

REIMAGINE THE APPAREL SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Abstract

COVID-19 is an existential crisis. Brands are facing new challenges, some of which are unprecedented. For instance, engaging with customers has become difficult during the lockdown. On their part, customers are changing their lifestyle choices in response to the pandemic. They are exercising caution and making only essential purchases. Their pattern of consumption has changed dramatically.

After COVID-19, consumers have become more receptive to embracing the 'new normal'. A combination of factors such as lockdowns, travel restrictions, fear of crowded places has led to a significant shift in consumer behavior – they are moving toward adopting digital platforms.

In this point of view, our experts focus on how apparels retailers can engage with their customers through digital channels.

How COVID-19 will transform retail business²



Experience
Zero-touch channels with consumers and employees



Connected devices
Collaborate and engage in new ways, leveraging the world of connected devices



Digitization
Optimize operations and use augmented reality and machine learning



New business model
Creating new business models and new product capabilities

How consumers' shopping habits have changed after COVID-19¹

According to a survey by the National Retail Federation:

- **9 out of 10** consumers have changed their traditional shopping patterns
- **More than 50%** of consumers purchased a product online, which they would have earlier purchased in-store
- **6 in 10 consumers** feared getting infected if they visited a store
- **92%** of respondents said that if they visit a store, they would disinfect shopping carts

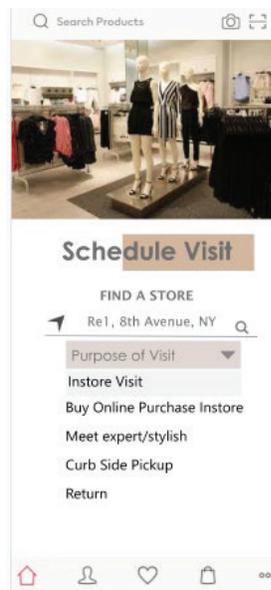
In the post-COVID era, retailers have to adapt to changes in consumer shopping preferences as well as changes in how the retail industry operates. Retailers cannot completely be dependent on an offline presence for sustenance even after the lockdown is lifted. They have to explore new ways of enhancing their offline experience while also introducing online purchasing options.

Apparel industry segment solutions

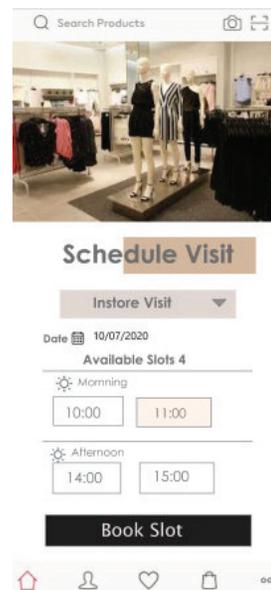
The apparels segment has witnessed several changes over the past few months. Both online as well as in-store experiences have evolved as customers have become more cautious about their safety. Post-COVID-19, retailers have several options to explore:

Slot booking

Using the slot booking feature, a customer can book in-store visits, schedule delivery, and plan curbside pickups. Customers receive real-time notifications via e-mails, SMS for updates on slots. The feature is also available for e-commerce websites and mobile applications.



Selects store location and purpose of visit from the dropdown



Depending on the purpose, the app displays time slots



Success message for slot booked

Benefits

- Manage social distancing
- Zero queues
- The store takes the initiative to ensure customer safety
- Enhanced customer experience because of better customer support by store associates
- Delivery overheads are reduced
- Enables retailer to deliver goods on-time every time

