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Review: NRF Big Show 2015

Customer engagement tools were the top draw at this annual industry event.

BY BRIAN DYCHES, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The National Retail Federation's (Washington, D.C.) annual Big Show kicked off the New Year with a whopping 33,000 show-goers and 1500 manufacturers/suppliers in attendance. The NRF's extensive global-attendee list, coupled with behind-the-curtain educational programs, has positioned the show as a must-attend event for industry leaders, designers and retailers.

Make no mistake: this over-a-century-old gathering doesn't target the store environments' crowd, in

a direct fashion. Rather, it's a four-day portal into the minds of visionary retail thinkers, who will be shaping the conversations in 2015, which will certainly be peppered into the content at other future events.

Held at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York, Jan. 11-14, the event that caters to some of the industry's largest design firms featured aisles and aisles of technologically innovative "solution providers" – as they like to call themselves. The latest in retail technologies and customer experiences were in full demonstration mode, while discussion topics revolved

ABOVE NRF's Big Show saw 33,000 show-goers at its annual event this past January and featured a range of in-store technology solutions.

around current issues on the minds of most retailers.

EBay and Intel are just a couple recognizable names that weren't showcasing what you might initially think they would. EBay wasn't there to tout its popular online auction portal, but rather, emerging "store experience" tools.

Specifically, it showcased engagement solutions, created in collaboration with the Rebecca Minkoff brand for its stores, making the retailer a hot topic at the show.

Its customer journey begins with shoppers checking in on a "Connected Glass" shopping wall – a large mirrored, interactive display. Once a shopper has made their selections, they tap a button on the display to have the products sent to a dressing room – which are each also outfitted with the mirrored touchscreens.

In the fitting room, a customer can browse Minkoff's online catalog and summon additional products to try on. Founder Rebecca Minkoff says, "My customers will be able to virtually connect with their stylist through the mirror's touchscreen for their needs ... whether it's another size or a glass of champagne."

Intel had one of the most experiential booths at the show. And the well-known chip manufacturer wasn't there to sell the product for which its globally known. Instead, Intel showcased new technologies

that will provide individualized experiences and data protection across all touchpoints for shoppers. These solutions should help push forward the conversation around in-store experiences, and in turn, create more viable "tech" concepts for retailers to implement in-store. (This tells me that a lot of retailers have

been slow to adapt and are behind on innovations demanded by consumers – especially when tech companies take charge of showcasing the trends.)

One of Intel's biggest attractions was an interactive mirror, a product that's now being debuted at some Neiman Marcus locations. The mirror works via gestures or its mobile app, allowing customers to create a 360-degree digital image of themselves. This body-image capture creates an ongoing experience, where customers can continue trying on different merchandise – virtually.

Intel (like most others) spoke to RFIDs, wearables, analytics and mobile p-o-s. They illustrated these themes using Nebraska Furniture Mart: The company reported its interactive digital systems are converting browsers to buyers, increasing basket uplift and reducing wait time – while yielding higher customer satisfaction. Access to real-time product information, inventory and the ability to complete transactions without leaving a customer's side, fed into another big trend at the show: utilizing technology to improve the customer experience.

Mobile usage was also a big topic. This was supported by a report from Deloitte (New York), that reported mobile in-store sales' influence grew from \$159 billion in 2012 to a staggering \$539 billion in 2013. Deloitte also divulged that cross-channel shopping journeys involving mobile devices rose, on average, by 20 percent from last year; mobile searches that led to in-store or online purchases are now actively used by 29 percent and 33 percent of shoppers, respectively.

The NRF show will continue to be a nexus point for all things retail – from CRM and statistics to p-o-s solutions and outlets for retail executives to share insights, strategies and forecasts. The show (like many others) can be overwhelming, confusing and contain so much technology that your head will spin. However, that's the beauty of why our industry is needed as a partner – all those retailers and potential clients need someone to "design" their applications into their concepts. They need the store design community, and we need to be able to offer our own solutions. I, for one, look forward to next January. ▀

For a copy of OpenEye Global's official NRF Big Show recap, contact Brian Dyches at bdyches@openeyeglobal.com.



This interactive mirror, currently being tested in some Neiman Marcus locations, was just one example of technology that could work to engage customers in a brick-and-mortar store.