Assists vs goals in retail's omnichannel game

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The omnichannel game

The omnichannel game

"Store passes to Website who passes to Social. Social passes back to Store. Store taps it to Mobile who scores."

In the 81st minute a shock goal from Argentina sent Brazil tumbling out of the 1990 soccer world cup. As jaws dropped, all eyes around the world fell not on the goal scorer, but on Diego Maradona.

The Argentinian superstar had delivered a sublime assist to set up an easy goal. The most valuable player that day was not the player who scored the game's only goal.

The journey of a ball to a goal may be compared to the journey of a consumer to a purchase. Data collected at touchpoints across different channels along the consumer journey is often more valuable than data collected at purchase. Until recently it has been hard to capture and avail of that value.

Retailers lost sight of the ball when e-commerce kicked the ball out of a defined playing field and into other channels. Store passes to Website who passes to Social. Social passes back to Store. Store taps it to Mobile who scores. Mobile might have sealed the deal, but was that largely a result of Social being in the right place at the right time or of Website making a brilliant connection with Social? And what about Store who set the ball rolling?

There is also the competition. Did an opposing channel make a good tackle or intercept a pass? Or was progress pretty much unhindered? Was the leadership team's pre-game homework on the opposition more useful than any individual channel's contribution?

Better technology and more opportunities for analytics are providing answers to these questions. Retailers are now winning the ball back through three intertwined approaches to handling consumer touchpoints:
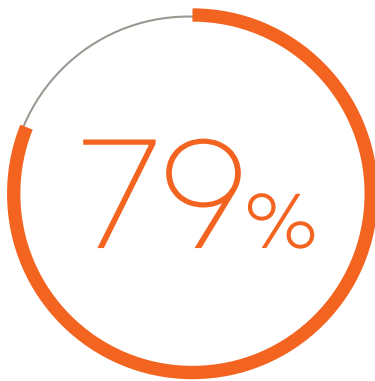
→ connecting the multiple touchpoints

→ making each touchpoint count

→ evaluating the role of each touchpoint

Keeping your eyes on the ball

Connecting the multiple touchpoints

Connecting the multiple touchpoints

79%

of consumers agree that they prefer to shop at stores with both an offline and online presence.

There are two challenges with tracing a consumer journey across multiple touchpoints: disparate data and gaps in data. The first is easier to solve. Technology can already bring all the data sources together on one platform and then uncover the journeys that consumers *really* take—as opposed to the journeys that retailers *expect* consumers to take. This connected data allows retailers to see how consumers use different channels on their journeys and to identify any problems along the way.

The second challenge is partly an artifact of traditional retail. Or rather, it is the lack of artifacts in traditional retail. Online, the behavior of logged-in consumers can often be followed across multiple channels and multiple visits. But logging in offline is not an option, and other identifiers like loyalty program numbers or order numbers generally only come into play at the point of sale. Still, online is not a panacea. Following consumers across each channel of interaction can be challenging unless the login information is shared with a retailer's own sites. And all the above assumes that a consumer even wants to login or join a loyalty program.

The future of retail will address many of the problems with consumer identification. Globally, 79% of consumers agree that they prefer to shop at stores with both an offline and online presence,[1] and something as commonplace as *buy-online, pickup in-store* already has consumers identifying themselves across channels by creating order numbers online before completing their journeys offline. The latest evolution sees inventory-light showrooms and experiential stores integrate with immersive commerce and social commerce in an offline–online fusion.[2] Technology-enabled sales assistants, in store or livestreaming online, will give access to entire consumer journeys.

A deeper connection of online and offline touchpoints regardless of channel allows for better personalization of consumer journeys by providing more relevant and cohesive experiences. Data privacy safeguards can then add piece of mind for consumers. Still, success hinges on making each touchpoint count.
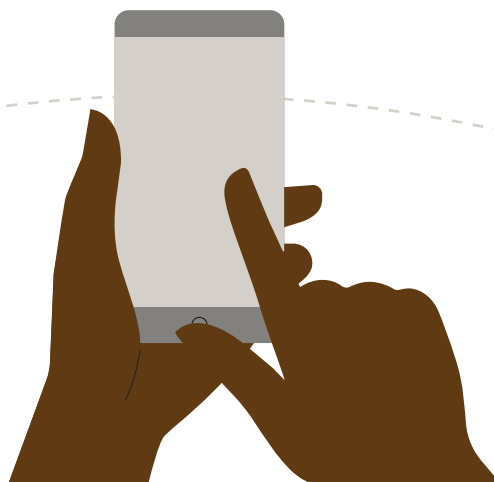
Controlling the ball

Making each touchpoint count

Making each touchpoint count

"Consumers do not think in touchpoints; they just expect one uninterrupted journey."

The shift from multichannel to omnichannel is based on the idea that experiences across many (multi) channels should be consistent across all (omni) channels. It is a good premise. Consumers do not think in touchpoints; they just expect one uninterrupted journey.

