**EXCITING RETAIL WORLD**

As consumers have become increasingly reliant on mobile devices, consulting apps, websites and online reviews to help dictate purchase decisions, the future of brick and mortar retailers once seemed bleak. But, just as consumers tend to move through ebbs and flows that dictate their purchase frequency and brand loyalty, new advancements in mobile technology point to a new retail future that will bridge the divide between online and physical storefronts, giving customers the very best of what both “worlds” have to offer. Here’s how.

**The end of lines**

One of greatest hiccups in the customer purchase process for physical retail storefronts has been the inconvenience of waiting in checkout lines. But thanks to increased customer familiarity and comfort with mobile payment options, that challenge has been eliminated entirely. With contactless payment methods, customers who download a mobile payment-equipped retailer app are empowered to scan the barcode of an item they want to buy and complete a purchase from anywhere in the store, without having to wait for, or even interact with, a salesperson.

**Personalization through technology**

Thanks to Apple’s introduction of beacons (hardware sensors that wirelessly communicate with mobile devices within a specific proximity) earlier this year, consumers will increasingly become more familiar with “push” messaging that essentially acts as their personal shopper, suggesting and pointing out relevant items that might be of interest, as they move through the store. As consumers and retailers grow more familiar with the technology, its functionality will reach beyond marketing. For example, when retailers leverage BLE proximity beacons, customers can use a retailer’s mobile app to request the help of a customer service staff when needed. The beacon can, in turn, immediately locate where the appropriate employee is in the store and facilitate the interaction by sending the team member to the customer.

The “push notification” feature also allows retailers to capture customer feedback about their in-store experience immediately after the point of sale, so they can continue to refine their brick-and-mortar strategy to meet customer needs.

**Flexible, guaranteed fulfillment**

Identifying where to buy a product for the lowest price once seemed like an insurmountable divide between physical storefronts and e-commerce, but new research, such as that by consultancy firm Simon-Kucher & Partners, reveals that online shoppers may not be as price-sensitive as once believed. In fact, the Simon-Kucher data indicates that consumers actually turned to e-commerce for the convenience aspects of knowing a product is in stock and ready to ship — and having a finite date of when they’ll receive the purchase.

Now that leading retailers like Walmart, Target and Nordstrom have streamlined “buy online, pick up in store” business models into the mainstream retail experience, physical storefronts actually have an upper hand: Delivery is much quicker than through e-commerce, often allowing the customer to pick the item up in store within minutes of the online purchase. If the customer doesn’t like the item once they see it in person, the return and exchange process in-store is far simpler than an e-commerce model entails.

**Reverse showrooming**

Though brick-and-mortar stores have faced the challenge of “showrooming” (when customers visit a physical storefront to experience a product in person only to make the purchase later online) for several years, advancements in mobile technology indicate that the once problematic behavior now works in the favor of brick-and-mortar retailers. Though Amazon is the venue of choice for traditional showroomers, it's become an even more popular destination for reverse showroomers who use the site for product research, but ultimately buy elsewhere, according to [**data from Business Insider**](http://www.businessinsider.com/reverse-showrooming-bricks-and-mortar-retailers-fight-back-2-2014-2). Reverse showrooming is particularly popular among this Millennials, indicating a shift in preferences of younger shoppers.

Provided that brick-and-mortar retailers understand and leverage the technology tools that will level the playing field with e-commerce to capture customer insights, message relevant offers, and provide the convenience and service that has made e-commerce popular, brick-and-mortar retailers are primed to emerge victorious in the battle for shopper dollars.

**What Retail Store Customers Want**

1. Provide Personalized Customer Service

Customers want in-person service they can’t get online. This is crucial to differentiating your store from the one-dimensional online shopping experience. According to research 79% of consumers say personalized service from a sales associate is an important factor in determining where to shop. Customers are more than willing to share their personal data if it helps you provide a better experience.

**What to do:** Gather customer data and use it to personalize offers and interactions.. But remember as a brick-and-mortar store, it’s your employees who put the “person” in “personalization.” Make sure your salespeople are well trained in customer service and empowered to make the customer experience outstanding. Hire for personality. You can teach someone to work a cash register, but you can’t teach “people skills.”

