

Digitalizing the Human Connection

Canadian menswear retailer creates a seamless shopping experience

by PAUL VACHON

Early in the era of e-commerce, the word “omnichannel” was coined as a collective term for the various avenues for sales at a retailer’s disposal. Each channel operated in isolation from the others.

Hindsight, however, has demonstrated the significant shortcomings of such an approach. By lacking integration, the result was a level of disarray that weakened the total customer experience and prevented retailers from maximizing their full sales potential.

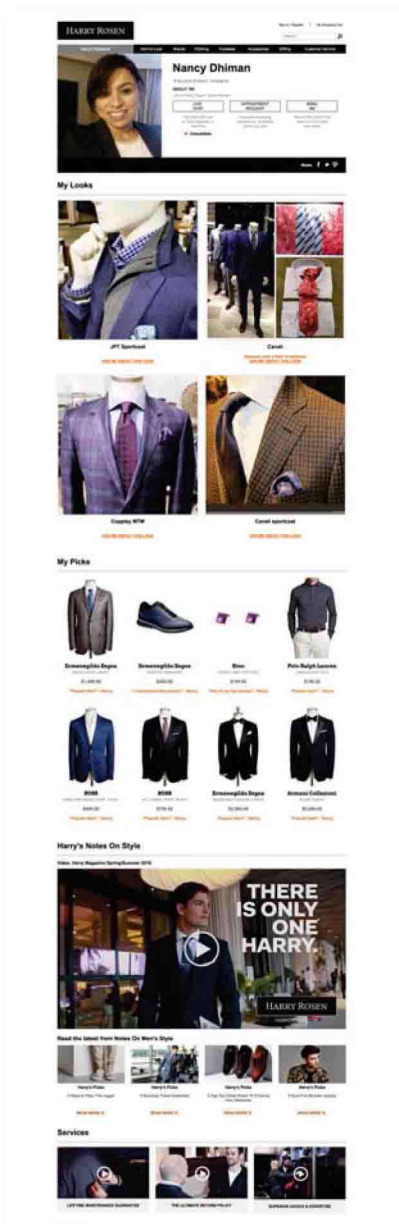
Years of consumer surveys backed up this conclusion. Customers complained about the impersonal nature of online shopping, executives pondered whether mobile apps would cannibalize in-store efforts and in-store commissioned sales associates became cynical at the threat online sales posed to their earnings.

DIRECT INTERACTION

Canadian menswear brand Harry Rosen was one such retailer facing that challenge. The company has 17 locations, annual sales volume exceeding \$230 million and some 1,000 employees throughout the country. Since its founding in 1954 by the current CEO’s father, the company has counted Canadian prime ministers and prominent business executives among its clients.

Harry Rosen’s highly trained associates, known as “clothing advisors,” are the prime drivers of customer loyalty, according to consumer surveys. CEO Larry Rosen says when clients can interact with advisors both online and in stores, they are likely to spend considerably more overall than if they were to use one channel exclusively.

Enter Salesfloor, an online sales platform that brings together in-store and online shopping. Established in 2012, the platform has been adopted by sev-



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— Larry Rosen, Harry Rosen

eral preeminent retail brands, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale’s and Stuart Weitzman.

“When we first contemplated how to start fresh with the omnichannel concept, we did something not done before,” says Salesfloor CEO Oscar Sachs. “We saw the in-store and online shopping experiences as inextricably linked, and that neither can survive without the support of the other. A vice president of e-commerce put a fine point on it when he said, ‘Stop telling me to fix my online business. If I don’t fix my in-store business, there is no business.’”

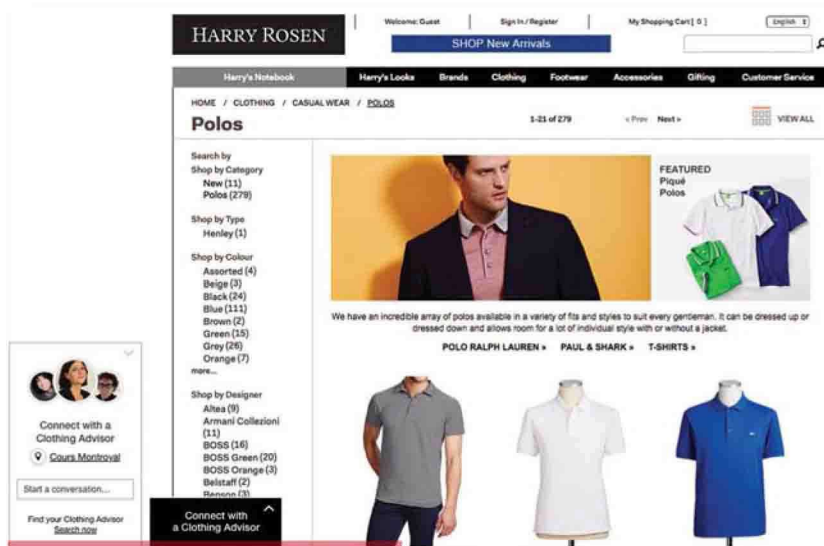
For example, Sachs says, “A customer walks out of the store, and his service-intensive in-store experience ends. For any follow-up concerns he’ll turn to the website, where there is no service.”

