



# The Human Experience POV



## How E-Commerce is Changing the Human Experience of Back-to-School

Back-to-school is here, and it's time to trade in the beach towels for backpacks. And no question, retailers have been ready. Second only to the holiday season, back-to-school is a massive retail moment expected to deliver \$80.7 billion in total spending in the U.S., according to the [National Retail Federation](#).

But back-to-school isn't just a consumer moment. It has become a human moment, as well. It's a rite of passage for parents and kids alike, underpinned by back-to-school traditions and rituals. It's also a moment for all of us to reset after the lazy days of summer and get back into a routine.

As with all other categories, e-commerce is changing the very nature of back-to-school. According to [Deloitte's](#) annual back to school report, 56% of shoppers plan to make back-to-school purchases in physical stores, while 29% are planning to make purchases online, up from 23% last year. And, not surprisingly, most of this will be done on smart phones, with mobile back-to-school shopping set to grow 60% this year.

Whether it's how we shop, where we seek inspiration or how we carve out our personalized back-to-school path, the rising influence of e-commerce presents new opportunities for brands and retailers to meet people on their back-to-school desire lines.

### **Back-to-School is Now for Everyone**

Back-to-school continues to expand from its roots. While it was once exclusively K-12-focused, it has expanded to college-bound kids in recent years, which brought with it new categories such as furniture, décor and electronics. Amazon's second concerted back-to-school campaign ("Happy School Year!"), which ran in conjunction with Amazon Prime Day, has underscored that back-to-school is really for everyone. Beyond getting a jump start on back-to-school basics, Amazon's push expanded further into beauty, grooming, wellness, household appliances, and so on, all with an eye toward resetting and getting back into healthy routines.

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## Personalized Shopping Experiences

Brands are creating new solutions to help reduce friction from back-to-school shopping. We're seeing increased focus on omni-channel approaches to simplify and personalize. College-bound kids can now purchase college furnishings, supplies and electronics near their home and have those items shipped directly to campus or picked up at a nearby store. And, for those kids who always want the latest back-to-school looks, subscriptions for apparel brands are on the rise. Brands like Nike and American Eagle Outfitters are now offering subscriptions, enabling shoppers to sign up and pay a certain amount of money each month to rent a continuous stream of the latest looks.

## E-commerce Driving New Rituals & Traditions

How families approach the big back-to-school shop and the traditions associated with it are changing. We now see parents and kids doing joint list-making in their Amazon or Target apps while browsing from their mobile devices. Families are gathering for unboxing moments to see their kids reaction while they try on that new backpack for the first time. Another emerging ritual taking hold is college kids creating YouTube "dorm reveal" videos to showcase to the world how they personalized their dorm room décor to reflect their personality and interests.

## New Spaces for Back-to-School Inspiration

Instagram, Pinterest and Snap have become the key channels for back-to-school shopping inspiration, and brands are creating new experiential and individualized tech-based marketing experiences to drive commerce. Best Buy's interactive "Shop the Dorm" feature empowers college students to set their dorm room vision before they step foot in a store or on campus. Bed, Bath & Beyond's Instagram content targets parents and college kids alike, partnering with influencers from diverse backgrounds and stages of life as everyone gets #CampusReady.

As back-to-school continues to become a more and more powerful cultural moment, there are abundant opportunities for brands to connect with people. Brands that will win at back-to-school will:

- **Think Expansively:** Back-to-school touches all of us - from parents to young kids to college students to grandparents. And, it's not just limited to school supplies, clothing and electronics. Categories like food, beauty, wellness and more are all in play. What need can your brand solve for people even if it doesn't feel directly connected to school?

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- **Lead with Solutions vs. Channels & Products:** Think about the human problem you are solving for at this time. What solution can you create that will reduce friction for people at this often emotional and overwhelming time of year?
- **Know when the brick-and-mortar retail is important, and when it isn't:** There are definitely needs and categories that are much better suited to e-commerce. Where your back-to-school basics – a list of supplies dictated by your school, for example – might be great for a Target curbside pickup. A mall visit may still reign supreme for more personal items like lunchboxes, shoes and accessories. Brands need to understand what channel to lead with based on whether it's a functional versus emotional purchase.

While e-commerce might be changing how people experience back-to-school, the back-to-school moment isn't going away. It's a time of year that's ripe with human possibility and ways for brands to connect. Understanding people's needs at this critical time will be key for brands looking to create meaningful experiences for people and capture those all-important back-to-school dollars.

## About the Author

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