

Personalization Best Practices

1. **Personalization can be an effective tactic for improving conversion rates as well as value per conversion.** Personalization of your site enables customizing the content presented to a prospect, based on many parameters. Improving the customer experience of websites is one of the highest priorities of online retailers. Significant investment of your time and attention is needed to implement personalization.
2. **Personalization begins with data and segmentation.** Effective personalization is based on good data and improving it over time. Leverage the data you have now, but identify the data you believe you will ultimately need (what products are ordered together, do they get reordered, etc.). Then, start gathering it. Using this data to identify groups of similar, actionable customers, so you can develop and execute plans for presenting the right messages to them.
3. **Consider personalization tools that can configure recommendations based on your rules and your data.** Personalization tools gather order, browsing, profile, and wish list data to effectively anticipate a personalized shopping list. Make sure the tools you consider can use your past and future data to make ACCURATE recommendations. Since recommendations improve with historical data, if a tool cannot use your old data, or its rules don't work well with the data you have, it will not give your customers relevant recommendations.
4. **Start small in order to grow large.** Start personalization on easily-identifiable segments which could include first-time visitors, visitors from particular geographic locations, visitors referred from specific sites or search terms. These can be built to give relevant recommendations quickly without as much past data as other groups.
5. **Like so much in online merchandising, personalization is an ongoing and continuous process.** Don't simply implement and launch and assume the improvement was worth the effort. Trials, evaluation and process automation will involve significant financial and human investment, but the incremental results will be worth the effort.
6. **Personalization should extend beyond the web to include email and social.** Since you typically have more information about customers who have signed up to receive emails or are involved in social media, these could be the most effective venues for personalization.
7. **Effective personalization requires subtlety.** If you're too explicit about your knowledge, you risk negative responses associated with "Big Brother" and privacy concerns.
8. **Link analytics, search, CRM and web content management technologies.** These tools are critical to gathering the necessary data for personalization. Work with these systems through all your channels to optimize what you gather and use it to deliver the most complete personalized content possible online.
9. **Data integrity is critical to optimizing personalization.** Develop practices to de-duplicate, cleanse and validate data on an ongoing basis. If data integrity is not kept up, it is much more difficult to go back to clean up.