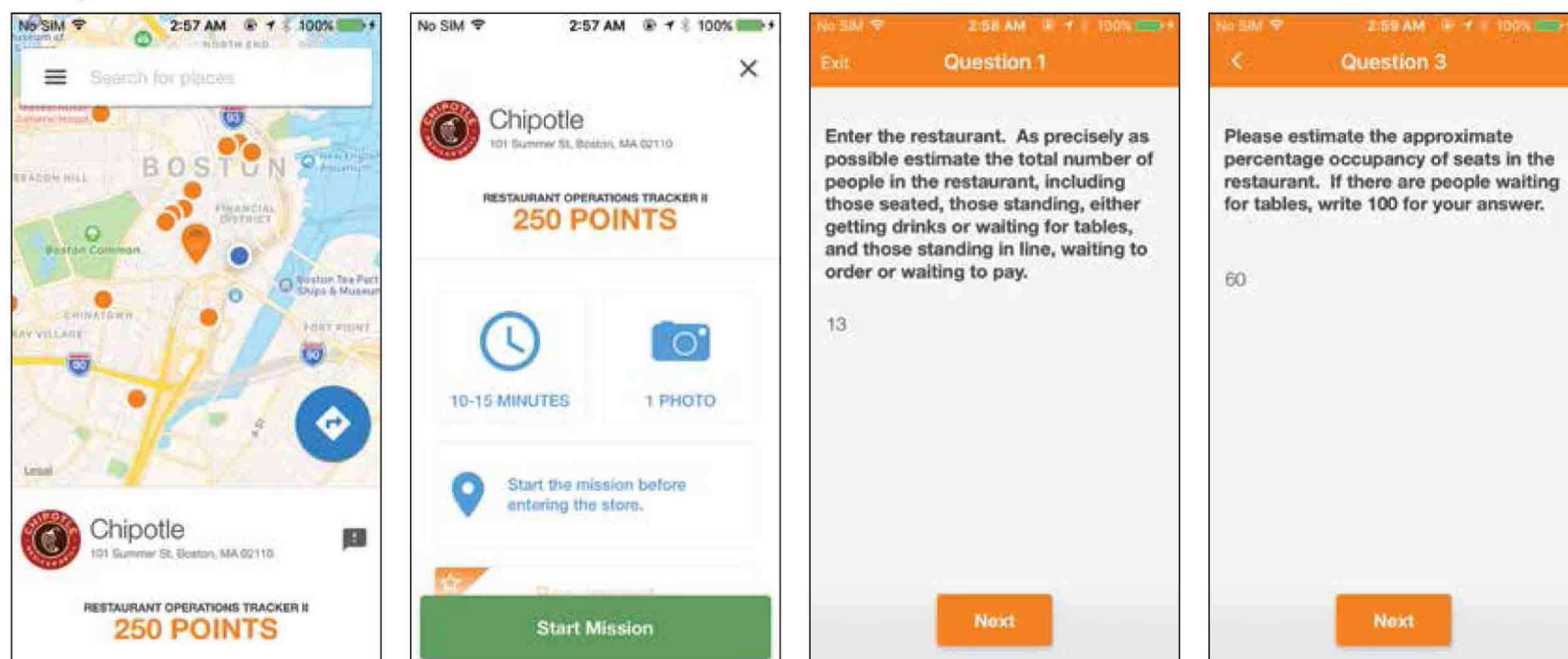
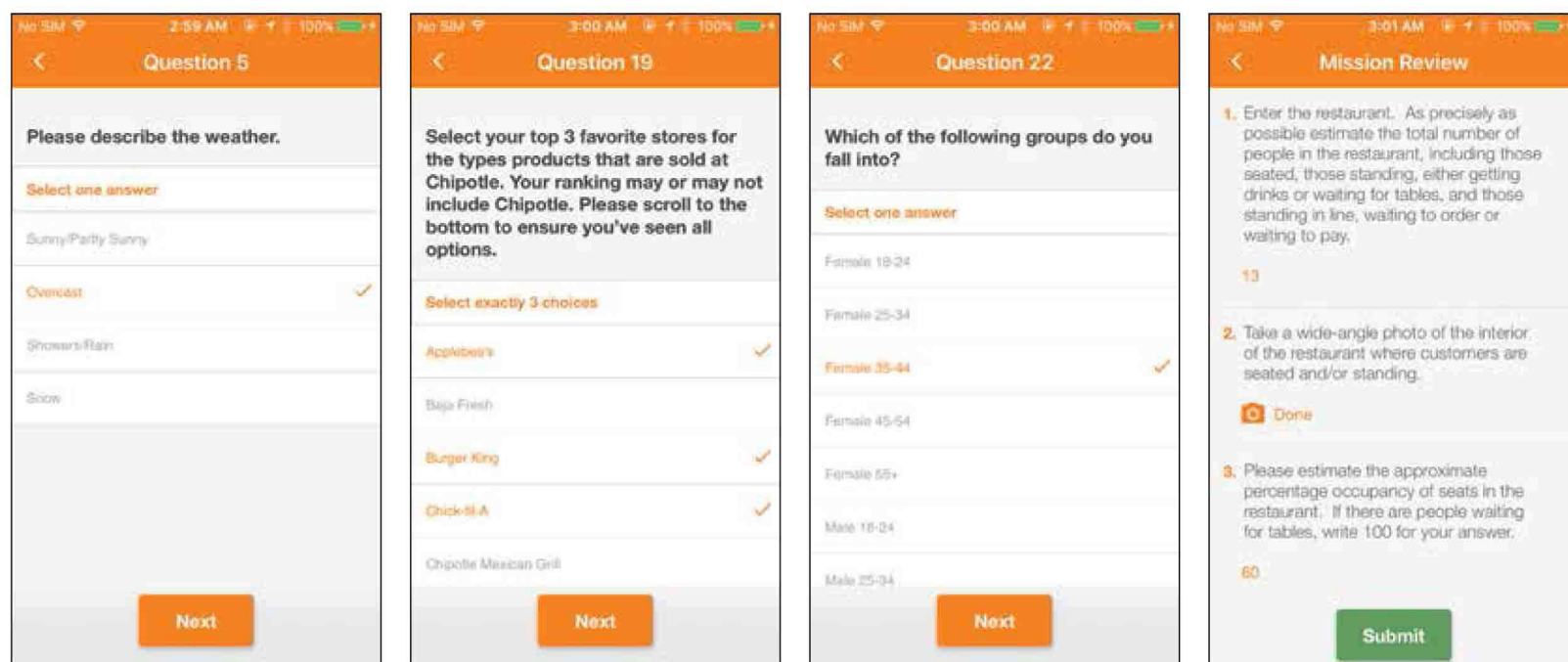


