



PERSONALIZATION PLAYBOOK:

The E-Commerce Marketer's Guide to Deep Personalization

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Growing burden of choice in e-commerce

As volumes in e-commerce continue growing, both consumers and retailers are struggling to deal with the overwhelm of products on offer.

For consumers, more is not necessarily better. With the ability of e-commerce stores to host a virtually infinite number of products, and the proliferation of smaller more niche brands, shoppers today must filter through a massive number of products to find the few that interest them. Relevant products with offers that serve their needs.

But with stores carrying more SKUs than ever before, the ‘ecommerce overwhelm’ is hurting the shopping experience.

According to a [2018 Personalization Pulse Check](#) report by Accenture, “nearly half (48 percent) of all consumers have left a business’s website and made a purchase on another site or in-store simply because it was poorly curated. This statistic has increased in every region surveyed last year, indicating that digital experiences are trending in the wrong direction.” The Accenture survey interviewed over 8,000 consumers from North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

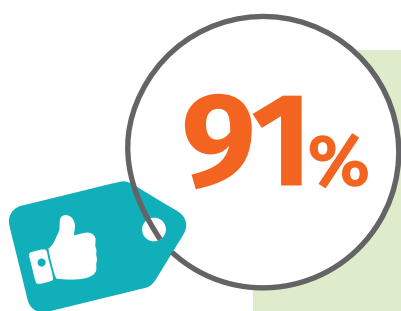


E-commerce retailers meanwhile are investing more energy to push discovery of an ever-growing catalogue of products. They must allocate more resources to technology and staff to ensure that customers are not overwhelmed and navigate away to another retailer simply because there were too many choices.

The challenge for e-commerce brands is how to meet consumer needs and find uniquely personalized ways to serve all of them without creating an overwhelm of choices.

Using a mix of technology and data strategy to understand customer choices for personalizing the online experience is the most promising solution. However, companies are lagging when it comes to personalization. And there is a constant increase in customers' expectations from e-commerce retailers to personalize their shopping journey.

Accenture's report [re-affirms the importance of personalized shopping journey for over 90% of the consumers surveyed](#).

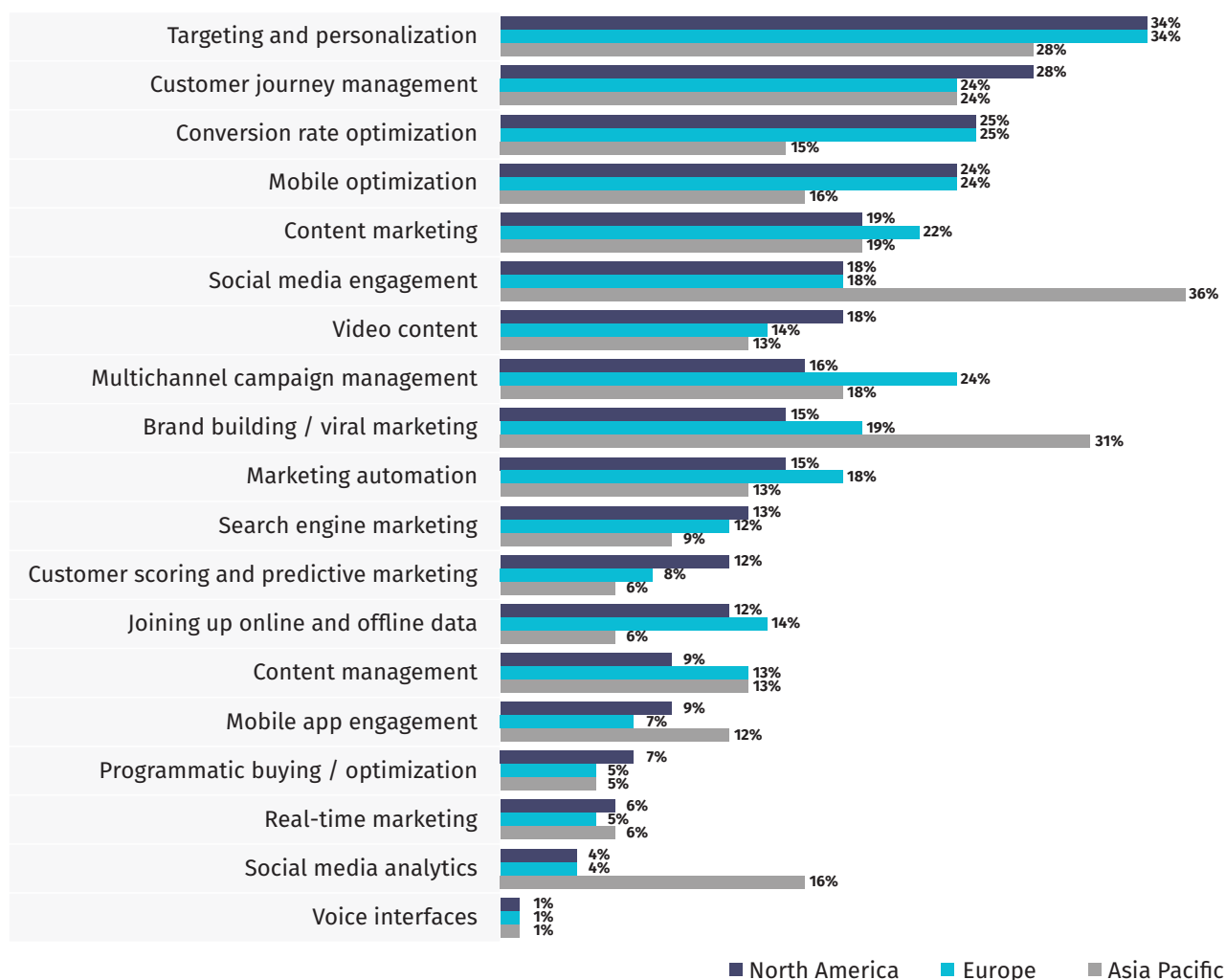


of consumers are more likely to shop with brands who recognize, remember, and provide relevant offers and recommendations.



E-commerce companies recognize the importance of deep personalization and understand that their users expect a better shopping experience. A report by Adobe and Econsultancy, [2018 Digital Trends in Retail](#), highlights that ‘Targeting and personalization’ was the number one priority for e-commerce marketers across North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

Which three digital-related areas are the top priorities for your organization in 2018? (Regional Comparison)

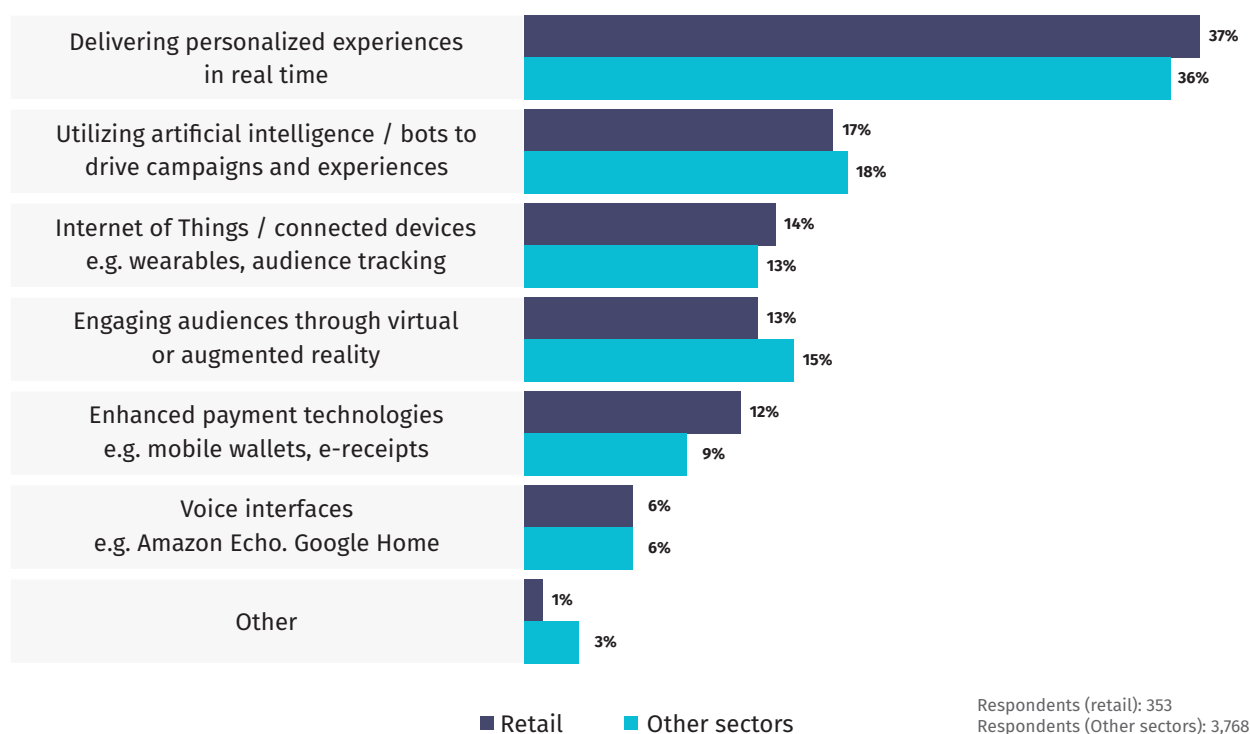


Methodology note: Respondents could select up to three options.

