Online Income Strategies presents . . .

# What's Ahead In . . .

# Top 5 Trends That Will Drive Ecommerce in 2018

Written by: **Derek O'Carroll**
**December 4, 2017**

The year 2017 will go down as the year merchants realized there is no longer any margin for error. Retail is moving so fast that automation is essential for survival. To compete and grow in today's real-time high-touch environment, retailers must offer and fully leverage multiple digital storefronts with flawless execution and service.

Product availability and timely receipt are the single-greatest priorities for ecommerce. What good is having a wonderful ecommerce site and personalized marketing strategy if you don't have operations streamlined? If you're offering five styles of brown shoes in size 8, they must be in stock and you must have the capability to ship them quickly within the timeframe promised. If not, someone else will – and you likely won't see that customer again.

There is good news for retail. Forrester has forecasted that U.S. online retail sales will reach more than $500 billion by 2020, driven by better web merchant execution, omnichannel efforts, Amazon growth and the economy. Holiday sales performance is also off to a bullish start, signaling huge opportunities for retailers across channels in 2018 – if they embrace the integrations and automation that yield both scale and sales.

Here are five trends that will drive ecommerce excellence in the next year.

## Automation Frees Up CX Strategy

A recent Brightpearl survey of 350 retailers found an average of 70% improvement in processing efficiency and negative service feedback after technology helped cut human errors 65%. Meeting

customer service standards will require embracing new technologies, such as chat bots and voice search, to help customer's research options and buy online. Automation technology – that is, automated processes, using clean data – will drive back-office efficiencies that free up retailers up to improve the customer experience (CX) and advance their personalization strategies.

## Integration Delivers Omni-channel Consistency

The survey also revealed that while the majority of retailers have an omni-channel strategy, less than 10% feel they are executing well. Customers expect to buy seamlessly and interact across channels, using different devices. It's not enough for retailers to have a presence across multiple channels; they must have efficient integrations. Retailers will get a firmer grip on omni-channel and use that understanding to integrate more online platforms to deliver a more consistent experience across channels.

## Technology Makes Immediacy Real

Next year will necessitate that merchants innovate to reimagine their customer journey, such as applying technologies that bring balance to their front and back office. More businesses will adopt technology that supports real-time commerce, so that they can quickly adapt to the challenges of 'immediacy' in today's omni-channel landscape.

## Social Storefronts Step Up

Social platforms are becoming virtual storefronts. A third of **Instagram** have purchased items after seeing them in photos or videos on the app (Marketing Week). **Instagram** and **Facebook** present unique opportunities for brand building and staying in front of users who scroll through their feeds daily. In 2018, we'll see more retailers begin integrating social commerce software with their shopping platform and ensuring they use technology that caters to social scrollers.

## Need for Speed in the Warehouse

Speed, convenience and accuracy now define an optimal shopping experience. Customers increasingly value the ability to buy items quickly and easily. They are far less patient about waiting – for great deals, new goods to show up in stores, and for order deliveries. In 2018, new challenges posed by demand for next- and same-day delivery. The need for accurate information about product availability, shipping and inventory counts will become the single-most strategic element for driving bottom-line success and establishing customer loyalty.

Derek O'Carroll is CEO of Brightpearl