

Power speaker

Why is fashion disrupting the retail space?

Rebecca Thomson | Head of commercial content | Drapers

Fashion retailers leading the way on innovation

Technology is touching every part of the retail industry but nowhere is its effect more pronounced, and the greatest amount of innovation taking place, than in the fashion sector.

Rebecca Thomson, head of commercial content at Drapers, touched on some of the more exciting uses of technology in fashion at the recent K3 Retail 'Make Happy' conference in London with virtual reality (VR) leading the way despite a few early hiccups.

"Until 18 months ago it felt like VR was over-hyped and possibly even useless for fashion retailers. The experience was not strong enough and the projects we saw seemed more PR-focused than anything. But I believe this is now changing," she suggests.

Technology is enhancing the shopping experience

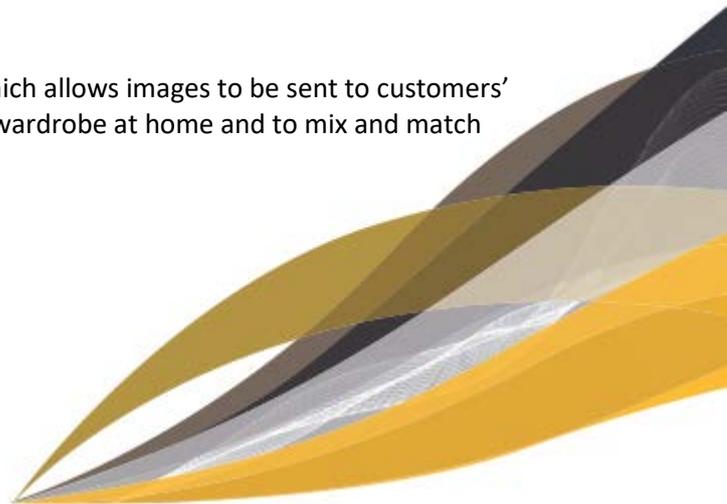
Thomson cites Topshop on Oxford Street for its effective use of VR to enable shoppers to take a waterslide through central London and the work done by Myers department store in Australia where customers could make purchases of the products they were viewing by simply looking at the MasterCard logo displayed in front of them. Also, North Face is using VR to virtually take people to mountain ranges in the US to inspire them and hopefully tempt them into making a purchase.

Chatbots are another development that uses AI technology and they are being adopted by a growing number of retailers including the Shop Direct Brand Very, Levi's - who use it to help customers find the right fit of jeans - and Macy's in the US - who enable the chatbot to be used in-store to find products and if this does not satisfy the shopper then a store assistant is called to assist.

Using AR to engage your brand

Augmented reality (AR) is also proving to be an increasingly effective way for brands to engage with shoppers: "If the use case is strong enough then people will adopt such technology very quickly. One area it is being used is to help with fittings. The likes of Sabina the fashion brand are using AR to help its customers buy the correct sized items."

Amazon is also experimenting with AR via its Alexa Look, which allows images to be sent to customers' phones where they could then be used to go through their wardrobe at home and to mix and match these items with a retailers' products using AR technology.



In a rather unusual partnership Nike linked-up with the popular Momofuku restaurant in New York and enabled diners who took a photo in the restaurant - and then posted it up in the relevant app - to visualize a limited-edition sneaker and to then make the purchase.

What's clear is that nowhere is the pressure to transform being felt more acutely than by retailers that service a core base of younger customers, such as the fashion retailers. They are being pushed into quickly adapting their models to consider the ways these individuals are now choosing to interact – which is predominantly via mobile devices. This is certainly cranking up the levels of complexity for many retailers.

We are already seeing evidence that the successful retailers will be those that use technology intelligently to connect and transform their ability to respond to the growing demands of the customer, and to deliver an enhanced customer experience.



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