

IoT innovation helping to mould Africa's stores of the future

One of the most technology-forward retail innovations recently launched in South Africa has been Shoprite Group's trial of [Checkers Rush](#), an automated, cashless, cashier-less concept store. For Africa, this is still uncharted territory but integrated marketing technologies are being used in a variety of ways to create 'stores of the future'.



Electronic shelf labelling at a Samsung store. Source: Supplied

By improving the customer experience through digital connectivity and data collection, smart stores help retailers retain business and increase revenues. The shopping experience is being transformed.

Chris Day, managing director of Moving Tactics, a South African digital signage solutions company, explains, "Leading retailers in Africa are beginning to adopt IoT (Internet of Things) technologies to improve their products, services, and most importantly, the retail experience they offer their customers.

"The delivery of integrated technology-driven marketing solutions to retail clients that include mobile telecommunications operators, international quick-service restaurants to national fashion and beauty retailers has picked up significantly in the last year."

"The store of the future will employ integrated technologies and data, similar to those used online, to tailor the in-store experience to a specific customer," Day adds.

Some examples of such digital signage IoT technologies include:

1. Electronic shelf labelling

Electronic shelf labelling (ESL) has been around for some time but has over the years progressed immensely and new technologies now offer new capabilities and increased efficiencies. Samsung has pioneered solutions that provide customers with a more informed shopping experience.

Through integrated near field communication (NFC) technology, store managers can prioritise product updates and provide customers with information to guide their purchasing decisions, i.e. sharing in-depth resources to inspire immediate on-site shopping. Built-in sensors also track customers through the retail environment via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi technologies, providing valuable data to better the store offering.



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2. Non-touch technologies

Brands such as Samsung and MTN are designing their stores around non-touch tables and displays so that customers get to interact with products and obtain the information required without physically touching any surfaces. "Gesture recognition

and motion sensor technologies are becoming more commonplace and we've experienced increased interest from clients wanting to implement these innovations in their 'stores of the future'".

Telecommunications companies such as Vodacom, Cell-C and Telkom want cellphone display counters where customers can experience dynamic content through physically interaction without touching the products and promotions via motion sensor and gesture recognition technologies.

"Through these innovations, retailers can gather essential data on what products and information customers most interact with and, in this way, tailor content on an ongoing basis. There has been increased interest from brands wanting to employ this technology, such as Samsung, who are using these screens and interactive elements in their new flagship stores."



Non-touch technologies at a Samsung store. Source: Supplied

3. Integrated digital touchpoints

In the larger retail environment, a convergence of digital touchpoints such as point-of-sale screens, touch screen kiosks, convergence area screens, in-store music and large-impact video walls accompany the customer on their journey through the store.

"Cellular brands, in particular, have created dedicated end-caps and touch screen kiosks to display promotions and allow customers to interact with a specific device; and these have proven popular with customers. The touch screen kiosk becomes your virtual in-store assistant and provides shoppers with an interactive product experience".



Integrated digital touchpoints at Puma. Source: Supplied

4. Experiencing the IoT in a retail environment

It isn't always easy to translate how IoT technology and 5G can apply and add value to a consumer's life. However, Moving Tactics has worked with mobile telecommunications operators to create in-store real-life scenarios of how IoT can be applied in the home environment and how it can change the way consumers live their daily lives.

"We have developed custom-made in-store gaming centres with focused sound systems for customers to experience the power of 5G. They also incorporate non-touch tables and various other technologies with which consumers can interact 'remotely', such as adjustable lighting and picking up temperature and weather in the area. Gesture sensor technology has played a big part in us being able to do this," says Kevin Bierman, head of digital signage at Moving Tactics.

"Clients are always impressed with the impact effective digital signage has on their sales figures and once this effect is seen, retailers are keen to continue rolling out their digital media platforms within their stores to not only benefit their brands but also the experience offered to their customers."

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