

COLUMNS

## Omnichannel retailing is getting personal

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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It is time our industry takes a step forward and considers how we think about consumers: the very person interested in your brand. A unified customer experience, or unichannel for short, has to link disparate channels into just one experience that makes sense to Joe Public.

Some retailers started building CRM and clienteling solutions to blur the lines between physical stores, online and mobile channels. While these digital technologies do improve the customer experience, consumers do not think in these terms at all. People want to easily search for and buy products and goods, wherever they are, whenever they want.

A TimeTrade survey found that 85 percent of consumers prefer to shop in-store versus online. This statistic validates the importance of the in-store experience and ultimately, customer service. But what should be most evident is the importance of personal service delivery and the value that brings to the customer.

In our unichannel world, technology solutions and service delivery must become one and the same experience. Retailers need to ask themselves, what value can we provide customers in our store and how can technology get us there?

Empower your in-store environment and employees with digital technologies and tools that improve service, convenience, and even drive sales. That is the key.

Here are a few examples of technologies that will aide in service delivery in the future.

Augmented not virtual reality

The world is talking about virtual reality. But being in a luxury store is all about the product. Presenting fashion, scents or even sports cars is a highly tactile and physical affair. If anything, you want to heighten, not virtualize this moment.

Augmented reality (AR) can bring immersive experiences and product education to customers while shopping. With these capabilities, brands can bring their stories to life, providing customers with unlimited access to their entire inventory and customizing choices.

In its infancy now, AR truly has unlimited potential to communicate hidden benefits. Seeing is believing, and AR can open whole new worlds.

Unique key to your customer

The infamous retail scene from the movie "Minority Report" was the first real look we had at biometrics. Tom Cruise's character was identified and received a personalized offer the moment he stepped foot into that particular Gap store.

This is quickly becoming a reality for retailers. Similar to clienteling solutions, biometrics can bring the same capabilities and benefits to their employees and customers. Whether its palm-vein technology, facial recognition or iris scanning, retailers have the ability to identify customers in-store.

Beyond offers or advertisements, retailers can use biometric technology to authenticate point-of-sale (POS) transactions to streamline checkout. But eye-tracking and fingerprint sensors are fairly old school, compared to the more discreet and ubiquitous technologies about to launch.

Location, location, location

Geo-fencing and proximity beacons have to be considered one of the most exciting, but illusive technologies for brands operating through physical stores. Locating a consumer near your brand, or even specific products can make a retailer's mouth water.

While seemingly a trend for ages now, beacons still have so much unrealized potential for retailers and their customers.

Having traditionally been focused on delivering timely mobile ads and personalized offers to customers, it is a difficult balancing act. Too many offers, and consumers will opt out. Not personalized enough, and consumers will still opt out.

The immediate opportunity retailers can capitalize on with beacons is not the front-end, but on the back-end.

Customer interaction and engagement still needs to be a focus, but using beacons and accompanying devices for data collection can lead to more insightful, operational decision-making around staffing or visual merchandising.

Friendly data to understand behavior

Retailers can use all of the aforementioned technologies, and more, as data collection points for in-store analytics. Why? The value from these insights can improve retail operations as well as the customer experience by further understanding their behavior.

These fact-based insights such as footfall rates and conversion can all help retailers make more informed, strategic decisions.

Knowing how customers move in-store, make purchasing decisions and actually buy goods can be the difference between missed opportunities and driving long-term loyalty with customers.

The sum of all these parts, in the end, is a more meaningful, targeted and impactful, customer experience.

WE ARE ALREADY starting to see a range of exciting unichannel projects rolling out with leading retail innovators. These will no doubt continue to evolve and mature, as retailers test technology to better understand people's reactions.

The aim, of course, is to provide customers with the most relevant shopping experiences to become positively personal in the here and now.

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