

Leading U.K. Retailer, John Lewis, Pilots Unique Cisco StyleMe™ Fashion Mirror To Help Capture More Cross-Channel Shoppers

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER

John Lewis

INDUSTRY

Retail

CHALLENGES

- Make the online and in-shop environments synonymous to capture more cross-channel shoppers

SOLUTIONS

- Pilot-test a virtual fashion mirror, Cisco StyleMe, to differentiate the in-store experience, create cross-channel shopping behaviors, and demonstrate John Lewis' passion for innovation

RESULTS

- 1,402 customers used StyleMe—an average of more than 40 customers daily
- Customers of all ages enjoyed the experience, with 67 percent giving it a positive assessment

Background

John Lewis, one of the largest retailers in the United Kingdom, opened its first shop on London's Oxford Street in 1864. Today, the retailer has grown to 37 shops (29 department stores and eight smaller-format *at home* shops) and a full online, cross-channel offering. With annual turnover of nearly £3.3 billion (US\$5.2 billion), much of the company's success has often been attributed to John Lewis' unique business model, through which all employees are co-owners, known as "Partners." Today, John Lewis' priority is to serve the omnichannel customer in the best possible way, with relentless commitment to and focus on quality, service, and value, both in its shops and online. John Lewis continues to quicken the pace of innovation and investment to achieve these goals.

Challenges

John Lewis challenges itself to innovate and provide a unique omnichannel experience by making the online and in-shop environments synonymous. The retailer understands that shoppers who buy regularly both online and in-shop consolidate their purchases and spend more, so John Lewis continually seeks ways to create and capture these "cross-channel" shoppers.

Strategy

John Lewis' strategy is to lead the U.K. market in omnichannel retail, with an understanding that ongoing sales growth is highly dependent on a combined in-shop and online experience that offers great customer service while also engaging and delighting customers.

In 2010, John Lewis asked the Cisco® Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) to help the retailer explore and innovate in-shop and online digital experiences that would create and drive greater cross-channel customer experiences. IBSG developed and shared seven experiences that could capture shopper spend by driving customers from an online experience into the store, or from the store experience to online. John Lewis chose to trial the virtual fashion mirror, which



Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

addressed a category of high strategic significance: fashion. It was believed that the fashion mirror would continue to demonstrate John Lewis' passion for innovation, as well as provide an opportunity to differentiate the in-store experience.

Solution

Concept Solutions and Development

In 2011, Cisco IBSG, together with its partners C-instore, Aitech, and The Team, developed the customer experience and prototype for the virtual fashion mirror, which consisted of a life-sized mirror that overlays the customer's image with pictures of clothing selected using a gesture-based interface. It enabled shoppers to quickly create outfits by mixing and matching a wide range of garments uploaded into the mirror. The mirror also added value by providing customers with expert recommendations for garments that complemented the one they had selected; by allowing customers to take pictures of themselves trying on garments virtually; and by creating a list of their selected garments. Their lists and pictures could then be printed, sent to them via email, or shared via social media.

The virtual fashion mirror experience was designed to enable customers to easily browse and quickly mix and match a wide range of garments—without having to walk the shop floor. The mirror gave customers a good idea of how they looked wearing different garments, after which they could either go ahead and buy the garment or try on an edited selection. Because it offered a fun, inspirational, and convenient experience that helped people explore and choose styles, the virtual fashion mirror concept was named Cisco StyleMe™.

Consumer Testing

Once the experience and prototype were developed, Cisco IBSG and John Lewis ran customer testing with a range of existing John Lewis customers. The testing clearly demonstrated that customers enjoyed and saw value in the virtual mirror experience. Two consumer groups were especially enthusiastic about the virtual shopping experience—women over 50 years of age and younger women in their 20s. During testing, it became clear that the benefits of easily trying on new outfits and getting expert advice far outweighed any apprehension the older group had about the technology. For younger women, tests showed that Cisco StyleMe made the shopping experience both fun and social. The consumer testing results gave John Lewis the supporting data and confidence that they should proceed to a live store pilot.

The Pilot

In John Lewis' Oxford Street shop, the StyleMe™ pilot was set up to run over six weeks during May and June 2012. The objective was to simulate the in-store experience of the ladies' wear fashion floor by offering an assortment of 10 brands, including three of John Lewis' own labels. Approximately 20 percent of the garments were previously available only online, including the entire collection from one of the external fashion brands.