Mobee platform



COMPLIANCE and BEYOND



Crowdsourcing apps with roots in retail audits are also adding value through research and enabling a more personalized store

By Dan Ochwat

For as long as there are products on brick-and-mortar store shelves, there will be troubles with planogram compliance, pricing, out-of-stocks and merchandising. For the last six years or so, crowdsourcing apps have been performing retail audits to help brands face these challenges.

But as brands and retailers have become more omnichannel and crowdsourcing apps have broadened the skill sets of their field teams, the question becomes what else can the “gig” economy do for the brands and retailers?

To be sure, compliance and out-of-stocks issues are not going away. Jim Swoboda, sales guru at the healthy snack food manufacturer and brand **Simply Eight**, uses the **Mobee** crowdsourcing platform to help with “the same challenge we have faced for my entire career: Getting what is agreed to for merchandising and performance to actually be executed with excellence at the point of the consumer in-store.”

Bill Bishop, chief architect at **Brick Meets Click**, concurs: “Achieving compliance is a notoriously difficult thing,” and he says the problem of out-of-stocks has been

around forever with very little progress being made.

So, crowdsourcing apps will continue to assist brands with compliance, but Swoboda, a self-described “tech nut,” is excited about what else an army of consumers armed with smartphones could bring to his business. “For the first time, it is now possible to get near real-time information back from arguably the most important retail team that exists: the actual shoppers.”

Swoboda envisions a crowdsourcing experience where a shopper gives live feedback on a retail mission while in the aisle, “to perhaps allow a consumer to video-stream their findings, and capture and share those; to hear directly from a customer in his or her own words; to have the possibility one day to look online at a particular store, see a live shopper and be able to directly interact with him or her with notifications in real time.”

Panos Bethanis, CEO of **Survey.com**, a crowdsourcing platform that focuses on merchandising and research, sees a “total personalization of the stores. If you have a half-million eyes into retail every day, the real room to grow is through dynamic planning and dynamic resource

allocation where every single Target, every single Walmart and every single grocery store is treated, to some degree, differently than any other one, and the live data feedback allows you to respond to conditions on the spot.”

He adds that Nielsen, IRI, Catalina Marketing and others already report what’s happening; “there’s a world out there that instead of telling you what went on, they do it right there.”

Brands will be able to use crowdsourcing teams to deliver completely different strategies that respond to different retail conditions, testing different promotions in real time. For example, in downtown Santa Monica, California, one store can run a tasting demo, but in St. Louis there will be a \$2 coupon, and in Miami a two-for-one offer – all based on conditions from the night before, he says.

Bishop says a store is being set more based on who the core shopper is, meaning the 20% who do 80% of the store’s business. With their data capabilities, the apps could allow for resetting a shelf to become more personally relevant to those shoppers who have embraced the store. “It’s different from putting up a standard planogram which is logic that applies to everybody,” he says.

Another vision shows how crowdsourcing apps can merge with the Internet of Things. The smartphone is the hub to communicate with the smart refrigerator or smart washing machine, so the full shopping and home-use experience will be in front of a consumer at all times on the mobile phone.

“Mobile methodologies are going to have to be designed such that if you’re in the middle of capturing Amazon Dash, all of a sudden your washing machine is computerized and it notices that you didn’t put in Tide but you put in Gain,” says Rick West, founder of **Field Agent**.

