

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Leadership in the Experience Economy

Workshop 6: Technologies for the Experience Economy

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Introduction

- What Technologies currently enhance the shopping experience?
- What are the emerging technologies?
- Where we must ensure that technology does not replace the human touch

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Introduction

- Technology use in retail delivers significant benefits by enhancing both operational efficiency and the overall customer experience.
- Smart technologies such as AI-powered recommendation engines, real-time inventory systems, and mobile point-of-sale tools enable retailers to offer seamless, personalised, and frictionless shopping journeys.
- Customers benefit from faster service, tailored promotions, and omnichannel experiences that let them move smoothly between in-store, mobile, and online touchpoints. Interactive tools like virtual try-ons, self-checkout kiosks, and digital signage also create engaging and convenient shopping environments.

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Opening Discussion Activity

- In your group, discuss both the benefits as well as the risks of the increasing use of technologies in retail. We are challenged in retail with the consumer seeking personalisation yet at the same time the requirement for efficiency, and frictionless service is vital. Traditional Retail or ‘Bricks and Mortar’ offers must compete with online shopping, with both having both advantages and disadvantages

- Your discussion seeks to highlight both the benefits and risks of technology in retail

10 minutes discussion - 10 minutes feedback

Technology in Retail - High Tech and High Touch

- Rather than fear technology in retail, we should view it as a powerful ally in enhancing the customer and employee experience. While automation, AI, and digital platforms are transforming how we shop and work, these tools are not here to replace people—they're here to support them. The real risk lies not in the technology itself, but in how it’s implemented
- When used responsibly and ethically, technology can free up time for staff to focus on building relationships, offer personalised experiences at scale, and create more inclusive, accessible retail environments. **T**he future of retail is not human *versus* machine—it’s human *with* machine. Embracing this mindset allows us to shape a retail world that is both high-tech and high-touch

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Why Technology Matters in the Experience Economy

- Enhances engagement
- Enables scalability and personalisation



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The Shift from Product to Experience and enhanced by technology

- Examples: Starbucks, Apple, Airbnb
- How tech contributes to the shift







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Where Technology has enhanced the experience at Starbucks

Technology has significantly enhanced the customer experience at Starbucks by making it more convenient, personalised, and engaging. Here are key ways technology has played a role:

- Pre-Ordering Apps
- Personalisation through data
- Digital menu boards
- Wifi and digital engagement
- Sustainability tracking

Technology at Starbucks enhances the end-to-end customer journey, from pre-ordering to in-store experience, by combining speed, personalisation, and digital engagement — all while reinforcing the brand's premium and community-focused identity

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Technology as an Enabler, Not a Replacement

- Augments the human touch
- Supports but doesn’t replace emotional connection

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Technology as an Enabler, Not a Replacement

- In the evolving retail landscape, technology serves best as an enabler rather than a replacement for human interaction. While digital tools streamline operations, enhance personalisation, and provide data-driven insights, the human touch remains central to building trust, empathy, and long-term customer loyalty
- Retail technology—from mobile apps to AI-powered recommendations—should support frontline staff and enrich the customer journey, not diminish it. By empowering employees with better tools and freeing them from routine tasks, technology allows them to focus on delivering meaningful, high-impact service that connects with customers on a deeper level

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Cutting Edge Technologies Shaping Experiences

- AI
- AR/VR
- IoT
- Voice & Gesture Interfaces



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Interactive Installations in Retail & Tourism

- Examples: Nike flagship stores, museum interactives
- Benefits: Immersion, Memory, Engagement





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Smart Environments and IoT

- Connected spaces - hotels, airports
- Personalised atmospheres



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Activity - Experience Enhancement Through Technology

In a group, please discuss, where technology currently enhances the customer experience in the following non-retail examples -

- Hotels
- Taxis
- Fast Food
- Sporting Occasions



Please give at least two examples for each of the above

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AI-Driven Personalisation

- Real-time suggestions
- Predictive experiences
- Emotional recognition



Example: Netflix and Spotify

- Recommendation algorithms
- Impact on user satisfaction





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Netflix - Personalised Recommendations Engine



