

Expert Perspective: Retail is...

Technology

Technology is an ever-changing, ever-advancing piece of your business, your life and the lives of your customers. Think about how quickly our reaction to new technology goes from “wow” to “duh.”

“Wow! You mean I can put this piece of paper into this facsimile machine and it will print out somewhere across the country?” (Fax machines were becoming a standard part of business by the 1970s.)

“Wow! I can type this email address and send a note to someone across the ocean through this computer?” (Email was becoming common practice in the mid-1990s.)

“Wow! I can call someone on the other side of the globe and see them on my cell phone while I talk to them, like on ‘Star Trek?’” (Apple introduced FaceTime in 2010.)

Do you remember the first time you had a video chat with someone? I sat on my couch and could see my neighbor across the street on a screen. It was amazing. Now, my five-year-old wants to walk off with my phone so he can casually “FaceTime Grandpa.” If he had my password or thumbprint, he could complete the process without my help.

What was “wow” just a few short years ago is now “duh” to the generation behind me and my fellow Gen Xers and even Millennials.

Think about how these advances in technology are now another customer expectation in retail. There’s free in-store Wi-Fi, mobile payments, emailing monthly statements and buy online, pick up in store. Don’t forget about regular interactions on social media.

It’s 2017, so you cannot be promoting and bragging about how you take credit cards and offer gift cards. Brag about accepting Apple Pay and the ability to send gift cards via text.

Remember, you become “behind the times” the minute you do not meet your customers’ expectations. You do not necessarily need to be a technology trendsetter, but you do need to be in line with what your customers experience in other retail environments. The minimum expectations customers have every time they step in your store are ever-escalating, and being a local retailer as opposed to a big box doesn’t give you a pass.

For example: It is a major pet peeve of mine when retailers do not have Wi-Fi in their stores, especially if cell reception is poor in their big, metal building. How else am I supposed to call my wife and make sure I’m buying the right product, or look at a YouTube video to make sure I’m purchasing what I need?

“This is Rob’s Hardware. How can I help you today?”



3 UNREAD EMAILS

Rob Joseph: Inventory



Missed Call

Ann Taylor



New Message

Meeting at 2pm?





“When you network with other retailers, find out how others are using technology in their operations.”

Technology is always evolving. You need to listen to your customers about what technology your store can offer them. More importantly, watch your customers as they shop your store. How are they interacting with their technology and the technology in the store? What can you learn from how they shop?

Read retail magazines and blogs to see what is new and trending; this magazine is a great resource. When you network with other retailers, find out how they're using technology in their operations. I recently discussed with some retailers what software they use to schedule their employees. Are you leveraging technology to build your schedules?

If you're unsure where to start, use your internal resources. Ask your employees what kind of

technology they prioritize when they are shopping. Find out what upgrades they think the store needs. I promise they will be eager to embrace it if they are the ones who suggest it.

As a retailer, you do not need to use every app, widget or tablet package that comes along. Some will just not be a good fit for your store. That's OK. But you do need to always be evaluating what you do (and don't do) and why you do it (or don't do it).

That simple evaluation will ensure you keep up with the constantly changing world of retail technology. ➡



Dustin Kaehr is a retail consultant with over 17 years of experience working with independent retailers, national retail chains and small businesses. His presentation, "Customers Uncensored: What They Wish You Knew," will take place at the NRHA All-Industry Conference, held in conjunction with the National Hardware Show®, May 9-11 in Las Vegas. Learn more about Dustin at dustinkaehr.com.

