

## I. Course Description

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Ecommerce has evolved and expanded dramatically since Amazon began selling books online nearly 30 years ago. Retail now exists within websites, mobile apps, social media, even videogames.

However, the ecommerce journey has not been smooth. The dotcom crash of 2000 proved that simply pushing products online didn't guarantee corporate survival. And recently, many high-flying ecommerce companies hit unexpected turbulence as post-pandemic consumers returned to brick-and-mortar stores.

This course explores the content and communication strategies that support ecommerce platforms, from the website copy that converts visitors into customers, to the subtle signals sent by various pricing models, from the controversial role of influencers in generating sales, to the very real reasons digital retailers get physical.

## II. Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this course, students will acquire expertise and experience in the following:

- Critically analyzing ecommerce platforms to ascertain their strengths and flaws.
- Positioning ecommerce brands to stand-out in competitive markets.
- Crafting ecommerce content that serves multiple purposes, from branding to conversions.
- Evaluating the signals that different marketing mix choices (such as pricing models) send to consumers.
- Developing marketing communication plans to attract both buyers and sellers to multisided platforms.
- Researching the factors that shape the fate of new formats, like livestreaming.

## III. Instructor

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**Freddy Tran Nager** is the Associate Director of the M.S. in Digital Social Media program at Annenberg, where he has taught since 2012. Beyond the classroom, he has worked with creators and influencers for over three decades as a marketer and creative professional. In 1994, he served as Editor of one of the world's first entertainment websites, *AMP: MCA Records Online*, which involved collaborating with musicians, managers, record executives, and radio programmers. He subsequently joined ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi as a senior creative for interactive media. Freddy currently runs the creative-strategy consultancy Atomic Tango LLC, where he advises executives and entrepreneurs, and he serves on the National Industry Advisory Board of the creator organization Reach. A second-generation Trojan, Freddy received his MBA from USC and his undergraduate degree from Harvard. He welcomes connections on LinkedIn at [FreddyNager.com](https://www.linkedin.com/in/freddynager).

## IV. Notes

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This graduate-level course requires extensive reading (100+ pages per week), in-depth primary and secondary research, quantitative and qualitative analysis, strategic planning and implementation, and creative development and content creation. Prerequisites — recommended but not required: Google Analytics Certification, understanding of search engine optimization tactics, graphic design fundamentals.

Attendance is required for all class sessions, which will consist of lectures, discussions, guest speakers, and hands-on application of concepts and methods. In addition, this course is web-enhanced, with mandatory discussions on Blackboard.

For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects 2 hours of out-of-class student work; consequently, prepare to invest at least 8 hours per week outside of class into course-related work.

## V. Required Media

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In addition to the following publications and videos, articles from academic journals and news publications will be assigned and discussed. (See the Lecture Schedule for details; additional readings may be assigned in class.)

- **Phil Barden & Rory Sutherland, *Decoded, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2022 Wiley*** (free via the USC library): Although not focused on ecommerce, the book teaches a scientific approach to understanding consumer decisions — a valuable approach for ecommerce managers.
- **Francisco J. Martínez-López, *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce, Fourth International Conference, 2023 Springer*** (free via the USC library): Select articles from this compilation will be assigned.
- **Baymard Institute** (<https://baymard.com>): Extensive research on ecommerce user experience.
- **eCommerce Resources, International Trade Administration**, <https://www.trade.gov/ecommerce>: Official U.S. government website with references and resources for cross-border ecommerce.
- **Insider Intelligence Ecommerce & Retail** <https://topics-na1.emarketer.com/industry/ecommerce-retail> (free via the USC Library): A popular industry source, but question the data and research methods.
  - Retail Daily newsletter (subscribe via the above page)

## VI. Assignments

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The following are brief summaries; complete instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

The primary assignment for this course is a team project that entails the planning (and optional launch) of a new ecommerce app, website, or social media profile. It consists of three required parts:

