In the Market for Innovation

Belgian shopping district sets the standard for digital retail with Digitopia and Intel® technologies

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One of Belgium's busiest shopping districts – the Meir in Antwerp – has been transformed into Innovation Boulevard, a showcase of digital retail technologies being used within a range of stores. The project has been driven by digital retail solution provider Digitopia, which has used Intel® technologies and collaborated with other Intel ecosystem experts to create applications and devices to support diverse use cases.

Challenges
- **Evolving retail.** With more out-of-town centers and online options, the way people shop is changing. High Street retailers need to offer a compelling experience to compete
- **Technology potential.** Many new retail technologies are available, but identifying the most appropriate ones for a given environment is tricky
- **Digital display.** Digitopia wanted to showcase some of the best solutions in a way that would help its customers create their own technology strategies.

Solution
- **Innovation Boulevard.** Working with a number of retailers, Digitopia created a digital retail showcase spanning multiple shops on Antwerp's Meir
- **Multifunctional.** A wide variety of solutions and use cases are on display, all powered by Intel technologies including Intel® NUC and Intel® Atom™ processors.

Impact
- **Broadening sales windows.** Retailers can use digital signage solutions to engage with – and sell to – customers even when the store is closed, optimizing revenue opportunities
- **Enhanced customer experience.** Shoppers can use interactive fitting rooms to browse different options or share purchases with friends through social media
- **Proven solutions.** Digitopia is working with retailers and analysts to gather metrics and identify the most suitable solutions for replication.

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Jan Bussels,
CEO,
Digitopia

Navigating the new retail landscape

The rise of online retail and large out-of-town shopping centers has been seen by many as marking the death of the High Street. However, for Digitopia, a Belgium-based specialist in digital signage for retail, it's simply a new beginning.

"The online retail revolution means people expect to have a personalized, fast, and seamless experience, whether they're buying something on a website or in-store," says Jan Bussels, CEO of Digitopia. "At the same time, there's a need for city-center retailers to attract customers away from their suburban megastore competitors."

Retailers are responding by implementing new technologies in their stores, from digital advertising signs to interactive screens that allow you to browse a retailer's entire inventory from a small kiosk. The potential uses of technology in the shopping environment are myriad, but there remains some uncertainty around which solutions can add the most value in a given retail environment.

Digitopia works with a number of retailers and wanted to help them ensure they are using the most effective technologies in their stores. "All

solutions have merit, but we felt our customers were often unsure which would be the right ones for them," says Bussels. "So we decided to develop a range of solutions and work with our clients to trial them in real-life situations and establish which technologies work best for different types of retailer and store environments."

Creating a digital showcase

Besides helping its customers make the best use of available technology, Digitopia also saw this project as an opportunity to show its innovative approach to digital retail. It has a strong heritage in digital signage and touchscreen solutions but wanted to demonstrate its expertise in all things digital by creating a showcase shopping environment in collaboration with some of Belgium's biggest names in retail, and with technology leaders like Intel.

Intel is reshaping the retail experience through technology, from new digital signage solutions to interconnected store environments. Thanks to Intel innovations, interactive retail displays anonymously detect the faces and movements of passersby, serving up relevant messages while measuring and tracking responses.

Digitopia delivers digital retail showcase in busy shopping street in collaboration with Intel

Touch-screen digital signage allows shoppers to research and compare products. Remote manageability gives retailers the power to reduce energy consumption, switch out daily promotions, and reduce operating costs.

"We've provided digital signage solutions based on Intel® technology for retailers around Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg for a number of years," says Bussels. "When we explained what we wanted to do, the Intel team was very supportive and brought us into contact with a number of other organizations, like Accenture, to collaborate with us on developing new solutions."

With the solutions in development, Bussels then set about finding the right environment for deployment. "Many of the retailers we work with have stores all over the region," Bussels says. "We realized that a number of them all had stores along a particular stretch of the Meir, in the center of Antwerp. This is the biggest shopping street in Belgium, so it was a perfect spot for our showcase." Digitopia approached each of its retailer customers with a store on the Meir, offering the opportunity to trial tailored digital retail solutions. "They all said yes," Bussels recalls.

