

RESEARCH

## Digital assets are ahead of brand representatives

October 14, 2014



*Men's section of Bloomingdale's in Palo Alto*

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By JOE MCCARTHY

NEW YORK - As retailers update stores to meet customer expectations, they must ensure that sales associates maximize the potential of digital touchpoints, according to a workshop session Oct. 13 at Luxury Interactive 2014.

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**Luxury Daily**

Brands are quickly improving cross-channel integration and data collection capabilities, but these moves are partially squandered if employee training programs fail to be enacted. Indeed, poorly leveraged technology can turn what should be a customer benefit into a hindrance.

"There's a tremendous amount of digital assets going into stores," said Milton Pedraza, CEO of the [Luxury Institute](#), New York. "But they haven't been optimized yet.

"We believe that sales associates in this new world should use those innovations to become more personal not less personal," he said.

### Changing the equation

In the interactive "Customer Service In The Digital Age" session, Mr. Pedraza and the audience brainstormed a number of omnichannel customer experience best practices.

First, brands must ensure that call centers, online chat representatives and digital teams are responsive and informed. For instance, if a customer asks if a certain store has a specific product, an online chat representative should be able to find and relay the answer quickly. If that question is asked through email, consumers should not have to wait a week to hear back and feedback times on social media must be even faster.

Of course, achieving this level of responsiveness requires a brand-wide commitment and major digital and operational infrastructure adjustments that allow for real-time information retrieval.



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Second, in-store sales associates should be fully versed in how to leverage technology to facilitate customers. Many retailers are introducing iPads into stores and sales associates should routinely use these tools to display social content, product information, brand information and more, while making recommendations and closing sales.

Instead of supplanting employees, technology can allow employees to better engage customers.

As technology integration progresses, employees should also be able to access customer profiles on-the-go to customize interactions. As loyal customers enter a store, sales associates should be notified and advised on how to best assist. Transactions and interactions that occur online can be tracked and consolidated and then packaged for in-store associates to learn from.



*Audi concierge members with iPads*

Furthermore, top sales associates should be linked up with top customers to nurture relationships.

Mr. Pedraza emphasized that these opportunities have not yet been optimized and that training programs should be implemented to bring employees up to a basic standard across channels.

Other recommendations include personalizing emails to encourage repeat purchases and adding social media components to in-store touchpoints.

No more waiting

Some brands are overhauling their retail format to make way for the future.

British fashion label Burberry opened a new digitally enhanced retail location to showcase its beauty line.

The Burberry Beauty Box, located in London's Covent Garden, carries Burberry's beauty, fragrance and accessory lines, and offers consumers the ability to discover the brand's cosmetics through both sales associate consultations and digital touchpoints, including mobile checkout. By creating a space specifically for its beauty line, Burberry is able to encourage consumer interaction with its beauty products, drive sales of the new line and test out new retail tactics ([see story](#)).

Mr. Pedraza said that as brands improve their ability to interact with consumers across channels, customer retention will rise.

"[Brands] are bleeding customers," Mr. Pedraza said. "And you don't even know what their value is because they only bought once."

Final Take

*Joe McCarthy, staff writer on Luxury Daily, New York*

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