- **Assignment 2: Ecommerce Plan, Part 1, Positioning Strategy (25%)**: In a well-researched PowerPoint presentation to “investors” (your classmates), your team will pitch your idea and goals for an ecommerce platform, its strategic position, and the marketing mix signals to support that position.
- **Assignment 3: Ecommerce Plan, Part 2, Content Direction (25%)**: In a well-researched and highly detailed paper, your team will craft content directions for all stages of the customer journey, both off-site and on your ecommerce platform, along with projected results for each stage.
- **Quizzes (20% total)**: 3 multiple-choice tests (10 points each — lowest score dropped) will assess your individual understanding of the course lectures and other materials. Note: there is no make-up for missed quizzes, even for excused absences. The missed quiz counts as the lowest score.
- **Literature Review (20%)**: This entails two requirements on Blackboard.
  - **Assigned Readings**: In 100-300 words, evaluate course readings by responding to discussion questions and classmates' posts.
  - **Weekly News Evaluations**: To stay atop influencer news, every week you will share on Blackboard a relevant recent article from the *L.A. Times*, *New York Times*, or *Wall Street Journal*, and analyze it in approximately 100 words. You may be asked to present your evaluation in class.
- **Class Participation (10%)**: Attendance in every class is required, since sessions are not recorded, and learning involves discussing and applying concepts, not just consuming lectures and readings. Since

discussions are an essential element of this course, attendance alone won't earn participation points. Whether in class or with your team, you must converse, ask questions, and debate respectfully. Staying silent is unacceptable, especially in the company of guest speakers, since it conveys disengagement. If you remain silent, you may be "cold called" to respond to a question or issue. To prepare for discussions, review past lectures, complete assigned readings, research additional materials, and apply theories to personal experiences. Here is how your class participation is evaluated:

- Is it relevant to the discussion and respectful of others?
- Does it address ideas offered by the readings, lectures, guests, or classmates?
- Does it increase everyone's understanding or merely repeat facts?
- Does it support views with data, third-party theories, and research?
- Does it test new ideas and challenge assumptions, or just "play it safe"?

On a related note, unauthorized use of phones and computers in class distracts your instructor and other students, and it prevents you from fully participating. You are in attendance but not fully present. Consequently, it might result in 1 participation point deduction per incident. Similarly, arriving late or leaving early is disruptive and impedes learning, and might also result in a 1 point deduction.

Half of your participation grade will be based on your contributions to your team assignment. At the end of the project, team members will confidentially rate each other on a scale of 1-5 based on the value of their contribution throughout the term. Students will receive an average of their ratings.

## VII. Grading

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### a. Breakdown

Assignment	Due Date	% of Grade
Ecommerce Plan, Part 1: Positioning Strategy	March 1	25
Ecommerce Plan, Part 2: Content Direction	May 1	25
3 Quizzes (lowest score dropped)	February 6, March 5, April 23	20
Literature Review	All Term	20
Class Participation	All Term	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100%</b>

### Scale

94% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

### Standards

Grade	Description
<b>A</b>	Excellent: A's and A-minuses are earned by "going the extra mile" to produce professional-caliber work that could be presented to a client, supervisor, or investor. A-level work features high production

	quality with no mistakes, draws on in-depth research of authoritative sources, reflects comprehensive understanding of course materials, and demonstrates superlative creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills. <i>Recommendations will be provided on request <b>only</b> to students who earn a solid A in the course.</i>
<b>B</b>	Good: B's are earned for graduate-school caliber work featuring in-depth research of authoritative sources, critical thinking, and solid if not thorough understanding of course materials, with only minor shortcomings. The ideas and quality need to be stronger to succeed in a professional context.
<b>C</b>	Fair: C's are earned for undergraduate-caliber work, reflecting insufficient critical thinking, only basic understanding, superficial research, and/or flawed production quality. Note that for graduate students, a C- is equal to failing.
<b>D</b>	Marginal: D's are earned for amateurish work featuring insufficient research, many errors, incomplete sections, and/or superficial analysis. The work might demonstrate only rudimentary understanding.
<b>F</b>	Failing: F's are earned for work that's incomplete, not researched, carelessly executed, and/or plagiarized. Plagiarism may also be subject to disciplinary measures. The work demonstrates little to no understanding. Note that three or more unexcused absences will also result in a failing grade.

