



The Future of eCommerce:

Creating Authentic Shoppable Content Experiences

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Introduction

Online shopping has been steadily on the rise for the last couple of decades. Then the COVID-19 global pandemic hit and online shopping skyrocketed.

In one year, eCommerce growth nearly tripled. Digital Commerce 360 estimated that online spending in 2020 represented 21.3% of total retail sales for the year—up from 15.1% annual growth in 2019 to an incredible 44% year-over-year growth in 2020¹.

But more online sales means fiercer online competition—both from well-established retailers and newcomers to the scene. Your competition is no longer just the other products on the shelf; it’s also products from the many eCommerce and DTC (direct-to-consumer) brands that are popping up across the internet seemingly every day.

It’s harder than ever before for brands to break through in such a crowded media environment where everyone is fighting for consumers’ limited attention. What’s more, the widespread availability of on-demand media has trained today’s consumers to expect a higher level of immediacy— whether that be instant viewing or instant buying.



In this rapidly changing landscape, content and commerce are becoming increasingly intertwined—opening the door for shoppable social content to emerge as a successful way to meet the evolving needs of scroll-happy shoppers who have high expectations but low trust in brands.

By connecting authentic content to commerce, today’s brands can engage consumers at the point of inspiration, shorten the path to purchase and effectively create better shopping experiences that drive discoverability, build customer trust and increase sales.

In this guide, we’ll share what shoppable content is, why it’s the future of eCommerce and how you can create engaging shoppable content experiences throughout your entire buyer’s journey.

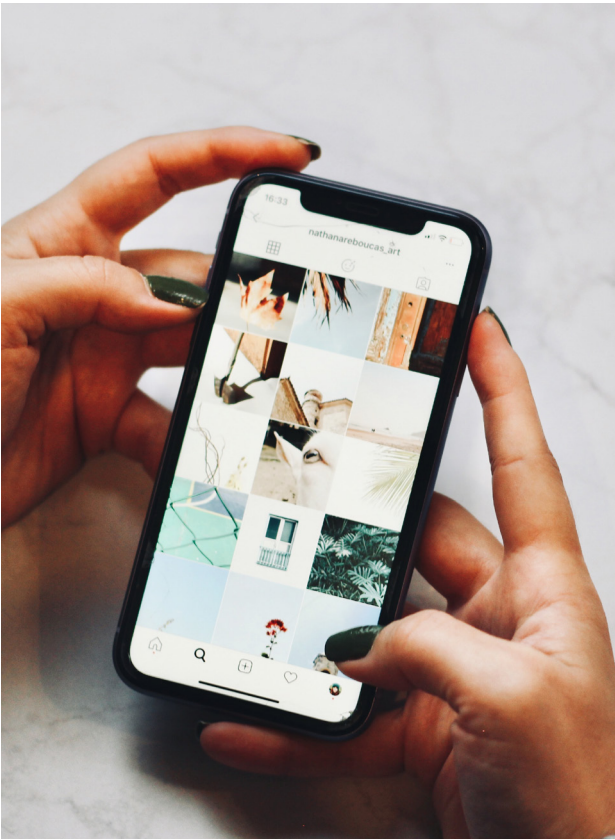


Closing the gap between inspiration and purchase

We currently live in a world of instant gratification. Shoppers have come to expect a direct route to buy from the inspiring content they see online. Brands that can provide the most frictionless experience with the most compelling content are the ones that will inevitably win over consumers and beat out the competition.

In the world of eCommerce, visual content is ultimately what links selling to buying. Yet, up until recently, visual content simply couldn't provide a direct, instant sale for shoppers who wanted to take immediate action. That is until shoppable content entered the picture.

Shoppable content is any piece of visual content—like images or videos—that gives consumers the ability to directly take action towards making a purchase, whether that be to 'learn more', 'add to cart' or 'buy now.'

