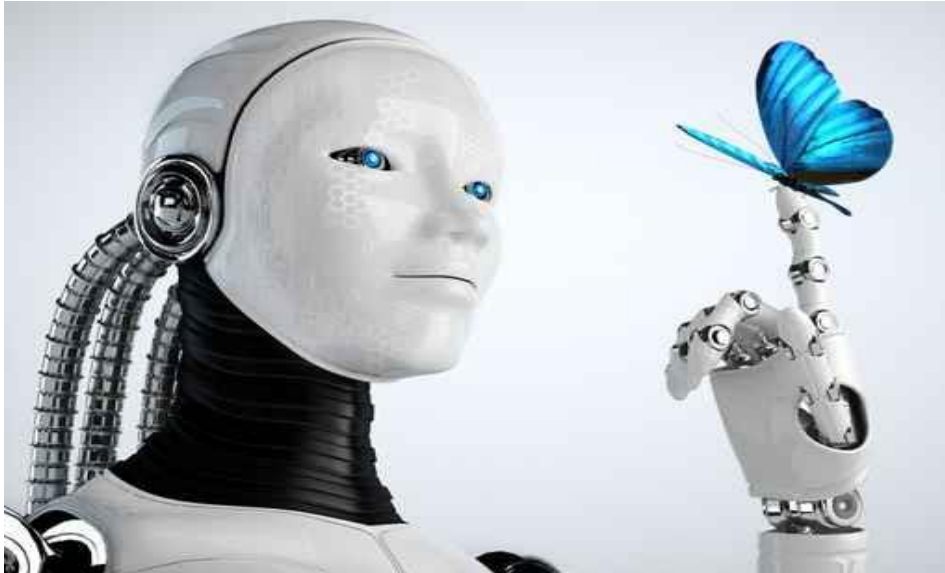


## Humanizing Retail Technology with Small Touches



The other day, I encountered the retail dressing room sorting rack shown below. In addition to having enough hooks to easily hang eight garments, the notes, "Try it! New Size" and "Keep it!" suggesting a helpful sorting method for the customer, impressed me.



Retail dressing room sorting rack – A small touch to humanize the customer experience

It's such a simple idea, yet it shows that the retailer cares enough to add small touches to improve my shopping experience. I could get used to that kind of treatment.

## Retail Thoughtfulness

Other examples of this same kind of thoughtfulness I've come across lately include a bedroom furniture store offering free naps, and a store "Quiet Zone" where no shoes, talking, devices or branding is allowed. That's the kind of break we all deserve today.

These encounters got me thinking of other thoughtful retail innovations I'd like to see. For instance, how about a self-checkout register with a sense of humor? I could be entertained Jimmy Fallon style instead of annoyed by the hair-trigger response and voice scolding me whenever I make a wrong move.

And here's one that millennials might like: a "Random Aisle," where the odd assortment of dissimilar goods might inspire creative uses and purchases.

## Technology Thoughtfulness

Being in the technology business, I ought to offer an example of the equivalent in retail technology thoughtfulness. I saw it the other day when I came across a sign in a shop that read:

"Free Wi-Fi Inspiration!" A simple statement encouraging in-store product research leading to purchases.

Inwardly I shouted YES, thank you for validating the way I like to shop that I am a bit cautious about because I feel like a traitor when I'm shopping online in a brick-and-mortar store. The sign was emotionally helpful.

In-store customer Wi-Fi can be very useful. A good example is a husband and wife that go shopping together but one of them doesn't want to be there (you can guess which one). Wi-Fi and X Files to the rescue.

Or, three friends looking at clothes who suddenly remember something they saw Emma Stone wearing on Jimmy Fallon and want to look it up. In this case, Wi-Fi adds to the thrill of the chase.

Having customer Wi-Fi is great, almost essential, but encouraging shoppers to use it in an authentic, positive way—I genuinely like that. And that leads us to the important point:

## Technology alone is dehumanizing.

Without humanizing touches, technology is impersonal or even cold. I offer as evidence a recent Intel Labs study which found that "61% of young adults felt that technology was dehumanizing" and that "Millennials are currently the least enthusiastic group about technology." The study contributes to my fear that adding bare technology to a store is going to kill enthusiasm, a real downer for sales.



On the other hand, by adding a personal touch, the technology has the potential to amplify the human connection. For example, it could be used to start a conversation with a greeting like, "Look who's wearing this!" while showing a photo on a mobile POS tablet, in place of the dreaded, "Anything I can help you with?" awkwardness.

## Creating an Emotional Connection

Creating an emotional connection with the shopper is the surest way to a sale and to *brand identification*. Advertisers know this and spent eight million dollars per minute last year on Super Bowl commercials featuring [kids in danger](#), a [lost puppy](#) and stories about [overcoming adversity](#) to create emotional connections with their brands. It even has a name; it's called "sadvertising."

According to a recent article in Business Week, *positive consumer identification* with a brand leads to a boatload of positive consequences, including "buying-related decisions, brand preference, consumer loyalty, a sense of brand community, consumer satisfaction, and a higher possibility of repurchase, positive word of mouth and consumers' willingness to pay a price premium."

## Personalize and Humanize the Customer Experience

I'm all for moving retail forward with lots of cool technology. Bring on the mobile POS, memory mirrors, smart carts and beacons. But let's remember that the goal is to personalize the shopping experience. So add a few thoughtful, personal touches to the technology in your store to help make that human connection.

Actually, that's why mobile POS can be such a great retail innovation. At its best it's technology functioning as an extension of the human sales associate.

If you don't yet have mobile POS, even a friendly note on a cash register will make the retail world a more personal place and elevate the customer experience.

In my business, we go out of our way to be helpful. We train for it, measure it and practice it until we live it. Little things we do mean a lot to customers. We know because they tell us, and also because of their loyalty.

What are some of the ways you are personalizing and humanizing the technology in your business?