**Assignment Grading Rubric**

Assignments will be graded on the following criteria without a fixed percentage, since unacceptable quality in any one area (writing, research, etc.) can undermine an entire project. Conversely, exceptional quality in one area might contribute to an overall positive evaluation.

- **Critical Thinking:** In communication there are few right answers: so-called "best practices" for one entity might fail for another — or even for the same entity at another time. Consequently, you should not just answer the questions, you should also question the answers, including methods and data. (Academic journal articles are not immune from critical analysis.) Assignments are not just reports: they must describe "why" and not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of the reasoning.
- **Creativity:** Your work should feature original ideas, not just "best practices," and should NEVER consist of copied or AI-generated work (see "Academic Integrity" in this syllabus). Creativity is expected for both content ideas and communication strategies. You may certainly be "inspired" by others, including AI, as long as you properly credit the sources, but most of the thinking and execution should be yours, and higher grades are awarded to work that is innovative and imaginative. The goal is to distinguish yourself; after all, "outstanding" literally means "to stand out."
- **Production Quality:** Your work should feature professional production values in terms of writing, design, and (as applicable) video and audio. Treat your work as a submission to a client, supervisor, investor, or award show. Eliminate all errors by proofreading meticulously, using Microsoft editing tools, AI apps, and/or Grammarly.com (strongly recommended). For help with fluency or simply polishing your writing, contact Annenberg's Graduate Writing Coach (<http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org/>). For design tips, read *Presentation Zen* (available via USC library).
- **Timeliness:** In the professional world, missing a deadline by even one minute can result in lost opportunities or even legal issues. Consequently, without an exceptional circumstance and the instructor's permission, late assignments will be downgraded one level (e.g., A to B) per day of lateness.
- **Research Quantity and Quality:** Support your work with research from multiple authoritative sources, including academic journals, major news publications, and credible experts — no guessing, generalizations, or stereotypes (such as "Gen Z").
  - Start with the USC library and our librarians, who have prepared Research Guidelines for DSM (<https://libguides.usc.edu/digitalsocialmedia>) and other departments (<https://libguides.usc.edu>).

- Search Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>) before searching regular Google.
- Never cite Wikipedia; rather, refer to the sources listed in the Wikipedia article.
- Do not trust sources cited by AI tools, such as ChatGPT. Verify before quoting or citing.
- Avoid superficial news sites like the 3F's (*Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Fast Company*) and company blogs (unless they are companies you are researching).
- Go beyond third-party sources and conduct direct primary research, such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews, particularly of subject-matter experts like professionals and professors.
- Within the body of papers, include reference notes, either parenthetical, such as (Lee 2017), or in the form of footnotes or endnotes.
- Bibliography entries must include COMPLETE source information, not just a URL. You may use any format that includes ALL the following: FULL FIRST NAMES AND LAST NAMES of authors (*we respect creators in this course, so a first-name initial alone is not enough* — a critical flaw with APA style), article/chapter titles, the name of the publication, dates of publication, original URLs (not USC library), and the dates a particular website was accessed.

### Timeframe and Disputes

The instructor will make every effort to evaluate your assignments within two weeks of submission. Should you wish to dispute a grade, you must do so within a week of receiving it, and before the end of the semester.

