

E-commerce – what can we see develop for 2020?

JENNY CARRICK, HEAD OF E-COMMERCE 15 JAN 2020

Drones, autonomous self-driven delivery vehicles, blockchain, digital wallets, voice search.... you've seen it all before, right? Well, yes actually. Every tech buzzword in retail was certainly well catered for in this year's show and while there were some shiny new toys, determining how much of the tech on display offered a valid business solution was a different story.

eMarketer predicts global consumer retail spending will rise 4.1% in 2020 to \$26.074 trillion. There is a lot to play for. Therefore, nailing the right kind of tech to drive and help fulfil your brand purpose, while also enhancing your customer experience is crucial. One interesting theme which took center stage was high-tech in-store experiential retailing over and above

pureplay DTC innovations. Retail businesses have by in large recognized the need to shift to more customer centric strategies with an emphasis on the consumer experience, whether in-store or online. Deploying such strategies is a different matter. This emphasis on genuinely boundaryless, omnichannel retail this year could be seen in Haier's Smart Closet concept designed to take personal biometric information and use AI integrations to offer virtual styling and fitting advice before deep-linking straight through to an eCommerce offering where the customer can buy the outfit. This Clueless-esque highly personalized shopping experience opens the door to multiple use cases, not just helping customers within in-store changing rooms, but also allowing brands to interact with potential consumers in their own bedrooms.

Building on this example of frictionless omnichannel shopping were a number of companies specializing in beauty, offering AI integrated mirrors for businesses and personal customer use. Designed to analyze skin Lululab, offers a lifestyle assistant to provide personal skincare advice and product recommendations. YouCam, from Perfect Corp were offering augmented reality beauty makeovers, allowing customers to virtually try on makeup and new hair colors and then buy directly from the app. While beauty AR is not a new concept, this year's demos showcased how far this sector has come from slightly clunky stock images of eyelashes and lips to really in-depth, bespoke analysis and recommendations. Obviously to really make any of these installations come to life in a retail environment, businesses need the appropriate hardware and there were certainly plenty of digital signage exhibitors. Sero, by Samsung was marketed primarily as a TV which offered both horizontal and vertical orientation. In itself, the novelty of this concept will likely wear thin pretty quickly. However, when you apply the same principle to retail, for the Gen Z group of digitally native shoppers, brought up on vertical screens, the opportunity to deploy interactive, digital signage which also allows addressable media inventory opportunities, they suddenly become more interesting. Further to this, Sannova, were offering similar screen-based innovations, specializing in point of sale digital shelf markers which allowed consumers to scan the item at the shelf for additional information. As 5G gains traction and is further scaled, these screens could help turn traditional retail stores into highly personalized, experiential shopping destinations.

Logistics and delivery are going to become key differentiators in retail as they compete for

the last mile of delivery. Walgreens Boots Alliance spoke to their partnership with FedEx in building out a portfolio of these solutions that will allow them to deliver fast moving products to customers within 8 minutes. Parcel Guard, a smart mailbox developed by Canadian company, Danby is designed specifically to prevent package thieves who steal home deliveries left visible to the street. With motion sensing cameras to record when a parcel has been delivered, it also facilitates phone calls between the customer and the courier to open the box remotely. It's interesting that this tech is consumer facing and has seemingly leapfrogged over existing business solutions in this space, lockers, alternative delivery options etc. to put control into the hands of the consumer.

From an eCommerce perspective, a company exhibiting which makes it easier for businesses with digital product catalogues to address a genuine business challenge was Scanblue. They are able to take a physical product and create a 360, 3D scan which can be rotated to every angle. Insider Trends research has found that customers expected 3 images on a product page in 2016, vs. 6-8 images and 2+ videos by 2018. It's proven that high quality, informative product imagery aids conversion rates and as such is a valid area to optimize. However, the production costs of generating such a high number of images especially for large retailers with thousands of product SKUs has a massive impact on ROI. Therefore, using a 3D image with a one-off cost which answers this business challenge, but can also be repurposed as a digital asset for other advertising collateral, including AR and VR use cases starts to become a worthy cost-saver. Retail technology is constantly changing the goal posts for brands and has created a market in which every company becomes a point of comparison, not only those selling similar products or services. Technological innovation is really enabling a new gold standard for boundaryless commerce where businesses have the opportunity to improve the customer experience at every stage of their journey. However, testing new, innovative tech is not an end goal in itself; it's a means to an end and should only be considered with an entirely customer centric lens.

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