

NRF 2016: It's (still) all About Customer Experience

Delivering a Personal Shopping Experience will Make or Break Brick-and-Mortar Retailers in 2016 and Beyond

This was one of the more prominent topics at NRF's (National Retail Federation) Annual Convention & Expo (nicknamed "[Retail's Big Show](#)") that took place the second week of January in New York City. The Expo welcomed approximately 35,000 retail industry professionals from around the world to see and experience all things retail including innovative ideas and insights from peers, partners and competitors.



Build-A-Bear personal shopping experience

In today's retail climate, consumers are more informed, connected, empowered, and distracted than ever before. Davide Savenije, Senior Editor, Retail Dive said "The biggest takeaway for me is that retail is in the middle of the biggest transformation in its history. Driven by a combination of pressures including e-commerce and new consumer shopping habits, large, traditional brick-and-mortar retailers are facing an increasingly competitive landscape in 2016."

According to Retail Dive's [perspective](#) of the NRF Big Show, there was a lot of buzz around the need for retailers to provide "experiences" for shoppers. Consumers have become more distracted by social media and are spending more on personal experiences, like dining out and vacations, rather than material objects. These distractions have forced retailers to get creative, market their brands in a whole new way and create in-store experiences to attract their target customers.

What's Driving the Need for Personalization

In another Retail Dive [article](#), regarding the Shake-up of Brick-and-Mortar, the author stated "the biggest drivers of retail's transformation are the emergence of Internet and mobile technology, the rise in millennial spending power, the impact of globalization, and the empowerment of the consumer." "We've now gone to a business where your best customer can be standing in your best store and with three touches of their thumb to a piece of glass, they can buy from your biggest competitor," Fred Argir,

Chief Digital Officer for Barnes & Noble, told Retail Dive in an interview. "That's changed everything."

Robin Lewis, CEO of the Robin Report added "The only way the physical stores are going to get the consumers to come there and leave the comfort of their homes and the easy ease of [mobile devices] is to provide an unbelievably awesome experience."

What Some Retailers are Doing to Provide that Awesome Experience

Ikea, Target, and Home Depot are just some of the retailers [discussed](#) at the Big Show regarding their efforts to provide unique experiences for their customers. All three offer online resources that include free How-To Videos. Examples are styling tips from Target, home renovation how-to's from Home Depot, and Ikea's makeover ideas in real houses. The inexpensive videos incorporate each retailer's products while sharing great information to consumers, making them a win-win marketing tool.

Some retailers are providing unique events that don't necessarily have a direct return on investment, but are geared toward keeping the brand relevant to the consumers and being "a part of their world". The Macy's Day Parade was a great example of this.

Similarly, Target teamed up with popular fitness brand, SoulCycle, to offer free classes in several cities in the U.S. However, Target is hosting the classes at offsite locations. While attendees don't have the opportunity to impulse buy, Target is connecting with potential consumers through the SoulCycle workout brand while improving customer loyalty.

In our recent KDM Blog "[Top 8 Retail Predictions for 2016](#)", the need for "personalization" was number one. NRF says that "personalization is mission-critical [and] we live in the Age of the Consumer." Shoppers expect retailers and consumer brands to deliver a tailored, personalized shopping experience just for "her". This includes savings, merchandise and services that "she" cares about. If retailers can't identify a shopper's known preferences across various points of interaction, they'll lose out.

To add to this notion, Steve Barr, a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, told Retail Dive in an interview, "The great news is the retail store is not dead. But the retail store that does not have a meaningful relationship with the consumer is dead."

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