



Update the in-store experience

Vincent Encontre proposes three digitally-enhanced interactions for in-store customer engagement

No two customers are identical. However, when entering a store, each and every one desires the best possible assistance for finding and buying the products they want and need. This ensures a positive shopping experience for the buyer and a loyal customer for the retailer.

Unfortunately, aside from in-store personnel, few options have existed for satisfying such a diverse group of people. That is, until now. Consumers of all stripes – thanks to the accelerating penetration of multi-touch enabled smartphones and tablets – are quickly becoming digital natives. Handheld devices, by introducing natural user interaction to the masses, have accelerated the general public's comfort level with technology.

Retailers are naturally turning to these mainstream digital paradigms in order to both increase and personalise the assistance they can provide to their in-store customers, while enhancing their multi-channel strategy.

But what types of in-store shopping digital experiences should be offered? The reality is that today's digitally-savvy customer comes with high expectations and that means traditional in-store kiosks and digital signage will not cut it. They underwhelm with emotionless, non-intuitive, inflexible, disconnected, sometimes unidirectional 'pre-smartphone' user experiences.

At IntuiLab, we recommend retailers bring three specific forms of digital interactivity into their stores to serve the needs of both customers and sales associates.

Customer self-service. The most common method for bringing digital shopping to a store is through the self-service kiosk. Recent software advances can bring highly intuitive and adaptable interfaces to the store floor. The resulting self-service experience addresses

a variety of customer wants and needs. For example, while waiting for a sales representative, a customer can digitally browse through a set of products, sorted and filtered to their taste, using natural interactions such as multi-touch gestures. Product options are pre-selected by the consumer, arming the next available sales assistant with the information they need to be of immediate assistance. Large touch screens (46" and larger) now available on the market at a reasonable price can even enable, in a 'wall' set-up, a group of friends to browse together, bringing social elements to digital shopping.

Interactive countertop for customer/vendor engagement. The purpose of such an interactive countertop, like Microsoft Surface, is to provide digital support for in-depth product and service discussions between the customer and the sales representative. This method is particularly useful for the sales of complex services such as loans or insurance in a bank branch or for complex products requiring customised set-up and/or configuration. Through this kind of engagement, the sales representative can act as an advisor and not just a pitchman to the customer.

The mobile sales companion. The last form of digital interactivity we suggest concerns the use of a mobile device by a sales associate – not the bulky, function-driven terminal your parcel service person is using, but rather those new, stylish tablets with 7" to 10" multi-touch screens. With this kind of device, sales associates can stand beside customers anywhere in the store and access detailed product information, inventory availability, pricing and cross-selling offers. Customers could even work with the associate to view their past purchases. These handheld devices can support smooth transitions to and from larger screen tablets and

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countertops to ensure a seamless interactive experience. Done right, this digital environment would encourage ad-hoc collaboration between customer and sales associates as well as enable the collection of detailed user information about preferences and buying behaviours.

The digitally-savvy consumer has become less of an exception and more of a rule. Successful implementation of in-store digital interactivity creates dynamic, collaborative and highly personalised experiences for these consumers, leading to increased sales and greater brand loyalty. The three approaches discussed in this article are actively deployed by IntuiLab customers across Europe, generating significant ROI for their bricks and mortar stores.

Vincent Encontre is CEO of IntuiLab, a leader in the design and development of natural user interface-based applications for retail