

RETAIL

3 ways brands help consumers use mobile to navigate physical retail

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Over the past decade, we have all been busy outsourcing our thinking to tech companies.

Consider: Many of us no longer take note of directions when we are driving, because Google Maps does it for us. We do not have to remember phone numbers, actors' or athletes' names, scheduled appointments or our friends' birthdays.

Our smartphones have become our digital sherpas, helping us navigate our lives.

If you think we are reliant on our digital assistants now, imagine the next five years, when pervasive computing informed by artificial intelligence (AI) will **know us better than our spouses** and anticipate our actions and thoughts better than we can. (Yeah, I am looking at you Alexa. Do not even think about ordering yourself a physical body from Amazon while I am at work.)

You would think that brands are preparing for this future by helping consumers use their smartphones to eliminate real-life friction. But that is the exception rather than the norm. Here are three ways that brands get ahead of this trend right now:

1. Help them find stuff fast. Retail stores were **designed to keep shoppers in the store as long as possible**, because the data shows that the longer we are in the store, the more money we will spend. That is why most supermarkets separate anchor items such as fruits and vegetables and milk and bread at opposite sides of the store.

But some retailers such as Lowe's Home Improvement are taking the long view. Rather than try to extract as much money as possible during a single visit, they reason that consumers will be more brand loyal if they have a positive experience at the store. That means getting in and out as efficiently as possible, with exactly what you need.

Innovative retailers, especially those with a massive physical footprint, are developing **applications** that help consumers find items quickly, making visits faster and more pleasant.

2. Cater to after-hours browsers. It is not surprising that many consumers want to check out new cars without the

premature attention of a salesperson.

Research has shown that while the phone has become a ubiquitous negotiating tool in the showroom, people are also using mobile devices to shop the lot after 10 p.m. at night. These are serious shoppers trying to navigate a complex process on their own.

One solution is to offer mobile self-guided tours that walk the consumer through a comparison of vehicles in inventory, allowing them to narrow in on their model of choice without pressure, capture their preference, and make it simple to connect them to the salesperson when they are ready.

3. Making paying mobile. Carrying a physical wallet increasingly feels anachronistic, but we persist because many retailers still require you to pay by credit card or cash.

Starbucks has undoubtedly done more for advancing mobile payments than probably any other brand, including Google and Apple. Mobile payments now account for **30 percent** of Starbucks' transactions.

The battle for the digital wallet from Bitcoin and other blockchain-empowered currency to the increasingly ubiquitous ApplePay means that physical retail needs to get comfortable with a new means of electronic payment, and fast.

The checkout process is expected to change dramatically in the next three years. Looking at Amazon's new Amazon Go physical store concept suggests that even cashiers can be eliminated from the experience.

From capturing "favorites" and prior purchases, to mobile ordering in advance of a retail visit, the ability to connect a digital shopping experience to a physical buying experience becomes critical.

What next?

Pretty much everything. Every real-life brand interaction you have as a consumer could likely be improved with a smartphone app, intuitive mobile Web experience, or Internet of Things (IoT) intervention.

Designing an effective user experience in real life means that we take the best of digital UX design and apply those lessons to physical spaces. How do we remove friction? Optimize the path to purchase? A/B test physical experiences to learn what drives satisfaction and transaction?

We begin to think about human interaction more as a personal-service node in the experience, rather than a traditional read: interruptive sales or checkout role.

Our digital experiences need to be pre-populated in physical retailers' business system and tools, so that every shopping experience is as efficient or immersive as a consumer wants.

THE FUTURE WILL belong to the brands that figure out the logistics behind making consumers' lives easier at retail, and put equal if not, even more attention into designing UX IRL.

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