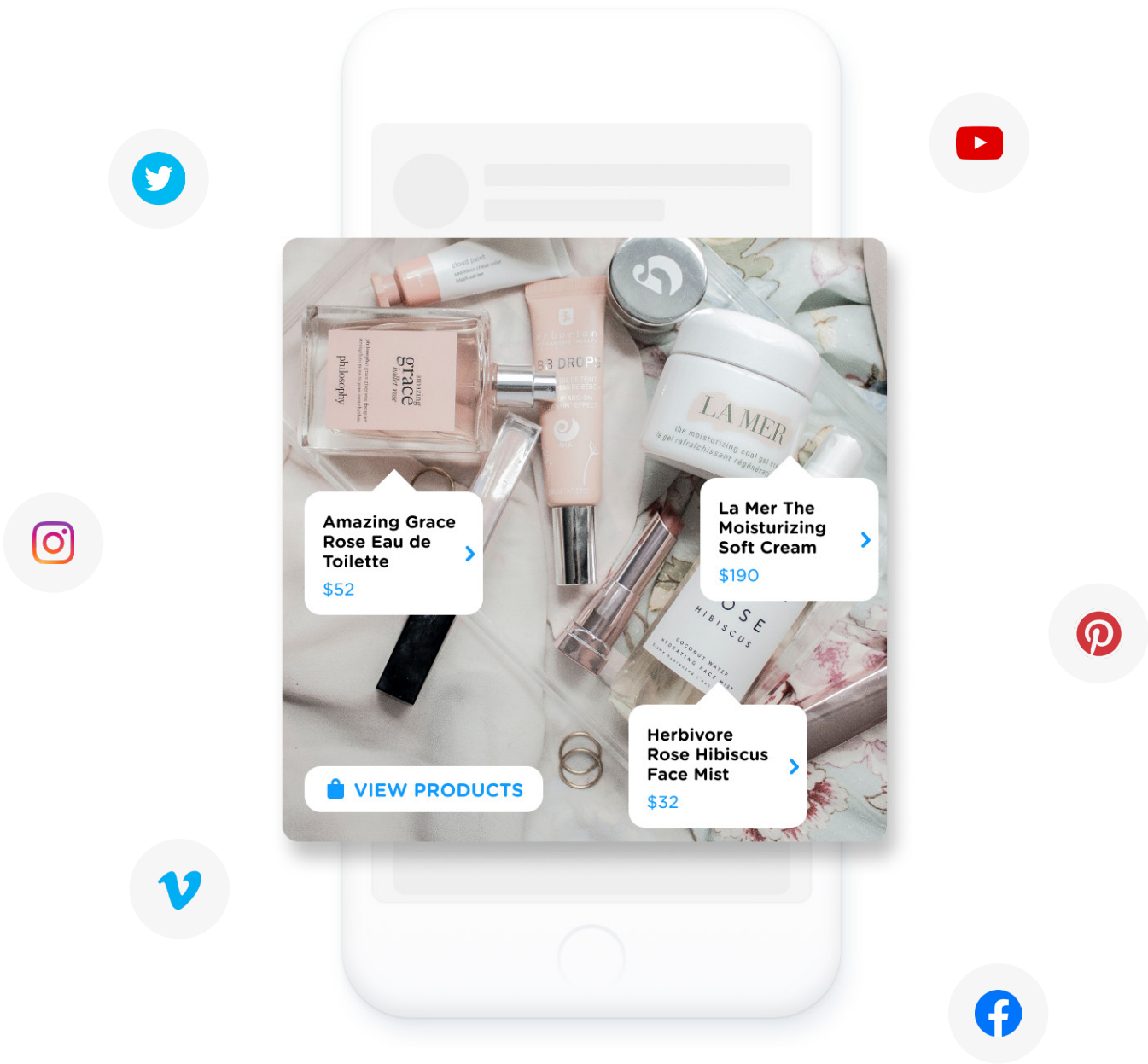


Shoppable content gives marketers an engaging way to promote their products, making them more accessible for audiences to discover and act on.

Best of all, shoppable content can eliminate steps in the traditional buyer's journey—diminishing the chance that potential buyers will drop off on their path to purchase. In a best-case scenario, shoppable content ensures consumers are only one or two clicks away from getting the product they desire. It's online shopping made fast, easy, seamless and engaging.

*“The medium is the store,
and the store is the medium.”*

— Randall Rothenburg, Executive Chair
of the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB)²



Why Shoppable UGC is the Future of eCommerce

Delivering compelling visual content that consumers can engage with is crucial to eCommerce success. In fact, a DemandGen report revealed that a whopping 91% of buyers prefer visual and interactive content over traditional formats³.

But all visual content is not created equal.

The last couple of decades have seen consumer interest in staged and polished brand content diminish as the popularity of real and unvarnished content on social media has grown. Armed with high-tech cameras in their pockets and the public publishing power of social apps, today's consumers have become the world's greatest content creators—and they're creating the content they want to see from brands.

It's called user-generated content (UGC) and it's the most authentic, trusted and influential content that eCommerce brands can use to fuel their shoppable content experiences.

User-generated content (UGC)—any form of content—posts, images, videos, reviews, etc.—created by consumers on an online or social network.

When pointedly asked what content they most want to see from brands, the majority of consumers (56%) said user-generated photos and videos. And it's easy to understand why. UGC is the only type of content that can provide the visual social proof online shoppers seek⁴.

When considering items in person, people can see, feel, touch, hold and even smell the product. But this becomes much harder with online shopping, where you can't physically experience an item before purchasing it. UGC provides a real and relatable view into what products being sold online could look and be like in a shopper's actual life.

Not only does featuring user-generated content in your marketing help your brand create more meaningful connections with people, but it also provides a greater level of relevance, inclusivity and personalization to everyday consumers that simply can't be replicated in a professional studio.