In addition to smoothing interactions from one touchpoint to the next, consumer journey mapping helps provide deeper personalization across loyalty programs. A combination of events data—such as rewards enrollment, mobile ordering, in-store transactions, co-brand transactions, mobile app data, and location data—with consumer profiles—incorporating unique individual affinities based on browsing and purchase behavior— is used to identify the most appropriate recommendations, offers, messaging and content.

Still, it is a delicate balance. Retailers want to incentivize without overloading, and they do not want to make offers to people who would have purchased something regardless. The ability to showcase different experiences to consumers with high, medium and low intent to purchase based on recent or real-time activity ensures retailers do not give discounts to shoppers already primed to purchase.

A further benefit of retailers seeing entire consumer journeys across the online–offline fusion is the attribution of relative values to those touchpoints. By understanding how different consumers rely on various channels, retailers can identify ideal routes to purchase according to individual contexts.

The proper attribution of value to touchpoints helps retailers know where, when and how to intervene to efficiently and effectively keep consumers engaged and prevent abandoned journeys. Converting that knowledge into execution requires a continuous contextual evaluation of the evolving roles of touchpoints.

Taking your eyes off the ball

Evaluating the role of each touchpoint

Evaluating the role of each touchpoint

84%

of consumers worldwide expect to make purchases when and how they want.

Retailers are used to evaluating consumer behavior by testing different approaches to engagement against control groups. The predefined attributes for comparison include any element within a digital property, such as desktop or mobile interface and associated loyalty programs, that can be tested against audiences based on demographics, geography, traffic source, online and offline behavior, and product preferences. The goal is to determine which experiences positively affect a particular performance indicator, such as a conversion or sale. This is important in terms of purchases when 84% of consumers worldwide expect to make purchases when and how they want.[3]

What standard approaches to testing miss is the ability to understand how consumers reach the point of purchase and whether engagement elsewhere on a different channel might have worked better—regardless of whether that channel is the one predicted to be used for purchase. Connected touchpoints with individual valuations now add that other dimension to testing and personalization.

Experiments can address the importance of a particular stage in the consumer journey, why a particular channel might be preferred in a certain context, and whether a more opportune moment for intervention might occur elsewhere and how it should be conducted. The resulting predictions are more sophisticated than simply guessing what kind of engagements might best appeal in the abstract. For example, a retailer may find that the same promotion works better via a push notification than an email for one audience and vice versa for another. Controlled testing can establish the overarching strategy and then be further refined through personalization tactics by testing different elements within each experience.

Consistency in engagement is a staple of omnichannel retail, but that should not mean sameness in engagement for consumers with broadly similar attributes following different journeys to purchase. Continual refinement of the role each touchpoint plays for a particular individual or audience along the consumer journey allows for the delivery of far more bespoke engagements over the long term.

Conclusion

Winning the game

Winning the game

Argentina was not supposed to win on that day in 1990. The Brazilian defense had stymied Maradona for most of the game. But Maradona had watched the game unfold and could see how it was moving. So, at the opportune moment, he perfectly timed and executed his assist.

Retailers can identify when and how to execute their assists by calculating ideal consumer journeys and then adjusting engagements through a combination of testing and personalization to keep them on course as they evolve. Maradona's assist won the game for Argentina before the goal was even scored. Any retailers that can orchestrate their consumer journeys accordingly will find themselves in a similar position.

More resources

Fulfilling experiences? Fulfillment centers vs experiential stores in retail

A "Click to Pay" e-commerce counterpart to contactless card payments

2022 Retail TouchPoints customer loyalty and personalization benchmark report

Mastercard's **Test & Learn®** analytics tool, **SessionM**'s customer engagement and loyalty platform, and **Dynamic Yield**'s Experience OS can help you win the omnichannel game by connecting touchpoints, making each touchpoint count, and evaluating the roles of touchpoints.

Contact us to learn more.

Emilie Kroner
Senior Vice President, Retail & Commerce

Scott Weller
Senior Vice President, Product Strategy & Merchant Loyalty

Nathan Richter
Vice President, Strategy & Program Insights, Dynamic Yield

Endnotes

1   "Mastercard New Payments Index: Consumer Appetite for Digital Payments Takes Off." Mastercard, May 4, 2021. Research conducted Feb 26 – Mar 10, 2021 by the Harris Poll and Mastercard Global Foresight, Insight & Analytics across a nationally representative sample via online interviews of 15,569 consumers in 18 countries in four regions worldwide (1,000+ respondents per country in Australia, India, Thailand, US, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa; 500+ respondents per country in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic).
2   "Fulfilling experiences? Fulfillment centers vs. experiential stores in retail." Mastercard, 2022.
3   "Mastercard New Payments Index: Consumer Appetite for Digital Payments Takes Off." Mastercard, May 4, 2021.