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The Importance of A/B Testing in Driving Ecommerce Performance

Commerce's evolution in recent years fuelled the need to exist on as many digital channels as possible. Retailers, marketplaces, social media, distributors, and direct-to-consumer (D2C) websites are all becoming critical and advantageous digital channels for brands. But many brands are going about this journey with one hand tied behind their back. **Best practices for product pages** will create a foundation for ecommerce success, but that will only get a brand part of the way.

Brands must understand the intricacies behind what causes product discovery and performance of each unique product. A/B testing, which divides customers evenly between two versions of content to provide insights into how well certain variables perform, enables brands with knowledge of what drives success and failure on the digital shelf.

A/B Testing Limitations on the Digital Shelf

A/B testing is likely in most marketers' repertoire for critical metrics like traffic and conversion across owned channels. However, the digital shelf cannot offer the same level of detail.

"There are huge **confounding factors that make getting real statistical significance difficult**," says Rob Gonzalez, co-founder and CMO of Salsify. Gonzalez highlights product titles to showcase the number of moving parts on the digital shelf. With so many moving pieces, it's a challenge to gauge whether any single change impacts conversion for a specific product.

If a brand's product (or a competitor's) goes out of stock, that will impact demand for the alternative. The Amazon Marketing Services (AMS) team may have depleted their budget. A competitor may have run a social media ad campaign to drive traffic to their product detail page (PDP).

With so many factors out of brands' control, it's challenging to draw causal conclusions on whether a product title change affected the metric of focus.

How to Implement Ecommerce A/B Testing

Despite these limitations, there are methods of A/B testing specialised for the digital shelf to extract insights and boost performance.

Step 1: Identify the Content for A/B Testing

Ecommerce is broad, so A/B testing's scale on the digital shelf must be equally broad. Examine a vast selection of products across a single product category (or groups of categories) to identify patterns. Patterns can be used to uncover insights that enable teams to optimise product listings.

Gonzalez stresses the importance of examining hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of products to identify patterns. From here, Salsify develops best practices that can guide brands to optimise their performance everywhere in their digital ecosystem, including the fact that more product bullets, photos and videos, and reviews can help product pages convert better.

ShurTech, a subsidiary of ShurTape Technologies, an industry leader in pressure-sensitive masking, duct, packaging, and specialty tape products, used A/B testing to uncover insights within their digital catalogue. ShurTech optimised 70 products and saw a 15% rise in sales rank across their entire product offering.

Brands can find the information they need to optimise listings and boost digital presence and revenue through analysing large portions of products on the digital shelf.

Step 2: Specific KPIs Leads to Better Data

What does your brand want to achieve specifically with A/B testing? The more specific a brand is with their goals, the more useful the data will be.

Don't combine multiple factors into a single test. Analysing image type, image number, and hero image placement all in one A/B test will result in murky data. Isolating each variable in a separate test can highlight best practices. If a brand runs the above test and finds that conversions rose, which change was the cause? All of them? One of them? Too many metrics is one of the biggest mistakes made with A/B testing.

Consider your brand's specific business goals and test metrics that correspond. Specificity makes testing simpler — it avoids surplus data that takes labour-intensive processes to analyse — and homes in on the key insights that will optimise PDPs.

Step 3: Starting Small, Then Scaling

Specificity will narrow down choices, but narrowing too much will not bear results. Performing ecommerce A/B testing across an entire range of products may be more accessible for brands starting out.

Testing on the digital shelf is not yet mature. Large-scale tests will take ample time to extract data and take time setting up experiments for a large number of products. The best thing to do is start small — small product groupings, specific metrics, and then build out testing and knowledge bases.

Optimise Future Strategy on the Digital Shelf

Although ecommerce A/B testing has its limits, it can offer valuable insights that guide future commerce strategy. Developing a better understanding of the successes and failures of each product category, brands can take the necessary steps to evolve their digital presence and improve on the digital shelf.