

IN-STORE

Audi to add 16 virtual showrooms in 2014

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By JOE MCCARTHY

German automaker Audi is continuing its shift toward a digital retail experience with its first "Audi City" in Germany.

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The virtual Berlin showroom allows consumers to survey the entire Audi portfolio, enabling the brand to minimize retail space and make the experience more immersive. New features at the latest Audi City include 3D virtual viewing of models and the "Audi Select" service.

"In order to let customers see what they're buying and to have the ability to upsell each model fully loaded, they need to showcase these products and allow customers to see it in action prior to making the purchase," said Lauren Fix, automotive expert and author of "[Lauren Fix's Guide to Loving Your Car](#)," Lancaster, NY.

Ms. Fix is not affiliated with Audi, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Audi did not respond by press deadline.

Increasing efficiency

Audi City lets the brand shrink back its physical dealer presence, while maximizing its

ability to cater to consumers.

Two other virtual showrooms are located in London and Beijing, and the next Audi City will be located in Moscow. Sixteen total Audi City showrooms will emerge this year in international cities.

The two-floor Audi City Berlin can be found on Kurfürstendamm, a popular shopping avenue. On the ground floor of the space are four multi-touch tables that communicate with three powerwall modules that each have 120 million pixels and 48 speakers.



Audi City Berlin

Two private lounges for consultation and a stereo 3D powerwall are located on the second floor. Four physical cars are stationed in the showroom as well.



Audi City Berlin

Visitors can customize an automobile among millions of options on the multi-touch tables, as opposed to browsing a finite range of cars in a lot.

The customized models are then projected on the powerwalls using a 1:1 scale.



Audi City Berlin

The new stereo 3D powerwall gives a three-dimensional view of a model.

Customers can then schedule a test-drive with the customized model.

The Audi Select option replaces the traditional single-lease model with a deal that allows a customer to drive three models consecutively in one year to determine which car is most suitable.

In the future, Audi intends that all of its dealerships will be able to frictionlessly incorporate these digital components. The interactive tables and the powerwalls are designed for easy transfer and set up elsewhere.

Audi City will also be used to stage events for consumers.

The automaker has already equipped many of its dealers with useful technology.

Audi of America is equipping dealership employees across the country with an iPad application that improves customer service and streamlines the car buying process.

The Audi Progressive Retail Experience revolves around the Sales Assist app that uses a variety of functions to present product information to the consumer in helpful ways. The new program goes on to encapsulate the entire consumer journey, assisting consumers well beyond an Audi purchase ([see story](#)).

Experiences

Other luxury automakers have experimented with showroom concepts.

For instance, Toyota Corp.'s Lexus International created a luxury experience space in Tokyo's Aoyama district for brand loyalists to interact with the automaker and each other.

The "Intersect by Lexus" space lets Lexus owners relax and interact with the brand and similar lifestyle brands in myriad ways. Fostering a space that transcends a typical showroom allows consumers to engage with the brand in new ways ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands in other categories have also shifted retail emphasis toward digital.

For instance, British fashion label Burberry has opened a new digitally enhanced retail location to showcase its recently launched beauty line.

The Burberry Beauty Box, located in London's Covent Garden, carries Burberry's beauty, fragrance and accessory lines, and offers consumers the ability to discover the brand's cosmetics through both sales associate consultations and digital touchpoints, including mobile checkout. By creating a space specifically for its beauty line, Burberry is able to encourage consumer interaction with its beauty products, drive sales of the new line and test out new retail tactics ([see story](#)).

Ms. Fix noted that Audi's investment in new technologies will continue to attract new consumers.

"It will be a critical part of [retaining] future customers as well as adding more technologies that customers want and seeing them in action," Ms. Fix said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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