

E-commerce and sport: Strategies used by top brands to strengthen and retain customer loyalty

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Consumers trawl the web for their purchases. The UK's sportswear market was valued at [£13.8 billion](#) in 2020 and [€757 billion](#) across Europe, with retailers of sporting goods and sportswear are among those who profited most from the pandemic. Sports clothing accounted for the largest share of this market in 2020, followed by sports footwear, and sports accessories. Customers turned online to make their sportswear purchases, meaning brands have successfully reinvented their e-commerce strategies to retain a committed customer base, whilst conquering new markets. They were able to do so by making use of a powerful e-commerce channel: marketplaces.

The boom in sports e-commerce during the pandemic

Although unexpected, retailers specialising in sporting goods fared much better than others during the health crisis. When asked if their household had acquired any home fitness equipment or items during the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic, [17%](#) of UK consumers claimed they had bought weights or dumbbells. Another 12% of customers said

they had purchased a treadmill or a yoga mat. Despite difficult economic conditions, **the sports goods industry has managed to return to pre-COVID-19 levels of growth.**

It was the sports brands with omnichannel strategies, like Decathlon and Go Sport, which took the lion's share. Decathlon registered an increase in customers of 32.1% in 2020, by focussing on the quality of customer experience and a more agile sports e-commerce strategy. This is a strategic shift borrowed from other brands which have **focused more on building a closer relationship with their customers**, by sending personalised newsletters and creating dedicated content on social networks to encourage exercising at home, for example. Focus is also placed on **greater logistics flexibility**, such as product localisation, easier online payment to encourage buying despite tighter budgets, greater delivery efficiency, etc. And it's a profitable strategy, given that Decathlon logs about **10,000 online sales every day.**

However, one element of these sports e-commerce strategies has proved more successful than others: **using marketplaces to sell sporting goods and sportswear merchandise.**

The role of marketplaces in sports brands' e-commerce strategies

Marketplaces have indeed played a distinct role in the growth of e-commerce in sport. These platforms account for 58% of the total turnover generated by e-commerce in Europe. **But sports retailers have benefited more than others:** in Germany, Amazon has become the number one digital channel for online sales of sporting goods, **ahead of specialised stores, both physical and online.**

This process has also substantially benefited Zalando, which overtook Lacoste and Adidas directly-operated networks. The **German marketplace has captured 11.8% of market share** in the sports and sportswear domains, making it the **European e-commerce champion.**

Even better, certain big omnichannel brands are establishing their own marketplaces. This is the case for Decathlon, which has ambitions to become the leading marketplace for sporting goods and sportswear. The **Decathlon marketplace is already present in nine countries and allows retailers to develop their e-commerce strategy across the whole of Europe**, reaching new audiences. In Belgium alone, the platform logs 13 million unique views per month. The same goes for the marketplace **Go Sport**, which counts more than one million products and logs more than two million monthly visitors.

In the future, we will also see the growing importance of ‘small’ **marketplaces specialising in sports e-commerce**, such as Alltricks (owned by Decathlon), Blissports and Colizey, and highly specialised marketplaces, like Some Ride (concentrating on winter sports and urban fashion).

The **advantage of these marketplaces is that they offer customers a larger number of products in one place**, clear product comparisons to simplify buying decisions, and easier relationships between brands and customers. Logically, they represent the cornerstone of sports e-commerce strategies for specialised retailers.

Adapt your e-commerce strategy to make allowance for consumer needs

However, marketplaces only provide one part of the solution. In order to grow online sales, sports retailers must **adapt their e-commerce strategies to better serve consumers’ new needs**. Consumers pay closer attention to brands and the values they convey; they take the time to educate themselves and compare products before buying; and they are more assertive about their logistical requirements. So these days, a successful sports e-commerce strategy should:

- **help consumers to better understand the product they are thinking of buying**, to ensure it truly corresponds to what they are looking for (which can help prevent returns);
- **provide customers with the information they expect to find**, depending on their preferences and values (eco-friendly manufacturing, sustainability, scalability, etc.);

- **give buyers the tools to make the right decisions** (by optimising visual impact, referring to client reviews, using brand storytelling, etc.);
- **choose the appropriate sales channels** (e.g. by finding the right balance between generalist and specialist marketplaces);
- **implement a more agile supply chain**, which promotes localisation (matching products to consumers, especially within the framework of a European e-commerce strategy) and delivery efficiency.

All this assumes a complete overhaul of on-line sales organisation and strategy. In other words, a solution such as provided by Lengow enables retailers to address these challenges and to carve out a better place within the sports e-commerce market. This can be achieved by optimising product data so that it is tailored to each individual channel (marketplaces, [Google Shopping](#), [Social Ads](#)); personalising online and offline strategies; managing product variations so that consumers can find them more easily; establishing distribution rules according to needs and periods (market seasonality, new product lines, promotions, etc.); creating personalised product catalogues, etc.
