

SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT: What It Takes to Win on Amazon

What Amazon Shoppers Want

The University of Washington study identified and ranked four aspects of the online experience that motivate a shopper to make a purchase.



How to Create Your Amazon Shopping Experience



Creating a Social Shopping Experience on Amazon



What does research show Amazon shoppers want from brands? The answer: the “just right” shopping experience.

Brands often treat Amazon product page content as an afterthought. But new research shows carefully crafted Amazon content holds the key to boosting shopper engagement and sales.

Traditionally, best-selling products have required eye-catching packaging, prominent shelf placement, and engaging in-store promotions to catch shoppers’ attention.

Showcasing products on Amazon’s digital shelf requires just as much attention to detail, according to new research from the University of Washington’s Sales and Marketing Strategy Institute (SAMSinstitute.com). Getting everything just right – image type, tone, text length – determines whether a product will succeed or flop online. The study results will be published in the March 2019 edition of the Journal of Marketing¹.

Analysis of 10,470 shoppers found that “just right” content can increase purchase intent by as much as 10%, a finding that was validated by a field experiment.

While using the right combination of design elements can multiply purchase intent, it’s not a one size fits all fix. This research demonstrated that brand and product factors play a critical role in determining the type of content that will drive sales.

“Brands that create an effective shopping experience on Amazon have a huge advantage over their competitors,” said Robert Palmatier, Research Director for the Sales & Marketing Strategy Institute at the university’s Foster School of Business. “It’s a matter of tailoring content for the brand and product that’s being sold.”

Amazon: Too Big to Ignore

All indicators point to the increasing importance of online retail to consumer brands big and small. By 2020, US retail ecommerce sales are expected to pass \$460 billion, with Amazon leading the pack.

“Amazon has become the de facto place where shoppers go to search for products,” says content26 President Mark White. “Shoppers might end up buying a product at Walmart. But chances are they’ve researched it on Amazon first.”

Studies show over half of all product searches start on Amazon, making it a hugely important touchpoint for shoppers to learn about products. Academic researchers from multiple universities looked at products across consumer packaged goods, consumer electronics, industrial electronics, and consumables, to find out what type of content converted visitors to buyers.

Brands that create effective “storefronts” (product pages) can expect boosts in shopper satisfaction and sales.

So what makes for effective Amazon storefronts? It depends. But never fear, here are some research-based recommendations for creating a great Amazon shopping experience.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Know Your Brand

How do Amazon shoppers respond to your brand?

University researchers found that strong brands (those with favorable reputations and high levels of consumer trust) benefit from building a more informative shopping experience. Well-known brands can’t afford to skimp on detail. Shoppers expect product pages with enhanced content (what Amazon refers to as A+ content) that is informative rather than gimmicky. They also want extras like charts that allow them to compare related products.

For these beloved consumer brands, researchers found that adding a single content element that improves the informativeness of the product pages can boost purchase intent by up to 5.4%.

“This research shows how important it is for brands big and small to re-think their Amazon content,” says content26’s Mark White. “Shoppers expect different content from well-known and upstart brands. And brands that refuse to give shoppers the content they want risk being ignored.”

Unknown brands need to focus on strengthening the entertaining aspects of their product pages and should consider, for instance, adding larger images which would allow consumers to get a better sense of the product.

But there’s more to content than brand strength. How shoppers view different products also plays an essential role in the type of content that needs to be created.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Know your products

Researchers found that Amazon shoppers want different content if they’re shopping for a Wi-Fi router loaded with technical features versus products you need to experience such as scented candles or clothing.

Additionally, Amazon recommendation agents (the carousels that tout “Customers who bought this item also bought...”) help shoppers navigate search products (those that you do not necessarily need to experience with your senses) by reducing information overload.

While brands can’t control Amazon’s recommendation agents, brands are increasingly using Amazon Advertising, a pay-per-click service, to help them show up on the sponsored product carousel on product pages.