Since people trust other people more than they trust brands, it's only natural that the most influential information in making their online purchasing decisions is not the brand's picture-perfect product photos, but rather the user-generated images from genuine customers. A recent Stackla report found that 79% of people say UGC highly impacts their purchasing decisions⁴.

At a time when digital competition has never been greater, user-generated visuals have been proven to help brands break through the noise and engage distracted consumers. Not to mention, the sheer abundance of these freely available visuals have the immense potential to lower the high costs most brands currently pay for content while also solving one of their greatest content and personalization challenges: producing enough engaging visuals at a fast enough pace to keep up with the demands of modern marketing.



In fact, data shows you can also boost customer loyalty by directly recognizing and praising your most passionate customers when you request the rights to use their content. Fifty-one percent of consumers said they'd be more likely to continue engaging with and/or purchasing from a brand if it shared their photo, video or social post across its marketing⁴.

Putting user-generated content at the heart of your shoppable content experiences helps to effectively take people from the point of inspiration to the point of purchase—creating engaging and meaningful shopping experiences that encourage conversions across every touchpoint.



Going Beyond Social Commerce

As the rise of social media has coincided with the shift toward eCommerce, social networks have increasingly invested in the commercialization of content on their platforms. This ability for brands to promote and sell products via social platforms is called social commerce, and it is undoubtedly a powerful tool at modern marketers' disposal. But it's only one side of the social shopping coin.

While shoppable social proof has proven to be very impactful in helping retailers reach shoppers on social networks, the value of user-generated social proof can (and should) extend far beyond social channels.

Extending shoppable content experiences past third-party sites, like social networks, and onto owned channels, like your homepage, product pages, emails and more, can help you create more consistent and engaging omnichannel experiences that drive sales no matter where shoppers are in their buying journey.



Shoppable Content Proof Points

- **91%** of buyers prefer visual and interactive content rather than traditional formats⁵
- **83%** of users say Instagram helps them discover new products⁶
- **83%** of weekly Pinterest users have made a purchase based on content they saw from brands on Pinterest⁷
- **79%** of people say UGC highly impacts their purchasing decisions⁴
- Customers are **6x** more likely to purchase a product if the page includes pictures from social media⁸
- **87%** of people say social media helps them decide what to buy⁹
- Brands like Wanted Shoes have increased online sales by **30%** by featuring shoppable UGC in their online catalog¹⁰

How to Leverage Shoppable Content Across Key Customer Touchpoints

Social Media

People are increasingly becoming accustomed to buying products through social media, with some even going to certain channels specifically to discover new brands and products. Since most of the top social platforms now have robust commerce offerings for businesses, you should be taking advantage of these tools to deliver shoppable content experiences to social audiences.

