



The Future of Retail Media is

Affinity Data

In the ever-evolving landscape of retail media,

advertisers are constantly searching for the most effective ways to reach their target audience. Two of the most commonly used types of data in retail media targeting are purchase data and affinity data. While purchase data—historical records of transactions—has traditionally been the foundation of advertising strategies, **affinity data**—insights into consumers' interests, behaviors, and preferences—has emerged as a superior approach in optimizing ad targeting. This article explores why affinity data is more effective than purchase data in retail media, focusing on predictive power, scalability, consumer intent, personalization, cross-category insights, and long-term customer engagement.

Targeting consumer affinities vs. past shopping behavior is a key to understanding satisfaction and emotional connection to foster deeper brand connections and drive long-term value.

306%

Greater Lifetime Value

A study by **Motista** found that emotionally connected customers have a **306% greater lifetime value** than those who are merely satisfied.



For more information on Affinity Data and Custom audiences, reach out to cs@affinityanswers.com



1. Predictive Power

Understanding Future Intent

Purchase data is inherently retrospective. It tells advertisers what a consumer has bought in the past but provides little insight into what they are likely to buy next. While some repeat purchases are predictable (such as consumables like toothpaste or coffee), many purchasing behaviors shift due to life changes, seasonality, or trends.

Affinity data, on the other hand, is forward-looking. By analyzing consumers' browsing behavior, content engagement, and online interactions, advertisers can predict what shoppers are interested in before they make a purchase decision. For example, if a consumer frequently engages with content from their favorite brand but has yet to make a purchase, an advertiser can target them with relevant products, critically and we can't stress this enough, **before they reach the buying stage**. This proactive approach allows brands to influence purchasing decisions at a much earlier stage, giving them a competitive edge over those relying solely on past purchases.

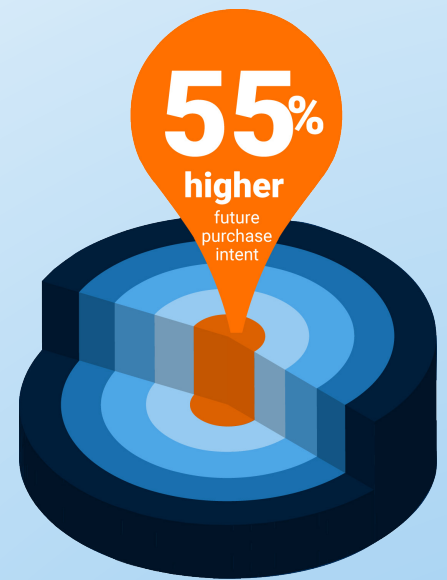
2. Scalability

Capturing a Larger Audience

Retailers and brands aiming to grow their market share need to reach beyond their existing customer base. Relying exclusively on purchase data limits the audience to those who have already bought a product, making it difficult to scale campaigns effectively. Moreover, new or infrequent shoppers who might be interested in a brand's offerings are often overlooked.

Affinity data expands the potential audience by identifying prospective customers based on their demonstrated interests and behaviors. Instead of waiting for a consumer to purchase a product, brands can reach individuals who exhibit strong intent signals based on their interactions across digital platforms, such as social media, search queries, and content consumption. This approach broadens the reach and maximizes advertising effectiveness beyond a retailer's current customers.

Affinity Data Proven to Outperform Purchase Based Segments



Across 4 major categories Affinity data segments were able to identify a user's future purchase intent 55% higher on average than the leading past-purchase based provider - **Lucid/Cint Study**



3. Personalization and Preference

The Key to Purchase Frequency

Yes. We know that customers want a level of personalization. What they don't want is a repeated spamming of the same message because they made a purchase online. If a customer bought a specific type of running shoe six months ago, and didn't like them, an ad showing the exact same product may not be so relevant. Affinity data enables a more real-time understanding of a person's preferences offering better insights into what consumers are currently interested in. By analyzing browsing patterns, content consumption, and engagement across multiple touch points, brands can serve hyper-relevant ads that align with a shopper's current interests. This level of personalization has proven to deliver higher engagement rates, purchase, and purchase frequency.

