

3 Ways Technology is Making Shopping More Convenient

The online shopping will be easier and more instantaneous in the future. The retailers are innovating to deliver top-notch customer experiences.

When you are filling cart with groceries, scrolling online for furniture or exchanging a gift, nothing can possibly affect your shopping experience - out-of-stock item, a complicated return process or a long line.

Retailers hope that such experiences will become few and far between. Here's how shopping is expected to evolve and become more convenient in the time to come.

Seamless Store Experiences

Karen Bomber, our retail strategy and technology expert with more than two decades in the industry, said that consumers "expect shopping to be convenient and instantaneous."

Retailers are adding [technology](#) to their stores to make shopping in-person a breeze.

For example, advancements like contactless and self-checkouts that auto-scan items using radio-frequency identification (RFID) embedded on product labels or tags in brick-and-mortar location are giving a hassle-free experience.

Although brick-and-mortar stores are no longer consumers' preferred method for shopping – 72% of consumers say they still rely on stores as part of their primary buying method, according to a 2021 survey conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value in association with the National Retail Federation.

More retailers are using [technology](#) in stores to give consumers a personal experience. For instance, beauty retailers are incorporating augmented and virtual reality technology to show shoppers what a hair color or lip product may look like on them before they decide to purchase.

Easier Returns

The consumer experience isn't just about how easy – or enjoyable – it is to make a purchase. It's also about being able to make a return seamlessly.

During this pandemic COVID-19, the return rates have increased, Bomber said.

In 2020, online returns more than doubled compared to the previous year, according to a 2021 report from the National Retail Federation and Appriss Retail. On average, returned items account for more than \$400 billion in lost sales for US retailers, according to a 2021 report from the National Retail Federation and Appriss Retail.

Returning an unwanted purchase used to put strain on the consumer, but technology is lightening the load compared to two years ago, Bomber said.

"Gone are the days where you have to take your items to a post office," Bomber said. "Shoppers can print out their own label or retailers send one in the box, and it gets picked up."

Shoppers can also return items they bought from ecommerce retailers at drop-off locations in stores. QR codes makes it convenient for consumers to scan and drop off their items for return

– and retailers also get an opportunity for those shoppers to make another purchase while in the store.

Grocery Shopping Going Hybrid

In the past two years, supermarkets have significantly improved their ecommerce experiences, Bomber said.

These upgrades have helped in-store shoppers increase efficiency and accuracy when fulfilling orders and giving consumers more ways to communicate with their in-store shopper.

Improved online grocery-shopping technology has made it easier for consumers to stock their fridges without waiting in lines. The National Retail Federation predicts that online purchases will account for 20% of sales in the grocery business within the next five years.

The future of grocery shopping will combine consumers' expectation for convenience and desire to control over items in their carts.

“What’s next is a blend between self-selection and store selection,” Bomber said.

Consumers will be more likely to let stores pick their non-perishable items, she added, but many are heading back into stores to pick their own produce.

“Retailers know that if they can get people in stores to pick their produce, dairy items or other products they want to hand-select, they’ll also make an impulse buy,” Bomber said.