



SMARTPHONES: POISED TO RE-SHAPE SHOPPING?

Smartphones are changing shopping behaviour. Reemé Idris, Stylist, Producer and Creative Director of reemeandnina.com, uses the new technology to create applications and events designed specifically to engage shoppers. Reemé looks at the new promotional opportunities for centre owners and retailers growing out of smartphone usage.

My inspiration derives from high-fashion. It has to; high fashion is central to the luxury sector. Fashion is the laboratory for experimentation. Smartphones are an important new technology because they can be used to engage fashion customers in a much more direct way than is possible using traditional marketing approaches. For example, we have pioneered an entirely new form of bespoke in-store fashion shoot (see <http://vimeo.com/33446834>) to support indies/luxury chains.

Held during the usual store opening hours, a full crew of photographers, models, stylists, make-up artists, hair stylists and production team, take over an area of the store's shop floor for a fashion shoot. Each shoot is styled using the participating stores' products or garments and runs for approximately six hours, all whilst being live-streamed. There is even scope for 'shopper-turned-stylist' experiences where the crew will create the styled-vision of customers present on the day.

Promotions of this kind work well with media platforms that host/distribute content. It is all about brand-building and awareness.

Great for magazines: also for centre owners and landowners or tenant associations wanting to promote posh pitches or upscale retailers. You have to know your placement of course to use this sort of promotion, but they are a potent way of drawing the attention of well-heeled customers.

Research shows that retailers, whether online pureplays or multi-channel retailers with bricks and mortar stores, are increasingly relying on their eCommerce platform to project their consumer face. Whilst more and more revenue is expected to derive from online channels, I find the most exciting developments are where retailers embrace the multi-channel experience: where they are working to understand their consumers' lifestyle. For example, the reported plans by GAP to utilise Styld.by to allow in-store shoppers to scan products and see how others have styled them, all via mobile format.

Communications between retailer and consumer, online and offline, need to be reciprocal: they need to be mutual exchanges: especially in an environment where consumers are encouraged to do research on their own and expect new technology to make life easier and more enjoyable. There is a balance to be achieved here between the tactile benefits of touching and feeling merchandise whilst retaining access to information online.

The two can be blended in in-centre promotions. For example, the City of London has by far the largest single concentration of wealthy shoppers in the country (very high discretionary income but time-poor). It also has a new shopping destination: One New Change. 'THE EDIT at One New Change' – a two day promotion – is a new take on the traditional personal styling lounge that combines both the online and offline offer. Held over two days at the end of March, 'THE EDIT' (brought by Twenty Two Events) offered personal styling for the time-strapped shopper, with a twist.

A micro-site was created featuring a specially selected sample of items from participating retailers. Customers chose the items that they were interested in buying. A 30-minute slot was then booked with one of the on-site stylists. Everything selected online was brought together in one place to be tried on by the customer. Booking was specifically designed to be quick-and-easy: there was minimal information collection. The purpose here is to entice time-strapped shoppers, not to plunder personal information for extraneous marketing purposes. By removing any overt pressure to purchase, it presents fashion in a way which encouraged shoppers to be very liberal with their choices, to try on more things than they would on a normal shopping expedition. And also to have a stylist to hand, a rare luxury: all at no cost to the customer. Importantly, lounge promotions integrate seamlessly with surrounding businesses. All the shopping centre owner needs to provide is the space.

But there are other alternatives for centre owners. A shopping centre web app and fashion show for example: perfect for large centres that have a strong fashion offer. All it requires is space for a central staging area featuring a catwalk, a small photo studio, a changing room and a blogger's hub. The area designated also acts as a control centre for the web app, pushing information to user's phones: fire sales for example can be promoted, or fashion show updates circulated or social networking features incorporated, pretty well whatever you like. Amongst many other things, users of the web app are provided with an overview of all the outfits featured during the fashion show, all sourced from participating retailers.

Fashion show promotions, like style lounge promotions, are designed to variously increase consumer engagement, boost footfall, extend dwell-time, increase purchasing activity and encourage customer loyalty. Promotions of this type also signal to consumers that centres are ahead of the game and exciting places to be. The shopping centre web app and fashion show promotions are easy to tailor. For example, a more broadly based event is 'You Style', where consumers submit their own style choices to be featured in a shopping centre fashion show. This sort of promotion creates even greater engagement, particularly with younger fashion shoppers.

The great thing about these types of promotions is that results are directly measurable: contributing retailers can see the benefit both in cash terms and in new customer acquisition, something difficult to

measure with traditional shopping centre promotions. Smartphone technology is also a great way of populating customer databases, especially if there is reason to integrate with larger social networks.

We already have a generation of shoppers who have been brought up on an eCommerce diet and that have turned Google into a verb. Ultimately it is smartphone technology that is now driving it all. Smartphones are 'empowering' shoppers: a horrible expression I know, but accurate in this case. Consumers can now research products and companies, at home or in-store, compare prices in-store and online and make purchases at the touch of a button almost anywhere. Time-poor consumers, particularly the young, have alighted on the technology with alacrity, adapting their shopping behaviour further with every technological advance. It is happening exceptionally fast. For once, it is the retail sector, not the consumer that is lagging behind.

What we are essentially doing is exploiting the new technologies to promote fashion/luxury shopping. It can of course be done with

other product lines but fashion is the core comparison goods type: it is a primary footfall driver. The people I am trying to reach are early adopters. Technology is all about convenience and/or expression for them. They want to be hooked into what is going on, to what is new. They are shaping the way the majority will shop in the future.

What I like about it all, from a business perspective, is the sheer stability of up-scale fashion markets. Luxury markets are global: they defy economic gravity. They are not fragile, just look at the current performance of high-end fashion in London relative to domestic shopping. And the more global the economy, the less fragile luxury markets become. Luxury market players are meanwhile becoming more innovative. Tissot deliberately broke down barriers with its interactive window display in Selfridges for example, allowing shoppers passing to employ 'augmented reality' to see themselves 'wearing' the watch. It provided a new way of engaging with the brand, reducing the apprehension that many feel visiting very high-end luxury retail settings.

One of the challenges still facing all internet promoters is to inject a social aspect into what is essentially a solitary activity hence the platforms like Pinterest, The Fancy and Lyst for example, which variously combine magazines, blogs and social networks. There are brands and retailers – not just those confined to the luxury market – that promote a similar sense of community by connecting tangible events with their customer's online experience: Ted's Drawing Room by Ted Baker and The Birthday Project by Australian brand Bonds are examples.

Catwalk promotions or live in-store photo shoots have a similar goal, to deliver consumer engagement by encouraging self-expression. It is enjoyable to receive feedback from peers and industry professionals in matters of taste. Sharing discoveries is enjoyable too. But customers also need to feel special: it is not just about packing people through the door. It is not just the footfall that matters but the level of engagement created, how much money is being spent: what the profit contribution is.



Designed by Jean Nouvel, one of the world's most celebrated modernist architects, One New Change is the single most important retail development to be completed in the City of London for a generation. A mixed scheme that includes over 300,000 sq ft of office space, the shopping and high-end catering add up to more 200,000 sq ft of entirely new retail space on Cheapside, restoring the street's traditional role as the prime focus of City shopping. The anchoring impact of One New Change has been reinforced by its location close to St Paul's and Paternoster Square.