Skis.com Delivers 1-to-1 Personalization with Product Recommendations

Retailers have long understood that their best chance at a sale comes when consumers are offered the most relevant products and offers at the right time throughout the shopper journey. In stores, that has driven the need for compelling displays and expert customer service. But online this has generally meant gearing promotions and product assortment to a broad segment of consumers rather than individuals. That approach just doesn't cut it in today's ecommerce environment.

When it comes to product recommendations, consumers expect a personalized shopping experience where just few clicks on their phone leads to exactly the right products for their individual needs, not the needs of other shoppers who bought the same product.

Skis.com, an innovative 36-year old merchant of ski and snowboard gear and apparel, understands how important one-to-one personalization is to winning the sale. After all, skis are not only a big-ticket item but also often represent a bundle of needs (bindings, poles, warm clothes, etc.) that together reflect their strong personal preferences and tastes. Not an easy challenge!

Skis.com was an early adopter of Product Recommendations, which leverages leading-edge data science to suggest product recommendations for both known and anonymous shoppers across the entire shopping journey.

"We know skis are not a simple purchase," says Andy Schepper, Chief Operating Officer. "And if we don't provide our shoppers with an easier, more informed experience, they may simply seek out the lowest price elsewhere. We needed a system to provide relevance for each consumer, so we are making personalized connections for them."

For example, a shopper who carts a jacket will be automatically presented with alternative jackets, as well as cross-sell items that speak to their broader needs, like hats and pants to ward off winter temperatures, or the right poles to compliment their interest in skis. These recommendations happen automatically and in real time which, given the enormity of the Skis.com product catalog, is a huge time saver for their merchandizers.

The recommendations are based on a predictive intelligence engine, built into the Commerce Cloud, that models shopper activity and affinities in real time to predict the most relevant products to promote to each individual shopper. With each click and interaction, the engine gets smarter, with recommendations becoming more refined and accurate.

Indeed, that was a key point for Skis.com, which has been on the Commerce Cloud since 2012. "The Commerce Cloud [formerly Demandware] already has all of our product information, browser behavior and transactions and operates the storefront where the recommendations are shown. It just made sense to adopt the recommendation engine too. This capability was a natural evolution of what we were already doing with the Commerce Cloud," says Scott Touchette, director of technology.

A report by Accenture Interactive notes that, "By learning about consumer preferences...companies can significantly increase their ability to stay relevant and competitive. Most importantly, companies that harness the power of advanced analytics to drive their recommendation engines will not only find, but also thread, the needle in the continually growing haystack of consumer data."

That has certainly been the case at Skis.com. The company ran an A/B split test for three months during the fourth quarter, which represents the majority of its peak selling for the year. The results were impressive: the company saw an increase in the number of orders per session, conversion and average order value.

In total, Product Recommendations from the Commerce Cloud drove more than 7% increase in overall revenue per visitor.

"The results exceeded our expectations, plus the system was simple to run and operate. It just works," says Schepper. "That's why Product Recommendations will play a key part in our growth going forward."

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