

CHALLENGES OF CATEGORY MANAGEMENT IN ONLINE SALES MANAGEMENT

Dijana Vuković

University of the North, Croatia
E-mail: dvukovic@unin.hr

Ana Globočnik Žunac

University of the North, Croatia
E-mail: agzunac@unin.hr

Anica Hunjet

University of the North, Croatia
E-mail: ahunjet@unin.hr

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Abstract

Today's modern conditions of megatransition from industrial to information economy, from economies of scale to knowledge economy, from rigid hierarchical structural organizations to organizations of fluid alliances and alliances, from human management to human relations management, from information to expert systems, from one retail location management of multiple channel formats, is characterized by increasing complexity, dynamism and increasingly difficult predictability of business results in which changes take on turbulent meaning. Online sales applies a multi-channel strategy and continuously introduces new formats in order to achieve market and financial sales results. The application of the category management concept affects the importance and significance of operational logistics activities Online sales, improves optimization processes and confirms the importance of logistics performance on the profitability of Online store. The aim of the research is to show how category management plays a central role in the success and efficiency of the company. In accordance with the main objective of the research, a survey will be conducted among online buyers to define variables such as total quality management practices, customer trust, purchase risk management, and their impact on the financial result of sales.

Keywords: Online store, category management, logistics, distribution, sales

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical roots of category management as a concept have been known for more than 20 years when it comes to retail sales. The category management of online stores has been attracting the attention of business economics theorists for a few years now. On the one hand, it is a marketing practice that defines competition in sales channels in the online world of sales, whereby online stores are defined as categories of products and sales space in the online world. On the other hand, category management actually incorporates tasks that improve the efficiency of the supply chain, taking into account the level of optimization of the portfolio of web stores' business tools. In fact, in this way, simplicity and simultaneous comprehensiveness of the market presence is achieved, along with elements of marketing-logistics balance and potential sustainability of the competitive advantage of the web store. Web store category management as a philosophy of strategic management in the background of product category management on the web store simultaneously respects the specificity of searching for competition, whereby the analysis of the effectiveness of the web store is observed through the applied reality of the moment when the customer makes a decision about what to buy and where to buy it in the online world. The difference between category management in retail and online shopping is in relation to innovation and the application of technology, but at the same time it is contained in the focus of the business strategy itself.

At the moment of strategy innovation, the consumer who buys on the web store is at the center of attention of marketing efforts, including the continuous need to structure his needs and requirements, as well as understanding consumer behavior in the online world, but also understanding consumer behavior at a certain level of the web store offer and product category separately. Category management based on the primary interests of suppliers, focuses on consuming those products and/or product brands that respect the consumer and understand their behavior when shopping on the web store. With the development of the web store and its increasingly important role, preconditions are created for the affirmation of the original interests of online retail, both in the area of demand and in the area of supply. Internet online stores is aimed at achieving a satisfied customer, which is gaining more and more importance, which creates the prerequisites for redefining the approach to category management. The goal of the research is to delineate the practice of category management focused on consumers in retail in relation to category management of web stores and their customers, i.e. consumers. At the same time, it is necessary to clarify the key sales strategies of the online store. According to the presented work, research questions were asked: "The inclusion of sales marketing in the category management leads to the redefinition of the web store, with clear elements of the concept of differentiation and positioning through the application of online sales strategies." The research used a qualitative methodology, and the collection of data from secondary sources was adequate in defining the questions that need to be answered in order to fully understand the experiences of category management. The paper will use the method of synthesis of relevant theoretical and practical knowledge about the management of the web store category, which implies defining the phenomenon in the context of the whole. Qualitative research methods as the chosen method are appropriate given that

the online consumer is at the center of demand. In parallel, the work will study the texts of selected theoreticians.

