

Omnichannel strategy, personalised CX to determine online winners this Black Friday

South African retailers are bracing for Black Friday - one of the biggest shopping days of the year - when about 47% of South African adults (an estimated 18.5 million people) are expected to make purchases on 26 November, according to forecasts published by [Finder.com](https://finder.com).



Source: Getty

While exact numbers are not available, it is expected that much of the country's Black Friday shopping activity will take place online, as analysts predict fewer in-store promotions compared to pre-Covid-19 days.

At the same time, most retailers will be offering many of the same promotions online as they do in stores, and it is in the digital space where the fiercest showdown between brands is expected to play out.

Jeremy Osborne, regional demand manager at Infobip explains that this is largely due to retailers being forced to accelerate their digital transformation initiatives last year as Covid-19 lockdown restrictions kept customers away from brick and mortar stores.

"The digital retail landscape is an extremely busy space at the moment, with a lot of competing offers out there. However, competitive advantage will not be so much about products and offers, but rather about the customer experience (CX)," says Osborne.



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Personalisation

Personalisation and relevance are now more crucial than ever and retailers will have to ensure they can deliver a personalised experience throughout the entire customer journey. Osborne notes that the value of delivering a positive CX was demonstrated during the pandemic, which forced all retailers to shift to digital platforms at about the same time.

“In most cases, it was the brand that got the level of personalisation and relevancy right that excelled. More and more customers are placing a much stronger focus on experiencing a brand via its digital channels, so this is ultimately where the most competition will take place on Black Friday,” he says.

However, the adoption of an omnichannel strategy will be key to delivering a positive CX, as retailers must ensure they can reach customers on every channel they may want to use, while also enabling customers to engage with them over their preferred channels.

“It is all about being where your customer is. Make sure that your omnichannel strategy is on point and that customers can reach you where it is convenient for them and when it suits them, while also ensuring that they can seamlessly move between channels,” says Osborne.

“People want to deal with brands that they have easy access to. If you are available where and when customers expect you to be, then more people will deal with your brand than with your competitors.”



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Quick and easy customer support

Osborne warns that due to the huge surge in traffic expected on Black Friday, retailers must ensure that their systems can handle the volumes and that services are always available, or customers will go elsewhere. Should something go wrong, customer support must be immediate.

“If a customer asks for help, they expect immediate assistance. So, tackle customer support from multiple angles, but have a single interface where you have sight of all customers coming to your platform via different channels. This will enable you to see the customer’s challenge in its entirety, track their history and provide instant support,” Osborne adds.

An omnichannel approach will also enable retailers to collect customer data and use these insights to build customer profiles almost in real time. This will make it easier for retailers to drive additional revenue generation by communicating the right messages, through the right channels, at the right time.

Anticipate change

“Use this customer data to also ensure you can react quickly and be agile if customer sentiment changes or evolves – you will need to adapt to these changes. It’s not just about responding, but also about anticipating change and being proactively engaged with your customers.”

Osborne also advises retailers to take advantage of the large volumes of traffic and data that will be generated on Black Friday, as it can be a valuable opportunity to capitalise on the insights gained from customers.

“Collect and use the data obtained from automated processes to push insights back into your customer profile so you can grow your understanding of your customer base. Use Black Friday as a leverage point to know your customers and provide better service going forward.”



Black Friday can be more than a short-term revenue boost

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He adds that Black Friday will place huge demands on retailers, so it is important that they have the right technology, services, and solutions in place.

“However, while it is important to have the right technology in place, it will be pretty ineffective if you haven’t onboarded the importance of CX. With the high level of competition, your competitors can acquire the same technology as you. But it is difficult to imitate good service and a solid customer experience,” he concludes.

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