
This is the second part of our US Back-to-School 2017 series of reports. Here, we focus on five social media trends that are impacting the back-to-school shopping season:

1) The No.1 reason shoppers use social media for back-to-school shopping is to find out about promotions
2) Social media influencers are affecting back-to-school purchases
3) Back-to-school social media conversations tend to be emotional
4) Pinterest is a retail hub that houses 45 million back-to-school ideas
5) Teens prefer Instagram and Snapchat for back-to-school social media engagement
The back-to-school period is the biggest shopping season of the year after the winter holidays, according to the National Retail Federation (NRF), and it has become one of the most buzzed-about shopping seasons across social media platforms. In 2016, for example, more than 11 million Pinterest users pinned nearly 45 million back-to-school ideas on the platform. #WOW

In 2016, US back-to-school shoppers spent a total of $75.8 billion, equivalent to an average of $674 per household, according to the NRF. We estimate that back-to-school spending will increase by a healthy 3%–4% this year.

Social media is playing a bigger role in back-to-school purchases every year and, this year, retailers started promotions on social media earlier than ever—some as early as June. According to Deloitte’s 2017 Back-to-School Survey, the number one reason consumers use social media with regard to back-to-school shopping is to view promotions and ads.

The back-to-school period is an emotional time for both students and parents, and it prompts much sharing on social media, most of which occurs via mobile devices. According to Facebook IQ data, more than 90% of back-to-school-related posts on Facebook between July and September 2016 in the US were shared on mobile devices. Social media influencers—whether they be celebrities, teachers or student peers—help drive back-to-school purchases.

In this report, we explore the five social media trends that characterize the 2017 back-to-school season.

1. The No.1 Reason Shoppers Use Social Media for Back-to-School Shopping Is to Find Out About Promotions
This year is shaping up to be a highly promotional one in terms of back-to-school retail. According to a number of surveys, consumers are seeking out promotions and retailers are offering more promotions than last year. Deloitte’s 2017 Back-to-School Survey found that more than half of those polled research online before shopping for back-to-school merchandise. The survey revealed that 27% of respondents plan to use social media to assist them with their back-to-school shopping and that 75% of that group will use social media specifically to view promotions and ads.
Consumers’ enthusiastic use of social media makes it a powerful channel for retailers looking to assert their value credentials. The International Council of Shopping Centers’ (ICSC’s) annual back-to-school survey highlights the overall importance of ads and promotions for back-to-school shoppers. The ICSC’s poll of 1,010 adults found that 87% of back-to-school shoppers are influenced by promotions in terms of the amount they spend and the items they buy. Additionally, 40% of those surveyed ranked seeing ads or lower prices in stores as the number one reason to start back-to-school shopping.

A June 2017 survey conducted by Propeller Insights on behalf of Ebates found that 80% of American parents are likely to take advantage of back-to-school promotions.

**Figure 1. Shoppers’ Plans for Using Social Media to Help with Their Back-to-School Shopping**

*With regard to your B2S shopping, how do you plan to use social media sites?***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2017*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To view promotions/ads</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To receive a coupon</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To browse products</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To read reviews/recommendations</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To visit retailers’ pages on social networking sites</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To watch a retail/product video</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To post comments, reviews or feedback</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To post to or view virtual image boards</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Shoppers who use at least one digital device, n = 978; multiselect question, n = 260

Source: Deloitte, 2017 Back-to-School Survey

In June 2017, Propeller Insights conducted a survey of 1,001 adults and 500 teens on behalf of Ebates (which is part of global internet services company Rakuten). The study found that 80% of American parents surveyed are likely to take advantage of back-to-school promotions.

For retailers, the key takeaways from these surveys and others are that back-to-school shoppers are focused on promotions and that many of them are using technology to help them find the best promotions before beginning their back-to-school shopping this year.

2. Social Media Influencers Are Affecting Back-to-School Purchases
Back-to-school is one of the busiest times of year in terms of social media engagement, but parents, teachers and students look to the channel for different things. According to digital marketing firm PMX Agency, price is important to all groups, but parents tend to focus on practicality when shopping for back-to-school items, while students tend to center on style. Each group looks to its own set of social media influencers and sources of inspiration, which presents retailers with significant opportunities to target their social media messaging effectively.

