

How UK Retailers Are Harnessing Trends In “Bricks and Clicks” To Increase Footfall

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Almost 90 percent of UK retail purchases still take place in physical stores today – and contrary to what many had predicted, online commerce has not signed the death warrant of shops and stores. However, retail brands are increasingly learning how to leverage digital tools to drive in-store sales, from providing information (store locators, product locators), to preparing a sale by allowing customers to book a product or an appointment online, to paying for their purchase ahead of time with “click & collect”.

To shed light on this changing landscape, Solocal, a European leader of local digital marketing services with over £800 million in revenue in 2013, today held a morning conference at Centre Point Tower in London. The event gathered eight different speakers from within the Solocal group as well as from the Local Data Company, IMRG and Local Social Labs. During this conference, experts revealed the top five current trends in “bricks and clicks,” giving retailers important insights into how they can seize online opportunities to draw customers into their actual shops.

1. **Mobile Is A Key Focus** Mobile is quickly becoming the dominant way to reach customers – nearly one-third of web-based page views in the UK now come from smartphones and tablets. However, too many brands still need to improve the mobile offerings they make to users. Revamps need to include multichannel and transactional functionalities, as store locators are merely a starting point. The rise of mobile is clearly opening the door to targeting, promotion push, m-commerce, mobile payment, loyalty and more. These opportunities will only become more crucial as wearable tech becomes more popular in 2014.
2. **Leverage Online Content and Social Media** More than ever, consumers are going online as part of their decision making process. Retailers have done a good job understanding this and more often than not, have jumped on the social media bandwagon and created their own content. So what’s next? For starters, visuals are fast becoming a must-have asset in a brand’s digital arsenal, as proven by Pinterest’s success and higher conversion rate. Brands know they can enhance the image and boost their products’ attractiveness in an unrivalled way through the use of quality visuals. Store locators are moving from being considered a mere commodity to an essential in-store traffic generator that can help maximize conversion by providing customers with useful content such as product inventory, promotions and other calls-to-action. Finally, brands need to scrutinise their e-reputation, both to be aware of customers’ feedback and to ensure they make a good impression on potential new customers. Be it ratings and reviews left on social media or transactional websites, it is crucial for retailers to listen to what their customers say about them, and use any complaints as an opportunity to demonstrate great customer service.

3. **Moving From Targeting To “Hypertargeting” Via Big Data and Social** Retailers will be able to leverage increasing quantity of behavioural and attitudinal data on digital users to better target their advertising campaigns. Mobile innovations such as geofencing, NFC, in-store wifi, augmented reality and Bluetooth low energy beacons will allow brands to push the right message (promotion, product, ad, event, etc.) to the right customer, at the right time and the right place. Imagine a high street brand organising a flash sale and pushing a mobile message to all 20 to 55 year old high revenue women that are currently present in the neighbourhood. Or a supermarket customising ad display screens to the specific customers that are present in the aisle. Brands could also customise how their websites are displayed to fit customers’ specific tastes and interests. The earlier brands leverage these opportunities, the better they’ll be able to capture consumers’ attention with the relevant message and get a high ROI for their ad campaigns.
4. **Enhancing The In-Store Experience With Technology** Facing competition from many pure e-tailers like Amazon, click-and-mortar retailers will need to boost their user experience from good to great. Multichannel solutions can help in many ways: click-and-collect for products, online appointment booking for services and in-store tablet interfaces that take the hassle of searching and queuing out of the shopping experience. For the same reasons, retailers will increasingly look into accepting in-store mobile payments and creating automatic loyalty programs that can add points from the simple swipe of a mobile device.
5. **Omnichannel and Multichannel – Must Dos** In 2014, more retailers will make an effort to give customers the choice to complete transactions on their own terms. In other words, if a customer views an item online, wants to buy it from his smartphone, have it delivered to a locker near his work and return it by dropping it in the store, it must be not only be possible but an easy, smooth and seamless experience. Click and collect, which today accounts for nearly a fifth of multichannel sales, will continue to grow, prompting retailers to add product locator functionalities to their online stores and store locators. Appointment booking services are expanding beyond hotels and restaurants and extending to all types of services. A recent study found that 34% of UK consumers were found to look at a product online before making a purchase in-store, a trend called “reverse showrooming”. Retail players are set to turn this threat into an opportunity by adapting their online and in-store pricing strategies to bridge the gap with e-commerce pure players. “The way retailers are using technology, and the web in particular, is evolving rapidly and profoundly changing their business. Retailers have a unique opportunity to provide a superior service by taking advantage of the influence digital has on the purchasing decision - therefore getting ahead of their online and offline competitors,” concludes Bruno Berthezene, Solocal Group UK Managing Director. For more information please visit: www.solocalgroup.com/en | @SolocalGroup_RH Follow Market Research World on Twitter or join in the conversation with our LinkedIn Group