

You will have your own digital shopping assistants

Ever find yourself in a fitting room with all the wrong sizes and no salesperson in sight? Don't you wish you could somehow look up if what you need is in the store, and if not, be able to find out what store is carrying your desired items? Wish you could have someone tell you what other items in the store would match what you are trying on? And what about affirmation from friends that the outfit you've chosen truly does look good on you?

Well, there's hope. In the next five years, shoppers will increasingly rely on themselves - and the opinions of each other - to make purchasing decisions rather than wait for help from in-store sales associates. A combination of new technology and the next wave of mobile devices will give the in-store shopping experience a significant boost. More than ever before, shopping will be a social sport, and it will be more fun, easy and collaborative with the rise of digital shopping assistants.

The Easy and Speedy Dressing Room Experience

Fitting rooms soon will be outfitted with digital shopping assistants - touch screen and voice activated kiosks that will allow you to choose clothing items and accessories to complement, or replace, what you already selected. No longer will you need to make multiple trips to the fitting room and comb through racks searching for the right colors and sizes. Once you make your selections via the digital shopping assistant, a sales associate is notified and will gather the items and bring them directly to you. If items you want aren't stocked on the floor, you will have the option to purchase them online and have everything shipped to your home using the digital shopping assistant. Or, your digital shopping assistant can tell you which stores nearby are carrying the items and offer to place them on hold.

And what happens when you're shopping alone and find yourself in need of a second opinion before splurging on a new outfit? With the digital shopping assistant you'll be able to snap photos of yourself in different combinations and email or SMS them to your friends and family, as well as to yourself, for the thumbs up...or thumbs down.

Shoppers also will be able to access product ratings and reviews from fellow consumers via their digital shopping assistants and can send that information to friends, family and themselves to help with the purchasing decisions. Shoppers will even be able to download money-saving coupons for items they wish to buy and instantly apply them to their purchases.

IBM is on its way to transforming the shopping experience in the following ways:

Guaranteed Product Availability

IBM has teamed with Galeria Kaufhof, a division of METRO Group, to develop and install a first of a kind system to enhance customer service in one of its department stores in Essen, Germany. As part of a pilot program, approximately 30,000 articles in the men's fashion department have been equipped with ultra high frequency second generation RFID tags. Employees are using the system to find articles that shoppers are looking for and to monitor stock to ensure that popular items are always available. The store also features devices in the store's fitting rooms which recognize the tagged garments and display customer information such as price, fabric and care instructions.

Coupons on the Go

IBM is also piloting technology that enables retailers to recognize when shoppers are in their stores and send relevant coupons to their mobile phones.

IBM scientists are helping to advance the form and functionality of digital devices to transform and ease the 21st century shopper's experience. As shopping emerges into a social sport, the digital assistants of the future will be better equipped to anticipate the shopper's every want and need. Ready, set, shop!