"This was a great innovation project. We learned a great deal about how customers want to use technology like this, as well as the business processes needed to support it. The trial will undoubtedly influence our future innovation strategy, and it was great to see customers and Partners interacting with the technology so positively."

Karen Dracou
Head of Omnichannel
John Lewis

The pilot was managed via five streams of work:

- Range selection and image management
- In-store layout, design, and signage
- End-to-end customer and Partner experience design
- Partner communication, engagement, and support
- Running the pilot operation

The success of the pilot was assessed against:

- Creating footfall and dwell in the fashion area
- Customer engagement, response, and feedback
- Usage: number of customers, garments viewed, and garments tried on virtually
- Creating additional sales and awareness of JL.com
- John Lewis Partner and management feedback

Range Selection and Management

Following the initial brand selection, John Lewis' buyers selected specific garment and accessory SKUs for the mirror. The SKUs were then associated with respective online data—their web ID, the price, colors, description, available sizes, and finally, their high-definition web image. “Go with” garments and accessories were also assigned to individual SKUs (e.g., a top would have a skirt or trousers, plus shoes, jewelry, and handbag SKUs assigned to it). The images and the associated data were then incorporated into the mirror database and run through a quality assurance process to ensure the garment looked good enough on the mirror.



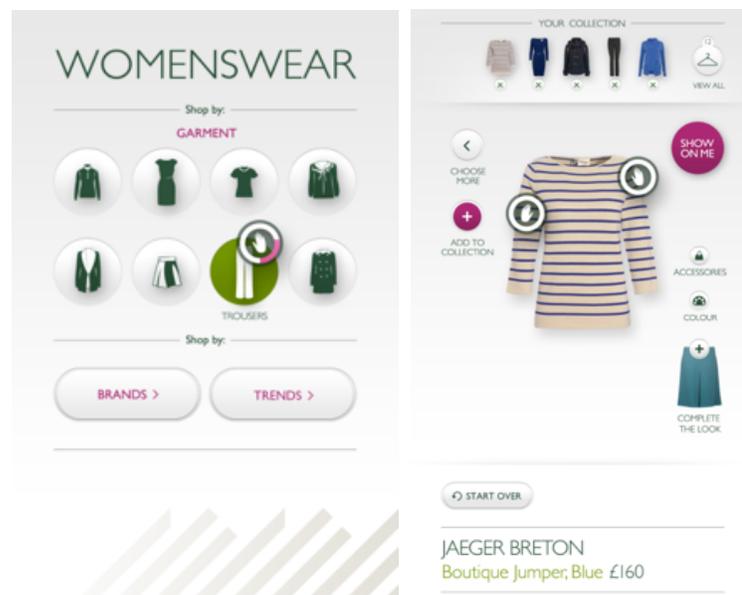
In-store layout, design, and signage.

The team designed a 3- by 2-meter enclosure to house the mirror and surrounded the space see-through walls that still provided some privacy. The store design included steady and consistent lighting plus a detailed “busy” backdrop to ensure the best visual experience. Signage was designed for use across the entire shop floor on the usual fixtures and fittings to make customers aware of the experience, and a nearby online kiosk enabled customers to buy online.

End-to-End Customer and Partner Experience Design

The virtual fashion mirror was designed to be a Partner-supported experience. The Partner captured each customer’s email address and marketing permissions via a tablet, and then took the customer through the stages of the virtual fashion mirror experience: calibration, browsing, outfit building, virtual try-on, and closing. Customers used gestures to control the screen, and the Partner also had a small touchpad to control the mirror if required. During the experience, customers were encouraged to take photos during virtual try-on and also to add items to their “collection.” Both the photos and their collection lists could be printed out or emailed at the close of their session, and a customer was guided either to buy the garments in-store or online at the in-branch kiosk.

While maintaining the John Lewis digital “look and feel,” the gesture-based user interface needed to be designed in a bright, bold, and simple way to make it easy to use. Drawing lessons from the proven discipline of web design, the team also needed to consider the significant requirements of a gesture-based user interface. Selection buttons needed to stand out with clear colors and animation, and the browsing design needed to ensure that customers could quickly see a large number of items.



The user interface for StyleMe clearly reflected the look and feel of the John Lewis brand, while meeting the requirements of a gesture-based interface.

Partner Communication, Engagement, and Support

The Oxford Street Partners were critical in setting up the pilot for success. The project team spent time describing the background, objectives, and approach to the branch fashion management team, and demonstrated the concept to them in John Lewis' head office. The branch leadership team took an active role in making decisions and ensuring the branch was ready for the pilot implementation. More than 23 Partners were trained on how to engage with customers on the virtual fashion mirror before the pilot commenced.

