

Improving the in-store customer experience

OVERVIEW

The economic downturn has permanently changed the way consumers shop. Shopping trips begin online or at in-store kiosks, and price comparisons and coupon searches are increasingly commonplace. Post-recession consumers are looking for trust relationships with retailers. They are guarding their resources, and have changed their shopping paradigm to be more selective and targeted. While it is generally the “brand” that brings retail consumers to the shopping environment, it is the retail “experience” that builds loyalty and keeps them coming back. Social media and mobile shopping initiatives may lure consumers into a retail environment, but digital in-store engagement must be at the heart of a retailer’s strategic cross-channel-execution.



FOCUS ON THE USER EXPERIENCE

Price Waterhouse Coopers studied post-recession shoppers in *"The New Consumer Behavior Paradigm: Permanent or Fleeting"* and found that retailers must leverage their marketing, merchandising and positioning to push their offerings that are "need to haves" and build a case for the "must haves." Although most people rely on cell phones in their everyday lives, this is a tall order in the context of a 2-inch screen. This goal is attainable when elements are integrated and retailers employ a variety of digital media, kiosks and in-store merchandising.

Consumers expect all contacts with the brand, across all channels, on-line, in-store or in-hand will be consistent and coordinated. They expect their needs and brand access to be met without limitations on a particular channel. The brand means more today than it did just three years ago, and it encompasses all the interactions consumers have with retailers – both digital and physical.

Consumers expect retailers to successfully marry the key elements of brand marketing, customer interaction, design, engineering and technology. Paco Underhill, in *"Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping,"* warns not to "get lost in the technology." It isn't the individual ingredients but the strategy of the whole that produces a winning solution.

SET YOUR IN-STORE EXPERIENCE APART

When analyzing the results of their study, *"The Customer Centric Store 2010,"* RSR found that the number one opportunity in the current market is to refine the customer's in-store experience. And the number one use of in-store technology, identified by 76 percent of retailers was to "maintain and/or improve the customer experience."

Interactive merchandising, whether delivered by a kiosk, tablet, Android app or digital media, is no longer an add-on option for the early adapter. It is a crucial differentiator in the retail setting. All retailers and brands have access to the same marketing, merchandising and technology resources. The savvy experience creates awareness, satisfies and delights consumers, and converts shoppers into loyal buyers – and success.

The use of multi-touch technology allows retailers to make a portion of the in-store experience as similar to consumers as the mobile devices people carry with them every day. By integrating the experience of smartphones with multi-touch interfaces, in-store shopping now becomes as natural and easy to use as the fastest growing consumer products in recent memory.

There are a multitude of benefits to multi-touch technology, many of which focus on the retail user experience. Taken together, these important elements result in a more-informed, more-efficient and more-engaging in-store interaction.

KEY ELEMENTS TO A GESTURE EXPERIENCE

Familiar Interface. The familiar interaction of a smartphone touchscreen lends itself to redefining the in-store user interface. Interactive applications can emulate mobile device applications, using similar gestures and responses. The result is an opportunity to create content that is dynamic and engaging to use.

Clean, industrial design. Removing the front bezel from the monitor allows multiple design and installation alternatives. A multi-touch monitor can be embedded into a wall or any other flat surface. Customers can use interactive content – not at a stand-alone kiosk – but actually embedded in the product display. It is possible to create interactive-video spaces within traditional retail environments. Monitors can be tiled together to create content that is bigger than a single monitor – without a concern about the interruption to the visual continuity caused by the bezel.

Multi-user options. The natural extension of multi-touch screens is the ability for multiple users to touch the same screen. This accommodates a system design with two or four different screen regions built around different information. Each region can be active at the same time – in essence creating four independent interactive areas with one screen.

Cleanliness. When the entire surface of the touch monitor is glass, the cleanliness of the interactive element improves significantly. Removing the monitor bezel removes areas for dirt, fluids and bacteria to collect.

Durability. A projected capacitive monitor can be placed in a range of environments not previously practical for touch input. Even with surface damage, projected-capacitive monitors continue to work. Even at the extreme case of breaking the cover glass, a projected-capacitive touch screen can continue to work. Uptime improves, therefore improving ROI and the total number of interactions per measurement period.

CRITICAL TAKEAWAY TIPS

Key elements. Digital in-store engagement and interactivity is a key contributor to the consumer's experience in the retailer's store. The design of the interactive element needs to reflect the retailer's brand, offer a call to action and show an engagement that is consistent with the retailer's marketing and merchandising strategy.

Leverage trends. Using projected-capacitive multi-touch technology, today the application interface can be designed to leverage the intuitive tendencies of consumers.

ROI. Projective capacitive multi-touch is the logical choice for retail or any in-store consumer interactive element. Cost, flexibility and longevity can deliver a generous return on investment.

Contributing Writer: Gene Halsey
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learn more at: www.touchrev.com
email us at: sales@touchrev.com

CALIFORNIA OFFICE
1400 Bridge Parkway, Suite 102, Redwood City, CA 94065
415.655.4940

MICHIGAN OFFICE
414 East 40th Street, Holland, MI 49423
616.786.5300