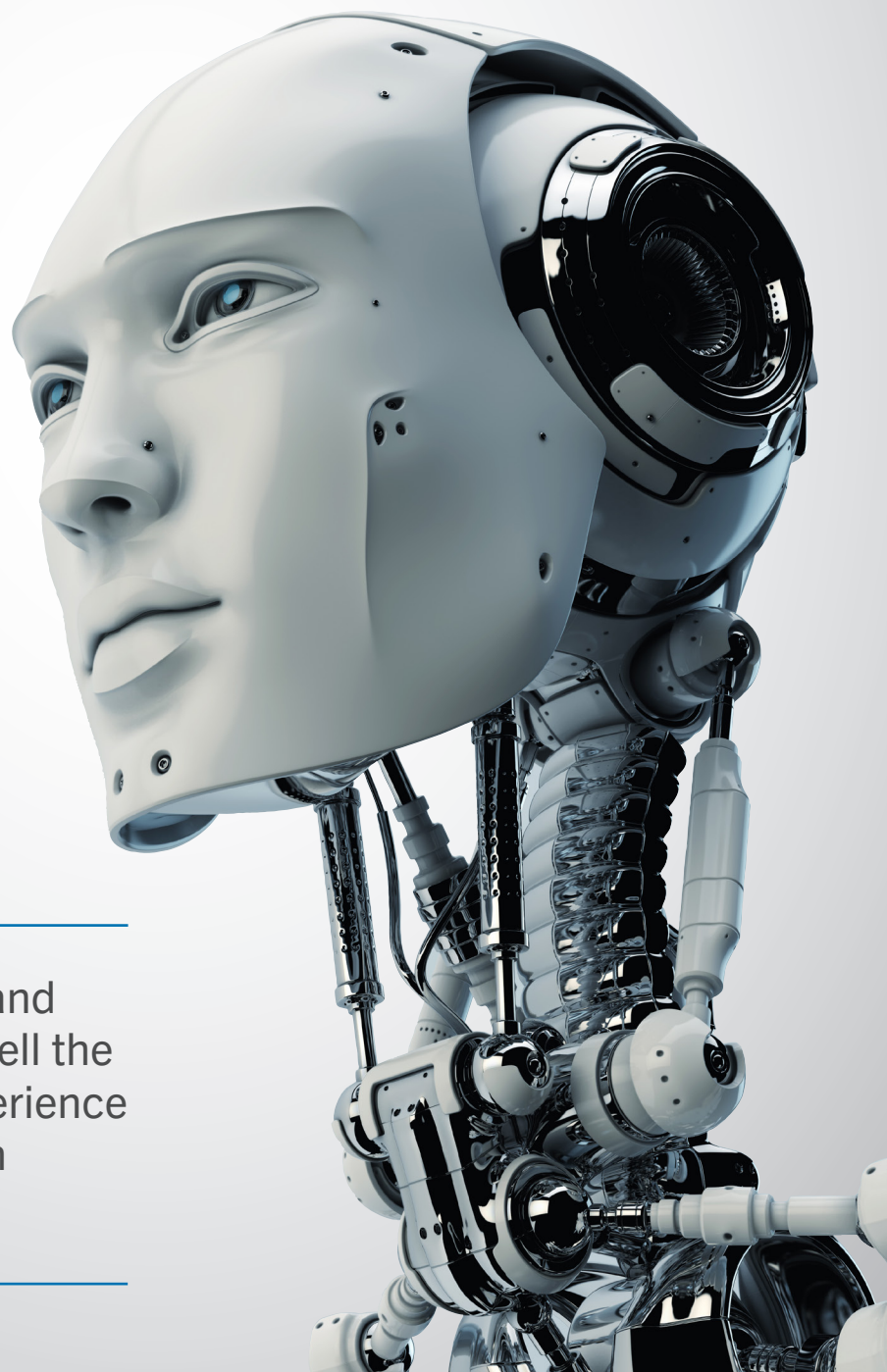


Tomorrow's World:

Discover the Multi-Channel Retail Business of the Future



Discover why technology and online services needn't spell the end of the high street experience - but actually enhance it in the future.

The British public still love the high street. While doomsayers predict the demise of bricks and mortar stores, reality offers a very different outlook. According to UK-based firm Shoppercentric:



of shoppers use their smartphones as part of their purchasing journey.



of shoppers use a mobile application.



of shoppers use a store.



70%

of shoppers use a retailer's website as part of their purchasing journey.

Shoppercentric's research also reveals that 70% of shoppers use a retailer's website as part of their purchasing journey. Such figures would suggest that both in-store and online can co-exist - but bricks and mortar stores need to be doing more. At the moment, many traditional retailers are using technology, mobile and web services as an 'extra' to their core services. To become a retailer of the future, these disparate channels need to be brought together to create a single unified front - omni-channel retailing.

But how?