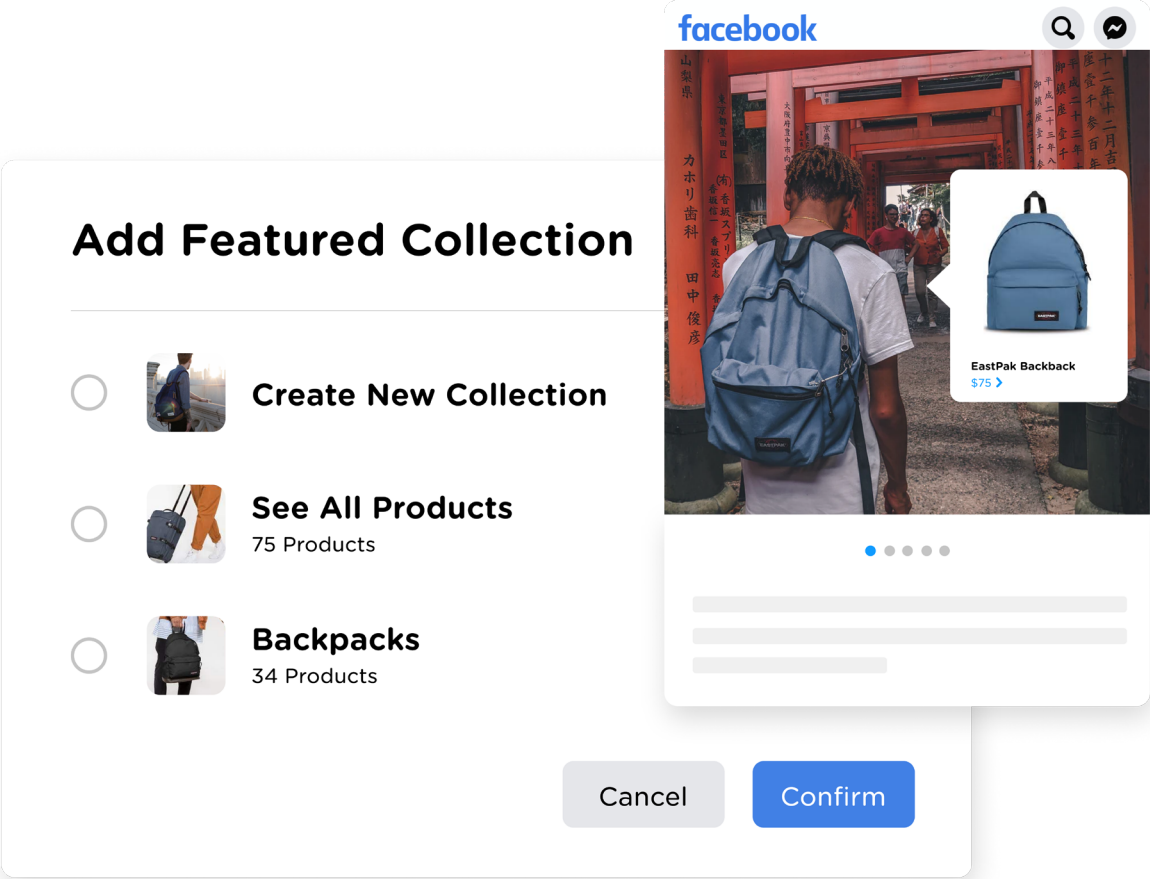
Facebook

Facebook has put a lot of emphasis on its platform toward advertising. While its shopping offerings via Instagram and Facebook are robust, most brands are already familiar with advertising and digital ads through Facebook. Remember, your brand’s shoppable content on both Instagram and Facebook will be managed via your Facebook business account.

Facebook Shops lets you create a virtual social storefront for your brand. As far as advancing technology in shopping experiences goes, Facebook is setting the standard. The key benefits and features include:

- **Virtual Catalogs** - Brands can set up catalogs that work across both Facebook and Instagram. This will be the place that holds all of the necessary information about your inventory.
- **Set up an online shop** - Facebook’s Commerce Manager is the platform used to manage your brand’s inventory that you decide to display on both Facebook and Instagram

- **Build collections** - In Commerce Manager, brands can create Collections to categorize their products so users can decide what they want to shop. For example, a clothing brand might have a ‘childrens’ collection and a ‘womens’ collection
- **Shop customization** - Once a brand has added collections and products to their shop, Facebook offers customization features so they can tailor the products on display to reflect their branding style and differentiate their store from competitors



Instagram

Did you know that 81% of people¹² begin their buyer’s journey on Instagram?

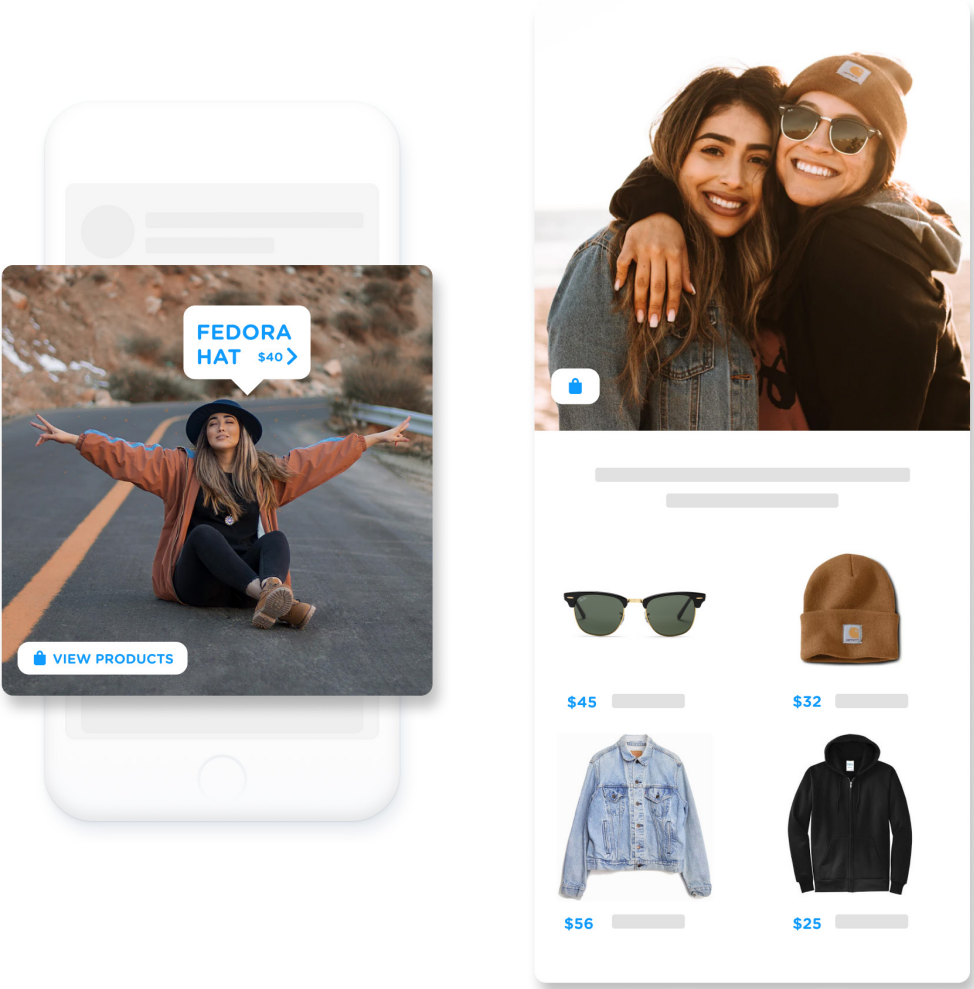
Instagram was also one of the first social media platforms to introduce shoppable content capabilities and currently boasts one of the richest offerings in terms of shoppable features.

