

DIVE BRIEF

Shopify adds Facebook Messenger direct sales channel

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Dive Brief:

- E-commerce platform provider Shopify unveiled free Facebook Messenger sales channel capabilities for merchant customers in the U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia.
- Consumers in a Messenger session with any Facebook Business Page enabled with sales capabilities will be presented with a "Shop Now" option to view a product catalog, and can complete a purchase using Shopify's checkout tools.
- To start using the new sales option, merchants need to add the Messenger channel in Shopify, connect their Facebook Business Page and pick the products they want to sell through Messenger.

Dive Insight:

This is an interesting and necessary move for Shopify to make on behalf of its merchant customers as it peers down the road to where e-commerce transactions might be going. However, there is a significant difference between enabling sales via Facebook Messenger and actually *closing* sales via Facebook Messenger.

The 11,000 or so chatbots created through Messenger earlier this year, which can help Facebook chats fuel a sales discussion, are an example of the former. That's what Shopify is pursuing in this case.

More than 20,000 merchants have had almost 2 million unique conversations since Shopify began Messenger support earlier this year.

As for closing sales through Messenger, this is Shopify's latest attempt, following its earlier introduction of buy buttons on Facebook (and Pinterest). We haven't heard much about once-ballyhooed buy buttons lately, although these things take time.

Fortunately, Shopify seems to recognize that, and is not betting too much on the potential for a lot of sales to be completed through this channel. Instead, according to TechCrunch, Shopify sees the channel and the "Shop Now" capability more as a conversation driver and a way to get merchants and customers closer to a sale that they likely will complete through another channel. The prevailing notion is that starting those conversations today could lead to real direct sales in Messenger tomorrow — whenever tomorrow is.

This idea of "conversational commerce" is not brand new, and Shopify long has been a fan of the concept, as it explained earlier this year when it bought chatbot firm Kit CRM. Its Facebook Messenger channel is its most recent riff on this concept, and gives Shopify a good foundation from which to develop similar capabilities for other messaging platforms.