2. Offer Online/Offline Integration

According to research, [87% of customers](https://brpconsulting.com/download/2019-special-report-real-time-retail/) want a consistent experience across all shopping channels. Even larger retailers are still playing catch-up in this area. Customers expect a seamless transition between shopping on your website (if you have an e-commerce site) and shopping at your store. For example, 56% want to be able to have a shared shopping cart across channels (such as putting something in your cart on desktop and having it show up on your phone), but just 7% of retailers offer this capability. Shoppers also want to be able to buy products online, then pick them up in store, or buy products online and return them to a physical store. However, just [29% of retailers offer click-and-collect](http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20171004005226/en/New-OrderDynamics-Study-Finds-37-Percent-Retailers), or buy online and pickup in store, as an option for customers.

**What to do:** If your business has both an e-commerce and brick-and-mortar component, make sure the experiences are integrated so one is an extension of the other. Investigate shopping cart software that lets customers share shopping carts across channels. Take an in-depth look at your store and website. Does your brand look and feel the same online and off? Try navigating your website like a customer would, paying attention to ease of browsing and buying. Is your e-commerce experience the same on a phone as on a laptop? Finally, take steps [to add click-and-collect to your store](https://smallbiztrends.com/2015/09/online-purchase-in-store-pickup.html).

3. Make the Most of Mobile Technology

How are you using mobile technology in your retail store? Your customers are using it for lots of things. Some 63% of consumers use their mobile phones while in a store to compare prices, look for offers or coupons, check inventory and more. Consumers expect to get mobile offers and coupons on their phones; 67% say such promotions are an important factor in deciding where to shop. In addition, 40% say they’re more likely to shop at a store that has a mobile point of sale (POS).

**What to do:** To keep up with your customers, you need to empower salespeople with mobile technology. Three-quarters of retailers plan to put mobile devices and tablets in the hands of their associates within the next three years. Currently, just 16% have them in-store and feel they are working well; 20% have them but feel improvement is needed. With mobile POS capability, your salespeople can process transactions of the sales floor the minute the shopper decides to buy. This eliminates waiting in line and gives salespeople more freedom to interact with customers on the sales floor.

### 4. Lure Them with Loyalty Rewards

Identifying customers as members of your loyalty rewards program during checkout is great. But what if you and your team could identify your most valuable customers the minute they walk in the store? Almost two-thirds (64%) of the consumers surveyed say they are OK with retailers identifying them as they enter the store—as long as they receive something valuable in return. Among Gen Z and millennial shoppers, 75% are comfortable with retailers identifying them.

**What to do:** Look for loyalty rewards programs that allow you to identify shoppers via their smartphones when they’re in-store. To get customers to sign up and share their personal information and location, you’ll need to offer incentives. Invitations to special events, personalized promotions and rewards, and early access to new products are all desirable loyalty perks among consumers BRP surveyed.

### 5. Offer Store Financing

Cash-strapped and debt-leery millennials often don’t have credit cards. Paying for costly retail purchases (or even moderately priced purchases) can be a problem without credit. To solve the challenge, more and more retailers are offering financing that breaks payments into smaller chunks. It’s similar to the old-fashioned layaway concept, except customers get the product in hand right away. Retailers benefit, too: In one study, [36% of respondents](https://grow.bigcommerce.com/rs/695-JJT-333/images/report-2018-omnichannel-buying.pdf?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWlRVMU9EQmpaVEUyWmpaaSIsInQiOiJ0Skx1NFIwaGdRT2w2WnY0V0xPRVNLSElzM2hyWnk0XC8xRXphRHo5aG5pU1wvMWJ2NGJrY3NvVEZaV05QWEVCaG1HYmFBak1wRGJxS0NOQkYra09najJIQnBtN1orN1QxVXowMm5icHVzVnNCcmh2RlE3djE5TUFJdGoxZ3BCY2RLIn0%3D) say financing allows them to buy more expensive products than they could otherwise.

**What to do**: Financing isn’t just for big-ticket purchases. Even clothing retailers that cater to younger shoppers are starting to offer it because it’s something millennial customers want. If you target this market, learn more about how to provide [installment payment options](https://smallbiztrends.com/2019/01/installment-payment-trends.html) and providers that offer financing solutions for stores.

What do retail customers want? It changes from day to day. But since [63% of consumers](https://brpconsulting.com/download/2019-special-report-customer-loyalty/) will stop shopping at your store after just one unsatisfactory shopping experience, you’d better offer it.