



The store of the future is likely to focus even more on the experiential element of shopping and equipping the consumer with as much information as they need to make purchase decisions

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The store of the future

How should retailers most effectively, and profitably, deploy technology to drive footfall? Dharmendra Patel of PlayNetwork EMEA advises

Retailers embrace technology and content in-store if it complements the brands they spend so much time and money promoting through multiple media and channels. When the customer hits the store, technology must contribute to the pay off that they expect, whether through music, video, social media, lighting, layout or a combination of all of these. Technology is now considered more often at the design and layout stage, rather than as an afterthought and the latest generation of hardware and systems can be more easily integrated, particularly now that so much content can be delivered remotely over broadband. The examples I give are all in use by retail brands, particularly as they develop flagship stores and new formats to ensure they can compete in the multi-channel world. Sites such as Facebook have revolutionised almost every aspect of our lives and shops are no exception. Retailers need to tap into this to maximise their chance of a sale. PlayNetwork is able to integrate a brand into the overall social experience where it not only gets seen by its customers, but their friends and family too. One such method is for customers to take part in exclusive competitions and offers that are only available to them if they 'like' a shop on Facebook.

In-store, ever-evolving smartphone applications enable customers to scan barcodes/tags or QR codes and 'like' individual products. The more a customer 'likes' a product, the more the store can tailor their offering through direct marketing etc. For example, a store could make personalised product recommendations and then invite like-minded prospects to special evening events to trial new ranges. To create a buzz, customers are encouraged to promote these via their social networks. Store graphics and labelling can also utilise social networking trends by displaying certain products as 'most liked' on Facebook and so generate demand.

One aspect of shopping which is becoming more and more prevalent is augmented reality. Video walls can be used to show how shoppers

will look in certain outfits at particular events. Possibilities include trying on a dress, having your photo taken and then having the image projected onto a mock up magazine cover, red carpet film premiere or even your wedding day. PlayNetwork has installed a 'social sun' feature in SunGlass Hut's flagship Covent Garden store in London. Customers can don a pair of sunglasses and then have a picture uploaded, which can be shared on social networking sites. The device lets shoppers receive instant feedback from peers who can offer their opinion on the potential purchase. This will become more prevalent as NFC technology increases.

PlayNetwork understands the importance of music and video content in adding value to the customer experience. Video walls allow customers to rate tracks via their smartphones while fashion shows can also be streamed directly. By using Facebook 'check in' application, customers can visit a store and unlock exclusive content such as shop discounts and free gifts. The store of the future is likely to see more use of iPads by personal shoppers as they offer quick and easy access to a store's entire product range and available stock. Using uploaded photos, customers' skin/eye colourings can be checked against new and existing ranges to find the best possible match.

The in-store environment is as important for staff as it is for the consumer. Getting the music right motivates staff and has a positive impact on sales. Our carefully crafted music profiles are designed so that no tracks are repeated on the same day and can be customised to suit particular times. Our clients include cosmetics firm, MAC, who have benefited from profiles to complement specific campaigns and recreate the buzz of their work at events such as London Fashion Week. So the store of the future is likely to focus even more on the experiential element of shopping and equipping the consumer with as much information as they need to make purchase decisions. This can be in the form of supportive material like full product ranges to affirm individual suitability or access to social media for peer approval.