Precovery

A new way to think about eCommerce promotions

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Someone fills a basket. They get to the last screen, hesitate, and go.

What happens next at most retailers is the same thing that's happened for 20 years. An email goes out. Maybe a banner appears site-wide, just in case. The discounts are given away. The retailer waits for the shopper to leave, then spends money trying to win them back.

This is recovery, and it's reactive by design. The sale has already been lost by the time anyone does anything about it. The only tool left is a bigger incentive, offered to everyone, in the hope that it reaches the people who need it.

The trouble is, most of the people who receive that incentive didn't need it.

There is a different way of thinking about the problem - not a new discount type, not a new email trigger. A different point in time to act, and a different question to ask before you act.

We call it precovery.

You won't find it in a dictionary, and that's the point.

The bill for doing it the old way

Blanket discounting isn't just imprecise. It's expensive, and the numbers are larger than most retailers expect.

- Nielsen's research puts the figure at around **84% of price promotions being unprofitable** once the real effects are accounted for.

- BCG estimates that **30% to 40% of retail promotions are either inefficient or outright lose money**. Baymard Institute puts average cart abandonment at close to 70%, meaning most baskets never convert in the first place.

- Capital One Shopping research found that **62% of clothing shoppers delay a purchase until they find a discount**, whether or not a discount was ever necessary to get them there.

Put these together, and a pattern emerges. Retailers are spending heavily on incentives, most of which aren't earning their keep. And a large share of shoppers were either going to buy anyway or were never going to buy at all, discount or no discount.

The uncomfortable part is why this keeps happening. Blanket discounting isn't a mistake so much as a symptom. Retailers can't tell, in the moment, who's about to buy and who's about to leave.

Without that information, the only rational move is to treat everyone the same and hope the maths works out. But it rarely does.

Marketing efficiency expert Les Binet has called price promotions "the crack cocaine of marketing" for exactly this reason: they feel like they're working because sales spike, while the actual profit quietly leaks away.

Recovery, in other words, isn't a strategy. It's what you're left with once the moment to act has already passed.

The word that didn't exist

Recovery has a word because it's the old way of doing things, and old ways get names. Prevention needed a word too, but until prediction was good enough to act on, nobody could actually practise it at the point that mattered, before the shopper had made up their mind.

So the gap sat there, nameless, because there was nothing to name.

Precovery fills it. *Pre*, plus recovery. You probably worked that out before you finished reading the word, which is the real test any new term has to pass. If it needs a paragraph of explanation, it hasn't earned its place. This one doesn't.

It also isn't inventing a concept from nothing. It's joining a family of words that already do this exact job.

- **Prediction**
  Working out what's about to happen.
- **Preview**
  Seeing something before it's fully arrived.
- **Prevention**
  Stopping something before it happens.

Precovery belongs on that list. Same forward-facing instinct, aimed specifically at the sale a retailer is about to lose. Recovery looks backwards, at a sale that's already gone.

Precovery looks at the moment just before, while the shopper is still on the page, still deciding, still reachable.

That distinction changes almost everything about how a promotion gets built

Why wasn't this possible five years ago?

None of this is a criticism of retailers for the way they have discounted. Reactive marketing was the only marketing available because nobody could reliably tell, in real time, who was about to convert and who wasn't.

That's changed, not because of a single breakthrough, but because prediction has finally caught up with intent. Behavioural data has always existed: clicks, scroll depth, time on page, product comparisons, and how quickly someone is moving through a site.

What's changed is the ability to read that data as it happens and turn it into a usable prediction before the shopper leaves, rather than a report generated after the fact.

This is the job of RevLifter's predictive engine, **Tempo**. It's worth being precise about what that means, because there's a lot of noise right now around anything with "AI" attached. **Tempo** predicts - it doesn't generate content, hold conversations, or write anything.

It watches how a shopper is behaving right now, weighs that against patterns it has learned from similar behaviour before, and produces a score: how likely is this person to convert without help.

That last part, right now, matters more than it sounds like it should. **A shopper who browsed once in the spring tells you almost nothing about what they'll do today**.

Tempo weights recent behaviour far more heavily than historic behaviour, because intent lives in the last few minutes of a session, not the last few months of a customer's history. Someone speeding through product pages behaves very differently from someone who's stalled on the same page for 10 minutes, even if their purchase history looks identical.

That single shift, from reading history to reading momentum, is what makes precovery possible. Recovery only had history to work with, so it could only ever react. Precovery has momentum, so it can act while there's still something to act on.

It's worth being specific about what "momentum" is built from, because it isn't one clever signal doing all the work. It's a wide set of ordinary ones, read together.

How quickly someone is moving between product pages. Whether they're comparing similar items or jumping around at random. How long they pause on a size chart or a delivery page, which often says more about hesitation than anything on the product page itself.