A 2016 Rakuten Marketing study of 2,000 parents in the UK with children under the age of 12 found that many parents are swayed by the influence of bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers such as Smudgetikka, Circle of Moms and Kid Style Junkie. The study also found that almost one-third of parents surveyed are willing to spend more on an item of clothing for their child if an online influencer has endorsed it and that 23% of those surveyed trust online influencers.

According to a Rakuten Marketing study in the UK, almost one-third of parents are willing to spend more on an item of clothing for their child if an online influencer has endorsed it.

Source: Instagram accounts of Smudgetikka & Circle of Moms

Rakuten Marketing research in the UK also found that Facebook is the most influential platform for guiding a parent’s fashion purchasing decisions for their children, and that almost 23% of parents use Facebook for inspiration when deciding what to purchase for their children throughout the year. Instagram and YouTube are the next-most-influential platforms, with 11% of those surveyed using these platforms for retail inspiration, and Twitter was the fifth-most influential platform among parents surveyed, with 8% choosing it as the option to search for fashion.
Students look for inspiration and information regarding purchases from multiple sources, including their peers and friends, social media influencers and celebrities. According to e-commerce solutions company ParadoxLabs, 83% of Gen Zers (which include students entering high school and college) trust online product reviews, and many of them are likely to ask friends for feedback on social media about products that they are thinking about buying. For example, they might take a picture on Snapchat while trying on an item of clothing and ask their friends how it looks. Additionally, many students use YouTube to look for items recommended by influencers, including back-to-school clothes, makeup and supplies.

What does this mean for retailers looking to optimize their use of social media? Retailers can create comprehensive social media strategies that include Snapchat geofilters, Facebook ads, YouTube ads and influencer strategies specifically targeted to the various back-to-school decision-maker groups. Some retailers have already taken advantage of the social media opportunity by amping up their back-to-school investments for 2017. According to a RetailMeNot survey (conducted by Kelton Global) of more than 200 US retail marketing leaders, 89% of those polled are increasing their investments in mobile platforms and 88% are increasing their investments in social media.

3. Back-to-School Social Media Conversations Tend to Be Emotional

While social media is the channel many back-to-school shoppers look to when researching the best deals and finding product information, Facebook and Instagram are the platforms where users share some of their most personal conversations, photos and videos related to the start of the new school year. A Facebook IQ study analyzed back-to-school conversations on Facebook and Instagram in the US between July and September 2016. While some of these conversations were practical or logistical in nature, many were more emotional. The study revealed that the top trending back-to-school-related topics on Facebook and Instagram were “planning” (getting ready to go back to school and organizing), “pride and affection” (related to love and positive feelings for children and other family members) and
“transitions” (related to the change of seasons, thinking ahead, and new beginnings or endings).

Figure 3. Back-to-School Conversations on Facebook and Instagram in the US, Jul–Sep 2016

Source: Facebook IQ

Brands and retailers can capitalize on the positive emotional energy that the back-to-school season promotes by channeling it into nostalgic messaging and social media campaigns. Focusing such messaging on specific days can help, too. For example, last year, Facebook conversations about back-to-school shopping, apparel and accessories peaked on Saturdays throughout July and August. Social media conversations about back-to-school consumer technology brands and products and telecom brands peaked in late August on Instagram and after Labor Day on Facebook. According to Chain Store Age, consumers are likely to do the bulk of their back-to-school spending in August, and the top shopping day is expected to be Saturday, August 5.

Chain Store Age predicts that the top five back-to-school shopping days for 2017 will be:

- Friday, August 4
- Saturday, August 5
- Saturday, August 12
- Sunday, August 13
- Monday, September 4 (Labor Day)
4. Pinterest Is a Retail Hub that Houses 45 Million Back-to-School Ideas

Pinterest is home to a collage of back-to-school retail inspiration that includes everything from hanging organizers to lunch bento boxes to emoji magnets. In 2016, Pinterest reported in an email to *Adweek’s Social Pro Daily* blog that 11 million users had saved nearly 45 million back-to-school-related ideas on the platform.

