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Product *power*

eStar digital strategist **Greg Randall** debates whether retailers should present products on the home page.



THIS IS ALWAYS a hot topic for debate. Here we outline why avoiding products on the home page makes commercial sense:

1. The purpose of the home page is to move consumers to the next step in their journey.
2. The priority of content on the home page should be navigation focussed, to enable the consumer's next steps.
3. Today's consumer comes to the home page because of various stimuli therefore their needs for engagement are broad, making the retailer's ability to predict intent nearly impossible.

The focus of the retailer and the purpose of the home page is to present various options to enable the next step.

By placing product on the home page, retailers are attempting to predict buying intent on a page where most of the traffic is "branded". "Branded" traffic are visitors who reach the home page by typing in the retailer's brand name.

In this common scenario, no intent has been defined. All the retailer knows is the consumer wants to engage with the brand.

In-store greeters

A common practice for larger retailers is to position employees at the front of their physical store locations to greet consumers.

For US retail giant Walmart, greeters are seen as an integral part of its company and culture. According to the retailer, it provides customers with an excellent first impression is part of broader strategy to ensure simple, more convenient shopping.

In the physical store context, the "greeters" role is to assist consumers in finding a product or category of interest. Greeters do not sell products. They are placed at the front to facilitate and enhance the in-store experience.

If retailers are assigning employees to deliver this experience – should the home page be any different?

Retailers which assign products to the home page think they are enriching consumer experiences. To enrich an experience, content needs to be relevant and add value to a consumer's journey by facilitating the next step.

Inc.com has had this to say about today's

consumer and the difficulty in retailers trying to anticipate consumer buying intent: "The real winners are retailers who understand that each time a customer now appears it's essentially a brand-new day dictated and determined in the moment by the customer's then-dominant and most pressing desires."

Google talks extensively about what Inc.com refers to as being in the moment. Google calls this 'micro-moments': "Mobile has fractured the consumer journey into hundreds of real-time, intent-driven micro-moments. Each one is a critical opportunity for brands to shape decisions."

To present products on the home page, a retailer is likely to be guessing as to what that visitor is wanting to experience at that particular moment.

Retailers are likely to say the placement of "New Arrivals", "Featured Products" or "Most Popular Sellers" enhances sales when featured on the home page.

When considering the consumer journey, and the ideal approach to merchandising, these featured products should be placed on dedicated landing pages or within categories deeper in the site. Then tiles can be strategically placed on the home page promoting the offer with a call to action.

Cramming featured products into a small area on the home page does little to communicate their importance. The impact of this approach is even more pronounced on smartphone screens.

The solution? Focus the body of the home page on content representing all main categories pictorially. The benefits of this are multi-faceted:

1. This content is another navigation element. The consumer needs as many options as possible to assist them on to their next step.
2. User research has found first time visitors scan the entire home page to "quickly establish an impression of the site's product range."
3. The tiles become great finger targets for tablet screens. Mega menus require more effort to engage with on these devices; this type of content reduces the reliance on the mega menu element.
4. This content delivers more context to main categories with vague titles. Many times, the picture can better explain what a category represents.

In summary, use the home page as your "in-store greeter". Don't guess what the consumer wants, give them the control by introducing content to enable their next step and start their journey with you on a positive note. ■