

RETAIL

Ecommerce is dead, says Holt Renfrew exec

October 19, 2017



Holt Renfrew department store location in Toronto. Image credit: Holt Renfrew

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

NEW YORK Canadian department store chain Holt Renfrew's recent in-store management transformation demonstrates how omnichannel begins from within a business before extending outward to appeal to consumers.

Omnichannel and digital has been difficult for the luxury industry, as the sector is heavily rooted in hands-on service, which digital essentially takes away. During the session "Digitizing the Store: Bringing the Online Experience Alive" at Luxury Interactive on Oct. 18, a Holt Renfrew executive detailed how the retailer saw success by arming store associates with a special application for an omnichannel experience.

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"Our associates are acting digitally," said Jessica Gale, director of omnichannel at [Holt Renfrew](#). "Our customers are expecting them to behave digitally.

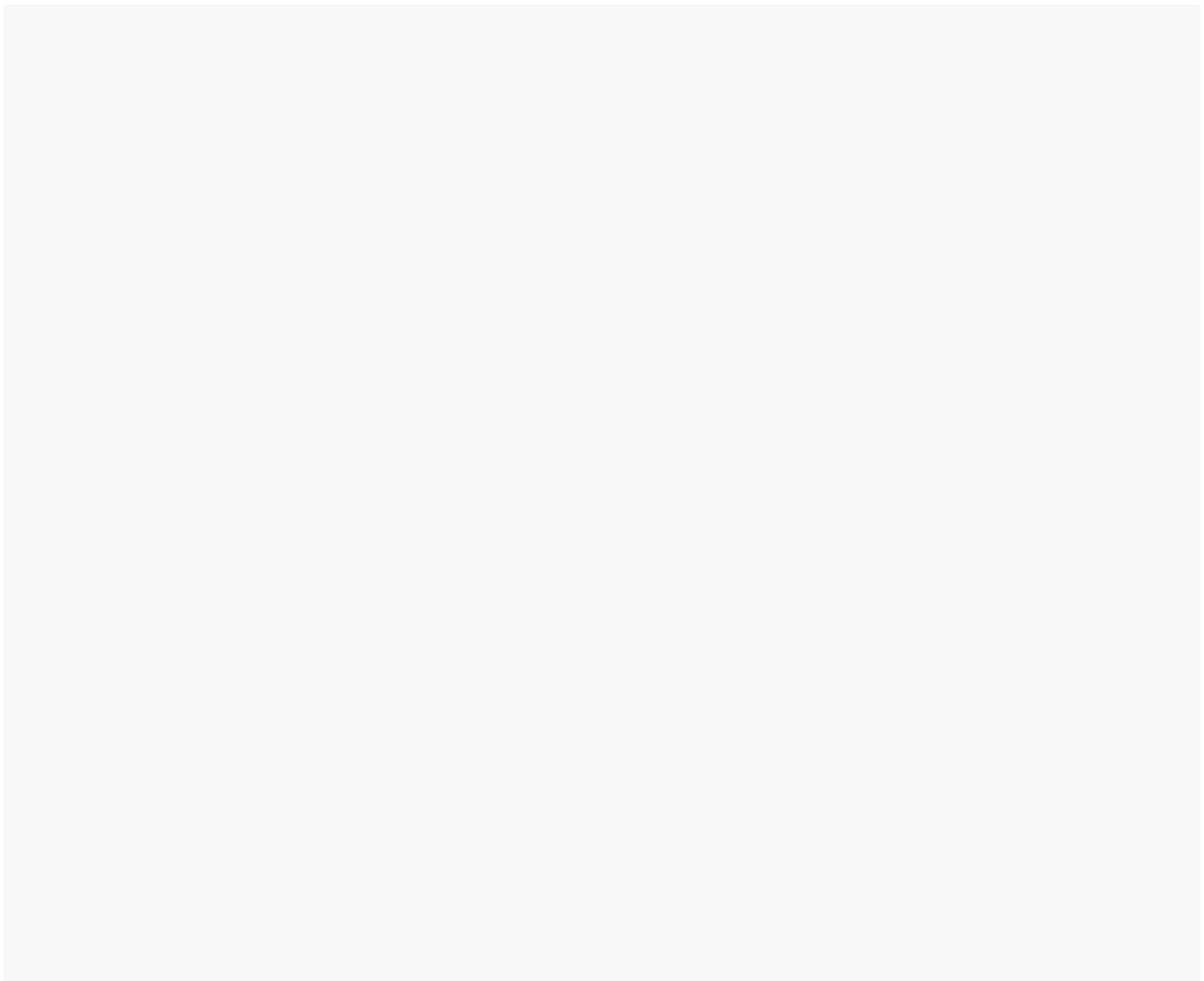
"So what is the right way to digitize the store?" she said. "It really is a massive opportunity but it can pose a problem in luxury because it is inherently a service-led industry.

