

HOW THE LINES BETWEEN
ECOMMERCE AND
BRICK & MORTAR
ARE BEGINNING TO BLUR





Shopping in a store or online: Which do you prefer? If you had to choose, which would you pick?

After all, brick-and-mortar stores and online shops offer distinct advantages.

Physically stores allow customers to connect with products before they buy them. They can feel the material. They can try on the clothes. They can inspect the product's quality. Thanks to store staff, they can also get personal attention and care while they shop. Plus, they get to go home with their purchases immediately.

Physical stores, then, offer an unmatched real-life customer experience.

Ecommerce stores, though, offer choice, flexibility, and convenience – qualities that today's shoppers love. Consumers can buy virtually anything in the world online.

They aren't limited by the stores available near them. They don't have to worry about inventory levels or store hours. Online shopping enables them to shop on their own time, when and where it suits them most.

Why choose? From click to brick and vice versa

While some consumers might prefer online shopping, others might love the tangible experience of shopping in a store. Others, though, might wonder why they have to choose between the two at all.

They want to have their cake and eat it too.

And, well, why shouldn't they?

It's the customer's world after all, and we should be giving them what they want.



This is what omnichannel retail accomplishes: it enables customers to shop whenever and wherever they want to, seamlessly moving from one sales channel to the other as they do.

Thanks to innovations in retail and advances in technology, the lines between online and offline shopping are blurring.

In the future, there likely won't even be a difference between the two.

And we're already seeing the way technology is enabling retailers to offer a seamless customer experience, online and off, by adapting to both the digital and physical demands of their customers.

Blurring the lines with tech to improve the customer experience

The purpose of omnichannel retail is to enable the customer to get the best of all sales channels and seamlessly move from one to the other during a shopping experience.

A variety of technologies can help you blend online and offline shopping to enhance the customer experience.

Chatbots

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a worthwhile investment for online retailers looking to enhance the customer experience. Specifically, AI chatbots enable customers to shop online but get the personal assistance they would get from in-store staff.

The chatbot becomes a digital personal shopping assistant that helps customers find the items they want to purchase quickly and easily, without having to search countless product pages on your website.





Visual search technology


One of the limitations of ecommerce is search. Unless you know exactly how to describe what you're looking for, it can be a struggle to find it online. This isn't an issue in store, where you can search shelves until you find it.

Visual search technology helps customers find what they're looking for using visuals rather than textual searches. They're presented with exact matches or similar items.

Interactive fitting rooms

A great use of digital technology in retail today is the interactive fitting room, which is valuable both online and in store. This technology enhances the customer experience by allowing customers to "try on" clothing and accessories virtually.

For example, a customer can upload a picture of themselves and "try on" glasses to determine whether the style and fit suits their face shape before buying them online. This not only helps them make informed buying decisions but also reduces the cost of returns for the retailer.



In store, customers can virtually try on items if they're short on time or want to eliminate options quickly. Then can then request physical items to be brought to them if they determine they're worth actually trying on.

This innovative use of technology merges the digital and physical world to improve the customer experience, regardless of the sales channel.

Next-day shipping

One of the most valuable propositions of in-store shopping is the notion of instant gratification. In fact, approximately 49% of US shoppers say they prefer to shop in store rather than online due to the fact that they can take their products home immediately.

When customers want to use their products right away, shopping online poses a problem. Most people simply don't want to wait days or weeks to receive their items.

Next-day shipping allows online retailers to offer the near-instant gratification that customers have come to expect.

Fully integrated mobile experience

Did you know?

At least 43% of consumers have used their smartphones to find information while shopping in a physical store.

While you can touch, see, hold, and view an item in store, there's no doubt that you can get more information about a product online. You can read customer reviews, search product data, view real-time stock levels, and find comparative products.

Innovative brands are creating dedicated shopping apps to encourage customers to access valuable information online while browsing the shelves in store, further blending digital and physical worlds. This shift towards in-store mobile technology is a clear sign that tech isn't killing retail—but enhancing it.



Immersive functionality with VR and AR

To take their in-store shopping experience to the next level, some brands are going a step further by creating fully immersive functionality. Using virtual reality and augmented reality, brands are experimenting with connected experiences where customers can try out products before they buy them.

For example, customers can digitally arrange furniture pieces in their home environment while in the store, providing the best of both worlds. Customers can see and touch the furniture IRL, but they can also harness the power of technology to visualize how the items would look in their own rooms.

