

## The wonders of webrooming: how retailers can inject new life into in-store shopping

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If there's one word guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of most retailers, it's showrooming. The idea of potential customers researching in-store before buying online is seen as an acute threat by most businesses with a high street presence. But how real is the danger of showrooming to physical retail, or is the nation's love affair with the internet actually benefitting bricks-and-mortar stores?



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### Showrooming? Try webrooming

The rapid adoption and development of digital technologies, particularly mobile devices, has created complex consumer journeys crossing online and offline channels. Although this has led to some shoppers treating the shop floor as a 3D catalogue, it has also given rise to a new trend in which consumers research online before buying in-store - known as webrooming.

A recent study by Merchant Warehouse revealed webrooming is actually a stronger force than showrooming; 75% of male and 63% of female participants surveyed claimed to webroom, whereas only 53% and 40% respectively admitted showrooming. So why is internet connectivity driving physical retail, and how is this impacting on shoppers' in-store expectations?

### What's so special about the store?

Put simply, bricks-and-mortar stores offer one crucial advantage: the ability to see, feel and try products. No matter how slick the browsing and buying process, online channels can't deliver hands-on interaction with products. And because shoppers have often researched the item first via retailer or brand websites or independent reviews, by the time they reach the store, theoretically they should be better equipped to buy - so long as the item meets their standards.

This enhanced level of product knowledge is something of a double edged sword for high street retailers, however. On one hand, shoppers are further along the route to purchase, but on the other they are already aware of the price and product capabilities outlined online. This means that discrepancies or disappointments within the store experience can deter them from buying.

For example, if a product is promoted at a certain price on a retailer's website but has a different price at the shelf-edge - or a price label is missing altogether - it is hardly likely to encourage a sale.

Equally, having built up a certain level of knowledge during their online research, shoppers' enquiries when they reach the store are likely to be in-depth or specific. This creates pressure on customer-facing staff to retain a vast amount of product knowledge, particularly if the store has a lack of information available at the shelf edge for customers to carry out independent research.

## **The digital/physical blur**

Unfortunately, neither of the above issues are easily solved, otherwise all retailers would offer a seamless online-offline customer journey to profit from webrooming shoppers. However, technology advancements are giving stores the power to unite digital and in-store experiences more closely than ever before.

For instance, electronic shelf labels (ESLs) are a powerful tool for updating prices across the store remotely, so retailers can maintain consistency with their online offering and go head-to-head with rival businesses in a much less time intensive manner than with current paper labelling.

ESLs can also be used to incorporate shoppers' use of internet enabled devices into the store experience. According to IMRG, a third of retail sales are made via a smartphone or tablet, but many retailers are missing out on the chance to drive store engagement through these channels. ESLs have larger displays and greater graphic capabilities, which gives brands and retailers the power to recreate the same content rich experience that consumers are offered online.

This content can also create shopper interaction - QR codes can be displayed on ESLs to give shoppers with smartphones more information at their fingertips including further product details via the retailer's website, product videos, and customer reviews and ratings at the shelf edge, all of which help inform their buying decision.

## **The final piece in the omni-channel jigsaw?**

Ultimately, retailers operating in online and offline spheres are searching for an omni-channel solution that maximises sales at all touch points, but before now the store has often been seen as less important to this strategy than online. What the rise of webrooming demonstrates, though, is that ecommerce proliferation has not led to the death of the store – it has created an opportunity to reimagine high street shopping as an interactive experience.

In order to profit from the store's new found position in the retail pecking order, retailers must find the right technology to bring the best of digital into the physical environment, uniting the rich product information available online with the direct, hands-on engagement exclusive to the store. Only by blurring these experiential lines will they be able to grab consumers' attention and achieve their overall ambition of maximising profitability in every channel.

Link: <http://www.retailgazette.co.uk/articles/31242-the-wonders-of-webrooming-how-retailers-can-inject-new-life-into-instore-shopping>