Using tech to elevate the in-store customer experience

In today's competitive market, retailers need to create a compelling reason for customers to enter their stores. Smart use of technology offers one way to differentiate themselves from the competition.

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"For the past two decades, retailers have tended to focus on saving costs and creating efficiencies. This has led to an introspective organisation. There now needs to be a shift in mindset to focus on the customer, to create a reason for them to enter physical stores," says Gareth Hawkey, group CEO at redPanda Software.

Making the customer the focal point of the business, and working from this mindset, technology can have a massive impact to change in-store customer experience.

Traditional retailers cannot compete with online retailers when it comes to price and merchandise, and need to bring something to the table that online retailers cannot. The biggest opportunity is the direct interaction with the customer - the true physical touchpoints with consumers.

Traditional retailers have to, therefore, find technology that will change the whole in-store experience to attract customers.

Impactful technology investments

According to Hawkey, "The technologies that can be most impactful to retailers include radio-frequency identification (RFID), Bluetooth beacons, mobile payment options, loyalty applications and facial recognition."

Bluetooth beacons allow retailers to broadcast a personalised message when a particular user approaches a certain aisle or section of the store. Ultimately, this technology enables retailers to engage with their customers in a hyper-personalised manner while they are in physical proximity – offering customised deals, discounts and even coupons to build brand loyalty.

For retailers, it is critical to offer mobile payment options to their clients, which enables seamless mobile point of sale (POS) options, and to provide incentives to customers via discounts, coupons and value-added pricing that can be accessed via digital wallets.

"The most valuable technology retailers can utilise is facial recognition. This can benefit both the internal workings of the organisation (through monitoring attendance) but also the customers, as the technology can alert the staff when queues are getting too long. This helps the retailer to deploy staff to tills, to improve customer experience," says Hawkey.

Advancements in this technology now means that retailers can predict when customers will move towards the POS, five to ten minutes before they do so. Managers can be alerted and more tills can be opened in time to assist with checkouts, before a backlog of waiting customers is created.

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The biggest benefit to investing in these tools and technologies is the survival of the business.

"It also makes the ecosystem more complicated. It adds cost to their bottom line but this investment and change in focus to improving the customer experience will create a compelling reason for customers to enter your store. That is going to be the end result of the investment," concludes Hawkey.