### VIII. Policies and Procedures

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- **Attendance:** Participation from each student is critical to the success of this course; therefore, class attendance is mandatory. You must attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay for the entire session. Although no points are awarded for attendance, an unexcused absence will result in the loss of 5 participation points (half a grade); 3 or more unexcused absences will result in an F for the course. In addition, any missed in-class assignments (such as quizzes and presentations) cannot be made up without a valid excuse. If you need to miss a class for a valid reason, such as religious observances or medical procedures, you must attain approval from the instructor in advance (except, of course, in emergencies). Student athletes should provide approved Travel Request Letters. For any excused absences, you will need to obtain lecture notes from classmates and Blackboard.
- **Illness:** If you are feeling ill, particularly with COVID symptoms, stay home to protect the health of your classmates, your instructor, and yourself. If you show up to class with an illness, you will be asked to leave and will be recorded as absent.
- **Electronics:** You must have a computer for accessing course materials from home; **however, phones, tablets, and computers may NOT be used during class meetings without permission of the instructor**, and should be completely hidden away before class begins. Any unauthorized use of electronics might result in the loss of 1 participation point, and you might be asked to leave the session.
- **Artificial Intelligence Apps:** You are expected to use AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this class; in fact, some assignments might require it. Here are a few guidelines, with assignments containing more details:
  - AI is a useful tool for helping you start an assignment or overcome writer's block, but the final submission must reflect your ideas and revisions. Treat AI as a personal intern: an efficient and capable assistant who can help you, but who has shortcomings and might be prone to errors.
  - Don't trust what AI says. Not only is ChatGPT's database limited, it draws its answers from fiction, nonfiction, and misinformation. It might even fabricate sources. Assume the answers it provides are wrong, and doublecheck them. You will be held responsible for any errors.
  - Provide detailed prompts to generate the best results. You might have to try multiple variations.
  - Your work will become part of the AI's database, so do not include any sensitive information.
  - You must acknowledge using any AI tools, just as you would any other reference, in your assignments. Include a paragraph explaining what you used AI for and how you used it, including the specific prompts.
- **Respect:** Treat classmates, the instructor, and speakers with courtesy. You should certainly question and criticize ideas — that is encouraged in the learning environment — but never criticize the person. We are

a community, so respect the opinions of others; instead of saying that you “disagree” or even “respectfully disagree,” offer a “different perspective.”

- **Appointments:** If you have questions or concerns, whether academic, career, or personal, do not hesitate to contact the instructor to arrange a meeting (Freddy’s email is fnager@usc.edu). In emergencies, see the support systems below.

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university’s mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity’s website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

### Annenberg Statement

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school’s policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

## Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This

includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call  
Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

[Annenberg Student Success Fund](#)

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

[Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund](#)

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

[USC American Language Institute](#)

[ali.usc.edu](http://ali.usc.edu)

English language instruction, assessment, and resources to support the academic and professional success of non-native speakers of English pursuing degrees at USC.

[Annenberg Graduate Writing Support](#)

[sites.usc.edu/graduate-writing-coach/](https://sites.usc.edu/graduate-writing-coach/)

In addition to being the place to make one-on-one appointments with the writing coach, this website will host resources, videos, and news about upcoming programs.

[Annenberg Digital Lounge](#)

[annenbergdl.org](http://annenbergdl.org)

Free lessons and certifications on a range of digital media.

*USC computing support:*

- [USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program](#)
- [Zoom information for students](#)
- [Blackboard help for students](#)
- [Software available to USC Campus](#)



## IX. Course Schedule

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This schedule will likely change depending on class progress, world events, and guest speaker availability. For final requirements, please refer to the lecture slides, which will be posted to Blackboard the night before each class. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the NEXT class.

### Class 1, January 9: Introducing Ecommerce (And This Course)

- Course intro: requirements and expectations
- Trend study: live-streamed shopping — China and the US
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - “The State Of Ecommerce 2023,” Storyblok (posted on Blackboard)
  - Jordyn Homan & Kalley Huang, “The Companies Trying To Make Live Shopping A Thing In The U.S.,” *New York Times*, 10 May 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/10/business/live-shopping-us.html>
  - Patrick Coffee, “Retailers, Brands And Tech Platforms Bet Big On Live-Streamed Shopping In The U.S.,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/live-stream-shopping-brands-retailers-11666037451>
  - Tracy Wen Liu, “TikTok And Amazon Bet On China’s Ecommerce Model. It’s A Dud,” *Wired*, 28 March 2023, <https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-amazon-china-livestream-ecommerce/>
- **Assignment due before next class: Self-Intro + Syllabus Acknowledgment**

