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## Mobile And Retail: Calling In Air Support

by [Steve Smith](#), Tuesday, September 8, 2009, 1:31 PM

It is my understanding that we have raised the most consumer-conscious, marketing-averse, hard-to-reach generation in American history. So much tortured thinking goes into marketing to my daughter's generation, it is shocking to see her sheer gullibility when staring at a store shelf wall of video games. "Ooh, that looks good," she says as she grabs the most colorful, cartoonish Xbox 360 game box. "She's never heard of the title. I have never heard of the title. But the box looks cool.

Knowing the gene pool whence this behavior came, and after two decades of similar experiences with her mother, I understand how quickly a bad idea can implant itself irrevocably in her head. Quick and certain countermeasures must be taken before the misguided notion takes root and resists all tugging. I take a quick stab at getting her to questions whether she really wants to plop down \$60 on a game before even reading the back of the box, but she just gets irritated and resistant to my doubting her first impulse. I flash back to 16 years of a previous marriage. My God, these genes are a powerful thing.

I literally call in air support. Luckily, the video games media publisher IGN has a great iPhone app that aggregates all of their reviews. I search the title and lo and behold the site gave that particular title a rating of 2.5 out of 10, which is just about drink coaster status. I luck out and show it to my daughter. "Hmm. OK. Lemme see that." I will spare you the inevitable conversation that ensues: "This is why I should have an iPhone, because of all the money it will save you..." She proceeds to spend the next ten minutes running phone searches on all the titles that catch her eye. Meanwhile, Dad is running interference against the countless store clerks desperately trying to help this rara avis, an attractive 17-year-old girl in a game store. Even my daughter is giving me "save me" looks as legions of geeks in fading "Assassin's Creed" and "Mass Effect" T-shirts descend in a bizarre attempt to impress her with their current "World of Warcraft" level status.

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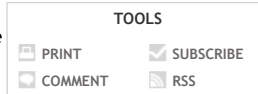
As this small father-daughter techno-tableaux suggests, the retail experience is on the cusp of radical change. It is long in coming. More than four years ago I recall conversations with *Consumer Reports* about its first mobile app and how putting product reviews and competitive intelligence in-store in people's hands was a genuine game changer. I am still waiting for *Consumer Reports* to give me that killer app. But in large part similar power is already there, but consumers and retailers are going to have find their way to make the inevitable transformation of shopping occur. Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Best Buy and others already have mobile tools that peek into their inventory and user reviews in ways that can and should change the way we shop. I now can take a snapshot of any book at my local Borders and get competitive pricing, reviews and related titles from my Amazon and B&N apps. I could even order it from a competitor. In fact, the B&N app lets me find the book and reserve it at their store down the road from this aisle at Borders. What happens when even a quarter of my fellow Borders shoppers realize they too have the same power?

The problem is that half the time I actually forget that I have this power in my pocket. I still peruse store shelves and try to remind myself that I should "check the reviews online when I get home." The reflexes are not there yet, even though the technology is right in my pocket.

How people shop and how technology will meet, meld and eventually transform these habits is going to be a critical question for mobile marketing in the next few years. The first step in the process is a better understanding of how people are using mobile platforms in the wild and how it might map against retailer tools. The geotargeting company Placecast today launches a six-part video series and consumer research program with Harris Interactive called The Alert Shopper (blog.placecast.net) that will explore some of these issues.



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#### STEVE SMITH

Contributing writer Steve Smith is a lapsed academic who saw the light, bolted the University and spent the last decade as a digital media critic and consultant. He is chair and programmer of OMMA Mobile and OMMA Behavioral conferences from Mediapost and is the Digital Media Editor at Media Industry Newsletter (MIN) from Access Intelligence. Contact him [here](#).

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Only an introductory video is at the site now but CEO Alistair Goodman tells me that the completed interviews and Harris studies will start to show how mobile can align better with shopping patterns. "We learned that 27% of women 18-to-24 with cell phones make at least one impulse purchase every week," he says. "There is a real opportunity if a retailer already has a strong relationship with the user to influence them with a mobile device." In order to get over our tendency to forget the power we already possess in our pockets, Goodman suggests that consumers might opt into letting a trusted brand use the phone's geo-location capabilities to send alerts when the consumer comes within a "geo-fence" set around the retailer. Placecast will be looking at consumer receptivity to certain kinds of geo-location services and opt-in mechanisms and will be doing some tech trials this fall.

Reflecting on the video interviews we will be seeing in coming weeks on Alert Shopper, Goodman says that we do need to bridge a disconnect between what mobile is capable of doing and how consumers want it to work. "We haven't framed the service in a way that the consumer finds valuable rather than useful. What came through loud and clear in interviews and the data is that if you can create something really relevant and reach me in a channel I find important, and you do it in a useful way, then it is something I want more of. It involves changing the dynamic a bit and not using mobile devices in the way we use them -- but beginning to evolve an interaction with the device based on where I am in time and the things I am really interested in."

We're just getting started in understanding that mobile-at-retail model, but any retailer that is not working hard on this problem is about to get a rude awakening. I don't know why Borders has no mobile site and isn't telling me at the door the things I can do with my phone while there. I also don't know why GameStop isn't buying up every inch of IGN's mobile inventory to give me coupons aimed at preventing my daughter and I walking out their doors with no game at all, the way we did the other day.

