



Bringing retail personalisation offline

High street retailers can make their stores more personal and improve their loyalty offerings by using customer data and online assets better, writes **Ryan Doherty**

So far, personalisation has largely been characterised by the use of customer data to produce digitally led marketing activities, product recommendations and targeted content online.

However, the in-store equivalent remains underutilised.

A more personalised approach in stores can take the form of appointment systems or click-and-collect upselling.

For instance, John Lewis is currently trialling a concierge service at its Oxford Street flagship to help shoppers plan their day and arrange bookings for personalised styling services.

Phase Eight also offers bridal and personal style appointments, where expert advice is provided by fashion consultants.

While targeting customers through click and collect has proved fruitful for some, retailers still need to improve at tailoring the overall shopping experience to individuals' needs. One way to do this is by harnessing the power of customer data to boost loyalty offerings.

In-store apps

Getting shoppers to use a retailer's app when they're in-store can also help identify a customer as well as enhance the overall experience.

Game has fully embraced this approach. It adopted its loyalty app for in-store purchases by developing an accolades system. Shoppers earn rewards in the app through specific achievements, like playing a video game.

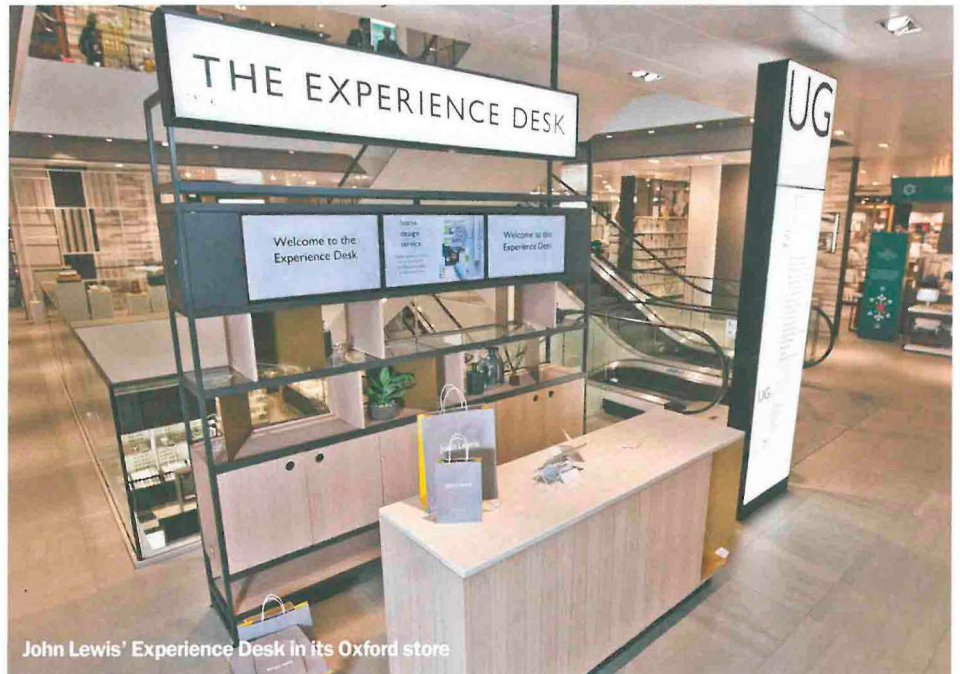
Building on this, Game used customer data to introduce smartphone scanning capabilities in-store, which offered personalised prices related to the shopper's loyalty score in the app.

Furthermore, the Belong gaming arenas in its stores allows it to track activity that feeds back into its personalisation strategy.

This has supported improved retargeting activities, such as customising its offer of games and consoles in each store.

Similarly, Asda should take note from its parent company Walmart.

Its personal shopping assistant on its mobile app tells customers the location of specific products in-store, and it has developed its own payment system.



John Lewis' Experience Desk in its Oxford store

Data gathered from the app can then be used to improve inventory management, but also help to build a personalised shopping list.

M&S has also encouraged mobile use in stores through its Sparks rewards card.

Shoppers are encouraged to gain 'Sparks' by using the card for each in-store transaction, generating data that is used to create personalised product offers and styling sessions.

It should be noted that the strength of these loyalty offerings is key to this approach – customers will only be willing to engage with apps if they have something to gain.

Challenges

There are growing concerns and regulations over consumer privacy, as well as connectivity and maintenance issues, as is clear from the limited application of beacons and heat-mapping.

Personalisation in a physical setting has the ability to thrive through less ominous and intrusive means than the more detached digital personalisation approach

In-store digital receipts are, for instance, a way for retailers to gain consumer data from in-store shoppers, but are increasingly viewed in a suspicious light.

However, the advantages of real-time location-based promotions and product recommendations cannot be ignored, and this is why the likes of Ted Baker and House of Fraser have persisted with beacon trials in recent years.

This is the real challenge for retailers looking to gain a 360-degree, single-customer view, and further innovation will be required.

Human touch

Personalisation in a physical setting has the ability to thrive through less ominous and intrusive means than the more detached digital personalisation approach.

It does not even need to be tech-driven. For example, Waitrose is currently piloting a personal nutritionist service to cater to increasingly health-conscious consumers, while Japanese retailer Muji offers in-store styling services to co-ordinate outfits and merge new purchases with a customer's existing wardrobe.

This modest uptake in such services is somewhat emblematic of UK retailers prioritising ecommerce while their physical stores are left lagging behind.

By bringing data analytics into the physical realm, retailers can transform in-store experiences and yield a greater influence over customer behaviour. Digital personalisation is only half the battle. **rw**

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