### Class 2, January 16: Identifying Opportunities And Revenue Models

- Analytical frameworks: PEST + Stakeholders
- Behavioral Targeting: sell to needs, not stereotypes
- B2B and two-sided marketplaces
- Losing money on every sale: growth vs profitability, and how investor priorities drive strategies
- Fortune at the bottom of the pyramid
- DTC (direct to consumer) — facts and fallacies
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Decoded*, Preface + Chapters 1-3
  - Jinjoo Lee, “The Pandemic’s E-Commerce Stars Are Coping,” *Wall Street Journal*, 27 December 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/business/retail/the-pandemics-e-commerce-stars-are-coping-be284c12>

### Class 3, January 23: Setting Goals + Positioning The Platform

- Positioning: differentiation and mental availability
- Goals, KPI’s, values, purpose
- Class teams and teamwork
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Decoded*, Chapters 4-6
  - Amanda Mull, “Is This How Amazon Ends?” *Atlantic Monthly*, 13 December 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/12/american-amazon-consumers-shein-temu/676339/>
- **Assignment due Friday, March 1: Team Project — Ecommerce Plan, Part 1: Positioning Strategy**

### Class 4, January 30: Sending Product Signals

- What is Amazon really selling? When products are just an excuse — alternative revenue models
  - retail media, data aggregation, memberships
- Impulse buys, renewables, FMCG, big-ticket, services, digital media
- Who needs a product? dropshipping, affiliate marketing, and promoting other sellers
- Product origins and artisanship
- Depth vs width vs niche (long tail)
- Service: CX and UX

- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Decoded*, Case Studies
  - Liliana Ribeiro & Amanda Maues, “Traditional Brands vs Born-Digital Brands: The Case Of The Fashion Industry,” *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*
  - Chris Anderson, “The Long Tail,” *Wired*, 1 October 2004, <https://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail/>
- **Assignment: Quiz next week**

### **Class 5, February 6: Sending Price Signals**

- Quiz 1
- The Devil is in the Discounts: the race to the bottom
  - what low pricing says about you
- Trials and errors and the freemium model
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Vahini Vara, “Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control: Inside Shein’s Sudden Rise,” *Wired*, 4 May 2022, <https://www.wired.com/story/fast-cheap-out-of-control-inside-rise-of-shein/>

### **Class 6, February 13: Sending Place Signals**

- Pros and cons of websites vs apps vs marketplaces vs social commerce
- Virtual meets real: the rise of the hybrid model
- Internationalization vs Localization + the gray market
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation: International Trade Association Ecommerce Resources <https://www.trade.gov/ecommerce>
  - “How Is The Online Shopping Experience Influencing In-Store Shopping?,” *Nielsen IQ*, 18 July 2023, <https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/analysis/2023/how-is-the-online-shopping-experience-influencing-in-store-shopping/>
  - Kate King, “Online-Only Startups Adopt a Bold New Strategy: Opening Actual Shops,” *Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/warby-parker-allbirds-everlane-parachute-collars-co-stores-e4b94623>

### **Class 7, February 20: Sending Promotion Signals**

- Paid, owned, and earned media — and how they shape the brand
  - creating awareness and building trust
  - media strategy and meaning transfer
- Seasonal campaigning
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Influencer impact articles
  - Monica Law, et al, “Assessing Streamer Attributes: The Role Of Trust in Purchase Intention For Live E-Commerce,” *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*
  - Nuo Wang, “Influencer Marketing Strategies In Foreign Marketplaces,” *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*