Those features include:

- **Profile page shops** - Brands can customize their business profile pages so people can shop directly on that page—making the Instagram profile page a virtual storefront.
- **Product tagging** - Established brands can add product tags to items posted in both their feeds and in Stories that people can click on to learn more.
- **Collections** - This feature gives brands more editorial control over their shops by allowing them to group products into themes and categories.
- **Product detail pages (PDPs)** - These are in-app product-focused pages that provide all the same relevant details on a product that you would expect to see on a website PDP. They can even pull all the media where the product is tagged within Instagram for people to see a specific product used in different ways.
- **Ads with product tags** - Brands can expand the reach of their products to new people by either boosting a shoppable post or creating a new ad in Ad Manager for more customization in how the product is shown on Instagram.
- **Checkout** - Only available for U.S. businesses as of this writing, Checkout allows brands to sell their products in-app—enabling users to purchase products securely via Facebook Pay.
- **Live shopping** - Brands that have qualified for Checkout can also sell products through Instagram live, allowing them to form connections with their audience in real time.
- **Shoppable stories** - Right now, businesses can create shoppable stories and posts to insert product tags with Instagram’s shopping features.
- **Shopping from Creators** - A feature that lets shoppers buy products directly from their favorite creators that they find inspiring.

- **Product launches** - Businesses can build excitement around new products by featuring a preview with product details. Users can even opt-in for reminders to buy the minute a product becomes available.
- **Instagram Shop** - A new hub center for product discovery. It’s Instagram’s shopping destination, personalized based on each individual’s user data to find products and brands they are likely to engage with.

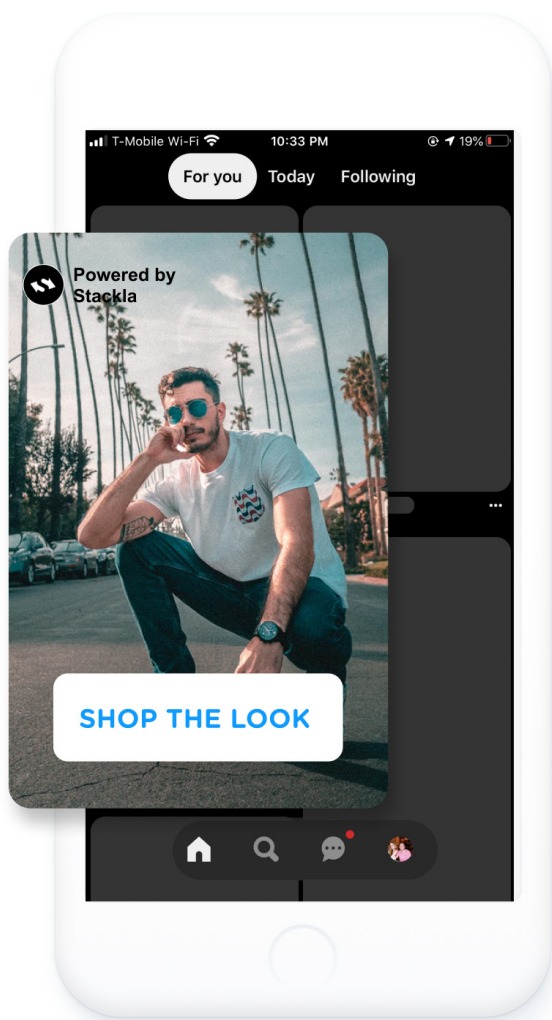
Since 75% of Instagram users¹³ take action after seeing a post, it’s definitely a medium worth investing in for your shoppable content strategy.



Pinterest

Brands should be paying close attention to Pinterest if they are interested in growing revenue with shoppable content. Pinterest is four times more effective¹⁴ at generating sales than other social platforms, with 47% of ‘Pinners’ logging on specifically to shop. In 2020, during the global pandemic, Pinterest continued to see immense growth on its platform, increasing its active user base to over 400 million¹⁵.

