

# Shopping in stores is over: It is time to adapt

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Internet shopping has totally changed consumers behaviour in the last decade, to shop and browse online rather than going into stores, and it's no surprise. Internet shopping is much easier, and in many cases, a much cheaper option, so an explosion of e-commerce platforms was always inevitable.

Not only has e-commerce massively increased in the past 5 years, but the effects of COVID-19 have instigated even more reasons to shop online, and given us even more insights into how online shopping has changed consumer actions and shopping experiences, forever.

Shopping in a store for many is the overall experience and joy of purchasing products to take home. However, online shopping is quickly becoming the 'preferred' way of shopping because it's simply easier and in this moment in time, safer! According to the Information and Communication Technology survey in 2027, 68% of internet users in the European Union shopped online (1). The ability to create a more seamless method of purchasing a product, is often demonstrated by the millennium and post-millennium demographics. Younger audiences have a need to want the product quickly and efficiently, and eCommerce has allowed this to happen with next day delivery.

More recently, the benefits of the pandemic have helped to support online, small businesses recover from revenue losses and customer shortfalls. These shops have adapted to the effects of COVID-19 and began to sell online. One retailer which has adapted is independent toy chain 'Toy Barnhaus'. In May 2020, they made 27% of what they did across eight of their stores in the same month in 2019, just by selling on eBay (2). They saw the demand of games and puzzles during lockdown, decided to adapt and began to use eCommerce to advertise these products.

Another businesses that increased sales from online shopping, was, perhaps unsurprisingly, Amazon. During May 2020, sales skyrocketed

and doubled through eCommerce (3). Consumers can purchase a product with the use of one click, and the product will come the next day through Amazon Prime. Unfortunately for shop retailers, they simply can't compete with this service and therefore lose out on sales. Not only this, but products are often cheaper with the benefits of online discounts. Some businesses, while already selling online, have taken some benefit from the pandemic to expand their online campaign and find new direct-to-consumer routes. So, could this be the end of an era for shopping centres?

After lockdown restrictions were eased in July, it allowed people to go back to shops and spend again, however not for all. With the current news status of 'masks to be worn in shops' and local lockdowns, this has diverted audiences back to online shopping again. Ecommerce is larger than ever, with users preferring the less hassle, easy access, and money-saving experience of purchasing goods or services online. But what about consumer's desire for real, in person, customer service?

Customer service is the most fundamental aspect of a transaction between consumer and sales assistant. Without exceptional customer service, consumers may look elsewhere. Unfortunately, eCommerce does not provide that one-to-one interaction for consumers to experience, just the efficiency of placing an order. On the other hand, online shopping can make the consumer feel welcomed, by making the website clear and user-friendly, and by regular communication via email, newsletters and social media interaction.

With the new issues surrounding 'Tier 2' restrictions in areas such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Chester, this has diverted customers back to online shopping. Retail shopping is often enjoyed with a companion, often a close friend for retail therapy, however with the new restrictions in place, people can't socialise in outdoor spaces – meaning shared shopping experiences are, essentially, over.

The pandemic has caused many people to have a shortage of spare funds to splash out on expensive shopping trips due to unemployment or furlough cuts. Therefore, some eCommerce businesses try to use 'penetration pricing', allowing the prices of certain products or services to be at a lower cost. For example, well-known fashion site 'Pretty Little Thing' advertise their clothing through a line of multiple sales

throughout the year, to engage and invite new demographics, alongside their current consumers. They, alongside the likes of Boohoo and ASOS, will drop their prices for a day or two, in some cases even just for a few hours, to boost sales. High street shops can't simply increase and decrease prices throughout the day.

Another company that has exceeded expectations in the auto industry is 'Cazoo'. The auto trader has demonstrated significant increase in popularity from the pandemic due to its experiential components and by 'going above and beyond' in the car industry. With Cazoo, you can buy or finance the car entirely online and complete your purchase from the comfort of your sofa, in your own time and select to have it delivered to your door or to collect it from the dealership (4).

This innovation has shown to be the new way of buying a car post-pandemic because it creates a new experience for the consumer in an easily accessible way. Therefore, eCommerce in the auto industry, has allowed consumers to purchase a chosen vehicle from the comfort of their home. It can only be a matter of time until other industries start to adapt too.

There are both pros and cons to the experience of digital sales or face-to-face shopping. Whereas high street stores and shopping centres would normally enjoy a boost around this time of year during the approach to Christmas, this year they're competing with a pandemic. We will learn in the new year what impact social distancing, mask wearing, local lockdowns and a potential second wave had on shopping during the festive period, but for now, the future of eCommerce is simply the only way forward.

1. <https://www.scalefast.com/blog/customer-behavior/>
2. <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/smallbusiness/article-8354669/The-small-businesses-taking-advantage-Covid-start-selling-online.html>
- 3 <https://time.com/5870826/amazon-coronavirus-jeff-bezos-congress/>
4. <https://www.cazoo.co.uk/how-it-works/>