

Walmart Designing the Customer Experience of the Future

By Patrycja Malinowska

ROSEMONT, ILL. — During her Path to Purchase Expo keynote presentation in September, **Walmart** executive Jamie Sohosky discussed the new demands of the retail giant's shoppers in an increasingly digital world and how Walmart is innovating to meet those needs.



New Demands

Saving time for shoppers is critical, especially as shopping time becomes increasingly compressed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' "American Time Use Survey" says time for shopping has declined 13% over the last decade.

"Our customers across the board are price sensitive; they've always been interested in saving money," said Sohosky, vice president of marketing, customer experience. "What we noticed in the last few years

is time has also become a really important currency."

For Walmart, saving time mainly means helping the shopper get through her list quickly. When she feels like she saved money, got everything she needed and got out of the store in a decent amount of time, she feels a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with the retailer.

"[Our shoppers] really look at saving money so that they can do other things with their family," Sohosky said. "But life is a juggling act, every day they have to fit pieces in and compartmentalize their time. And they want that time back. They want to save the time just like they're saving the money to do things with their family."

Digital's Potential

Walmart has immersed itself in disruptive digital technology – from artificial intelligence and biotech to self-driving cars and robotics – and examining the impact it will have on retail.

"As we think about our reliance on digital and how that's become such an important part of life, what we're seeing is changing expectations our customer has when she's offline," Sohosky said. "Her [digital] expectations have transferred to when she's in the physical store as well."

More than 90% of Walmart's sales still go through physical stores, so getting that right and bringing it together with the other layers of shopping is critical for the retailer.

"We're looking at different layers of shop-

ping: there's actually buying in digital, e-commerce; there's how you're influenced by social; and there is shopping in a physical store using technology differently," Sohosky said.

Innovation

Walmart has been conducting many tests to learn about new solutions. "We look at where we can make small improvements that have a big impact," Sohosky said.

One-Sized to Personalized: "[Shoppers] want the experience to be about them and they've learned this from how they interact online," Sohosky said.

- **Pickup:** Available in all markets, the service lets you order online and pick up the items in store as early as that day.
- **Grocery Pickup:** A test in several markets that lets you order items including fresh produce.
- **Lyft and Uber:** A third-party delivery test.

Standing in Line to Online: "We're really focused on how we can help the [shopper] save time through the line," Sohosky said.

- **Mobile check-in:** Available in all markets, the service lets shoppers check in via Walmart's mobile application so that their pickup order can be ready as soon as they arrive.
- **Scan & Go:** A test that lets you scan your items as you put them in your basket and pay on your way out without having to go through the usual checkout process.
- **Walmart Pay:** Available in all markets, the service saves shoppers the hassle of pulling out a wallet or credit card and

stores receipts, gift cards, prescriptions and shopping lists.

Search to Guide: "Navigation has become really critical in our stores," Sohosky said.

- **Mobile app:** Offers an item locator and store-specific information.
- **Smart Life display:** A smart-home display testing in a couple of stores that simplifies the technology; created with Shoptology.

Dense to Digestible: "Shoppers' attention spans are waning," Sohosky said.

- **Icons:** Borrowed from online and used to help guide shoppers across the store.
- **Tires touchscreen:** Makes the considered purchase more accessible by letting shoppers find the right tire, see if it is in stock, read ratings and reviews, do price comparisons and order.
- **Self-checkout hosts:** Wearing yellow vests, they help guide and troubleshoot.

Collaboration

Sohosky indicated that Walmart is seeking partners with micro-level brand and category insights that it can pair with its macro-level knowledge to develop powerful strategies. The retailer welcomes help in understanding data and what's informing the decisions that shoppers are making, thoughts about what an experience of the future looks like, and solutions that inspire the customer and make sure her time is well spent.

"We can win together," Sohosky said. "Help us deliver on this mission of saving our customers time and saving them money." 