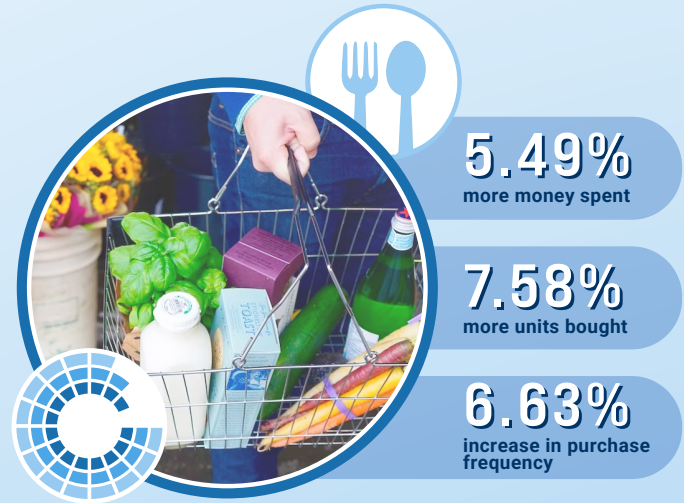
4. Consumer Intent

Differentiating Between Habitual and Exploratory Shoppers

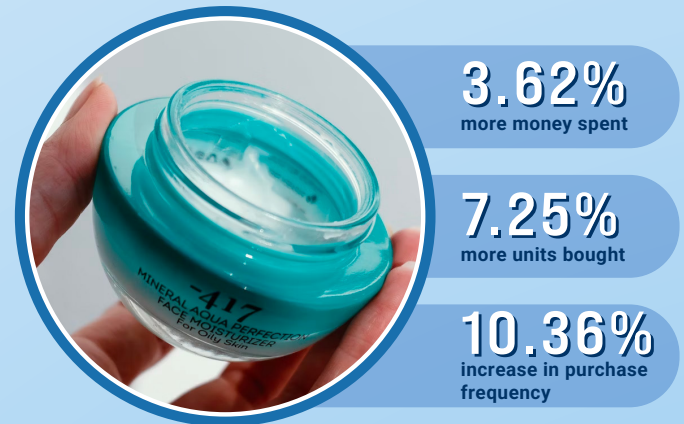
Purchase data often captures habitual behaviors—consumers buying the same brands repeatedly due to convenience or preference. However, it fails to differentiate between a genuinely loyal customer and one who might be open to exploring new brands.

Affinity data identifies exploratory behaviors, showing when a consumer is researching, comparing options, or engaging with content related to a new category. For instance, if a shopper regularly buys one brand of skincare but starts engaging with content about organic beauty products, this signals an opportunity for advertisers to introduce alternative brands. Recognizing these shifts in intent allows retailers to influence consumer decisions more effectively, rather than assuming past purchase patterns will always hold true.

Report Shows Impact of High vs. Low Affinity



Food & Beverage



Facial Care & Makeup

Report from Neutronian confirms there is an identifiable lift in purchase behavior by high-affinity purchasers compared to low-affinity consumers. The impact is greater than expected, even more, the lift translates across conversions, order value and total revenue, and frequency.

