

Omniscient Companies Employing OmniChannel

Gone are the days when a shopper's in-store experience was limited to the physical boundaries of a brick-and-mortar building. Back in 2007, Best Buy was caught using an Intranet site displaying higher prices at its in-store kiosks rather than the low prices consumers had seen on their home computers. Such a bait-and-switch scam never could have succeeded in today's smartphone-connected world. [Internet Retailer](#) reports that 75% of in-store shoppers now use mobile devices during store visits.

Wise retailers have created mobile apps that make it easy to receive promotions, check inventory at other locations, add items to lists for future purchase and even compare prices. Even wiser retailers have created systems that cater to the customer's desire to purchase, regardless of time, place or other constructs. Transparency, convenience and personalization have become key to retail success at every step during a buyer's experience. This is the crux of the OmniChannel concept. It is an approach that recognizes the user journey should be enabled in a seamless manner across all touchpoints. There are certain exemplars who should be noted for their particular innovations.

Alfred Angelo Bridal is one such retailer who has embraced the OmniChannel concept in a creative, albeit creepy, way. Firstly, brides can browse the latest looks online before setting foot in the store, save their favorite looks to their online account and schedule in-store appointments via the company's website. Once the bride has placed her order, she can check the status of her dress (a truly nerve-wracking experience), update her bridal party, and take advantage of perks through partnerships with companies offering wedding items such as favors, as well as services ranging from mail-in gown preservation to name-change assistance. A downloadable app allows the bride to receive promotions and get advance notice of trunk shows and other special events. The app (and here is the creepy part) even allows the bride or her bridesmaids to activate a Magic Mirror in one of the company's Signature Stores throughout the U.S. The mirror is a product created by Pickn'Tell, a Florida-based company that provides retailers with technology to bridge the gap between the "physical, digital and social worlds." In my opinion it is rife with potential privacy concerns, but it seems to have been embraced by brides, especially those trying to plan a wedding with far-flung family and friends. It enables them to share dresses as they look on

them, not on a model in a catalog. Think of it as a virtual “Say Yes to the Dress.” Whatever I may think, research is clearly in Alfred Angelo’s favor. Studies have found that Millennials tend to be social shoppers who solicit the opinions of friends and family. Contrary to the popular belief that they are disconnected from reality and simply engaged in a digital world, they in fact eschew online-only purchasing. They still go to malls and shop with friends. The in-store experience is, indeed, important to them. Retailers who are able to tap into that human need for connection and pair it with the digital-savvy expected by today’s consumer will do well.

Designer Rebecca Minkoff is also using mirrors in an innovative way in her stores. In collaboration with eBay, she designed a mirror that takes the hassle out of in-store shopping. Furthermore, she has paired it with a mobile app that allows fashion mavens to extend their shopping experiences beyond the door. Upon entering the store, customers can use an interactive wall to view the latest collection. Simply tap the wall to have an item added to a fitting room and enter a mobile number to be alerted when the room is ready. In the interim, the shopper may use the app to order water, coffee, tea or champagne. Once inside the fitting room (which features adjustable lighting - hurray), patrons can request different sizes or colors to be brought to them, or ask an associate to bring them one of the items the mirror has suggested. Through RFID technology embedded in the labels of the clothes, the mirror will remember the items tried on and sync them with the app for future purchase if desired.

Shifting from fashion to food, I would be remiss if I failed to mention how well Panera Bread executes OmniChannel. The restaurant’s website and mobile app allow diners to locate the nearest store, browse menus, order online and even have their food waiting for them upon arrival using the Rapid Pickup service. Users may login to their digital accounts to store their favorite meals and link their orders with the rewards program. What I find particularly appealing is that this convenient ordering process has been extended within Panera Bread’s physical stores. The restaurant has clearly embraced the “third place” concept popularized by Starbucks. On any given day, there are people diligently working on their laptops using the store’s free wi-fi. While other counter-service chain restaurants allow the same practice, nobody makes it quite as easy as Panera. Once diners have settled into tables by the nearest electrical outlets, they are unlikely to give up their spots or leave valuable electronics unattended to stand in

line. No problem. Simply use Panera Bread's app or website to have food delivered to the table using the number that has been affixed to it. I don't have any facts to prove it, but Panera surely must generate more profit from "third-place" patrons than their competitors by making it convenient to order food while availing themselves of free wifi. There is no excuse to nurse the same coffee cup for hours for fear of losing a table (or a laptop).

There are plenty of other examples of retailers and others who are executing OmniChannel in an enviable fashion. Much has been written about giants such as Target, Walmart, Bank of America, etc. However, I wanted to share some of the more unique approaches to OmniChannel that I have found in my research on the subject. I am eager to see what innovations lie ahead, and how the concept will be applied in other industries over time. I will surely keep you informed of what I find.