To meet that growth, Pinterest has rolled out many shoppable features for advertisers hoping to engage Pinterest users, such as:



- **Verified Merchant Program** - This allows businesses to create business accounts through Pinterest and enable shopping on their Pinterest profile.
- **Product Pins** - Product Pins contain metadata to inform browsers on Pinterest that an item is shoppable. Product Pins on Pinterest come in two forms:
 - **Catalogs** - Catalogs with Pinterest allow businesses to upload products from a data source which can then be grouped and turned into shoppable ads.
 - **Rich pins** - These are Pins that a user shares to Pinterest from an advertiser’s website containing metadata that can make them shoppable. However, these Pins cannot be grouped or made into ads, and a brand will not be able to have Rich Pins unless they are part of the Verified Merchant Program.
- **A buyable pin search tool** - Users can browse Pins that are specifically buyable if they’re wanting to make a purchase and eliminate confusion between Shoppable versus regular Pins.

- **Shopping Bag** - A feature where users can add their buyable pins and checkout without leaving the platform.
- **Third-party integration** - Pinterest can connect with platforms like ChannelAdvisor, Feedonomics, Square and more.
- **Analytics** - Pinterest also has a feature that lets verified merchants see and measure the ROI of their Product Pins.

TikTok

TikTok is one of the fastest-growing social media channels. The short-form video platform has been testing out shoppable content features. In a recent deal with Shopify, TikTok launched TikShop to sell products directly through shoppable video ads. They include:

- **Shopify integration** - Merchants can connect their business TikTok account to their Shopify account.
- **Product tagging** - Brands can tag specific products in their videos.
- **Unlimited Feeds** - Businesses can create different ‘Feeds’ of products in their TikShop, similar to Facebook Catalogs. They also get a Dashboard overview to see the number of product views and purchases from any feed.
- **Shop Now buttons** - These are buttons brands can include in their video ads to make them shoppable.
- **Hashtag Challenge Plus** - eCommerce feature that lets users shop for products associated with a specific hashtag.



eCommerce Homepage

Your homepage is one of the first experiences shoppers have with your brand. A bad homepage can even make or break a business. Impress new and returning visitors to your website by providing a visually engaging experience that offers inspiration and drives product discovery.

Put compelling UGC galleries front and center on your site. Seeing your products on real people and in real-world scenarios will offer inspiration and third-party validation to shoppers who may be unsure of what they’re looking for or unfamiliar with your brand.

Making that social proof shoppable gives people the opportunity to effortlessly interact with that content and immediately take action to ‘learn more’ on the product page, ‘add to cart’ or ‘buy now.’

Worried about having enough UGC to showcase across your homepage? Include a call-to-action encouraging customers to share their favorite buys to be featured on your site. You’ll gain more quality customer content and make that personal connection with shoppers.

Product Detail Pages (PDPs)

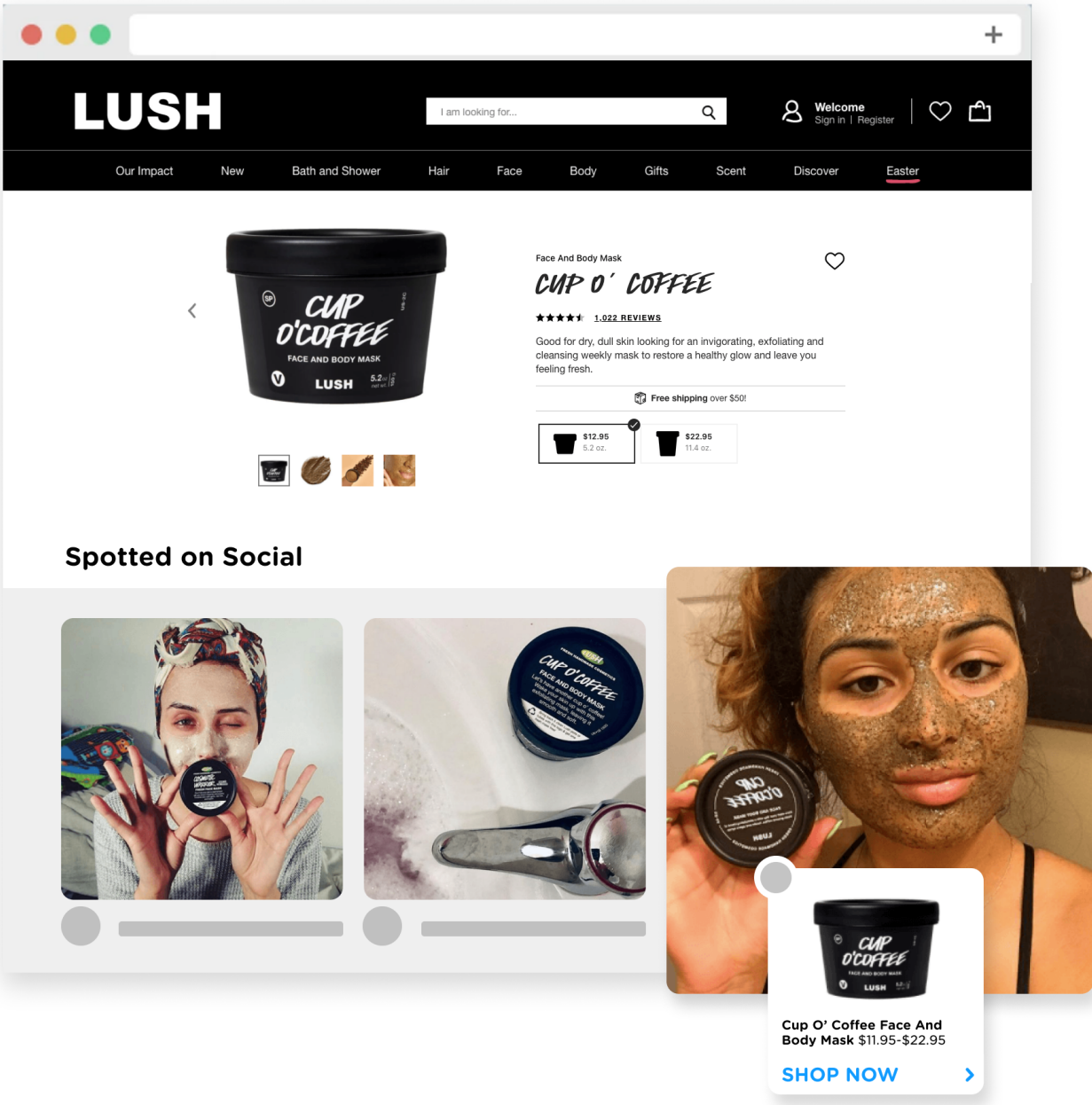
We know what you might be thinking: Why add shoppable content to a product page? If they’ve landed there, doesn’t that mean the customer is already where I want them?