Bringing together your off -and online strategies is key to omni-channel retailing; and there are several practical steps that can be taken to ensure that your multi-channel silos are busted, creating a joined-up single vision for your customers, however or wherever they engage with your brand:



'Prove'

Offer 'social proof'; this is where other customers' and/or friends' recommendations prove to a potential customer that your services or products can be trusted. Bear in mind that review sites are booming, with an [eConsultancy survey](#) revealing that 24% of UK smartphone users take their phones with them when shopping to compare prices and check up on products.

Instead of fighting this trend, retailers should consider offering free in-store wifi for smartphones like John Lewis do or web-enabled technology such as kiosks that feature the retailer's online services and customer reviews.

Kiosks have been around for a while now, and some retailers are beginning to use them to great effect. For example, Footasylum uses in-store kiosks that allow customers to choose from a vast range of different product styles, colours and sizes, plus the system enables the company to manage its inventory more efficiently.



'Integrate'

Bringing the online and in-store worlds together when a consumer enters a shop creates loyalty. Witness US fashion retailer Neiman Marcus, which is trialling an app that activates when a customer enters a store and lets them know about events, new products and even allows them to nominate who their favoured sales assistant is. The same app in turn alerts sales assistants when a particular customer arrives, bringing up their sales history and picture to ensure a more personalised service.



Thorntons has deployed in-store kiosks to sell high-value larger items that are typically difficult to stock in store, while offering free home delivery in-store as a sweetener to seal the deal.



'Engage'

Create forums where customers can discuss your products and services in a theme-driven environment. For example, beauty retail specialist Sephora has created [an online community](#) to complement its retail stores where its customers can glean expert views, interact with one another and share opinions; all driving sales without the customer being told to 'buy, buy, buy'.

Amscreen has created a system that brings up ads on any in-store LCD depending on who is in the store at the time and offers up targeted marketing messages.



'Enhance'

Technologies such as Shelf Edge offer a host of consumer aids in-store by creating 'interactive shelves' using augmented reality. This soon-to-be-deployed technology allows users to hold up their smartphones (or in the future, potentially via Google Glass) and glean more information about a particular product onscreen, receive coupons on the fly, be pushed recommendations/advice for the product, and more.



Retail solutions expert One iota is currently showcasing a prototype, a games console-style technology that allows customers to use hand gestures to order direct from a shop window when a store is closed.

Bring The Virtual & Physical Together

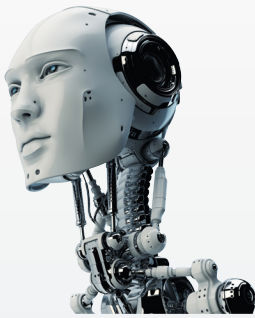
Social media shouldn't be forgotten in the retail sector's scramble to innovate. Retailers need to fully integrate social media into their traditional marketing, offering full integration of Facebook, Twitter and more, while using these digital outlets to promote exclusive in-store events and promotions.

So what might be in store...?

With any technological push, there are inevitably more left-of-the-middle concepts that might sound like the stuff of science fiction now – but could become a reality sooner than you think:

Rotors vs. robots

Online giant Amazon generated huge buzz (and plenty of goodwill-boosting PR for its brand) when it unveiled its plans for a new delivery service - Prime Air - where goods are delivered directly to the customer's doorstep via drone.



Google is exploring a more-down-to earth delivery solution, using its self-driving technology that could see autonomous cars pulling up outside your home with your delivery in the boot. Now couple this concept with Google's recent acquisition of eight robotic firms, and you could be kissing that delivery guy goodbye as a robot steps out of the vehicle and hands over your order . . .

Back to the future?

It's ironic that, for all the talk of silo-busting and of using the latest technology to give each and every customer a bespoke experience, what the retail sector is ultimately craving is a move back to the luddite world of the 20th Century. The one where the shopkeeper of a local community knew each and every one of their customers and what they wanted as soon as they walked in; a shopkeeper whose suggestions, advice and products were gratefully received and, more importantly, highly valued. In fact, IBM are going as far as saying that local stores will beat ecommerce in the future.



All modern retailers want this special one-on-one relationship with their customers – but on a vast scale. And while technology is becoming available to facilitate this vision, the coordinated strategy required to build such a mass of trusted relationships is what will prove to be the ultimate challenge for retailers.

And there's no magic bullet for that, just hard work and creative thinking . . .

The future, now:

What is right for your own emerging omni-channel operation is, of course, down to you:

- Monitor emerging technologies on a regular basis and decide what could be useful to you.
- Research how other retailers are using technology to bring their own in-store experiences to life.
- Don't use technology and online services simply for the sake of them or as a gimmicky 'bolt-on'; every element you introduce must add value to your customer's experience.
- Go local; make each customer feel that the experience you are offering is for them and their local area.
- Provide customers with useful information, not sales speak.
- Finally, be realistic – your budget dictates what you can and cannot achieve. If you need advice on how best to target your omni-channel endeavours, speak to a technology supplier with expert knowledge of the market and your sector.

To find out if you and your company are ready for omni-channel retailing, take our free 'How omni-channel are you?' survey.

Take Survey ▶