

# Evolution of online merchandising

Developing a better online shopping experience is key to driving more sales through the Web, says Donna Remillard

For years, retailers have developed, refined and adapted their strategies to create the ideal shopping experience. The same fundamental principles of placement, promotion, price and product apply online, but until recently technology has limited retailers' abilities to implement these indispensable strategies.

Traditional Web content management systems provide basic ways to display static content, but do not cater well to online retail. We know that simply placing products on shelves is not enough. Re-merchandising inventory from the window to the clearance rack is an easy example. But just as it is laborious and time consuming to rearrange the inventory of a physical location, re-merchandising online can be just as hard without the proper tools.

New e-commerce merchandising management tools address this void by enabling merchandisers or marketers to apply well honed merchandising strategies online. The ability to quickly and effectively re-merchandise content, alter product placement, show relevant advertisements and promotions, or even provide help to shoppers with questions is just as critical in the online world.

Additionally, effective online merchandising addresses those issues typically only experienced by the online storefront. Unbound by physical restrictions, consumers can visit your e-commerce site an unlimited number of times a day. If the homepage is equivalent to the window display, it is there to draw customers into the store with the anticipation of new and exciting merchandise, so it must be kept fresh, enticing and relevant. Solutions like Cactus's CommerceLive give the ability to effectively serve dynamic content on the homepage. From displaying deep product information via reviews and ratings, to filtering and sorting results via easy to use navigation, there are tools to help site users make educated decisions about their purchases.

For customers with specific questions, implementing online chat works to replace a helpful in-store sales representative.

Relative to traditional environments, online shopping is experiencing accelerated evolution. Today, cross-channel initiatives demand consistency between online and physical locations. In addition to branding and product offer information, inventory data must be available to users as they make their purchasing decisions. As it becomes easier for consumers to research and compare products, it becomes the survival of the fittest in the competition to respond quickly to this demand. The merchandiser or marketer must provide the right products at the right time, with relevant promotions to meet conversion goals. Providing the right tools to drive brand consistency and deliver dynamic personalised content is just one of the checklist items you shouldn't compromise on when choosing a new e-commerce solution.

The accelerated evolution of e-commerce continues. Merchandisers and marketers are looking to better understand the psychology of online shopping and deliver Web sites that are more dynamic and engaging than ever before. Advanced integrated analytics, real-time personalisation, and highly segmented microsites across multiple channels are mainstays in the next generation of e-commerce. All of this must be achieved on a foundation that gives power to business users, enabling them to perform their jobs with minimal IT support.

Years of merchandising in physical stores have produced a number of best practices to emulate in the online channel. It is imperative that the e-commerce solution you choose offers the same amount of merchandising control you'd expect in physical locations. Solutions like CommerceLive offer the essential e-commerce merchandising management necessary to attract, engage and retain customers online.

**FURTHER INFO:**  
www.cactuscommerce.com



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Donna Remillard, senior product manager for Cactus Commerce, is responsible for supporting the product development, marketing and sales efforts behind the Cactus CommerceLive solution. With over 20 years' experience in the retail solutions industry developing both enterprise and e-commerce solutions, Donna has an in-depth knowledge of systems, best practices and retail business processes.

# Register online

For the latest news and views from Microsoft and its partners



OnWindows.com is the definitive source for companies who use Microsoft technology. Microsoft's unrivalled partner ecosystem is constantly launching new and improved software tools to boost business performance. In manufacturing, retail, communications, financial services or the public sector, visit OnWindows to keep in touch with Microsoft and its partners.

### News

Product launches, customer wins and key Microsoft announcements. Keep in touch with the latest developments that can boost **your** business

### Subscribe

A simple sign-up process gives access to premium content such as our newly launched digital editions

### Resources

Case studies, analyst reports and white papers: detailed information on how Microsoft and its partners are enabling business excellence



### Partner directory

A comprehensive list of Microsoft partners with solutions for your sector, and coverage of their key announcements

### Microsoft magazines

OnWindows is the electronic sister of four global titles, *Finance on Windows*, *RetailSpeak*, *Prime* and *Microsoft Connections in Communications*

**OnWindows.com**  
Enterprise technology on the Microsoft® Windows® platform