

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

What others are doing: Talbots eyes more revenue, customer engagement with Concierge in-store install

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Getting mobile in-store

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

The Talbots Inc., a retailer known for classic but fashionable womenswear, will implement a new in-store mobile product called Concierge to improve the store experience and boost sales.

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Starting Aug. 29 with pilot in Northampton, MA that will extend next month to 60 stores, Talbots will arm store associates with iPads for enhanced customer engagement, mobile point-of-sale use, clienteling and task management. Mad Mobile is enabling the deployment of Concierge for Talbots.

"This is about collecting and displaying customer information as well as digital content," said Patrick Walsh, senior vice president of sales and operations at Talbots, Gingham, MA.

Talbots has a retail footprint in 46 states nationwide and four provinces in Canada, selling everything from tops, shirts and dresses to trousers and accessories.

Throwing the book

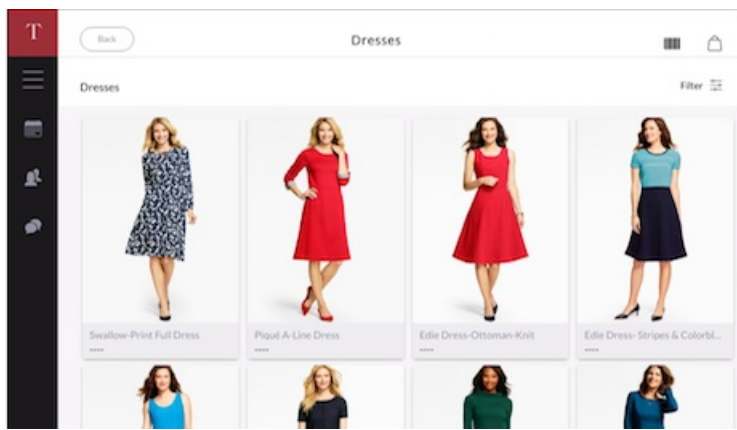
The chain spent three years developing what Mr. Walsh calls a selling culture journey, modeling sales training on industry practices.

Enabling store associates with mobile tools is designed to help them better engage with customers, especially given that 75 percent of Talbots stores are off-mall.

Not surprisingly, old ties matter with customers to keep them coming back with courtesies such as handwritten thank-you notes.

"We built those skills in-store with an eye towards the technology," Mr. Walsh said.

"We're halfway through a five-year journey," he said. "This is a tool that will help us get to the finish."



Concierge for Talbots interface

The benefits of Concierge for Talbots are many.

First is the ability to better access and display inventory on the iPad, with the roving salesperson able to recommend products and offer suggestions based on the search results.

Second is the transition from paper and other deskbound systems to Concierge and Oracle Customer Engagement CRM for Black Book notes, appointment calendar, market segmentation and one-to-one communication.

Third is the use of the iPad as the mobile point of sale. Associates can build a cart and wrap the transaction from the mobile device or physical point of sale at the counter.

Finally, Concierge on the iPad allows for the display of corporate messages, key activities, store events, social media feeds, tasks from managers and the day's appointments. This functionality is meant to make store associates more productive.

Selling it

Concierge is integrated with Oracle retail offerings such as Customer Engagement, ATG, Order Broker and Xstore POS as well as Micros, for which Mad Mobile is a key partner. Mad Mobile claims to be the only company with direct integration to these Oracle/Micros retail services.

"Concierge connects store associates with all the product data, customer info and delivery information they need to create a personalized shopping experience and sell more effectively," said Greg Schmitzer, president of Mad Mobile, Tampa, FL.

"We are very proud to work with Talbots as they've built their successful business on strong customer engagement and loyalty," he said.

The goal is to install Concierge via iPads and POS terminals with Windows 10 across 535 stores in the first quarter.



Patrick Walsh is senior vice president of sales and operations at Talbots

Mr. Walsh is a keen mobile evangelist.

In a prior stint at Brooks Brothers, the nation's oldest apparel retailer known for its preppy style, he designed and implemented a homegrown mobile clienteling service.

"You don't get to be the oldest [apparel] retailer in the U.S. unless your customers root for you through good times and bad," Mr. Walsh said.

"You have to adapt the selling culture to the environment," he said.

But he admits that retailers are often behind the technology curve. The hospitality sector, for example, does a better job with mobile commerce, which is one of the brightest spots in retail.

Degree of ease

The challenge for retailers is to transfer the tactile experience of feeling a sweater or the cut of the suit to the small screen of the phone or tablet, all the while supporting 360-degree views and simulating fabric and fit.

That said, the benefits of deploying technology such as Concierge outweigh the negatives of mobile.

The mere action of fulfilling store out-of-stock needs on mobile, accessing loyalty member information, streamlining inventory search, checkout and tying all disparate sources of data into one mobile source is a boon to Talbots.



It all started with a scarf

Talbots, like many retailers of its ilk, faces enormous competition not just in its merchandise offerings but also its adoption of technology and increasingly from the category killer, Amazon.

The growth of ecommerce and mobile commerce, which Concierge for Talbots currently does not support, is also a factor in consideration as the retailer vies to retain its customers' loyalty.

FOR TALBOTS, the adoption of Concierge growth is paced and of the time.

After all, its deployment is intended to strengthen bonds between store associates and its typical customer the forty- and fifty-something woman in the workplace or retired who seeks fashionable wear with a classic twist.

"We're not looking for revolution," Mr. Walsh said. "We're looking for evolution."