

The rise of mobile shopping and its impact on business

 By Robyn Cooke

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At TFG 60% of our shoppers use mobile phones to shop and browse our sites, with over 44% of all checkouts taking place on a mobile device, up significantly from the previous year. While retailers need to be geared for mobile, it is only a part of the shopping journey in South Africa. Omnichannel is where it is at.



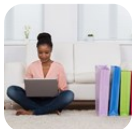
Robyn Cooke, TFG.

A mobile-friendly retail environment makes more sense by the day; in the past year the internet achieved critical mass with half the world's population now connected to the web – and this is even more pronounced in South Africa, where we have 54% of our 58 million population connected. Entry level smartphones increased market penetration by 9% over the course of the past year.

Mobile phones are the number one possession for South Africans. A cellphone is an integral and indispensable part of their lives. In a recent survey, when we asked our shoppers about their cell phones, some locals immediately said that: "I would die without it!", "It's an extension of my arm", "My soulmate" and "It means everything to me."

Currently we have 38 million unique mobile users in South Africa increasing by approximately 2 million users a year. This is more than half of the population accessing mobile phones, and during the past year approximately 18% of the population made an online purchase via a mobile device.

We've also started seeing mobile payments become mainstream, with tap and go not far behind. Free wifi is becoming increasingly important to customers and responsive sites are critical if you want to trade online. With the increased demand for mobile internet access, sites need to be reverse-engineered by coding them to be mobile-first, and then translating that into a desktop experience.



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Buy online, collect in store

With most South Africans online, retailers are seeing the shift from pure bricks and mortar retail in South Africa, to a more considered omnichannel environment where more than 70% of the shopping journeys start on the internet, but end up at a store cash desk.

Mobile internet is a very important part of the shopping journey, but it is only a part of it. The South African customer likes the internet as a resource and enjoys browsing and shopping there. But generations of security fears are very well embedded and at least some kind of in-store interaction is an important part of their shopping experience – just to feel safe.

The drive, therefore, is to get as many shoppers to shop across multiple channels as a true omnichannel shopper.

Currently, the most important thing to our omnichannel shopper is the ability to shop online and collect their purchase in store. This allows them to try on, swap out or just trust a little deeper than having their goods delivered to them at the office or at home.

Over 4,000 customers a month shop online and collect their packages in one of our nationwide stores or pick up points, making this the most popular delivery mechanism for these shoppers. We believe this may be the key to moving South Africa's online shopping above the 1% of trade currently done online.



The omnichannel shopper

The omnichannel shopper is younger (18-34), more female (63%) than a bricks-only shopper. They also have a smartphone and a monthly salary – and access to the internet almost the entire day.

The omnichannel shopper is time-conscious and desperate for convenience. They love to browse online in their downtime, taking screenshots of their desired product and then taking the picture into the store to streamline the in-store experience.

They will have looked up stock availability online and set aside the product in store for easy access when they get there.

In the last year we have seen omnichannel shoppers grow by 20%, many of which came to our online stores as new shoppers, driven by digital advertising – and later, landing up shopping in the physical stores as well.

In South Africa, retailers need to understand their customers and to make online shopping as inclusive as possible. This means prioritising mobile-first sites, but also providing a breadth and depth of choice online by price, size, style, payment option and delivery method, to enable a seamless, convenient omnichannel environment.

Visit our [Mobile Commerce](#) special section for further insights throughout the month of July.

ABOUT ROBYN COOKE

Robyn Cooke is head of e-commerce at TFG. She has worked as a marketing leader in the technology and internet field for over 20 years for some of the globe's largest companies based out of London. Robyn returned to Cape Town to merge this experience with her first love, fashion and was South Africa's first fashion blogger, commentator and stylist, and ran the popular blog www.robyncooke-styleguide.co.za, since 2008...

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