

# VELOCITY: THE SEVEN NEW LAWS FOR A WORLD GONE DIGITAL<sup>1</sup>

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Ajaz Ahmed founder and Chairman of AKQA talks to Reemé Idris

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**How do the Velocity principles help companies use theatre to give good experience in an era of ever-growing channels?**

“When we talk about theatre, we don’t mean the veneer or the way the store is decorated. Our belief is that when retailers show deep care and appreciation for their customers, the most successful relationships are built.”

**You mention looking outside of your own industry to grow innovatively. If the retail industry were to look at the hospitality industry as you suggest, where do you see the lessons being learned?**

“We encourage all organisations to think broadly and be influenced from many different places. For example, the entrance to the Louvre in Paris is a glass pyramid. The entrance to the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York is a glass cube. Retailers can learn from many different industries and culture.”

**There is a nod to J. Crew’s Mickey Drexler [known as ‘the merchant prince of retail’] who also sits on Apple’s board of directors. How can big brands retain a market stall mentality?**

“It’s about never losing touch with the people who rule: the customer. For some retailers the customer is abstract, a slice of a pie chart. For the most successful retailers the customer is respected as an individual. These retailers are deeply engaged with their customers and the experience they create to think of ways and solutions to enhance lives through better product and service.”

**Bricks and mortar brands who are slower to recognise the importance of an online presence can learn from the Borders/Amazon comparison you mention. How important is data to the consumer connection?**

“Data is about helping the customer choose, not just giving them choice. Amazon distances



itself from a standard definition of a retailer and has a much bigger vision which is to be 'earth's most customer centric company.' When that's your starting point, then the level of respect and intelligence applied to being relevant to your customers is second to none. Amazon puts its investment into the customer experience, offering ease of use, low cost products and delivery. For retailers with short term goals or without a unique and valuable offer, it's a difficult proposition to compete with."

**In a multichannel environment, it's easy to dwell on statistical analysis. Can brands choose how to tell their stories best by leading with their values alone?**

"Everything a brand does tells a story. The packaging, the advertising, the products, the delivery. Everything. The brands that people love are the ones that create the most emotional resonance with their customers through each of these stories. They also ensure that the memory of any experience is a good one. Every touch and connection counts."

**Compared with a shop, the Internet creates an obvious separation between customer and trader. As we have seen on the financial, utilities and transport side, that separation from the customer can result in a long-term deterioration in customer service (particularly in the area of complaint handling and problem resolution generally). How do you see things panning out on the customer service side in the retail sector as Internet penetration grows and face-to-face contact dwindles?**

"The most successful retailers will be those that eliminate friction and increase their proximity to customers through better service and products. When it comes to customer service, it's important to put more effort into quality and accessibility throughout the process. In the last decade of retailer consolidation, manufacturers have become effective at dealing with fewer more demanding retailers. Successfully managing many more customers who require individual solutions will be a core competence of the most relevant retailers of the future."

*<sup>1</sup>Velocity: The Seven New Laws for a World Gone Digital was written as a conversation between the authors – Stefan Olander, Vice President of Digital Sport from Nike and Ajaz Ahmed founder and Chairman AKQA about routes to success in the digital age. Published 2012 by Vermilion.*