None of these signals is remarkable on its own. A pause on a delivery page could mean anything. Taken together and weighted toward the last few minutes rather than the last few months, they start to accurately describe a shopper's state of mind.

Older approaches to personalisation leaned on static profiles instead: a customer segment, a loyalty tier, a set of past purchases. Useful for some things, but useless for the specific question precovery is trying to answer, which is what this person is about to do, right now.

A high-value returning customer can still be one click from leaving. A first-time visitor can be seconds from buying.

Static profiles miss both. Real-time behavioural reading catches them.

What precovery actually does

Strip away the mechanics, and precovery comes down to four steps, repeated constantly, for every shopper on site.

1. **Watch behaviour as it happens**. Clicks, pacing, comparisons, hesitation. All of it, in real time.
2. **Predict who's about to leave without buying**, based on what that behaviour looks like right now.
3. **Decide who actually needs a nudge to convert**, and who was always going to buy regardless.
4. **Act only where it counts**. Shoppers who were converting anyway see nothing different. The ones who needed a reason to stay get one.

That third step is the one recovery could never do. Blanket discounting can't distinguish between a shopper who needs 10% off to convert and a shopper who was reaching for their card anyway. It offers the same incentive to both, because it has no way of telling them apart.

Precovery's entire value sits in that distinction.

RevLifter say the aim is to reach every shopper and discount only those who need it. It's not a slogan so much as a description of what's mechanically different here. Every visitor still gets attention. Not every visitor gets a discount.

The two were once treated as the same decision. Precovery treats them as separate ones.

It's worth saying plainly what this isn't. It isn't personalisation in the sense of "we know your name and your birthday." It's behavioural, not identity-based.

A first-time visitor gets exactly the same quality of prediction as a returning customer, because the model is reading what they're doing on this visit, not who they've been in the past.

And it isn't a black box. Every decision **Tempo** makes, to show an offer or hold one back, can be explained after the fact. If a retailer asks why a particular shopper was or wasn't offered a discount, there's an answer, not a shrug.

That matters more than it might seem, because "trust us" has never been a great foundation for a pricing strategy.

What counts as success has to change

None of this works if the old measure of success stays in place. A blanket discount campaign is usually judged on conversion rate during the promotion, which is a flattering number by design.

Of course, conversion goes up when everyone gets money off. That was never in question. The real question, which conversion rate alone can't answer, is how many of those conversions would have happened anyway.

Precovery forces that question into the open, because the whole approach is built around it. Success isn't "did the offer get shown," it's "did the offer reach someone who needed it to convert." That's harder to measure, and it's also the only version of the measurement that matters for margin.

This is also why explainability matters as much as accuracy. **A prediction that can't be examined afterwards is just an assertion with better marketing**.

Every decision **Tempo** makes, to offer or to hold back, comes with a reason attached: which signals mattered most for that particular shopper, and how strongly each one pushed the decision one way or the other. Retailers don't have to take the trust score on face value.

They can see what it was built from. Shown, not assumed, isn't a slogan here either. It's a description of what happens when a retailer asks why.

Trust and accuracy are the whole model

None of this works if the prediction underneath it isn't accurate, and it's worth being honest about what getting it wrong costs on each side of the decision.

A false positive, showing an offer to a shopper who was going to buy anyway, isn't a minor slip. It's the exact waste that precovery was built to remove. A false negative, holding an offer back from someone who genuinely needed it, is worse in a different way: a sale that could have been saved is lost outright, with no follow-up email arriving to catch it afterwards.

Recovery had a safety net, of sorts. Everyone eventually got an email, whether they needed one or not. Precovery removes that net for the sake of precision, which means the prediction has to earn the trust it's being given.

That's why accuracy isn't a feature of precovery; it's the entire premise. A prediction engine that gets the call wrong often enough stops looking like an improvement and starts looking like the blanket discounting it was meant to replace, just with better marketing wrapped around it.

Retailers aren't being asked to trust a system because it sounds confident. They're being asked to trust it because it can be checked.

That checking has to be visible, not assumed. Every decision **Tempo** makes can be examined after the fact: which signal mattered most for a particular shopper, and how strongly it pushed the outcome one way or the other.

That matters far more once real revenue is on the line than it does in a demo. A retailer holding an offer back from a real shopper, on the strength of a model's judgement, needs a better answer than "trust us" if that judgement is ever questioned internally.

Trust also has to be earned continuously, not granted once at launch and left alone. Shopper behaviour shifts with the season, the category, and the broader market conditions.

A model that was accurate in January isn't automatically accurate in November. Precovery only holds up if the accuracy behind it is monitored and adjusted as conditions change, rather than treated as a one-off setup task and forgotten.

