What does 2015 hold for retail? – webchat roundup

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We gather all the best comments, case studies and insights from a Guardian webchat on the future of retail

Tablets and smartphones will rule the retail roost in 2015. Photograph: Alamy

Michael Kliger, vice president, international, eBay Enterprise
Retailers need master mobile in 2015: This is less a technology-driven challenge and more a customer insight opportunity. While mobile usage is constantly on the rise, the work looking into the customer journey that eBay's marketing team is conducting shows that the function of mobile will vary considerably across products, customers and purchase location. The challenge is therefore to offer a mobile experience that is attuned to these differences. In many instances, even though mobile is not the transactional device, it is the most important one to create both awareness and desire.

Showrooming: it's an opportunity for retail, not a threat
Will showrooming be a help or hindrance? Showrooming is often described as a threat to high-street retailers, but in a recent study that eBay conducted in the UK and Germany, we found is that showrooming works both ways. While one-third of online customers did indeed browse in a physical store before buying a product online, one-third of customers who actually bought at a physical store also stated they browsed online for product information. This just demonstrates how important it is as a retailer to be present, consistent and available across multiple channels, which means an opportunity to increase overall sales by 20-30%.

Ranjiv Dale, head of technology, GfK
2015 will be the year of the smartphone: The smartphone has been instrumental in bringing the online and offline experiences together. In the past you would search online at home, then go in store and then go back home to buy online again. Now, consumers have the web at their fingertips and can research anywhere and in store. This has forced traditional retailers to think about how they truly build the seamless, omni-channel experience for consumers and embrace the tech-savyy shopper. In terms of the future, this will only increase the pressures on having a holistic shopping/retail process across both online and offline.

The omni-channel opportunity for retailers: what's the story?
Tablets and phablet use is on the rise: We've seen some good activation around this idea from Burberry and M&S. Burberry arm sales staff with tablets, not to replace human interaction, but to enhance it, which means that more detailed product information is to hand, and also means that items that are not available in store can be ordered online. M&S have done the same thing with wine, as a trial.

Virtual reality (VR) has potential: A lot of problems about buying online, with fashion items for example, is that you never truly understand if it is going to fit or suit you. If you entered a VR store, you could have an immersive experience where you are getting to try on the goods and really see how well they fit you or if they are what you want.

Toby Abel, chief technology officer, Befittd
What's here to stay? In terms of things that are here to stay, look no further than improvements in the connection between online and physical retail. These include improved delivery options for online sales (click-and-collect and 90-minute delivery services), improved online product experiences and improved in-store mobile offerings. Beacon technology is one tiny part of a much larger shift in our understanding of how digital retail can be brought in store – it's a change that's mainly being led by customers at the moment, so retailers are going to have to keep up.

Andreia Campos, managing director, Gleam
Will wearables rule in 2015? There are actually a lot of interesting applications for retail and consumer engagement with wearables. We see them as an enhancement to the cycle of discovery, adding a new layer, especially in "faster" areas of consumption where snap decisions can be made.

Mobile is all around us: It has moved from being a buzzword to a ubiquitous concept. But retailers still seem to think that just being there is enough, with little regard for user experience and interface in some cases. Retailers, make sure you have a great experience that meets your aims. Whether you're focused on brand-building, discovery or shopping, don't just add on modules because you feel you must. It's about consumer delight. A bad experience is just not worth putting out there given the echo it can create.

Richard Perks, director of retail, Mintel
Top tip for retailers: The key point to remember about all these new technologies is that they will only work if people want to use them. Granted, beacons will link stores and online more closely together, and that will strengthen the store-based retailer's overall proposition, so that gives it an advantage over the online-only retailer. Which is great if that's where you want to shop, but it seems to me that one of the most important aspects of the development of mobile is that shoppers are better informed.

They can, and do, check out one retailer when shopping at another, which means they no longer have to make do with second best. That, in turn, means that any retailer whose current offer falls short is going to be more severely punished than in the past – and that means we can expect much greater extremes of performance in the future.

Gary Davies, professor of strategy, [Manchester Business School](#)
Soft technology will be important in 2015: Let's not ignore soft technology and focus too much on the latest gismo. Click-and-collect removed the problems of having to wait in for a delivery, sometimes to find the delivery isn't even going to happen. Even better, it puts the customer in control. They can plan their collection to fit in with other things such as shopping the store. My local supermarkets are open 24/7 for me to collect.

Henry Lawson, CEO, [AutoGraph](#)
Beacons have the potential to be incredibly effective: Consumers love getting things of interest when they are in a retail environment, but it can so quickly turn to spam if misused. The secret is both proper understanding of a given consumer using personalisation, and then the discipline to not send a message that only may be of interest. On Regent Street, we only send messages once for every 20 beacons.

In 2015, know your consumer: If we think back to the origins of retailing, the local shopkeeper knew every customer well, saw what they bought and also knew their broader interests. The digital world has replaced that with massive data usage, some of which can be intrusive, but bricks-and-mortar remains largely a blank canvas (except in supermarkets where a weekly shopping cycle makes loyalty programs meaningful for both sides). A lot of new technology does little to provide the personal experience of old world retail; it's based on counting and shouting. So the secret weapon as a retailer is to get to know the consumer in a two-way dialogue, just like Arkwright and Granville in [Open all Hours](#).

Link: http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/jan/13/2015-retail-trends-technology-webchat-roundup?CMP=new_1194