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HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESSES EFFECTIVELY DESIGN AND MANAGE THE OMNI-CHANNEL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE? (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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≈ INTERACTIVE PAPER ≈

**HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESSES EFFECTIVELY DESIGN AND
MANAGE THE OMNI-CHANNEL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?**

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Principal Topic

An omni-channel strategy can be defined as the ability of companies to effectively design and manage the multiple touchpoints it has with its customers, consumers, and business partners. These touchpoints include the use of new media, such as social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest), mobile technologies (e.g., smartphones, Foursquare), and search solutions (e.g., search engine optimization, Yelp review sites), in addition to traditional channels such as physical retail and traditional marketing (e.g., print media). To date, there has been limited omni-channel research, and most of it has focused on large retail organizations. This is occurring despite the growing use of new media by small companies. Therefore, the focus of this research is to understand how small and medium-sized companies are effectively integrating multiple customer touchpoints, including the strategies and tactics used to integrate the various technology channels.

Method

Our research methodology includes approximately 30 semi-structured interviews conducted across small and medium-sized businesses that are currently using multiple channels, including social media, mobile, website, digital properties, and physical touchpoints, to interact with customers and consumers. These interviews focus on omni-channel strategies and tactics used at different customer journey stages, including customer acquisition, customer retention, and customer advocacy stages.

Results and Implications

A major theme from the interviews is that *flow* is critical to the success of any omni-channel strategy. In a technology-mediated environment, flow is the degree to which the user navigates successfully across multiple touchpoints. An environment with a high degree of flow indicates that there is a seamless and integrated series of interactions from the user's perspective, and this results in an enjoyable user experience. Companies who have a successful experience with omni-channel look at the "big picture" and design the various touchpoints from the customer perspective. Also, the different channels complement each other so that the user is able to move easily from brand awareness, to product selection, to customer, to brand advocate stages. For example, one company described how it used email marketing not only to promote deals, but also to emphasize its social properties such as Facebook and Twitter. These properties in turn were used to empower its customers to become advocates for its products through leading customer communities and gamification techniques.

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