And interestingly, delivering personalized experiences in real-time is the most exciting priority for marketers for the next few years.

The [Adobe report notes](#) that, “Retailers recognize that the quality of customer experience will increasingly depend on being able to serve up the most relevant content and messaging.”

**Looking ahead, which of these do you regard as the most exciting prospect in three years' time?
(Retail Vs. Other Sectors)**



The value of personalization is clear – both for retailers and consumers. E-commerce companies need to build a 360-degree view of their customers to truly understand their unique preferences, needs and emotional triggers.

In practice however, technology, data and skilled resources remain significant challenges for ecommerce companies. These have held back their personalization efforts.

Retailers must invest in data and technology for better personalization

'The State of Retailing Online 2019', a report by US National Retail Federation and Forrester Research details the challenges and strategies around personalization for retailers in the US.

The top 10 barriers to improving online personalization were unsurprisingly ALL related to technology, data and automation capabilities.

Even though the technology has improved massively over the last

couple of years, ecommerce retailers have been slow to understand and embrace it for their stores.

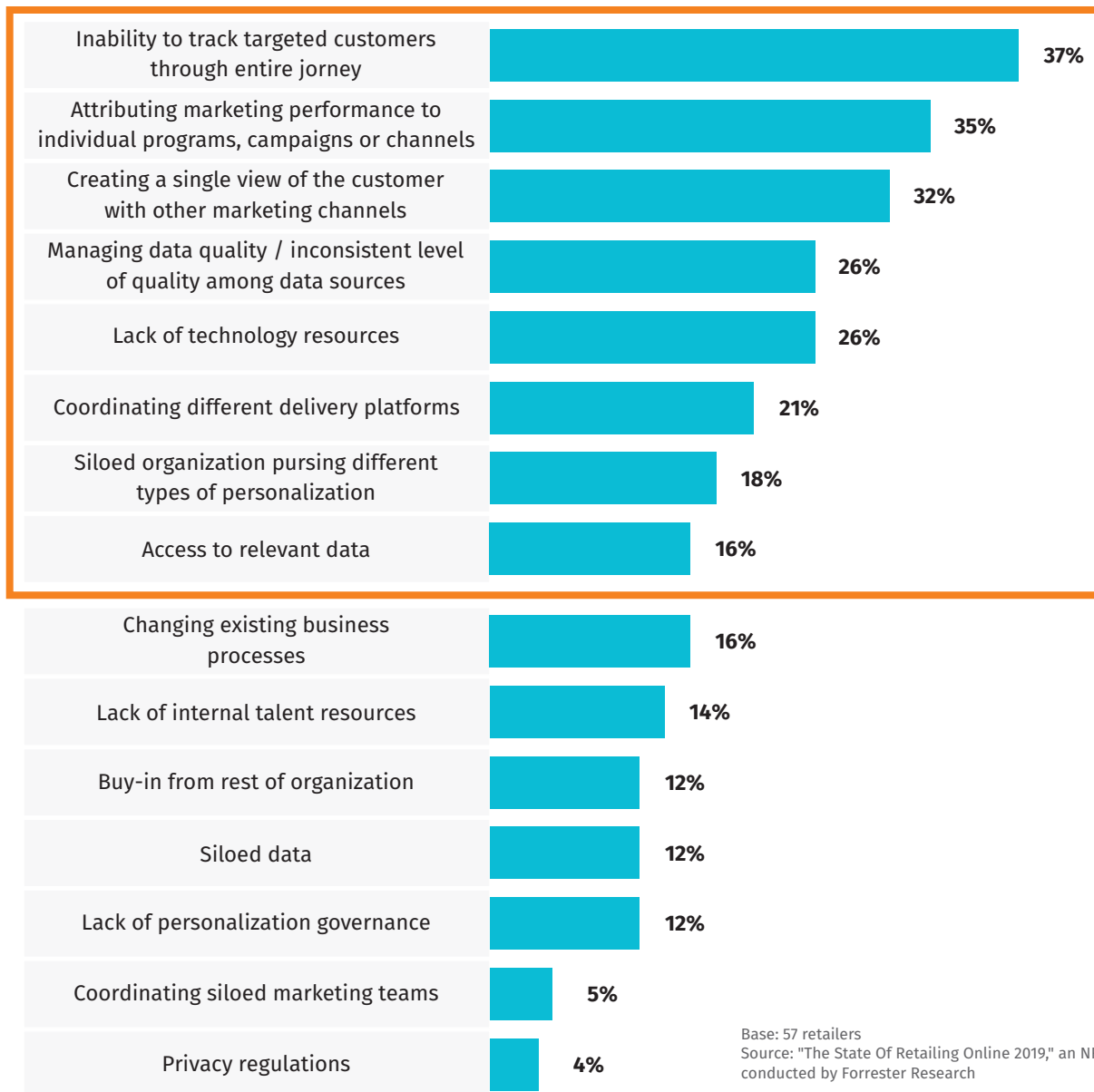


Progressive marketing automation and data platforms are helping e-commerce companies to effortlessly build detailed profiles of shoppers and automate content recommendations to make them appealing and relevant. Today, this can be done across the shopping journey – on their website, emails, notifications, and even social media.

Rewards of these investments in personalization are significant and long-lasting.

In this e-book we take a deep look at leading personalization techniques that e-commerce marketers can implement on their websites to boost customer engagement and promote loyalty.

"What are your three primary challenges to implement and grow/evolve your personalization strategy and tactics?"



1. **Personalize pages across your website**
2. **Show a personalized storefront to each user**
3. **Customize search to show more relevant results**
4. **Personalize re-engagement touchpoints to bring shoppers back**

A. Personalize pages across your website

E-commerce marketers understand the tremendous value of personalization across the shopper journey, but efforts in the past have mostly been limited to website retargeting and email marketing. Retailers have been slower to adopt deep personalization of their web stores.

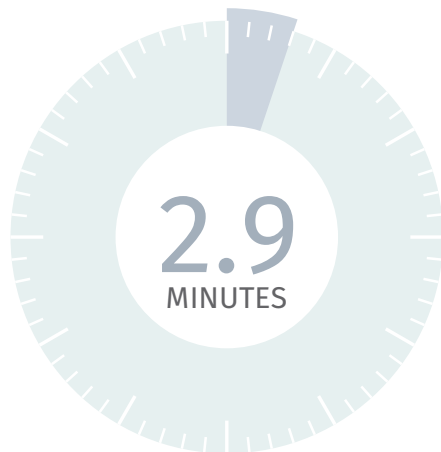
With thousands (and sometimes millions) of products spread across hundreds (and thousands) of pages on a typical e-commerce store, a user rarely has the time or willpower to browse products beyond their immediate interest. They either search for the product by brand name and product type or go straight to the category of interest and filter down from there.

Shoppers don't have the patience to stick with a single store either. If they cannot find what they need they are likely to bounce off and go to a search engine or a competing store to continue their journey.

Personalization cuts the time between the initial urge to browse and the event of finding the right item thus reducing the odds of them leaving your store.

This does not translate to shoppers spending less time on your site once they find what they need. Delighted by the good experience, such shoppers stick around longer to continue browsing related products.

Time spent on retail site



SHOPPERS THAT DIDN'T CLICK
A RECOMMENDATION



SHOPPERS THAT CLICKED
A RECOMMENDATION

An [analysis by Salesforce of over 150 million shoppers](#) and 250 million visits to ecommerce websites show that deep personalization delivers a massive lift to your revenue.

The Salesforce analysis shows that by encouraging up to 4.5X more shoppers to move swiftly through the purchase process, personalized recommendations boost checkout rates and revenue.

SHOPPERS THAT CLICKED RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:



Shoppers who engage with personalized recommendations have also been proven to frequent the store more and spend more dollars with the store in their lifetime.

Likelihood to return to site



Products viewed

Shoppers that clicked a recommendation viewed 4.8 times more unique products per visit.



Clearly, shoppers who engage with personalized recommendations are among your most loyal and profitable customers.

Marketing automation today offers the capability to build 360-degree profiles of each of your shoppers. With the rich data on each user, you can personalize the pages on your store to recommend products based on their unique profile.

