

# Eavesdropping on e-tail

By [Matthew Leighton](#)

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So we are well and truly into 2021 now. The infamous conversations and headlines that plagued 2020 are slowly losing momentum as the world tires of the same old, same old. Industries need to breathe new life into the 'new normal' we continue referring to, and offer insight and guidance into how businesses can navigate the aftermath of one of the world's most epic storms.



Matthew Leighton

It is no secret that e-commerce was one of the few industries – if not the only – that had anything remotely positive to report on the year that was. Globally, e-commerce sales grew 27.6% to the tune of \$4.280tn according to [eMarketer](#). Although the report suggests that this will decline in 2021 due to traditional brick and mortar stores taking back some of the commercial activity, the e-commerce landscape has changed significantly.

Here are some key checkpoints for e-tailers operating in the 'infodemic' world:

## Understanding your customer and meeting a need

“Although the environment has become more ‘digital’, customer experience is still pivotal to e-tail success. Before looking at sales figures and forecasts, invest your time into understanding your customer.

Just because a large portion of purchasing activity has moved online, people still want to be able to explore and connect with a brand in a way that meets a need. As an example, e-tailers the world over saw a significant increase in DIY and home maintenance sales. Those who optimised this data by either grouping product categories or offering promotional deals and discounts proved their value for the customer by understanding the immediate need.



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## Instant gratification needs to be 'instant'

A key emerging trend from e-commerce activity over the past year that has influenced positive or negative sentiment is the online delivery process. Grocery retailers have taken the delivery timeframe to the next level by offering a 1-hour turnaround on delivery. Although this may not necessarily be realistic in the short term for other online retailers that don't sell food, e-tailers will need to prioritise efforts in working with 3rd party suppliers, distribution and warehousing teams.

## Invest in tech

Tech is expensive. The larger the scope the larger the bill so it is important to make sure that whatever tech investment you make now is scalable for the future. Businesses who are in the infancy stages of their technical back-end need to consider what the future of online retail as far as tech is concerned looks like.

Building apps is imperative. But building apps that can integrate with artificial and business intelligence, augmented reality and other e-commerce APIs geared toward helping online stores learn about the customers who shop there, will lead the charge in tech advancement and innovation, especially around mobile.



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## Data tells a riveting story

So many businesses have focused on the 'what' instead of the 'how'. We all want to know what we 'should' be doing; which systems to run; which products to sell; but at the end of the day, who should be telling us this? Who should we be building our business around? And how do we find this out?

By listening to the customer. Listen to what they are looking for. Watching and understanding how they engage with your business, with your brand and in your social conversations – the good ones, of course, but the bad ones even more so as customers often have a candid way of telling you when you are messing up.

## An online store still needs people who like working with people

Just because an e-tailer may 'operate' from behind the screen, does not mean the people within that organisation should not be part of creative narrative of the brand. It is important that customers remain central to the core business objectives and the only way for this to happen is for the entire team to be part of the online fulfilment journey – from the social media channels, right through to the individual delivering the package.

*The inaugural [E-commerce Day](#) launches on 10 March 2021, with a [special editorial focus on Bizcommunity](#) for the week. [E-commerce Day](#) is an initiative by [ecommerce.co.za](#).*

## ABOUT MATTHEW LEIGHTON

Matthew Leighton is the Creative Director at OneDayOnly.

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