Salesfloor enables individual sales associates to open their own virtual “storefront,” which branches off from the store’s main website. Each associate uses their storefront to interact directly with personal clients via email or direct messaging. The goal is to personalize online sales while viewing both in-store and online business as a contiguous whole.

Harry Rosen was one of the first retailers to utilize Salesfloor — a move Rosen regards as one of his best decisions. It tested the platform in early 2014 and rolled it out to the entire company over the succeeding months.

“When I was first introduced to Salesfloor about a year and a half ago, it clicked with me right away,” Rosen says. “I saw this as an invaluable tool our clothing advisors could use to extend their excellent service capabilities beyond the physical store environment.”

“With their own personal website, a clothing advisor can share his own ideas and suggestions with his clients.



But the dialogue can also go the other way. Let's say a client sees a shirt in the latest issue of *harry* [the company's semiannual publication] but can't make it into the store. He can work with his advisor to order it."

24/7 ACCESS

Salesfloor's technology offers a number of benefits.

First, it allows for two-way communication, making it possible for associates to promote products to their customers, while allowing customers to chat with associates, obtain product knowledge and place orders.

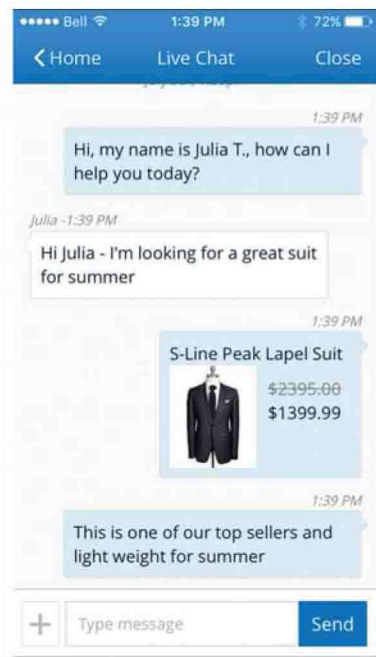
Since the storefront is open 24/7, the associate can transact business anytime. Sachs says that sales associates have often checked their site early in the morning to discover a large order placed by a client overnight.

Second, by removing the barriers imposed by the bricks-and-mortar store, the associate's role is redefined.

"At Saks in Miami, associates have built relationships with tourists visiting from Brazil and continued that association after the client has returned home, since Saks ships to 64 different countries," Sachs says. "The barrier of distance has been removed."

Salesfloor also makes associates' clienteling efforts more productive.

"In the past, an associate might reach out to clients with the hope



they'll walk into the store," he says. "With a virtual storefront, they have the option of purchasing right away."

Further, a feature known as Salesfloor Connect allows a visitor to the store's main website (who may have never been to the physical store) to click on a widget and request expert guidance and advice from an associate. This optimizes convenience for the customer and earning potential for the associate while increasing volume for the retailer.

"Our research shows that when online ordering is linked to the local store,

conversion rates experience a tenfold rise over conventional e-commerce, while the average transaction increases by 50 percent," Sachs says. This is what e-commerce should have been like from the start, he says — an online interface with an instore sales professional rather than simply an electronic version of a traditional catalog.

'AUTHENTIC' OMNICHANNEL

At Harry Rosen, Salesfloor expands opportunities for clothing advisors throughout the company. Store locations vary in size from 54,000 to 10,000 square feet, so by having access to the company's full inventory online, an advisor at a smaller store can offer his clients anything Harry Rosen has to offer.

"This is what the authentic model for omnichannel retailing should be," Rosen says.

On the technological side, each application of Salesfloor is customized to the specific retailer to offer a visually seamless transition from the retailer's site to the associates' storefronts.

"Everything that is customer-facing must use the same fonts, logos and graphics as the parent site. It must also be compatible on all technical platforms — PCs, tablets, mobile, etc.," Sachs says.

Salesfloor can also connect with any e-commerce system, he says, and the application interface can integrate with any retailer's customer relationship management system.

All this may be just the tip of the iceberg. According to Sachs, Salesfloor can be leveraged to create any number of shopping apps that capitalize on the direct-to-customer connection, including one that will allow a customer to set up his own page where he can record his preferences, which a sales associate can use to make product recommendations. **STORES**

Detroit-based Paul Vachon writes for various trade publications, in addition to feature stories for consumer magazines and books on Michigan history and travel.