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Optimising Customer Experience

Inspiring consumer confidence is a necessary step for any online retailer trading in the UK. From attracting customers to increasing the likelihood of a sale and ensuring a return visit to your online shop, building levels of trust and confidence in your service will go a long way in improving your overall performance and profitability.

The issues that typically undermine UK consumers' confidence when buying cross-border are:

- a. Lack of clarity over consumer rights
- b. Concern over the ease of redress
- c. The inability to effectively compare international retailer offerings
- d. Concerns over delivery arrangements
- e. Fear of fraud

Indeed, 70% of the cross-border UK e-shoppers surveyed by IMRG said that their biggest fear was identity theft and fraud. To inspire consumer confidence, a merchant should provide consumers with clear information on website security and on how they handle consumer transactions and protect consumer information. Merchants are strongly encouraged to publish their privacy policy concerning their use of a customer's personal information. Importantly, 90% of UK cross-border e-shoppers say that buyer protection against loss is critical and recent research indicates that 97% of UK customers receive a full refund for any losses sustained through online shopping. To this end, merchants should endeavour to meet the reasonable expectations of UK customers in terms of consumer protection and will ensure that they comply with all applicable law in such areas. Ultimately, UK consumers expect a clear and transparent service charter with a high level of guarantee if something goes wrong.

Generally, when trading in a new territory, online entrepreneurs should treat their new market in much the same way they do their home market— setting up in a different country is more than just a matter of acquiring a new URL. One very important consideration is the language used throughout your website, as all webpages and associated content should be translated into the language of your adopted territory. In fact, UK legislation requires that certain information on the landing page of a merchant's website be provided in English if they are trading in the UK, and anyway, a website in English will increase the visibility on UK search engines and lift consumer confidence. Importantly, if you do use a UK domain name and your website and transactions are in English, you will almost certainly be considered legally to be targeting UK consumers and thus subject to UK law and dispute resolution mechanisms with regard to those customers.

It's also a good idea to do some consumer research to see whether your brand name and image will perform well within the UK marketplace.



If consumers are able to transact in English on your website, as is recommended, then you should also provide customer service in English, or clearly state prior to purchase that you cannot. If you pride yourself on providing highly personalised customer care, then scaling up to serve the UK market (typically by telephone, live chat or email) is a necessary cost of trading in the UK. Localised contact centres are also a must and specific consideration should be given to time zones. If provision of these services in-house proves problematical, you can always take advantage of the growing pool of good quality third party suppliers available to take on customer service provision.

Regardless of the selected location, it's always vital for a trader to examine key market trends and behaviours in their territory of choice and localise their product ranges accordingly, taking into account things such as consumer demographics and territory climate. A cross-border entrepreneur should also take note of things like territory-relevant phrases, national holidays and events, and effective tones of voice. In every case, merchants should endeavour to ensure that their advertisements and sales promotions are considerate to the sensibilities, expectations and legal protection of consumers within the territories from which the merchants are prepared to accept orders. Merchants should also make every effort to ensure that unsuitable or inappropriate material does not reach consumers and warnings should be given regarding material that may be unsuitable or inappropriate for children or other consumers.

Before expanding your business into the UK, an additional important step for a developing e-retailer is the analysis of existing website traffic; a lot can be learned from examining your UK customer base and their behaviour. Are they just bouncing or browsing, or are they following an order through to completion? Are they engaging with your social media channels? It's also a good idea to do some consumer research to see whether your brand name and image will perform well within the UK marketplace.

Upon setting up an e-shop in the UK, a merchant can also make inroads by maintaining and supporting his consumer base by taking steps to investigate technological developments and optimising service performance criteria, as in recent years UK customers have become accustomed to high standards of web performance. For example, the optimum web screen arrival time is <6 seconds, and >20 seconds is completely unacceptable under normal conditions.

Further means of inspiring consumer confidence in the UK include:

- Implementing a platform for consumers to review your products and/or services
- Displaying an industry accreditation or trust mark

Finally, with the growth of ecommerce imposing a heavy burden on logistics and delivery, clear and effective delivery information and mechanisms are an important consideration when it comes to bolstering consumer confidence. Merchants should make best efforts to meet the reasonable expectations of their customers when determining delivery times and fulfil orders within 7 days unless the consumer has consented to a different arrangement or is given an opportunity to recover any money paid. As a UK merchant you should also keep customers reasonably informed of any failure to meet an expected delivery time.