

A digital personal assistant to help customers with their shopping

By **George Freney** – Founder and CEO, Booodl It

Technology that helps retailers locate shoppers in-store and send offers to their phones (Beacons) is improving the in-store experience. However, to be effective the shopper needs to actually be in the store. Moreover, the retailer needs to know about that shopper to be able to communicate something with them that's relevant.

At the moment, digital technology isn't effectively driving people to visit stores. If there are more visits to stores, the value of technology such as Beacons is increased. If that store has insight into what products that person is visiting the value is even higher.

There is a way to improve this, however, it is complex and requires an evolution in retailer thinking and technology capability.

People generally keep a list of products they want to buy. They're remembered (I struggle with this), written on paper, kept in a to-do list app (ToDoist), note taking app (Evernote) or something like Pinterest. However, this effort is not rewarded because you still need to remember when a store that might stock what's in those lists is convenient to visit.

If that list was 'intelligent,' in that it knew precisely what the product was and at what stores it was stocked, then it would be useful. It could send you a notification when you were within a convenient distance of the store. Once the product has been added to the list, you could forget about it, comfortable knowing that you would be

reminded when it was convenient to go in-store and buy it.

This is in many ways like a personal assistant (PA) dedicated to making shopping convenient.

If a retailer's live in-store inventory was available it could be matched with products on shoppers' lists enabling notifications that the precise product they want is available now. This would enable shoppers to swipe and buy without even visiting the store; they could then just walk in and pick it up.

Shoppers want one app (like a PA for products they want to buy) that enables them to list all the products they want to buy, be notified that they are stocked, confirm the availability of the precise items and then seamlessly buy them. This brings the convenience and instant gratification of online shopping in-store.

Retailer-by-retailer solutions serve the purpose of the retailer, but don't enable a simple and delightful experience for the shopper.

Amazon Wish List is closest to this, it lets you create a list of the products you want. However, this doesn't help you buy

in-store when it's convenient. Moreover, Amazon represents a threat to Australian retailers if they're unable to provide that level of convenience to shoppers, which they will be demanding more and more. Recently Google revealed a 20 percent decline in shopping searches with that share going straight to Amazon, emphasizing the threat to tradition bricks and mortar retail.

Mobile devices and the availability of information are shaping the experiences that shoppers expect. More and more people expect that the delightfully simple experience of ordering and paying for a car with Uber is available for other products and services. Why would this not apply to in-store retail? ■

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