

SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

NRF 2020: Robotics realize real-time retail

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I have just returned from NRF 2020 in New York last week. There were more than 40,000 attendees and 800 exhibitors from 99 countries. They showed how to deliver real-time retail, applying technology to win, serve and retain the most demanding retail customers.

This year, the emphasis was more than ever on boosting supply chain responsiveness to anticipate customers' latent demand.

Robots in plain view

Forrester wrote previously about Bossa Nova Robotics boosting employee productivity and wages in store operations. You can find the report [here](#).

At NRF 2020, the company announced plans to expand its robot deployment at Walmart to 1,000 robots through a partnership with NCR.

Zebra Technologies also announced its [SmartSight intelligent automation system](#). It uses the EMA50 mobile robot to travel along store aisles looking for out-of-stock items, mismatched prices and planogram violations.

Retailers subscribe to the service, which provides and maintains the robots and offers a platform that recommends corrective actions and routes them directly to store associates' mobile devices for real-time resolution.

Robotics behind the scenes

Forrester readers often ask how to accelerate fulfillment with automated warehouses. This normally requires significant systems integration effort between warehouse management systems (WMSes) and warehouse execution systems.

Forrester was intrigued that WMS veteran HighJump announced pre-integration with Locus Robotics, the first of a series of planned pre-integrations with autonomous mobile robots.

Forrester has followed HighJump, admiring its functionality and its shift to software-as-a-service (SaaS), which can be read about in the report "[The Global SaaS Landscape, 2019 To 2022: Some Categories Grow, While Some Reach](#)

Saturation."

Invisible robotics

But as for all fashion apparel retailers, the most intractable problem is synchronizing supply with volatile demand.

I enjoyed the presentation from Tom Litchford, head of worldwide business development for retail at Amazon Web Services; Richard Potter, CEO of Peak; and Tom Summerfield, head of commerce at Footasylum. They showed how to apply AI to customer data to develop a predictive supply view and optimize warehouse processes to drive highly competitive fulfillment and generate a 28 percent increase in digital revenue.

Another Peak customer, fast fashion retailer Boohoo.com, uses AI to tune assortments to anticipate demand.

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