

Do customers really care about smartphone innovations in retail?

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Retailers are facing a digital dilemma after research finds customers want their shopping journey to be easy, not innovative.

As retailers plough cash into digital innovations, do customers really want all the latest technologies or are they craving the simple life?

Only 10% of smartphone shoppers regularly buy goods through a retailer's mobile application. And according to research from independent shopper agency Shoppercentric, retailers should be concentrating their efforts on improving and mobile optimising their websites, rather than launching yet more applications into the smartphone market.

Seven years after Apple's App Store launch popularised downloading a designated piece of software, retail customers are turning their backs on non-essential applications.

Danielle Pinnington, managing director at Shoppercentric, told Essential Retail: "I'm not sure why a retailer would want an app if they have a mobile enabled website."

"Apps are now becoming wallpaper on your phone," she added. "Similar to how lots of posters in stores become wallpaper and people zone out. The apps that work are the ones which give you information that can't be accessed anywhere else."

But Pinnington said the research indicated that retail apps are not providing customers with the value they need, and many smartphone users ignore the technology.

She said retailers like Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Tesco have provided extra value with some of their applications, such as showing customers a map of inside a store, or providing a shopping list functionality.

She said these apps are designed to encourage customers to be loyal. "But how many shoppers of that kind of mindset are actually out there?" she asks. "We're very promiscuous."

"And we shop in loads of stores, why would you have an app for each store you shop in?" she added. "Some apps which do something different and quirky might be enjoyed, but shopping a lot of the time is boring and a chore that you want to get done."

Using smartphones in store

Pinnington also said shoppers are less interested in the "whizzy" gadgets retailers are investing in store, such as beacons, augmented reality and QR codes, especially when they are implemented without thinking about the effect on the consumer journey.

Half of the 1,000 UK shoppers surveyed said they could not see the benefit of using their phones in store, 27% said it was too much effort to use their phones in store, while 23% had never even

thought about using their phones in store. A lack of free Wi-Fi also prevents 22% of consumers from using their phones in shops.

Pinnington said these digital innovations often interrupt the shopping journey, which frustrates customers and may send them to a competitor's store.

But some thought-through innovations are welcomed. Pinnington points to the partnership with Maybelline and Blippar from 2012 where customers used augmented reality to see what nail varnish colours would look like on their nails.

"It gave a real sense of what the product looked like on your nails, resolving the problem for shoppers, and it also prevented anyone tempted to open a bottle to test in the store," explained Pinnington.

Nearly half those surveyed use their smartphones in store to share ideas, while only 29% compare prices on competitor websites and 20% use their devices to learn more about the product.

Meanwhile, 36% of respondents use their smartphones to find store locations and 32% use the technology to get ideas and read reviews.

Pinnington advised retailers to think carefully about what customers need while on their shopping journey.

"It isn't all about this amazing Burberry Regent Street style of shopping," she added.

"Sometimes you just want shopping to be as easy as possible and I think we can get very carried away with the exciting technologies. Retailers bombard customers with too much and it's important to focus on the simple things that help customers make their purchase."

Link: <http://www.essentialretail.com/news/article/559a4d845c7e0-do-customers-really-care-about-smartphone-innovations-in-retail>