- Uses machine learning to analyse viewing history, preferences, watch time, and behaviour to suggest shows/movies
- AI clusters users with similar behaviours to recommend trending content in peer groups
- Netflix dynamically changes the cover art of the same show for different users based on what style they respond to e.g. comedy vs. action visuals
- AI adjusts video quality in real time based on bandwidth and device, ensuring minimal buffering and better user experience
- Data-driven insights from AI help Netflix decide what type of content to commission or license, based on predicted popularity

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Spotify - Personalised Recommendations Engine

Spotify uses a wide range of digital enhancing tools and technologies to improve user experience, personalise content, and support artists and advertisers. Here are the key ones:

- Personalised Playlists: AI powers curated playlists like *Discover Weekly*, *Daily Mix*, and *Release Radar* based on user listening habits
- Recommendation Algorithms: Collaborative filtering, natural language processing (NLP), and audio analysis help recommend songs you might like
- Smart Shuffle: Introduces new tracks that match your existing playlist's style using deep learning models
- Analyses lyrics, blog posts, reviews, and even social media to understand trends and mood, enhancing recommendations and search
- Wrapped uses data visualisation and analytics to create personalised, shareable annual listening summaries
- Artists use Spotify for Artists to access real-time streaming data, track demographics, and plan tours or releases
- Seamlessly syncs across devices: smartphones, smart TVs, speakers, gaming consoles, and smartwatches
- Spotify Connect allows control of playback on one device from another

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AI in Customer Service

- Chatbots
- Virtual Assistants
- Natural Language Processing (NLP)



The Personalisation-Privacy Trade-off

- Consent and data use
- Transparency and control

Voice Technology

- Smart speakers, kiosks
- Conversational interfaces in hospitality

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Facial Recognition & Emotion AI

- Mood detection
- Customer insights and customisation

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AR for Interactive Experiences

- IKEA Place, Sephora AR mirror
- Virtual try-ons and previews

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VR for Immersion

- Virtual hotel tours
- Tourism previews e.g. Machu Picchu VR



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Case Study: Museum of the Future Dubai

- See Handout

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Retail Technology Integration

- Smart shelves
- In-store analytics
- Mobile checkout



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Hospitality Tech Integration

- Mobile room keys
- Smart thermostats
- AI concierge



Tourism & Destination Management Tech

- AR city guides
- Geofencing for custom alerts



Aligning Brand Values with Technology

- Authenticity
- Transparency
- Trust-building

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When to Use Automation

- Routine tasks
- High-volume, low-touch interactions

When NOT to Use Automation

- Sensitive conversations
- Crisis or emotional service moments

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The Empathy-Automation Divide

- Visual: Heart vs circuit board
- Best practice principles



Empowering Employees with Tech

- Tools that enable better service
- Real-time support and knowledge bases



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Designing Tech for Inclusion

- Accessibility features
- Multilingual interfaces



Data as the Backbone of Experience Design

- Analytics & behavioural insights
- Custom journey mapping

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Emotional Design in Tech Interfaces

- Human-centric UX/UI
- Tone, imagery, and language



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Digital Twins & Simulations

- Testing experiences virtually before deployment

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The Role of Gamification

- Engaging loyalty programs
- Rewards, points, achievements



Mobile-Centric Experience Design

- Importance of mobile-first
- Examples in travel, dining, retail



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Future Trends: Hyper-Personalisation

- AI evolving to anticipate unspoken needs



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Future Trends: Ambient Computing