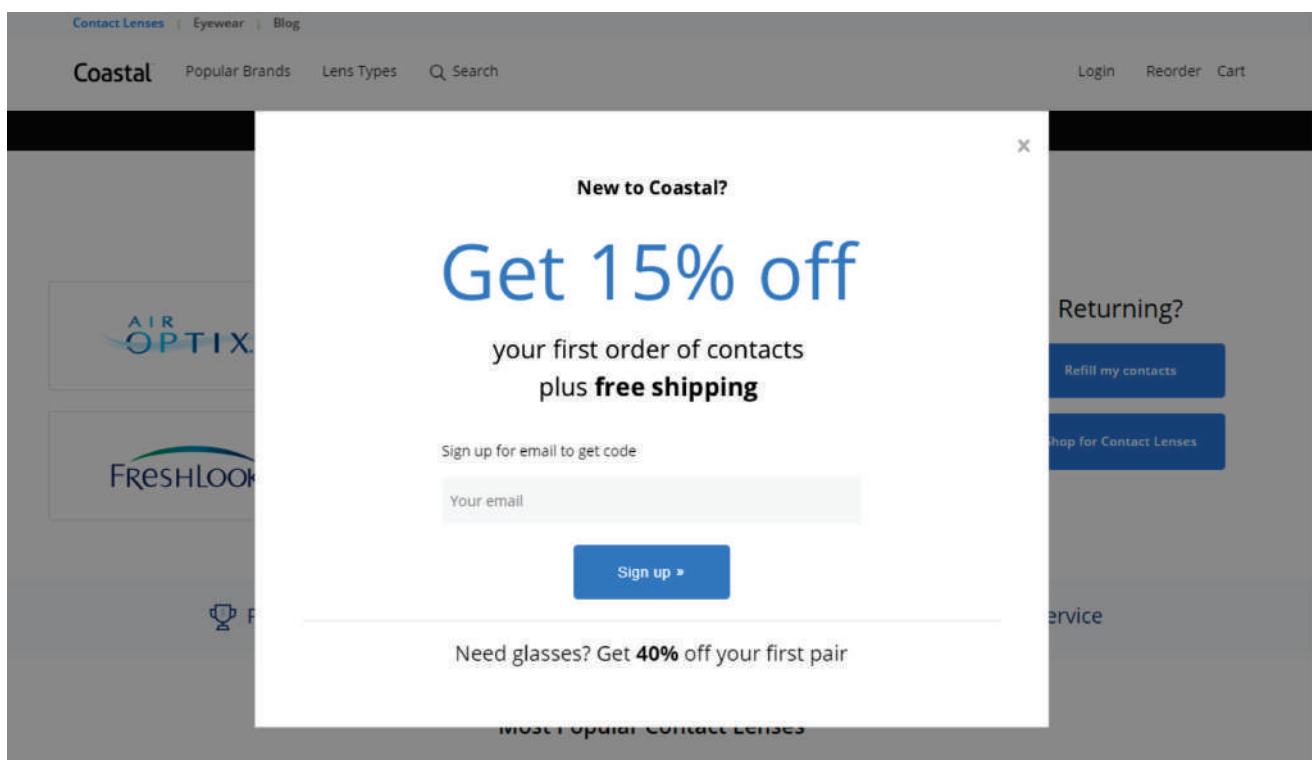
E-commerce retailers can personalize the experience on your website in hundreds of different ways. Here are some important ones that you can start with low effort.

1. **Personalize product showcase banners** to drive more users to category listing and product display pages.

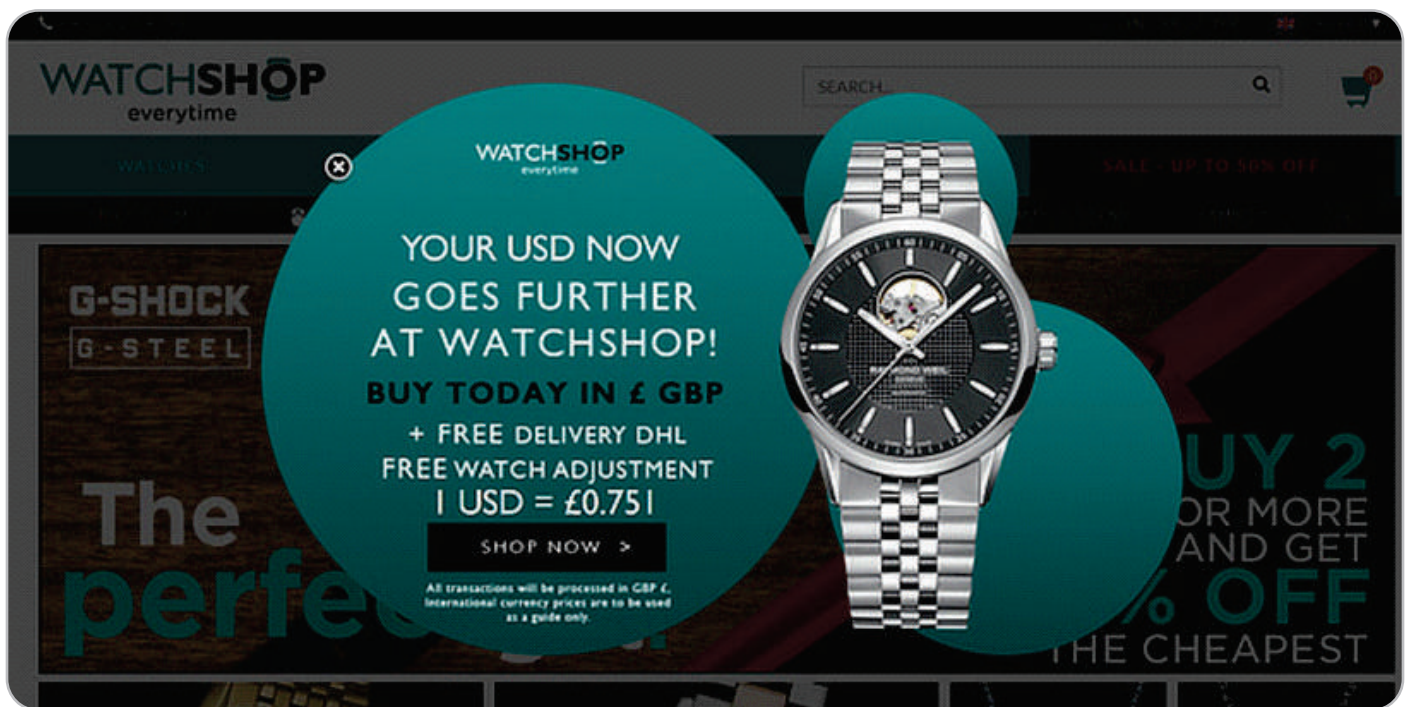
Product showcase banners are a great way to push users to specific product pages and to make them transition smoothly between different categories.

E-commerce websites can further personalize these banners based on individual user's historical behavior to take them directly to products and categories they are most likely to purchase or engage with.

[Coastal.com](#), an online eyewear retailer, differentiates between new and returning visitors to show them personalized content. To entice first-time users to make their first transaction on the store, it shows them a banner with a 15% discount on their first purchase. Returning visitors see an option to refill their contact lens supply instead.



[Watchshop](#), a UK-based watch retailer, did something different with their banner personalization. Knowing that they often get customers from across the Atlantic, they used geo-location targeting to personalize the showcase banner on the homepage with USD-specific content to make customers from the US feel more welcome.



2. **Personalize category listing page** to prioritize products the shopper is likely to buy.

With marketing automation, you can easily customize the category listing pages for each visitor. You can set up the system to use both individual and aggregate customer data for reordering the products within individual categories.

For example, let's assume that a user arrives on the electronic category page and the system has tracked that in the past he has spent 15% of his browsing time on audio equipment. Clearly the shopper has a strong interest in audio products.

Based on this information, the system can automatically show him more personalized banners for audio gear, like headphones and speakers, at the top of the electronics category page on his future visits.

Category-level re-ordering can also be done in real-time, for example, based on the previous products browsed in the same session. This increases the likelihood of the customer on clicking and progressing through the shopping flow as they see more recommendations relevant to their current ‘moment of interest’.

This data can also be combined with ‘products popular with other customers’ to deliver a recommendations list with more variety to the shopper. Recommendations that combine his individual choices with the ones of other users with whom he has an overlap in preferences.

