

COLUMNS

How the Apple Watch changes consumer shopping behavior

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Now that the dust has settled since the launch of the Apple Watch, it is time to take a good hard look at just how the new device is set to change the way we interact with technology on a daily basis.

People are on both sides of the fence, with some journalists touting how much it revolutionizes their lives, while others find its vibrating notifications a nuisance and the small screen difficult to navigate.

Regardless, preliminary unit sale estimates for the Apple Watch are quite strong, coming in between 8 million to a whopping 41 million.

But underneath all the speculation around whether or not the watch will take over as the predominant screen in our lives, another debate is taking place – how does it affect retailers' marketing strategies?

Many retailers are already struggling to seamlessly connect the physical and digital shopping experiences, including mobile.

With its small screen size and easy accessibility, the Apple Watch has big implications for the way we shop, forcing retailers to once again rethink their plans for mobile engagement as they consider how to integrate this new form-factor into their overall digital strategy.

New in-store shopping buddy

Even though smartphones are “mobile” by nature, it is nearly impossible to balance your phone while you steer a shopping cart, read your shopping list and grab your products off the shelves.

Try holding a kid or two in the process, and all bets are off. The hands-free accessibility of the Apple Watch makes it more practical for in-store use than smartphone applications alone, so there is potential for it to become the preferred channel for shopping in stores.

As shoppers gravitate toward watch-based technologies, retailers will need to focus on creating an engaging in-store experience on the new devices.

This poses a challenge because the Apple Watch’s interface is a fraction of the size of a smartphone’s.

The Watch’s significantly smaller screen makes it impossible for retailers to simply copy their Web experience into app form, so retailers that created apps by copying their Web site and using it as an app will be forced to rethink their strategy.

Smart retailers will consider the optimum user experience for the Watch, simplifying and streamlining the app to meet the needs of in-store shoppers.

This will be much easier for retailers that have already integrated in-store engagement features into their mobile apps.

Target, for example, is one of the only big-box retailers that launched an Apple Watch app because its mobile strategy takes a very different approach than its ecommerce approach. Its mobile phone app already has engaging features such as shopping lists and product location features.

Retailers now leverage wearable technologies to create apps that sort shoppers’ shopping lists based on where they are in the store and guides them to their next item.

Bulb goes off

The days of Kmart’s Blue Light Specials are over – shoppers want deals on their favorite brands in the aisle in which they are currently standing.

The Apple Watch brings retailers a step closer to achieving these types of location-based offers because it pairs nicely with beacons and is quickly and easily accessible to shoppers.

Beacons create a form of micro-communication between retailers and shoppers via mobile apps.

Retailers who nail this strategy on the Apple Watch will be able to significantly improve

customer engagement and generate new types of micro-messaging campaigns.

For the first time, shoppers will not need to have their smartphones out to see location-based notifications since they will be sent directly to their wrists.

Removing this physical barrier of having to pull your phone out of your pocket paves the way for truly contextual deals and recommendations, letting shoppers simply glance at their wrist to see them.

The key to leveraging this opportunity is offering brief, relevant messages that are truly helpful and fit on the Watch's tiny screen. This could be as simple as offering the aisle number of the next item on a shopper's list or a deal on his or her favorite brand just a few feet away.

More productive store associates

The Apple Watch does not just benefit shoppers – it also helps businesses and store associates who wear it while on the job.

Employees who wear the Watch will have both hands free to grab and sort items, making them more efficient at carrying out a variety of operations including processing orders, shelving products and fulfilling shipments.

Store associates will also be able to receive instant, location-based task alerts on the Watch to notify them if a nearby shopper needs help.

If a customer wants to exchange an item, it does not make sense for an employee at the checkout counter to hustle to the back of the store if another employee is already standing near the product.

By solving this dilemma, the watch could not only save time and make employees more productive, but also enable them to provide better customer service in a more efficient manner.

THE APPLE WATCH is a game-changer for in-store retail.

The platform forces retailers to think outside the box to engage with shoppers on its tiny two-square-inch interface.

This is a first major milestone towards wearable retail apps that will completely change the way we shop, making it a more contextualized, efficient and interactive experience. It is time for change, and you had better be ready.

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