

From till to thrill: Retail capability development

Retailing is not what it used to be. Customers live in a world of speed and increasing options spurred by Internet connectivity, greater accessibility and rapidly emerging products and services. How do customers deal with all this clutter? How do retailers build trust in a world of too much stuff? This article discusses the strategic implications of recent trends on retail capability development.

Make lives better

The point in retail business is not only to make money. By making lives better, retail professionals will always stay relevant to their customers, thereby gaining mind-share, wallet-share and referral-share. Then, the money will follow.

Customers cut clutter by tuning in to solutions that make their lives better. To capture attention, retail professionals must identify their target customers and identify their expectations, mindsets, habits and behaviours.

Gain deep customer insights. Map their shopping journey. Identify their joys, pains and work-around. Explore ways to improve. Put leverage on omnichannel retailing to offer a seamless shopping experience.

Promote socialisation, then sell

A product or service without a story is a commodity. Undifferentiated from others, it is often ignored.

Retail professionals go beyond selling by interacting with customers and cultivating intimacy. They tell their stories and let their customers tell their versions. The retailer-customer relationship then evolves from monologues to dialogues.

Today's customers want to share their experiences. They are Generation C: They want to Connect, Collaborate, Co-create in Communities for a Cause. To them, participation is the new consumption.

They look out for authentic experiences to share. The more authentic the story, the more hits it obtains and the



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higher the brand value and recall. Retail professionals have to be great storytellers.

Create sensory environments so that smartphone-wielding customers can capture images, comment, and with a tap on a screen, share their interpretation with their communities instantly. Retail professionals are now waking up to creating experiences, not only transactions.

Key performance indicators such as engagements, surprises and smiles per square foot have been developed to determine the success of socialisation efforts. Socialisation generates interest that generates sales.

Problem-solve

There are way too many choices on the shop floor and this can lead to confu-

sion. The key is not only to provide choices for customers but also to help them choose the most suitable.

To do so, retail professionals must be able to build rapport, diagnose problems, listen emphatically, synthesise knowledge, propose solutions and evaluate responses.

Enhance the collection experience

Instead of pay and wrap, think reward and return. Instead of cashier and queue, think concierge services. Instead of farewell, think life-long fans.

Given the convenience of online retailing and delivery, retail professionals must enhance the collection experience so that customers remain attracted to the physical stores. Events, demonstrations, rewards and store atmospherics can help to attract customers to the stores.

Retail professionals need to abandon their routine, cookie-cutter duties and get in sync with customers' needs. Create meaning and deliver in-store experiences that online retailing cannot deliver.

Innovate

Urbanisation leads to smaller living spaces. A growing green mindset creates less wastage. These trends promote asset-light retailing in which hiring is preferred to buying. Temporary ownership, pooling and sharing become new retail possibilities. Retail professionals must be able to recognise such trends readily and respond promptly to put leverage on them.

Increasingly, emerging technologies impact the way retailing is conducted. Retail excellence now requires different types of capabilities. As we shift from transaction-based retailing to socialisation, today's retail professionals need both digital skills and the ability to create tangible physical — and better yet, thrilling — experiences to energise and engage their customers. **ra**

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