3. Personalize product display page

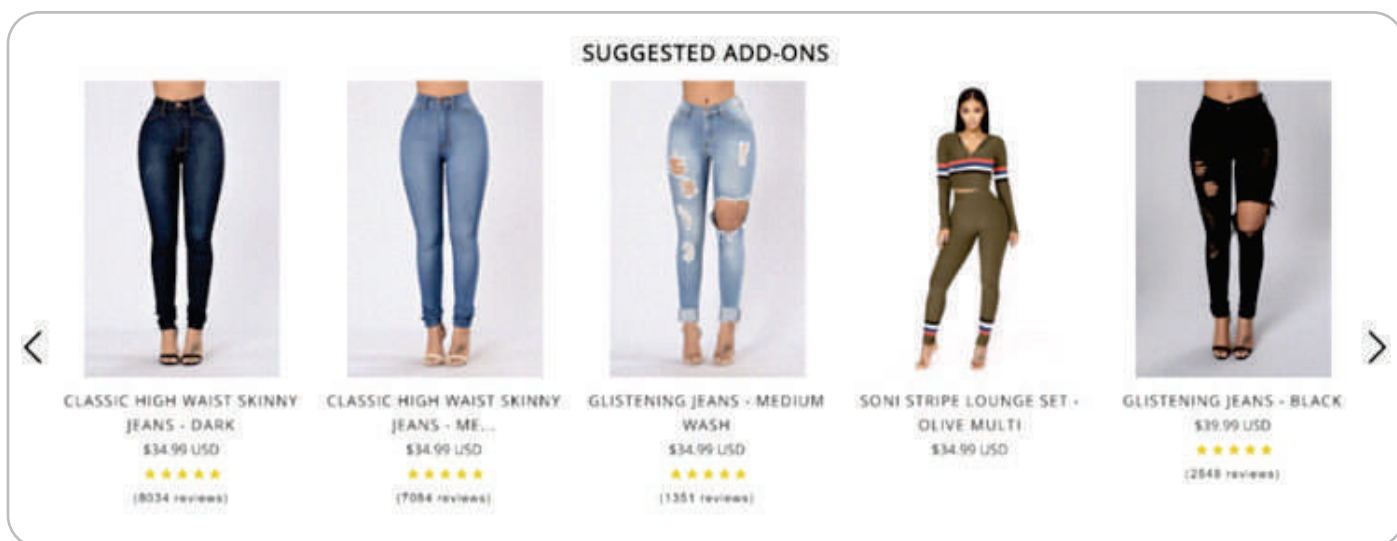
When customers spend time on product listing pages, they give strong signals about their preferences – for product type, brands, ratings, and their current needs.

E-commerce retailers can encourage buying behavior on these pages by using personalization to show a curated list of products in individual widgets, for example:

- customers that viewed the current product also viewed
- other best-selling products related to the product
- products that other customers bought after viewing the product
- products that are offered as a combo with the current product

Product display page personalization can accelerate the shopping journey by showing other products from the same or closely related categories that the user has viewed in the past.

For example, [Fashion Nova recommends](#) similar jeans and complimentary lounge sets on its Shopify webstore.



Customizing product pages for each shopper can show tremendous results for e-commerce stores. If you think about the flow of a purchase journey, a product page is the penultimate page for a shopper before they move to the checkout process.

It's important that the page delivers what the shoppers expect. But also keeps them engaged to continue the journey to other products they may be interested in.

For example, [Pura Vida Bracelets created two recommendation categories](#) on their product pages generating over 24M recommendations and 1.6MM clicks, 7.9% average conversion rate and over 10% of overall revenue.



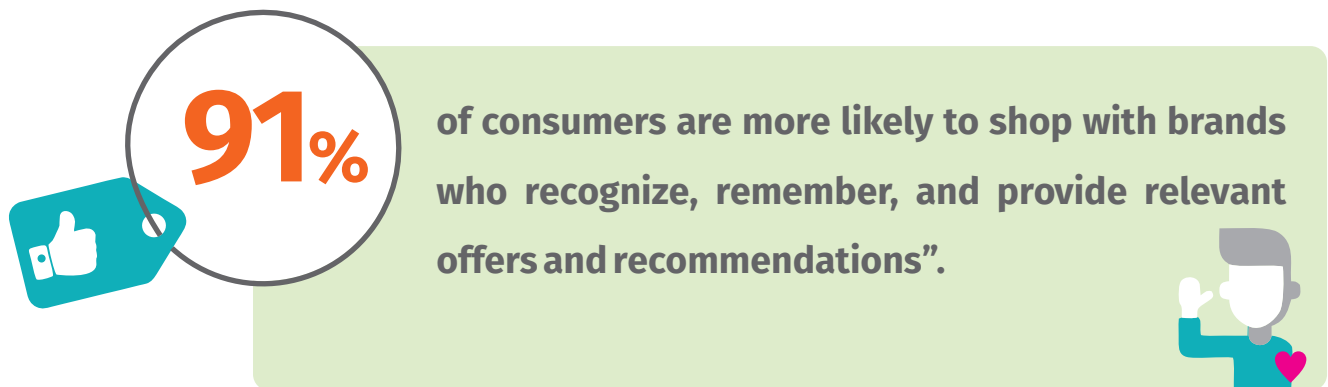
Personalizing product and category pages has three clear benefits.

First, it creates more diverse ideas in the mind of shoppers about different products they could buy which they may not have thought of on their own. This encourages a shopper to think of new products and categories he may be interested in – either now or in the future.

Second, it improves the visibility of your catalogue by promoting discovery of hidden gems which may not be popular yet but have the potential of matching the shopper's needs. This spreads out the page views more evenly across a larger share of your offerings rather than always being dominated by the most popular products.

Finally, and importantly for retailers playing the long-term game, category and product level personalization massively improves the customer experience. It encourages repeat behavior and loyalty thus generating a higher life-time value from customers.

Going back to [a key finding of the report by Accenture](#),



B. Show a personalized storefront to each user

In 1998, Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos, had a vision of an ecommerce website that is so deeply personalized that every user sees their own version of the store. In [an interview with Washington Post](#) he famously said "If we have 4.5 million customers, we shouldn't have one store. We should have 4.5 million stores."

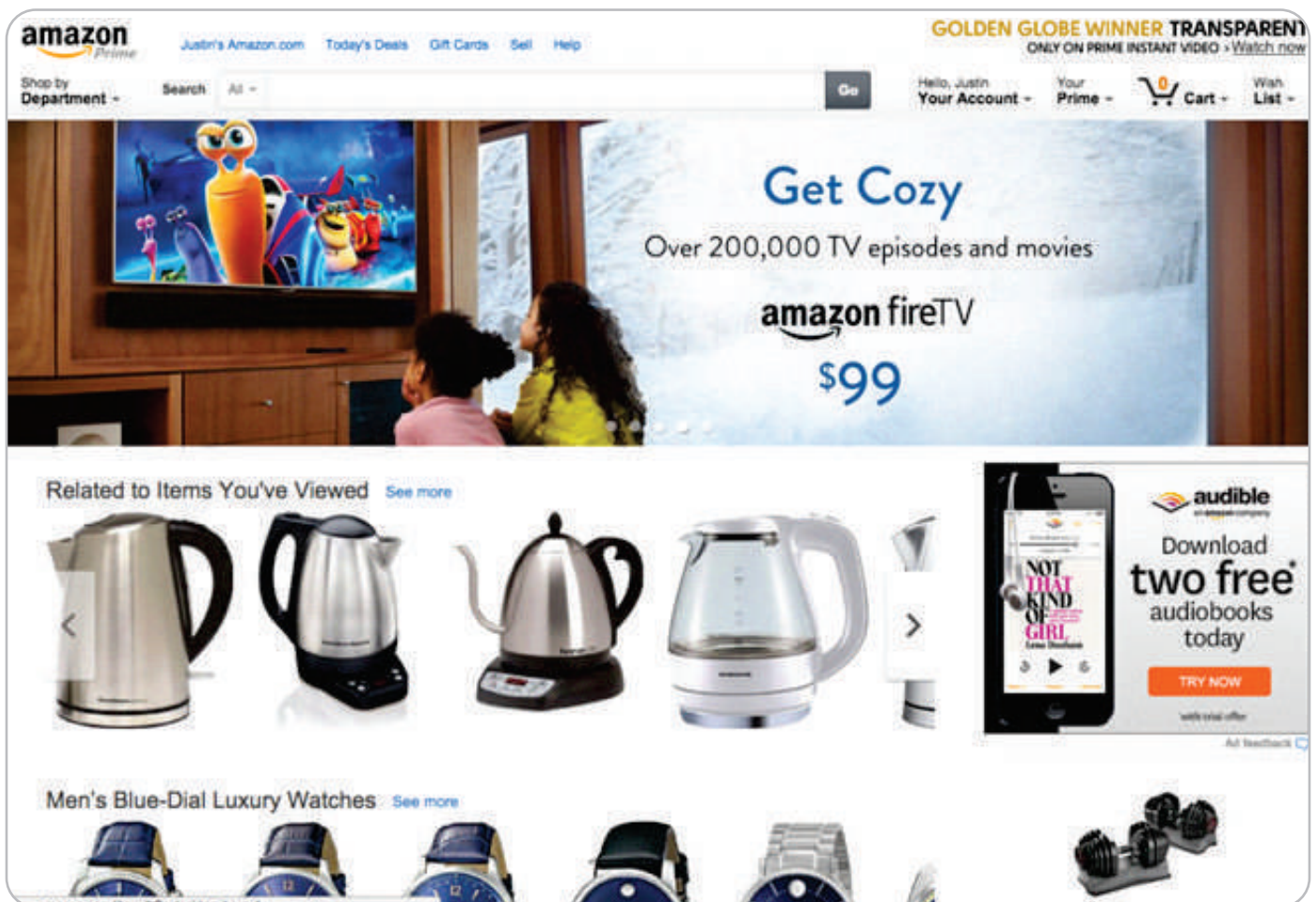
Bezos believed that the future success of e-commerce retail was in deep personalization – in the ability of online stores to create a unique experience for every user from the moment they entered the virtual door.

