Three Keys to Thriving in a Post-Pandemic World

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THE PANDEMIC SENT SHOCKWAVES ACROSS THE BUSINESS WORLD, SEVERELY LIMITING OPERATIONS OF MOST BUSINESSES, WHILE CLOSING OTHERS ALTOGETHER.

Those of us in the digital signage world felt the sting more than most, with millions of digital screens either going dark due to temporary closings or playing to a much smaller audience. Many of the restaurants, entertainment venues, retail establishments, office buildings and other businesses that rely heavily on digital signage to engage customers were left wondering if digital dystopia had come home to roost. After all, what use are digital displays in an empty store? And how can we ever expect customers to use interactive displays when they're fearful of high-touch surfaces?

Questions like these have been posed countless times in the pandemic's early days. Our customers were rightfully concerned about the role digital signage would play during these unprecedented times. I'm grateful for these conversations because they gave me an unvarnished view of the challenges so many businesses have been dealing with in 2020. But more importantly, it gave our team the opportunity to look beyond the solutions we typically recommend during "normal" times and focus with precision on some engagement solutions best suited to our current business climate – in the here and now. For businesses willing to embrace this challenge, digital signage opens up unlimited opportunities to foster deeper connections now to ensure those relationships emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever. Here are three strategies to help you do precisely that.

Bring the Best of In-store into the Home

Customers keep coming back to retail because they can touch, feel, test out and try on products before they purchase. They long for what we hold precious about the retail experience – so the question is how can digital platforms keep customers engaged, even when they're not shopping in the physical environment? The answer is an omni-channel approach that embraces digital engagement not just in-store, but well beyond.

For example, a retailer could offer virtual sales appointments for styling advice, consumer electronics support or design help. And the world of augmented reality opens up some creative possibilities – for example Ethan Allen Home and L'Oreal Cosmetics are using AR to deliver immersive, in-home experience to their consumers. And while these applications certainly fall outside the realm of traditional digital signage, the goal is to use technology to remain connected to your customers so when the world heals and customers return, they'll be accustomed and receptive to similar immersive experiences delivered in store.

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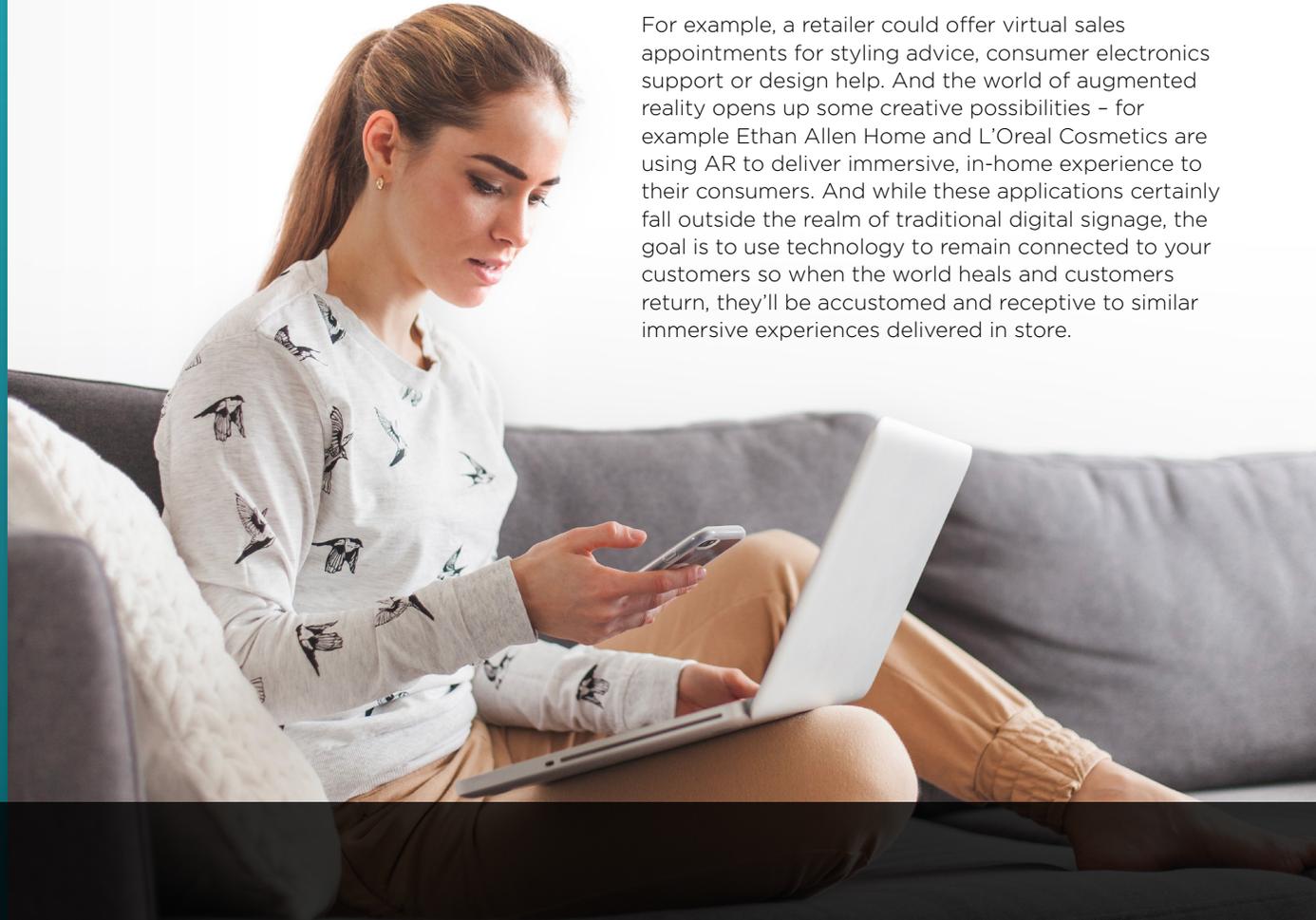
Personalize
the Shopping Experience