2. THE CONCEPT OF CATEGORY MANAGEMENT ON THE WEB STORE

Category management or the management of product categories according to O'Brien (2019) can be seen as a strategic approach based on the organization of goods and services with other members participating in the process in order to satisfy customer needs and achieve profit. Product category management has a focus on the entire process and on the customers who are the main creators of the categories. Given the differences between physical and online stores, there are also differences in the approach to category management in electronic stores. A focus on overall category performance also has gained prominence in business practice as demonstrated by the significant resource commitments made by both manufacturers and retailers to develop effective category management processes (Dhar, Hoch, Kumar, 2001). According to Biloš et al. (2014), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) facilitates the creation of long-term relationships with consumers who can become regular customers and return to the same electronic store. According to Dujak and Segetlija (2013), a product category represents "one group of products that, from the consumer's point of view, can be seen as a set of related products to satisfy needs". Some authors see shopper marketing as a further development of trade marketing and category management (Harris, 2012; Singh, Glaherty, Sohi, Deeter-Schmelz, Habel, Le Meunier-FitzHug, 2019; Kalyanam, Tsay, 2013; Wade, 2013; Ridge, Johnston, Donovan, 2015; Silveira and Marreiros, 2014). Others argue that customer marketing is distinct from store marketing and category management (Veoder, 2004; Raskin, 2013; Poloian, 2013). In marketing and sales, and in order to manage customer categories, some authors start from the necessity of knowing customer categories and profiles (Inman, Winter, Ferraro, 2009; Kent, 2004; McAfee and Brynjolfsoon, 2012). The category consists of several brands and types of individual products, which represents the breadth of the assortment. The person who is in charge of managing a certain product category in the store is called a category manager. The goal of category management is to offer those products that will satisfy the wishes and needs of customers in order to adapt to customers and their demand in the best possible way. In order to achieve its own efficiency, an online store must focus on the consumer and monitor:

- who is the consumer of the online store (his habits, lifestyle, ethical influences, etc.)
- what the consumer of the online store buys (which brand he chooses, the size of the packaging, whether and to what extent he buys products on promotional campaigns, etc.)
- why he buys (influence of price, quality, practicality, promotional actions, past experiences, etc.)
- when he buys (when was he last at an online store, how often does he shop, time/day of the week, seasonal purchases, cyclical purchases)

- how much he buys during each visit to the online store (transaction size).

Due to frequent changes in consumer preferences, increased growth of online stores, online stores must follow changes in consumer behavior. In this way, they can attract a larger number of visitors and at the same time stand out from the offer of their competitors. In order to create categories, it is necessary to research several items, and Muller and Singh (2006) state four main items on which category management is based, namely: costs, consumers, competition and drivers of categories. Costs play a big role in the creation of category management, because if the costs are too high in relation to the income, a certain category should be removed or replaced with a more efficient category. Various methods can be used or combined to track costs, depending on the business entity's way of doing business. It is essential to identify all performance indicators in order to get the most accurate insight into the costs, on the basis of which a plan of further activities could be drawn up. Consumers are the ones who create categories and are an important factor in planning activities in the category management process. Product categories in a certain store bring value to consumers, and based on these values, it is necessary to design the right strategy so that consumers can recognize it and decide to buy in that store. Also, in order to be able to define the right product categories, it is necessary to monitor consumer behavior and understand their decisions.

A large selection of categories is necessary for better variety and giving more choice to consumers, but if it is not well planned, it can lead to consumer confusion. This is why category drivers are crucial in category management because they are what make consumers visit a particular store. There are a large number of competitors on the Internet, and because of this, it is an increasing challenge to attract and retain potential customers. Customers have increasing access to information, the ability to compare products and stores with just a few clicks, and can very easily choose the best offer that suits them. Also, generations change over time, and thus consumer habits and product selection criteria. Because of all of the above, it is necessary to follow the trends that will allow the electronic store to get as close as possible to potential customers, offer them a unique shopping experience and create a long-term partnership. Trends in online category management impose new focuses of electronic commerce:

- collecting data on customers and observing the purchase path in order to better personalize the content and create a recommendation of an offer that will suit their individual needs,
- creating a new and improved user experience by connecting physical and electronic stores using technology,
- cooperation with other brands to better approach the target audience,
- improvements based on user experience and feedback.

In order to see the strategic advantages of category management, it is necessary to make a series of category plans. The category plan is a basis that is jointly developed and is based on category goals, the competitive environment and consumer

behavior. Category management theory starts from the fact that sales on the web store and profits are maximized thanks to the optimization of the mix: the type of brands that are sold, the storage of products and the price policy, which are determined by the customer profile and existing sales statistics.