"How do we make this a high service and high touch experience?"

In-store omnichannel

Ms. Gale explained that she believes ecommerce is dead. Brands and retailers are still thinking in terms of silos, but that concept is far behind. There is no ecommerce or bricks-and-mortar; it is all omnichannel.

The department store exhibited its knowledge of this by reshaping its store associate strategy.



The art of seduction @azzedinealialaofficial #CarolynMurphy #LiyaKebede

A post shared by Holt Renfrew (@holtrenfrew) on Sep 9, 2017 at 9:08am PDT

Holt Renfrew developed a mobile application, which store associates are able to use to not only look at inventory and product information but also information about the customer themselves.

This helps arm associates with more information to help craft a special experience for customers.

Holt Renfrew also looked at revamping the commission process as well, to help the disconnect between online and offline. For instance, if a customer comes in looking for a product that is available online but not in the store, the associate is likely to try to steer them towards another product to get a commission.

This is not a good experience for the customer. Holt Renfrew now allows for the store associates to get commission for that online sale to help alleviate this tension.

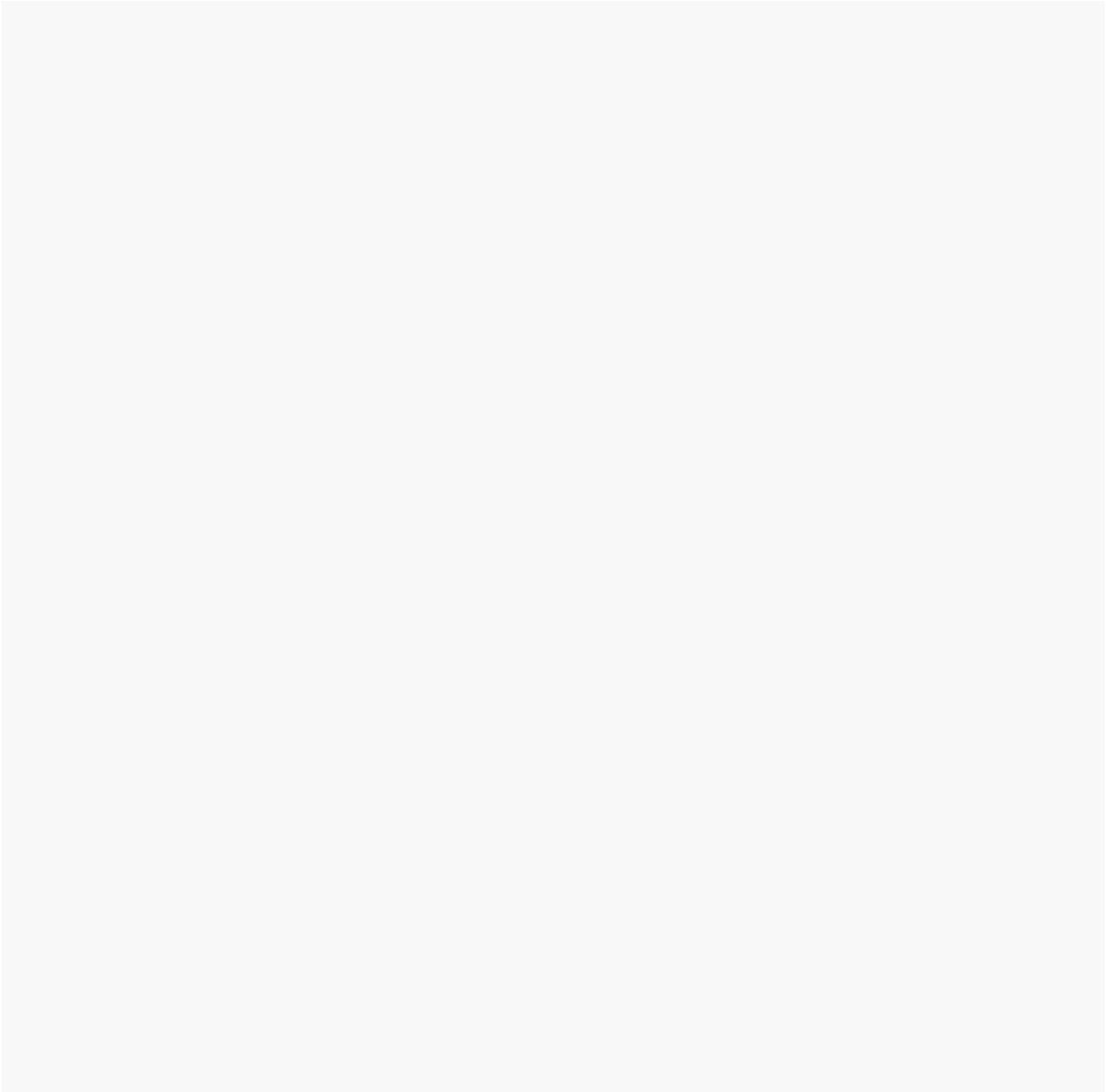
While digital is a vital aspect of retail, in-store associates are not useless and are proving to be an essential part of the customer experience, according to consumers.

A report from Astound Commerce shows that 52 percent of consumers think it is vital for store associates to be able to place an order and 46 percent believe they should have access to inventory information. However, online shoppers are having extremely positive experiences as well, with 86 percent claim their customer service interactions were great, and 42 percent saying excellent ([see more](#)).