Appointment with stylist

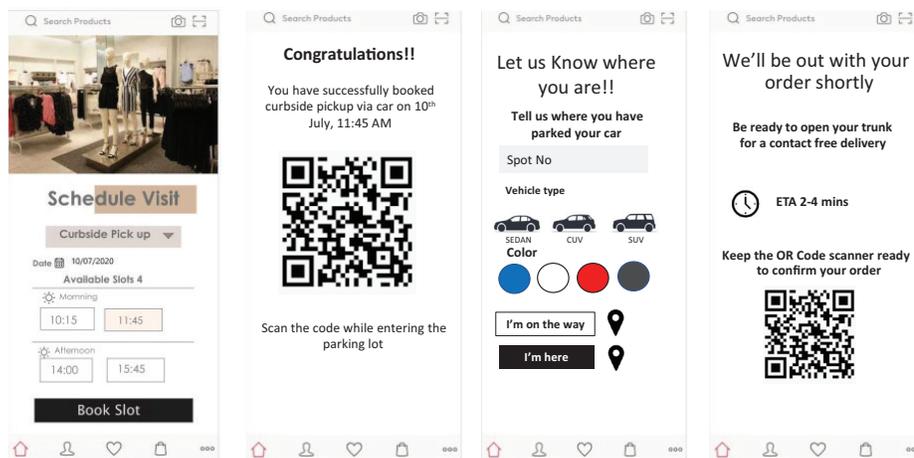
The customer experience can be enhanced by allowing them to book appointments with an online stylist. The stylist can help them with fashion tips, trends, and creating suitable looks. Most high-end apparel retail outlets have in-store stylists, whose services can be availed of using this feature.

Features

- **Schedule appointments**
 - Schedule appointments with stylists or fashion designers via a slot booking feature
- **Boxed service and / or subscription service (providing personalized selections)**
 - Provide personalized selections curated by an expert based on the customer's profile and past purchases
 - Customers can opt in for scheduled services, or may request them as needed for upcoming events, trips

Curbside pickup

During the pandemic, curbside pickups have increased. These services help retailers to drive sales while giving customers a convenient option. Curbside pickups ensure a contactless delivery experience and the real-time notification feature assures minimum customer wait time.



Book slot for curbside pickup

Success Message

On the day of pickup notification sent to the customer

If the customer has reached following message would be displayed

Benefits

- Ensures customer safety
- 60% of shoppers are more likely to consider alternatives to traditional in-store browsing and checkout, such as BOPIS (Buy online, pick up in-store), with over 25% extremely likely to consider these alternatives³



Anticipatory shipping

Anticipatory shipping helps enhance a customers' online as well as offline experience by bringing in high levels of personalization and other features. The retailer can reduce customer effort by curating a list based on their preferences and shipping the items to their doorstep. The anticipatory shipping process involves:

- Predicting demand based on buying behavior and creating personalized recommendations
- Creating a potential identified product list for the customer

- Emailing the curated list based on customer preferences and purchase history for the customer to confirm
- The customer can:
 - Select the items for delivery from the list
 - Customize the list
 - Approve the list of items for doorstep delivery
 - Schedule an appointment with the store stylist if they want advice on the curated items on the list

Benefits

- Understand customer sentiments
- Effort to minimize delivery time to encourage more orders
- Improve recommendations and services from customer feedback and reviews

Virtual trial room

The Virtual Try application allows customers to try on apparel using their mobile phone or with a device equipped with a camera. The app creates a virtual avatar using the image uploaded by the customer. The selected products are then overlaid on the virtual avatar.



Virtual Try on option available for all merchandise



Option to create virtual avatar



Selected merchandise overlays on image

Benefits

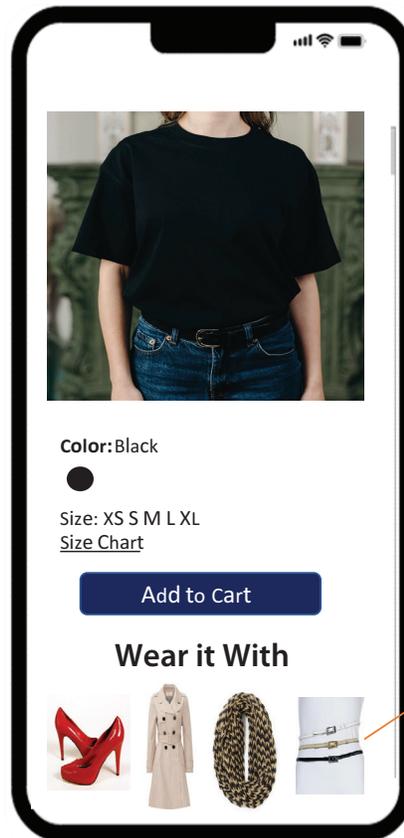
- Reduction in return rate
- Bridging gap between customers' imagination and reality
- Personalized communication for better reach and conversion
- Enhanced customer experience
- Enables retailer to deliver a personalized shopping experience

Way to Wear - apparel

The Way to Wear feature helps the customer to shop a complete look from a single page, using a mobile or handheld device. The solution helps reduce shopping effort and enhances the customer experience. It uses styling algorithms to provide recommendations best suited for the customer.

