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Driving seamless and integrated customer engagement strategy in an Omni-Channel world

With rising channel proliferation, it is imperative for retailers to meet customers' demands and deliver a seamless, integrated experience across channels. Even with multiple channel routes, shopping at a retail store is still the preferred choice rather than shopping online. All research data including Gartner, reports that brick-and-mortar stores will remain the dominant revenue-generating channel.[1]

	2011 Actual %			2015 Estimated %			2017 Estimated %		
	Total	US	UK	Total	US	UK	Total	US	UK
Brick-and-mortar store	89.5	91.9	83.2	81.3	85.5	70.6	76.5	80.7	66.4
eCommerce	6.9	5.1	11.2	12.1	9.5	18.4	14.6	12	20.8
Mail-order catalog	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.4
Call center	1.2	0.5	2.9	0.7	0.3	1.6	0.7	0.3	1.6
Mobile commerce	1	0.7	1.8	4.1	2.7	7.7	6.5	5	10.1
Social commerce	0.2	0.3	0	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8
Other channels	0.7	1	0	0.7	0.9	0	0.7	0.9	0

[1]Source: Gartner (March 2013)

According to Accenture Seamless Retail Study, up to 86% of consumers in North America state they 'like shopping in brick-and-mortar stores' (for select retail sectors)[2] and another report by Nielson said that 77% of shoppers felt 'in-store shopping is the most trusted and reliable.'[3] However with increased digital focus, FMCG and automobile brands are straddling to maintain a physical presence at the store.

Beyond the critical issues of price competition and showrooming, retailers are struggling to keep the store experience relevant to new gen tech savvy shoppers, with information-rich devices to navigate multi-touch point paths to purchase.

The most important factors are:
- Driving meaningful foot traffic into stores
- Providing an immersive in-store customer experience
- Integrating seamlessly with online, mobile and social channels
- Improving conversion through empowered store associates
- Connecting everyone through a single technology platform

Enabling the future of Omni-Channel retailing: Customer rules and demands for a seamless and integrated experience

Omni-Channel retailing is defined as a set of integrated processes and decisions that support a unified view of a brand throughout the customer experience, irrespective of the channel (in-store, online, mobile, call center, or social). The stages of customer experience are research, decision, purchase, return and / or exchange. The new paradigm of retailing is to ensure continuous and enhanced customer experience with integrated merchandising, order management, marketing, operations and technology platforms.

The Accenture seamless retail study is based on a poll of 750 consumers in USA. This was conducted to analyse leading retailers' operations across multiple sales channels. It concluded that 49% of consumers believe the best thing retailers can do to improve the shopping experience is to integrate in-store, online and mobile shopping channels together. An overwhelming 89% of consumers stated that it is important for retailers to let them shop for products in the most convenient manner for them, no matter which sales channel they choose.[4]

Despite the shift towards online shopping, the in-store experience still remains significant with the customer and contributes towards a majority of retail sales. Accenture's study found that the top three capabilities for successful retailing are:
- Consistent experience
- Connected shopping
- Integrated merchandising across channels

In the increasingly competitive retail environment, retailers must leverage every opportunity to engage better with both on-line and in-store customers.

Gamification, Empowered Store Associate and Technology – A three pronged strategy to drive meaningful foot traffic to stores for increased conversion and sales

Source: Cisco StyleMe Virtual Fashion Mirror @ John Lewis[6]

Use of Gesture-based technology invites customer interaction through Gamification, a principle of game psychology applied on top of business applications. This combines cleverly structured applications with the deep emotional urges of human beings to compete, succeed and collect things in order to win. Gamification combined with commerce has the potential to build personalized experience, brand loyalty, increase sales and deeply engage with shoppers. In addition to providing a unique high-tech shopping experience, these solutions also virtually display items without requiring the individual store to stock the inventory until the buying decision is made and the actual item is purchased.[7]

Single platform technology is the key to enable the next state of Gamification and any commerce related to such a business model. This requires Agile and integrated IT platforms that deliver personalized, context-based single view of product, inventory and customer cost-effectively across channels, as well as in real time. Currently, most platforms just aren't up to the challenge. But by investing in powerful analytics, in-memory technologies and Cloud-based solutions, retailers can start to bring the

current multitude of siloed platforms, applications and architectures under one standardized umbrella. By doing so they won't potentially reduce running costs. These technologies also help deepen insight and improve flexibility and speed—the keys to faster innovation and decision-making

Technology is just a business enabler. Delivering an engaging in-store experience relies on a retailer's ability to leverage the technology that creates more compelling brand experiences.[8] Store mobility and in-store Wi-Fi are a few capabilities that some of the retailers are using to stay competitive. A store associate can use mobile technologies to enhance the in-store experience in several ways, outside of inventory management and intelligence. Implementing product displays, promotions, and campaign material as specified by the marketing department, provides customers with more options to respond faster to queries.

Conclusion

A successful retail business needs to partner with an enterprise that will help them adopt and develop a seamless and integrated customer engagement strategy. This approach incorporates and manages every channel a brand uses to reach their customers in a cohesive and seamless information stream. This ensures the consumer is engaged with the brand before, during and after the sale in-store or online.

Physical stores are a key to retail success. The challenge for enterprises is to transform them into strategic Omni-Channel environments that align with both customer needs and corporate strategic objectives. The in-store experience serves as an integral part of overall customer engagement – especially when combined with technologies associated with Omni-Channel retailing. Today's advanced digital technologies make the task much easier, allowing retailers to implement a single cross-channel platform that integrates the digital channels customers expect with contextually relevant content. This ensures more effective in-store marketing.

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Contact Us

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Mindtree Digital Commerce Services

Mindtree's integrated, comprehensive set of service offerings and solutions enable enterprises to address their commerce strategy needs. They aid Fortune 500 customers in their digital commerce transformation. We empower them to deliver a truly Omni-Channel experience to their customers.

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