And while everyone is innovating, how about a Gamestop app that geo-tags all of their store clerks so I know when one of these mouth-breathing 120-pound Orc-slayers is penetrating a no-geek "geo-fence" around me and my daughter? Or perhaps an iTaser peripheral? I don't want to hurt them, just let them know that this Dad isn't as easy to take down as some virtual dungeon boss.



This commentary is insightful. I recommend it to others.

34 people recommend this article.

## 8 comments on "Mobile And Retail: Calling In Air Support "

**David Shor** from **Quillion, a WONGDOODY Company**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 9:05 PM

The challenge with retailers as a class is, of course, that all but the big national chains are extremely slow to move with new online/mobile technologies other than couponing. Mechanisms to deliver more value than "lowest cost" need to be developed--such as providing more consumer rewards and other items that an informed mobile shopper holding an "I can get it cheaper here" wap site would have difficulty making an apples-to-apples comparison against.

Going to enjoy watching mobile-instore interaction best practices emerge, but don't forget the possibility of a Black Swan.

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commented on: September 08, 2009 at 9:04 PM

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**Timothy Murphy** from **Keynote Systems Inc.**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 3:58 PM

Nice article and a great example of how Mobile Retail is not about simply replicating the online experience on a device. Consumers will use mobile devices for new and innovative ways to enhance brick & mortar retail. For the consumer that purchases with their head- the Internet provides a powerful research tool. For purchases that are impulsive or emotional- Brick & Mortar gives the tactile experience. Mobile Retailing is about bringing them both together. When all components are working well, everyone wins.

**David Charnatz** from **Starz Entertainment, LLC**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 3:47 PM

Stop overcomplicating the shopping experience. We're human beings, therefore, lazy and stupid by nature. The following is a quick overview of a presentation Gilbert Fiorentino (gf@syx.com), Chief Executive of the Technology Products Group at Systemax, gave on June 11 during CEA's LibeShows. It's an example of smart thinking leading to consumer-friendly applications ...


Systemax Technology Worldwide Brands: TigerDirect, CompUSA, Circuit City, Misco, Global Computer Supply, Infotel Distribution, Systemax PC

"CompUSA New CE Sales Process" - The customer retail experience is about to change—Retail 2.0 (2008+) + Retail Issues (CompUSA example) \* Product lines quickly change \* High customer rep turnover \* Associated hardware can be missing, i.e., remote controls \* Detail placards are missing or have incomplete information +

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Retailers should display product specific information on or near it and have a promo video and have Internet linkage, i.e., TV or PC + Each product or product group has a dedicated monitor and server to generate product/category specific information + Have bar code scanners at the end of each aisle to allow consumers to acquire product information + "Waterfall" linked to a server via sensors that automatically brings up product detail on a monitor + Can serve more customers more efficiently with the same number of staff + Customers can create their own virtual shopping cart and connect to it via any terminal in the store + Fatter pipes into each store to minimize latency when requesting information + Hiring sales people from other industries who are now out of work to increase conversion rates (auto sales, etc.) + Red button printing to show the consumer exactly how the image is reproduced in real time. Allows for direct, real time comparisons of printers. + On top of the cost of the monitors and servers, it currently costs \$30K to convert a store a wireless platform + Increase the number and kind of value added customer service, e.g., free installation of chips and software, free virus protection updates, etc. + Since introduction of R2.0, conversion rate increased by 20% - R2.0 can be implemented in any category, i.e., paint, shoes, cars

 **Paula Lynn** from **Who Else Unlimited; hollywood5459@gmail.com**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 3:31 PM

If you owned a store or a big brand store manager who found out your non-permanent, part-time \$10 an hour or less salespeople were selling products less than the price tag because they said the customer showed them a lower price on a website on their phone, you would be blowing a bigger gasket than you are responsible to sell at a particular price with the margin for which you are responsible. So what would need to be done is to change the structure of the retail sales process which is not the same as offers from a cell phone where those same salespeople will need to be included in the information about the promotions and how to handle/register them. Plus, you will find many smaller retailers cannot financially match on line prices and refuse to do so no matter what your phone tells you.

 **Steve Smith** from **Mediapost**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 2:26 PM


Howie

This has been my temptation countless times. I should be able to walk up to a salesperson with the mobile page in hand showing a lower price and have them price match or beat.

 **Howie Goldfarb** from **Sky Pulse Media**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 2:20 PM

Gotta love the research about percentage of 18 to 24 year old women with cell phones. Since 99% of them have cell phones shouldn't they break it into smart phones or just say 27% of women 18 to 24 make one impulse buy each week?

As for your take on shopping when you have a phone in your pocket I think this is going to eventually become common. And it is going to slam retailers. I have been discussing this with friends and family for about 2 months. If your in the store and ready to buy will a retailer take a hard line and let you walk vs matching the price? If I was the retailer I would match the price and take the margin hit vs losing the sale. Remember the key metric on wall street is not Same Store Profits it is Same Store Sales. So growing revenues is the number one need for retail to prop up their stock price.

 **James Kabrajee** from **Marshall Fenn Communications**  
commented on: September 08, 2009 at 2:10 PM

Great article, I truly appreciated the notion that if my daughter only had an iphone she could save me a lot of money. Yup, that's my life too.

To the core question; "when will we realize that we have this power in our pockets?" probably when we stop referring to it as a phone.

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