The Interactive Retail Digital Experience

Creating or enhancing a digital experience inside the four walls of a retail store is no longer an option or something for "next year's" budget. Let's face it... we're living the digital experience in virtually every aspect of our everyday lives and walking into a retail store doesn't change that. We're bombarded with the digital "experience" through hundreds of TV channels, talk radio, phone conversations, voicemails, emails, text messages, and social media. Most of us have learned to filter out the digital data that is not applicable to us, and then how to immediately access the information that is. So when trying to create or enhance a digital experience in a retail environment, it's important to remember that shoppers have developed an inherent ability to "filter out the irrelevant".

If a significant investment is made into some mechanism to deliver digital content that is irrelevant to a large percentage of the in-store customers, then it's like pouring money down the drain. Care must be taken that the digital content isn't just "white noise" that the consumer filters out and has no use for. This is often the case with digital signage. We've become so used to this technology that often times it just gets passed by without so much as a glance. This type of digital experience is created when content is simply forced onto the consumer. They didn't ask for it, it's just there. You have to hope that the shopper looks at it and that it's relevant to their shopping needs and spurs an interest... but the odds aren't very good.

Beacon technology, as part of the retail digital experience, has yet to be embraced for one simple reason. Shoppers aren't "opting in". They don't want to be pinged with a push notification every time they turn the corner of an aisle. Their phone is in their pocket or their purse

anyway. This is another example of forcing digital content onto the shopper when they didn't ask for it. Even if their shopper profile indicates they should be interested in the coupon or the offer being presented, the fact is most shoppers simply aren't responding favorably to the technology yet. It's either too intrusive so it gets turned off, or it's just white noise that gets ignored.

A more effective way to deliver content and create a more impactful digital experience is to allow the customer to go directly to the content that is relevant to their needs, and retrieve it on demand. This is an interactive approach that engages the willing shopper. Maybe they need to locate a product in the store, or look up the price, read reviews, learn about the warranty and accessories, safety information, or nutritional information. Everything they might possibly need to prompt a buying decision right then and there. The reality is that most, if not all, of the information they want and need is either on the store's website or on the store's smartphone app. Obviously the logical assumption is that the shopper is going to pull

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out their smartphone and just navigate right to the information they need. But there are lots of problems with this assumption.

First, believe it or not, not everyone owns a smartphone. According to a report by Pew Research Center, only 68% of American Baby Boomers own a smartphone. That means, in theory, a third of Baby Boomer shoppers in a store at any given time, may not have a smartphone. Secondly, retail smartphone apps are not being adopted and embraced nearly as well as retailers hoped they would. In fact, those store smartphone apps are way down the list of "must have" apps that consumers install onto their phones. According to Forbes, no brick and mortar retailer cracked the top 10 most downloaded apps of 2022.

According to the 2022 Global Digital Shopping Index, of the smartphone users that actually pull their phone out of their purse or pocket and use it in the store, 15% of shoppers use smartphones to compare prices, 14% use their smartphones to search for offers and discounts, and 10% use it to read product reviews.

Ideally, a main component of a retailer's digital experience should be based on an interactive method of delivering relevant content to the shopper. This method would not be dependent on the consumer's willingness to use their own smartphone, but would in fact be more convenient and inviting to use, and would reduce the possibility that the consumer would browse competitive websites.

The answer...
Small-form-factor kiosks.

Small-form-factor kiosks are powerful, intuitive devices that any smartphone or tablet user would gravitate to and feel comfortable using. These devices are affordable enough that several could be distributed around the store, making them accessible and convenient. They can be equipped with barcode scanners, card readers and printers to broaden their scope of functionality. Shoppers can access loyalty programs to check balances or retrieve coupons. They can locate a product or lookup

a price and when they do, the content manager recommends complimentary products for the classic cross-sell. Find recipes and print out a list of ingredients and nutritional information. Use the kiosk to look up which lamp bulb they need for the headlight of their pickup truck. Research product reviews, warranty policies, or even watch movie trailers and how-to videos. If the content is available, give the shopper access to it. And when the kiosk isn't in use, play eye-catching promotional ads and videos to further maximize the return on investment.

The objectives are clear:
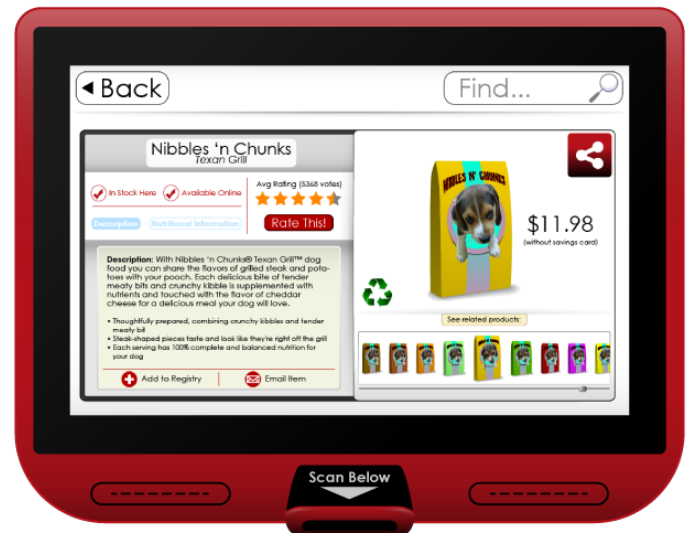
1. Create a digital experience that is interactive, not just "white noise". If the shopper is engaged, mission accomplished.

2. Once engaged, use the opportunity to cross-sell and up-sell.

3. Make as much information available as possible on the kiosk. Don't limit it to one or two tasks. Utilize the technology and maximize the investment to ensure the shopper has a pleasant experience and is compelled to make a purchase.

Kiosks can still do even more...

- The kiosk can augment your store sales force by providing high quality customer service functions. How many sales people can memorize the warranty coverage on every item in the store? We live in such a self-service society already. Take advantage of the current culture and make the self-service technology conveniently available.

- The kiosk can collect and forward data. How often is it used? Which ones are used most frequently? What are shoppers using it for? Which products are being scanned or researched more and why? Are people constantly looking for the same product? Maybe it needs to be relocated elsewhere in the store. Are they constantly looking up the price on the same product? Maybe there's something wrong with the shelf labeling. Are some kiosks being used more than others? Maybe they need to be re-deployed.

While the store-wide deployment of kiosks may not be the only component of an effective digital experience, the interactive nature of kiosks ensure that they could be the most impactful and productive part of the equation. Most, if not all of the content is likely already on the store website and consumers are already conditioned for self-service environments, especially Millenials. Add in the rising cost of retail labor as well as the challenge of recruiting and retaining quality retail associates, and kiosks may be the perfect solution for a cost effective means to a digital experience that makes a positive impact on shoppers, controls costs, and drives profits.

About AML

AML is a leading provider in the development of next generation retail kiosks....powerful, compact devices suitable for a wide-range of interactive, user-facing applications. Designed with the optimal user experience in mind, AML kiosks are engineered and manufactured in the USA.