### **Class 8, February 27: Crafting Ecommerce Content**

- Customer Lifecycle + Closed-Loop Measuring: prospects → visitors → customers → loyalists → advocates (reach, acquisition, conversion, retention, loyalty)
- Design fundamentals (legibility first!)
- A/B testing
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation: Baymard Institute (<https://baymard.com>)
  - Moz.com, “The SEO’s Guide To Content Marketing,” <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-content-marketing>

- “Here’s What Bothers Consumers Most When Shopping Online,” *Marketing Charts*, 9 June 2023, <https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/retail-and-e-commerce-229658>
- **Assignment: Quiz next week**

### **Class 9, March 5: Enhancing Awareness**

- Quiz 2
- On-site vs off-site
- Impressions = reach x frequency x memorability
- Retargeting: are the annoyance + alienation worth it?
- True influencers
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Nadine Ampler, et al, “Who Buys When And Where?” How Channel Design And Consumer Attributes Influence Customer Journey Outcomes,” *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*

### **March 12: Spring Break — No Class Meeting**

### **Class 10, March 19: Enhancing Interest**

- ROSI (Research Online, Shop In-store) or ROPO (Research Online, Purchase Offline)
- Feeding the need: detailed descriptions, competitive comparisons, product usage, blogging
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Alexandra Upton & Justin O’Brien, “Glossier: From Beauty Blog to Billion-Dollar Brand Community,” Sage Knowledge, 4 January 2021, <https://sk.sagepub.com/cases/glossier-from-beauty-blog-to-billion-dollar-brand-community>
- **Assignment due Wednesday, May 1: Team Project — Ecommerce Plan, Part 2: Content Direction**

### **Class 11, March 26: Enhancing Desire**

- Wish lists and queues
- Wants and needs
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - “Types Of Deceptive Patterns,” Deceptive Patterns, <https://deceptivepatterns.org>
  - Sam Kemmis, “How Airlines Trick You Into Paying More,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2023-07-22/how-airlines-trick-you-into-paying-more>
  - Louise Matsakis, “The Subtle Tricks Shopping Sites Use to Make You Spend More,” *Wired*, 6 August 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/amazon-online-retail-dark-patterns/>

### **Class 12, April 2: Enhancing Action**

- Creating urgency
- Reducing shopping cart abandonment
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Avinash Kaushik, “Six Nudges: Creating A Sense Of Urgency For Higher Conversion Rates!” *Occam’s Razor*, 4 June 2018, <https://www.kaushik.net/avinash/nudges-creating-urgency-higher-conversions-revenue/>

### **Class 13, April 9: Enhancing Satisfaction**

- Many unhappy returns
- How to manage ratings, reviews, referrals, and replenishment
- How to reduce churn, and inspire loyalty
- CRM (what’s a follower?)
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation

- Salesforce, "A Beginner's Guide To CRM Systems," <https://www.salesforce.com/eu/learning-centre/crm/crm-systems/>
- Suzanne Kapner, "Retailers Clamp Down On Returns," *Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/online-retailers-tighten-return-policies-to-boost-profits-9bf6ccc2>

**Class 14, April 16: Analyzing + Forecasting**

- Fads vs trends
- Financial metrics and the problem with attribution
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Markus Rach, "Louis Vuitton, Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. The Greatest Marketing Stunt of the Century, or just Hype Driven Vanity-Metrics?", *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*
- **Assignment: Quiz next week**

**Class 15, April 23: Predicting The Ecommerce Future**

- Quiz 3
- Fads, trends, traditions, and empty promises
- Metawhat and AI
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Maria Vernuccio, et al, "Deepening Branding Opportunities in VR-Based Metaverses. A Qualitative Study," *Advances In Digital Marketing And Ecommerce*
  - NielsenIQ Brandbank, "The Future Of Retail: Adapting To Trends To Grow Sales," 2022
  - Steven Levy, "Shopify Goes Soul Searching," *Wired*, 24 June 2022, <https://www.wired.com/story/plaintext-shopify-soul-searching/>

**EXAM WEEK, May 1: Wrapping Up — Final Projects Due**

- Upload team paper to Blackboard