- Technology that blends into the environment



Future Trends: Ethical Tech Integration

- Responsible AI use
- Sustainability and experience design

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Technology as Memory-Maker

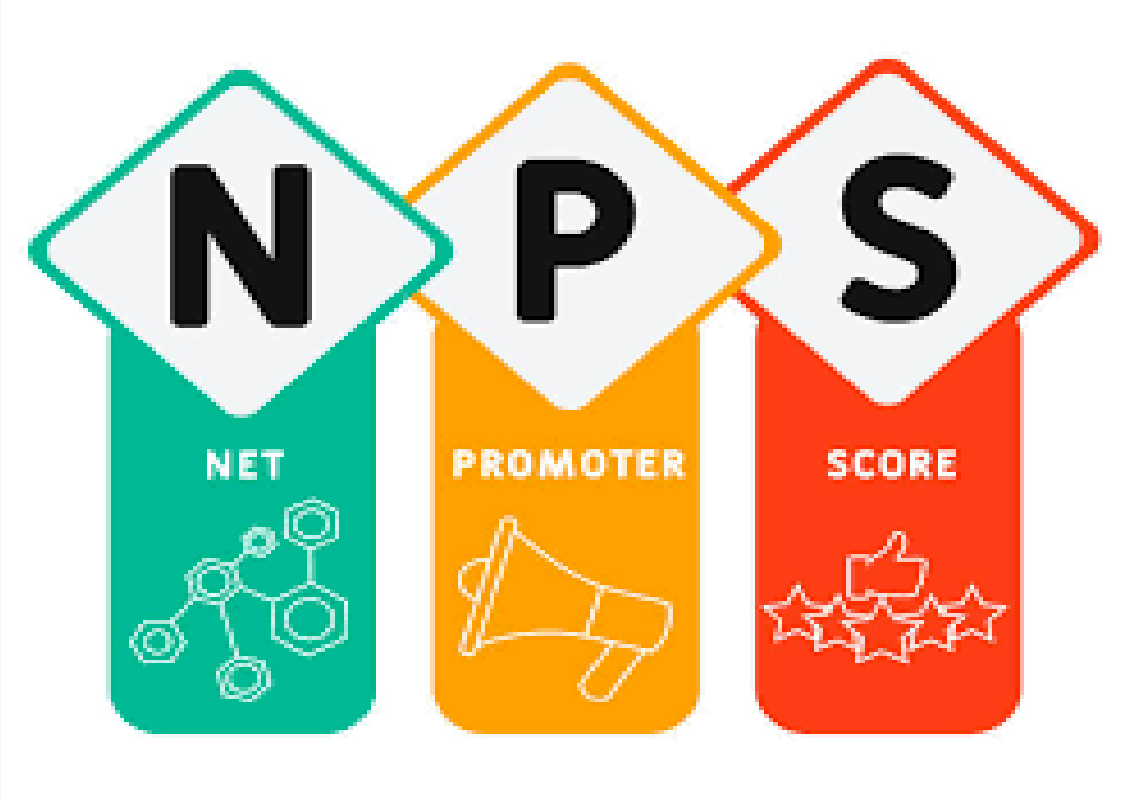
- Using tech to create memorable moments



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Measuring Tech Impact on Experience

- NPS, CES, sentiment analysis
- Voice of the Customer tools



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Training Teams to Use Experience Tech

- Onboarding and support
- Encouraging confidence and consistency

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Technology and Mental Health

- Excessive use of technology, especially smartphones and social media, has been increasingly linked to a range of mental health risks. Constant connectivity can lead to heightened anxiety, reduced attention spans, and disrupted sleep patterns, while the pressure to engage with curated online personas may contribute to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and low self-esteem
- Technology addiction can also reduce opportunities for real-world social interaction and physical activity, both of which are vital for emotional well-being. Over time, this imbalance can create a dependency cycle, where individuals turn to digital platforms for relief, further deepening their reliance and intensifying mental health challenges

Technology and Mental Health - Activity

- In a group - discuss the possible implications of introducing too much technology, too quickly into retail

- Consider your own experience of social media in all its forms, and discuss and give feedback of where technology in retail threatens mental health in any way

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The Role of Leadership in Tech Adoption

- Role modelling
- Building a culture of innovation

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Challenges in Tech Integration

- Budget, legacy systems, resistance to change

Overcoming Barriers to Adoption

- Case study examples
- Employee engagement strategies

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Checklist: Experience-Driven Tech Integration

- Human need first
- Test for usability
- Ethical data use

Action Planning Activity (Participant Engagement)

- Identify 3 touchpoints in your business
- Choose one to enhance with smart tech



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Key Takeaways

- Tech should enhance, not replace the human touch
- Align with human needs and values
- Stay agile and customer-centric

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Reading & Resources

New ways technology is changing retail

https://www.retail-insight-network.com/features/new-ways-technology-is-changing-retail/?cf-view

Retail Ireland Skillnet – Retail Technologies and future skills report

https://retailirelandskillnet.com/report

15 examples of AI in Retail

https://www.digital-adoption.com/ai-in-retail-examples/

The impacts of technology on mental health

https://geroshealth.com/how-technology-affects-mental-health

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Thank you

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