

Proactive Assistance for Risky Purchases: Catalyst or Inhibitor for Online Lead Generation?

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Abstract:

Many purchases involve a high level of risk for consumers (e.g., a high financial risk when buying a house). Companies offering such products or services are increasingly implementing features on their website that proactively offer website visitors the opportunity to contact a sales representative—a concept we refer to as proactive assistance. In five experiments, we investigate whether, why, and when proactive assistance facilitates or hinders online lead generation. While the increasing use of proactive assistance in business practice suggests a positive effect on online lead generation, our results point to the pivotal role of customer autonomy and show that proactive assistance can also backfire. However, managers can induce a positive effect of proactive assistance if they frame the assistance element in an outcome-oriented (vs. conversion-oriented) way.

Keywords: Online customer experience, customer autonomy, online lead generation

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media