

SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

Oak Labs exec: Touchscreen fitting rooms revamp retail experiences

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Oak Labs promotional image

By [Alex Samuely of Mobile Commerce Daily](#)

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NEW YORK An Oak Labs executive at Forrester's CXNYC 2016 revealed how major retailers, including Ralph Lauren, are transforming their fitting room experiences with interactive touchscreens, displaying the fluid way in which mobile technology can integrate into a bricks-and-mortar store.

During the session June 22, "Part Three: The Rise of Experience Design," the executive discussed how digital commerce is being redefined with the help of touchscreen experiences within fitting rooms, which allow shoppers to change the lighting scheme and request items in a different size or color from a front-of-house store associate. The touchscreen capabilities which are currently live within Ralph Lauren's Third Avenue location in New York solve real problems for consumers and employees, in addition to providing memorable digital experiences that do not require shoppers to interact with retail applications on their smartphones instead of real-life products.

"Technology and the future should seamlessly blend into the material of a store," said Healey Cypher, CEO and founder of [Oak Labs](#). "It should be beautiful. You should see wood and metal and glass, and people and products."

Journey to the touchscreen

Oak Labs first dabbled within digital-powered retail commerce with digitized storefronts for brands such as Sony and Rebecca Minkoff. However, the featured items' high price tags dissuaded consumers from buying them directly from the shoppable billboards.

Instead, the digital storefronts shaped a tremendous amount of traffic for the brands' retail locations, per Mr. Cypher. Marketers must keep in mind that today's shoppers have drastically changed, with many preferring to spend money on experiences rather than material goods. This has caused several facets of the retail industry to be redefined.

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The touchscreens showcase a natural progression of steps for customers to follow

"People are redefining luxury," Mr. Cypher said. "Luxury isn't Louis Vuitton anymore; it's travel and three-star Michelin restaurants."

Therefore, brands would be well-suited to include useful, relevant mobile-driven experiences in their bricks-and-mortar locations, particularly if they are aiming to fuel higher amounts of foot traffic. One pitfall to avoid, however, is leveraging technology just for the sake of it.

Additionally, companies should ensure that the innovation does not end with the launch of a new mobile product or service.

"Launching is the beginning, but after that is when the real insight comes," Mr. Cypher said.

Data and design's intersection

The interactive touchscreen fitting rooms serve as an example showing how marketers can discover new trends and customer behaviors that may never have been known in the entire history of the retail industry.

Oak Labs is now able to identify the average length of time spent trying on apparel in a fitting room for both male and female shoppers, as well as the average length spent for each time of day. The touchscreens also help inform conversion rates for specific items.

For example, if a retailer would like to know how its new seasonal collection is being received, it can roll it out on the sales floor and collect data from the items customers bring into the fitting room. This practice has helped Oak Labs' clients discover which products never go into the fitting room, and which items are always sized up or down.

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Ralph Lauren is one of the first retailers leveraging Oak Labs' touchscreen fitting room technology

In turn, this informs future product creation.

Additionally, every digital and physical touch point must be considered when mapping out an individual's path to purchase.

"We're starting to challenge the definition of mobile," Mr. Cypher said. "I'm mobile; [the smartphone] is just close to me most of the time."

User experiences should be treated like games that continuously offer engaging ways of interacting with products. This strategy is what prompted Oak Labs to roll out the light-changing feature in the fitting rooms. It acts as a gateway tool to the rest of the functions that the touchscreens perform.

"It's not gamification; this is about the science of reward," Mr. Cypher said.

Ultimately, while some may argue that mobile is changing the face of the retail industry and promoting more technological interactions instead of face-to-face ones, it is in fact bringing a different and more engaging spin to customer service experiences.

"We're not dehumanizing commerce, we're re-humanizing it," Mr. Cypher said.

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