Press Release

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ECOMMERCE CLINIC REPORT

Sustainable ecommerce growth will depend less on chasing technology trends and more on building adaptable organisations, customer-centric subscription models and long-term loyalty strategies, according to insights shared during the final eCommerce Clinic Live, hosted by eCommerce Expo and featuring Duncan Rutherford, Head of eCommerce at BT Group.

ECOMMERCE CLINIC
IN ASSOCIATION WITH imrg

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

The concluding 48-hour live Q&A brought together ecommerce leaders to discuss the future of subscriptions, customer retention, loyalty, artificial intelligence and recurring revenue. Throughout the discussion, one message consistently emerged: the brands best prepared for the next 12 months will be those willing to learn continuously, experiment responsibly and evolve alongside changing customer expectations. This report brings together the topics, challenges and solutions discussed.

IN AN ERA OF CONSTANT CHANGE, CURIOSITY BECOMES A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Asked what single piece of advice he would give businesses preparing for the year ahead, Rutherford resisted offering a simple answer.

Instead, he argued that organisations should avoid relying on any one strategy or trend. With technology advancing rapidly, customer behaviour evolving, and market conditions remaining unpredictable, businesses need to build cultures that embrace continuous learning, measured experimentation and adaptability.

Importantly, he stressed that successful transformation depends not only on technology adoption but on bringing employees with you throughout the journey, particularly as artificial intelligence becomes more deeply embedded across ecommerce operations.

SUBSCRIPTION SUCCESS STARTS WITH CUSTOMER NEED

Rutherford challenged the assumption that repeat purchasing automatically translates into a successful subscription model. Instead, he encouraged brands to first understand whether customers genuinely require an ongoing service or whether they simply purchase infrequently out of convenience.

He highlighted that subscription strategies differ significantly across industries, with utilities, software, consumer goods and insurance all requiring very different approaches. Rather than applying a single pricing model, businesses should carefully consider perceived value, frequency of need and long-term customer benefit.

Successful subscription programmes, he argued, are built around solving customer problems, not locking customers into recurring payments.

LOYALTY IS EARNED THROUGH FLEXIBILITY, NOT LOCK-IN

Closely linked to subscriptions was the evolution of customer loyalty.

Rather than relying on aggressive acquisition offers or rigid pricing structures, Rutherford emphasised the importance of consistency, fairness and flexibility. Customers should be able to move between subscription tiers as their needs evolve, rather than feeling trapped within a particular proposition. As artificial intelligence increasingly influences product discovery and purchasing decisions, loyalty will become even more dependent on delivering outstanding customer experiences after the initial purchase.

For brands operating in categories with naturally long replacement cycles, such as technology and consumer electronics, maintaining ongoing relevance between purchases will become a critical differentiator.

AI CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

The conversation also explored how AI is beginning to reshape subscription businesses.

At BT, Rutherford highlighted the company's introduction of Google AI Pro within selected mobile plans as one example of how AI-enabled services are becoming part of customer propositions.

Looking further ahead, he suggested AI-powered assistants and large language models will create new opportunities for personalised recommendations, intelligent cross-selling and more relevant customer engagement throughout the lifecycle.

However, he cautioned that businesses must strike the right balance between optimising for AI-driven discovery and continuing to deliver exceptional real-world customer experiences that encourage long-term loyalty.

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH REQUIRES LONG-TERM THINKING

Across every topic discussed, one principle remained consistent: sustainable ecommerce growth cannot be achieved through short-term tactics alone.

Whether designing subscription models, developing loyalty programmes or implementing AI, businesses should focus on creating propositions that evolve alongside customer needs rather than chasing temporary trends.

Experimentation remains essential, but it should always be guided by customer insight, commercial understanding and a willingness to adapt.

BRINGING THE ECOMMERCE CLINIC SERIES TO A CLOSE

The final clinic concluded a four-part series exploring the technologies and strategies shaping the future of ecommerce.

Across discussions covering artificial intelligence, supply chain transformation, digital customer experience and subscription strategy, a common thread emerged: the most successful ecommerce businesses will be those that combine innovation with operational excellence and place customer value at the centre of every decision.

While artificial intelligence continues to transform the industry, the clinics reinforced that long-term success will still depend on **strong leadership, adaptable teams, and a relentless focus on delivering meaningful customer experiences.**

ABOUT ECOMMERCE EXPO
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eCommerce Expo is the UK's leading event for ecommerce and digital marketing professionals, bringing together retailers, brands, technology providers, and industry experts to explore innovation, strategy, and growth in modern commerce.

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