Value-added features

- Recommending complementary products on the product pages
- The 'featured look' option uses product images, attribution data, and an intelligent styling algorithm to create visually appealing and on-brand outfits
- Offer flexibility to change the outfit with different products
- Recommend products to customers based on their past purchases
- Personalized, sorted products in category and search results based on Affinity API



Get recommendations to complete the look based on the product being browsed

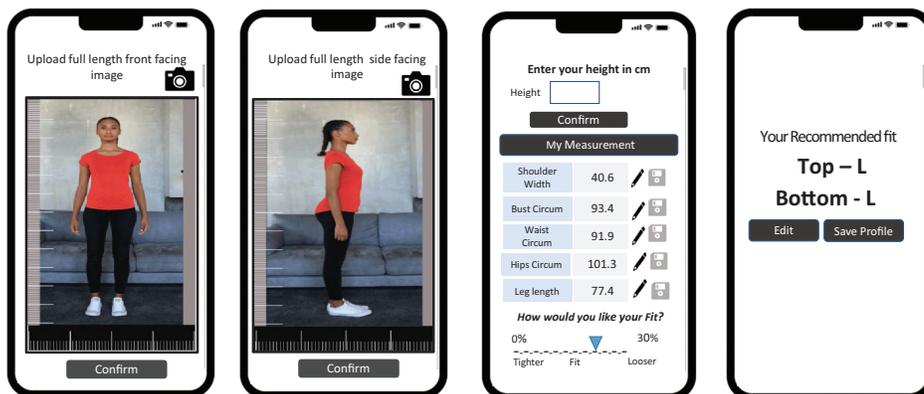
Way to Wear



Complete Look

Size and fit

Size and fit remain a big issue for e-commerce retailers as consumers are unable to try on apparel and end up ordering the wrong sizes, which is one of the major reasons for high return rates. A Size and Guide feature will enable a customer to find their correct size while shopping online. It acts as an interactive sizing guide which will help to reduce returns or exchange of products.



Set up the profile by uploading front and side facing image

Once both front and side images are correctly uploaded and the user enters the height, the measurements will be displayed to the user. The recommended fit is displayed to the user and they can save the profile or edit it and continue with their shopping journey

Benefits

- Reduction in return and exchange rate
- Enhanced customer experience ultimately resulting in customer retention
- Reduced product damage because of reduction in trials and exchanges
- Smooth flow of inventory with reduction in inventory management cost and delivery cost

Conclusion

The pandemic has led consumers to be more conscious than ever about their means of purchases. Today, consumers are more likely to adopt digital mediums than in the pre-COVID era. Reimagining the apparel shopping experience with the proposed modern solutions will not only help organizations respond better to the pandemic situation but also help reward them in the long term.

Embracing these modern solutions will help retailers to differentiate themselves from their competitors and at the same time provide value to the customers. They can leverage these solutions to deliver a more personalized customer journey, reduce the pain points like refunds and returns, safety concerns, gaps in imagination and reality, etc. The paradigm shift towards the digital space has opened the gates for ample opportunities for retailers to remodel their business.



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About the Authors



Santhosh Subramaniam

Senior Industry Principal, Domain Consultancy Group Retail, CPG, and Logistics Practice

Santhosh_Subramaniam@Infosys.com



Gaurav Saxena

Lead Consultant Domain Consultancy Group Retail, CPG, and Logistics Practice

Gaurav_Saxena12@Infosys.com



Dhanya V

Product Manager Domain Consultancy Group Retail, CPG, and Logistics Practice

Dhanya_V@Infosys.com



Ashwija Satishchandra Shetty

Associate Consultant Domain Consultancy Group Retail, CPG, and Logistics Practice

Ashwija.Shetty@Infosys.com



Additi Ramakant Wadje

Associate Consultant Domain Consultancy Group Retail, CPG, and Logistics Practice

Additi.Wadje@Infosys.com

For more information, contact askus@infosys.com



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