Product detail pages (PDPs) are one of the most crucial places to insert shoppable content. Just because someone is on a PDP, that doesn’t mean they’ve committed to purchasing. They’re likely still doing research and debating whether this product is worth spending their hard-earned money on.

Displaying relevant UGC alongside your professional product images is a great way to provide people with the social proof they may need to move from maybe to purchase—especially if they can ‘add to cart’ from any image. They might not have thought a particular product was for them until they saw someone they related to using or wearing it.

Shoppable UGC can also effectively demonstrate different product variants. A shopper might not want those particular shoes in brown, but if they see them in black and can easily ‘buy now,’ you’ll have a new customer.

Looking to improve upsell or cross-sell capabilities across your eCommerce store? Feature UGC and branded images with multiple products on your PDPs, adding shoppable calls-to-action for each item in the image or video. Then, someone who may have originally been interested in a pair of shoes might also be inspired to buy a pair of jeans and sweater or even a purse. Now you’ve created a better, more seamless shopping experience for your customers while boosting your average order values.



Blogs and articles

One of the most common ways to build brand authority in a specific market is to write content and have a blog. As you position your brand as an expert voice on specific topics, you will inevitably want to inject promotions for your products when it makes sense.


Adding shoppability to your blogs and articles is a great way to make your content strategy multi-task for you. Including product images in a written piece with “buy now” CTAs allows visitors to add items directly to their cart without distracting from their reading experience. You can deliver valuable information to your audience while also weaving in the instant gratification element with shoppable content, giving people an easy way to learn and buy.

Emails


Emails are a direct and effective line of communication with your customer, but they can quickly get stale and boring, losing the interest of shoppers with crowded inboxes. Keep your emails inspirational and engaging by adding some shoppable imagery.





Provide people with examples of how your product looks when people are wearing, using and even experiencing it. Make them more personal and create a sense of urgency with limited-time offers that they can click on and shop right away.

You’ll find that the more authentic, relatable and actionable your emails are, the higher your conversion rates will be.




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Shoppable Content Best Practices

Make it as frictionless as possible

Don't try to distract your customers with several things at once. This means if your mission is to inspire someone to buy, focus on making that path to purchase as simple as possible for the customer.

Add relevant product tags and calls-to-action for every product featured in the image so people can easily take action on every item they want to engage with. Feature this content prominently so people don't have to go searching for it.

Want more customers to share photos of their favorite recent buys? Be consistent and clear with your asks and make it as easy for people to submit content to your brand—whether it be via a direct upload form or social media hashtag or mention.

Have a QA and testing process

Have members of your team test the shoppable content to make sure there are no points of friction, broken links or images. These things are always worth checking and double-checking. You don't want redirects, out-of-stock products, dead-end paths or separate webshops to mess up the seamless experience you're trying to create.

Leverage UGC as much as possible

As we said before, UGC is the most compelling kind of content to your audience and it incentivizes them to buy. Using a tool like Stackla can help you collect the content people are already creating about your brand and use it to effortlessly create shoppable content experiences for your brand.

Build a community of creators

Don't have enough UGC for specific products to create those quality shoppable posts? Consider cultivating a brand community of micro-influencers and enlisting their help in coming up with content that you can tie specifically to product offerings. Pairing micro-influencers with your shoppable UGC strategy can be an effective way to broaden your brand awareness while also growing sales.