For as much as we all respect the key attributes a brick-and-mortar experience can bring, ecommerce has some distinct advantages. Because they exist in the virtual realm, e-retailers have access to data that can accurately predict, anticipate, recommend and create desire in ways that resonate with the individual. In short, they can personalize the shopping experience in ways that are difficult to replicate in store. We can learn so much by watching the nuances of digital-first brands, and by connecting the dots at retail with new and existing digital signage platforms.

Forward-thinking retailers should be asking questions like: How can my digital programs create a personalized "check in" experience? Are there ways to integrate customers' mobile devices into the shopping experience, either by helping customers find products on the shelf more quickly, or by offering a hybrid experience whereby they purchase on mobile and pick-up in store? Can my mobile platform geo-detect and welcome customers upon arrival with an on-screen welcome message? Or taking it one step further, can I deliver customer-specific messaging based on purchase history to help accelerate the path to purchase so customers can grab and go? These scenarios are easily attainable with technology that's readily available, in many cases utilizing existing hardware that's already in place.

Integrate
Impulse in New Ways

In-store transactions run approximately 30% higher than that of on-line, acutely due to the impulse factor. And even now when customer dwell time is down, impulse purchases are increasing, presumably because when people take fewer trips to the store, they're more likely to make additional purchases because they want to minimize return trips. With retail operations currently distracted with the heavy challenges of nailing in-store and curbside pick-up, helping retailers think through new pandemic-proof impulse strategies that are low-touch but high-impact may help inspire more effective impulse at the right place and time in the customer journey. To that end, retailers can use digital signage to help put combinations of goods that might not be visually merchandised together. They can also use QR codes for shoppers to 'bump' to mobile to browse adjacent or related merchandise to purchase on the spot and take it with them.

And while sometimes it's difficult to see beyond what is directly in front of us, this too shall pass. Inevitably, life will return to some form of normal. With that, there are so many ways technology can positively influence the trajectory of retailers and other businesses as we prepare to emerge from the pandemic. The smartest bet right now is to invest in rich customer experiences that not only help you connect with customers today, but also build a bridge for customers to return in-store once the pandemic runs its course. After all, the goal is not to simply survive the pandemic, but to thrive in spite of it.

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