The aforementioned mix is impossible without a systematic category review and results in a category that is differentiated from other competitive categories and recognized as such by the customer. Category management in practice makes it possible to differentiate one's own offer in relation to the competition. Different web stores have different destination categories based on target customers, strategy and form, so two competing web stores will not focus on the same categories in order to ensure a sustainable competitive advantage of the web store.

Content Management System which, according to Biloš and others (2014), "enables publishing, editing and changing content and maintenance via a central interface." Lauren (2018) states that a Content Management System offers a wide range of features that help manage and edit a website to make it as visible to search engines as possible. It can be used to edit the store description, select keywords for SEO (Search engine optimization) construction, adapt the site to foreign users by adding various languages, and the like. The modification of the technological, social, and business landscape of the last decade induced profound changes in shoppers' behavior, such as the emergence of new shopping tools that enable potential buyers - e.g., ability to search for product and price information at any time, outside or inside the store (Wyner, 2011). The design of the website has a great impact on visitors because it represents the entire electronic store and guides visitors through the assortment that is sold. Also, product descriptions, photos and suggested products can have a major impact when it comes to purchasing decisions because in the online world, customers cannot smell or try the product they are interested in. CMS helps the electronic store to become more visible on the Internet, to retain visitors and to further encourage them to research the product and make the purchase itself. In addition to using a CMS, it is also necessary to know the basic elements of building a website and certain design principles for the most efficient results. Based on all the solution systems that can be used to monitor business, we can conclude that they also have an impact on the management of product categories. By conducting an analysis of the collected data, it is possible to see the user's journey through the electronic store, which categories are the best sellers, and which should perhaps be removed due to lack of interest. Also, it is possible to determine what the driver of the category is and, based on that, create a marketing promotion that will attract customers to their electronic store.

3. SALES STRATEGIES OF ONLINE STORES

E-commerce that can be done on computers, tablets or smartphones can be considered a digital version of mail order catalog. Almost every imaginable product and service is available through e-commerce, including books, music, airline tickets, and financial services like stock investing, cryptocurrencies, and online banking. A value proposition can help not only better communicate with potential customers, but

also bring clarity and focus to products and services before they even come to market. Many companies invest a huge amount of resources in product development without really examining the problem it solves, whether the solution is unique and compelling, and how easy it is for users to use. Creating a strong value proposition helps to better understand customers, which is always the first step to success. The e-commerce space has never been so elastic and wide before. Keeping in mind the recent rise in global business, technological advancements and people using online shopping, the digital space has opened up flexible ways to set up e-commerce revenue models online and reach audiences much more easily.

Simply put, e-commerce or electronic commerce business refers to selling, buying or transacting online in a digital marketplace. Products or services are displayed through a website or mobile application that facilitates the purchase of products and financial transactions.

The e-commerce revenue model is usually taken into account when classifying an e-commerce business because revenue refers to the total amount of money a business receives after trading its products or service with its customers. There are a number of options that can be used to generate revenue, including advertising, affiliate marketing, subscriptions, and more. Generally, advertisers are always charged a commission to place their ads on a well-known internet marketing platform. It is a classic principle followed for a business categorized for an advertising revenue model. They take advantage of the huge traffic of people who regularly visit the chosen platform to make a purchase, view an ad and be redirected to the point of purchase. This can be related to how to increase the number of potential customers in the business. Payments are made on the hosting platform based on a fixed commission or the traffic density is decided.

Phygital is the latest buzzword for the strategies and tactics marketers use to engage with their customers. Phygital is a combination of two words or concepts of physical and digital, and represents the merging of physical and digital. Simply put, "Phygital" is the next and latest evolution of that same mindset as marketers think about how best and most effectively to engage with their consumers. Customers today live their lives online. Most aspects of their daily lives have a digital equivalent. As consumers, our lives today are a blend of the digital and the physical. We may not realize it, but the two worlds are so intertwined that the differences are often blurred. It is logical for marketers to meet customers in that same world and with the same approach. Phygital retail is blurring the lines between physical retail and digital retail. What this boils down to is taking the best elements of each and using them to improve the performance of both, while providing a better user experience.

