

**A Consumer-Centric Perspective Of Online Purchase Decision Information**  
by  
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The only thing that rings the cash register is a purchase (ok, making change or theft would also do the trick). Given the importance of revenues in deriving profits, it is understandable that a significant proportion of energy has been devoted to understanding how and why consumers make purchase decisions. It is not surprising that articles, books (e.g., Paco Underhill's "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping"), seminars and organizations are dedicated to this aim.

The purpose of this handout is not to summarize all of the findings articulated in these sources. Given the nature of an online experience as being one based on information, I consider the aspects of information and communication in covering a consumer's purchase decision. The issues that I find most instructive are:

- Information (or processes) that consumers may desire in order to finalize a purchase decision.
- Information that consumers may want to communicate to merchants when making a purchase decision.
- Information that merchants communicate to consumers when they are making a purchase decision.

**Information (or processes) That Consumers May Desire In Order To Finalize A Purchase Decision**

- **Bottom Line**
  - The consumer desires at least one reason for making a purchase from a merchant.
  - The consumer purchases from a merchant whose offering provides a level of satisfaction that is, ultimately, no worse than that of all other merchants considered, given *all* aspects of the consumer's current situation (e.g., time, resources, location, urgency, etc.)
- **Details** (Another way to consider this: a merchant can impact the consumer purchase decision by providing the opportunity for consumers to obtain this information.)
  - **Price:** The asking/list/final price of a product under consideration.
  - **Quantity:** The quantity desired (given my needs and your total offering -- e.g., price, brand, quality, shipping method, shipping price, etc.)
  - **Discount:** Discount offers available and how to realize discount benefits (e.g., enter a coupon code).

- **Product:** The product's makeup, functionality, performance, reliability, heritage, etc.
- **Product Presentation:** Information that provides a good enough sense (i.e., enough confidence) to understand it (e.g., demonstration, in-use examples, etc.).
- **When:** When a purchase is to be or can be filled and delivered.
- **Whom:** For whom the purchase is intended; or for whom the purchase is being made.
- **Why (i.e., purpose):** Rationale for making purchase (e.g., gift, maintain inventory -- say, cereal in the cupboard).
- **Payment Method:** The methods by which payment may be rendered for an order (e.g., credit card, points, check, etc.).
- **Navigation:** The ability to traverse the site in order to perform all desired processes that are related to (ultimately) making a purchase.
- **Trust:** That all promises about aspects or processes related to the transaction will be maintained. Information How well have you performed in this regards given all or others experiences other perceive you (e.g., rating services).
- **Record of Potential Purchase (e.g., shopping cart):** A method for keeping track of or being aware of the items that are being considered for purchase and its related information (e.g., (item descriptions, quantity, unit price, total price per item, total price, shipping price, etc.).
- **Assistance/Customer Service/Questions:** A method for providing guidance in either learning about or invoking purchase-related processes; assistance to get from completed "Alternative Evaluation" stage to completed "Purchase Decision" stage (e.g., FAQs, online help, 800#, email, links to other informative sources, online advisor, etc.).
- **Place Order (e.g., checkout):** A method for placing an order and requesting that the ultimate exchange processes commence (i.e., consumer provision of value -- e.g., money -- and merchant provision of value -- e.g., product)
- **Adjustment:** Processes for adequately modifying elements of an exchange (e.g., returns, incorrect credit card charge, adding items to an order).
- **Security:** All aspects of the transaction that are to be secure will be secure.
- **Privacy:** Definition of how exchange information will be treated and which elements of that information will remain private, and between whom this information will remain private.

- **Experience:** The emotional essence of engaging the merchant during a purchase decision (e.g., thrilling, the best place to learn about hansom).
- **Search:** Locating a desired element (search by product description, price, release date, availability, size, manufacturer, brand, etc.)
- **Merchant History (e.g., About Us):** Information about the party with which an exchange may take place (e.g., founders, management team, philosophy, philanthropy, etc.).
- **Account Status:** Records that describe the historical relationship between a consumer and a merchant (e.g., past orders, payments made).
- **Current Order:** Records that describe the status of any in-progress transaction between a consumer and a merchant (e.g., items being pulled off the shelf/packed, getting prepared for shipping, shipped, track shipping, delivered, etc.)
- **Future/Repeat Order:** A method to leverage past orders/transactions to benefit future orders/transactions/relations (e.g., "1-click" settings, product recommendations, network building, etc.)
- **Community:** Connecting with others who have a particular interest, curiosity, set of experiences or wisdom.
- **Relationship:** Indications of what type of relationship could be formed, its status and evaluation of the relationship (e.g., what it is, where it is heading, buying more, advertising/selling on your site, affiliating/getting commission/spreading the word for a fee/participating in the value of what you offer/joining your network, keeping in touch -- via newsletter, email, etc., membership and special treatment -- deals, notification about news that will interest me, etc.)
- **Brand:** The benefits provided; the brand "promise" -- i.e., what the brand "does for the customer."