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Offline stores offer e-com experience

Brands Rely On Tech To Make Shopping Interactive At Brick-And-Mortar Outlets

How would you like it if you could go to a garment store, stand before a screen there, and see how you would look in one of the dresses displayed on a poster without trying it out? Or walk into a mall, and have your favourite brand find out you're in there and offer you a special discount?

Brands know you will love this, and are roping in startups to bring such technology inside brick-and-mortar stores.

Yamini Chao/Digital Vision/Getty Images

VIRTUAL REALITY

➤ Top brands are using technology to make shopping fun at stores and to interact with customers outside the store as well

➤ Screens at stores show you how you would look in a particular dress

➤ Tablet-like devices allow customers to browse through all the brand's products,

mix and match an ensemble

➤ Tech captures signals from smartphones and collates data on how many people walked into a store or how many are repeat customers

With consumers getting used to the conveniences of the online shopping world, brickand-mortar stores are using technology to bring in features like `virtual reality', `unlimited product stock', `similar searches' or `related products' options. Nike, USPA, Satya Paul and Being Human are among the brands using technology products in their stores to give customers the advantages that ecommerce portals offer.

Shopsense is one such startup which provides brands technology-based solutions to engage with customers in the store. The company installs a tablet-like device in the store, which customers can use to browse through all the brand's products, the way they would on an e-commerce portal. It allows customers to mix and match products and see how they would look in the ensemble. "There will also be more engagement between the customer and the store salesperson. The salesperson can observe what the customer is looking for on the screen, and pick out similar products from the shelves. Customers can also look at inventory from other outlets and this sometimes helps brands reduce real estate costs," says Harsh Shah, co-founder of Shopsense. Brands say that using such products see a 12-15% increase in revenues.

Another augmented reality based startup TeliBrahma, which has a similar product where a screen in the store can show you how you would look in a particular dress, is working on integrating it with the mobile. "A lot of shopping happens on the mobile now. There will be a product where you could choose a picture from your gallery, and the app will show you how the person in that picture would look in another dress," says Suresh Narasimha, founder and CEO of TeliBrahma. While solutions like these work on the front-end, and at the back-end come products like Torchsight. The company uses wireless technology to capture signals from smartphones and collates data on how many people walked into a store, how long they stayed or how many are repeat customers. Torchsight installs a device inside the store which captures such data, then analyses the data and sells it to brands. Brands can then use this data to design their marketing campaigns, find out which products do well and which don't, and even customize offers for customers. "They could, for instance, use the device and find out when a customer walks near the store and try to lure him into the store with special offers," says Anup Balagopal, cofounder, Torchsight.

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Companies are using technology to interact with customers outside the store as well. Brands like Titan's Helios, Pizza Corner, Louis Philippe, Future Group, Lawrence & Mayo, and Nerolac Paints work with Nifty Window, whose technology allows physical stores to showcase their inventory on line, and update the inventory information and make offers in real time. "If someone is in a particular locality and searches for a certain brand store there on her mobile phone, not only will our store link be on top of any search list, but it will also provide full details of the inventory in the store, including pricing. This even allows the buyer to compare the store price with prices on e-commerce sites and decide where to buy from," says Sujit Zachariah, who was product director at Yahoo, US before founding Nifty Window last year.