Retail websites are the front door to the shopping experience, and have a major influence over sale conversions both in-store and out. RIS sat down with Limelight Networks’ VP of Operations Dan Carney to discuss how retailers can create a secure, fast, feature-laden, dynamic online experience that puts the brand’s best foot forward.

RIS: Retailers don’t get a second chance to get a first impression. If their website is down even for a few seconds they can lose current and future sales. How can retailers best ensure that their e-commerce platform is always ready to perform?

CARNEY: Redundancy is key to keeping your website up and content accessible no matter what. It is one of the reasons why companies choose to work with content delivery networks (CDNs). Only through a CDN can you spread content demands across a wide network of servers around the globe - which also helps to improve the speed of the website.

It is not only a “down” server that creates a poor impression. More often, it is a slow experience or stale content that frustrates customers and impacts the bottom line. For retailers in particular, keeping content on your site as up-to-date as possible can directly impact sales. For example, imagine a scenario where it’s Cyber Monday and an item that has been out of stock is now in inventory. In a typical purge scenario, it could take hours to update the website to show the item is now available. This delay could mean a huge loss of potential sales. However, with Limelight’s SmartPurge functionality, this process now takes seconds instead of hours to complete and could be a huge opportunity for sales.

RIS: We’re seeing a trend in the retail space for delivering a more custom end-user experience with methods such as behavioral content targeting. What advice can you offer to online retailers trying to accelerate this type of dynamic content on their sites? How does Limelight address this challenge?

CARNEY: It’s essential for retailers to focus on the speed of content delivery to end-users, and that includes content that is dynamically generated through behavioral content targeting. However, since this content is dynamic, it can’t be cached like static content. If you aren’t delivering dynamic content quickly to customers, it’s like fumbling on the goal line. You did the hard work of mining your data in order to target, don’t blow it by delivering too slowly.

If you are trying to accelerate dynamic content, you need to work with a CDN provider who has a sophisticated network that can speed up the delivery of the dynamic content on a global scale. Limelight’s web acceleration services are specifically designed for accelerating both static and dynamic content.

RIS: Mobile devices continue to account for a larger portion of online traffic. How can retailers best optimize their digital content to ensure a seamless end user experience?

CARNEY: Speed of delivery, absence of interruption, and content tailored for your customers, are all equally relevant regardless of device. Consider how your Web site and apps are delivered to every device, and use the same strategies of content delivery for your mobile strategy. Content caching and dynamic web acceleration will all help with the delivery of content to mobile. Bandwidth is usually more limited for mobile and makes content acceleration strategies even more important. Customers expect the same high quality of experience from mobile devices which necessitates tailoring the user experience to the device. For example, if you have video on your site, mobile devices use many different formats, so you need to produce content in each format in order to deliver the best experience to any device. Transmuxing video files can be a very manual, time-consuming process, so look for a solution that can automatically transmux to different file formats.
Supercharge Your Online Presence

RIS: As customers continue to migrate to online shopping channels the opportunity to capture and leverage shopper behavior in the online space continues to increase. How can retailers best seize this opportunity to increase sales?

CARNEY: It starts with your big data strategy. Look for every way possible to mine data to create a more targeted end-user experience. If you don’t have a big data strategy yet, you can start off small. The most important thing is that you just start. If you need help getting the data to create a big data strategy, your CDN provider is an excellent source of data. They can give you valuable information such as the type of content delivered the most to specific geographies and the most popular time of day. This information can help you develop or build on your big data strategy.

RIS: With all the stories in the news about cyberattacks, how can retailers protect their website without hurting the experience of their customers?

CARNEY: Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks are designed to overwhelm your website with malicious traffic and can bring your site down. If you’re not working with a CDN, the traffic from a DDoS attack would quickly flood your servers and render them unable to respond to authentic requests. CDNs help mitigate this risk. They spread the load for content delivery across a tremendous number of servers, acting like a natural shock absorber while also protecting the origin from the onslaught of bad traffic.

Absorbing an attack is good, but intercepting it is even better. And when there is not an attack underway, you want to be sure that good traffic is being served and delivered at the speed and quality your shoppers expect. Some DDoS protection solutions impact site performance as they’re monitoring, which can hurt the quality of experience for your customers and ultimately hurt sales. Consider a solution that constantly monitors for attacks without impacting your website’s performance. For example, Limelight’s DDoS Attack Interceptor provides an additional layer of protection by observing traffic in a non-obtrusive manner – outside of the content path so it doesn’t insert any latency into the service. If an attack is detected, we dynamically remove the erroneous traffic and send it to a scrubbing center while continuing to deliver authentic traffic.

Every retailer needs to have some level of DDoS protection. You won’t be generating any revenue if your site is taken offline from an attack. At a minimum, work with a CDN which will help spread the load in case of an attack. But also check to see if your CDN provider not only monitors for and blocks malicious traffic, but that you’re not impacting performance while monitoring.

This interview has been edited and condensed, please see the full article at:

About Limelight Networks

Limelight Networks (NASDAQ: LLNW), a global leader in digital content delivery, empowers customers to better engage online audiences by enabling them to securely manage and globally deliver digital content, on any device.

For more information visit our website at http://www.limelight.com.