Running the Pilot

The pilot ran for six weeks, from the middle of April to the end of May, 2012. The branch managed to staff the shop floor mirror with a Partner for the majority of the pilot. The Partners encouraged customers to try the mirror, helped customers through the experience, and used the virtual fashion mirror as a tool to make recommendations and to cross-sell.

One of the key opportunities was to encourage customers to continue their John Lewis fashion experience online. If customers were willing to share their email addresses, they were sent a link to items in which they were interested. Usage and feedback data were collected both automatically by the system and on tracking sheets. These were reviewed weekly and helped the team make changes to continuously improve the experience and results.

"It was fun. I found it helpful to see the colors on me."

"Very useful. I found dresses that suit my shape."

John Lewis customers



A customer uses StyleMe to try on a dress virtually.

Results

Over the pilot's six weeks, 1,402 customers used the mirror—an average of more than 40 customers daily. Initially, usage peaked on weekends, but by the end of the trial, usage was relatively consistent throughout the week. Customers of all ages enjoyed the experience, with 67 percent giving it a positive assessment. As in the consumer testing, older generations viewed the experience favorably, commenting that it allowed them to get an idea of how garments would look on them without having to undress. One disabled customer was especially delighted with what it enabled her to do.

"Mother and daughter" groups really enjoyed their digital try-on sessions by encouraging each other to experiment with garments they would never have taken into a traditional changing room. Many walked away with several pictures of themselves trying on garments virtually. Partners found that once a customer was using the mirror, a crowd quickly formed and others were eager to try it. Customers were certainly not shy about trying a public digital experience, and both customers and Partners embraced the use of the in-store digital experience to explore with garments and accessories.

During the trial, 34,178 items were logged as viewed in the outfit builder space. While that suggested an average of 24 items per customer, there was a specific group of "super users" who looked at 50-plus items apiece. The Partners and customers found that the browsing experience made it easier to see the range of garments quickly without having to walk around the store. In addition, customers also appreciated the recommendations for garments to complement the selections they had made. The automatic recommendations on the mirror also gave Partners an opportunity to make further suggestions.

When it came to virtual try-on, 2,483 items were selected—an average of two items per customer. The most virtually tried-on items were dresses with bright colors; many customer comments referred to the usefulness of the experience in seeing how different colors and styles looked on them. Customers also commented that it was very easy to experiment with garments that they would never have tried on under normal circumstances. The photos of customers trying on garments virtually were also well received, and many customers went off to find their items in-store and online.

"It's fantastic. It equips our Partners to sell and it creates sales. We want people to enjoy shopping at John Lewis, and customers can really do that with Cisco StyleMe."

Paul Coby
John Lewis CIO

Most important, the Oxford Street shop Partners and management provided positive feedback about the concept and pilot experience. The Partners perceive StyleMe as a tool that can help them sell more, while also enabling non-fashion-adviser Partners to assist customers looking for clothing. The Partners had many ideas on how to continue to develop the experience and felt that it had a positive impact on the shop floor.



Oxford Street Partners put the in-store virtual fashion mirror through its paces.

...the joint project team of John Lewis, C-inStore, Aitech, and Cisco was praised by Simon Fowler, the MD of John Lewis Oxford Street, for their support, engagement, and sensitivity in the midst of one of the busiest and most successful department stores in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

StyleMe achieved a new standard for delivering innovation pilots, and the joint project team of John Lewis, C-inStore, Aitech, and Cisco was praised by Simon Fowler, the MD of John Lewis Oxford Street, for their support, engagement, and sensitivity in the midst of one of the busiest and most successful department stores in the United Kingdom.

By developing and piloting the virtual fashion mirror's engaging, in-store digital experience, Cisco IBSG was instrumental in demonstrating to John Lewis that customers are ready to embrace these types of experiences in their shops. Customers liked it and Partners found it useful.

"With StyleMe, we have taken the walls off the store and are beginning to create theater in the store," said John Lewis CIO Paul Coby. "There's lots of talk about this kind of thing, all very theoretical, but what we've done is make that a reality. We have shown how we can create the foundation for our omnichannel vision in the store.

"It's fantastic," Coby continued. "It equips our Partners to sell and it creates sales. We want people to enjoy shopping at John Lewis, and customers can really do that with Cisco StyleMe."

More Information

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