

CROSS-CHANNEL : WHY BRANDS WILL STEP UP TO THE PLATE IN 2012

If 2011 seems to have been the year of recognising this fact . . . in 2012 brands will leap into action. Some recent indicators substantiate this statement:

- 1. The major Internet players such as Google, eBay, PayPal, Android, Cdiscount and Amazon have all opened physical stores.*
- 2. The federation of e-commerce and distance selling (Fevad) has predicted the end of e-commerce in around 2020. In fact, this is not so much to argue that the e-commerce will disappear, but rather that online sales will fit into the same strategy of product distribution alongside other channels.*
- 3. The widespread use of mobile Internet devices (and the potential to be always in touch with friends) changes behaviours during the process of in-store purchasing. Today, 25% of social networkers consult their social media networks in-store. 45% to geotag, the others to find, compare or verify information about the product. (Performics & ROIresearch Study)*

Eric Voltezniguel (RBS Change) says most brands have already begun to put in place a multi-channel approach to distribute their products . . . the previous major change having been to secure their online sales presence. The pure players themselves are performing the opposite manoeuvre and starting to open physical stores. The necessity for this evolution has been the changing behaviour of French consumers:

- 86% said they had visited a website before purchasing a category-leading product (FEVAD 2011)*
- 30% have researched a purchase in-store and later realised it on the Web (McKinsey 2011)*
- 53% have researched a purchase online and later realised it in-store (McKinsey 2011)*

A "channel"-oriented approach has so far consisted mainly in the ad hoc supplementation of sales channels, that is to say, in simply making the company's products or services available via those sales channels that are preferred by customers.

What requires a true enterprise-level business strategy is not multi-channel, but cross-channel, the centre of which is the knowledge of the customer leading to custom behaviours.

Specifically, what will the retail environment look like in 2012?

So far brands have managed to create convergences between the shopping experience on their website and the shopping experience at the physical point of sale. In 2012 they will start to do the same work the other way around. Physical stores will increasingly tend to consist of the convergence between the experiences of their customers online brought in-store via the multi-channel strategy.

- Developing the service through cross-channel. To be successful, brands will have to constantly redevelop their service offerings.*
- Creating a link with the consumers. How? By developing a stronger presence on social networking sites, online sales sites, applications for tablets, mobile, etc. . . . but also with temporary retail outlets, pop-up stores and all other valid means of building trust through the creation of a unique and personalised shopping experience.*

All of this is to say that it is those brands that were first to have built their marketing and operational cross-channel strategies that will make a decisive advance this year.

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