Get the accuracy right, and precovery delivers exactly what it promises: fewer wasted discounts, fewer lost sales, and a much smaller pile of shoppers caught on the wrong side of the decision. Get it wrong, and it isn't precovery at all.

It's recovery with worse odds, because recovery, however badly targeted, at least doesn't actively withhold offers from people who need them.

What precovery isn't

A concept this simple tends to attract a few misreadings, so it's worth heading three of them off directly.

Precovery isn't a way to spread the same promotional budget more evenly. The point is to spend less on promotions overall, not to keep the same spend and slice it more cleverly. That happens by cutting the offers that were never doing anything, the ones going to shoppers who'd have bought regardless, and only spending where a nudge actually changes the outcome.

Fewer offers, better targeted, at a lower total cost. That's the goal, not a side effect of a smarter process.

Precovery isn't a minor CRO improvement. It's not a widget bolted onto checkout to nudge conversion rate up half a point, and it shouldn't be filed alongside button colours and page-load speed. It changes which shoppers see an offer at all, and why.

That's a structural shift in how promotional decisions get made, not a line item on a CRO backlog.

Precovery isn't set and forget. The model doesn't run on a single fixed setting and stay there regardless of what's happening in the business. Retailers can adjust the decision threshold, how confident **Tempo** needs to be that a shopper will convert unaided before it holds an offer back, and the discount level attached to the offers that do go out.

Tighten the threshold during a margin-sensitive period, and fewer offers go out. Loosen it heading into a key sale window, and more shoppers get a nudge. That control sits with the retailer, adjusted as the business needs shift, not locked in at launch and left alone.

Precovery beyond the checkout

Everything so far has focused on a retailer's own site, but the same logic extends outward, particularly into affiliate and agency relationships, where the stakes around incrementality are arguably even higher.

Affiliate programmes have a well-documented cannibalisation problem: a meaningful share of attributed conversions would have happened anyway, with or without a discount, with or without an affiliate.

Recovery-style thinking, paying commission on every conversion regardless of whether it was incremental, has the same blind spot at scale that blanket discounting has at the individual level. Precovery's core distinction, working out who needed the nudge versus who didn't, applies just as well to a commission structure as it does to an on-site discount.

Incremental by design isn't just a retailer promise. It's the same underlying discipline, pointed at a different part of the funnel.

Why the name is doing more work than it looks like

It would have been easy to launch this idea under a safer name: smart discounting, intelligent targeting, predictive promotions. Any of those would have been fine, forgettable, and indistinguishable from a dozen other vendor claims saying roughly the same thing.

Precovery is a deliberate risk in the other direction. It's a made-up word, and it says so about itself, upfront, without pretending otherwise. That self-awareness does some quiet work.

It signals confidence rather than desperation. Vendors who need a new word to describe something new are usually doing something new. Vendors who reuse existing jargon to describe something new are usually not.

The name also forces a question that "smart discounting" never would: what, precisely, is the old way called, and why doesn't it have competition?

The answer is that recovery has had decades to settle into eCommerce as the default, unquestioned, simply because nothing better existed.

Precovery doesn't argue that recovery was always a bad idea. It argues that recovery was always a compromise, necessitated by the absence of prediction, and that this compromise is no longer necessary.

Where this leaves retailers

The shift precovery describes isn't really about technology, even though technology is what makes it possible. It's a shift in when a retailer chooses to act and in the question they ask themselves in that moment.

Recovery asks: how do we win this shopper back after they've left? Precovery asks: Does this shopper need our help at all, and if so, right now, while they're still here?

The second question is harder to answer than the first. It requires reading behaviour in real time, weighing it correctly, and being willing to say nothing to a large share of visitors because they don't need to hear anything.

But it's also the only version of the question that protects margin instead of quietly eroding it, offer by offer, month by month.

Recovery will keep working, meaning it will keep generating some sales. It always has. The problem was never that recovery does nothing. The problem is what it costs to get there, and how much of that cost was avoidable all along.

Precovery is what happens once that cost becomes visible, and the technology exists to address it before the sale is lost, rather than after.

None of this requires a retailer to abandon discounting altogether, or to trust a black box, or to overhaul a promotional calendar overnight. It requires a willingness to ask a slightly uncomfortable question about every offer currently going out: would this sale have happened anyway?

For most retailers, applying blanket promotions across the board, the honest answer is that, at some point, yes, it would have.

That's not a criticism. It's simply what happens when the tools available can't tell shoppers apart. Now they can.

The word is new. The instinct behind it isn't. Retailers have always wanted to spend promotional budgets on shoppers who actually need them, rather than those who don't.

What's changed is that it's finally possible to know, in the moment that matters, which is which.

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