

# Consumers Are Warming Up to Purchasing Furniture Online

Emerging tech will play a key role for retailers

## ARTICLE |

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**S**hoppers have been slow to embrace buying furniture online. Most pieces are a major investment they want to see before acquiring. For retailers, furniture is bulky and expensive to ship (and return and restock). Even Ikea, the master of flat-pack furniture, built its entire low-cost model on in-store shopping, and only recently began exploring ecommerce.

That said, retailers are having success with the furniture and home goods category online. We expect US retail ecommerce sales of furniture and home furnishings will hit \$50.32 billion in 2018. That will account for just 9.6% of total retail ecommerce, but it will represent the fastest growth (18.2%) among product categories.

**Williams-Sonoma** and its portfolio of brands like West Elm and Pottery Barn sees roughly half of retail sales coming through ecommerce (52.8%), and digital-only **Wayfair** ranked 10th in US retail ecommerce sales (\$4.23 billion) last year, also according to our estimates.

Where does **Amazon** fit into the picture? It's not necessarily the first retailer you think of when buying furniture, but by many measures,

online shoppers are increasingly eschewing search engines like Google and going straight to Amazon.

Last year the ecommerce giant launched an Amazon Home section, which encompasses everything from bed and bath to home improvement to lawn and garden. It also debuted two private-label furniture brands: Rivet, described as midcentury modern, and Stone & Beam, which features “family-inspired casual comfort.” This isn't as aggressive of a play as in [the fashion category](#), but indicates interest.

According to new data from [One Click Retail](#), furniture sales on Amazon grew 51% year over year in 2017. Mattresses and box springs were the No. 1 category, rising 82% with \$1.1 billion in sales. Bedroom furniture (45%) and living room furniture (40%) were next on the list.

<b>US Furniture Sales on Amazon, by Category, 2017</b>		
<i>billions and % change vs. prior year</i>		
	<b>Furniture sales</b>	<b>% change vs. prior year</b>
Mattresses & box springs	\$1.1	82%
Bedroom furniture	\$0.8	45%
Living room furniture	\$0.6	40%
Home office furniture	\$0.5	27%
Kitchen furniture	\$0.4	27%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>\$4.0</b>	<b>51%</b>

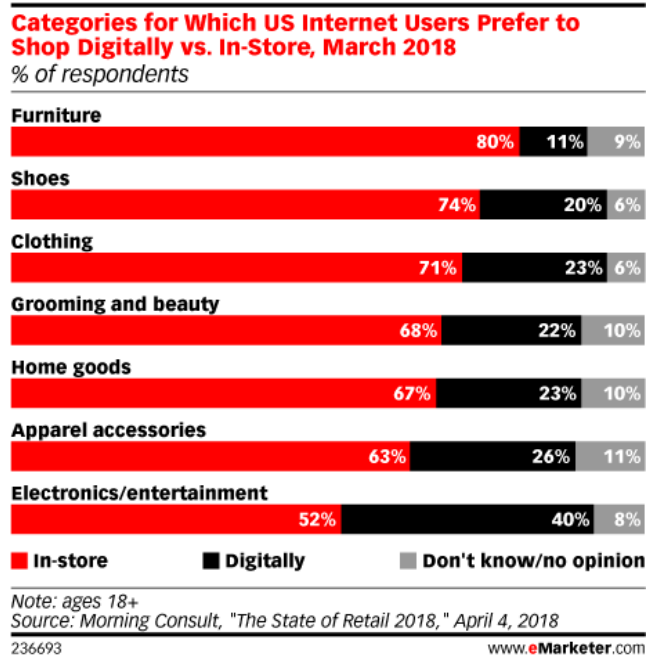
*Note: \*includes categories not listed*  
*Source: One Click Retail, "Furniture: The Amazon Effect," June 14, 2018*

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Mattresses have long been an infrequent, expensive purchase subject to personal preferences. It is also an opaque product category, with retailers carrying items from the same manufacturer but named differently, making it difficult to compare prices. So when lower-priced “bed in a box” startups like Casper and Tuft & Needle came on the scene, featuring less selection but lower prices, free delivery and money-back guarantees, buying mattresses online became more attractive.

Amazon also has the added benefit of (mostly) free shipping. For shoppers accustomed to this perk, buying a sofa or dining table online can come with sticker shock once the delivery surcharges and often mandatory installation fees are tacked on.

It's not surprising furniture was the category with the highest in-store buying preference, according to a March 2018 survey by [Morning Consult](#). Only 11% of US internet users polled preferred to buy furniture digitally.



In "The eMarketer Ecommerce Report," conducted by [Bizrate Insights](#) in May 2018, there was a lower preference for in-store buying among the US internet users surveyed. Furniture, home furnishings and accessories ranked fifth, with 71.8% of respondents preferring physical retail. Roughly 18% preferred shopping for those products via digital channels. Morning Consult separated furniture and home goods, though, which could account for its lower figures.

Retailers rely on product photos and user reviews to convert digital furniture shoppers, and they are increasingly experimenting with emerging tech. Wayfair has been at the forefront of using artificial intelligence in consumer applications (the company even has [a technology blog](#)) to provide visual search and augmented reality (AR) tools to help shoppers visualize tables and chairs in their own spaces.