Mix-and-match solutions

The retailers involved in the street-long showcase, dubbed Innovation Boulevard* by Digitopia, cover a wide range of verticals, including fashion, food, and travel. The ways in which they are using technology to enhance the customer experience are equally diverse.

One travel agency, for example, has installed a touch-and-go environment in its storefront window. A digital screen, powered by Intel NUC, features a quick response (QR) code that a shopper standing on the street can scan with their smartphone. This turns the device into a remote control for the screen, enabling the customer to browse through the holidays available and then send him or herself the details of any appealing offers to review at home. "We developed this solution as a way to enable the store to continue engaging with its customers – and doing business – even when it's closed," says Bussels.

Meanwhile, a fashion retailer has implemented interactive fitting rooms. Customers can use Intel NUC-powered screens to check for the item they are trying on in a different size or color, or to find complementary pieces to complete their outfit. They can also use the screen to share their purchases through social media, or to send a request for help to a shop assistant who receives the alert through an Intel Atom processor-powered Asus* tablet. "This is just the beginning for the interactive fitting room," says Bussels. "In the future, we hope to work with fashion retailers to use radio frequency identification (RFID) tags in clothes taken into the fitting room to push recommendations to the shopper. We could also use RFID tagging to track which items are regularly brought to the fitting room and not purchased, or even left on the rack and never even tried on. This will really help retailers to optimize their inventory."

When shoppers on the Meir need a rest, they may head to Maurice Coffee & Knit, the café that has implemented an app developed by Digitopia to help with ordering. Customers can submit their order through an interactive screen or through their smartphone, which then issues an alert when their food is ready to pick up and even allows them to pay through the device. "This eliminates the psychological barrier of the queue and makes it easier for people to stop for a stress-free coffee," says Bussels. "The café reports that it has seen a substantial sales increase since it started using the app."

Tartines and technology

Maurice Coffee & Knit is a great example of those stores that have traditionally had little to do with technology enjoying the advantages of participating in the initiative. Véronique Leysen, the owner of Maurice Coffee & Knit, says: "Maurice (named after my grandpa) is synonymous with authenticity, getting back to basics, warmth, and unity. A brand that started as a handmade knitwear label has now grown to become 'coffee & knits,' where coffee and old-fashioned tartines go hand in hand with wool, from the knitted covers around the teacups to the wool on sale inside.
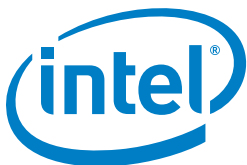
Lessons Learned

It can be tempting for organizations to implement the latest technological solutions to stay ahead of the competition, but they must ensure they are appropriate to their business model. The Innovation Boulevard initiative was designed to enable retailers from a range of verticals to see how technologies from Digitopia and Intel could be best applied in their own environments. In this way, they can make more informed investments that will deliver both business value and an enhanced customer experience.

"Technology may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of our brand, but Maurice has proven that technology can go together perfectly with a nostalgic approach. A mirror was created by Digitopia to match the Maurice look and feel and it is now impossible to imagine the coffee bar without it. The mirror offers waiting customers entertainment and challenges them to get better acquainted with Maurice knitwear. Meanwhile, the app helps customers consume more in the cafe, since they no longer have to leave their laptop unattended to place an order."

With the first wave of solutions in place, Digitopia is now working with the retailers and a team from the local university to analyze how the technologies are being used and their impact on sales and the customer experience. "We'll be looking at which solutions work well and can be replicated, which need further development, and which are probably not going to be viable long term," says Bussels. "It's an ongoing process of testing and optimization, but the feedback we've had from the retailers so far has been very positive. They believe in the initiative and see the benefits it will bring to their businesses – including increased customer loyalty and brand awareness, as well as optimizing sales opportunities."

Find the solution that's right for your organization. Contact your Intel representative, visit **Intel's Business Success Stories for IT Managers**, or to learn more about Intel retail solutions visit **intel.com/retailsolutions**.