For these search products, a very conversational style can be a distraction and detrimental to closing the sale. The same can be true when adding too much descriptive information to the product page of an experience product.

Product Factors that Affect Content Requirements:

Utilitarian – Seen as a necessity. Provides a functional value (i.e., diapers, shampoo). **Strengthen the informative aspects of the experience.**

Search – A product with easy-to-evaluate features (i.e., hammer, notebook). **Strengthen the informative aspects of the experience.**

Experience – The quality of the product is difficult to determine in advance (i.e., lipstick, clothes, wine). **Strengthen the social and sensory aspects of the experience.**

Complex – A product with many features or configurations (i.e., window blinds, pressure washer). **Strengthen the sensory aspects of the experience.**

RECOMMENDATION 3

Identify the content and design elements that would create the best possible customer experience

Once market research into brand strength and product characteristics has been completed, it’s time to begin assembling effective content.

While this research found that no single approach to a product page will work for every brand equally well, creating an entertaining experience is always a good starting point. Shoppers who derived pleasure out of interacting with a brand’s content were much more likely to click the “buy” button. Effective product pages also helped Amazon shoppers feel personal connections to brands and made them forget they were interacting with a machine, which made them more likely to buy.

The ideal content configuration depends on the product attributes and the brand strength. Here are a few examples:

- An internationally known toilet paper manufacturer should create content rich on descriptive detail, have essential content with five bullets, and should add a comparison matrix.
- An internationally known brand selling perfume should focus on a conversational linguistic style, include lifestyle pictures, and keep content concise.

Brands that want to keep up with the competition need to begin paying as much attention to their Amazon shelves as they do to their brick-and-mortar offerings. Effective content holds the key to connecting with Amazon shoppers and providing a branded experience within Amazon.

Questions Brands Should Ask Before Creating Amazon Content

1. Is a conversational tone required?
2. What level of descriptive detail would be optimal?
3. How many bulleted features should I add?
4. Should I include a comparison matrix?
5. Does the enhanced content need to “activate the senses”?

Research Partnership Brings Academic Insight to Businesses

SAMS Institute and UW-affiliated researchers partnered with content26, a Seattle-based digital agency that develops Amazon advertising and content strategies for many of the world’s most recognizable brands.

As part of the study, content26 created 256 “Amazon look-alike” product pages which allowed UW-affiliated researchers to test 13 product page elements. While adding a single element can boost a product up to 11.5%, related field research showed that adding multiple elements has a multiplicative effect. During the two months period of the field study, the tested search products more than doubled their sales when the page was edited to create an informative experience.

¹ See original research paper: Bleier, Alexander, Colleen M. Harmeling, and Robert W. Palmatier (2019), “Creating Effective Online Customer Experiences,” *Journal of Marketing*, 83 (2), 92-119, March 2019. The paper can be downloaded from SAMSinstitute.com.



About SAMS

The University of Washington’s Center for Sales and Marketing Strategy Institute (SAMS) links business and academics for knowledge. The institute works with firms on interesting sales and marketing problems to improve business performance as well as generate academic research. Interested businesses can contact the SAMS Institute to discuss joint research projects at SAMSinstitute.com.



About Content26

Content26 is a Seattle-based digital agency that develops Amazon advertising and ecommerce content strategies for many of the world’s most recognizable brands. To learn more visit content26.com.

Academic Contact at SAMS:

Robert W. Palmatier, PhD
University of Washington Professor & Research Director
Phone: 206.913.3388
Email: palmatrw@uw.edu

Academic Contacts of Affiliated Researchers:

Alexander Bleier, PhD
Frankfurt School of Finance & Management
Email: a.bleier@fs.de

Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD
Florida State University
Email: charmeling@business.fsu.edu

Media Contact:

Trinity Hartman, Director of Content
Phone: 206.706.3339
Email: trinity@content26.com