Online reviews, in store

Customer reviews are key to making online purchasing decisions. In fact, many online shoppers place significant importance on them. Leveraging the power of reviews in store can help your customers make decisions in real time.

Thanks to beacon technology, near-field communication, QR codes, and digital signage, it's possible to share this user-generated content in store to inform decision-making and offer a more convenient shopping experience.

Checkout-free stores

No one likes standing in line, but it's almost inevitable that customers will need to do so when shopping in store. This makes the customer experience less enjoyable and more frustrating.

That's why, as innovative as ever, Amazon opened a checkout-free grocery store, Amazon Go, where customers can shop in store and walk right out without paying. State-of-the-art sensors and cameras track what shoppers remove from the shelves and bill them later using the credit card on file. Customers simply scan the Amazon Go app to pass through a gated turnstile to get into the store. When they leave, their account is charged for the items in their virtual shopping cart.

With digital technology used in such a way, checkout lines and cash registers become superfluous.



Buy online, pick up in store

One of the most common ways retailers are melding online and offline shopping is with a “buy online, pick up in store” option. The benefits are clear: The customer doesn’t need to spend time wandering aisles to find what they need in store since they can buy it with just a few clicks online. But they can still get the product in a timely fashion by picking it up at a physical location on the same day.

In return, the retailer gets to reduce shipping costs and attract more people to its physical location.

It’s a win-win, offering a more delightful experience than either option could offer separately.

Showrooms

A still-experimental concept that might take the retail world by storm is the showroom. In this shopping experience, customers can walk into a store to check out the merchandise. They can see it, feel it, hold it, and try it on.

However, all purchases are subsequently made online and the merchandise is then delivered to the customers’ homes at a later date.

This may be a great option for consumers looking to try out products before they purchase them, as well as for those who prefer to return online orders to a physical location.

Creating a true omnichannel experience is complex

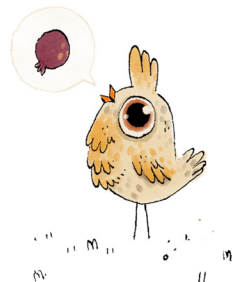
While all retailers worth their salt want to give their customers a seamless shopping experience, **omnichannel retail is more difficult to achieve than most people realize.**

It might seem simple, reasonable, and even obvious that consumers should be able to easily move between shopping online, on their phones, and in store. But the reality is a lot more complex. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it, after all.

Omnichannel retail requires a significant investment in IT and innovation. Here are some tricky questions to answer:

- If you allow people to buy online and pick up in store, how much inventory do you need? What happens if something goes out of stock immediately after they click “buy”?
- If you want to match the convenience of in-store shopping, how will you be able to offer next-day shipping? What if the customer is halfway across the country? The world?
- If you allow customers to buy with a range of payment methods online, will you be able to offer those same options in store on your terminal?

Delivering a true omnichannel experience requires a major overhaul of your shipping, inventory, supply chain, and technology infrastructure. But if you can successfully deliver on all your promises, you'll better meet the needs of your customers, achieve new heights of success, and ensure your brand stays relevant in the future of retail (whatever that may be).



Blending together to benefit the bottom line

In today's changing landscape, there's no reason to favour one sales channel over the other. There is no reason to choose between a brick-and-mortar store and an online store.

We live in a time when the real world and the online world are blurring, and tech advancements continue to offer new opportunities for retailers to enhance the customer experience.

Although creating a truly seamless and frictionless omnichannel retail experience is more complex than most retailers realize, those that overcome the challenges and offer customers the experience they're looking for will be the ones to stay standing.



Build an omnichannel brand with BNA

At BNA, we focus on ensuring our merchants stay ahead of the tech curve, give their customers the payment options they really want, and improve the customer experience with the right payment processing solutions.

A stylized '24/7' icon where the numbers are white with teal and yellow accents, set against a purple background.

help desk and dedicated customer-service teams

A stylized '1st' icon where the '1' is white with teal and yellow accents, and the 'st' is in a small, white, sans-serif font, set against a purple background.

In Canada to offer wireless terminals and internet-based payments instead of dialup

A stylized '30' icon where the numbers are white with teal and yellow accents, set against a purple background.

BILLION

In transactions processed

A stylized '99.9%' icon where the numbers are white with teal and yellow accents, set against a purple background.

reliable payment processing

