Whether you're new to selling on Amazon or a veteran vendor, you probably noticed that 2018 was a year with plenty of changes. As we prepare to launch into 2019, what are the main takeaways from the last year? Which surprises did Amazon have in store, and how did they affect your business? We reflect on 12 turbulent months — and glance into the future.

Pro Tip: Check out our Amazon Marketing Strategy 2018!

Advertising on Amazon

Amazon has continued to scale products and services for advertisers. We expect this area to grow even further, so it's a good move by Amazon to streamline their portfolio and rebrand it under one easy-to-remember name: Amazon Advertising.

Although some products received a new name (most notably Headline Search Ads, now Sponsored Brands), the rebrand does not affect how users interact with the service. The redesign allows room for growth, though, and we look forward to more intuitive advertising possibilities in 2019.

One development to look out for is the first new advertising feature of the old year: Sponsored Ads Retargeting, aka Extended Ad Network, was rolled out in beta in early 2018.

It's been fairly quiet around this new retargeting feature, which uses CPC bids in automatic Sponsored Products campaigns to display ads on third-party sites, so we expect to hear about the test results and more access to off-Amazon customers in 2019.

We're also very excited about the new product targeting feature for Sponsored Products. Rolled out in late 2018 and also in beta, this introduction of new options for both manual and automatic Sponsored Products campaigns could be a game changer.

We are currently running extensive tests to see how targeting ASINs directly could boost your sales — make sure to check back frequently and sign up for our newsletter to stay up to date!

Amidst such avid growth, Amazon strives to keep the customer (and seller) experience intuitive and easy. One of
the last releases of 2018 was the introduction of Campaign Portfolios.

Advertisers can use this new layout feature to organize Sponsored Products & Sponsored Brands campaigns by brand, category, season... sky’s the limit, according to Amazon.

Advertising on Amazon has become so much more feature-rich and easy-to-use in 2018, we expect this trend to continue in 2019.

We believe the changes will be fast-paced and advertisers will have to be prepared to act quickly. We are likely to see more targeting towards behavior and location, improved audience segmentation, and custom video advertising.

Amazon SEO

The introduction of ASIN-targeting may have ushered in an age of keyword-free advertising, but as long as customers enter search terms, your listing will only be visible and rank highly if you play by Amazon’s SEO rules. These rules change from time to time — it continues to be important to stay up to date.

The first major shift occurred in mid-2018 when Amazon updated the rules for Backend Keywords. The tightened limit now includes special characters such as hyphens, spaces, and commas.

This update was, however, only precedent to a huge A9 algorithm update in October 2018 that we discovered via thorough testing. Our experiments revealed that keyword fields were no longer weighted and allowed for definitive conclusions regarding the indexing of a product listing.

On a lighter note, Amazon is handing out smileys and thumbs up by introducing only positive feedback to reviews. The year 2019 will answer: Is this the End of Downvoting?

In the meantime, the thumb down finds a new place in Amazon Scout, where users can browse pictures of furniture and other household items. By voting them “hot or not”, they narrow down their selection — until just the right thing ends up in the basket. Maybe not the most pressing matter, but we still think it’s fun.

Amazon goes offline

2018 was the year Amazon went offline. Real stores, aka “Brick & Mortar Presence”, popped up all over the main marketplaces.

Amazon Go, the first-ever cashierless supermarket, opened to the public in January. Since this first reveal in Seattle, six more stores have opened and can be visited in Chicago and San Francisco.

The newsworthy spectacle was quickly followed by four-star stores in NYC, Colorado, and California — real shops that offer only customer-favorite products with, you guessed it, 4+ review stars.

Soon after, Amazon tried a different format in Europe — temporary pop-up stores.

In London, Amazon Fashion invited customers in from busy Baker Street to browse through (own-brand) clothing and attend events like beauty discussions, yoga sessions, and live music.

In Berlin, Amazon tried to show its knowledge of local flair — by promoting a homemade TV series. Deutschland 86, a German spy series produced by Prime Video, focuses on true events during the cold war.

The promoting pop-up store was open less than a week, but it offered an original and gadget-rich time travel experience: Real toys, stickers, and even food from 1986, fashion, vinyl, and pinball machines in the basement.

Naturally, it was only possible to pay in D-Mark, the German currency before the Euro was introduced.
Nostalgic fans of the kids' radio play TKKG were treated to a live show with the original cast — for free.

In December 2018, Amazon nestled into Berlin’s busy shopping heaven Ku’Damm — the small pop-up store amidst the high street's famous Christmas lights focussed on — no surprises — Santa and his many gifts.

While this excursion into real-live A/B-testing was a lot of fun, Amazon soon got serious again and is now evaluating top U.S. airports for new Amazon Go locations, according to the news agency Reuters.

A kiosk-sized store to quickly grab a candy bar without waiting is up next: It already exists in Seattle, though only for Amazon staff — for now.

According to Bloomberg, Amazon is planning to open 3000 cashierless stores by 2021.

What does Amazon Online have in store for us? More Amazon Stores, of course.

Currently, branded stores are not very visible, and a bit hit and miss, but we will probably see more of them in 2019.

What do you think the future has in (the everything) store for us? Go on, there's room for outlandish ideas! After all, Jeff Bezos embraces the extraordinary. A virtual mirror to try on clothes before you buy? A goat to mow your lawn? Carsharing for even faster Prime delivery? You'd be surprised... Let us know in the comments, and have a happy new year!

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