Building a better in-store grocery experience

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By Sunil Bajaj

For the new age digital consumer, grocery shopping is perhaps one of the most uninspiring chores. While innovations have kept happening across other retail sectors, grocery shopping hasn't seen many advances on the technology front.

Wandering aisle to aisle hunting for that elusive item on the shopping list or going through the long, tortuous wait in a checkout queue is still an all-too-familiar experience for the time-crunched shopper. As shoppers grow more connected and demanding and flit seamlessly between channels, grocers need to reimagine various aspects of their business by leveraging digital at all stages of the shopper journey. Here's a list of must-have tools that the smart grocer needs in his arsenal to secure his digital future:

In-store navigation

In-Store Navigation offers incredible potential for both consumers and retailers alike. Once the consumer reaches the store, he studies all the items on the shopping list, maps their location on the shopping floor and creates the most optimal shopping route. In-store navigation ensures that a busy consumer does not lose an instant browsing endlessly through aisles for his kid's favorite breakfast cereal or the extra soft tissue rolls. Plus, he now has extra time and energy to check out the new launches in the store.

There are huge upsides for the retailer too. Armed with the tracking ability, he enjoys unprecedented access to detailed consumer analytics.

He can thus send personalized real-time updates to a consumer pertaining to in-store specials, discount coupons and new product advertisements or share bundled offers to increase the basket value. Such personalized marketing actions help to build a certain connection that encourages repeat visits and plays right into the retailer's traffic building objectives.

Empowered store associates

Mobile can enable in-store staff to deliver great service by making important shopper preferences available to them in real time. They can locate shoppers, suggest new products, provide customized offers and make the whole shopping journey more rewarding for the consumer.

Self- checkout

Some studies show that people spend around 30 minutes standing in a grocery que per week. The checkout queue is one area that perhaps represents the biggest pain point for grocers and consumers alike.

Smart apps can handle the entire checkout process from start-to-finish in a secure way. Shoppers can take control of the shopping experience, scanning bar codes/ QR codes of items by simply pointing their smartphone camera as they shop. Apple Pay and other digital wallets can then be used to complete the transaction.

Another option that offers speed and convenience to the modern shopper is to equip the sales associate with hand-held, mobile POS so that he can complete a transaction at any location in the retail store, thereby making checkout queues at the billing desk a thing of the past. With a view to provide additional convenience to shoppers, Walmart is setting up all of its stores in the U.S. to accept its in-house Walmart Pay mobile payments app.

Cross-channel fulfilment

In the era of omni-channel integration, consumers must be provided with the option for cross-channel fulfilment. This means retailers face greater pressure to deliver products anywhere, anytime. To do this, they need to include online ordering as a function in their websites and also offer busy shoppers the option of either picking it up in store or having it delivered to their homes.

The incorporation of mobile into the store enables the grocer to track his consumer's previous purchases and search history to target each consumer as an individual with repeatable baskets, customized loyalty coupons and discounts. Loyalty programs can thus be made more flexible to better reflect the shopper's unique value.

Flexible loyalty programs

Research by Nielsen revealed that 63% of respondents were ready to use a retailer/loyalty program app when available.

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Furthermore, apps with inbuilt machine learning algorithms can study the users' consumption patterns along with their visit frequency to the store and then remind them when the items on their regular shopping lists are up for refill.

Grocery giants like Southeaster Grocers are already using their mobile app to offer personalized coupons to their users, based on their purchase history and geographic interests.

The right technology solutions can enable retailers to interact with shoppers on a whole new level, deepen shopper engagement and increase sales while optimizing costs in the long run. The most successful grocer will be the one who is at the intersection of the physical & digital space, leveraging technology to make the whole shopping experience more robust and rewarding. **PG**

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