this product cost?	Which business meets my needs? Which can offer me the best deal? What should I be looking for?	Is this business reliable? What are the businesses' capabilities? What are other people saying about this business?	Was the purchase process smooth? Did I enjoy my experience? Did I get what I expected?	Did I make the correct decision? Will I purchase here again? What feedback should I leave?
TOUCHPOINTS	Increases accessibility and user experience for both users whosensitive environments so can't	Google Social Media Website Blog Comparison Sites	Website Customer Service Review sites	Website	Website Social Media Customer Service Email Review Sites

Customer journey maps help to identify and unblock customer pain points.

What part of the funnel are customers getting stuck in, and why? Consider the message you send to them and the medium with which you engage them. Does it achieve the goals and answer the questions of the customer? Is the tone in line with the intent of the customer at that time?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you have an area for your marketing or UX teams to refine and improve upon. Once you've made improvements, update the customer journey map and continue to evolve your efforts at pushing customers through the funnel.

## THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER JOURNEY INSIGHTS: DATA SCIENCE

Data has always been crucial in business. It allows us to make informed, evidence-based business decisions rather than simply relying on gut-feeling. Today, it's easier than ever for businesses to get hold of data and make actions based upon it.

Data-driven attribution models are becoming more sophisticated, allowing businesses to identify the value of each channel and make informed marketing decisions that will push prospects through the customer buyer journey. Using tools like Google's advanced analytics platform, Analytics 360, marketers can create data-driven models that provide further insight into how each channel is contributing to sales.

Previously, attribution models have been too one-dimensional, placing too much credit on the last touchpoint a customer interacted with before making a purchase, and creating silos for each channel. Using a more holistic attribution model, you can get insight into the value of every touchpoint a customer has interacted with, and the role this played in leading to a conversion.

Once you have a greater understanding of the role each channel plays in the customer journey, you can build a data-driven strategy that capitalizes on your strengths and improves your business' weaknesses. Not only will this help to improve the customer journey (and therefore, online conversions), it helps businesses to budget more effectively as they can identify which activity will

deliver the highest ROI. A custom attribution model delivers deeper insights into the ROI of each channel and gives businesses the power to redistribute budget that isn't bringing a return and pump more budget into channels that might have been neglected.

Technology continues to shape human behavior. One of the clearest applications of this comes in how we shop. Businesses have always been faced with the challenge of getting inside their customer's heads. Emerging technologies make the task of predicting your customer's journey to purchase even more unpredictable. But there's one thing that can be relied upon to make deeper, more insightful judgements.

Harness the power of data and help your customers make the journey to conversion.

### SEARCH LABORATORY CAN HELP

We keep data at the heart of all our global digital marketing. Letting data science and analytics inform every business decision, we use the best tools on the market to develop intricate, integrated campaigns.

We apply these skills to the customer journey. As experts in the Google Marketing Platform, including our status as a sales partner of Google Analytics 360, we can get a closer look at how customers interact with your website, identifying the performance of each touchpoint and assigning budget accordingly.

Then our channel expertise, including everything from SEO and Online PR to PPC and Programmatic, can take over to ensure that channel is working to push customers down the user journey and increase your rate of conversion.



# SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH IN DATA

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