Source: Pinterest.com

What does that mean for retailers? Pinterest is an appealing social media platform because teachers, parents and even some students use it for inspiration, compiling, generating and sharing thousands of back-to-school ideas on the platform every day. Also, Pinterest has “buy” buttons that enable agile retailers to take advantage of trending ideas. In 2016, social media marketing company Crowdtap surveyed 300 adults, and found that 27% planned to use Pinterest boards to organize their back-to-school shopping lists. Additionally, 25% of those surveyed said that they would use Pinterest for creative recipe ideas for school lunches and snacks.

According to January 2017 data from digital marketing agency Omnicore, there are more than 150 million active Pinterest users. The firm claims that 67% of users are under age 40 and that 87% of users have purchased a product because of Pinterest. Pinterest itself has reported that 80% of its users access the site through a mobile device.

Some of the back-to-school retail ideas that have trended upward on Pinterest from 2016 to 2017 include:

- Phone stands and grips: up 3,920%
- Paper-bag-waist pants (pants that have a scrunchy waistband, like a paper bag): up 682%
- Happy Planners: up 574%
- Painted rocks: up 220%
- Bento box lunches: up 90%
- Outfits for the week: up 47%
- Lunch kabobs: up 47%
- Hair organization and bow holders: up 20% Items on Pinterest
5. Teens Prefer Instagram and Snapchat for Back-to-School Social Media Engagement

Instagram and Snapchat are the social media platforms that teens prefer to turn to when making back-to-school shopping decisions. Propeller Insights surveyed teens in June 2017 on behalf of Ebates (part of Rakuten), asking respondents which social media platforms they use most frequently. The survey found that teens’ use of Instagram and Snapchat was nearly equal (at 68% and 67%, respectively). Among college students surveyed, 71% said they use Instagram, while 67% said they use Snapchat. Only 39% of teens responded that they use Facebook most frequently, whereas 66% of college students surveyed said Facebook was the platform they use most frequently.

When asked in the same survey which social media platform is most helpful in finding back-to-school items to purchase, 45% of younger teens surveyed selected Instagram, while 53% of college students selected Facebook.

Brands such as IKEA are capitalizing on the fact that teens look to both Snapchat and social influencers when making back-to-school purchase decisions. The company has launched a back-to-school campaign featuring social media influencers Superfruit, a pop music and web comedy duo. The campaign is designed to promote IKEA products for college dorms and uses an interactive video that prompts viewers to swipe to play along. Users answer questions about their home décor style to find the right products for them. After answering the questions, users can click through to IKEA’s website to buy products that are featured in the video.
IKEA’s back-to-school campaign uses influencers such as the music/comedy duo Superfruit
Source: YouTube

Key Takeaways

• Social media will influence back-to-school shopping more than ever this year. Deloitte’s 2017 Back to School Survey found that more than a quarter of consumers plan to use social media to help them with their back-to-school shopping and that 75% of that group will use social media to view promotions and ads.

• Social media influencers also affect back-to-school purchases. According to a Rakuten Marketing study, one-third of UK parents are willing to spend more on an item of clothing for their child if an online influencer has endorsed it. Retailers are taking note, according to a RetailMeNot survey, as nearly nine in 10 of US retail marketing leaders surveyed said they are increasing investments across mobile and social platforms for the 2017 back-to-school shopping season.

• According to a Facebook IQ study, back-to-school-related photos, videos and messages shared on social media are often emotionally tinged. Retailers seeking to connect with back-to-school shoppers can target their messaging accordingly.

• Pinterest is a hub for back-to-school ideas. The platform housed nearly 45 million back-to-school ideas last year and, according to a 2016 Crowdtap survey, 27% of Pinterest users planned to organize their back-to-school shopping using Pinterest boards.

• Instagram and Snapchat are the platforms teens prefer, with nearly 70% of teens surveyed saying they use those networks most often. IKEA took advantage of Snapchat’s popularity among teens this year by launching a back-to-school campaign on the platform that features social media influencers.
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