It's no secret that e-commerce has captured an increasing percentage of total retail sales. In the last few years, theories and predictions have been developing about how digital retail (e-commerce) is surpassing physical retail. So city streets are dying and people don't want to go to shops anymore. While it's true that e-commerce has advantages over brick-and-mortar retail, it's just not right to see it as a head-to-head competition. E-commerce allows customers to browse products at their leisure (from their home), look for good deals and have them delivered straight to their door. Physical retail simply can't compete with that and shouldn't try. Physical retail shines with experience, brand loyalty and awareness. The Phygital retail strategy is a concept

that has been around for some time and is thriving with users (consumers). By combining physical and digital retail, the potential of both is maximized, that is, the strengths of each are used. The term *Phygital* was coined to describe multi-channel marketing, an approach where all marketing channels work together to provide a completely seamless customer experience. The intention of combining physical and digital experiences is to bring out the best of both worlds, and the ultimate goal is to provide customers with unique, highly personalized experiences that leave a lasting impression.

Not only does *phygital* benefit the consumer experience, but it's also a way for brands to seamlessly integrate their physical and digital marketing efforts and get more opportunities to sell their products.

The *Long Tail* is a business strategy that allows companies to make significant profits by selling a large number of unique but less popular items that are sold in relatively small quantities. The term was first coined by Chris Anderson, who argued that low-demand or low-volume products can collectively account for a market share equal to or greater than a high-demand product, but only if the store or distribution channel is large enough. The *Long Tail* concept considers less popular goods that are in lower demand. Anderson argues that these commodities could really boost profitability as consumers move away from mainstream markets. This theory is supported by the growing number of online marketplaces that alleviate competition for shelf space and enable the sale of an immeasurable number of products, especially via the Internet. Although mainstream and high-demand products achieve a higher number of purchases through leading distribution channels and shelf space, their initial costs are high, which raises the question of their profitability. In comparison, "long tail" goods have remained on the market for a longer period and are still sold outside the market channels. These goods have low distribution and production costs and are readily available for sale. Cross selling consists of offering different complementary products to your clients. The key to this system is adding value to the user by showing them that their needs and wants are truly recognized. Like any other marketing campaign, there must be planning and strategy behind cross selling.

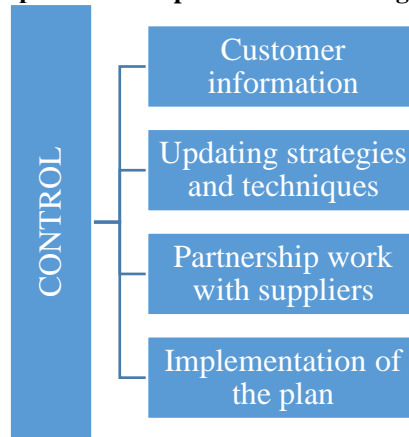
The differences between cross selling and classic selling are big, although these two terms are usually mixed up. However, it is important to clearly distinguish between them. Cross selling, as mentioned above, encourages customers to buy other related products that complement their purchase. However, an upgrade tries to force the customer to buy another, more expensive version of the same product. These are different strategies with the same goal - to increase the average amount of the shopping cart and at the end of the purchase. With the Cross selling strategy, this goal is achieved by adding other products. This method sells a more expensive and thus more profitable product. Another strategy often used in electronic stores is up-selling, which suggests visitors to buy a more expensive product or to buy a larger quantity of products. This is achieved by proposing similar products that meet the same need but are of higher quality and more expensive, and by creating a package of several related products, the purchase of which results in greater savings than when purchased individually. The basic difference between cross-selling and up-selling is that up-selling suggests products only after analyzing the customer's shopping cart and thus suggests related products that could better meet his needs. The main goal of the

mentioned methods is to achieve higher profits and encourage visitors to buy a larger quantity of the products sold.

4. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE REDEFINED CATEGORY MANAGEMENT ON THE WEB STORE

Respect for the variability of the business environment, i.e. quick use of new business opportunities, becomes a condition for the survival of modern retail online organizations that apply category management, especially if it is a web store where products from different manufacturers can be purchased. Web stores have implemented the category management in their established business processes, which they continuously adjust and develop, with priorities set, i.e. speeding up the business process, which is achieved by reorienting customers and applying an appropriate sales strategy while monitoring the competition, treating web stores as a marketing medium, new technologies and loyalty programs. Web store category management must be focused on the customer with local and global application. The focus of the online store category management strategy is the customer, and it starts with defining the category, that is, what determines the category itself, including segments and sub-segments. After defining the categories, priority is given to the continuous collection and selection of information about customers. The key moment of such a redefined category management is the active use of insight into customer profiles obtained through loyalty programs and the CRM approach. Based on the information about the customers of the online store, it is necessary to define and recognize the purchase modalities, the online store develops a strategic and operational plan of the category management that is focused on customers. After the planning part of the business process, which should be 80% dedicated to the basic plan or basic planning, and 20% to adjustments, there follows the implementation of the defined program of the category management, with elements of continuous supervision and development of new solutions. It is especially necessary to pay attention to the supervision of the implementation of the business plan of the category management, which is actually an important source of the new business cycle in the function of improving sales and creating customer loyalty. A key innovation in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of the redefinition of the category management, which is contained in the "new" model of the category management and the separation of the first two described steps of the business process from the subsequent stages of business practice. Namely, the very fact of relatively rare re-examination of the existing definitions and role of the category management relieves the overall process of the category management, creating space to focus on the operational activities that the online store deals with. This speeds up the reaction to business opportunities that arise at the level of the online store, i.e. the product category in question.

Figure 1. Continuous operational steps of web store category management



Source: author's work according to Fowler and Goh (2012), p. 104.

According to Nath and Bharadwaj (2020), the focus of the innovative category management is on finding the best opportunities and avoiding wasting potential customers' time on extensive searches. The emphasis is also on understanding consumer behavior and solving business challenges. The objectified collection and processing of data about customers of online stores is a continuous activity of the business process of the category management, whereby the variables of consumer behavior of customers are registered and clarified, including the potential influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of shopping marketing. The essence is to speed up the processing of a large amount of collected data, primarily through automation and sometimes decentralization, which enables daily updating of detailed insights about customers in a large amount of collected data. Daily updating of customer data and their management processing is essential for the success of the application of category management practices and the overall business in online retail. According to the above, product category management by concept, the effectiveness of which on the web store depends on the following:

1. Sales management begins with the collection of transaction data.
2. Sales support management means managing sales efficiency by collecting requests for interventions and other types of data used for changes in operational business and improvements to the web store;
3. Campaign management provides the possibility of creating and activating campaigns in certain time intervals, statistics of user responses included in campaigns, predictions of future user reactions;
4. Managing call centers means recording input values - user interaction with the company, recording user satisfaction with the service and the ability to measure employee efficiency;
5. Data management: collection of user data as fundamental knowledge for business success.

6. Service quality management: uses already collected interactions and general transactional data for the purpose of analyzing and identifying user needs.

Severović (2013:137) also mentions the queue management component as another integral element of CRM, stating how clients If the same applies to web stores, then when logging in to the web store, clients receive their number and wait for the system to call them when their number is in line. However, if we look at this same component in the context of an information system, it is not common business practice that a queue management system is part of a CRM information system. The CRM information system can, through integration, receive information from the queue management system in order to link exactly that interaction and transaction with each individual client. In addition to standard financial indicators of business performance, web stores also monitor performance using customer-related indicators. Financial indicators that are monitored indicate the consequence of business strategy, while key performance indicators related to customers are indicators that can explain the cause of business results.

Web stores today often categorize their customers precisely according to their different values - for example, high-value users, those who bring less value, users with potential, etc. According to Peppers and Rogers (2004), in the context of the aforementioned attribute of the online customer's lifetime, there are four categories of customers:

- "Most Valuable Customers (MVCs) - clients who bring the most value to the business - those who have the most transactions, bring the highest profit, are extremely willing to cooperate and tend to be very loyal. [...] The goal of the business is to keep these clients.
- Clients with the greatest growth potential (MGCs) – clients with the greatest potential that can be realized through cross-selling, keeping clients for a longer period of time or by trying to change the behavior of these clients in using products and the company's service in a way that is cheaper for the company and whose price will be lower. [...] MCGs are actually the most desirable customers for competing companies, and that is why the goal of business is the growth and development of relations with this category of clients.
- Below-Zeros clients (BZs) – clients who, regardless of the company's efforts, will record less income than maintenance costs. This means that not only is their actual value below zero, but their potential value is also below zero. [...] The goal of the business is either to convert these clients into profitable ones (eg by charging a fee for the use of services they previously had free of charge) or to encourage them to become someone else's unprofitable clients.
- Clients who move (Migrators) – clients who stay on the edge of what is unprofitable and the potential for profitability. [...] The goal of the business is to migrate these clients to the MCG group or to get them to show their "true face" in the context of potential profit for the company in the future."

