

Services You Can Use: Selling Through Your Website

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One of the dilemmas manufacturers face is how to sell through their website directly to consumers without making their retail customers upset. *Shopatron*, founded in 2001, is a company that specializes in bridging the gap between manufacturer, retailer and consumer. It provides a service which may be interesting to many toy industry manufacturers.

Simply put, *Shopatron's* service allows a manufacturer to create direct to consumer sales through their own website but rather than shipping directly to the customer, the purchaser picks it up at their local retailer.

To find out more I spoke with Ed Stevens, CEO of *Shopatron*. Here is my interview:

Richard:

What services does *Shopatron* offer the manufacturer?

Ed:

Shopatron makes it simple for a manufacturer to integrate retailers as ecommerce fulfillment partners. For example, a shopper ordering a product at a manufacturer website can go to their local toy store to pick up the order the very same day. Retailers can also be engaged to ship orders by *UPS* or *Fedex*.

Richard:

Why should manufacturers want to use your service?

Ed:

Manufacturers, in a competitive market, must provide the experiences shoppers want when buying a product. If a shopper wants to come to a manufacturer website, place an order for a product, and go pick it up the same day at a local toy store, why would a manufacturer not want to provide that experience? Our research shows more than 50% of shoppers want that kind of experience.

The pre-purchase research experience, the purchasing experience, and the post-purchase experience are key value layers on top of the actual physical product. In the toy industry, look no further than *Webkinz*. A plush toy is transformed by the experiences built around it.

Richard:

How do consumers feel about picking up merchandise at a local retailer rather than have it arrive by mail?

Ed:

Consumers are incredibly fast to adopt experiences that save them time and money. The main driver behind in-store pickup is speed. The sooner the consumer can get the product, the better. If 2 day express shipping is better than 5 day ground shipping, then same day pick up is even better. The other sales drivers are free shipping and ability to see and touch the product.

Richard:

How do retailers feel about being the pickup point?

Ed:

Retailers are overjoyed to see their brick and mortar stores providing convenience value to online shoppers. One in four shoppers who pick up an online order adds something to their purchase while in the store. That the web is transforming into a medium for driving local sales is hard for some internet only retailers to accept, but it is very easy for brick and mortar retailers to accept.

Richard:

Your company services many different kinds of consumer products manufacturers. Do you have any toy industry manufacturers currently using your service?

Ed:

There are more than 120 toy and hobby manufacturers using *Shopatron*. *Melissa and Doug*, *Small World Toys*, *International Playthings*, *Ravensburger*, *Creativity for Kids*, *Folkmanis*, and many others I wish I could mention here. Manufacturers who use *Shopatron* understand that retailers are a key component of the value chain. Their wisdom in deploying *Shopatron* five years ago, even before the in-store pickup demand was obvious, is impressive.

Richard:

If someone wanted to learn more about *Shopatron*, where should they go: To your website?

Ed:

A manufacturer or retailer can go to the *Shopatron* website, www.Shopatron.com, for some additional high level information. We have consultants in the toy industry who can assess needs and recommend strategies. We work with over 500 manufacturers worldwide, and we welcome the opportunity to work with more great companies.

Richard:

Are there other companies providing a similar service? If so can you provide my readers with some names?

Ed:

There are a fair number of ecommerce companies out there. Some of the better ones are *Elasticpath* (www.elasticpath.com), *Marketlive* (www.marketlive.com), and *Truition* (www.truition.com). There are not, however, any companies providing retailer-integrated ecommerce solutions for manufacturers, though, so we will even be a back end partner to ecommerce companies in cases where solutions like in-store pickup are key to client needs.

If you are a provider similar to *Shopatron*, write in and let our readers know about your services. Good selling!

<http://www.playthings.com/blog/390000439/post/870029487.html>