

Delivering a personalised, multi-sensory in-store experience

By [Jaqueline van Eeden](#)

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It's no secret that online shopping is taking off in South Africa. In fact, [studies](#) show that the local e-commerce market is expected to reach almost twenty-five million online shoppers by 2021 - a considerable number given our internet penetration is [at around 50%](#), give or take 10% depending on which study you read. However, the other 50% still enjoy an offline shopping experience and, it goes without saying, even online shoppers like visiting an actual store.



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Retailers are finding themselves in a challenging position. Increasingly, they have to cater to a market that wants the convenience, customisation and touch point capabilities of their online experience along with the tangible, interactive and personal experience of in-store shopping, while in store.

Digitalising the in-store customer experience helps retailers keep customers in store for longer, while also catering to the unique needs of the new market.

It's no longer a question of which technologies retailers should be investing in to elevate their in-store experience. It's about how to integrate these multiple technologies seamlessly to create an omnichannel, multi-sensory and personalised experience for customers that captures their specific interest and satisfies customer demands.

The fourth dimension

Some retailers are making massive inroads in digitalising their customers' in-store journey, making it a unique, 4-D experience that keeps customers enthralled. Home renovation depots, in particular, are finding their niche in this space.

Home renovations is an area where online shopping works well, especially for customers who are already aware of what they want, or aren't too fazed by a generic result. However, most customers want to see the tile, feel the wallpaper and make sure their décor choices merge harmoniously with each other and with existing décor and furnishings.

To answer this need, some homeware and DIY retailers have created in-store design spaces, where customers can design a room virtually, incorporating existing elements with selected items available in-store. During the design process, the customer can also physically examine various elements they wish to incorporate, ensuring they are happy with the final product before placing their order for whatever components they need.

Some apparel retailers are also establishing a presence using augmented reality. They are setting up "mirrors" throughout their store where customers can "try on" different outfits without having to physically do so, yet still touch and feel the actual items to ensure they are happy with the quality and design. Retailers are also leveraging low investment mobile applications, which customers can use to "try on" various outfits. In this way, they can experience multiple outfits, place their orders and purchase them in a far shorter time, with more ease and comfort, and still enjoy the in-store experience.



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The balance between choice and customisation

Taking it a step further, retailers are investigating opportunities for customisation for in-store consumers. Despite the wide variety of choices offered in store, one of the biggest benefits online shoppers enjoy is the ability to custom design their own purchases at the component level.

Design has become more modular, so rather than merely designing a kitchen using the choices available from a store's catalogue, customers are able to create their own designs from a wide selection of prefabricated parts, or modules, available.

For those who want to design their own tiles or create cupboards out of materials not on the typical inventory, some retailers offer 3D printing options. Retailers are able to 3D print a customer's own designed tile or cupboard door – or shoes and clothing, for that matter – based on their specifications, preferred material (within reason) and chosen design, within a relatively short timeframe.

Fully integrated

Today's customer not only wants customisation and a unique experience; they want to be known, acknowledged and understood. Retailers are elevating their in-store communication touchpoints by leveraging data, both historical and current.

Multiple integrated platforms such as IoT, PoS systems and video cameras allow retailers to interact with their customers, offering promotions, information and unique selling points to individual customers while collecting data to define their unique shopping profile. Retailers can leverage this data, combined with historical data to create a streamlined, customised experience across different touchpoints within the store.

A shopper who lingers a little longer over a specific genre of books, for example, may be able to receive – at point-of-sale –

a discount voucher for select books in that genre. A customer who has previously bought a specific brand of jeans can walk into a store and receive a communication that new stock has arrived, or of various shirts that will complement a previous purchase.

The opportunities are endless, for retailers.

Spread the word

The technology to fuel these innovations exists, and retailers should be leveraging them to digitalise and enhance their customer experience. Retailers can start small but must act quickly. Then, once word spreads and the customer base grows, they can slowly scale up and adapt based on feedback.

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