

What shopping will look like in the future

May 23 2014, by Mae Anderson



In this undated photo provided by Hointer, a woman demonstrates the Seattle store's shopping technology. Hointer displays clothing not in piles or on racks but as one piece hanging at a time, like a gallery. Shoppers just touch their smartphones to a coded tag on the item and then select a color and size via their phone. Technology in the store keeps track of the items, and by the time a shopper is ready to try them on, they're already at the dressing room. (AP Photo/Hointer)

When it comes to shopping, more Americans are skipping the stores and pulling out their smartphones and tablets. Still, there's more on the

horizon for shopping than just point-and-clicking.

No one thinks physical stores are going away permanently. But because of the frenetic pace of advances in [technology](#) and online shopping, the stores that remain will likely offer amenities and services that are more about experiences and less about selling a product. Think: Apple Inc.'s stores.

Among the things industry watchers are envisioning are holograms in dressing rooms that will allow shoppers to try on clothes without getting undressed. Their homes will be equipped with smart technology that will order light bulbs before they go dark. And they'll be able to print out a full version of coffee cups and other products using 3-D technology in stores.

"Physical shopping will become a lot more fun because it's going to have to be," retail futurist Doug Stephens says.

MORE SERVICES

Forrester analyst Sucharita Mulpuru says stores of the future will be more about services, like day care, veterinary services and beauty services. Services that connect online and offline shopping could increase as well, with more drive-thru pickup and order-online, pick-up-in-store services. Checkout also will be self-service or with cashiers using computer tablets.

Some stores are taking self-service further: A store in Seattle called Hointer displays clothing not in piles or on racks but as one piece hanging at a time, like a gallery.

Shoppers just touch their smartphones to a coded tag on the item and then select a color and size on their phone. Technology in the store keeps

track of the items, and by the time a shopper is ready to try them on, they're already at the dressing room.

If the shopper doesn't like an item, he tosses it down a chute, which automatically removes the item from the shopper's [online shopping](#) cart. The shopper keeps the items that he or she wants, which are purchased automatically when leaving the store, no checkout involved.

Nadia Shouraboura, Hointer's CEO, says once shoppers get used to the process, they're hooked.



This product image provided by eBay shows what a pair of jeans looks like on a 3-D model in an online virtual dressing room. EBay recently bought PhiSix, a company that is working on creating life-size 3-D models of clothing that can be used in dressing rooms to instantly try on different colors of clothing or different styles: You can see 30 or 40 items of clothing realistically without trying them on. (AP Photo/eBay)

ON-DEMAND COUPONS

Some stores like British retailer Tesco and drugstore Duane Reade now are testing beacons, Bluetooth-enabled devices that can communicate directly with your cellphone to offer discounts, direct you to a desired product in a store or enable you to pay remotely.

For example, you can walk into a drugstore where you normally buy face cream. The beacon would recognize your [smartphone](#), connect it with past purchasing history and send you a text or email with a coupon for the cream.

"The more we know about customers ... you can use promotions on not a macro level but a micro level," says Kasey Lobaugh, chief retail innovation officer at Deloitte Consulting. A store could offer a mother 20 percent off on Mother's Day, for example, or offer frequent buyers of paper towels a discount on bulk purchases.

3-D PRINTING

Within 10 years, 3-D printing could make a major disruption in retail, Deloitte's Lobaugh predicts. Take a simple item like a coffee cup. Instead of producing one in China, transporting it and distributing it to [retail stores](#), you could just download the code for the [coffee cup](#) and 3-D print it at a retail outlet or in your own home.

"That starts a dramatic change in terms of the structure of retail," Lobaugh said. And while 3-D printing today is primarily plastic, Lobaugh says there are tests at places like MIT Media Lab and elsewhere with other materials, including fabric.

Right now a few stores offer rudimentary 3-D-printing services, but they are very limited. He predicts the shift will come in 10 to 20 years.

ORDER YOURSELF

Steve Yankovich, head of innovation for eBay, thinks someday buying household supplies won't take any effort at all. He says someday a connected home could be able to use previous customer history and real-time data the house records to sense when a light bulb burns out, for example, and order a new one automatically. Or a washing machine will order more detergent when it runs low.

"A box could show up on porch with this disparate set of 10 things the connected home and eBay determined you needed to keep things running smoothly," he says. "It's called zero-effort commerce."

HOLOGRAMS

EBay recently bought PhiSix, a company working on creating life-size 3-D models of clothing that can be used in dressing rooms to instantly try on different colors of clothing or different styles. You can see 30 or 40 items of clothing realistically without physically trying them on.

EBay's Yankovich says the technology can be used in a virtual dressing room as well, showing what the clothes look like when you are, say, walking down the street or hitting a golf club.

Some companies have been testing this already. British digital agency Engage created a Virtual Style Pod that scanned shoppers and created a life-size image onto which luxury clothing from brands like Alexander McQueen and DKNY were projected. The Pod was displayed in shopping centers in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

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