

How Spree is transforming its customer experience through technology

Ahead of the CEM Africa Summit taking place in August, conference organisers Kinetic Events interviews Sven Schoof, head of customer experience at Spree, on how the online retailer is transforming its customer experience (CX) and why it's important for brands to keep innovating to remain relevant.



What do you think of the current state of the customer experience industry in South Africa?

We see a continuous evolution and a few lighthouse examples of offering great customer experiences in South Africa. At the same time, there is much room for improvement. Even though awareness around great customer experiences and the need to invest in customer-centricity is growing, too many companies still offer poor customer experiences.

Why do you think it is important to keep innovating and growing in this industry?

In this digitally enhanced, always on and increasingly transparent world, brands that are not embracing customer centricity are likely to face an increasing amount of issues. If your company is not innovating and attempting to find ways to delight your customers, you can be assured that your competitors are. Ultimately, fostering long-term loyalty of your customer base is always highly profitable.

From a retail perspective what is most important for customer experience?

From a retail perspective, it is primarily all about having a well-designed, high performance, mobile-first online offering, showcasing relevant products at the right price points. And, as for any other business, offering a delightful customer experience needs to permeate every layer of the business, from the technology to the user interface, from the customer service to the courier handing over the parcel.

How has Spree used technological innovation to transform its customer experience?

Spree recently launched a highly innovative [image search and similar style feature](#) in the shopping app. Within the existing search functionality, the Spree app now offers a feature, which allows shoppers to take a photo or upload an image, which will return visually similar items in seconds. Finding similar styles while browsing is now also easier: shoppers can tap and hold any product image in a category, search results or product view and the feature will highlight items that are visually

similar.

Spree is the first online fashion retailer in Africa to offer this AI-driven technology and launched the feature in the iOS app first, thereby showcasing Spree's mobile app first approach.



Spree launches image search, similar style shopping app feature

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Why was it necessary for Spree to invest in this new technology?

Within the past one to two years, Facebook, Google, Pinterest and Amazon have all released image-based search or recommendations features. This clearly global trend uses today's technological advances in AI to make life easier and more intuitive for customers – especially when using mobile devices, another global trend. As a mobile-first company that continuously tries to delight our customers, investing in this new technology made absolute sense to Spree.

How does the technology work?

The visual search technology uses images uploaded by users as search queries instead of keywords. It then returns visually similar images by analysing the pixels inside the image instead of the image metadata (size, resolution, etc.) The order of the displayed images is based on the parameters 'colour', 'pattern' and 'style silhouette', all of which have different weightings.

Have you seen positive results from the new technology as yet? If yes please share some?

Absolutely! The Similar Styles feature is gaining traction fast, as it is very easy and intuitive to use by merely tapping and holding on a product image. The increase in engagement is the most positive feedback we have, but it is still early days and we are very excited to see how our customers will be using our image search features in the near future.

What are your learnings/insights from the process?

We anticipated high engagement for the Similar Styles feature and slightly less for the Image Search feature, as this requires more interaction. This has so far proven to be spot on, but again, it is early days and we are still learning. Regarding the Image Search we are pleased to see that the image quality used by our customers has been improving and that they are moving towards using social media images to find matching Spree products.

Where to next for customer experience in South Africa?

This is of course hard to predict, but I can safely say that in my view, companies will continue to focus on getting the mobile customer experience right, as well as viewing customer-centricity as a holistic approach that requires the entire company to buy in to make it successful.

What other brands do you think are leading the way for customer experience in South Africa?

“The online home and kitchen retailer, Yuppiechef, stands out as a leader in creating delightful customer experiences and thereby gaining customer loyalty.

How can we inspire growth and innovation in the South African customer experience

industry?

By leading by example. Singular companies that shine by innovating within the customer experience sphere will automatically drive others to follow suit.

The 6th annual [CEM Africa Summit](#) is taking place at Century City Conference Centre on the 16th and 17th of August.

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