Stackla's Organic Influencers tool can help you identify up-and-coming influencers who have a more genuine connection with your brand and smaller, yet more highly engaged audiences—meaning their endorsement carries more weight with consumers.

With Organic Influencers, you can easily connect with micro-influencers, as well as your existing customers, to create an active and centralized creator community who you can incentive and reward to create the types of high-quality content your brand needs—simultaneously generating more shoppable content while fostering a sense of community with your audiences.



Creating Shoppable Content Experiences with Stackla

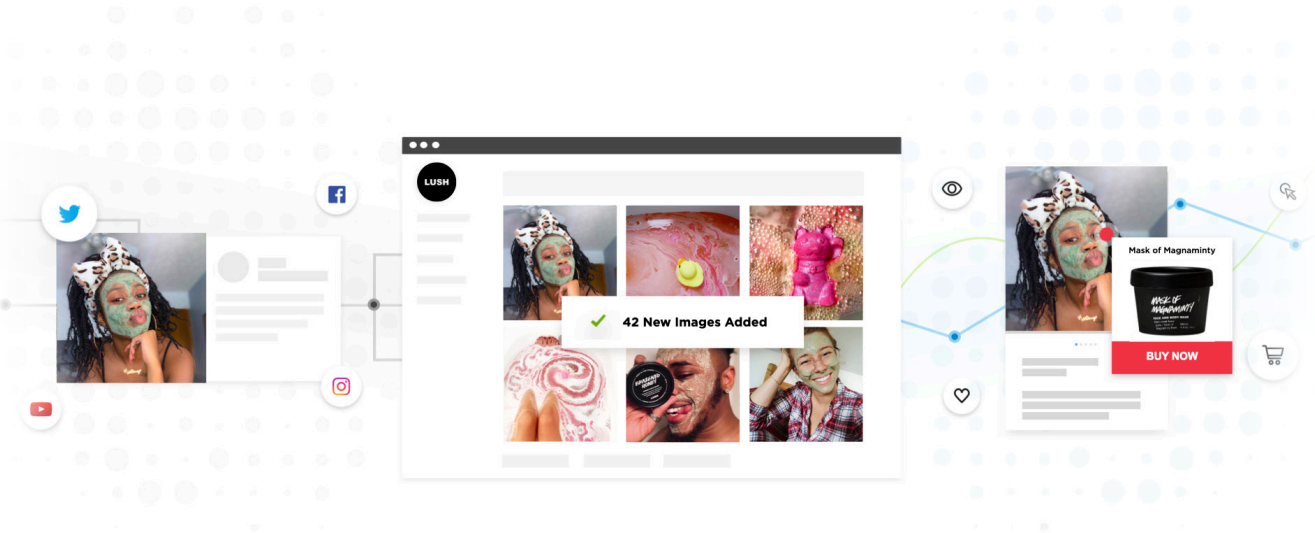
Shoppable content experiences are the future of eCommerce, but they can be challenging to create without the right tools. Stackla's leading user-generated content platform was built to help brands across industries create dynamic and engaging shoppable experiences that seamlessly connect authentic content to commerce.

With Stackla, brands can quickly surface the best, most relevant UGC from across the social web and easily obtain content rights from creators. To make this compelling UGC shoppable, we help you auto-sync your product catalog with Stackla, dynamically pulling your product metadata—such as names, descriptions, images and pricing—directly into our platform for effortless content tagging.

Once everything is auto-tagged, you can easily add shoppable calls to action to each relevant piece of UGC. Then, our deep integrations and out-of-the-box publishing suite enable you to seamlessly push those shoppable content galleries live across all your key eCommerce webpages (as well as your other marketing touchpoints—social, ads, emails, etc.).

And with support for multiple product catalogs, real-time personalization and even auto-hiding features for out-of-stock items, you can feel confident that your shoppable content is being optimized for each product, shopper and market.

Today's consumers seek and expect authentic and personalized shopping experiences. By featuring shoppable user-generated content not just on social media, but across all your key eCommerce touchpoints, your brand can drive discovery, increase conversions, grow order values and ultimately win lifelong customers.



About Stackla

Visuals have become vital to modern marketing, but they're notoriously difficult and costly for brands to create at scale. Instead of wasting tons of time and money creating picture-perfect visuals for all your marketing activities, you could be tapping into the wealth of photos and videos your customers share online every day.

Stackla is the world's smartest visual content platform, helping marketers discover, manage and publish the best authentic consumer content across all their marketing touchpoints—from ads and emails to websites and events. With an AI-powered user-generated content (UGC) platform, asset manager and organic influencer tool, Stackla sits at the core of the marketing stack, enabling brands to build a rich library of visual content by actively discovering, recommending and rights managing content from across the social web to fuel personalized content experiences at scale.

Want to learn more? Visit stackla.com to request a personalized demo.

Stackla

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