

ROLE REBOOT

Store experience strategies and design concepts are being redefined to address the needs of the new-age, multi-channel smart shopper

■ By Surender Gnanaolivu

Retail brands have had to reboot their store experience strategies to deliver the needs of the evolved customer who is informed and is simultaneously shopping across channels. With brand loyalty being passé, the brand needs to present its proposition smartly at its store front and interiors with utmost clarity and comprehensiveness. With the shop no more being contained in the four walls of brick and mortar, techniques used to attract, entice and convert customers are a combination of tricks used in both online and the offline stores at the intersection of the channels. Let's look at five key roles expectation of the physical store yesterday and their repurposed roles for stores of today.

1. BRAND IMAGE TO BRAND HOMEPAGE

The role of the store has evolved from being primarily about brand image building to being its 'home page', the introductory start page of a store serving as a table of contents for its offerings for a browser and clearly communicate what the brand stands for and what it offers. A mere architectural effort would fall short of the 'least credible info' that a new-age experimental consumer needs to be presented to, to show interest



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in the brand and its offerings. Brands and retailers now need to use a combination of physical and digital elements to deliver inspiring visual content to excite, introduce (about themselves) and entice customers.

2. PRODUCT PRESENTATION TO PRODUCT PUSH

Backed with predictive algorithms from big data, selling is becoming more personal. With it, the objective of product presentation has become more active with compulsive phy-gital communication of its features,



► Today's stores offer a combination of physical touch and feel products along with insights from social media

benefits and reviews. This is critical for assisting the customer to make informed decisions, drawing more focus on 'how to sell' rather than 'what to sell'. This necessitates the store to be very logically laid out and presented so that customers can find what they are looking for quickly (a good website achieves this with three clicks). With a combination of physical 'touch and feel' products, virtual 'insight-loaded' product information and social proofing (from social media), stores have been able to effectively play this role in smaller selling spaces. It must be kept in mind that customers are people and their emotions lead in every decision made at the store..

3. CUSTOMER WELCOME TO CUSTOMER RECOGNITION

Technology has enabled customers to have a unique identity across brands, retailers and channels. They share their personal information in return for special services. To offer these services, the store needs to recognise the visitor and the most discreet way to do this is using technology (for eg. RFID). This is a critical piece for the start of customer engagement and both online and offline stores have started using big data to help drive this. Traditionally, offline stores have been able to capture data from only about 25% of customers at the cash counters in comparison to 100% from online channels. With the blending of on-line and offline, stores are able to create and communicate better value to customers to encourage them to give information.



► To offer improved services, stores need to recognise visitor in the most discreet way

4. CUSTOMER JOURNEY TO CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

The role of a store is no more just about providing a good environment that helps convenient circulation and presentation but to inspire and inform customers to encourage them to engage with the brand, the store and the products leading to loyalty or sale. Stores plan and deploy methods to engage with the customer right from the store entrance, leading them into the merchandise offerings, presenting insightful product benefits, offering digital assistance to help make informed decisions, co-creating customization, making available out-of-store convenience services and ending the journey at the cash counter with personalized offers based on their buying behaviour.



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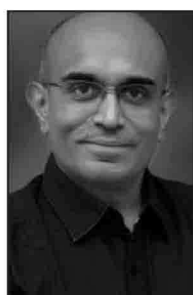
5. CUSTOMER SERVICE TO CUSTOMER INTIMACY

The expectations of customer service have also changed to delivering personal service with products and services customised to personal preferences and shopping behaviour. This engagement is made available to both recognized customers and also unrecognised customers. The former is possible with personal data of the customer that has been captured in a previous visit and the latter is for first time visitors where the customer has to give personal information to get the service. Many made-to-measure brands use this engagement technique with the use of both skilled staff and intelligent data.



► From customer service to customer intimacy

Many new store concepts testify how new age store design has created immersive in-store experiences using the collaboration of architecture, interior design, visual merchandising, technology, content creation, psychology, marketing, personal selling and visual arts. This also is a clear indicator of how the role of store design and presentation in the new age of retail is evolving into a multi-disciplinary science and art which no forward thinking retailer or brand can ignore. 😊



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