

ANALYSIS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

How customer experience is changing in retail

Delivering a strong customer experience has never been more important. Retail Week looks at the top trends driving what today's customer wants

1 iBeacons

Apple has snubbed near-field communication (NFC), the mobile payment method of choice for many.

Its new service, iBeacons, has the potential to become a customer experience staple in payment and marketing.

If customers sign up, payment for small items such as coffees or lunch items could be taken from their phone via low energy bluetooth. So far, beacons have lent themselves best to marketing.

Landlord Hammerson is rolling them out across all of its European shopping centres. The beacons will be used to help consumers navigate shopping malls, and to send marketing and promotions to their phones.

2 An imaginative approach to delivery

Delivery innovation matters, and retailers are recognising that. Asda is rolling out click-and-collect drive-thru points to all its stores, while Asos has signed up to new delivery service Doodle, which places click-and-collect shops with changing rooms in train stations and other high-footfall locations.

3 Retail theatre

Whether it's in-store installations, talks, events or debates, stores must entice shoppers with more than just products. Selfridges' recent Beauty Project showed how imaginative the retailer's approach has become.

It ran a range of talks and debates, and launched the Fragrance Lab – an immersive experience that claimed to discover participants' signature scent.

Topshop has excelled at enticing shoppers into its London flagship. One project involved a virtual reality headset – the Oculus Rift – to make consumers feel as though they were on the front row of its Topshop Unique fashion show at London Fashion Week.

4 Digital stores

If a huge, creative installation isn't the right option, retailers could do worse than follow the lead of retailers such



Selfridges demonstrates its creativity with its Fragrance Lab, which discovers consumers' signature scent

as Argos and travel agent Thomson.

Both have used digital technology to enhance their stores and help their staff sell – Thomson is using interactive maps to inspire holiday-makers and Argos has replaced paper catalogues with digital screens.

5 Consistency

A consistently good experience is high on retailers' agendas – even more than wowing the customer with retail theatre or slick digital ideas.

Amazon's customer experience impresses because shoppers feel they can trust it to deliver time after time. John Lewis has built its reputation for service not just through overhauling its multichannel offer, but by building and developing its business with customer experience and service as priorities.

6 Supply chain visibility

It might not be the most glamorous part of the customer experience, but it is vital. Argos' mobile app allows shoppers to check stock levels of a product in a nearby store, while Tesco is working on a service that will show shoppers a map of how to find it in store. This doesn't just need clever apps, but stock systems that are up to date.

“SHOPPING IS BECOMING SOMETHING THAT'S INSPIRING, ENGAGING AND FUN”

Chris Sanderson,
The Future Laboratory

7 Geolocation services

As any shopping centre visitor will tell you, today's huge malls can be difficult to navigate. Apps that inform consumers of the quickest route to a store, or a particular product in a department store or supermarket, are gaining traction and helping to make shoppers' lives easier.

8 Convenience

If in doubt about what to do to improve the customer experience, retailers could do worse than focus on convenience. Sainsbury's has just teamed up with Google to develop a search engine that enables shoppers to enter the ingredients they have left in their fridge and receive recipes that will use them up. The idea is to help shoppers reduce waste and save money – it is in services like this, which make shoppers' lives easier, that retailers are starting to excel.

Retail Week is holding its first Customer Experience conference on October 21 in London.

The one-day event will provide retail professionals with knowledge, ideas and inspiration to develop and implement a customer-centric strategy.

Visit <https://customerexperience.retail-week.com> for more information