Affinity Answers Audiences Available Now

Apparel & Accessories

Apparel & Accessories > Activewear & Sportswear Apparel
 Apparel & Accessories > Lululemon
 Apparel & Accessories > Men's Athleisure
 Apparel & Accessories > Men's Shoes
 Apparel & Accessories > Nike

Automotive

Automotive > Hybrids, Electrics and Alternatives
 Automotive > SUVs
 Automotive > Luxury Vehicles
 Automotive > Pickup Trucks

Beauty & Cosmetics

Beauty & Cosmetics > Make-Up
 Beauty & Cosmetics > Anti-Aging Skin Care
 Beauty & Cosmetics > CoverGirl
 Beauty & Cosmetics > ULTA Beauty

Financial Services

Financial Services > Apps & Payment Systems
 Financial Services > Insurance
 Financial Services > Insurance Providers
 Financial Services > Insurance Providers > Progressive

Food & Beverage

Food & Beverage > Alcoholic Beverages
 Food & Beverage > Snacks
 Food & Beverage > Soft Drinks
 Food & Beverage > Soft Drinks > Coca-Cola

Travel

Travel > Travel Enthusiasts
 Travel > Airlines
 Travel > Cruises
 Travel > Delta Airlines

Retail

Retail > Pet Care
 Retail > Department Stores
 Retail > Drug & Pharmacy
 Retail > Home Improvement

Interests
 Athletes
 Celebrities
 Influencers
 Music
 Movies
 Sports
 Streaming Video

5. Cross-Category Insights

Understanding Holistic Consumer Behavior

One of the biggest limitations of purchase data is its narrow focus on past transactions within a specific category. It does not capture the broader context of a consumer's lifestyle, interests, and evolving needs.

Affinity data provides a 360 degree view of consumer behavior by tracking interests across multiple media touch points - social, search, ecomm, and more. This enables brands to uncover valuable cross-selling opportunities. A consumer engaging with travel blogs, outdoor gear, and camping recipes is likely interested in adventure travel, even if they haven't previously purchased related products. Retailers can leverage this insight to create more compelling, multi-category advertising strategies.

6. Long-Term Customer Engagement

Building Brand Loyalty

Sustainable brand growth is not just about acquiring new customers but also about fostering long-term engagement. Purchase data often treats customers as static entities—basing advertising strategies on past behaviors without considering how their preferences may evolve over time.

Affinity data fosters continuous engagement by identifying emerging trends in consumer interests. By staying attuned to what customers are exploring and engaging with, brands can maintain relevance and nurture loyalty through personalized content, recommendations, and exclusive offers. This ongoing interaction strengthens customer relationships and encourages repeat business in a way that purchase data alone cannot achieve.



7. Overcoming the Limitations of Sparse Purchase Data

Not all consumers generate frequent purchase data. For new customers, infrequent shoppers, or those making one-time purchases (such as a new refrigerator or a wedding dress), transaction data is sparse and insufficient for effective targeting.

Affinity data helps fill these gaps by identifying behavioral signals that indicate purchase intent. A consumer who suddenly starts researching baby products, for example, may be an expecting parent, even if they have not yet made any related purchases. Brands can capitalize on this insight by targeting them with relevant offers early in their journey, ensuring they become loyal customers over time.

8. Reducing Wasted Ad Spend

Reaching the Right Consumers at the Right Time

One of the biggest challenges in retail media is minimizing wasted ad spend. Purchase data can lead to inefficient targeting by serving ads to customers who have already completed their buying journey. For example, if a customer recently purchased a laptop, continuing to show them ads for the same model is redundant and wasteful.

Affinity data allows for better timing in ad delivery. By understanding when a consumer is in the research phase versus the decision-making phase, advertisers can ensure their messages reach audiences at the most opportune moments. This results in higher conversion rates and better returns on ad spend (ROAS).





Conclusion

The Future of Retail Media is Affinity-Driven

While purchase data remains valuable, it is no longer sufficient as a standalone strategy for retail media targeting. Affinity data offers deeper insights, enabling advertisers to predict future behavior, scale campaigns effectively, personalize ads, and engage consumers over the long term. By leveraging affinity data, retailers can move beyond transactional targeting and develop more meaningful, data-driven connections with their audience.

In an era where consumers demand relevancy, real-time engagement, and personalized experiences, brands that prioritize affinity data will gain a significant competitive advantage. The shift from purchase data to affinity-driven insights is not just an evolution—it is the future of retail media advertising.