The homepage is the virtual doorway to your store. It's the first view shoppers get of your product catalogue. And the first experience most will have with your brand. Homepage personalization is an effective way to take visitors directly to categories and products they are most interested in while offering a delightful experience.

True to Bezos' vision from two decades ago, Amazon's homepage today is uniquely personalized to showcase:



- Products and categories that a customer has browsed in the past
- A 'Continue where you left off' section that shows 3-4 most recently browsed products
- Other products related to the items the customer viewed
- Recommendations and best-sellers in top categories that the user frequents
- Ability to quickly re-order products purchased in the past to generate more ideas



Inspired by your shopping trends:



Recommendations for you in Office Products



Like-new Smartphones [See more](#)



Best Sellers in Computers & Accessories [See more](#)



Best Sellers in Cell Phones & Accessories [See more](#)



With Amazon-like extensive personalization, the homepage gets transformed into a personalized store for each user. Their own space to start every new shopping session. Think of it as their 'personal shopper' that removes the noise from shopping and helps customers focus on products that matter to them.

This 'personal shopper' understands what they need, knows their choices for shipping and payment, is aware of their favorite brands, delivers bespoke recommendations using their purchase history and for categories such as apparel and shoes, even knows their size!

Your customers enjoy a deeply intimate experience every single time they visit your store.

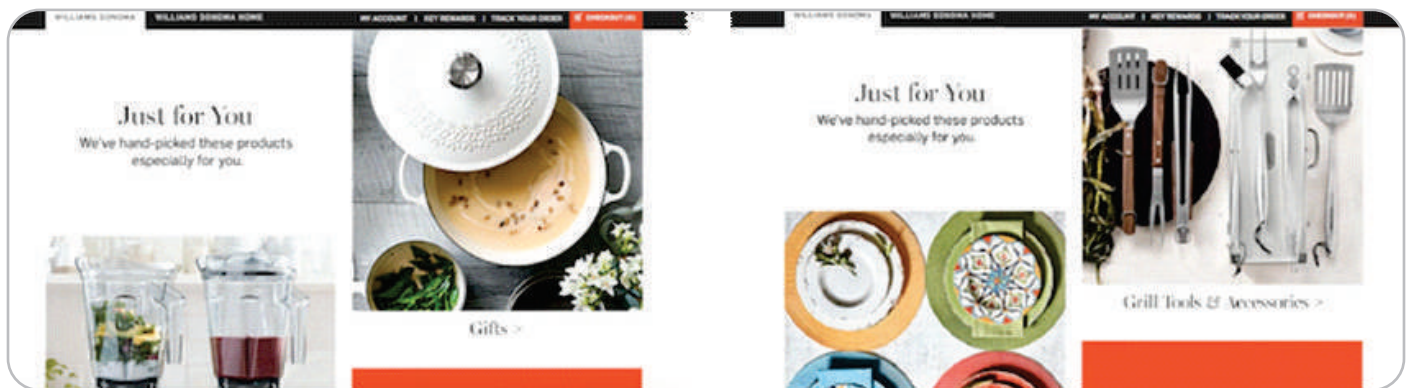
This is a brilliant advantage over traditional brick-and-mortar stores that always must cater to the most popular trends for their store collection. As your customers spend more time interacting with your store, the marketing automation system learns more about their choices and continues to evolve the storefront to satisfy them.

Remember your homepage is the most visited page on your website. It's a prime space for pushing adoption of new products and increasing usage of promotions and offers.

You can use personalization to push greater discover of the catalogue using cross-category recommendations, deeper recommendations from each category, and products that are extremely popular with other users while still being relevant to the users' interest.

For example, [Williams-Sonoma changes the](#) “Just for You” section on their homepage to outdoor cookware after the researcher browses grilling utensils. (source: [Bloomreach](#))

Before Browsing



By tracking the actions taken by shoppers on personalized homepage widgets you can capture further direct feedback to fine tune the personalization for other sections of your website – products, categories, search and even notifications.

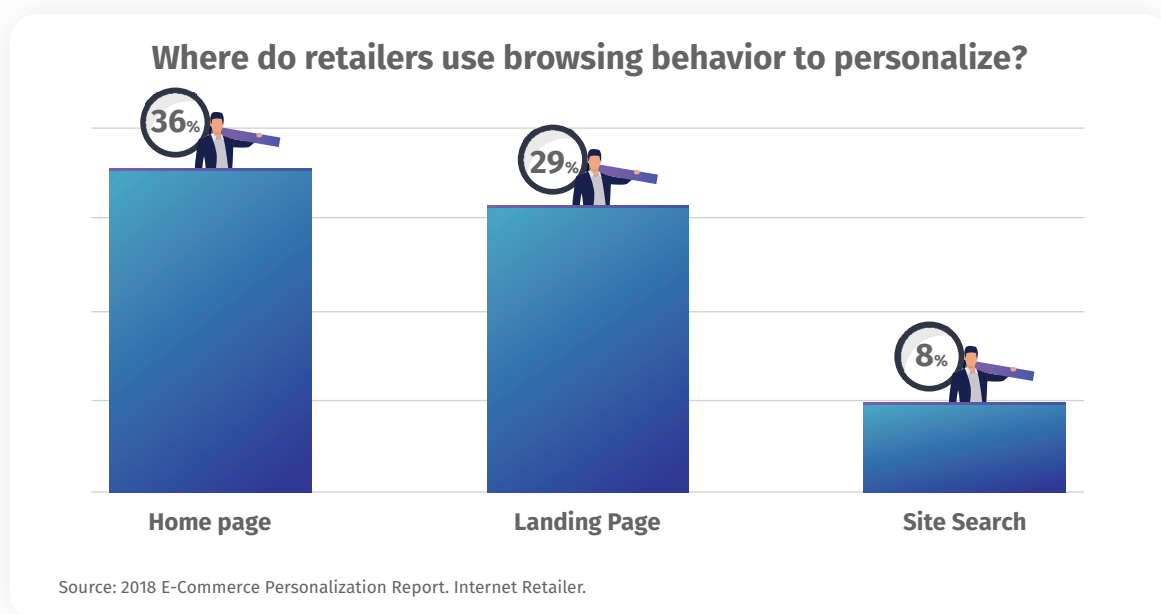


C. Customize search to show more relevant results

One important yet often overlooked area in the shopping journey is on-site search.

Back in 2013, Econsultancy found that up to 30% of site visitors use e-commerce site search during their shopping journeys, and [conversion rates for those shoppers can be up to 50% higher than average](#).

This was reinforced in a [2018 survey by Internet Retailer and Bloomreach](#) of 119 e-commerce retailers which found that in spite of the clear importance of search only 8% of the retailers currently personalize it.



And site search, as a technology module, still presents a challenge to companies with retailers experiencing multiple problems with their current implementation.

The Internet Retailer report notes that *“Customers seeing irrelevant results (39%) was the biggest challenge followed by the lack of personalization capabilities within*

the tool (35%) and the solution simply being too manual (29%). A further 37% said they had underestimated the effort required to deploy and maintain their current site search solution.”

The graphic below summarizes these challenges that e-retailers face with their site-search solutions.

What challenges / pain do you experience with your current site search solution?

(Multiple responses allowed)



To overcome these challenges, ecommerce retailers need more automated search solutions that optimize query results using personalization.

By personalizing the search box, bringing relevant products in the search results page to the top, and by providing easy access to previous searches done by the shopper, you can help them easily find the products they're interested in.



The reality is that shoppers who use site search are much more likely to complete a purchase with a shorter research cycle compared to visitors who simply browse categories.

