

Getting VR right and ready for retail

By [Daryn Mason](#)

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Online retailers have led the charge when it comes to the early adoption of technology to enable better customer experience. However, despite a growing appetite for virtual reality (VR), its use in retail has largely been a novelty. But this is set to change.



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Moving beyond the hype

Until recently, VR has been seen as unattainable for the masses due to cost. Comparatively few people own headsets, and only a small number of brands have actually delivered VR-based services that have truly elevated customer experience.

However, this year you've barely been able to move for the launch of a new VR headset. From Facebook's Oculus Rift to Microsoft's HoloLens, the tech giants have placed their offerings firmly on the table, while the likes of Google and Samsung have released headsets that are significantly cheaper than early concepts.

When VR meets CX

At the same time, consumers are expecting and demanding better, more immersive and ultimately more rewarding customer experience. This includes a desire for fewer human-to-human interactions and a preference for self-service.

According to Oracle research, 34 percent of online retailers admit their customers prefer to make purchases or resolve a service issue without speaking with a member of the sales or customer service team. Consumers want brand interactions on their own terms, and only when they need them. In response, retailers are waking up to the importance of VR and other emerging technologies in revolutionising customer experience both online and in-store. It could provide differentiation and strengthen retailers' rapport with consumers.

In a world where customer expectations are changing at a faster pace than ever before, retailers need to start thinking like technology companies.

There are some innovative and technology-savvy retailers rising to the challenge and starting to dip their toes into the VR water. [John Lewis in the UK](#), for example, incorporated two VR experiences into its 2016 Christmas campaign activity.

Others retailers are ramping up their investments in new technologies to provide the kind of customer experience consumers want. Seventy-four percent of retailers responding to a [recent Oracle study](#) confirmed that they already have or are planning to implement VR by 2020. A similar proportion of retailers plans to invest in chatbots, automation and purpose-built mobile apps in a bid to transform customer experience and bring it in line with customer expectations.

Getting up to scratch with customer understanding

Whilst the plans retailers have to invest in emerging technology is exciting, many are still struggling to get a single view of their customers.

According to Oracle's research, just over a third (39 percent) of respondents regularly draw on data from multiple sources to predict customer behaviour and tailor their approach accordingly. And just 41 percent are including social and CRM data in their customer analytics.

Retailers need to ensure they have a fully-functioning data strategy, one that unites the sales, service and marketing functions and allows information to flow freely between all CX teams, if they are to make the most of emerging technology. This smarter use of customer data will give them the insight to develop and launch customer experiences that feel like they've been designed personally for each consumer. It will also help them to capture the attention of their target audience through immersive shopping experiences and seamless customer interactions.

If retailers can get the data side right, the opportunities are huge. It could lead to the development customer experiences based on VR and other emerging technologies that retailers – and consumers – could only ever have imagined.

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