

OPINION: How mobile will change the way we shop

The nature of retailing is changing. Customers demand more sophisticated services and they demand them on their own terms, whenever and wherever they are.

This is why I believe existing POS systems, which direct all shoppers to one central till location, have outlived their usefulness.

Mobile is, of course, the main driver of this change. And the proliferation of smart devices and their usage in stores will power mobile retailing evolution over the next two to five years.

The convergence of the 'Internet of Things' and mPayment technologies has opened up new possibilities for retailers, museums, TV and even public transport.

In fact, any retailer or organisation taking payment, (whether this is voting on a reality TV show, buying a ticket or buying a product) can now take payment and communicate with a customer via a mobile device – at the customer's convenience.

But this is just the start.

We are already seeing POS systems and traditional in-store payment facilities replaced with centralised web based ordering via mobile and tablet devices and mobile payments. There has already been an uptake of mobile payments in-store, with Apple leading on innovation in this area.

The real innovation however, is still round the corner.

Imagine you walk into a large hardware store, take a trolley that is internet-connected and able to read who you are via your smartphone. It would draw on previous data showing if you have shopped there before.

It then 'reads' what you are putting in your trolley and starts to send offers to your smart phone on or screen on the trolley related to products you are already buying. Thereby, every customer gets a tailored offer relevant to each visit they make to the store.

The human touch comes in where they are able to ask for help from a store assistant to come and find them in a particular aisle via a request from their smartphone or a connected device in-store.

When they have finished their shop they can pay via mPayment technologies, making this part of the shop quick and easy. A message would then appear on their smart phone thanking them for shopping in the store and offering to help them to their car to load up their shopping.

The above scenario demonstrates how the commerce platform, together with the convergence of the 'Internet of Things' and mPayment technologies can drive customer loyalty and engagement. This is a huge opportunity for mobile retailing in-store as the smartphone offers the ability for retailers to have a conversation with customers.

This is critical.

If all 'conversation' and purchase history can be taken into account by retailers in future marketing and in-store interactions, then the retailer could really bring back that personal touch to the in-store experience.

Ultimately, this is why POS won't survive the mobile retailing evolution. Customers want service on their own terms, whenever and wherever they are, and existing systems can't give it to them.

We call this new form of shopping 'proximity commerce'. And the special combination of internet-connected devices and mPayment technologies can make it happen.

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