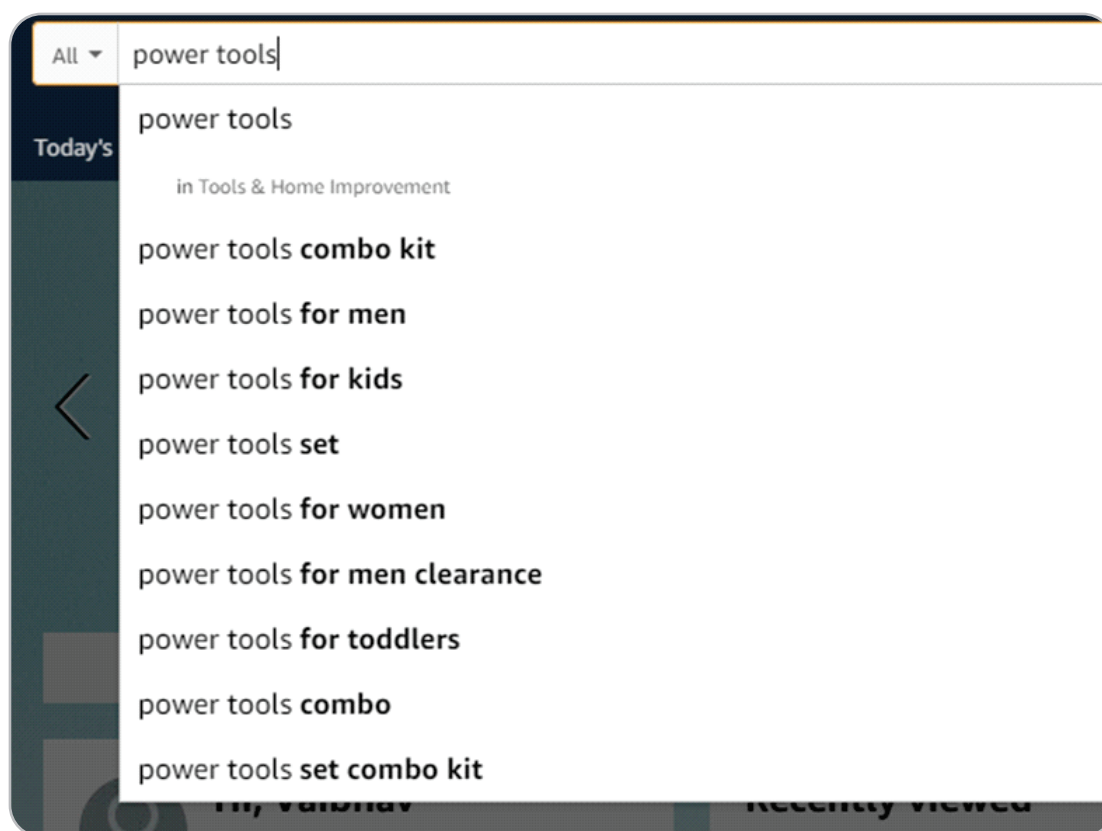
The main difference is the presence of high intent. Shoppers who are utilizing search functionality already have a better understanding of what they want, and their purchase journey is at a more advanced stage.

At this advanced stage, they expect the search box to deliver relevant results quickly so they can continue their journey to a product page. Here they can easily view criteria like price, deals, availability in their city, payment methods and shipping charges.

Here are three ways you can get started on improving the search experience on your webstore:

Autocomplete search queries as the user types them into the search box. This not only speeds up the search process requiring fewer keystrokes, but also shows the most recent and relevant searches for the user in a drop-down list.

For example, when a user is typing in “power tools” into the search bar, Amazon’s search engine preempts what the user may want and brings up a list of possible refinements of the query to quickly select from.



If this is the first time the user is making this query the list comprises the most popular search terms on Amazon's store. If he has done this or similar search before, the list can also include those historical searches at the top.

Beyond just category and product level personalization, you can also include additional 'incentive-oriented' words in the autocomplete list like “clearance”,

“combo” and “on sale” to further accelerate the purchase behavior. This gives retailers an opportunity to promote new product ideas by combining the user intent with other popular search queries.

Show relevant search results and prioritize based on taste. Instead of displaying results purely matched to the query, contextually aware search can showcase a unique set of results which consider the shopper's past activity. Personalized results speed up the journey for these customers who are at an advanced stage of their journey.

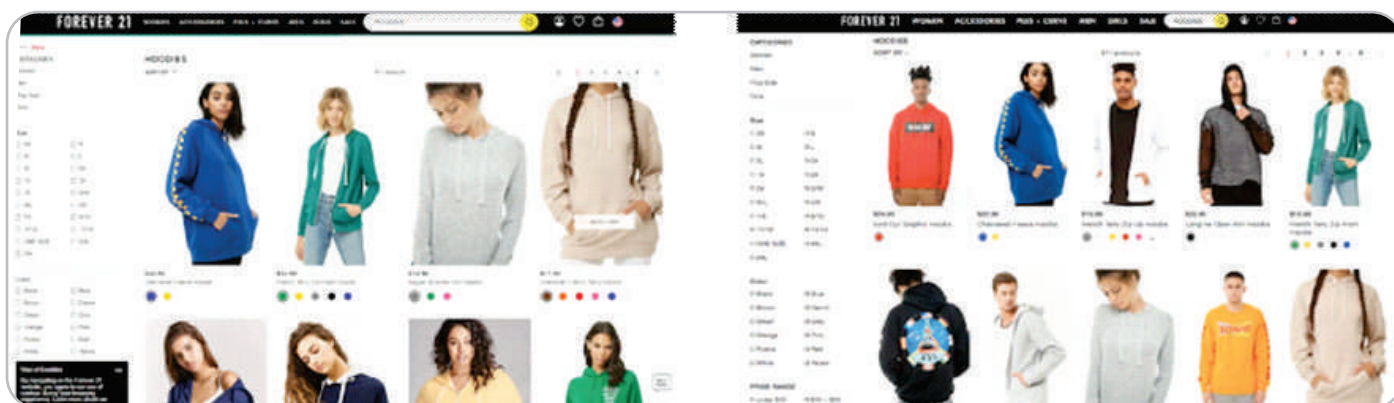
For example, when a user, who in the past has purchased men's clothes, searches for 'slim fit jeans', the results should be customized to show only men's jeans that are slim fitting. Within these results you can include a section that showcases “Most popular brands for slim-fit jeans for men” to generate more ideas.

You can take this even further by **personalizing the ordering of results on the search page**, not just the selection of results. The system typically looks at the shoppers past purchase and browsing history to show the brands, colors, sizes, styles and even price range that the user frequents.

For example, [Forever 21 uses the session browsing data](#) to better understand what the user is looking for and personalizes the search results in real-time. When Internet Retailer researchers first searched for “Hoodies” they saw primarily women's items but after browsing men's items the engine listened - and returned more relevant results. (source: [Bloomreach](#))

Before Browsing

After Browsing Grilling Utensils



Search is a window into the mind of a shopper

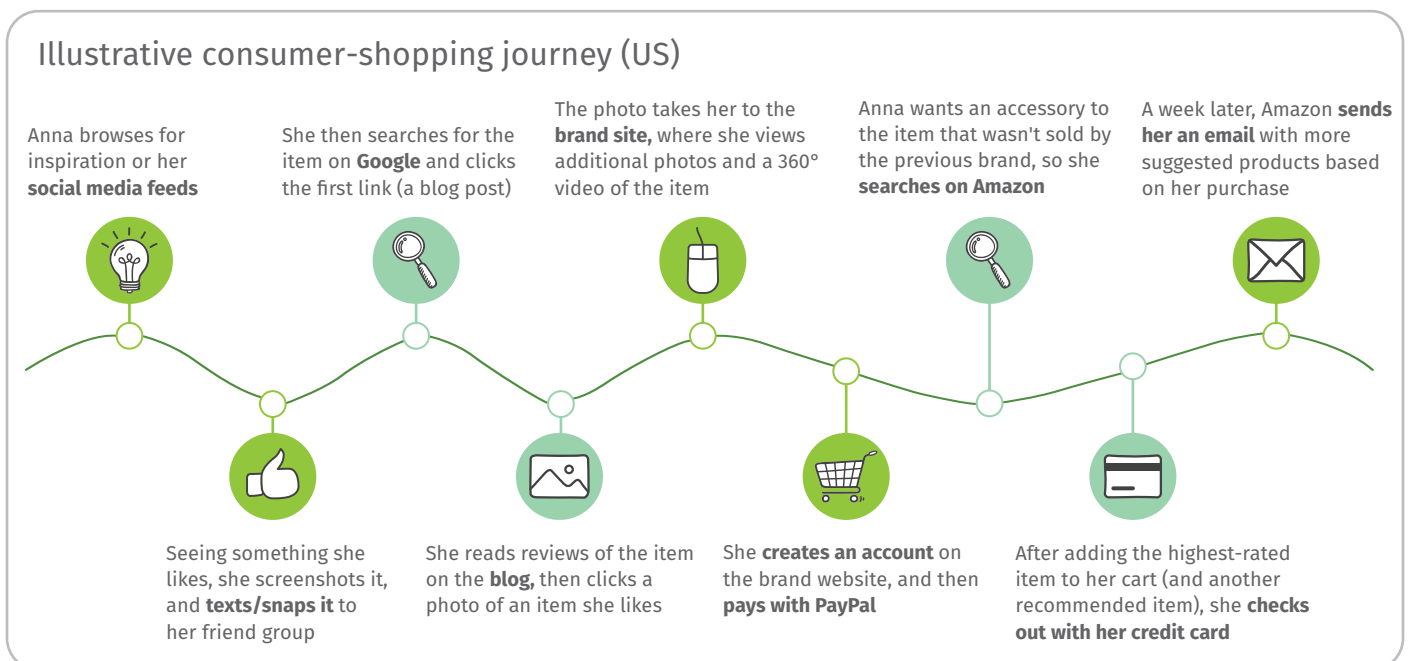
Improved search functionality on your website does more than just drive high-value conversions. Search actions provide a valuable insight into the mind of a shopper. Not just about WHAT they are think about, but also HOW they think when they are traversing a purchase journey.

