THINKING HATS

TOP 10 TRENDS THAT WILL TRANSFORM THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

The Covid 19 pandemic has adversely impacted the economy along with disrupting numerous industries. The retail industry is no different. Indian retail sector has lost around Rs. 5.5 lakh crores since the lockdown in March 2020. In a struggle to revive, the industry is reinventing itself by taking innovative measures.

1. SPACE MANAGEMENT

Brands are evaluating their retail design to maintain social distancing guidelines. **Clear lines, signage posts, limited shoppers in a particular section** – all these steps are taken to corroborate a contactless shopping experience.

In picture: Walmart has installed social distancing markers to ensure a reasonable gap between two people.

Phoenix mall is planning to allow only 4 people in 1000 sq. feet area. Similarly, DLF had decided to redesign its store outlet by removing the middle aisles, making more space for shoppers. They have also allotted space for isolation rooms.


2. VIRTUAL QUEUE MANAGEMENT

One of the effective measures employed to control the number of people within the store is **appointment-based walk-ins.** Instead of physical tokens, QR codes would be generated which would enable consumers to be part of virtual queue. Once their turn arrives, they will be notified via SMS, WhatsApp or even an email.

In picture: *Bev Q, a queue management App in India has already been approved by Google for managing long lines in liquor shops in compliance with social distancing norms. Within hours of launch on Google Play, the app was downloaded by more than 1 lakh users.*
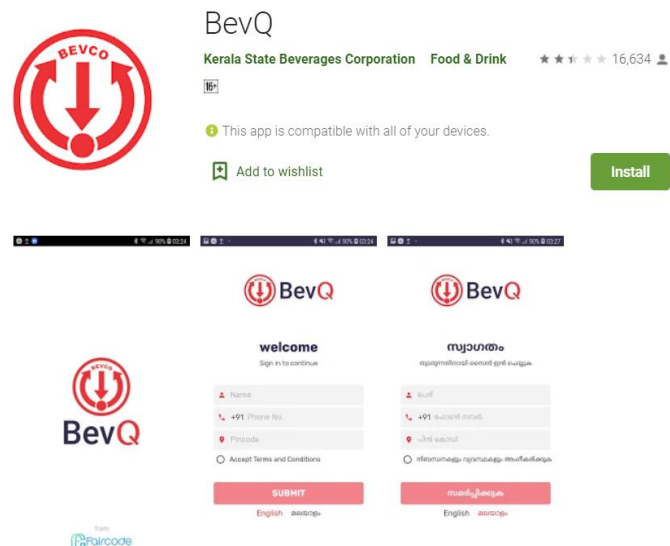
3. CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS

Covid contagion has pushed retailers to adopt contactless payment options. Digital wallets could play a significant role in prevention of the virus due to exchange of cash and credit/debit cards.
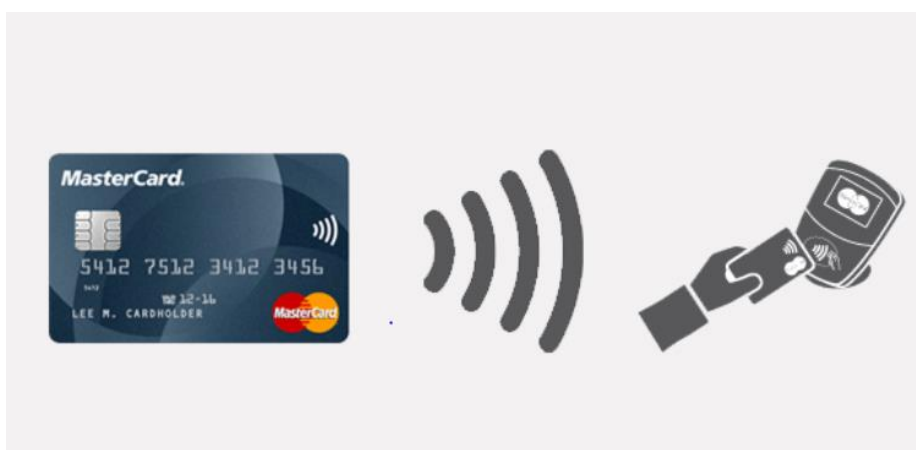
Other alternatives are **Near Field Communication system** like Samsung Pay, Apple Pay etc. Visa and Mastercard are heavily promoting their **contact less cards,** using **Radio Frequency Identification.**

4. ONE WAY AISLES

To mitigate the spread of the virus, retail stores have divided aisles and post signage for shoppers to move only in one direction.

Walmart has adopted a policy of only "one in and one out", ensuring minimum crowd in the store. Also, have instructed shoppers to tour the store while following the norms.

5. 3D VIRTUAL MIRRORS

With changing scenarios, physical trial rooms are going to be a thing of the past. Mens Wear Apparel brand, BlackBerrys has decided to remove the trial rooms.

An **amalgamation of radio frequency identification and augmented reality**, virtual fitting room is the new normal. Online brands like Myntra, Lenskart have already incorporated these magic mirrors on their portals. However, in this pandemic situation, offline retails are planning the same.

6. LIVE STREAM SHOPPING

Also known as teleshopping 2.0, live shopping is in vogue among Chinese consumers. It is a **real time immersive experience** in which an influencer walks through a store, talks about the different products and motivates viewers to shop.

Similarly, channels like Naaptol, Shop 18 are quite popular in India. But live streaming takes the whole experience of shopping to the next level. With free gifts, celebrity hosts and access on mobile phones, they are much more convenient and appealing.

In picture: Rural live-streaming host Chen Jiubei, a super host conducted rural live streaming and helped farmers to sell two million kilograms of oranges in 13 days.

In picture: During a live streaming session, Kim Kardashian sold 150,000 units of her perfume brand

7. VIRTUAL REALITY

Virtual reality is offering a unique instore shopping experience with benefits of e-commerce platforms. Only a panoramic photoshop of the store is enough for retailers to set their own 3D store. Consumers could access these stores on the app and purchase as per their convenience.

Another latest key trend is virtual reality headsets which guide the consumer about merchandise and make customized product recommendations.

In picture: Ikea Virtual reality kitchen - After wearing headsets, people can open drawers, cook or even put vegetable peelings in the waste sorting station.

8. SKIP CHECKOUT APPS

Skip Checkout Apps could significantly reduce the crowd while making payments. The App allow users to scan product bar code to add it to their cart list. Once done with shopping, users scan a special QR code that tells the app they are ready to pay. Finally, users make digital payment and leave without standing in any queue.

9. SMART SHELVES

Smart shelves are cloud based display solutions for shelves in a superstore. They showcase prices, advertisements, nutritional data, coupons and videos. To save a consumer's time in a retail store, the smart shelves interacts with an app, check consumer's purchase list and inform consumer where to find the product along with deals on that particular product.

In picture: Kroger's Edge, a leading smart shelves company

10. OMNI CHANNEL BUSINESS MODEL

Although a forced transformation, retail giants have realized that they no longer can stay focused only on offline stores. To connect with their consumers and maintain survival, they must explore online space. Retail chains like Big Bazaar, Future Group etc. are pushing aggressively to step up their online delivery strategy.

Even, Kirana stores have started accepted orders through Whatsapp and are providing free home delivery.

The near future would be decisive for the retail industry. Only those will be able to resuscitate and witness a profitable business growth which could transform themselves and adapt to these unprecedented times.