The disruption of online shopping has greatly impacted bricks-and-mortar, but physical retailers are fighting to stay alive with an arsenal of digital and tangible tactics to safeguard their industry.

It is no secret that bricks-and-mortar has been suffering with more stores having to close their doors within the past few years. But a new report from Applied Predictive Technologies (APT) shows that 75 percent of retailers are

increasing their investments in online ([see more](#)).



Aprs ski @moncler #XiaoWenJu

A post shared by Holt Renfrew (@holtrenfrew) on Oct 10, 2017 at 10:08am PDT

Refining technology

The retailer realized through this process that it is important for brands not to wait until their product or initiative is perfect before launch. These strategies should be thought of as consistently evolving, and should be shared with the public and developed based on feedback.

For instance, testing this technology, Holt Renfrew realized store associates were spending too much time on the tablets in stores and also there lacked a mobile device management system in stores.

The retailer made adjustments based on this feedback such as making sure employees only used the tablets when with customers and also wrapped a mobile device management system into current policies within the store. Integrating new policies into current processes in stores can make a big difference in ease of transaction for employee adoption.

The better the Holt Renfrew associates can adapt to the technology, the more a positive experience will extend to the customer.

"Evolution is revolution," Ms. Gale said. "Don't put a technology out there, exhale and let it sit.

"It is really critical to get that feedback and evolve it into something more," she said. "The worst thing you can do is wait for something to be perfect, and you won't even know if it is perfect unless you get it out there and gain user insight."

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