The search terms that a user types into the search bar can reveal key behavioral traits of shoppers that you can learn from and further fine-tune your personalization engine. You can further increase conversions and boost loyalty by using this data smartly.

D. Personalize re-engagement touchpoints to bring shoppers back

Shopping journeys switch repeatedly between moments of purchase intent and of indifference to shopping. To attract shoppers to your webstore, you must extend your personalization efforts to different touchpoints that reach them in moments they are not thinking of your brand.

Illustrated by the [2019 Retail Outlook report by Deloitte](#), a typical online purchase journey for a shopper in the US is very complex:



By customizing re-engagement touchpoints to deliver content and offers that appeal to the user, the entire webstore shopping experience becomes holistic.

To connect with your customers at an emotional level you must build and use your ability to tap into their unique motivators. Two of the most effective channels for ecommerce retailers are:

1. Emails
2. Push notifications – in-app and desktop

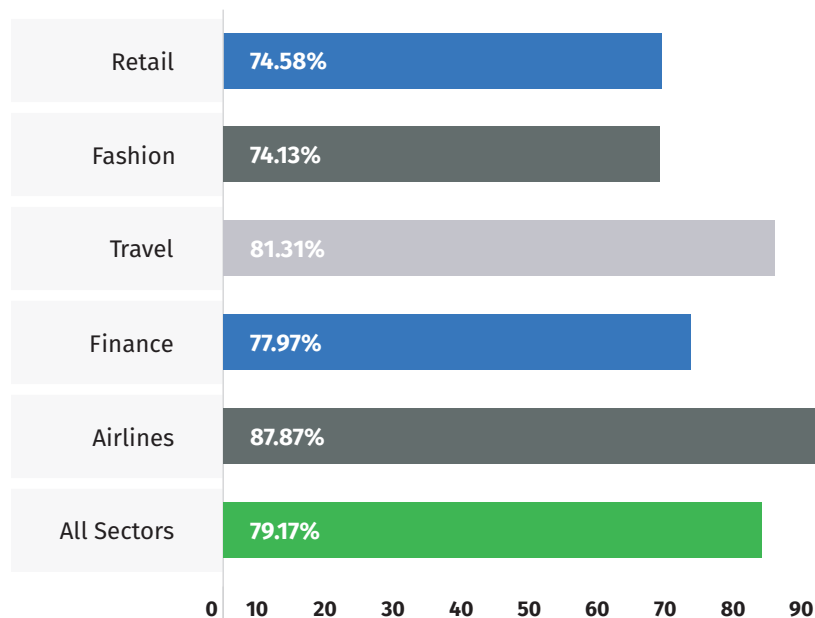
With personalized email re-targeting your brand can present products and offers in front of audiences at the lowest points in their interaction cycle – in their moments of indifference.

This effectively reengages customers who probably had good experiences with your store in the past but have lost touch or have simply tuned out because of other priorities in their lives.

For example, abandoned cart emails are sent to users who went through a few, or several steps of the purchase flow but didn't complete the checkout process.

According to SalesCycle.com, [cart abandonment rate for Retail and Fashion stood at 75% in 2018](#).

Cart Abandonment Rates by Sector (2018)



Source: SaleCycle Client Data (FY 2018)



www.SaleCycle.com

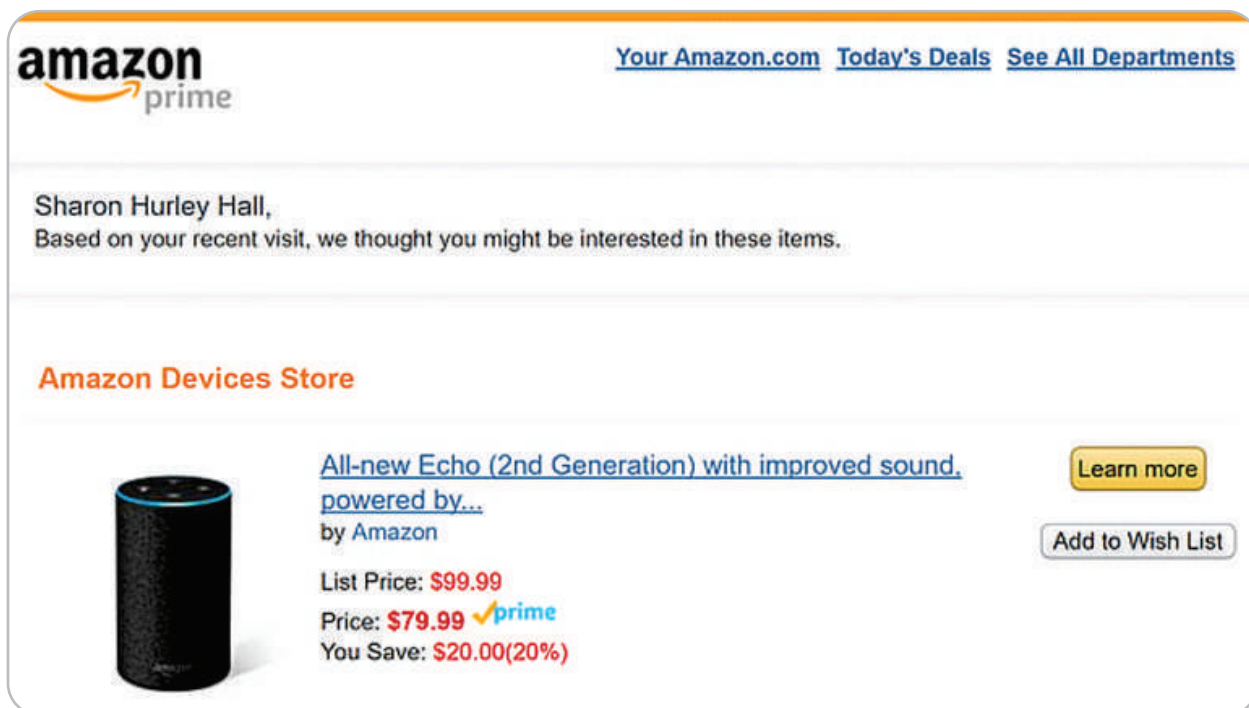
The reasons for abandoning a purchase process are numerous - it could be because of connectivity or UI issues, payment concerns, trying to find other features or detailed shipping fees, or simply because the user was comparing total price with other e-commerce stores.

Abandoned flow emails attract these users back. The emails get triggered from your marketing automation platform depending on the step of the purchase flow the user exited from.

