

3.10: Why It Matters- Multi-Channel Retailing

Learning about changes in the grocery industry over the past 20 years, we've reflected on the emergence of new distribution channels and non-traditional formats. While this has dramatically changed the competitive landscape, it's important that we also consider how the rise of technology is changing shopper behavior. These are changes that will further alter the retail landscape, as channels are blurred.

Online, engaged and connected without interruption, our consumers have high expectations for their shopping experience, the speed of fulfillment and customer service. They easily shift among a host of retail formats and channels to suit their needs. Online and offline, in-store and at-home, they engage with brands and retailers, expecting accessibility, consistency, and service.



Consider this example:

On a social network, a consumer sees a post from Pillsbury™, announcing the winners of the annual Pillsbury™ Bake-off. Interested, they search for past winning recipes and find themselves at Pillsbury.com. Inspired, they find a recipe they want to try and plan a trip to Schnuck's, their local supermarket, where Pillsbury items are available on-shelf.

Think about the implications of this:

1. When the consumer chooses to engage, they expect to find Pillsbury™ present on social networks and online—accessible.
2. Engaged, the consumer expects an experience similar to past interactions with the Pillsbury™ brand, regardless of whether it is on a social network, on-line or in-store. They expect the same style, tone and quality—consistency.
3. The consumer expects that they can access the information and products they want from Pillsbury™ quickly and easily—service.

For retailers, the bar is potentially higher. Think again about our consumer researching winning recipes from the Pillsbury™ Bake-off. What if they had already made their weekly trip for groceries and weren't planning another? What if Schnuck's doesn't carry everything they need? What if they can open another page on their phone or tablet or computer and place an order for those same groceries on Amazon.com or through InstaCart right now, without leaving home?

You see, not only do consumers have the same expectations of accessibility and consistency for retailers, but they may have elevated expectations around service regardless of whether it's online or offline. Specifically, they may also expect that retailers will accept orders online, complementing and copying in-store service while adding delivery.

What does this imply about how manufacturers and retailers must manage channels going forward?

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