

Retailers Turn to Artificial Intelligence to Grow Sales



It is getting easier and easier to buy goods online and have them delivered to the doorstep quickly—a fact that has been hurting brick-and-mortar retailers for years. Now, real-world retailers are turning to the digital world for help in the form of artificial intelligence. Businesses such as Macy's, Asos and various luxury businesses are testing AI and using it to help retain customers.

With brick-and-mortar stores, it can be hard to locate salespeople sometimes and Macy's has decided to use artificial intelligence developed with IBM Watson to help customers out. The retailer is testing one mobile tool in five locations that will let shoppers ask their phones if a product is in stock or where a particular brand might be located in a specific store. In five other stores, it is testing a Macy's On Call tool that will summon a nearby sales associate. The tools will keep "learning" about customer needs and feeding info back to the retailer, the [Associated Press](#) reports. In time, it will be able to sense when a customer is frustrated with the information being given and will then notify a sales associate (who will hopefully have been well trained on calming annoyed customers). Amazon.com, by the way, is expected to pass Macy's in clothing sales next year, so the retailer now has extra incentive to figure out a new way to retain its customers.

Watson isn't alone. Another program, called Metis after the Greek goddess of wisdom, is being used to help luxury retailers learn more about their customers. (After all, what better way to make luxury customers feel special and than have Big Data identify desires before they even know they exist?)

Metis gathers info from customer actions and reviews. At this point in time, it seems, people are listening. "It's not what the data tells you; it's what you *do* with what the data is telling you that makes the difference," writes Ana Brant, the director of global guest experience and innovation for London-based Dorchester Collection and a member of the Metis advisory board, in the *Harvard Business Review*. "Can you resist the temptation to standardize, and use the data to uncover what makes your business unique? Big data is helping us move from what *we* think is important to what the *customer* thinks is important."