



E-COMMERCE June 14, 2021

E-Commerce in 2021: Come for the Social Distance, Stay for the Convenience



Credit: Getty Images by Eva-Katalin

By **Sean Reiter**

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As the saying goes, "necessity is the mother of invention." Well, a whole lot of our necessities were compromised over the past year. And though the world is finally, mercifully, beginning to see light at the end of a long, dark tunnel, there's no demise in sight for the ingenuity and inventiveness that exploded in e-commerce as a result.

As vaccinations proliferate, we don't foresee last year's exodus to digital shopping reversing any time soon. The new shopping experiences that the pandemic necessitated have become pleasant surprises to consumers who weren't ready or willing to dip their toe in prior. Those pleasant surprises have cemented into routine over the past 12 months — routine that many shoppers won't soon let slip from their warm, inoculated fingers.

There's no question that the explosive growth we saw online in 2020 won't continue at a similar blistering pace in 2021. Everyone's eager to re-inhabit the physical world and try on that scarf they've been eyeing instead of clicking "Buy Now" and hoping for the best. Nevertheless, more people than ever understand that if that scarf isn't what they had in mind, e-commerce allows for quick, convenient, hassle-free returns. They know now that e-commerce is simply another fantastically viable option, along with everything they enjoyed before, not something so complex and daunting that they dare not even consider it.

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In 2021, not only will we see the ongoing effects of the e-commerce adoption curve, but brands are going to continue to get smarter about how they make data an essential part of their business strategy. They discovered the tools of a new golden age and will begin using them to greater effect, then begin to transition away from the confines of the previous age.

The fact that PriceSpider saw a 98 percent increase in sales and 57 percent increase in traffic in 2020 on its e-commerce platform is strong evidence that adoption was widespread and meaningful. Our platform serves as an excellent barometer as it processes and analyzes the consumer purchasing behaviors of nearly 2,000 of the world's leading consumer packaged goods (CPG) brands. Sales growth peaked at a ridiculous 185 percent year-over-year in Q2 2020, and still held strong at a remarkable 97 percent year-over-year in Q4.

The health and beauty sector saw the biggest gains in both traffic and sales at 160 percent and 152 percent year-over-year, respectively. This category includes household essentials such as toilet paper and over-the-counter medicine — necessities that millions of consumers now have the muscle memory to tap and have delivered without hassle.

The anchor to which all of this adoption is tethered isn't just the necessity to keep your airborne particles to yourself, it's the intoxicating cocktail of time and convenience. The first time you shrink an entire afternoon's trek to the supermarket down to, say, 25 minutes — a 10-minute drive to the store, 5 minutes for pickup, and 10 minutes back home — it's not something many of us will soon relinquish. And as brands continue to utilize the tools that enforce minimum advertised price (MAP), blur the line between browsing and buying, and monitor their products across the digital shelf, convenience will flourish and e-commerce will become an indispensable way of doing business.

In 2021, the question isn't whether you're prepared for an impending future of e-commerce retail, it's whether you're doing it now because unlike strict COVID-19 safety measures, it isn't going away any time soon.

Sean Reiter is the chief marketing officer for PriceSpider, an advanced retail data and analytics technology company that provides insights about consumer purchasing behavior.

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