



# Virtually There

Retailers are discovering the next step in personalized online customer service

by **SUSAN REDA, EDITOR**

**A**nnie is a self-proclaimed skin-care fanatic. One of her favorite brands is Kiehl's, and she rarely passes the store without stopping in to see her favorite sales associate, Jennifer. Annie was out of town when she received an email about a new item — Turmeric and Cranberry Seed Energizing Radiance Masque. Intrigued, she wondered if it was a good fit for her skin and wished she could get Jennifer's input right away.

In the not-too-distant future, Annie will be able to use online chat and a personalized digital storefront to exchange messages with Jennifer and know in a matter of minutes if that masque is a good fit — or if another might be better suited to her needs.

Kiehl's is one of several retail brands including Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale's, Toys "R" Us and Macy's that have recently launched or are testing Salesfloor, a retail technology platform that allows customers to shop online with their local store and associate.

This first-of-its-kind technology, already entrenched at Canadian menswear retailer Harry Rosen, provides store associates with their own version of their company's e-commerce site, letting customers shop online with real associates and get personalized service.

Retailers like Harry Rosen have reported as much as a 10-fold lift in online conversions, a 50 percent increase in average order values and a three-fold rise in email marketing open rates.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

With comScore reporting that shoppers now make 51 percent of purchases online, the need to blend the best of bricks-and-mortar with the convenience of online has heightened.

Salesfloor recently conducted research studying the impact sales associates have on the shopping experience. A key takeaway: 87 percent of shoppers say in-store purchase decisions are influenced by store associates, while 58 percent of shoppers feel

that service is lacking online.

When shopping in traditional stores, 84 percent of shoppers seek help or recommendations from sales associates; 77 percent are more likely to make a purchase from a sales associate who has helped them in the past. And 73 percent say that sales associates who remember their personal preferences have a positive effect on how much they buy.

It's that 73 percent that resonates with Oscar Sachs, co-founder and CEO of Salesfloor. "By helping their associates connect with customers online, retailers can build relationships at scale while providing a consistent shopping experience for all customers on all platforms," Sachs says.

"The role of today's retail associate has changed and the technology platform we've developed empowers them to serve today's shopper — wherever she chooses to shop. Retailers are quick to acknowledge the positive impact sales associates create, but until recently that knowledge could not be extended online. The chance to now bring the personalized interaction that sales associates provide to the online arena is a game changer."

## ONLINE ASSOCIATION

Saks Fifth Avenue started using the technology last year as part of ongoing efforts to allow every customer, online or in-store, to enjoy the retailer's elevated level of service. "This is a highly personalized online solution to selling, merging our highest trafficked channel — saks.com — with our highest converter — our associates," Marc Metrick, company president, said at the time.

"It is the perfect response to the growing demand for consumer-facing technology ... We finally have the ability to bring the high-touch Saks experience and store environment online."

Salesfloor recently raised a new Series A round of investment by White Star Capital; the company expects its revenue to more than double by the end of the year. **STORES**