

Four ways how retailers should look at technology in 2015

2015 is going to be a 'milestone year' for Indian retail, where technology will act as the biggest differentiator across all major functions.

E-tail will see its biggest growth year in history driven by increased Internet, smartphone penetration and consumer acceptance of category.

Four Trends that will enhance core Retail functions

Increased interactivity with customers is foreseen. New technologies will evolve in shaping how retailers interact with customers through technology.

One of these is 'Beacon' – a nearfield technology that helps the brand interact with the customer through smart data exchange inside the store in real-time.

Increased customer intelligence: Stores would be equipped with a host of smart data capturing devices that capture every movement that the customer makes, leading to a whole new way in which stores look at consumer behaviour. This would be made possible by new technologies like Euclid analytics in offline retail and its Indian clones.

Increasing personalisation: With access to richer and more robust customer data and the ability to converge data from multiple sources like card usage, social media habits, locations, and shopping behaviour, there would be increased 'personalisation' of both products and services in Indian retail.

Online-Offline integration: Advances achieved in online retail will gradually get transformed into offline retail primarily through new visual merchandising technology inside stores.

The Technological Leap foreseen in Other Areas of Retail

Technological innovations, emulating best practices from international biggies

Easier interface, stronger back-end technology

End of long queues: More and more traditional retailers will embrace Mobile POS technology (already implemented by some large-format retailers).

Exponential growth of mobile commerce, shopping and mobile payment apps

Newer categories will get into retailing on the back of smarter usage of technology mainly through eCommerce and smartphone apps

Newer forms of payment mechanisms will grow. All retailers whether online/offline must appreciate and embrace them. India is a big cash economy currently with a huge scope of growth in e-payments

Convergence of online & offline brands. Offline going online and online going offline. We are a strong votary of this integration which helps a brand grow exponentially in a category where it has a strong position

Coupons: New, innovative channels of couponing and channels selling to specific affinity groups. Example: Rocketperks.com, an employee benefits service targets only Corporates (www.rocketperks.com)

Faster reaction time to consumer enquiries and complaints online and offline. A brand can be dented / destroyed within minutes on social media (flipkart Oct 2014).

Increased focus on 'product-isation' of services: Retailers start selling productised services like Reliance ResQ – service packs from Reliance Digital, Medical service packages from Meradoctor.com



Guideline for Retail professionals

The CEO should be facilitator and evangelist of technology in the organisation. His key role would be to bring in a culture of appreciation and quick adoption of technology in the organisation's fabric.

For the CMO, digital marketing would take a whole new role, from a mere 'good to have' medium to a critical 'customer acquisition medium'. With the growth of social media, the CMO would need to make use of technology for better consumer engagement, brand-building and communication. He would need to think more creatively on how to utilise each platform. As more and more offline retailers go online, the CMO's job would move from marketing of products to marketing a complete website or a mobile app as a whole. As new technology makes it easier and more cost-effective to manage customer relationships and lifecycle communication, the CMO needs to use new technology like apps and software to improve the overall after-sale consumer experience.

The CIO should focus on usage and adoption of technology beyond just the end-customer. The CIO will need to drive usages of technologies like the company's own intranet, develop smart apps for internal use and ultimately shift all offline services shift to a site or an app. The CIO needs to ensure technology driving operational efficiency, effectiveness and thus indirectly building a service brand also.

Tips on using smart data analytics technologies

There are a host of smart new data analytics technologies that will help take consumer understanding to the next level. One of these is BlueKai, a cloud-based big data platform, which can personalise online, offline and mobile marketing campaigns for retailers.

It enriches the retailer's mobile app with new features with regular updates to keep track of consumers and utilise these learnings to offer them differentiated services.

Initiatives that Retail teams can follow

The following initiatives I feel, would be crucial for retail teams looking at exponential growth trajectories in 2015 & beyond:

Creation of mobile dashboards / app for all businesses, offline-online

Better usage of new technologies like 'Augmented reality' in enhancing consumer experience both online and offline

Regular and targeted training programmes for employees, particularly those in customer-facing roles. Training can be planned through mobile dashboards to disseminate information faster.

Omni-channel or integration of offline and online: This is key for anyone and everyone looking to make a mark in a vast and complex country like ours, where literacy levels are still abysmally low, but the market size is huge.

By Peshwa Acharya, Former CMO – Reliance Retail & Founder & CEO - "Think as Consumer", The Growth Accelerator Firm for Start Ups. He is also Consultant to Housing.com.