

Panel Q&A hosted by Juliet Mann

## Retail at a Crossroads – what next?

AGR| CRA | LS Retail | Verifone



### Not technology for technology's sake

As technology becomes increasingly intertwined in people's lives then retail must be careful that it strikes a balance between embracing such developments while still maintaining the human element that can be a strong differentiator in physical stores.

Participating on a panel at the K3 Retail 'Make Happy' conference in London – debating the topic of 'Retail at a Crossroads – what next?' Robin Osterley, chief executive of the Charity Retail Association, suggested that charity retail has had a good year and that it has to some extent benefited from being based on community and maintaining the human element.

"If you go into these shops it's not just transactional. People feel a sense of engagement with the charity in a way they do not get from high street brands. I'm not saying technology is not important to the charity retail sector, it's very important, but we've not lost the human element. Technology could be about bots telling you what your next meeting is going to be about, but this is going too far. Charity retail has more of a human element," he explains.

Osterley believes that some of the technology that is being brought into the market should only be embraced if it is more than simply being a "phase". He suggests: "Smart-phone usage has gone down slightly and, so I think things will balance out. I'm just not comfortable building a world around kids who text each other when they are in the same room."

## Evolution not revolution

Even though Melissa Cupis, group business development director at AGR Dynamics, regards herself as a disruptor she agrees with Osterley that business changes brought about through the use of technology need to be more evolution than revolution.

“I like to see real practical examples of it being used in business. Technology should be used in everyday life as seen in the way we use Microsoft Word. But we should also be asking whether we should be creating a document or if it should be a video instead. We certainly have to embrace the fact that there is a new generation out there and they have to be considered,” she says.

## Delivering personalised experiences

Carsten Wulff, regional VP for Europe at LS Retail, agrees and believes retailers need to “accommodate the needs of this generation”. He says his business is working on many new developments that will potentially be lapped up by this young age group.

“We’ll have personalisation whereby people are recognized when they come into the store. We’ve some health clubs now that recognise people by retina scanning because these individuals do not have their mobile phones on them in the gym. Also, there’s a supermarket in Dubai where we’re able to recognise the customers and highlight product recommendations,” he says.

He also cites the forthcoming Japan Olympics where people will create their own account and then be able to pay with their fingerprint in certain participating retailers who’ve signed up to operate such biometric technology.

## Rewarding loyalty

All these solutions become richer and more personalised to consumers when the relevant data is being accumulated on them. This can sometimes drive quite straightforward insights, according to James Lotz, Head of UK & Ireland at Verifone, who says: “We’ve done some work based on knowing the payment card that a person regularly uses and then simply give them [loyalty] points that can be redeemed when they use that specific card.”

They are effectively operating a loyalty programme but without the customer having to change their behaviour at all, which contributes to giving them a seamless experience.

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