In-Store Digital Technology in a Post-COVID Retail World

THE RETAIL ENVIRONMENT IS the setting for the customer experience (CX) that a store delivers to its shoppers. First and foremost, store design needs to ensure the safety of customers and staff. Each element in the retail environment, from the lighting to the flooring—and everything in between—helps shape the CX. The CX is an in-store shopper journey designed to engage, delight, and wow the customer, emotionally bonding him/her to the store or brand.

Over the past few decades, retail has evolved into today’s CX-based model. Online shopping already offers convenience; therefore, instead of trying to compete with online retailers to deliver convenience, many brick-and-mortar stores are instead focusing on delivering enjoyable and memorable experiences to attract the attention of shoppers and win their loyalty. Some CX trends that have emerged include the wow factor (impressing, delighting, and surprising customers), personalization (satisfying the customer’s individualized needs and wants), and localization (supporting and reflecting the local community).

TOUCHPOINTS
The store design is an opportunity to deliver a “wow” factor even before shoppers engage with the merchandise and marketing materials. The design sets the foundation for the customer experience and critical touchpoints within the shopper journey. Knowledge of the basic best practices of store design helps retail teams create and maintain stores that customers will enjoy visiting and helps suppliers more effectively anticipate their clients’ needs. There are at least 20 times where the customer will engage with a product or engage with a service. This creates an opportunity to seize signage or digital applications, or other technologies explored in this white paper.

PRODUCTS NEED TO BE EASY TO FIND
Store fixtures help form the store layout and the path to purchase, inviting customers to see, touch, and discover products along the shopper journey. They display, organize, and store merchandise, making shopping quick, easy, and enjoyable for customers. An effective, fully stocked merchandising display drives sales for the retailer as well. While store fixtures have always been used to define traffic routes within a store, in mid-2020 retailers used them to minimize interaction with other people. In addition, free-standing and directional floor signage took on greater significance. Shields were added to cash wraps to ensure the safety of their employees in an era when staff is responsible for maintaining the safety of customers and staff alike. An example of this can be seen in the full report at shopassociation.org/industry-reports/.

As online shopping growth explodes, many retailers are designing the in-store CX and the online shopping experience to complement rather than compete with each other. The goal of omnichannel retail is to deliver an integrated and consistent experience for shoppers regardless of how they make their purchases (in person, online, or via a smartphone app). Examples of this can be found on the next page.

TOP FIVE TAKE-AWAYS FOR DESIGNERS
1. Be a collaborative partner with brand retailer clients.
2. Design the in-store experience to create that WOW factor.
3. Recommend the best signage and/or technology for a given situation.
4. Identify technology that is easy to update and use.
5. Design the in-store CX to compliment the client’s online shopping experience.
The following are some examples of technology retailers have used to enhance the in-store customer experience and make finding products easier.

**DIGITAL IN-STORE IN AMSTERDAM**
This store in Amsterdam, Netherlands, uses digital to control inventory and maximize space. The shoppers interact with the screens in the small store and choose the items to purchase. Once chosen, the items are brought to them by a sales associate. It’s a great way to be efficient in store operations and inventory control and provides a unique interaction between the shopper and store employee via technology.

**DIGITAL TOUCH SCREENS IN BARCELONA**
In Barcelona, Spain, this store uses digital touchscreens to share product information and encourage product selection. The information on the screens change with promotions and product selection. The staff processes sales transactions, and in this time of COVID, keeps the screens clean.

**MERGING IN-STORE AND ONLINE SHOPPING**
B8ta is a retailer whose physical stores serve as showrooms. According to the retailer’s website, the purpose of these stores is to enable shoppers to discover, try, and buy the latest tech products. The store displays cutting-edge consumer technology products, with new products featured on a monthly and even weekly basis. Many of the products on display at B8ta have never before been featured in a physical retail space; some have been developed by companies that do not have brick-and-mortar stores. An example of continuous adaptation and flexibility, there is no printed signage in the space. For each product, an interactive tablet delivers product information. The store has no point-of-sale stations. All sales transactions are processed digitally or online, and most products ship directly to customers.

**BRAND MESSAGING VIA DIGITAL AND PRINT IN BUENOS AIRES**
Digital supports and enhances in-store campaigns and environments to create a better CX. In this photo the screen on the left wall is showing a live soccer game during which advertisements are playing. This gives shoppers the feeling that they are watching or at the game. This is a good example of the marriage between digital and traditional POP.

For more examples and to read the full white paper, please visit shopassociation.org/industry-reports

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