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Cutting-edge retailers are using video for purposes beyond security, realizing faster inventory turns, more consistent customer services, and fewer bottlenecks.

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Taking Video Further: Using It to Deliver Better Customer Service

by Andrew Wren

Delivering the best possible customer service is critical to retailers' success in today's ultra-competitive environment. Traditionally used exclusively for security purposes, video can be used to significantly enhance the service provided to customers. While some retailers are beginning to realize the value of video for customer service purposes, most have not applied the powerful tool to this critical area of their business. There are several ways for retailers who are eager to improve customer service to utilize video as a tool.

» **Merchandising: Getting Customers What They Need**

Several forward-thinking retailers are using video in their high-end and fast-moving merchandising departments as an evaluation tool. Traditionally placed in these areas to provide added protection against theft of high-value, high-shrink items, these same cameras are capturing video that contains valuable merchandising information.

With this tool, Store Planning and Merchandising can evaluate traffic patterns in the department:

- How much time are their customers spending in a department or looking at displays?
- What are the peak traffic times?
- How long are customers waiting in line to pay?
- Which fitting rooms do customers use most?

All of this information makes it possible to better plan for and accommodate customers, ultimately yielding a better customer experience. In stores where out-of-stocks are common, managers may use video to verify that shelves are fully stocked and product is available, especially during peak hours.

Cameras at the front door may also provide invaluable information about merchandising opportunities to grab shoppers immediately when they enter the store. For example:

- Do customers tend to go left or right?
- Do they stop at displays positioned in impact areas?
- Are customers entering the store with bags from other stores?

Merchants may even share video with their vendors to provide information about how their goods are doing in the field. By sharing this information, retailers can command co-op advertising funding from vendors in return for placing their merchandise in strategically advantageous locations in the stores

» **Customer Service: Ensuring a Short Wait**

Cameras placed at the registers are not only a great way to prevent and identify the sources of shrink in a retail organization, but also a great way to verify and improve the customer experience. Cameras at the registers reveal average wait times customers experience during peak and non-peak hours, providing managers with an opportunity to better staff the store or to improve utilization, redeploying staff to other areas if registers are not busy. Video can also be evaluated to understand if the customer is being properly processed and correct procedure is being followed.

» **Management: Making Sure Everything Goes According to Plan**

For corporate and regional managers, video is an essential tool for pinpointing areas of improvement and identifying best practices that they can share among stores. Before video, these managers' insight into the day-to-day at individual stores was either hearsay or information gathered from a single day's visit every few weeks or months. Video provides them the ability to view activity in stores on a regular basis, identifying trends or spotting problems. These managers can use that same video as a training tool to point out incidences successfully handled and to correct behavior.

The power of verification can also be extremely important. For example, a large retailer recently had a particular concert in town and wanted to display the performer's music, videos, and other merchandise in the front of the store and on end-caps before the concert. The order was sent from corporate headquarters, but 50% of the stores did not end up highlighting the merchandise until after the concert was already finished. The power of video here would have allowed regional managers to verify that each store had properly displayed the merchandise, providing pressure or additional assistance to ensure it was done on time.

Advancements in video have made it possible for retailers to easily share and distribute video to users across the organization. Cutting-edge retailers who are taking advantage of those new capabilities are using video for purposes beyond security are realizing faster inventory turns, more consistent customer services, and fewer bottlenecks. The ultimate result is happier, more satisfied customers.

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