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Online merchants gain an extra \$107 billion in 2020 thanks to pandemic

April Berthene | Sep 14, 2020

U.S. online sales increased 42% year over year in August, a slowdown from July. BOPIS sales surged 259% year over year in August, and smartphone sales generated 40% of online sales so far in 2020.

U.S. online sales increased 42% year over year in August, a significant increase but markedly slower than July, when online sales increased 55% year over year, according to new data from Adobe Analytics.

In August, online sales reached \$63 billion, and the first eight months of 2020 generated \$497 billion in online sales, according to Adobe. Since March, Adobe attributes the pandemic to an extra \$107 billion spent online. As of August, 130 days in 2020 exceeded \$2 billion in online sales, compared with 2019, when only two days exceeded \$2 billion in online sales outside of the holiday season.

Adobe Analytics data is based on online sales data from trillions of anonymous visits to retail sites and tens of millions of product SKUs from 80 of the top 100 retailers in the Digital Commerce 360 Top 1000. Data is based on 18 product categories including apparel, electronics, home, grocery, appliance, personal care, office supplies, books, jewelry, furniture and toys, among others.

Adobe attributes part of the August slow down to more stores opening. In Adobe's Aug. 31-Sept. 2 survey of 1,018 U.S. consumers, 27% of consumers said they felt more comfortable shopping in physical stores compared with July.

“While online shopping continues to dominate, we’re now seeing a slowdown in growth as more people return to shopping in brick-and-mortar stores and consumers curb their online spending across certain categories, like apparel,” says Vivek Pandya, senior digital insights manager at Adobe Digital Insights.

Online daily apparel sales fell 3% in August compared with online daily sales in July, according to Adobe. Many categories, however, had online daily sales increase in August compared with July, including online groceries and consumer electronics, both up 3% in August compared with July.

Shoppers continue to flock to buy online pickup in store (BOPIS) for fulfillment, with BOPIS sales increasing 59% in August compared with July and increasing 259% in August 2020 compared with August 2019, according to Adobe. BOPIS may be a popular option for shoppers who want to receive their product right away. This is especially important when shipping carriers are stretched to capacity and packages may be delayed. Adobe’s consumer survey found that 33% of consumers said their online orders arrived later than expected. Plus, 30% of consumers said they prefer using BOPIS or curbside pickup over delivery, according to the survey.

Adobe also found that consumers spent \$190 billion on smartphones in 2020 as of August, and smartphones accounted for 40% of online sales so far this year.

U.S. ecommerce average order values continue to recover in August, at \$153.10 compared with \$151.00 in July, and up from the monthly low in April at \$144.00.

Many of these online sales throughout the pandemic likely went to marketplace giant Amazon.com Inc. (No. 1 in the 2020 Digital Commerce 360 Top 1000), as shoppers flocked to the marketplace to buy COVID-19-related goods, according to a recent study by Remazing GmbH, an agency that helps brands sell on Amazon. It found that 71% of the top 100 search terms on the U.S. Amazon marketplace were related to COVID-19 from mid-February to mid-March.

Remarkable defined COVID-19 keywords as searches related to products that surged because of the virus such as face mask, disinfectant, hand sanitizer, N95 mask, thermometer for adults, rice, bread, rubbing alcohol and toilet paper.