Another example is the refrigerator notices a craft beer was put into the fridge instead of the usual Michelob. A crowdsourcing app can reach out to that consumer who has opted into this type of communication and ask a personally relevant survey question on why the change to craft beer. The person answers and gets a coupon to try a craft beer from Michelob.

West says that’s helping to “close the loop.” The shopper has opted in to engage, but “how do I close that loop so that I can provide feedback in a meaningful way into brands, retailers and restaurants so that it’s not creepy, and they give me information back that makes my experience different.”

That engagement can be simple too, like clicking a “thumbs up” on Spotify when liking a song, which then further personalizes a user’s music. West says Millennials are sharing in this way; they give feedback to Spotify, Amazon and others because it will make their experience better. In a crowdsourcing scenario, they get paid, too.

Field Agent launched in 2010 as the first app in iTunes to enable PayPal as a way to pay someone for using their phone for a gig. Prior to that, West says, the rewards were in the form of badges. Field Agent says 800,000 people



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have downloaded the app in the United States, and it recently sent them training materials on what omnichannel is as well as showrooming (going to a store to touch product but buying online) and webrooming (researching online but buying in-store).

The mobile phone helps engage users to participate in diary studies that are more accurate than the traditional form of shadowing shoppers, he says. If a shopper knows a researcher is coming to the house, they clean up and change behavior for that researcher. With the mobile phone, every time she shops, simply have her do a screen grab of websites she looked at while researching, snap a photo of a receipt after shopping and answer some core questions. “I’m capturing data at the point of influence, as opposed to relying on recall, which we know is going to be inaccurate,” West says.

Crowdsourcing platforms are a more efficient use of time, says Swoboda, who compares the apps to a traditional retail team driving to stores. “Time is of the essence in determining if a display is up on Monday morning when the ad begins, or if there is a special price that requires a tag to be on the shelf for a consumer to know the item is on promotion.”

Jim Lamberti, CEO and co-founder of **Quri**, one of the leading platforms among CPGs, focuses on three types of solutions:

- **Field labor optimization.** Helping manufacturers improve merchandising on and off shelf, both in and out of cycle.
- **Data-driven selling to retail customers.** Helping manufacturers sell to key customers using unbiased, high quality and scaled data from the shopper view of in-store merchandising conditions.
- **Trade optimization.** Helping manufacturers increase sales and profits from the 15% to 20% of the P&L focused on retail trade spend.

To Quri, the future is being more dynamic in real time and investing in technology to enable faster, real-time

access to merchandising data and insights. “The standardized, routine and scaled measurement of in-store merchandising conditions dramatically increases the ROI for manufacturers,” Lamberti says.

Mobee, which calls its people in the field “Bees,” started in 2012 and has expanded its capabilities to focus more on a “systemic data collection model,” going to a store regularly to understand a broader trend line.

Hal Charnley, Mobee’s CEO, says that down the road there could be an intersection of both the retailer and the brand working collaboratively on data. “If we’re going and collecting data at Walmart for a particular brand, that data is going to benefit the brand and the retailer. So rather than have an engagement with a retailer and another engagement with a brand, there’s intersection – a real opportunity to combine those two.”

Survey.com differentiates itself by focusing more on merchandising inside stores, including performing in-store demos on demand. Bethanis also focuses on emerging brands, and his field team does sales presentations at retailers. For 60 of its customers, Survey.com has become the retail team working under that client’s field director.

He believes in a highly trained, highly skilled consumer who lives in the region to do a more passionate job. “I like the argument that retail gig will be a showstopper against Amazon owning our houses and our children,” he says. “When you play locally correct and with a vetted argument, the shopping experience is better than just clicking on Amazon. I like the argument that this model serves social purposes as well. At the end of the day, think of the tremendous investments retailers have made. Millennials will like the experience even though they can click and get 20 protein bars delivered tomorrow.”

His one concern is that “society prices the crowd as a lesser-quality solution,” but results should drive that price in the future.

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CROWDSOURCING PLATFORMS

- **Bnocular.** Formerly GroundCtrl, the platform now focuses on supplying data and retail performance of certain stores, QSR and more for the financial industry (hedge funds, private equity and investment banks).
- **Field Agent.** Sign up and become an “Agent” to earn money completing small tasks like taking photos. Jobs pay between \$2-\$12.
- **Gigwalk.** It pays “Gigwalkers” money for completing jobs in the areas of staffing, consumer brands, retail and merchandising, and research.
- **Mobee.** The app pays users for completing missions and mystery shopping, but the app focuses more on data collection for clients.
- **Quri.** A platform used by more than 200 CPGs, but the company also operates the loyalty app EasyShift, which awards users money for completing “shifts” or retail assignments.
- **Rewardable.** Another app that awards cash for in-store photos, counting shelf-facings, recording wait time and rating customer service, for example.
- **Survey.com.** The platform aims for more high-end execution of merchandising tasks, including selling in at retail, resets and in-store demos.
- **VisitBasis Retail Execution.** The platform helps manage field reps to perform audits, mystery shopping and data collection.