One of the more important advantages of categorizing or ranking customers by value is that web stores can, thanks to this categorization, allocate resources and

marketing efforts more rationally, focusing more on high-value customers and less on those who bring low value. The goal of the entire process of categorization and ranking of users is also to enable the business to develop different value propositions and strategies for managing the relationship with clients that the company can use.

Automated product processes are part of the web store's product category management system and represent, in fact, application support for business processes within the web store. They enable the reduction of storage costs, the shortening of the time required for the preparation of orders and the shipment of goods, as well as more efficient supervision in the warehouse according to the location and shelf life of the products. In order to eliminate errors when ordering and positioning products, a number of software solutions have been developed that enable automatic ordering and automatic positioning of goods. The automated positioning of goods on the website of the web store can be observed through the positioning of goods on shelves in the warehouse area and the positioning of goods in the retail area. Automated ordering of goods as well as automatic positioning of goods directly affects the reduction of costs through optimization of stocks, and the elimination of human work in repetitive and standardized activities.

5. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

Web stores offer a whole spectrum of advantages, one of the biggest of which is the availability and greater selection of products. Visitors can shop from the comfort of their own home, and just comparing products and information is much more accessible. But, in addition, they can more easily find similar electronic stores, i.e. competitors, and visit them and make a purchase in just a few clicks. For this reason, attracting and retaining potential customers is a real challenge, and it is important to create a unique electronic store that offers a unique user experience, a wide selection of not only delivery, content personalization and payment methods, but also products and categories. Tracking customers has become much easier compared to physical stores, which leads to better knowledge of customers and their buying habits. This enables an individual approach through the design and management of product categories, cross-selling or up-selling, newsletters and personalized discounts. Content on the electronic store should encourage visitors to buy, which is not available to such an extent in physical stores.

Digitization of the sales process of web stores is the driving force that has brought a series of structured and unstructured data, for the first time ready for analysis and use in the application of appropriate strategies. The feverish race involving manufacturers of hardware, applications, web stores, manufacturers, consulting firms, marketing experts and other participants is aimed at clearer, more accurate and more complete prediction of customer decisions and more effective management of timely information (signals) that facilitate the purchase. by product category, it is also transformed from a concept that contributed to a better understanding of suppliers and web stores into a concept that enables suppliers and web stores to better understand customers.

This ongoing business transformation is accompanied by numerous changes in the business philosophy and organization of both the supplier and the design of the web store, with an emphasis on business analytics, a customer-oriented web store with an IT system that can provide immediate analytics of its customers. It is evident that a new concept of strategic differentiation and positioning is on the horizon. Product category management is a concept that will be intensively studied and researched in the future and in the further development of web stores - category management research in a multi-channel environment will gain importance. Given that in the future the largest number of customers will be oriented towards purchasing, i.e. interaction on the web store, it will be interesting from several aspects to investigate how the behavior of said customers will affect category management and vice versa, whether category management can influence and with which strategies to apply customer behavior. The question of the effectiveness of the category management in electronic commerce has not been sufficiently investigated, which should be the subject of future research and collaboration between the authors. One of the future directions of research can be the application of modern technology and its interaction with category management, that is, the relationship between the benefits that the application of modern technology brings to category management and the resulting costs.

The latest official data of the State Institute for statistics are in favor of increasing sales through web stores, so qualitative research is a limitation and can only be taken as a basis for the implementation of a quantitative sample on those consumers who shop online. Furthermore, category management on the web store was approached in this paper in general, and it is necessary in future research to take into account the fact that it is necessary to conduct two studies. One, on a web store that sells several manufacturers, and the other, that is, a web store whose sales are based exclusively on one manufacturer.

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