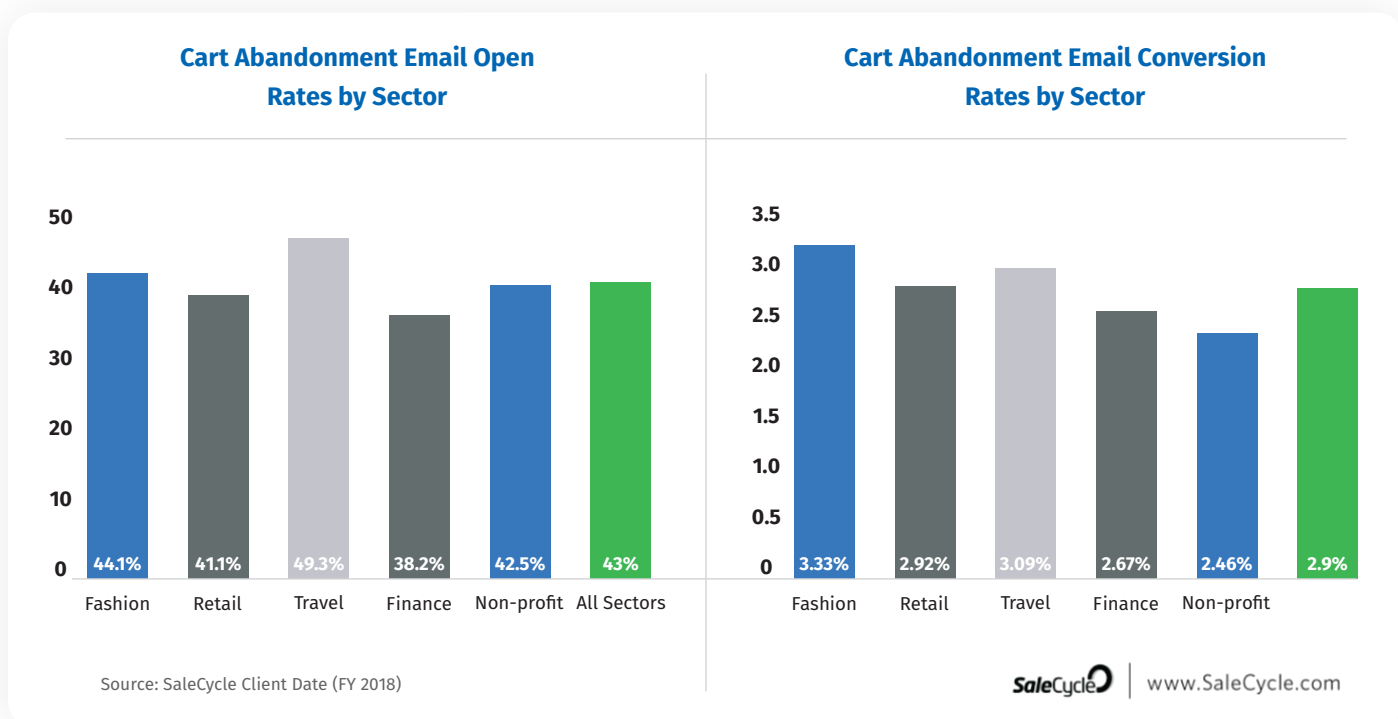
Here are a few examples of re-targeting emails with personalized content:

- **User exits** from the search results page after searching for a product
Content: Send a recommendations email within 24 hours and again within 3 days with a list of the most popular products that match or are closely related to the search terms. To make the content even more interesting, also include products that other users viewed and purchased after searching for the same terms.
- **User exits** after viewing a product page for 60s or more but before adding it to the cart
Content: Send a personalized email with top customer reviews and other product details. At the bottom of the main content include additional products that are similar and are also highly rated or in the same price range.
- **User exits** with a product in his cart from the payment page (abandoned cart)
Content: Send super specific email with the exact cart details offering the user additional options and an extended time to complete the purchase. Also include other recommendations that are closely related to the selected product.

For example, Amazon.com sends closely related items to the user by email



Because they are super-relevant, cart abandonment emails have some of the highest open, click and conversion rates



E-commerce retailers can also leverage **personalized push notifications** – both in-app and on the browser/desktop – to attract disengaged users back to the store.

Even though content such as cart abandonment, recommendations based on browsing history and popular products works well for this medium, notifications are better tuned for more in-the-moment alerts that induce a sense of urgency in shoppers.

Some types of content that is very effective for push notifications are:

- alerts for limited time discounts or open sale
- when the user left products in the cart without checking out
- when new products added to a category/brand store which the user engaged with in the past
- when previously browsed or wish listed products are back in stock
- alerts for shipping and delivery status changes
- introducing new features or services recently launched on your platform

For example, [H&M sends suggestions for additional items](#) that may go well with a previous product the customer bought. *“If a user purchased a pair of trousers from their store, they’d get a notification on their phone urging them to grab a pair of shoes that would go just perfectly with the pants.”* (source: [PlobalApps](#))



Remember, to use reengagement channels in the right quantity and with high relevance.

Poorly designed content in emails and notifications or an abusive frequency of alerts can quickly snowball into a bad experience for users turning any returns on their head and driving your shoppers away.

E-commerce retailers must keep enhancing shopper profiles to create more interesting combinations of content for re-engagement touchpoints.

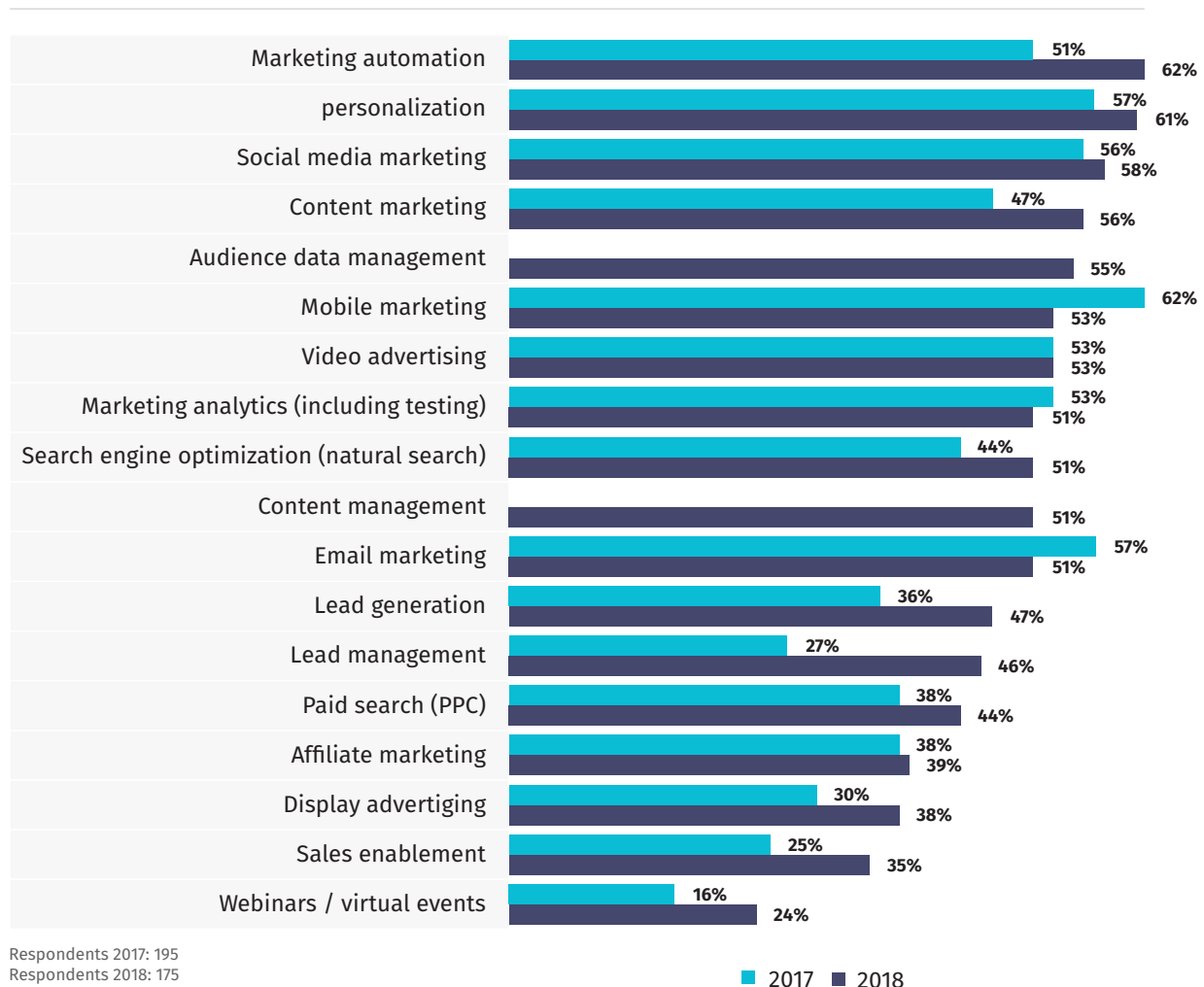
Marketing automation technology has made it more effortless. You can easily integrate data from numerous sources to build a 360-degree view of the customer that can drive personalized email and notification content with simple rules-based triggers.

Marketing automation technology is a key for success with personalization

With more marketers embracing personalization as the future of e-commerce, investments in key technologies and data platforms continues to grow.

The [Adobe 2018 Digital Trends](#) report shows that retail leaders are prioritizing key investments in Personalization along with Marketing automation for the future.

Proportion of respondents planning to increase their budget for digital channels or disciplines in 2018



In the past, personalization was merely limited to ad retargeting, social engagement and email channels. Today, powerful marketing automation platforms are changing that.

The technology to personalize more than just recommendations exists today...



New marketing platforms are helping progressive e-commerce brands personalize the experience across the purchase journey with a combination of data management and sophisticated automation features.

By personalizing the discovery and purchase process of their customers, you can improve your acquisition and conversion rates while pushing discovery of a growing product catalogue.

Personalization goes beyond than just improving immediate bottom-line though.

It makes customers feel valued and improves their shopping experience. And that means loyal customers and high conversion rates for your ecommerce brand for years to come.



AI-powered Growth Marketing Platform

Empowering Marketers & Product Managers With Cross-Channel Marketing Automation & Analytics Suite To Increase Web & App Conversions

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