

COLUMNS

In-store cognitive apps will solve retail's biggest challenge

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Have you ever been shopping in a retail store and known more about a product than the sales assistant?

More frequently, the response to that question is a frustrating yes. According to a Motorola Solutions Shopping Study, 54 percent of all retail store associates report that shoppers are better connected to product information than they are.

This is an issue that retailers have been struggling to overcome in the last few years as more consumers turn to the Internet and their smartphones to research products, reviews and make side-by-side comparisons before making a purchase.

However, with this approach, consumers are often only evaluating what is available to them through reviews and social sharing, overlooking critical data that any discerning consumer could miss.

Think thank

With the right tools, retailers could have the ability to connect the dots for customers and guide them through purchase decisions.

The answer to solve this industry-wide challenge can be found in "thinking applications" mobile apps that harness intelligent, self-learning systems and use data-mining, analysis, pattern recognition and natural language processing to bring the power of Big Data to shop floors.



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Thinking apps go beyond the structured consumer profile data of age, location and past purchase history found in databases. These new apps seek to understand and know customer needs by also using unstructured data found in social media, online reviews and other written documents.

It is less complicated than it sounds.

With the right tools in place, these intelligent apps can crunch data into a format that is easily actionable in seconds, giving employees the ability to become experts with every product offered.

With a push of a button, employees can understand more about their customer by analyzing demographics, purchase history and wish lists, as well as product information, local pricing, customer reviews and tech specs.

Make it personal

To date, mobile retail solutions have mainly focused on pushing customers personalized promotions. Thinking apps provide retailers new innovation possibilities to truly personalize the experience and drive sales.

The power of cognitive enables sales assistants to interact with customers more effectively, answer their questions quickly and help them along in the buying process by identifying the best options for a consumer's specific needs.

Consider this holiday shopping season.

Many stores have hired new employees for the busy time of year. By leveraging apps that "think," employers are able to quickly train and scale up worker expertise in a way that until now has never been possible.

AS ONLINE SHOPPING continues to grow, the power of cognitive computing and mobile has the ability to transform the in-store experience for shoppers during the holiday season and beyond.

While the use of thinking apps in retail is just starting to take off, in the coming years we predict many retailers will power their business with cognitive to better arm their employees with the tools they need to meet consumer demand.

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