

Could AI resurrect the high street?

Daniel Martinho-Corbishley is at the helm of Aura Vision – the “Google Analytics for retail” leading the way to an exciting and experiential future for brick and mortar stores. He tells us how shopping will change post-COVID.

Aura Vision is an insights platform for retailers and shopping centres. A step beyond traditional footfall sensing, it can segment customers, staff, ages and genders – and has been implemented by brands like Asics, O2 and Onitsuka Tiger to help drive customer conversion.

Adding something new to the retail tech landscape – using old hardware

There are lots of other solutions, which have a variety of different types of sensors, and use different types of technologies. But invariably, they need you to go and put something into the main footprint of the store.

We plug into existing security cameras, so we don't have to put up loads of new sensors to get full-scale analytics. This means we can capture everything that happens in the store in a really efficient way.

Prior to solutions like ours, retailers had to put loads of sensors in stores to count even the most basic things. But now that we can reuse security cameras, we get full coverage of the store. We can also get really tight detail into what's happening in different areas of the store. And that's game-changing.

Security cameras are already present in around 80% of all chain retailers – and fewer than 1% of those are being used for analytics.

Protecting privacy without compromising accuracy

We don't do facial detection or recognition in any way. All of the data we collect is from the body.

We can see people's age and gender, and whether they're a staff member or a customer, just by looking at their body characteristics. That could be what they're wearing, or how they move.

For staff members, it's based on uniform. Our product will learn what the uniform looks like for that particular retailer; it knows that anyone not wearing that uniform is a customer, and everyone wearing it is a staff member. That's unique to us.

There are a few other solutions out there that can use security cameras to count people, but there are pretty much zero that can do age and gender without seeing a face.

Brand experience is the priority for physical stores

E-commerce is having a huge impact on physical brick and mortar.

We're seeing a lot of physical locations moving towards more experiential styles of shopping.

As everything moves online, it's becoming harder for brands to differentiate without those physical, real world experiences. So measuring how people are engaging with the brand in the real world is becoming very important.

'The next step: hygiene data'

One of the big things we launched over the pandemic was social distance heat mapping.

It's about spotting where in the store people are bunched up. It was really good to do because we can incorporate our demographic segmentation. You can see where customers are standing too close to customers, or where staff are standing too close to staff, or staff too close to customers.

We generate 'hotspots' which show you where the choke points are in your store. You might want to move your staff away from the customers in a certain place, if they're slightly too close.

The other big one we did was PPE compliance. That was based, again, on demographic segmentation. We can train the system to recognise when people are wearing face masks and when they're not – similar to a uniform. And then we can generate all the metrics:

What is the percentage compliance of people walking through this entrance to the store? Typically, which areas in the store – or outside of the store – are people most compliant in?

It was really important for us to deploy COVID security measures over lockdown to show the flexibility of the platform. A lot of our competitors didn't react as proactively.

Welcoming strategic capital investment

Getting a €250K investment from Wayra was super important for us. Wayra has a research partnership with Telefonica in the UK, so we're getting deals through them already.

Alongside retail businesses, there are other applications as well. They're really broadening the horizons for where we can get this technology. And sometimes that's very large organisations, with incredibly complex infrastructure.

The other big piece is O2 Motion – which is aggregating GSM data. They have a lot of data points about the early stages of the customer journey, such as where customers live and work and how they've commuted to the location, what types of transport they've taken.

Early in the journey we can use O2 Motion data and later in the journey, once they've entered the store, we have the Aura Vision data. Linking those two

pieces together gives an even broader view of the customer journey.

It's still early days, but Wayra is also looking at replicating what we're doing with Telefonica in the UK in their other markets – like Spain and Latin America with the support of dedicated business development people that we have been allocated.

I think in-store analytics have less penetration in those markets. They're earlier on in the process – but that means a huge amount of opportunities. Those markets are becoming a lot more technologically savvy.

Post-pandemic – and I say that tentatively – retail all over the world is opening up pretty rapidly. Now is a great time to be in this space. Physical retail took a horrible hit. It's suffered, but this has provided the foundations for new routes to growth.

Maddy Ness, media partner of [Wayra](#)

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